ELEPHANT&CASTLE 34 | III/2024 | ISSN 1826-6118

The Educational Merits of Banquets and Wine Consumption in Plato's *Symposium* and *Laws*

VASILEIOS LIOTSAKIS

University of the Peloponnese
v.liotsakis@uop.gr

doi: https://doi.org/10.62336/unibg.eac.34.552

Keywords

Plato
Symposium
Laws
Banquets
Wine consumption

Abstract

In this paper, I endeavor to demonstrate that the similarities between the *Symposium* and the Athenian's normative agenda about banquets in the *Laws* are so close and so many that it can justifiably be argued that in the *Symposium* Plato follows a system of values which we also find in its entirety in the *Laws*. I argue that this agenda is inextricably related in Plato's mind to the virtue of courage, the other part of which entails practicing keeping in check one's fears in battle. Socrates, although not the most appropriate candidate for the position of a banquet's head, undoubtedly resists more than anyone else in the Symposium the "enemies" he confronts at the party and thereby emerges as not only the most moderate but also as the most courageous of all.

CC BY

In Book 1 of the *Laws*, the main figure of the dialogue, the anonymous Athenian Visitor, defends the usefulness of banquets and wine consumption for citizens, offering his arguments in terms of (a) the benefits of banquets and drinking for the human soul (exercise in controlling emotions such as excessive courage, shame and hope), (b) the role of each participant in a banquet according to their age, and (c) the circumstances under which a banquet can be organized in a morally acceptable fashion. Accordingly, in the *Symposium* Plato dramatizes his views on the aforementioned topics by means of a well-aimed and skillful theatrical design.[1] The interlocutors from the outset agree upon the way they will consume wine;[2] they constitute a heterogeneous group of people in terms of their age; and they demonstrate different modes of conduct depending on their age and the excess of their consumption of wine. Finally, in the *Symposium*, too, the reader is led to the conclusion that banquets, under certain circumstances, can serve as a social context fertile in the production of philosophical ideas about ethical matters, in this case *eros*.

It is a fact, though, that little attention has been paid to the *Symposium*'s close linkages with this 'manifesto' about the proper organization of banquets we find in the *Laws*.[3] In this paper, I endeavor to demonstrate that the similarities between the *Symposium* and the Athenian's normative agenda about banquets in the *Laws* should not merely be seen as sporadic thematic affinities; these connections are so close and so many that it can justifiably be argued that in the *Symposium* Plato follows a system of values which we also find in its entirety in the *Laws*. This training, I will argue, is inextricably related in Plato's mind to the virtue of courage, the other part of which entails practicing keeping in check one's fears in battle. Socrates, although not the most appropriate candidate for the position of a banquet's head, undoubtedly resists more than anyone else in the *Symposium* the "enemies" he confronts at the party and thereby emerges as not only the most moderate but also as the most courageous of all.

1. Socrates and the qualities of the ideal head of a party

In the *Laws*, the Athenian argues that a party can be conducted in an acceptable way only if it is administered by a proper leader (*Leg.* 639a2–641a2), who is expected to possess the following qualities. First, he should not be swayed by the turbulence prevalent at a party due to intoxication. He should be calm and quiet, so that he can prevent the noise of the banquet from getting out of control (640c1–8).[4] Second, the leader of a party is expected to be wise enough to be in a position to secure what is at stake on these occasions, i.e. concord and love between the participants (*Leg.* 640c9–d2). One further prerequisite for the realization of this goal is that the leader should remain sober. Although Plato does not explicitly say so, he certainly believes that the head of the banquet will avoid getting drunk if he has self-control. Last, the Athenian Visitor adds that the leader should be wise and old enough – if not the same age as himself, then at least not extremely young (*Leg.* 640d4–7).[5]

In the *Symposium*, the figure that possesses most of these qualities is unsurprisingly Socrates. Although he is certainly not as old as the Athenian of the *Laws* might have hoped him to be – he is fifty-three years old –, his age matches the age described in the *Republic* as the most fitting for those who wish to engage in philosophy (*Rep.* 540a4–c2), and the age propounded in the *Laws* as the prerequisite for someone who aspires to take on certain public offices.[6] One further quality of Socrates that fits well with the portrait of the ideal leading banqueter of the *Laws* is his ability to remain calm and quiet. When the banqueters decide to praise Love in an order that renders Socrates the last person to speak, he cheerfully accepts this decision and never interrupts his friends as they are speaking (*Symp.* 177c5–178a5). When his turn comes, he reveals that, while listening to his friends, he had serious objections to the spirit and content of their praises (*Symp.* 198a1–201c9). Nevertheless, he never intruded on their speeches to express his disagreement.

Socrates demonstrates one further virtue also mentioned by the Athenian in the *Laws*, i.e. his ability to remain unaffected by the noise of drunken companions. The first relevant occasion is Alcibiades' arrival. Plato stages the scene of Alcibiades' entry as a typical, rowdy moment of a banquet reminiscent of those we read of in the *Laws*. Alcibiades suddenly knocks the courtyard door causing a loud clang, which is accompanied by the voices of other men and of the flute girl (*Symp.* 212c6–e3). The banqueters immediately hear the voice of Alcibiades, who is de-

scribed as shouting (*Symp.* 212d4). Socrates' sober, quiet and unruffled reaction to this noisy interruption is highlighted by being contrasted not only with Alcibiades' boisterous conduct but also with the ease with which the rest of the banqueters are immediately influenced by Alcibiades' entry and interrupt their discussion (*Symp.* 213a3ff.). Socrates does not even talk to Alcibiades and is so silent that the drunken Alcibiades realizes Socrates' presence only when he sits next to him. But even then, Socrates speaks to him only after Alcibiades addresses him first (*Symp.* 213b6–d6). Furthermore, when Alcibiades teases Socrates for his alleged jealousy, the latter rebukes him and asks him to silence himself (*Symp.* 214d5).

