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Price, Anthony W. (2017) Generating in beauty for the sake of immortality: personal love and the goals of the lover. In: Destree, P. and Giannopoulou, Z. (eds.) *Plato's Symposium: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge Critical Guides. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 176-193. ISBN 9781107110052.

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Generating in Beauty for the Sake of Immortality: Personal Love and the Goals of the Lover

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I : PREFACE

It is characteristic of Platonic dialogues to lack any clearly demarcated topic, certainly as a whole, and often even within the parts of a whole. Eryximachus' proposal, prompted by Phaedrus, is that each symposiast give a speech in praise of *Erōs* (*Symp.* 177d2-5). Socrates' response is at once compliant and subversive: "It's not likely that I would say no, seeing that I claim not to understand anything but erotics" (*ta erōtika*, d7-8, tr. after Rowe). This at once intimates that he will be presenting nothing less than his own philosophy. When it comes fully to his turn, he cites a supposed "woman of Mantinea" (201d2), Diotima, as his teacher in "erotics" (d5), again, it will turn out, in a wide sense. Of course, the occasion imposes a focus that will fit what Eryximachus and Phaedrus had in mind; and yet within his own philosophy everything connects.

It should not surprise us, therefore, when Socrates has Diotima begin to explain what utility *erōs* has for human beings (204c8) by a lucid statement of the core of Socratic moral psychology:

"Come on, Socrates: the person who loves, loves good things; why does he love them?"

"To have them for himself", I said.

"And what will the person who has good things get by having them?"

"That", I said, "I'm better placed to answer: he'll be happy (*eudaimōn*)."

"Yes", she said, "because those who are happy are happy by the possession of good things, and one no longer needs to go on to ask 'And what reason does the person who wishes to be happy have for wishing it?' Your answer seems to be final" (204e2-205a3).

The methodology is typically Socratic: to identify the benefits that *erōs* brings, one needs first to define the good that human beings ultimately desire. Only by reference to that can a common opinion about the utility of *erōs* be tied down by an account of the reason (*aitias logismos*), and so become knowledge (*Men.* 98a3-4); the rest – which is the remainder of the *Symposium* – is rhetoric.

As the discussion proceeds, a further twist derives a specification of the utility of *erōs* from a refinement of the teleology. It is said to be common to all human beings that they always (*aei*) want to possess good things (205a6-8); this mostkely conveys that in every action a human being aims at his own good (which is a familiar tenet of Socratic psychology). However, that thesis gradually makes way for a different one: human beings desire to possess the good always, that is, forever (206a11-12). The transition is verbally deft (being marked by a simple shift in the position of *aei*), but not disguised: it is with an equal necessity (note the gerundive *prostheteon*, 206a6, a10) that we are to spell out a love of the good as a love *to have* the good (a6-7), and to have it *always* (a9). Of course, there is no logical inference from desiring to have the good to

desiring to have it always; yet it may suit Plato's present purposes to impose both supplements. Doing so is debatable, and yet, in the present context, fruitful.¹

There follows an ambiguity that at once complicates the task of exposition, and confirms how closely Socrates' moral psychology connects with his erotics:

erōs is for one's having the good forever ... Given, then, that *erōs* is always of this,² in what manner will those pursuing it do so, and through what activity, if their intense zeal would be called *erōs*? What really is its function? ... I'll tell you: it is generating in beauty, whether in respect of the body or of the soul (206a11-b8).

What does *erōs* mean here, and does it have one meaning, or two? The commonest reading is stated succinctly by Christopher Gill (1999: 78, n. 112): "Here Diotima uses the general motive identified as 'love' in 205a-206a to explain the subdivision of this motive (marked by a special 'enthusiasm and intensity') that is normally called 'love'."³ However, others suppose that *erōs* retains a single sense and reference throughout these lines.⁴ Is the way of loving now indicated by the phrase "generating in beauty" *the* mode by which generic love operates, or *a* mode by which it operates, viz. when it takes the form of what is idiomatically called *erōs*, where this is conceived as a species within the genus?

An answer to this question may help or hinder an understanding of the two notions "having the good forever" and "generating in beauty". The former can be paraphrased as "immortality together with good" (206e8-207a1); when it is then said that *erōs* is of "immortality" (207a3-4), this confirms that desire aims at *both*, though together and not separately, since nothing is desired but the good (205e-206a1). Now it was a previous thesis that desire presupposes lack (200a9), so that its objects are neither present (*parōn*) nor reliably available (*hetoimon*, 200e2-3); it follows that the immortality in question cannot be identified with that which is argued in the *Phaedo* to be an essential and secure aspect of soul as such. Two alternatives remain. There is the vicarious immortality that Diotima will relate to the procreating of offspring, physical or mental, and identify as the one way in which the mortal can partake of immortality (208b2-4). And there is the proprietary immortality that may be achieved by a human soul that achieves assimilation to the divine; this is not explicated in the *Symposium*, but may well be indicated at the climax of the ascent passage (212a5-7). "Generation in beauty" is again variably interpretable, in part depending on whether we interpret the *erōs* that motivates it as specific or generic. Paradigmatic is intercourse, physical or mental, either of a man with a woman whom he impregnates with a new human being, or of a lover with a boy whom he inspires with a new mental life. However, the notion becomes extended, both in its occasion and in its upshot. Poets, inventors, and legislators may count as generating in the beautiful though there is no mention of a loved one; and what they generate may ultimately be a reputation. Philosophers generate in a beauty that becomes depersonalized, and what they generate remains only debatably interpersonal.

