

D IS FOR...

DIOTIMA OF MANTINEA

MORAL STAGES IN ANTIQUITY

*DIOTIMA TEACHER OF SOCRATES
FLOURISHED AROUND FOUR HUNDRED FORTY BCE.*



MORALIZED TIME LINE. Advantages, adversities, principle moral attachment figures, moralized genogram mentors, influences, crises, conversions, renunciations, repudiations and transformations are appropriate here.

Marshalling evidence for Diotima as a real person against the received opinion (traced to the 15th century ACE) that she was a Socratic-Platonic figuration occupies a good deal of the chapter devoted to her in Mary Ellen Waithe's compendious History of Women Philosophers (1987, volume I pp. 83-116). Waithe argues for Diotima's historicity from ancient artefactual evidence, textual evidence in Plato, and the conspicuous absence of any doubt about the matter in later antiquity. She argues further from intertextual analysis that if Diotima's teachings are attributed not to her but instead to either Socrates or Plato, there arise serious and unaccountable doctrinal inconsistencies among key Platonic concepts such as immortality of the soul, transmigration of the soul, concept of personal identity, and the relationship of *eros* to reason and beauty as an idea at the level of Platonic forms.

That the issue of Diotima's historicity has still not been laid to rest by Waithe's persuasive arguments, however, is attested to by the recent appearance of the assertion that Diotima was a code name for another woman philosopher, Aspasia (D'Angour, 2019). Nonetheless, exercising what seems to us a justifiable suspension of the so-called 'law of parsimony' (Occam's razor) in an application always already suspect of being wielded on behalf of structural patriarchy, we align with those who concede that more than one woman of remarkable intellect and creativity could and did flourish in Athens at roughly the same time. We expect that these women, albeit struggling against the odds of the patriarchal society in which they were reared, could and did contribute authentically to philosophical conversations. Socrates learned from them (and gave them credible attributions as two separate persons) as Plato likely learned from his mother, Perictione. Accordingly, in our conscience sensitive sketch for this entry in the EOC, we will follow Waithe's lead.

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PERICTIONE II.

Late Pythagorean philosopher, putatively the mother of Plato.

Excerpt from the Sophias translated by Vicki Lynn Harper (Waithe, p.56):

It is appropriate to wisdom to be able to see and to contemplate those attributes which belong universally to all things: those that belong to most things are the business of natural science, while separate sciences are concerned with the more individual and particular. On account of this wisdom searches for the basic principles of all the things that are, natural science for the principles of natural things while geometry and arithmetic and music are concerned with quantity and the harmonious.

The period of flourishing of Diotima of Mantinea is positioned in Waithe's chronology circa 400 BCE.

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Our personal quest for the woman philosopher who taught Socrates.

The artifact of interest: "...a small bronze relief which, according to classical archeologist Paolino Mingazzini, is an overlay for the wooden cover of the cassette or container that originally housed the roll of the *Symposium*." The actual roll is housed in the Oxford University Collection. However, we had hoped to find the bronze relief in the National Archeological Museum in Naples NUMISMATIC wing (usually not open to visitors) through which we were personally escorted by another gracious guide. Unfortunately, we were not successful in finding the object there. However, for use in future searches 'on the ground', we have two references in Waithe's treatment of the evidence: the first, already mentioned: Mingazzini, P. (1970): *Su duo oggetti in terracotta raffiguranti: Socrate* **La Parole del Passato: Rivista di Studi Antichi**, XXV: 351-358; and the second, Jahn, Otto (1841): Socrate et Diotime, Bas-Relief de Bronze, **Annales de l'Institut Archeologique**, XIII:3-4.

