

Articles

Platonic *Erôs* and What Men Call Love

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I can still recall the feeling of bewilderment I experienced at the age of seventeen when, during my first term in college, I encountered the following exchange between Socrates and Agathon in W.H.D. Rouse's translation of Plato's *Symposium*:

'Now then,' said Socrates, ' . . . say whether Love desires the object of his love?'

'Certainly,' said Agathon.

'Is it when he *has* what he desires and loves that he desires and loves it, or when he has not?'

'Most likely, when he has not,' said he.

'Come now,' said Socrates, 'let us run over again what has been agreed. Love is, first of all, of something; next, of those things which one lacks?'

'Yes,' he said.

'Well now, it has been agreed that he [Love] loves what he lacks and has not?'

'Yes,' he said.¹

What seemed self-evident to me at the time I read those words was exactly the reverse. To be able to love only what one lacks and does not have was a characteristic foible, I thought, of neurotics, or masochists, or extreme romantics, and indicated some psychological dysfunction impeding the formation of stable and intimate relationships. Successful, *healthy* love—as exemplified in the paradigm of emotional and erotic fulfillment held out to me by society: namely, marriage—consisted precisely in the love of what one had. Nor was my way of thinking so very different from that of the ancient Greeks. As Achilles says in the *Iliad*, ὅς τις ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς καὶ ἐχέφρων/τὴν αὐτοῦ φιλέει καὶ κήδεται (ix 341-342: 'any man who is good and sensible loves and cares for her who is his own').

My bewilderment disappeared, of course, as soon as I could read the *Symposium* in the original and, thus, understand the point of the questions which Rouse had so puzzlingly rendered: Πότερον ἔχων αὐτὸ οὐ ἐπιθυμεῖ τε καὶ ἐρᾷ, εἴτα ἐπιθυμεῖ τε καὶ ἐρᾷ, ἢ οὐκ ἔχων; Οὐκοῦν ὠμολόγηται, οὐ ἐνδεής ἐστι καὶ μὴ ἔχει, τούτου ἐρᾶν; (200a, 201b). Plato, I discovered, was not discussing love at all but rather *erôs* (ἔρως), or

passionate sexual desire—a single aspect of what we normally consider love. Erotic passion for husband or wife is indeed an important component of any good marriage, for the Greeks as for us,² but neither culture is disposed to treat *erôs* as the affective basis of or the single most highly prized element in a life's partnership.³ As Achilles' remark implies, what predominates in a successful marriage, or even in a sexual relationship of any duration, is not desire but love, not *erôs* but *philia* (φιλία).⁴ The relation of *erôs* to *philia* in marriage and the priorities governing the operation of each are set forth with unusual explicitness by Phaedrus in Plato's *Symposium* (179b-c); the import of Phaedrus' mythological allusion has been aptly summarized as follows: 'Alcestis had *philia* for her husband, Admetus, and so did his parents; but "because of her *erôs* for him she so surpassed them in *philia*" that she was willing to die in his place, while they were not.'⁵ In other words, her love for Admetus—the fundamental motive force behind her act of self-sacrifice—was a strong and militant love because it happened to be accompanied by the *additional ingredient* of erotic passion. Similarly, the Athenian Stranger in Plato's *Laws* claims that one of the beneficial results of restricting men's possible sexual partners to the women from whom they can hope for legitimate offspring will be to make them *oikeioi* and *philoï*, affectionately attached, to their own wives (839b),⁶ and that, after all, is the mark of a successful marriage.⁷ In the *Symposium*, however, Socrates was questioning Agathon about *erôs* and *epithymia*—about sexual desire, then, not love or *philia*—and, as Rouse's version properly emphasizes, it is obvious that one cannot desire and long for the enjoyment of an object which one already possesses and enjoys (except in the sense of wishing to continue to enjoy it, as Socrates explains [200d]).⁸

Modern efforts to gain an accurate historical understanding of Platonic love have been as frequently betrayed by the application of the term 'love' to Plato's theory as they have been by the changing significance of the term 'Platonic.' To be sure, the vulgar meaning of 'Platonic love' has long been in disgrace among students of classical Greek literature, accustomed as they are to cautioning their less wary colleagues in other branches of learning that there is hardly anything 'Platonic' about either the erotic doctrine articulated by Diotima in Plato's *Symposium* or the ideal relationship between lover and beloved envisaged by Socrates in Plato's *Phaedrus*.⁹ The French, Thomas Gould informs us, have even gone so far as to devise a terminology that distinguishes between the popular and authentic conceptions of Plato's theory by differentiating *amour platonique* from *amour platonicien*.¹⁰ Similarly, every teacher of Greek knows that it is not legitimate to regard the word *erôs* in Attic usage generally or in Plato's writings specifically as an exact equivalent of 'love' in modern English, but specialists have been slow to confront the full implications and consequences of that fact. Indeed, even scholars familiar with the philosophical texts in the original are still in the habit of thinking and writing about the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* as if the central topic of those dialogues were love as we currently understand the word. Thomas Gould—to choose only the example nearest to hand—remarks that Plato 'will try to extend love to include all desire',¹¹ whereas in fact the reverse is more likely to be true: Plato enlarges the scope of desire (for that is what *erôs* primarily signifies) until it has become—if not the foundation for a theory of all love, as Gould claims¹²—at least a substitute and replacement for other, more conventional ways of formulating the affective basis of human choice and motivation. More recently, Irving Singer and

Gregory Vlastos have each adjudged the Platonic theory deficient as a philosophy of love and have elicited, in turn, a spirited defense of its adequacy from Plato's partisans.¹³ I propose to argue that if we do not require Plato to bear the unnecessary burden of satisfying our criteria for a coherent philosophy of love (in the full sense of the word), we shall not only be more just in our criticisms of him but may also eliminate a number of obstacles to appreciating the subtlety, relevance, and originality of his thought.

I

In attempting to distinguish between the meanings of *erôs* in Greek and 'love' in English we can no longer appeal to the facile historicism of those who consider love an invention of the twelfth century or who deny the existence of a word for 'love' in ancient Greek.¹⁴ As Vlastos and K.J. Dover have each demonstrated in different connections, the verb *philein* and its derivatives come close to signifying in classical Greek much of what we today signify by 'love';¹⁵ if *philia* does not *mean* quite the same thing as 'love', it at least *refers* to much the same thing as the English word. Plato concerns himself with *philia* in the *Republic*, whose interlocutors envisage an ideal society consolidated by the fraternal love of its citizens,¹⁶ and he devotes the *Lysis* to exploring the weaknesses of the traditional ways of conceiving *philia* in Greek culture;¹⁷ he also appears to share the conventional tendency of his age to ascribe bonding in nature and in society to the operation of *philia* (e.g., *Gorg.* 507e-508a; *Soph.* 242e-243a; *Tim.* 32c; *Alc. Maj.* 126c-127d).¹⁸ It is all the more noteworthy, then, that in his most detailed investigations of the phenomenon of attraction or bonding between individual human beings Plato should choose to emphasize the role not of *philia* but of *erôs*.

According to Vlastos, *erôs* differs from *philia* in at least three important respects: '(i) it is more intense, more passionate . . . ; (ii) it is more heavily weighted on the side of desire than of affection (*desire, longing*, are the primary connotations of *erôs*, *fondness* that of *philia*); (iii) it is more closely tied to the sexual drive (though *philein* may also refer to sexual love . . .): for non-incestuous familial love one would have to turn to *philia* in lieu of *erôs* . . . '

¹⁹ Dover defines *erôs* succinctly as the 'intense desire for a particular individual as a sexual partner' and goes on to observe, 'The word is not used, except rhetorically or humorously, of the relations between parents and children, brothers and sisters, masters and servants or rulers and subjects.'²⁰ Because, as Dover remarks, *erôs* is thought of chiefly as 'a response to the stimulus of visual beauty', it is not necessarily evoked by the entire complex of admirable or lovable qualities possessed by the person who serves as its target.²¹ In short, *erôs* conventionally refers in Greek to the passionate longing awakened in us by the appeal of physical beauty. Plato's inquiry into the nature of 'erotics' (τὰ ἐρωτικά)—whatever its ultimate goal—is concerned in the first instance not with the emotion or sensation of love, however defined, but with the phenomenon of attraction between people, with what we would now call sexual desire. To say that, of course, is not to imply that Plato's theory of *erôs* purports to account for the positive, physiological and behavioral, facts of human sexuality as we currently understand them; sexual desire represents a proper subject of study for an erotic philosopher not insofar as it can be described as something specifically *sexual*—that is, as a biophysical process—but insofar as it

can be described as an expression of intentionality—that is, as a manifestation of the capacity of mental events to be directed to objects and states of affairs in the world.²² Although we often choose to employ a certain delicate periphrasis in speaking of sexual desire and call it, accordingly, ‘love’,²³ we must realize that by *erôs* Plato refers not to love in the global sense in which we often intend that word but to one kind or aspect of love—or, rather, to the intense *desire* which often goes by the name of love. That there does not exist in English a totally satisfactory way of expressing the exact meaning of *erôs* (we cannot, after all, substitute for ‘lover’ some other word such as ‘desirer’) only increases our obligation to be conceptually clear in our efforts to elucidate Plato’s erotic theory.

Proust’s Baron de Charlus may well have been correct in pointing out the essential affinities between all forms of passionate love, irrespective of object (whether mistress or daughter),²⁴ but the greater precision of Greek terminology makes it nonetheless absurd to expect the Platonic *erôs* to account for all love, especially for the love between parents and children or between siblings in any context short of incest. Anyone who approaches Plato with a contrary assumption is doomed to disappointment, as Singer discovered: ‘One turns to Plato in the hope of learning about human relations, specifically about the phenomenon known as love. . . . [But] Platonic love [does not] really explicate the nature of love itself’, reducing as it does ‘married love, parental love, filial love, love of humanity to mere imperfect approaches to the philosopher’s love’.²⁵ The real wonder, of course, is not that Plato treats those other kinds of love as by-products, in some sense, of *erôs* (that was an option which contemporary conceptions of *erôs* left open to him)²⁶ but that he manages to work them into his erotic doctrine at all. Even stranger than Singer’s attack is L.A. Kosman’s defense of the Platonic *erôs* as a summons of the beloved object to its true nature: Kosman cites, as paradigmatic examples of the love that calls us to ourselves, relationships ‘not with people we are necessarily attracted to or choose’ but rather with ‘parents, family, children, perhaps above all one’s self’.²⁷ Those are obviously the very persons whom the Greeks would be *least* inclined to consider permissible—or even possible²⁸—objects of *erôs*. In fact, Plato admits as much quite explicitly: in the supposedly Lysianic oration recited by Phaedrus in the dialogue which bears his name, the speaker attempts to discount the noble affection obtaining between passionate lovers by the following appeal to common sense. ‘If however you are disposed to think that there can be no firm friendship [*philia*, or “love”] save with a lover [*erôn*, or “one who happens to desire you passionately”], you should reflect that in that case we should not set store by sons, or fathers, or mothers, nor should we possess any trustworthy friends [*philoî*]: no, it is not to erotic passion [*epithymia toiautê*, or “sexual desire”] that we owe these . . . ’ (233d).²⁹ And in the *Symposium* Socrates is even more emphatic: γελοῖον γὰρ ἂν εἴη τὸ ἐρώτημα εἰ Ἐρως ἐστὶν ἔρως μητρὸς ἢ πατρὸς . . . (199d: ‘for it would be ridiculous to ask whether *Erôs* were *erôs* for mother or father’). If we did not insist on pressing the Platonic *erôs* into service as a theory of love in general, we would be more likely to avoid such elementary misapprehensions.

The Platonic *erôs*, then, refers in the first instance not to love but to sexual attraction. There are, however, many ways of interpreting the intentionality of sexual desire, and here the evidence indicates that Plato’s outlook was radically different from that of most of his contemporaries.³⁰ In Greek *erôs* originally meant any longing capable

of satisfaction, and for Athenians of Plato's day *erôs* still retained the sense which it, or its ancestor, possesses in the conventional Homeric phrase, αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο ('when they had expelled their *eros* of food and drink').³¹ In other words, even when the Greeks had largely transferred the operation of *erôs* to the more specialized arena of personal relations,³² they continued to understand it by analogy with hunger and thirst:³³ throughout the classical period *erôs*—and sexual desire in general—is treated by our sources as one of the necessities, or innate compulsions, of human nature³⁴ (and against necessity, as Simonides said, even the gods do not fight).³⁵ Like hunger or thirst, the desire aroused in us by the sight of a beautiful human form is a longing capable of satisfaction, according to the ordinary Greek conception, inasmuch as it aims at the physical possession of a real and attainable object in the world; once that object has been attained, possessed, and consumed in the sexual act, the longing for it disappears. Just as the object sought by hunger must, in order to qualify as a possible source of gratification, be pleasing to the stomach, so the object sought by *erôs* is conventionally required to be pleasing to the eye: 'from beholding derives man's desiring', the tragic poet Agathon wrote, employing a specious and untranslatable etymological pun that continued to be echoed throughout the succeeding centuries.³⁶ In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle furnishes, as he so often does, a rather more systematic formulation of the popular conception; he traces the source or origin (ἀρχή) of *erôs* to the pleasure afforded by sight (ἡ διὰ τῆς ὀψεως ἡδονή), adding that no one experiences *erôs* who has not first been attracted by a person's visual form (προησθεις τῇ ἰδέᾳ)—though such attraction, Aristotle is careful to point out, while necessary, is not of course in and of itself a sufficient condition of erotic passion (ix 1167a4-7; cf. Plutarch, *Mor.*, fr. 134 [Sandbach]). An approximation to the Greek outlook on *erôs* can be found closer to our own day in the *Songs and Sonets* of John Donne, who at one point describes his previous amorous activity as the pursuit of 'any beauty I did see, Which I desir'd, and got'. In our more ramified and categorical vocabulary hunger, thirst, and *erôs* so conceived would properly be termed *appetites*, and in what follows I shall use 'appetite'—at least, provisionally—to signify a longing for the physical gratification of a need, a longing whose immediate aim is the possession and consumption of an object in the world.

The object-directed, acquisitive, and consummatory character of *erôs* as it is traditionally understood in Greek culture is expressed metaphorically in the lyric poetry of the archaic period by the recurring image of amorous pursuit and flight, hunting and capture (or escape), διώκειν and φεύγειν.³⁷ The conceit is elaborated in the almost formulaic comparison of the lover to a wild beast, usually a lion, and the beloved to its prey, usually a fawn;³⁸ the implication seems to be that in the sexual act one person becomes the object and possession of another.³⁹ To be sure, whenever the lover's attempt to possess his beloved is frustrated, postponed, or prohibited, *erôs* is liable to turn into that acquisitive obsession and characteristic overvaluation of the individual object which constitute sexual passion.⁴⁰ But the passion of *erôs* still falls within the class of desires capable of definitive satisfaction, in the customary Greek way of thinking, because it can be assuaged and eventually eliminated by repeated sexual intercourse. Hence, the importance for a lover's emotional hygiene of a speedy consummation of his desire.⁴¹ In Menander's *Dyskolos*, for example, the highly practical (if ignoble) Chaireas—sounding a bit like the Vicomte de Valmont in *Les Liai-*

*sons Dangereuses*⁴²—maintains that τὸ μὲν βραδύνειν γὰρ τὸν ἔρωτ' αὔξει πολὺ, / ἐν τῷ ταχέως δ' ἔνεστι παύσασθαι ταχύ (62-63: 'for slowness [in achieving gratification] greatly increases *erôs*, but in swiftness there is swift surcease'). The gods conduct their own amorous affairs with a similar despatch: when Apollo, in Pindar's Ninth Pythian, is about to 'accomplish the delicious conclusion of mating', the poet admiringly remarks, ὡκεῖα δ' ἐπειγομένων ἤδη θεῶν/πρᾶξις ὁδοί τε βραχεῖται (68-69: 'the action of gods in their urgency is quick and their ways are short').

It was, therefore, not uncharacteristic for a Greek lover to plead, 'Let me have what I ask of you so that I can get rid of my *erôs*: put me out of my misery.'⁴³ Such a plea testifies to the temporary, albeit intense, fluctuations of *erôs* and identifies it as an appetite. (Demosthenes speaks quite seriously about the extravagance of a traitor who wastes his ill-gotten wealth on 'whores and fish' [xix 229]: see, also, Plutarch, *Mor.* 750d-e; cf. Aristophanes, *Nub.* 1073; Athenaeus, xiii 592f.) It was doubtless in order to protect potential victims from the tyranny of *erôs* that Xenophon's Socrates (*Mem.* i 3.14), much like his Antisthenes (*Symp.* 4.38), advised the ordinary man to procure the easiest and cheapest release of sexual tension on those occasions when he is troubled by it.⁴⁴ That attitude was taken to its logical conclusion by Diogenes the Cynic,⁴⁵ whose famous masturbatory gesture later earned Galen's approval on hygienic grounds (*De loc. aff.* vi 5 [8.419 K]),⁴⁶ and by Lucretius in book 4 of his *De rerum natura*. Adapting the Epicurean doctrine about the propriety of gratifying natural and necessary pleasures (among which Epicurus himself probably did not include sex, however),⁴⁷ Lucretius counselled any man likely to be beset by *amor* to obtain the minimal requisite satisfaction owed to nature by periodically jettisoning his accumulated seminal fluid into the nearest convenient human receptacle (*in corpora quaeque*: 1065)⁴⁸ in order to preserve the tranquillity of his soul (cf. Galen, *De loc. aff.* vi 6 [8.450-51 K]). Lucretius based that precept on a bizarre physiological theory, but his general outlook is informed by a perfectly orthodox classical assumption, namely, that *amor* is a natural appetite which can be rationally gratified and only becomes passionate (that is, pathological—a νόσος or 'disease', literally speaking) when it is afforded no release.⁴⁹ Similarly Horace, in an Epicurean mood, praised *parabilis Venus facilisque* (*Serm.* i 2.119: cf. Martial ix 32). Such an outlook on sexuality is already implicit in the Homeric formula which, as we have seen, assimilates *erôs* to the status of an appetite.