Socrates remains equally untouched by the party's disorder, when further drunkards intrude on the gathering. While most of the banqueters forget their initial agreement to remain sober, get drunk and fall asleep, Socrates continues his discussion with Agathon and Aristophanes until the morning of the next day (*Symp.* 223b1–d12). One may easily discern Plato's intention to create a sharp contrast between the disorder of intoxication prevalent in other parts of the party and the serenity of Socrates' encounter with the two poets.[7]

Socrates manages not to be swayed by the frenzy of intoxication and partying partly because he is able to remain sober, an ability which brings him even closer to the image of the ideal leading banqueter of the *Laws*. When, at the beginning of the dialogue, the banqueters agree not to get drunk and to instead use wine merely as an accompaniment to their discussion, Pausanias stresses that Socrates would not have a problem whether they drank a lot (*Symp.* 176a1–d4). Pausanias does not clarify whether Socrates does not get drunk because he does not drink or because he can handle the effects of wine, but he probably means both.[8] This view is confirmed by Alcibiades' statement when he urges the banqueters to drink. After drinking from a wine cooler, Alcibiades asks the servants to refill it for Socrates, explaining that this trick will not have any effect upon the latter, as he can remain sober no matter how much wine he is invited to consume (*Symp.* 213e7–214a5). That Socrates avoids getting drunk not only due to his immunity to wine but also due to his self-control in consuming alcohol is also proved by Alcibiades' story about Socrates' unwillingness to drink wine in common meals during military expeditions (*Symp.* 220a1–6).

Socrates' self-control in wine consumption is part of his overall moderation in circumstances which could create temptations for other people. This quality is reminiscent of the Athenian's ideal head of parties in the *Laws*. Furthermore, besides these aforementioned issues (serenity and self-restraint in conversations and drinking), Alcibiades' laudatory story about Socrates foregrounds one further level on which Socrates is moderate, i.e. sexual desire. Socrates did not succumb to the temptation of having sex with Alcibiades either when they had physical contact during their wrestling or when they slept together at Alcibiades' house, with the latter sleeping naked next to him after having confessed his desire to be his lover (*Symp.* 217a2–219d2). According to Alcibiades, Socrates did not succumb to his flirting due to his self-control (*Symp.* 219d5: σωφροσύνην).

Alcibiades' assumption entails, of course, that Socrates was sexually attracted to him and, consequently, that he resisted not due to total absence of sexual desire but due to his ability to control his desire. Although Socrates nowhere in the dialogue admits that he ever wished to have sex with Alcibiades, we should nonetheless not hasten to take Alcibiades' conviction that he attracted Socrates as reflecting his arrogant over-confidence. For, although Alcibiades repeatedly provokes Socrates to deny anything he is saying (*Symp.* 214e6–215a3; 215b7–8; 216a2; principally 217b1–3 and 219c2), Socrates never does so. Furthermore, when Alcibiades, according to his own story, asked him to take his time and think about the possibility that they become lovers, Socrates, without denying that he was attracted by Alcibiades, agreed that they should take their time and consider this possibility (*Symp.* 218c7–219b2). Socrates' moderation in the *Symposium* is manifested, in my view, as some kind of resistance to the attraction he feels for Alcibiades, an attraction which he, if not accepts, at least never denies.[9]

2. The education of young intoxicated men by leading banqueters like Socrates

Both in the *Symposium* and the *Laws*, Plato is particularly interested in the benefits a young man can earn from his interaction with virtuous men like Socrates within the context of a banquet. Even more

importantly, in both dialogues these benefits are principally the following two: (a) the young man is taught by the older man how to control himself whenever he falls victim to shamelessness due to intoxication; (b) the young man learns that the real goods not only for himself but also for everyone else are wisdom, moderation, justice and bravery and that, on the contrary, health, strength, beauty, wealth and honors, although highly valued by many, come second to the aforementioned ethical virtues.

In the *Laws*, the Athenian argues that young men, and actually all men, drink a lot and thereby loosen their shyness in terms of what they both do and speak. The role of the party's head is, *inter alia*, to teach intoxicated young men how to control themselves and resist their shamelessness, which makes them say and do things that they would avoid were they sober. The Athenian adds that the proper organization of a banquet and the proper management of intoxication may also contribute to the right education of the citizens (*Leg.* 645d4–650b10). Part of this education lies in that young people are trained to desire or not desire those things which are prescribed by reason (*Leg.* 643b4–644b4), and to prioritize the virtues of wisdom, moderation, justice and bravery over lesser goods such as health, strength, beauty, wealth and honor (*Leg.* 631b3–632d7; especially 631c1–5: [...] μὲν ἐλάττονα [...] μὲν ὑγίεια, κάλλος δὲ δεύτερον, τὸ δὲ τρίτον ἰσχὺς εἴς τε δρόμον καὶ εἰς τὰς ἄλλας πάσας κινήσεις τῷ σώματι, τέταρτον δὲ δὴ πλοῦτος and 631c5–d1: ὃ δὴ πρῶτον [...] ἡ φρόνησις, δεύτερον δὲ μετὰ νοῦ σώφρων ψυχῆς ἕξις, ἐκ δὲ τούτων μετ' ἀνδρείας κραθέντων τρίτον ἂν εἴη δικαιοσύνη, τέταρτον δὲ ἀνδρεία).

