

A COMPARISON OF PLATO'S VIEWS OF EROS IN THE SYMPOSIUM AND PHAEDRUS

by

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ABSTRACT

A Comparison of Plato's views of *eros* in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*

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My examination of Plato's valuation of *eros* in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* dialogues in its manifold elements in general has resulted in a more concrete definition of *eros* as a relational entity. The transition of an initially natural cosmic force in archaic times into a more valid ethical quality so as to encourage betterment in human relations is evident in Plato's philosophy. The terms 'Platonic love' and '*eros*' are misinterpreted and my thesis purports to prove that Plato's *eros* is a spiritual quest for beauty (*kalos*), truth (*alethes*) and the good (*agathos*). Modern scholastic commentaries were referred to and proved helpful in assessing the differences in ancient and current ethical schools of thought. The argument purports that Platonic *eros* is not a static condition of soul but a continuous movement/progress towards the highest spiritual love.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Research Problem and Methodology

1.1 The Research Problem

During the archaic era down to the late 6th century B.C. the notion of *Eros* as a natural cosmic force remained traditional and sacrosanct. (Perhaps, here we have to except Pythagoras and Xenophanes who lived in the 6th century) The 5th century issued in an era of questioning. – *Ἄνθρωπος μέτρον πάντων* ‘Man is the measure of all things.’

Protagoras’ axiom was accepted as skepticism (Rogers 1937: 50/1). Plato grew up during this surge of sophistic relativism. This pervasive, revolutionary thought together with the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.), which Thucydides in his Introduction to his history termed ‘the greatest disturbance in Greek history ... even (in) the whole of mankind’ caused Plato to revert to philosophy, where through Socratic inspiration and voice he denounced materialism and advanced that ‘soul and spirit were creative principles; these only deserving the appellation of *Physis*’ (Pohlenz 1953: 435 n.1). In this tumultuous climate the ethical value of *eros* was born in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*.

But *eros*, or as we say, love, remains to this day, ‘a principle of cosmic magnitude’ (Kosman 1976: 53). Hesiod, Empedocles, perhaps all antiquity, gauged this force in these terms. Plato ‘threw the involved problem into sharp relief’ when, against this divine concept of love, he introduced logical validity and ethical value into the figure of *Eros* as a *daemon* striving towards the good in the *Symposium* (Schrecker 1971: 130).¹ The shift of emphasis of *eros* from the accepted harmonious system of the universe does not mean that Plato refuted the established notion of *eros* as a force in nature. But *eros* as a form for rules of human conduct had to be verified in ‘a) the intentional, object-saturated

¹ The thought expressed by Schrecker (1971: 130) that: ‘ever since Plato threw the involved problem into sharp relief we have come to realize that over against the universe of space and time, where everything is relative, there stands, in absoluteness, the spaceless and timeless realm of spirit – to wit, logical and mathematical validity and ethical value’ encouraged me to look further into the meaning of *eros* for Plato.

character of love, and b) the separation of love from its object' (Kosman 1976: 58). The theme of *eros* is further explored in the *Phaedrus* in that the problem of our irrational elements (our emotions and appetites) are inevitably linked with the body. Yet 'the essence of the person' is the soul (psyche) (Gill 1990: 75). Therefore the individual shares in a higher purpose. Socrates' example in yearning for a portion of the divine spark in opposition to the sensual responses of human nature creates an ineluctable tension in the soul. Early in the *Phaedrus* Socrates asks the question:

I am not yet capable, in accordance with the Delphic inscription, of knowing myself ... I inquire ... to see whether I am actually a beast more complex and more violent than Typhon, or both a tamer and a simpler creature, sharing some divine and un-Typhonic portion by nature' (229e-230a).

Rowe (1990: 227-8) interprets the question of 'what is it to be human' as a central theme of the *Phaedrus*.

Platonic love has elicited disputes among scholars for perhaps over a century. The article of von Armin (1913: 99-104) contesting Karl Barwick's thesis that the *Phaedrus* precedes the *Symposium* has stimulated the research into the nature of Plato's theory of love. Guthrie (1975: 420) emphasizes that *Eros* is central to Plato's view of the world (*Weltanschauung*). He quotes Hermeias, the Neoplatonic commentator on the *Phaedrus*, who noted: 'the soul makes the motions having in view its own benefit and the good of the whole' and then adds: 'It brings out the importance for Plato of *eros*, to which he devotes so much attention in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, for in its widest sense it is, as "desire for the good" (204e), another name for self-motion of the soul and so of all motion and change in the universe.' The research problem of Plato's view of *eros* would be similar to that of the scholarly dispute between Paul Shorey, supported by von Armin, who advocated the unity of Plato's thought when he founded the Academy, and others (*Entwicklungs-theoretiker*) who claimed that Plato adapted and modified his doctrines in sequential dialogues. This, again, gave rise to the dispute over the chronology of the dialogues. Both Shorey and von Armin advance their plea for the 'unity of Platonic thought' by conceding that contradictions do occur, when considered from certain

perspectives; that throughout Plato's long life a development ensues, but the unity and the basic outline of his philosophical tenets remained constant.

My thesis relates to Gregory Vlastos' *The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato*, published in 1973. This controversial essay 'casts Plato as the champion of a spiritualized egocentrism' in addition to denying him the grace of depicting love of persons for their own sake (Price 1981: 25). Vlastos' charge that Plato exalts the higher value of love as a transcendental vision of beauty and pursuit of the good at the expense of personal love has evoked reactions from commentators across Anglo-American classical scholarship; yet the problem of Plato's *eros* has not been resolved. However, the scholarly literature has stimulated a renewed search in the textual density of Plato's two dialogues on *eros*.

Taking into consideration Vlastos' criticism of Plato's apparent neglect of personal love, it would become clear in scholarly responses that Platonic love seeks to elevate *eros* above the usual, mundane meaning to a higher, ethical dimension. Nussbaum (2001: 203) expounds upon Plato's *apologia* in the *Phaedrus* (palinode) for the devaluation of love in Diotima's ascent passage in the *Symposium*. She counters Vlastos' charge of Plato's impersonal love in favour of the 'objectifications of excellence' with regard to the lovers in the *Phaedrus*. Nussbaum's defence of Plato's *reformed* view of personal *eros* in the *Phaedrus* is praised, while her neglect of the significance of the Forms is regretted (White 1990: 396/7). However, Gill (1990: 74/5) points out the incompatibility of the Platonic theory of Forms where 'objective truths, especially in matters that occasion value judgements, which are equally valid for all individuals, regardless of the beliefs they may hold on the matters in question,' with the notion of the 'unique personal identity' in modern thinking. The thesis that qualities of persons effect the development of love is proposed, questioned and debated by commentators, who oppose Vlastos' claim that Platonic love is impersonal. Is love conditionally or unconditionally bestowed? These questions are then taken into consideration as it becomes clearer that Plato's *eros* is conditional, and that for him, personal conduct determines the cause of love; that the

Christian and post-Christian conception ‘of love for the person and not for his qualities’ cannot be applied to Diotima’s account of the self. (Warner 1979: 339). The differentiation between Platonic love, *agape* and modern assumptions about individuality is established and clarifies Plato’s ‘conditional’ views of *eros*.

The research problem lies in the question as to whether Plato changed his view on *eros* from the *Symposium* to the *Phaedrus*. Did he, after sixteen years, modify his concept of love as an entity of goodness identified with that Form that surpasses the usual notion of passion such as was exemplified by Sappho, Anacreon and Ibycus? I mention the latter to remind us that love for the ancients was indeed seen as a powerful physical force of nature as well. I will argue that, if Plato did change his view on *eros* during those sixteen years a marked adjustment of thought would surely be discernible in the *Phaedrus*, his last dialogue on love, although the issue is also treated in the *Laws*, his last work.

1.2 Methodology

A synchronic analysis of *eros* as expounded in each of the two dialogues would reveal the status of the nature of *eros* at the time of writing viz. 384 B.C., the *Symposium* and 368 B.C., the *Phaedrus*. Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis would cover this enquiry. From this finding of the erotic nature as well as reference to contemporary commentators’ contentious views of Platonic love in Chapter 2, one can deduce whether changes in Plato’s love theory had developed in time and/or through personal experience from circa 384-368 B.C. The final Chapter 5 will then comprise the diachronic analysis of Plato’s *eros* theory.

Chapter 2: Modern scholars contend that Platonic love can take on many forms. Is it egocentric, impersonal and mainly fostered for the purpose of attaining higher ends? Or, on the other end, in spite of exacting principles is it good, personal and spiritual as well? Scholarly debate on Plato’s *eros* in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* relates to the complex question of ferreting out these effects of love. According to modern scholars,

namely, Gill, Rowe and White, the ancient concept of love does not conform to our modern perception of persons with regard to terms such as: ‘individuality’, ‘autonomy and separateness’, or ‘unique identity.’ All this ‘modern thinking about love’ tends to shroud love in an elusive role (Gill 1990: 72-75). We have an enigma here. Love is rooted in self-preservation – in our desires for pleasure, wellbeing and ease. But the unexamined life is not livable for a man. Plato infuses his *eros* with those qualities that transcend ordinary mundane existence and reaches for beauty which is absolute.

Chapter 3: ‘*Perspectives of eros in the Symposium*’ presents a synchronic analysis of the text in which the Diotima-Socrates speech, a pivotal argument where *eros* features as a relational entity separated from what it seeks. It is at this point that love assumes ‘logical validity and ethical value’ in contrast with the usual indefinable ‘cosmic magnitude’ generally attributed to a force beyond human understanding. I will pay close attention to the mythical allusions used by Plato and to his use of the imagery of generation in the *Symposium*, which advocates reverence for the natural world.

In **Chapter 4:** ‘*Perspectives of eros in the Phaedrus*’ I offer an extended synchronic analysis of the context of the dialogue, to show how Plato’s theory of love, patterned on the bi- and tripartite division of soul, functions. The lover’s soul, through sight perceives Beauty, and because the soul in its discarnate state has experienced the Form of Beauty, the true erotic impulse is nurtured to give rise to the fostering of true virtue in persons.

In **Chapter 5:** *Does Plato change his view on eros from the Symposium to the Phaedrus.* In a diachronic framework I shall endeavour to trace the possible modification of Plato’s view of *eros* between the two dialogues. Therefore, as an example, I shall consider whether Plato’s *eros*, as *daemon* in the *Symposium*, undergoes any essential change or whether the apparent transformation into a deity in the *Phaedrus* is a mere device employed to suit the content of the particular argument. There is an obvious difficulty when assessing the elusive potency of love, indivisible and complex, in establishing whether such an image should be taken literally. I am uncertain as to whether there is

anywhere a clear definition of *eros* – ‘love belongs with the disputed cases’ (*Phdr.* 263c). Vlastos’ disputation demonstrates our modern enigmatic understanding of love. I suggest Plato has explained that the energy of love can be diverted from a physical inclination into avenues of education and philosophy. In short, *eros* transcends the sensory realms of perception to embrace the higher universal Forms of beauty, goodness and truth. I shall be investigating the comments of some of the scholars participating in the Vlastos debate.

I shall argue that Plato did *not* change his view of *eros* from the *Symposium* to the *Phaedrus*. I think, with Guthrie (1975: 420) and Groag (1915: 140) that Plato maintained his initial concept of *eros* as movement of the soul striving towards the good. In thus negating the excesses of human appetite, *eros* effects the transcendence and immortality of the soul. Plato’s theory of *anamnesis*, exemplified especially in the *Phaedrus* confirms his belief that there is a unity between man and the universe. There is a link between human and divine realms. At *Phaedrus* 249cd Socrates states that we have, as humans once seen ‘reality’ (the Forms) for we would not have the human form without that ‘recollection of those things which our soul once saw when it travelled in company with a god and treated with contempt the things we now say are’ (*Phdr.* 249cd).

Chapter 2

Scholarly debate on Plato's *eros* in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*

Plato shows us *eros* as the ladder to that state in which *eros* is transcended, but in the mode of acceptance (Kosman 1976: 66).

The scholarly debate on Plato's *eros* in the two dialogues on love, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* was evoked by Vlastos' thesis put forward in his publication *The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato* (1973). In Vlastos' view Platonic love was 'good-producing' and criticized for the strict conditional and impersonal quest for the Forms (Vlastos 1973: 7). Other scholars perceived Platonic *eros* as a stronger, stable love, not without personal concerns. Interesting comparisons between ancient and modern ways of thinking about love have emerged in response to Vlastos' censure of Platonic love. I shall discuss some scholarly views according to the chronological order of their publication:

- L.A. Kosman 1976
- M.C. Nussbaum 1976, 1982 (in Ferrari 1987: 288) and 2001
- A.W. Price 1981
- G.R.F. Ferrari 1987
- F.C. White 1990
- C. Gill 1990
- C.J. Rowe 1990.

2.1 Vlastos' criticism of Platonic love

Vlastos (1973: 3,10) recalls Aristotle's definition of *φιλεῖν* 'as wishing for someone what you believe to be good things – wishing this for his sake not for yours' (Vlastos 1973: 10 n 34). He maintains that this is an ideal, envisioned in classical antiquity, which comes

closest to the Kantian axiom of treating persons as ‘ends-in-themselves.’ I quote two passages from Vlastos’ (1973: 32) controversial essay:

Since persons in their concreteness are thinking, feeling, wishing, hoping, fearing beings, to think of love for them as love for objectifications of excellence is to fail to make the thought of them as *subjects* central to what is felt for them in love. The very exaltation of the beloved in the erotic idyll in the *Phaedrus* views him from an external point of view. Depicting him as an adorable cult-object, Plato seems barely conscious of the fact that this ‘holy image’ is himself a valuing subject, a center of private experience and individual preference, whose predilections and choice of ends are no reflex of the lover’s and might well cross his at some points even while returning his love.

He (Plato) has, therefore, missed that dimension of love in which tolerance, trust, forgiveness, tenderness, respect have validity. Apart from these imperatives the notion of loving persons as ‘ends in themselves’ would make no sense. No wonder that we hear of nothing remotely like it from Plato.

Vlastos (1973: 8) claims that Platonic love is ‘utility love’. It is therefore egocentric. He expresses the sequence thus: ‘A loves B, he does so because of some benefit he needs from B, and for the sake of just that benefit’. Vlastos cites from the *Lysis*: ‘The sick man loves his doctor for the sake of health; the poor love the affluent and the weak the strong for the sake of aid’ (218e). Indeed, as Kosman (1976: 54-5) suggests, love of the individual is bypassed in favour of the *qualities* that are manifested in that person – qualities that bear resemblance to the Forms of beauty, justice and wisdom.

