I was looking for you, Apollodorus, only just now, that I might ask you about the speeches in praise of love which were delivered by Socrates, Alcibiades, and others at Agathon’s supper.

In our boyhood, I replied, when Agathon won the prize with his first tragedy, on the day after that on which he and his chorus offered the sacrifice of victory.

Then it must have been a long while ago, he said; and who told you—did Socrates?

No indeed, I replied, but the same person who told Phoenix—he was a little fellow who never wore any shoes, Aristodemus, of the deme of Cydathenaeum. He had been at Agathon’s feast; and I think that in those days there was no one who was a more devoted admirer of Socrates. Moreover, I have asked Socrates about the truth of some parts of his narrative, and he confirmed them. Then, said Glaucon, let us have the tale over again.

Aristodemus . . . met Socrates fresh from the bath and sandaled; and as the sight of the sandals was unusual, he asked him whither he was going that he had been converted into such a beau.

To a banquet at Agathon’s, he replied, whose invitation to this sacrifice of victory I refused yesterday, fearing a crowd, but promising that I would come today instead; and so I have put on my finery, because he is such a fine man. What say you to going with me unasked?

I will do as you bid me, I replied.
Socrates took his place on the couch and supped with the rest; and then libations were offered, and after a hymn had been sung to the god, and there had been the usual ceremonies, they were about to commence drinking, when Pausanias said, And now, my friends, how can we drink with least injury to ourselves? I can assure you that I feel severely the effect of yesterday’s potations and must have time to recover; and I suspect that most of you are in the same predicament, for you were of the party yesterday. Consider then: how can the drinking be made easiest?

I entirely agree, said Aristophanes, that we should, by all means, avoid hard drinking, for I was myself one of those who were yesterday drowned in drink. . . .

It was agreed that drinking was not to be the order of the day, but that they were all to drink only so much as they pleased.

Then, said Eryximachus, as you are all agreed that drinking is to be voluntary and that there is to be no compulsion, . . . let us have conversation instead; and, if you will allow me, I will tell you what sort of conversation. This proposal having been accepted, Eryximachus proceeded as follows: . . .

Phaedrus . . . often . . . says to me in an indignant tone: “What a strange thing it is, Eryximachus, that, whereas other gods have poems and hymns made in their honor, the great and glorious god Love has no encomiast among all the poets who are so many. . . .”

Now in this Phaedrus seems to me to be quite right, and therefore . . . I think that at the present moment we who are here assembled cannot do better than honor the god Love. If you agree with me, there will be no lack of conversation; for I mean to propose that each of us in turn, going from left to right, shall make a speech in honor of Love. Let him give us the best which he can; and Phaedrus, because he is sitting first on the left hand, and because he is the father of the thought, shall begin. . . .

Phaedrus began by affirming that Love is a mighty god, and wonderful among gods and men, but especially wonderful in his birth. For he is the eldest of the gods, which is an honor to him. . . . And not only is he the eldest, he is also the source of the greatest benefits to us. For I know not any greater blessing to a young man who is beginning life than a virtuous lover, or to the lover, than a beloved youth. For the principle which ought to be the guide of men who would nobly live—that principle I say, neither kindred, nor honor, nor wealth, nor any other motive is able to implant so well as love. Of what am I speaking? Of the sense of honor and dishonor, without which neither states nor individuals ever do any good or great work. And I say that a lover who is detected in doing any dishonorable act, or submitting through
cowardice when any dishonor is done to him by another, will be more pained at being detected by his beloved than at being seen by his father, or by his companions, or by anyone else. The beloved, too, when he is found in any disgraceful situation, has the same feeling about his lover. . . .

Love will make men dare to die for their beloved—love alone; and women as well as men. . . . These are my reasons for affirming that Love is the eldest and noblest and mightiest of the gods, and the chiefest author and giver of virtue in life, and of happiness after death.

. . . [T]he next which he repeated was that of Pausanias. Phaedrus, he said, the argument has not been set before us, I think, quite in the right form—we should not be called upon to praise Love in such an indiscriminate manner. If there were only one Love, then what you said would be well enough; but since there are more Loves than one, you should have begun by determining which of them was to be the theme of our praises. I will amend this defect; and, first of all, I will tell you which Love is deserving of praise, and then try to hymn the praiseworthy one in a manner worthy of him. For we all know that Love is inseparable from Aphrodite, and if there were only one Aphrodite there would be only one Love; but as there are two goddesses there must be two Loves. And am I not right in asserting that there are two goddesses? The elder one, having no mother, who is called the "heavenly Aphrodite"—she is the daughter of Uranus; the younger, who is the daughter of Zeus and Dione—her we call "common"; and the Love who is her fellow worker is rightly named common, as the other Love is called heavenly. . . .

