

Beyond *eros*: Friendship in the *Phaedrus*

Plato is often held to be the first great theoriser of love in the Western tradition, and yet his account has been taken to be a resounding failure by many, if not most, modern scholars working on this topic. Criticisms have been articulated forcefully by Vlastos whose seminal paper ‘The Individual as an Object of love’ charged Plato with ‘cold-hearted egoism’; his account, he argued, disdained persons in favour of abstract, conceptual, objects – the so-called Platonic Forms, and advocates a ‘spiritualized egocentrism...scarcely aware of kindness, tenderness, compassion, concern for the freedom, respect for the integrity of the beloved, as essential ingredients of the highest type of interpersonal love’ (Vlastos (1981/2000: 642)). The evidence is roughly as follows. In the *Symposium* Plato argues that the highest form of *eros*, roughly, ‘passionate desire’ is love for Forms, and beautiful bodies and souls are to be used ‘as steps’ towards this end. The *Lysis* appears to be the only exploration of friendship (*philia*), and this is an inconclusive work. At best, it is held, the lack of an account of love and friendship for persons compares unfavourably with Aristotle’s detailed account of *philia*, which occupies two books of his *Ethics* and is, arguably, central to his account of human flourishing; at worst, this omission supports the view of Plato as ‘a cold-hearted egoist’ who disdained persons in favour of abstract objects. If Plato thought philosophy could answer the question how should one live, in one crucial area of his thought the life worth living is not, apparently, a life worth choosing; as Aristotle made explicit, no one would choose to live without friends.

This paper challenges this view. I will argue that the view of love that Plato is commonly taken to have held, and which is the target of this and other such critiques is not, in fact, representative of Platonic love at all.¹ I hope to reshape this debate, first by arguing us out of a particular misreading of Plato’s *Symposium*, and second, by encouraging us to explore the largely neglected account of *philia* in the *Phaedrus*. I argue that this work provides an account of love and friendship for persons, which satisfies more of the criteria that we (including Vlastos) take to be central to love. In exploring this account we shall also, I hope, go some way towards mitigating the egoism many find so objectionable in Plato’s ethics.

I Platonic Love: The Old Version and its Failures

It was Ficino who coined the phrase *amor platonicus* and he did so on the basis of reading the *Symposium*. This is the text most people turn to when searching for Plato’s views on love, and it has influenced a diverse range of thinkers from Dante to Freud.² I begin, then, by laying out the basic framework of this account and its core criticisms before arguing that we should not, in fact, be focusing on this text for Plato’s account of interpersonal love. The *Symposium* consists of a series of speeches in praise of *eros*, ‘passionate love’ or ‘desire’, and its role in the good human life. At its core stands an argument for the superiority of the philosophical life as the happiest life (211d), and the central claim that the satisfaction of *eros* is to be had in the contemplation of the Form of the Beautiful, or Fine (this translates the Greek term ‘*kalon*’ which was a general term of appraisal with both aesthetic and moral

¹ Scholars who inherit this debate from Vlastos’ (1981) article include Nussbaum (1986), Kosman (1977), Gill (1990), Price (1989), Rowe (1998).

² On the reception of the *Symposium* and its influence on modern thinking about love, see Leshner, Nails and Sheffield (2006).

connotations).³ In one of the most famous passage in the Platonic corpus Socrates describes an ascent of desire through a hierarchy of different beautiful objects. He argues that a lover should start by loving the beauty of one body (210a). He must come to realise next that the beauty of all bodies is similar, and then that they are one and the same (b4). Next one comes to love the beauty of soul, and then the beauty of laws, practices and sciences, until one can finally know, and love, what beauty is, in itself (211d1-3). This passage, and specifically the claim that *eros* is best satisfied by union with an abstract intelligible object, is at the root of much unease about Plato's view. The proper end of *eros* is the Form of Beauty and persons or things are loved insofar as they instantiate that true beauty.

'This is what it is to approach love matters, or to be led by someone else in them, in the correct way: beginning from these beautiful things here, one must always move upwards for the sake of that beauty I speak of, using the other things as steps from one to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, from beautiful bodies to beautiful activities, from activities to beautiful sciences, and finally from sciences to that science, which is science of nothing other than beauty itself, in order that one may finally know what beauty is, itself (211c1-d1; trans. Rowe).'

Various criticisms have been levelled at this as an account of love. First, the idea that *eros* is a response to beauty seems to lead here to a state of affairs whereby beauty is the real object of the lover's attention at every stage, rather than the person or thing which possesses it. So Vlastos, for example, has argued that the lover loves only 'a complex of qualities answering to the lover's sense of beauty, which he locates for a time truly or falsely in that person.' (1981: 28). The account is not about love for persons: 'What it is really about is love for placeholders of the predicates 'useful' and 'beautiful'' (1981: 26). Second, the account assumes a homogeneity of value such that one can exchange one beautiful object for another and come to view them as part of a 'wide sea' of beauty. If the qualities instantiated by a person or thing are repeatable in this way then they become replaceable by any other person or thing that exhibits the same, or more of, that desired quality. The upshot of this is that the uniqueness and irreplaceability that some (e.g. Nussbaum (1986)) see as central to love for human beings, at least, is lost.⁴ Third, love for the beauty of persons is ultimately instrumental in the ascent to an understanding of the Form of Beauty: lower loves are to be used 'as steps' towards this goal (211c). This violates our notion that love involves a recognition that individuals have intrinsic value. We seem to care that love recognises the other, at the very least, as a centre of valuation and agency, and not just as an object of arousal. At best, we think that love involves the idea that we love another person 'for their own sake, not our own'. This, at any rate, is the measure Vlastos uses as a standard for judging the Platonic material (and which he finds in Aristotle). It is not always clear what is involved in the latter notion, but (since Aristotle) it has involved a contrast with instrumental or utility love, whereby one uses a person for the sake of some further end (e.g. pleasure, or wisdom here). 'End love', as it is sometimes now called, is taken to involve an active desire to promote that person's good for their sake, not for ours.⁵ The notion that there is a degree of

³ On this issue see the detailed discussion of this term in Nehamas (2004).

⁴ See Nussbaum (1986) 165-95.

⁵ Vlastos write that 'Aristotle's wishing another good for his sake, not ours, though still far from the Kantian conception of treating persons as ends in themselves, is the closest any philosopher comes to it in antiquity.' See Vlastos (1969) 10 n.24.

care and concern for the wellbeing of the loved person is central to many ancient and contemporary accounts of loving relationships.⁶ All three of the claims made for the Platonic account above, namely that it focuses on persons as ‘placeholders for predicates’, that loved qualities are repeatable and replaceable, and that loved persons or things are treated instrumentally, violate many of our strongest intuitions about love.

In much of the criticism of Plato’s view a pivotal contrast is that between ‘loving someone for their own sake’ and loving them ‘as a placeholder for predicates’, as Vlastos puts it. Treating a person as a placeholder seems to involve abstracting a quality of merit from a person and disregarding their individual worth.

‘If A is valued for some meritorious quality, m, his individuality does not enter into the valuation. As an individual he is then dispensable; his place could be taken without loss of value by any other individual with as good an m rating...No matter how enviable a package of well rounded excellence A may represent, it would still follow that, if he is valued only for his merit, he is not being valued as an individual.’⁷

Socrates does commit himself to the view that persons are desirable insofar as they exhibit the quality of beauty. Eros recognises and responds to the perception of value (201a8-10, b6-7, c4-5, 202d1-3). We might not find this much objectionable. Some traditions reserve unconditional love only for God.⁸ The concerns with a value based view of love are typically taken to involve the following: (a) if you respond to value then individuals might be replaceable by other individuals who also exhibit the same or similar valuable properties; (b) you are not loving the whole person, but their best properties; (c) you might get something out of them, hence this does not count as a real case of ‘end love’.

Scholars have tried to extricate Plato from some of these concerns. Kosman, for example, has argued that there are some valuable properties that are so determining of who a person is that in loving them for those properties we are, in fact, loving them as persons – for themselves (1976: 53-69).

‘If I love A because of P, or love the P in A, I should not be said to love something other than A if P is what A is. Thus, to love A for its beauty, it to love A for itself.’⁹

If we assume (and there is reason to do so) that Plato and Aristotle held a teleological view of nature according to which the real nature of a thing is revealed in its fullest and best stage of development, then idealizing an object of love – seeing them as beautiful, perhaps, - is to see them as they really are. So, to love someone for their beauty is to love them for themselves. But even if we could explain the relationship between the quality of beauty and an individual body or soul best expressed in some such way, we would need to say more to silence Plato’s critics. This might allow us to say that persons are valued, but not yet that they are valued as unique and

⁶ See, for example, Frankfurt on the importance of ‘disinterested devotion to [the beloved’s] well-being’ in ‘Autonomy, Necessity and Love’ (1994) and ‘On Caring’ (1999). Cf. Taylor ‘Love’ (1976) 157: ‘If X loves Y then X wants to benefit and to be with Y etc., and he has these wants because he believes Y has some determinate characteristics X in virtue of which he thinks it worthwhile to benefit and to be with X.’ Cf. Rawls on the relationship of love and other directed concern (1971) 190; Sobel, ‘Union, Autonomy and Concern’, in (ed.) Lamb (1997) 65-92.

⁷ Vlastos (1962) 44.

⁸ On which, see Nygren (1982) 76-7.

⁹ See Kosman (1976) 64.

irreplaceable.¹⁰ Nor does it deal with what is arguably the central problem that beautiful bodies and souls have instrumental value in the ascent to ideal beauty. Although scholars too readily assume that the relationship between particulars and Forms is that between means and ends, so that particular bodies and souls necessarily bear an instrumental relationship to the Form, the fact that all beautiful objects are here, in the end, to be used ‘as steps’ in an ascent to the Form of Beauty strongly suggests that one’s attitude towards these beautiful particular things at the very least includes an instrumental role for them here.¹¹ And if we accept Kosman’s promising account of the relationship between beauty and the real self, then in some sense the account is worse. We are to be loved as persons – recognised as we really are – and then seen as part of a ‘wide sea’ of homogeneous value and used for the sake of an understanding of the Form. Part of what we take to be involved in the concept of a person (since Kant, at any rate) is that persons are treated as ends (idealized or not). If Socrates is advocating a view of love according to which persons (however conceived) are valued only instrumentally, then whatever interpretative moves that are made will fail to address the central problem that an adequate account of love must accommodate our intuition that this involves care and concern for individuals who are recognised as subjects of experience and valued as ends in themselves. In the account of an ascent to the form as the highest kind of *eros* Plato spectacularly fails to do this.