Closely tied to the issue of historicity of Diotima's personage, the provenance of Diotima's renowned *scala* has been, like the provenance of Artemisia Gentileschi paintings (Bal, 2006), an issue with considerable import in feminist politics. By all accounts, we are given a fourth-hand (but first and only recorded) narration in The Symposium. It is fair to say, however, that interpretation based upon textual deconstruction has enriched feminist ethical and aesthetic philosophical inquiry (Irigaray, 1993). In order to promote circumspection regarding our conscience sensitive approach to the more traditional exposition of Diotima's Ladder, we will concentrate on this matter in the immediately following section CONSCIENCE RELEVANT WORKS. Then, in the course of our conscience sensitive approach to the more traditional exposition of the ladder, we will attempt to elevate three themes: *hierarchism*, *emergence* and *essentialism*. These themes are particularly relevant in seeking to independently secure conscience sensitive and relevant methodology not only for—but also from—current as well as alternate theories of conscience. Our deconstructive aim here may be seen as analogous to that of historians of philosophy who, like Waithe and Irigaray, seek to secure Diotiman thought from that of Socrates or, indeed, like F.M. Cornford who, in his 1932 lectures at Cambridge, distinguished the methods and motives of Socrates

from the essentialist elaborations by Plato in the Dialogues. The lasting contribution of the Conscience Project may not, after all, be an invariant hierarchical stage-based theory (primarily applicable to youth reared in advantage, providing grounds of comparison for those less fortunate) but the methodical domain-based inquiries and tasks in conversations in which genuine curiosity about personal conscience is expressed irrespective of privilege. Those inquiries begin with ‘Have you heard of the word conscience? What does it mean to you?’ One might imagine Socrates asking something like this, in the Athenian *agora*. Perhaps there he encountered Diotima who wished to tell him of *eros* instead, leaving him to his own devices to make connections to the good life and the perfection of the soul.

CONSCIENCE RELEVANT WORKS. Direct Quotations, Scripture Passages and Commentary as well as inferences and interpretations of a more general sort are appropriate [here](#).

In An Ethics of Sexual Difference (1984) Luce Irigaray devotes a chapter to Diotiman thought (trans. Burke and Gill, 1993, pp. 20-33). The chapter is entitled “Sorcerer Love: A Reading of Plato’s *Symposium*, ‘Diotima’s Speech’” The lead-in words seem most likely to refer to *eros* but may also refer to Diotima’s status as a priestess of Mantinea who, by virtue of womanhood is *in absentia* from the meal and conversation. As those present strike the theme of *eros*, she is nonetheless echoed by Socrates. “Diotima’s teaching”, according to Irigaray, “will be very dialectical” but not in the style of Hegel positing thesis, antithesis and a synthesis that issues in a fresh thesis to perpetuate the dialectical process. Rather:

... From the outset, she establishes an *intermediary* that will never be abandoned as a means or a path.... Her method uncovers, unveils the insistence of a third term that is already there and that permits progression: from poverty to wealth, from ignorance to wisdom, from mortality to immortality. Which, for her, always comes to a greater perfection of and in love. ... It is love that leads to knowledge, whether in art or more metaphysical learning. It is love that both leads the way and is the path. A mediator par excellence.

This mediating role I indicated as part of the theme, but it is also perpetually at issue, on stage, in the exposition of the theme....

... At the risk of offending the practice of respect for the Gods, she also asserts that Eros is neither beautiful nor good. This leads her interlocutor [Irigaray means The Socrates of Plato’s Symposium] to suppose immediately that Eros is ugly and bad, as he is incapable of grasping the existence or the in-stance [Irigaray means here to freight the word ‘instance’ with special meaning] of that which stands *between*, that which makes possible the passage between ignorance and knowledge.... Therefore, between knowledge and reality, there is an intermediary that allows for the encounter and the transmutation or transvaluation between the two. Diotima’s dialectic is in at least *four terms*: the here, the two poles of the encounter, and the beyond—but a beyond that never abolishes the here. And so on, indefinitely. The mediator is never abolished in an infallible knowledge. Everything is always in movement, in a state of becoming. And the mediator of all this is, among other things, or exemplarily, *love*. Never fulfilled, always becoming.

So, here, working interpretatively within our metaphor of *scala*, Irigaray’s Diotima calls our attention to the spaces between rungs of the ladder, but preserves the ladder’s linear and vertical (hierarchical) orientation. That is to say, ladders are still meant to be climbed. But what if the ladder is laid horizontally like a bridge or looped in a circle like a treadmill for a hamster? What if transcendence yields to immanence? How else should either beauty or goodness be gauged except in terms of aesthetic and moral exertion (counter-viciousness and virtuousness both given an algebraic absolute value)?

