

Man as Monster: Eros and Hubris in Plato's *Symposium* *

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Abstract:

According to Aristophanes' account in Plato's *Symposium* (189c2-193d5), humans emerged from a race of double-bodied creatures, who are commonly misconceived by modern readers as being spherically shaped. Through a close reading of the passage, I demonstrate that the grotesque myth as narrated by Aristophanes serves as a simile for the subsequent narrative of Diotima on the cognitive ascent to the idea of beauty. Just as man is permanently searching for his lost other half and desires nothing else but to be reunited with it, so the true philosophical eroticist desires to see the idea of beauty. By leaving behind the beautiful bodies, beautiful souls and beautiful cognitions, the philosopher desires to be with beauty (*συνεῖναι*), to touch it (*ἐφάπτεσθαι*) and to procreate true and ultimate knowledge with it (*τίκτειν*).

Aristophanes' double-bodied prehistoric men suffered their division as punishment for their ὕβρις-driven attempt to storm Olympus. Due to the character of the myth as a simile, it would appear that Socrates' description of cognitively approaching the divine world of ideas is also to be understood as a form of ὕβρις. In order to illustrate this, Plato also uses the discourse of the monstrous. The cleft men, that is men as desiring beings, as eroticists, are categorized as τέρατα; their existence, therefore, like the existence of the greatest eroticist of all, Socrates, points to the ὕβρις of philosophizing and its potentially bitter consequences.

In Plato's *Symposium*, each of the participating symposiasts attempts to analyse the nature of desire (*Eros*). Some approaches are simpler, others more sophisticated. Interestingly, in contrast to the rest of the Platonic dialogues, this text lacks a leading moderator in the sense of one participant setting the tone and course of the conversation, nor does it display an attempt to bring together the divergent contributions. On the contrary, the reader is left with the impression of utter heterogeneity; a feeling of having encountered a totally un-self-contained, truly dialogical piece of work, behind which it is difficult to ascer-

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tain a uniform authorial intention. This lack of uniformity establishes the appropriate ambience for the speech of Aristophanes (*Symp.* 189c2-193d5), which I consider – together with Diotima’s expositions as reported by Socrates – to be the most important of the dialogue.

The comic poet tells a myth: in ancient times the human race did not look like it does today, but consisted of double-bodied beings that were male, female or androgynous. These primeval humans were equipped with four arms, four legs, two sexual organs and two faces. They were immensely strong, and hence conceived the ὕβρις of wanting to conquer Mount Olympus. For this, they were punished with division into their two halves. Moreover, Zeus turned the faces of these semihumans around so that they should forever see what they had lost. The misery of the new human race, however, was so great – they wasted away in longing for their lost other half, embracing and holding each other tight so as to die together – that Zeus felt pity for them and moved their sexual organs to the other side as well, so that the two halves could now have sexual contact with each other, and could thus satisfy their desire for each other, at least temporarily. Ever since this primal sin, man has been driven by the desire for his other half in varying combinations of homo- and heterosexuality. If someone is lucky enough to meet ‘his’ or ‘her’ other half then he experiences a feeling of infinite security and the wish never to let the other one go. The hope for such a reunion rests entirely on future godliness, whereas a further case of ὕβρις would result in another division by Zeus, which would reduce man to jumping around on one leg only.

Before thinking about the meaning of this strange narrative in itself and its context in the entire dialogue, one must attempt to reconstruct the appearance, the shape of the creatures which Aristophanes describes in some detail (*Symp.* 189e5-190a4):

ἔπειτα ὄλον ἦν ἐκάστου τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὸ εἶδος στρογγύλον, νῶτον καὶ πλευράς κύκλω ἔχον,¹ χεῖρας δὲ τέτταρας εἶχε, καὶ σκέλη τὰ ἴσα ταῖς χερσίν, καὶ πρόσωπα δὴ ἐπ’ ἀγένη κυκλοτερεῖ, ὅμοια πάντη². κεφαλὴν δ’ ἐπ’ ἀμφοτέρους τοῖς προσώποις ἐναντίους κειμένους μίαν, καὶ ὄτα τέτταρα, καὶ αἰδοῖα δύο, καὶ τὰλλα πάντα ὡς ἀπὸ τούτων ἄν τις εἰκάσειεν.

1 As to the periodic structure of this sentence see Morrison (1964: 46). For the English translation of the *Symposium* I refer to Lamb (1967).

2 The above version, usually printed in modern editions according to the unanimous textual tradition ὅμοια πάντη, does not make sense. It can be related sensibly only to both faces which is then translated by both Lamb (1946) and Rowe (1998) without further explanation as ‘two faces perfectly alike’ or ‘two completely similar faces’ respectively. The subsequent division of the primeval men, however, leads to the genesis of individuals and not to that of purely twins; and how is one supposed to understand such a completely identical section of the face in the case of the androgynous creatures? A solution would be to emend ὅμοια πάντη to ὁμοίᾳ πάντη. What is referred to is then the neck and it is stressed that, as opposed to the neck of contemporary humans, it is evenly round on all sides.

“The form of each person was round all over, with back and sides encompassing it every way; each had four arms, and legs to match these, and two faces perfectly alike on a cylindrical neck. There was one head to the two faces, which looked opposite ways; there were four ears, two privy members, and all the other parts, as may be imagined, in proportion.”

German-speaking scholars usually call Aristophanes' primeval men 'Kugelmenschen' and Anglo-American research also frequently refers to 'globular shape' or 'globe-shaped creatures'. This, however, is illogical since 'we' are the result of the division – and we are not normally hemispherical.³ The division does not lead to the genesis of comically deformed humans,⁴ but to the

3 Morrison (1964: 47-49) already argued extensively for a 'circular' conceptualization; he has also shown that the description of the earth in *Phaedo* 110b, which is often referred to as an argument for the globular shape of primeval men, makes, if understood correctly, a circular cross section of these creatures' shape more likely.

4 Vase paintings displaying scenes from comedies and characters in the typical costume of comedy – with jutting bellies and buttocks – may have been responsible for giving rise to the assumption that Aristophanes may have thought of such spherical creatures. Another possible reason for this wrong conclusion may be the fact that Plato names sun, moon and earth as parents of these beings (*Symp.* 190a8-b5). This makes us think of spherical stars; the greatest part of classical antiquity, however, did not think of stars in this shape, certainly not in the age of Plato. Stars were conceived not only in the popular imagination but also in early scientific thought as disks, at best as being of hemispherical shape, but not as spherical (see also the following footnote); for textual evidence see Morrison (1964: 48-49). The subsequent comparison of the act of division with slicing through sorb-apples and eggs (*Symp.* 190d7-e2), which also may have led to the conception of an originally spherical shape, in fact refers in its *tertium comparationis* to the ease of cutting through a previously formally perfect unity, and was proverbially used for the separation of previously 'inseparable' lovers over a bagatelle (see Dover 1980: 116). Furthermore, that the intended conception here is not that of a grotesque spherical shape also becomes clear in the comparison of primeval men with the giants (*Symp.* 190b5-c1): the iconography of giants in the fifth and fourth century B.C. depicts these enemies of the gods physically as heroes and, thus, as beautiful; they are not portrayed with serpentine bodies before the third century B.C. There have been frequent attempts to derive the monstrosity of the primeval men from a seemingly similar conception in Empedocles' work *On Nature* (31B57-62 DK) as its source, although it is rather *fr.* 31B63 DK which in fact contains a terminological, although ultimately not conceptual, proximity if the terms σύμβολον and ὄλον at Aristotle, *De gen. anim.* A 18, 722b10, are originally Empedoclean. This seems quite arguable to me; however, οὐλοφουεῖς (31B62.7; vgl. 10) – *pace* Rowe (1998: 154) – refers to the limbless semen from which the future living beings are yet to arise. Yet Empedocles only describes the phylogenetic consequences of his hypothesis of dualistic cosmic dynamics – the conflict of 'friendship' (φιλότης) and 'strife' (νεῖκος): initially, individual limbs come into being which wander around, seek combination, eventually find it and grow together partly into *hybrid creatures* (e.g. combinations of bull and human), partly to *humans* (and notably not to double-humans); as opposed to what is assumed in Ajootian (1995: 99), the fragments do not mention or imply a later division of any bisexual creatures – which Empedocles in my opinion would have regarded as deficient – which thus might have come into being. The survival of the thus assembled creatures depends on the capacity of their synergies, i.e. the survivability of those random combinations which in the case of human beings are ideal (see Simplicius, *Phys.* 371.33). Yet, from these premises a connection to the conception of the Platonic Aristophanes is only possible if one is willing to assume that Empedocles was thinking of a subsequent evolutionary step in the form of further combina-