Both these benefits, resistance to shamelessness and proper evaluative prioritization of mental, physical and societal goods, are highlighted in the *Symposium* by the way Plato dramatizes Socrates' interaction with Alcibiades. Also, both themes are touched upon before Alcibiades' arrival, in some preparatory statements found in the banqueters' encomia of Love. As far as shamelessness is concerned, at the beginning of the *Symposium* Phaedrus notes that lovers are always ashamed to do and say disgraceful things in their beloveds' presence (*Symp.* 178d4–179b3). It has been rightly noted that this statement prepares us for the shame Alcibiades will later confess that he feels in Socrates' presence.[10]

Besides, however, this cross-reference, I would like to draw attention to one further, unnoticed, narrative seed of the dialogue with regard to Alcibiades' comments about Socrates' impact upon his psychology.[11] This is the short conversation of Socrates and Agathon after Aristophanes' speech (*Symp.* 194a1–e3). Socrates worries that Agathon's imminent speech, along with all that has been said by the other banqueters, will leave him with nothing to add about Love. Agathon complains that Socrates is trying to disquiet him by enhancing his audience's expectations of what he is to say. Socrates answers that it is not reasonable for him to be afraid of speaking in the presence of a handful of people after having performed his tragedies in front of thousands of Athenians. Agathon responds that he finds it harder to speak in front of a few wise men than many uneducated ones. And at this point Socrates introduces the issue of shame; he asks Agathon if he would be ashamed to do something bad only in front of a few educated men, or in front of the many as well. While Agathon is ready to be sidetracked by Socrates' questions, Phaedrus interrupts and asks him to return to their purpose, the encomium of Love. In this short interlude between Aristophanes' and Agathon's speeches, Plato discreetly returns to a subject which has already been introduced by Phaedrus and will later turn out to be a distinctive feature of Alcibiades' relationship with Socrates, i.e. the sense of shame.

Let us now move on to Alcibiades' statements about his shame in Socrates' presence. Alcibiades admits that Socrates, both through his ethical admonitions and his *modus vivendi*, makes him feel, even in an intoxicated condition, something that he would never expect himself to feel: shame (*Symp.* 216a8–c3). What matters is that Alcibiades makes this confession while drunk (*Symp.* 212d4; 212e9; 214c7; 215d7; 217e3) and therefore in a mood to say and do things which he would (perhaps!) avoid were he sober. When he announces his decision to narrate the story about how Socrates had once rejected his efforts to seduce him, Alcibiades admits that he would not share his experience were he not under the influence of wine (*Symp.* 217e3). In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades serves as the dramatized paradigm of the intoxicated young men who are described in the *Laws* as not being ashamed to do and say things due to their intoxication.

Even more importantly, Alcibiades does not merely present himself as an individual whose shame is lessened due to intoxication; he also sketches himself as someone who is shameless anyway (*Symp.* 216a8–b3). Consequently, in fashioning himself in such a way and being in an intoxicated condition, Alcibiades emerges as the most difficult challenge for any virtuous banqueter who would endeavor to instill in intoxicated young men the slightest modicum of shame. The fact that shame is the very first emotion which such a man (and in such a state of mind) asserts that he feels in Socrates' presence underlines in the reader's mind the great ethical value of Socrates' psychological effect on his friends.[12]

On the other hand, it may be argued, Alcibiades is not ashamed as much as he is claiming to be.[13] He says whatever comes to his mind and draws the rest of the banqueters into the turbulent atmosphere he has already created even with his very first knocking on Agathon's door. Nonetheless, even Alcibiades' first reaction once he realizes that Socrates is present, seen in the light of how uncomfortable he claims to always feel in Socrates' presence, may be interpreted as a spontaneous and genuine expression of this shame before his teacher. As already mentioned, Socrates is silent as Alcibiades enters the party; the latter notices his presence only when he sits beside him, and his very first words to him are the following: "Heracles! What's this! Socrates here! Lying in ambush for me again, suddenly appearing as you usually do where I least expect you to be" (213b8–c2). In essence, his whole confession about the shame he feels in front of Socrates and about his wish to make him disappear from the places he himself visits helps us explain this first reaction.[14] In the *Symposium*, Plato dramatizes the relationship between a virtuous banqueter and a drunken young man in a way that helps us apprehend in what sense the modest head of a party is meant to elicit the shame of their younger intoxicated companions.

Alcibiades is ashamed before Socrates because he is forced by him to realize that everything he pursues in his life (honor, wealth, power) is worthless compared to what he should pursue but he does not (moral virtues) (216a8–c3). And exactly at this point we may discern one further point of accordance between the *Symposium* and the *Laws*. As we have seen, the Athenian Visitor claims that both the teachers and the laws of a city should teach the citizens that there are two kinds of goods for men: (a) the divine goods, which are the virtues of the soul and specifically wisdom, moderation, justice and bravery; (b) and the mortal goods, namely health, beauty, strength, wealth and honors (631b3–d7). When the Athenian argues that the proper organization of banquets and the proper management of intoxication can contribute to the ethical education of young individuals (641b3–c7), he leads us to the conclusion that banquets and intoxication may help people, *inter alia*, to realize and understand the differences between these two kinds of goods and to pursue the divine ones, and this is exactly what Socrates is described in the *Symposium* as helping Alcibiades realize.

