

PSYCHIC PREGNANCY AND PLATONIC EPISTEMOLOGY

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It requires much care and knowledge to carry and nurture a child in the womb and to bring it to birth.

HIPPOCRATES, *Diseases of Women* 1. 25

A pig and a dog were arguing about successful delivery, when the dog said that she alone among the four-footed creatures delivers quickly. The pig answered, 'But know when you say this that you give birth to blind offspring.' The story shows that matters are judged not in terms of their speed, but in terms of their perfection.

AESOP 251. 1

1. Introduction

THE account of an ascent leading to the apprehension of the form of beauty is one of the most famous passages in the Platonic corpus. It appears as the culmination of Socrates' account of the nature and goal of *ἔρως*, love or desire, in the *Symposium* (210A–212A). Most scholars, perhaps drawn in by the particularly philosophical nature of this part of the speech, have isolated the passage from the rest of the account of which it forms the climax. In so doing, I shall argue, they fail to understand the nature of the lover's progress and thereby also the new, and distinctive, method of education which Socrates is proposing. In particular, the predominance of verbs for

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‘delivery’ throughout the description of the lover’s progress is noteworthy (e.g. 210 A 7, C 1, D 5, 212 A 3, 5), and clearly draws on the curious notions of pregnancy and delivery which were introduced to explain the characteristic activity of *ἔρως* earlier in the speech (206 B 3–C 4). It is therefore worth pausing over the claim that all lovers are pregnant and that this conception (*κύημα*, 206 D 7) is what they deliver when they engage in activities such as those described in the ascent. In the first part of this paper, then, I elucidate the notions of pregnancy and delivery, for by clarifying them we shall be in a better position to understand the nature of the philosophical progress outlined in the ascent—progress which culminates in an act of successful ‘delivery’. I argue in the second part of the paper that the notions of pregnancy and delivery form a crucial part of the *Symposium*’s explanation of how we can attain the knowledge we need to become truly virtuous. By taking these notions into account we shall change the way we view the nature of the lover’s epistemic progress and clarify hitherto unsolved puzzles. The interpretation is two-pronged: first, I attempt to explain what it means to say that the lover is pregnant with wisdom and virtue; second, I demonstrate that he follows a method which is designed to bring this pregnancy to a successful delivery. I end by locating this discussion within a larger context of Plato’s middle-period preoccupations, most notably the epistemological concerns of the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*. In those dialogues certain assumptions are made about the mind in order to explain its capacity for knowledge. As I hope to show, although there are numerous important differences between the *Symposium*’s account and those of the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, the notion of pregnancy plays a similar, significant role in the former as just such an assumption about the mind. If the following account is plausible, then the *Symposium* will shed new light on our understanding of Plato’s rationalism.

2. An outline of the notions of pregnancy and begetting

As part of the account of *ἔρως* which Socrates heard from the female priestess Diotima, he explains that all lovers desire to beget in beauty (*τόκος ἐν καλῷ*, 206 B 7). This is the characteristic activity (the *ἔργον*) of *ἔρως* (206 B 1–3). Part of the explanation for this activity is that all human beings are pregnant in both body and soul

(κυούσιν πάντες ἄνθρωποι καὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν, 206 C 1–3) and begetting in beauty releases what we have long been pregnant with (206 C 3–4, 209 C 3).¹ This is part of a larger attempt on the part of the lover to secure a sort of mortal immortality through γέννησις (206 E 7–8). Socrates goes on to describe the various generative activities which lovers engage in, activities which range from childbearing to lawmaking and philosophy. The discussion of these activities is divided into the so-called ‘lower mysteries’ of erotic practice (208 C 1–209 E 4) and the ‘higher mysteries’ (210 A 1–212 A 7), which alone constitute the activity of a philosophical ascent to the Form of beauty. The lover who embarks on the ascent to the Form of beauty surveys many kinds of beauty and, in response, is said to beget λόγοι at each stage in his progress (210 A 7, C 1, D 5) until he finally comes to an understanding of the nature of beauty itself, at which point he is said to beget true virtue (212 A 4). The precondition of all these diverse activities is a corresponding state of pregnancy. What the nature of this pregnancy is, and the way in which it contributes to the generative activities of lovers, form the focus of this paper.

Socrates begins his account of these activities with some important distinctions: there are some human beings who are pregnant in their bodies and some who are pregnant in their souls more than in their bodies (209 A 1–2). Those who are pregnant in their bodies are pregnant with physical offspring (παιδογονίας, 208 E 3), and those who are pregnant in their souls, among whom are mentioned poets, inventive craftsmen, and lawmakers, are pregnant with ‘what it is fitting for a soul both to become pregnant with and to beget’—wisdom and the rest of virtue (φρόνησίν τε καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετήν, 209 A 1–4). We learn at the end of the ascent, though, that these poets, inventive craftsmen, and lawmakers, who are relegated to the lower

¹ The notion that lovers are seeking something beautiful in which to beget needs to be analysed carefully. The phrase τόκος ἐν καλῷ suggests begetting (literally) in beauty, as if lovers were ejaculating inside a beautiful object in the context of a sexual encounter. Throughout, τόκος is ambiguous between ejaculation and delivery. But since the role of beauty is to preside over childbirth (206 D 1) and we are told that the pregnant lover begets ‘in proximity to the beautiful’ (περὶ τὸ καλόν, 206 E 1), we need to modify our understanding of τόκος ἐν καλῷ so that it does not import any literal, spatial, sense of begetting *in* beauty. Beauty is better described as the creative environment in which lovers beget their offspring, where the ἐν indicates being in the presence of, rather than literally inside, beauty. Price notes a similar use of ‘in’ to signify the occasion rather than precise location at *Phaedr.* 228 E 4; cf. *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle [Love]* (Oxford, 1989), 41 n. 45.

mysteries of *ἔρως*, beget mere images of true virtue. The begetting of true virtue, by contrast, is grounded in a philosophical understanding of the nature of beauty itself and is achieved only by those who complete the ascent to the Form of beauty (212 A 3–5).

There are two distinctions to take account of here. The first is that between bodily and psychic pregnancy; the second, that between the delivery of true virtue and the delivery of an image thereof, which forms the basis of the distinction between philosophers (the lovers of the higher mysteries) and non-philosophers (the lovers of the lower mysteries). When the notion of pregnancy was first introduced, we were led to believe that all human beings were pregnant *both* in their bodies and in their souls (206 C 1–3), but before his discussion of different generative activities, Socrates not only distinguishes between two different types of pregnancy—bodily and psychic (209 A 1–2), but states also that there are some human beings who are pregnant in their souls *more than* in their bodies (and not that they are *not* pregnant in their bodies); so we must take it that everyone is pregnant in both body and soul, albeit to varying degrees. The second distinction within the class of those who are psychically pregnant—between the lovers of the lower mysteries and the lovers of the higher mysteries—is more difficult to clarify. Since it is said that all lovers beget what they have long been pregnant with (206 C 3–4, 209 B 1–2, 209 C 3), and beget different things (212 A 1–5), we may be tempted by the suggestion that the relevant distinction between philosophers and non-philosophers is antenatal. But only two types of pregnant people are mentioned: those who are pregnant in their bodies and those who are pregnant in their souls even more than in their bodies (208 E 1–2, 209 A 1–2); no mention is made, when we reach the discussion of the philosophical lover, of a third type of pregnancy. Moreover, at the end of the ascent we are not told that those who have failed to complete the ascent are *pregnant* with images, but only that they have *delivered* images (cf. *τίκτειν . . . εἶδωλα ἀρετῆς*, 212 A 4). Nowhere is it stated or implied that the distinction between philosophers and non-philosophers is to be understood in terms of different pregnancies. So we have three claims to take account of in our understanding of psychic pregnancy: first, there are some creative, and inventive, people who are pregnant in their souls (more than in their bodies); second, those who are psychically pregnant carry wisdom and the rest of virtue (209 A 2–4); third, only some of these pregnancies result in

genuine wisdom and virtue (212 A 1–5). I focus now on the last two claims: What does it mean to say that psychically pregnant lovers carry wisdom and the rest of virtue? And how is the difference between the offspring of the philosopher and the non-philosopher to be explained?

When the distinction is first made between those who are pregnant in their bodies and those who are pregnant in their souls, it is natural to take this as referring back to the general claim made earlier that ‘all human beings are pregnant both in their bodies and in their souls’ (206 C 1–3). It is then also natural to read the specification of ‘*phronēsis* and the rest of virtue’ as a quite general description of the nature of a psychic pregnancy. This, we are told, is what it is fitting for a soul to be pregnant with (209 A 1–4). We do not know what such virtue or *phronēsis* consists in. The phrase ‘*phronēsis* and the rest of virtue’ suggests a plurality of virtues, which could be taken as the four cardinal Greek virtues. But the emphasis on *phronēsis* among these virtues may suggest a more ‘Socratic’ emphasis, a suggestion which will be borne out in the ascent, where we learn that true virtue must be grounded in knowledge (of the Form of beauty). At this stage, however, the description is underdetermined. This may well be significant. The fact that we have to wait for a discussion of the generative activities of lovers in order to understand the nature of their deliverances further suggests that the activity of begetting in some sense determines the nature of the offspring, and forms the basis of the distinction between philosophers and non-philosophers. In other words, in order to learn more about this ‘*phronēsis* and the rest of virtue’ we shall have to wait and see how such resources are employed. When Socrates begins his description of psychic generators with the poets and inventive craftsmen (209 A 4–5), he does indeed view the pregnancy from the standpoint of the generative activities which express it (they are referred to as *γεννήτορες*, 209 A 4). Hence I take it that when we are told that the greatest part of this virtue is ‘the correct ordering of cities and households, what is called temperance and justice’ (209 A 6–8), this is not a further specification of the pregnancy itself, but rather a description of the way in which the pregnancies of the poets and craftsmen make themselves manifest (one could perhaps detect an emphasis on ‘*this* wisdom’, *τῆς φρονήσεως*, at 209 A 6). The virtue of these inventive people (i.e. the poets and craftsmen) manifests itself in the attempt to order cities and households.

