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Mid-Term Exam: Topic 3

Eros or Love in modern times is associated with some of the strongest feelings a human can experience, almost to a level that seems non-human, especially in terms of being able to put into words. Socrates takes a fairly logical approach in the Symposium to discussing the topic. He discusses love from an exterior position, instead of attempting to discuss it from his experience of it as an imperfect human. In the Symposium, Agathon sets up the topic and justifies it by stating that no poet has been able to properly speak on the topic of Eros.

Socrates elects to place himself close to being last for speaking on the topic, possibly to maintain some aspect of his dialectic position. In being at the end of most of the narratives Socrates is able to respond to all of them and determine what is not correct to say, and avoid some of the criticisms. Socrates is able to maintain dialectic internally, which allows him to treat the situation where he is expected to give a narrative similarly to how he would a normal dialog. This is important in Socrates' ability to form his theories and deliver his speech clearly. Socrates selects to speak on fact and not in a form of praise of love, as he claims to have no knowledge in the area.

Socrates begins by relating love to desire, which he claims Diotima taught him was not good or beautiful. Love as desire is related to the internal attraction of two parts seeking each other in order to achieve a completion. Love as Desire is highly physical in most views of it. Desire is most closely connected to physical forms of love, mainly sexual intercourse. Desire can be sparked by physical beauty, or simply a lack of something, whether it is for knowledge or companionship or something else entirely. In this context desire results in some type of a search, whether for the other half to creation completion, or for the knowledge required to satisfy the



intellect. Desire forms the most animalistic side of love, it often will be accompanied by a goal of procreation. In the philosophical context this procreation involves the immortality of ideas and virtue. In other contexts it usually means physical procreation for the survival of the species. For that type of procreation it is necessary for sexual interaction between a male and a female, which in Socrates' time was considered to be unclean and perverse, because of the standing of women. This view of females would be consistent with Diotima's opinion of desire, as long as desire is interpreted to be on the physical level. Desire can not be purely physical because of the inclusion of the philosophical component. The love of wisdom is philosophy, and philosophers such as Socrates desire knowledge to decrease their distance from wisdom.

If love is to be compared or related to any virtue it must transcend all time and circumstance. Socrates states that love is there intermediary between mortal and immortal. This relationship is easiest seen in the terms of procreation, while the lover and the beloved are both mortal the act of procreation allows something immortal to be created, a line of genealogy. For philosophers, if it is possible to teach an idea, then the idea can become immortal, while the originator of the idea remains mortal. The idea can be taught continuously to all successor generations, preventing the idea from ever dieing. In a more dramatic analysis of this it could be said that if the passion for philosophy continues and there is a desire for knowledge, then at some future point in the human timeline all knowledge could be attained, resulting in absolute wisdom, a divine quality. It is in this transcending nature of love that immortality is found. Craftsmen who have a passion for their craft can find their immortality in the objects of their craft. These objects represent the good as well as the beautiful. A craftsman who loves his art will strive to make his object the best and most beautiful he can, perhaps because in the end it represents him to eternity.



Socrates presents love as being of beauty, which implies that love itself, must be without beauty. In the context of this argument Eros becomes the lover and things that are beautiful become the loved. Socrates places an additional meaning in this by stating that wisdom is at the epitome of all things beautiful. In essence, Eros is love of wisdom. When the subject is taken to be the messenger Eros, it could be said that Eros is a lover of wisdom, a philosopher. Socrates interprets this role of Eros to be an indication of a journey towards beauty that tends to lead to the Good. Basically, Socrates is stating that love is contained in his mistress, the dialectic. While this seems like a far leap, his dialectic technique has an ultimate goal of complete understanding, or wisdom, which is comparable to absolute beauty. The journey of which he speaks is the interaction of dialectic participants as they eliminate one failed possibility after another, getting closer to a flawless conclusion. Like with absolute beauty, perfection in a conclusion to the dialectic is out of the human reach. Truth becomes involved with love in this aspect. The search for truth occurs through a slow ascent, in this respect truth and beauty are the same, and Eros is the mediating factor between the human levels of truth and beauty and the divine levels of truth and beauty.

Socrates' life is the experience of love. While possessing neither beauty nor wisdom, he contains the traits that make Eros not a god. Through his philosophical methods he is constantly searching for beauty, wisdom, truth and in general, Good. The results of his efforts produce his immortality. From these premises it is possible to conclude that Eros is a human life well lived. Humans can not improve themselves by themselves; there is a need for something external. Humans learn from each other, without companionship there is no one to force the recollection of the suppressed knowledge of existence. While it is possible to hold dialectic with one's self, if



there is no one around to propagate the conclusions to, there is no immortality. A human life well lived transcends the mortal and begins a journey towards divine.

Alternate conclusion:

Eros is a desire to possess the beautiful forever, absolute beauty is held away from human grasp by a great quest for the Good. The quest brings many attempts at things of beauty, many of which can lead to a sense of immortality. If Socrates' love was wisdom (he was a philosopher), and his ideas were his objects of beauty, then his arguments must be correct, because he has gained a level of immortality. Socrates lives on through his thoughts as recorded by his student Plato, as well as through the new ideas of another student, Aristotle.