origin of *καλοκάγαθοί*, humans that meet the classical ideal of beauty, or at least of humans with ‘normal’ proportions. Nor does the quoted text give any evidence of spherical humans. The Greek words *στρογγύλον* and *κύκλος* rather refer to something ‘circular’, hence, beings who are characterized by a circular ‘periphery’ as it were,⁵ whose torso as well as their neck are to be described as cylindrical and who only have sides and backs but not chests (so already Rowe 1998: 154).

This conception, however, leads to some problems which are not addressed by the text. After the division, Zeus moves the faces and genitals of the halved humans around to the side of their navels: the first so that they may always remember what they have lost, the latter so that they find fulfilment of their desire for each other. Yet, there is no mention of the arms and legs being turned around as well, in other words, of arms and legs having originally been directed to the front and to the back.⁶ If man nevertheless looks the way he does today – face, genitals and outer extremities all facing the same direction as does the navel – then there must be an immanent reason for this which is not made explicit by the text. A solution can be found in my opinion if one also takes into account how Aristophanes’ speech continues. The comic poet imagines Hephaestus, god of blacksmiths, with his tools approaching two lovers who are fulfilling their erotic desire with each other and asking them the following question (*Symp.* 192d3-e4):

tions of, in themselves, already optimally functioning humans to anthropoid dyads or that Aristophanes has developed Empedocles’ model further in this way. This, however, could hardly be put down as parody, and would also imply that Aristophanes here, firstly, claims a status of ideality for his creatures and that he, secondly, develops a pre-Socratic model further, that is, that he proposes a serious philosophical thesis; one might, at most, think of a comic inversion which, however, usually shows a double movement (both upwards and downwards). Orphic ideas may also have had an influence on the myth of the original unity of mankind that is reported here; we find for example the conception of a primordial uniformity of heaven and earth (Uranus and Gaia), which have become separate only due to a later row (Apollonius Rhodius, *Arg.* 494-498), a separation which alone made the procreation of all terrestrial beings possible (Euripides, *Melan. fr.* 484 K.), and is thus arguably also the precondition for mutual desire. This makes it a conception that is, at least, analogous to that of the Platonic Aristophanes, albeit a step earlier in the cosmic chronology. – Most comparable are perhaps the Siamese twins Aktorione-Molione mentioned in Hesiod (*Eh. fr.* 17a, 14-18 Merkelbach & West) who also have four arms and legs but differ in having *two* heads; like Aristophanes’ primeval men they are said to have been invincibly strong. See Dover (1966: 46), and see *LIMC* (s.v. “Aktorione”) I.1.472-476 with illustration (I.2.364-365).

- 5 The text continues: They were *περιφερῆ* in their shape as in their progress, since they took after their parents (*Symp.* 190b3-5). *περιφερῆ* clearly refers to a circular form in a horizontal perspective (cross-section of the body) as well as in the vertical perspective, namely in locomotion which looks similar to the turning ‘wheel’ of the sun chariot.
- 6 Whereas Hunter (2004: 62) wrongly describes them as “resembling perhaps two modern humans standing back-to-back ...”.

Τί ἔσθ' ὃ βούλεσθε, ὦ ἄνθρωποι, ὑμῖν παρ' ἀλλήλων γενέσθαι; (...) Ἄρα γε τοῦδε ἐπιθυμεῖτε, ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ γενέσθαι ὅτι μάλιστα ἀλλήλοις, ὥστε καὶ νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν μὴ ἀπολείπεσθαι ἀλλήλων; εἰ γὰρ τούτου ἐπιθυμεῖτε, θέλω ὑμᾶς συντήξει καὶ συμφωσῆσαι εἰς τὸ αὐτό, ὥστε δύο ὄντας ἕνα γεγονέναι καὶ ἕως τ' ἂν ζῆτε, ὡς ἕνα ὄντα, κοινῇ ἀμφοτέρους ζῆν, καὶ ἐπειδὰν ἀποθάνητε, ἕκεί αὖ ἐν Ἄϊδου ἀντὶ δυοῖν ἕνα εἶναι κοινῇ τεθνεώτε; (...)

“What is it, good mortals, that you would have of one another? (...) Do you desire to be joined in the closest possible union, so that you shall not be divided by night or by day? If that is your craving, I am ready to fuse and weld you together in a single piece, that from being two you may be made one; that so long as you live, the pair of you, being as one, may share a single life; and that when you die you may also in Hades yonder be one instead of two, having shared a single death (...).”

It seems to me significant that Hephaestus does not promise just to tie or solder the two lovers together⁷ but to fuse them, to ultimately undo their duality and separateness. Yet, if the ἀρχαῖα φύσις can be fully restored through Hephaestus' rescue act, then the previous unity of the double-men was not a combination of something double, a united duality as it were, but a unity in the sense of an 'identity': a mutual pervasion and total interpenetration that is nothing other than the sexual act grotesquely thought through to the end.⁸ Aristophanes imagines in my opinion his primeval humans as homo- and heterosexual couples who are virtually one by permanently interpenetrating each other in an eternal kiss and in an eternal copulation; they permeate each other to such an extent that their faces and genitals, so to say, surface again on the other side, that is, on the outside (figs. 1 and 2).⁹ It is the eternity and at the same time the

7 Although this would have made perfect sense, since in the well-known myth of Ares and Aphrodite narrated for the first time in Homer, *Od.* 8.266-366, the god of blacksmiths catches the lovers in *flagranti* and ties them together with a forged net (*Od.* 8.274-275); hence, this sort of an indissoluble connection would have been possible too.

8 Rowe (1998: ad 192e6-9) already sees a connection between sexual intercourse and the original appearance of the human race.

9 Ovid hints at this (possibly alluding to Plato; see Anderson 1996: 453) *in nuce* in his account of the emergence of Hermaphroditus as the result of the fusion of the son of Hermes and Aphrodite with the nymph Salmacis (*Met.* 4.373-379): (...) *nam mixta duorum / corpora iunguntur faciesque inducitur illis / una. Velut, si quis conducat cortice ramos, / crescendo iungi pariterque adulescere cernit, / sic, ubi complexu coierunt membra tenaci, / nec duo sunt sed forma duplex, nec femina dici / nec puer ut possit, neutrumque et utrumque videntur.* The act of union, violent and forced upon the youth against his will, is here compared to the process of grafting. The result, as Anderson (1996: ad loc.) rightly emphasizes, is not a powerful, sexually self-sufficient hybrid but a weak freak who does not conjoin both genders in himself but appears as a half-complete and inconsequent mixture. The fact that the result of their union is *one* face (as well as just *one* sexual organ) points to the aversion of the youth who in the very moment of the bodily integration has apparently turned away from Salmacis so that she faces his back. See also Lateiner (2009, in this volume). Relevant for our understanding of the passage in Plato, however, is the analogous conception of a total fusion of two bodies; yet, it may be more than mere coincidence that there is particular evidence of *three-*

