
In *Socrates’ Daimonic Art*, Elizabeth S. Belfiore discusses what she calls Plato’s four ‘erotic dialogues’ (*Alcibiades I*, *Lysis*, *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*), in which Socrates practices his ‘erotic’ or ‘daimonic art’. The components of his art also characterize the daimon *Erōs* described in the *Symposium*: Socrates is devoted to erotic things — the wisdom, beauty and other good things that fall under the sphere of *Erōs*; he is aware that he lacks them, and passionately desires them. He is also skilled in searching for them, and in helping others in their search so that they too can acquire the erotic art (p. 6). Belfiore’s focus on Socrates’ practice demonstrates that the dramatic or literary and the philosophic aspects of Plato’s dialogues are inseparably connected (p. xii). By emphasizing Socrates’ erotic art, moreover, Belfiore defends Socrates against the position of scholars such as Vlastos who present Socrates as unerotic and as failing in love (p. xiv). In all of these ways, her book is a welcome addition to the literature on Plato’s Socrates.

In the ‘erotic dialogues’ that Belfiore discusses, the meaning of *erōs* ranges from sexual love, to love of the soul of another, to love of wisdom itself. In the first dialogue of the ‘erotic quartet’, *Alcibiades I*, Socrates proclaims his love to Alcibiades, a love directed towards the young man’s soul rather than ‘erotic in a sexual sense’. In that dialogue, Belfiore argues, Plato dramatizes Socrates’ at least temporary success in persuading Alcibiades to pursue justice and wisdom, while fostering Alcibiades’ love for Socrates himself (pp. 11, 20). The *Lysis* dramatizes Socrates’ attempt to demonstrate to a lover how to speak to his beloved by ‘creat[ing] friendliness’ in him (pp. 20 and 71–2). In the *Symposium*, Belfiore finds Socrates’ practice of erotic art especially in his exchanges with Agathon. The latter’s modest character, she argues, allows him to recognize his own lack of wisdom, even though his nature, less passionate than that of a man like Alcibiades, makes it more difficult for him to share Socrates’ love of wisdom (p. 162). The clearest manifestation of Socrates’ erotic art, for Belfiore, comes in the *Phaedrus*, whose title character shares with Socrates a love for wisdom, and whom Socrates ‘persuades to dedicate his life to *erōs* together with philosophical words’ (p. 198).

Belfiore’s sustained and careful examination of Socrates’ philosophic practice enriches our understanding in many ways. Her contrast between Diotima and Socrates in the *Symposium*, for example, is a useful way to highlight Socrates’ distinctive contribution. Whereas Diotima presents an erotic ascent towards a mystical contemplation of beauty, Socrates’ questioning his interlocutors brings them to an awareness of their own ignorance (pp. 140–55). Belfiore’s observations of the similarities and differences between Agathon and Alcibiades in the *Symposium* reveal difficulties that Socrates’
erotic art faces (pp. 180–7), as do her excellent observations of the ways in which Alcibiades misunderstands Socrates (pp. 189–92). Moreover, her account of the greater importance of friendship between the interlocutors in the Phaedrus than in the drama of the Symposium (pp. 102–3) indicates why Plato wrote yet another dialogue on love, insofar as it serves as a culmination of the erotic quartet, and therefore of Plato’s portrayal of Socrates’ erotic art.

According to Belfiore, love ‘has a much less prominent role in other dialogues [than in the four she identifies as erotic], nor is Socrates represented as practicing an erotic art’ (p. 21). Belfiore gives the example of ‘another quartet, the trial and death dialogues (the Apology, Euthyphro, Crito and Phaedo)’, where ‘philosophy is a preparation for death of older people’ rather than ‘the education of passionate young men for a life devoted to Socratic erōs for wisdom’ (pp. 21–2). I wonder, however, whether this distinction holds up. If Socrates’ erotic art ‘helps to make him unique’, as Belfiore argues (p. xiii), would it not be found in various ways in all his conversations with others? Socrates’ elderly friend Crito is not the only one with Socrates in the Phaedo, for example, but also a number of younger men, including Apollodorus, the passionate lover of Socrates who narrates the Symposium (Phaedo 117d; Symposium 173a and d). Socrates insists that there would be greater cause for mourning the death of the argument than his own death, and encourages those present to keep the argument alive after he is gone (Phaedo 88b–d). Might this not exemplify Socrates’ practice of his erotic art?

In the Apology, another of Belfiore’s trial and death quartet, Socrates defends his life of questioning before the Athenian assembly, not simply before the elderly. The hope that Socrates articulates there concerning an afterlife is of one in which he continues to question others about the very things he questioned the Athenian youth (Apology 41a–c). Indeed, this vision of the afterlife comes closer to the practice of the erotic art of questioning that Belfiore attributes to Socrates than anything that characterizes the lover and beloved that Socrates describes in the erotic Phaedrus, whose love prepares them for an afterlife in which they journey together in the heavens (Phaedrus 256b–d).

Because Belfiore deliberately limits her work to ‘a single aspect’ of the erotic dialogues, Socrates’ erotic art, she abstracts from broader questions of psychology, metaphysics or epistemology found in those dialogues (see, e.g., p. 151). Consequently, she does not explore the relation between the sensible world and the eternal objects sought by philosophy, or the way in which love acts as the bridge for Plato between the sensible and the intelligible. Because Socrates is not wise but only pursues wisdom, she claims that such questions are beyond the scope of his erotic art, which cannot lead to ‘authoritative truth’ (pp. 151 and 154–5). The self-limitation of her inquiry thus requires a sharp dichotomy between wisdom and its pursuit, a dichotomy cast into doubt by the very description of the daimon Erōs in the Symposium who Belfiore