DOES IRIGARAY BELIEVE THAT DIOTIMA ACTUALLY MODELS BOTH THE SOCRATIC METHOD AND SOCRATIC IRONY FOR SOCRATES?

Compare the following passage, amended for gender exclusivity, drawn from Cornford's 1932 lectures, reflecting a theory of Socrates' mind and motive:

Socrates was ready to converse with anyone; but above all he welcomed the company of the adolescent young. He would never silence their crude questionings with the superior tone of adult experience; he wanted to know all that was going on in their minds, and positively encouraged them to think for themselves on every subject, and especially about right and wrong. He always said, with manifest candour, that he was himself had nothing to teach, but regarded every question as an open question....

Socrates said that he knew nothing that could be taught to anyone else. At the same time he declared that human perfection lies in the knowledge of good and evil.... The individual, if [he is] to be complete must become morally autonomous, and take [his-own] life into [his] control.

To this passage from Irigaray reflecting a theory of Diotima's mind and motive:

And, in response to Socrates' protestation that love is a great God, *that everyone says so or thinks so, she laughs....* While laughing, then, she asks Socrates what he means by *everyone*. Just as sure as she ceaselessly dismantles the assurance of *closure* of opposing terms, she undoes all *sets* of units reduced to sameness in order to constitute a whole. "“You mean, by all who do not know?” *said she ‘or by all who know as well?’ — ‘Absolutely all.’ At that she laughed”* (Plato *Symposium*, 202). Once the tension between opposites has subsided in this way, she shows, or demonstrates, that “everyone” does not exist, nor does love's position as *always* a great God. Does she teach nothing that is already defined? A method of becoming wise, learned, more perfected in love and in art. Thus she ceaselessly examines Socrates on his positions but without positing authoritative, already constituted truth. Instead, she teaches the renunciation of already established truths. And each time Socrates thinks he can take something as certain, she undoes his certainty. His own, but also all kinds of certainty that are set in language. All entities, substantives, adverbs, sentences are patiently, and joyously, called into question.

Irigaray reads Diotima's Eros as one of the daimons, tutelary divinities, serving as a mediator between men and gods:

... Eros is one of them. And his parentage is exceptional: he is the child of *Plenty* (who is the son of *Invention*) and of *Poverty*.... So, Diotima tells Socrates, Eros is always poor and “rough, unkempt, unshod, and homeless, ever couching on the ground uncovered, sleeping beneath the open sky by doors and in the streets, because he has the nature of his mother... But ag, headlong, and intense, a mighty hunter, always weaving some device or other, eager in invention and resourceful, searching after wisdom all through life, terrible as a magician, sorcerer, and sophist....

This particular volley, preceding the exposition of the ladder (210-212) concludes when Diotima makes a claim that both love and philosophers (lovers of wisdom) are typically misrepresented in the imaginary “as *beloveds* and not as *lovers*” The emphasis here is that the lover goes toward what is beautiful, perfect and so on but doesn't possess it. In this line of inquiry, Diotima is quite willing to substitute ‘good’ for ‘beautiful’ in order to elicit a response from Socrates, who more readily identifies possession of the good

with happiness. Diotima's answer to Socrates on the nature of the manner of pursuit, the activity, the movement:

'This action is engendering in beauty, with relation both to body and to soul (206)'

But according to Irigaray, what is lost upon Socrates is the full implication of mind-body generativity:

'The union of a man and a woman is, in fact, a generation; this is a thing divine; in a living creature that is mortal, it is an element of immortality, this fecundity and generation (206)'

According to Irigaray, "... And its fecundity is *mediumlike*, *daimonic*, the guarantee for all, male and female, of the immortal becoming of the living...."

However, at this juncture, Diotima in seeking a cause for love in the animal world—procreation—disappoints Irigaray:

Diotima's method miscarries here. From this point on, she leads love into a split between mortality and immortality, and love loses its daimonic character.... Love has lost its divinity, its mediumistic, alchemical qualities between couples of opposites. Since love is no longer the intermediary, the child plays this role.... And isn't love trapped there in the beloved, contrary to what Diotima wanted in the first place? A beloved who is an *end* is substituted for love between men and women.... Something becomes frozen in space-time, with the loss of a vital intermediary and of an accessible transcendental that remains alive. A sort of teleological triangle is put into place instead of a perpetual journey, a perpetual transvaluation, a permanent becoming....

