

The Ages of Socrates in Plato's Symposium

Margalit Finkelberg

Tel Aviv University

finkelbe@tauex.tau.ac.il

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1957-9094>

ABSTRACT

Plato's Symposium has no less than three dramatic dates: its narrative frame is placed in 401 BCE; Agathon's dinner party is envisaged as having occurred in 416; finally, Plato makes Socrates meet Diotima in 440 BCE. I will argue that the multi-level chronology of the Symposium should be approached along the lines of Socrates' intellectual history as placed against the background of Greek ideas of age classes (also exploited in the Republic). As a result, the Symposium functions as a retrospective of Socrates' life, which uses the traditional concept of ages of man to create a paradigm of philosophical life.

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Nowhere else in his dialogues does Plato pay as much attention to chronological detail as in the *Symposium*. The dialogue exhibits a string of carefully dated events which stretches far beyond the chronological framework suggested by its mult-level narrative structure. Each of these events leads the reader further into the past: Socrates' associate Apollodorus narrates a story he heard from another Socrates' associate, Aristodemus, about a dinner party in the house of the poet Agathon that took place years ago; Aristodemus' account in turn includes two embedded narratives relating to even more remote past, namely, Alcibiades' reminiscences of Socrates' military exploits and Socrates' account of his meetings with Diotima. As a result, the dialogue has several dramatic dates relating to different periods in Socrates' life. In what follows, I will argue that this assemblage of chronological data is far from being accidental and that in the *Symposium* Plato uses the set of traditional ideas concerning age classes in order to shape Socrates' life story as a paradigm of philosophical life.

1. REACHING MATURITY

Socrates was born in 469 BCE. When he meets Diotima, he is still a young man.

Symp. 201d1-5 And now... I shall repeat the account of Eros which I heard from Diotima of Mantinea, a woman wise in this and in many other kinds of knowledge, who in the days of old, when the Athenians offered sacrifice before the coming of the plague, *delayed the disease by ten years*.¹

The *Symposium* is our only source for the historical episode evoked in this passage (more below). Plato dates it as having taken place ten

years before the great plague, which firmly points to 440 BCE. This means that at the moment of his encounter with Diotima Socrates was approaching the age of thirty.

In everything concerning the traditional perception of age groups, arriving at the age of thirty was considered a milestone of the utmost importance.² At thirty, the Athenians became eligible for the Council and other offices, including military ones.³ When the twenty-nine-year-old Xenophon takes the decision to assume leadership of the contingent of his dead friend Proxenus, he is acutely aware that he has not yet reached the appropriate age. "From what state am I expecting the general to come who is to perform these duties?" he asks himself. "And what age must I myself wait to attain? For surely I shall never be any older, if this day I give myself up to the enemy."⁴ Thirty was also the age of marriage sanctioned by tradition at least since the time of Solon. Compare Solon's fifth hebdomad (from twenty-eight to thirty-five):

The fifth is time a man should think of being wed and look for sons to carry on his line.⁵

Similarly, at the age of thirty the Spartans gained not only full rights to hold office and engage in economic activity but also the right to produce legitimate offspring.⁶

This supplies a broader cultural context to those sections of the *Republic* and the *Laws* that deal with the legislation relating to marriage and procreation. The discussion of the age appropriate for marriage in Books 4 and 6 of the *Laws* is especially pertinent:

Laws 721a9-b2 Then let me first give the law of marriage in a simple form; it may run as follows: - A man shall marry between the ages of *thirty and thirty-five*...

Laws 785b2-6 The limit of marriageable ages for a woman shall be from sixteen to twenty years at the longest, for a man, from thirty to thirty-five years; and let a woman hold office at forty, and a man at thirty years.⁷

Significantly, this late dialogue not only resumes the association between procreation and immortality which plays such a prominent role in Diotima's speech of the *Symposium* but also treats it in closely similar terms.⁸ In the *Symposium*, however, the biological procreation serves only as a starting point for developing the concept of a spiritual one:⁹

Symp. 208e1–209a4 Those who are pregnant in the body, betake themselves to women and beget children - this is the character of their love; their offspring, as they hope, will preserve their memory and giving them the blessedness and immortality which they desire in the future. But those who are pregnant in their souls rather than in their bodies (for there certainly are such people) conceive that which is proper for the soul to conceive or contain. And what are these? – good sense (*phronēsin*) and the other virtues.

