Classical Quarterly (2004) **54.2** 366–378
doi:10.1093/clquaj/bmh045

VIRTUE IN PLATO'S *SYMPOSIUM*

According to many scholars Plato's *Symposium* reaches its summit in Diotima's account of love, Diotima's account of love in the higher mysteries, and the higher mysteries in the contemplation of Beauty, this last being the true lover's ultimate object. Against this view I shall argue that the higher mysteries reach their summit, not in the contemplation of Beauty, but in the philosopher's bringing forth of true virtue and in the immortality that this bestows. I shall further argue that the true virtue in question is not an internal state of soul but external discourse, and that the immortality attained by the philosopher *qua* mortal consists in his living on in the philosophical works that he leaves behind him.[1]

I

Because my argument will rest on the claim that Diotima's account of love is continuous in structure, I shall need to examine the detail of what she says.[2]

Her account begins with a description of love's nature.[3] It is not beautiful or good, she says, but nor is it ugly or bad. It is not a god, nor is it immortal, but neither is it mortal. It is a spirit and, like all spirits, it mediates between gods and humans, binding these together.[4] What then, she asks, is its function, use and purpose (its ἔργα, χρεία, and ἵνα τί)?[5] And as a preliminary to answering this question she remarks that according to Socrates (ὡς σὺ φῄς) love is of beautiful things in the sense that the lover

[1] The thesis that I shall defend is a complex one and to the best of my knowledge has not been advanced before. Most of the propositions it comprises are contrary to majority opinion, as I shall point out in footnotes at the appropriate places. Some of them, on the other hand, as again I shall point out, are asserted by others, but usually the reasons that I give in support of them are, I believe, novel.

[2] In this paper I shall assume with most commentators, past and present, that Diotima speaks for Plato: e. g. L. C. H. Chen, 'Knowledge of beauty in Plato's *Symposium*', *CQ* 33 (1983), 66–74, at 66; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* 4 (Cambridge, 1975), 385; R. Hackforth, 'Immortality in Plato's *Symposium*', *CR* 64 (1950), 42–5, at 45; R. A. Markus, 'The dialectic of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*', reprinted in *Plato II*, ed. G. Vlastos (New York, 1971), 132–43, 134; C. D. C. Reeve, 'Telling the truth about love: Plato's *Symposium*', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 8 (1992), 89–114, at 101. C. Osborne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford and New York, 1994), 56–7, casts doubt on the conventional view that what Diotima says is what Plato means us to believe. There is no room to discuss her reasons here, but the close parallel between what is said by Diotima of the true lover and what is said of the philosopher and lover in the *Republic* (490b) convinces me that what Diotima says is indeed what Plato means us to believe. For the view that we have no idea at all what Plato held, see H. Neumann, 'Diotima's concept of love', *American Journal of Philology* 86 (1965), 33–59, at 34–7.

[3] For an interesting discussion of this denial of the intrinsic goodness of love, see D. Levy, 'The definition of love in Plato's *Symposium*', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40 (1979), 285–91, esp. 289–91.

[4] It is worth noting that one of the first things said by Diotima of love is that it binds humans and gods together—not humans and Beauty—and that the last thing said by her (or virtually the last) is that love ensures friendship between the lover and the gods (making the lover θεοφιλής). The importance of this will become clear as my argument develops.

[5] Cf. 205a1–3.

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https://doi.org/10.1093/clquaj/bmh045 Published online by Cambridge University Press

desires the possession of these, and she asks what a person will acquire (*τί ἔσται ἐκείνῳ*) who gains possession of beautiful things. Socrates is unable to say until Diotima suggests the substitution of 'good' for 'beautiful',[6] upon which he asserts that the lover of good things will acquire happiness (*εὐδαίμων ἔσται*), an assertion endorsed by Diotima who pronounces that the happy are happy by virtue of possessing good things (*κτήσει ἀγαθῶν*).[7]

Socrates is now prompted to assert that all human beings experience love in the foregoing sense of love: all desire the permanent possession of the good (*τἀγαθά*), and they desire this for themselves (*αὑτοῖς*). But Diotima qualifies this general claim by saying that, while all human beings love in this sense, the word 'love' is restricted to the pursuit of it in a specific way. Love, she explains, is not what some have suggested, not the seeking of one's half, since the *good* is what human beings love (*οἱ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἐρῶσιν*). More properly, what human beings love is that the good be in their possession for ever: the object of their love, what their love is 'of', is the permanent possession for themselves of the good (*τοῦ τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὑτῷ εἶναι ἀεί*).

If this is the object of love, Diotima now asks, what are the means employed in the pursuit of it? That is, what does love *do*, what is its function (*ἔργον*)? She answers that its function is 'begetting in the beautiful (*τόκος ἐν καλῷ*)', and she explains what she means by this as follows. All human beings, men as well as women, are 'pregnant (*κυοῦσι*)'[8] in body and soul and, urged on by nature, when they reach a certain age they desire to beget (*τίκτειν*). This, however, they cannot do 'in' what is ugly, but only 'in' what is beautiful:[9] begetting can only take place when a person who is pregnant approaches one who is beautiful (*ὅταν μὲν καλῷ προσπελάζῃ τὸ κυοῦν*), since begetting (this time *γέννησις* is used) is something divine, something immortal in mortal nature. It follows that Socrates is wrong in thinking that love is of the beautiful. It is not. Love is of begetting in the beautiful,[10] and the reason for love's wanting to beget is that begetting endows mortal nature with immortality.[11] This, Diotima points out, follows as a matter of necessity from what she and Socrates are already agreed upon, namely that humans cannot do other than desire immortality, given that the

[6] On the significance of this substitution, see Neumann (n. 2), 38–9, and F. C. White, 'Love and beauty in Plato's *Symposium*', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 109 (1989), 149–57, at 156.

[7] Diotima's view here and Plato's view generally, *pace* P. W. Cummings, 'Eros as procreation in beauty', *Apeiron* 10.2 (1976), 23–27, at 24, is that the possession of good things *constitutes* happiness, not that it is an instrumental means to happiness.