There is much in the description of the poets and lawgivers that suggests that their deliverances manifest a kind of demotic wisdom and virtue.² The claim that the most beautiful part of this wisdom and virtue is concerned with ‘the correct ordering of cities and households, what is called *sōphrosunē* and *dikaiousunē*’ is reminiscent both of Meno’s first definition of virtue (as emended by Socrates) in the dialogue that bears his name (*Meno* 73 A 7–B 2) and of Protagoras’ claim to be able to instruct men in the virtue that is concerned with the affairs of the household and the city (*Prot.* 319 A, 322 E). The phrase ‘poets and craftsmen [*δημιουργῶν*]—so many as are said to be inventive [*ἄσοι λέγονται εὐρετικοὶ εἶναι*]’ (209 A 5) further suggests that these types are those whom the *dēmos*, but not necessarily Socrates or Diotima, held in high esteem as socially useful (those same types of wise men, incidentally, that Socrates chose to examine in the *Apology*). The description of the virtue of such lovers points to the virtues of the politicians and lawgivers which certain sophists professed to teach, and to the kind of wisdom to which Agathon refers in his speech as motivating all kinds of artistic production (cf. 197 A–B). Socrates frequently expresses scepticism in the dialogues about this sort of virtue in comparison with a superior kind based on understanding.³ Although, as we shall see, the virtue of such lovers is developed without the philosophical practice which leads to knowledge, it should be borne in mind that this is, none the less, a quite extraordinary group of people: poets, lawmakers, and *inventive* craftsmen. This suggests that, whatever we make of the virtue of such types, they should not be aligned with the demotic virtue of the many, who in other dialogues are said to follow slavishly the habits and practices of the *dēmos*. The virtuous offspring of these lovers may pale in comparison with philosophical offspring, but they none the less have some claim to be *εὐρετικοί*—as those who shape and form the habits and practices of the *dēmos*.⁴

² As has been noted, for instance, by R. G. Bury, *The Symposium of Plato* [*Symposium*] (Cambridge, 1932), 121, and C. J. Rowe, *Plato: Symposium* [*Symposium*] (Warminster, 1998), 190.

³ e.g. *Meno* 99 C 3–5, E 6–100 A 1, *Phaedo* 68 D, 82 A, *Rep.* 401 E, 500 D, 506 A, 518 D–E, 554 C, cf. R. D. Archer-Hind, *The Phaedo of Plato* (London, 1894), 149–55, and the discussion in D. Scott, *Recollection and Experience* [*Recollection*] (Cambridge, 1995), 43–52.

⁴ It is difficult to know whether, and in what sense, *λέγονται* has sceptical implications (209 A 5). As a parallel for the virtue of such lovers, one might compare such types as Thucydides and Themistocles, who are mentioned at the end of the *Meno* (99 B–C). They do not just possess virtue formed through the slavish adherence

Socrates both compares and contrasts the lover of the lower mysteries and the philosophical lover, and in so doing indicates that a lack of understanding is a distinctive feature of the behaviour of the former. On the one hand, the description of the lover of the lower mysteries cleverly mirrors the philosophical lover of the higher mysteries. On the other, the swiftness with which the unphilosophical lover pursues his objects points to the misdirected nature of his *ἔρως*. Both the lover of the lower mysteries (LLM) and the lover of the higher mysteries (LHM) seek out something beautiful in which to beget their conception (LLM: *τίκτειν τε καὶ γεννᾶν ἤδη ἐπιθυμῆ, ζητεῖ δὲ οἶμαι καὶ οὗτος περιῶν τὸ καλὸν ἐν ᾧ ἂν γεννήσειεν*, 209 B 2–3; LHM: 210 A 7, C 1, D 5, 212 A 5). Both lovers engage in the activity of begetting *λόγοι* which are educative in nature (LLM: *εὐπορεῖ λόγων περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ περὶ οἶον χρῆ εἶναι τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἂ ἐπιτηδεύειν, καὶ ἐπιχειρεῖ παιδεύειν*, 209 B 8–C 2, LHM: *καὶ τίκτειν λόγους τοιοῦτους καὶ ζητεῖν, οἷτινες ποιήσουσι βελτίους τοὺς νέους, ἵνα ἀναγκασθῆ αὐτὸν θεάσασθαι τὸ ἐν τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι καὶ τοῖς νόμοις καλόν*, 210 C 1–4). The aim of both lovers is to beget their conceptions by means of an encounter with a beautiful object (LLM: *ἀπτόμενος γὰρ οἶμαι τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ὁμιλῶν αὐτῷ, ἃ πάλαι ἐκείναι τίκτει καὶ γεννᾶ*, 209 C 2–3, LHM: *ἢ οὐκ ἐπιθυμῆ, ἔφη, ὅτι ἐνταῦθα αὐτῷ μοναχοῦ γενήσεται, ὁρῶντι ᾧ ὁρατὸν τὸ καλόν, τίκτειν οὐκ εἶδωλα ἀρετῆς, ἅτε οὐκ εἰδῶλου ἐφαπτομένῳ, ἀλλὰ ἀληθῆ, ἅτε τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἐφαπτομένῳ*, 212 A 3–5). Both passages manifest a similar pattern of activity and a similar use of terminology in which to express it.

These artfully constructed parallels serve both to highlight the fact that all psychically pregnant lovers are ultimately engaged in the same thing, and also to indicate carefully where the LLM goes wrong. The differences promise to explain, then, what is responsible for the disparity between the offspring of the two types of lovers, both of whom undergo a psychic pregnancy. The search for beauty in which the LLM engages is far from the methodical *ζητεῖν* of the ascent: when he hits just the right age (*καὶ ἡκούσης τῆς ἡλικίας*, 209 B 1–2) this lover is attracted to beautiful bodies (209 B 4–5), and then if he *chances upon* a beautiful soul (cf. *περιῶν . . . ἐντύχη*, B 3–6)

to tradition and hearsay (like those who are said to practise demotic virtue in the *Phaedo* (82 B 1–2), for example); if they did, it would be difficult to see how they could fail to pass this on to their sons. These are rather the political leaders of the day, those who shape the habits and practices of the many. They fall short of genuine virtue because they have only true belief and not knowledge. This distinction was made clear to me by D. Scott.

immediately issues λόγοι about virtue (cf. εὐθύς εὐπορεῖ, B 8). The use of the term περιών to describe this lover's 'search' for beauty may be significant, for although the word is not always used in a derogatory sense, it is so used quite commonly in the dialogues, and when paired with ἐντύχη (as it is, for example, in the *Protagoras*) it carries a pejorative connotation.⁵ In the *Symposium* itself the term is applied unflatteringly to the wanderings of Alcibiades, humiliated after a failed seduction attempt (219 E 5), while a similar περί-verb is used for the aimless behaviour of Apollodorus before he met Socrates (cf. περιτρέχων ὄπη τύχοιμι, 173 A 1). The random activity of the LLM stands in sharp contrast to the philosophical lover who starts from early youth (ἄρχεσθαι . . . νέον, 210 A 5) and follows a correct method (cf. τὸν ὀρθῶς ἰόντα, 210 A 4, ὀρθῶς ἡγήγεται, A 6, παιδαγωγηθῆ, θεόμενος ἐφεξῆς τε καὶ ὀρθῶς τὰ καλά, E 3, τὸ ὀρθῶς παιδεραστεῖν, 211 B 5–6; and the use of πρῶτον . . . ἔπειτα at various points in the speech). Although both lovers are interested in begetting educative discourses (cf. 209 B 8–C 1, 210 C 1–3), the LLM is like an over-excited adolescent who seems to care more about relieving himself than he does about the quality of that relief (cf. εὐθύς εὐπορεῖ, 209 B 8). The adverb εὐθύς is also often used in the dialogues in a pejorative sense, to signal an opposition to a reasoned and well-thought-out response.⁶ In contrast, the philosophical lover feels compelled to *seek out* such discourses (cf. ζητεῖν, 210 C 2) and thereby come to an understanding of the nature of beauty itself. Indeed, the laws and practices at 210 C 3–4 and the 'knowledges' at C 6 are examined as a consequence of this lover's concern for the beautiful souls of B 8–C 1 and for the quality of the educative discourses which he is inspired to produce (καὶ τίκτειν λόγους τοιούτους καὶ ζητεῖν οἷτινες ποιήσουσι βελτίους τοὺς νέους, ἵνα ἀναγκασθῆ αὐτὸν θεάσασθαι τὸ ἐν τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι καὶ τοῖς νόμοις καλόν, 210 C 1–4). The correct method followed by the philosophical lover here leads to knowledge of the Form of beauty, and his delivery of true virtue is grounded in this philosophical understanding (211 C 8: γνῶ ὃ ἐστὶ καλόν). Both the LLM and the LHM may concern themselves with similar beautiful objects, bodies, laws, and practices, for example, but they approach

⁵ Socrates uses it of his search for wise men in the *Apology* (e.g. 23 B 5, 31 C 5), a characterization which could, however, be artfully self-derogatory. For a pejorative sense of the term cf. *Prot.* 320 A 2, where it is said that children have to wander around in search of a teacher of virtue.

⁶ Cf. *Ion* 532 C, 536 B 8; *Prot.* 357 D 1; *Theaet.* 144 E 2, 186 B 11.

these things very differently. The parallels and contrast between the two lovers suggest that it is because the LLM does not engage in the method which leads to an encounter with the right sort of beautiful environment that he begets only an image of the virtue which someone who engages in the intellectual rigours of the ascent can beget.⁷ His experience of beauty is grounded in sensible images which, we are told, are subject to change and decay and are beautiful at one time and not at another, or in relation to one person and not another (cf. 211 A 1–5). As a consequence, his delivery of virtue turns out correspondingly.⁸ This, we are led to believe, is what is responsible for the disparity between the offspring of the two types of psychically pregnant lovers.

