Let me try already from the outset to get to the heart of what separates my understanding of Plato from Patterson's. Patterson regards Plato as a "Platonist," primarily involved in the elaboration of a "theory of ideas." I do not. Patterson understands Plato's conception of Eros as being essentially identical with what has entered common discourse under the rubric of "Platonic Love." Again, I do not. Linked with Patterson's understanding of Plato as a Platonist is his apparent conviction that Plato articulated a single, internally coherent doctrine. He bears this out insofar as he looks to the "ascent passage" in the Symposium for a way of illuminating the structure of the Republic and vice versa. In contrast, I understand the two dialogues as decisively opposed, as embodying the internal tension which, without attaining a final resolution, works itself out in the extraordinary fullness of Plato's dialogues: the tension between Eros and Logos. Patterson resolves, without ever really facing, this tension, by maintaining that Plato accommodates only the erotic passion for form. According to his interpretation, Plato affirms the love of bodies only to the degree that they are conduits of the virtuous life which in turn derives from devotion to the forms and to the Good above all. While this may in fact be true for the dialogue character, Socrates, who after all had to be trained in erotics by Diotima, it is not true for Plato himself. As preliminary evidence let me quote the epitaph that Plato wrote after the death of Dion, the prince of Syracuse: "Oh Dion, you are the one who inflamed my heart with raving love."1

The Symposium leaves unresolved the question of whether Socrates might have expressed similar emotion towards Alcibiades. What does, however, seem clear is that, as Stanley Rosen has pointed out, Diotima places Socrates' erotic capacity into doubt. She finds it inappropriate that he is so astonished at the frenzied irrationality (άλογία - 208c) with which the entire animal realm (207b) seeks to sustain itself through sexual intercourse and reproduction. And, more important in the present context, she questions Socrates' ability to properly comprehend the erotic ascent to a vision of the beautiful (210a). Socrates' astonishment at propagation is related to his prior reluctance to acknowledge a middle between the beautiful and the ugly (201e-202b): it is precisely his fixation on the realm of forms and its corresponding principle of logic, the principle of the excluded middle, which obstructs his understanding of Eros, itself a principle of mediation only to the degree that it is rooted in nature, so deeply rooted, in fact, that it draws from the darkness and indeterminacy of nature's most primal ground. Socrates' very commitment to the logical renders difficult his comprehension that beings are generated out of not-being (205b).

It is in this regard that we must understand Diotima's implicit assertion that the way into the ascent necessitates as its precondition a descent. A guide is necessary to point the initiate towards an erotic encounter with a beautiful body. As if to emphasize that we are beginning as deeply, or if you will, as basely as possible, Diotima later tells us that the body must be that of a young boy (211b). Homoeroticism reflects, by its very sterility, an unadulterated sexuality which requires strict moderation by virtue before it can give rise to the propagation of spiritual goods. That the goal is indeed spiritual should not detract

2. Rosen 1987, pp. 221-263.
3. The theme of prior descent is implicit in the more general Platonic procedure of creating aporia as the precondition of authentic inquiry. The first step of virtually any of the dialogues is decisively negative: Socrates elicits opinions in order to refute them and thereby create the acknowledgment of ignorance that must precede the search for truth. This is accomplished in the Symposium simply by letting the speeches of the sophists and poets precede the speech of Socrates-Diotima.