The Love who is the offspring of the common Aphrodite is essentially common, and has no discrimination, being such as the meaner sort of men feel, and is apt to be of women as well as of youths, and is of the body rather than of the soul. . . . But the offspring of the heavenly Aphrodite is derived from a mother in whose birth the female has no part—she is from the male only; this is that love which is of youths, and the goddess being older, there is nothing of wantonness in her. Those who are inspired by this love turn to the male, and delight in him who is the more valiant and intelligent nature; anyone may recognize the pure enthusiasts in the very character of their attachments. For they love not boys, but intelligent beings whose reason is beginning to be developed, much about the time at which their beards begin to grow. And in choosing young men to be their companions, they mean to be faithful to them, and pass their whole life in company with them, not to take them in their inexperience, and deceive them, and play the fool with them, or run away from one to another of them. . . . Evil is the vulgar lover who loves the body rather than the soul, inasmuch as he is not even stable because he loves a thing which is
in itself unstable, and therefore when the bloom of youth which he was desiring is over, he takes wing and flies away, in spite of all his words and promises; whereas the love of the noble disposition is lifelong, for it becomes one with the everlasting.

Eryximachus spoke as follows: Seeing that Pausanias made a fair beginning and but a lame ending, I must endeavor to supply his deficiency. I think that he has rightly distinguished two kinds of love. But my art further informs me that the double love is not merely an affection of the soul of man toward the fair, or toward anything, but is to be found in the bodies of all animals and in productions of the earth, and I may say in all that is; such is the conclusion which I seem to have gathered from my own art of medicine, whence I learn how great and wonderful and universal is the deity of love, whose empire extends over all things, divine as well as human. And from medicine I will begin that I may do honor to my art. There are in the human body these two kinds of love, which are confessedly different and unlike, and being unlike, they have loves and desires which are unlike; and the desire of the healthy is one, and the desire of the diseased in another; and as Pausanias was just now saying that to indulge good men in honorable, and bad men dishonorable—so, too, in the body the good and healthy elements are to be indulged, and the bad elements and the elements of disease are not to be indulged, but discouraged. And this is what the physician has to do, and in this the art of medicine consists; for medicine may be regarded generally as the knowledge of the loves and desires of the body, and how to satisfy them or not; and the best physician is he who is able to separate fair love from foul, or to convert one into the other; and he who knows how to eradicate and how to implant love, whichever is required, and can reconcile the most hostile elements in the constitution and make them loving friends is a skillful practitioner. Now the most hostile are the most opposite, such as hot and cold, bitter and sweet, moist and dry, and the like. And my ancestor, Asclepius, knowing how to implant friendship and accord in these elements, was the creator of our art, as our friends the poets here tell us, and I believe them; and not only medicine in every branch, but the arts of gymnastic and husbandry are under his dominion. Anyone who pays the least attention to the subject will also perceive that in music there is the same reconciliation of opposites. . . . Whence I infer that in music, in medicine, in all other things human as well as divine, both loves ought to be noted as far as may be, for they are both present.
Aristophanes professed to open another vein of discourse; he had a mind to praise Love in another way, unlike that either of Pausanias or Eryximachus. Mankind, he said, judging by their neglect of him, have never, as I think, at all understood the power of Love. For if they had understood him they would surely have built noble temples and altars, and offered solemn sacrifices in his honor; but this is not done, and most certainly ought to be done: since of all the gods he is the best friend of men, the helper and the healer of the ills which are the great impediment to the happiness of the race. I will try to describe his power to you, and you shall teach the rest of the world what I am teaching you. In the first place, let me treat of the nature of man and what has happened to it; for the original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which had once a real existence but is now lost, and the word “Androgynous” is only preserved as a term of reproach. In the second place, the primeval man was round, his back and side forming a circle; and he had four hands and four feet, one head with two faces, looking opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike; also four ears, two privy members, and the remainder to correspond. He could walk upright as men now do, backward or forward as he pleased, and he could also roll over and over at a great pace, turning on his four hands and four feet, eight in all, like tumblers going over and over with their legs in the air; this was when he wanted to run fast. Now the sexes were three, and such as I have described them; because the sun, moon, and earth are three; and the man was originally the child of the sun, the woman of the earth, and the man-woman of all the moon, which is made up of sun and earth, and they were all round and moved round and round like their parents. Terrible was their might and strength, and the thoughts of their hearts were great, and they made an attack upon the gods; of them is told the tale of Otys and Ephialtes who, as Homer says, dared to scale heaven, and would have laid hands upon the gods. Doubt reigned in the celestial councils. Should they kill them and annihilate the race with thunderbolts, as they had done the giants, then there would be an end of the sacrifices and worship which men offered to them; but, on the other hand, the gods could not suffer their insolence to be unrestrained. At last, after a good deal of reflection, Zeus discovered a way. He said: “Methinks I have a plan which will humble their pride and improve their manners; men shall continue to exist, but I will cut them in two and then
they will be diminished in strength and increased in numbers; this will have the advantage of making them more profitable to us. They shall walk upright on two legs, and if they continue insolent and will not be quiet, I will split them again and they shall hop about on a single leg.” He spoke and cut men in two, like a sorb apple which is halved for pickling, or as you might divide an egg with a hair; and as he cut them one after another, he bade Apollo give the face and the half of the neck a turn in order that the man might contemplate the section of himself: he would thus learn a lesson of humility. Apollo was also bidden to heal their wounds and compose their forms. So he gave a turn to the face and pulled the skin from the sides all over that which in our language is called the belly, like the purses which draw in, and he made one mouth at the center, which he fastened in a knot (the same which is called the navel); he also molded the breast and took out most of the wrinkles, much as a shoemaker might smooth leather upon a last; he left a few, however, in the region of the belly and navel, as a memorial of the primeval state. After the division the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and throwing their arms about one another, entwined in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one, they were on the point of dying from hunger and self-neglect because they did not like to do anything apart; and when one of the halves died and the other survived, the survivor sought another mate, man or woman, as we call them—being the sections of entire men or women—and clung to that. They were being destroyed, when Zeus in pity of them invented a new plan: he turned the parts of generation round to the front, for this had not been always their position, and they sowed the seed no longer as hitherto like grasshoppers in the ground, but in one another; and after the transposition the male generated in the female in order that by the mutual embraces of man and women they might breed, and the race might continue; or if man came to man they might be satisfied, and rest, and go their ways to the business of life: so ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of man. Each of us when separated, having one side only, like a flat fish, is but the indenture of man, and he is always looking for his other half.

