An Ethics of/for the Future?

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Edited by

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For Grace

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INTRODUCTION

The questions of what ethics is, what it does, and how it should or should not operate are some of the oldest, and yet also most current, that human beings ask. This collection, as alluded to in its title, engages with our desire to come to terms with the 'how' of being ethical. Given the various backgrounds and interests of the contributors, the chapters circumnavigate a vast terrain in attempting to respond to this 'how'. Beginning with Plato, we move through the Middle Ages and modernity before arriving at the future of/for ethics, addressing a wide range of themes along the way.

In Chapter One, Colm Shanahan argues that Plato has much to offer to contemporary culture regarding an understanding of what grounds our ethical judgements. Focusing on the account of *eros* provided in the *Symposium*, Shanahan seeks to demonstrate how it is that knowledge is a constituent feature of virtuous character. In so doing, he attempts to show that Plato's thinking does not suggest a retreat from the physical realm to that of the transcendental but rather that, for the embodied soul, the task of seeing the Form of Beauty is achieved by directly engaging with others in the physical realm.

In the second chapter, John Dillon addresses Plotinus' *Doctrine of the Sage*. Dillon notes that it is generally agreed that the epicentre of Plotinus' ethical theory consists of his concept of the nature of the *spoudaios* ('the Sage') and the virtues appropriate to such a figure. Drawing on a breadth of scholarship, Dillon suggests that the Plotinian Sage exhibits more than a passing resemblance to its Stoic counterpart. Dillon contends that, while Plotinus differentiates himself from the Stoics to a significant extent, he nevertheless shares with them a concern for freeing oneself from all manifestations of the passions (*apatheia*), and from any concern with the phenomena of the physical world that could distract one from attaining the ultimate goal of 'likeness to God' (*homoiosis theôi*).

In the third chapter, we move to the Middle Ages. Here, Stephen J. Costello presents an innovative reading of Boethius from a logotherapeutic perspective. Costello begins by addressing the tripartite approach to mental health to be found, he contends, in the work of Plato, Freud and Frankl. Using Frankl's method of tri-dimensional ontology, Costello offers a reading of Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* that purports to

highlight the relevance of both for contemporary society. For Costello, logotherapy may be defined as any meaning-centred intervention that leads to an attitudinal adjustment. Just such an adjustment, Costello holds, is to be found in Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*.

Maintaining the Christian theme introduced in Chapter Three, in Chapter Four Kevin Sludds turns our attention to Heideggerian phenomenology and its ethical implications. Sludds examines the make-up and meaning of Heidegger's description of ontological conscience and the distinct points of contact that exist between this and the Christian conception of kerygma as an hermeneutical intuition. The phenomena of formal indicators (*formale Anzeige*) in *Being and Time* are detailed and Sludds attempts to show how close Heidegger comes to a Christian interpretation of fallenness by considering the relevance of paradoxes, contracts and doublets.

In Chapter Five, Ian Leask notes that Michel Foucault's later writings on ethics and the 'care of the self' have been depicted not only as a kind of post hoc recantation or even *apologia*, but also as being profoundly out of kilter with the bulk of his more famous archaeological and genealogical analyses of modernity. Leask argues that, by attending more carefully to Michel Foucault's philosophical relationship with Kant, we can understand his thought as being consistent, coherent and developmental. Leask does not endeavour to 'simply' provide a better understanding of Foucault (or Foucault *vis-à-vis* Kant), he also suggests that the way in which Foucault roots 'the practical' in terms of its 'historical *a priori*' provides a crucial corrective to the ahistorical and apolitical myopia of so much contemporary ethical discourse.

In a striking appraisal of ethical systems, in Chapter Six William Desmond notes that a frequent practice of ethical reflection is to distinguish different sets of moral value and sometimes to pit one against another. Desmond offers a reflection which is a kind of "step back" from the foreground of such sets or systems of moral value into the sources of the ethical, sources often recessed or taken for granted as we go about the daily practice of ethical life. Desmond calls these sources the "potencies of the ethical". Among these are numbered the idiotic, the aesthetic, the dianoetic, the eudaimonistic, the transcendental, the transcending and the transcendent. Drawing on *Ethics and the Between* (Desmond 2001) Desmond explains what each of these means and what they entail. His point is that these potencies enter differently into different ethical systems, sometimes some potencies are repressed, sometimes some are recessed, sometimes certain potencies are in the dominant. Desmond contends that understanding the potencies allows us to look differently at different

ethical orientations, again say, Christianity or Kantianism or Nietzscheanism, without simply pitting one ethical system against another. The "step back" allows a return to the multiple sources of the ethical in the potencies, sources which can get diversely expressed, inflected, repressed or ignored in different ethical systems. This "step back", Desmond asserts, would paradoxically help us have something to say about the future of ethics.