The lower levels of this kind of procreation relate to such spheres of human activity as poetry and legislation (209c4-e4); the higher ones relate to sciences and, eventually, to what Plato sees as the greatest science of all:

Symp. 210c6-7 And after laws and institutions he will go on to the sciences (*epistēmai*), that he may see their beauty... (d3-e1) ...drawing towards and contemplating the vast sea of beauty, he will give birth to many and noble arguments in a

boundless love of wisdom (*philosophia*), until ... at last the vision is revealed to him of some such single science, which is the science of this kind of beauty.¹⁰

This is the way shown to Socrates by Diotima, his instructor in the matters of Love (*ta erōtika*).¹¹

As far as I can see, little attention has been paid thus far to the fact that Diotima's training of Socrates as presented in the *Symposium* bears a close resemblance to the program of the training of the Guardians introduced in Book 7 of the *Republic*.¹² In the *Republic*, the unspecified 'sciences' of the *Symposium* materialize as a succession of disciplines that includes arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and harmonics; the highest level of study is represented by dialectic;¹³ it emerges at the point at which the *Symposium* has "some such single science, which is the science of this kind of beauty" (*Resp.* 534e2-535a, *Symp.* 210e2-6 and above, with n. 10).

The *Republic* is quite explicit as to the age at which the Guardians' training is supposed to start. Not surprisingly, this is the age of thirty:

Resp. 537c6-d7 The comprehensive mind is always the dialectical. ...and those who have most of this comprehension, and who are most steadfast in their learning, and in their military and other appointed duties, when they have arrived at the age of thirty have to be chosen by you out of the select class, and elevated to higher honor; and you have to prove them by the help of dialectic, in order to learn which of them is able to give up the use of sight and the other senses, and in company with truth to attain absolute being.¹⁴

The study of dialectic should last five years:

Resp. 539d8-e2 Suppose, I said, the study of dialectic (*logoi*) to take the place of gymnastics and to be continued diligently and earnestly and exclusively for twice the number of years which were passed in bodily exercise — will that be enough? –Would you say six or four years? he asked. –Say *five years*, I replied.

This brings us again to the age of thirty-five, marked in the *Laws* as the upper limit of the period during which the male members of the community should conclude marriage (above). We arrive, then, at the following correlation:

REACHING MATURITY (30-35)

SOCIAL	POLITICAL	THE GUARDIANS	SOCRATES
marriage	eligible for offices	training in dialectic	training by Diotima

With this in view, let us turn to the next age group with which Socrates is associated in the *Symposium*.

2. ACTIVE LIFE

In his reminiscences in the concluding part of the *Symposium*, Alcibiades refers to two military campaigns in which Socrates distinguished himself: the expedition of Potidaea and the battle of Delium (*Symp.* 219e5-8, 220e7-8). The campaigns at Potidaea and at Delium are dated to 432 and 424 BCE, respectively. That is to say, when fighting at Potidaea Socrates was thirty-seven years old, and he was forty-five years old at the time of the disaster at Delium; he also fought at Amphipolis two years later (*Ap.* 28e; cf. D. L. 2.22). This fits in well with what is in store for Plato's Guardians when, at

the age of thirty-five, they have completed their training in dialectic:

Resp. 539e2-540a4 At the end of the time they must be sent down again into the cave and compelled to hold any military or other office which young men are qualified to hold, lest their experience of life be inferior to that of the others. In addition, on this occasion it should also be examined whether, when they are drawn all manner of ways, they will stand firm or flinch. –And how long is this stage of their lives to last? –*Fifteen years*, I answered.

