

## PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM<sup>1</sup>: VIRTUE AS A LESSER GOOD?

In Plato's *Symposium* Socrates reports a conversation in which Diotima<sup>2</sup> revealed to him the nature of love<sup>3</sup>. I will argue that in this account there is much to indicate that the guide<sup>4</sup> (Socrates for example) is primarily con-

1. Unless otherwise stated I am using Christopher Gill's translation.

2. Diotima's role has interested and intrigued many scholars. R. E. Allen suggests that Diotima is used as it would be inappropriate for Socrates to give a speech in praise of *Eros*, since he is closely linked to it in Alcibiades' speech. Allen states that love «will turn out to fit Socrates himself», *The Dialogues of Plato: Volume 2, Symposium*, p. 46. F. N. Cornford refers to this as a «masterstroke of delicate courtesy», *The Unwritten Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 71, because it allows Socrates to indirectly criticize Agathon, in whose honour the symposium has been held. However, while these points may be persuasive, the true significance of Diotima's role is that it allows Plato to move away from traditional pederasty. This is why Socrates rejects Alcibiades' seduction of him (217 c): sexual interaction has no place within an educational environment. Gould also notes: «[a]s for sexuality, it is, Plato maintained, a perfectly natural, but somewhat unimaginative manifestation of love correctly understood», *Platonic Love*, p. 1. Thus I am in agreement with Halperin when he states that Diotima «signals Plato's departure from certain aspects of the sexual method of his contemporaries and thereby enables him to highlight some central features of his own philosophy», *Why is Diotima a Woman?*, in D. HALPERIN, (ed.), *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp. 113-151.

For an interesting feminist perspective on the role of Diotima, cf. L. IRIGARAY, *Sorcerer Love: A Reading of Plato's Symposium, Diotima's Speech*, in N. TUANA, (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Plato*, pp. 181-195. Cf. also, S. HAWTHORNE, *Diotima Speaks Through the Body*, in B.-A. BAR ON, (ed.), *Engendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle*, pp. 83-97.

3. I agree with Thomas Gould's suggestion that: «Diotima ... is the high point of that dialogue» (*Platonic Love*, pp. 1-2). For this reason I shall primarily be referring to this account of love. However, the alternative strategy of reading the speeches as interconnected is employed by: Stanley ROSEN, *Symposium*, p. 198; E. STEHLE, *Performance and Gender in Ancient Greece: Non-dramatic Poetry in its Setting*, p. 222; W. S. COBB, *Symposium and Phaedrus: Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, p. 12; W. JAEGER, *Paideia, The Ideals of Greek Culture: Volume II, In Search of the Divine Centre*, p. 194. Cf. also C. D. C. REEVE, *Plato on Love: Lysis, Symposium, Phaedrus, Alcibiades, with Selections from Republic and Laws*, p. xxii.

4. Each time that I use the term guide I am referring to the Platonic lover who has seen the Form and who also assists his beloved in this regard. Additionally, each time that I use the term beloved, I am referring to the one who is being assisted by the guide on the ascent. The guide has knowledge of the existence of the Form but this knowledge is not exhaustive. Therefore, it should not be a contentious issue that I take Socrates to be a guide.

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cerned with assisting his beloved. There is no greater good for the guide than that which is generated by assisting his beloved, and, as such, assisting him is his primary objective. There is also, however, evidence to suggest the contrary. The philosopher who is in love with another has, it would seem, two loves: he is by definition a lover of wisdom, and he is also a lover of another person. This issue of where the true allegiance of the guide lies has been the subject of debate. It has been asked: does the guide love his beloved solely because he is the means of developing knowledge of the Form of Beauty? This question stems, in large part, from 210 e<sup>5</sup> where Plato writes that all of the efforts of love are undergone to achieve the 'ultimate objective' of seeing the Form of Beauty<sup>6</sup>.

In this article I shall attempt to reconcile this 'ultimate objective' of love with the view that the guide's assisting of his beloved is not a lesser concern for him. I will argue that the virtuous character of the guide is his true object of love because this is what generates reproduction and the good<sup>7</sup>. Reproduction, I will hold, generates a co-constituted good which is shared by both the guide (in actualizing his virtuous character) and the beloved (in progressing on the ascent)<sup>8</sup>. This co-constituted good is the outcome of generating virtue in another and is, for the guide, equivalent to that of contemplating the Form of Beauty.

In section I of this article, I shall argue that the object of love is virtuous character; in section II, I shall argue that the production of virtuous

5. «The ultimate objective of all previous efforts» (οὗτος οὖν ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων ἔσχατος σκοπὸς ὃν οἱ ἐμπεροσθεν πάντες πόνου ἤσαν).

6. Cf. for example, G. VLASTOS, The Individual as Object of Love in Plato, in IDEM, *Platonic Studies*, pp. 3-34.

7. That virtuous character is not explicitly mentioned in the dialogue is no great obstacle. It is clear that the objects of love are valued and from this it is clear that things of value will be interacted with in an appropriate manner. That is, if I value something I will also be careful not to harm it. Beauty and love, therefore, refer to objects of love and virtuous interaction. Appropriate interaction, I will show below, relates to interaction that leads to education and the development of the beloved. As such, love, in Plato's schema, presupposes virtuous character.