Turning to the analytical tradition, in Chapter Seven Patrick Quinn offers an analysis of Wittgenstein's ethical writings. Quinn contends that, while Wittgenstein does not devote a great deal of his philosophical attention to ethics, the little that he does write on the subject makes it clear that ethics is of great importance to his understanding of life generally. Quinn also notes that the religious dimension in Wittgenstein's understanding of ethics is crucial. For Wittgenstein, Quinn contends, ethics is all pervasive and is a "condition of the world, like logic" (Wittgenstein 1993, 77e). So, Quinn asks, what contributions might Wittgenstein's thinking make to an ethics of/for the future? For Quinn, apart from its importance to human life and thought, the value of Wittgensteinian ethics is of striking significance. Finally, Quinn contends that Wittgenstein's view of the supernatural basis of ethics is worthy of significant attention.

In Chapter Eight, David McPherson presents a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethic approach to bearing and rearing children. On such an approach, the virtues are derived from an account of human nature in that they define what it is to flourish or be fulfilled *qua* human being. Neo-Aristotelians generally agree that one of the 'natural ends' of human beings–as for other living things–is to promote the continuance of the species. This might seem to suggest that to be a flourishing/fulfilled human being one must be a parent, indeed, a good parent. McPherson argues that parenthood is not necessary for human flourishing/fulfillment because we are meaning-seeking animals who can have a number of meaningful projects, commitments, or concerns that can be in tension and must be worked out through practical reason. However, a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethic does require of every human being the virtue of hospitality in being receptive to the "gift" of life and the virtue of benevolence in promoting human life. For at least some this will involve bearing and rearing children and doing so is a human good. Moreover, family life is an important school for the virtues for parents as well as for children. But further questions remain about whether coming into existence is beneficial, first, for the child, and, secondly, for the wider human community in light of overpopulation concerns. In regard to the first issue, McPherson argues against the

pessimistic view that it would be better if we were never born and defends the view of human life as a "gift". The second issue is best approached on a neo-Aristotelian account of practical reason and McPherson suggests what this would look like.

In the final chapter, Mary Shanahan continues with a similar theme but turns her attention exclusively to pregnancy and maternity, exploring the notion that pregnancy can be understood to be a mode of ethical development. Drawing on the notions of otherness, the self-Other relation and responsibility, Shanahan argues that, although these notions are conducive to a consideration of pregnancy as a modality of transcendence and ethical development, Levinas does not engage with them in this way. Instead, he chooses to pay attention to the themes of fecundity, paternity and the father-son relationship, showing scant regard for the potency of maternity. Although Levinas argues that the transcendent can be characterised as an "absent presence" and that the Other can be said to be "in" the same, he does not adequately explore these notions through the lenses of either maternity or pregnancy. Thus this chapter seeks to show that the Levinasian ethical framework, and by implication his consideration of transcendence, is somewhat lacking given his apparent overlooking of the ethical potential of maternity and pregnancy.

In the era in which we live, critical debate about the future of ethics and, indeed, the ethics of the future is surely essential. Each of the nine contributors has offered an interesting response to the challenge posed by the question mark in the collection's title but, in the spirit of ethical dialogue, not one has arrived at a 'case closed' solution. For this reason, and given the array of subjects and philosophers tackled, it is my hope that this collection will serve as a stimulating invitation to further critical engagement with the 'how' of ethics and its future possibilities.

CHAPTER ONE

PLATO:
THE HUMANITY OF ETHICS

COLM SHANAHAN

Introduction

Plato's thinking on the nature of love has been the subject of much scholarly attention because of the pivotal role it plays in his understanding of the nature of the soul, its good, and how this good relates to others. As such, understanding Platonic love will, in turn, shed light on Plato's conception of ethics.

Gregory Vlastos, in his much discussed essay "The Individual as Object of Love in Plato", argues that Plato takes ethics to involve self-development by way of deepening and developing one's level of knowledge. In this account, others are loved because they can assist with this task of self-development. According to Vlastos, Plato's thinking on love ultimately asserts a utility-based, self-interested drive that does not really relate to loving others *per se*. More recently, in relation to the *Symposium*, Frisbee C. C. Sheffield has argued that, since the goal of the members of the symposium is to outline the nature of *eros* and not interpersonal love (which I take to be a type of *philia* since it requires love and a genuine concern for another), much of the debate that has arisen in response to Vlastos is misguided (see Sheffield 2012). Conflating these two distinct forms of interaction, she argues, will necessarily lead to confusion and to a misrepresentation of Plato's thinking.