Plato’s theory of love perhaps transcends the bounds of this earth. Plato speaks of love in language related to mysteries and myths of his own making. Therefore, personal love is difficult to discern in the text. The lover on Diotima’s ladder who has loved rightly – that is, ascending from the particulars of physical love (boy-love) (*Symp.* 211b) to the higher love of soul; from thence to ‘loving and caring’ about ‘the betterment of the young’ (*Symp.* 210c); then to revere customs, laws and philosophical systems; and thereby finally to arrive at the universal Form of beauty – has fulfilled with his beloved a noble task which surely reveals a glorious love. This abstruse form of love, as Warner (1979: 332) explains, is ‘bound up with a desire for immortality, to overcome our finitude.’ That which endures must be sought in qualities (the Form of beauty) that transcend individual idiosyncrasies. To master the power of the particular Diotima invites us to see that ‘the beautiful qualities of the beloved’ are found elsewhere: ‘if he means to ensue beauty in form, it is gross folly not to regard as one and the same the beauty belonging to all

(bodies)' (*Symp.* 210b).² When we turn to the *Phaedrus* (252c3-253c6) we find a *mutual* love developing, as the lover discovers and learns from his beloved who has in the pre-natal state shared in the 'blazing beauty' in Zeus' chorus. This means both lover and beloved have seen 'reality' in the plain of Truth (*hyperouranios*). This scene (*Phdr.* 252c3-253c6) in the dialogue is undefined: perhaps we should imagine statues of the eleven deities being adorned by their followers – for each man lives after the pattern of the god in whose chorus he once was (*Phdr.* 252d).

I shall discuss the views of eight commentators who have rendered responses to the problems of Platonic love, the one unrelated and seven related to Vlastos' charges. I have attempted to understand and interpret their separate reactions to his most pertinent criticisms of Plato's theory of love: 1) the egoistic slant and 2) the bias in favour of the good qualities instantiated in a person, bypassing the value of personal love.

2.2 Kosman's response to Vlastos

The *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* present us with puzzling speeches and dialogues. Kosman (1976: 53-69) challenges readers to formulate their understanding of Platonic love from the clues that lie embedded in these. According to Kosman (1976: 61), there 'is a wide variety of ways to misunderstand the sense in which the philosopher practices the art of dying' (*Phaedo* 64). Socrates in the *Phaedo* had pointed out that a life worth living attaches no great value to bodily needs, but rather to the betterment of the self and pursuit of wisdom. Price (1981: 33) acknowledges Kosman's response to Vlastos' censure of Plato's neglect of personal love with a claim that Platonic love teaches a doctrine of transformation and therefore urges 'to practice the way of death, which is philosophy (*Phaedo* 64a), is alone to care for oneself' (*Phaedo* 115b).³ Likewise, we may 'misunderstand the sense in which the philosopher's love is self-love'. Kosman (1976:

² Warner (1979: 332) The Loeb translation reads: 'belonging to all.' Has Warner added 'bodies' to avoid vagueness in the sentence?

³ Price (1981: 31,33) acknowledges stimulation by Kosman's (1976: 53-69) essay and that Socrates' 'practice for death' should be understood as 'practicing philosophy'.

60) explains that *eros* in the form of *self-love* (not love of love, or selfish love) in the speeches of Phaedrus, Agathon, Alcibiades and primarily in Aristophanes, contains elements of this misunderstanding of *eros* as a power for becoming what one really is. I shall follow Kosman's notion of *self-love* as analogous to Aristophanes' myth.

The completeness of the self is dramatically exemplified in the rounded quasi-human figure imaginatively signifying the kinship between micro- and macrocosm. This is implicit of harmony and order in the *self*.⁴ Kosman interprets Aristophanes' comic myth on the principle of striving for the original self (i.e. the profound rounded shape, the image of the 'true self') that was lost because of chance and the jealousy of the gods. *Eros* thus 'restores us to our native selves, to our true and original nature' (*Symp.* 193d) (Kosman 1976: 61) (word order slightly changed). We are always striving for the *proton philon* of which we are in need. This seeking and need Kosman (1976: 60) calls 'our own fugitive nature'. It is 'the desire of each thing to become what it is'.⁵

I suggest that Kosman's interpretation of the 'generating power and proper *telos*' of *eros*, which he reads in Aristophanes' myth (i.e. the quest for the virtuous self) in terms of 'the archaeology of love taken up in its teleology,' (Kosman 1976: 65) can be equated with a plant which placed in an unfavourable position, without sufficient nurture or moisture, still strives to bring forth its beauty by budding and flowering, irrespective of adverse circumstances. Procreative imagery pervades the *Symposium*, from physical begetting to pregnancy, to birth and caring for offspring both in the animal and human spheres. Kosman (1976: 65,68 n.29) directs our thoughts inward, to our ethical sensibilities, so that the transforming power of love 'in begetting on a beautiful thing by means of both the body and the soul' is perceived to bring forth a sense of shame and a betterment of the self (*Symp.* 206b7). Diotima here defines love as '*tokos en kalo*'; i.e. 'begetting upon the beautiful.' This would imply that the union of love has an enduring quality for the lovers.

⁴ Diez (1978: 72 n.26) cites Marie-Louise von Franz, *Zahl und Zeit*. Stuttgart 1970: 158: Parmenides setzt das Seiende an sich einer wohlgerundeten Kugel gleich (Fr.B8, 43f. Diels-Kranz). Für Empedokles sind Sein und Werden in der Harmonie einer unbedürftigen Kugel fest verwahrt (F. B27,3f Diels-Kranz)

⁵ This may be Nussbaum's (2001: 467 n.35) reflection on Kosman's valuable focus on the 'erotic creativity in the ascent.'

Kosman transposes *'tokos en kalo'* to 'love calling the beloved to his own beauty and virtue.' He interprets Plato's 'conditional' type of love as encouragement towards betterment of the self. Kosman (1976: 66) intimates that Plato finally relates love to a *spiritual* dimension: 'Plato shows us *eros* as the ladder to that state in which *eros* is transcended, but in the mode of acceptance.'

2.3 Nussbaum's response to Vlastos

Martha Nussbaum (2001:179-183) adopts an 'inclusive' interpretation of Diotima's ascent speech in the *Symposium*. The lover 'emerges with a proportionally diminished, though not fully extinguished, regard for those he formally prized. His vision is broadened to take in the beauty of value of laws, institutions, sciences' (Nussbaum 2001: 180). Nussbaum perceives a problem in equating a beloved person with impersonal universal values of Athenian democracy, Pythagorean geometry and Eudoxan astronomy: 'Just think of it seriously: this body of this wonderful beloved person' being 'exactly the same' as another's 'mind and inner life' (2001: 180). At *Symposium 209e-210a* Diotima tells Socrates that he might haply be 'initiated into these love-matters.' It is generally accepted that this terminology signifies the sacred mysteries of Eleusis. Diotima's erotic ascent images a spiritual transformation of the lover analogous with that of the initiate in the Telesterion. The lover, therefore, relinquishes those attachments and loves he cherished before the ascent. I am unsure about Nussbaum's equation that 'this body of this wonderful beloved' being 'exactly the same' as another's 'mind and inner life.' The beautiful physical structure of the human body is a gift of the gods to all. I question whether Plato is not merely warning against the over-emphasis of the 'particular' as opposed to the 'universal' validity of phenomena? Gill (1990: 72, 75) relates 'personal identity' in love relationships to 'psychological and psychophysical wholes,' which finally results 'in the general view that to be a person is to be the bearer of a *unique identity*.' Our modern liberating and emancipating notions have perhaps caused Plato's theory of love to be misunderstood. However, the main thrust of the dispute has involved

Gill, Rowe and White to criticize Nussbaum's modern thinking about Plato's *eros* as well.

Gill, Rowe and White cautiously acknowledge Nussbaum's original and radical interpretation of Plato's love theory, although all three have reservations about her thesis that love in the *Phaedrus* concerns love relations primarily of *this world*, ignoring the importance of love as 'symbolic of the desire for the beyond' (White 1990: 396 n.1). Rowe (1990: 232) objects that Nussbaum (2001: 214, 218-9) ignores the superior guidance of reason and maintains that the non-intellectual elements of soul are productive of 'valuable components of the best human life.' Rowe gainsays this by recalling the famous line that 'the region above the heavens (i.e. the plain of truth) ... is observable by the steersman of the soul alone, by intellect, and to which the class of true knowledge relates' (*Phdr.* 247c). Thus, by implication, the *logistikon* alone has seen and fed upon true knowledge. Incidentally, this vision of the charioteer has entitled the person embodying that soul to a rare privilege which Heidegger (1961: 223) explained thus: 'Der Mensch ist das Wesen, das sich zum Seienden als solchem verhält', i.e. we are, as human beings affiliated, partially at least, to 'the things that are' by virtue of the soul's former connection with the divine essence.

Ferrari (1987: 192-3) has recognised a problem in Rowe's avid correction of Nussbaum's claim that the non-intellectual elements have value 'for the best human life.' Ferrari refers to the dramatic conflict in *Phaedrus* 253e 'when the charioteer first catches sight of the light of his love,' the 'tickling and pricks of longing' warms the whole soul. We read that the dark horse springs powerfully forward while the obedient horse is constrained by the charioteer's whip and goad. However, the black horse 'mentions the delights of sex'. The *logistikon* and *thumos* resist 'indignant at being forced to do terrible and improper things' but finally they follow the dark horse, and it is only when the charioteer, close by, sees the beloved's 'flashing face' that he is recalled to the 'nature of beauty'. It is at this juncture that charioteer sees the sacred statue of beauty and *sophrosune* and this evokes a struggle within the soul which brings about 'reverence' for the Forms and the charioteer

sees how much he cares about ‘the virtuous model’ that is his goal in life (Ferrari 1987: 192-3). Graeser (1969: 44) likewise wonders how the complete absence of conflict in the soul (i.e. the agency of lust fostered by the dark horse) could bring about the final triumph of the sublimation of the sexual impulse towards a harmonious life (in Ferrari: 273 n.79).

Nussbaum (2001: 195, cf. 167) vindicates personal *eros* in the speeches of Aristophanes and Alcibiades in opposition to Diotima’s effort to guide the lover to recognition of higher qualities manifested in the Forms of Beauty and Goodness: ‘Has Diotima come again to save us from the plague of personal *eros*?’ Nussbaum’s concern for our personal *eros* as far as Diotima’s erotic ascent goes, I think, is in agreement with Vlastos. She points out that Plato ‘then shows us, through Socrates and Diotima, how, despite our needy and mortal natures, we can transcend the merely personal in *eros* and ascend, through desire itself, to the good’. Nussbaum’s (2001: 197) choice is for the personal for she continues: ‘But we are not yet persuaded that we can accept this vision of self-sufficiency and this model of practical understanding, since, with Vlastos, we feel that they omit something.’

2.4 Price’s response to Vlastos

Price (1981: 25-34): acknowledges Vlastos’ censure of Platonic love in *The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato* mentioning especially his charge of spiritualized egocentricism. In his paper Price (1981: 31) focuses on two aspects of Vlastos’ criticism:

- 1) ‘If A loves B, he does so because of some benefit he needs from B and for the sake of just that benefit ... No reason is offered why we could love anyone except for what we could get out of him.’
- 2) ‘It does not provide for love of whole persons, but only for love of that abstract version of persons which consists of the complex of their best qualities.’

Price’s response to especially these two complaints recalls Kosman’s similar remarks in his paper in 1976 of which he acknowledges stimulation. The first issue of ‘utility’ love

may not really be, if rightly understood, a defect (Price 1981: 31).⁶ It seems in Platonic love that A loves B for his own immortality as evidenced in this passage:

So when a man's soul is so far divine that it is made pregnant with these from his youth, and on attaining manhood immediately desires to bring forth and beget, he too, I imagine, goes about seeking the beautiful object whereon he may do his begetting, since he will never beget upon the ugly ... For I hold that by contact with the fair one and by consorting with him he bears and brings forth his long-felt conception, because in presence or absence he remembers his fair (*Symp.* 209a-c).

The lover needs his beloved in order to be delivered of his soulful burden. Probably thoughts and ideals or literature which need imparting to a fitting soul. Price's response to Vlastos' valid complaint lies in the concept that: 'I may find immortality in another by taking his future upon myself' and he links this with these lines:

It is only for a while that each live thing can be described as alive and the same ... he is continually becoming a new person, and there are things also which he loses, as appears by his hair, his flesh, his bones, and his blood and body altogether. And observe that not only in his body but in his soul besides we find none of his manners or habits, his opinions, desires, pleasures, pains or fears, even abiding the same in his particular self; some things grow in him, while others perish. And here is a yet stranger fact: with regard to the possessions of knowledge, not merely do some of them grow and others perish in us, so that neither in what we know are we ever the same persons; but a like fate attends each single sort of knowledge. What we call conning implies that our knowledge is departing; since forgetfulness is an egress of knowledge, while conning substitutes a fresh one in place of that which departs, and so preserves our knowledge enough to make it seem the same. Every mortal thing is preserved in this way; not by keeping it exactly the same for ever, like the divine, but by replacing what goes off or is antiquated with something fresh, in the semblance of the original (*Symp.* 207e-208a).

By imparting his mental and physical experiences and his 'manners, habits, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains and fears' Plato's philosophical lover proclaims a meaningful contact with his beloved. So when A loves B, and when B later loves C, in the paederastic tradition, the good tradition is extended. In this way the lover enjoys a vicarious immortality. Price asserts that in this way Plato is absolved from the charge of egoism.

The second complaint of impersonal love in 'that abstract version of persons which consists of the complex of their best qualities'⁷ is seen as a general dilemma which Price

⁶ 'Aright' and 'rightly understood' are terms used by Kosman (Price 1981: 31).

counters with reference to the *Phaedrus 252e* where the lovers' dispositions are mutually compatible, their aspirations coincide and they worship the same god. Price (1981: 33) recognizes that the fine qualities in the loved one as follower of Zeus may become infected with desires that afflicted Glaucus, studded with 'shells and seaweed and rocks' symbolic of the incarnate state (*Republic 611d*). So the dual nature of man is again evident. So the Platonic lover loves him only for what he is potentially (i.e. for his 'better self'). Price's 'better self' echoes Kosman's 'our true and original nature' which echoes *Symp. 193d* 'our very own' nature (*physis oikeion*) as Aristophanes pleaded for in the *Symposium*. Therefore some form of purification is necessary and Price equates this 'to practise the way of death, which is philosophy (*Phaedo 64a*), is alone to care for oneself' (*Symp. 115bd*). This is mindful of Kosman's (1976: 62, 65) 'self love' which 'manifests our good and beautiful nature' – bearing in mind 'that love is, as Aristotle said, a virtue not merely a passion' (word order re-arranged).