8. T. Irwin suggests: «Plato speaks of the effects of love as 'educating' or moulding», *Plato's Ethics*, p. 311. The educational aspect of the Platonic love relationship is also identified by J. M. Rist who characterises it as: «[the] pupil-master relationship», *Eros and Psyche: Studies in Plato, Plotinus and Origen*, p. 24. Or, as P. Friedländer puts it: «Diotima envisages the way of love as guidance of young boys, as an act of education», *Plato, Volume I: An Introduction*, p. 68. In relation to the import that virtue has on this educational framework, W. Jaeger states: «Even in the first speeches about *Eros*, Plato brought out the fact that *Eros* implies a yearning towards moral beauty ...», *Paideia, The Ideals of Greek Culture: Volume II, In Search of the Divine Centre*, p. 194. Pierre Hadot also notes the transformative aspect of the knowledge generated by conversing with Socrates when he states the following: «the interlocutor, too, is cut in two: there is the interlocutor as he was *before* his conversation with Socrates, and there is the interlocutor who, in the course of their constant mutual accord, has identified himself with Socrates, and who henceforth will never be the same again», *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, p. 154.



character, produced by the interaction between the guide and the beloved, is the highest worldly manifestation of Beauty; in section III, I shall reconcile the ultimate object of love with generating the highest worldly manifestation of Beauty. I shall outline this argument with particular reference to Frisbee C. C. Sheffield's work, *Plato's Symposium: The Ethics of Desire*. It is my view that Sheffield places too much emphasis upon the role of contemplation, to the extent that she does not discern that the philosopher's primary virtue is his virtuous character; this necessarily demands his assistance of his beloved. In taking this view, Sheffield has unnecessarily cast the guide's virtuous character and his assisting of his beloved as both a secondary good and a secondary concern for him.

### I. Virtuous Character as the Object of Love: An Overview of Sheffield's Position

In Socrates' account, love is said to have an object (206 a) which is not beauty but rather «reproduction and birth in beauty» (τῆς γεννήσεως καὶ τοῦ τόκου ἐν τῷ καλῷ, 206 e). Intrinsic to the object of love is the activity of generating reproduction in beauty. The resultant consequence of this activity, it is stated, will be having the good forever (206 a)<sup>9</sup>. This, Socrates states, necessarily suggests that «the object of love must be immortality as well» (207 a)<sup>10</sup>. If this was not perplexing enough, Socrates goes on to make the following claim at 210 e: perceiving beauty «single in form» (211 b) is «the ultimate objective of all previous efforts» (210 e-211 a). Referring to the Form of Beauty in this manner seems to suggest that loving the beloved is secondary, in some way, to contemplating the Form.

But does this 'ultimate objective' have to be read in this way? The activities that lead to the good and to reproduction in beauty are referred to in a way that suggests that «wisdom and other kinds of virtue» (209 a) must be produced if they are to be had at all. At 205 e it is stated: «I don't think that each of us is attached to his own characteristics, unless you are going to describe the good as 'his own' and as 'what belongs to him' and the bad as 'what does not belong to him'»<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, the condition of having

9. «the only object of people's love is the good ... they should have the good forever» (ὁ ἕρως τοῦ τοῦ ἀγαθὸν αὐτῷ εἶναι ἀεί, 205 e - 206 a).

10. However, since my concerns are more focused on understanding the nature of the good, I will limit my comments on immortality to what I say in n. 26.

11. There is some discrepancy amongst the various translations of this passage. Both C. Gill and T. Griffith refer to the good, and the attachment of qualities, as the manner in which man's qualities come to be considered his own. However, neither Nehamas and Woodruff nor C. J. Rowe refer to the idea of the good in this manner. Rowe's translation emphasizes that, *contra* Aristophanes, the 'other half' is not the object of love: «[f]or it's not, what is their



something requires that it be produced in line with the good, since anything else would not be said to 'belong to him'<sup>12</sup>. This forces two immediate questions: (i) who is virtue being produced in? And (ii) what is the status of the guide's good and its relationship to his beloved's good?

Responding to these questions, Sheffield's position suggests that the good of the guide is related to that of the beloved, who is reaping the benefits of instruction from him. For Sheffield the good that comes about *via* philosophizing is generated in and through the activity of contemplation. If the guide is a lover of wisdom, he engages in that love by contemplating. The ultimate 'objective of love', on her account, is coming to some awareness of the Form of Beauty through the activity of contemplation. As she puts it: «*eudaimonia* resides in contemplation of beauty; this is the highest virtue, the best good for human beings<sup>13</sup>». However, Sheffield also argues that «human beings cannot engage in continuous contemplative activity» (179), and, since the guide cannot contemplate *ad infinitum*, he therefore assists his beloved because it is some kind of secondary good.