Very good, . . . said Agathon; I see no reason why I should not proceed with my speech, as I shall have many other opportunities of conversing with Socrates. Let me say first how I ought to speak, and then speak:

The previous speakers, instead of praising the god Love, or unfolding his nature, appear to have congratulated mankind on the benefits which he con-
fers upon them. But I would rather praise the god first, and then speak of his
gifts; this is always the right way of praising everything. May I say without
impiety or offense that of all the blessed gods he is the most blessed because
he is the fairest and best? And he is the fairest; for, in the first place, he is the
youngest, and of his youth he is himself the witness, fleeing out of the way
of age, who is swift enough, swifter truly than most of us like: Love hates
him and will not come near him; but youth and love live and move together—
like to like, as the proverb says. Many things were said by Phaedrus about
Love in which I agree with him; but I cannot agree that he is older than Iape-
tus and Kronos—not so; I maintain him to be the youngest of the gods, and
youthful ever. . . . Love is young and also tender; . . . for he walks not upon
the earth, nor yet upon the skulls of men, which are not so very soft, but in
the hearts and souls of both gods and men, which are of all things the soft-
est; in them he walks and dwells and makes his home. Not in every soul with-
out exception, for where there is hardness he departs, where there is softness
there he dwells; and nestling always with his feet and in all manner of ways
in the softest of soft places, how can he be other than the softest of all things?
Of a truth, he is the tenderest as well as the youngest, and also he is of flex-
ile form; for if he were hard and without flexure he could not enfold all
things, or wind his ways into and out of every soul of man undiscovered. And
a proof of his flexibility and symmetry of form is his grace, which is univer-
sally admitted to be in an especial manner the attribute of Love; ungrace and
love are always at war with one another. The fairness of his complexion is
revealed by his habitation among the flowers; . . . his greatest glory is that he
can neither do nor suffer wrong to or from any god or any man; for he suf-
fers not by force if he suffers; force comes not near him, neither when he acts
does he act by force. For all men in all things serve him of their own free will,
and where there is voluntary agreement, there, as the laws which are the lords
of the city say, is justice. And not only is he just but exceedingly temperate,
for Temperance is the acknowledged ruler of the pleasures and desires, and
no pleasure ever masters Love; he is their master and they are his servants;
and if he conquers them he must be temperate indeed. As to courage, even
the God of War is no match for him; he is the captive and Love is the lord,
for love, the love of Aphrodite, masters him, as the tale runs; and the master
is stronger than the servant. And if he conquers the bravest of all others, he
must be himself the bravest. Of his courage and justice and temperance I
have spoken, but I have yet to speak of his wisdom; and according to the
measure of my ability I must try to do my best. In the first place he is a poet
(and here, like Eryximachus, I magnify my art), and he is also the source of
poesy in others, which he could not be if he were not himself a poet. And at
the touch of him everyone becomes a poet, even though he had no music in
him before; this also is a proof that Love is a good poet and accomplished in
all the fine arts; for no one can give to another that which he has not himself,
or teach that of which he has not knowledge. . . . [F]rom the Love of the
beautiful, has sprung every good in heaven and earth. Therefore, Phaedrus, I
say of Love that he is the fairest and best in himself, and the cause of what
is fairest and best in all other things. . . . Such is the speech, Phaedrus, half-
playful, yet having a certain measure of seriousness, which, according to my
ability, I dedicate to the god. . . .

