

“What is he then, Diotima?”

“He is a great *spirit*, Socrates. All spirits are intermediate between gods and mortals”.

“What is the function of a spirit?” I asked.

“Interpreting and conveying all that passes between gods and humans: from humans, prayers and sacrificial offerings, and from gods, instructions and the help given to us. Spirits, being intermediary, fill the space between the other gods and humans, so that all are bound together into one entity.... No god seeks wisdom or desires to be wise because gods are wise already, and no one who is wise already would pursue wisdom. But neither do ignorant people pursue wisdom or desire to be wise. For the problem of ignorance is that someone who is neither good nor wise is still quite satisfied with himself as he is. No one desires what he does not realize he lacks”.

“But who then are those who pursue wisdom, Diotima”, I asked, “if they are neither the wise nor the ignorant?”

“It is those who are in between, and Love is one of them. For wisdom is a most beautiful thing, and Love is love of the beautiful. So, Love must be a philosopher, and a philosopher is in a middle state between a wise man and an ignorant one....”  
[The word *philosopher*, which comes from ancient Greek, means *lover of wisdom*.]

“... Love appeared to you to be supremely beautiful. But in fact, the one which is really beautiful and delicate, flawless and endowed with every blessing, is the beloved object, while the lover is entirely different, as I have just described”.

“All right, Diotima”, I replied. “You are very persuasive. If Love is as you say, what need does Love supply in the lives of people? ...

“What does it mean to say that Love is love of beautiful things? Or to put it more clearly: what does the lover of beautiful things actually desire?” Diotima asked.

“To possess beautiful things, Socrates replied.

“What will he gain by possessing beautiful things? ... suppose one changed the question and asked about the good instead of the beautiful: ‘Come now, Socrates, what does the lover of good things actually desire?’ ”

“To possess the good things”, Socrates replied.

“And what will he gain if he possesses them?”

“...he will be happy”.

“Yes”, she replied. “The happy are happy through the possession of good things [such as beauty and wisdom].

....

[Diotima teaches Socrates to criticize the notion of the *soulmate*, which, we saw, Aristophanes viewed as *a person's other half or completion*]

Diotima said, “And you will hear it said that lovers are people who are looking for their other half. But love is not directed towards a half, or a whole either, unless that half or whole is actually something good — after all, people are quite prepared to have their own hands or feet amputated if they believe that these parts of themselves are diseased. So, it is not part of themselves that people cling to... The fact is that the only thing people love is *the good*.”

“But shouldn't we add that what they love is that *the good* should be theirs? And not only that”, Diotima said, “but that *the good* should always be theirs?”

“Yes, ‘We should’”.

“Then we can sum up”, Diotima said. “Love is the desire to possess *the good* always”.....

[The Platonic Ladder of Love and Beauty] “A person who