II

Plato, of course, was fully acquainted with the contemporary Greek attitude to sexuality. He subjects it to merciless ridicule in the *Phaedrus*, where it provides the ideological basis for a highly disreputable and paradoxical speech alleged to be the work of Lysias.⁵⁰ What, after all, could be a better illustration of the folly of the conventional outlook than the Lysianic speaker's claim that, since the sexual urge is safer and more economical to indulge than erotic passion, a handsome youth should submit only to the advances of one who does *not* passionately desire him? As Socrates remarks, one might as well argue that boys should favor the poor instead of the rich, the old instead of the young (227c). Assuming the persona of an older man who is in the process of negotiating the surrender of the youth in question, Lysias had argued that the μὴ ἐρῶν (*mê erôn*, 'non-lover') acts willingly, not out of ἀνάγκη or compul-

sion, and so retains complete control of his affairs and of himself (231a); he therefore behaves more discreetly and more rationally than the lover, and is better able to promote both his own interests and those of his partner (231e-234c).⁵¹ As Josef Pieper comments, the Lysianic speaker displays a supreme concern for psychological hygiene and for efficiency in matters of human intercourse: 'The scarcely dissimulated sensuality is combined with a scientific interest in techniques for living.'⁵² But Lysias' argument also depends on the traditional assumption that sexual desire is a natural appetite which can and ought to be rationally gratified. Only on that assumption can the speaker portray himself as a sensible, realistic, and virtuous individual properly engaged in the pursuit of his own as well as other people's advantage, while depicting the lover as a dangerous lunatic caught in the grip of an intense and transient passion. In Plato's Greek, however, the irony of the Lysianic position is palpable. For *erôs* customarily refers not only to sexual passion but also to sexual attraction *tout court*,⁵³ and the Lysianic speaker encourages us to identify those two meanings of *erôs* by reserving the word *epithymia*, the more general Greek term for appetite or desire, *not* for his own rallying-cry, *not* in order to distinguish his own—putatively wholesome—motive from that of the lover's, as one might have expected (cf. 237d4-5), but solely to specify the content of the lover's *erôs* (231a3, 232b2, 232e4, 232e6, 233b1, 233d3, 234a7):⁵⁴ the lover's true motive, in other words, is not erotic passion but physical lust. The result of that insinuation is to make the motives of the 'non-lover' completely opaque: What does the *mê erôn* want, and why has he mounted such an elaborate argument if indeed he does not himself feel any *erôs*, any desire, for the boy? Socrates removes the difficulty in his reformulation of Lysias' speech by introducing the crucial proviso that the speaker really *is* attracted to the youth in question but has determined to conceal and deny his *erôs* for the purpose of rhetorical effectiveness (237b).⁵⁵ Socrates thereby reveals Lysias' argument to be a sham, a mischievous attempt to cloak the true nature of *erôs* beneath a show of sweet reasonableness. The *Phaedrus* as a whole is predicated on a very different assumption, namely, that *erôs* is not a natural appetite⁵⁶ but an irrational—or, rather, supra-rational—passion, a *mania*:⁵⁷ however temporary or fluctuating in its manifestations, *erôs* by its very nature is ultimately a transcendental force.

The picture of erotic desire that emerges from Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium* and is later confirmed, with some alterations, in its authority by Diotima is wholly unlike the conventional Greek view of sexuality as a natural, rationally gratifiable appetite. Aristophanes' myth addresses the question which is asked with increasing urgency throughout the *Symposium* and which Plato, it seems, continued to ask throughout his life: What does the lover really want? What is the ultimate aim of *erôs*?⁵⁸ Aristophanes' charming story of the eight-limbed aboriginal creatures cut in half by Zeus is designed to prepare us to accept the truly radical solution to the puzzle of erotic intentionality which Hephaestus will propose at the myth's conclusion. When the double beings who were our ancestors, according to Aristophanes, were first bisected and later reunited, the two halves of each former individual were far from being satisfied in the mutual possession of their complements.⁵⁹ Rather, they clung to one another so desperately that they perished for lack of sustenance (191a-b).⁶⁰ Zeus eventually took pity on them and moved their genitals to the side their bodies faced, so that they might have some requital of their desire and turn it, if homosexual, to

productive or, if heterosexual, to reproductive ends (191b-c).⁶¹ But the delightful possibility of sexual consummation does not answer to the most fundamental aspect of the desperate longing we experience; the new sexual apparatus has been deliberately contrived in such a way as to prove laughably inadequate to the task of realizing our innate desire for wholeness. Sex is a substitute for what we really desire but are no longer in a position to demand: it is something inauthentic insofar as it was invented to displace and replace our striving for that true nature from which we had been forcibly alienated.⁶² Classical and modern assumptions to the contrary notwithstanding, then, sexual intercourse is not the ultimate aim of sexual desire, according to Aristophanes. What is? Not even an experienced lover is likely to know the answer. Those who spend their whole lives together 'could not say what they wish to gain from one another', Aristophanes remarks. 'No one would think it was sexual intercourse', he adds, 'or that for the sake of sex each partner so earnestly enjoys his union with the other. But it is clear that the soul of each lover wants something else, which it is not able to say, but it divines what it wants and hints at it' (192c-d; cf. *Resp.* 505d-e). Aristophanes hypothesizes that if Hephaestus were to approach two lovers while they were in bed having sex and ask them whether they wished to be fused, to be joined so intimately to one another as to become a single being, they would instantly recognize the true goal of their desire. *Erôs*, Aristophanes concludes in a famous sentence, is nothing else but the name we give to the desire and pursuit of the whole (192d-193a).

That does not mean, however, that *erôs* in Aristophanes' myth represents a love of whole persons, as Martha Nussbaum claims.⁶³ On the contrary: Aristophanes' fragmentary beings desire one another not for the sake of one another but for the sake of individual self-fulfillment and existential restoration. Hence, individuals belonging to the same gender are fungible for erotic purposes: Aristophanes recounts that when one half of a former double being died, the remaining half, having lost possession of its original complement, would seek out another individual of the same gender and repeat with him or her the embrace he had earlier assayed with the half of himself he had lost (191b). Desire for Aristophanes, and for Plato as well, is transference in the Freudian sense: it is shaped by a primary object-choice and displaced from an originary object onto substitutes for it ('surrogates') that resemble it generically in certain crucial respects and are chosen on the model of the originary object. The individual features of any particular object, besides those—such as gender—that qualify it for admission to the more general class of possible vehicles of libidinal investment, are apparently of no importance for erotic bonding.

The psychological implications of Aristophanes' celebrated myth are startling. Aristophanes in effect posits two distinct and discontinuous longings in human beings: first, a longing for transcendental union with an originary object subsequently lost in an archaic trauma—a longing that antedates the development of the sexual organs and is, therefore, not essentially sexual by nature—and, second, a longing for sexual union with specific human beings which, though in principle satisfiable, has its source in the antecedent urge to recover an existential wholeness that is forever beyond the power of physical sex to achieve.⁶⁴ As Singer remarks, Aristophanes' myth—despite its optimistic finale (193c-d)—is Plato's way of illustrating 'the futility of sex. For he knows that it does *not* enable the lovers to melt into one another.'⁶⁵ Sexual posses-

sion of the beloved object, however much we may seek it, is but the immediate, proximate aim of erotic desire, on this view, not its true goal or terminus, for sex ultimately cannot fulfill the primaeval longing for transpersonal union which the beloved object awakens in us. Physical sex is doomed in principle to frustration, then, because the erotic aim transcends its ostensible object.⁶⁶ If sexual desire *could* be sexually realized, the act of physical sex would lead to the annihilation of one or both of the lovers, as Aristotle drily observed in his one allusion to this passage (*Pol.* ii 1262b14-15; cf. *GA* i 731a10-15), and so it would hold for us all the terror of Rilke's angel at the start of the *Duino Elegies*—that awesome, elaborately uninvoked presence in whose thrilling and dread embrace we should instantly dissolve. But sexual intercourse is inadequate to the expression of sexual desire, according to this account: it is a stupid, clumsy sort of groping towards that which is by definition 'lost' to it, a gross attempt to literalize our longing for transpersonal union.

So much for erotic psychology. In the domain of metaphysics, Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium* contains the first hint of Plato's unprecedented and shattering discovery that the genuine object of *erôs*—whatever it is—does not belong to the same order of reality as the objects intended by the human appetites. Instead of an empirical, bounded, localized, and therefore (theoretically, if not always actually) attainable entity in the world, the object of *erôs* turns out to be something more elusive, perhaps ineffable; it can only be described by means of a mythopoeic image ('one's other half'). Erotics is not a science but a mystery: as Aristophanes emphasizes, the identity of the object we truly desire whenever we are attracted to someone remains hidden from us.⁶⁷ It is, apparently, an idea or value of some sort (e.g., *oikeiôtês*, or the sense of belonging to oneself: *Symp.* 192c1) that mediates all individual, proximate objects of desire and makes them instrumental to the eternally thwarted realization of an ideal state of affairs (e.g., 'wholeness'), thereby lending them a specious attractiveness which they in turn focus or reflect to those who desire them.

The immense conceptual gulf that separates Aristophanes' view of *erôs* from the traditional Greek outlook is already plain. *Erôs* can no longer be classed together with hunger and thirst among the desires capable of satisfaction: the 'whole' which Aristophanes' lovers seek is not only physically inaccessible to them; its attainment lies under the eternal interdict of the gods. *Erôs* is, therefore, an endless, unterminating, perpetual desire. Although in any specific instance my *erôs* may appear to be focused or fixated on an empirical entity outside myself—namely, my beloved (whether conceived as a 'whole person' or simply as a 'body')—it cannot be consummated by possessing that entity because its true aim is not the simple acquisition of its desired object but a self-transcending union with it.⁶⁸ That goal endows sexual desire with its obsessiveness but forever eludes mere sexuality.

The function of Aristophanes' myth within the larger design of Plato's argument in the *Symposium* can be characterized in both negative and positive terms: on the one hand, it demolishes the conventional Greek conception of *erôs* as an appetite and thereby clears the ground on which Diotima will later erect the intellectual edifice of her erotic theory; on the other hand, it renders some of the central tenets of that theory accessible to a general audience by rehearsing them in a poetic (or, at least, non-discursive) form. One need hardly subscribe to a transcendental ontology, after all, in order to recognize in Aristophanes' myth an accurate and compelling descrip-

tion of what it feels like to be powerfully attracted to someone, and so the myth provides the non-philosophical reader with a basis in ordinary human experience for initiation into the mystery of Platonic erotics. Plato, in effect, secures our assent in advance to Diotima's account of human sexuality by embedding her premises in a symbolic transcript of the workings of our erotic psychology. In this way he persuades us to accept the myth's philosophical implications before we have become fully aware of what they are; he manages to suggest—without, however, venturing as yet to specify it—something about the very nature of passionate sexual desire that cries out for a metaphysical explanation.

III

Plato is the first person on record to distinguish sharply and clearly between sexual *appetite* and sexual *desire*.⁶⁹ 'Appetite' and 'desire', as I understand those terms (stipulatively, though not—I trust—improperly), differ from one another chiefly in this respect: *appetite* refers to a longing for pleasure (physical pleasure, most commonly) which aims at and is capable of achieving terminal gratification, usually by means of possessing some object in the world; *desire*, by contrast, cannot be definitively satisfied, certainly not by acquiring its object, because it is aroused by a perception of value in things and so neither terminates in nor is fully consummated by the possession of any concrete entity. Every passionate longing for sexual union with a particular human being qualifies as a genuine instance of *desire*, in Plato's view, because the very intensity, exclusivity, and ultimate futility of such a passion point to the presence, in the beloved, of a cherished value or idea logically distinct from and ontologically independent of the particular individual who happens to instantiate it. Hence, all immediate objects of sexual desire are at best instrumental and at worst illusory or unreal (as Aristophanes' myth implies), since what sexual desire aims to realize is an ideal state of affairs (e.g., 'wholeness') whose defining features have been identified in advance by the lover's soul and are but tenuously connected to the empirical world of separate and autonomous objects—objects which glimmer momentarily with significance as desire passes over them.

Plato is the first theorist of desire in this sense. He must therefore be reckoned the founder, or at least the precursor, of the intellectual traditions and critical methodologies which have come into prominence in our own age. The concept of desire as an endless longing that seeks not to satisfy but to perpetuate itself figures importantly in philosophical phenomenology from Hegel onwards; it has been popularized recently by French theoreticians such as Lacan, Barthes, and René Girard. Plato's 'depth psychology'—his denial of any strict or necessary correspondence between the proximate and the ultimate objects and aims of sexual desire—should be congenial to Freudians of every complexion, and Plato's Aristophanes would appear to be in sympathy with those recent psychoanalytic revisionists who hold that all desire originates in infantile experiences of separation and loss.⁷⁰ Plato, however, does not go quite so far: Diotima will reveal that the authentic goal of *erôs*, though in some sense internal to the lover, is no psychological phantom (or 'self-object') but is ontologically grounded in reality.

Underlying Plato's distinction between sexual appetite and sexual desire, as we shall see, is a philosophical anatomy of human motivation that differentiates two basic types

or kinds of longing, corresponding respectively to what I have been calling *appetite* and *desire*, namely, the *appetitive* and the *erotic*; we have been concerned hitherto with the distinction between appetite and desire, between the appetitive and the erotic, only as it shapes and informs Plato's outlook on sexuality. The foregoing discussion has, therefore, not been intended to imply that Plato is interested principally in the sexual manifestation of *erôs*, however conceived, or that the chief purpose of his erotic doctrine is to provide a philosophically adequate analysis of the intentionality of sexual desire. Rather, it is we today, Plato's modern interpreters, who—despite the drift of our own intellectual traditions—tend to conceive erotic desire almost exclusively in sexual terms. In order to close the gap which has opened between Plato's outlook on *erôs* and our own, and in order not to lose sight of the experiential basis of Plato's erotic theory, it is necessary to emphasize the descriptive, psychosexual dimension of the Platonic *erôs*—just as Plato prepares the unwary reader for Diotima's theoretical exposition by prefacing it with Aristophanes' mythopoeic parable. Far from being essentially sexual in Plato's thinking, the erotics of personal attraction may simply reflect, on the individual level, the operation of the universal bond that holds the entire cosmos together (*Symp.* 202e);⁷¹ in attempting to lift Plato's erotic theory out of its larger context in his philosophical system we may well be perpetrating a kind of violence upon it. If, however, we allow Plato's erotic doctrine to remain submerged in its philosophical context, we are liable to neglect those features of it which account for its evidently urgent and pressing claims on the attention of modern readers.

My assumption throughout this paper, then, is not that Platonic *erôs* must be conceived wholly and exclusively as sexual desire but that, *whatever else it may be*, Platonic *erôs* does indeed *also* make sense as an analysis of the intentionality of sexual desire and demands to be taken seriously as such. For Plato, of course, the emphasis falls not on *sexual* desire but on *sexual desire*: that is, on erotic desire in its sexual manifestation (which is, to be sure, but a single species—merely one of the various manifestations or expressions—of erotic desire).⁷² If one wished to avoid the appearance of violating the norms of ordinary linguistic usage by attaching stipulated, technical meanings to common words, one might substitute for the distinction I have drawn between sexual appetite and sexual desire an equivalent distinction between the two types of longing (or 'desire' in the non-technical sense) that manifest themselves in the realm of sexual life: an appetitive longing (desire_A), corresponding to what I have been calling 'appetite', and an erotic longing (desire_E), corresponding to what I have been calling 'desire' proper. In what follows I shall invoke desire_A and desire_E whenever the use of 'sexual desire' is likely to create ambiguities. Our present task must be to define rather more precisely both the appetitive and the erotic versions of sexual longing, as Plato conceives them: What exactly are sexual desire_A and sexual desire_E?