Yet, as I will argue, many of the conclusions drawn by both Vlastos and Sheffield are reached because of a misconstruing of the role that knowledge is assigned by Plato. Indeed, there is much to suppose that, while *eros* begins as a self-interested drive, there are still grounds for holding that, as our understanding of the good develops, *eros* for others will become *philia*. That is, with the advent of new levels of awareness

regarding beauty, the soul, and the good, the focus of *eros* ceases to be on a good that is ultimately self-interested and takes as its object a good that is divested within the Platonic love relationship.

In relation to the *Symposium*, the dialogue that I shall be focusing on, it is often taken that the goal of *eros* is seeing the Form of Beauty, such that this alone is said to be what "all of his previous toils were for" (210e). As such, knowledge should be assigned a significant role in the object of *eros* but, I will contend, it is misguided to conclude from this that knowledge of Beauty *per se* is the object of *eros*. At 212a, for example, we read that upon contemplation of the Form: "it is under these conditions alone…that he will succeed in bringing to birth, not phantoms of virtue…but true virtue". Contemplating the Form is what generates true virtue and so it is not the case that knowledge of the Form is itself true virtue. This is so as true virtue is said to issue from knowing or contemplating the Form. Therefore, true virtue is something over and above simply knowing the Form of Beauty since it is what is generated as a consequence of knowing such. I will argue that it is this true virtue that is the object of *eros* and that the possession of this virtue requires interaction with others.

My argument shall be outlined as follows: in Section 1, I will outline what Plato takes to be the manner in which virtue is generated. I will suggest that, since beautiful bodies cannot be understood to produce the good that an individual like Socrates is in pursuit of, they alone cannot be an appropriate object of love. In Section 2, I will argue that the re-evaluation of bodily beauty goes straight to the core of understanding the good. I will also address, with direct reference to Ralph Wedgwood, how this "transformation" of the good enables the transition from relating to the others through *eros* to relating to them through *philia*. In Section 3, I will show how knowledge can be understood to be a component feature of generating true virtue, and I will argue that, as a consequence, *eros*' ultimate object is the good of virtuous character. I will also contend that virtuous character is attained in virtuous forms of interacting with others. In so doing, I will analyse Plato's position regarding the need for a guide in the pursuit of virtue. In addition to this, I will hold throughout that knowledge of the Form of Beauty, *vis-à-vis* virtuous character, has a direct application to the world.

Section 1: The Value of Loving Bodies

While Socrates-Diotima[1] has many things to say about the features of love, I shall primarily be concerned with how love relates to coming to know the Form of Beauty. Taken as a whole, Socrates-Diotima's account

of love is, one might suggest, as perplexing as it is insightful. At 199c5, Socrates questions Agathon's account of love with a view to showing the weaknesses therein. However, he also does so in order to outline a necessary feature of love. Socrates attempts to show that when an individual loves something, the object of his love is not something which the lover possesses (see 200a10-b1). From this conclusion, Socrates goes on to hold that love, as a fundamental aspect of the soul, reveals that the soul is itself inherently "lacking".

This lack, Socrates-Diotima goes on to state, is responsible for the promulgation of all of our longings and is also the cause of the quest for both knowledge and the good. The desire to possess the good further reveals that this lack refers to an inability to maintain possession of the good. As such, this arduous task of pursuing the good is responsible for our pursuit of happiness and this desire for happiness is, in turn, what precipitates both "the supreme love and treacherous love" (205d2). The good and happiness are what motivate love and they lead to the activity of acquiring the objects of love. That is, motivation springs forth from the lack that is inherent to the soul and so the objects that are thought to generate both happiness and the good become the objects of love's pursuits.

Ultimately, these objects are what Socrates-Diotima suggest will be possessed when a person comes to know the Form of Beauty. In effect, all of the "previous toils [of love] were for" (210e5-211a) this supreme object of love: the Form of Beauty in itself. Yet, this achievement, the climax of the ascent of love, begins in the physical world and its initial object is physical bodies and the desire for such. This desire for bodies will be considered, at various stages of the ascent, to be something that ought to be avoided (210b), and, at 210b5, it is stated that the beauty of bodies is a "slight thing" because the beauty in the soul is "more valuable than beauty of the body". Yet, as I will show, a more accurate reading of the text suggests that this should not be interpreted as a negation of the physical body's value. Or, more accurately put, in this account, Plato propounds the notion that the body can be a component feature of an appropriate object of love.