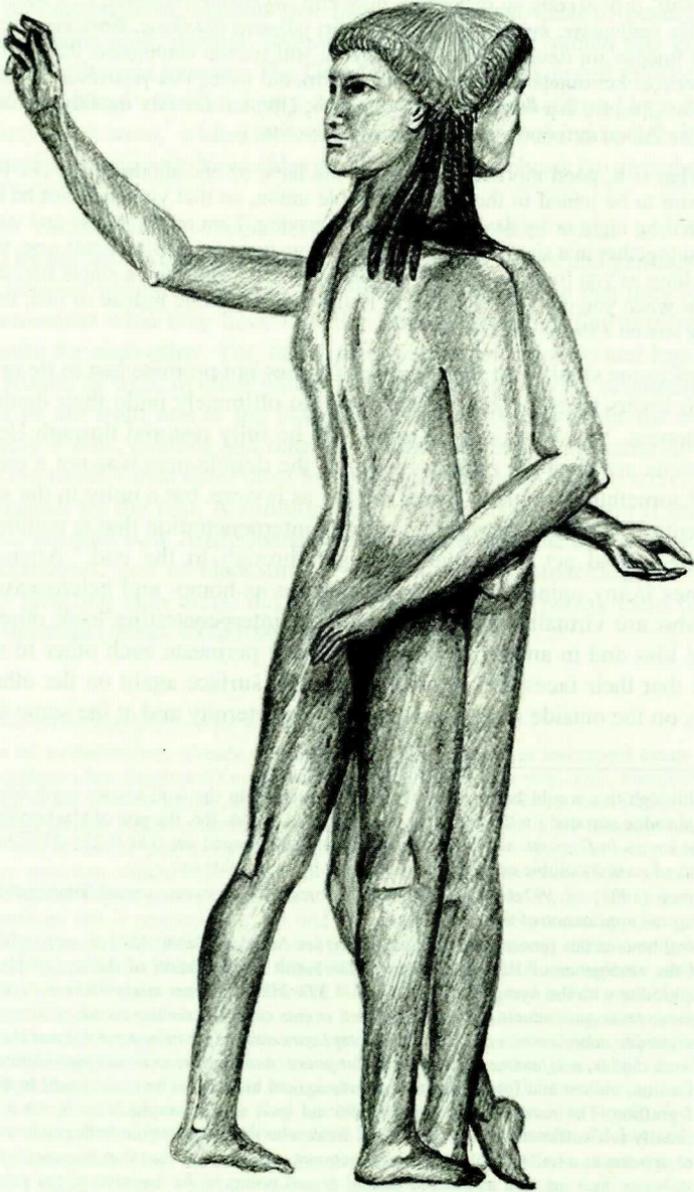


Figure 1: Aristophanes' double-bodied humans (male)

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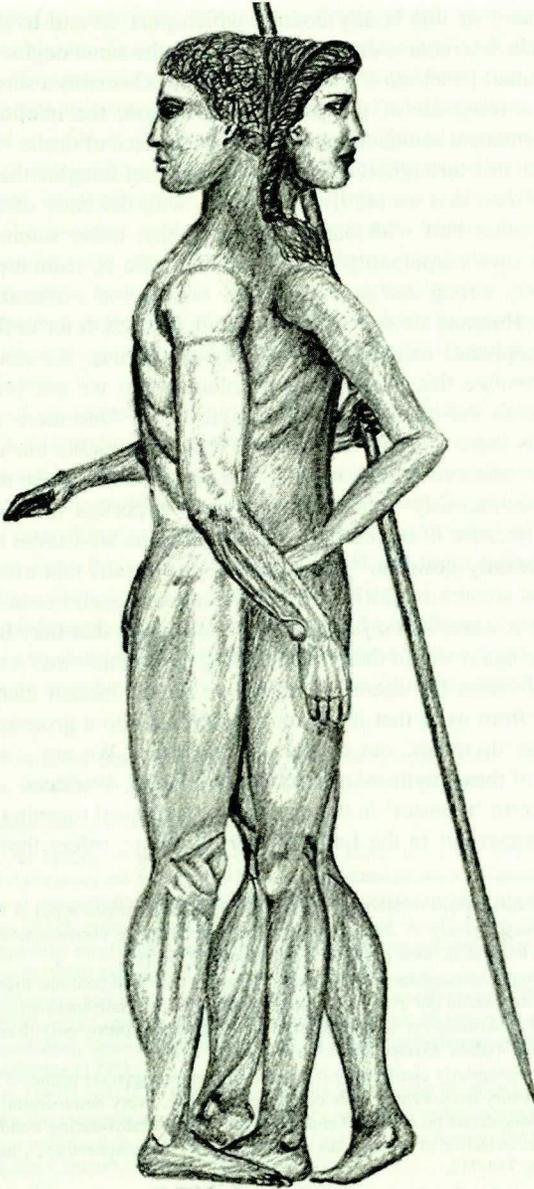


Figure 2: Aristophanes' double-bodied humans (androgynous)

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eternal fulfilment of this bodily contact which puts an end to desire; consequently, no later intercourse can ever reach again the same degree of fulfilment in terms of mutual penetration and therefore always remains a surrogate, which can only be a reminder of the previous perfection, the abolition of desire through its permanent satisfaction and thus the absence of desire.

If we think this through, it follows that *we* cannot imagine the result of *our* division other than that we are living partially with the body of our lost other half, and the other half with ours. Everything that today seems normal and right with our own corporeality and our erotic desire is, from a primeval perspective, utterly wrong and perverted. Our organs and extremities sit in the wrong places. Humans are only fragments and, as such, refer to the loss of the whole – Aristophanes calls us σύμβολα (*Symp.* 191d4). *We* can only understand and formulate this oneness and wholeness that we are yearning for as combination with the other. Yet, in the myth of the One there was never an Other, nor was there the trait of referentiality which marks our current existence, since the primeval beings were, as the centeredness of the outer extremities shows, continuously facing themselves in a perfect state of total self-containment. Because of our current *condicio humana* we cannot think the One (anymore), but only desire it.¹⁰ Desire, Eros, thus means that every half longs for the other as something intrinsically identical with itself because in the division it has, as it were, lost *a part of itself* – whatever that may be. Becoming one and whole again would then mean finding in the other one's very own self again.¹¹ The division has therefore not given us our human identity, but has taken it away from us in that it has transformed us into a grotesque dyad, and made deficient 'dividuals' out of real 'individuals'.¹² We are – seen from the point of view of these mythical ancient times – freaks, monsters.

I use the term 'monster' in the original etymological meaning of the word. The Greek counterpart to the Latin *monstrum*, τέρας, refers firstly to a won-

dimensional cult statues of Hermaphroditus (of the anasyromenos type) at the beginning of the 4th century, namely in Athens, and thus in a remarkable chronotopical context of the *Symposium*. Regarding these sculptures, see Ajootian (1995).