Similarly to the issue of shamelessness, this theme, too, is introduced for the first time long before Alcibiades' arrival. Already in the first encomium of Love, Phaedrus introduces the difference between moral virtues and material goods. For Phaedrus, there is nothing better for a young man than a virtuous lover. A righteous erotic partner can offer the young beloved benefits that cannot be gained from any kind of wealth or honors (178c3–d1).[15] Similarly, in the second speech about Love, Pausanias maintains that a virtuous love is never motivated by political and financial expediency. All this, i.e. beauty, wealth and honors, is temporary in contrast to the virtues of the soul, which are eternal (182d5–183b5; 183d3–e6; 184a7–c3). This antithesis, similarly to the one we find in the *Laws* between divine and mortal goods, foreshadows the evaluative prioritization of goods which Alcibiades will later on admit that he is led to by Socrates.[16]

Differently to Phaedrus and Pausanias, Alcibiades does not refer to virtue merely in a vague way; he talks specifically about those virtues which the Athenian Visitor also addresses in the *Laws*. Alcibiades believes that Socrates, although he seems to act as a satyr and to be swayed by his desire for beautiful youths, has true self-control (216d2–7 with d7: σωφροσύνης) and does not care if someone is handsome, rich or receives any other kind of honor in society (216d7–e2: οὔτε εἴ τις καλός ἐστι μέλει αὐτῷ οὐδέν […] οὔτ' εἴ τις πλούσιος, οὔτ' εἰ ἄλλην τινὰ τιμὴν ἔχων τῶν ὑπὸ πλήθους μακαριζομένων). Alcibiades creates the same contrast which we read of in the *Laws* and, what is more, in the very same way, i.e. by characterizing the moral virtues as divine. For, in his view,

Socrates takes wealth, beauty and honors to be insignificant, while he himself characterizes Socrates' moral virtues as divine, golden, extremely beautiful and admirable (215b3: ἀγάλματα θεῶν; 216e6–217a1: ἀγάλματα […] θεῖα καὶ χρυσᾶ εἶναι καὶ πάγκαλα καὶ θαυμαστά; cfr. *Leg.* 631b6 – 7: διπλᾶ δὲ ἀγαθά ἐστιν, τὰ μὲν ἀνθρώπινα, τὰ δὲ θεῖα; 631c6: τῶν θείων).[17] Apart from moderation, Alcibiades also adds the rest of the moral qualities we read of in the *Laws*, as he admits that he admires Socrates' courage, wisdom and endurance (219d5–7: σωφροσύνην καὶ ἀνδρείαν […] εἰς φρόνησιν καὶ εἰ̓ς καρτερίαν).

Socrates is sketched as choosing these virtues over beauty, power and honors also in Alcibiades' analepsis about how Socrates managed to resist his flirting. Alcibiades attempts to seduce the older man by means of a mortal good, bodily strength. He invites Socrates to wrestle with him, hoping that, while in physical contact with him, Socrates will feel some kind of sexual desire for him. Nonetheless, Socrates remains unaffected by Alcibiades' provocations (217b7–c4). Alcibiades then tries to entice him by implying that to offer himself sexually to him is a great honor. Alcibiades explains to Socrates that he thinks it fair to choose him as a sexual partner because Socrates, due to his incomparable virtue, is worthy of this honor more than anyone else. Socrates is not cajoled by Alcibiades' flattery and answers that Alcibiades is too young to know who is really virtuous and who is not (218b8–219b2). After this failed confession, Alcibiades tries to seduce Socrates using one further mortal good we find in the *Laws*, beauty. He takes off his clothes and reclines next to Socrates, but the latter is not swayed by this either (219b3–d2). The whole story about Alcibiades' suit to Socrates aims at teaching the reader that Socrates is the ideal candidate for teaching, both through his admonitions and his behavior, intoxicated young men about the superiority of virtues such as moderation, cleverness, endurance and wisdom over beauty, strength, wealth and honors. This ability of Socrates could also make him the ideal candidate for the duty of heading a party (but see next section).

3. Socrates' courage in the sympotic battlefield of temptations

These similarities between the *Symposium* and the *Laws* concerning the way Plato invites the reader in both cases to assess the participants in a party show, if anything, that the Athenian's sketch of the ideal banquet in the *Laws* may legitimately serve for us, despite its significant temporal distance from the *Symposium*, as a reliable prism through which to examine how Plato invites us in the *Symposium* to assess the didactic value of this fictional gathering. I use this last section as a conclusion, in which I analyze the verdicts we are led to in the *Symposium* in this respect. Second, I use the *Laws* as a basis on which to draw attention to a relatively neglected message Plato wished to convey in the *Symposium*, a message about Socrates' self-control as part of his courage.

To begin with the issue of how we are invited to assess the didactic value of the party described in the *Symposium*, we may discern one further connection with the *Laws*. The Athenian Visitor admits to his friends that even he has never attended a party taking place in a perfectly proper way. He has merely encountered banquets that were only partly beneficial for the participants (639d5–e3). Of course, the Athenian, speaking of acceptable moments of banquets, probably refers to occasions on which he had discerned elements congruent with his own ideal banquet (perhaps sober and quiet leading banqueters, intoxicated young men who managed to control themselves, etc.). However, the point is that the Athenian by no means idealizes current parties; he does not argue in favor of them based on their 'glorious' pre-history but out of optimism about their promising, in his view, educational potential, provided that they are administered in a way he himself finds to be right.

In the *Symposium*, Plato leads us to similar speculations about the finite benefits of a banquet both on a level of what is said and what happens. Regarding the views expressed by the characters, the first five laudatory speeches about Love admittedly combine views that Plato would find reasonable and rhetorical exaggerations and syllogistic stumbles. On the one hand, Gorgias' and Lysias' rhetorical typologies may help Plato caricature Phaedrus' and Agathon's speeches, but on the other, both speakers put forward views consistent with Socrates' definition of Love and Alcibiades' *laus* of Socrates. This is also the case with the speeches of Pausanias, Eryximachus

and Aristophanes.[18] However, if this view holds true – and, in my opinion, it does – the following question then arises: why did Plato wish to compose five praises of Love which are partly flawed and, in a final analysis, with all their merits, inadequate?