This reading of the activities of both the LLM and the LHM presents the relationship between the lower and the higher mysteries in terms of an elucidation of proper erotic activity, with the LLM as a negative exemplar. Those who believe, as many do, that the lower mysteries represent the views of the historical Socrates and the higher mysteries of the philosophical ascent represent a Platonic break with these ideas will find the previous assessment of the LLM too dismissive.⁹ Support for a Socratic/Platonic distinction is often found in the disparaging remark which Socrates reports having heard from the priestess Diotima, who says at the start of the higher mysteries: ‘Into these aspects of erotics, perhaps, Socrates, you too could be initiated; but as for those aspects relating to the final revelation, the ones for the sake of which I taught you the rest, if one approaches these correctly—I don’t know whether you

⁷ See n. 1 for the notion of beauty as the creative environment. The description of the Form of beauty as an object of the LHM’s understanding might seem at odds with the description of beauty as the environment in which he begets his offspring. But I take it that when the Form of beauty is described as an object of knowledge (211 C 8), this is a specification of what it means for the LHM to beget his virtue in this beautiful environment. One comes to be in the presence of the Form of beauty by understanding beauty.

⁸ This brings out the import of the earlier description of beauty as Moira and Eileithyia at the birth (206 D 1). In the role of Eileithyia, beauty presides over the delivery; in the role of Moira, beauty determines the fate of the offspring in the sense that the quality of one’s virtuous offspring is determined by the quality of the beautiful environment in which one gives birth. For Moira’s role see Pind. *Ol.* 6. 41–2; *Nem.* 7. 1. Cf. Rowe, *Symposium*, 183.

⁹ See e.g. F. M. Cornford, ‘The Doctrine of Eros in Plato’s *Symposium*’, in G. Vlastos (ed.), *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York, 1971), ii. 119–32 at 125, 129; and R. A. Markus, ‘The Dialectic of Eros in Plato’s *Symposium*’, *ibid.* 132–44 at 134.

would be capable of initiation into *them*' (209 E 5–210 A 2, trans. C. J. Rowe). Since examples of the LLM included poets, inventive craftsmen, and lawgivers, I would argue that the dismissal intended here is rather directed towards Socrates' fellow symposiasts, many of whose speeches celebrate Eros through these very practices.¹⁰ Moreover, the goals of the LLM are specified in ways which make it difficult to identify the LLM with the historical Socrates—if we assume that the *Apology* can be used as evidence for the latter. For when Socrates introduces the activities of these lovers he cites *philotimia* as part of the explanation of their behaviour (208 C 3). The LLM believes that honour constitutes the good life and so engages in the kind of activities which procure this for him (e.g. poetry or lawmaking, which provide 'immortal glory' in the form of shrines and cults set up in his honour, 209 D–E). This goal and its corresponding activities stand in contrast to the love of wisdom which is thought to be conducive to the good life and desired on that basis by the LHM. The distinction between those who value honour and those who value wisdom is, in fact, a crucial one for the Socrates of the *Apology*. In his defence Socrates claims that he incites men to care for the welfare of their souls above all else, saying, 'Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honour, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul?' (*Ap.* 29 D ff.). The disparaging treatment of the LLM is precisely the kind of attitude that the Socrates of this tradition would adopt towards 'those who neglect what is of supreme importance . . . the highest welfare of the soul' (*Ap.* 30 A–B). In short, the Socrates of the *Apology* is better identified, in many respects, with the LHM, whereas the LLM is reminiscent of those people with a reputation for wisdom whom Socrates examines in that dialogue (22 ff.).¹¹ Consequently, the distinction between the lower and the

¹⁰ Pausanias' speech praises the practices of Eros which are lawful (182 A 7), Eryximachus praises Eros as a fine craftsman (186 D 5), and Agathon praises his poetic practices (197 A–B). See also Rowe, *Symposium*, 190, who argues that the reference to the poets is meant as 'an ironic compliment' to Aristophanes and Agathon, and the reference to the craftsmen is meant to recall Eryximachus, who is indirectly 'compared to the great inventors of the past' (cf. *δημιουργός* 'craftsman', used by him of the doctor in his praise of Eros at 186 D 5).

¹¹ Why, then, it may be asked, does Diotima raise doubts about Socrates' ability to understand the highest mysteries? After the elenchus of Agathon, Socrates continues to play the role of both the Agathon who now realizes he lacks wisdom about Eros, and the wise Diotima (201 D–E). He comforts Agathon with the thought that he too

higher mysteries is better explained in terms of a distinction between those who make wisdom their goal and can therefore make progress towards real virtue, and those who make honour their goal and thereby produce only spurious virtue.¹²

What do these differences between the LLM and the LHM tell us about the nature and status of a psychic pregnancy? As the contrasting description of the two types of lovers shows, it is only the lover who completes the intellectual ascent to the Form of beauty who is able to beget his *phronēsis* and *aretē* successfully. Since all psychically pregnant lovers need to experience the Form of beauty in order to beget true virtue rather than its image, the appropriate environment for the psychic pregnancies of *both* philosophers and non-philosophers will be the Form of beauty. The problem with the LLM is that he does not engage in the right method which leads to this encounter with the Form. Since there is no indication that the distinction between philosophers and non-philosophers is to be understood in terms of different pregnancies, there needs to be a construal of psychic pregnancy which allows for the possibility both of a successful delivery of true virtue (for those lovers who complete the ascent to knowledge of the Form of beauty), and of a delivery of mere images of virtue (for those lovers who do not complete the ascent). One can account for the difference between the offspring of the two types of lover in terms of the manifestation (or not) of one and the same type of pregnancy if this state of pregnancy is understood as a potentiality; otherwise, it is difficult to see how the deliverances of both the LLM and the LHM can be expressions of the same sort of pregnancy—one which the LLM fails to bring to a successful conclusion (hence the description of his

used to make the same mistakes about Eros, but now, as a mature Socrates who has learnt about these things from the wise Diotima, he has come to understand ‘erotic matters’. In other words, Socrates’ abject ignorance belongs to the past and is rehearsed here for the sake of his host, who has just been refuted by Socrates. It is not, then, the mature Socrates who would not understand the erotic matters of the ascent, but the young, inexperienced Socrates who—before he met Diotima—used to be in just the same state in which Agathon is now (201 D 8).

¹² There is a shift of emphasis in the higher mysteries to the LHM as the *educated* party rather than as the *educator*, which was the role assumed by the LLM who went around in search of a beautiful boy to induce the delivery of his pregnancy (209 B–C). The activity of the LHM shows that one needs knowledge before one can deliver virtue. Since the LLM does not have knowledge, he does not have virtue (cf. 212 A 3–5), in which case, we may infer, he has no business setting himself up as an educator of anyone else. The shift in the ascent to the lover as the educated party can also be seen as part of the polemic with the LLM.

activity as a mirror image, and yet a poor reflection, of the LHM's) and one which the LHM successfully brings to term at the end of the ascent.¹³ If what it means here to be pregnant is to have a potentiality of a certain sort, then one can account for the fact that this pregnancy can be put to good use *if* it is properly realized, and an inferior use if its development is thwarted.¹⁴ In a certain sense, of course, this is rather obvious. For just as a physical pregnancy is a potentiality for human life, so a psychic pregnancy should also be a potentiality of a certain sort. But if we analyse the import of this metaphor, then we shall end up with some substantial claims about the lover's soul.

I have suggested so far that a psychic pregnancy consists in a potentiality for virtue. But what sort of potentiality is this? The fact that the philosophical method of the ascent is required for the proper realization (the 'successful delivery') of the lover's potentiality suggests that the potentiality has to be understood as rational. The predominance of cognitive terms in the ascent passage is noteworthy (κατανοῆσαι, 210A 8; πολλή ἄνοια, B 2; ἐνοήσαντα, B 4; ἡγήσασθαι, B 7; θεάσασθαι, C 3; θεωρῶν, D 4; διανοήματα, D 5; θεώμενος, E 3; θεωμένω αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, 211 D 2—note the predominance of θεωρεῖν towards the end of the progress), as is the fact that the proper realization of this potentiality results in *knowledge* of beauty and true virtue.

The fact that this potentiality for virtue can be fully realized only in the encounter with the Form of beauty suggests an intimate relationship between virtue and beauty. Knowledge of the Form of beauty is, at least, a necessary condition of the development of the

¹³ It is important to bear in mind the degree of continuity between the start of the LHM's progress and its finale: the activity of repeated begetting in the context of a correct method and in response to different beautiful objects of desire does not inspire the LHM to reconceive, but rather to *bring forth* the conception he already carries (note the exclusive use of *τίκτειν* and *γενᾶν* here). This might seem problematic unless one takes it that this pregnancy he has undergone 'from youth' is a potentiality which is being developed.

¹⁴ One might compare the idea in Aristotle's biological writings that *κινήματα* reach different stages of completion—and only some are capable of higher degrees (cf. *GA* 736^{a-b}). There is an analogue for both of these points. First, the pregnancy of the LHM reaches a higher degree of completion than that of the LLM. Second, the idea that only some *κινήματα* are capable of higher degrees can be compared to the distinction between those who are pregnant in their bodies and those who are pregnant in their souls more than in their bodies. Those who are predominantly pregnant in their bodies, we infer, are much less capable of higher degrees of completion on the psychic level, i.e. the virtuous activity of those who are more pregnant in their souls. I owe this suggestion to Alan Code.

lover's potentiality, so one may wonder whether it is also a sufficient condition of virtue.¹⁵ The description of the lover's progress gives no reason to doubt that such knowledge is both a necessary and a sufficient condition of virtue. When the lover comes to understand the Form of beauty, his delivery of virtue seems to be the direct result: he begets true virtue by grasping the truth (212 A 3–5).

So far I have referred, vaguely, to the notion of 'potentiality' as a way of understanding the lover's pregnancy. But what does this amount to? Since we have seen that this potentiality is properly realized only in knowing the Form of beauty (212 A 3–5), it is not just a bare potentiality (if such a thing were even conceivable) which could properly develop in any given direction, but a specific one which is directed towards a certain sort of end—knowledge of the Form of beauty. If realization in relation to the Form of beauty is the end towards which the potentiality develops, then we can say that the potentiality is teleologically directed towards that state. This is also brought out by the figuring of the potentiality by the use of the verb *κτείνω* and cognate terms. Just as in a physical pregnancy the specific state of the body's potentiality structures and informs its development towards a certain sort of end, a complete human being, so a psychic pregnancy is already informed by the *telos* of its development—virtue grounded in knowledge of the Form of beauty, which structures and informs its development. Acorns grow into oak trees, foetuses into adult human beings, and, given the right conditions, potentialities for *phronēsis* and *aretē* develop into knowledge of the Form of beauty and true virtue. This directive, teleological nature of the potentiality is important to bear in mind as we examine the ascent. It is because the lover's pregnancy is teleologically directed towards knowledge of the Form of beauty that it requires the particular method of the ascent.