At *Phaedrus 252e* we read: 'And so those who belong to Zeus seek that the one they love should be someone like Zeus in respect of his soul.' So Price (1981: 33) rightly points out that 'loving another for himself is not to be set against loving him for some qualities of his (actual or potential) so long as he too cares for these qualities, and it is at least partly because of this that I care about his having them.' Because of their mutual dispositions Platonic lovers refused to indulge their sexual desire; being 'pregnant in soul' they jointly see that such an action would disrupt their aspirations (*Phdr. 256*). Price argues that Platonic love judged superficially may seem egoistic and impersonal. Vlastos has perhaps seen it through our modern concept of regard for a person's independence and identity, but if A loves B for his best qualities only, it gives space for B to become his 'ecstatic' self. Furthermore A shows an awareness of B's sensitivity to a spurious, casual affection. Price (1981: 33-4) admits that Platonic love is different from the Christian love of all persons. Warner (1979: 339) points to the merits of Plato's theory of

⁷ The term: 'that abstract version of persons which consists of the complex of their best qualities' is cited repeatedly (Kosman 1976: 55; Vlastos 1973: 31; Price 1981: 31).

love: ‘it is not always recognized how close is the interdependence of our ethical conceptions with our understanding of the nature of man.’

2.5 Dyson’s impartial interpretation of consideration in the *Phaedrus*

Dyson’s (1982: 307-311 esp.309) interpretation follows: ‘Lovers of beauty, whose memory is strong enough to lift them beyond a beastly response, find in the image of beauty an overwhelming and life-transforming stimulus to further recollections; among these are followers of Zeus and of other gods’ (*Phdr.* 252c-253c). He draws a parallel with the ideal lovers (*Phdr.* 256a) who with ‘the better elements of their minds get the upper hand by drawing them to a well-ordered life, and to philosophy.’ They too ‘learn to follow the ascending road’; it is the disengagement from particulars in the search of ‘reality.’ This echoes the climax of Diotima’s ascent in the *Symposium* 210a-212a.

2.6 Ferrari’s response to Vlastos

Ferrari (1987: 163,183) interprets the lover’s sight of the beautiful boy in *Phaedrus* 250a as an encounter that calls him to ‘a way of life,’ which is another form of learning. So then the lover and the loved one start upon a shared project in life – i.e. learning about their affinities, themselves and their patron god. Ferrari (1987: 183) asserts ‘that in propounding this ideal Plato shows every concern, *pace* Vlastos, for the fact that the boy is “a valuing subject, a center of private experience and individual preference” for he makes it clear that the relationship can only be a success if the boy already shares as a matter of individual preference the values on which the lover wants them to build together.’ They shared in the following of the patron god during the heavenly circuit– ‘both learning from wherever they can and finding out for themselves ... to the extent that it is possible for man to share in god: and because they count their beloved responsible for these very things they love him still more’ (*Phdr.* 252e-253a). Vlastos

(1973:18-19) cites *Republic 462a*⁸ where ‘cohesion is dissolved when feelings differ between individuals.’ He argues that this Platonic ideal disregards tender regard for differences ‘as some things in the world would thrill A and chill B.’ Ferrari (1987: 184) argues that Plato asserts that ‘divergence in character and goals’ disrupts the unity of a love bond. Vlastos’ contrary opinion advances a *modus vivendi* where differences between lovers should be accommodated and respected and that this is tantamount to ‘wishing another’s good for his own sake.’ The general gist of Ferrari’s defence, which I think, refers to Vlastos’ (1973: 6) initial quote of Aristotle’s *philia* ‘that to love a person we must wish for that person’s good for that person’s sake not for ours,’ is that unconditional tolerance of ‘divergence of character and goals’ would counter the lovers’ established project and joint aspirations. Ferrari (1987: 184) closes his reply to Vlastos’ attack on Platonic love that the notion of divergence of ends in the lovers’ project was entirely alien to Plato – it would work against their love and it would not provide ‘a positive focus for their shared project of life.’ An ‘ends in themselves’ relationship, perhaps commendable and noble, yet seems to have some likeness to the liaison in the ‘speeches of the non-lovers’ – an agreement entered into for ‘the furtherance of their separate goals!’ Ferrari asks: ‘but can it be love?’ when *separate* ends are so vital in a relationship and closes his defence.

2.7 Gill’s response to Vlastos and Nussbaum

Gill (1990: 74) attempts to reconcile the ‘radical’ Nussbaum interpretation with ‘current thinking about love’ and confirms that Kant’s claim about treating persons as ‘fellow-members of a Kingdom of Ends’ lies behind Bernard Williams’ statement about persons having ‘ground projects’ and that they should not be treated as ‘other-selves’. Gill affirms that Nussbaum brings to our notice that the lovers of the *Phaedrus* are aware of ‘the extreme sensual stimulation involved in intercourse’ thus for the sake of ‘reverence and awe for the other as a separate person’ they refrain from the sexual act. Gill, and

⁸ Plato. 1955 *Republic*. Translated by Desmond Lee – 2nd Edition (Revised). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

incidentally Rowe as well, points out that it is the charioteer's resolve in the psyche, through recollection of the Form of *sophrosune*, that the black horse is restrained and abstention from sexual intercourse gained. Gill (1990: 76-7, 85 n.56) does not deny that Plato values the considerate and unselfish treatment of his beloved, but that he certainly does not hold the notion of 'the status of the beloved as a separate and autonomous subject.' Conversely, Plato 'separates the person into a psyche and a body' (Gill 1990: 75). To substantiate the claim that Plato does hold that the 'cult object', the adorable object of love has feelings of his own, contrary to Vlastos' assumption, Gill points to the *Phaedrus* 252c, 253b7-8 and 254a2 ff as proof: 'If the man who is taken by Love belongs among the followers of Zeus, he is able to bear the burden of the feathery one [Zeus] with sedateness' (*Phdr.* 252); 'they (the lovers) draw him into the way of life and pattern of the god, to the extent that each is able, without showing jealousy or mean ill-will towards their beloved' (*Phdr.* 253b7-8); 'the horse which is obedient to the charioteer, constrained then as always by shame, holds itself back from leaping on the loved one' (*Phdr.* 254a2 ff).

2.8 Rowe's response to Nussbaum and Vlastos

Rowe (1990: 240) in the main responds to Nussbaum's radically free interpretation. The central message of the myth is Socrates' question whether he has inherited the nature of a beast (*Typhon*) or whether he has inherited a portion of the divine. The ideal lovers of the famous myth discover that they must tame their irrational propensities (*Phdr.* 250e-251a; 254, 256). Rowe points to the irrefutable realization that the requirements of the body are linked with our humanity irrespective of our higher aims for 'a portion of the divine.' Rowe (1990: 241) agrees with Nussbaum that 'for the Plato of the *Phaedrus* responding emotionally and sensually is part of what it means to live a human life.' The sensual responses of the charioteer as he sees the boy's beautiful form and face (*Phdr.* 253e-254a) and experiences body contacts such as 'looking, touching, kissing, lying down together' (*Phdr.* 255e3) are normal and underscores 'what it means to live a human life.' But Rowe disagrees with Nussbaum's assertion that Plato sees this as the 'best human life' which would, conversely, rather be the control of these responses. To substantiate Rowe's

claim with regard to intercourse in the *Phaedrus* we read: ‘they resist this with a reasoned sense of shame...’ and thus become ‘masters of themselves’ (*Phdr.* 256a). Rowe emphasizes that appetite (*epithumia*), according to Socrates must be kept down and it is not as Nussbaum claims ‘a driving force towards the good’. Here then, Rowe (1990: 238) comments that ‘if madness means a loss of control, then the philosophical life is conditioned on being cured of madness.’ Although, I think, inspiration (*enthousiasmos*) as a form of madness prevails.

It is interesting to note that Rowe alleges that the horses attached to the chariot are not essentially advantageous to the human soul – only when the black horse is tamed into submission order prevails. The spirited horse merely helps to check the black horse. So, Rowe says: ‘It is *our wings*, when, and if we sprout them, which carry us upwards.’ Verdenius (1954:257) makes a comparison (which tallies with Rowe’s view, I think) with the Christian conception of God and *Platons Gottesbegriff*: ‘Das christliche Leben ist ein Wandeln mit Gott (*Micha* 6,8 *Ps.* 75,23), das platonische Leben ist ein Wandeln zu Gott, oder besser: ein Kriechen zu Gott, denn Platon vergleicht das Philosophieren mit einem Ölstrom, der sich langsam vorwärts schiebt’ (*The.144b*).

I have found Verdenius’ quotation in *Micah* 8 which is applicable: ‘He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?’ In Plato’s world it seems, we do need ‘our own wings’ to reach ‘a portion of the divine.’ I suggest that the exacting features of Plato’s *eros* may well be related to his ‘Gottesbegriff.’

In Rowe’s (1990: 241-6) response to Vlastos he states that if the relationship of the ideal pair becomes devoid of any erotic feelings and merely ‘a marriage of minds’ we have an account of *eros* in the *Phaedrus* which is much in common with the effects of love in the ascent in the *Symposium* – ‘only with repression substituted for sublimation.’ However, the episode of 256 in the *Phaedrus* calls for a double understanding. Has love, which is ‘a kind of madness run its course here?’ (Rowe 1990: 242). Is this Olympic wrestling-

match one instance or is it a recurring temptation in the lovers' harmonious life needing constraint as Vlastos interprets? (Rowe 1990: 243). Rowe (1990: 244) suggests that the mature philosopher will be beyond sexual desire 'which the *Phaedrus* recommends to us as the ideal.' He concedes towards Nussbaum that love in the relationships in the *Symposium* was 'a means to an end' since boy-love is relinquished for the love of Beauty (Rowe 1990: 245 n. 61).⁹ However, Socrates' myth portrays love as a means to philosophy but also incorporates a life-long bond between lovers. The *Phaedrus* ends, leaving sexual desire far behind – we find the dialectician sowing his *logoi* for the benefit of his practitioners. He is happy (*eudaimon*) when the seeds germinate and grow as the lover on Diotima's ladder likewise rejoices in his brain-children who grant him 'vicarious immortality'.

2.9 White's response to Vlastos

In his paper *Love and the Individual in Plato's Phaedrus*, White (1990: 396-404) acknowledges preceding reactions to Vlastos' controversial essay by Kosman, Price, Ferrari, Nussbaum and Rowe. His discussion opens with two objections of Vlastos regarding Plato's theory of love:

- 1) 'The *Phaedrus* sees men as mere images of another world making it "folly, or even idolatry" to treat them as worthy of love for their own sakes.'
- 2) 'it considers the love that we bear for our fellow men to be the result of human, temporal deficiency' (White 1990: 396).

In the second complaint here listed, Vlastos implies in Plato's *Phaedrus* that we love persons because we share the common mortality. As souls in the perfect divine dimension we would love only the Forms.

⁹ Rowe (1990: 245 n. 61) comments that 'even Price (1981: 34) admits that something (is) to be abandoned when the real goal is reached', though not Kosman (1976: 53-69).

White affirms that Plato wishes to elicit ‘emotions of metaphysical, religious and epistemological’ wonder in the *Phaedrus*: ‘A man must comprehend what is said universally, arising from many sensations and being collected together into one through reasoning; and this is a recollection of those things which our soul once saw’ (*Phdr.* 249c).

White argues for our human capacity of loving persons for their own sakes irrespective of benefits or whether they represent some form of ‘their divine original’ (Vlastos 1973: 32). White (1990: 401) responds to Vlastos’ insistence that ‘for Plato the notion of loving the Forms ‘for their own sakes’ would make no sense for the Forms are not persons. But with this reassurance White claims that ‘a person who resembles those Forms, and thereby has the qualities of beauty, wisdom and temperance, is lovable for his own sake’. He points out that the person bearing those qualities is loved as well: ‘It follows that the doctrine of the *Phaedrus* in no way makes it inconsistent to love a human being for his or her own sake, while loving him or loving her qua an image of Beauty’ (White 1990: 399).

Furthermore, White (1990: 399-400) raises the question as to whether we love persons for their qualities, or for what they just are. He refers to Kosman (1976: 56-57) who solves the riddle by positing a further riddle: ‘Insofar as I love him (the beloved) for his qualities, the qualities seem to constitute the proper object of my love; insofar as I love him irrespective of his particular qualities, it becomes unclear in what sense I may be said to love, especially, *him*.’

With regard to the second objection by Vlastos, White (1990: 403) argues that ‘even if it were true that seen face to face the Forms would “absorb all our love”, this would not render us unable in *this world* to love human beings for their own sakes, nor would it render us unworthy of such love.’ Conversely, relating to this question, Price (1981: 34)

goes along with Vlastos by citing a parallel instance from St Luke¹⁰, and asking whether ‘once the lovers have recovered their wings, and are again following their god through the Platonic heaven, will they have eyes for one another, or only for ‘*those things*’ (viz. the Forms) ‘*a god’s nearness whereunto makes him truly god?*’ (*Phdr.* 249c).

In conclusion, however, White (1990: 404) speaks of human and divine souls in the Platonic heaven, who as Plato asserts, are nurtured on the Plain of Truth. Furthermore, ‘contemplation of Reality then, on Plato’s own doctrine, far from being all-absorbing, renders souls benevolent and caring for others.’

Summary

I have managed to trace the enigmatic nature of *eros* by investigating why classical scholars responded to Vlastos’ charge: Plato’s ‘impersonal’ tendency with regard to love.

I suggest the main point was that ‘we are at odds’ about what *eros* is, it is the same as deciding what ‘just’ and ‘good’ really mean (*cf. Phdr.* 263a). This confusion applies to the ancient and to the modern complexity about *eros*. Modern psychology tries to explain persons as unique, separate and autonomous. Arguments from Kosman, Rowe, Price, Gill, White and others evinced that the so-called ‘impersonal’ Platonic love exhorts the soul to achieve its ultimate goal. Plato’s ethic rests on conditional love. The human being ‘seeing that we are not an earthly but a heavenly plant,’ must attain his goal by his own efforts to become better – no god will assist him. Identification with the divine within is paralleled with the *daemon* yearning for his ‘kindred in the heaven’ above (*Timaeus* 90a-c). Gill (1990: 74) recalls our relation to modern Kantian ethics where the individual should be seen as a ‘fellow-member’ of a ‘Kingdom of ends.’ Our inherited Christian and post-Christian sensitivity admonishes that ‘the most important forms of love are seen as

¹⁰ St Luke, XX 35-36 N.E.B.: ‘The men and women of this world marry; but those who have been judged worthy of a place in the other world and of the resurrection from the dead, do not marry, for they are not subject to death any longer.’

essentially personal' (Warner 1979: 333). Conversely, Diotima's 'impersonal' view is that 'we should love those properties that are worthy of love wherever they are instantiated' (Warner 1979: 339).