Socrates-Diotima outlines the manner in which the ascent begins in the physical and how the lover, if he "leads him [his beloved][2] correctly" (210a5-b1), enters into a process of educating the beloved in virtue, in the ways in which "young men become better men" (210c1-c5). Love, it has been stated, is not love of beauty but of "procreation and giving birth in the beautiful" (206e5). It is by this process of generation or regeneration that human beings and animals are thought to possess their own qualities.

Socrates-Diotima holds that physical bodies exist by way of the body continually regenerating itself and, as such, an old man is distinct from the person he was as a young man (207d5-e1). This process of educating the beloved, I will argue, is one by which the guide can generate within his beautiful beloved and, in so doing, maintain the possession of his virtuous character.

At 207e Socrates-Diotima states that "its traits, habits, opinions, desires, pleasures" are continually renewed afresh and so the nature or quality of a character can change in a person. In the case mentioned above, positive changes occur when one person pursues knowledge of virtue with the assistance of another. The ascent to knowledge of the Form therefore represents the advent of new types of knowledge which will in turn allow the person making the ascent to develop their virtuousness. Since knowledge here refers to a process of "possessing" a particular character, it follows that new concepts will allow a person to transform the quality of their character.

Additionally, since these concepts are at the very least brought into clearer focus by the education that is inherent in the ascent, it follows that the world *vis-à-vis* beauty is brought into being by the individual's ability to consider (and reconsider) that which is thought to be beautiful. For example, as referred to above, the first "step" on the ascent refers to loving one body, then to loving all bodies, and then to the view that the beauty of bodies has little significance compared to the beauty of the soul. Crucial to an understanding of why the body's beauty is "devalued" is the following: this devaluing of the body should lead to the development of desires that do not take the body to be their object. This means that Socrates-Diotima takes the new conceptual development to be matched or marked by a corresponding conative achievement.[3]

The notion of conceptual development is intrinsically linked to desire which also shows that progress on the ascent is not limited to the development of knowledge or concepts. The lover of beauty must be a lover of wisdom (since "Wisdom is actually one of the most beautiful things" (204b)) but, since both are taken to refer to more than simply knowing, it is clear that *eros* will involve going beyond a purely epistemic frame of reference. Desires themselves are cultivated on the ascent and so the development of knowledge is always considered from the perspective of knowledge being attained by an embodied soul. That is, a soul that has the capacity to generate vice,[4] and so the good outlined is, in turn, the good of an embodied soul. Therefore, with the advent of new levels of knowledge regarding the soul's good, the "task" becomes living in a way that adheres to the new valuation placed on beautiful objects.

It is from this perspective that "character"/qualities relate to "possession", where possession means the continual production of both concepts and character/qualities. As Sheffield cogently notes: "[i]f we desire to possess good things and happiness, or anything at all for that matter, this is something that must be realized in various actions and productions if it is to be had at all" (Sheffield 2006, 109-110; see also: 105, 107, and 112[5]).[6] As such, concepts and knowledge are being generated by individuals possessed of *eros*. The embodied soul, therefore, may develop the ability to generate beautiful ideas. However, these ideas–which in turn lead to the new conative stances to the world–do not suggest that the conative force of the new concept extinguishes that of a previous conceptual framework. Indeed, since the pursuit of beauty in the bodily sense (being pregnant in body) is a characteristic of the embodied soul, and since each quality of the embodied soul must be continually generated to be possessed, it follows that if one concept/desire is to take precedence over another it must be consciously made to do so.

Therefore to say that Socrates, for example, is a just man is to say much more than his knowledge is such that he only desires good for others. Rather, he has the fortitude to allow his knowledge to generate a desire for good within himself to such a degree that this desire takes precedence over his other desires. This suggests that goodness of character does not consist in the removal of desires *per se* but in the ability to curtail one type of desire in favour of the pursuit of another.

It seems reasonable then to suggest that, for one reason or another, Socrates is drawn to the beauty of Alcibiades' body. That being stated, it is also evident from the text that Socrates, despite having the opportunity to receive sexual gratification from Alcibiades, was not willing to engage in such activity (at 219c, for example, Alcibiades states that Socrates treated him as would a "father or elder brother"). Alcibiades notes his astonishment at being rejected by Socrates, stating: "how completely full he…[Socrates] is…of moderation" (216e1). This example brings two points into clearer view: (1) that it is Socrates' ability to exercise moderation that makes him virtuous, and, (2) that the need for temperance or moderation indicates the presence of a desire that requires virtue to be exacted over it. Such activity is indeed an instance of virtue and, by this very process, Socrates can be said to be virtuous due to actively generating his virtuous character. While the love of bodies remains, the task of maintaining virtuous character is such that these desires are not permitted to corrupt virtue. Beautiful bodies, as with all beautiful objects, are to be valued with reference to how they relate to the production of the good. However, it is simply the case that sexual gratification is an inadequate "object" of Socrates' love, hence,

he forgoes the sexual pleasures offered to him by Alcibiades and, in so doing, maintains his own virtuous character.