From these conclusions two things can be inferred: (i) that she takes contemplation to be that which generates the good (where the good signifies reproduction in beauty in the man contemplating), and (ii) that assisting another is predicated upon an inability to contemplate perpetually and is therefore a secondary good. The latter is achieved in the following manner: the guide traverses his 'steps' by 'assisting' another with his ascent, so that he can re-practice the steps of the ascent and thereby «again, realize

own that either group is embracing, except if someone calls the good 'what belongs to' him». Nehamas and Woodruff also stress this but they add: «I don't think each individual takes joy in what belongs to him unless by belonging to me he means the good ...».

The reason that I favour Gill is that the idea of having to produce the good to attain qualities is very much in line with the message of Diotima. The idea that a man's mental qualities, no less than his physical qualities, can be said to be in his possession can be the case only insofar as they are renewed. Therefore, the 'having' of good qualities is necessarily dependent upon having produced the good.

12. This point may at first appear somewhat strange, but the concept of the good outlined here is very much in keeping with Plato's schema. In the *Apology*, for example, Plato writes that: «wealth does not bring about excellence [virtue], but excellence makes wealth and everything else good for men, both individually and collectively» (30 b). The point that Plato is making is grasped quite well by Vlastos, who notes: «he is not saying that the non-moral goods ... have no value at all [but that their value is engendered by virtue and] this is what makes all other things valuable», *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, p. 220. In the *Apology*, it is virtue or excellence that has the power to attach value or to assign a general quality to things. (A similar argument is made in the *Alcibiades* 134 a, where Socrates states that: «it is impossible to prosper unless ... [a man] is self-controlled and good»). In the *Symposium*, the only difference is that the good is what is said to attach qualities to men. That said, it nevertheless remains the case that Plato understands virtue and the good to be that which allows other things to have the quality of value attached to them.

13. F. C. C. SHEFFIELD, *Plato's Symposium*, p. 136.



the good» (179) for himself. «Such practices», she continues, «will not be at odds with one's own happiness ...» (179-180) The highest virtue resides exclusively in contemplation and the assisting of others is «a way of manifesting the virtue of *νοῦς* ... in a less perfect way» (180).

The assistance that the guide provides is in one way or another motivated by his inability to contemplate. He assists his beloved only on the grounds that there is some overlap of benefit but, since this leads to a less perfect manifestation of *νοῦς*, it must likewise generate a secondary or lesser good. If reproduction involves interaction with another, on Sheffield's version of events, this is so only on the grounds that the overlap results in a lesser good for the guide which, due to the inability to contemplate *ad infinitum*, is the only reward on offer to him. While this strategy has its merits, Sheffield nevertheless appears to suggest that the virtuous character of the guide is likewise a secondary concern. This must be the case since the philosopher is a lover of wisdom and truth, thus any activity that generates a lower manifestation of *νοῦς* must surely be of secondary concern. But does this resultant dichotomy of greater and lesser goods adequately answer my second question regarding the status of the guide's good? If the object of Platonic love is virtuous character, as opposed to contemplation, then I am not assured that it does.

In Sheffield's account, contemplating the Form is central because it relates to the 'ultimate objective' of love and the realizing of the 'greater' good. Yet, this could not be the original desire of the man beginning the ascent. He is not yet aware that the Form even exists and so there must be some object of love prior to this object since, if he is not aware of the Form, he can neither contemplate it nor desire it<sup>14</sup>. Taking the case of Alcibiades as an example, it is clear that he is initially possessed of a desire to become «as good a person as possible» (218 d), a man who has knowledge of «the subjects that you must examine if you're going to become a good person» (222 a). Moreover, since Alcibiades believes that Socrates, his guide, has such knowledge and is in fact such a person, it follows that the object of his love is not just knowledge of such subjects but is also the desire to become as Socrates is.

14. That knowledge of the soul seems to bear a relation to knowledge of the Form is problematic for Sheffield's position. Since knowledge of the soul and love are outlined prior to discussing either the ascent or seeing the Form of Beauty, it would appear as though this knowledge is essential to both making the ascent and seeing the Form. Therefore, coming to knowledge of the Form of Beauty will, to some extent, relate to coming to knowledge of the soul. Turning to Plato's *Phaedrus* may also prove informative here.

In the *Phaedrus*, as C. L. Griswold acutely notes, there is no mention of recollection leading us to, as it were, 'unlock' the knowledge of the soul's nature: «If there is no idea of soul, then there is no anamnesis of the soul *qua* soul, and self-knowledge cannot in principle be recollective in that sense ...», *Self-knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 89.



The desire to contemplate subjects is not originally understood to be a virtue or a good in itself since the good or virtue is the outcome of contemplation. The good that the guide has in virtue of contemplation relates to his virtuous character, where virtue implies an active engagement with others. Thus, it is the attainment of such character that is the object of love for the man beginning the ascent. In light of this, if Sheffield's position is correct, the question is: at what stage would his initial primary objective, the desire to become a good man, be superseded in favour of contemplating the Form of Beauty? I suggest that the former project never ceases to be the primary concern of the guide.

