




ALCIBIADES' SPEECH IN THE *SYMPOSIUM*
AND ITS ORIGINS

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“I have no knowledge I could teach the man to improve him,
but I thought that by associating with him
I could improve him through my love.”
Aeschines Socraticus, *Alcibiades* (fr. 11c, Dittmar)

Alcibiades and Socrates



The encomium on Plato's teacher and friend is delivered by a person who was charged with impiety because of parodying the Eleusinian mysteries, betrayed Athens to Sparta, associated with another serious enemy of Athens, the Persians, and later gave up Sparta for Athens again to be finally expelled from the city and killed in 404 B.C. Socrates' contacts and relationships with Charmides, Critias and Alcibiades seem to be behind the charges of corrupting the youth, which brought him to his trial and death.¹ And yet it is Alcibiades whom Plato chose to deliver the long praise of Socrates.²

Michael Gagarin claims that in the speech Plato actually pictures Socrates' failure as a teacher and educator.³ In the following paper

¹ Xenophon closely ties the charge against Socrates to Critias and Alcibiades (*Mem.* I,2,12); the same goes for Libanius' *Defence of Socrates* (§ 160), and it is highly likely that these two men were mentioned in the *Accusation of Socrates* by Polycrates.

² For a literary overview cf. D. Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens*, Oxford 1999. For a biographical account cf. W. M. Ellis, *Alcibiades*, London 1989.

³ M. Gagarin, *Socrates' hybris and Alcibiades' failure*, in: *Phoenix*, XXXI, 1977, p. 23: “I will suggest that Alcibiades' criticism illuminates an



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I want to argue that presenting Socrates as being a faulty teacher of Alcibiades actually supports the charge against Socrates and this, I believe, cannot be Plato's intention. On the other hand, I believe, the encomium on Socrates in the *Symposium* could be interpreted together with the *Alcibiades I*. There, Plato offers a fuller picture of the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades, one that gives a possible explanation of Alcibiades' failure and moral collapse, while keeping Socrates' position as a moral teacher intact. This approach presupposes that Plato wrote some of the dialogues in a deliberate order of the fictional chronology.⁴ Interpreting the *Symposium* together with the *Alcibiades I* allows me then to make a broader claim concerning Plato's conception of the personal self.

In the following interpretation I make use of the fictional chronology Plato incorporates into his dialogues. It is actually the *only* chronological order of the Platonic writings which finds support in the texts themselves. The fictive or dramatic chronology cannot make any claims about the dates of the composition of the dialogues and does not need to use the standard chronology. It is not essential for me now whether Plato wrote first the *Symposium* and later the *Alcibiades I* or vice versa.⁵ Rather, I am interested in the connections which Plato suggests between the dialogues regarding their (a) philosophical issues; (b) dramatic setting, and (c) quasi-historical framework.

important feature of Socrates' character, his *hybris*; that this *hybris* is consistent with Socrates' doctrine of *eros*; and that this *hybris* helps to explain Socrates' failure as a teacher."

⁴ Cf. C. L. Griswold Jr., *Unifying Plato: Charles Kahn on Platonic Prolepsis*, in: *Ancient Philosophy*, 10, 1990, pp. 256 ff.; C. L. Griswold, *E Pluribus Unum? On the Platonic Corpus*, in: *Ancient Philosophy*, 19, 1999, pp. 387 ff.; and C. L. Griswold, *Comments on Kahn*, in: J. Annas – C. Rowe (eds.), *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, Washington D.C. 2002, pp. 138 ff.

⁵ The actual debate in the *Symposium* is set on the second evening after the young tragedian Agathon had his first victorious production, which could be dated to 416 B.C. (cf. R. G. Bury, *The Symposium of Plato*, Cambridge 1969², p. LXVI). Alcibiades is in the position of his greatest influence (cf. *Symp.* 216b). There is no explicit textual remark for setting the date of the debate in the *Alcibiades I*. It occurred before Alcibiades' partici-



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Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium*

I am not going to offer a comprehensive interpretation of Alcibiades' speech. Rather, I will focus on selected passages that (a) throw some light on the development of the relation between Socrates and Alcibiades and, when interpreted together with the *Alcibiades I*, (b) show several interesting features of the *care of the soul*, so that they (c) serve as an apology for Socrates against the charge of corrupting the Athenian youth.