Note that the phrase “on this occasion it should also be examined whether, when they are drawn all manner of ways, they will stand firm or flinch”¹⁵ applies not only to the extraordinary endurance and self-control displayed by Socrates at the siege of Potidaea and the retreat from Delium but also to his withstanding Alcibiades' attempts at seduction which, according to Alcibiades' speech, took place immediately before Potidaea.¹⁶

In the case of the Guardians, the stage in their lives dedicated to community service is supposed to last fifteen years. It is noteworthy that Plato makes this period considerably shorter than what seems to have been normally practiced in Athens, where men used to retire from civic duties, including military service, around the age of fifty-nine; the same would be true of Sparta, where men ceased to be liable to military service and became eligible for the Gerousia at the age of sixty.¹⁷ Plato reasserts this well-established practice in the legislation he proposes in the *Laws*: “Let a man go out to war from twenty to sixty years” (785b6-7). At the same time, it should be taken into account that normally those close to either the low or

the upper limit of this age range normally did not participate in military operations abroad, being engaged on garrison duty only (Thuc. 3.13.7). This would explain why there is no mention of the twenty-two-year-old Socrates taking part in the battle of Coronea (447 BCE); the chorus of Athenian elders in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, left to defend the city during the war, also comes to mind in this connection. That is to say, the actual difference between the retirement age of Plato's Guardians and the standard Athenian practice was probably much less pronounced.

It follows, then, that the fulfilment of military and civic duties was the focus of the mature period in the life of both the citizens of Athens and the citizens of Plato's ideal state. Socrates' case, however, was different. While his exemplary military record is well attested (above), no less well attested is the fact that during his entire life Socrates avoided civic duties, having had to depart from this practice only once, in 406, when it fell to him to serve on the Council (*Ap.* 32b). As the *Apology* makes abundantly clear, being a citizen of a state whose ways he did not approve, Socrates chose to serve his city in another capacity, that of a seeker of wisdom, or philosopher, who saw in taking care of the souls of his fellow citizens the central mission of his civic life (cf. also Xen. *Mem.* 1.6.13).

The years of active life are commensurate to the period of procreation. This can be inferred from *Republic* 5:

Resp. 460e1-7 "Do you agree that the period of the prime (*akmē*) may be fairly estimated as twenty years for a woman and *thirty for a man?*" - How do you reckon it? he said. "The women, I said, beginning at the age of twenty shall bear for the State to the age of forty, and the man shall beget for the State from the

time he passes his prime in swiftness in running¹⁸ *to the age of fifty-five.*"

Here, again, Socrates' case is special in that, as the Diotima speech makes clear, the philosopher's procreation is first and foremost a spiritual one. It finds its expression in that "he will give birth to many and noble arguments in a boundless love of wisdom (*philosophia*)" (above, with n. 10). Accordingly, the following correlation suggests itself:

ACTIVE LIFE (35-50/55)

SOCIAL	POLITICAL	THE GUARDIANS	SOCRATES
procreation	military and civic offices	military and civic offices	military service/search for wisdom

3. RETIRING FROM ACTIVE LIFE

After the retirement from active life the citizens of Athens were expected to take up various advisory roles. Thus, an Attic inscription (424/3) prescribes that the ambassadors sent to Methone should be over fifty years of age; this is also the age of the envoys (*theōroi*) in the legislation Plato lays out in the *Laws* (Kenel, 2013, 14; *Laws* 951c6-7). The age of fifty is also set by Plato as a significant milestone in the lives of the Guardians. Let us return for a moment to *Republic* 7:

Resp. 540a4-c2: ...and when they have reached *fifty years of age*, then let those who still survive and have distinguished themselves in every action of their lives and in every branch of knowledge to be led at last to their consummation (*telos*): the time has now arrived at which they must raise the eye of the soul to the

universal light which lightens all things and behold the absolute good;¹⁹ for this is the pattern according to which for the remainder of their lives they are to order the State, the lives of the individuals and their own lives, making philosophy their chief pursuit, but, when their turn comes, toiling also at politics and ruling for the public good.... Then they will depart to the Islands of the Blest and dwell there; and the city will ... honor them, if the Pythian oracle consent, as divinities (*daimones*), but if not, as blessed and divine. (cf. *Resp.* 498b7-c4)

For the Guardians, whose mature period was wholly dedicated to civic life, “making philosophy their chief pursuit” coincides with the age of retirement; this is also the age at which they would not only rule the state in turn but also “raise the eye of the soul to the universal light which lightens all things and behold the absolute good.”

In the conversation that frames the main narrative of the *Symposium* Plato goes to great lengths to draw the readers' attention to the dialogue's dramatic date:

Symp. 172b6-c4 And first tell me, he said, were you present at that meeting? --Your informant, Glaucon, must have been very indistinct indeed, if you imagine that the occasion was recent... Are you ignorant that for many years Agathon has not resided at Athens?
Symp. 173a 4-6 Well, he said... tell me when the meeting occurred. --In our boyhood, I replied, when Agathon won the prize with his first tragedy.

This firmly points to the Lenaea competition of 416 BCE, which means that at the

time of the party at Agathon's house Socrates was fifty-three years old. That is to say, the Socrates of the *Symposium* has just crossed the upper limit of the age singled out in *Republic* 7 as the period of active involvement in the life of the community²⁰ and has entered the age of intellectual contemplation and of purely advisory roles. Simultaneously, he is also approaching the upper limit of the age of procreation, which is set in *Republic* 5 as fifty-five (above).²¹

Fifty-three is the most advanced age at which Socrates is portrayed in the *Symposium*. It is true of course that the dialogue's frame narrative is set at the date when Socrates is approaching the end of his life at the age of seventy;²² yet, while being the focus of the frame story, Socrates does not appear there as a character. To see the manner in which Plato might position Socrates after the age of fifty-five, we should turn to the *Theaetetus*, a dialogue whose dramatic date is set just before Socrates' trial and death.²³

The *Theaetetus* resumes the theme of spiritual procreation that was so prominent in the *Symposium*.²⁴

Tht. 149b5-7 No woman, as you are probably aware, would ever attend other women in childbirth so long as she herself can conceive and bear children, but only those who are past bearing.

Tht. 150b6-9 Well, my art of midwifery is in most respects like theirs, but differs in that I attend men and not women, and look after their souls when they are in labor and not after their bodies. ... (c4-8) And like the midwives I am barren of wisdom (*agonos ... sophias*)... the reason is that the god compels me to be a midwife, but does not allow me to bring forth.

As far as I can see, when approached in the context of the present discussion, Socrates' barrenness would amount to the following.²⁵ In the speech of Diotima, philosopher is described as inferior to both gods and the wholly wise men in that, being found midway between ignorance and wisdom, he only seeks after wisdom rather than possesses it himself:

Symp. 204a1-2 The truth of the matter is this. No god is a philosopher or seeker after wisdom, for he is wise already; nor does any man who is wise seek after wisdom (*philosophēi*).²⁶

Reaching the age of retirement, Socrates ceases to be engaged in search for wisdom: his time is now divided between spiritual contemplation and giving advice to others. Note that, if correlated with the *Symposium*, the fact that the Socrates of the *Theaetetus* does not give birth himself but only helps others to give birth would amount to Plato's placing Socrates (even if Socrates himself characteristically denies that) among those wholly wise men who, to paraphrase *Symposium* 210d3-6 (above), "after having given birth to many and noble arguments and thoughts in a boundless love of wisdom," have attained the state of self-sufficiency, and therefore, like gods, have no need to seek after wisdom, that is, to be engaged in the creative activity of *philosophia*.²⁷