[8] For a discussion of *κυεῖν* and the difficulties of translation, see J. S. Morrison, 'Four notes on Plato's *Symposium*', *CQ* 14 (1964), 42–55, at 51–5, and E. E. Pender, 'Spiritual pregnancy in Plato's *Symposium*', *CQ* 42 (1992), 72–86, *passim*.

[9] 'In' starts off, where intercourse between a man and a woman is at issue, having a clear and literal meaning, and it ends up, where intercourse between the lover and Beauty is at issue, having a clear but highly metaphorical meaning. Sometimes in between 'in' is impossible to construe, as in the case, say, of the beautiful 'in' which Lycurgus supposedly begets his laws.

[10] Diotima in fact says that love is *τῆς γεννήσεως καὶ τοῦ τόκου ἐν καλῷ*, but the use of this longer formula adds nothing to the earlier and shorter assertion that the function of love is *τόκος ἐν καλῷ*, 206b.

[11] The scholar who affirms most clearly (and repeatedly) that according to Diotima love is not of the beautiful is Neumann: 'For both Diotima and Socrates, love's real goal is not the beautiful, but the good.' 'Beauty is, therefore, not loved for its own sake, but as the means by which mortals can give birth.' 'Lovers are not in love with their beautiful beloved who only seems to attract them; their real object is their own good or happiness.' 'The end of Diotima's *eros* is not the communion of contemplation, but reproduction.' '[For Diotima] knowledge, even of absolute beauty, is a tool for gaining undying fame' (Neumann [n. 2], 38, 39, 41, 43, n. 29, 44).

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object of love is the permanent possession of the good. Love, she adds, is 'also' of immortality (*καὶ τῆς ἀθανασίας*), in saying which she draws attention to the fact that what humans desire is not immortality as such, but immortality in addition to the good.[12]

So far what Diotima has done is give a generic definition of love in terms of its object and its function: its object is the permanent possession of one's own good,[13] its function is begetting in the beautiful.[14] She now applies this generic definition at specific levels, beginning with the love of non-human animals. When these are desirous of begetting, she says, they are lovingly disposed, entering into sexual union and subsequently caring for their young, and this behaviour is easily explained in the light of what has been said, since begetting is the sole means that mortal creatures have of achieving immortality: they achieve it by leaving new creatures behind them in place of the old (207d). Further, we can be sure that this explanation is right, since we could not otherwise account for the remarkable deeds that humans sometimes perform on behalf of others, deeds such as the self-sacrifice of Alcestis for Admetus, or of Codrus for the kingdom of his children. Such deeds are performed in the expectation of immortal glory.

This explanation by Diotima of the remarkable deeds that humans sometimes perform on behalf of others is not altogether satisfactory, since the comparison that it relies on is difficult to make sense of: while physical procreation is perspicuously an instance of begetting, it is not clear how sacrificing one's life for others is a case of begetting at all.[15] Moreover, it is unfortunate to offer an explanation of human intentional acts of self-sacrifice by comparing them to non-human behaviour, particularly if ascribing the sort of cause to them that gives rise to sexual union between non-human animals. More important, it is unfortunate on Diotima's part to suggest that the sole reason that humans have in sacrificing their lives for others is the expectation of renown (*ὀνομαστοὶ γενέσθαι*): unfortunate, not only because the suggestion is in itself implausible, but because it risks setting us on the false trail of

[12] While at one point Diotima says that love is of the good (*τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ*) or of the permanent possession of the good (*τοῦ τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὑτῷ εἶναι ἀεί*), at another point she says that it is of begetting in the beautiful (*τῆς γεννήσεως καὶ τοῦ τόκου ἐν καλῷ*), and at a third that it is of immortality (*τῆς ἀθανασίας*). However, from the way in which she develops her argument it is clear that the object of love is the permanent possession of the good, while begetting is loved as a means to attaining that possession: begetting, as she says, is the sole means that mortals have of achieving immortality. And when she says that love is of immortality, she means simply that the object of love is the *permanent* possession of the good.

[13] The object of love (the genitive in Greek) that Diotima is talking about is the underlying or fundamental aim of love, whether or not the lover consciously aims at it. When, for example, she asserts that the object of sexual union (including that of non-human animals) is immortality, achieved by leaving new creatures behind in place of the old, she does not mean that this is, or at any rate has to be, the conscious aim of sexual partners. Similarly, when she describes the object of the philosopher's love as the begetting of true virtue, she does not mean that in the process of ascending to the vision of Beauty the novice-philosopher has this object consciously in mind.

[14] Diotima's account of love rests upon a contrast between the good and the beautiful, yet there are commentators who believe the *Symposium*'s teaching to be that the good and the beautiful are identical, and even that it is 'axiomatic for Plato' that they are identical. See e.g. Markus (n. 2), 137; A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and his Work* (London, 1949[6]), 231.

[15] It seems contrived to suggest that what is begotten is, say, memories or records or the continued life of those for whom the deeds are performed.

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thinking that Diotima sees all love as exemplifying an unattractively narrow sort of selfishness.[16]

After her comments on non-human love, Diotima returns to the point that all humans are pregnant in body and soul, this time classifying lovers into two kinds: those pregnant principally in body and those pregnant principally in soul. The latter she further divides into those initiated into the mysteries of love at a preliminary level and those initiated into love's full rites and revelations.[17]

Lovers pregnant principally in body turn typically to women, achieving immortality and happiness, or so they believe, through the begetting of children. The object of these lovers is immortality (*ἀθανασίαν*) and happiness for themselves (*αὑτοῖς*): the means that they employ is the begetting of children to ensure that they are remembered. Diotima does not mention that this begetting takes place 'in the beautiful', but she has already made clear in some detail that sexual union takes place only through commerce with a body that is beautiful (206d–e).[18] Procreative love of this bodily kind, then, satisfies Diotima's generic definition of love in a straightforward manner: its object is the permanent possession of one's own good in the form of one's own children and their children, in which progeny one lives on; and its function is begetting in the beautiful in the sense of begetting children through union with the beautiful body of one's partner.