So far all that has been said about the nature of the lover's pregnancy requires no more than that the one who possesses such a pregnancy be psychically 'fertile', or 'able'. One might think, then, that pregnancy amounts to no more than the state of fertility that a man or a woman is in when they carry seed.¹⁶ It is crucial to

¹⁵ From other dialogues we are familiar with the idea that virtue is knowledge (*La.* 194 D 1–2, *Prot.* 361 B 1–2).

¹⁶ For example, E. Pender, 'Spiritual Pregnancy in Plato's *Symposium*', *Classical Quarterly*, NS 42 (1992), 22–86 at 74. In support of such a construal is the obvious fact that the notion of a lover undergoing a *bodily pregnancy* is very difficult to understand. At 206 c 5 we are given what purports to be an explanatory example

clarify the import of the metaphor precisely. For what is at stake here is the richness of the psychic endowment and the extent of its contribution to knowledge.¹⁷ The term used to describe this state of pregnancy suggests that all lovers are in a developed state of fertility: they are pregnant (*κνοῦσιν πάντες ἄνθρωποι καὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν*, 206 C 1–3). This notion of pregnancy has raised two puzzles of long standing in the scholarly literature. First, the use of *κνεῖν* suggests that Socrates is not simply claiming that human beings are fertile and creative agents who are able to generate offspring of various sorts: for that, he could have used exclusively such terms as *σπέρμα φέρειν*, *φύειν*, *τίκτειν*, and *γεννᾶν*—the last two of which he does in fact use—since these terms could stand for the procreative activity of either sex.¹⁸ If the begetting involved in the intercourse with beauty were just the ejaculation of seed, why does

from the physical sphere (cf. *γάρ*) which is not at all clear: the intercourse of a man and a woman would not normally be seen as a giving birth (that both men and women are pregnant seems implied by the use of *ἄνθρωποι* at 206 C 1). But this should not deter one from sticking to the sense of *κνεῖν* and cognate terms. The fact that the notion of pregnancy is pursued beyond any biological basis may suggest that it is being used to make a specific point, one which, though peculiar on the literal (physical) level, bears fruit on the psychic level. It is notable that the focus throughout is on psychic pregnancy: after 206 C those who are pregnant in their bodies occupy a meagre three lines of text (208 E 1–3). The nearest biological parallel I can find which may help make sense of the image on the physical level is preformationism, a particular version of which was attributed to Empedocles (cf. Arist. *GA* 722^b17). *κνεῖν* is not, however, used to describe the state of the *σπέρμα* which carries the preformed small animal.

¹⁷ One might compare the attention to metaphors in the 17th-cent. debate over the nature and contents of the mind. See below, sect. 4.

¹⁸ For *γεννᾶν* see 206 C 5, E 5, 7–8, 207 A 8–9, 209 A 4, B 2–4, C 3–4, D 7, E 2–3, 210 A 7. For *τίκτειν*, *τόκος* see 206 B 7, C 3–4, 6, D 5, E 5, 209 A 3, B 2, C 3, 210 C 1, D 5, 212 A 3. For the construal of *κνεῖν* as if it meant no more than fecundity or fertility see D. Clay, 'Platonic Studies and the Study of Plato', *Arion*, 2/1 (1975), 116–32 at 124–5; Léon Robin, *La Théorie platonicienne de l'amour* (Paris, 1933), 16–17. Both Clay and Robin translate *κνοῦσιν πάντες ἄνθρωποι* as 'all human beings are conceiving/fertile', but this translation is difficult to sustain. Later we are told: *εἰσὶ γὰρ οὖν, ἔφη, οἱ ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς κνοῦσιν, ἔτι μᾶλλον ἢ ἐν τοῖς σώμασιν, ἃ ψυχῇ προσήκει καὶ κηῖσαι καὶ τεκεῖν* (209 A 1–3). The latter aorist form *κηῖσαι* is inchoative, denoting 'coming to be' in that state of pregnancy, whereas the earlier present form *κνοῦσιν* indicates 'being' in that state. In other words, the lover has already conceived those things which it is fitting for the soul to beget and to bear and he is now in (the resultant) state of being pregnant. Throughout the biological works of Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen *κνεῖν* in the present tense means 'to be pregnant', and not 'to be in the process of conceiving' (a process which has already occurred in the case of the *Symposium*'s lovers). For *κνεῖν* in the present meaning 'to be pregnant' cf. Hippocratic corpus, *De mulierum affectibus* 170; *Aphorisms* 2. 54. 2; Arist. *HA* 543^b14, 545^a24, 546^b2, ^b11; See also Hom. *Il.* 23. 264; Dem. *Contra Macartatum* 43. 75. 6; Ar. *Lys.* 752; Men.

Socrates use a term for the carrying of seed which applies exclusively to the female state of carrying a child in the womb?¹⁹ *κνεῖν* specifically indicates the state of fecundity intermediate between fertility and birth. The import of the metaphor, then, is not just that human beings have the *ability* to create children and, on the psychic level, poems and laws, but that *the essential resources for life*, as it were, *are already there*. Compared with mere fertility, this is a further stage of physical, or psychic, development.²⁰ The second puzzle is that the characterization of the lover as pregnant (and not just fertile) reverses the roles of pregnancy and intercourse in such a way that the intercourse with a beautiful thing does not make us pregnant but rather brings forth that with which we are already pregnant. In consequence, the lover who encounters beauty has no need to *generate* anything in his body or soul, but rather needs to

fr. 413. For *κνεῖν* in the aorist meaning ‘to conceive’ cf. Her. 5. 41. 3; Hippocratic corpus, *De moribus popularibus* 5. 1. 11. 3; Galen, *De uteri dissectione* 2. 897. 4.

¹⁹ Cf. 206 C 1, 7, D 4, 7–8, 208 E 2, 209 A 1–2, B 1, 5, C 3 for *κνεῖν*, *κνήσις*, *ἐγκύμιον*. This verb is also used in the *Theaetetus* at 149 C, 151 B 8, 184 B 1, in connection with Socrates’ art of intellectual midwifery. See K. J. Dover, *Plato: Symposium* (Cambridge, 1980; repr. with 2nd preface 1982), 147, who highlights the surprising application of this verb to males: ‘In Greek generally *τίκτεω*, *γεννᾶν*, *τόκος* and *γέννησις* are used both of “begetting” and of “bearing” offspring (cf. 191b7–c1 n.), whereas *κνεῖν* “be pregnant” and *κνήσαι* “conceive” are used only of females.’ See also LSJ s.v.; J. S. Morrison, ‘Four Notes on Plato’s *Symposium*’, *Classical Quarterly*, NS 14 (1964), 42–55 at 53; M. F. Burnyeat, ‘Socratic Midwifery, Platonic Inspiration’ [‘Midwifery’], in H. Benson (ed.), *Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates* (Oxford, 1992), 53–65. In the biological works of Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen *κνεῖν* applies without exception to females only. However, there is a causal use of the aorist which can apply to the male: cf. Aeschylus, fr. 44. 4, Ouranos *ἐκόνσε Γαῖαν*, ἣ δὲ *τίκτεται βροτοῖς*. There are a few pre-Platonic metaphorical uses of *κνεῖν*, *κυμαίνω*, e.g. in Pindar—fr. 123 *ὄς μὴ πόθω κυμαίνεται*, *Pyth.* 4 158 *ἄνθος ἦβας κυμαίνει*—and in Theognis, whose usage might be thought to draw also on the specific import of this verb: 39–40 *κίει πόλις ἦδε, δέδοικα δὲ μὴ τέκη ἄνδρα | εὐθνητῆρα κακῆς ὕβριος ἡμετέρης*. The force of Theognis’ warning to the citizenry may well rest on the use of *κνεῖν*, which suggests that the city harbours evil just beneath its surface; wickedness in the polis has come *this* far. For a later metaphorical use see Gregory of Nyssa, *De mortuis non esse dolendum*, 9. 63. 20 *πνεῦμα σωτηρίας σου ἐκνήσαμεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*.

²⁰ Since the notion of the lover having a potentiality for virtue might be misunderstood as having too weak a sense, one might talk instead of the lover who is pregnant with *phronēsis* and *aretē* as carrying embryonic knowledge and virtue. For just as a physical pregnancy is a potentiality for human life which consists in the possession of embryonic life, so the potentiality for knowledge of beauty and virtue is a potentiality which consists in the possession of embryonic knowledge and virtue. This is an accurate description of what it means to be pregnant, but since talk of ‘embryonic’ seems to be repeating the metaphor, I shall stick to potentiality, although this stronger sense should be borne in mind throughout.

bring forth his conception (cf. 206 D 1–2). Herein lies the ‘strange reversal of pregnancy and procreation’ noted by Burnyeat.²¹

In psychic terms, this pattern of ideas will prove to be important, as we shall see when we turn to the lover’s ascent. This is not just the position (compatible with an empiricist account of learning) that the soul is capable of certain states and processes. To say that the lover is in a state intermediate between fertility and birth, and that he has no need to generate anything in the encounter with beauty, is to indicate that he has all the internal resources for knowledge already potentially there, and so needs rather to elicit the knowledge which he already carries. The particular beautiful objects do not, properly speaking, provide the basis of his knowledge of beauty, since this is already inherent in the soul as part of what it is to be pregnant with ‘wisdom and the rest of virtue’. The position is rather that the soul is already informed with this specific knowledge which structures its experience, and which directs its cognitive development towards its end. This causal account of the lover’s progress will prove attractive because it is the lover’s possession of this innate potential knowledge which explains how he is able to grasp the relevant and unifying features of the beautiful particulars which he encounters.