II eros as the aspiration towards happiness

The account fails, I want to argue, because we have lost our sense of what the passage is about. I want now to argue for two specific claims. The first is that Socrates makes it plain that it is both a semantic and a philosophical confusion to think that *eros* centrally refers to interpersonal love. It refers, more broadly, to the desire for good things and happiness. All that Socrates is committed to, then, is the more plausible claim that a desire for an individual per se is not a desire for a proper eudaimonistic *telos* (that is, an individual is not a constitutive good of *happiness*, or its proper *telos*). The proper *telos* of happiness is an intelligible object – the Form of Beauty – the contemplation of which is held to be constitutive of the best human life (211d). An implication of the first claim is a second, namely that the ascent in the *Symposium* does not, as is commonly held, show us interpersonal love ‘sublimated’ from earthly to divine. All it shows is that the desire for happiness is (a) believed by Socrates to be satisfied in the acquisition of wisdom of a certain sort, and (b) that within the context of the acquisition of wisdom beautiful bodies and souls have instrumental value *as objects of understanding*. Whether *eros* is the only response one might have towards a person, or whether a person is reducible to a property like the *kalon*, are further questions not addressed or answered by this text. We might well want to ask whether, and how, personal affection, or loving relationships, are to be integrated within a

¹⁰ Arguably, though, the ancients were less concerned with such criteria for personhood. On this issue, see Gill (1998).

¹¹ The relationship between particulars and forms can be construed differently. Since particular things embody, albeit partially, the intrinsically valuable character of the form, one might take it that they exemplify the nature of the form. In this way they still have a relationship to the further end (the Form), but this relationship need not be construed instrumentally; rather, it is a way in which that further end (the Form in this case) is manifested. On this distinction, see Adams (2002) 153. Cf. Williams (2007) 122-3 who argues that the notion of an intrinsic good might better explain the role of the Form here, and this is not one that can simply be mapped onto the distinction between a final good and an instrumental one.

happy human life. But this is a further, different, question and one that is not easily settled on the basis of an examination of the *Symposium's* ascent.

There are two facts about the term *eros* that are relevant to Plato's use of the term in the *Symposium*. First, in Greek literature *eros* signified any intense desire aroused by the stimulus of beauty. It could be used of desires for persons, for food, sex, or war.¹² Plato did not strain the term beyond recognition in using it to refer beyond an attachment to individual persons. Second, *eros* centrally referred to the experiences of a desiring agent of some sort. One does not expect the love of other persons for their own sake to enter into a discussion of *eros*, nor again the reciprocity of affection that ideally characterises a relationship of *philia*, for example (often translated as 'love' or 'friendship'). In the *Phaedrus* Plato employs a new term: *anteros*, to describe a sort of echo of *eros* which returns back from the beloved to the lover (255d8). Furthermore, the tradition of pederastic *eros* which provides the larger context for this discussion, did not traditionally include the love of other persons for their own sake, but rather an exchange of benefit for both parties – *pederasteia* for *philosophia*, as one of the speakers in this dialogue puts it (181c). Feelings of care and concern may, of course, result from some of these interpersonal erotic attachments, but they are not entailed by them. Given these considerations many of the criteria employed in this debate are simply misplaced. If the discussion were concerned with *philia* – often translated as friendship, or love, a term used to cover affection for family and friends, for example - we might more reasonably expect the account to cover those features of our interpersonal lives. But the *Symposium* is not (centrally at least) about this phenomenon.¹³

Socrates clarifies how he conceives of the topic under consideration at the start of his speech. He argues that *eros* is a response to value – perceived beauty in a desired object – that aims at some good we currently lack and desire (206a12). We desire good things because we believe these to be central to, or constitutive of, our happiness. This is the *telos* of desire because no one would ask, as they might of other desired good things, why we desire happiness (205a1-3). There is a question here about how far this definition of *eros* as the area of desire concerned with good things and happiness is a departure from standard Greek usage, and the agenda set in the rest of the dialogue by his peers.¹⁴ Even if we concede that one would not expect a discussion of reciprocal affection, or love of persons for their own sake, from a discussion of *eros*, if Socrates' use of the term is a significant departure from current usage then it may, after all, be argued that Socrates is transforming a predominantly interpersonal phenomenon into something much broader and quite different. The fact that Socrates claims that people have confused a part of *eros* for the whole phenomenon and so they mistakenly use the term *eros* to refer to sexual love exclusively, suggests that he does see himself as doing something distinctive (205b). He argues that the extension of the term is wider, and applies to the love of money, athletics and wisdom, indeed it applies to anything which we make a central object of

¹² On this issue, see Ludwig (2002) 8.

¹³ On this issue see Halperin (1986) 60-80; Ferrari (1992) 248-9; Kahn (1996) 261. Kahn argues that 'In such a theory the object of desire is only initially or instrumentally a person. Reciprocal relations between persons would have to be treated in an account of *philia* which Plato did not develop' (1996) 261. Vlastos (1981) was clearly sensitive to these nuances, but he believed (a) that Plato held a unitary theory of love with *philia* and *eros* as distinct species and (b), that since the *Lysis* failed to deliver an adequate account of love of other persons 'for their own sake' in its discussion of *philia*, it was legitimate to search for this notion in the account of *eros* in the *Symposium*. For detailed criticism of this approach see Sheffield (2006) chapter 5.

¹⁴ I thank Peter Goldie for pressing me on this point.

positive concern in our pursuit of happiness (205d). Socrates presents himself as making explicit something he takes to be implicit in current erotic practices. The point, I take it, is this. If you ask most people why it is that they desire a certain person or thing, they will, eventually, answer that they pursue such things for the sake of happiness. Socrates is still explaining the very same phenomenon as his peers, desire – of which sexual desire is a central case – but he is placing it in a larger explanatory framework by arguing that the real end of this desire is a desire for good things and happiness. And that is just to say that when we experience intense desires, e.g. sexual desire for a person, we are groping towards the kind of good that will satisfy our desire for happiness, and we believe this to be found in another person.

Whatever we make of these claims, it is clear that the terms of the discussion are wider than the interpersonal. Socrates is concerned with whatever we deem to be of value, or more specifically, those things that we consider to be central to our happiness.¹⁵ In this respect Socrates is not making a significant departure from the agenda of his peers either. *All* the speakers place their accounts of *eros* in the wider context of a discussion of good things and happiness. On offer in the speeches is a vast spectrum of different ideas available about the nature of happiness, and what constitutes human excellence. In one account bravery on the battlefield is the privileged value for human desire and this is somehow related to a love of honour (Phaedrus). In another, wisdom is central to the excellence that should be cultivated in an erotic relationship (Pausanias). Eryximachus prizes the virtue of the doctor, or seer, who can promote a harmonious order (188d). Aristophanes highlights the virtues of the politician (192a), and Agathon gives priority to poetic skill (196d). All the speakers are concerned with the nature of human goods and happiness; and this for good reason. The kinds of erotic relationships with the young with which all the speakers at this symposium are concerned, and which provide the context for this discussion, were ideally educational relationships, whose erotic practices were justified ultimately by the social function they played in educating the young. Pederasty was a respectable institution in certain social circles because feelings of desire and (at best) concern for the welfare of one's partner were employed for the socially productive end of furthering education.¹⁶ The fact that erotic relationships had this educational dimension, and that the symposium was an important forum for such relationships, goes some way towards explaining why Plato wrote this dialogue. As we might expect from a philosopher whose works consistently focus on the nature of the good life and how it is achieved, Plato has much to say here about the sorts of values that lovers should transmit to their beloveds as they pass the wine cup. Since it is on the basis of a certain conception of a flourishing life that certain sorts of things are advocated to the young as worthy of desire and pursuit, the dialogue explores the nature of *eudaimonia*, 'happiness or 'flourishing'. And this is ultimately why a dialogue concerned with *eros* is at its core an ethical work, which culminates in the specification of "the life which a human being should live" (211d).

It is in the account of how human beings achieve happiness that the ascent passage, with its claim that the highest object of *eros* is the Form of Beauty, plays a

¹⁵ Cf. Moravcsik (1971) 290 who, in light of this passage, suggests that *eros* is best translated as aspiration, since it refers to 'any over- all desire or wish for what is taken to be good, ...the wish or desire for things deemed on account of their nature to be worthy of having their attainment become a man's ultimate goal.' Cf. also Dover (1978) 157 who argues that within Socrates' circle '*eros* is not a desire for bodily contact but a love of moral and intellectual excellence.'

¹⁶ On pederasty as an important social institution in classical Athens, see Dover (1978); Bremmer (1990).

role. Let us explore the details. Along with all the other speakers in this dialogue, Socrates takes it for granted that *eros* manifests itself in the pursuit of beauty. Beauty dropped out of the account briefly because Socrates was unable to answer the question why it is that we desire beauty (204d10); when good was substituted for beauty he could see more easily why it is that we pursue good things: for the sake of happiness (205a1-3). With this in place, he now returns to the role of beauty. Being mortal, Socrates argues, we are subject to flux and change and cannot possess things in any straightforward way. Much of our mortal life requires productive work, like the replenishment of hair and skin and blood in our bodies (207d5-208s5). The upshot of this account of mortal life is that if we want good things, these too must be produced if they are to be had at all. And this is part of the answer to why we desire beauty; beauty arouses the creative activity required to possess good things in the way in which mortals are capable (206d). Socrates provides examples of this phenomenon. Some people pursue beautiful women in whom they can be productive of a certain perceived good for themselves – ‘memory and happiness’ - which they believe comes from the creation of physical offspring. Others seek beautiful cities or souls in which they can be productive of the honour that comes from creating fine laws or educating the young (209b). Others seek beauty of a different kind – the beauty of the Form – in which they can be productive of their perceived good: wisdom (211d3). And these are the philosophical types described in the ascent. Reflecting on the beauty of bodies and souls here is a way of creating in beauty and thereby producing a desired good end (wisdom in this case) in the distinctive way in which mortal beings are able. Put differently, the cognitive engagement with beautiful bodies and souls in the ascent is the way in which one comes to be in the creative environment required to produce the desired good end in this case – wisdom. Compare the physical union required to be with, and reproduce, in physical beauty.