At the very beginning of his speech Alcibiades uses an image (*eikôn*) to describe Socrates and says that this image should not be a matter of laughter; rather, it is employed *for the sake of truth* (*tou alêthous heneka*; 215a4–6). This image is the well-known statue of Silenus with his flute, usually to be found in the market-place, a statue that is inside full of *tiny statues of the gods*. Indeed, according to Alcibiades, Socrates looks like Marsyas, whose melodies are *divine* (*Symp.* 215c–d). This brings about the collision between the inner, true character and the outer appearance.

After explicating Socrates' virtues Alcibiades comes back to this image and claims that even Socrates' ideas and arguments are just like those hollow statues of Silenus (221d7 ff.),⁶ as they are totally ridiculous and laughable from outside, but

pation in the battle of Potidaea (432 B.C.) and he is still very young in the dialogue, yet already confidently heading to the assembly to advise the *polis*. Since eighteen- and nineteen-year old Athenians were not sent on military campaigns outside Attica (cf. Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* 42,3–5), Alcibiades had to be born before 450 B.C. and a probable date of the fictional meeting of Socrates and Alcibiades might be the years 435/434 B.C. (Cf. D. Nails, *The People of Plato*, Indianapolis – Cambridge 2002, pp. 10–12.)

⁶ Whereas Alcibiades has uncovered the inner centre of Socrates' speeches, his dramatic counterpart, Callicles from the *Gorgias*, remains at their surface when he criticises and despises them (*Gorg.* 490e–491b); moreover, it was Callicles who envisaged the trial of Socrates and its end (*Gorg.* 486a–b, 521e–522c), caused by Socrates' relation to Alcibiades. For Callicles as a dramatic counterpart for Alcibiades, see D. Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens*, Oxford 1999, pp. 231 ff.



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“if you see them when they open up, like the statues, if you go behind their surface, you’ll realize that no other arguments make sense. They are truly worthy of a god, bursting with figures of virtue inside. They’re of great – no, of the greatest – importance for anyone who wants to become a truly good man.” (*Symp.* 222a1–6; tr. A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff)

As Alcibiades reports, he once caught Socrates opened like a Silenus’ statue and he saw the figures of gods kept inside him. They were god-like, bright and beautiful, absolutely amazing (*Symp.* 216e–217a).

Socrates’ words cause Alcibiades to be beside himself when he hears them (215e) and they bite him in the most sensitive part of his self, whether one wants to call it the heart or the soul (218a). It is then his soul that under the influence of Socrates’ speeches protests against the way Alcibiades lives (215e6). Charmed by Socrates and his speeches, at first Alcibiades behaved as if he was the *lover* of Socrates, not the beloved, as one would expect in Athenian society (217c7–8). He invites Socrates for dinner several times and tries to seduce him by promising him that together with sex, all his possessions will arrive as well (218d).

But Socrates refuses this exchange of fake beauty for real virtue, bodily love for turning a better man.⁷ While Socrates’ speeches are necessary for anyone who wants to take care of him- or herself, paradoxically, Alcibiades does not have much to offer back. Socrates simply does not care about things such as wealth or fame, as other people do (216d–e). Thus he is also the only man in the world who makes Alcibiades feel ashamed and humiliated (216b; 219d). Socrates shows to Alcibiades how futile his political and social ambitions are without the proper care of oneself, without being a virtuous man.

These are the grounds for Alcibiades’ mixed, or perhaps even schizophrenic attitude towards Socrates. There’s more beyond wondering whether he ought to hate Socrates for humiliating him and so to lose his friendship (219d). Alcibiades’ life had become one constant effort to escape from Socrates and keep away from him. He says:

⁷ Cf. Socrates’ speech in the *Symposium*, esp. 210a ff.



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“Sometimes, believe me, I think I would be happier if he were dead. And yet I know that if he dies I’ll be even more miserable. I can’t live with him, and I can’t without him! What can I do about him!” (*Symp.* 216c1–3; tr. A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff)

This is the final result of Alcibiades’ encounter with Socrates. But how could this picture of his schizophrenic attitude be taken as a defence of Socrates? Doesn’t it after all show that he did indeed fail in attracting this gifted and well-disposed young man for philosophy and the virtuous life?

I will argue that an answer to this question becomes somewhat clearer when one takes a quick look at the first fictional meeting of Socrates and Alcibiades, as it is presented in the *Alcibiades I*.