In the *Symposium* (204d-206a) Diotima distinguishes her notion of *erôs* from the popular conception by arguing that erotic objects are desired for the sake of a good, either real or perceived. In the *Republic* (437d-439b), by contrast, Socrates explicates the nature of appetite—or *epithymia*, in Plato's Greek—by arguing that thirst itself is not a desire for good drink but simply for drink.⁷³ The basic difference between *erôs* and *epithymia* as Plato conceptualizes them (in those two passages, at least) is the difference between a good-dependent and a good-independent desire:⁷⁴ erotic desire incorporates an implicit, positive value-judgment about its object, whereas appetitive

desire expresses no such judgment—it merely aims at the gratification of a need (bodily replenishment, in the case of thirst), whether such gratification actually constitutes a good thing for the agent in the context of his present circumstances or not. The paradigmatic examples of *epithymia* in Plato's writings are hunger, thirst, and similar, pre-reflective physical needs (*Gorg.* 494b-c, 496c-497c, 504e-505a, 517d-519a; *Resp.* 437b-439d, 475b-c, 558d-559d; *Phlb.* 34d-35d; *Tim.* 70d-71b)—those needs which drive the soul 'like a beast' to obtain satisfaction, as Socrates colorfully remarks in the *Republic* (439b4; cf. Xenophon, *Hiero* 7.1-3). Although elsewhere in the same work Plato expands the epithymetic category to include other good-independent desires besides physical urges—e.g., corpse-gazing, in the case of Leontius (439e-440a), and money-making, in the case of the oligarchic man (580d-581a)⁷⁵—*epithymia* in its original formulation is a brute impulse, like the heroin addict's desire for a fix;⁷⁶ according to this conception, the sexual manifestation of *epithymia* (properly called *aphrodisia* [ἀφροδίσια] at 580e5, euphemistically τὸ δὲ ᾧ ἐρᾷ at 439d6)⁷⁷ would be the blind urge to copulate, an instinctual drive to obtain the sexual pleasure afforded by genital stimulation and release.⁷⁸

Plato's conceptualization of *erôs* and *epithymia* has several important consequences for his moral psychology. Whereas, first of all, the aim of *erôs* is the actualization of a good, the aim of *epithymia* is the achievement of *hêdonê*, by which Plato signifies the terminal gratification of a need (*Gorg.* 494a-507e, *Phlb.* 34c-40d): by *hêdonê* we may understand 'pleasure', then, only if by 'pleasure' we do not mean something apart from, or over and above, the satisfaction of an appetite.⁷⁹ Socrates illustrates appetitive intentionality in the *Gorgias* (494c-e) by likening *epithymia* to the urge to scratch an itch.⁸⁰ In the *Charmides* (167e), accordingly, the interlocutors agree—platitudinously enough—that the goal of *epithymia* is *hêdonê*, but the object of *erôs* is *ta kala* ('the beautiful'); similarly, in the *Hippias Major* (297e-304a) Socrates argues that sensual gratification produces τὸ ἡδύ ('the pleasant') but not *to kalon*. Just as Plato's prime examples of *epithymia* are hunger and thirst, so his favorite instances of *hêdonê* are eating and drinking (*Prot.* 337c; *Phdo.* 64d, 81b; *Phlb.* 31e-32c), and he frequently pairs *hêdonê* with *epithymia* (*Lach.* 191d-e; *Gorg.* 484d, 491d; *Phdo.* 81b, 83b; *Symp.* 196c, 207e; *Resp.* 430e, 431b-d, 559c, 571b; *Tim.* 86c; *Laws* 647d, 714a, 782e, 802b, 864b, 886a-b; cf. *Phdr.* 237d-238c; Aristotle, *EN* 1148a22, *PA* 661a7-9; Plutarch, *Mor.* 750e), almost as if one word were conceptually incomplete without the other.⁸¹ These semantic patterns and associations take on additional, philosophical significance in the light of Plato's tendency, evident as early as the *Gorgias* (500b-502c), to argue that it is possible to pursue gratification independently of the good; indeed, he sometimes appears to elevate the drive to *hêdonê* into a rival motivational principle—despite the implicit damage that does to the Socratic Paradox that no one errs willingly.⁸²

The predominant element in an erotic desire is the *object*, which holds out to the lover the promise of something good; the predominant element in an appetitive desire, by contrast, is the imperative to gratify a need, that is, the epithymetic *aim* which can be realized by means of any one of a number of possible objects. Hence, erotic desires are largely object-oriented, whereas appetitive desires are largely aim-oriented. The description of the intensional object of an appetitive desire, in other words, makes essential reference to the desire in question, whereas the description of the intensional

object of an erotic desire does not. In order to specify the proper object of an agent's unreflective thirst, for example, it is both necessary and sufficient, on this account, to refer merely to 'the thirst-quenching' or, just possibly (though I do not follow this line of reasoning here) to 'the good *qua* thirst-quenching'; the relevant goodness of an erotic object, however, cannot be fully specified solely in terms of its aptness as a vehicle for the agent's gratification. Thus, I desire_A this glass of water because I believe it will quench my thirst, but I desire_E my beloved because I find my beloved beautiful (where the meaning of 'beautiful' is not exhaustively defined as 'that property of my beloved which satisfies my desire_E for him/her').

To put the matter somewhat differently, appetitive desires are content-generic: they do not intend particularized objects. To be sure, appetites are normally *directed* to local, empirical objects (e.g., I desire to drink *this* glass of water because I am thirsty), but they are not excited by particular objects: they arise, rather, in response to needs which can be satisfied indifferently by any member of a more generalized class of things. If it is true that insofar as I am purely and simply thirsty (if I ever am) I desire_A not good drink but simply drink, then it follows that I do not desire_A this or that drink in particular *except* insofar as it is a drink and thereby answers to my need for bodily replenishment (cf. *Resp.* 437d-e). In any given situation, to be sure, I gratify my thirst by drinking *this* drink—whatever drink it is that I do drink—and, of course, I also desire_A the drink that I do drink. But I do not desire it in all its irreducible specificity or individuality—such that, in other words, if you take away my drink and give me another one just like it, I make a tremendous fuss—the point is that any old drink will do. (Such substitutions are not likely to work in the case of my beloved, however.) Sexual desire_A, if we follow out this logic, would be something on the order of Kinsey's notion of an unmediated impulse to sexual gratification irrespective of the object by means of which such gratification is procured, an impulse stemming from 'the capacity of an individual to respond erotically [by which Kinsey means 'with appetitive sexual desire'] to any sort of stimulus.'⁸³ By contrast, any desire which intends a specific object such that its conditions of satisfaction allow no substitutions necessarily implies a positive valuation of the desired object on the agent's part—more positive, at least, than merely 'good *qua* gratifying'—and, therefore, qualifies as an erotic desire.⁸⁴ Indeed, the more exclusive the fixation, the more we, along with Plato, are inclined to explain it by appealing to an 'erotic' factor—that is, by triangulating from the desiring subject and the desired object to some *tertium quid* distinct from both subject and object which lends value to the object in the subject's estimation and thereby mediates exclusive object-choice. No individual object can furnish in and of itself an exhaustive account of its own overriding attractiveness.

Thus, my preference for a particular pencil, although I have many pencils on my desk which write equally well, has something *fetishistic* about it. By calling that preference 'fetishistic', we signify that the ground of the valuation placed upon the individual object by the agent is obscure, inasmuch as the agent values the object in excess of—and out of all proportion to—its practical usefulness or innate attractiveness; therefore, the valuation placed upon the desired object can be explained only by reference to some other locus of value on which the agent draws in endowing the particular object with a meaning extrinsic to it. In order to account for the agent's overvaluation of an individual object, in other words, we are obliged to hypothesize that the desired

object manifests to the agent an idea or value which he prizes and which by virtue of its instantiation in the object of his desire 'causes' (i.e., supplies a reason for) him to fixate on it in particular. Without the ghostly intervention of a value-laden erotic factor in the business of selecting an object, the only considerations relevant to choosing among a plurality of objects belonging to the same genus are utilitarian (convenience, need, pleasure), and the agent's intentional mode is consequently appetitive.⁸⁵ But to prefer one member of a more general class is to distinguish it implicitly as good. Any content-specific desire must therefore be erotic—it cannot be merely appetitive.⁸⁶ It is easy to understand why, on this account, the Lysianic speaker's argument in the *Phaedrus*—his denial of being erotically aroused—must, as Socrates hypothesizes (237b), be a sham: the supposed *mê erôn* has, after all, set his sights on one boy in particular (227c6), and his claim not to experience any *erôs* is contradicted by the lengths to which he goes in order to seduce the specific individual who has excited his desire. Only if a lover achieves a measure of Platonic enlightenment, of profound and necessary self-understanding, does he come to see the object of his *erotic* desire, too, as content-generic in certain respects, and only then will he begin to relinquish his exclusive fixation on it in particular (*Symp.* 210a8-b6: I shall examine this claim more closely in section 5, below).

Sexual attraction expresses a genuinely erotic and not merely an appetitive desire, according to Plato, whenever the sexual object is desired for the valued qualities it manifests to the lover, not merely for its usefulness as an instrument of sexual pleasure.⁸⁷ Plato's account of the 'triangulation'⁸⁸ implicit in all erotic desire, including sexual desire_E, is not simply a logical consequence of the structure of his metaphysics: it also helps to explicate the nature of passionate sexual desire itself by emphasizing the 'mental factor' at work in it.⁸⁹ We are all fetishists in our erotic life insofar as we tend to find certain isolated human features (such as a specific eye color) more immediately appealing than others. Freud accounted for such preferences by referring us to an erotic *tertium quid* in the form of internal objects, transferences, invisible others, and the like; his famous dictum that the sexual act is a process in which four persons are involved reckons with the ghostly, triangulated object intended by each lover in addition to the real individual who serves as his or her sexual partner. Did not Proust also enunciate, and tirelessly illustrate, the precept that '*L'amour le plus exclusif pour une personne est toujours l'amour d'autre chose*'?⁹⁰ Every passionate lover is *necessarily* an idealist, on this view, because sexual desire_E is always mediated by an idea or value in which the erotic object participates. So long as a sexual desire is erotic and not merely appetitive, in other words, there is nothing essentially or irreducibly *sexual* about it. The *apparently* sexual characteristics or qualities of the desire result from the fact that the object in question can, in principle at least, be sexually enjoyed and that the erotic value desired by the lover manifests itself in a sensuous medium. But this fact about the object and the medium of its value does not determine the intentional structure of the lover's desire: it does not explain why what might simply have been an impulse for sexual gratification turns out instead to be a passionate longing for something precious, a longing excited by the aura of value surrounding and suffusing the sexual object—by those very aspects of it, in short, that defy sexual possession. What is essential to sexual desire_E, then, and what such desire has in common with other kinds of erotic desire, is its mediation by an idea

of the good.

Sexual desire_E is erotic desire that for various reasons (some of which I shall consider shortly) has become sexually thematized. But in being directed and attached to sexual objects, it never forfeits its essentially erotic character. Even when the immediate object of sexual desire_E is wholly physical, the lover's response to it is not irreducibly sexual:⁹¹ what thrills and fascinates me about the body of my beloved is not any particular somatic feature *per se* but rather the implicit meaning or value which the combination of those features expresses to me.⁹² If certain physical characteristics appear to arouse my sexual desire_E whenever I encounter them, they do so *not* because they are naturally desirable in and of themselves but because they evoke in me a set of private—though, no doubt, widely shared—associations. An object excites sexual desire_E if and only if it can accommodate the largely predetermined configuration of ideas, values, and associations that comprise the lover's erotic ideal and thereby define for him the scope of what is attractive. That love is blind is an ancient truth; Plato explains the blindness of desire by arguing that the lover cannot fully discern the individuating features of his beloved in the dazzling light of the ulterior value which his beloved focuses and reflects to him (cf. *Phdr.* 233b, 251a-253b; *Resp.* 474d-475a, 601b).

In no case, then, is an individual the terminal object of desire, whether such desire be erotic or appetitive. Love or attachment to an individual object may perhaps be philosophically perspicuous,⁹³ but desire for an individual object in and of itself is not. Thus, both the objects of *epithymia* and the objects of *erôs* are fungible, according to Plato; they are fungible, however, for quite different reasons: the objects of appetite are *samples*, whereas the objects of erotic desire are *instances* or *manifestations*.⁹⁴ What I desire_A whenever I am thirsty is to drink a certain quantity of potable liquid in order to quench my thirst. I do not, to be sure, desire_A the beverage I drink for all its co-extensive properties (such as the property of being compounded of hydrogen and oxygen): rather, I desire_A it under the description of gratifying my need for bodily replenishment. Hence, I may even fail to specify the precise content of an appetitive object, asking my host simply for 'something cold to drink'. The object of such a request will turn out to be a sample of a stuff that is in fact widely distributed throughout the world; whatever answers, in any specific case, to my appetitive desire for drink can be thought of as a quantity or sample of a 'scattered object'—the kind of object normally designated by a mass term⁹⁵—because it is no less available in the beer my host serves a fellow-guest than it is in the soda-water he serves me. The few ounces of cold liquid I happen to drink in order to satisfy my thirst represent, then, an actual sample of the scattered, potable stuff of which I desire to drink a certain quantity whenever I am thirsty.

But what I desire_E whenever I am passionately attracted to an individual human being is, by contrast, some valued quality which he or she manifests—or instantiates—and thereby makes locally accessible to me. What attracts me to a particular individual, in other words, is not in reality⁹⁶ something unique to that individual but is rather a combination of qualities or properties that can be abstracted, generalized, and repeated in other human instances. Any person who similarly manifests the constellation of qualities I cherish in my beloved is, therefore, an equally likely candidate

for erotic investment on my part, whether I realize it or not; once I have come to understand my own motives a little better, I may even be able to disintoxicate myself from infatuation with specific individuals altogether (cf. *Symp.* 210a8-b6).⁹⁷ My beloved, however, is not a sample or quantity of some cherished value (e.g., youthfulness), but an instance or manifestation of it. Youthfulness is not available to me in him or her in the same way that a potable liquid is available to me in a beverage: when I drink a glass of water I actually drink *some* water, whereas when I embrace a youthful individual I do not actually embrace *some* youthfulness. The sample/instance distinction thereby provides another way of explaining why appetitive desires can be terminally gratified whereas erotic desires cannot. Every sample of drink fully possesses all the requisite features of the drink I desire to drink when I am thirsty, whereas my beloved—no matter how cooperative—leaves me perpetually unsatisfied because he or she merely manifests the youthful qualities I find so attractive and is not *some* of what it is that I desire.⁹⁸ A glass of water is also, to be sure, an instance of water—i.e., an example of what it is to be water—but that is not the description under which I desire_A it when I am thirsty; similarly, even in the highly unlikely event that my beloved could be construed as a quantity of youthful stuff, that is not the description under which I desire_E him or her when I am passionately attracted. Nor is my beloved, for that matter, a perfect instance or manifestation of the quality I cherish: my beloved's youthfulness, for example, is not complete and unchanging, although by the logic of my desire I may, like Bob Dylan, wish him or her to stay forever young.

The distinction between appetite and desire, as it applies to sexual intentionality, enables Plato to escape the implication that every sexual impulse necessarily expresses a transcendental erotic desire. Despite what Plato's Aristophanes might have led us to believe, sexual longing may be either good-dependent or good-independent: not every sexual object is erotic in the intension of the lover. Insofar as it *is* erotic, however, it can be described as holding out to the lover the attraction of something good, not merely something gratifying. Hence, the lover's desire to hold on to it ('fixation'), a desire he never feels for a wholly appetitive object, which ceases to interest him once his need for it has been terminally gratified.⁹⁹ Sexual desire, then, can be genuinely erotic, according to Plato, but by virtue of being erotic, of being a mediated desire, it necessarily forfeits the possibility of achieving a fully sexual realization.

IV

Is there a single idea or value that mediates all forms of *erôs*? Despite Plato's frequent and radical departures from traditional Greek assumptions about the intentionality of sexual desire, he does not hesitate to enlist conventional notions in support of his own theory whenever they can be made to harmonize with it. Although his understanding of the ultimate *aim* of *erôs* is highly original, as we shall see, his definition of its ultimate *object* is so commonsensical (by Athenian standards) as to require little justification or defense—and therefore, apparently, no argumentation. For the Greeks tended to conceive *erôs* as a response to the stimulus of visual beauty, and Plato simply borrows from his contemporaries the customary formulation of the erotic object—although, to be sure, he understands the significance and ontological status of 'beauty' in an unprecedented way. Thus, Diotima agrees with the unreconstructed

Socrates that *erôs* is a desire for the beautiful (204d3); she teaches that physical beauty is what in the first instance attracts the desiring lover: if a beautiful body has a beautiful and well-formed soul in it, so much the better (τά τε οὖν σώματα τὰ καλὰ μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ αἰσχροῦ ἀσπάζεται ἅτε κυῶν, καὶ ἂν ἐντύχη ψυχῇ καλῇ καὶ γενναίᾳ καὶ εὐφυεῖ, πάνυ δὴ ἀσπάζεται τὸ συναμφοτέρων: 209a-b; cf. *Resp.* 402d-e). Similarly, in the *Phaedrus* Socrates describes erotic mania as triggered by the glimpse of a face or bodily form that reflects beauty (ὅταν θεοειδὲς πρόσωπον ἴδῃ κάλλος εὖ μεμιμημένον ἢ τινα σώματος ἰδέαν: 251a;¹⁰⁰ cf. Plutarch, *Plat. Quaest.* 6, 1004c: κάλλους δὲ τοῦ περὶ τὸ σῶμα ὁ ἔρωσ). In the *Cratylus* Socrates playfully etymologizes *erôs* to mean ‘influx through the eyes’ (420a-b), a gloss which reappears—freighted with philosophical significance—in the *Phaedrus* myth (255c-d).

Plato provisionally agrees with his contemporaries, then, in regarding *erôs* as a response to the stimulus of visual beauty, but he strenuously disagrees with them about the nature of that response. Such is the point of Diotima’s crucial and much-neglected¹⁰¹ distinction between the object and the aim of erotic desire:¹⁰² “‘*Erôs* is not for the beautiful, Socrates, as you suppose.’” “What is it, then?” “It is for birth and procreation in the beautiful” (206e). Leaving aside for the moment what Diotima means by ‘birth and procreation in the beautiful’, we must first examine the consequences of her denial that *erôs* is a desire for beauty. As her later, celebrated account of the Platonic lover’s contemplative ascent to the Form of the Beautiful makes clear, Diotima does not intend to repudiate in the passage I have just quoted the common notion, which she elsewhere espouses, that beauty is the ultimate object of *erôs*: indeed, she has already admitted that *erôs* has something to do with beauty; it is all about beauty, as she rather cagily puts it (“Ἐρως δ’ ἐστὶν ἔρωσ περὶ τὸ καλόν: 204b3; cf. 203c4, 206e1). Her insistence that *erôs* is a desire for ‘birth and procreation in the beautiful’ does not bear at all on the identity of the erotic object. Rather, in the passage quoted above Diotima is speaking entirely to the question of the erotic aim—that is, she is attempting to specify what the lover wants his erotic object *for*, what he wishes to do with it or to accomplish by means of it.¹⁰³

The purpose behind Diotima’s refusal to call *erôs* a desire *for* the beautiful *tout court* is to avoid the otherwise inescapable implication that erotic desire *aims* at the *possession* of beautiful things. For in the context of contemporary Athenian attitudes to sexual behavior (to say nothing of ordinary language, whether English or Greek), to define *erôs* simply as a desire for the beautiful would be to specify its aim as well as its object and, thus, to characterize it implicitly as an acquisitive passion, a longing for the physical possession of a beautiful object—to construe it, in other words, as an appetite for beauty. That is precisely where the youthful Socrates went wrong when Diotima initially interrogated him. ‘*Erôs*’, she had conceded, ‘is of such a nature and parentage and is a desire for the beautiful, as you say. But suppose someone were to ask us, “What is *erôs* for the beautiful, Socrates and Diotima?” To put it more clearly: the lover desires the beautiful; what does he desire?’ The first part of Diotima’s reformulated query refers to the erotic object, the second to the erotic aim; Socrates conflates the two and answers, predictably enough, that the lover of beauty desires ‘to have it’. Diotima has to find a way of communicating to Socrates that beauty, though related in some fashion to the true aim of *erôs*, does not exhaust the purpose of erotic desire; it is not the solution to the problem of erotic intentionality but an invitation

to further inquiry. 'Your answer still yearns', she says, 'for another question [*erôtêsis*],¹⁰⁴ such as this one: What will whoever acquires the beautiful obtain?' (204d). To this Socrates cannot reply. Beauty may be what elicits our desire but its acquisition is not the ultimate goal of the desire it arouses: it merely describes a horizon of possibility. We still need to ask why we should desire beauty so passionately: Whatever do we want it for?