Diotima recovers momentarily in Irigaray's eyes only to jeopardize her insight once again:

What seemed to me to be original in Diotima's method has disappeared once again. This intermediary milieu of love, which is irreducible, is resplit between a "subject" (an inadequate word in Plato) and a "beloved reality." Falling in love... is now the teleological quest for what is deemed a higher reality and often situated in a transcendence inaccessible to our mortal condition.... Beauty of body and of soul are hierarchized....

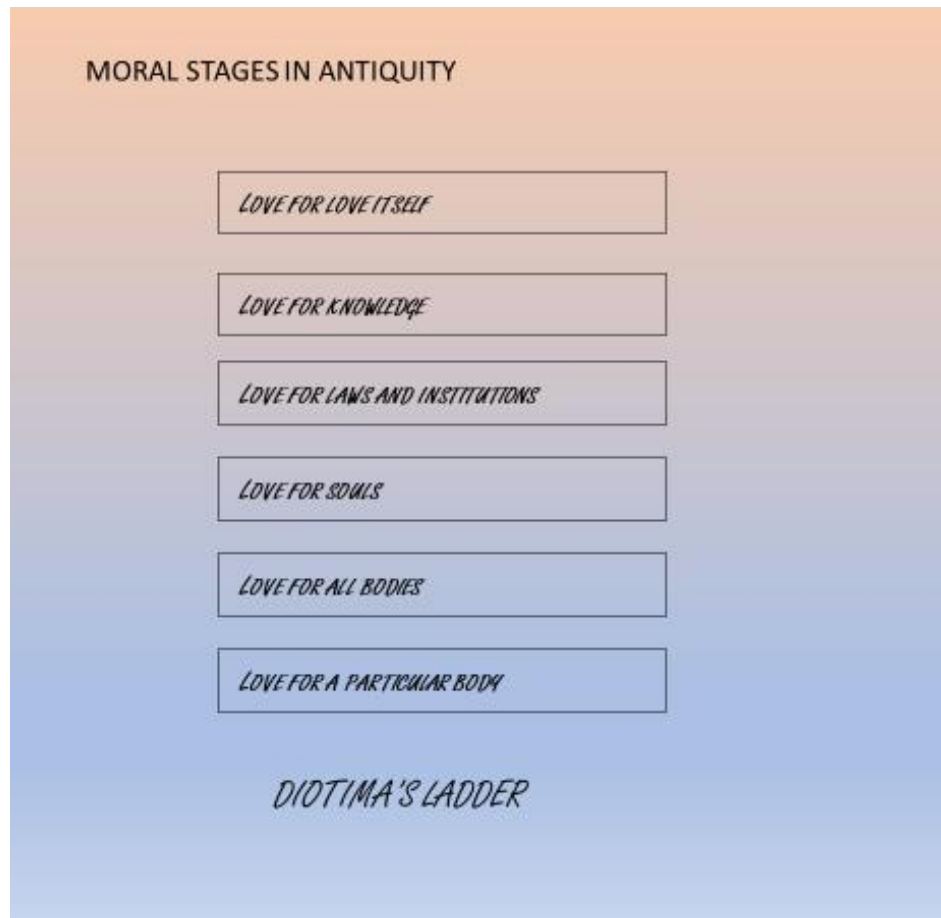
To fall in love, to become divine, or immortal, is no longer left to the intermediary current but qualified, hierarchized....

... In the second part of her discourse, she treated Love itself as a means. She doubled its intermediary function and subjected it to a *telos*. Her method seems less powerful here than at the beginning of her remarks, when she held love to be the mediator of a state of becoming with no objective other than becoming. Perhaps Diotima is still saying the same thing. But in the second part, her method runs the risk of being reduced to the metaphysics that is getting set up.