One of the most popular answers to this question has been that Plato wished to present Socrates as remedying his friends' oversights through his narrative about his conversation with Diotima about Love.[19] At the same time, however, the combination of truth and falsity in the speeches preceding Socrates' analysis may receive one further explanation if examined along with the more general question of what message Plato wished to convey about the potential of banquets not only in terms of what is said but also of what takes place at them. Precisely at this point the *Laws* can be of great help. In my view, Plato's choice to foreground the co-existence of mistakes and valid views in the speeches about Love is part of his general intention in the *Symposium* to lead us to the conclusion which is also expressed by the Athenian in the *Laws*: what is said and done at a banquet is normally doomed to be only partially acceptable.

Socrates possesses, as we have seen, the desired qualities of the Athenian's ideal leading banqueter; however, he also demonstrates features which render him inappropriate for this duty. With all his unremitting focus on his own self-control and on educating his friends, Socrates appears to be indifferent to a banquet's perfect organization. His serenity should be seen as a rather introverted choice and is not manifested as an effort to impose control over noise in the entire banquet.[20] With the same indifference he approaches the turbulence caused by Alcibiades and his friends and by the second festive wave, which leads to the total dissipation of the gathering. He attends to all this without doing anything to prevent the interruption of the discussion about Love. He does not even care if he will be at the banquet from the very beginning, wasting time in a neighbor's porch. Nonetheless, despite his indifference in all this, Socrates should take the credit for some serene highlights of the banquet, which suggest certain facets of the Athenian's normative approach to parties in the *Laws*. Whoever (Agathon and Aristophanes) remains with him enjoys a calm and sober discussion. Socrates is presented as possessing elements which could render him the ideal leading banqueter, but at the same time as being prevented from becoming so by humbler factors, such as wine consumption, the drunkenness of his companions, and their shamelessness.

Alcibiades is placed in an even more controversial path between positive and negative features. He may indeed be ashamed in the presence of Socrates, but he is not ashamed enough, both due to his temperament and his intoxicated state. He has embraced Socrates' belief about the qualitative superiority of moral virtues over everything he pursues (wealth, honors, power, etc.), but he never adopted such a worldview as a basis for his own lifestyle.[21] Even more importantly, Alcibiades' shamelessness and the inappropriate way in which he approached the love he felt for Socrates elicit our doubts about the feasibility of the principles expressed by the rest of the banqueters before his arrival about a moderate and virtuous love.

In a similar vein, the rest of the banqueters also prove to be incapable of securing the sobriety and self-control both of themselves and the banquet as a whole. While they had agreed upon not getting drunk, they are eventually swayed by Alcibiades and the other intruders and perpetrate something which the Athenian of the *Laws* would treat as a flagrant mistake: they allow an intoxicated young man to take control of the banquet simply because he asks them to. One may reach the Athenian's conclusion in the *Laws*: "for a commander of drunkards who was himself drunken, young, and foolish would be very lucky if he escaped doing some serious mischief" (640d5–7). Nowhere in his oeuvre is Plato more concentrated in his effort to dramatize the great suspensory power of men's desires for earthly goods and the intoxication which inflames these desires, at the expense of men's efforts to pursue the divine virtues of their souls.[22]

Apart from the Athenian's normative agenda about banquets, the very context in which he places his speculations on self-control and shamelessness may also shed light on an unnoticed function of Alcibiades' praise of Socrates' moderation. In the *Laws*, the conversation about parties emerges from the Athenian's and his friends' discussion about the nature of courage. After he and his companions have defined courage as one's ability to endure the fear of one's enemies and the hardships of war (*Leg.* 624a1–634d3), the Athenian proceeds with the following

objection: while Sparta and the Cretan societies have established many institutions that help the citizens develop their courage in war, they lack activities which would train the youth to confront their internal enemies, i.e. their desires and pleasures. For the Athenian, the self-control with which men patiently resist their passions is part of their courage. In this respect, activities like banquets enhance, through intoxication, men's vulnerability to pleasures and thus, in a way, serve as battlefields equally as dangerous as the real ones, where the fight is not against external enemies but against the internal enemies of their souls (*Leg.* 634d3–650b10).

In his praise of Socrates in the *Symposium*, Alcibiades, apart from presenting Socrates as the ideal beloved we read of in Diotima's analysis,[23] also proceeds with a similar parallelization between the temptations lurking in a banquet and the enemies in a battle. After his story about Socrates' self-control in the face of his sexual siege (*Symp.* 216c4–219e5), Alcibiades completes Socrates' portrait in a way that is reminiscent of the Athenian's twofold definition of courage. Alcibiades starts narrating Socrates' extraordinary feats during certain military enterprises, feats which demonstrate Socrates' ability to endure both the hardships of war and the temptations of banquets (*Symp.* 219e5–221c1). Socrates is presented as enduring the labors, hunger and cold more than anyone else (*Symp.* 219e7–220a1); he demonstrates an admirable courage and eagerness for self-sacrifice at the battles of Potidaea and Delium (220d5–221c1). Alcibiades markedly associates Socrates' attitude in war with his mentality in common meals during expeditions (220a1–6). For it was only Socrates who avoided drinking, and whenever he could not avoid it, he did not get drunk. Both Socrates' resistance to his desire for Alcibiades and his moderation regarding battles and the temptations of common meals are described as emerging from the virtue of endurance (220a1: τοῖς πόνοις […] ἐπὶ στρατείας […] ἀσιτεῖν […] καρτερεῖν; 220a6: τὰς τοῦ χειμῶνος καρτερήσεις; cfr. *Leg.* 633b6–c7 on endurance as a distinctive feature of courage, καρτερήσεις τῶν ἀλγηδόνων […] ἔν ταῖς […] χερσὶ μάχαις … διὰ πολλῶν πληγῶν […] πολύπονος πρὸς τὰς καρτερήσεις, χειμώνων). The patience, self-control and courage with which he faces his enemies, and the hardships of war foreshadow the self-control with which he resists and overcomes the hardships/temptations of the banquet.[24] And in both cases he succeeds in escaping victorious. Just as in the *Laws*, in the *Symposium* Plato treats self-control towards the temptations of wine consumption and the pleasures of a banquet as something which goes hand in hand with and therefore should be examined together with patience and endurance when faced with enemies and the hardships of war.