In Chapter 3, I shall analyze the eulogies of love by the symposiasts into their component parts. The speeches give us a multifaceted perspective of this mighty force, *eros*, how it was interpreted in Plato's time. In fact, *eros* in the *Symposium* takes on the nature of mediator, a daemon facilitating human contact with a higher sphere. *Eros* becomes an ethical way of life. Can we say this is not personal love?

Chapter 3:

Perspectives of *eros* in the Symposium

Was er (Eros) aber gewinnt, zerrinnt ihm immer wieder (203e)
(Platons Gastmahl – Schleiermacher translation)

I propose to discuss the perspectives of *eros* in the *Symposium* in four sections for clearer definition:

- The Diotima-Socrates speech
- The Speeches of Phaedrus, Pausanias and Eryximachus
- Aristophanes and Agathon speeches
- Alcibiades' speech.

The cosmic element *Eros* is echoed by the symposiasts in the *Symposium*. The speakers remain true to the entrenched axiom that love was the combining force pervading the universe.¹¹ Socrates and the host engage an *elenchus*, the upshot of which elicits a shift in this established concept (*Symp.* 198b-201c). The *daemon Eros* emerges, divested of his former mythical dress, he is no longer the archetypical great god. On Socrates' view *Eros* exists relationally; he is love or desire of somebody or something (Guthrie 1975: 374). In Plato's theory the nature, functions and uses of love take on an ethical tenor.

3.1 The Diotima-Socrates speech (201d-212c)

This speech is recalled by Socrates to the symposiasts in the form of a dialectic dialogue between himself and Diotima, the prophetess from Mantinea. It is incumbent to treat the main issues in this format: a) the nature, function and uses of *eros* and then, b) the near

¹¹ 'This cosmic theory was derived from Empedocles, who spoke of Love as the combining, and Strife as the disruptive, force pervading the universe.' (in Plato III 1925: 125 n 1) William Heinemann Ltd and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Loeb Library Harvard University Press.

erotic possession of the prophetess as she, like a *teleos sophistes*, breaks into elated speech. The mystery allusions in the closing aspects of Diotima's speech suggest the divine love triumphant over the sensual (*Symp.* 208a-212a). Metaphysically, in the final passages, one senses a movement of the relative to the absolute. A beauty that 'neither waxes nor wanes' reveals itself to the aspirant lover (*Symp.* 210e).

In the opening dialogue between Diotima and Socrates *eros* emerges as a *daemon*, born of *Poros* and *Penia*, *Resource* and *Poverty* respectively. The mythopoeic passage reveals more than is at first apparent (*Symp.* 203b – 203c). *Metis* is *Eros*' grandmother – she is *Invention*, *Cunning*, '*Klugheit*' and all the attributes of genius. This paradoxical pedigree extends the picture and renders *Eros* a curious mixture of opposite characteristics. Being 'true to his mother's nature, he ever dwells with want ... hard and parched, far from tender or beautiful as most suppose him' (*Symp.* 203c). Conversely, 'he takes after his father in scheming for all that is beautiful and good ... desirous and competent of wisdom, throughout life ensuing the truth' (*Symp.* 203d). He is not a deity, nor a human being, but links the terrestrial with the celestial spheres. Diotima explains: 'God with man does not mingle: but the spiritual is the means of all society and converse of men with gods and of gods with men, whether waking or asleep' (*Symp.* 203a). *Eros* as mediator is of the spiritual realm and as we later come to see Socrates shares this position with *eros* (Verdenius 1954: 257-8; Szlezak 1985: 262; Hamilton 1951: 27).^{12 13}

Poros means a way, also a way through difficulties towards a *telos* in the figurative sense – thereby suggesting effort and endeavour and the attainment of that purpose. *Eros*, the *daemon* or spirit, in his multifarious forms was of great importance to Plato's philosophy especially as 'desire for the good' (*Symp.* 204e) (Guthrie 1975: 421). Groag (1915: 191

¹² 'die Runde akzeptiert es, daß er (Sokrates) in der Rede des Alkibiades an die Stelle des Gottes tritt, dessen Verherrlichung das Thema des Abends war. Im Satyrikon Drama des Alkibiades vollzieht sich so etwas wie eine Ineinssetzung von Eros und Sokrates, eine Erhöhung des Philosophen zur Inkarnation des Gottes' (Szlezak 1985: 262) Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter.

¹³ Socrates is for Plato the perfect example of the lover of wisdom; Alcibiades calls him 'daemon-like', and it is hardly going too far to regard him as *Eros* incarnate; the most superficial reading reveals that in describing his character and way of life Plato is simply clothing in flesh and blood the sketch of *Eros* at work in the soul of the true philosopher already drawn by Diotima (Hamilton 1951: 27).

n.3-192 n.1) concerning the *Phaedrus* speaks of the soul's 'intellektuelles Begehrungs- und Gefühlsvermögen' signifying a passion for wisdom, good sense and planning (*epithumia phronesios*). Groag (1915: 191) refers to the *Republic* 485d-e, where Socrates explains: 'So, when a man's desires have been taught to flow in the channel of learning and all that sort of thing, they will be concerned, I presume, with the pleasures of the soul in itself, and will be indifferent to those of which the body is the instrument, if the man is a true and not a sham philosopher.' Guthrie (1975: 425 n.2) endorses Groag's assertion in that 'it is *Eros* that gives *Psyche* her wings' in the *Phaedrus* and he adds that '*Psyche* and *Eros* may be the same.' Furthermore 'the soul moves ... through the power of *eros*' in the *Phaedrus*. Cornford (in Verdenius 1962: 141 n.43) says '*eros* is the manifestation of a single force or fund of energy directed through channels towards various ends.'

Plato fittingly transposes the pervasive imagery of conception, pregnancy and bringing forth in the physical world to the soul or mind of man (*Symp.* 203c). The desire to beget (i.e. the erotic impulse) – by procreation as a function of love – is described by Diotima as the 'immortal element in the creature that is mortal' (*Symp.* 206c). Plato attaches paedagogic *eros* to this process of bringing forth. It was Socrates' manner by refutation (*elenchus*) and argument to assist young men, heavy with intellect who were unable to discourse and define these thoughts, to bring to light their 'brain-children' (Guthrie 1969: 378 n.1). The presence of *Fate* and the *Lady of Travail* or *Moirai* and the beautiful *Eileithyia*, deities of birth, exemplify the concord of Beauty necessary when bringing forth things of value, physically, a baby, or spiritually, an immortal thought. In mythology *Eileithyia*'s absence at the births of Heracles, Apollo and Artemis, caused *Alkmena* and *Leto* respectively, extreme discomfort. We recall that the conception of *Eros* was somewhere in the vicinity of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. He becomes her minister and devotee. The presence of beauty is Plato's hint that the awakening of *eros* in the higher senses of the human being will hopefully appeal to the lower, needy parts of the soul to strive with him for the good.¹⁴ May we assume with Cornford (1930: 217)

¹⁴ 'Eros wird endlich am Geburtsfest Aphrodites erzeugt, denn die Erscheinung des Schönen ist es, wodurch die Liebe erweckt, der höhere Teil des menschlichen Wesens solliziert wird, den niederen,

that *eros*' force is bent upon the highest object (i.e. the good), a doctrine of sublimation, or as Kosman (1976: 65-6) prefers to call it, a catharsis? As the sculptor creates and loves his image, so the teacher of virtue delights in the beautiful bodies and souls of others. Should the lover, or philosopher, pregnant in mind 'chance on a soul that is fair and noble and well-endowed, he gladly cherishes the two combined in one' (*Symp.* 209b). The Greek ideal was the combination of a fair and noble body with the soul. Gradually the philosopher prizes the beauty of soul higher.¹⁵ In Diotima's ascent speech, in the lesser mysteries stage, she asserts: 'But his next advance will be to set a higher value on the beauty of souls than that of the body' (*Symp.* 210). Diotima tells of 'those things proper for soul to conceive: the regulation of cities and habitations called sobriety and justice' (*Symp.* 209a) (words re-arranged). Plato hopes by discourse to evoke a response in the good man's character and therefore 'he takes in hand the other's education' (Kranz 1926: 445).¹⁶

It is not always evident that *mania* is closely related to *eros* in Plato's love theory in the *Symposium*. *Mania* in the *Symposium* is linked with *eros* in abstruse terms – in Diotima's role as mystagogue she is seized by an impassioned love that culminates in a 'wondrous vision'. The vision is 'ever-existent and neither comes to be nor perishes, neither waxes nor wanes' (*Symp.* 210e). Indeed Diotima's language rises to a prophetic register as she tells of the 'essential beauty' (*Symp.* 211d) that transcends the beauties of earthly faces, hands and bodies (*Symp.* 211a).

Again as Alcibiades appears in Dionysian accoutrements at the close of Socrates' speech a sense of drama raises our suspicions and a few are witness of the mistaken meaning of love in the relationship between Alcibiades and Socrates.

endlichen und bedüftigen zu befruchten, sich mit ihm zum Streben nach dem Guten zu vereinigen' (*Schleiermacher F translation of Platons Gastmahl [sa]. Again published in 1944: 74 quoting from Zeller, E. Die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie II [sa] Leipzig: Reclam.*

¹⁵ 'Das griechische Ideal war die Vereinigung der Schönheit des Körpers und der Seele; der Philosoph lernt allmählich die Seelenschönheit höher zu schätzen.' (in Schleiermacher, F. [sa] translation of *Platons Gastmahl*. Published again in 1944: 84) Leipzig: Reclam.

¹⁶ Kranz (1926: 445) draws attention to philosophical *eros*. I have applied his insight to my interpretation of the passage.

When Socrates alludes to Diotima as a perfect sophist she waxes prophetic – she tells him about the inherent ‘love of winning a name.’ Yes, that Alcestis and Achilles died ‘to win a deathless memory for valour.’ She mentions Hesiod and Homer, Solon and Lycurgus. This is ‘the passion for immortality’ *eros athanasias* (Conford 1930: 217). Perhaps not the most noble sort, but when humans beget children they also imaginatively achieve a vicarious immortality. Poets, craftsmen, legislators and teachers bring forth virtue in general; they produce works of enduring worth. These works are ‘the fine offspring they leave behind to procure them a glory immortally renewed in the memory of men’ (*Symp.* 209d).

Socrates assumes the humble role of pupil and initiate when he relates how he was persuaded by Diotima to honour *eros* as the best guide in life. The erotic ascent can be equated with climbing a mountain or a ladder in order to reach the summit – it is the manic urgency of a human being in search of a higher vision of the world. Another dimension of light and colour may be available when seeing things from another perspective. Diotima tells about the love of the beloved’s body becoming less intense as the soul takes precedence. Absolutes abolish relativities. When the greater love of the Forms of Good and Beauty is achieved the former loves do fade away. So too, says Plato, it will be when *eros* is seen aright.

3.2 The speeches of Phaedrus (178a-180b), Pausanias (180c-185c) and Eryximachus (186-189b)

The two speeches of Phaedrus and Eryximachus concern the cosmogonical and cosmological concepts of *eros*. Pausanias’ speech centres on the aspects of double *eros* and homophile relationships.

Phaedrus

In contrast to Diotima’s view of the *daemon, eros*, Phaedrus as father of the debate had earlier affirmed the established cosmogonic notion that *eros* was an ancient god –

according to Hesiod – evolving with *Earth* out of *Chaos* and that ‘parents of Love there are none, nor are any recorded in either prose or verse’ (*Symp. 178b*). In Diotima’s speech *eros* emerges as a dynamic force in human nature set against the symposiasts’ notion that love is some intangible god bestowing blessings upon all. I argue that Plato sharply brought human relations to a head, when, against this divine concept of love he introduced moral value into the figure of *Eros* who as a daemon strove for the good in the *Symposium*. For example, the element of *metaxy* in *eros* who with his ‘Mittler-Kräfte’ brings about a link, perhaps even an understanding between divine and mortal spheres (202) (Diez 1978: 61). This explains *Eros* as a being between knowledge and ignorance, between good and bad, and ultimately seeing man as a being, also a daemon-like creature, like *Eros*, linked with two worlds – the sensible and the intelligible worlds.¹⁷ Socrates, the incarnation of *Eros* wishes to help Alcibiades into exploiting his higher qualities by evading the seductive approach, perhaps with self-control. This power of prudence seems to have reached the sensitivity of Alcibiades, but regrettably without lasting effect. Even Socrates, before his enlightenment by Diotima had thought *eros* ‘a great god, and (was) of beautiful things’ (*Symp. 201e*). Phaedrus introduces *eros* as evoking the feeling of shame in people. This feeling is again borne out by Alcibiades when hearing the discourse of Socrates – ‘his heart leaps and he is in tears’ (*Symp. 215e*), for ‘he is made to feel ashamed’ (*Symp. 216b*). Phaedrus maintains that *eros*’ peculiar power elicits shame in a pair of lovers should either be involved in some base behaviour such as abandoning a station or flinging arms away (*178cd*). Heroic deeds are achieved by erotic power, indeed a ‘fury inspired’ as Homer¹⁸ had said. He exemplifies Achilles as the favourite who rescues his lover Patroclus and later avenges his death although such a deed would incur his own early death.

Pausanias

¹⁷ It seems to me that the English word ‘mediator’ noted as ‘metaxy’ or μεταξίς does not adequately catch the meaning of μεθεξίς which is given in Koenen Greek/Dutch dictionary as ‘deelgenootschap, deel hebben aan.’ *Eros* the daemon, therefore is also sharing on both sides of the apparent contradictions.

¹⁸ Iliad x.482, xv. 262.