3. Pregnancy and begetting in the ‘ascent’ passage

I turn now to the ascent passage itself in order to see how the notion of psychic pregnancy structures the lover’s progress towards knowledge. On the standard reading of the lover’s progress, he comes to have knowledge of the Form of beauty by means of a process of ‘generalization and abstraction’ from the beautiful particulars which he encounters.²² Although some such process must clearly

²¹ Cf. Burnyeat, ‘Midwifery’, 63. Normally, of course, *κεῖν* follows *συνουσία*; cf. Apollonius, *Lexicon Homericum* 106. 3 *Κύπρις ἐπιθετον Ἀφροδίτης, οὐ μόνον ἐκ τῆς νήσου Κύπρου, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ τὸ κέειν πορίσκειν, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐκ τῆς συνουσίας.*

²² The main advocates of this reading are J. M. E. Moravcsik, ‘Reason and Eros in the “Ascent” Passage of the *Symposium*’, in J. Anton and G. Kustas (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Albany, NY, 1971) 285–302; A. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle [Love]* (Oxford, 1989) ch. II. Price, *Love*, 42, does argue that this reading requires ‘a little supplementation’, and he suggests that ‘the lover must be fresh from a pre-natal apprehension of the Forms (cf. *Meno* 98a4); this will make him at once capable of the ascent, and dissatisfied until he has completed it.’ He does not develop this suggestion, however.

be involved, as we shall see, this is (as it stands) a puzzling picture. For the distinctive characteristics of the Form are conveyed by means of a derogatory contrast with sensible particulars (in a manner reminiscent of *Phaedo* 78 D–E): whereas the Form is stable, immune from change, and uniform, the sensible particulars which partake of this Form are unstable and changeable, and exhibit opposite characteristics (211 A 1–B 5). Given the radical contrast between particulars and Form, how could the lover get sufficient cognitive input about this Form from the particulars? What ensures that the lover is able to grasp general characteristics of the class of objects under scrutiny, and to recognize kinships in a way relevant to his search? Since the lover's progress is structured by repeated acts of begetting (cf. 210 A 7, C 1, D 5, 212 A 3, 5), it is reasonable to bring an understanding of psychic pregnancy to bear on the passage. If we do so, then we must bear in mind that the lover begets what he has already conceived and long carried within himself (206 C 3, 209 C 3), and that beauty acts as an occasion for the lover to bring forth his pregnancy and is not itself a generative partner (206 D). Placing the ascent within the context of the notion of psychic pregnancy will create a significant shift of emphasis.

One of the clearest implications of characterizing the lover as already pregnant is that it favours a particular view of teaching and learning. The lover has a guide who aids his progress, and yet this guide does not *teach* the lover in any traditional sense, but rather *leads* and *turns* the lover towards new beautiful objects in whose presence the lover brings forth his conception (cf. *ἡγήται*, 210 A 6, 7, *ἀγαγεῖν*, 210 C 7, 211 C 1, and the use of *τετραμμένος*, 210 D 4). The guide's role is far from the traditional one assumed by Agathon's seductive play for Socrates' wisdom at the start of the dialogue, for example: wisdom is not to be transmitted from the fuller into the emptier like water which flows through the thread of wool from one cup to another (cf. 175 D).²³ This paradigm of the transmission of knowledge, which Plato elsewhere associates with sophists in particular, is rejected in favour of a view of education which aims to deliver the pupil of the resources he already carries.²⁴ The activity of the guide can be seen as based on the assumption that the lover

²³ This is also the view of education advocated by Pausanias, who validates the transaction of sexual favours for the wisdom of an *ἐραστής* (cf. 184 D 7). For this view of teaching as sophistic, see *Prot.* 313 C.

²⁴ Cf. Burnyeat, 'Midwifery', 56, who argues that the notion of psychic pregnancy in the *Theaetetus* forms part of a contrast with sophistic models of education.

already has a determinate potentiality for knowledge and virtue. For if the notion of pregnancy intimated simply that the soul has a mere ability for knowledge and virtue (which might be an outcome of construing pregnancy as ‘fertility’ or ‘ability’), then such a model might be perfectly compatible with more traditional teaching methods. There is nothing in the notion of a student having an ability for virtue which would prevent a teacher from transmitting knowledge ‘from the fuller into the emptier’. It is because the lover is already pregnant with knowledge that the guide does not need to inform him about such objects. The guide rather seems to assume that the lover has the ability to respond to the new beautiful objects that he encounters in a way that is relevant to his progress. He simply aids the lover in his attempts to deliver himself of the resources that he already carries, by turning him towards the appropriate objects.²⁵

So how is the lover’s potentiality for virtue realized? The lover’s training takes place within the context of a method which proceeds to the Form of beauty through the use of particular examples or kinds. This procedure has certain structural features in common with Socrates’ procedure in certain other dialogues, standardly dated earlier than the *Symposium*, which attempt to explain some general term. In many of these cases, where the method proceeds through a systematic review of the thing in question, Socrates talks as if he were examining *all* the different instances, as Robinson noted.²⁶ When Socrates implies that he has given a complete review of every case, what the context suggests he means is that he has examined different cases of the thing in question by means of a review of different classes.²⁷ In the *Gorgias*, for example, Socrates takes Polus through beautiful bodies first, then shapes, colours, and sounds, and then laws and practices, in his examination of beauty

²⁵ Some editors have raised a query about *αὐτόν* at 210A 8, which reads in Rowe’s translation (*Symposium*) as follows: ‘and then he realises for himself that the beauty . . .’ Rowe, *Symposium*, 194, argues that *αὐτόν* might serve ‘to mark the difference between the “leader” and an ordinary teacher, the lover/pupil comes to see what is the case “for himself”’. The interpretation I am developing here would help to substantiate that reading. A lover must realize things ‘for himself’ because he is developing his own pregnancy. One might compare *Meno* 85D 6, where the slave has to realize things for himself because he is eliciting his own beliefs.

²⁶ Cf. R. Robinson, *Plato’s Earlier Dialectic [Dialectic]* (Oxford, 1953), 37.

²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*: ‘Besides the inference where we obtain the universal by inspecting every one of its particulars, there is the inference where we obtain it by inspecting every one of the subuniversals or species into which it divides according to a given principle of division. Thus the division of human affairs into bodily and psychical often enables Socrates to review them all compendiously.’

(474 D–E). In the *Charmides* Socrates divides his initial examination of temperance into things which concern the body and things which concern the soul (159–60). In the *Meno*, when Socrates is examining ‘what kinds of things benefit us’, he says ‘let us take them individually’ (87 E 5) and proceeds to divide the examination into things which are beneficial to the body (e.g. health, strength, beauty, and wealth) and things which are beneficial to the soul (e.g. moderation, courage, intelligence, and memory) (87 E–88 E). The body–soul division also plays a role in earlier parts of Socrates’ speech in the *Symposium*. At 206 C 2 Socrates explains that all human beings are pregnant *καὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν*, and at 207 E 1–2 he describes the state of flux that affects mortal creatures *καὶ μὴ ὅτι κατὰ τὸ σῶμα, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν*. Such a division according to body and soul in the ascent passage would help to account for the different classes of beauty through which the lover progresses. The initial division of beauty would be into physical beauty (cf. 210 A 5–B 6) and psychic beauty (210 B 6 ff.) and the classes of laws, practices, and knowledge would be subclasses of objects which are related to psychic beauty in so far as they are things which concern the soul (by appearing to make the young better).²⁸

On each level of the ascent the lover focuses his attention on the common quality of beauty in each class (*τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς σώμασι κάλλος*, 210 B 3; *τὸ ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς κάλλος*, B 6–7; *τὸ ἐν τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι καὶ τοῖς νόμοις καλόν*, B 6–7), and draws generalizations about the

²⁸ This division explains the following textual points. First, we are told that the lover comes to realize that psychic beauty is worth more than physical beauty (*τιμιώτερον . . . τοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι*, 210 B 7) and he searches ‘for such *λόγοι* as make the young better’, a search which compels him to look upon the beauty in practices and laws (cf. *ἵνα ἀναγκασθῆ ἀνθεάσασθαι τὸ ἐν τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι καὶ τοῖς νόμοις καλόν*, C 3–4). The way in which the love of laws and practices follows from the lover’s search for *λόγοι* that will make the young better, which in turn follows from his interest in psychic beauty, suggests that love for laws and practices lies in extension of the concern with psychic beauty. There is no step here which corresponds to that between body and soul at 210 B 8: rather, the interest in laws and practices is forced upon the lover because of his interest in the soul (B 8–C 4). Moreover, after examining laws and practices, the lover comes to think that physical beauty is *σμικρόν τι* (210 C 5). Why, if the laws and practices are not to be thought of as, in some way, subclasses of soul, would the lover be compelled to make a comparison with physical beauty after this step? Further support for this suggestion comes from the summation of the lover’s progress. The steps mentioned are bodies, practices, and learnings (211 C); no mention is made of soul. The lack of any explicit mention of soul here might seem problematic unless, as I have suggested, fine practices and laws are, in some sense, related to psychic beauty.

quality of beauty on that level. On the first level, for example, he comes to realize that in so far as they are beautiful, bodies are related (cf. κατανοῆσαι ὅτι τὸ κάλλος τὸ ἐπὶ ὁτῶν σώματι τῷ ἐπὶ ἐτέρῳ σώματι ἀδελφόν ἐστι, 210A 8–B 1, and then that they are ἐν τε καὶ ταῦτόν, B 3; ἰδεῖν ὅτι πᾶν αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συγγενές ἐστιν, C 4). Instances of beauty are used as a way of recognizing the εἶδος by realizing that, in so far as they instantiate the property in question, they are ἐν τε καὶ ταῦτόν.²⁹ The systematic process of drawing generalizations on each level enables the lover to develop a synoptic vision which forms the basis of his theoretical understanding of the nature of beauty (βλέπων πρὸς πολὺ ἤδη τὸ καλὸν μηκέτι τὸ παρ' ἐνί, 210C 7–D 1, with ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ πέλαιος τετραμμένος τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ θεωρῶν, 210D 3–4). This recognition of unity on each level is also essential preparatory training for the apprehension of an entity which is essentially one and the same (cf. αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μεθ' αὐτοῦ μονοειδές, 211B 1).