Lovers pregnant principally in soul are pregnant with what it is fitting for souls to be pregnant with and beget (*καὶ κυῆσαι καὶ τεκεῖν*), namely wisdom and the rest of virtue. Poets, who are begetters (*γεννήτορες*) of wisdom and the rest of virtue, are examples of this kind; so are craftsmen of the sort that are genuinely creative; so again are those lovers pregnant with the greatest and most beautiful (*καλλίστη*) parts of wisdom, namely justice and practical sense (*σωφροσύνη*).[19] When a lover of this kind comes of age, he desires to beget and bring to birth (*τίκτειν τε καὶ γεννᾶν*) what he is pregnant with, and looks about for a 'beautiful one' in union with whom to beget;

[16] It is not surprising that A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (New York, 1969), 180–1, seizes upon this passage to support his view that love according to Plato is egocentric. But Plato's love is certainly not egocentric in the sense of being without concern for the good (the virtue) of others: on the contrary, I shall argue, the love of the true lover is essentially concerned for the virtue of others and so is inherently heterocentric. Socrates was undoubtedly concerned for the virtue of others, as is clear from so many dialogues (*Apology*, *Crito*, *Protagoras*, *Meno*, the concluding part of the *Symposium* itself, and so on), and in the *Gorgias* he explicitly asserts that the good man ought to make his fellow citizens as good as possible (515c), that it is of the very nature of a good citizen to seek to make his fellow citizens better (515d–e), that to make his fellow citizens better is the one and only task of the good citizen (517b–c), and so on. See F. C. White, 'The good in Plato's *Gorgias*', *Phronesis* 35 (1990), 117–27, *passim*, and cf. T. A. Mahoney, 'Is Socratic Eros in the *Symposium* egoistic?' *Apeiron* 29.1 (1996), 1–18, *passim*. Osborne (n. 2), 101–3, rejects Nygren's uniform interpretation that love according to Diotima is a selfish desire to possess, arguing that Diotima's account changes. Initially it sees love as possessive, but later it is revised and sees true love differently: in the initial account the lover aims at possession of good things, but in the revised account 'the ultimate aim of his love is not possession of good things but a vision of unfailing beauty'. 'Only immortality is desired for possession, and then as a means to the permanent enjoyment of other things, not as an end in itself.' Osborne's interpretation, if I have understood it, implies that Diotima's account of love is discontinuous, and this I do not accept; the whole first section of my paper argues against such a view.

[17] It will be convenient for the most part to treat the fully initiated as a kind apart and to speak of the rest of those pregnant in soul as if by themselves constituting the second kind.

[18] For detailed comments, see K. J. Dover, *Plato: Symposium* (Cambridge, 1980), 147, and Pender (n. 8), 73–4.

[19] 'Temperance' does not seem to be what is at issue here, and *σωφροσύνη* often has the meaning of practical or good sense, opposed to *ἀφροσύνη*. See White (n. 16), 125, n. 11.

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and if he comes across such a one, beautiful in soul as well as in body, he takes the education of that one in hand, and finds much to say concerning virtue and those qualities and ways of acting that characterize the good man. As a result of embracing (ἁπτόμενος) the beauty of the one that he thus encounters, this lover begets and gives birth to those things that he has long been pregnant with;[20] and, this done, he shares the rearing of these 'children' with his beautiful partner. Moreover, the partnership between these two is closer than that between bodily procreating partners, and their affection (φιλίαν) for each other is stronger, because their children are more beautiful and more immortal than children after the flesh. Indeed anyone would prefer children of this kind to children after the flesh, casting admiring eyes upon the progeny that good poets like Homer or Hesiod leave behind them (καταλείπουσιν), progeny affording them immortal glory and renown. The same holds of the 'children' that Lycurgus left behind him (κατελίπετο), or Solon, or any of the other Greeks and non-Greeks who have begotten virtue of every kind (γεννήσαντες παντοίαν ἀρετήν). On account of such children, sacred cults have from time to time been instituted for such begetters of virtue.

This account of lovers pregnant principally in soul again satisfies Diotima's generic definition in a straightforward if analogous manner. The object of their love is the permanent possession of their own good in the form of the 'children (ἔκγονα)' that they leave behind them (καταλείπουσιν) and that they live on in, just as parents after the flesh live on in theirs. It is important to notice the point that these lovers beget 'children' that *live on after them*, for it means that when Diotima speaks of the many Greeks and non-Greeks who beget *virtue* of every kind, what she is referring to is not 'personal' virtue, not a state of their souls apt to bring about just actions and the like, but external and perduring works. To illustrate the point, Homer's virtue in this context is not his virtuous state of soul, but his epic poetry; it is this that brings him immortal glory and renown. Moreover, all of this should be seen in retrospect to apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the wisdom and the rest of virtue that Diotima earlier said those more pregnant in soul are pregnant with. What they are pregnant with is not personal virtue, not states of soul to be brought forth in themselves, but external works in the form of conversations, poems, and the like.

The function of this kind of love, again in keeping with Diotima's generic definition, is begetting in the beautiful, this time begetting through union with a partner beautiful in both body and soul. Diotima tells us plainly that the lover who is pregnant with justice and practical sense embraces and consorts with his beautiful partner (ἁπτόμενος τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ὁμιλῶν αὐτῷ) in order to bring forth what he has long been pregnant with. On the other hand, in her treatment of this kind of love Diotima pays more attention to what is begotten and to its begetting than to the beautiful in which the begetting takes place.[21] By contrast, when she now turns to the ultimate kind of lover, to the full initiate in the rites and revelations of love, she attaches so much importance to the beautiful in which this lover begets that she is often taken to be

[20] Neumann (n. 2), 39, describes this as giving birth 'to the beauties of virtue in the other's soul', but this is not what is said.

[21] Homer doubtless consorted with the goddess addressed at the beginning of the *Iliad*, Lycurgus with Zeus, Solon with Apollo, and so on, though whether Plato had anything clear in mind is another question; I suspect that he did not. Dover (n. 18), 151–2, suggests that the beautiful medium in which Homer generated his poems and Solon his laws 'can only be the virtuous character of the societies for which Homer sang and Solon legislated', while Pender (n. 8), 80, thinks that Plato is deliberately 'playing down the idea of spiritual intercourse at this stage'.