The Socratic-Platonic circle in the late 5th century B.C. must be seen in the historico-social setting. The *Symposium* is concerned with *eros* between a mature male and a youth (*erastes* and *eromenos*). Homosexual relations practiced in Athens were more or less accepted with certain reservations. As Pausanias states the ‘noble’ association required the lover to pursue the boy (i.e. probably with entreaties, gifts, mentorship in gymnastics and other virtuous activities) while a time of testing had to elapse before such a relationship was sealed by intercourse or what is termed ‘gratifying the lover’. The fact that young boys had paedagogues who watched over them confirms that the relations, sexual or not, were problematic. The right *erastes* had to prove his status so that the *eromenos* was sure of ‘the attainment of the highest possible excellence’ (*Symp.* 218c).¹⁹ Pausanias introduces the double nature of *eros*. The two *erotes* feature as the children of the goddesses, heavenly and popular Aphrodite. Pausanias remarks that all gods should be praised but that he wishes to honour the *eros* ‘worthy of his godhead’ (*Symp.* 180d). This opens an issue which has interested many commentators – the good and the false loves.

Pausanias tells his circle that all actions in themselves are not necessarily noble or base – they take on the characteristics of the conduct of the participants. So with all our doings as well as with love. Undoubtedly the *eros* of the Popular Aphrodite fares the worst according to Pausanias for the lovers under her sway love the body more than the soul. Furthermore her devotees love boys and women and make no distinction whether the manner is noble or not.

Under the guidance of the heavenly Aphrodite ‘which is precious to both public and private life,’ homosexual *eros* predominates, and this area is not without contradictions and complications (*Symp.* 185bc). I argue that Pausanias’ recognition of the preponderant homoerotic inclination of his audience serves to foreshadow Plato’s earnest consideration of the role the worthy lover is to play in the future of the young boy in his care. Dover (1964: 39) estimates the homosexual relationships to be transient in that between the ages

¹⁹ Szlezak (1985: 253) ..Als schändlich galt in diesen Kreisen nicht das Nachgeben gegenüber dem Drängen des *Erastes*, sondern die Hinwendung zu einem unwürdigen, und das bedeutete: nicht hinreichend erprobten und geprüften, *Erastes*. Berlin New York: Walter de Gruyter.

of 15 to 25 the male body, face and physique takes on a different aspect – the necessary emotional adjustments for the *erastes* and especially the *eromenos* must be fraught with problems. Dover says: ‘the man and the boy are partners in a search for the imperishable’ in the teachings of Plato who depicted this sensitive issue in the Alcibiades-Socrates conflict. It firmly establishes the Athenian *nomos* that there is a mutual understanding that the favourite who obliges his lover, or wants to oblige, in Alcibiades case, expects to be made ‘wise and good’ (*Symp. 184de*).

The speech of Pausanias is plausible in that it sets out the rules of society and of the city for the good of the citizens as well as the dangers of homosexual relationships. Pausanias mentions the heroic action of the tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton in the assassination of Hipparchus (*Symp.182cd*).²⁰

Pausanias accentuates that a worthy lover would devote himself to his loved one for life (*Symp. 183e-184a*). This abiding quality of love suggests the spiritual sphere of love. The third level of the lover’s progress on Diotima’s ladder refers to that love which is of the soul rather than the body (*Symp. 210b*). With the assertion that *eros* is for life one is confronted with the problem of true meaning of Pausanias’ and Socrates’ (*Symp. 212b*) statements about ‘the love that abides throughout life.’ Pausanias maintains that to love ‘is no simple thing’ (*Symp. 183e*) since noble and base loves co-exist. It is the popular lover who craves the body rather than the soul: as he is not in love with what abides (i.e. soul), therefore he himself is not abiding. The non-abiding lover is attracted to new or younger bodies and this inevitably dissolves a loving bond. To a man, in archaic, classical, and Hellenistic elitist groups the pursuit of one’s desire was a challenge. This agonistic attitude must have appealed to the Greek mind. The hunting instinct was part of his

²⁰ Thucydides (*vi 54*) relates the classical problem of this love relationship. Hipparchus also approached the beautiful Harmodius on two occasions. Aristogeiton had little standing against the brother of the tyrant who also insulted the sister of Harmodius by rejecting her performance in the procession after he had at first offered her such a position of honour. So this was a murder done out of wounded pride and love. In *Thucydides: History of the Peloponnesian War* 1954 & 1972 – 1987 (Translated by Rex Warner with Introduction and Notes by M.I. Finley) Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

nature.²¹ The energetic sense of achievement was part of his life. The gymnasium, where gymnastics and athletics were impressed upon the youth, was his encouragement. Pindar's odes testify to the glory that the games brought to the Greek heroic quest.

In spite of the exceptions of Aspasia, Sappho and Corinna it seems that females did not feature in public life. So the sexual and romantic elements prevailed in male society. I assume the established rules that virtue and paedagogic guidance should pervade the beloved's life throughout transcends the initial *erastes-eromenos* relationship since the favourite later may marry and/or pursue his own *eromenos*. But friendship in whatever form was a worthwhile bond for the Greek. Socrates himself was ostensibly the epitome of this love, albeit controlled, unphysical and unconsummated. Vlastos (1973: 22/3) noted that Plato's ideal love 'transmuted physical excitement into imaginative and intellectual energy.'

Eryximachus

The doctor Eryximachus begins by referring to the double *Eros* of Pausanias but then supports Phaedrus' emphasis that *Eros* is one of the original cosmic powers – not only men are inspired with this attraction to their own kind but animals and plants respond to this power as well. Aeschylus and Euripides wrote that *Eros* inspires the Sky with passion to impregnate the Earth (in Guthrie 1975: 382). Also Hesiod spoke of love in much the same manner: 'And Heaven came, bringing on night and longing for love, and he lay about Earth spreading himself full upon her.' Pausanias' plea that the *eromenos* should only gratify the *erastes* who is able to make him better in the cause of virtue, is taken up by Eryximachus to apply to medical treatment of the body. He confuses the issue with the good and false loves with the moral complexity of sexual gratification. There is some clarity in that he asserts that the physician should gratify the healthy elements in the body and disappoint the sickly parts. It seems sensible that the doctor would be able to discern when a wound must be cauterized or whether a healthy

²¹ Euripides in his *Iphigenia at Aulis* recalls the hubris of Agamemnon in hunting down Artemis' favourite deer; that this transgression led to her exhortation to sacrifice of Iphigenia.

constitution could bring about its own healing. The seasons are then described in their responses to the double Loves as devotees of the heavenly or popular spheres. Here also the popular love is almost an ‘anti-Love and could much better be called Strife as by Empedocles’ (Guthrie 1975: 383). The mild and fruitful climate responds to the heavenly Love and when the wanton-spirited Love gains the ascendant destruction comes about.

3.3 Aristophanes’ (189c-193d) and Agathon’s (194e-197e) speeches

Aristophanes

It is not clear whether one should read the myth of our original nature, the story of a rounded four-legged, four-armed, two-faced race of male, female and hermaphroditic beings as tragic or comic or grotesque. Owing to the *hubris* of these mortals Zeus, in fear that they would, like the Giants overthrow his reign – or that by exterminating them the gods would forfeit their sacrifices – had them severed and then healed by Apollo. Thus the human figure now has a flat front, one face and four limbs and walks upright. But as mortals they yearned for restitution of their ‘true selves.’ Nussbaum (2001: 172-5) claims that the myth purports a deep psychological insight of *eros* as desire – the fulfillment of which would be fusion with the other half: ‘Aristophanes’ myth vividly dramatizes the sheer contingency of love, and our vulnerability to contingency through love.’

Aristophanes also drew attention to the sexual nature of the original man and woman who propagated in the ground like cicadas and not within each other. It is interesting that the Athenians wore golden cicadas as hair pins to signify their auto-chthonic origin.²² So the myth must have had a topical interest also. Kosman (1976: 61) reads the myth in abstract vein – the human being striving to be the self that he ‘is in the mode of always being about to become.’ So *Eros* is ‘that great god who leads us, who restores us to our native selves, to our true and original nature’ (*Symp.* 193d).

²² ‘Die Zikanden gelten als Symbol der Autochthonie. Um sich als Autochthonen zu bezeichnen trugen die Athener goldene Zikaden als Haarnadeln.’ Schleiermacher, F translation of *Platons Gastmahl* [sa]. Again published in 1944: 51 Leipzig: Reclam.

Agathon

Agathon noted that the competitors neglected to give views about the nature of *Eros*; that he ‘will praise the god first for what he is and then for what he gives.’ However, he drops this resolve and *Eros* appears as a supple, virtuous and beautiful wraith-like god that walks on flowers and lives in the hearts of men and gods. One may visualize the putto-like *Eros* figure on the vase paintings of that age (late 5th century). Agathon disagrees with Phaedrus about *Eros* being the oldest of gods. *Eros* is young and flees old age - like seeks like as the axiom claims. The horrific tale of Hesiod, questionable as it is, regarding the castration of *Ouranos* at the mercy of *Gaia* and *Chronos* would not have been if *Eros* had been reigning. There would have been amity and peace in the heavens. Here Agathon reveals himself as rational skeptic, a pupil of Gorgias. He, however, remains true to the cosmic moral of ancient lore as he reveres *Eros* in the encomium in rhetorical verve: ‘And who, let me ask will gainsay that the composing of all forms of life is Love’s own craft whereby all creatures are begotten and produced?’ (*Symp.* 197a). Agathon as dramatist eulogizes his own art – poetry. He maintains that Homer would be able to tell of the delicacy of *Eros* as he did of *Ate* who walked only on the heads of men and not on the ground. *Eros* inspired the gods and goddesses in their respective arts. Apollo in archery, medicine and divination, the Muses in music, Hephaestus in metal work, Athena in weaving and Zeus in government. The speech ends with Socrates claiming that ‘the beauty of the words and phrases could not but take one’s breath away.’ This was an unkind but true criticism of Agathon’s attempt at imitating the glorious but insincere rhetoric of Gorgias – and Socrates said so much too. The elenchus follows which I have discussed at the beginning of the Diotima-Socrates speech (*Symp.* 198a-c).

3.4 Alcibiades’ Speech (215a-222b)

Alcibiades’ famous word ‘to open’ in a literal sense signifies the curious Silenus figure cabinets, probably with concealed apertures, in the statuary shops that contain fine marble or stone images of the gods. These figures suggest Silenus, Dionysus’ tutor or Marsyas

the satyr. Socrates' physical appearance brings them to mind. These odd figures when opened reveal a divinity that fills the onlooker with delight. The same exaltation can be claimed for Socrates' discourses – for when the talk is of smiths, cobblers and tanners it seems absurd and thoughtless but when properly 'opened' one discovers a divinity that would bring about grace and worth to those who take note. In taking note he had fled the scene because he felt ashamed of his life.

I have related this quaint simile cited by Alcibiades because it ironically – yes, in spite of this accurate account of Socrates – indicates that he too has seen the divine eros in Socratic discourses. Alcibiades arrived late at the symposium. He missed Diotima's report of the initiation into the mysteries of *eros* as related by Socrates.

The two *Eroses* proposition of Pausanias might be seen as introductory to Diotima's teaching. The noble element leads to the five rungs in Diotima's erotic ascent: 1) the love of one particular body and the acknowledgment that there are other beautiful bodies; 2) the beauty of soul to be set higher than that of the body; 3) The beauty of observances and laws; 4) the love of wisdom and 5) the love of the Form of Beauty.

Kosman (1976: 67-69 n.35) asserts that Plato's Forms are set out so that the mystery of loving is 'incorporate' in this world – only 'we perceive it amiss.' It is through 'catharsis' that one transcends that difficulty; this is when one loves aright. To do just that is probably when we reach the second or third rungs of Diotima's ladder. The Socrates-Alcibiades exchange of the lesser beauty (physical charms) for the greater beauty (wisdom) illustrates the differences between the first and third rungs of the ascent. Kosman notes that the higher 'love is fugitive and difficult; Alcibiades is always in the wings.' This is puzzling but probably explains Alcibiades' yearning to become a better person. He had not witnessed or heard about the erotic mystery as told by Diotima. We see him on the first rung of Diotima's ladder. He is still in the wings and lacks the courage to appear on stage, ascend to the second rung of the erotic ladder so to speak. Maybe that the fugitive *eros* is a process of purification which the human being does not

easily enter into. Alcibiades attempted to attain moral excellence (*arete*) which Pausanias had mentioned as the ideal state an *eromenos* could hope for by a seductive bargain in offering his beauty to Socrates in exchange. Socrates had reached the third rung of Eros' ascent – a self-control (*sophrosune*) through years of struggle on the first and second rungs of the same ladder. Guthrie (1969: 396) aptly elucidates: 'In this process the sexual impulses have their place, for it is through them that the *psyche* is first attracted to what is beautiful. They lead first of all, of course, to the admiration of physical beauty, and if they are indulged at this level by physical debauchery, our life is maimed. But in fact this *eros* in us is a spiritual force, and by shunning its lower manifestations and learning its true nature, we may allow it to lead us upwards (as Socrates is made to expound it in the *Symposium*) from passionate desire for a particular body to an aesthetic enjoyment of visible beauty in general, from that to beauty of character, higher still to the intellectual beauty of the sciences, until by persevering to the end we are granted the sudden vision of Beauty itself, the absolute Form which is perceived not with the bodily eye at all, but with the eye of the soul or mind.' In Alcibiades' unconscious, yet desperate, yearning for happiness he had turned to assume the status of *erastes* – his offer of sham for gold was turned down by the *eromenos*, Socrates.

Summary

In this chapter I have explained the main concerns of *eros* as seen by the symposiasts. Phaedrus as leader of the discourse sets great store on the feelings of shame elicited when lovers do not sustain the primary rules when serving their country in warfare. A lover would rather die than exhibit cowardice in the presence of his favourite by abandoning position, armour or honour in battle. Pausanias extols the position of the good and bad *Eroses* under the tutelage of Aphrodite *Ouranios* and Aphrodite *Pandemos*. Love is pictured in its true and false aspects. The homophile relationships are then also classed as good and bad and much depends on the conduct and moral framework of the lover's solicitation of the *eromenos*. If virtue is the aim then the relationship will be condoned and accepted. Eryximachus draws *eros* as a cosmic power evidenced in the world reflecting its capacity to flourish in plant growth and in seasonal changes as it exhibits its

favourable and disastrous effects on human beings. Aristophanes' speech is seen as finding one's true nature and being according to Kosman's interpretation. It anticipates Socrates-Diotima's love theory of beauty and the good. Agathon's speech is 'cliché-ridden' but shows his reverence for the natural world (Kosman 1976: 53). His comment that the previous speakers had merely 'facilitated humanity on the benefits' that love grants them evokes Socrates' admiration (*Symp. 195a, 199c*). The Socrates-Diotima speech as central underscores the moral quality of *eros*. *Eros* as *daemon* initiates a relationship between good and bad, god and man, the sensible and the intelligible. Plato has introduced this ideal form of *eros* for the first time in philosophy in understandable terms. Alcibiades' speech evokes our thoughts about the right and wrong of love in homophile relationships. His story of satyrs and their effigies enfolding divine images suggest the outer and inner being of Socrates. Plato has succeeded in encapsulating the real meaning of *eros* in the figure and nature of Socrates.