The details of this account, many of which remain controversial, can be left aside for now.¹⁷ But the context outlined thus far should make plain the following. Socrates is providing an account of our desire for happiness, and then presenting and assessing competing conceptions of happiness (honour and wisdom, in the so-called lower and higher mysteries: see 208c3 with 211d1). If such considerations inform the interpretation of Socrates’ account then they significantly shift our perspective. For if happiness is the aim of *eros*, and our pursuit of beauty is determined by that aim, it is not just a semantic confusion to think that *eros* centrally refers to love for individuals, but a deeply misguided idea to think that a person or persons can satisfy our aspiration for good things and happiness, or that they are the proper objects of *eros*. Only the most committed romantic would entertain such an idea. Indeed, it should come as no surprise that it is only the comic poet Aristophanes who advocates such a model in this dialogue. It is a sign of our modern romantic notions that Aristophanes’ comic fantasy of missing halves and two becoming one is the best loved speech in the work, and one which is often used as the measure of how far Socrates has fallen from the realm of the interpersonal. If we respect the focus on human aspirations quite broadly conceived, and the things we pursue as central to happiness, then Socrates’ move away from individuals as the focus of a happy human life is laudable. We might want persons to figure in our conception of a happy life, to share a happy life, but to be the proper objects of our happiness, to be that on which our happiness depends, is not only a heavy burden for an individual to carry, but a limited view of the rich

¹⁷ For a defence of these claims see Sheffield (2006).

possibilities for human aspiration. And that is one reason why Socrates welcomes a more expansive encounter with things considered to be of value in the ‘ascent’.

If one believes (as the majority of speakers do in this dialogue) that psychic goods (such as wisdom) are central to a happy life, then Socrates’ point is that we need an expansive encounter with things we consider to be of value to ensure that we attain them. We need a wide and reflective encounter with those things we deem valuable (*kalon*) in the area of body and soul so that we may come to understand the sorts of things that a good person should pursue and why. And this is the central concern of the ascent passage. Given certain familiar Platonic assumptions about the relationship between the human good (virtue) and knowledge of value, the fact that Socrates advocates the practices of the ascent is not surprising. These practices are designed to attain just that goal. This can be seen in the clear methodological procedure, strongly reminiscent of those dialogues where Socrates searches for the *eidos*, the common feature of a thing (210e3, cf. *Charmides* 159-60, *Gorgias* 474d-e, *Meno* 87e-88e). On each level one *reflects* on what it is that makes a body or soul a beautiful body or soul, and considers what it is about such things that is ‘one and the same’ (210c4-5). The emphasis on intellectual engagement with the objects encountered, and conversation at every level, is precisely the kind of activity that characterises a search for the common feature of beauty, a search that for a Platonist ends in an encounter with the Form.

There is little evidence that Socrates is here describing an *eros* sublimated from an earthly attachment to persons towards an intellectual appreciation of the divine form. It is only if one thinks that the beautiful bodies and souls are successive objects of different *kinds* of love - the first of which is interpersonal and employed instrumentally - that it follows that ‘personal affection ranks low on Plato’s *scala amoris*’ (Vlastos (1981) 31). On the above account all that follows is that beautiful bodies and souls rank low *as objects of understanding*. Commentators too readily assume that sexual *eros* is operative on the first stage of the ascent because of the fact that this desiring agent experiences *eros* and the object of this is a beautiful *body*.¹⁸ But since Socrates has already made it plain that *eros* refers to any intense desire – for sex, athletics, honour, or wisdom, for example - what needs to be clarified is the kind of *eros* that is operative here. There is little reason to assume that it is, in fact, sexual *eros* in operation here. If it were, then why does the desiring agent seek a *reflective* kind of intercourse with this beautiful body? Searching for what is ‘one and the same’ amongst a collection of beautiful bodies makes little sense as an expression of sexual *eros*. An *eros* for wisdom is surely what motivates this desiring agent *to reflect* upon what it is that makes this beautiful body an instance of that kind. And if it is an intellectual *eros* that is operative even at the early stages of the ascent, then the ascent provides no evidence that Plato thought that one could sublimate one kind of *eros* (the sexual kind) into *eros* of another sort (an intellectual kind). Second, if the ascent is about the pursuit of wisdom, believed in this case to satisfy the desire for happiness, then treating persons along with other valuable things as ‘placeholders for predicates’ begins to look less objectionable – epistemologically suspect perhaps, but morally repugnant it is not. Providing an account of wisdom and how to get it *as the climax of an account of human happiness* and how it is achieved is a perfectly respectable idea. At least to the ancients, this would be considered a natural candidate for the sort of good on which human happiness can depend.

¹⁸ A notable exception is Moravcsik (1971) 290-1: ‘it is not mere sexual desire; rather, it is love of a body for the sake of bodily beauty that can be abstracted and contemplated on a general level’. Cf. the discussion in Price (1989) and Patterson (1991) 197.

Now, I do not mean to imply that a desire for wisdom is the only feeling one has for the beautiful bodies and souls encountered in the ascent. One might well be sexually attracted to the beautiful bodies under consideration in this context. Indeed, one might experience a variety of interpersonal responses towards the persons encountered in the ascent.¹⁹ The claim is only that the salient point is what the desiring agent does with those responses in this context, and how he uses them ‘like steps’ in an understanding of the proper grounds and basis of human flourishing. And this in turn is perfectly explicable, and not morally repugnant, in light of the content he has given to his overall goal (the good, in which the acquisition of wisdom plays a central role), and the larger context of this account (happiness as the proper aim of *eros*). So, we can agree with Vlastos that Plato does not offer an account of love for another ‘for their own sake’, but this is *not* a criticism of Plato, or the *Symposium*, given an informed sense of the overall aims of the work. Objections about persons being considered as placeholders for predicates in the ascent passage gain force if the ascent is read as an account of the proper object of interpersonal love. But this interpretive assumption is a fiction of the literature. It arises when the passage is divorced from its context. As an account of how we understand the grounds of human flourishing in the area of body and soul, there is nothing morally objectionable about the procedure at all. All the ascent shows is that human aspiration - the desire for happiness – is best satisfied in the acquisition of knowledge of a certain sort. And within the context of this search for knowledge of value beautiful bodies and souls – persons – play an instrumental role.²⁰

III The Transformation of Loving Relationships: ‘Utility love’ to ‘End love’?

Nothing so far, then, commits Plato to the views that have been so heavily criticised. Nor has Plato lost sight of the value of interpersonal relationships in the good life. This is the *context*, if not the *focus*, of the ascent passage. Socrates says explicitly that he has been describing how to go about the correct love of boys (211b). The point here is not that ‘correct love’ involves sublimating interpersonal attachments into more abstract ones, or that individuals are not proper objects of love, just Forms. Rather, the point is that loving relationships of this kind are best informed by some understanding of what is genuinely valuable and worthy of desire and pursuit.²¹ And this is for the reason that such relationships were typically educational relationships, justified, in part, on the basis of a lover’s understanding of what made a good and

¹⁹ And there is evidence that other responses are in play: when the beauty of soul is encountered, for example, the one making the ascent is said to ‘love and care for the person, and if he has even a little bloom, even then this is enough for him’ (210b6-c3; trans. Rowe). This fails to satisfy scholars looking for evidence of love for another person’s own sake because they see (rightly, I think) that ultimately any sentiments had here are instrumental to an understanding of the Form. The experience of care for the beauty of soul prompts the one making the ascent to explore laws and practices, and those things that are responsible for the creation of beautiful souls, in order that he (the lover) may be turned towards other bearers of beauty (211b). Cf. Price (1989) 56-7. This need not exclude concern for others. Although this experience is an occasion for progress towards understanding beauty, the conversations that are produced as a result of this understanding are delivered ‘ungrudgingly’ (210d5). This suggests that one is generous with one’s insights, which in turn suggests that other people are involved as the beneficiaries of an increased understanding (cf. *Phdr.* 249a2). None of these suggestions are explored in this text, however.

²⁰ Socrates’ argument for why the desire for happiness is best satisfied in the acquisition of wisdom of a certain sort is outside the scope of this paper. For an exposition of this argument see Sheffield (2006) 141-152.

²¹ This is a theme of many dialogues which discuss *eros*; see, for example, *Alcibiades* I 122b5, *Lysis* 204b1-2 with Penner and Rowe (2005: 231), cf. *Euthydemus* 282a1-b7.

flourishing individual. The ascent describes the proper goals and activity of an interpersonal love relationship presented by someone with genuine care and concern for the welfare of the young. This is manifested, if not philosophically explored, in the behaviour of the guide who leads the ascent.