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saying that the object of love is not, after all, the good and its related immortality, but Beauty itself.[22]

This is not what she is saying. The account that she gives of the ultimate kind of lover, the 'true lover' as I shall from now on call him, is as follows. For one who is properly guided, she says, the actions and undertakings relating to love so far described are for the sake of yet higher mysteries, and the path that such a one must follow is this.[23] He must begin with beautiful bodies, first of all loving one particular body and in association with that body (ἐνταῦθα) begetting beautiful *discourses* (γεννᾶν λόγους καλούς). Then he must be brought to see that the beauty of one body is akin to that of another, and in seeing this become a lover of all beautiful bodies.[24] Next, he must come to judge beauty of soul to be of greater worth than beauty of body, and as a result of this *beget* (and elicit, τίκτειν καὶ ζητεῖν) such *discourses* as are likely to make young men better; in attempting which he will in turn be forced to give thought to beautiful customs and ways of living (ἐπιτηδεύμασι). But the novice is to be led yet further onwards, from considering ways of living to considering different sorts of knowledge (ἐπιστήμας) and perceiving their beauty; so that, being now turned towards the entire ocean of beauty,[25] he may *beget* (τίκτῃ) many beautiful *discourses* (καλοὺς λόγους)

[22] The idea that Beauty and the vision of Beauty is the ultimate object of love is almost universally accepted. To cite some representative examples, past and present: R. G. Bury, *The Symposium of Plato* (Cambridge, 1932), xliv, xlix; Chen (n. 1), 66; F. M. Cornford, 'The doctrine of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*', reprinted in *Plato II*, ed. G. Vlastos (New York, 1971), 119–131, at 122; G. Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates* 3 (London, 1885), 18; G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (London, 1935), 105; W. Hamilton, *Plato: The Symposium* (Harmondsworth, 1951), 17; T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford, 1977), 165; W. R. M. Lamb, *Plato: Symposium* ([Loeb] Cambridge, MA and London, 1967), 76–7; Levy (n. 3), 286; Nygren (n. 16), 174, 177, 179; Plotinus, *Enneads*, ed. P. Henry and H. Schwyzer (Paris, 1973), I.6, 8–9; J. E. Raven, *Plato's Thought in the Making* (Cambridge, 1965), 107; C. Rowe, *Plato* (Brighton, 1984), 43; J. Stannard, 'Socratic Eros and Platonic Dialectic', *Phronesis* 4 (1959), 120–34, at 121, 129; Taylor (n. 14), 225, 231–2; A. E. Taylor, 'Plato', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 18 (Chicago, 1970), 27; H. Teloh, *The Development of Plato's Metaphysics* (University Park and London, 1981), 96. For the extremes to which this view can lead see G. Vlastos, 'The individual as an object of love in Plato', *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, 1973), 3–34, *passim*, and for detailed arguments against it, see F. C. White, 'Love and the individual in Plato's *Phaedrus*', *CQ* 40 (1990), 396–406, *passim*: cf. Osborne (n. 2), 222–6; R. Waterfield, *Plato: Symposium* (Oxford, 1994), xxxiv, together with notes to 206. Most recently, Kyung-Choon Chang, 'The form of the beautiful versus the unmoved mover', *CQ* 52 (2002), 431–46, at 433, distinguishes between the ultimate end of love, which he says is the eternal possession of the good, and the final object of love, which he says is Beauty. I agree with him that the ultimate end of love is the eternal possession of the good, and I agree that the lover finds Beauty attractive, but I think it misleading to describe Beauty as love's *final object*. Chang appeals to 210e4 in which the word τέλος occurs and to 211b7 in which τέλους occurs, but τέλος at 210e4 is simply the conclusion of the lover's ascent to Beauty and τέλους at 211b7 is Beauty as the object of the lover's *ascent*, which is quite different from its being the final object of his *love*.

[23] A persuasive account of the ascent, treating each level as an image of the next, is given by R. Patterson, 'The ascent in Plato's *Symposium*', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 7 (1991), 193–214, though this is criticized by J. P. Lawrence, 'Commentary on Patterson', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 7 (1991), 215–25 on the grounds *inter alia* that there is no 'discursive path that can guarantee final insight'.

[24] Diotima means 'become a lover of the *beauty* of all beautiful bodies'. She does not mean that 'we should spread the passion thin by converting it into an equal love for all beautiful bodies', as I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* 2 (London, 1963), 266, perhaps with tongue in cheek, would have us believe.

[25] For an interesting discussion of this point and of the three stages of the lover's ascent, the last of which is a sheer leap, see Chen (n. 1), 70–3.

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and many beautiful ideas (διανοήματα).[26] Then, deriving growth and strength from these, he will at length catch sight of a single form of knowledge, the object of which is Beauty. The man who up to this stage has been properly guided from one kind of beautiful thing to another is at long last approaching the end of his initiation, and now of a sudden he catches a glimpse of a reality altogether remarkably beautiful in its nature, something for the sake of which all previous labours have been undertaken.[27] This reality always is, neither becoming nor perishing; it is not beautiful in part, or only at certain times, or in some respects, or merely to some observers. Nor again does it present itself as a bodily thing, or as a form of knowledge, or as belonging to something else. Rather it presents itself as single, eternal, existing by itself, and as that in which all other beautiful things partake.

All of this is the proper way to be initiated into the mysteries of love, the candidate ascending from beautiful bodies to beautiful ways of living, and then on to beautiful forms of knowledge, so that at length he may come to have *knowledge of the beautiful itself* (ἵνα γνῷ αὐτὸ τελευτῶν ὃ ἔστι καλόν). In this stage of life (ἐνταῦθα τοῦ βίου), if in any, a human should live, contemplating Beauty itself. Socrates and others, Diotima now adds, are ready to go without food and drink in order simply to gaze upon and consort with (συνεῖναι) their beloved. What then would happen if one were able to behold divine Beauty itself? Do you think, she asks Socrates, that the life of a man beholding Beauty itself with the appropriate faculty (ᾧ δεῖ) and consorting with it (συνόντος αὐτῷ) would be a mean and inferior kind of life? Or do you not upon reflection see that there alone, there where he beholds Beauty itself with the faculty capable of seeing it (ᾧ ὁρατόν), he will be able to beget (τίκτειν), not images of virtue (οὐκ εἴδωλα ἀρετῆς), but true virtue (ἀλλ' ἀληθῆ), because he holds reality in his embrace (ἐφαπτομένῳ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς); and that, having begotten and reared true virtue (τεκόντι δὲ ἀρετὴν ἀληθῆ καὶ θρεψαμένῳ), it belongs to him to be dear to the gods and to become, he if anyone, immortal?[28]

The immediate point to notice here is that Diotima is not asserting that the object of this highest kind of love is the vision of Beauty. She says that life at the stage in which the true lover beholds Beauty is the life that is to be lived, and she returns to this point shortly afterwards, saying that such a life is of no mean kind. But she then explains

[26] The 'ideas' here are *expressed* ideas.