Plato's Aristophanes, though rather vague about the ultimate object of erotic desire, was perfectly clear about its aim. He was quite prepared, that is, to specify what the lover wants his beloved for: *erôs* is the desire and pursuit of the whole, Aristophanes said; it is the striving for a self-transcending union with one's 'other half' (or with whoever possesses the requisite complementary features and thereby re-presents, or 'symbolizes', it). According to Diotima, however, adherents to the 'Aristophanic' theory of *erôs* have made at least one crucial mistake: in laying so much stress on the 'innateness' and 'naturalness' of the desire for union, they apparently lost sight of the need to specify the further aim of that desire, to explain *why* the lover wants to be united with his other half, and so they stopped short of a full elucidation of the erotic aim. To be sure, Aristophanes did imply, correctly, that *erôs* is mediated by an idea or value that makes the proximate objects of the lover's *erôs* desirable to the lover in the first place, and he even hinted at the content of that idea or value: it evidently has to do with complementarity, in his view, with what will make good the lack or deficiency in human nature—with, in a word, *oikeiotês* (192c1), the quality of being a part of, or belonging intimately to, oneself. That objects of desire can indeed be properly described as *oikeios*, 'one's own,' is a philosophical commonplace familiar to readers of Plato's *Lysis*.¹⁰⁵ But Aristophanes neglected to define the essential constituents of *oikeiotês*; he failed to analyze the ethical principle that governs the pursuit of whatever is one's own, and in that respect his account was unsatisfactory.

According to one *logos*, [Diotima pointedly remarks,] lovers are those who seek their other halves. My *logos* claims that *erôs* is of neither half nor whole unless, my friend, it happen to be good in some way, since people are willing to have even their own feet and hands cut off if they think their own are bad. So I don't think that everyone cherishes what is his own except insofar as he calls the good *oikeios* and his own, the bad alien. Thus, people desire [*erôsi*] nothing else but the good (*Symp.* 205d-206a).

Diotima's approach to *erôs* complements Socrates' account of *epithymia* in the *Republic*, where considerable care is taken to show that Diotima's argument about erotic objects does *not* apply to appetitive intentionality: 'Let no one then', Socrates cautions Glaucon, 'disconcert us when off our guard with the objection that everybody desires not drink but good drink and not food but good food, because, the argument will run, all men desire the good, and so, if thirst is desire, it would be of good drink or of good whatsoever it is, and so similarly of other desires' (438a; trans. Shorey). Glaucon, however, *is* disconcerted by this apparent objection, and Socrates takes some time to dispose of it.

Glaucon's momentary confusion may have Socratic origins. For the line of argument that Socrates abandons, when discussing appetitive objects in the *Republic*, and that Diotima espouses, when discussing erotic objects in the *Symposium*, is favored

by the Socrates of Plato's 'early' dialogues, such as the *Meno* (77b-78b), when discussing the psychology of ethical choice. It is typical of Socrates to argue, as John Beversluis notes, that objects are not desired *simpliciter*; they are desired, rather, under the description of contributing to the agent's well-being (or *eudaimonia*).¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Diotima implies that erotic objects are desired both for the sake of a good which the agent wishes to achieve (e.g., health) and because they are good themselves. Like Plato's Aristophanes (193c3, 193d5) in this respect, she concludes that the ultimate aim of *erôs* is to achieve *eudaimonia* (204e-205a, 205d2), which she construes as the lover's perpetual possession of the good (206a11-12, 207a2).

But there is a difference between desiring something *for the sake of a good* and desiring it *because it is good*. That difference, I shall argue, is reducible, at least in part, to the distinction I have been employing between the aim and the object of erotic desire. To desire an object x for the sake of a final good F is to make the possession or actualization of F the ultimate aim of the desire for x , whereas to desire x because x is F (i.e., because x has the property F) is to identify F as the property of x that makes x desirable in itself and that must therefore be reckoned the ultimate object of desire in the desire for x (except, of course, where F stands for the property 'contributes to the final good G ').¹⁰⁷ Plato differentiates these two aspects of erotic desire by distinguishing the lover's *boulêsis* from his *erôs* proper (*Symp.* 204d-205a)—by distinguishing, that is, what the lover *wants* (i.e., his aim) from what he *is attracted to* or *desires* (i.e., his object). Wanting, or erotic desire_w, implies an ulterior aim: whenever I say that I desire_w x , what I really mean is that I want to ϕ x (where x is the direct object of an active verb ϕ),¹⁰⁸ and ϕ -ing therefore represents the immediate, or proximate, aim of my desire_w for x . But there is also a hierarchy of aims; I want everything I want for the sake of something else. Hence, Socrates argues in the *Gorgias* (467c-468c, 499e-500a) that *boulêsis* ultimately aims not at the thing wanted but at that for the sake of which the thing wanted is wanted—namely, the good.¹⁰⁹ By contrast, *erôs* proper, or desire_p, need have no ulterior aim whatsoever; it can refer merely to the experience of finding an object endlessly attractive, fascinating, admirable, or valuable in some respect, such as in respect of physical beauty (in the case of sexual desire_e).¹¹⁰

The conceptual differences between desire_w and desire_p can be more easily grasped by means of the following example. Suppose I see a particular antique violin and conceive a longing for it. The violin evidently represents something valuable to me, but there are at least two different modes of desiring that can be invoked to explain the positive valuation I have placed upon it. I may desire_w the violin, in which case I probably want to own it and play it: that is the proximate aim of my desire_w. Ultimately, however, I desire_w the violin because, say, I aim to be a better musician (owning the violin will enable me to play better) and being a good musician is a constituent of my *eudaimonia*, my well-being or happiness (which signifies the good-for-me). The good is therefore that for the sake of which I desire_w the violin; the violin is desired_w under the description of contributing to my *eudaimonia*. What I ultimately desire_w, then, is not the violin but *eudaimonia*, my own well-being. By contrast, I may desire the same violin not because I want to own it and play it and (ultimately) be happy, but because I am attracted to it and admire it for some quality or property that it possesses. The violin remains the same, but it has now become the object of

my desire_p and so is desired under a different description. Let's say that I now desire the violin because it is an extraordinarily fine piece of craftsmanship. In this second case, what I ultimately value is fine craftsmanship, not the violin itself: I desire_p the violin because it manifests to me a certain cherished quality, not because I have any ulterior aim I wish to achieve by means of it (in neither case, then, is the violin itself the terminal object of my desire); indeed, I can desire_p the violin without wishing to own it or even knowing how to play it. Hence, I can desire_p something I do not desire_w—e.g., my best friend's wife; similarly, I can desire_w something I do not desire_p—e.g., major surgery, to cite Diotima's example. The good featured in a good-dependent desire can therefore function in at least two different ways, according to whether it represents (1) that for the sake of which we desire_w what we desire_w, or (2) the quality or value instantiated in what we desire_p.

The kind of good that is the ultimate object of desire_w Plato calls *to agathon* ('the good'), whereas the kind of good that is the ultimate object of desire_p he calls *to kalon* ('the beautiful').¹¹¹ In the *Gorgias* (467e-468c, 499e-500a) Socrates argues that the *telos* (499e8), the end or ultimate object, of all *boulêsis* is *to agathon*. Similarly, in the *Symposium*, the *telos* of the lover's *boulêsis* (205a3)—i.e., what the lover ultimately wants, the final object of his desire_w—is *eudaimonia*, which consists in his possession of *ta agatha* (205a1, 6-7). But the final object of the lover's *erôs* proper, of his desire_p, remains *to kalon*, just as the object of *epithymia* remains *hêdonê* (the same tripartition and distribution of the objects of desire can also be found at *Chrm.* 167e). The ultimate aim of erotic desire, then, is the lover's perpetual possession of the good (*Symp.* 206a) and its ultimate object is the beautiful.¹¹²

How does Plato explain the relation between the ultimate aim and the ultimate object of erotic desire? How does an understanding of our desire_w for the perpetual possession of the good help to elucidate our desire_p for beauty? Diotima's doctrine of erotic procreation is designed to supply the necessary connection. Her logic is well known¹¹³ and can be quickly summarized. What we ultimately want is (1) *eudaimonia*—or, the perpetual possession of the good; desire_w for the perpetual possession of the good entails (2) desire_w for immortality; the necessary condition of achieving immortality is (3) the production ('procreation') of *aretê*, 'virtue' or 'excellence'. Only by producing true *aretê*, by instantiating perfect virtue in our souls, can we achieve *eudaimonia*. Here is the point at which beauty fits into Diotima's scheme and guarantees that her model of human aspiration is not merely ethical but also erotic: in order to give birth to *aretê* we require the inspirational presence of beauty. 'All men are pregnant',¹¹⁴ Diotima declares, 'but our nature cannot give birth in ugliness, only in beauty' (206c; cf. 209b: ἐν τῷ γὰρ αἰσχροῦ οὐδέποτε γεννήσει), and she follows up her statement with an almost embarrassingly anatomical image describing how we shrink from the presence of ugliness (206d).¹¹⁵ We need beauty in order to procreate, to motivate us properly, and only desire can bring us into the presence of beauty¹¹⁶—it is an utter sophistry to maintain that we can seek beauty without desiring it, led purely by a δόξα ἐπὶ τὸ ἄριστον λόγῳ ἄγουσα, a 'judgement guiding us rationally towards what is best', as Socrates fleetingly pretends in the *Phaedrus* (237e; trans. Hackforth).¹¹⁷ *Aretê* is thus the vehicle by means of which we express our desire for what we value. Sexual desire_E, inasmuch as it is excited by the presence of beauty in an object, is continuous with the contemplative philosopher's desire for transcendental Beauty, a desire which if successful issues in the production of true *aretê* (cf. *Symp.* 212a): under

Diotima's description, therefore, ethics and erotics are the same science.

It might seem that at some point in the course of constructing this argument Diotima has in effect diverted her efforts from the task of analyzing the intentionality of *erôs* to that of formulating the axioms of moral psychology or ethical theory. Indeed, Diotima appears to confirm that impression when she numbers gymnastics, commerce, philosophy, and all other human activities that aim at some good among the forms or expressions of *erôs* (205d). But, as we have seen, there is a specific sense in which the pursuit of all such activities can and must qualify as erotic: they do not possess in themselves a natural, self-evident ground of attractiveness such that devotion to them is universal or automatic; the valuation placed upon them by those who pursue them is no more self-explanatory than the valuation placed upon a beloved object by its lover. In order to account for the particular path which anyone chooses to follow in pursuing the good, we need to specify what that person values—i.e., what things manifest beauty to him, or 'attract' him. The gymnast does not exercise merely for the pleasure of working out, on this view; he exercises because for some mysterious reason gymnastics is attractive (or 'beautiful') to him: it represents to him a valuable, meaningful way of living his life.¹¹⁸ It is an activity well-suited to expressing his desire for what he values, in that it provides him with a means of translating his personal, erotic vision of beauty into an 'image of excellence' (cf. *Symp.* 212a4), a form of lasting achievement. Gymnastics properly qualifies as an expression of *erôs*, in short, whenever it functions as a vehicle of personal *aretê*. What Diotima is trying to elucidate, then, is not only our motive for wanting the things that we value but also for valuing the things that we do. Beauty, she concludes, contributes an essential element to the way or activity (*tropos, praxis*) by which we set about to possess the good forever (206b), for it causes us to cherish (*ἀσπάζεσθαι*: 205e6; cf. 192a5, 192b5, 209b5) whatever enables us to give birth to *aretê*; it thereby motivates us to possess the good and so conduces to our *eudaimonia*.

Erôs is not acquisitive but creative.¹¹⁹ It is a desire that aims in the first instance at giving birth, and thereby at possessing the good forever, not at the acquisition, possession, and consumption of beauty. We cannot *have* beauty in any case: we can only have beautiful objects, but having *them* will not satisfy our desire_p for beauty. I cannot, for example, satisfy any more effectively the desire_p aroused in me by the sight of Velazquez's 'The Drunkards' by taking it home and hanging it in my living room than I can by viewing it in the Prado, for the mere fact of owning the physical art object will not put me in more direct possession of the cherished quality that causes me to desire_p the painting in the first place, though I may still want (i.e., desire_w) the painting for a variety of reasons; desire_w, however, ultimately aims not at the possession of beautiful things but at the possession—indeed, at the perpetual possession—of good things, and so the mere possession of beautiful objects will not satisfy my desire_w, unless it is also good for me to have them. To surrender forever the possession of the good in order to acquire a beautiful object would indeed be like trading gold for bronze, to borrow Socrates' Homeric analogy (*Symp.* 219a)—or, to employ a different one, it would be like exchanging the fate of Odysseus for that of Menelaus, abandoning marriage with Penelope in order to live perpetually with Helen. Dante's Paolo and Francesca illustrate the dire consequences of preferring the beauty that one desires to the good that one wants: only after they have been eternally united in a

virtually 'Aristophanic' fusion do the two lovers discover that there does in truth exist something else that they would much rather have than one another.

Beauty, then, is not the goal in which our erotic desire_w terminates; rather, it is a stimulus to new activity. No beautiful object, not even beauty itself, contains within it everything we seek: the *telos* of our striving lies as much within us as outside us, and beauty furnishes us with an opportunity to give birth to what already quickens within our souls.¹²⁰ By teaching that the proximate aim of *erôs* is procreation, instead of possession (as the conventional Greek conception of *erôs* as an appetite would have implied), Diotima deflects erotic desire from all objects of temporary, partial gratification and thereby places its goals beyond the empirical individuals in any specific erotic relationship just as surely as Aristophanes did by claiming that what *erôs* seeks is the lost *primaeval* union. *Erôs* is an endless desire, in Diotima's view, not only because the beauty which evokes desire is a transcendental entity but also because the immediate aim of *erôs* is not gratification but creativity, an ongoing and eternal urge to make what is best in us a perpetually living force.¹²¹ Unlike the acquisitive response to beauty—which makes of the beloved object something that has to be swallowed whole, so to speak, and which, as the case of Alcibiades demonstrates, excuses the lover from any obligation to change his own nature—the procreative response vouches for the radically transformative power of *erôs*. Despite its apparent fixation on the beloved object, the lover's desire aims in fact at a liberation and release of his own creative energies. *Erôs* is thus the desire to realize an objective potential in the self.¹²²

V

There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as physical attraction, according to Plato: bodies, after all, are not attracted to other bodies;¹²³ as Auden wrote, 'Our bodies cannot love, but without them, What works of love could we do?' Bodies may have *needs* which they drive us to gratify, but they are not the source of our attraction to individual objects. It is the human soul that desires the beauty in bodies, and it does so in order to create, to produce excellence.¹²⁴ If Diotima is correct, what I most crave (consciously or unconsciously) even from a beautiful body is not an opportunity to lose myself in its materiality but an opportunity to realize myself by apprehending its beauty.¹²⁵ The impulse to creativity and self-realization draws me towards beautiful bodies, but what actually evokes my desire is not any particular body *per se* but the beauty it incarnates, the beauty *in*—or, as Plato rather dissociatively puts it, 'upon' (i.e., borne by)—the body (τὸ κάλλος τὸ ἐπὶ ὁτιοῦν σώματι . . . τὸ ἐπ' εἶδει καλόν . . . τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς σώμασι κάλλος—*Symp.* 210a-b; τὸν τὸ κάλλος ἔχοντα—*Phdr.* 252a-b). I desire_E the body of my beloved only insofar as it is the medium or vehicle of beauty—not *qua* body, then, but *qua* beautiful—though if it were *not* a body my desire for the beauty in it would not be a *sexual* desire_E.¹²⁶ The sexual component in *erôs*, in other words, is not a necessary consequence of the beloved's beauty but of the corporeal medium through which that beauty manifests itself. Any lover who sets about to translate his supposed physical attraction into sexual activity has in effect substituted the body of his beloved for the beauty in it that attracts him and has thus doomed himself to an enslaving (*Symp.* 210d3; cf. 219e3-4) and frustrating obsession. For inasmuch as his goal is something corporeal the sexual lover no longer intends a real object

but a wraith, an *eidôlon*: he has become an idolator,¹²⁷ and his longing is directed at a phantom such as the gods sent to Troy in place of Helen (according to some versions of the myth) to be an empty focus of contention and strife (*Resp.* 586b-c).¹²⁸

It so happens that human beauty is always composite: it dwells in bodies, in souls, and in combinations thereof, and is inevitably mixed up with all sorts of 'mortal trash', as Diotima loftily calls it (211e);¹²⁹ it is encrusted with the 'shell and weed and rock' (*Resp.* 611d)¹³⁰ of material contingency. In our own embodied and sensuous condition, therefore, it is virtually impossible for us to isolate the beauty that we desire, and that we need in order to produce true excellence, from any single human instance or manifestation of it: that is the ground of the false consciousness whereby we persistently treat objects of erotic desire as unique and irreplaceable entities instead of what they really are—namely, instances of universal and generalizable properties. If one's entire erotic horizon is bounded by one beautiful body, it will not be possible to desire solely the beauty in that body and not also the body incarnating it (although in actuality it is only the beauty in the body and not the body itself that evokes desire, as Diotima's analysis shows). For the beauty of any particular body, as the lover sees it, is inseparable—both practically and psychologically—from the physical particulars which combine to express it, and for that reason the 'accidental' (i.e., corporeal and personal) characteristics of the beloved come to represent in themselves an object of desire in the conscious life of the lover. Beauty transfigures the individual features of the person who instantiates it. That is why all desire for the beauty of human bodies tends to include an element of sexual longing, even on Plato's account, despite his insistence that beauty *per se* is not the object of a specifically *sexual* desire_E. For beauty informs the whole body in which it dwells with a sense of value, a sense of something far more deeply interfused, and thereby makes the body desirable in all its particularity. The beloved's personal features may similarly qualify for erotic investment on the lover's part, although they do so—whatever he may think—only insofar as they are beautiful (or, perhaps, insofar as they form part of a beautiful whole: *Resp.* 474c-475b).