Why, my dear friend, said Socrates, must not I or anyone be in a strait
who has to speak after he has heard such a rich and varied discourse? I am
especially struck with the beauty of the concluding words—who could listen
to them without amazement? When I reflected on the immeasurable inferior-
ity of my own powers, I was ready to run away for shame if there had been
a possibility of escape. . . . And then I perceived how foolish I had been in
consenting to take my turn with you in praising love, and saying that I too
was a master of the art, when I really had no conception how anything ought
to be praised. For in my simplicity I imagined that the topics of praise should
be true, and that this being presupposed, out of the true the speaker was to
choose the best and set them forth in the best manner. And I felt quite proud,
thinking that I knew the nature of true praise and should speak well. Whereas
I now see that the intention was to attribute to Love every species of great-
ness and glory, whether really belonging to him or not, without regard to
truth or falsehood—that was no matter; for the original proposal seems to
have been not that each of you should really praise Love, but only that you
should appear to praise him. And so you attribute to Love every imaginable
form of praise which can be gathered anywhere; and you say that “he is all
this,” and “the cause of all that,” making him appear the fairest and best of
all to those who know him not, for you cannot impose upon those who know
him. And a noble and solemn hymn of the praise when I said that I would
take my turn, I must beg to be absolved from the promise which I made in
ignorance, and which . . . was a promise of the lips and not of the mind.
Farewell then to such a strain; for I do not praise in that way; no, indeed, I
cannot. But if you like to hear the truth about love, I am ready to speak in my
own manner, though I will not make myself ridiculous by entering into any
rivalry with you. Say then, Phaedrus, whether you would like to have the
truth about love, spoken in any words and in any order which may happen to
come into my mind at the time. Will that be agreeable to you?
Aristodemus said that Phaedrus and the company bid him speak in any manner which he thought best. Then, he added, let me have your permission first to ask Agathon a few more questions, in order that I may take his admissions as the premises of my discourse.

I grant the permission, said Phaedrus; put your question. Socrates then proceeded as follows:

[T]ell me what I want to know—whether Love desires that of which love is.

Yes, surely.

And does he possess, or does he not possess, that which he loves and desires?

Probably not, I should say.

Nay, replied Socrates, I would have you consider whether “necessarily” is not rather the word. The inference that he who desires something is in want of something, and that he who desires nothing is in want of nothing, is in my judgment, Agathon, absolutely and necessarily true. What do you think?

I agree with you, said Agathon.

Very good. Would he who is great desire to be great, or he who is strong desire to be strong?

That would be inconsistent with our previous admissions.

True. For he who is anything cannot want to be that which he is?

Very true. . . .

Then, said Socrates, he desires that what he has at present may be preserved to him in the future, which is equivalent to saying that he desires something which is nonexistent to him, and which as yet he has not got.

Very true, he said.

Then he and everyone who desires, desires that which he has not already, and which is future and not present, and which he has not, and is not, and of which he is in want—these are the sort of things which love and desire seek?

Very true, he said.

Then now, said Socrates, let us recapitulate the argument. First, is not love of something, and of something, too, which is wanting to a man?

Yes, he replied. . . .

And if this is true, Love is the love of beauty and not of deformity?

He assented. . . .

Then Love wants and has not beauty?