Care of the soul in the *Alcibiades I*

Let me briefly sketch the main points about the care of one’s soul or the care of one’s self as introduced in the second half of the *Alcibiades I*. After it has been said that Alcibiades should “take care of himself” (119a8–9 ff.), the new question Socrates raises is: what does it actually mean, “to take care of oneself”?⁸ In the first part of the argument Socrates distinguishes the art that takes care of what belongs to a given *x* on the one hand, and another art that takes care of *x* itself on the other (128d3–4). While shoemaking takes care of what belongs to our bodily parts, it is gymnastics that takes care of these bodily parts on their own. Since it is now clear that Socrates and Alcibiades have to be aware of this distinction between the arts, the question is, what kind of art can be used to take care of oneself (128d12)?

In the following passages Socrates applies the results of the investigation about the self to his relation with Alcibiades (131c–132b, cf. with 104e–106c): while everyone so far has loved only Alcibiades’ body, Socrates loves his soul, which means that he is the only true lover of Alcibiades himself. In order not to lose this only true lover, Alcibiades agrees that he will try to be, in his soul, as

⁸ Plato, *Alc.* I, 127e8: τί ἐστὶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι.



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beautiful as possible, and asks Socrates how exactly they should cultivate themselves (132b4–5).

Even though Socrates describes his reply as a “step forward”,⁹ instead of responding what kind of *technē* could help us to take care of ourselves he introduces an epistemological problem concerning the cognition of the soul. While Alcibiades asks how or in what manner (*tropos*) they should cultivate themselves, Socrates twists the question into the following query: in what manner (*tropos*) can we get the most distinct knowledge of the self? And he goes on to say that this would then bring about to them knowledge of themselves as well (132c7–9).

Though previously he has said several times that it is a craft or skill they are looking for (cf. 128d8–11), he now subordinates this question to the problem of cognizing the true self, namely getting to know one’s soul. He proceeds further with the help of an image (*paradeigma*). To describe the method of “knowing oneself”, Socrates uses the simile of sight. An eye can see itself not only in mirrors but in another eye as well. In this way it observes itself in something that is different but also same, as it is an eye, after all. In the same manner the soul should look into another soul in order to know itself (133a–b). And it must look especially into the region of the soul where its virtue, wisdom, resides (133b9–10).¹⁰ In this manner, then, the soul can attain a degree of self-knowledge.

If the soul, i.e. a particular self, is to know itself (herself, himself), it must look at a soul. The contact is pictured as a sensual vision. The simile stands for some kind of cognition which is not specified in any detail. The region (*topos*) of the soul inhabited by wisdom is the most divine (*theion*) in us, and so self-knowledge is

⁹ Plato, *Alc.* I,132b6: εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν πεπεράνται.

¹⁰ This passage presupposes the doctrine of the complex soul as we know it from the *Republic*, or at least some parts of this theory. What it seems to lack is the theory of virtues applied to each part of the soul, known from the *Republic* as well. The notion of the soul is still associated with rationality more than with anything else. So wisdom is called the “virtue of soul”, while in the *Republic* there are several virtues in the soul, wisdom is only one of them, and belongs merely to one part of the soul, even though to the best and the ruling one.



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achieved by contact with this divine aspect of our self (133c1–6, cf. *Resp.* 589d).¹¹ Alcibiades can achieve knowledge of his true self by contact with another soul, another true self, in which he can find wisdom – this trace of the divine in us.

Alcibiades I as a dramatic origin for Alcibiades' speech

The main pattern of thought in both Platonic texts is based on a conflict between the *inside* and the *outside*, between the inner truth and the outer appearances, or some inner self and whatever outwardly belongs to this self. Socrates' unsightly figure¹² – his outer appearance – is in Alcibiades' *eikôn* contrasted with the beautiful statues of the gods inside him, the divine, bright and beautiful *inside* of Socrates (*Symp.* 215a–b; 216e–217a). The Sileni were not famous for their beauty, quite the opposite, and Marsyas charmed people not by his outer appearance, as beautiful Alcibiades did,¹³ but rather by his flute playing. Socrates does the same with his *logoi*, and his speeches are then truly worthy of what is inside him, as they are truly worthy of god (*Symp.* 222a).

¹¹ This is suggested by the mutually supportive ideal relation between the true lover and his beloved, as pictured in the *Phaedrus* (252e; 255e ff.). If the true self is the soul, and so true beauty is the beauty of the soul, then it is by looking into this *beautiful and divine* soul of the beloved that the lover gets to the stage when “neither human wisdom nor divine inspiration can confer upon man any greater blessing than this” (*Phdr.* 256b5–7). Indeed, there can be no greater blessing than this one, which enables us to become similar to god according to the divine in our souls.