Hence, Plato's view of personal relations does not, in fact, suffer from what some of Vlastos' critics have taken to be the chill consequences of his well-known claim that 'Plato's theory is not, and is not meant to be, about personal love for persons. . . . What it is really about is love for place-holders of the predicates "useful" and "beautiful"—of the former when it is only *philia*, of the latter, when it is *erôs*.'¹³¹ Now, to elucidate the intentional structure of erotic desire is not to specify its phenomenological content. To say what Vlastos says is not, therefore, to imply that every Platonic lover consciously conceives of his love-object, or represents it to himself, as a place-holder of a value-predicate—at least, not before he has completed his contemplative ascent to the Form of the Beautiful. Nor do the lovers whom Plato portrays and whose words and behavior he scrutinizes regard their beloveds as mere receptacles of abstract qualities. Whatever Plato's theory is ultimately *about*, it is designed (at least in part) to *explain* personal relationships, to account for why certain individuals—including the ideal couple in the *Phaedrus* (256a-b)—choose to spend their entire lives together (*Symp.* 181d, 183e, 192b-c) and even to die for one another (*Symp.* 179b-180a, 208c-d). Plato is fully alive to the sense of particularity that informs any passionate erotic attachment between persons.¹³² He can afford to be precisely

because his reductive analysis of personal *erôs* leaves the personal element in it unreduced.¹³³

On Plato's view, the lover's conscious and articulable wish (his *demande*, to use Lacan's term) is simply not a reliable guide to his underlying motives or intentions (his *désir*).¹³⁴ The 'mysterious' character of *erôs* (*Symp.* 210a1) and the need for a 'depth psychology' in order to elucidate it derive precisely from the lack of necessary correspondence between the content of the lover's mental representations and the objective structure of his intentionality: even a noble lover, in Plato's conception, may not know what or why he loves (cf. *Phdr.* 255d3). Socrates, after all, did not know what he actually desired until Diotima pointed it out to him; the very beasts, moreover, experience an *erôs* that has an *aitia*, a determinate end (namely, the immortalization of the mortal), even though they obviously have no notion of what it is, acting as they do without *logismos* (*Symp.* 207a-d).¹³⁵ As David Glidden has persuasively argued in the case of the *Lysis*, 'Plato is not interested in how lovers of persons and things consciously regard themselves and the objects of their desire. Plato is interested in something else: the psychological function achieved by our loving the persons or things we do, regardless of our various motives.'¹³⁶ Plato does not allow himself to be distracted by the conscious intentions of the lover; he inquires into the objective structure of the relationship which the lover establishes with the beloved, into 'the function which cherished objects play for those that love them, . . . what it is among the actual features of the loved object which coincides with the real source of satisfaction for the lover's condition'.¹³⁷ In love as in all other realms of ethical activity, virtue is knowledge: 'one cannot succeed in loving another, as opposed to oneself and one's fantasies, unless the intent of one's love actually designates some real object and not one's own state of mind. Nor is one in a position to know that he loves someone or something unless he knows that his intent succeeds in its reference.'¹³⁸ It is necessary to receive proper guidance in matters of erotics from the time of one's youth, as Diotima advises (210a), in order to learn how to match what one seeks (or demands) with what one really wants (or desires).¹³⁹ Otherwise, one stands in peril of mistaking the particular individual who instantiates beauty for the beauty he instantiates; one risks, in other words, interpreting one's response to incarnate beauty as a longing to possess the beautiful object (i.e., as a sexual impulse) rather than as a longing to (pro)create excellence by means of it (i.e., as an erotic desire). The species of *erôs* we call sexual desire is in fact a response to that share of generalized, transcendent beauty which inheres in bodies: were such beauty not manifested in bodies, my response to it would not be *sexual*; did bodies not participate in transcendent beauty, my sexual longing for them would not take on the passionate features of an erotic *desire*. I have the illusion that the attraction I feel in the presence of my beloved is directed at him or her as a person, but the strength of my passion is merely a sign that beauty is present—inextricably mixed up, to be sure, and impossible to isolate—in the body or, could I perceive it, in the soul or perhaps in some composite, personal feature of my beloved.¹⁴⁰

In pursuing the beauty in bodies we cannot afford to follow our instincts because the danger of confusion is too great, the danger of mistaking the proximate for the ultimate object of desire—the beautiful body for the beauty in it—and thereby failing, as Alcibiades did, to achieve transcendence. If we wish to liberate ourselves from

the powerful grip of the phenomenal world, we must practise 'philosophy without fraud' or 'paederasty with philosophy', Socrates maintains in the *Phaedrus* (249a);¹⁴¹ in the *Symposium* Diotima makes a similarly ambitious claim for what she calls 'correct paederasty' (τὸν ὀρθῶς ἰόντα ἐπὶ τοῦτο τὸ πρᾶγμα—210a; τὸ ὀρθῶς παιδεραστεῖν—211b; τὸ ὀρθῶς ἐπὶ τὰ ἐρωτικά ἰέναι ἢ ὑπ' ἄλλου ἄγεσθαι—211b-c).¹⁴² It is our misfortune that we cannot successfully pursue both our sexual and procreative responses to beauty simultaneously: the former offers no hope of isolating the beauty we need from the accidental circumstances of its material instantiation, whereas the latter, in fulfilling that very hope, denies our desire the possibility of sexual gratification. In order to perform the sexual act the (male) lover's full attention must be absorbed by his beloved object, by the individual, physical embodiment of beauty in all its contingent specificity; his sexual desire_E, if it is to be sexually expressed, must be directed not to the beauty in the body but to the body which a buried fragment of transcendent beauty illumines and renders sufficiently attractive to enable it to qualify as a potential target of desire. Sex thereby condemns the lover to the tyranny of the particular (cf. *Phdo.* 64d-67d, 81b-83e). I must therefore renounce the sexual gratification of sexual desire_E if I wish to fulfill the longing a beautiful body awakens in me.¹⁴³

The task of isolating beauty from its admixture in the physical world proceeds by abstraction. But it is impossible, as we have seen, to abstract a comprehension of beauty itself by concentrating all of one's attention on a single instance or manifestation of it. The process of abstraction is therefore dynamic: it demands of the mind a sort of epistemic vibration between the particular and the universal. It requires a plurality of objects whose common elements can be abstracted—a large data base. Abstraction begins when I allow myself to be attracted to my beloved in a way that depersonalizes (or, as Ludwig Chen prefers, 'deindividualizes')¹⁴⁴ him, that robs him of his adorable particulars, thereby enabling me to desire him for the beauty which he has in common with all good-looking people. Sexual desire, which is notoriously impersonal and effectively deindividualizes its objects, provides an obvious springboard for such a process of abstraction. But the fullest description of the movement from the specific to the general is furnished by Diotima in the form of a grand escalated figure (to borrow Vlastos' phrase): the so-called Ladder of Love.

It does not require extraordinary powers of discernment to perceive a widespread sense of uneasiness among those commentators on Plato who discuss Diotima's ordering of the steps on her ladder. Both Singer and G.M.A. Grube, for example, suggest that something may have gone wrong when Diotima posits a seamless continuity between our attraction to other human beings and our attraction to moral or intellectual embodiments of beauty.¹⁴⁵ As Grube puts it,

in the contemplation of supreme beauty the philosopher may indeed find a sublime satisfaction, but we would hardly call this the satisfaction of love which must surely be limited to relations between individuals. If we look closer we shall find that the point where we should part company with Plato is when Diotima reaches the beauty of 'laws and institutions'. Love, we feel, must have and retain some sort of physical basis and Plato has here, though to a less extent in the *Phaedrus*, been carried away on the tide of his own

magnificent metaphors.

But Grube then reverses himself and goes on to argue, rightly, that in Plato's view 'the passionate love of truth in the mind is the same stream of desire which expresses itself in physical passions'; Plato was *not* swept away by his own metaphors, as it turns out, 'for he very definitely asserts that they are not metaphors at all': the desires for physical satisfaction and for intellectual discovery presented themselves to Plato indistinguishably in his own experience of them.¹⁴⁶ Now whether Plato himself actually did or did not experience this unity of desire is immaterial to Grube's point: the ascent to beauty is not metaphorical because the various stages of the ascent are linked to one another not by the subjective experience of the lover who progresses from one to the next but by the objective and essential identity of the beauty that is present, in varying degrees, in all of the objects encountered in the course of the ascent. The discontinuity in the nature of the lover's attraction to the objects belonging to each of the hierarchical categories on the ladder, therefore, does not provide a reliable clue to the unchanging attractiveness of the beauty instantiated by those objects. The objective relation of the steps to one another is grounded instead in the ontology of the self-identical paradigm-form.¹⁴⁷

The word 'beautiful', as it applies to objects in the visible world, may indeed constitute an 'incomplete predicate' which will have a 'different descriptive content' depending on the subject of its predication, as Kosman argues and as Plato himself appears to realize (*Phdo.* 78d-79e; *Crat.* 439c-440b; *Resp.* 474d-475a, 479a-480),¹⁴⁸ but beauty, insofar as it is beauty, is everywhere the same (*Phdo.* 78d-79e, 100b-e; *Crat.* 439c-440b; *Eud.* 301a-c; *Resp.* 476b-d, 479a-480). Not only do we call a crystal, a giraffe, a mathematical proof, a naked body, a sunset, a courageous act, and a concerto beautiful, but we do so with reference to a single form of beauty (cf. *Hip. Maj.* 294a-c; *Eud.* 300e-301a; *Gorg.* 474d)—beauty not merely similar or analogous in Newton's *Opticks* and in the physique of an individual whom we may happen to find sexually appealing but the *same* beauty, single and unified, pervading all value-laden areas of human life.¹⁴⁹ Of course, so long as we identify the beauty of a rose with its color and the beauty of Helen with her shape, we shall quickly deduce from the non-identity of colors and shapes that there is no one beauty that the rose and Helen both share; but color and shape are beautiful only in the context of the particular rose and woman (cf. *Phdo.* 100c-d)—they are simply the media in or through which certain individuals manifest their beauty: 'Now this is not to deny that Helen's being a woman is relevant to assessing her beauty: only if x is a woman will *that* shape contribute to her satisfying the definition of beauty. But this is not to say that the definition of beauty differs from kind to kind.'¹⁵⁰

Hence, as both Singer and Julius Moravcsik maintain,¹⁵¹ there is neither repression nor sublimation in what Diotima calls 'the correct approach to erotics'. There is no repression because there is no motive to restrain or deny the desire to give birth to virtue; there is no sublimation because the authentic object of desire never changes during the upward journey towards the Form. What changes are only the local embodiments of beauty that occasion desire and the quality of the lover's response to them. No one would claim that the objects of intellection in themselves elicit *sexual* desire—save one who was determined to defend a theory at all costs.¹⁵² Sexual desire is a response to the stimulus of physically instantiated beauty, as we have seen: it is sexual

insofar as the particular instance of beauty which arouses it is carnally embodied, but it is erotic insofar as it is aroused by the presence of beauty, expresses itself as an endless desire to procreate excellence therein, and ultimately aims at the lover's perpetual possession of the good.

The same definition of 'erotic' applies to the desire the lover feels at *every* stage of the ascent—whether his desire continues to feel the same to *him* or not—even when his response to beauty ceases altogether to be sexual (as it does at the higher reaches of the 'ladder'). As the proximate objects of his desire change from the utterly impure (bodies) to the rather less impure (souls, sciences), the authentic and ultimate object of *erôs* (beauty) remains the same, as do both the proximate and the ultimate erotic aims (procreation of virtue, perpetual possession of the good). The subjective character of the lover's erotic response may change, in other words, but it never ceases to be erotic: when he is attracted to the beauty in one body, his response is sexual; when he is attracted to the beauty in all bodies, it is aesthetic (or perhaps 'erotic' in the current, vulgar meaning of the word); when he is attracted to the beauty in souls, his response is personal or moral; when he is attracted to the beauty in laws and institutions, it is social or political; when he is attracted to the beauty in sciences, his response is intellectual. All of these responses represent genuine *species* of erotic desire.¹⁵³ Only when I recognize that what attracts me to the person I desire is actually available to me in purer form in the objects of intellectual beauty am I finally ready to embark upon my true course of education.

VI

Many questions about Plato's erotic theory still remain to be answered. If the beauty in bodies is the same beauty as the beauty in objects of intellection, according to Plato, and if the latter manifestation of beauty is in some way superior to the former, what is the purpose of Diotima's ladder? Why, in other words, should I not start my erotic education with the sciences rather than with bodies? Yet another problem presents itself: What is the connection between erotics and aesthetics? What is the difference, in Plato's view, between the beauty in a beautiful body and the beauty in a successful work of art? Why are works of art missing from the instances of beauty distributed along Diotima's ladder? And there are still other questions: What, for example, are the implications of Plato's theory for personal relations—that is, what would a properly Platonic love-affair look like in practice? How can such a relationship be justified both psychologically and ethically? How would it differ from what Plato's contemporaries considered normal in the way of erotic relationships? Would it be more or less exploitative of the erotic object? I believe that Plato offers answers—some more explicit than others—to all of these questions: any serious attempt to articulate them would require a separate study.¹⁵⁴ Enough has already been said, however, to dissolve the apparent paradox of Platonic eroticism and to show what sense it makes for Plato to posit the essential unity of sensual and intellectual beauty.

Commentators and scholars have traditionally assumed that Platonic *erôs* cannot refer with equal validity to both sexual and philosophical activity; they have tended, accordingly, to treat one version of *erôs* as primary to Plato's philosophical intent and to view the other as a logical or figural corollary to it. Those who privilege the metaphysical function of desire in Plato's system regard his eloquent appeal to the

data of sexual experience as a racy metaphor, model, or analogy for the erotics of philosophical inquiry.¹⁵⁵ Those who consider sexuality a basic and irreducible element in human life treat philosophical *erôs* as a redirected, sublimated form of sexual energy. Neither approach does justice, I believe, to the psychological and philosophical power of Plato's erotic theory. I have tried to demonstrate that a coherent account can be given of Platonic eroticism without collapsing either its sexual or its metaphysical dimension to the other.

Plato's argument that the lover's sexual desire is identical with respect to the nature of desire to the philosopher's desire for being and truth (*Resp.* 485a-b, 490a-b, 501d) rests on three assumptions: (1) sexual desire_E is aroused by the beauty of or in an individual human body; (2) beauty is transcendent; (3) beauty is qualitatively transcategorical—that is, the beauty manifested in all and each of the manifestations of transcendent beauty is identical with respect to beauty. The argument, to be sure, requires many more assumptions about the nature of sexual desire, such as that it is intentional, that it is creative rather than acquisitive, and that the Form whose manifestation in bodies evokes it is itself beautiful.¹⁵⁶ But the distinctive orientation of the Platonic theory results from its being firmly based, as both Singer and Vlastos have observed,¹⁵⁷ on a metaphysical 're-structuring of what there is on the scaffolding of what is more and less real'.¹⁵⁸ The beauty in the body is the same beauty, *qua* beauty, as the beauty of the Form, and it is the Form of Beauty which 'causes'¹⁵⁹ the body to be beautiful. The sexual longing excited by a beautiful body is therefore a transcendental desire: it intends, unbeknownst perhaps to the lover who experiences it, an object of metaphysical knowledge.

It is not through some philosophical sleight of hand or flight of the metaphorical imagination, then, that Plato identifies the intellectual's quest for truth with the lover's awestruck admiration for his beloved's physical beauty: both responses express the same desire (*erôs*), are aroused by the same object (transcendent beauty), and have the same aim (the achievement of *eudaimonia*, defined as the lover's perpetual possession of the good).¹⁶⁰ Hence, there is no need to substitute for *erôs* or 'desire' some other—more neutral—term, such as 'aspiration',¹⁶¹ in order to express the intentional and psychological unity of Platonic eroticism: it will be sufficient simply to credit the ideal or transcendental dimensions of all forms of erotic desire. Sexual activity, for the erotic man at least, represents a low-order form of philosophical activity: every passionate longing for the physical beauty of a human individual is an expression of a more profound, if inchoate, metaphysical desire to transcend the conditions of mortality and make the good one's own forever. Just as M. Jourdain was delighted to learn that all his life he had been speaking prose without realizing it, so we are entitled to take whatever pleasure there may be in the reflection that we have all been engaged in pursuing metaphysical truth without knowing it¹⁶²—at least to the extent that we have all discovered in the experience of sexuality a poignant reminder of our mortal finitude and limitations.

* * * * *

Not all undergraduates find the erotic doctrines of Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* so enigmatic as I once did: Oliver Alden, for example, the title character of George Santayana's novel *The Last Puritan* (1935), certainly knew what to make of them. From

his privileged vantage in Emerson's old rooms in Divinity Hall at Harvard College, during the first decade of this century, Oliver took Plato to task in a prize essay in philosophy composed for Professor Santayana, who had solicited his students' personal comments. 'Plato', he wrote, 'may have been a great philosopher, but he knew nothing about love. He talks only about desire.' By the end of the novel, however, Oliver has come to see Plato's emphasis in a more positive light. Plato's relative neglect of 'general benevolence, friendliness, and charity' turns out to be an advantage of the theory instead of a liability:

Now affection and kindness are all that I have felt or ever ought to feel about the real Rose, or about the real Edith; just as it was all I could rightly feel about the real Jim or the real Mario: but where I have . . . allowed them to bewitch me or to make me suffer, then I was not seeing the reality in them at all, but only an image, only a mirage, of my own aspiration. They may drop out, they may change, they may prove to be the sad opposite of what I thought them: but my image of them in being detached from their accidental persons, will be clarified in itself, will become truer to my profound desire. . . . Towards them, towards my wife and children, if I ever have them, natural affection, tenderness, sympathy; but no expectation that they can ever fill my whole being, or make my true happiness, or entrance my soul. . . . ¹⁶³

Oliver's reasoning breaks down, to my mind, only when he goes on to insist that 'the inspiration of a profound desire, fixed upon some lovely image, is what is called love,' and when he attempts to defend Plato on that basis.