Certainly, he replied.
And would you call that beautiful which wants and does not possess beauty?
Certainly not.
Then would you still say that love is beautiful?
Agathon replied: I fear that I did not understand what I was saying. . . .
There is yet one small question which I would fain ask: Is not the good also the beautiful?
Yes.
Then in wanting the beautiful, love wants also the good?
I cannot refute you, Socrates, said Agathon; let us assume that what you say is true.
Say rather, beloved Agathon, that you cannot refute the truth; for Socrates is easily refuted.
And now, taking my leave of you, I will rehearse a tale of love which I heard from Diotima of Mantinea, a woman wise in this and in many other kinds of knowledge, who in the days of old, when the Athenians offered sacrifice before the coming of the plague, delayed the disease ten years. She was my instructress in the art of love, and I shall repeat to you what she said to me, beginning with the admissions made by Agathon, which are nearly, if not quite, the same which I made to the wise woman when she questioned me: I think that this will be the easiest way, and I shall take both parts myself as well as I can. As you, Agathon, suggested, I must speak first of the being and nature of Love, and then of his works. First I said to her in nearly the same words which he used to me that Love was a mighty god, and likewise fair; and she proved to me as I proved to him that, by my own showing, Love was neither fair nor good. “What do you mean, Diotima,” I said, “is love then evil and foul?” “Hush,” she cried; “must that be foul which is not fair?” “Certainly,” I said. “And is that which is not wise ignorant? Do you not see that there is a mean between wisdom and ignorance?” “And what may that be?” I said. “Right opinion,” she replied, “which, as you know, being incapable of giving a reason, is not knowledge (for how can knowledge be devoid of reason? nor again, ignorance, for neither can ignorance attain the truth), but is clearly something which is a mean between ignorance and wisdom.” “Quite true,” I replied. “Do not then insist,” she said, “that what is not fair is of necessity foul, or what is not good, evil; or infer that because Love is not fair and good he is therefore foul and evil; for he is in a mean between them.” “Well,” I said, “Love is surely admitted by all to be a great god.” “By those who know or by those who do not know?” “By all.” “And how, Socrates,” she said with a smile, “can Love be acknowledged to be a great god by those who
say that he is not a god at all?” “And who are they?” I said. “You and I are two of them,” she replied. “How can that be?” I said. “It is quite intelligible,” she replied, “for you yourself would acknowledge that the gods are happy and fair—of course you would—would you dare to say that any god was not?” “Certainly not,” I replied. “And you mean by the happy those who are the possessors of things good or fair?” “Yes.” “And you admitted that Love, because he was in want, desires those good and fair things of which he is in want?” “Yes, I did.” “But how can he be a god who has no portion in what is either good or fair?” “Impossible.” “Then you see that you also deny the divinity of Love.”

“What then is Love?” I asked. “Is he mortal?” “No.” “What then?” “As in the former instance, he is neither mortal nor immortal, but in a mean between the two.” “What is he, Diotima?” “He is a great spirit (daemon), and like all spirits he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal.” “And what,” I said, “is his power?” “He interprets,” she replied, “between gods and men, conveying and taking across to the gods the prayers and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands and replies of the gods; he is the mediator who spans the chasm which divides them, and therefore in him all is bound together, and through him the arts of the prophet and the priest, their sacrifices and mysteries and charms, and all prophecy and incantation, find their way. For god mingles not with man; but through Love all the intercourse and converse of god with man, whether awake or asleep, is carried on. The wisdom which understands this is spiritual; all other wisdom, such as that of arts and handicrafts, is mean and vulgar. Now these spirits or intermediate powers are many and diverse, and one of them is Love.” “And who,” I said, “was his father, and who his mother?” “The tale,” she said, “will take time; nevertheless I will tell you. On the birthday of Aphrodite there was a feast of the gods, at which the god Poros or Plenty, who is the son of Metis or Discretion, was one of the guests. When the feast was over, Penia or Poverty, as the manner is on such occasions, came about the doors to beg. Now Plenty, who was the worse for nectar (there was no wine in those days), went into the garden of Zeus and fell into a heavy sleep; and Poverty, considering her own straitened circumstances, plotted to have a child by him, and accordingly she lay down at his side and conceived Love, who partly because he is naturally a lover of the beautiful, and because Aphrodite is herself beautiful, and also because he was born on her birthday, is her follower and attendant. And as his parentage is, so also are his fortunes. In the first place, he is always poor, and anything but tender and fair, as the many imagine him; and he is rough and squalid, and has no shoes, nor a house to dwell in; on the bare
earth exposed he lies under the open heaven, in the streets, or at the doors of houses, taking his rest; and like his mother he is always in distress. Like his father, too, whom he also partly resembles, he is always plotting against the fair and good; he is bold, enterprising, strong, a mighty hunter, always weaving some intrigue or other, keen in the pursuit of wisdom, fertile in resources: a philosopher at all times, terrible as an enchanter, sorcerer, sophist. He is by nature neither mortal nor immortal, but alive and flourishing at one moment when he is in plenty, and dead at another moment, and again alive by reason of his father’s nature. But that which is always flowing in is always flowing out, and so he is never in want and never in wealth; and, further, he is in a mean between ignorance and knowledge. The truth of the matter is this: no god is a philosopher or seeker after wisdom, for he is wise already; nor does any man who is wise seek after wisdom. Neither do the ignorant seek after wisdom. For herein is the evil of ignorance that he who is neither good nor wise is nevertheless satisfied with himself; he has no desire for that of which he feels no want.” “But who then, Diotima,” I said, “are the lovers of wisdom, if they are neither the wise nor the foolish?” “A child may answer that question,” she replied; “they are those who are in a mean between the two; Love is one of them. For wisdom is a most beautiful thing, and Love is of the beautiful; and therefore Love is also a philosopher or lover of wisdom, and being a lover of wisdom is in a mean between the wise and the ignorant. And of this, too, his birth is the cause; for his father is wealthy and wise, and his mother poor and foolish. Such, my dear Socrates, is the nature of the spirit Love. The error in your conception of him was very natural and, as I imagine from what you say, has arisen out of a confusion of love and the beloved, which made you think that love was all beautiful. For the beloved is the truly beautiful and delicate and perfect and blessed; but the principle of love is of another nature, and is such as I have described.”