The theme of the philosopher becoming godlike, either before or after death, emerges in Plato's dialogues more than once.²⁸ We saw it in the *Republic* description of the Guardians' afterlife (above, with n. 19); Parmenides of the eponymous dialogue and the Eleatic Stranger of the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, both of them old men, are apparently also seen as such godlike figures.²⁹ As the famous Digression of the *Theaetetus* demonstrates, this theme plays an important role here as well:

Tht. 176 a8-b2 Wherefore we ought to fly away from earth to heaven as quickly as we can; and to fly away is to become like God, as far as this is possible (*homoioōsis theōi kata to dunaton*).³⁰

The nascent status of Socrates as a godlike mortal also transpires from the speech of Alcibiades that concludes the *Symposium*. Alcibiades tells the company of how once he, the most beautiful youth in Athens, tried to seduce Socrates and failed. This amounts to complete reversal of the usual distribution of roles in a homoerotic relationship; nevertheless, the reversal is correct on a higher scale. This is emphasized in Alcibiades' closing words, which also conclude the entire conversation:

Symp. 222a8-b4 And he has ill-treated not only me; he did the same to Charmides the son of Glaucon, and Euthydemus the son of Diocles, and a great many others. Creating a false impression as if he were the lover (*erastēs*), he himself is in the position of the beloved (*paidika*) rather than in that of the lover.³¹

It is Socrates, then, who possesses true beauty and thus is the true object of love (*erōmenos*). While helping his younger companions to deliver their spiritual offspring, he himself is no longer engaged in the search after wisdom. Thus,

RETIRING FROM ACTIVE LIFE
(50/55-)

SOCIAL	POLITICAL	THE GUARDIANS	SOCRATES
end of procreation	advisory roles	ruling the state/ search for wisdom/ spiritual contemplation	advisory roles/ spiritual contemplation

4. SHAPING AN EXEMPLARY LIFE

We have arrived, then, at the following series of correlations. The traditional concept of the ages of man as coming to the fore in *Republic* 5 and the *Laws* is correlated in *Republic* 7 with the stages in the life of the Guardians, and both are correlated in the *Symposium* with the stages in Socrates' life:

reaching maturity		active life	retiring from active life
30-35		35-50/55	50/55 -
SOCIAL	marriage	procreation	end of procreation
POLITICAL	eligible for offices	military and civic offices	advisory roles
THE GUARDIANS	training in dialectic	military and civic offices	ruling the state/ search for wisdom/ spiritual contemplation
SOCRATES	training by Diotima	military service/ search for wisdom	advisory roles/ spiritual contemplation

The *Symposium* thus twice positions Socrates at the point of transition: first, in his encounters with Diotima, where he is placed at the threshold of the age of procreation, both social and spiritual, and second, in the main narrative, which places him at the upper limit of this age, at the point of transition to the new status of an intellectually self-sufficient god-like wise man. This is unlikely to be accidental. Note indeed that neither of the two milestones on which the *Symposium*'s inner chronology is based, namely, Socrates' encounters with Diotima (440 BCE) and his attending Agathon's dinner party (416 BCE), can be supported by external evidence. Agathon's victory at the Lenaea competition in the early spring of 416 is, of course, authentic, but it was entirely the matter of Plato's own choice to pick up a particular historical event that happened to coincide

with Socrates' transition to the age of retirement and to make Socrates be associated with it. The uncharacteristic emphasis that Plato lays on the dialogue's dramatic date (above) further emphasizes the special significance of the latter.³²

The Diotima episode is even more telling. In dating her meetings with Socrates by an impending plague that has never materialized, Plato introduces a typical non-event whose only reliable reference point is the remark that it took place ten years before the great plague of 430 BCE. As a result, the only piece of historical evidence that this episode supplies is that Socrates' philosophical conversion occurred when he was in his thirtieth year. Again, arriving at the age of thirty was a landmark event in the life of the Athenian male. Even more to the point, in the *Republic* Plato obviously has this landmark in mind when, in his program of the upbringing of the Guardians, he adopts thirty as the age at which their training in dialectic should begin. As we saw, the final objective of the Guardians' training is identical to that of Diotima's training of Socrates, namely, arriving at "some such single science, which is the science of this kind of beauty" (above, with n. 10).