Chapter 4:

Perspectives of eros in the Phaedrus

We said, didn't we, that love was a kind of madness? (*Phaedrus* 265a)

In this chapter I will discuss the progression of *eros* from the composition of the *Symposium* to the *Phaedrus*. There is a 16 year interim. In this dialogue the soul of man, guided by *eros*, is not traced from this world to the regions of Beauty and the good in the ultimate Forms, as in the *Symposium*. The scene opens with the 'blazing beauty' of the heavenly chorus. By the law of *Adrasteia*, should the soul loose its wings, it falls back to earth to be incarnated in a human body. Socrates tells us of a pair of ideal lovers, which I think, is the example drawn Plato would have us follow.

After his exaltation of love in the famous charioteer and two horses myth, Socrates and Phaedrus engage in a discussion about the complexity of *eros*. Socrates explains that we can easily differentiate between the terms 'iron' and 'silver' but that 'just' and 'good' are concepts where 'most people are bound to tread uncertainly' (*Phdr.* 263c). Most of us interpret 'just' and 'good' by different attributes. It is so with understanding of *eros*, and we need to reduce these complex themes into simpler constituents. So love also can be 'harmful to beloved and lover', but on the other hand it can be 'the greatest of goods come to us through madness, provided that it is bestowed by divine gift' (*Phdr.* 244a). The elusive theme of love permeates human existence. This uneasy element in love-relationships is explored in the *Phaedrus*. Lysias' speech professes to teach a way of escaping the contingent emotional upheavals associated with *eros*. The flat, spurious, mechanisms of a non-loving couple reveals an empty existence fit for the punishment of nine thousand years of wallowing under the earth (257a). Socrates' first speech propounds the left-handed aspect of love and similarly teaches a love fraught with conflicts over material gain, leaving no room for any development of the soul.

In opposition to the above superficial *eros* there is a passage depicting the ‘right-handed’ side of love in the *Phaedrus* that is perplexing in its tenderness – I would have thought overdrawn and feminine: When the lover and his favourite are finally united in each other’s company ‘the springs of that stream “*desire*” flows about the lover and as a breath of wind or an echo rebounds’ and then ‘the stream of beauty passes back into its possessor through his eyes, which is its natural route to the soul’ (*Phdr.* 255a-c). I take it that the boy’s image is grafted via the eyes into the lover’s soul. On thinking further this echoing liquidity brings to mind the *kouroi* grave steles before and in Plato’s time – the male bodily beauty preserved in stone.²³ So the Greek temperament must have had a special yearning for such perfect symmetry. Guthrie (1969: 392) mentions that Lagerborg²⁴ refers to these ‘tender feelings’ which were nothing to be ashamed of and that ‘in his love of beautiful youths Plato is a true child of his time.’

Pausanias in the *Symposium* expounds the established social norms between lovers and their favourites. In Athenian law a lover (*erastes*) is granted freedom to pursue his boy (*pais*) provided the relationship is free of bribes for money or positions. A good relationship seems to provide for exchange of favours between the parties. The *erastes* offers gifts and tuition in say gymnastics, music and wisdom and virtue (*arete*) or other refined or military accomplishments to the youth. It was held that these relationships had a positive bias as well – and it was far more likely to foster heroism, virtues and even a lasting ‘spiritual connection than the marriage between a man and a woman’ (Guthrie 1969: 390-1).²⁵ This elitist homoerotic tradition was established to prevent aristocratic peers from associating with inferior male or female prostitutes (Ferrari 1988:92). No wonder that Pausanias spoke of the heavenly Aphrodite vested in noble male

²³ The grave stele referred to here has been entitled ‘*Jüngling aus Attika*’ Archaic sculpture 540/530 Marble 210cm Munich Glyptothek.

²⁴ Lagerborg, R. 1926. *Platonische Liebe*. Leipzig.

²⁵ Guthrie (1969: 390-1) states: ‘The position is summed up by Demosthenes: We have courtesans for our pleasure, concubines for the requirements of the body and wives for the procreation of lawful issue.’ I find this remark fits in well with the homophile society, but then why the reverence for Alcestis? In the tragedy *Antigone* Haemon and Antigone formed a couple that seemed to love each other. Euripides suggested the tragic love of Achilles for Iphigeneia before her sacrifice. Demosthenes might well have said these words for some but not all.

relationships. The love of Aphrodite *Pandemos* was relegated to the vulgar sort who consorted with females and boys (*Symp. 181*). In 1795 Friedrich Schlegel wrote that Solon had declared ‘Männerliebe’ as a privilege of free men only, while the practice was legally denied to slaves. These codes were apparently instituted to forestall deviant moral behaviour.²⁶

In this context I propose to trace the perspectives of *eros* in the *Phaedrus* by analysis of 1) the Lysias and first Socratic speeches against love; 2) Socrates second speech which is the famous palinode, a myth and a eulogy of love. I shall analyse some of the main passages that are important features in Plato’s love-theory.

4.1 Lysias’ speech

Social norms governing a love relationship seemed to stipulate mutual exchange of services between the parties. The adult male needed emotional reciprocity and sexual gratification from the youth. The youth needed a mentor who could inculcate *arete* and guidance in social and military expertise. In some way the erotic relationship was a badge of honour for both parties in this aristocratic sphere. But *eros* remains ambivalent and elusive, was it harmful or good? Lysias’ persona advises the beautiful boy to choose a non-lover as partner rather than a man in love with him. He alleges ‘that it is to their advantage that this should happen’ – that they should sleep together – in spite of his not being in love with him. As non-lover there would be no recriminations about services rendered because with initial clear thinking such services did not impose upon his private interests. A man in love invariably reproves his loved one when his passion ceases. He resents the time and effort he spent in serving him (the intellectual stimulus and imparting of virtue, I imagine) because his own interests were neglected while he was aflame with love. The speaker subtly devalues the trust in *eros*. It is assumed that the lover’s affection incurs the enmity of others if it so pleases his beloved. The reverse, however, is evident

²⁶ Schlegel, F 1795. *Über die Diotima*. The article published in *Studien des klassischen Altertums* Eingeleitet und herausgegeben von E.Behler Paderborn/München. Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh. 1979: 70-115. (Originally published in *Berlinische Monatschrift*. Von Biester, 26 Band (Juli bis Dezember 1795).

should the lover fall in love with another he is likely to spurn the old love if the new love wishes it. After all how could one ‘give away such a thing’ (euphemism for sleeping with the lover) to a man who admits he is ‘sick and out of his mind’ (*Phdr.* 231). Lovers therefore cannot control themselves and when they return to sanity the personality changes – for what they said and did seems even strange to them. The boy is advised to select a non-lover as companion since he will have a wider choice in finding a worthy friend. When a lover has succeeded in capturing a youth he usually boasts of his prize whereas a non-lover is circumspect and social conventions will not be disturbed. In fact this suitor’s suggestion is not open and not according to the moral standards in Athens either. The public spirit demanded distinct rules in the courtship of youths. The speaker acknowledges that love and friendship can be transient in that it does not always last. Therefore should a quarrel ensue the lover becomes supersensitive for he sees the wealthier and educated suitors as rivals. This is the pain of love. (The story of the rivalry of Aristogeiton and Hipparchos for Harmodius is surely an example of jealousy). In this jealous state the lover isolates his favourite from friends and relatives. The non-lover’s favour was gained through merits and therefore he would not begrudge his boy his own friends and interests.

Lysias’ persona touches upon the issue of ‘noble’ and ‘base’ loves (*Aphrodite Ouranios* and *Pandemos*) as he asserts that the lover ‘is in love more with the boy’s body than with his soul’ as Pausanias proclaimed in the *Symposium* 183e. The speaker modifies this ‘truth’ to ‘those in love desire a person’s body before he knows his ways and gains experience of the other aspects of his personality’ (*Phdr.* 232e). Conversely, the non-lover prizes friendship even ‘before they did what they did’ (*Phdr.* 233a). As the cessation of desire in the lover sets in confusion obfuscates wise counsel and friendship. Love has the uncanny power to distort a man’s senses. If he is unsuccessful he will find those things that most people ignore, painful, and those things which cause displeasure he would praise. In the end the loved one would pity his guardian lover who should be an example for emulation (*Phdr.* 233b). The suitor assures the boy that his friendship would last for a long time since he is master of himself and would not, as a man unhinged by the power of

eros start ‘violent hostilities over small things’ (*Phdr.* 243c). He asserts that ‘strong affection’ is not to be attributed to the lover only as parents, sons and trustworthy friends also animate our deepest feelings of love – love of another kind unassociated with desire. The suitor reverts to his hidden purpose for the boy; terms it ‘the thing you have to give’ and this insinuates the subtle distortion of ‘true love’ which he certainly does not have. By pointing out the harmful and ambivalent nature of love the speaker is bent on securing for himself ‘miserly benefits of a mortal kind’ (*Phdr.* 256e). It is an audacious invitation to the boy for convenient sexual gratification which comes close to prostitution which he covers with a specious show of good sense.

4.2 Preamble to Socrates’ first speech

Phaedrus maintains that no one had ever said anything of greater value than Lysias about *eros* and here Socrates disagrees with him. He argues that men and women of old would rise up if he agreed with Phaedrus. His ‘breast is full’ and he has ‘been filled up through his ears’; he would render a speech no worse than Lysias’ about *eros*. Socrates, through dullness is unable to name his sources but mentions the excellent Sappho and the wise Anacreon (*Phdr.* 235b-c). I cite two lyrics of these poets which echo the inherent ambivalence of love which Lysias had so infamously tailored to suit his attack on *eros*:

Once more Love like a smith hit me with a massive
hammer, and plunged me in icy water. [Anacreon Fr. 413 Page (tr. Fred Jones)]

and

Eros the loosener of limbs shakes me again –
Bittersweet, untameable, crawling creature [Sappho fr. 130 Voigt (tr. Jane Snyder)]

Because Phaedrus has a special liking for organizing speeches and orations for entertainment or even for the public he forces Socrates to counter Lysias’ speech by promises of erecting commemorative statues to him, first in Delphi and then in Olympia. This may be Plato’s playful jest but Socrates does with covered face make his own

infamous speech. Before starting the speech Socrates makes an important statement regarding Lysias' subject in his speech. No one would deny that, in the case that one should grant favours to the non-lover rather than the lover, there is good sense in the former and lack of sense in the latter (*Phdr.* 235c). This however does not vindicate the overall treatment of love.

4.3 Socrates' first speech

Socrates' anti-*eros* speech depicts a negative perspective of love which does not fit his character at all; therefore the post palinode apologetic prayer to *Eros*: 'do not in anger take away or maim the expertise in love which you gave me, and grant that I be valued still more than now by the beautiful' (*Phdr.* 257a).

Socrates' speaker feigns not to be in love with his beautiful boy, or rather stripling, whereas he actually is in love (*Phdr.* 237b). It is disingenuous but Rowe (1986: 145) asserts that perhaps Plato wished to shield such a cold calculating attitude towards *eros* as exemplified by Lysias' speaker from the figure of Socrates. Ferrari (1987: 102) in contrast sees Socrates' non-lover as hypocritical in hedging behind a stance of emotional detachment. Socrates defines *eros* in telling of the confusion it occasions in the *psyche*; whether it brings 'advantage or harm' and what power it possesses (*Phdr.* 237de-238a). How do we sort out the man who is in love and the man who is not in love? Lovers and non-lovers alike have a desire for beauty and pleasure. If the impulse towards pleasure strays into excesses man degenerates into vices of drunkenness, gluttony and other sorts. Our judgmental faculty which 'forces a man towards the right' controls irrational behaviour (*Phdr.* 238b). Since we all have a propensity for bodily beauty and the associated pleasure of it, one calls this *eros* (*Phdr.* 238c4). So it happens that a man who is 'ruled by desire and enslaved to pleasure' will necessarily subdue the loved one and impose his lowered standards upon the youth. In fact he is endangering the welfare of the beloved. A sick man (the lover) avoids resistance. Discipline and effort are required to attain excellence. Worst of all the youth will forfeit divine philosophy since this

knowledge might alert him to the guardian's weaknesses. Through the lover's fear of being despised a youth's mind will stagnate.

It is implied that through the lover's *eros* the favourite's intellect will suffer. Likewise the body will not be exercised, thus 'softness' ensues (*Phdr.* 239c); this state would cause anxiety in friends whereas the enemy takes heart in the face of a weakling (*Phdr.* 239d). Like Lysias, Socrates asserts that the needs of a lover can become so extreme that he begrudges his beloved a wife, children and home since his company is his prerogative (*Phdr.* 240a). Furthermore, when the physical intimacy of *eros* goes awry it becomes oppressive and even disgusting, and then more terrors are exposed. The lover 'becomes pernicious and unpleasant when he is 'in love' (Plato's irony?) (*Phdr.* 239e). When the lover ceases to be in love he absolves himself from 'promises, oaths and goods for the future'. His personality reverts to a 'different master' viz. 'sense and sanity in place of love and madness' (*Phdr.* 241a). Having regained his former equilibrium the lover takes flight and the desperate youth becomes the pursuer not aware that 'he ought never to have granted favours to a man who is in love and therefore mindless, but much rather to a man who is not in love and is in possession of his mind' (*Phdr.* 241c). The *Phaedrus* dialogue is specifically aimed at ferreting out a solution to the disturbing emotional trap set by *eros* in the first two speeches.