Notes

* I would like to warmly thank Professor Ioannis M. Konstantakos for his kind invitation to write this paper, and the two referees for their useful notes on my arguments.

[1] On the *Symposium* as a "particularly dramatic work" (Howatson, Sheffield 2008: VII) compared with the rest of the Platonic oeuvre, see Hamilton 1951: 9; von Blackenhagen 1992; Johnson 1998; Robinson 1998; Rowe 1998: 9–19; Sharon 1998: 1; Henderson 2000; Hunter 2004: 3–15 (who contextualizes the dialogue within the framework of ancient literature on banquets ('sympotica') and modern bibliography); Giannopoulou 2017: 9.

[2] On intoxication and wine in the *Symposium*, see, selectively: Anderson 1993; Robinson 1998; Anagnostou-Laoutides 2020; 2021.

[3] For this direction in modern scholarship, see Corrigan, Glazov-Corrigan 2004: 39; n. 34 on the rules of a proper drinking; Hunter's (2004: 24) brief mention of *Leg.* 730b and 874a as parallels to *Symp.* 178c3–d1; Scott, Welton 2008: 126–127 on virtue vs. love of honor in both dialogues. Erler (2017) interprets Alcibiades' behavior using the *Laws* as a guide, but he does not assess Plato's sketch of the banquet in the *Symposium* from the perspective of Book 1 of the *Laws*; Goeken (2022: 27–28) notices certain affinities between the two dialogues but does not proceed further with a reading of the *Symposium* through the prism of the *Laws*. See also Sheffield's admission (2006: n. 8) that "Plato's *Symposium* is to be seen within an evolving fourth century tradition of prose sympotica, which look back to the sympotic poetry of the archaic period. Cfr. Xenophon's *Symposium*, Plato's *Protagoras* 347c–e and *Laws* 1 and 2". The most comprehensive reading of the *Symposium* in the light of the *Laws* is offered by Berg (2010: 133–149), who confines his analysis in Alcibiades' intoxication, his relationship with Socrates and his shame before him. Cfr. Murray (2013), and Charalabopoulos (2021) on the value of satyr plays in the *Symposium*, *Laws*, *Charmides* and *Theaetetus*.

[4] For the text of the *Laws*, I used Burnet's (1907) *OCT* edition and Bury's (2001[8]) translation. For the text of the *Symposium,* I used Burnet's (1901), *OCT* edition and Allen's (1991) translation.

[5] On the old men's virtue in banquets, see Murray 2013.

[6] The party takes place at the tragic poet Agathon's house two nights after his victory at the Great Dionysia of 416 BC (Athen. 217a). On the dramatic time of the plot, see Bury 1909: li. lxvi; Hamilton 1951: 9; Dover 1980: 8–10; Waterfield 1994: XIII; Hunter 2004, 3. On the superiority of elders over the youth in the *Laws*, see Stalley 1983: 3 and Liotsakis 2023: 166–171.

[7] On the contrast between Socrates' serenity and the turbulence prevalent in the party, see Hunter 2004: 32–33 (Socrates contrasted with Agathon's showing off); Bartels 2020; see also Waterfield 1994: XX (on Socrates' calmness juxtaposed with Alcibiades' and the rest of the banqueters' reaction to Alcibiades' entry); Edmonds III 2017: 194ff. on 210e4–6 contrasted with 212e5–7 and d3–5. On Socrates juxtaposed to the disorder at the end of the dialogue, see Bury 1909: XX.

[8] Cfr. Bury 1909: XIX; Hunter 2004: 18–19.

[9] For a similar line of thought, cfr. Hamilton 1951: 25–26, 28; Dover 1980: 4; Waterfield 1994: XVII–XVIII; Rowe 1998: 59–69; Hunter 2004: 19. See also Kalaš and Zelinová's (2020) extreme view that Socrates would not be able to teach Alcibiades about virtue were he not in love with him.

[10] Bury 1909: lx1; Hunter 2004: 42; Goeken 2022: 66–71.

[11] See, e.g., Bury's (1909, xxiii) that this interlude "calls for no special remark". But see Emlyn-Jones 2004.

[12] On Alcibiades' shamelessness and his shame towards Socrates, see principally Berg's (2010) excellent monograph. See also Hamilton 1951: 10; Scott 2000; Berg 2010; Bolzani Filho 2012; Edmunds 2017; Bonnemaison 2022.

[13] Cfr. Berg 2010: 133–149.

[14] On this reaction of Alcibiades, cfr. Bury 1909: lxi, who associates it with 178d (see, above, n. 7).

[15] Hunter (2004: 24) relates this passage to *Leg.* 730b and 874a as well as *Rep.* 491c. Further parallels from the *Republic* and the *Euthydemus* are mentioned by Sier 1997: 65, 132, n. 66, n. 277.

[16] On the contrast between virtue and love of honor in the *Symposium*, see Ågotnes 2019. For this element in both the *Symposium* and the *Laws*, see Scott, Welton 2008: 126–127.