¹² Indirectly mentioned in the *Theaetetus*. Talking about the young Theaetetus, Theodorus says: “as a matter of fact – if you’ll excuse my saying such a thing – he is not beautiful at all [οὐκ ἔστι καλός], but is rather like you [προσέειπε δὲ σοί] snub-nosed, with eyes that stick out...” (*Tht.* 146e6–9; tr. M. J. Levett, revised by M. Burnyeat).

¹³ Athenaeus, 534b–f; Antisthenes, fr. 30 Caizzi; Plutarch, *Alc.* I,4 or IV,1 etc.



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Not even Socrates could deny that he resembles these creatures in his outer appearance (*eidōs*), i.e. in what is apparent at first sight (*Symp.* 215b5). But when Socrates opened up, he became most virtuous (*spoudasantos*), and Alcibiades saw the *inner* (*entos*) statues (*Symp.* 216e5–6). These then seemed *divine*, gold, outstandingly beautiful and amazing to him (216e7–217a1). Thus the outer appearance stands here in clear opposition to the inner beauty and divine character of Socrates' *inside*.

The proper care of one's true self, as described in the *Alcibiades I*, then starts with self-knowledge, i.e. moderation, *sôphrosynê* (*Alc.* I,133c). This equals knowledge of one's own soul, as that is exactly the true self. As the *eikôn* of Socrates in the *Symposium* shows, body is always only the outer case for the true self which resides in it, that is, for the soul (cf. *Alc.* I,130b). While in the *Symposium* it is made clear that it is a mistake to judge Socrates or his speeches *prima facie*, or according to their outer appearances, the dialogue *Alcibiades I* declares that none of the outer and visible features of one's personality, such as beauty or property, count as one's true self.

In both dialogues the metaphorical language describing the close contact of one's inner self with the inner self of someone else is that of sensory vision. This language thus makes the pair of opposites 'inner–outer' even more explicit. In the *Alcibiades I*, Plato, besides illustrating his intention by taking an example from the realm of vision (one eye looking into another), also uses sensory terminology for describing the relation between the souls themselves (cf. e.g. *blepton* and *blepôn* at 133b8 and c5).¹⁴ Alcibiades in the *Symposium* then uses the metaphor of opening (*anoichthentos* on 216e6) the statue of Silenus so as to see the beauty and the divine that are hidden inside, in order to express how he looked (*heôraken* and *eidôn* at 216e6–7) into Socrates' soul.¹⁵

¹⁴ Moreover, one should look into a certain place or region (*topos*) of the soul (*Alc.* I,133b9). The language is metaphorical and the *topos* of the soul corresponds to the *topos* of the eye in the analogy (*Alc.* I,133b3); still, Plato might well hold that the soul, though immaterial and invisible, occupies certain space (e.g. *Tim.* 34b, 42a, 43a etc.)

¹⁵ A further metaphor used by Alcibiades to depict his relationship with Socrates is that of the snake and its victim. Whoever was not "bitten" by



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To know oneself, Socrates argues in the *Alcibiades I*, is to know one's soul. Since a person is the soul (*Alc. I,130c5–6*), the soul has to know itself. And to do so it must look at another soul (*eis psychên blepton*, *Alc. I,133b7–8*). Especially it should look into that place (*topon*) in the soul where the virtue of the soul, wisdom (*ê psychês aretê, sophia*), resides and whatever is similar to it (*Alc. I,133b8–10*). There is nothing more divine (*theioteron*) in the soul than where the knowing and understanding takes place, and therefore that place in the soul resembles the divine. Thus, the soul which looks into another soul and gets grasp of what is godlike in it will get the best picture of itself as well (*Alc. I,133c4–6*).

From Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium* it seems clear that he actually saw what is divine in Socrates himself. Alcibiades speaks metaphorically about the statues inside of Socrates and how they seemed to him divine (*theia*), beautiful and amazing (*Symp. 216e7–217a1*). Further on, Socrates' speeches, according to Alcibiades, are inside full of virtue (*aretê*) and most divine (*theotatous*, *Symp. 222a3–4*) – as it was demanded in the *Alcibiades I*.

Alcibiades in the *Symposium* admits that these *logoi* are of the greatest importance for anyone who wants to become a truly good and prime man (*kalôi kagathôi*; *Symp. 222a*). This is, actually, what Socrates tells him at the beginning of the *Alcibiades I*: he, Socrates, is worth the world for Alcibiades since only he is capable of providing him with what he wants (*Alc. I,105e*). And Alcibiades, as he says, definitely wants to be one of the truly good and prime men of Athens (*Athênaiôn oi kaloi kagathoi*, *Alc. I,124e16*). Moreover, the corruption of Alcibiades due to the love of the crowds – which, according to the *Symposium*, he seeks (*Symp. 216b5*) – was also envisaged already in the *Alcibiades I* (131e11–132a4).