Singer and Vlastos, by contrast, are right to criticize Plato for having failed to produce a fully adequate philosophy of love.¹⁶⁴ Platonic *erôs* is indeed inadequate to the task of explicating the nature of love, and Plato never intended to put it to that use. What Plato did attempt, and what he triumphantly achieved, was the creation of an erotic theory that could account for the metaphysics of desire. The various defects which Singer and Vlastos rightly see in the Platonic *erôs* when it is construed as love—its impersonality, its fixation on qualities, its constant reference to the interests of the lover rather than the beloved—disappear as soon as *erôs* is conceived as desire. I should like to believe that Plato, if confronted by his recent critics, would not have resorted to the rather forced defensive strategies employed by Donald Levy and A.W. Price,¹⁶⁵ for example, but would have willingly appropriated, instead, the apology devised by one of his more prominent modern disciples,¹⁶⁶ the poet Shelley:

I can give not what men call love,
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the Heavens reject not,—
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow?

NOTES

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¹ Rouse 1956, 95-96.

² Dover 1974, 211; Sutton 1981, 186-189, 224-225; Foucault 1984, 177-183, 222-223.

³ See, generally, Redfield 1982, esp. 192-198, on the importance of χάρις (*charis*) in marriage; on the traditional separation of *erôs* and γάμος (*gamos*) in Greek culture, see Winkler 1982; Foucault 1984, 159-203; and cf. Goessler 1962, 29-69. For the modern Greek analogue, see Hirschon 1978, 75-76.

⁴ Dover 1974, 212, citing a number of corroborating sources from the classical period, of which the most pertinent are Aristophanes, *Lys.* 870-871, 905-906; Demosthenes, *lix* 64.

⁵ Vlastos 1981, 4n; cf. Erbse 1966, 201-202. The wording of Plato's Phaedrus (ὑπερεβάλετο τῇ φιλίᾳ διὰ τὸν ἔρωτα: *Symp.* 179c1-2) is recapitulated by Aristotle in his own formulation of the relation between *erôs* and *philia*: ἐρᾶν . . . ὑπερβολὴ γάρ τις εἶναι βούλεται φιλίας, τοῦτο δὲ πρὸς ἓνα (*EN ix* 1171a12). On erotic *hyperbolê*, see, generally, Foucault 1984, 59-60.

⁶ On this passage, see Grube 1935, 118-119; Vlastos 1981, 22n.

⁷ Note that Aristotle treats the marriage-bond as a species of *philia*: *EN* viii 1162a16-33; also, 1158b11-16, 1161a22-25; *EE* vii 1242a32-33; cf. *Prior An.* 68a39-68b6. See, also, Plutarch, *Mor.* 769a-b.

⁸ The emphasis in this passage of the *Symposium* (200a-e) on gratification as an aim of *erôs* requires the collocation of *erôs* with *epithymia*, for Plato does not regard *erôs* chiefly as a drive to physical enjoyment and tends to speak of the exclusively carnal component in *erôs* as *epithymia*. In 200a-e, however, Socrates has been obliged to adopt the outlook of his interlocutor in order to refute it, and Agathon (like the youthful Socrates in this respect) assumes that *erôs* is a desire for the beautiful—that is, for the possession of a sexually gratifying object—contrary to the Platonic view articulated by Diotima at 206e (and discussed in section 4, below). Hence, Socrates conjoins *epithymia* with *erôs* in his refutation of Agathon; a similar emphasis occurs in *Tim.* 91c-d.

⁹ E.g., Demos 1934, 341: 'It can not be too strongly stressed that there is no Platonic love in Platonic love'; Dodds 1951, 218; Vlastos 1981, 25; Cummings 1976, esp. 23: 'the only thing clear about *eros* and *philia* in Plato is that love in Plato is not Platonic love. . . . ' Dover 1966, 48-50, and Lowenstam 1985, 88, also argue against the identification of Platonic *erôs* with love.

¹⁰ Gould 1963, 1.

¹¹ Gould 1963, 37.

¹² Gould 1963, 1-3.

¹³ Singer 1966, 49-90; Vlastos 1981, 3-42. Attempted refutations include: Clay 1975, 119-127; Kosman 1976; Levy 1979; Nussbaum 1979; Haden 1979/80, 382-387; Glidden 1981; Price 1981. ~~Additional support for the view 127, Kosman 1976, Levy 1979, Nussbaum 1979, Haden 1979/80, 382-387, Glidden 1981, Price 1981.~~ Additional support for the views of Singer and Vlastos has been furnished—unknowingly, it would seem—by Warner 1979. Now Scruton 1986, 1, has imputed to Plato a disastrous (in his eyes) 'distinction between erotic love and sexual desire'; Scruton makes the same distinction, however, though not so exclusive a one as that he ascribes to Plato. Plato's erotic theory, on my interpretation, is considerably closer

to Scruton's account of 'sexual desire' than the latter appears to have realized.

¹⁴ For a lively rebuttal of the first tendency, see Singer 1966, 49ff.

¹⁵ Vlastos 1981, 3-6, esp. 4n.; Dover 1974, 212; Dover 1978, 49-50; Dover 1980, 1-2. See, also, Else 1981. Cope 1877, 292-296, is still a helpful guide to the usage of *στοργή*, *ἔρως*, *φιλεῖν*, and *ἀγαπᾶν* in fifth- and fourth-century authors; more recently, Fischer 1973. The correspondences between *philia* and 'love' are probably closer in Elizabethan than in modern English, as Scruton 1986, 219, observes.

¹⁶ Vlastos 1981, 11-19; Kraut 1973, esp. 336-337; and cf. Aristotle's critique in *Pol.* ii 1262b1-25. On the suppression of *erôs* in the *Republic*, see Rosen 1965.

¹⁷ See Vlastos 1981, 6-11; Versenyi 1975, esp. 187, on the meaning of *philia*. On Plato's manipulation of traditional notions of *philia* in the *Lysis*, see Hoerber 1959, esp. 22; Glidden 1980; Glidden 1981.

¹⁸ Cf. Kosman 1976, 53-54.

¹⁹ Vlastos 1981, 4n.

²⁰ Dover 1980, 1. The notorious exception to all this, of course, is a passage from the (lost) *Erechtheus* of Euripides, fr. 358 (Nauck):

οὐκ ἔστι μητρός οὐδὲν ἥδιον τέχνους·
ἐρᾶτε μητρός, παῖδες, ὡς οὐκ ἔστ' ἔρως
τοιούτος ἄλλος ὅστις ἡδίων ἐρᾶν.

As Dover 1978, 156n8, observes, this passage 'is deliberately daring in language, but [it] is so obviously not a command to feel incestuous desire for one's mother that there is no risk of misunderstanding'.

²¹ Dover 1973, esp. 59; cf. Dover 1974, 69-70, on the conventional application of *kalos* to the body rather than the soul of an individual. See also Barrett 1964, 239 *ad* Euripides, *Hipp.* 441-442: 'here above all the translation "love" is misleading: the word [*erôsi*] denotes simply desire, with no thought of wishing the beloved well, so that there is no suggestion (which "love" would give) of consulting another's interest at the expense of one's own'; generally, Devereux 1968, esp. 74-75.

²² Searle 1983, 1. Scruton 1986, 8, defines intentionality as 'the quality of "reference beyond" which is contained in human consciousness: the quality of pointing to, and delineating, an object of thought' and he makes intentionality the central feature in his account of sexual desire (pp. 18ff.). Cf. also Nagel 1979, 41-42, on the intentionality of sexual desire.

²³ An extreme instance: a character in Edward Albee's play, *The Death of Bessie Smith*, announces to his beloved, 'at night the sheets of my bed are like a tent, poled center-upward in my love for you.' Cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* viii 6.24: *ut . . . "Venerem" quam "coitum" dixisse magis decet*. For an example from Platonic scholarship, see note 77, below.

²⁴ Proust 1954, vol. i, 763.

²⁵ Singer 1966, 87.

²⁶ On the ability of *erôs* to generate *philia*, see Vlastos 1981, 4n; Dover 1973, 59; Dover 1978, 41, 46-47, 50-52; Dover 1980, 1-2.

²⁷ Kosman 1976, 65.

²⁸ According to the Athenian Stranger in Plato's *Laws* (838a-b), most people never even experience any desire for sex (*ἐπιθυμία ταύτης τῆς συνουσίας*) with good-looking persons when those persons happen to be members of the immediate family (but see *Resp.* 571c-d).

²⁹ Hackforth 1952, 29-30.

³⁰ Some contemporary approximations to Plato's outlook are discussed by Ferguson 1959, 93-94; Ehlers 1966, esp. 20-25, 65-90. See also Kraus 1983, esp. 13-14, and compare Democritus, DK 68 B73; Euripides, fr. 388, 547, 672, 773.45-46, 897 (Nauck). On Euripides, see North 1966, with the qualification by Vlastos 1981, 22n63.

³¹ Dover 1978, 43; cf. MacCary 1982, 144.

³² *Erôs* continues to be used, of course, to denote any passionate desire, regardless of its object: see, e.g., Archilochus, fr. 19.3 (West), and compare Herodotus, v 32 and Euripides, *Rh.* 166; Sappho, fr. 16.4 (L-P); Aeschylus, *Ag.* 540, *Eum.* 865; Sophocles, fr. 85.8 (Nauck); Critias, DK 85 B15 = Euripides, fr. 659 (Nauck); Euripides, *Pho.* 359 and fr. 729.2 (Nauck); Gorgias, *Pal.* 15 (DK 82 B11a); Thucydides, vi 24.3.

³³ E.g., Xenophon, *Hiero* 1.30. See the brilliant discussion of this point by Foucault 1984, esp. 60-62, 115-116; also, Dover 1974, 69-70, 208-209, 212. Cf. Freud's definition of 'libido' by analogy with 'hunger' in the opening paragraphs of Freud 1905, 135; also, 149. See Sulloway 1979, 277n (for the pre-Freudian history of the term 'libido') and 291ff. (for the pre-Freudian association of sex with hunger).

³⁴ Schreckenberg 1964, 50-65; Barrett 1964, 394, *ad* Euripides, *Hipp.* 1277-1280; Dover 1978, 60-62;

Golden 1984, 314nn27, 28. Cf. Foucault 1984, 115-116.

³⁵ Simonides, fr. 37.29-30 (PMG 542, p. 282); cf. Pindar, fr. 122.9; Sophocles, *Ant.* 787-788, *Trach.* 443, frs. 235, 855.13-16 (Nauck); Euripides, fr. 431 (Nauck); Pl., *Symp.* 196d1; Theocritus, 30.30-31. See Dover 1974, 76, for references to the *topos* 'Even Zeus was worsted by Eros'; also, Mitscherling 1985.

³⁶ Agathon, fr. 29 (Nauck); cf. Philostratus, *Epist.* 52; Plutarch, *Mor.* 764c-d and *Mor.*, fr. 138 (Sandbach, who provides these references); generally, Gorgias, *Hel.* 16-19 (DK 82 B11). For passages illustrating the visual character of the erotic stimulus, see (e.g.) *Hymn. Hom.* 5.56-57, 81-91; Mimnermus, fr. 5.2 (West); Theocritus, 2.77, 82. For the tradition that located the source of *erôs* in the eyes (of the beloved, usually) and that made eye-contact between lover and beloved the erotic stimulus *par excellence*, see the long list of passages assembled by Pearson 1909, to which add Hesiod, *Th.* 910-911; ps.-Hesiod, *Sc.* 7-8; Alcman, fr. 3.61-62 (PMG 3, p. 12); Ibycus, fr. 6 (PMG 287, p. 150); Sophocles, *Trach.* 107; Euripides, *Hipp.* 525-526; Gorgias, *Hel.* 19 (DK 82 B11); Aristotle, fr. 96 (Rose); Maximus of Tyre, 25.2; Athenaeus, xiii 564b-f; and a fragmentary poem ascribed to Aspasia by Herodicus of Babylon and quoted by Masurius *ap.* Athenaeus, v 219e.

Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* pt. 1, q. 5, art. 4: 'Beauty is what pleases on being seen.'

³⁷ For a conspectus of sources, see Bonanno 1973; Giacomelli 1980 (and cf. Fortenbaugh 1966); generally, Dover 1978, 58, 87-88. Cf. also Stigers 1981, 46-49.

³⁸ Dover 1978, 58, cites Theognis, 949-950 = 1278cd, inverted by Cydias, fr. 1 (PMG 714, p. 370) = Plato, *Chrm.* 155d. The new Archilochus fragment also likens the object of sexual aggression to a fawn (PC. 7511.31 = SLG S478.47); one might compare Anacreon, fr. 63 (PMG 408, p. 203); Horace, *Carm.* i 23. The entire tradition is parodied by Theocritus, 13.62-65. On lovers as hunters in Plato, see *Prot.* 309a; *Symp.* 203d5, *Soph.* 222d-e, *Laws* 823b. See, generally, Parry 1964, esp. 269-272; Hoffmann 1977; Detienne 1979, 23-52; Borgeaud 1979, 53-55; Schnapp 1984; Zeitlin 1986.

³⁹ For a similar interpretation of the animal-similes in Homer, see Redfield 1975, 191-199.

⁴⁰ Cf. Theognis, 1353-1356; Freud 1905, 150-151, on 'overvaluation'.

⁴¹ MacCary 1982, 105.

⁴² 'J'ai bien besoin d'avoir cette femme, pour me sauver du ridicule d'en être amoureux: car où ne mène pas un désir contrarié?' (Lettre 4).

⁴³ Cf. Aristophanes, *Eccl.* 956-959, 966-968 (cited by Dover 1974, 211); Theognis, 1319-1322; Aeschylus, *PV* 654; Theocritus, 29.40, 30.23.

⁴⁴ Dover 1974, 212-213.

⁴⁵ See Foucault 1984, 64-66; Dover 1974, 213n. Cf. Cercidas, fr. 5 (Powell).

⁴⁶ See Krenkel 1979, 164-65.

⁴⁷ The issue is disputed: see, generally, Bailey 1947, 1303-1304.

⁴⁸ On the meaning of these words, see the gloss by Bailey 1947, 1304.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Tim.* 86d, 90e-91d, for the closest Platonic parallel to the Lucretian passage, and note that Lucretius, in his attack on *amor* (1058-1120), comes closer than any other ancient writer to duplicating Plato's outlook in the *Symposium*; Lucretius, however, draws the opposite conclusion from the same evidence: he condemns desire and praises appetite. On *erôs* as a νόσος or νόσημα, see Sophocles, *Trach.* 445, fr. 153.1 (Nauck); Gorgias, *Hel.* 19 (DK 82 B11); Theocritus, 2.95; Barrett 1964, 246-247, *ad* Euripides, *Hipp.* 476-477; Lasserre 1944, 175, 177; Lebeck 1972, esp. 276n; Dover 1974, 125.

⁵⁰ On the question of the authorship of the speech, see the sensible remarks of de Vries 1969, 11-14. On the unconventionality of the sentiment expressed in it, cf. the *Dissoi Logoi* 2.2 (DK 90).

⁵¹ See Nussbaum 1982, esp. 94-96. For a fuller account of Plato's attitude to 'slavish virtue', see, generally, Irwin 1977, 160-162, 172-174, 238-241, and cf. Foucault 1984, 63-73, 253-254.

⁵² Pieper 1964, 17.

⁵³ *Pace* Pieper 1964, 12, who claims that *erôs* is love, not desire, and that Lysias' speech 'proposes as a normative standard desire and enjoyment without love'.

⁵⁴ Note that *erôs* in Plato generally implies *epithymia*, in the sense that *erôs* is a species of desire, but *epithymia* obviously does not imply *erôs*: cf. Hyland 1968, esp. 36. Prodicus, DK 84 B7, calls *erôs* 'epithymia doubled': Dover 1973, 59.

⁵⁵ See the excellent discussion by Gould 1963, 113-116.

⁵⁶ I do not of course mean to imply that *erôs* on Plato's view is *unnatural*, merely that it is not to be understood primarily as a biophysical mechanism—which seems to be something like the way that Plato's Eryximachus understands it. Note that Aristophanes is a good candidate to refute Eryximachus, since if

the latter's view is correct *erōs* is an absurd, grotesque bodily function, the sort of thing that furnishes the comic poet with a traditional source of humor on the stage and that his hiccups in Plato's *Symposium* neatly exemplify: the hiccups represent a typically Aristophanic comic reduction of the biophysical interpretation of *erōs*—*erōs* is turned into a mere physical spasm, a penile sneeze (see, esp., *Symp.* 189a).

⁵⁷ See Verdenius 1962; generally, Gundert 1949; and cf. Simmel 1921, 241.

⁵⁸ Τί τῶν καλῶν ἐστὶν ὁ Ἔρως . . . ; ἐρᾷ ὁ ἐρῶν τῶν καλῶν τί ἐρᾷ; (*Symp.* 204d; cf. 204e, 207a); τί ποτε βούλοιντο ἂν αὐτῷ γενέσθαι τὸν τρίτον [i.e., μικτόν] ἔρωτά τις ἔχων τοῦτον; (*Laws* 837b). That Aristophanes' myth is indeed addressed specifically to the question of the erotic aim is evident from Diotima's rebuttal of one point in it at the conclusion of her own disquisition on the aim of *erōs* (205d-e; cf. 212c). On the importance of distinguishing the object from the aim of *erōs*, see section 4, below, esp. note 102.

⁵⁹ For this felicitous translation of *symbola* (191d) I am indebted to Markus 1955, 135.

⁶⁰ Cf. Diotima's description of the paederastic lover's aim at 211d: μήτ' ἐσθίειν μήτε πίνειν, ἀλλὰ θεᾶσθαι μόνον καὶ συνεῖναι.

⁶¹ Cf. Freud 1912, 190: 'For what motive would men have for putting sexual instinctual forces to other uses if, by any distribution of those forces, they could obtain fully satisfying pleasure? They would never abandon that pleasure and they would never make any further progress.'

⁶² Cf. Brisson 1973, 36-37.