Since the guide's good and virtue are achieved by engaging with others, desiring to become the guide will also involve the desire to help others. Therefore, why not interpret the good generated by the guide's assisting his beloved as both the greatest good and as part and parcel of the guide's maintaining of his virtuous character<sup>15</sup>? From this perspective, it already appears as though Sheffield's dichotomy with regard to greater and lesser goods is unwarranted, since the good of both the guide and the beloved are entwined.

## II. Instances of Worldly Beauty: Towards Virtue

Sheffield could argue that the desire to become the guide is usurped as the primary concern once the Form of Beauty is intuited. For Sheffield «one comes to be in the presence of the form of beauty by understanding beauty» (153), and only «the form can cause the proper emergence of νοῦς ...» (131). This means that understanding the Form involves being in its presence; this presence is what generates virtue. Yet, what does this say of being in the presence of instances of beauty, and, more to the point, what exactly is understood as an instance of beauty in the world?

Sheffield argues that men who are beautiful in body, for example, are valued in themselves because they «... exhibit the character of the form. If beautiful bodies and souls embody the supremely valuable character

15. For example, reading 205 e in conjunction with 208 a («we are not the same person as regards our knowledge ... Forgetting is the departure of knowledge, while study puts back new information in our memory to replace what is lost»), it is clear that both the good and the 'attachment' of qualities have to be continually reproduced, irrespective of whether or not they have already been generated. This means that the man who has become a guide must continually maintain his character. As M. P. Nichols also notes, the completion of the ascent implies a «beginning» in which the guide «generates» in another: *Socrates on Friendship and Community: Reflections on Plato's Symposium, Phaedrus, and Lysis*, pp. 67-68. Moreover, why should the guide's virtuous character not also involve virtuous forms of interacting with his beloved?





of the form, then they will be worth valuing for their own sakes too ...» (173). And while beautiful bodies do have a role in the ascent they are also referred to as something petty (210 c). This does not mean, however, that they are of no value but, rather, that they are of little value.

This reference to the role of physical beauty on the ascent also suggests, I argue, that it is beautiful only insofar as it is fulfilling its role on the ascent. It is the response to 'physical beauty' that signifies progression on the ascent and, as such, this is why it is placed so low on the ascent<sup>16</sup>. The beauty that physical beauty can be said to possess relates, on the ascent, to appropriate ways of interaction with such beauty<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, if it is beautiful, it is only so because it relates to the process of moving away from being exclusively concerned with physicality. Yet, this response to physical beauty is not contained within it but rather relates to the soul of the man reacting to it: physical beauty does not suggest or incite a virtuous response from anyone except the man of virtuous character. This implies that the beauty that Socrates is in pursuit of should not be understood as physical but rather as that of virtuous interaction that leads to development or progression on the ascent.

Reading Plato's account in this manner provides an explanation of the guide's motivation for assisting his beloved: he does so in order to maintain his own virtuous character. Reproduction in the beautiful is the objective of love and provides a way of understanding the co-constituted good: Socrates/the guide maintains his virtuous character by helping his beloved to progress on the ascent. The consequences of this union are that the guide maintains his virtuous character by transferring virtue and good to the beloved, and the beloved generates virtue and good for himself.

This distribution of good and virtue does not imply that the guide 'gives' the beloved all of the good or virtue that he can attain. The guide demonstrates that the Form exists and not that this information leads, immediately, to the ability to see «all [the] other things [that] share its character» (211 b). It is the task of the beloved to apply this knowledge

16. This line of thinking fits quite congruently with Alcibiades' statement that Socrates has an inner beauty which can be compared to the «Statue of Silenus» (215). Later, he states that he «admired» Socrates because of his «self-control and courage» (219 d). This could also be interpreted as suggesting that, for Plato, worldly beauty is better understood as beauty of character.

17. Since beautiful bodies *per se* do not contain the ethical response needed for the ascent, it seems fitting that Plato characterises the soul in the following way at *Phaedrus* 246 b: «To begin with, our driver is in charge of a pair of horses; second, one of his horses is beautiful and good and from stock of the same sort, while the other is the opposite and has the opposite sort of bloodline» [καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ἡμῶν ὁ ἄρχων συνωρίδος ἡνιοχεῖ, εἰ τὰ τῶν ἵππων ὁ μὲν αὐτῷ καλὸς τε καὶ ἀγαθὸς καὶ ἐκ τοιοῦτων, ὁ δ' ἐξ ἐναντίων τε καὶ ἐναντίος]. Here, the lack of moral response is indicated by the reference to the lack of noble bloodline.