Socrates (*Symp. 217e–218a*), cannot understand what then actually happens. And Alcibiades was bitten in his most sensitive part (*to algeinotaton*), his soul. A snake's poisonous bite penetrates inside through the outer surface and injects what is inside of the snake to the inside of its victim. Socrates' speeches cause Alcibiades to be outside of himself and seemingly at a loss about himself: his heart starts leaping in his chest, tears flow on his face. These are not only signs of some mysterious frenzy but rather symptoms of an intoxication, too. However, all this is just the first step towards realizing that all Alcibiades has so far cared about does not constitute his self, and indeed, is worthy of nothing (*Symp. 215e, 216a–b*).



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General conclusions about Platonic psychology

What can we conclude from the parallels shown above, and generally, from reading Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium* against the background of the *Alcibiades I*? First, Socrates did not fail in his role as a teacher for young Alcibiades. In the *Symposium* it is made clear that Alcibiades saw or got in touch with what was necessary for the proper care of oneself leading to virtuous character. The necessary cognitive condition, as stated in the *Alcibiades I* (133b–c), was fulfilled. Moreover, Socrates' *logoi* met Alcibiades' most sensitive part, his soul. Insofar it seems that Alcibiades was on the right track and Socrates fulfilled his role as moral teacher and educator.

But something went wrong with Alcibiades. When confessing his deeply conflicting feelings about Socrates, Alcibiades concludes: "I do not know what to do with this man" (*Symp.* 216c3). He does not understand the message of the *Alcibiades I* and of Socrates' god-worthy speeches, as in fact he ought to wonder *what to do about himself*, instead of worrying what to do about Socrates.¹⁶ Having looked into Socrates, Alcibiades saw his beauty and the divine that resides in the souls. Yet he did not accomplish the reflexive and practical moment of self-knowledge, which would consist in an attempt to shape one's own soul into a divine-like form; instead, he went and sought popularity with the crowd, and a political career.¹⁷

In fact, Alcibiades himself says that he submits himself to the stronger desire to please the crowd (*hêttêmenôî tês timês*, *Symp.* 216b5). Alcibiades *knows* that he cannot contradict Socrates; nevertheless, when Socrates is not around, he reverts to his old habits, his desire to please the crowd. Yet even then he knows that this is not the

¹⁶ This perhaps shows Plato's worry about any ordinary politician: too much concerned with what to do with others, and therefore having no time, no *scholê* for the concern about her- or himself.

¹⁷ In this way one could explain the role of the divine (θεῖον) in our souls: it enables us to fulfil the ultimate task of the human life, namely, to become as similar to god as possible. Cf. *Tht.* 176a–b and the interpretation by J. Annas, *Platonic Ethics Old and New*, Ithaca – London 1999; ch. 3: "Becoming Like God".



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correct way of life and he remains aware of the Socratic option. Moreover he knows that whenever he meets Socrates he will be persuaded by his *logoi* again. This creates a conflict in Alcibiades' self. And the entire passage *Symp.* 216a–c suggests that it represents an internal conflict in Alcibiades' motivation. As I have said earlier, Alcibiades is in a rather schizophrenic state: he knows he cannot live without Socrates, and yet he wishes Socrates did not exist (*Symp.* 216b5–c3).

At the same time Alcibiades is aware that only Socrates could help him to be the right person for the highest political tasks (*Alc.* I, 105d and 106a): if he wants to be one of the *kaloi kagathoi* (*Alc.* I, 124e15–16), Socrates is for him of the greatest value (*Symp.* 222a). Nevertheless, Alcibiades started to avoid Socrates and tried not to meet with him anymore (*Symp.* 216b5 ff.). What else could count as an internal psychic conflict if not the situation when Alcibiades does not do what he acknowledges as the best for him?