⁶³ Nussbaum 1979, 140-141: 'The objects of these creatures' passions are whole people: not "complexes of desirable qualities," but entire beings, thoroughly embodied, with all their idiosyncracies, flaws, and even faults. . . . Nor are love objects interchangeable for these people, as seats of abstract goodness or beauty might be. The individual is loved not only as a whole, but also as a unique and irreplaceable whole.'

⁶⁴ Cf. Singer 1966, 53-54 (I have substituted 'desire' for 'love' in his formulation): 'Among our spherical ancestors desire did not exist. It came into being only after they were cut in two. . . . Desire is the yearning for one's other half . . . and this occurs *before* Zeus moves the reproductive organs around to make sexual intercourse possible. For Aristophanes, as for Plato, sex is a physical makeshift. It is needed for procreation in our divided state; it may provide a rudimentary union with another person; but in itself it does not explain the nature of desire. Far from being sexual, desire is the search for that state of wholeness in which sex did not exist.' For the corresponding psychoanalytic distinction between ego-libido and object-libido, see Freud 1914 (the original formulation). Cf. also Jaeger 1947, 184-185; Levi 1949, 295-296; Brisson 1973; Kosman 1976, 66; Nussbaum 1979, 144: '*Erōs* is the desire to be a being without any contingent occurrent desires. It is a second-order desire that all desires should be cancelled.'

⁶⁵ Singer 1966, 68-69; Lowenstam 1985, 89; cf. Brisson 1973, 42.

⁶⁶ Cf. Freud 1912, 188-189: 'It is my belief that, however strange it may sound, we must reckon with the possibility that something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself is unfavourable to the realization of complete satisfaction. . . . [A]s a result of the diphasic onset of object-choice, and the interposition of the barrier against incest, the final object of the sexual instinct is never any longer the original object but only a surrogate for it. Psychoanalysis has shown us that when the original object of a wishful impulse has been lost as a result of repression, it is frequently represented by an endless series of substitutive objects none of which, however, brings full satisfaction. This may explain the inconstancy in object-choice, the "craving for stimulation" which is so often a feature of the love of adults.' Sartre and Lacan similarly rule out the possibility of *successful* sexual desire, though on (different versions of) Hegelian grounds: see Wilden 1968. Scruton 1986, 120-130, like Rollo May before him, argues that sexual intercourse is not the aim of sexual desire; he also makes a number of interesting observations about the 'paradoxicality' of desire.

⁶⁷ Cf. Scruton 1986, 194. I disagree, therefore, with Dover 1966, 47-48, who argues that Aristophanes' myth is entirely at odds with Diotima's erotic doctrine.

⁶⁸ On the self-transcending character of the desire for what one lacks, cf. Gadamer 1980, 14-15.

⁶⁹ This is precisely the same distinction that has recently been championed by Scruton 1986 in supposed opposition to Plato.

⁷⁰ See, generally, Greenberg and Mitchell 1983; cf. also Wilden 1968, 168-174.

⁷¹ Demos 1934; Jaeger 1947, 188; Kranz 1958, 74-80; Gould 1963, 44-45; Friedländer 1969, i 41-44.

⁷² Erbse 1966, 201, gets it exactly wrong when he insists: '*Platon geht augenscheinlich von dem Grundgedanken aus, dass sich die reine Begeisterung für das Schöne, Gute und Wahre nur mit Hilfe der körperlichen Begierde bilden können, also unter Mitwirkung desjenigen Verlangens, das wir als irdische oder sinnliche Liebe zu bezeichnen pflegen.*' For Plato it is not sexuality that gives a boost to erotic desire, but rather erotic desire that endows sexuality with its soul-shaking power.

⁷³ Cf. Neumann 1965, 54. For a detailed outline of Plato's argument about the nature of thirst, see Robinson 1971. Later echoes of Plato's view of the appetites may conceivably be found in Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrr. Hyp.* i 11.24, i 34.238. Though I treat Plato's analysis of *epithymia* as an analysis of appetite, I do not wish to obscure the many differences between 'appetite' (i.e., *epithymia*) in Plato's conception and what I described in sections 1 and 2 of this essay as the notion of 'appetite' or 'natural compulsion' (*ἀναγκή*) shared by many classical Greeks. As I hope will become clear, Plato's conceptualization of *epithymia*, though related to the common Greek notion, does not accurately express or represent it but, if anything, caricatures it somewhat.

⁷⁴ Cf. Irwin 1977, 192-193. Cf. also Watson 1975, esp. 208-215, whose distinction between 'desiring' and 'valuing' turns on the distinction between good-independent and good-dependent desires and so is roughly congruent with the distinction between desire_A and desire_E which I have ascribed to Plato; Watson fails to differentiate Platonic *epithymia* from *erôs* in terms of 'desiring' and 'valuing', however—partly because his interpretation of Plato is influenced by Penner 1971 and partly because he quite rightly observes that not all good-independent desires are appetites. According to Gadamer 1980, 17-18, the difference between appetite and desire for Plato depends on the distinction between conditional and unconditional valuation. Plato's conceptualization of *epithymia* may be compared, with interesting results, to Bertrand Russell's conceptualization of 'desire' in the third chapter of Russell 1921, 58-76, esp. 67-68; cf. also Bishop Butler, *Sermon* 2.10-13.

⁷⁵ See Irwin 1977, 193; cf. also 230-232; 337n53.

⁷⁶ I borrow this analogy from Penner 1971, 117n, although I do not accept his interpretation of *epithymia* as a thought-independent desire: see note 86, below.

⁷⁷ I hope to discuss Plato's shifting terminology in a forthcoming essay on 'Plato and the Language of Desire'. Gosling 1973, 18, takes *Resp.* 439d6 to mean that Plato includes 'love' (!) in the epithymetic part of the soul.

⁷⁸ It is precisely the failure to distinguish between the epithymetic and the erotic manifestations of sexual desire in Plato's thought that leads to the massive misinterpretation of Plato's erotic theory by Scruton 1986, who identifies Platonic *epithymia* with the whole of sexual desire and who therefore reproaches Plato for teaching that all sexual desire (as opposed to 'erotic love') is a bestial affair.

⁷⁹ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* pt. i, q. 5, art. 6: 'that which terminates the movement of appetite in the form of rest in the thing desired is called the pleasant'. For the opposing tradition, which teaches that appetites do not aim at their own satisfaction but rather at the 'external things themselves'—i.e., at the objects that will serve to gratify them, see Bishop Butler, *Sermon* 11.6-16; Thomas Hill Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, ii 2, §§ 121-128; iii 1, §§ 158-170; Campbell 1967, 123-127.

⁸⁰ Cf. Xenophon, *Mem.* i 2.29-31, where Socrates, using identical language, rebukes Critias for his relentless pursuit of the beautiful Euthydemus by comparing him to a pig scratching itself against rocks. Cf. also Hythlodæus' remark about sexual pleasure in Thomas More's *Utopia* (quoted by Greenblatt 1980, 43): 'If a person thinks that his felicity consists in this kind of pleasure, he must admit that he will be in the greatest happiness if his lot happens to be a life which is spent in perpetual hunger, thirst, itching, eating, drinking, scratching, and rubbing.'

⁸¹ See Foucault 1984, 51-53, esp. 53n.

⁸² See Irwin 1979, *ad* Plato, *Gorg.* 491d4, 491e, 493a, 499e-500a, and 505b-c, on the various indications telling both for and against the interpretation of *epithymia* as a good-independent desire in the *Gorgias*. See, generally, Dodds 1945, largely recapitulated in Dodds 1951, 207-235.

⁸³ Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948, 660.

⁸⁴ To be sure, an ethical hedonist might find a specifically positive value in anything that constitutes for him a source of pleasure, but such a possibility does not threaten Plato's conceptual distinction between *epithymia* and *erôs* in terms of *hêdonê*-directed versus value-directed desire: it just so happens that in the case of the ethical hedonist the agent aims at pleasure *qua* good and thereby places a positive (ideological) value on gratification over and above the actual gratification afforded by the object; thus, the hedonist transforms what for most people are objects of appetite into objects of erotic desire as well. Cf. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, iii 1, § 158.

⁸⁵ This seems to be the logic behind Plato's argument for calling the appetitive part of the soul *φίλοχρηματον* as well as *ἐπιθυμητικόν* and for collapsing the distinction between those two dimensions of appetite at *Resp.* 580e-581a (an argument which Irwin 1977, 337n53, considers 'feeble', noting that Plato 'does not always do justice to his own discussion'): the love of money is taken to be a purely instrumental desire (*διὰ χρημάτων μάλιστα ἀποτελοῦνται αἱ τοιαῦται ἐπιθυμίαι*); cf. Moline 1978, 9-10. But whenever someone pursues

χρηματισμός not simply because it is a means to the gratification of his desires but because commerce represents to him a meaningful way of living his life, then, as Diotima maintains, his activity qualifies as erotic—or, to use her equivalent expression, as an ἐπιθυμία τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ τοῦ εὐδαιμονεῖν (*Symp.* 205d)—inasmuch as the valuation he places upon it is mediated by his notion of what is good. See the excellent discussion of this point (to which I shall return in section 4, below, at note 118) by Sinaiko 1965, 83-86; cf. also Irwin 1977, 167, 173-174, 235-241.

Note that nothing prevents an appetitive object from having the same extension as an erotic object: in the case of money, just cited, there is no extensional difference between the actual objects of desire in *Resp.* 580e-581a and *Symp.* 205d, only a difference in the *descriptions* or *aspects* under which they are desired; cf. Watson 1975, 211. I may desire_A this glass of wine because I believe it will satisfy my thirst or I may desire_E the same glass of wine because I believe the wine in the glass used to be my grandmother's favorite kind of wine; similarly, I may desire_A my beloved for the sake of the pleasure which sexual intercourse with him or her affords me or I may desire_E the same individual because he or she is youthful, French, kind, very much like my ex-lover, a friend of Marlon Brando's, and so on. (On this point, see Proust 1954, vol. ii, 362.) Indeed, I may even desire the same human individual appetitively and erotically *at the same time*, but (if so) that is a fact about my own psychology, not about the definition or the nature of appetitive and erotic desire.

⁸⁶ It may be objected, however, that some appetitive desires are indeed content-specific. Suppose, for example, that I want to have some Chinese food for supper tonight and that, moreover, I particularly want to eat a certain kind of dish made with beef and bitter melon which I especially prize. Suppose, further, that I desire this food not because some value or other attaches to it in my eyes—not because, say, it reminds me of a particularly happy period in my life during which I tasted that dish for the first time—but because I happen to be in the mood for it. If I am unable to obtain this particular food and have to make do with a hamburger instead I will not be devastated, of course, but I will be distinctly disappointed, even though a hamburger will serve to satisfy my hunger quite adequately. Is my desire still an appetitive desire, according to the criteria I have outlined above and imputed to Plato? Yes, because what remains foremost in my intention is the desire for a certain kind of 'pleasure' (that is, for the gratification of a particular need), not the desire for an individual object—and the impulse to obtain *hêdonê*, as we have seen, is the signature of epithymetic intentionality. It so happens, in other words, that I have become psychologically dependent upon the regular procurement of a pleasure which only a certain type of object affords me, but I do not value the object itself except in an instrumental sense. Note, also, that what I desire is not one particular serving of the dish in question rather than another: any old sample of beef with bitter melon—so long as it is properly prepared, of course, which signifies only that it satisfies the condition of being gratifying—will do. Nonetheless, this objection to Plato's account of appetite has sufficient force to demonstrate that appetitive objects, though content-generic, need not be conceived as empty of all content whatsoever; they may in certain cases have considerable specificity: they just lack sufficient specificity to individuate them completely.

It will be observed that my interpretation of *erôs* and *epithymia* in Plato lies athwart the distinction between thought-dependent and thought-independent desires which Penner 1971 borrows from Hampshire and applies to Plato. According to Penner, if I understand him correctly, *epithymia* is thought-independent, but the desire for the consumption of a particular object involves the exercise of practical reason (e.g., this liquid is water; drinking it, rather than looking at it, will satisfy my thirst, etc.) and is therefore thought-dependent. Irwin (1977, 328n18, paragraph 6) has discussed some of the defects of Penner's approach; for my purposes, it is sufficient to remark that Penner's analysis does not enable us to determine whether the individual object of a desire is appetitive or erotic, since from his perspective every desire for a particular object is thought-dependent.

⁸⁷ Cf. the treatment of 'individualising thought' by Scruton 1986, 78-82, who considers Plato, however, an adversary of the view he expounds (34-35).

⁸⁸ Friedländer 1969, i 50-53, calls this feature of Platonic *erôs* its 'intentionality': every erotic relationship includes, in addition to the 'I' and 'thou' of the two lovers, an 'object' or 'Idea' towards which they move. I borrow the term 'triangulation' from Girard 1965.

⁸⁹ Freud 1905, 161-162. Cf. Vlastos 1981, 28-30, for a discussion of correspondences between the Platonic and Romantic tendencies to idealize erotic objects. On 'the complicity' between psychoanalysis and philosophical idealism (as typified by Plato), see Brenkman 1982; cf. Livet 1976.

⁹⁰ Proust 1954, vol. i, 833. 'There is no such thing as a romantic experience', Oscar Wilde wrote in

1885: 'there are romantic memories, and there is the desire of romance—that is all. Our most fiery moments of ecstasy are merely shadows of what somewhere else we have felt, or of what we long some day to feel. So at least it seems to me.' (Hart-Davis 1979, 64.)

⁹¹ Cf. Moravcsik 1971, esp. 291.

⁹² See Proust 1954, vol. i, 100: '*Même les femmes qui prétendent ne juger un homme que sur son physique, voient en ce physique l'émanation d'une vie spéciale*'; also, vol. ii, 46, 362.

⁹³ For some of the difficulties, see Pascal, *Pensées* 323 (Brunschvicg = 688 Lafuma); Kosman 1976, 56-57; Scruton 1986, 98, 111-118. Cf. Simmel 1921, 244: 'The deepest mystery of our world view, however, Individuality—this unanalyzable unity, which is not to be derived from anything else, not subsumable under any higher concept, set within a world infinitely analyzable, calculable, and governed by general laws—this individuality stands for us as the actual focal point of love, which for this very reason becomes entwined in the darkest problematic aspects of our concept of the world in contrast with the rational clarity of the Platonic attitude'.

⁹⁴ The terms 'sample', 'instance', and 'manifestation', as they appear in my text, are simply working terms. I must caution the reader not to understand them in one or another of the ways in which they have been defined by recent philosophers of language. Thus, I do not mean by 'sample' the same thing as does Goodman 1976, 52ff., who uses 'sample' interchangeably with 'example' and 'exemplification'; my distinction between 'sample' and 'manifestation' cuts across his categories: a glass of water is a sample of water, as I see it, but a youthful person—one who manifests youthfulness—is both an example of youthfulness and an exemplification of the predicate 'youthful' as well as an instance of youthfulness.

⁹⁵ See Quine 1960, 97-99. But see, also, Bealer 1979, esp. 282-283, who argues against the identification of 'stuffs' with 'scattered particulars'.

⁹⁶ For Plato's implicit observation of the distinction between erotic phenomenology and erotic intentionality, see section 5, below, at note 131.

⁹⁷ Pace Nagel 1979, 42-43, who, despite his own warnings against the temptation to adopt a 'pious view' of the 'psychological content' of sexual desire, nonetheless succumbs to such a temptation himself; a position roughly similar to Nagel's is defended by Scruton 1986, 96, 103-107, who speaks of the 'non-transferability' of sexual desire.

⁹⁸ Cf. Goodman 1976, 53: 'Exemplification is possession plus reference.'

⁹⁹ See the passage from Kant's *Lectures on Ethics* quoted by Scruton 1986, 83: 'Sexual love makes of the loved person an object of appetite; as soon as that appetite has been stilled, the person is cast aside as one casts away a lemon which has been sucked dry' (trans. Infield).

¹⁰⁰ The importance of this passage was clearly seen by Thompson 1868, 161.

¹⁰¹ The outstanding exceptions are Bruns 1900, esp. 22-24; Grube 1935, 115; Markus 1955; Neumann 1965, esp. 46; Vlastos 1981, 20-22; and Cummings 1976.

¹⁰² Throughout this essay I have been consistently applying to Platonic texts the familiar psychoanalytic distinction between the source, aim, and object of a drive. I have done so because I believe this distinction helps to make conceptually clear what is already implicit in Plato. Diotima's discussion of *erôs*, for example, seems to be organized along the lines of the psychoanalytic distinction: she begins by describing the source (literally, γένεσις) of *erôs* in mythopoeic terms at *Symp.* 203b-204c; she then goes on to formulate its aim (τί ἐρᾷ: *Symp.* 204d6, 204e3) at 204d-209e; finally, she reveals its object at 209e-212a. The same distinction often provides a convenient conceptual means of differentiating among the various kinds of desire discussed by Plato—e.g., Platonic *epithymia* and 'Aristophanic' *erôs*: the former springs from a need or lack, aims at gratification or *hêdonê*, and takes as its object a sample of a gratifying stuff, whereas the latter springs from our unnatural condition of incompleteness, aims at a self-transcending union, and takes as its object the lover's 'other half' (or its surrogate).

¹⁰³ Cf. Santas 1979, 69-70.

¹⁰⁴ The same pun can be found at *Cratylus* 398d.

¹⁰⁵ See Versenyi 1975, Glidden 1981; and cf. Kosman 1976. Gadamer 1980, 18-19, describes *oikeiôtês* in Plato's conception as a property common to the objects of both need and desire.

¹⁰⁶ Beversluis unpublished, n37. See, now, Vlastos 1984.

¹⁰⁷ Another way of conceptualizing the difference between the aim and object of *erôs* is to invoke the distinction Aristotle draws in *NE* i 12 (1101b9-1102a4) between 'prizing' and 'praising'. The erotic aim—what the lover seeks to achieve—is what he prizes, on this account, whereas the erotic object is what he praises.