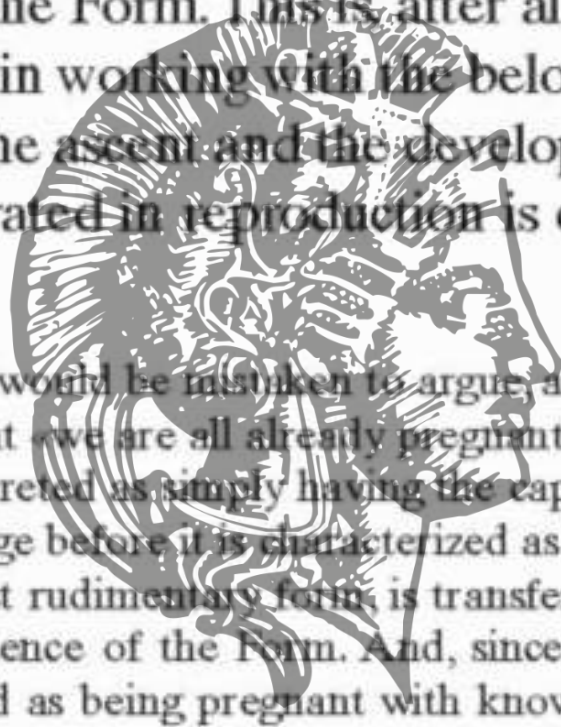


to the world. Therefore, the guide's role can be viewed as that of transferring virtue (by nurturing the beloved's capacity to interact with others), and the beloved's as generating virtue<sup>18</sup>. This, I contend, moves beyond Sheffield's reducing of the guide's role to: «[discussing] his insights about beauty ... [and perceiving] argumentative deficiencies ...» (123).

Sheffield rightly argues that the man making the ascent must do so for himself; that is, he should not imagine that his guide will somehow completely solve his lack of virtue. As she states: «The transformative benefits of an erotic relationship with Socrates are thwarted by ... [the] fixation upon Socrates as an individual and the repository of all that can make [him] happy» (204). Yet, must this be emphasized to the extent that there is «no such transference of virtue ...»? (164). I suggest that the guide's instruction of his beloved involves providing him with a form of discourse that requires his active participation. At the same time, the guide directs him, in a dialogical manner, to knowledge of the nature of love/soul and knowledge of the existence of the Form. This is, after all, what happens in the dialogue. In which case, it is in working with the beloved that the guide best facilitates his progress on the ascent and the development of his virtuous character<sup>19</sup>. The good generated in reproduction is co-constituted and

18. F. C. C. Sheffield contends that it would be mistaken to argue, as A. W. Price does, that virtue is transferred, on the grounds that «we are all already pregnant with virtue» (p. 175, n. 43). Yet, this pregnancy could be interpreted as simply having the capacity to become virtuous. If contemplation requires knowledge before it is characterized as a virtue (even in Sheffield's view), this knowledge, in its most rudimentary form, is transferred to the beloved by his guide demonstrating the very existence of the Form. And, since being «pregnant with virtue» does not have to be interpreted as being pregnant with knowledge of the Form, or that virtue is restricted to contemplation, I take it to be unproblematic to hold that the guide transfers virtue to his beloved. This is so because, as I shall show, this knowledge opens up the possibility of becoming a guide and morally interacting with others.

19. T. Irwin argues that progression on the ascent is generated by the fact that «at each stage of the ascent the pupil tests his aspirations against his present objects of admiration, and ... finds the objects inadequate to the aspiration», *Plato's Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues*, p. 170. Price argues that: «nothing has been said to indicate that attraction by the new [stage of the ascent] is preceded, and motivated, by dissatisfaction with the old [stage]». *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, p. 42. He continues, «Plato may be [simply] supposing that each stage justifies itself once the guide has prompted its achievement ...» (*ibid*). I argue that Price's and Irwin's points are compatible. As per Irwin's suggestion, the beloved may be motivated towards a higher level on the ascent by the inadequacies of his current level but not with reference to the next level on the ascent. However, since the beloved's initial objective was to become a guide, it is clear that any object which, *contra* Price, does not yield that outcome would be inadequate. Moreover, it is also the case that the guide can assist his beloved to progress on the ascent by, as per Price, 'prompting' his beloved to newer levels of beauty. Yet, I add that each level on the ascent represents not just new levels of beauty but new beautiful objects to interact with virtuously. The culmination of the ascent, as I shall show below, refers not just to knowledge of the Form but to ways of interaction predicated upon this knowledge.





this is a sentiment that is at the heart of 205 e: the good of the guide is maintained, or to use an Aristotelian term, actualized, only by successfully helping the beloved to progress on the ascent<sup>20</sup>.

I contend that the very activity of generating virtue in another and thereby actualizing one's own virtuous character is the supreme example of a worldly instance of beauty. This is so because the worldly beauty of reproduction, as the development and maintenance of virtue, is what is common to each level of the ascent. The worldly beauty that Plato is concerned with is the beauty of virtue and character generated in and through the production of the co-constituted good. If something is beautiful in this world, it is so only on the grounds that it relates to the reproduction of virtue. Hence, 205 e states that the production of all qualities, including beauty, is dependent upon the production of the good.

Yet, as stated, this good relates to the good achieved by the guide in assisting his beloved, and so, *contra* Sheffield, the good is not generated by any isolated act of contemplation. Thus the highest level of worldly beauty is not physical beauty or, for that matter, beautiful forms of learning but is in fact the co-constituted good achieved in reproduction. Virtuous character is the object of love, because it generates reproduction and the co-constituted good and, as such, the worldly manifestations of Beauty.

ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑ

ΑΘΗΝΩΝ

### III. Reinstating the Assisting of Others as the Primary Concern of the Guide

Contemplation and thinking will still have a role to play in this process since reproduction is achieved through dialogue and reflection, leading to progression on the ascent. Contemplation, thus, relates to reproduction, but it is misguided to hold, as Sheffield does, that this alone is what generates the good, reproduction, or happiness. The good is a co-constituted phenomenon and is not an activity undergone in isolation but rather one that is generated from the relationship between the guide and his beloved<sup>21</sup>.

The good that is generated in this dual type of reproduction suggests that there is no need to posit a hiatus between the object of a man's love when

20. Regarding the guide's actualizing of his own character by assisting his beloved, cf. A. W. Price, who states in relation to immortality: «we may think of the man as speaking and acting in ways that simultaneously renew and develop his qualities in himself, and bestow the same on the other», *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, p. 28.

21. This argument is also to be found in the work of Price, who contends that: «contemplation (*Symp.*, 210 d 4) and looking (212 a 2) cannot be self-contained activities when their objects are the moral, or practical, Forms», *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, p. 51. The 'practical' aspect of knowledge of the Form of Beauty is engaging in the assisting of others. Therefore, the activities of Platonic love refer to the production of the co-constituted good, and not simply to contemplation.





he begins the ascent and the object of his love as he reaches its heights. The 'ultimate objective' of the ascent is the generation of «true virtue» (212 a) through the production of virtuous character. But why should it be the case that this ability relates exclusively to the virtue of the guide? It is true that he is the one who sees the Form of Beauty (hence he can generate true virtue), but there is nothing to indicate that this capacity must be restricted to that of his own<sup>22</sup>. If this is the case, the initial desire to become the guide is fulfilled only when the Form is seen and virtue is reproduced in the beloved. It must be asked, however, since the guide does not have to opt out of his desire to be virtuous in order to assist his beloved, how does the good of this project relate to the good of seeing the Form of Beauty?

Sheffield takes the view that knowledge is the «sufficient condition of virtue» (116) and so knowledge of the Form of Beauty is generated by seeing in the sense of contemplating the Form; contemplation is therefore virtue, and by extension the 'greater' good, because it relates to knowing the Form of Beauty. This reasoning appears to be sound, but Plato has much to say that extends virtue beyond this. For example, at 209 b-c it is stated that when a guide encounters his beloved «he immediately finds he has the resources to talk about virtue and about what a good man should be like and should do, and tries to educate him» (ἐκτελεσθεὶς παιδεύειν). Since doing, here, relates directly to knowing and instruction, I contend that knowledge of and seeing the Form also require the activity of assisting others.

The process of assisting the beloved to reproduce is not a less perfect manifestation of *νοῦς* since wisdom and virtue, in this context, do not refer to an isolated having, but to an activity that leads to the production of the co-constituted good. It is for this reason that the guide's primary concern is the reproduction of his virtuous character *via* his virtuous interaction with his beloved; this is where *νοῦς* becomes one with character in actuality. Stating that wisdom is beautiful does not, after all, equate to it being beautiful only in the isolated possession of it. Yet, there is much to suggest that wisdom and virtue relate to the activities that lead to reproduction and to the co-constituted good. This good, after all, is what is generated by both the guide's and the beloved's commitment to the production of their virtuous characters<sup>23</sup>.

22. Sheffield cites 212 a 3-5 (p. 175, n. 44), where it is stated that the man who sees the Form «is said to nurture true virtue by or for himself». However, this is not as problematic for my account as it may appear. Firstly, as I have outlined, the man being guided on the ascent ultimately becomes the guide. The 'for himself' is also not problematic for my view since this 'for himself' refers to a virtue that, if it is to be actualized or maintained, requires the assisting of another.

23. G. R. F. Ferrari is correct in stating: «By thinking about the soul ... we can change our souls – in other words, the soul is able to change itself by virtue of its own proper activity, thought», *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 125. But I add the caveat



I have also argued that reproduction and the co-constituted good represent the highest worldly manifestation of the Form of Beauty. This was so on the grounds that the beautiful things, qualities or attributes that relate to men are generated and possessed as a consequence of the co-constituted good. Moreover, knowing the Form to the extent of knowing that «all other things share its character» (211 b), implies knowing how such things are produced. And since the production of the good is what allows good qualities to be possessed by men, it follows that seeing the Form in its worldly manifestation will involve producing the good. In the absence of the knowledge that leads to the ability to generate virtue, the beloved could not fulfil his desire to become a guide. Thus, seeing the Form is the criteria for becoming the guide.

The Form, however, is seen only after passing through the various stages on the ascent. These stages represent the progression toward the Form through a hierarchy of its worldly instances. The Form, therefore, is seen with reference to all of the previous stages of the ascent, that is, its worldly instances. Neither instances nor the Form are completely distinct from one another, hence the reference to a sharing of character, and so the guide's seeing of the Form is akin to seeing its instances<sup>24</sup>.