- 10 Correspondingly Aristophanes formulates: "These are they who continue together throughout life, though they could not even say what they would have of one another (...). Obviously the soul of each is wishing for something else that it cannot express, only divining and darkly hinting what it wishes" (*Symp.* 192c2-4, c7-d2).
- 11 This idea is particularly challenging if applied to the androgynous primeval humans since it implies that every heterosexual male comprises a female, every heterosexual woman a male. Maybe this idea draws on scenes of androgyny in various rituals during wedding ceremonies; for numerous evidence of such rituals see Jessen, s.v. "Hermaphroditos", in: *RE* 15 (1912), 714-721, esp. 714-715.
- 12 It is because of this that the occasionally expressed criticism of the Aristophanic conception, most recently stated in Hunter (2004: 69), that erotic fulfilment results here in giving up one's individuality, is inadequate. What is at stake from Aristophanes' perspective is precisely salvation from a form of pseudo-individuality.

drous and therefore terrifying omen of a future event, sent by the gods (in Homer preferably by Zeus) and needing interpretation.¹³ Of these three primary criteria of monstrosity – (a) being wondrous and terrifying, (b) being sent by a divinity, (c) ominous significance in need of interpretation – the first two are connected insofar as the presumed divine origin of a *τέρας* reveals itself precisely in its extraordinariness, its unexpected deviance from normality. The semiotic aspect is of particular importance¹⁴ because it gives meaning to the existence of the monster, which disrupts perception, refers to disarray in the world order, and directs attention to a future threat. The notion of (d) ‘counter-natural monstrosity’, however, is derived from criterion (a);¹⁵ the same is true for (e) the aspect of deformity, of ugliness.¹⁶ But these two notions are already prevalent in Plato’s age and seem to have increasingly dominated the semiotic history of this term.¹⁷

The halved creatures which remain after the division of the primeval double-humans in Aristophanes’ speech meet all of the five listed criteria of monstrosity and would therefore also have been perceived as *τέρατα* by contemporary recipients. Their mutilated appearance is (a) from the perspective of their predecessors something new and terrifying, and the divided men are so agitated that even Zeus feels pity for them and provides them with some relief by rearranging their faces and sexual organs. Criterion (b) – being sent by a god – is met by Zeus’ function as punishing divinity. As *σύμβολα* (c) the halved men point not only to their other half, but also to their previous *ὑβρις* against the gods, as well as to potential future events; since Zeus threatens (*Symp.* 190d4-6):

ἐὰν δ’ ἔτι δοκῶσιν ἀσελγαίνειν καὶ μὴ ἠέλωσιν ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν, πάλιν αὖ (...) τεμῶ δίχα, ὥστ’ ἐφ’ ἐνδὸς πορεύσονται σκέλους ἀσκολιάζοντες.

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- 13 Regarding the history of the terms *monstrum* and *τέρας* as well as their semantic equivalences and differences see Moussy (1977). On the general problems of possibilities and comparabilities of categorizations see Atherton (1998: vii-xxxiv, esp. xxiv-xxxiv); note, however, that here as in the entire volume monstrosity is reduced to awfulness, counter-naturalness and, consequently, insufficient classificability. As to different possibilities of classification see Lada-Richards (1998: esp. 41-49).
- 14 It is etymologically and hence causally rooted in the relevant terms *monstrum* and *τέρας* and must therefore in my opinion not be disregarded in favour of focussing only on terrifying counter-naturalness, abnormality and ugliness, as in the contributions to the essay collection edited by Atherton (1998).
- 15 See Moussy (1977: 361-362). Hybrid corporeality in particular is strictly speaking not characteristic for the term *monstrum* but can be easily subsumed under ‘counter-naturalness’ and is then often perceived as the actual monstrosity: see e.g. van Keuren Stern (1978), with regards to Hydra, Centaurs, Minotaurus, Medusa, Chimaira.
- 16 See *LSJ* s. v. II.2.
- 17 So for example already in Aristotle’s *Poetics* and in his biological writings; as to the latter see Louis (1975). Excellent on the taxonomical importance of monsters as well as on symbolic and classificatory ways of dealing with them is Sperber (1975).

"If they continue turbulent and do not choose to keep quiet, I will do it again (...) I will slice every person in two, and then they must go their ways on one leg, hopping."¹⁸

The aspects of counter-naturalness and dysfunctional deformity (d) are clear in that the halved men not only lose their strength and dangerousness, but are also deprived of their sexual self-sufficiency. Moreover, they have lost their physical functionality: previously they had been able to move with the greatest speed in any direction without the need to turn around, namely by doing a cartwheel or a backflip (*Symp.* 190a4-8); now this is possible only to a limited extent. Ultimately, we present-day humans are considered ugly (e). For a crucial aspect of Greek aesthetics, not least for Plato, was *συμμετρία* in the sense of commensurability, proportion, as a precondition of beauty (*κάλλος*).¹⁹ Yet this perfection of symmetry of the human body was taken away from the primeval men by their division. If we consider ourselves as beautiful because we are symmetrical, we overlook the loss of that former higher beauty. Furthermore, if we were to be cut into halves a second time, according to Zeus' threat, even these pathetic remains of our original symmetry would be lost.

A characteristic feature of Aristophanic humour is the frequent usage of the unexpected, the *ἀπροσδόκητον*, on all levels of the text.²⁰ Plato has imitated this feature in his literary impersonation of the comic poet perfectly, as can be seen clearly in the theme of monstrosity. Myth, of course, knew numerous counter-natural creatures (that is, 'monsters' in a reductionist sense of the term), amongst which the reader would have been inclined to count the hybrid men Aristophanes describes *ad hoc*.²¹ However, a sudden and unpredictable 'cut', typical of comedy, reverses the line of vision and turns the world upside down: what seemed to be normal is deficient, whereas that what was initially passed off as a monstrosity turns out to be the more perfect order. Normal man

18 Aristophanes picks up this threat again at the end of his speech in the role of the interpreter and exhorter: "We may well be afraid that if we are disorderly towards Heaven we may once more be cloven asunder and may go about in the shape of those outline-carvings on the tombs, with our noses sawn down the middle, and may thus become like tokens of split dice (...). Love is the god who brings this about; he fully deserves our hymns (...). He also supplies this excellent hope for the future, that if we will supply the gods with reverent duty he will restore us to our ancient life and heal and help us into the happiness of the blest" (*Symp.* 193a3-7, c8-d5).

19 This agrees with the definition of beauty as it was put down in its classical form in Polycletus' *Κανόν* (in both his writings and his sculptures) half a century before the *Symposium* but maybe only twenty years before its fictitious date; see Pollitt (1974: 14-22, 256-258 and *passim*). *συμμετρία* remained in the centre of aesthetic theorizing until the third century B.C. (Xenocrates of Athens).

20 Fundamental for this matter is Landfester (1977).

21 Hermaphrodite children were sometimes perceived as *monstra* / *τέρατα* and were therefore forcibly exposed; see Diodorus Siculus, *Hist.* 4.6.5-7 and Ajootian (1995: 101-103).

is in truth a freak, and he is suffering from it. However only a god, not mere desiring, nor even *finding* that which is lost, could heal the loss. Our path in love and piety towards the gods can only lead us near to the ἀρχαία φύσις; in order to finally reach it, it takes (as corresponds to the preceding punishment) a divine act of grace. That is the only way to retrieve that unity which was at the same time a duality, to become again that perfect monster we used to be.

It is probably because of the paradoxality and ineffability of this idea²² that Plato has put this speech into Aristophanes' mouth in the first place. Aristophanes' speech corresponds to the famous Diotima-speech of Socrates in a mimetic-parabolic way, but also undermines the seemingly noble image of Socrates as a superior philosopher. I will begin with some reflections on the nature of their parabolic relationship, for which some remarks on the disposition of the *Symposium* are necessary. The long introduction which develops the setting (*Symp.* 172a1-178a5) is followed by three cycles of speeches – 'Praise of Eros' (*Symp.* 176a1-212c3); 'Praise of Socrates' (*Symp.* 215a4-222b7); 'Tragedy and comedy' (*Symp.* 223c6-d8)²³ – of which only the first cycle is completed. The cycle in itself would be structured paratactically according to the symposiasts' order on the couches. But, firstly, neither the reporter of the first level, Aristodemus, nor that of the second level, Apollodorus, remember all the speeches that were given (*Symp.* 178a1-3. 223b8-9), so that a controlled selection has to be assumed. Secondly, Aristophanes does not give his speech at the point which is dictated by the 'coincidence' of his position in the symposiastic lying order, but gives precedence to the doctor Eryximachus because of hiccups (*Symp.* 185c4-e5, 188e2-189a6).²⁴ Because of this, Aristophanes' speech