[17] On Alcibiades' deification of Socrates' soul and the religious connotations of his wording in these statements, see Reeve 2006; Petraki 2022.

[18] See, e.g., Bury 1909: ix–lxiv; Hamilton 1951: 12, 27; Buchner 1965; Waterfield 1994: XVIII; Hunter 2004: 42–53; Blondell 2006; Ungefeh-Kortus 2006; Sheffield 2008: VIII–XXVIII; Pietsch 2012; Wardy 2012; Reid 2017; Goeken 2022: 71–79.

[19] See Reid 2017; Brophy 2020.

[20] Hunter 2004: 32. Scolan (2007, 213–220, 229–238) arguments on why Socrates is the ideal guest at a party.

[21] Berg 2010: 133–149.

[22] Cfr. Johnson 1998, who argues that the *Symposium* transfers the reader from the world of the Ideas to the sensible world.

[23] Bury 1932: lx–lxii; Hamilton 1951: 27; Edmonds 2000; Scott 2000; Sheffield 2001; Cornelli 2012; Destrée 2012; Ford 2017.

[24] Hunter 2004.

Bibliography

ÅGOTNES K. (2019), "*Philotimia*: On Rhetoric, Virtues and Honour in the *Symposium*", in FOSSHEIM H., SONGE-MØLLER V., ÅGOTNES K. (eds.), *Philosophy as Drama. Plato's Thinking Through Dialogue*, London/New York, pp. 123–139.
ALLEN R. E. (1991), *Plato. The Symposium*, New Haven/London.
ANAGNOSTOU-LAOUTIDES E. (2020), "A Toast to Virtue: Drinking Competitions, Plato, and the Sicilian Tyrants", in REID H. L., SERRATI J., SORG T. (eds.), *Conflict and Competition.* Agôn *in Western Greece. Selected Essays from the 2019 Symposium on the Heritage of Western Greece*, Sioux City, pp. 123–138.
ID. (2021), "Drinking and Discourse in Plato",in *Méthexis*, 33, pp. 57–79.
ANDERSON D. E. (1993), *The Masks of Dionysos. A Commentary on*