Diotima herself belongs with those of Plato's characters (Callicles of the *Gorgias*, the Eleatic Stranger of the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, Philebus of the eponymous dialogue) who are generally assumed to be fictitious. This is not to deny that, when creating this character, Plato may well have had in mind the personality of Aspasia of Miletus and her role in Socrates' life.³³ But Diotima is not Aspasia in disguise. To begin with, in the period described Aspasia, who was Socrates' contemporary, must have been in her late twenties. Yet, Diotima's priestly status strongly suggests that Plato saw her as a middle-aged woman.³⁴ Furthermore, the entire Diotima episode falls neatly into the well-established pattern of a life-changing

revelation carried out by an authoritative female figure. Parmenides' Goddess initiating the philosopher into the Way of Truth readily comes to mind in this connection: characteristically, she addresses her disciple as "youth" (*kouros*) (DK 28 B1.24). Another such example is Prodicus' parable of Heracles at the Crossroads, where Heracles, placed at the age of transition from boyhood to youth, encounters Virtue and Vice personified as 'two women of great stature' (Xen. *Mem.*2.21-22). Plato adopts the same pattern in the *Crito*, where Socrates, imprisoned in the Athenian jail, has a dream predicting his approaching death (44a10-b2):

There appeared to me a woman, fair and comely, clothed in white garment, who called to me and said: "O Socrates, The third day hence to fertile Phthia shalt thou go."

These parallels strongly suggest that, rather than a reminiscence of a real event, the entire Diotima episode was conceived as a philosophical parable. This conclusion finds further corroboration in the *Phaedo*, where Plato offers an alternative version of Socrates' intellectual biography. Disappointed by the philosophy of nature, young Socrates adopts the doctrine of Anaxagoras, only to become disillusioned again and to take refuge in dialectic (*logoi*) as his own method of seeking the truth of being (99e5-6); as in the *Symposium* and the *Republic*, the search after truth culminates in Plato's own concept of the existence of absolute beauty and absolute good (*Phd.* 100b5-7).

The *Phaedo* account of Socrates' intellectual biography starts with the words "when I was young (*neos*; 96a7)." In principle, the term *neos* can designate any young man between eighteen and thirty years (cf. Golden, 2015, 92-93). Thus, according to a story told

by Xenophon, when Charicles, one of the Thirty Tyrants, was asked by Socrates to define the age limit below which a man is to be considered young, he answered: "So long as he is not permitted to sit in the Council, because as yet he lacks sound judgment. You shall not converse with anyone who is under thirty" (*Mem.*1.2.35; tr. E. C. Marchant, slightly adapted). On the other hand, when referring to the nineteen-year-old Socrates encountering Parmenides, Plato twice styles him as "exceedingly young" rather than just "young."³⁵ It can be suggested in view of this that in the *Phaedo* too, Socrates' search after truth is envisaged as covering the period that immediately preceded his arrival at philosophical maturity at the age of thirty. However that may be, no further attempts are made in the *Phaedo* at analyzing Socrates' intellectual development along the lines of age groups.³⁶ Neither Diotima nor any other external agent are envisaged here as responsible for his philosophical conversion.