There is thus an intrinsic link between seeing the Form and knowing that the production of the co-constituted good is what generates worldly representations of Beauty. Moreover, since the seeing of instances of beauty relates directly to seeing the Form, seeing the co-constituted good likewise implies seeing the Form. Therefore, not only does the guide have the ability to see the Form in a contemplative manner but, as consequence of this, he can make this seeing or understanding manifest in the world. Knowing the nature or structure of the 'guide's good', thus, opens up the possibility of a worldly glimpse of the Form of Beauty because this good is what produces all of its worldly instances<sup>25</sup>. Seeing the Form

that this activity need not be restricted to an individual thinking in isolation and developing only himself. Therefore, when A. E. Taylor states: «we are only truly men insofar as we are becoming something more» (*Plato: The Man and His Work*, p. 226), I read this as being achieved through assisting another.

24. It for this reason that 210 c-d is translated by Gill as follows: «Looking now at beauty in general and not just at individual instances ... [from this] he will be turned towards the great sea of beauty ...». The 'not just at instances' is directly related to seeing the Form of Beauty, and therefore should not be read as stating that seeing the Form is not akin to seeing its instances. As such, seeing instances bears a direct relation to seeing the Form.

25. When Plato states: «From forms of learning, he should end up at that form of learning which is of nothing other than *that* beauty itself, so that he can complete the process of learning what beauty really is» (211 c), he himself leaves a gap between forms of learning and jumps to «gazing on beauty itself» (211 d). Yet, if this is related to reproduction and the constituted good, there would be no gap here at all. Learning the nature of reproduction and the co-constituted good, by analogy, allows the beloved to see the Form. That the co-



is not a greater good than assisting the beloved since this assistance relates to seeing the Form and to producing that by which it is seen<sup>26</sup>.

Thus, being in the presence of the Form, in all of its manifestations, involves something greater than the guide's ability or inability to contemplate or know the Form. Being in its presence involves assisting another to generate its worldly manifestation and progress on the ascent. The 'ultimate objective' of seeing the Form has now been shown to be concomitant with reproduction and the co-constituted good. Thus, assisting the beloved can be said to be the guide's primary concern, since the object of love, virtuous character, cannot be achieved without doing so. The 'ultimate object' of love is neither distinct from the guide assisting his beloved, nor is it a good which is in some way superior to the co-constituted good; it is part of the same project and the same good.

## Conclusion

I have argued that the guide's primary task is comprised, in equal measure, of both seeing the Form and assisting the beloved to generate virtue in order to maintain the guide's virtuous character. The guide has a virtue in seeing the Form but it is not a virtue that exists *qua* 'seeing' or knowing; it is rather assisting the beloved that qualifies it as a virtue. Thus, the co-constituted good is intrinsically bound up with assisting the beloved, since this is the guide's only route to having the good. Moreover, since the beloved's good will eventually be produced in and through the activities of being the guide, seeing and contemplating the Form will not, in any way, be a good which is distinct from the good that is generated by assisting another<sup>27</sup>.

constituted good, and all that this entails, should be what facilitates the seeing of the Form is in keeping with how the Form is characterised: «unmixed, not cluttered up with human flesh and colours and a great mass of mortal rubbish» (211 e). The co-constituted good is likewise unmixed and not, as argued above, contained in physical matter. Moreover, it is generated by producing true virtue as a consequence of seeing the Form. This opens up the possibility of becoming a guide, and of the guide maintaining his virtuous character. This also supports my view that seeing the Form is not a greater good than the good generated by assisting the beloved. Seeing the co-constituted good is bound up with seeing the Form.

26. The notion of immortality (the possession of the good forever) may seem to be a cause for concern regarding my suggestion that the good is co-constituted. It can be asked: how could man's immortality be co-constituted? This question is not as problematic as it appears; for one thing, I am in agreement with Sheffield when she states: «there is no need to translate τὸ ἀθάνατον as the immortal meaning immortality ... it may just as well mean the immortal thing» (92). She also contends: «the point is not that he will live on; immortality in this case resides in the perfection of soul» (151). However, I am of the view that the perfection of the soul will require assisting another.

27. My reading of the *Symposium* suggests that Plato, at least at this point in his writing, had not abandoned the view that «the greatest good for a man [is] to discuss virtue every



Sheffield's dichotomy of greater and lesser manifestations of *νοῦς* is not required once the object of the Platonic love is understood to be the maintaining of virtuous character. The Form of Beauty is made manifest in the world through this process and it is precisely with reference to this manifestation that the guide can see the Form. The 'ultimate objective' of love is not dissociated from the initial desire to become «as good a person as possible» (218 d) but is, in fact, an intrinsic aspect of it. Reproduction itself – giving birth in beauty – implies that being in the presence of Beauty refers not simply to understanding the Form, but to generating its highest manifestation. Therefore, the assistance with which the guide provides his beloved should not be understood as a lesser manifestation of *νοῦς* or as a task that is not his primary objective, since the object of his love is virtuous character.