An explanation of this conflict is to be found neither in the *Alcibiades I* nor in the *Symposium*. For a response to the problem of conflicting desires raised above, we have to look in the *Republic*, where Plato introduces his tripartite psychology and a theory of motivation. Human virtue, according to the *Republic*, is a complex interrelationship among three separate psychological elements, each of which makes its contribution to the whole.¹⁸ What one needs to achieve, the virtuous state of being, is not a mere intellectual capacity but rather a harmonious order of all three parts of one's soul. Moreover, on Plato's theory in the *Republic*, all three parts of the soul are *independent* sources of motivation (cf. *Resp.* 580d–581b). As each of these desires is aiming at its own pleasure, a deep psychological conflict may easily result:

“It seems to me that there are three pleasures (*triôn ontôn trittai kai hêdonai*) corresponding to the three parts of the soul, one peculiar to each part (*henos hekastou mia idia*), and similarly with desires (*epithumiai*) and kinds of rule.” (*Resp.* IX,580d6–7, tr. G. M. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C. Reeve)

¹⁸ J. M. Cooper, *Plato's theory of Human Motivation*, in: *Reason and Emotion*, New Jersey 1999, p. 118. Cf. J. Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New*, p. 125–128.



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The conflict of different desires (*epithumiai*) could then result in the split of the personality at the same time when a given person is aware of the state he or she is in. Moreover, there might be some conditions (a close circle of friends, some drinking) when the very person that is in this schizophrenic state of mind or soul can intelligibly explain it.¹⁹

But let's come back to conclusions we can draw from meshing the *Alcibiades I* with the *Symposium*. In the very shaping of our souls, i.e. taking care of oneself, the teacher in a certain sense serves as a model or pattern.²⁰ Yet the process of shaping one's soul into its proper form is entirely a personal or even *existential* task, fully dependent on one's decisions and actions. The care of oneself is not a *technê* simply to be learnt; rather, it requires an authentic and strong involvement of the entire personality in shaping and forming oneself. It is a matter of one's own responsibility, which cannot be taken over by anyone else.

Alcibiades' schizophrenic feelings about Socrates, as expressed in the *Symposium*, might even play another role in Plato's apology of Socrates. Alcibiades gives the true picture of his feelings towards Socrates in the same way that Aristophanes depicts the feelings of Athens about Alcibiades himself. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades says:

¹⁹ A few lines later, at *Resp.* 581b7, Plato's Socrates tells us that the intellect is always straining [$\alpha\epsilon\iota$ $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\tau\alpha\tau\alpha\iota$]. In the *Phaedo* (65a6), the same word is used in relation to pursuing or not pursuing the pleasures of the body. Though a non-technical term, *teinô* is clearly used as a term for some desire or strain.

²⁰ The Apollodorus of the beginning of the *Symposium* is an extreme example of this approach in its superficial aspect. He describes his last three years of life as taking care to know "exactly what <Socrates> says and does each day" (172c6). This opening of the dialogue and Alcibiades' closing thus seems to exhibit two opposed but equally problematic views and relations to Socrates himself. Both of them exhibiting a certain misunderstanding of Socrates' message. Perhaps it was the author of the dialogue – aware of both of these extremes – who tried to found the proper way of following Socrates, one that consists in taking care of one's soul by means of doing philosophy. Whereas Alcibiades can overcome the effect of Socrates' speeches, it seems that Apollodorus highly admires them and does not dare to challenge them at all, yet perhaps understands their meaning less than the well-disposed but psychologically torn Alcibiades.



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“Sometimes, believe me, I think I would be happier if he were dead. And yet I know that if he dies I’ll be even more miserable. What can I do about him!” (*Symp.* 216c2–3; tr. A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff)

And in the *Frogs*, the god Dionysus reports the feelings of the city about the exiled Alcibiades in the following way:

“The city of Athens loves <him>, and hates <him>, and longs to have him back.”²¹ (Aristophanes, *Ran.* 1425)

However, Plato shows that Athens actually needs someone like Socrates. Socrates seems to be the only one who can possibly pacify and set right such people as Alcibiades. As a virtuous Alcibiades was perhaps one of the last chances for Athens to prosper and win over the Spartans, so was Socrates the only chance for Alcibiades to become virtuous. But then, Alcibiades got spoiled on the account of desires arising from his appreciation of his own beauty and influence, these features – as Xenophon tells us – so much admired by the city itself.²²

²¹ B. B. Rogers suggests that this expression about a collision of desires might be traced back to the *Guards* by Ion, where Helen says to Odysseus: *σιγᾶ μὲν, ἐχθαίρει δέ, βούλεται γε μὴν* (Schol. 428). Cf. Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, transl. and ed. by B. B. Rogers in *Loeb Classical Library*, London – New York 1974, comment ad line 1425.

²² Xenophon, *Mem.* 1,2,24; cf. Isocrates, *Busiris*, XI,4.