I said: “O thou stranger woman, thou sayest well; but, assuming Love to be such as you say, what is the use of him to men?” “That, Socrates,” she replied, “I will attempt to unfold: of his nature and birth I have already spoken; and you acknowledge that love is of the beautiful. But someone will say: Of the beautiful in what, Socrates and Diotima?—or rather let me put the question more clearly, and ask: When a man loves the beautiful, what does he desire?” I answered her “That the beautiful may be his.” “Still,” she said, “the answer suggests a further question: What is given by the possession of beauty?” “To what you have asked,” I replied, “I have no answer ready.” “Then,” she said, “let me put the word ‘good’ in the place of the beautiful, and repeat the question once more: If he who loves, loves the good, what is
it then that he loves?” “The possession of the good,” I said. “And what does he gain who possesses the good?” “Happiness,” I replied; “there is less difficulty in answering that question.” “Yes,” she said, “the happy are made happy by the acquisition of good things. Nor is there any need to ask why a man desires happiness; the answer is already final.” “You are right,” I said. “And is this wish and this desire common to all, and do all men always desire their own good, or only some men?—what say you?” “All men,” I replied; “the desire is common to all.” “Why, then,” she rejoined, “are not all men, Socrates, said to love, but only some of them, whereas you say that all men are always loving the same things?” “I myself wonder,” I said, “why this is.” “There is nothing to wonder at,” she replied; “the reason is that one part of love is separated off and receives the name of the whole, but the other parts have other names.” “Give an illustration,” I said. She answered me as follows: “There is poetry, which, as you know, is complex and manifold. All creation or passage of non-being into being is poetry or making, and the processes of all art are creative; and the masters of arts are all poets or makers.” “Very true.” “Still,” she said, “you know that they are not called poets, but have other names; only that portion of the art which is separated off from the rest and is concerned with music and meter is termed poetry, and they who possess poetry in this sense of the word are called poets.” “Very true,” I said. “And the same holds of love. For you may say generally that all desire of good and happiness is only the great and subtle power of love; but they who are drawn toward him by any other path, whether the path of money-making or gymnastics or philosophy, are not called lovers—the name of the whole is appropriated to those whose affection takes one form only—they alone are said to love, or to be lovers.” “I dare say,” I replied, “that you are right.” “Yes,” she added, “and you hear people say that lovers are seeking for their other half; but I say that they are seeking neither for the half of themselves nor for the whole unless the half or the whole be also a good. And they will cut off their own hands and feet and cast them away if they are evil; for they love not what is their own unless perchance there be someone who calls what belongs to him the good, and what belongs to another the evil. For there is nothing which men love but the good. Is there anything?” “Certainly, I should say, that there is nothing.” “Then,” she said, “the simple truth is that men love the good.” “Yes,” I said. “To which must be added that they love the possession of the good?” “Yes, that must be added.” “And not only the possession, but the everlasting possession of the good?” “That must be added too.” “Then love,” she said, “may be described generally as the love of the everlasting possession of the good?” “That is most true.”
“Then if this be the nature of love, can you tell me further,” she said, “what is the manner of the pursuit? What are they doing who show all this eagerness and heat which is called love, and what is the object which they have in view? Answer me.” “Nay, Diotima,” I replied, “if I had known, I should not have wondered at your wisdom, neither should I have come to learn from you about this very matter.” “Well,” she said, “I will teach you—the object which they have in view is birth in beauty, whether of body or soul.” “I do not understand you,” I said; “the oracle requires an explanation.” “I will make my meaning clearer,” she replied. “I mean to say, that all men are bringing to the birth in their bodies and in their souls. There is a certain age at which human nature is desirous of procreation—procreation which must be in beauty and not in deformity; and this procreation is the union of man and woman, and is a divine thing; for conception and generation are an immortal principle in the mortal creature, and in the inharmonious they can never be. But the deformed is always inharmonious with the divine, and the beautiful harmonious. Beauty, then, is the destiny or goddess of parturition who presides at birth, and therefore, when approaching beauty, the conceiving power is propitious, and diffusive, and benign, and begets and bears fruit; at the sight of ugliness she frowns and contracts and has a sense of pain, and turns away, and shrivels up, and not without a pang refrains from conception. And this is the reason why, when the hour of conception arrives, and the teeming nature is full, there is such a flutter and ecstasy about beauty, whose approach is the alleviation of the pain of travail. For love, Socrates, is not, as you imagine, the love of the beautiful only.” “What then?” “The love of generation and of birth in beauty.” “Yes,” I said. “Yes, indeed,” she replied. “But why of generation?” “Because to the mortal creature generation is a sort of eternity and immortality,” she replied; “and if, as has been already admitted, love is of the everlasting possession of the good, all men will necessarily desire immortality together with good—wherefore love is of immortality.”