All things considered, it would be hard to avoid the conclusion that the *Symposium* stages events in Socrates' life rather than follows them. Alongside representing the young Socrates at the moment of his becoming engaged in the activities of philosopher, the *Symposium* celebrates the elevation of the mature Socrates to the status of the wholly wise men, the very ones who are privileged "to become the friends of gods and to be immortal, if mortal men ever may" (*Symp.* 212a6-7). All this is perceived from the vantage point of the frame story, whose dramatic date is set shortly before Socrates' death.³⁷ By correlating the milestones in Socrates' life with the traditional Greek ideas of age classes, which are also exploited in the *Republic*, the *Symposium* offers a symbolic retrospective of the life of its protagonist,³⁸ set as a paradigm of philosophical life.³⁹

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Endnotes

- 1 Here and elsewhere, I use B. Jowett's translation of the dialogues, adapted when necessary. The emphasis is mine.
- 2 Cf. Garland, 1990, 242: "In Athens at least then, and probably elsewhere, the thirtieth year marked an important turning point in a man's life." See also Golden, 2015, 92-93.
- 3 Arist. *Ath.Pol.* 4.3, 30.2, 31.1, 63.3; cf. Golden, 2015, 92. On the "pivotal cultural significance" of the age of thirty see also Blondell, 2002, 213, n. 163.
- 4 Xen. *An.* 3.1.14; tr. C. L. Brownson. Cf. also 3.1.25.
- 5 Solon 27W 9-10; tr. M. L. West. Cf. Garland, 1990, 2-4.
- 6 Garland, 1990, 242. For a useful recent discussion see Kennel, 2013, 10, 12; 26, 29, 30-31. In his criticism of Lupi, 2000, Kennel points out that the Spartan law of marriage is only attested as late as Plutarch; yet, as we shall see immediately, both the *Republic* and the *Laws* testify to the fact that, centuries before Plutarch, Plato operated with the same or a closely similar model.
- 7 Cf. also *Laws* 772d, 773e-774a.
- 8 Cf. *Laws* 721b8 μετείληφεν ἀθανασίας, c6 τῆς ἀθανασίας μετείληφῆναι as against *Symp.* 208b3 ἀθανασίας μετέχει. Cf. also *Symp.* 206c1-8, 206e-207a, 207d.
- 9 For a thorough analysis of the relevant *Symposium* passages see Sheffield, 2001, 2-16.
- 10 *Symp.* d7-e1 τινὰ ἐπιστήμην μίαν τοιαύτην, ἣ ἐστὶ καλοῦ τοιοῦδε.
- 11 On Diotima as instructor and Socrates' encounters with her as training see *Symp.* 201d5, 207a5-6, 207c5-6, 210e2-3.
- 12 See, however, Prior, 2006, 155, on the higher stages of Diotima's program: "the Socrates of *Republic* books 6—7, concerned with the mathematical sciences, belongs here." On the affinity between the *Republic* and the *Symposium* see also Kahn, 1996, 359-63.
- 13 *Resp.* 521d-541b; cf. also *Euthyd.* 290e.
- 14 Cf. also *Resp.* 539a. Blondell, 2002, 213, n. 163, explicitly places this passage against the social background of Greek age classes.
- 15 *Resp.* 539e5-540a2 καὶ ἐν τούτοις βασιανιστέοι εἰ ἐμμενοῦσιν ἐλκόμενοι πανταχόσε ἢ τι καὶ παρακινήσουσι.
- 16 *Symp.* 216c-219d; the words "and after that" (καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα) at *Symp.* 219e5-6, opening Alcibiades' account of Potidaea, refer to this particular episode.
- 17 Athens: Arist. *Ath.Pol.* 53.4; Plut. *Phocion* 24.3; cf. Garland, 1990, 263, Golden, 2015, 92. Sparta: Lupi, 2000, 12-21; Kennel, 2013, 29-31.
- 18 That is, when he reaches the age of thirty. Cf. Solon's characterization of the fourth hebdomad (from twenty-one to twenty-eight): "while in the