4.4 Socrates' second speech

Socrates suddenly exclaims 'Don't you think Love to be the son of Aphrodite, and a god?' – and here he acknowledges the divinity of *Eros*. As a god *eros* is therefore devoid of evil. Socrates rates the two previous speeches so refined in argument and style whereby the truth and healthy aspects of love were obliterated. Erotic complexities do not necessarily lead to harmful effects. In a state of contrition Socrates refers to Stesichorus who wronged Helen by following the general thought that she eloped with Paris. He offered a palinode to absolve himself of this offence. Hence, Socrates will do the same. Mindful of the shameful of his speech he wonders what a character of a noble and

gentle nature, who might have loved someone, would think if he heard those two speeches – someone with no inkling of ‘large-scale hostilities over small things’ or about the harmful attitude towards his beloved (*Phdr.* 243c). He would think he had been listening to people ‘brought up among sailors.’ He would deny the blame foisted on *eros* and conclude that the speakers had never ‘seen love of the sort that belongs to free men’ (*Phdr.* 243cd). (White 1990: 397) points out that ‘the Forms are the objects of that recollection (*Phdr.* 249cd) which marks off the madness and splendour of philosophers and lovers.’ There may be a secular reference to ‘the fostering of heroism and virtues’²⁷ and to Solon’s law that *Aphrodite Ouranios* is a free man’s privilege.²⁸ Out of shame for what this man would think and out of fear of *Eros* Socrates offers his palinode. In the ensuing recantation Socrates attacks the former speeches’ thesis that a lover is mad and therefore prone to vice, whereas a sane non-lover would prove a fitting suitor for the youth. He lists the god-sent dispensation of divination, orgiastic release from sickness and inspiration from the Muses towards poets as the three forms of *mania*. The designation of the fourth type of madness, namely *eros*, to be divine involves a proof which would be disbelieved by the clever, believed by the wise (*Phdr.* 245c3). Socrates launches his myth of the charioteer and two horses in the definition of the nature of the soul. The immortality of the soul with its eternal motion is necessary for the understanding of the theory of *anamnesis* – for it is the lover who experiences ‘reality’ (the forms), the vision of which ‘causes him to be regarded as mad (*Phdr.* 249de). I argue that *Eros* and *Psyche* are intertwined – that ‘we must comprehend the truth about the nature of soul, both divine and human’ (*Phdr.* 245c). White (1990: 396) states that many commentators in the last hundred years tend towards the view that according to the *Phaedrus* ‘the vision of the eternal forms is the highest aim of divine and human souls; the “desire for the beyond” is the motivating power; the wings, borrowed from the god of

²⁷ (Guthrie 1969: 390-1)

²⁸ Schlegel 1795. *Über die Diotima* in Behler E.(Ed.) *Studien des klassischen Altertums*: 70-115. München: Paderborn.

love, are symbolic of this striving.’²⁹ After all, Platonic love transcends the initial physical beauty and attraction to attain the higher spheres of beauty, goodness and truth.

The ideal philosophical lovers overcome their mundane erotic love – ‘that choice which is called blessed by the many’ (*Phdr.* 256c). How do these lovers attain the necessary self-control (*sophrosune*) over normal sexual intercourse which will entitle them to win the first of the three submissions to the true Olympic games? Plato may be referring to the test of philosophical souls in three thousand years. Is it the victory over the doom of repeated incarnation? Is he equating this spiritual contest with the strenuous physical prowess a gymnast or sportsman must attain? Perhaps it also refers to the charioteer’s daunting task of curbing the dark horse (*epithumetikon*). Verdenius (1962:141) asks the question: ‘Wie kommt nun diese Selbstüberwindung zustande?’ I am following his clear interpretation. It is necessary to read Verdenius’ opinion in contrast to Nussbaum’s understanding of this episode (*Phdr.* 253e-254e) of the allegory, which she bypasses. Gill (1990: 76/7, 85 n 57) noted her vague reference to the ‘suspiciousness of the body’ in Plato (Nussbaum 2001: 220-1). The charioteer ‘begins to be filled with tickling and the pricks of longing’ (*Phdr.* 253e-254a). The dark horse mentions the delights of sex, disdains the curbs of the charioteer and good horse and they are about to leap upon the loved one – but the charioteer ‘sees the flashing of the beloved’s face’ (*Phdr.* 254ab). As the charioteer’s *mania* threatens to revert to an earthy level his *personal* desire is transposed to a *universal* desire. The recollection of the ‘nature of beauty’ excites fear and he sees ‘it standing again together with self-control on a holy pedestal’ (*Phdr.* 254b). We are reminded that the lover had ‘selected his love from the ranks of the beautiful according to his own disposition’ and ‘adorned him like a statue as if he were himself his god in order to honour him and celebrate his mystic rites’ (*Phdr.* 252d) (Tense changed from ‘adorns’ to ‘adorned’). These religious metaphors of reverence to a god transposed to the beloved suggests that *eros* has indeed ascended to a sphere beyond the physical. The lovers had mastered themselves; they had sublimated their sexual love to the love of intellectual and

²⁹ White (1990: 396) cites Guthrie (1975: 246-7), Rowe (1984: 172-3) and Friedländer (London 1958). These scholars refer to the ‘desire for the beyond’; the wings borrowed from the god of love are symbolic of this striving.

virtuous pursuits. Goodness entered their souls that had dispensed the ‘miserly benefits of a non-lover’ and when they died their wings grew and thus they escaped the ordeal of ‘wallowing for nine thousand years under the earth’ (*Phdr.* 257a).

In Lysias’ and Socrates’ first speeches *Aphrodite Pandemos* predominates. The youth’s dilemma is the choice between the man in love who is thought to be mad or a non-lover who is in his right mind. In the palinode Socrates proves that *eros* is madness, but a god-sent gift and therefore the man in love, who stands ‘aside from human concerns, and coming close to the divine is admonished by the many for being disturbed’ (249cd), could well be the best lover. Platonic love is that special kind of *eros*, perhaps heavenly, but it rests rather in the nature of the lover’s soul, which determines his approach to the beloved.

In this chapter I have traced the problems of love relationships which were also dealt with in the Socrates-Alcibiades conflict near the end of the *Symposium*. Love has always been a perplexing phenomenon of the human condition. Lysias’ persona in his speech and Socrates’ man in his first speech profess to know how a man should or could avoid the pains of *eros* by attaching to a non-lover and practicing the art of benefiting from a loveless match without emotional turmoil. Little do the speakers acknowledge that such a contrived affair is damaging to the soul. Plato foretells the purgatory of the aimless, mindless wallowing of the soul for nine thousand years for indulging in this type of left-handed love. It amounts to exploiting another for the

benefits of position, ease, sexual gratification without the ‘true *eros*’ that is after all a madness, but a gift of the gods. The ideal lovers in the *Phaedrus* conform to Plato’s notion of true love. Here the beauty of soul is clearly recognized. Similarly, physical beauty of the beloved inflames the lover at *Phaedrus* 251a; this love is transcended when the lover seeks kinship with soul:

And so those who belong to Zeus seek that the one they love should be someone like Zeus in respect of soul; so they look to see whether he is naturally disposed towards philosophy and towards leadership, and when they have found him and fall in love they do everything to make him of such a kind (*Phdr.* 252de).

In chapter five I shall examine, with reference to contemporary views of commentators, whether Plato changed his view of *eros* in the interim of the sixteen years that separate the two dialogues. The effects of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.) feature strongly in the *Symposium* which is set in 416 B.C. We hear of the Athenian retreat where Socrates served as hoplite. The Alcibiades-Socrates lovers' conflict becomes poignant considering that the Sicilian expedition will be led by Alcibiades and the devastating charges of the mutilation of the *hermae* and profanation of the mysteries that follow. Plato's seventh letter gives us an idea of his idealism in that 'the human race will never cease until either philosophers in possession of rightness and truth attain political power or those who have the power become "by some dispensation of divine providence" genuine philosophers' (Guthrie 1975: 17). By the same token, I will suggest that Plato's idealization of *eros*, more as a love of real wisdom and of the belief in the transcendent capabilities of the human spirit over mundane physicality, remained constant throughout his life. His love of Socrates and of Dion of Syracuse may well have been physical but there is no doubt of the overriding spiritual elements in the relationships.

Chapter 5:

Does Plato change his view on *eros* from the *Symposium* to the *Phaedrus*?

Sokrates-Diotima weiß sich zu helfen: ihre Auffassung von Eros gründet sich auf Kenntnis seines Ursprungs, d.h. seiner ‚Herleitung‘ von höheren Prinzipien, ihre Erklärung der Wirkung des Eros beruht auf ihrem Wissen davon, daß das Gute das letzte und einzige Ziel des Strebens ist (205a/e, 206a) (Szlezák 1985: 261).

Plato does not change his view on *eros* from the *Symposium* to the *Phaedrus*.

I venture to say this with the conviction that for Plato *eros* ‘in its widest sense (is) the desire for the good’ (*Symp.* 204e-205a) (Guthrie 1975: 420-1). Hence Platonic love is a refined effort of soul/mind that, with the help of *eros*, transcends the limits of ‘those things we now say are,’ and through initiation achieves real perfection (i.e. vision of the Forms) (*Phdr.* 249c-d). This philosophical *eros* transports us into the rarified nature of ontology which is that branch of metaphysics dealing with being. *Eros* in this abstruse field of thought remained constant in the dialogues under discussion.

In the physical realm there is modification of *eros* from the *Symposium* to *Phaedrus* which I shall mention in conclusion. Fostered by the love for Socrates, Plato set out to convince us of the separate existence of the Forms of justice, of beauty and of the good. The term *chorismos* denotes ‘the affirmation of the existence of the Ideas – separate, that is, both from the particular instances of them in the world and from our thought of them’ (Guthrie 1969: 352/3). Plato maintained that righteousness and the good were spiritual entities that existed – ideals, timeless and secured in his theory of Ideas/Forms.

Once again the words *kalon*, or *agathon*, the Greek for ‘beauty’ and ‘good’ come to mind, since in the context that Diotima used the term I read it as relating to an ethical and/or spiritual dimension, since our English equivalents do not measure up to the Greek

meaning. Guthrie (1969: 170) and Nussbaum (2001: 7) suggest that ‘fine’, ‘value’ and ‘worthy’ are suitable extensions for *kalon* and *agathon*. Guthrie explains: ‘(t)o say that for the Greeks Beauty and Goodness were one and the same is an error. But put it, that to the Greeks Fineness automatically included excellence, because what is fine must be *fitted to its purpose* and therefore *good*,³⁰ and we are on the right track. Fineness could become the ultimate Value by which all other Values could be measured.’

I labour this point as it is not easy to grasp what Plato’s *eros* means. Szlezák’s epigraph above intimates a transcendence of divine good vested in the Forms over common, earthly love. We may be reminded of Vlastos’ (1973: 31) critical opinion: ‘As a theory of the love of persons, this is its crux: what we are to love in persons is the ‘image’ of the Ideal in them. We are to love the persons so far, and only insofar, as they are good and beautiful.’ White (1990: 396-406) has adequately neutralized this severe interpretation, however, Vlastos clearly expresses the value Plato attached to ethical conduct. He asserts that Platonic *eros* is most explicit in the *Phaedrus* 250e1 ff: ‘the corrupted man does not move keenly from *here* to *there*’ therefore, if I read Vlastos’ meaning correctly, the ‘cathartic wisdom’³¹ of the good man lies in his ability to see the higher value of restraint, for his soul had seen most of the Forms. The initiate of love’s mysteries is praised, while the sexual indulgence of the man ‘*here*’ is condemned.

Szlezák (1985: 261 n.33) points to an agonistic undercurrent pervading the *Symposium*. Agathon and Socrates in mock-earnest exchange contend for the most thought-provoking representation of *eros*. Agathon foretells before the banquet: ‘A little later on you and I shall go to law on this matter of our wisdom, and Dionysus shall be our judge’ (*Symp.* 175e). Szlezák’s comment ‘ihrem Wissen davon’ relates to the higher wisdom of Diotima-Socrates that *eros* is derived from *Poros*, being a way, a resource, a salvation and a purpose in spite of *Penia*, signifying victory over spiritual poverty. Socrates

³⁰ I have italicized the words ‘fitted to its purpose’ and ‘good’ since Guthrie (1969: 170) asserts that ‘beauty’ was not isolated and in the Greek mind this term ‘was associated with appropriateness and fitness for function.’

³¹ I have used the term ‘cathartic wisdom’ coined by Kosman (1976: 66) as it denotes the hard-earned *eros* of the higher sort.

embodying *eros* transcends penury to ascend finally to the Form of Beauty. These are the high Platonic principles which are in fact *eros* of the good, *eros* not of the flesh, but of the soul or mind. It is a paradoxical quirk of Plato that it is Alcibiades, epitome of sensuality, decked out in wreaths of ivy and violets, reeking of wine thus personifying Dionysus, who on second thoughts, crowns Socrates as victor of the eulogists. The wreath of victory belongs to Socrates the embodiment of true *eros*. Like the mythical *eros* Socrates is ‘hard and parched, shoeless and ever poor’ and ‘far from tender or beautiful’ (*Symp.* 203c-d). However, on the spiritual level Alcibiades testifies to Socrates’ kinship with Marsyas the flute-player, and his divine gift of identifying souls who yearn for ‘initiation into union with the gods’ (Hamilton 1951: 101). There is no doubt that Socrates was physically attracted to beautiful youths. Love of the beauty of the body is a necessary principle for the progress to higher regions. This beauty, however, must be paralleled by an inner beauty. For example compare the equation Alcibiades draws between Marsyas with his beautiful music and Socrates’ exhortations to virtue. Socrates’ outer appearance is likened to the clumsy satyr statues but when opened these reveal little gods. Union with the gods necessitates a transition into the abstract – into the Forms of beauty, goodness and truth. For simplification I will section the argument for unity of Plato’s *eros* under the headings:

- Ontological aspects of *eros*
- Forms of erotic transcendence
- Plato’s acknowledged love of Socrates and Dion of Syracuse

5.1 Ontological aspects of *eros*

Ontology relates to the study of being. It is the search for the essence of things. It therefore refers to the abstract. When reading Plato ‘being’ is difficult to understand, but finally one realizes that beauty, the good and righteousness are essences in the abstract. This is philosophy and *eros* is an abstract entity. We say it is emotion but *eros* can be ‘harmful’ and yet ‘the greatest of goods’ (*Phdr.* 263c).

White (1990: 396-7) confirms that in the *Phaedrus* ‘the Forms are transcendent, real, awe-inspiring and holy, and play a central part in Plato’s account of love.’ How does White justify this statement? The soul is nourished in this ‘region above the heavens’ which is:

occupied by being which really is, which is without colour or shape, intangible, observable by the steersman of the soul alone, by intellect, and to which the class of true knowledge relates (*Phdr.* 247c).

White (1990: 396 n.1) cites scholars from Jowett and Zeller to Guthrie and Rowe who have asserted that ‘the vision of the eternal forms is the highest aim of divine and human souls; the “desire for the beyond” is the motivating power, the wings, borrowed from the god of love, are symbolic of this striving’ (in Friedländer 1968: 55). In the *Symposium* Diotima explained a parallel vision to Socrates from the topmost rung of the erotic ladder:

But tell me, what would happen if one of you had the fortune to look upon essential beauty entire, pure and unalloyed; not infected with the flesh and colour of humanity, and ever so much more of mortal trash? What if he could behold the divine beauty itself, in its unique form? ... Do but consider ... that there only will it befall him, as he sees the beautiful through that which makes it visible, to breed not illusions but true examples of virtue, since his contact is not with illusion but with truth (*Symp.* 211e-210a).