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- 22 See above. The ineffability (and, hence, unthinkability) shows itself for example in the fact that language needs the aid of predicate usage ('at the same time', 'that was ...') but is neither syntactically nor semantically in a position to express the duality of unity or the unity of duality properly. Both intellectually and linguistically only an approximation of that perfection is possible.
- 23 They are linked with each other by intermezzi which – like the introduction – expose the respectively changed setting.
- 24 Friedländer (1960: 15) has already pointed out that according to the initially intended sequence of speakers Aristophanes would have given his speech as the third of five pre-Socratic speakers (Phaedrus, Pausanias, *Aristophanes*, Eryximachus, Agathon). The hiccups motif thus makes clear that Plato takes him out of this centre – he is not meant to be compared to them – and that he gives him a new, even more strongly emphasized role. Yet even among these five speakers he holds a unique position, if only because he has come on his own while the others have arrived in pederastic couples (Phaedrus and Eryximachus, Pausanias and Agathon). Moreover, his choice of a mythical narrative instead of an argument distinguishes him from the others. Furthermore Friedländer (1960: ad loc.) has demonstrated that the speeches of Phaedrus and Agathon (Eros as the oldest and the youngest god respectively) as well as those of Pausanias and Eryximachus (Eros as twofold god) form pairs in terms of their content. By means of all this a net of relationships is woven between the four other speakers in which Aristophanes is initially caught, but from which he manages to escape through his hiccups which by means typical of comedy turn things upside down and al-

moves into the centre of the cycle (fig. 3) and thus into a position clearly marked by Plato, from which it can claim the same attention as the longest and concluding speech of the cycle, that of the predictable protagonist Socrates. Such a correspondence is made likely by the fact that Aristophanes is, apart from Socrates, the only participant of the dialogue who gives a true definition of ἔρωσ – the search for wholeness.²⁵

subject 1: praise of Eros	176a1-178a5
speech of Phaedrus	178a6-180b8
speech of Pausanias	180c3-185c3
disruption: Aristophanes' hiccup	185c4-e5
speech of Eryximachus	185e6-188e4
Intermezzo: Aristophanes and Eryximachus argue humorously	189a1-c1
speech of Aristophanes	189c2-193e2
Intermezzo: Phaedrus, Agathon and Socrates argue humorously	193e3-194e3
speech of Agathon	194e4-197e8
disruption: Socrates rejects the current form of discussion	198a1-199c2
speech of Socrates I: refutation of Agathon	199c3-201c9
speech of Socrates II: Diotima on Eros	201d1-212c3
disruption: unexpected entrance of the <i>akletos</i> Alcibiades	212c4-214b8

Figure 3: The structure of the speeches in Plato's *Symposium*

Diotima's description of the ascending course of desire forms the centre of Socrates' speech. The 'Platonic lover' initially loves the beautiful body of a beloved one, but then frees himself from it so as to eventually love all beautiful bodies. He then raises his desire from beautiful bodies to the beautiful activities of the soul, and from there to beautiful knowledge. Finally, he achieves the ultimate knowledge of pure, uniform and true beauty (the 'idea' of beauty) from which all individual beautiful things draw their partial beauty through participation. The encounter of the desiring mind with this ultimate object of knowledge is described by Diotima with verbs which are also used for sexual contact: συνεῖναι ("to have [sexual] intercourse"), ἐφάπτεσθαι ("touch") and

low the protagonists to escape all contextual constraints. Apart from this, Aristophanes is the only speaker who tries to speak up again after Socrates' speech (*Symp.* 212c4-6), and it is only to his speech that Diotima refers explicitly (*Symp.* 205d10-206a1). On the two sets of speeches produced by the hiccups motif see also Lowenstam (1986), which includes an overview of previous research.

25 See most recently Hunter (2004: 67).

τίκτειν (“procreate”).²⁶ In addition to this, and in analogy to earthly love, he who desires philosophically also desires procreation. In the same way in which beautiful children can be created with a beautiful body, the philosophical lover can create beautiful thoughts, virtues and attitudes in a beautiful soul; and eventually political communities, in which relationships based on such love take place, become better. Further in the ascent, he reaches great and new thoughts in the area of beautiful knowledge – for Plato that is first of all mathematics and philosophy – in order to ultimately reach the one great knowledge which is the aim and end of all desire. In possession of this knowledge, he gains immortality.

If one compares these explanations with those of Aristophanes’, the parabolic nature of the comic poet’s speech becomes immediately obvious.²⁷ The desiring ascent to the last One, via the intermediate stages of love for beautiful bodies, souls and knowledge, is replaced here by the desiring search for the one belonging body, the lost half, via the intermediate stages of love for various different loved ones, the love for the beloved one with whom one is in harmony in all regards, and ultimately – as the last aim – the union with him as the true and only lover, who has always belonged to oneself (just as the idea of beauty as immortality has always been there). As is typical for his parables, Plato has staged the abstract line of thought in concrete action. Accordingly, philosophical love is portrayed in the parable as physical love, and the non-individual *one* idea of the ‘idea of beauty’ is individualized in the sought-after *one* Other; in both cases achieving the aim puts an end to desire. This narrative transformation entails the establishment of a temporal dimension, of events happening in time; the timelessness of an immortal idea, and consequently the detachedness of philosophical desire from time, is depicted in the paradox of the restitution of a *past* ideal state as the project of a distant *future*. Boldest of all is probably the following hypothesis: Diotima describes the ascent to the idea of beauty as a process which begins with physical Eros, and in the course of which the erotic interest moves to always new and, at the same time, always less spatially and temporally limited objects. Hence, what changes is the object relation of Eros, while neither the erotic intensity nor the nature of Eros as such change. It should therefore be legitimate to understand the intellectual union with the idea of beauty as a sexual act, albeit a disembodied and sublimated sexual act.²⁸ Seeing it then has to be understood – completely in accordance

26 *Symp.* 212a2: συνόντος, 212a3: τίκτειν, 212a5: ἐφαπτομένῳ. See Sier (1997: 109-112) and Tornau (2005: 277).

27 One does not have to go as far as Reale (2001), who has seen Aristophanes’ speech as a coded version of Plato’s unwritten teachings, to acknowledge that both conceptions relate to each other in many ways and obviously have a parallel design.

28 In *Phaedrus* 253e6-256a6 Plato gives a striking description of both the necessity and the difficulties of rejecting the desire for the physical sexual act and of replacing it with intellectual

with the classical concept of seeing (see Rakoczy 1996: 19-37) – as a kind of tactile contact, or indeed rather as an immersion in Being itself, since a perception that relies on distance cannot be thought capable of perceiving an infinite Being.²⁹ From this point of view it makes immediate sense for Diotima to use sexual terminology alongside epistemological terminology. However, this ultimate erotic act is paradoxical because it can only be understood as a love in love with itself, since it is directed at the idea of beauty which does not belong to the level of reality of the lover (cf. Tornau 2005: 277-281). This intellectually becoming one with the One is then depicted in Aristophanes' parable as a union with the belonging other half, with – as outlined above – 'one's own Other'.³⁰

The meaning of Aristophanes' speech, however, cannot be reduced to its parabolic nature, in particular because this parable is put not into Socrates' but into another character's mouth who – if one assumed a purely parabolic nature – would be reduced to a mere mouthpiece which is not suggested by the text.³¹ As a matter of fact, Aristophanes' myth provides two motifs which do not really go beyond Diotima's conception of the erotic path, but which characterize and assess it anew from a different perspective. These are, on the one hand, the motif of the primeval human's ὄβρις – their wanting to storm Mount Olympus, supplemented by Aristophanes' final warning against future transgressions – and, on the other hand, the motif of the *monstrosity* of the halved men, which is manifested not only in their appearance but most of all in the fact of their erotic desire. In what follows I wish to demonstrate that, by introducing these motifs, Plato establishes a very unusual perspective on his philosophical discourse and shows us the radicality, inacceptability and the dis-

συνουσία. What is depicted in the *Symposium*, however, is a union, because if the One is Being as such then it cannot be understood as distinguished from others; see *Symp.* 211a7-b1: (...) οὐδέ τις λόγος οὐδέ τις ἐπιστήμη, οὐδέ που ὄν ἐν ἑτέρῳ τινι, οἷον ἐν ζῳῳ ἢ ἐν γῆ ἢ ἐν οὐρανῷ ἢ ἐν τῷ ἄλλῳ (“[Nor again will our initiate find the beautiful] as a particular description or piece of knowledge, nor as existing somewhere in another substance, such as an animal or the earth or sky or any other thing”).