Socrates desires beauty in order to reproduce–and thereby generate the good–but since this beauty refers to the soul, it would not be appropriate for him to engage in sexual activity. Instead, he attempts to educate Alcibiades, which facilitates the maintenance of his own virtue and presents the possibility of generating virtue in another (Alcibiades).[7] I must stress that it is not the case that Socrates does not value the beauty of Alcibiades' body. It is rather that his *eros* for beauty, knowledge and virtuous character has developed an understanding of the good such that the physical is not sufficient to fulfil his desires.

Indeed, bodies should be valued and interacted with appropriately, hence Socrates-Diotima refers to the guide leading correctly towards the Form of Beauty (210). In other words, Socrates' actions should be in keeping with the value that he knows the body has and, as a result, he will no longer be a slave to the passions of his body.[8] Love for bodies, in this regard, is love for the embodied soul's virtuous character. This demonstrates that the motivational force of Socrates' *eros* can be deployed in a manner that is sensitive to the knowledge that he has attained, and towards virtuous interaction. After all, it remains the case the Socrates is very much drawn to the raucous and beautiful Alcibiades. Such attributes suggest that it is quite unlikely that Socrates is drawn to the beauty of Alcibiades' character.[9]

Section 2: Bodies, Self-interestedness and the Form of Beauty

It could be argued that Socrates' interest in Alcibiades is motivated by the opportunity to exercise moderation. However, it is evident from the text that Socrates went much further than this, for he also tried to educate him. At 216a5 Alcibiades states that Socrates has caused him: "to admit that although there's much that I lack myself, it is myself I neglect, and do the Athenians' business". This is precisely the type of education that Socrates-Diotima prescribes between a lover and his beloved. Yet, the reference to self-neglect also seems to bear a heavy resemblance to Socrates-Diotima 205e, where it is stated that the good is "what belongs" to a person. I suggest, therefore, that when Alcibiades states that he is neglecting himself this should be read as his recognition (admittedly, a rather unreflective one) that he is neglecting the pursuit of the good. That this is indeed the case, and that Socrates' efforts do not lead to Alcibiades' betterment, is confirmed when he states that: "I forcibly stop my ears and

I'm off, as if I were running away from the Sirens" (216a5). It is for this very reason that Alcibiades, in contrast to Socrates yet by the same means, can be thought of as not being a virtuous person.

Indeed, that virtue and the good are things that require continuous effort suggests that what is required is not a fleeting appreciation of the object of *eros* but rather, in some sense, a "commitment to being virtuous" and thereby of generating the good. *Eros* is ultimately bound up with knowledge since it pursues beauty, and wisdom is one of the most beautiful things. Yet wisdom, in the context set out in the *Symposium*, seems to have a wider application than simply seeking knowledge or virtue. The relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades (perhaps a case study of the Platonic love relationship gone awry) demonstrates, on the one hand, a frustrated teacher and, on the other hand, a struggling student.

Their relationship, I argue, reveals what is meant by Plato's appeal to giving birth in beauty. The active sense of possessing beauty, as stated, refers to the very process of generating virtue and wisdom, or, put differently, of being beautiful in soul. In the case of Alcibiades, he is "amazingly proud of the way I looked" (217a) and the opportunities that he believes it can afford him: namely, possession of the wisdom that he perceives in Socrates. As Socrates correctly identifies: "you're trying to get hold of truly beautiful things in return for only apparently beautiful ones, and you have in mind a true exchange of 'gold for bronze'" (219a).

This might be more problematic for Alcibiades than it first appears. For one thing, the beauty of bodies (including his own) is considered by Socrates-Diotima to be less important than the beauty associated with the soul, namely virtue. As such, Alcibiades' pride could, in large part, be what prevents him from progressing on the ascent. This implies that the ascent is concerned with knowledge of the Form of Beauty but it also indicates the importance of considering the implications of knowledge for the person who attains it. In other words, living in a way that is sensitive to this knowledge is a component feature of this "knowledge". If the final goal of *eros* involves coming to knowledge of the Form of Beauty then such knowledge must generate a reconceptualization not only of beauty but also of what it means to be beautiful.