It is this larger context, rather than the specifics of the ascent, that should be brought into focus in an account of Plato's view of love. If we do so we can appreciate, I think, that Plato is transforming pederastic relationships in a way that satisfies at least some of the criteria we take to be important in an account of interpersonal love. In particular, there is enough suggestive material to indicate that Plato rejects aspects of what has been called a 'utility based' model of interpersonal relationships which is based on the use one person has for another, in favour of a model which recognises the value of individual persons as proper subjects of experience, rich in potential, who deserve to be treated with care and concern for that potential. For 'correct love' involves thinking about human well being and not just embarking on the sort of exchange of benefit for both parties which was taken to be so central to pederastic relationships by other speakers in the dialogue (gratification for wisdom, as Pausanias so delicately puts it (181c-185d), cf. Agathon (175d1) and Alcibiades (217c7)). This is a model of interpersonal relationships that figures in the account of those who love honour in Socrates' speech (the so-called lesser mysteries of *eros*) and it is characterised by the dynamics of exchange. Such relationships are employed as a way of acquiring honour *for oneself* by the production of educational conversations (see 208c3 with 209b8-c2; cf. *Phdr.* 256c7-d1). This model is rejected in the ascent to knowledge of the Form of Beauty in favour of a practice which leads and turns a young man to develop the resources of his own soul (210a6, 7, c7, 211c1, 210d4). Rejection of the exchange model of pederastic relationships occurs in other places in the dialogue. At the start, Socrates rejects the exchange flirtatiously elicited by the beautiful Agathon who wants to recline beside Socrates and receive the benefits of his wisdom (175d1). This theme is revisited at the end of the work. Although some scholars have taken Alcibiades' speech as a critique of the abstract other-worldliness of Socrates' account,²² considered differently Alcibiades' speech explains that Socrates did not reject interpersonal relationships as such, but just a particular kind of interpersonal relationship. What Alcibiades attempts to procure from Socrates is his wisdom, and he offers his delightful body in exchange. His hopes are dashed when Socrates spends the night with him like a brother. Socrates refuses to enter into this kind of exchange, just as he refused Agathon's advances at the start, which were also grounded in the dynamics of exchange. He nonetheless encourages a relationship with Alcibiades and advocates a relationship of joint inquiry into how to become a good man (219b1).²³ Alcibiades must become a subject of inquiry himself and develop his own intellectual resources. He must stop seeing himself as the passive recipient of another's wisdom and his physical charms as a suitable exchange. Socrates does not reject him as such but advocates a relationship grounded in a shared aspiration for wisdom (219b1; cf. 174d3-4).²⁴ Refiguring the dynamics of such relationships to forge one based on sharing, not exchange, is also a key feature of

²² E.g. Nussbaum (1986).

²³ Cf. *Alcibiades I* on the *koine boule*, the common search, between Socrates and Alcibiades, 191b, 124b10.

²⁴ Socrates' rejection of this model of pederastic relations can also be seen in his role reversal where he transforms himself from lover to beloved and thereby thwarts the active/passive dynamics that typically characterised such relationships. See *Symp.* 222a8 with Halperin (1986).

Xenophon's account of Socratic friendship in the *Memorabilia* (1.6.13-14). Perhaps this was a familiar Socratic theme.

Plato's insight in the *Symposium* was to see that an attachment towards persons can be an occasion for reflection – not because individuals are mere stepping stones to Forms, but because part of what it is to be a proper lover is to know about the sorts of values that should inform such relationships. This requires knowing about happiness, what it consists in (wisdom), and how it is achieved (developing the resources of one's own soul in proper philosophical activity, viz. the ascent). That is one reason why pederasty and philosophy go hand in hand for Plato.

IV Happiness and Interpersonal Relationships

One might object that the argument above just shifts the problem. Since the account of happiness is one in which the Form is the highest object of human aspiration, one might still ask why there is no account of how, or why, a life in pursuit of this goal involves other persons.²⁵ Even if we concede that the account is about *eros* conceived as the aspiration towards happiness one still wants to know whether, and how, a happy human life involves other persons. Some of the debate has shifted in this direction.²⁶ There are those who argue that though the account is focused on the agent's acquisition of virtue and happiness these are goals that can only be achieved with another person. More specifically, in order to secure the immortal possession of his virtue, the philosopher must reproduce his virtue in other souls, just as the educational pederast of the lower mysteries passes on his educational *logoi* to young men. There are numerous problems with this reading, which I will only touch on here. Even if one could show (as Price (1989) claims) that this does not reduce the other to an instrument of the lover's own fulfilment, there is no evidence for this reading. There is no other person mentioned at the top of the ascent. The philosopher contemplates the Form of Beauty and this is said to be the *telos*. 'Here is the life', we are told, 'contemplating the Form of beauty'. If there was some further step required here, such as generating virtue in other souls, then Plato has been spectacularly unclear in his exposition. It will not, after all, be true that life is worth living in contemplation of the Form; there will be some further activity required for a life worth living. But such is not mentioned in the text. One cannot just import the model from the lower mysteries without threatening the contrast with the honour lovers who do indeed need others to secure honour. No such thing is even hinted at with the philosopher at the top of the ascent.²⁷

More promising, perhaps, is Socrates' earlier characterisation of *eros*. This stated that *eros* fluctuates between the human and the divine realms, and *back again* from the divine to the human realm (202e3-203a5), it is tempting to think that cognitive contact with the divine form is not only compatible with *eros* for human beings, but part of the proper functioning of our aspiration for good things and happiness. Just what this state consists in, though, is not clear. It might be that one is interpreting the world of human concerns in light of the divine Form, bringing together the flux of particulars in a state of divine understanding, and not necessarily that one is engaging with other persons. Or it could be that the guide in the ascent is an example of a person who has attained a godlike state of understanding and yet wants to persuade others of how to achieve wisdom, as Diotima evidently does. This is perhaps exemplified in the relationship between Socrates and Diotima, but it is not

²⁵ Though see the suggestive material mentioned in n. 20.

²⁶ See Vlastos (1981) 31; Price (1989); White (2005).

²⁷ For detailed arguments against this view, see Sheffield (2006) chapter 5.

philosophically explored here. In order to meet the demands of the critics we need the sort of philosophical exploration that can answer, at least, the following questions: does one guide another for that other's own sake, or for one's own, or both? Why does such a person desire to educate others? What is the end in view in performing such a task, and how do others relate to that aim? Is contemplation of the Form something that requires constant work (as 207d-208c might suggest)? If so, is guiding other persons instrumental to one's re-attainment of that end, or does interaction with them provide a way of exemplifying contemplative activity and, if so, how? Answers to these questions are not forthcoming here.

Such questions amount to asking how Plato conceives of the highest good (wisdom) and what relationship, if any, it has to other good things (e.g. interpersonal relationships). All we know from the *Symposium*'s explicit remarks is *what* the highest good is. Notice, though, that this question is different from asking whether and how an *eros* for the Form of Beauty includes an *eros* for other persons. This beautiful object is the proper *object* of *eros*, and we should recall that one pursues beautiful things for the sake of the good things (e.g. wisdom) that result.²⁸ An answer to this question will be determined by the contrast between beautiful particulars and the beauty of the Form that structures the ascent. The particular beautiful things pursued there are pursued 'for the sake of' the Form of Beauty (211e). Such a question is answered, then, on the basis of examining Plato's metaphysics.²⁹ The question about whether and how contemplation of the Form of Beauty is compatible with love for other persons is a question about one's overall *aims*. There is no reason to think that the parameters of this question are similarly determined by Plato's metaphysical views. This is a question about a certain kind of activity (contemplating), rather than a certain kind of object (Forms versus particulars). We are asking whether contemplation is an activity that includes other persons and, if so, in what sense.

To be precise then, Socrates' claim is that contemplation is the end of our aspiration for good things and happiness: it is this that makes a life 'worth living' (211d). This is not necessarily to claim that all actions have this end in view. It is never said, for example, that all actions are justified in bringing about contemplation; the point is that *eros* is the desire responsible for bringing about good things, and so when good things are under consideration, contemplation is the goal. This leaves it open whether there are actions, or interpersonal relationships, had without reference to some good end. But insofar as interpersonal relationships are seen as good, and are not entered into on the basis of, say, duty, or obedience to a higher power, then Socrates is committed to the view that what makes such relationships worth having is contemplation of the beautiful, or the fine (*to kalon*). The question then, is how to construe this in such a way that other good things are not simply instrumental to this end. For if Socrates is committed to such a view, then he would be falling into the laps of his critics after all; for interpersonal relationships might have no value for

²⁸ Recall that *eros* is not of the beautiful, but of creative activity in the presence of beauty (206d); for it is the creative activity (e.g. child-bearing, law-making or philosophy) in the presence of beauty that produces a desired good end (honour or wisdom).

²⁹ Vlastos (1981), for example, argues on the basis of Plato's metaphysical views that 'it would be folly and even idolatry to treat them [persons] as worthy of love for their own sake.' Cf. Nussbaum (1990: 117) 'we must take very seriously the claim that every property of objects relevant to practical motivation will be homogenized qualitatively with every other. Now the question is what is left of objects and persons in this scheme? Everything about an object or person that counts for desire and action is flattened out into 'the wide sea. So what is left for the body or person to be? What individuates it, enables us to refer to it, trace it through time, identify and re-identify with it?'

Socrates, or they might be valued only ‘for the sake of’ wisdom and thereby count as cases of a lesser ‘utility love’. Or so an objection might run.

Socrates’ explicit remarks here do not commit him to any such view. The claim is that contemplation of the Form of Beauty makes that life ‘worth living’ (211d). This is not necessarily to claim that there is one good that is pursued to the exclusion of all other goods, but just to say that contemplation is what gives value to a life, and particular things within it insofar as they are chosen as ‘good’. Such a view does not commit Plato to the view that wisdom is the end and everything else is a means to that end; it is to say only that contemplation is what gives value to a life and makes it one – however many goods it may include – that is ‘worth living’. Put differently, contemplation is sufficient for this, but it might not be the only thing which is an end in itself (still, a life with other ends but no contemplation would not be worth living).³⁰

There are, in fact, numerous options here, which may or may not include the above, and in teasing out some of these my point is simply to show that the text is underdetermined on this issue. That Socrates, the seeker after wisdom *par excellence*, does engage in interpersonal relationships is clear from his interactions with Apollodorus, Aristodemus and Alcibiades. And that the person who has attained wisdom continues to engage in interpersonal relationships is strongly suggested by the activity of the guide who leads the ascent. This in itself, however, will do little to decide the issue. What needs to be clarified is how exactly the two come together in ‘a life worth living’. All I have argued so far is that nothing in the *Symposium* commits Plato to the views that have been attributed to him. The *Symposium* says nothing, for example, about the proper objects of interpersonal love being Forms rather than persons, nor does it imply that persons are to be valued only as imitations of Forms and used ‘as steps’ to an encounter with them. All it commits Plato to (to the extent that Plato is committed to anything written in the dialogues) are the following: (a) the proper object of the aspiration towards happiness (which is what *eros*, on this account, is: 205d10) is a Form (for Form as *telos* see 210e2); (b) happiness resides in the intellectual activity of contemplation of *to kalon* (211d1-3); this is why it is the *telos* of *eros*; (c) within the context of a search for knowledge of this Form beautiful bodies and souls have instrumental value (they are to be used ‘as steps’: 211c4). Whether this is the only value that persons have for Plato, or how exactly persons are to be valued within a happy life are further questions not addressed by this text. There is good reason for this. In an account of *eros* one does not expect to be able to answer such questions along the lines that Vlastos and others have used in the interpretation of this text. There may be all sorts of contexts in which individuals are valued – and for their own sakes. This is just not the concern here. The aim is to show how *eros* plays a role in the good life (the expressed agenda is to *praise eros*, 177c), and this amounts to giving an account of the sorts of things that human beings should desire and pursue as rational agents concerned with their own good and happiness. And that is precisely what the ascent shows. We must let Plato off the charge that he has said something objectionable about what we call love. He says nothing about it here at all.