All this she taught me at various times when she spoke of love. And I remember her once saying to me, “What is the cause, Socrates, of love and the attendant desire? See you not how all animals, birds as well as beasts, in their desire of procreation are in agony when they take the infection of love, which begins with the desire of union; whereto is added the care of offspring, on whose behalf the weakest are ready to battle against the strongest even to the uttermost, and to die for them, and will let themselves be tormented with hunger or suffer anything in order to maintain their young. Man may be supposed to act thus from reason; but why should animals have these passionate feelings? Can you tell me why?” Again I replied that I did not know. She said
to me: “And do you expect ever to become a master in the art of love if you do not know this?” “But I have told you already, Diotima, that my ignorance is the reason why I come to you; for I am conscious that I want a teacher; tell me then the cause of this and of the other mysteries of love.” “Marvel not,” she said, “if you believe that love is of the immortal, as we have several times acknowledged; for here again, and on the same principle, too, the mortal nature is seeking as far as is possible to be everlasting and immortal: and this is only to be attained by generations because generation always leaves behind a new existence in the place of the old. Nay, even in the life of the same individual there is succession and not absolute unity: a man is called the same, and yet in the short interval which elapses between youth and age, and in which every animal is said to have life and identity, he is undergoing a perpetual process of loss and reparation—hair, flesh, bones, blood, and the whole body are always changing. Which is true not only of the body but also of the soul, whose habits, tempers, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears never remain the same in anyone of us, but are always coming and going; and equally true of knowledge. And what is still more surprising to us mortals, not only do the sciences in general spring up and decay, so that in respect of them we are never the same; but each of them individually experiences a like change. For what is implied in the word ‘recollection’ but the departure of knowledge which is ever being forgotten and is renewed and preserved by recollection, and appears to be the same although in reality new, according to that law of succession by which all mortal things are preserved, not absolutely the same, but by substitution, the old, worn-out mortality leaving another new and similar existence behind—unlike the divine, which is always the same and not another? And in this way, Socrates, the mortal body, or mortal anything, partakes of immortality; but the immortal in another way. Marvel not then at the love which all men have of their offspring; for that universal love and interest is for the sake of immortality.”

I was astonished at her words and said: “Is this really true, O thou wise Diotima?” And she answered with all the authority of an accomplished sophist: “Of that, Socrates, you may be assured—think only of the ambition of men, and you will wonder at the senselessness of their ways, unless you consider how they are stirred by the love of an immortality of fame. They are ready to run all risks greater far than they would have run for their children, and to spend money and undergo any sort of toil, and even to die for, for the sake of leaving behind them a name which shall be eternal. Do you imagine that Alcestis would have died to save Admetus, or Achilles to avenge Patroclus, or your own Codrus in order to preserve the kingdom for his sons, if
they had not imagined that the memory of their virtues, which still survives among us, would be immortal? Nay,” she said, “I am persuaded that all men do all things, and the better they are the more they do them, in hope of the glorious fame of immortal virtue; for they desire the immortal.