[27] It is important to note that the ascent is not an easy one: Socrates singles out courage (δύναμιν καὶ ἀνδρείαν) as the characteristic of love most to be praised (212b7–8), just as Alcibiades singles out courage as the most noteworthy characteristic of Socrates himself.

[28] Cf. *Republic* 490b, where the philosopher is possessed of love (ἔρωτος), approaches and has union with reality, and so begets intelligence and truth (ᾧ πλησιάσας καὶ μιγεὶς τῷ ὄντι ὄντως, γεννήσας νοῦν καὶ ἀλήθειαν, γνοίη τε καὶ ἀληθῶς ζῴη . . .). The language of union with reality and begetting is parallel to that of the *Symposium*, and the ἀρετὴν ἀληθῆ that the *Symposium*'s true lover begets is the outward expression of the ἀλήθειαν referred to in the *Republic* as begotten by the philosopher. Indeed there are many commentators who confidently assert that the Beauty of the *Symposium* and the Good of the *Republic* are identical: see e.g. Taylor (n. 14), 231–2, and more recently Patterson (n. 23), 207–10; cf. Bury (n. 22), xxxvii ff.; J. N. Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (London, 1974), 150; N. Gulley, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1962), 49; Grube (n. 22), 21; Guthrie (n. 2), 392; R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge, 1952), 55; L. Robin, *Platon: Oeuvres Complètes* 4.1 (Paris, 1960), xcviii. Others avoid asserting that Beauty and the Good are identical but see the two as playing the equivalent part as the proper goal of the philosopher and lover: see e. g. C. H. Kahn, 'Plato's theory of desire', *Review of Metaphysics* 41 (1987), 77–103, at 91, 101. For a defence of the view that Beauty and the Good are not identical, see White (n. 6), 155–7. Neumann (n. 2), 37–8, takes the extreme view that Diotima rejects the whole notion of there being a Good at all.

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why this is so. It is not because the life of contemplating Beauty is such that nothing is to be sought other than the contemplation itself,[29] but because in the life of contemplating Beauty, and in that life alone, the lover will beget true virtue and, having begotten that, be dear to the gods and immortal. At the same time Diotima says nothing that belittles the vision of Beauty. On the contrary, her teaching is that Beauty is so ravishing a reality, and the vision of it so arresting, that the lover is drawn to embrace and seek union with it and so to beget true virtue: the fact that the vision of Beauty and union with Beauty is a means to begetting true virtue does nothing to diminish its intrinsic worth,[30] nor to deny its place in the true lover's happiness.[31]

What Diotima is talking of here is not a passing vision of Beauty or a fleeting experience of the kind that mystics are said to meet with, but a new life:[32] from the time that the true lover catches sight of Beauty he enters into a new life in which he is in union with Beauty by means of his appropriate faculty of soul.[33] There is no reason therefore to suppose that his begetting of true virtue is a single and one-off affair; on the contrary, there is every reason to suppose that his knowledge of reality continues to manifest itself in true virtue, rather as Homer's creativity continued to manifest itself in poetry. Finally, the true lover's contemplation of reality (*τοῦ ἀληθοῦς*) does not render him incapable of being aware of and concerned for others (for their virtue), any more than the gods' contemplation of reality renders them incapable of being aware of and concerned for others.[34]

The above account of the highest kind of love satisfies Diotima's generic definition for a third and last time. Its object is the permanent possession of the lover's own good in the form of the 'virtue' that he leaves behind him, and in which he lives on, just as

[29] It is true that for Plato contemplation or knowledge of the Forms is inseparable from virtue in general and from true happiness. None the less it is possible to consider contemplation as something distinct, as Diotima does here and Socrates in a different context does in the *Republic* (519d ff). Indeed the whole of Diotima's analysis of the highest kind of love depends upon distinguishing contemplation of Beauty from the true virtue that it results in.

[30] Plato makes clear at *Republic* 357c ff. that a thing's being of instrumental worth does not preclude its being of intrinsic worth. Beauty itself is of higher intrinsic worth than anything human, and among human goods the vision of Beauty is a great intrinsic good. It is moreover one of the goods that jointly make up the philosopher's happiness. In the *Philebus* dialectic is ranked as the highest kind of good constituted by knowledge (55c–59c), and the pure pleasure associated with beauty is ranked as the highest kind of good constituted by pleasure (51b–52a). See the following note.

[31] For Plato contemplation of Beauty and the rest of the Forms is a part of the philosopher's happiness, as it is a part of the happiness of the gods. Diotima says nothing that conflicts with this, but it is not a point of immediate concern to her: she is concerned with the nature of love and of the true lover as such (even though the true lover is the philosopher).

[32] This point is sometimes missed. Thus Levy (n. 3), 288, speaks of other regions in which life can (and should) be spent, but Diotima is not talking about one among several regions of life but about a whole life (or phase of life) entered into by the lover.

[33] Cf. *Republic* 490b: *ᾧ προσήκει ψυχῆς ἐφάπτεσθαι τοῦ τοιούτου· προσήκει δὲ ξυγγενεῖ*. In the *Timaeus* Plato distinguishes various parts of the soul (roughly answering to the parts of the soul in the *Republic*), and the highest part (*ἀρχὴν ψυχῆς ἀθάνατον*) is the part capable of awareness of reality (69c). For related comments see Raven (n. 22), 117.