V Eros philias: loving the good and loving individuals

Having seen that there is nothing that commits Plato to the views that have been attributed to him, I want now to argue for a more positive thesis. For an account of

³⁰ Cf. Broadie (2005: 45) who argues that the ancient perspective on the highest good is one that consists in some relation of the highest good to other goods. Cf. McCabe (2005: 202).

how ethical achievement and interpersonal relationships come together we should turn to the *Phaedrus*. This is a dialogue that explores the relationship between *eros* and *philia*, and in so doing it promises to deliver material about how our aspiration for the good (*eros*) relates to our interpersonal relationships (*philia* attachments). This dialogue suggests not only that these notions are related for Plato, but, more specifically, that the best kind of loving attachments (*philia* based relationships) are those that are grounded in a proper orientation of *eros* towards wisdom; they are not excluded by it.³¹

(a) *A theory of philia?*

The *Phaedrus* is a work deeply concerned with *philia*, and with the proper valuation of persons within relationships of *philia*. Friendship between Socrates and Phaedrus is emphasized throughout (235e2, 228d6, 228e1; Phaedrus and Socrates repeatedly refer to each other as friends (*phile*): 227a1, 228d6, 229e5, 230c5, 235e2, 238c5, 243a3, 264a8, 271b7, 275b5, 276e4, 279a9, 259e7, 236b9),³² and each of the three speeches contributes to a theoretical account of *philia*. The expressed concern of each speech is whether a young man should gratify a lover (*erastes*) or a non-lover, a question which hinges on who will provide the most benefits, an issue decided on the basis of the likelihood of a *philia* relationship developing between the pair (on whether *eros* is compatible with *philia*, see 231b7-c7; 232d1-4; 232d7-e2; 233a1-4; 237c6-8; 253c5; 255b5-7). The assumption here is that it is in a relationship of *philia* that the beloved is benefited. So, if a loving relationship is incompatible with *philia*, then a beloved should not gratify a lover. If, as will be the case, Socrates argues that *eros* for wisdom is the highest kind of *eros*, one expects an account of how this too is compatible with *philia* and so benefits the beloved. This is exactly what we get in his second speech in the dialogue, which explains how an *eros* for wisdom involves the love of other persons, and for their own sake; or so I shall argue.

The term *eros* is variously defined in the speeches, and *philia* is not explicitly defined anywhere in the dialogue, though an account of this phenomenon emerges from a close reading of the speeches. The first two speeches take it that *eros* is an irrational desire which aims at some form of gratification for the lover (237b7-c4 with 238c1-2) and it is on this basis that they deny that erotic relationships provide a good context for the development of *philia* relationships. Lysias' speech is presented as novel and rhetorically artful because he attempts to sever the connection between *eros* and *philia* by arguing against the thought that '*philia* cannot occur unless a man is actually in love' (233d).³³ This is explored as a question in Socrates' first speech ('whether one should enter into friendship (*philia*) with a lover or a non-lover' (237c6-8) and, armed with a different account of *eros* as a form of beneficial madness which aims at the good, Socrates argues in his second speech that it is, in fact, only the friendship (*philia*) of a lover (*erastes*) that brings great blessings (256e3). In each of the speeches the claims about *philia* are made on the basis of a certain conception of *eros*, and the lover (*erastes*). This is significant. As we shall see, different

³¹ Though the *Symposium* explores the nature of *eros*, and the *Phaedrus* embeds its discussion of *philia* within its accounts of *eros*, this does not amount to a proof that these accounts provide, or were supposed to provide, a unitary theory of love. So, one might question the legitimacy of reading these dialogues together in a way that suggests as much. I am committed to no such view. I am concerned simply to establish that Plato had an account of interpersonal love and its place in the good life. Whether this is enough to extract a unitary and exhaustive theory of love is a separate question that will not concern me here.

³² And for *hetaire* see 227b2, 230a6, 234d1, 262c1, 270c6, 273c9 with Griswold (1986) 26 n10.

³³ All translations of the *Phaedrus* are from Rowe (1986).

conceptions of *eros*' nature and aims inform and determine different interpersonal relationships.

According to the first speech of Lysias, although it is alleged that 'those in love show a greater degree of affection (*philia*) to those they love' (231c2-3), lovers are unstable creatures, subject to a sickness; they are unable to deliberate about what is best (231a3-4, 232a5). They are so consumed with the satisfaction of their own irrational desires that they deprive the beloved of goods such as property, family and friends, in order to increase their dependency on the lover (232c5-e2). Since many of those in love desire a person's body it is unclear whether they will want a friendship to continue when desire for the body ceases (e6). One has a greater chance of finding someone worthy of your affection (*philia*) from the many, rather than the group of insane lovers (231e1-2). The (apparent) non-lover, by contrast, has lasting friendship for the boy (233a1-4), which consists in providing more benefits to the boy than a lover (230e6-7). Profit comes to both (234a6-7), through an association with those who promise to 'share [their] advantages' (234a5), and 'render services with regard to their own capacity to render them' (231a3-4). It is not altogether clear what these benefits consist in: the non-lover appears to be someone who achieves his ends 'though merit' (232a5); he is not just interested in the other's body (233a) and they do not neglect what is best (233b). This description suggests that perhaps the benefits received here are like those of the educational pederast familiar from the *Symposium*: moral improvement for the sake of the honour it brings.³⁴ It is clear later that those whose friendship is based on 'pledges given and received' are indeed honour lovers (256c7-d3). The implication is that one or both parties in this case desires to further his ambitions, or gain some status, with this association.

Socrates' first speech is also concerned with 'whether one should enter into friendship (*philia*) with a lover or a non-lover' (237c). Since *eros* is defined as an irrational desire, pitted against judgement in its pursuit of bodily beauty, it is no surprise to find that much here accords with Lysias' speech. Such a person is ruled by desire and 'enslaved to pleasure' (238e). This sets the parameters for the nature of the relationship. The lover wants to make the beloved as pleasing as possible, and what is most pleasing is what does not resist him. A man who is in love will therefore deprive the beloved of benefits in order to make him more dependent and accessible to the satisfaction of the lover's needs (238d5-e5). Since the lover guards such dependency and accessibility dearly, his relationship towards the beloved is marked by envy towards any positive associations the beloved has forged (*phthonos*, 239a7, 240a5, 241c2; cf. 243c6, 232c4-d4). There is no genuine goodwill (*eunoia*) in the *philia* of a lover (241c), and the result of such a relationship is the gradual debilitation of mind, body and possessions (239b-d).

Socrates' second speech recants these ideas. He does this, in part, by challenging the central claim that *eros* is a form of irrational madness that aims at pleasure. He argues that *eros* is a form of beneficial and divine madness (245b-c), whose aim is the good, or more specifically, the return of the soul to its original state, when it was whole, winged, and traversed the heavens in possession of knowledge (249d, 250c). One satisfies *eros* by making proper use of earthly reminders of beauty to recollect the objects of our lost knowledge - the Forms (249c): 'When he partakes

³⁴ Compare the *Symposium* which discusses those who educate young boys alongside poets and lawgivers as those who desire cults and shrines set up in their honour (208c3, 209e1f. for the love of honour which characterises this section of Socrates' account). The boy receives an education and you receive honour from educating a fine young man (that there is also a hint of sexual gratification may be suggested by the lover's interest in the combination of a beautiful body and soul: 209b-c).

in this madness [viz. recollection] the man who loves the beautiful is called a lover' (249e). By implication, other so-called lovers are imposters. The genuine lover is one whose *eros* is directed towards its proper object: the Form of beauty, which can be seen imaged in a beautiful boy (251a). But – and crucially – it is not the case that the boy who occasions such a process is reduced to a mere instrument of the lover's reflection. On the contrary, the value of the relationship between them is enhanced by the philosophical orientation of the lover's desire (*eros*) in this case. Herein, then, lies an opportunity to explore how interpersonal relationships and ethical achievement come together.