- 29 The *Symposium* here, in my opinion, in many ways goes beyond comparable descriptions of the ascent of the intellect in the *Phaedrus*. There the charioteer of the soul chariot manages for a shorter or longer time to catch sight of the realm of ideas. But Socrates argues there that the ideas are located at a ὑπερουράνιος τόπος above the sky (*Phaedrus* 247b6-e6) where they present themselves to the sight of the gods and of him who is capable of following them. Tactile contact is not mentioned.
- 30 One may ask to what extent the aspect of belonging which is crucial for Aristophanes depicts the relation of the One to the world (see Diotima's critique in *Symp.* 205d10-206a1). Tentatively I would refer here to the theorem of 'participation' (μέθεξις) which also propagates a connection of the One and the many which is indissoluble but not realized in a knowing or conscious way in every day life and actions.
- 31 A proof to the contrary lies particularly in the fact that Diotima explicitly contradicts Aristophanes' position (see above n. 24).

turbing nature of such thinking which not only irritates men in the daily application of their value systems, but also questions the relationship between men and gods. I will first demonstrate to what extent Diotima's metaphysical philosophizing and the behaviour of her disciple Socrates can be seen as ὕβρις. After that I will ask if Socrates in his state of philosophical desire shows aspects of monstrosity, and if the events unfolding around him fit into the scheme of action which is characteristic for the classical discourse of the monstrous.

Can the way of philosophizing propagated by Diotima and practised by Socrates be seen as a 'transgression'? The answer must be "yes" if Diotima's thinking is assessed from the perspective of traditional religiosity. Myth confirms that even the attempt of humans to see gods in their true appearance is punished most heavily (e.g. Actaeon, Semele); this is all the more true for attempts at sexual assault (e.g. Ixion).³² With this in mind, the desire not only to see, but also to seek union with 'divine beauty' as articulated by Diotima and Socrates (*Symp.* 211e3) is far from unproblematic. If the space of true being is a divine space³³ then the taboo of inviolability must *a priori* be valid for it,³⁴ and thinking, in particular if it is understood as an erotic activity, could not claim an exception from the law. The way in which Socrates talks about these issues during the banquet also can be criticized from a religious point of view: Diotima has explained her revelations to Socrates, especially the last part that covers the vision of the One, as an initiation into the mysteries, as her terminology clearly shows (esp. *Symp.* 209e5-210a2). Yet one had to remain silent about what one experienced in the course of initiations, such as that which took place every five years at the Great Mysteries at Eleusis. How seriously this religious law was taken is shown by the trial for profanation of the Mysteries in 415, one year after the fictitious date of the *Symposium*, where Alcibiades amongst others was accused of having profaned the Mysteries by re-enacting them in his private house. Divulging secrets of the mysteries during a banquet could well be understood as a form of ὕβρις.

Apart from these transgressions, Socrates is explicitly described as full of ὕβρις in his relationships with others more frequently than in any other of

32 This is even true for sexual approaches towards the *statue* of a god: see (Ps.-)Lucian, *Am.* 15 (Aphrodite's statue of Praxiteles at Knidos).

33 This is not precluded by the fact that Diotima refuses to see Ἔρως as a god and rather identifies him as δαίμων (*Symp.* 202b10-e1). Similarly, the differentiation between the heaven of the gods and the ὑπερουράνιος τόπος (see above n. 29) of ideas even further above it, undertaken in the *Phaedrus*, only constitutes a relocation of the problem.

34 The giants which Aristophanes introduces in the beginning for the purpose of comparison are likewise punished for their attempt to conquer Mount Olympus (*Symp.* 190b5-e1).

Plato's texts.³⁵ Eros is already always in danger of violating others (Hunter 2004: 17), and in the case of Socrates, as the remarks of the other participants of the conversation clearly show, it is mostly emotional violations, namely the sneering rejection of all those who feel erotically attracted to him and seek his attention and instruction. Exponent of these 'victims' of Socrates in the *Symposium* is Alcibiades. He reports in his speech how as a young man, confident in his own good looks, he tried to seduce Socrates and was rejected, despite his intention to become as good as possible with Socrates' help as a teacher (*Symp.* 218d2). Offended by such coolness, he apparently gave up on his philosophical efforts. And yet Socrates himself emphasizes in the *Phaedrus* that not everybody is given the opportunity to accomplish in this life the ascent into the realm of ideas, but that apart from this there are also second and third best ways of life and philosophizing (*Phaedrus* 253b7-e2). Which path one takes depends on which of the twelve gods the soul had affiliated itself to in its previous disembodied wanderings. Alcibiades' self-perception pretentiously aims at an affiliation with Zeus (see below, p. 107) due to which he would have been potentially predestined for the highest level of philosophizing (*Phdr.* 252e2-253e2, 248c5-e3). But this was not necessarily 'the truth', and Socrates shows after Alcibiades' narration very little empathy, as opposed to his behaviour towards young Phaedrus in the dialogue named after him. This is all the more remarkable insofar as Socrates, at least according to his representation in the texts of Plato and Xenophon, seems to have understood the acquisition of knowledge as an individual cognitive achievement guided by a teacher, rather than as instruction in a sophistic manner. It may therefore be appropriate to speak here of a didactic failure of Socrates when he possibly overestimated his student's capabilities to make further philosophical progress.³⁶ Similarly, Socrates' partners in dialogue have again and again perceived his pretended ignorance as εἰρωνεία, a word which does not carry positive connotations in Greek but denotes a dissimulation for bad purposes. It is thus not surprising that Soc-

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- 35 Right at the beginning of the banquet the host Agathon criticizes Socrates for having ridiculed him already in the first words after his arrival with his infamous irony (*Symp.* 175e7). The speeches of Pausanias and Eryximachus later on make it clear that Eros in conjunction with ὄβρις can cause a lot of harm; see *Symp.* 181c (Pausanias) and 188a (Eryximachus). Then Alcibiades uses such a reproach even four times explicitly in the course of his speech (*Symp.* 215b7, 219c5, 221e3, 222a8); and in addition to that he twice (*Symp.* 222b3 and 5) raises the reproach that Socrates tricks (ἐξαπατᾷ) those who place their trust in him for which Alcibiades lists further names.
- 36 See in general with regard to criticism of Socrates' didactic aptitude Nussbaum (1980) as well as Möllendorff (2002: 135-137). In the depiction of Socrates' instruction in Aristophanes' *Clouds* he also does not take into consideration the (rather underdeveloped) intellectual capacities of his student Strepsiades.

rates in the *Symposium* is, with Aristophanes as the sole exception,³⁷ surrounded only by men who themselves qualify in one way or other as guilty of ὕβρις, a fact which became particularly obvious in the historical context of the year 416.³⁸ If, however, Socrates gathers these kinds of people around himself, then the accusation of corrupting the youth as documented in the *Apology* may have found some approval in the general public. In any case, Plato has obviously very advisedly chosen the year 416 as the dialogue's fictitious date.