At the opening of the palinode we learn that ‘madness is given by the gods to allow us to achieve the greatest of fortune’ (*Phdr.* 245bc). In the preamble we are told about the 1) inspired prophecy of the mad Sibyl; 2) the wonders of divination and the curing of familial illnesses by orgiastic rites; and 3) the necessary mad inspiration needed by the poet for his creation. To this Socrates then adds the fourth 4) kind of madness which is *eros*. Why then does he in the preliminary statement juxtapose *eros* with these ancient traditions? We have just heard in Lysias’ speech and Socrates’ first speech that ‘when a lover is there for the having one should rather grant favours to the man who is not in love with you, on the grounds that the one is *mad*, while the other is sane’ (*Phdr.* 244a). Plato engages us in another *agon*. This misguided aforesaid thesis on *eros* could only ‘carry off the prize of victory’ if it can show ‘that love is not sent from the gods for the benefit of lover and beloved. We in our turn must prove the reverse, that such madness is given by the gods to allow us to achieve the greatest good fortune; and the proof will be

disbelieved by the clever, believed by the wise' (*Phdr.* 245bc). Immediately there follows the link of *eros* to soul: 'first we must comprehend the truth about the nature of soul, both divine and human, by observing experiences and actions belonging to it.' Thereupon Socrates expounds upon the theme of immortality and motion: 'All soul is immortal. For that which is always in movement is immortal' (*Phdr.* 245c ff). Hiebel (1977: 244-5) in his novel allows Aristotle to criticize his master with reservation: 'Du sprichst mit Mythen' to which Plato retorts: 'Mythen sind höhere Weisheit.' Plato employed mythopoeic devices to justify ontological concepts. Examples are:

Diotima's Eleusinian teaching and the imagery of climbing:

Beginning from obvious beauties he (the initiate) must for the sake of that highest beauty be ever climbing aloft, as on the rungs of a ladder ... from personal beauty he proceeds to ... that particular study which is concerned with the beautiful itself and that alone; so that in the end he comes to know the very essence of beauty (*Symp.* 211c).

The charioteer and the winged steeds of the *Phaedrus* are already a well-known symbol of the soul. In the myth the gods have noble horses that easily travel to the *huperouranios*, 'the region occupied by being which really is, which is without colour or shape' (*Phdr.* 247c). Compare Diotima's 'essential beauty entire, pure and unalloyed; not infected with the colour and flesh of humanity' (*Symp.* 211e). But human souls, being of mixed qualities, hamper the charioteer who has great difficulty in training and driving his team. Here at the summit of the arch of heaven 'the hardest struggle awaits the soul' (*Phdr.* 247b). The human soul does not easily see 'the things that are' and therefore the sad fate of incarnation upon incarnation may follow before with the help of *eros* the soul may reach her heavenly home. With this celestial toil compare the struggle on earth between charioteer and dark horse's powerful sexual urges (*Phdr.* 253e-254e) and later at (*Phdr.* 256ab) when lovers have come to appreciate *eros* of the spirit.

The myth of *Er* in the *Republic* tells of the fate souls undergo in the underworld where the choice of their next incarnations are complex, but the belief system is similar to Christian, Buddhist and Pythagorean eschatological tenets. Souls are brought to

judgement and there is a right and a left, a heavenly and underground exit for some. Other souls may be guided to Lethe where forgetfulness prepares them for the next incarnation. *Er*'s experience in this region may at first appear fanciful but after all Socrates warned that the miserly non-lover of Lysias would be doomed 'to wallow mindlessly around and under the earth for nine thousand years' (*Phdr* 256e-257a). However, Plato brings to mind the urgency of man 'to make a reasoned choice between the better and the worse life, with his eyes fixed on the nature of his soul' (*Rep.* 618de). Furthermore, this Republic is 'in the ideal' for it 'can be found nowhere on earth' (*Rep* 592ab). The upshot of the myth is surely an injunction that we are 'to choose those things in life that are seated in the mean ... for this is the greatest happiness for man' (*Rep.*619a).

There is the famous traveller who escaped from the cave in the *Republic* who experienced the light of the sun. These are the gems of wisdom which Aristotle was critical of, although he still followed in his master's footsteps with his 'Unmoved Mover' (cf. Guthrie 1975: 421)³².

5.2 Forms of erotic transcendence

Vlastos, Kosman, Price, Gill et al

Examination of Plato's love theory by the above commentators opened a new way of reading the two *eros* dialogues and other texts on psycho-somatic and philosophical theories. The scholarly debate discussed in *Chapter 2* has thrown light upon the terms: 'unique identity' 'autonomy and separateness of persons' and other modern psychological nomina (Gill 1990: 74,75). Above all the scholars seem to be in unison about the transcendent element of Plato's *eros*.

³² Guthrie (1975: 421) comments that: 'Though Aristotle's theory of motion excluded the idea of a self-mover, the operation of the Unmoved Mover which is his 'first Cause' owed more to Plato than his criticism in the *Metaphysics* (1071b 37) suggests. What moves without being moved is the object of desire and thought. The primary objects of both are the same ... but desire follows judgement [that something is good] rather than judgement desire, for thought is the *arche*' (ib. 1072a 26-30).

Vlastos (1973: 41-2) equates ‘Platonic love’ with the later *courtly*, and the subsequent *romantic* forms of love that express a ‘life-transforming miracle, a secular analogue to religious conversion.’ Compare Gill’s (1990: 78) account where ‘*romantic love*,’ as he understands it, responds ‘to the beloved not as a real, complex whole, but rather as a partial and illusory ideal, which satisfies the lover’s own needs and desires, including, perhaps, his need for a relationship which actualizes his fantasy of *romantic love*.’³³ I understand why Vlastos equates *romantic love* with *courtly* love since it seems to be merely ‘love of love’ and not for the person. This points to the lover’s search for ‘an ideal’ or ‘illusory’ perfection which cannot be realizable in ordinary human experience. It could degenerate into solipsism (i.e. the view that the self is the only thing really existent).

Vlastos (1973: 42) links courtly and romantic notions of love with Plato’s since they too are informed by a transforming power: The lover ‘pregnant in soul’ finds the ‘noble soul’ housed in a perfect bodily form and ‘straightway ... he is resourceful in discoursing of virtue and of what should be the good man’s character and what his pursuits’ (*Symp.* 209b-c). On the ladder as Beauty is reached the lover ‘breeds not illusions but true examples of virtue, since his contact is not with illusion but with truth’ (*Symp.* 212a). Diotima is referring to the procreative motif in the *Symposium*. Vlastos concludes his criticism: ‘What started as a pederastic idyl ends up in transcendental marriage’ (Vlastos 1973: 42). I was grateful to find that this spurious line was countered by Price: ‘Vlastos sacrifices truth to style.’ Price points out that the ‘transcendental marriage’ with Beauty brought forth ‘mutual offspring’ – that the lover passes off their mutual gain to the beloved. At *Phaedrus* 252e-253a where the philosophic lovers ‘follow the scent from within themselves,’ they endeavour to live by their god through memory: ‘All this, mark you, they attribute to the beloved.’ Price asserts that the Platonic lovers jointly find the wisdom that leads to a personal kind of ‘glorified love’ (Price 1982: 30).

³³ Gill (1990: 73, 78, 84 n 27) refers to Shirley Robin Letwin’s article Romantic Love and Individuality in *Philosophy* 52 (1977):131-45.

Kosman (1976: 60,64-5) introduces ‘a desire of each thing to become what it is,’ and he elucidates as he understands Plato’s eros: ‘My love is the condition of my asking the other that he be himself, i.e. the self which I love and which I recognize as in the accidental being of that other even perhaps in the mode of non presence.’ Price (1981: 34) cites Michelangelo’s Sonnet 55: ‘If I love in thee, beloved, only what thou lovest most, do not be angry; for so one spirit is enamoured of another.’ I think this is what Kosman means by *recognition*. Love can only flourish in an exalted way. The lover is exhorting the beloved to be ‘how he might be what he is.’ By ‘bid(ding) the other to his true virtue and beauty’ one ‘recognizes the beauty of another.’ In this way great portrait painters have glorified even plain subjects without superficial cunning but by ‘just that light’ and ‘just that attitude, in which their true beauty is revealed’ (Kosman 1976: 64-65).

Price (1981: 33-4) asserts that the beloved with good qualities fostered by a lover ‘pregnant in soul’ still would have questionable properties taken on in his incarnate state. Compare Glaucus studded ‘with shells, rocks and seaweed’ symbols of gross impurities (*Rep. 611d*) and the black horse ‘hard to control’ in the *Phaedrus*. The philosophic lover loves another for his ‘better self’, in other words, for what he is potentially, and rejects the elements relating to ‘Glaucus’ and the ‘black horse.’ Price recalls the joint rejection of the ideal lovers to satisfy their physical desire ‘with a seasoned sense of shame’ because such involvement, they find, would be contrary to their mutual aspirations (*Phdr. 256a*). They are responsive to the higher values of restraint (*sophrosune*). Is it identification with the divine? We have read that ‘those who belong to Zeus seek that the one they love should be someone like Zeus in respect of his soul’ (*Phdr. 252c*). We also recall the episode cited by Verdenius (1962: 141) when the lover sees the beauty of the boy the transcendent image of the ‘nature of beauty’ excites fear and his ‘higher self’ sees ‘it standing again together with self-control on a holy pedestal’ (*Phdr. 254b*). ‘That which is perfect must transcend its own kind’ is a maxim qualifying transcendence of the organism.

I have mentioned that Warner (1979: 332) endorses Plato's emphasis on the spiritual qualities of persons that are to be loved (§ 2.1). Warner (1979:338) further stresses that for Diotima the identity of the person is serious; that her concern is for 'immortality.' Therefore 'she does not ignore the very human instinct to wish for the immortality either of one's own body or else of something as like to it as possible.' To procreate children is nearest to the sense of extending one's existence. In a sense it indicates that 'talk of immortality is preservation of identity' (Warner 1979: 337). But this anxiety about 'immortality' can be transcended and that 'things of greatest value are created when it is.' This transcendent energy is expended on the creation of literary works – Diotima speaks of Hesiod and Homer, about the 'fine offspring they leave behind to procure them a glory immortally renewed in the memory of men' (209a). Paradoxically Alcestis had not died merely to save Admetus but she died for 'a deathless memory for valour' – so doing she transcends earthly mortality to gain immortal preservation of identity (*Symp.* 208d). Heroic fame is also allotted to Lycurgus and Solon who established laws as guidance for righteous ways of life. Warner (1979: 338) states that Diotima's 'higher' concern for 'immortality' is based on 'the sense of loss at the heart of love.' Therefore Diotima's statement: 'the mortal nature ever seeks, as best it can, to be immortal' (*Symp.* 207c-d). Socrates in his devotion to a high resolve of truth rejects Alcibiades' seductive advances with fortitude and wisdom. True to one 'who has had his share of philosophic frenzy and transport,' Alcibiades concludes: 'After that, you can imagine what a state of mind I was in, feeling myself affronted, yet marveling at the sobriety and integrity of his nature' (*Symp.* 219d). Socrates was an initiate of the mysteries of *eros*.

5.3 Plato's acknowledged love of Socrates and Dion of Syracuse

I do not perceive any meaningful change in Plato's view of *eros* from the *Symposium* to the *Phaedrus* and my conclusion does not gainsay the fact that he loved Socrates during his youth – of this the dialogues are proof. Afterwards in Sicily and in Athens and even in the years of their separation Plato loved Dion. Wilamowitz, Bowra, Guthrie and others have attested the authenticity of the epigraph is by Plato. This would mean that Plato was

Dion's lover. Would Plato's personal physical involvement of *eros* necessarily result in relaxing his views on the sexual act?

Nussbaum (2001: 228/9) tells that it has frequently been observed that the love of the philosophical couple in the *Phaedrus* relates to Plato's association with Dion of Syracuse whom he loved. This love has been eternalized by the epigram he wrote and testifies to his love of Dion who died a victim of factious assassination: 'Dion, you who drove my heart mad with love!' (*ὦ ἐμὸν ἐκμήνας θυμὸν ἐρωτι Δίων*). To this last line von Scheliha (1934: 84) gives good grounds for Plato's love of Dion: 'Und mit den beiden letzten Worten eint er noch einmal den Namen des Gottes und des Geliebten und rührt an das heilige Geheimnis, das ihm der herrscherliche Schöne offenbarte.' In 4.4 supra I have mentioned the fear of the lover who sees 'true' beauty itself when 'filled with tickling and the pricks of longing' (*Phdr. 253e-254a*).

Rowe (1986: 190) points out that the physical aspect of love is more evident in the *Phaedrus* than in the *Symposium*. The ideal couple 'touch, kiss and lie down' (255e4). He adds that 'it suggests a warmth and sympathy in Plato's conception which it is hard (or harder) to detect in the *Symposium*.' He explains that the lover's quest in the *Symposium* is a search for wider horizons – from the lower erotic drives of love on earth to reality/Forms. In the beginning of the *Phaedrus* myth we are told by Socrates how the blessed discarnate souls follow Zeus' chariot. Then, by the law of *Adrastus*/Necessity or mischance some souls lose their wings, fall to earth and are incarnated and try to find earthly meaning in love-relationships in this world (*Phdr. 248c*). But as pointed out the soul with wings 'borrowed from the god of love'³⁴ forever strives for its original home and the nourishment granted in the *huperouranios*.

Kosman (1976: 66) as cited in the epigraph in Chapter 2 of this paper points to the transcendent quality in Platonic love. Boy-love and the miraculous procreative impulse,

³⁴ Compare § 5.1 and § 4.4 supra (in White 1990: 396-7)

the beauty in animals, the search of immortality, literal and figurative as Diotima extols it is surpassed to culminate in the idea or Form at the top of her ladder. This means 'absoluteness, the spaceless and timeless realm of spirit' (Schrecker 1971: 130). There is the separate validity of the good existent beyond human speculations. *Eros* is the powerful god who traditionally caused the creation of the cosmos, humans, animals and plants, he who ordered the Empedoclean favourable seasons in opposition to hate. Furthermore Socrates in the *Phaedrus* proved *eros* to be 'a madness given by the gods to allow us to achieve the greatest good fortune' (*Phdr.* 245c).

Kosman (1976: 66) tells us 'that it is this love which is true "agapic" love, a love in which the philosopher, by transcending the world to a vision of its perfect form, is able to accept it as an appearance and manifestation of that form.'

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