Befitting a sorcerer, in her adopted philosophical idiom, Irigaray teases somewhat mysteriously that what may seem a conceptual ladder might, once climbed, be kicked away in the manner of Wittgenstein:

Unless what she proposes to contemplate, beauty itself, is seen as that which confounds the opposition between immanence and transcendence. As an always already sensible horizon on the basis of which everything would appear. But one would have to go back over everything to discover it in its enchantment.

CONSCIENCE STAGES. The subject's sense of or depiction of the developmental process of conscience formation.



From Diotima by way of Socrates by way of Plato, we are given a metaphorical *scala*, a stage like conceptualization, known as DIOTIMA'S LADDER. This version adapted from Wikipedia has been cross-checked with the Symposium in the Collected Dialogues of Plato (Hamilton, 1961) and should be serviceable for our purposes.

First: LOVE FOR A PARTICULAR BODY. Love is a desire for physical features.

Individuals tend to get attracted to what is missing from their own bodies.

Different particular bodies trigger different individuals.

Second: LOVE FOR ALL BODIES. Attained when individuals recognize the physical features to which they are attracted.

They understand that many bodies can have beauty. Love is then expressed towards all beautiful bodies in the lover's view, not just a particular body.

They then see beauty in all bodies and learn to love the differences.

Third: LOVE FOR SOULS. This stage is attained when physical features are put aside and spiritual and moral beauty trigger love.

Taking this rung of the ladder, one will fall in love with beautiful minds.

Fourth: LOVE FOR LAWS AND INSTITUTIONS. Love for the practices, customs or foundations derived from people with beautiful souls.

Fifth: LOVE FOR KNOWLEDGE. When individuals turn their attention to all kinds of knowledge. They love [it] that there is knowledge to acquire everywhere.

Sixth: LOVE FOR LOVE ITSELF. When individuals see the beauty in its Form and love the beauty of Love as it is.

The lover who has ascended the ladder apprehends the Form of Beauty/Good in a kind of vision-- not through words or in the way that other sorts of more ordinary knowledge become known. Every particular beautiful thing is beautiful because of its connection to this Form.

CONSCIENCE DOMAINS [INTRINSIC VALUES]

CONCEPTUALIZATION/IMAGERY OF CONSCIENCE [MORAL MEANING MAKING].

Many Plato scholars argue the Form referred to here is identical to the Form of the Good. If these scholars are correct, then Plato's use of Diotima's ladder would have the implication that his conceptualization and imagery of conscience has a stage like progression on a scala and, in modern terms, moral meaning would be informed by something akin to what Iris Murdoch writes about in The Sovereignty of Good. If Good, Beauty (and, one might add, The One) are intended in Plato's management of Diotiman philosophy to be identical, this interpretation has both *emergent* and *hierarchical* features. Notably, developmental theories in general that posit stages, and developmental moral psychological theories (as opposed to anthropological or psychological factual investigations of what is termed moral behavior) in particular share these features with the Platonic interpretation of Diotima's scala. This is no less true of current conscience theory in which the concept of invariant hierarchy presumes that a biological preparation or capacity must emerge at an earlier stage and be negotiated before a biological preparation or capacity can emerge at the next higher stage. Saltatory spider-man like leaps and bounds allowing one to by-pass rungs are strictly prohibited. Moreover, developmental moral psychological theories, conscience theory being no exception, are especially prone to inviting teleological valuational thickness. That is to say, some kind of presumptive *essentialism* appears to be encouraged: the *higher* the stage the *better*—the further advanced in progress up the ladder the closer the approximation of goodness. As Kohlberg wryly observed in reference to his cognitive moral development theory: it is a way of committing the naturalistic fallacy (deriving a moral ought from a description of facts) and getting away with it. Well almost (Lapsley, 1996. pp. 49-50.)