The second question is whether Socrates is also monstrous beyond his ὕβρις. Is Aristophanes' classification of the erotic human being as *monstrum*, and Socrates is according to all symposiasts the most eminent eroticist, realized in the portrayal of the philosopher and his actions? Let us initially enquire into how far the five criteria of monstrosity – awfulness through exceptionality, being sent by a god, ominous significance, counter-naturalness and ugliness – can be applied to him and his philosophizing. Looking at Socrates' own speech does not bring us any further here, but the way Alcibiades, who appears unex-

37 But the old Attic comedy, which Aristophanes represents, is by definition known to use a hyperbolic discourse of polemic attacks against everything and everyone (if sanctioned by the performative context of the Dionysian festivals).

38 One year after the fictitious date of the *Symposium* Phaedrus is, like Eryximachus, involved in the Hermocopid scandal. Eryximachus, about whom we know very little in general, belonged like Phaedrus (Andocides, *Myst.* 15) to those who were denounced in this context (Andocides, *Myst.* 35): they were tried and condemned to exile. Agathon, his perennial friend Pausanias and Alcibiades – as whose ἐραστής Socrates is seen – were socially conspicuous. Agathon was already at the fictitious date of Plato's *Protagoras*, around 432/431, a charming ἐρόμενος, and he still is now – but 16 years later he is definitely beyond the age in which the role of a beloved one in a pederastic relationship could be deemed acceptable by society: it is not without reason that his fellow symposiast Aristophanes in his *Thesmophoriazusa*e aims his remarks at him during the Lenaia of the year 411, portraying him as an effeminate, even downright transsexual, tragic poet. This mockery also touches, of course, the no less grown up Pausanias about whom we only know that he later on accompanied Agathon to Achelous in Pella. Alcibiades is likewise significantly involved in the Hermocopid and mystery scandals, deserts to Sparta and leads Athens in the following years into most serious military calamities. In 414, he is put on stage again by Aristophanes, this time in the *Birds*, if one agrees with the allegorical interpretation, which a substantial part of scholarship suggests for this comedy's protagonist, Peisetarius, a ὕβρις-driven and violent character who even dethrones the gods. As is generally known, Socrates also became a victim of Aristophanes' art of mockery, namely seven years prior to the *Symposium* in the *Clouds*, which was performed for the first time in 423; in its second version, however, which has come down to us and on which Aristophanes worked during 420 and 415 (and, hence, again in the chronological context of the fictitious date of the *Symposium*), he is not given the role of the protagonist but that of an antagonist who, in the end, is brutally destroyed, although his teaching bears baleful fruits which outlive the end of his own existence: The protagonist Strepsiades sets the house of Socrates, his son's teacher, on fire because his son has turned the teachings of the 'philosophist' against his own father, but the sophistically corrupted son survives of course. Again, there is doubtlessly an accusation of ὕβρις against Socrates in the background. As to the ὕβρις-ridden character of the dialogue partners in the *Symposium* see Vlastos (1971) and Gagarin (1977); see also Blanckenhagen (1992).

pectedly, portrays him in his speech is instructive. If we understand Aristophanes' speech as a parable, then it is striking that Alcibiades opens his statement about Socrates with a parable too, namely one in which Socrates appears as a hybrid creature (*Symp.* 215b3-6):

καὶ φημὶ αὖ εἰκέναι αὐτὸν τῷ σατύρῳ τῷ Μαρσύᾳ. ὅτι μὲν οὖν τό γε εἶδος ὅμοιος εἶ τούτοις, ὃ Σόκρατες, οὐδ' αὐτὸς ἂν που ἀμφισβητήσῃς· ὡς δὲ καὶ τᾶλλα εἰσκας, μετὰ τοῦτο ἄκουε.

"I further suggest that he resembles the satyr Marsyas. Now, as to your likeness, Socrates, to these in figure, I do not suppose even you yourself will dispute it; but I have next to tell you that you are like them in every other respect."

Like a silenus – a hybrid creature, part man, part horse – Socrates is heedless and violent in love affairs, a ὕβριστής; like Marsyas, he is someone who knows how to enchant people. But these are all superficialities, as is the case with the folding Silenus sculptures (*Symp.* 216d6-217a2):

ἔνδοθεν δὲ ἀνοιχθεὶς πόσης οἴεσθε γέμει, ὃ ἄνδρες συμπόται, σωφροσύνης; ἴστε ὅτι οὔτε εἴ τις καλὸς ἐστί μέλει αὐτῷ οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ καταφρονεῖ τοσοῦτον ὄσον οὐδ' ἂν εἰς οἰθηεῖη, οὔτ' εἴ τις πλούσιος, οὔτ' εἴ ἄλλην τινὰ τιμὴν ἔχων τῶν ὑπὸ πλῆθους μακαριζομένων· ἡγεῖται δὲ πάντα ταῦτα τὰ κτήματα οὐδενὸς ἄξια καὶ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν εἶναι – λέγω ὑμῖν – εἰρωνευόμενος δὲ καὶ παίζων πάντα τὸν βίον πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους διατελεῖ. σπουδάσαντος δὲ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνοιχθέντος οὐκ οἶδα εἴ τις ἐώρακεν τὰ ἐντὸς ἀγάλματα· ἀλλ' ἐγὼ ἦδη ποτ' εἶδον, καί μοι ἔδοξεν οὕτω θεῖα καὶ χρυσᾶ εἶναι καὶ πάγκαλα καὶ θαυμαστά, ὥστε ποιητέον εἶναι ἔμβραχῦ ὅτι κελεύει Σωκράτης.

"(...) If you opened his inside, you cannot imagine how full he is, good cup-companions, of sobriety. I tell you, all the beauty a man may have is nothing to him; he despises it more than any of you can believe; nor does wealth attract him, nor any sort of honour that is the envied prize of the crowd. All these possessions he counts as nothing worth, and all of us as nothing. I assure you; he spends his whole life in chaffing and making game of his fellow-men. Whether anyone else has caught him in a serious moment and opened him, and seen the images inside, I know not; but I saw them one day, and thought them so divine and golden, so perfectly fair and wondrous, that I simply had to do as Socrates bade me."

That Socrates' impact on his audience is of a wondrous and terrifying nature is stated by Alcibiades with reference to his power to enchant people (*Symp.* 215d3-6):

ἐπειδὴν δὲ σοῦ τις ἀκούη ἢ τῶν σῶν λόγων ἄλλου λέγοντος, κἂν πάνν φαῦλος ἢ ὁ λέγων, ἐάντε γυνή ἀκούη ἐάντε ἀνὴρ ἐάντε μειράκιον, ἐκπεληγμένοι ἐσμὲν καὶ κατεχόμεθα.

"But so soon as we hear you, or your discourses in the mouth of another, – though such person be ever so poor a speaker, and whether the hearer be a woman or a man or a youngster – we are all astounded and entranced."

The aspect of ominous significance is closely linked with this since the outer form functions, due to its analogy to the openable silenus statuette, as a signal that there are images of golden divinity hidden within him. At the same time this can count as evidence for the criterion of being godsent. The comparison to Marsyas also fulfils the criteria of counter-naturalness and ugliness by evoking the Silenus' hybridity.