[34] Nygren (n. 16), 177, says that because the gods have everything 'there is no question of their feeling love'. This is correct of *ἔρως*, as the *Symposium* itself points out, but Nygren's statement could be misleading, since in another sense of 'love' the gods do love: they love with the kind of love that friends have for one another, the true lover being loved by the gods in that way (he is *θεοφιλής*). Also, Nygren is wrong is saying that the only relation that the gods can have to *ἔρως* is to be its object, since they cannot be the object of *ἔρως* at all, the sole object of *ἔρως* according to Diotima being the permanent possession of the lover's good.

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lovers of the second kind live on in the 'virtue' that they leave behind them.[35] Its function is that of begetting in the beautiful, the beautiful this time being Beauty itself. The true lover unites with (*συνεῖναι*) Beauty, holds it in his embrace (*ἐφάπτεσθαι*) and begets (*τίκτειν*) true virtue,[36] just as the lover of the second kind embraces and unites with his beautiful one (*ἅπτόμενος τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ὁμιλῶν αὐτῷ*) and so begets (*τίκτειν*) virtue of every kind (*παντοίαν ἀρετήν*).

This true virtue of the true lover and its relation to immortality warrants further consideration.

II

It has already been noted that the virtue begotten by the true lover is not 'personal' virtue, not a disposition of the true lover's soul, but something brought forth into the world and continuing to exist there when the true lover is dead.[37] Were this not so, Diotima's account of love would be seriously discontinuous: the offspring of a lover of the first or second kind would continue to exist in the world and in that way bestow immortality, while the offspring of the true lover would cease with him: the virtue of a poet, for example, would continue to exist after his death, while the virtue of the true lover would perish with him. From this it would follow that the meaning of the word 'virtue' would differ widely when applied to the second lover and to the true lover respectively, and the same would hold of the words 'begetting', 'offspring', and 'immortal'. By contrast, if the virtue begotten by the true lover consists, like that of the second lover, in enduring works (*πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ ἔργα*), Diotima's account is continuous and simple: *all* lovers bring forth 'children' that continue in the world and bestow immortality on their begetters. Further, once it is granted that Diotima's account is continuous and that the children of the true lover like those of the second consist in enduring works, there is no doubt concerning what those works are. For the true lover is the philosopher, in fact he is

[35] By lovers of the second kind I mean all who are pregnant principally in soul except the true lovers. These latter, as I remarked earlier, really form a third kind.

[36] For some interesting comments see Pender (n. 8), 82, 84: on Pender's view it is Beauty that experiences the 'pregnancy, labour and birth of the soul-child'.

[37] This is contrary to the almost universal opinion of scholars. Thus Hackforth (n. 2), 45, speaks of true virtue as being virtue begotten *in another* (but see his n. 2), while R. S. Bluck, *Plato's Phaedo* (London, 1955), 29, n. 1, in rejecting Hackforth's view states that the 'offspring is not someone *else's* virtue . . . but the begetter's own'. Waterfield (n. 22), xxxix, says that 'virtue—stable virtue of the kind that Socrates displays in Alcibiades' account—is the product of the philosopher's intercourse with absolute beauty'. Pender (n. 8), 85, asserts that the children that the lover of Beauty begets 'cannot exist independently of him, for they are new virtues present in his soul. Thus he cannot be said to "leave behind" these children after death'. Cf. T. Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers* 2 (London, 1964), 392; Chen (n. 1), 66, 71; Mahoney (n. 16), 16–18. Most recently, Chang (n. 22), 433, 435, 436, takes true virtue to be the philosopher's moral excellence, excellence *in* him. One of the most surprising commentators is Markus (n. 2), whose theme is that love in the *Symposium* is a desire to give. One would have expected him to insist that the lover's true virtue is something concerned with others, but he simply says that the offspring produced is wisdom and true virtue (140). Other commentators replace the expression 'true virtue' with 'equivalent' expressions but without commenting on what is meant: e. g. Grube (n. 22), 105, says that the lover 'will create not semblances of excellence, but excellence itself', Robin (n. 28), ad loc., translates *un mérite réel*, and Reeve (n. 2), 109, completely alters Diotima's assertion by saying that what the true lover begets is 'true beauty'. What is most surprising is that so many commentators are silent on the issue: e. g. Dover (n. 18), Guthrie (n. 2), Robin (n. 28), Taylor (n. 14).

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Socrates,[38] and his works therefore are discourses of the kind familiar to us from Plato's dialogues and other sources.[39]

That the true lover is the philosopher is evident from the fact that he is said to attain to *knowledge through union with reality*, as is the philosopher, the lover, and the begetter in the *Republic* (490b; cf. 496a). That the true lover is Socrates is evident from the fact that Socrates claims that love is the only subject that he understands (177e, 198d)[40] and that he engages in the rites of love with particular devotion (*τὰ ἐρωτικὰ . . . διαφερόντως ἀσκῶ*), assertions that may fairly be taken to imply initiation into those rites. It is further evident from Alcibiades' description of Socrates, a description that makes little sense unless it is meant to portray Socrates as the true lover, coming as it does immediately after Diotima's account of true love and Socrates' declaration of particular devotion to love.[41]

If it is thus meant, as surely it is, we must take Alcibiades to be describing the true lover; and, given this, what he says is at first blush surprising. He does not describe him as one who has attained to a vision of Beauty, though doubtless he has,[42] but speaks of his character and discourses. 'He and his discourses (*καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ λόγοι αὐτοῦ*)', he says, 'are without their equals past or present'.

What makes Socrates without equal, declares Alcibiades, is his spiritual (*δαιμονίῳ*) and divine (*θείᾳ*) nature, and more particularly his pre-eminence in wisdom, courage, endurance, and temperance.[43] What makes his *discourses* without equal is, in addition to their persuasiveness, their comprising 'everything to be reflected on by one who wishes to become a good man (*μέλλοντι καλῷ κἀγαθῷ ἔσεσθαι*)'.[44] The fact that Socrates is described in this way is important, because it means that Plato wishes us to

[38] This is accepted even by those who, like M. Gagarin, 'Socrates' hybris and Alcibiades' failure', *Phoenix* 31 (1977), 22–37, at 22, believe there to be much merited criticism of Socrates in Alcibiades' speech.