- fourth one, each achieves his peak of strength” (Solon 27W 7-8).
- 19 Cf. also *Symp.* 210e (quoted above) and 211d.
- 20 The peace of Nicias signed in 421 effectively put an end to his military service. The last campaign in which he took part was at Amphipolis (422). When the fighting renewed in 415 Socrates was already nearing the upper limit of the age of conscription: as we saw, the members of this age group were no longer expected to take part in military campaigns.
- 21 Aristotle concurs, see *Pol.* 7 1335b33-38, where he recommends, for reasons of his own, that men should stop bringing children into the world when they are four or five years above the age of fifty; he adduces traditional measuring of man’s life by hebdomads (cf. also 1336b40-1337a2 and above, with n. 5) to support this argument.
- 22 Insofar as it is set shortly before Agathon’s death, which is dated ca. 400 BCE; cf. Nails, 2002, 9, 314-315.
- 23 This is emphasized at both the beginning and the end of the dialogue, see *Tht.* 142c, 210d. The other dialogues relating to this period in Socrates’ life (the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*) do not approach it from the perspective of age groups.
- 24 On similarities and dissimilarities in the treatment of this theme in the two dialogues see Burnyeat, 1977.
- 25 For a comprehensive discussion of Socrates’ midwifery see Sedley, 2004, esp. 30-35.
- 26 See also *Symp.* 200 b9-c5, 202a; *Ly.* 218ab; cf. *Xen. Mem.* 1.6.10. See further Finkelberg, 1997, 234-241.
- 27 Proceeding from the midwife analogy, Sedley, 2004, 32, n. 57, tentatively suggests that “Socrates too has some past experience of producing intellectual offspring of his own” (Sedley’s emphasis). Comparison with the *Symposium* strongly suggests that this would indeed be the case.
- 28 See, e.g., *Phd.* 82b10-c2; *Symp.* 212a5-7; *Resp.* 500c9-d1, 540b5-c2, 613b1. See also the discussion in Sedley, 2004, 74-81.
- 29 Parmenides’ wisdom and serene old age (he is presented as sixty-five years old) are repeatedly emphasized in the *Parmenides*, see 127a7-b5, 136e5-137b1. On the Eleatic Stranger see esp. *Soph.* 215a5-6, where he is compared to a god in disguise. For a discussion of the Stranger’s anonymity and lack of physicality see Blondell, 2002, 318-326, esp. 323-324.
- 30 See also *Resp.* 613b1. On the Digression and the history of its interpretation see esp. Sedley, 2004, 62-81; Bartels, 2015 (with bibliography).
- 31 *Symp.* 222b3-4 οὐς οὗτος ἐξαπατῶν ὡς ἐραστὴς παιδικὰ μᾶλλον αὐτὸς καθίσταται ἂντ’ ἐραστοῦ.
- 32 To the exclusion of those dialogues that are directly associated with Socrates’ trial and death (the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*), the dramatic dates of Plato’s dialogues are based on circumstantial evidence, whereas some of them (e.g., the *Gorgias*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Philebus*) have no agreed upon dramatic date at all. For an overview see Nails, 2002, 307-330.
- 33 For a recent argument in favor of this hypothesis see D’Angour, 2019.
- 34 Cf. *Laws* 785b6 (quoted in full above, with n. 7), prescribing that a woman should hold office at the age of forty.
- 35 *Prm.* 127c5 σφόδρα νέον; *Tht.* 183e7 πάνυ νέος. On Socrates’ age at the time of the encounter see Nails, 2002, 309.
- 36 The same is true of the *Apology*, where the turning point in Socrates’ life is synchronized with the Delphic response, with no reference to the age at which he became exposed to it (20e-21d).
- 37 A similar arrangement is also characteristic of the *Theaetetus*, where juxtaposition of the main story and the narrative frame produces a retrospective of the protagonist’s life. Note that at the time of his death in the aftermath of the battle at Corinth (369) Theaetetus was approximately at the same age as Socrates when he fought at Delium and Amphipolis; this undermines the argument (Nails, 2002, 276) that the forty-six-year-old mathematician must have been considered unsuitable for taking part in a military expedition and therefore a much earlier date of his death should be adopted.
- 38 On ‘biographical criticism’ in the *Symposium* see Halperin, 1992, 100; cf. Finkelberg, 2019, 96-97.
- 39 I would like to thank Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz and Aryeh Finkelberg for their expert advice.