¹⁰⁸ See Kenny 1963, esp. 112-126, whose entire treatment of desire is restricted to desire_w. See, fur-

ther, the considerably more sophisticated analysis by Bealer 1986, who writes, 'An intentional act is about objects only secondarily, inasmuch as it involves standing in an intentional relation to an intension that is about those objects' (253); even Bealer, however, allows for objectival relations that are *directed* to objects without being *about* objects (in the sense of 'about' defined in the foregoing statement): see 254-255.

¹⁰⁹ On this point, see the discussion by MacIntyre 1982, 304.

¹¹⁰ See Scruton 1986, 75-76, 85-86.

¹¹¹ Cf. Neumann 1965, 38; Santas 1979, 71: 'The intentional object of generic eros is the good rather than the beautiful. . . . The distinction between a generic *erôs* for the good and a specific *erôs* for the beautiful, in Plato's conception, goes back to Kranz 1926, 443.

¹¹² Thus, the good is the sort of value that is susceptible of being either intrinsic and extrinsic or instrumental and final, whereas the beautiful is the sort of value that admits only of being intrinsic (the Form) and extrinsic (beautiful particulars), according to the meta-distinction drawn by Korsgaard 1983.

I am moved but not, finally, persuaded by the subtle arguments of Moravcsik 1982, 30-32, who distinguishes between 'the beautiful' and 'the fine', contending that the latter is the proper sense of *to kalon* in Plato, except when *kalon* refers to what is 'fine in appearance'—i.e., beautiful. The meaning of *kalon* is not, in my view, a complex semantic problem involving the ancient tendency to collapse the vocabularies of erotics and aesthetics; the word normally refers to the quality of being outwardly attractive or appealing, like *bello* in Italian, and whereas in English 'fine' or 'fair' may sometimes do greater justice to the connotations of the Greek word, 'beautiful' is perfectly adequate for most purposes and usually does not lay Plato open to the charge of equivocation. If I were to translate *kalon* in Plato by a more specialized or tendentious philosophical term, it would be 'valuable': see Vlastos 1981, 49-52.

¹¹³ For a more detailed analysis, see Kranz 1926, 442-443; Wipperfurth 1965; Santas 1979; Vlastos 1981, 20-22; and Chen 1983, esp. 66.

¹¹⁴ For a defense of this translation, see Vlastos 1981, 21n, 424; Burnyeat 1977, 14n5; and cf. Morrison 1964, 51-55; Neumann 1965, 39; Plass 1978.

¹¹⁵ On this image, see Dover 1980, 147.

¹¹⁶ Bruns 1900, 22.

¹¹⁷ On this passage, see Hackforth 1952, 41-42; Gould 1963, 113-116; Hyland 1968, 42; Friedländer 1969, iii 224-225; Dorter 1971, esp. 282-286; Brown and Coulter 1971; Irwin 1977, 238-239. I have here reproduced some remarks previously published in Halperin 1986.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Gould 1963, 46-48, and see note 85, above.

¹¹⁹ Vlastos 1981, 28, 30; cf. Neumann 1965, 40, 44; Santas 1979, 72-74.

¹²⁰ Cf. Neumann 1965, 44-47.

¹²¹ Voegelin 1966, 13.

¹²² Cf. Kosman 1976.

¹²³ Cf. Scruton 1986, 26-27.

¹²⁴ For Plato's location of desire, even appetitive desire, in the soul, rather than in the body, throughout his writings after the *Gorgias* (esp. 517d) and the *Phaedo*, see *Resp.* 437b-439e; *Phlb.* 34d-35d.

¹²⁵ To be sure, the *Phaedrus* contains scant indication that *erôs* is for procreation in beauty rather than for beauty *tout court*, but Socrates does emphasize the moral benefits that will accrue to lovers who realize that their desire has a transcendental aim (245b, 253c, 256d-e), and so it might be fair to say that the relationship between lover and beloved in the *Phaedrus* instantiates but does not of itself generate Diotima's erotic ideal. On the compatibility of the doctrines of the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, see Irwin 1977, 323n62; cf., generally, Moore 1973.

¹²⁶ Cf. Chen 1983, 68n16.

¹²⁷ Cf. Singer 1966, 70-73, 87-88; Vlastos 1981, 32-33. Cf. also Scolnicov 1978, esp. 40-41.

¹²⁸ Lucretius iv 1091-1101, makes the same point: '*nil datur in corpus praeter simulacra fruendum/tenvia*' (1095-1096); also, Plutarch, *Mor.* 759c, 765f-766a. Cf. Achilles Tatius, i 9.

¹²⁹ On Plato's contemptuous application of the word *φλυαρία* to mortal affairs, see Vlastos 1977, 34n110.

¹³⁰ On this image, see Clay 1985.

¹³¹ Vlastos 1981, 26; cf. Warner 1979. I wish to thank Professor A. A. Long, of the University of California at Berkeley, for helping me to understand more clearly the nature of the objections which might be raised to this aspect of Vlastos' interpretation.

¹³² See, generally, Nussbaum 1979; see also Pater 1901, 126-142, for a classic statement of the connection between Plato's erotic theory and his attentiveness to the particularity of human experience (as wit-

nessed chiefly by his literary art).

¹³³ On the criteria for a sound reductive argument, see Nagel 1979, 175.

¹³⁴ For an introduction to Lacan's terminology, see Wilden 1968, esp. 185-200, and Lemaire 1977, 161-175; cf. also Brenkman 1982, 415-418. My own analysis of erotic phenomenology is roughly congruent with Lacan's insofar as desire_A corresponds to what Lacan calls 'need', ultimate desire_E to 'desire', and proximate desire_E to 'demand'.

¹³⁵ Cf. Neumann 1965, 49.

¹³⁶ Glidden 1981, 40. Glidden's argument, if accepted, would seriously undermine the interpretation of the *Symposium* which Nussbaum 1979 bases on the personal testimony of Alcibiades.

¹³⁷ Glidden 1981, 46-51.

¹³⁸ Glidden 1981, 49. The roots of this view are securely Socratic: see Beversluis unpublished, n37: 'This reference to the self is essential for understanding the Socratic Paradoxes. One's conception of the object will determine whether one desires it or not. The reason why knowledge cannot be "dragged about by the passions like a slave" (*Prot.* 352b-c) is not because knowledge enables a person to resist the passions but because knowledge enables its possessor to see his former object of desire under a new description: for what it really is—an object which, if possessed, would be harmful rather than beneficial.'

¹³⁹ Glidden 1981, 53.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Simmel 1921, 238, 241-242; Singer 1966, 72; Vlastos 1981, 26 (quoted in the text at note 131, above); Nussbaum 1979, 145-150.

¹⁴¹ Gould unpublished, however, interprets this passage differently: 'Even the best kind of *paiderastia*, therefore, is only a *dolos* [or "fraud"], not a necessary "step" at all.'

¹⁴² Cf. Kranz 1926, 445. In the *Phaedrus*, to be sure, Socrates omits to mention any of the intermediate steps between the desire for one beautiful body and the desire for the Form of Beauty itself.

¹⁴³ Cf. Proust 1954, vol. iii, 897-909; Vendler 1981, 26: 'Denying itself the possession of the sacred object, the soul finds identity. Acquiring an object means absorbing it into the soul and losing it from view; renouncing it, the soul keeps it in view forever, and is able to see it clearly, free of projection. The sacred object is exposed, its underlying body visible, its form known in the X-ray vision of desire, which by renunciation is enabled into perception.' For the economic analogue, compare Hyde 1983, esp. 21-23.

¹⁴⁴ Chen 1983, 67; 69: 'Scholars like to interpret this method of apprehending Ideas in terms of abstraction and generalization, whereby they read empirical logic into Plato's theory of Ideas. In fact, there is neither abstraction nor generalization for Plato as there is for later empiricists. The deindividualization of which we spoke above is not abstraction. What is reached by abstraction is something common, but the beautiful body deindividualized is still a particular body; it is just that its possessor is being disregarded.' (The term 'deindividualization' derives, presumably, from Simmel 1921, 246.) Chen's point is well taken, but his line of argument nonetheless seems very odd: after all, deindividualized beautiful bodies do indeed contain an ideal, if not an actual, common element—namely, Beauty—and, as Chen himself acknowledges (68n16), insofar as they remain particular bodies after undergoing deindividualization they are irrelevant to the Idea.

¹⁴⁵ Grube 1935, 114-115; Singer 1966, 76-80; cf. Ferguson 1959, 92; also, Hamilton 1951, 26: 'After that [i.e., the second rung of Diotima's ladder] what Plato calls love is hardly what we recognize as love at all, especially when he speaks of the moral beauty of laws and institutions as objects of love.'

¹⁴⁶ Grube 1935, 115; cf. Brown and Coulter 1971, 415: '... there is no reason at all to believe that the metaphor of the philosopher as lover rests on a merely non-essential point of comparison. For Plato, the activity of thought and the arousal of reflection in others both draw on the same deep sources of passion which animate our sexual natures.'

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Vlastos 1981, 29-30.

¹⁴⁸ Kosman 1976, 61-62. See Chen 1983, 66-70; Matthen 1982, esp. 93, 96-97, together with the rejoinder by McPherran 1983, for a helpful clarification of the sense in which individuated beauty is relative for Plato.

¹⁴⁹ Nussbaum 1979, 147: '... Socrates' argument depends on a strong hidden assumption: that all beauty, *qua* beauty, is uniform, the same in kind.' I do not know of a passage in which Plato explicitly articulates the doctrine that the beauty in a beautiful object *x* and the beauty in a beautiful object *y* (where *x* and *y* belong to different genera or categories) is the same beauty. He does make it clear in the *Phaedo* and *Republic* (passages cited in text, above) that beauty in respect to itself, *qua* beauty, is everywhere the same—but for our purposes that is tautologous, a mere re-assertion that the Form is self-identical. Plato sometimes suggests that the beauty of all particulars belonging to a *single* genus or category (e.g., bodies) is 'akin' (ἀδελφός; *Symp.* 210b1), though by that word he may simply wish to express (as Chen 1983, 66-67,

argues) the point of view of the initiate in erotics who perceives the kinship among the various instances he encounters but does not yet consider the beauty in all bodies 'one and the same' (ἐν τε καὶ ταυτόν: *Symp.* 210b3), as he will do later on when and if he has completed the ascent. Plato also implies that the beauty of particulars belonging to *different* genera or categories (e.g., bodies, laws) is 'related' (συγγενής: *Symp.* 210c5), though Chen's argument about ἀδελφός, as he observes (67nn10, 11; 70n23), still applies (I follow the implicit view of Moravcsik 1971, 288, that πᾶν αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συγγενές ἐστίν refers inclusively and synoptically to 'all of the levels' of the ascent previously mentioned by Diotima). Elsewhere, Plato contents himself with saying that physical beauty 'copies' or 'imitates' beauty itself (*Phdr.* 251a2-3), and he leaves the details of the Form's *parousia* in the particular—the Form's 'immanent character' (as Vlastos 1981, 84-86, calls it)—notoriously vague (*Phdo.* 100d: see Tarrant 1948, 33-34). But since in the case of other Forms, such as Piety or Strength, Plato freely allows that the immanent characters manifested in particular instances of the Form are qualitatively transcategorical (ἡ οὐ ταυτόν ἐστιν ἐν πάσῃ πράξει τὸ ὅσιον αὐτὸ αὐτῷ, καὶ τὸ ἀνόσιον αὐτῷ τοῦ μὲν ὀσίου πάντος ἐναντίον, αὐτὸ δὲ αὐτῷ ὅμοιον καὶ ἔχον μίαν τινὰ ἰδέαν κατὰ τὴν ἀνοσιότητα πᾶν ὅτιπερ ἂν μέλλῃ ἀνόσιον εἶναι; *Euthyphro* 5d1-5; cf. 6d10-e6; *Meno* 72e4-73a3), and since in the case of Beauty, the Form-manifestation in all members of a particular class of objects (i.e., bodies) is, as we have seen, 'one and the same' (*Symp.* 210b3), it follows that in the ascent-passage of the *Symposium* the beauty manifested in each of its instantiations is the same with respect to beauty: the beauty in a beautiful x and in a beautiful y must be the same beauty, though manifested differently in each case. Diotima's language abets this identification: she speaks of the lover ἀρχόμενον ἀπὸ τῶνδε τῶν καλῶν ἐκείνου ἕνεκα τοῦ καλοῦ αἰεὶ ἐπανίεναι (211c1-2). The ascent-passage, then, seems to be predicated on the assumption that the beauty in laws is not merely (1) self-identical *qua* beauty, nor (2) generically self-identical in laws but different from the beauty in bodies which is also unitary and self-identical within its class, but (3) the same beauty, specifically and generically, as the beauty in bodies. For similar interpretations of Plato's position on this issue, see, generally, Moravcsik 1971; Matthen 1982, 96-97.

¹⁵⁰ Matthen 1982, 97; cf., generally, Moravcsik 1971, esp. 295: '... according to Plato not every predicate expression stands for a Form, and ... the mere comprehension of a common element among a plurality of particulars is not necessarily the comprehension of a Form'. More detailed consideration of this matter would entangle us in the notoriously vexed questions surrounding Plato's treatment of immanent characters (also called 'Forms-in-things', 'Form-manifestations', 'quality individuals', 'immanent properties', 'attribute manifestations', and 'Form-instantiation factors'). For an introduction to this topic, see Vlastos 1981, 76-110, esp. 84-92; most recently, McPherran 1982.

¹⁵¹ Singer 1966, 51-52; Moravcsik 1971, 291. *Pace* Demos 1934, 341; Grube 1935, 136; Cornford 1950, 121 (though heavily qualified on 128-129); Dodds 1951, 213, 218-219. Cf. Beversluis unpublished, n37: 'Hence, for Socrates, desire is not to be suppressed but redirected to more adequate objects, to real rather than to apparent goods.'

¹⁵² It is therefore a mistake to interpret Plato's sexual imagery in the literal way that Gould unpublished does, assuming 'that Plato understood even the erection as a vivid response to the drawing power of the upper regions of reality'. As Professor Vlastos has pointed out to me in a private communication, Plato can describe the ultimate object of desire in either sexual or non-sexual language, resorting to metaphors drawn from Dionysiac possession-mysteries or Eleusinian vision-mysteries whenever he wants to produce more intense or expressive effects without recourse to sexual comparisons. For a list of Plato's references to Eleusinian vision-mysteries, see Scolnicov 1978, 45n24; for a list of Plato's references to Dionysiac possession-mysteries, see Anton 1962; Schein 1974, 163-166.

¹⁵³ Cf. Brown and Coulter 1971, 415; Scolnicov 1978, 44: 'At the lower levels [of the soul] cognition is minimal, obscure, and therefore the soul is able to relate only to objects which are not proper objects of knowledge, viz., the objects of the sensible world. The same is true of the emotions: the soul's attraction and repulsion at its lower levels are likewise related to improper objects. As the soul is shaped into higher levels, its attraction is gradually directed to more adequate objects. But this is not another type of relation. It is still a drive that has a cognitive element' (so, also, Moline 1978, 10-13). See Irwin 1977, 171: 'the development of virtue is ... both cognitive and affective'; also p. 173.

¹⁵⁴ I hope to address these and other issues in *The Metaphysics of Desire: Plato and the Origins of Erotic Theory in the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

¹⁵⁵ E.g., Murley 1946; Hackforth 1952, 10.

¹⁵⁶ On this controversial point, see the sane remarks of Moravcsik 1971, 296-301; cf. Stough 1976, 21-22; Mates 1979; Malcolm 1985.

- 157 Singer 1966, 85-90; Vlastos 1981, 31-32.
- 158 Vlastos 1981, 56.
- 159 See Vlastos 1981, 76ff.
- 160 Bruns 1900, 22-24.
- 161 Moravcsik 1971, 290-291, proposes this substitution. I do not, of course, have any wish to deny that Platonic *erôs* is a form of aspiration.
- 162 See Bruns 1900, 20: '*Deshalb ist der von der körperlichen Schönheit Ergriffene, ohne es zu wissen, der höheren Welt näher gebracht*'; Sinaiko 1965, 68: 'Physiologically this [sight of the beloved] is merely an act of visual sensation, but humanly it is far more than that; for in some degree it reminds man of the transcendent beauty, "beauty itself," which he once beheld directly in the "place beyond the heavens." When this reminiscence occurs, then in a quite concrete sense the man who experiences it, "beholds . . . and feasts" on the "Being which truly is" in the very act of ordinary visual perception. Thus, according to the myth [in the *Phaedrus*], the transcendent character of the contemplative act means that any ordinary sensory experience of a soul within the physical universe may also be transcendent'; also, Sinaiko 1965, 90: 'Thus, to see beauty in another human being and to make him or her one's beloved remains the mark of the true philosopher, but to the degree that any man finds beauty in another person he is partaking of the "blessed" life of the philosopher'; Scolnicov 1978, 45-46: 'the knowledge of the good is not mere knowledge but it is a unified activity of the soul, which includes cognition, desire and creation. At the lowest level, it presents itself as sexual attraction, in which too there is a minimum of cognition, and physical procreation; at the higher level it appears as philosophical knowledge, whose necessary consequence is political and educational activity.'
- 163 Cf. Proust 1954, vol. iii, 899n: '*Chaque personne qui nous fait souffrir peut être rattachée par nous à une divinité dont elle n'est qu'un reflet fragmentaire et le dernier degré, divinité (Idée) dont la contemplation nous donne aussitôt de la joie au lieu de la peine que nous avons. Tout l'art de vivre, c'est de ne nous servir de personnes qui nous font souffrir que comme d'un degré permettant d'accéder à leur forme divine et de peupler ainsi joyeusement notre vie de divinités.*' For a comparative study of Santayana and Proust, see Ames 1937. If Ehlers 1966, 65-90, is correct, it seems that Aeschines of Sphettus considered *erôs* within marriage to be a vehicle of ennoblement for both partners; Plato would seem to disagree (see Vlastos 1981, 41-42).
- 164 Cf. Santas 1979, 74, who argues that Plato has constructed 'what amounts to a theory of creativity in the arts and sciences, rather than a theory of interpersonal love'.
- 165 Levy 1979; Price 1981.
- 166 See, generally, Notopoulos 1949; Holmes 1975, 429-438; Brown 1979, esp. 5-23, 117-149.

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