[39] See Levy (n. 3), 285. They do not have to be written works: they can live on in the minds and discussions of members of the Academy and so on; cf. Hackforth (n. 2), 45.

[40] For an unusual interpretation of Socrates' claim that he understands nothing but love, see D. L. Roochnik, 'The erotics of philosophical discourse', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 4.2 (1987), 117–129, *passim*.

[41] It is argued by Reeve (n. 2), 112–13, that Socrates has not completed the ascent of love described by Diotima, but Reeve's arguments are not convincing, for Socrates claims to have *knowledge* of love, indeed of nothing else (177d), and he claims to practise the rites of love with peculiar devotion (212b); moreover, he was Diotima's pupil for a long time, and surely Diotima is not supposed to have failed in her teaching. Again, Socrates is described as containing within himself images that are divine, golden, totally beautiful, and so on. Cf. M. Blundell, 'Commentary on Reeve', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 8 (1992), 115–33, at 128, and Gagarin (n. 38), 27–8.

[42] See Blundell (n. 41), 128; J. Burnet, *Greek Philosophy* (London, 1968), 113; Robin (n. 28), cvi; Taylor (n. 14), 232–3. Hackforth (n. 28), 14–16, objects to Socrates' 'fits of abstraction' (175a–b, 220c–d) being given a mystical interpretation, but his objections are not convincing, since they rely on Alcibiades' *interpretation* of what happens (e. g. *ἐπειδὴ οὐ προὐχώρει αὐτῷ*). How could someone from the 'outside' describe a mystical experience? To Hackforth (n. 28), 14–15 and to Raven (n. 22), 116, it seems obvious that Plato himself was a mystic.

[43] See 216d7, 216e7–217a1, 219c1, 219d5–7, 220b1 ff., 221b1, 221b6. R. Duncan, 'Plato's *Symposium*: the cloven Eros', *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 15 (1977), 277–90, at 287, says that 'nowhere is there any praise of Socrates' justice. In its place we find an accusation: Socrates is guilty of *hubris*.' However, whatever Alcibiades means by hubris (see Gagarin [n. 38], 24–6), it is unreasonable to conclude that Alcibiades is accusing Socrates of injustice: cf. White (n. 16), 124 and 126, n. 12.

[44] 222a5–6; cf. 216a–e, 218d. Strictly speaking at 221c2–d6 the uniqueness of Socrates that Alcibiades speaks of is the incongruity between his 'exterior' and his 'within'. But from what follows, 221d6–222a6, it is clear that it is Socrates' 'within' that makes him beyond compare.

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see the true lover not, *pace* some commentators,[45] as primarily a mystic or religious initiate, but as a man who is both good and committed to furthering the moral goodness, the virtue, of others.[46] He wishes us to see him as indistinguishable from the true orator of the *Gorgias*, the good man who speaks always with an eye to what is best for his hearers (ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἀνὴρ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιστον λέγων, 503d).[47]

Diotima asserts that the virtue of the true lover is *true* virtue,[48] not an image or set of images of virtue (εἴδωλα ἀρετῆς), and in this she is often taken to be making the *Phaedo*'s contrast between true virtue and 'the painted representation of virtue fit only for slaves (69a–c)'.[49] But, given that the *Phaedo*'s true virtue is the philosopher's personal virtue, not his philosophy, that contrast cannot be what she has in mind.[50] What she has in mind rather is that the true lover's virtue, arising as it does from a vision of reality, is an expression of *knowledge*, and stands in contrast to the second lover's virtue, which is an expression of true belief. In other words, the contrast drawn is the sort of contrast drawn in the *Republic* between the philosopher who

[45] For example, Burnet (n. 42), 113; R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge, 1955), 12, 20; Taylor (n. 14), 225.

[46] Alcibiades mixes criticism with his praise of Socrates (222a7–8), his criticism focusing principally on the 'rough' treatment that he claims to have received from Socrates (ἃ με ὕβρισεν). There has been much discussion recently concerning Socrates' faults and failings as a lover and as a teacher (see e. g. G. Vlastos, 'Socratic irony', *CQ* 37 [1987], 79–96; Blundell [n. 41]; Duncan [n. 43]; Gagarin [n. 38]; Reeve [n. 2]), and while I cannot consider the question in detail I cannot entirely ignore it. The following are the points that I think worth considering. (1) Even if failures are seriously attributed to Socrates, we are not meant to see them as failures in virtue, since Alcibiades praises Socrates' virtue in the highest terms *immediately after* relating the events that he claims to have been such a signal example of hubris on Socrates' part (219d ff.). (2) The fact that Alcibiades did not change his life is evidence of his own failure, not of Socrates' failure, as he himself admits: he refused to listen (216a). (3) Given that Alcibiades refused to listen, it is hard to see what else Socrates could have done to get him to see that he was following the wrong moral path; Alcibiades' crude attempt to gain wisdom from Socrates, even after having heard Socrates' views many times, demonstrates that he needed, not further talk, but a severe jolt. (4) Whatever the virtues of Diotima's method of instructing Socrates, it is implausible to suggest that that method would have succeeded with Alcibiades, since, while Socrates listened, Alcibiades would not have done so. (5) In fact, despite his refusal to listen, Alcibiades learned a great deal from Socrates: he learned to recognize genuine goodness, and he learned with feelings of shame that he was on the wrong moral path. (6) The idea that Socrates treated his 'pupils' and others with hubris does not fit the view of him that we have from such dialogues as the *Protagoras*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Theaetetus*; even his treatment of Thrasymachus, Polus, and Callicles can scarcely be described as excessively rough, however little they appreciated it.