While Ralph Wedgwood has many cogent insights in relation to the *Symposium*, his suggestion regarding the four modes of relating to beauty–outlined in the following quote–cannot be applied here: "happiness consists in *instantiating* the Form of Beauty, in *making active efforts to maintain and renew* one's instantiation of the Form of Beauty, in *creating* instantiations of the Form of Beauty, in *loving and admiring* instantiations of the Form of Beauty" (Wedgwood 2009, 318). For one thing if a person

admires their own physical beauty, as Alcibiades does, it may impede their development on the ascent. For another, it is not clear from these four stances how Alcibiades ought to value his own beauty. In addition, this is another sense in which knowing or coming to know the Form of Beauty has a direct relationship with the world in and through virtuous character.

This means that pursuing beauty can lead to "the supreme love and treacherous love" (205d2). And so any "ethics of *eros*",[10] therefore, will involve: (i) commitment to being virtuous, (ii) coming to an understanding of what, exactly, is being pursued, and (iii) allowing this knowledge to inform desires. As already suggested, being "committed to being" (wise or beautiful) is what distinguishes Socrates' *eros* from Alcibiades' since he is willing to live by his knowledge and Alcibiades is not.

It is this active sense of possession that allows character traits to be possessed. Such possession also generates reflection on the nature of beauty, the good, and how both are attained; this allows Socrates to value each type of beauty according to its due. Socrates generates his virtue and wisdom, things associated with the beauty of soul, and yet he can still appreciate the beauty of Alcibiades' body. Physical beauty *per se*–either literally being beautiful, as Alcibiades is, or the perception of such–will not generate the good or virtue. Therefore, it is not knowledge or perception of Beauty that elicits beauty of the soul but, rather, it is the content of desires and actions in response to Beauty which generates virtuous character. The argument that contemplation is inadequate for the purposes of the ascent is also to be found in Price, who states that: "[c]ontemplation (*Symp.* 210d4) and looking (212a2) cannot be self-contained activities when their objects are the moral, or practical, Forms" (Price 1989, 51). Physical beauty is thus best considered a suggestion of the good since it can prompt a virtuous response.

Therefore if *eros* begins as an attempt to attain the "good" of sexual pleasure, such self-interestedness needs likewise to be tempered by the degree to which its emphasis is shifted. Socrates values beauty appropriately and wishes to generate beautiful ideas but, if *eros* is the pursuit of a subjective good, would not Socrates have been better off to find a more worthy partner than Alcibiades? Therefore, it would be misguided to argue that since *eros* begins as a self-interested drive that it must remain so, especially when it comes to loving others.[11]

Yet it seems evident that Socrates, along with knowing what value should be placed on physical beauty, is also very much concerned with showing Alcibiades the same. Alcibiades' beauty might act as a catalyst for Socrates' musings but it is quite clear that Socrates attempts to share his insights regarding beauty and the manner in which it should be valued

with him.[12] Indeed, valuing beauty seems to imply, on the one hand, cognition and the tempering of desires, and, on the other hand, in the application of such, actively generating one's own good–the good of being virtuous–while at the same time, and perhaps as a condition of the said, attempting to share this good with another.[13] By this very process, and in shifting its emphasis, *eros* for the beloved becomes *philia*.[14]

This new transition is vital in understanding Plato's thinking on the development involved in the ascent to the Form of Beauty. The original object of *eros* was thought to be a self-interested pursuit of the good of sexual pleasure but, with the resultant revaluation of the physical body, the demise of *eros* is not ushered in. Rather, the all-encompassing desire that was directed toward the beautiful body begins to be directed towards knowledge of the Form of Beauty.[15] *Philia* allows for individuals to assist one another in the development of their knowledge corresponding to their current stage on the ascent. Such a sharing, and the orientation of *eros* towards a new understanding of the good, in addition to being evident from the education that Socrates-Diotima prescribes, is also intuited by Alcibiades when he states of his fellow symposiasts: "you've all shared in the madness and Bacchic frenzy of philosophy" (218a).

The philosophical lover seeks to generate in beauty. He does so with an understanding of the many incarnations of beauty, which brings about the ability to generate in beauty. Socrates can perceive the Form of Beauty as an instance in Alcibiades' body and so he gives birth in the presence of the Form when he is with him. Yet, knowledge *per se* could not be the sole objective since Socrates lives by this knowledge, thereby generating his virtuous character, but he also attempts to generate such in Alcibiades' soul. As such, Socrates, in the manner outlined, attempts to generate beautiful qualities within Alcibiades and so is committed to both *knowing* the Form and *acting* on this knowledge.[16]

The physical beauty that is within the world can be "added" to and hence the very processes and activities of *eros* are engendered. Therefore, all beauty is valued–hence it relates to the good–but the attempts to generate in beauty can be understood as the effort to move away from what might be termed "actualised beauty" in the pursuit of yet to be realised levels of beauty. Therefore, the philosophical lovers, in and through their acts of philosophizing, generate higher levels of virtuous interaction which are, in turn, predicated on higher levels of knowledge. Moreover, since valuing knowledge and virtuous interaction are intrinsically related there is no need to suggest that one should take precedence over the other.