At each of these stages the lover is said to deliver λόγοι. Since we have seen that his potentiality, properly speaking, is for knowledge of the Form of beauty, there must be an intimate relationship between realizing one's potentiality for knowledge and the delivery of λόγοι. Such a relationship was suggested earlier in Diotima's analysis of Eros as an intermediate δαίμων. Significantly, Diotima chose to clarify the nature of Eros' intermediate status with the aid of the example of the cognitive state in between wisdom and ignorance:

τὸ ὀρθὰ δοξάζειν καὶ ἄνευ τοῦ ἔχειν λόγον δοῦναι οὐκ οἶσθ', ἔφη, ὅτι οὔτε ἐπίστασθαί ἐστιν—ἄλογον γὰρ πρᾶγμα πῶς ἂν εἴη ἐπιστήμη;—οὔτε ἀμαθία—τὸ γὰρ τοῦ ὄντος τυγχάνον πῶς ἂν εἴη ἀμαθία;—ἐστι δὲ δήπου τοιοῦτον—ἡ ὀρθὴ δόξα, μεταξὺ φρονήσεως καὶ ἀμαθίας. (202A 5–9)

Don't you recognize that having correct beliefs, even without being able to give a rational account of them, is neither a matter of knowing (since how could something irrational be knowledge?), nor of ignorance (how could something that hits on what is the case be ignorance)? Correct belief is, I imagine, something of the sort in question, between wisdom and ignorance. (trans. C. J. Rowe)

The characterization of correct belief implies that having a λόγος is,

²⁹ In a passage in the *Meno* where Socrates explains the form a definition should take, the pursuit of the εἶδος is clearly connected to the realization that certain types of virtue are ἐν τε καὶ ταῦτόν: 'The same is true in the case of the excellences. Even if they are many and various, all of them have one and the same form [ἐν γέ τι εἶδος ταῦτόν] which makes them excellences, and it is right to look to this when one is asked to make clear what excellence is' (*Meno* 72 c).

at least, a necessary condition for having knowledge. At this stage in the account we do not know what this *λόγος* would be or how one would get it. In dialogues such as the *Theaetetus* one gets a keen sense that Plato was well aware of the importance and difficulty of this question. But the emphasis on the generation of *λόγοι* in the ascent suggests that this characterization of knowledge is operative here. Moreover, given the nature of the lover's search, the *λόγος* needed seems to be a definitional one (the lover's progress towards knowledge is not complete until he has come to know ὁ ἔστι καλόν (211 C 8–9). Since knowledge involves the ability to give a definitional *λόγος*, and true virtue either is, or is based on, knowledge or the Form of beauty, the activity of begetting *λόγοι* about beauty must be an essential part of developing the lover's potentiality for virtue.

On each level of the ascent, then, I take it that the lover attempts to articulate the common quality of beauty in each class. There are numerous examples from many dialogues which show how difficult it is to articulate the salient features of the thing under consideration. It is one thing to say what is similar about a given class of objects (for example, that the beauty of all beautiful bodies is akin, ἀδελφόν, 210 A 8–B 1), but quite another to say what it is in virtue of which they are 'one and the same' (ἐν τε καὶ ταῦτόν, B 3). Moreover, since particulars are not 'one and the same' but many and various (cf. 211 A 1–5), it is difficult to see, as one would if one were to take an abstractionist view of the lover's progress, how it is solely in virtue of encountering these particulars that the lover can acquire the ability to discern this feature. But if we recall that when the lover responds to these objects and delivers *λόγοι* he is bringing his pregnancy to term, then we can understand the resources of the lover's soul as contributing to just this cognitive step. These beautiful objects cause the lover to bring forth his conception, which means, I take it, that they occasion the emergence of the lover's potential knowledge of the Form. They activate the lover's own latent understanding of unity and structure. The lover is able to grasp the salient features of the objects under scrutiny and the relationships between them in a way that is relevant to the search for the *εἶδος* because he already potentially knows the Form, and this cognitive training is a matter of developing that knowledge.³⁰

³⁰ It might seem problematic to claim that the lover is at once developing his potential knowledge of beauty, and that he is employing his potential knowledge in

One may well ask why it is that the lover needs to undergo such an arduous ascent and to survey different classes of beauty 'correctly and in the right order' (cf. *θεώμενος ἐφεξῆς τε καὶ ὀρθῶς τὰ καλά*, 210 E 3). What is the importance of the structured movement from an *ἀρχή* to a *τέλος* emphasized throughout the passage? (Cf. 210 A 1 *τὰ τέλεια καὶ ἐποπτικά, ὧν ἕνεκα καὶ ταῦτα ἔστιν*; C 3 *ἵνα*; C 5 *ἵνα*; C 7 *ἵνα*; E 3-4 *πρὸς τέλος ἰών*; E 5-6 *οὐ ἕνεκεν πάντες πόνοι ἦσαν*; 211 B 7 *τοῦ τέλους*; C 1 *ἕνεκα C 7 τελευτήσαι*; C 8 *γινῶ αὐτὸ τελευτῶν ὃ ἔστι καλόν*.) The use of terminology drawn from the mysteries to figure this teleological movement adds further weight to the notion of proceeding correctly through a series of steps each of which is essential preparatory training for the next. But why is exposure to these sensible images of true beauty, which are later denigrated as 'mortal trash', a necessary condition of the lover's apprehension of the Form (cf. 210 C 8, D 4)?

Just as gestation develops towards the goal of a complete human being through a series of stages, so epistemic progress goes through a series of stages which enable the soul's conception to grow and develop in a certain way.³¹ Neither foetuses nor embryonic knowledge can successfully be brought to birth prematurely (as the example of the LLM shows). Both have a natural course of development which they must follow through a series of specific steps each of which is necessary for the subsequent step. The lover's psychic growth is described in the following passage:

ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺν πέλαγος τετραμμένος τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ θεωρῶν, πολλοὺς καὶ καλοὺς λόγους καὶ μεγαλοπρεπεῖς τίκτηι καὶ διανοήματα ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ ἀφθόνως, ἕως ἂν ἐνταῦθα ῥωσθεῖς καὶ αὐξηθεῖς κατίδη τινὰ ἐπιστήμην μίαν τοιαύτην. (210 D 3-7)

The lover is turned towards the great sea of beauty and contemplating that, may bring to birth many beautiful, even magnificent, words and thoughts in a love of wisdom which grudges nothing, until, *having grown and been strengthened there*, he may catch sight of a certain single kind of knowledge. (trans. C. J. Rowe with modifications)

As a result of surveying the great sea of beauty, which encompasses all its different kinds, the lover has a more comprehensive,

the ascent. The analogy with physical development may be helpful here. For the presence of an embryo endows the body with an ability to use external factors, such as food and warmth, to develop it in a certain way. So, the presence of potential knowledge in the soul endows the lover with an ability to use his experience of beauty in the proper way, to develop that potentiality further.

³¹ See n. 14 for the parallel between cognitive and psychic development.

and better-articulated, understanding of beauty. Since the Form of beauty has a wide extension and comprises different kinds of beauty (which participate in the Form, 211 B 2), the ascent is an appropriate mode of development for his potential knowledge of the Form of beauty.

Socrates not only emphasizes the way in which the lover must proceed, but also stresses the *difficulty* of the procedure (cf. 210 A 1). This suggests that the necessity for proceeding *ἐφεξῆς τε καὶ ὀρθῶς* is also due to the difficulty of apprehending an object radically distinct in nature from the particulars which form the basis of our ordinary ways of thinking about beauty (cf. 211 D 3–8). Just as in the mysteries, where the necessity for an ordered series of steps was in large part due to the difficulty of the procedure and the need to accustom the initiate to the experience of *τὰ τέλεα καὶ ἐποπτικά*, so too the lover in this ascent must prepare himself for the apprehension of the Form.³² It is natural that the lover does so by encountering kinds of beauty which would be familiar to him, and from there moving on to the less familiar (from *σώματα* at 210 A 6 to *αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν* at 210 E 4–5). The need to move appropriately from different classes of objects to the Form is also crucial to the ascent to the Form of the good in the allegory of the cave in the *Republic*, where there is a comparable emphasis on the need for the prisoners to adjust their ‘sight’ to the light of the sun. If someone suddenly dragged a prisoner up out of the cave, the sun would be too bright and he would be unable to see. Socrates advocates a slower progression because the prisoner ‘would need time to get adjusted before he could see things in the world above. At first he’d see shadows most easily, then images of man and other things in water, then too, the things themselves . . . Finally, he’d be able to see the sun clearly and study it’ (*Rep.* 516 A–B). Such a person sees the Form only with difficulty, after a long time adjusting to the new light of the intelligible realm (*ὁ χρόνος μὴ πάνυ ὀλίγος εἴη τῆς συνηθείας*, 517 A 1–2). The ability to see the Form is something which requires arduous training, without which the eyes and the soul are blinded. The prisoner trains his cognitive powers, beginning with the use of sense perception and moving on through the use of *ἐπιστήμαι* and *τέχναι* (533 D). Because they require thought and not sense perception, and are directed towards what is, these *ἐπιστήμαι* and

³² On the procedures of the Eleusinian Mysteries see W. Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, trans. J. Raffan (Oxford, 1985), 285–90, esp. 288.

τέχνας have the power to awaken the soul's intellectual abilities (532 c–d) and to turn it towards the intelligible realm (533 d). In the *Symposium*, too, the lover begins from perceptible examples of beauty (210 a) and moves on through the use of νόμοι, μαθήματα, and ἐπιστήμαι (210 c 4, c 6), appreciation of which (we infer) requires the use of thought rather than sense perception.³³

The lover's actual knowledge of beauty is something which he develops only over time with arduous intellectual work.³⁴ Since this work requires experience of a wide range of particular examples or types of beauty, these play an important role in the lover's progress. Ultimately, though, this role should not be mistaken for an epistemic foundation. The beautiful objects which the lover encounters cause the lover to bring forth his conception, which is to say that they cause his potential knowledge of beauty and true virtue to come into full being. Since this progress requires experience of a wide range of types of beauty, it is tempting, but mistaken, to underrate the role of the innate resources of the lover's soul. The ultimate explanatory force of the notion of psychic pregnancy is to explain how, given a limited cognitive input from particulars, we can end up grasping a Form that is categorically distinct from those particulars: since we already potentially know the Form, a process of cognitive training focused on classes of particulars may be sufficient to stimulate the actualization of our potential know-

³³ It may be significant that the lover is said to give birth to λόγοι and διανοήματα as a result of his examination of these cases of beauty (cf. 210 d 5), for in the *Republic* Socrates revises his earlier description of ἐπιστήμαι and τέχναι as branches of what is called νοῆσις in the image of the line (on the grounds that they proceed from unexamined hypotheses) and locates them on the level of δίανοια instead (cf. 533 d 6).