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day ... and [test himself] and others» (*Apology*, 38 a). Therefore, it is difficult to understand how or why Sheffield argues that Plato understands the assisting of others to be a less perfect manifestation of *νοῦς*.



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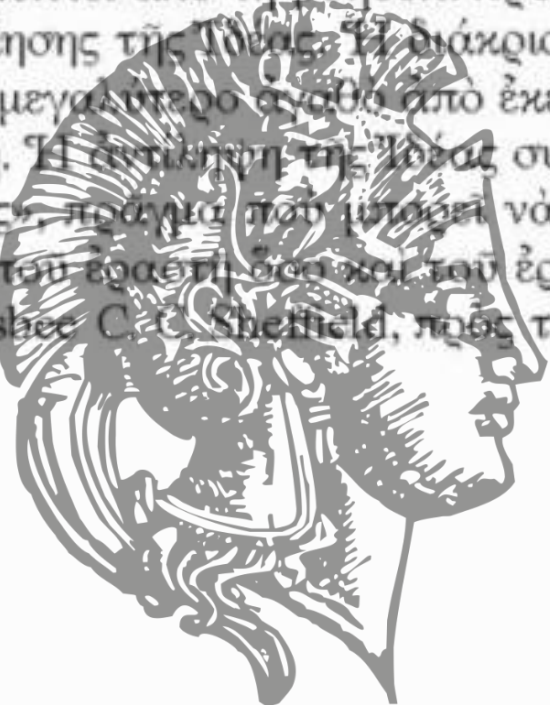




ΠΛΑΤΩΝΙΚΟ ΣΥΜΠΟΣΙΟΝ: Η ΑΡΕΤΗ ΩΣ ΚΑΤΩΤΕΡΟ ΑΓΑΘΟ;

Περίληψη

Στὸ *Συμπόσιον* ἡ Διοτίμα δηλώνει πὼς ἡ συνειδητοποίηση τῆς Ἰδέας τοῦ «καλοῦ» εἶναι, τελικῶς, τὸ κίνητρο τῶν προσπαθειῶν τοῦ ἔρωτα. Ἡ κατανόηση τῆς Ἰδέας καθ' αὐτὴν δημιουργεῖ τὴν «ἀληθινὴν ἀρετὴν»· αὕτη ἡ ἀναπαραγωγή τῆς ἀρετῆς δίνει σὲ κάποιον τὸ δικαίωμα νὰ λέει ὅτι κατέχει τὸ ἀγαθόν. Ὡστόσο, ἀπὸ τὴ στιγμή πού ἡ ἱκανότητα κατανόησης τῆς Ἰδέας ἐπιτυγχάνεται μόνο μέσα σὲ μιὰ σχέση ἐρωτική, μὲ ποιὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθὸ σχετίζεται μὲ τὸν ἔρωτα πού τρέφει ὁ ἔραστής γιὰ τὸν ἐρώμενο; Στὸ ἄρθρο αὐτό, θὰ ὑποστηρίξω ὅτι ἡ συνειδητοποίηση τῆς Ἰδέας συνδέεται μὲ τὴν προσδοκία τοῦ ἔραστη νὰ ἐκπαιδεύσει τὸν ἐρώμενο. Στόχος τοῦ ἔρωτά του εἶναι νὰ κάνει τὴν ψυχὴ του ἐνάρετη· καὶ ὁ τρόπος μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο ὁδηγεῖται σὲ αὐτὸ τὸν στόχο εἶναι, ἀκριβῶς, ἡ ἐκπαίδευση τοῦ ἐρωμένου του. Ἡ συνειδητοποίηση τῆς ἰδέας ἀποτελεῖ προϋπόθεση γιὰ τὴν κατάκτηση αὐτοῦ τοῦ στόχου καί, ὥς ἐκ τούτου, τὸ ἀγαθὸ πού προκύπτει ἀπὸ τὴ βοήθεια πρὸς τὸν ἐρώμενο συμβαδίζει μὲ τὸ ἀγαθὸ τῆς συνειδητοποίησης τῆς Ἰδέας. Ἡ διάκριση τῆς Ἰδέας κατὰ τέτοιον τρόπο δείχνει ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχει μεγαλύτερο ἀγαθὸ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνο πού γεννᾶται μέσα σὲ μιὰ Πλατωνικὴ ἐρωτικὴ σχέση. Ἡ ἀντίληψη τῆς Ἰδέας συνδέεται μὲ τὴν ἱκανότητα δημιουργίας «ἀληθινῆς ἀρετῆς», πράγμα πού μπορεῖ νὰ θεωρηθεῖ πὼς περικλείει τὴν ἀρετὴ καὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸ τόσο τοῦ ἔραστη ὡς καὶ τοῦ ἐρωμένου. Αὕτη ἡ θεώρηση ἀντικρούει τὴν ἀπόψη τῆς Frisbee C. C. Sheffield, πρὸς τὴν ὁποία ἀσχετῶνται κοίτικα τὸ κύριο μέρος τοῦ ἀρθροῦ.



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