“Those who are pregnant in the body only betake themselves to women and beget children—this is the character of their love; their offspring, as they hope, will preserve their memory and give them the blessedness and immortality which they desire in the future. But souls which are pregnant—for there certainly are men who are more creative in their souls than in their bodies—conceive that which is proper for the soul to conceive or contain. And what are these conceptions?—wisdom and virtue in general. And such creators are poets and all artists who are deserving of the name inventor. But the greatest and fairest sort of wisdom by far is that which is concerned with the ordering of states and families, and which is called temperance and justice. And he who in youth has the seed of these implanted in him and is himself inspired, when he comes to maturity, desires to beget and generate. He wanders about seeking beauty that he may beget offspring—for in deformity he will beget nothing—and naturally embraces the beautiful rather than the deformed body; above all when he finds a fair and noble and well-nurtured soul, he embraces the two in one person, and to such a one he is full of speech about virtue and the nature and pursuits of a good man; and he tries to educate him; and at the touch of the beautiful which is ever-present to his memory, even when absent, he brings forth that which he had conceived long before, and in company with him tends that which he brings forth; and they are married by a far nearer tie and have a closer friendship than those who beget mortal children, for the children who are their common offspring are fairer and more immortal. Who, when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets, would not rather have their children than ordinary human ones? Who would not emulate them in the creation of children as theirs, which have preserved their memory and given them everlasting glory? Or who would not have such children as Lycurgus left behind him to be the saviors, not only of Lacedaemon, but of Hellas, as one may say? There is Solon, too, who is the revered father of Athenian law; and many others there are in many other places, both among Hellenes and barbarians, who have given to the world many noble works and have been the parents of virtue of every kind; and many temples have been raised in their honor for the sake of children such as theirs, which were never raised in honor of anyone for the sake of his mortal children.

“These are the lesser mysteries of love into which even you, Socrates, may enter; to the greater and more hidden ones which are the crown of these,
and to which, if you pursue them in a right spirit, they will lead, I know not whether you will be able to attain. But I will do my utmost to inform you, and do you follow if you can. For he who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms; and, first, if he be guided by his instructor aright to love one such form only—out of that he should create fair thoughts; and soon he will of himself perceive that the beauty of form in general is his pursuit, how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in every form is one and the same! And when he perceives this he will abate his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms; in the next stage he will consider that the beauty of the mind is more honorable than the beauty of the outward form. So that if a virtuous soul have but a little comeliness, he will be content to love and tend him, and will search out and bring to the birth thoughts which may improve the young, until he is compelled to contemplate and see the beauty of institutions and laws, and to understand that the beauty of them all is of one family, and that personal beauty is a trifle; and after laws and institutions he will go on to the sciences, that he may see their beauty, being not like a servant in love with the beauty of one youth or man or institution, himself a slave mean and narrow-minded, but drawing toward and contemplating the vast sea of beauty, he will create many fair and noble thoughts and notions in boundless love of wisdom; until on that shore he grows and waxes strong, and at last the vision is revealed to him of a single science which is the science of beauty everywhere. To this I will proceed; please to give me your very best attention:

“He who has been instructed thus far in the things of love, and who has learned to see the beautiful in due order and succession, when he comes toward the end will suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty (and this, Socrates, is the final cause of all our former toils)—a nature which in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly, not fair in one point of view and foul in another, or at one time or in one relation or at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul, as if fair to some and foul to others, or in the likeness of a face or hands or any part of the bodily frame, or in any form of speech or knowledge, or existing in any other being, as for example, in an animal, or in heaven, or on earth, or in any other place; but beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase or any change is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things. He who from these ascending under the influence of true love begins to perceive that beauty is not far from the end. And the true order of going,
or being led by another, to the things of love is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upward for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is. This, my dear Socrates,” said the stranger of Mantineai, “is that life above all others which man should live, in the contemplation of beauty absolute; a beauty which if you once beheld you would see not to be after the measure of gold, and garments, and fair boys and youths, whose presence now entrances you; and you and many a one would be content to live seeing them only and conversing with them without meat or drink, if that were possible—you only want to look at them and to be with them. But what if man had eyes to see the true beauty—the divine beauty, I mean, pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colors and vanities of human life—thither looking, and holding converse with the true beauty simple and divine? Remember how in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities (for he has hold not of an image but of a reality), and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may. Would that be an ignoble life?”

Such, Phaedrus—and I speak not only to you, but to all of you—were the words of Diotima; and I am persuaded of their truth. And being persuaded of them, I try to persuade others that in the attainment of this end human nature will not easily find a helper better than love. And therefore also I say that every man ought to honor him as I myself honor him, and walk in his ways, and exhort others to do the same, and praise the power and spirit of love according to the measure of my ability now and ever.

The words which I have spoken, you, Phaedrus, may call an encomium of love, or anything else which you please.

When Socrates had done speaking the company applauded. . . .