³⁴ When the lover reaches such a point and encounters the Form of beauty, he is said to 'look there and behold it with that which he ought' (ἐκεῖνο δὲ δεῖ, 212 a 1, 3). This 'intellectual organ of vision' is elsewhere in Plato said to be nous. I borrow the phrase from Bury, *Symposium*, 132, who notes the similarity of Socrates' description here to *Phdr.* 247 c; *Phaedo* 65 e; *Rep.* 490 b, 518 c, 532 a. If this phrase does refer to that intellectual organ elsewhere called nous, then one could give a more determinate sense to the development of the lovers' cognitive abilities, and one that would make sense of the predominance of θεωρεῖν as the cognitive verb of choice near the end of his progress: the developed understanding that marks the successful delivery of what the lover has long been pregnant with is nous. This would make good sense of the contrast with the non-philosophical lovers who practise demotic virtue, those who in the *Meno* are said to be 'without nous' (νοῦν μὴ ἔχοντες, 99 c 7, ἀνευ νοῦ, 100 a 1). It may also be significant that later in the dialogue Alcibiades says of Socrates' λόγοι, 'they alone have nous', a description which here, as sometimes elsewhere, is used to differentiate those with knowledge from those with correct opinion (*Meno* 99 c–100 a).

ledge. This is not the position (compatible with many empiricist accounts) that the soul has a mere ability to derive that knowledge from experience, but rather the position that the soul is already informed with the specific knowledge which experience elicits.

4. Pregnancy and innatism

In other Platonic dialogues assumptions are also made about the mind in order to account for how it is able to come to have knowledge. How does the *Symposium*'s notion of psychic pregnancy fare when compared with the innatist accounts of the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, for example?

An obvious similarity between the notion of psychic pregnancy and the accounts of the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* is that they share the assumption that the soul has certain resources which account for its ability to make epistemic progress. Although there are differences between the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, in both dialogues Socrates argues for the view that knowledge is recollection of what the soul once knew (*Meno* 85 D 9–86 B 4, *Phaedo* 74 E 9–75 C 5). It is this latent knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη ἐνοῦσα*) in the soul which is brought out by the senses and experience. The notion of psychic pregnancy shares the assumption that in learning the learner develops resources she already has. The role of senses and experience is to work as a propaedeutic for the soul. In the language of the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, they would be said to cause the learner 'to recollect'. In the language of the *Symposium*, they would be said to cause the lover to beget his conception. The role ascribed to the senses and experience in learning clearly locates the *Symposium* within the rationalist tradition of the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*. But there are many important differences in the way in which these dialogues characterize the soul's resources, differences which, in turn, have implications for the way in which such learning is described. Nothing is said in the *Symposium*, for example, about recollection. Moreover, since, if achieved at all, immortality is something to be earned and not a given property of the soul, the soul and its resources cannot be pre-existent.³⁵ To clarify and bring out the importance of some of

³⁵ Whether, and in what sense, the soul is immortal is controversial. Hackforth, for example, comparing the *Symposium* with the *Phaedo*, argued that 'The *Symposium* shows us a relapse into temporary scepticism; it drops the claim that the soul,

these differences, it will be helpful to use Leibniz. Leibniz, who admired the Platonic doctrine of reminiscence, none the less found the notion of pre-existent knowledge objectionable. He saw himself as developing his own distinctive account which avoided the notion of pre-existent knowledge, without slipping into vacuous talk of potentialities.³⁶ Since the *Symposium*'s innatist account also avoids both these notions, it may seem as if Leibniz's distinctive variety of innatism was anticipated by none other than Plato himself.

Leibniz saw himself as a Platonist on the issue of innate ideas in so far as he held that knowledge is innate to the soul, and that the role of the senses and experience is to 'bring to life' the knowledge that is already within it.³⁷ But he was concerned to distance himself from the errors inherent in what he perceived to be the otherwise sound Platonic doctrine of reminiscence. He writes that

[The doctrine of innate ideas] is what Plato took account of surpassingly well when he put forward his doctrine of reminiscence, which is a very sound doctrine provided that one interprets it correctly and purges it of the error of pre-existence, and that one does not suppose that the soul must

collective or individual, is imperishable': R. Hackforth, 'Immortality in Plato's *Symposium*', *Classical Review*, 64 (1950), 43–5. But Luce replied that 'a reconciliation of their [i.e. the *Phaedo*'s and the *Symposium*'s] apparent inconsistencies is possible if one remembers that in the *Symposium* attention is focused on the *ἀνθρωπίνη φύσις*, in the *Phaedo* on the immortality of the *θείη ψυχή*. The former *qua ἀνθρώπων* is *θνητόν*; the latter *qua θεῖον* is *ἀθάνατον* . . . My contention is that in the *Symposium* the distinction between mortal *φύσις* and immortal *ψυχή* remains latent but not abandoned, implied though not expressed': J. V. Luce, 'Immortality in Plato's *Symposium*: A Reply', *Classical Review*, 66 (1952), 137–41 at 140. Since the only kind of immortality here mentioned is achieved through generation (207 ff.), Hackforth must be right that there is a difference from the *Phaedo*'s notion of an imperishable soul: any other kind of immortality, even if 'latent', would surely disrupt an account which develops the idea that immortality is something to be striven for and achieved, if at all, by the generation of real virtue. Luce's distinction between a mortal and an immortal part of mortal nature is better understood, not in terms of the *Phaedo*, but rather in terms of the passage where we are told that begetting is something divine, and that living creatures, despite their mortality, contain this immortal aspect of pregnancy and begetting (cf. *ἔστι δὲ τοῦτο θεῖον τὸ πρᾶγμα, καὶ τοῦτο ἐν θνητῷ ὄντι τῷ ζῳῷ ἀθάνατον ἔνεστιν, ἢ κύησις καὶ ἢ γέννησις*, 206c 6–8). This is compatible with Hackforth's claim.

³⁶ G. Hunter and B. Inwood, 'Plato, Leibniz and the Furnished Soul' ['Furnished Soul'], *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 22 (1984) 423–34, offer a more detailed discussion of Leibniz's critical reaction to the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*.

³⁷ G. W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding* [*New Essays*], trans. and ed. P. Remnant and J. Bennett (Cambridge, 1981), 48, 76.

already have known and thought distinctly at other times what it learns and thinks at the present time.

Leibniz's criticism is twofold. First, he believes that Plato assumes that in order for the soul to learn something it must previously have acquired actual knowledge of that thing (*New Essays* 78).³⁸ This is a straightforward concomitant of the analogy between learning and remembering. Second, Leibniz criticizes the claim that the soul must have existed at some earlier time at which it acquired this knowledge.³⁹ The object of Leibniz's purge is the notion that the soul previously had actual knowledge; for it is this which gives rise to the need to explain when the soul acquired this knowledge, which is supposedly answered by pre-existence.⁴⁰ Leibniz did not believe that pre-existence was an answer to this problem at all, since it failed to explain the origin of innate ideas and instead merely pushed the problem back to an infinite number of incarnations, each of which was supposed to have learnt something from the previous one.⁴¹ For Leibniz, a more plausible answer would have been that the soul has simply known these ideas or truths all along. It is not clear exactly what the *Meno's* position on this would be; for the claim there is that the soul has always been in a state of knowledge (τὸν αἰὲν χρόνον μεμαθηκνῦα ἔσται, 86 A 8), which suggests that there is no time at which the soul did not know, and then later acquired, this knowledge. But in the *Phaedo*, at any rate, the idea does seem to be that the soul acquired this knowledge in a previous existence.

³⁸ Although actual knowledge, for Leibniz, is not necessarily the same as distinct knowledge (a sign of which is the ability to enumerate the distinctive marks, or features, of a thing: *New Essays* 255–6), in the *New Essays* he refers to both actual and distinct knowledge when discussing Platonic innatism.

³⁹ Cf. the definition of recollection at *Meno* 85 D and *Phaedo* 75 E as ἀναλαμβάνειν τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἣν ποτε καὶ πρὶν εἶχομεν, which indicates a previous grasp of knowledge (at *Theaet.* 196 D–199 C ἔχω refers to active use of a 'knowledge bird', rather than the mere possession, κέκτημαι). See also *Phaedo* 76 C–D, where Socrates dismisses Simmias' suggestion that knowledge might have been acquired at the moment of birth because that would imply that we gain and lose knowledge simultaneously.

⁴⁰ For pre-existence as an explanation of the origin of innate ideas cf. *Meno* 85 D 9–86 B 4, *Phaedo* 74 E 9–75 C 5, with Scott, *Recollection*, 16.

⁴¹ 'If there was an earlier state, however far back, it too must have involved some innate knowledge, just as our present state does: such knowledge must then either have come from a still earlier state or else have been innate or at least created with [the soul]; or else we must go to infinity and make souls eternal, in which case these items of knowledge would indeed be innate, because they would never have begun in the soul. If anyone claimed that each previous state took something from a still earlier state which it did not pass on to its successor, the reply is that obviously some self-evident truths must have been present in all of these states' (*New Essays* 79).

Leibniz distanced himself from Plato by arguing for a version of innatism which does not require either of these objectionable features. He argues that ideas are innate to the soul as ‘inclinations, dispositions, tendencies, or natural potentialities, and not as actualities’ (*New Essays* 52).⁴² How talk of ‘potentialities’ and ‘dispositions’ is elaborated is of great importance to the innatist debate.⁴³ Leibniz’s Lockean interlocutor in the *New Essays*, for example, would readily concede that the soul was endowed with an *ability* to form ideas, but the origin of these ideas would lie ultimately with the senses and experience which imprint themselves on the passive *tabula rasa* that is the soul. For Leibniz, however, the construal of the soul’s ability as a merely passive power, ‘as indeterminate as the power of wax to receive shapes or of a blank page to receive words’, is a ‘mere fiction’ (*New Essays* 79). For him, the soul’s ability is active in two important senses. First, the ideas innate to the soul dispose the soul to specific acts of thinking. Second, the innate ideas serve as the origin of these thoughts.