[47] This entails the exact opposite of what Duncan (n. 43), 286, claims, namely that 'Socrates has made Eros a matter of mystical vision transcending all relation to other persons.' It will be manifest by now that I think Nygren and others to be wrong in holding that according to the *Symposium* 'all that matters from first to last' is the soul's 'blessed vision of the Ideas in their unveiled glory'. On the contrary, I have now in effect argued, what matters from first to last to the true lover *qua* true lover is that others take care of their souls. It will also be manifest that I do not share the view of Vlastos (n. 22) and others that according to Plato love is incapable of treating others as worthy of consideration for their own sakes. For detailed criticisms of that view see Levy (n. 3), esp. 286–8, and White (n. 22), *passim*. I think Cummings (n. 7), 26–7 right in holding that the philosopher who has attained to knowledge of the Good (or Beauty) desires to make goodness (or beauty) present wherever possible; cf. Findlay (n. 28), 150.

[48] Gagarin (n. 38), 28, understands 212a4–5 to be saying that the lover has grasped 'the truth of arete'. I see no grounds for this.

[49] See e.g. Guthrie (n. 2), 390, n. 3; Robin (n. 28), n. 3 ad loc.; Mahoney (n. 16), 13. According to Pender (n. 8), 84, the contrast is between things of this world and the Forms.

[50] That contrast does not fit the context anyway, since there is no reason to suppose that Plato wished to dismiss Homer, Solon, and their like as possessing virtue that is really no more than cowardice and profligacy (*Phaedo* 68d ff.).

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possesses knowledge and is able to give an account of the Good, and the non-philosopher who possesses an *image* of the Good (εἰδώλου), but has only belief concerning it (534c).[51]

Diotima further asserts that, having begotten and reared true virtue, the true lover if anyone becomes immortal,[52] and here she is usually taken to be speaking of personal immortality.[53] But while it is true that the lover in this life becomes one with Beauty and in some sense therefore becomes timeless and immortal like Beauty itself,[54] and while it is also doubtless true that the lover's soul after death becomes immortal when separated from his body, Diotima cannot be referring to either of these immortalities, since on the assumption that her account of love is continuous she must be speaking of an immortality like in kind to that attained to by other lovers, an immortality through offspring.

On the several occasions when Diotima declares that all humans seek 'immortality (ἀθανασία)' she does not mean immortality as such, that is, irrespective of its kind, as though the true lover might at a pinch be content with the kind of immortality achieved by Archelaus or some other exemplar of injustice. What the true lover seeks is simply to go on persuading others through his works to attend to what matters most, their personal virtue.

Finally, Diotima says that, having begotten and reared true virtue, the true lover is dear to the gods, and it will be plain by now what she means by this. She means that the true lover is dear to the gods, not because of his personal virtue, though he is that, but because of the philosophical works that he brings forth.[55] These are expressions of concern for the virtue of others, and it is this that makes the true lover dear to the gods,

[51] *Republic* 534c. Diotima earlier on, though in a different context, draws attention to this distinction (202a).

[52] This must mean that the true lover, if anyone, *merits* to live on in his works: it can scarcely mean that he is more likely to.

[53] Thus, according to Cornford (n. 22), 127, through acquaintance with Beauty 'man becomes immortal in the divine sense'. Bluck (n. 37), 28, n. 1, suggests that 'to *become* immortal' at 212a means 'to become freed, through gradual purification and unification, from the cycle of death and reincarnation'. He further suggests that talk of the lover's becoming immortal may have been intended as a hint for the benefit of those who knew that Plato believed in the immortality of the soul. Pender (n. 8), 85, holds, not unlike Bluck, that the lover of Beauty achieves a vision of true reality that leads him to an understanding of true virtue, which in turn helps him to free his soul and to achieve his escape from the realm of becoming to the eternal realm of Being; cf. Waterfield (n. 22), xxxiii. Guthrie (n. 2), 390, thinks that the immortality in question is 'the immortality to which the philosopher looks forward in the *Phaedo*'. By contrast, Hackforth (n. 45), 20, says that even in Diotima's concluding sentences, 'it is a vicarious survival, not an immortality of the personal self, the individual soul, that is proclaimed'.

[54] See *Phaedo* 79d1–7. Many commentators wish to explain the true lover's immortality in this sort of way: e. g. Bury (n. 22), xlv; Chen (n. 1), 66; R. K. Gaye, *The Platonic Conception of Immortality and its Connexion with the Theory of Ideas* (London, 1904), 28; Gomperz (n. 37), 392; Mahoney (n. 16), 15; P. Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago, 1933), 196. Pender (n. 8), 85, has the more unusual view that because the lover consorts with a divine Form and is the father of a semi-divine child he has a closer link with the realm of divine beings. L. Robin, *La Pensée Grecque* (Paris, 1932), 225–6, describes how Beauty is revealed and concludes as if it follows straight off: 'Alors nous devenons véritablement immortels.' Recently, Chang (n. 22), 436, seems to express a similar view, asserting that Beauty 'causes the philosopher's contemplation to be directed towards itself and thus makes him excellent and thereby immortal so far as this is possible for a mortal'.

[55] Mahoney (n. 16), 15, seems to express the view that the true lover is dear to the gods simply because he beholds the Forms, though later he says that the lover is dear to the gods because he brings forth virtue in himself and in others (17).

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since one of the gods' own principal characteristics is concern for others: the gods care for us and for our happiness and indeed they are the source of everything good that we possess.[56]

To sum up. Diotima's account of the highest kind of love is that its real object, whatever the conscious aims of the lover (the philosopher) may be, is not the contemplation of Beauty but the permanent possession of the good in the form of true virtue. This true virtue is not personal virtue, not a state of the philosopher's soul, but his external discourses handed down to posterity, and it is true in the sense of issuing from knowledge not opinion. Another way of saying that *qua* lover the philosopher seeks the permanent possession of the good is to say that he seeks immortality—not by living on in person, but by living on in his works. Finally, the philosopher's external discourses are aimed at the virtue of others, and it is this that renders him dear to the gods. The philosophical lover of the *Symposium*, as exemplified by Socrates, is the good man of the *Gorgias*, striving always to make others good.[57]

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[56] *Euthyphro* 15a; *Phaedrus* 244a, 245b, 247a; *Phaedo* 62b; *Laws* 899d ff. See F. C. White, 'Justice and the good of others in Plato's *Republic*', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 5 (1988), 395–410, at 400–1.

[57] I am grateful for an anonymous referee's careful comments, which I have made use of, and for many discussions with Dr E. E. Sleinis.

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