Therefore, when Sheffield states that "The proper end of eros is the Form of Beauty and persons or things are loved insofar as they instantiate that true beauty" (Sheffield 2012, 118), she does not acknowledge the fact that knowledge is pursued to generate true virtue, that which issues from knowing the Form of Beauty. Also, when she states that instances of the Form of Beauty "at the very least includes an instrumental role" (Sheffield 2012, 121), she overlooks the manner in which this instrumental role acts as a muse for Socrates (which will lead him to simultaneously educate Alcibiades). Therefore, the instrumental character is in place but, on my reading, this cannot be completely self-serving. Indeed, it is with the surpassing of this self-interestedness that a concept of a shared good is generated.

Section 3: Realising the Need for Teachers

I have argued that progressing towards knowledge of the Form of Beauty involves: (1) coming to re-evaluate objects of beauty; (2) Socrates–a lover of beauty–valuing beauty in all of its manifestations; and, (3) Socrates generating beauty in all of its manifestations, both in himself and in others. The latter point suggests that, in the case of the "guide", the process of generating in beauty–that is, the attempt to instantiate an instance of beauty–is itself a virtuous project. As such, knowledge can be understood to provide a grounding for the very possibility of virtuous action. That said, there is reason to suppose that knowledge should not be understood to be the "complete" object of love. That is, knowledge is rather a component feature of the broader term "virtuous character" which is the object of love.

It is important to note that development on the ascent requires knowledge of what good is most suited to the soul. Moreover, developing knowledge of this good will, in turn, involve developing knowledge of the soul itself since the good, in this sense, is the good of the soul. However, there is no suggestion of a Form of the soul in Plato and, therefore, any knowledge of the soul and its good will involve something more than contemplation. That is, any suggestion of the good will have to correspond to the theory holding true in experience to some extent. This presents something of a moral quagmire that is filled with the possibility of activities that might not be virtuous and so, in this regard, a guide would be most helpful. This point is suggested in simple terms when Socrates states that "I realize that I need teachers" (207c), attesting to the obstacles that isolated acts of contemplation can lead to. Something of this is also

intuited by Alcibiades when he attempts to persuade Socrates to "teach" him what he lacks.[17]

The challenge of moving from love of beautiful bodies to love of beautiful minds is, I suggest, that (in addition to the consequence of Alcibiades needing to downgrade his own beauty) the activities of generating children of the body and children of the mind both generate a level of the good. Therefore, what is required to choose between the two is the knowledge of which good is best. This is precisely the type of knowledge that contemplation, in and of itself, cannot generate because of the fact that there is no Form of the soul to contemplate.[18] (Hence love, being linked to the soul of the philosopher, is said to be "between wisdom and ignorance" (203e5).) Since contemplation, in and of itself, will not yield knowledge of the soul, it is evident that working with a guide is the most appropriate route to take. As Reeve puts it: "the goal of the elenchus is not just to reach adequate definitions of virtue, however. Its primary aim is moral reform" (Reeve 2006, xiv); where moral reform refers to both members of the Platonic love relationship. *Eros* begins with the desire for beautiful bodies but virtue develops with the realisation that bodies alone cannot generate the good of the soul.

Upon the realization that beautiful bodies are of "slight importance" compared to the soul, the task of philosophizing–using rationality to re-evaluate the known to be beautiful objects–is needed and this is precisely the point at which Alcibiades becomes concerned about Socrates' teaching. The object of Alcibiades' love, however, could not be understood to be the good of knowing the Form since he does not yet know the Form (although he does seem to apprehend the good that "possession" of Socrates' knowledge would entail). Knowledge, once the object of *eros* is understood to be virtuous character, is pursued with the desire to act virtuously already contained within it. Thus, when Socrates–being committed to living virtuously–learned the value of beautiful bodies he came to interact with them accordingly. As such, teachers are required both to teach the nature of the soul and also to provide–in their very personhood–a coherent object of love. This coherent object is, of course, the good of virtuous character. This is precisely the role that Socrates fulfils for Alcibiades since it is this good that the latter wishes to obtain. The role of the guide or teacher is ultimately to cultivate this desire and to assist the beloved with coming to knowledge of the Form of Beauty. In addition, the guide also assists his student by showing him how the application of such knowledge can bring about the ability to generate in beauty.