In the *New Essays* Leibniz illustrates his position with the analogy of a veined block of marble:

I have also used the analogy of a veined block of marble, as opposed to an entirely homogeneous block of marble or to a blank tablet—what the philosophers call a *tabula rasa*. For if the soul were like such a blank tablet then truths would be in us as the shape of Hercules is in a piece of marble when the marble is entirely neutral as to whether it assumes this shape or some other. However, if there were veins in the block which marked out the shape of Hercules rather than other shapes, then that block would be more determined to that shape and Hercules would be innate in it, in a way, even though labour would be required to expose the veins and to polish them into clarity, removing everything that prevents their being seen. This is how ideas and truths are innate to us—as inclinations, dispositions, tendencies, or natural potentialities, and not as actions. (*New Essays* 52)

The veins in the block which mark out the shape of Hercules rather than other shapes endow that block with a specific creative poten-

⁴² In a paper entitled ‘What is an Idea?’ he develops the notion of an innate idea as follows: ‘An idea consists not in some act, but in the faculty of thinking, and we are said to have an idea of a thing even if we do not think of it, if only, on a given occasion, we can think of it’: G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, trans. L. E. Loenker, 2nd edn. (Dordrecht, 1969), 207. Jolley calls this Leibniz’s ‘reduction of ideas to dispositions of the mental’: N. Jolley, ‘Leibniz and Malebranche on Innate Ideas’ [‘Leibniz’], *Philosophical Review*, 97 (1988), 71–91 at 84.

⁴³ See the discussion of this debate in Scott, *Recollection*, 221–59.

tial, a potential, moreover, which is grounded in the fact that the marble has certain properties (what he elsewhere calls ‘preformations’: *New Essays* 80). Hard work may be required to expose and polish the veins into clarity. Meanwhile, the presence of the veins directs and grounds the course of the artistic process.⁴⁴

In this cursory glance at Leibniz’s position we can see how he maintains his Platonism while distancing himself from what he perceived to be the errors of the doctrine of reminiscence. In the notion of directive and determinate potentialities in the soul, Leibniz was able to say (along with Plato) that knowledge is, in a sense, innate to the soul, and that the role of the senses and experience is to ‘bring to life’ the knowledge that is already within it (*New Essays* 48, 76). However, the notion of specific and directive potentialities avoids the implication that the soul now has this knowledge in virtue of a previous state of actual learning. So Leibniz distances himself from this aspect of the theory of recollection as found in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*.⁴⁵ I want to suggest a similar interpretation of the notion of psychic pregnancy in the *Symposium*. There is no implication here that the pregnant soul has ‘previous actual knowledge of what it thinks and learns at the present time’. It is not that the soul possesses knowledge from before birth, but that from youth the soul is pregnant with knowledge (of the Form of beauty) and virtue, where this indicates not that the soul has items of knowledge within it which it has learnt at some time prior to its entry into a body, but rather that the soul has a specific potentiality for knowledge and virtue—for what it ends up learning in the ascent. Since this potentiality is already informed by the end of its development (just as a physical pregnancy is already informed by the end of its development), it is both specific

⁴⁴ Leibniz had to be careful when he reduced innate ideas to mental dispositions lest he fall into vacuous talk of potentialities. As Jolley has shown, Leibniz was influenced by Malebranche’s critique of certain varieties of dispositional innatism which claimed that the soul does not possess innate ideas, but rather is disposed to form them (‘Leibniz’, 78). Malebranche had attacked such positions as explanatorily vacuous. Talk of faculties and dispositions, he argued, must be grounded in non-dispositional properties of the mind in order to be explanatory. The explanation of a plant’s growth in a certain direction should not refer simply to a disposition to grow in a certain way; rather, its having the disposition to grow in a certain way should be explained by its possessing innately certain non-dispositional properties which determine the disposition to grow in that way. Leibniz’s comparison of the soul to a veined block of marble suggests that he believed that there are certain properties of the soul, analogous to the veins, which explain why the soul has a particular disposition.

⁴⁵ Cf. Inwood, ‘Furnished Soul’, 428–9.

and directive. The potentiality determines the course of the epistemic progress just as Leibniz's figure in the marble determines the course and nature of the artistic process, and its 'preformation' determines the cognitive development of the soul.⁴⁶ For those who believe that Plato failed to consider innatist positions other than the notion of pre-existent knowledge,⁴⁷ psychic pregnancy may come as a welcome addition to his repertoire. Leibniz, for one, believed that he distanced himself from the Platonic counterpart of his doctrine by arguing for a version of innatism which does not require a pre-natal occasion for the soul's acquisition. He would have found less need to distance himself from the notion of psychic pregnancy.

But one might think that the notion of psychic pregnancy is prey to other problems. For example, it raises the questions: Where does this potentiality for knowledge and virtue come from? What is this potentiality grounded in? These are questions which are at least addressed in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*. For Leibniz, just as the potential for Hercules to emerge from the artistic process was due to certain structural properties of the marble, so the mind, it is suggested, has innately certain properties which shape its experience. Similarly, we might speculate that Plato in the *Symposium* is suggesting that the potential for knowledge is due to certain structural features of the soul itself. For in physical pregnancy the embryo's potential to develop into a human being is grounded in certain physical properties such as, we would say today, a certain genetic structure. So, perhaps, in the case of psychic pregnancy, the potentiality for knowledge of beauty and virtue may be grounded in its possession of a certain sort of psychic structure. The idea that potential knowledge is part of our natural make-up as human beings might be suggested by the dual claims that *all* human beings are pregnant, and that 'when we reach a certain age, we naturally desire to give birth' (*τίκτειν ἐπιθυμεί ἡμῶν ἡ φύσις*, 206 c 1-4). For if the development of our psychic pregnancy were not to some extent grounded in our biological nature, it is hard to see why we should *naturally* want to give birth when we reach a certain age. So it may be suggested that this pregnancy is part of our natural make-up as human beings.⁴⁸ As human be-

⁴⁶ One might add that Plato's organic notion has the merit that it unites material and shaping force into a single unit.

⁴⁷ e.g. *ibid.* 427.

⁴⁸ This is the kind of answer which Leibniz may have been happy with. In the

ings we are all naturally knowers,⁴⁹ and this ability naturally develops as we mature as human beings. There is, of course, variation in the degree to which different individuals develop their pregnancy, as we saw in the contrasts between the LLM and the LHM. The LLM failed to develop his pregnancy in the right environment and so delivered only images. This variation in epistemic performance shows a dependency in part on external factors. But the same could be said for our physical development. Two individuals with the same genetic make-up may develop differently according to nourishment, exercise, and other external factors. The parallel between physical and epistemic development is a feature of Plato's account which suggests that epistemic development, like our physical development, is grounded in our natural maturation as human beings.

This feature of the account may also increase its modern appeal. For Chomsky, who is largely responsible for the recent revival of innatism, makes the following proposal:

It is a curious fact about the intellectual history of the past few centuries that physical and mental development have been approached in quite different ways. No one would take seriously the proposal that the human organism learns through experience to have arms rather than wings, or that the basic structure of particular organs results from accidental experience. Rather, it is taken for granted that the physical structure of the organism is genetically determined, though of course variation along such dimensions as size, rate of development, and so forth will depend in part on external factors . . . The development of personality, behavior patterns, and cognitive structures in higher organisms has often been approached in a very different way. It is generally assumed that in these domains, social environment is the dominant factor. The structures of mind that develop over time are taken to be arbitrary and accidental; there is no 'human nature' apart from what develops as a specific historical product . . . But human cognitive systems, when seriously investigated, prove to be no less marvelous and intricate than the physical structures that develop in the life of the organism. Why, then, should we not study the acquisition of a cognitive structure such as language more or less as we study some complex

New Essays he seems to say that the resources of the soul are simply a natural part of its make-up, too, asking 'Why could not nature also hide there an item of unacquired knowledge?' (*New Essays* 78; see also 86).

⁴⁹ Albeit to varying degrees, since there are those who are pregnant in their souls more than in their bodies, 209 A 1–2.

bodily organ? (N. Chomsky, *Reflections on Language* (New York, 1975), 9–11)⁵⁰

Chomsky's parallel between the development of our physical and cognitive structures recalls Plato's suggestion in the *Symposium* that our epistemic and ethical abilities emerge in much the same way as physical abilities. They are part of 'human nature' and develop as part of our natural maturation. If so, then Chomsky may have a further reason for acknowledging his Platonic heritage.

5. Conclusion

I hope to have shown that Socrates' account of how the lover is able to beget true virtue begins before the start of the ascent at 210A1, the traditional interpretative starting-point. In order to appreciate how the lover's progress leads to a successful delivery of virtue, we must first appreciate the nature of the psychic pregnancy which he is bringing to term. Once we have integrated the notion of pregnancy into the account of the lover's progress, we can see that it is an important part of the description of how the lover attains knowledge. We can also appreciate the difference between the lovers of the lower and the higher mysteries: as Hippocrates noted, it requires much care and knowledge to bring a child to birth. Cognitive development is, in this respect, like physical development. With the notion of psychic pregnancy in play, the account ascribes to the senses and experience a similar role in the explanation of progress towards knowledge to that in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, and it can therefore be relocated as part of the same rationalist tradition. But the notion of psychic pregnancy is a distinctive contribution to this tradition. In the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* Plato articulated his rationalism by assimilating it to a familiar model, namely, discovering that you have known something all along because you once knew it but then forgot it. This model had the consequence of forcing Plato to earmark a prior time when we originally had the knowledge, a time which, it turned out, could only be pre-natal. Whether this consequence was in his eyes a disadvantage or not is a separate question, since, as we can see from the *Phaedo*, it did at least appear to offer independent arguments for the soul's discarnate existence, a no-

⁵⁰ Cf. S. Pinker, *The Language Instinct* (London, 1995), 9–10.

tion Plato was clearly attracted to in some dialogues. By making the Socrates of the *Symposium* innocent of any doctrine of the soul's intrinsic immortality, Plato keeps his immortality thesis and his epistemology independent of each other. In the *Symposium* Plato accounts for our ability to find the truth within ourselves, not by assimilation to the remembering model, but through the notion of embryonic knowledge. In doing so, he finds a way of developing the notions of potentiality and actuality, a development which can help to reposition Plato in the innatist debate, and appease those innatists, like Leibniz, who have been disappointed with the 'wild metaphysical flights' involved in the doctrine of recollection.

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