Plato's Symposium, Albany NY.
ARCIONI R. (2003), *Platone. Il Simposio*, Rome.
BARTELS M. L. (2020), "Plato's Seasick Steersman: On (not) Being Overwhelmed by Fear in Plato's *Laws*", in CANDIOTTO L., RENAUT O. (eds.), *Emotions in Plato*, Leiden/Boston, pp. 147–168.
BERG S. (2010), *Eros and the Intoxications of Enlightenment. On Plato's* Symposium, Albany.
BLACKENHAGEN, P. H. VON (1992), "Stage and Actors in Plato's *Symposium*", in *GRBS*, 33, pp. 51–68.
BLONDELL R. (2006), "Where Is Socrates on the Ladder of Love?", in LESHER J., NAILS D., SHEFFIELD F. (eds.), *Plato's* Symposium. *Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, Cambridge MA, pp. 147–178.
BOLZANI FILHO R. (2012), "L'elogio di Alcibiade a Socrate", in BORGES DE ARAÚJO JR. A., CORNELLI G. (eds.), *Il* Simposio *di Platone. Un banchetto di interpretazioni*, Napoli, pp. 33–51.
BONNEMAISON A. (2022), "Why Did Plato Choose Alcibiades to Praise Socrates in the *Symposium*?", in *AncPhil*, 42, pp. 389–407.
BROPHY C. T. (2020), *Perilous Ascent. The Education of erôs in Plato's* Symposium, Notre Dame Ind.
BUCHNER H. (1965), *Eros und Sein. Erörterungen zu Platonss* Symposion, Bonn.
BURY R. G. (1909), *The* Symposium *of Plato*, Cambridge.
ID. (1926), *Plato. Laws*, voll. 1–2, Cambridge MA/London.
CHARALABOPOULOS N. G. (2012), *Platonic Drama and Its Ancient Reception*, Cambridge.
ID. (2021), "Plato and the Elusive Satyr (Meta)Drama", in ANTONOPOULOS A. P., CHRISTOPOULOS M. M., HARRISON G. W. M. (eds.), *Reconstructing Satyr Drama*, Berlin/Boston, pp. 519–538.
CORNELLI G. (2012), "La colpa di Alcibiade: Il *Simposio* die Platone come apologia di Socrate", in BORGES DE ARAÚJO JR. A., CORNELLI G. (eds.), *Il* Simposio *di Platone. Un banchetto di interpretazioni*, Napoli, pp. 77–96.
CORRIGAN K., GLAZOV-CORRIGAN E. (2004), *Plato's Dialectic at Play. Argument, Structure, and Myth in the* Symposium, University Park PA.
DESTRÉE P. (2012), "The Speech of Alcibiades (212c4–222b7)", in HORN C. (ed.), *Platon* Symposion, Berlin, pp. 191–205.
DESTRÉE P., GIANNOPOULOU Z. (eds.) (2017), *Plato's* Symposium. *A Critical Guide*, Cambridge.
DOVER K. (1980), *Plato. Symposium*, Cambridge/New York.
EDMONDS III R. G. (2017), "Alcibiades the Profane: Images of the Mysteries", in DESTRÉE P., GIANNOPOULOU Z. (eds.), *Plato's* Symposium. *A Critical Guide*, Cambridge, pp. 194–215.
EDMONDS R. (2000), "Socrates the Beautiful: Role Reversal and Midwifery in Plato's *Symposium*", in *TAPhA*, 130, pp. 261–285.
EMLYN-JONES C. (2004), "The Dramatic Poet and His Audience. Agathon and Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*", in *Hermes*, 132, pp. 389–405.
ERLER M. (2017), "Argument und Perfomanz: Alkibiades' Verhalten im *Symposium* und Platons Analyse in den *Nomoi*", in *Peitho*, 8, pp. 213–223.
FORD A. (2017), "Alcibiades' *Eikôn* of Socrates and the Platonic Text: Symp. 215a–222d", in DESTRÉE P., EDMONDS R. G. (eds.), *Plato and the Power of Images*, Leiden/Boston MA, pp. 11–28.
GIANNOPOULOU Z. (2017), "Narrative Temporalities and Models of Desire", in DESTRÉE P., GIANNOPOULOU Z. (eds.), *Plato's* Symposium. *A Critical Guide*, Cambridge, pp. 9–27.
GOEKEN J. (2022), *Boire sous l'œil de Gorgias. Un commentaire rhétorique du Banquet de Platon et du* Banquet *de Xénophon*, Turnhout.
HAMILTON W. (1951), *Plato. The Symposium*, London.
HENDERSON J. (2000), "The Life and Soul of the Party: Plato, *Symposium*", in SHARROCK A. R., MORALES H. L. (eds.), *Intratextuality. Greek and Roman Textual Relations*, Oxford/New York, pp. 287–324.
HOWATSON M. C., SHEFFIELD F. C. C. (2008), *Plato, the* Symposium, Cambridge/New York.
HUNTER R. (2004), *Plato's* Symposium, Oxford.
JOHNSON W. (1998), "Dramatic Frame and Philosophic Idea in Plato", in *AJPh*, 119, pp. 577–598.
KALAŠ A., ZELINOVÁ Z. (2020), "Was Socrates Educated by Alcibiades?", in *Electryone*, 7, pp. 20–41.
LESHER J., NAILS D., SHEFFIELD F. (eds.) (2006), *Plato's* Symposium. *Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, Cambridge MA.
LIOTSAKIS V. (2023), *Plato's Proto-Narratology. Metanarrative Reflections and Narrative Paradigms*, Berlin/Boston.
MORVAN T. (2013), *Érôs et le lien cosmique. Lecture ancienne et nouvelle du* Banquet *de Platon*, Paris.
MURRAY O. (2013), "The Chorus of Dionysus: Alcohol and Old Age in the *Laws*", in PEPONI A.–E. (ed.), *Performance and Culture in Plato's* Laws, Cambridge. MANCANO PP.
PETRAKI Z. (2022), "Alcibiades's Epiphanic Experience in Plato's *Symposium*", in *ICS*, 47, pp. 45–73.
PIETSCH C. (2012), "Die Rede des Phaidros (178a6–180b8)", in HORN C. (ed.), *Platon* Symposion, Berlin, pp. 35–52.
REEVE C. D. C. (2006), "A Study in Violets: Alcibiades in the *Symposium*", in LESHER J., NAILS D., SHEFFIELD F. (eds.), *Plato's* Symposium. *Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, Cambridge MA, pp. 124–146.
REID J. (2017), "Unfamiliar Voices: Harmonizing the Non-Socratic Speeches and Plato's Psychology", in DESTRÉE P., GIANNOPOULOU Z. (eds.), *Plato's* Symposium. *A Critical Guide*, Cambridge, 28–47.
ROBINSON S. R. (1998), *Drama, Dialogue and Dialectic. Dionysos and the Dionysiac in Plato's Symposium*, Guelph ONT.
ROWE C. J. (1998a), *Il* Simposio *di Platone. Cinque lezioni con un contributo sul Fedone e una breve discussion. A cura di Maurizio Migliori*, Sankt Augustin.
ID. (1998b), *Plato. Symposium*, Warminster.
SCOLAN Y. (2017), *Le convive et le savant. Sophistes, rhéteurs, grammairiens et philosophes au banquet de Platon à Athénée*, Paris.
SCOTT D. (2000), "Socrates and Alcibiades in the *Symposium*", in *Hermathena*, 168, pp. 25–37.
SCOTT G. A., WELTON, W. A. (2008), *Erotic Wisdom. Philosophy and Intermediacy in Plato's* Symposium, Albany.
SHARON A. (1998), *Plato's* Symposium, Newburyport MA.
SHEFFIELD F. (2001), "Alcibiades' Speech: A Satyric Drama", in *G&R*, 48, pp. 193–209.
SHEFIELD F. C. C. (2006), "The Role of the Earlier Speeches in the *Symposium*: Plato's Endoxic Method?", in: LESHER J., NAILS D., SHEFFIELD F. (eds.), *Plato's* Symposium. *Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, Cambridge MA, pp. 23–46.
ID. (2006), *Plato's* Symposium. *The Ethics of Desire*, Oxford.
SIER K. (1997), *Die Rede der Diotima. Untersuchungen zum platonischen* Symposion, Stuttgart/Leipzig.
ID. (2012), "Die Rede des Pausanias (180c1 – 185c3)", in HORN C. (ed.), *Platon* Symposion, Berlin, 53–69.
STALLEY R.F. (1983), *An Introduction to Plato's* Laws, Oxford.
STEINER D. T. (1996), "For Love of a Statue: A Reading of Plato's *Symposium* 215 A–B", in *Ramus*, 25, pp. 89–111.
UNGEFEHR-KORTUS C. (2006), "Rhetorischer Höherpunkt und widersprüchliche Gedankenführung in der Rede des Phaidros: (Platon, *Symp.* 179b4–180b8) ", in *RhM*, 149, pp. 241–247.
WARDY R. (2012), "Father of the Discourse: Phaedrus' Speech in the *Symposium*", in *RPhA*, 30, pp. 133–184.
WATERFIELD R. (1994), *Plato.* Symposium, Oxford/New York.