Thus, interacting with the good that the guide, as a consequence of his virtuous character and knowledge, possesses provides the beloved with both an experience of beauty that generates the good and, after a process of education, the realization that it is the path of developing this good that is most suited to the nature of the soul. This facilitates the beloved with the knowledge of the limitations of the "good" of a purely sexual pursuit of beauty. Ultimately, this results in the beloved having the capacity to act as a guide to another. This is so as the ascent leads to the capacity to generate beauty both in one's own soul and in the soul of another.

"Possessing" knowledge, with a firm commitment to interacting with others on the basis of this, is what generates the good of virtuous character or, in other words, true virtue. This shows knowledge, virtuous character and the good to be intrinsically related in the sense that all three bear a causal relationship to one another, though they retain their distinctiveness. Consider the following example: if a person desires the good of living in a house, he will need some degree of knowledge regarding architecture but this knowledge alone will not give him a house nor, as such, the good of living within one. He must first put this knowledge to "work", just as in the case of living by knowledge and "possessing" knowledge in the active sense. Thus the literal work of building the house can be likened to the point at which virtuous character is generated/maintained. However, it is the outcome of the process that generates the house and thereby the good of living there.

The virtuous soul, just as was the case with the house, requires knowledge and education to be built/realised. The actions and desire to "possess" the good of the house and the good of a virtuous soul, orientated towards rational desire for development and active engagement with others, are attained with the development of appropriate desires for others. It is the formation of rational desires, desires to possess a virtuous soul, which signifies the good of virtuous character. Thus, while knowledge plays a pivotal role in attaining the good it should not be taken to be the object of love. Rather it is a condition of achieving the object of love; an objective that is synonymous with initially needing and interacting virtuously with a guide and which will, in turn, involve becoming a guide, and interacting virtuously with another.[19] Therefore, it is virtuous action that is the object of *eros* and the very condition of "possessing" the good.

All intelligible interaction is, as stated above, predicated upon some conceptual understanding of the object of the experience but true virtue is said to issue from, as per 212a, knowledge or contemplation of the Form. It is not the case that contemplation is itself true virtue. It would therefore seem to be the case that knowledge is but a requirement of the production

of true virtue. True virtue is the good that is generated from the outcomes of contemplating the Form of Beauty. The ultimate object of love, it turns out, is not simply contemplation of the Form. The object relates to the consequence of this: the ability to generate true virtue. The true object of love is never completely dissociated from the good and, as such, it is the pursuit of the good that is the continuous thread from the ascent's inception to its completion.

Conclusion

Beauty pursued as an object of *eros* is best understood as a suggestion of the good but it is with regard to the understanding of the good that leads to the type of *eros* generated. Therefore, Wedgwood is correct in arguing that *eros* can be a rational desire (see Wedgwood 2009, 306). Yet, what is not at all clear is how a rational desire for the Forms (taken, by Wedgwood, quite rightly, to be intrinsically valuable) comes to inform and underpin interaction with the instances of the Form. It is also evidently the case, as per Socrates-Diotima, that such instances can be generated (see Wedgwood 2009, 318). However, as I have argued, and this is in contrast to Wedgwood, new levels of understanding with regard to Beauty and its value must be related to self-knowledge. As was the case with Alcibiades, admiration of one's own beauty, in and of itself, is a negative occurrence which leads one away from knowledge of the Form.

Eros for the physical beauty of the beloved can, with the right orientation, become *philia*. Such *philia* is focused on maintaining and developing both the guide's and his beloved's understanding and knowledge of Beauty, virtue and the good. This is situated within a love relationship which pursues "true virtue", the attainment of which sees the good of both the guide and his beloved. Indeed, in this *philia*, the *eros* of both members of the relationship can be thought of as being deployed "in the madness and Bacchic frenzy of philosophy" (218a). By focusing on the "how" of virtue, Plato demonstrates how the good of the guide relates directly to the good of his beloved. Knowledge, in the active sense, is the "how" of virtue which, in turn, leads to the attainment and production of the good.

Pursuing and possessing this good require knowledge and virtuous interactions with others. This line of thinking is quite congruent with Socrates' claims that: "the greatest good for a man [is] to discuss virtue every day...and [test himself] and others" (*Apology*, 38a), and, "I was always concerned with you, approaching each one of you like a father or an elder brother to persuade you to care for virtue" (*Apology* 31b; this is

also reminiscent of *Symposium* 219c, cited above). Plato's analysis of *eros* provides justification for these Socratic claims. Moreover, the Socratic dialectic, in pursuing and developing virtue, can itself be understood to be a virtuous project once the object of *eros* is taken to be virtuous character. Such character is predicated upon a commitment to living virtuously based on the findings of this knowledge, and, therefore, while the end goal of *eros* involves knowledge, it would be a mistake to hold that knowledge is the object of *eros*.

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