Let us explore the details. A philosophical orientation provides this lover with an interest in the beauty of soul. He selects a beloved appropriate to his philosophical orientation and chooses someone 'naturally disposed towards philosophy' (252d7-e3-4), as he himself is. Though he (like the pleasure-seekers) has a sexual response to the boy (the dark horse is aroused: 254a3-7), his attention remains focused upon the soul and the beauty imaged there (252e). Instead of wanting to mount the other 'in the manner of a four-footed beast', he desires to *understand* the arresting experience of beauty. As a reflective person, who values wisdom, he is reminded of his vision of the Forms when he encounters the boy (249e4-250a4, 254a5; 250e1-251a5). This enables him to realise the inappropriateness of a sexual response and he treats the beloved with reverence and awe (254e). He values the other's good nature as something 'god-like', and not as something to be possessed for the sake of his own pleasure, or advantage. The lover promotes the other's good by trying to 'make him of such a kind' as he is naturally disposed to be (i.e. to make him philosophical, 252e4-5). This benefits both lover and beloved: for 'if they have not previously set foot on this [philosophical] way, they undertake it now, both learning from wherever they can and finding out for themselves; and as they follow the scent from within themselves to the discovery of the nature of their own god, they find the way to it through the compulsion on them to gaze intently on the god' (252e-253a). Since they are philosophically inclined their own god was Zeus, whom they followed in the celestial circuit, and the process of discovering the nature of their god is partly achieved by gazing intently on the god imaged in the philosophical disposition of the boy, an image one brings into sharper focus by cultivating the disposition characteristic of the god. The beloved is stunned by the goodwill from the lover, and realises that 'not even all his friends and relations together have anything to offer by comparison with the friend who is divinely possessed' (255b-c). Because the lover holds the beloved responsible for 'the discovery of the nature of their own god', he does not abandon him, but loves him more (*agaposin*, 253a5). And so begins a relationship of mutual benefit: they both draw inspiration from their philosophical god, Zeus, which the lover sees reflected in the boy, and the boy sees reflected in the lover's gaze. The lover experiences an abundance of desire for the beloved, and like an echo which rebounds to its source, 'the stream of beauty passes back to its possessor through his eyes...and fills the loved one in his turn with love (*eros*)' (255c5). The beloved, too, is now in love, but in a confused state; his wing feathers have begun to sprout (255d), i.e. he is beginning to recollect his own vision of the beautiful. The beloved is 'unaware that he is seeing himself in his lover, as if in a mirror' (255d8-e1).³⁵ This reflects the initial response of the lover who is: 'amazed and beside [himself], but do[es] not know what is happening to [him] because [his] perception is too weak'

³⁵ As Nussbaum (1986: 219) notes, 'They are both mutually active and mutually receptive: from the one the other, like a Bacchant, draws in the transforming liquid; and he pours liquid back, in his turn, into the beloved soul'.

(250a5-b1). In perceiving and desiring the beauty imaged and reflected back in the other their memory of the Forms is aroused, but unclear. Their philosophical natures were the proper subjects of that previous experience when they saw beauty itself, and they too are elicited in the presence of the beauty of the other which prompts the recollection of the Form. The couple try to understand their experience together, and spend their time in devotion to philosophy (256b), cultivating the disposition they see and value in the other. There is genuine goodwill (*eunoia*, 255b, 256a), and no jealousy (*phthonos*, 253b7cf. 247a7), as they lead a life together ‘of one mind’ (*homonoetikon*, 256b1). Since this experience brings the soul near to its proper good, Socrates concludes that it brings happiness from the lover – also called a *philos* – to the object of his *philia* – because of his *eros* (253c). So, (contra Lysias) the friendship of a lover is a good thing (256e).

Although a theory of *philia* is not explicit in the speeches, each of them provides a particular characterisation of *philia* relationships, shaped by different conception of *eros*. These are ranked: the *philia* of the philosophers is said to be superior to that of the honour lovers, whose relationship is based on pledges given and received (256c7-d3). It is also superior to the *philia* had between the beloved and all his other friends and relations together (255b7). We also know that both of these types are superior to those that figured in the speech that Socrates recanted (and which adopts the views of Lysias), that is, those whose *philia* is based on the acquisition of pleasure for the lover. The key to understanding the ranking of relationships lies in appreciating how the goodwill (*eunoia*) between the pair is affected by the overall orientation of the lover’s *eros* in each case. For Lysias, the relationship of *philia* is based on sexual pleasure, and it is *because* the lover wants to be gratified sexually that any goodwill towards the beloved is stunted by his desire for easy access from him (232c5-e2). The result is that the beloved is deprived of family, friends and possessions (232c5-e2, 239b-d). Socrates’ first speech explores a similar relationship. The lover’s desire for his own gratification (he is ‘enslaved to pleasure’: 238e) determines the relationship between them: what is most pleasing to him is what does not resist him, so a man characterised by this *eros* will deprive the beloved of benefits (238d5-e5). Furthermore, the lover’s desires, being as they are for physical gratification, are fleeting (232e6), and so the lover is likely to be untrustworthy and not ‘pay what he owes’ in exchange for the beloved’s gratification (241a). Though the beloved ‘demands a return from the lover for favours done in the past’, the lover, once sated, gains control of himself and is ‘compelled to default’ (241b4). So, there is: (i) restricted goodwill, (ii) jealousy, and (iii) inconsistency of affection, in an association with those dominated by pleasure.

The *philia* of the honour lovers is based on the exchange of pledges and, though this couple spend their lives as friends, their *philia* is not as great as the philosophical types (256d). Such types have an eye on ‘profit’ not ‘pleasure’, which is no guarantee of continued goodwill towards the beloved. One does not wish well to another properly speaking when the end in view for the sake of which one acts is not the other’s good, but ‘future profit’. Once each has got what it wants from the other (the honour that comes from educating a promising youth, for example, cf. *Symp.* 209cf.) the relationship will end. Such a relationship is based on an asymmetry of needs typically outgrown once a youth has entered manhood. So, even if there were reasons for bountiful goodwill in the first instance, which is doubtful if one’s eye is on profiting from the partnership, the relationship will not endure. So, (i) less goodwill and (ii) less consistency characterise this relationship.

The third type, by contrast is generated by a different *eros*. This motivates a different focus, response, and aim, in the relationship. The catalyst for the relationship is the beauty of the other's soul, the investigation of which leads to a relationship based on the recognition of a shared good - philosophical - nature. (cf. 'for it is fated that evil shall never be friend to evil, nor good fail to be friend to good', 255b). Their developing relationship of *philia* is grounded not in the opportunity he provides for profiting or honouring you, or pleasing you), but in his nature (*phusin*, 252e3).³⁶ A philosophical orientation generates a desire to understand the experience of beauty, followed by an attempt to promote the good nature that forms the focus of attention. The philosopher values the other as –'god-like', which, I take it, is to say that he values the other as such. And since the lover is like the beloved in the relevant respects, there is no asymmetry of their good qualities. Their goodwill is returned and there is no jealousy between the pair. This pair spend their lives as friends. There is no asymmetry of needs outgrown once each has got what it wants from the other. The appreciation of the good that grounds the relationship has more potential to endure. This is both because a good nature, as opposed to some accidental feature of the other is more lasting, but also because one's attraction to this good nature is rooted in an overall evaluative orientation dominated by reason. And that evaluative orientation is the only one that provides a unified and consistent framework for binding concern over time. So, in this relationship there is (i) increased and mutual goodwill (255b), based on the fact that the other's good is the focus of the attraction; (ii) no jealousy because they are genuinely concerned with the other's good, not their own pleasure; (253b); and (iii) consistency of affection (256c).

The speeches, then, outline three kinds of *philia* relationship, strikingly similar in many respects, to Aristotle's account of friendship in Books 8 and 9 of his *Ethics*:³⁷

- (a) *pleasure based philia*;
- (b) *philia based on some kind of exchange*;
- (c) *philia based on the mutual recognition of beauty and goodness in the other*.³⁸

The previous analysis of the ranking suggested key features of *philia* conceived here, and the reasons for the ranking. An *eros* of a certain sort is not just a context for the development of friendship in each case; it *determines its nature*. Presumably this is why it is said that the association with such a lover brings happiness from the *philos*, to the object of his *philia*, *because of his eros* (253c). Compare Aristotle: 'People who love each other wish good things for each other *in that respect in which they love*' (NE 1156a9-10). It is the degree of goodwill that is affected by the agent's *eros*,

³⁶ Cf. *Alcibiades I* where Socrates claims that he can correctly be described as a lover of Alcibiades because he loves his soul. Those who love his body do not love Alcibiades, but something that belongs to him. The *Phaedrus* point is similar just insofar as it also claims that loving another in the true and proper sense also requires loving their soul, and this is because the soul is where the real nature of the other resides.

³⁷ Those familiar with Aristotle's account of *philia* in *Nicomachean Ethics* books 8 and 9 will recognise the division I am outlining here, and the ranking, as a familiar one. I have learnt much from Cooper (1999) 312-336.

³⁸ There is no indication that this needs to be complete or perfect goodness. One sees beauty in the boy and a *glimpse* of the god in whose train one followed in the celestial circuit, and seeks to make him as like that as possible (253a). Notice too that the boy naturally *disposed* towards philosophy' (252e3), a disposition not actualised until his association with the lover. The fact that each *discovers* the nature of his own god makes it plain that one is not perfect and god-like already.

which provides the initial motive stimulant for the developing *philia* relationship. The philosopher's concern with the good grounds his interest in the good character of the other, and brings with it a desire to promote that good character by bringing it into sharper focus. This is not valued for the sake of his own pleasure or honour, but valued as something 'god-like'. Moreover, this concern with the good means that he selects someone who has a good character, and is, in this respect, like himself. This facilitates a relationship of equality and reciprocity. Such details suggest that Plato did indeed have an account of *philia*, which he conceived roughly as follows:

A relationship based on the mutual recognition of goodness, which is characterised by reciprocal well wishing towards the other ('*eunoia*'), actively trying to bring that about (reinforcing and cultivating the other's philosophical disposition), and an absence of envy ('*pthonos*'), as the pair lead a life together sharing in thought ('...of one mind').