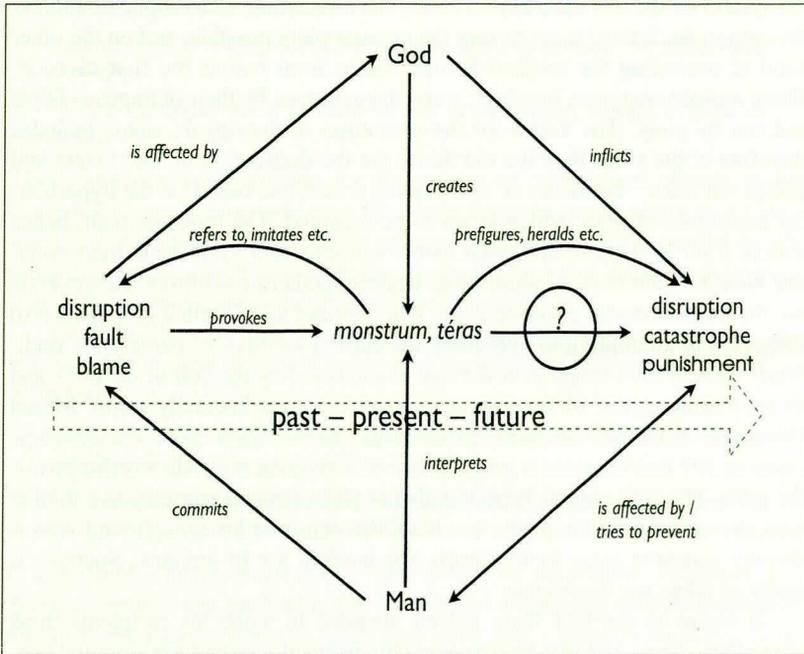


Figure 4: Monstrosity as sign of disruption between man and god

If Socrates can therefore, categorically speaking, be seen as a *monstrum* then finally we have to ask how far the plot follows the rules of the monster discourse. Let us bring to mind for this purpose the agents and vectors of the discourse version typical for classical thought, the one in which the monstrous is understood as a sign of the existence of a disruption whose divine punishment it heralds (fig. 4). This rather symmetrical model reveals a blank position because the *monstrum* itself is usually purely an object; it is provoked by a disruption, created by a god, and interpreted by man, but it does not have an *activity of its own*, in particular none that is directed towards the future, that is towards the time when, according to the system, the catastrophe, punishment, is to be expected; it is, however, usually man's task to relate the ominous sig-

nificance of the *monstrum* to past and future and to try to prevent the predicted consequences. Yet it is exactly here that Aristophanes interferes with the traditional model and turns it on its head: by portraying man himself as monstrous he projects his structural position onto that of the monster, and by means of this projection he can also equip the monster with human activity. For the halved humans in their mostrosity are particularly characterized by a vehement activity, their erotic pursuit, and this pursuit aims in perfect conformity with the system on the one hand at preventing the threatening catastrophe of another division in the future by exercising the greatest piety possible, and on the other hand at restituting the original human nature from before the first division. These archaic creatures, however, were characterized by their outrageous ὕβρις and not by piety. The desire for the restitution of the ἀρχαία φύσις includes therefore at the same time the old desire for the destruction of the current and god-given order³⁹ by means of establishing a new one based on the hyperbolic συμμετρία of man, which is yet to be regained. The monster, man, hence suffers from his current deformed nature and thus also from the current order, and would, circumstances permitting, work towards its overthrow. However, is not the transcendental philosophizing that Socrates and Diotima propagate also suspected of attempting to overthrow the current worldview, namely the traditional conservative religious order that is stipulated by the cult of the polis and its supporting myths, of attempting, as it were, to 'intellectually storm' Mount Olympus? After all, Socrates' prosecutors, as we learn from the *Apology*, claim in 399 that Socrates is guilty of not worshipping the gods worshipped by the polis. Thus not only as lover but also as philosophical eroticist, as a thinker who strived with all his power to obtain the object of his thought and who is thereby prepared even to transgress the borders set to humans, Socrates is guilty of ὕβρις *par excellence*.

It seems to me that Plato indeed intended to make his recipients think along these lines, and that he consequently drastically staged the potential consequences of such intellectual behaviour with the punishment of a further division, as expressed in Aristophanes' speech. I come to this conclusion in particular because immediately after Socrates' ὕβρις-laden revelations Alcibiades *suddenly* appears, almost like a divine epiphany. Alcibiades' quasi-divine ambitions were not only mocked by Aristophanes in his *Birds* in 414,⁴⁰ two years after the fictitious date of the *Symposium*, in which he lets him take the place

39 This, in my opinion, can be well related to a corresponding European controversy in the second half of the 17th century (Daston & Park 2002: 248): "Viele Theologen, gewarnt durch das Wissen, daß Menschen Brüche der natürlichen Ordnung als Einladung zum Brechen der staatlichen Ordnung nutzten, gingen mit Vorzeichen und Wundern genauso sparsam um wie die Naturphilosophen".

40 See esp. Vickers (1995). The discussion of the question whether or not the protagonist of the *Birds*, Peisetarius, alludes to Alcibiades is presented in Möllendorff (2002: 108-113).

of abdicating Zeus, but were also made obvious by the historical Alcibiades himself in his choice of crest which depicted the god Eros with Zeus' thunderbolt in his hand.⁴¹ This would-be Zeus Alcibiades now lies down on the couch on which Agathon and Socrates, whom Alcibiades does not recognize immediately, are lying together, and he lies down between them.

This separation of the two eroticists is interpreted by Agathon, after Alcibiades' speech accused Socrates of erotic ὕβρις, as jealousy aiming at separating them (*Symp.* 222e1-2):

τεκμαίρομαι δὲ καὶ ὡς κατεκλίνη ἐν μέσῳ ἐμοῦ τε καὶ σοῦ, ἵνα χωρὶς ἡμᾶς
διαλάβῃ.

"I take his sitting down between us two as an obvious attempt to draw us apart."

This cumbersome formulation for the process of 'separation' already makes one prick up one's ears: until now the whole dramatic action seems like a staging of Aristophanes' division myth reduced to earthly-realistic conditions: the separation of the united lovers (on the couch) by Zeus and, thus, the dramatization of the narrative about the origin of the monsters.

Immediately after this, however, Alcibiades' divine pose suddenly collapses as he turns his head and recognizes Socrates who lies behind him (*Symp.* 213b7-9):

καὶ ἄμα μεταστρεφόμενον αὐτὸν ὄραν τὸν Σωκράτη, ἰδόντα δὲ ἀναπηδῆσαι
καὶ εἰπεῖν ὦ Ἡράκλεις, τοῦτί τί ἦν;

"With that he turned about and saw Socrates, and the same moment leapt up and cried, 'Save us, what a surprise!'"

Is this fright – again criterion (a) – not caused by Alcibiades' recognizing in Socrates his true and profound love – or should we not say with Aristophanes: his (from Alcibiades' point of view) own other half – and consequently, is not what he reports in his speech the story of a (for him) tragic loss? If that were to be the case then the details of the staging of this moment would be rather significant because Plato makes Alcibiades adopt in the moment of frightful recognition the very position that Zeus had initially forced upon man after the division: the face directed towards the lost half (Socrates), the sexual organ turned towards the other side (Agathon).

Is that yet another monstrous sign that through Socrates the order of the world is being disrupted? In any case, by its reference to the discourse of the monstrous, Aristophanes' parable makes not only the bliss of transcendental cognition comprehensible, but it moreover names (notably from a radically conservative perspective) the price that has to be paid for metaphysical ambi-

41 See Plutarch, *Alc.* 16.1-2, and Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 12 534e.

tions, namely in the case of their *fulfilment*: the danger of an overthrow of world order; in the case of their *failure*: existential isolation. If Socrates' subsequent death can not only be historically linked with the social and political failure of his friends and students, but also represents the death which Socrates predicts in the seventh book of the *Republic* for the philosopher that returns into the cave (*Rep.* 7, 516e8-517a7), then the *Symposium* illustrates what could be the deeper reason for such a tragic ending, for such a far-reaching loss of social and interpersonal integration: namely that philosophical thinking transgresses respectable boundaries, that it is capable of hurting even those with whom one is close and intimate, that philosophizing rigorously also means becoming oblivious to the fact that for many the desire to know arises only on the foundations of fulfilled bodily desires, and that this oblivion can entail severe inter-personal damage. A look at our monstrous counterpart in the mirror should be a warning to us.

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