In any event, proceeding with an inquiry into Diotiman philosophy and to what extent it is to be charged with essentialism, it is not at all clear that the formation of love of beauty Diotima has in mind resembles a Platonic Form. As Waithe (1987) points out: "Her concept of the good appears not to function as a Platonic Idea. Her concept of good is of a selfish good: one's good is identified as the acquisition of immortality by reproducing oneself through the idea of the Beautiful. But even the idea of the Beautiful is not a Platonic Idea: it is an idea at the level of appearances not at the level of Platonic Forms." (p. 91) Moreover, Waithe goes on to say, Diotima is 'out of synch' with Platonic doctrine in so far as she is committed to personal identity and a kind of immortality understood to be no more than the generation in "offspring of the soul" personal qualities that survive at the end of personal embodiment. (p. 91) Even as the

impression of her thought and person, the offspring of Diotima's soul is managed by Plato, Diotima conveys that eros is innate, instinctual, and, yes, essential— but only in the sense of natural purposefulness for generating offspring of the soul. Eros is not a passion to be subdued by reason but on the contrary, uses reason for its purposes. (p. 90).

MORALIZED ATTACHMENT [CONNECTEDNESS]

We leave the connection to be made with connectedness as an exercise for the reader with the cautionary word that the first rung of Diotima's ladder should not be automatically interpreted as a preoedipal psychoanalytic stage of development. It is nonetheless interesting to compare the notes of her learners, Socrates and Plato, with those of psychoanalysts Freud, Lacan and, as we have seen, Irigaray.

MORAL EMOTIONAL RESPONSIVENESS [BALANCE—HARMONY – EQUANIMITY]

There does seem to be a harmonizing process at work in the stage-like ascension of Diotima's scala. However, Diotima is mute on the subject of reparative and amendatory processes that might lovingly and kindly restore equilibrium (gauged by the personal moral emotional barometer) as one inevitably experiences slip-sliding stress from transgressing against love for souls, against aesthetic-social progression, and/or against truth-seeking and truth-telling. The image of a person ascending a ladder cannot be entertained for very long without it also calling forth the image of a person mis-stepping, faltering or even falling from it.

MORAL VALUATION [WORTH ATTRIBUTED TO AUTHORITY-OTHER-SELF]

In aesthetic terms, Diotima's fourth stage of eros naturally purposeful trajectory captures something of the transition from Kohlberg's stage four—social system morality— to his two principled and highest stages of moral development: human rights and social welfare morality and morality of universalizable, reversible, and prescriptive general ethical principles, stages five and six, respectively (Lapsley, 1996. pp. 70-72)

MORAL VOLITION [FREEDOM-RESPONSIBILITY]: prospects for change, prescriptions/recommendations for human flourishing, AND/OR for prevention of and recovery from demoralization and harm.

Ladders (perhaps twisted and curved like spiral stairs conforming to helical geometry) conjure another counter image in recollection (writ small to distinguish it from the Platonic Doctrine of Recollection) of the childhood board game of chutes and ladders. The implication here is that the endurance of loving-kindness in various guises: of personal responsibility, of retrieval of values and of help-seeking in the face of setbacks may be the truer image of LOVE FOR LOVE ITSELF.

[For our schematic 'chutes and ladders' imagery see I.U Conscience Project (2011)

Demoralization and Harm Prevention Planning

<https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/handle/1805/16478>]

Frontispiece Image: JADWIGA ŁUSZCZEWSKA, a poet in Warsaw used the pen name *Diotima*, posing as the ancient seer in a painting by JÓZEF SIMMLER, 1855.

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DIOTIMA'S LADDER adapted from WIKIPEDIA, public domain.

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About this Work

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Since 2001, our Conscience Project meetings have regularly included lively discussions and applications of the conceptual framework of conscience theory - stages, domains and bedrock/intrinsic values – to the ideas we are studying in ethics, neuroscience, education, philosophy, psychology and theology. Early on, Dr. Barbara Stilwell compiled an alphabetical list of authors who may or may not have been explicit about conscience, but who deeply influenced our theory of conscience as it evolved, and recently, we have begun to apply the same conscience-sensitive approaches to character/author analyses in the histories, biographies, and other literature, fact and fiction, we are reading. We are excited to see how these unique conscience-sensitive approaches can enrich our own writing and teaching in humanistic medicine, general humanities, and specifically, moral education. The brief entries in this **Encyclopedia of Conscience** are not meant to be full biographies, but rather to provide an imaginative sketch of the form and function of each subject’s conscience. We welcome ideas and additions.



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