Caution is required with talk about 'actively trying to bring about some good for the other'. If the contrast with those who give and receive services is to be upheld then even doing good for the other might not be the correct specification of the characteristic activity of these types. This implies inequality and possibly even deficiency in the other at odds with the emphasis on mutuality and equality in this relationship. Perhaps this highlights a difficulty for Plato, who uses the context of erotic relationships, which are characteristically asymmetrical, to forge his account of *philia*. Such were typically conceived as relationships of inequality structured by the dynamics of exchange. Changing such dynamics was one of the features of Socrates' pursuit that Alcibiades found so baffling in the *Symposium*. The *Phaedrus*, too, is concerned with remodelling such relationships. Though the relationship between lover and beloved here is initially one of inequality, and certainly one with a youth, the selected young man has a similar nature and experiences a similarity of desire. Though it would be quite shocking for Plato's contemporaries to conceive of a youth experiencing *anteros*, as he does here, careful attention to the text shows that Plato's remodelling of such relationships remains sensitive to such traditions. The proper object of the *eros* experienced by the youth is the Form of beauty, not the older lover, which the beloved sees reflected back in the desiring gaze of the lover. It is, more appropriately, *philia* which he experiences for the older lover, as he is stunned by the goodwill received from him, and comes to appreciate the other's good nature. Their shared nature grounds the relationship of *philia*, and their shared experience of desire for the image of the Forms grounds the similarity of erotic experience. Since this facilitates a relationship of equality, it would perhaps be better to say that *philia* is not characterised in terms of benefits given or received, but sharing in thought. It is not entirely clear from the *Phaedrus* itself what *homonoia* consists in exactly, and what activity characterises this shared life. In the *Clitophon* *homonoia* is distinguished from *homodoxia* on the grounds that many shared opinions are harmful but friendship is wholly good and the *idion ergon* of justice (409d-410a). The requirement that *homonoia*, as a characteristic feature of friendship, be something good motivates the restriction of *homonoia* to knowledge – as Kamtekar, has argued.³⁹ Knowledge is also a characteristic feature of *homonoia* and friendship as it is conceived in *Alcibiades I* (126c). This makes good sense of the fact that the friends in the *Phaedrus* are rational

³⁹ R. Kamtekar, 'What's the good of agreeing: *Homonoia* in Platonic Politics', *OSAP* (2004) 131-171, esp. 135.

agents concerned with the truth. We need not say that the friends actually possess knowledge, and reflect this in their unity of mind; that would be at odds with the characterisation of the pair as philosophers. *Homonoia* will, perhaps, reflect shared insights in the pursuit of truth. It is tempting to think that the second half of the *Phaedrus* provides an account of the dialectical activity that structures a life of shared perception and thought. Exploring this would be the subject for another occasion. The purpose of this paper is to ascertain whether Plato had the notion of love of another ‘for their own sake’, something that would meet the concerns of his critics. To this I shall not turn.

(b) Love for another ‘for their own sake’?

The superior nature of philosophical *philia* can be illuminated well in terms of a contrast between ‘utility love’, and the love of another ‘for their own sake’. Although the latter notion is an Aristotelian term that does not appear in our text, the highest form of *philia* in the *Phaedrus* appears strikingly similar to that notion in Aristotle. For Aristotle, wishing someone well for their own sake involves a contrast with wishing something well for one’s own purposes (as in *NE* 1155b29-31), and it involves a contrast with wishing someone well because of incidental facts about him (e.g. 1156b7-11), such as his pleasantness or usefulness. A friendship grounded in excellence, by contrast, is a friendship based on what someone essentially is (8.3. 1156b9, 1157a18; cf. 1156b12). To say, then, that you love someone for their own sake, is at least partly to say that you love someone for their essential properties.⁴⁰ If we begin with this notion of what it is to love another ‘for their own sake’, then the *Phaedrus* fares well. The first two kinds of friendship are characterised by the use one person has for another: ‘pay[ing] what he owes’ to the lover in exchange for the beloved’s gratification (241a) in the first case, and an exchange of pledges in the second (255b7). Any goodwill between the parties concerned is restricted by the parameters of their utility, or advantage, and that is why it is of limited benefit. The goodwill increases in philosophical friendship because their interests create the proper conditions for valuing another person: they motivate the focus on the soul, prompt reflective activity, and thereby create the conditions for focus upon, and cultivation of, a ‘god-like’ nature. Since this god-like nature is the other’s original and true nature (252d), we can say (i), that one loves the other for his nature (*phusin*, 252e3), as opposed to some accidental feature (as in the first two types of *philia*). This nature is not valued because it is the other’s nature, however; it is valued as something ‘god-like’, that is, something good. So, we can say (ii), that one loves the other *for his characteristic goodness*.

Since this is something the lover recognises, and values, as god-like, and treats with reverence and awe, we are also inclined to say (iii), that the other is loved as an end. To call something godlike for Plato is a mark of the highest value. But caution is required here. For it is as he cultivates the philosophical and god-like disposition that forms the basis of his fascination with the other that the lover discovers the nature of his own god (‘one *finds the way to it through* the compulsion on them to gaze intently...’, 253a).). The notion that the other is a way in which one can acquire the self-knowledge necessary for one’s own happiness is borne out further in the image of the mirroring of souls used to describe the similar experience of the beloved as he sees his own godlike reflection in his lover (255d). The implication is that just as one

⁴⁰ On the variety of ways in which the phrase ‘for his own sake’ can be construed in Aristotle, see Broadie and Rowe (2002) on *NE* 1155b28-9, and Penner and Rowe (2005) 318.

can see oneself best in a mirror, so one can see oneself best in another who is similarly like oneself and reflects this image back.⁴¹ This suggests that the more the lover benefits the other ('makes him of such a kind as he is disposed to be'), the more he benefits himself by creating the appropriate reflecting image in which to know himself and the god-like nature in which he himself shares. Since the lover benefits, it is not clear that the good of the beloved is, in fact, an independent reason for action, nor that he is valued as an end, and not (at least also) as a means to the well-being of the lover. If so, then we are not entitled to draw the conclusion that Plato does embrace the notion of love of another 'for their own sake'; for the beloved would be valued for the sake of a god-like quality which has instrumental value for the lover.

Though the knowledge gained about the nature and value of his own self is clearly a feature of the relationship, it does not seem to be what motivates the lover to form the association in the first instance. A selection is made 'from the ranks of the beautiful according to his own disposition' (252d), which I take it means that his philosophical disposition orientates him to value of a certain kind. The other is valued not because he shares a similar nature, but insofar as that nature is seen as good. If so, then seeing the other as a mirror in which to see one's own character reflected more clearly is not what grounds the relationship.⁴² Nor is the lover's own benefit the end in view for the sake of which he acts in promoting the godlike qualities perceived in the other. He does not benefit the other *in order that* he can see the divine image in sharper focus. He values philosophical, god-like, activities for themselves, and desires to promote such goods. Though it may be true that he himself benefits by promoting such activities, it is never suggested that this is the reason for the sake of which he engages in the other benefitting activity. It would seem that we have not just other benefitting action here, but a situation where the other's good is an end in view for the sake of which the agent acts. This is supported by the contrast with the motivational states of other agents. If the philosopher were to act for the sake of his self-knowledge, then the distinction between who act for the sake of pleasure, or pledges given and received, would be threatened and the reasons for the superiority of philosophical *philia* would remain unclear. Furthermore, it is only if he appreciates that the good qualities in the other are divine and worthy of reverence and awe – that is, it is only if he values the good perceived in the other for non-instrumental reasons – that he comes to exemplify his own philosophical character, and in so doing bring that into sharper focus. If that is the case, then Plato does have a notion of loving another for their characteristic goodness (i), their nature (ii), and (as philosophers and lovers of the good) this is valued non-instrumentally, as an end (iii). How much of this is unfamiliar to the Aristotelian notion of love of another 'for their own sake'?

It may be the case, and surely is, that one can come to know oneself more fully in a relationship of this kind (see 253a5 and 255d8-e1).⁴³ Self-knowledge has

⁴¹ In the *Alcibiades* 1 a relationship with another is described as crucial in coming to an awareness of oneself as a knower (133b7-10). Another soul can be like a mirror in which one perceives oneself more clearly. If the other is a mirror this presupposes that the other will be similar to us in relevant respects – as a knower, something made explicit in the *Phaedrus*. On this passage in the *Alcibiades*, see Denyer (2001).

⁴² Compare Aristotle: 'The good man is a lover of the good (*philagathos*) not a lover of self (*philautos*); for he loves himself, if at all, because he is good' (*Magna Moralia* II.14 1212b18-20). Cf. Socrates' rebuttal of Aristophanes in the *Symposium* which employs a distinction between the *oikeion* and the *agathon*: no-one, it is held, desires what it *oikeion* unless it is good; the good is the central motivator here.

⁴³ Cf. Cooper (1999) on the best form of *philia* in Aristotle. He turns to the *Magna Moralia* (II. 15 1215a7-26) to explore *NE* IX.9 1169b18-1170a where it is said that the good man wants to *theorien*

been on the agenda from the start.⁴⁴ In the opening conversation with Phaedrus, Socrates claimed that he is not yet capable of knowing himself in accordance with the Delphic inscription; he wants to find out whether he is ‘a beast more complex and more violent than Typhon, or both a tamer and a simpler creature, sharing some divine and un-Typhonic portion by nature’ (230a). In seeing the value of another god-like soul, the philosopher is compelled to investigate the basis of this attraction, and the intensity and reverential nature of his response. In so doing he recovers his own philosophical nature and learns that one is the kind of being that ‘shares some divine portion by nature’.⁴⁵ The point is just that this is neither the reason for cultivating the relationship, nor the end in view for the sake of which the agent acts.

There is a remaining concern. In the account that I have outlined it *philia* and *eros* are related, but distinct. It is not just that erotic relationships provided a context for the development of *philia* relationships for Plato, as they did for his contemporaries. Plato’s account of *philia* is developed in terms of the motivational structure of the agent’s concerned, and this is where *eros* plays a key role. It is a direct result of being a certain kind of person or lover, that is, someone who loves (*eros*) the good, that one learns to value others in the right way. And this is not just an incidental consequence of a love of wisdom, but its cause.⁴⁶ The point of keeping them distinct, however, is just as important. For it is clear from the *Phaedrus*, as it is from the *Symposium*, that *eros*, properly speaking, is a response to value – beauty – and a desire for the agent’s own good and happiness. The proper object for *eros* in both texts is the Form in which beautiful bodies and souls participate. Though *philia* of a certain sort is generated by *eros*, it has a different object: the good character of the other. Hence we can conclude that Plato does view persons as genuine ends of care and concern. The problem is that the lover is described as an *entheon philon* (255b6-7), and the description of him as inspired suggests a source of inspiration above and beyond the boy. Is the proper object of *philia* really the god in whose train the lover followed in the celestial circuit and not the boy? Two features of the text are promising here. First, it is said that the lover holds the beloved responsible for ‘the discovery of the nature of their own god’, and this increases his affection for the boy (*agaposin*, 253a5). Second, this pair *spend their lives* as friends. It does seem as if the other person remains in focus in this relationship, even as their *eros* is directed towards the Forms. There are features of the relationship here that make it difficult to imagine forming with the gods. The gods exist in a state of complete knowledge based on a continual feasting on a vision of the Forms, and experience no motivational conflict of the sort that humans have to struggle with. By their very natures, even the best human characters only glimpse the Forms, struggle against an unruly nature, and require work to re-attain that vision of unity in multiplicity. Given

good actions and one cannot so easily study one’s own actions as those of another. In the *MM* passage it is said that self-knowledge is necessary for *eudaimonia*, and that friendship is the best way to achieve self-knowledge.

⁴⁴ On this see Griswold (1986).

⁴⁵ Cf. Ferrari (1987) 147: ‘You can learn who you are by considering your unconsidered reaction to an encounter with someone beautiful, and thus gain the opportunity to foster and justify the life appropriate to the kind of character you take yourself to be.’

⁴⁶ Arguably, this is also why *eros* is the springboard for the discussion of *philia* in the *Lysis*. I have deliberately avoided the *Lysis*, not only because it is an aporetic dialogue which brings with it a host of interpretative issues, but also because the *Phaedrus* has been neglected as a source of insight into Plato’s views of *philia*. My conclusions here, though, fit nicely with those of Penner and Rowe (2005: 8, n.22; cf. 190-1), who have argued (with reference to the *Lysis*) that the discussion of *philia* there is grounded in an account of desire more generally.

these facts no relationship of mutuality and equality would be possible with the gods. The fact that the kind of *philia* relationship outlined here can only occur between human beings does not settle the worry that ideally it would not be so. After all, Plato does conceive of *philia* with the gods as an ethical ideal elsewhere (*Symp.* 212a6). Ideally, we would like some sense that the proper object of such a relationship is another individual because it is best that it be another individual and not that, given facts about our nature and an asymmetry with the gods, we cannot have such relationships with gods, though ideally we would if we attained the knowledge and virtue possessed by them. But such considerations do not require us to say that the boy is valued for the sake of the god in whose nature he shares. Plato seems concerned here to provide an account of a relationship in which another person is the end of the philosopher's care and concern. And that is why Socrates can draw his conclusion that a relationship with a philosophical lover would provide the most benefits to a young man.

VI Back to the critics

Plato's accounts of *eros* and *philia* in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* suggest the following: *eros* grounds the account of our orientation towards good things and happiness (and of which the proper objects are Forms), and *philia* that towards persons who, if our desires are orientated correctly, can be valued 'for their own sake'. So, how far have we come from the critics of Section 1?

We noted three central problems that were raised in relation to the *Symposium*:

- (i) Persons seemed to be valued as placeholders of predicates of value;
- (ii) Valuable qualities were repeatable and replaceable;
- (iii) Persons had only instrumental value;
- (iv) There is no notion of love for another for their sake and not for ours.

Does the *Phaedrus* fare better? On the one hand, appreciating the relationship between loving someone for their goodness, and loving someone for their nature should help to alleviate the concern that the account is concerned only with the other's best qualities and *not* the individual whole person (Vlastos (1981) 31). As Kosman replied with reference to the *Symposium*, there may be some qualities that are so defining of who a person is that in loving them for those qualities we love them for themselves.⁴⁷ The *Phaedrus* makes this point explicitly: loving the goodness of the other is to love them for their original and true nature (252d). But on the other hand, we might ask to what extent do we love someone as a *particular* individual, if what grounds the love in this case is the person's essential nature, some goodness that is shared with other (philosophically inclined) human beings? This is part of problem (ii). There is, in principle, no reason why one should be exclusive in one's love for other persons on this account. It may be a contingent fact that I cannot love more than one person at any given time, but it is not a necessary feature of such love. Arguably the ancients were less concerned with individuality than we are today, and it might be worth our while to consider why we think this to be of central importance. We cannot say that the problem is that we are not loved for who we are on this account for we have seen that that is evidently not the view of the *Phaedrus*. Perhaps the issue is that if we are not loved as a particular, and exclusively, then there will be a lack of commitment in the relationship. But, again, the *Phaedrus* would disagree. It is

⁴⁷ Kosman, *ibid.*

precisely *because* the relationship is grounded in someone's essential nature and not, say, 'pledges given and received' that this friendship is more enduring than others. For (we infer) a nature is something lasting.⁴⁸ We might not have particularity, then, but we do have some notion of love for another person for who they really are, and the suggestion that such love for another person will be enduring.

Though we have identified a notion of love for another individual for their own sake (to meet problem (iii)), our most pressing problem (iv) remains. The friend is motivated by the good of the other in a way which is compatible with his own interest, and even promotes it, as we have seen. The life of shared aspiration towards the good envisaged in the highest kind of *philia* is of joint benefit to both parties. And this fact might remind us that the critics are left standing; cornered, I hope, but standing nonetheless. Vlastos, at least, wanted some evidence that the account provided evidence of a purely altruistic kind of love, encapsulated by the notion of love 'for their sake *and not for ours*', or what he also termed 'disinterested affection'.⁴⁹ If the highest kind of relationship Plato envisages is of joint benefit to both parties (and they surely are), are we not in danger of the taint of egoism after all? There is no pure altruism here, but a life of shared life of virtue and mutual benefit.⁵⁰ So this is their corner, and it is distinctly Kantian in flavour.

The grounds of the highest kind of friendship did not seem to be tainted with egoism. We provided an account that made no reference to the good of the lover, or the benefits he would receive (such as increased self-knowledge). This was not to say that he did not receive such benefits, but just that they were not the lover's reason for entering into the friendship, nor did self-concern motivate the other benefitting actions. If one still wants to object that though egoistic concerns do not ground the love in this case they are nonetheless involved as part of the characteristic features of the relationship, then we might add the following remarks. We should be cautious about the applicability of such Kantian criteria here. For it is not clear that the notion that the lover develops his own good in the relationship is at odds with at least some of what Kant wanted to exclude from the domain of ethics by expunging the satisfaction of the agent's desires from ethical accounts. Kant wanted to distance his ethics from the idea that we might satisfy our own desires, in part because he held a conception of desire as a non-rational inclination (see, for example, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*: 398-9). Part of the need to distance ethical behaviour from the taint of any satisfaction of the agent's own desires has arisen because this appears to exclude rational assessment of those desires, since desires, as commonly conceived by philosophers since Hobbes and Hume at any rate, are (non-rational) affections or inclinations to which one is either subject or not.⁵¹ Such motivations are particular and emotional and held in contrast to those which are universal and rational. On such a view, these cannot ground actions that form the basis of our ethical achievements, for these must be rationally grounded and of universal applicability. But desires for Plato (and Aristotle) are not Kantian inclinations. It is important to their ethical

⁴⁸ This point is explicit in Aristotle *NE* 1156b12, but suggested in the *Phaedrus* too: see 232e6, 241a and contrast with 256b, d)

⁴⁹ For this notion, see Aristotle *Rhetoric* Book II with Broadie and Rowe (2002: 318).

⁵⁰ Cf. Gill (1998) who argues that notions of reciprocity and shared life replace notions of altruism in much of Greek ethics. See 'Altruism or Reciprocity in Greek Ethical Philosophy' in (ed.) Gill *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (OUP) 303-328, esp. 314: 'other benefiting motivation is best explained by reference to a combination of the social ideals of solidarity and reciprocity'. Cf. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (1999) who avoids all talk of egoism /altruism for similar reasons and talks instead of self-concern and other-concern.

⁵¹ On this issue see Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford, 1970) p4.

theories that some desires are open to rational assessment, can be rationally justified, and are not just given inclinations. Some desires – those for the good – are deliberately and actively cultivated through the leading of a certain kind of rationally reflective life. These are desires for which we can be held responsible, and which can be rationally assessed, as an important part of our ethical lives. Since both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* in different ways make it clear that the highest kind of interpersonal relationships are those that are grounded in precisely this kind of rational desire, the idea that we might love another person ‘for their sake and for our own’ does not have some of the implications from which Kantians desire to maintain their distance. To say, that we love someone for their own sake and for ours, is not to admit that we love other persons for their sake and for the satisfaction of some non-rational inclination; rather, it is to say that we love other persons for their sake and for the sake of our rational grounded orientation towards things of real value. For both Plato and Kant, other directed concerns are freely chosen and rational, and at least in this respect can fall into the category of the morally praiseworthy. Furthermore, the motivational structure of the Platonic agent who acts from this kind of desire is reliable, and not transient and capricious, and it can motivate him to act contrary to inclinations of an appetitive kind. The distance between Plato and Kant need not be so great if we bear in mind that for neither thinker basic inclinations are determining our ethical actions. We need not accept a moral psychological framework that groups motives in categories of duty versus inclination and then views the latter as primarily egoistic. Part of the virtue of Plato’s analysis of *philia* in terms of its motivational structure in the *Phaedrus* is that it highlights this discrepancy between a Kantian moral psychology and a Platonic one. Nor, then, do we need to accept the remaining criticisms of Plato which are grounded in such assumptions. If so, perhaps Vlastos’ Kantian objection need not cut so deep either.

Conclusion

I have argued that the *Symposium* does not provide, and was not meant to provide, Plato’s account of interpersonal love; it is an account of the desire for happiness, and individuals are not proper objects of that particular desire. This is a perfectly inoffensive conclusion. We might still want to know whether persons have any role to play in the acquisition and cultivation of the good life. Plato, like Aristotle, explores that issue in an account of *philia*. I have argued that we can reconstruct an account of *philia* from the *Phaedrus*. Moreover, in showing how *eros* and *philia* work together the *Phaedrus* shows how an *eros* for wisdom (forms) functions together with our attachments to others. Plato had, in fact, a deeply rich and humane account of interpersonal love that requires us to take responsibility for our own selves and to properly orientate our own desires before we embark a life with significant others. That, I submit, is fundamentally why his account of *eros* is not the end of his account of interpersonal love, but its proper beginning.

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