While there is much here to be fruitfully debated, I doubt whether we can resolve the ambiguity of 206a11-b8 with any confidence. It may be indeterminate whether talk of "generation in beauty" locates *erōs* as a species of desire, or reconceives desire in a manner that

¹ For, and against, the second supplement, contrast Wedgwood 2009: 36-7 with Santas 1998: 55, n. 39.

² I read *toutou* for the mss. *touto*; see Vlastos 1973: 21, n. 57. However, it is possible to pursue (*diōkein*) an occupation as well as its object; so Sier 1997: 222.

³ So Gilbert 1909: 54, Bury 1932, 1st edn 1909: xxxvii n., et al.

⁴ So Sier 1997: 99 ff., 220-2, Rowe 1998a, 1998b: 181-2, et al.

illuminates the goals of *erōs*. Different difficulties arise in either case; yet these are independent of the answers to what we may think the most interesting questions.

II : GENERATION IN BEAUTY

The object of *erōs* is to possess the good forever (206a11-2, 207a2). Nothing is presumed about life after death, perhaps because Diotima is describing universal aspirations that cannot depend upon distinctive Platonic views at variance with traditional Greek religion (which bleakly envisaged immortality without the good). What nature already provides, as a rescue from mortality, is sexual reproduction. Both in procreating and nurturing offspring, all animals display an intense commitment that Diotima interprets as an aspiration towards the eternal possession of the good; hence we may impute not just to human beings, but to “mortal nature” in general, an innate if mostly inarticulate orientation towards immortality (207a6-d3).

What indicates that procreation offers more than a simulacrum of survival over time is that it re-enacts the pattern of an automatic loss and replacement of bodily parts that alone enables an animal to live through a lifetime (207d4-e1). If living bodies persist through time, it is only through processes analogous to those active in sexual reproduction. Hence, if we count renewal through a lifetime’s sequence of physical changes as a form of persistence that satisfies a desire for survival, we should count renewal through a sequence of descendants as also satisfying that desire. If we can only conceive the second as *vicarious* survival, this may be because of a crucial difference: as boy grows into a man, the boy disappears as the man appears, whereas, when a man begets a boy, the man remains *in* existence as the boy comes *into* existence.⁵ And yet, as I have heard Derek Parfit ask of cases of fission in which a person seems to split into two persons, why should a double success thereby count as a failure? Logic may forbid a father to say, pointing to his son, “I am *there*, and also *here*”; and yet physical continuities link his past self to *both* present places.

Diotima speaks analogously of the persistence through a lifetime of a mind or mentality, with two salient differences. First, the rehearsing or conning or going over (*meletan*, 208a4) that replaces one memory with a new one is most naturally interpreted as a conscious activity that is under the control of a subject. Secondly, whereas the processes of disappearance and reappearance are applied to “the whole body” (207e1), they are never ascribed to the soul *itself* as well as to its contents. These points are doubtless linked: it is the soul as a continuing subject that renews its own states. (This is how, though Diotima is silent about the Platonic doctrine of the essential immortality of the soul, she does not exclude it. This will matter later.) Now, just as I replace one memory by another just like it by *reminding myself of it*, I may pass on an idea to another person by *informing him of it*.⁶ This is where Diotima locates the Greek tradition of pedagogic pederasty: “It’s by contact with what is beautiful [viz., a boy], and associating with it, that he [the lover] begets and procreates the things with which he was so long pregnant” (209c2-3). This actually resembles mental continuity within a life more than sexual reproduction resembles physical continuity; for rehearsing a thought by oneself and communicating it to

⁵ Thus Wordsworth’s analogy, “The Child is father of the Man”, is inexact.

⁶ As David Mabblerley pointed out to me, this anticipates Richard Dawkins’s notion of the *meme* (analogous to the physical *gene*), defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “an idea, behavior or style that spreads from person to person within a culture”.

another are both intentional activities, whereas the self-renewal of a body is an automatic and unconscious process.⁷

In both cases, what is first prolonged, and then propagated, is a *life*, physical or mental. The existence of a living body over time reduces to the continuation of a series of bodily changes; the soul that animates the body becomes the source of a life that flows, after the body has procreated or given birth, through later branches of the same series. The existence of a soul over time is not so reducible; and yet a soul that directs a stream of mental life naturally *identifies with* it, so that it continues to value the stream even after this has flowed into a tributary directed by another soul.⁸

Thus erotic love evidences the fundamental teleology of desire for “immortality together with the good” (206e8-207a1). This deep diagnosis of the springs of sexuality has implications for Plato’s sexual morality. Pausanias’ moralizing pederast was set on sexual pleasure, but willing to accompany it with philosophy and the rest of virtue (184d1). Diotima’s lover pregnant in soul may or may not make love to the boy, but must view this as at worst a perversion, and at best a diversion; for it fails to connect – even if it does not conflict – with his fundamental orientation towards immortality.⁹

Other aspects of Diotima’s account may be troublesome. She further relates human quasi-immortality, as vulgarly conceived, to a lasting memory that is passed on either to one’s descendants, or to future generations steeped in one’s poems or drilled in one’s laws (208e3-5, 209d3-4, e3-4). Within pederasty, this was a commonplace dear to love-poets (cf. what Ibycus promised to Polycrates, and Theognis to Cyrnos). Heterosexually, it complicates the initial contrast (cf. 206c1-3) between physical and mental procreation (or between genes and memes); but that is no objection. Since the goal is a *good* reputation, this does not earn any complaint (*pace* Obdrzalek 2010: 422-3) that here, in contrast to 206e8-207a1, immortality is being pursued *without* the good.¹⁰ And yet it seems out of place. It is true that first-person memory may be added to the continuities that she has described as making a unity of a single life: if I remember doing something, this may count as a continuation of my doing it that helps to hold my life together.¹¹ However, it is only in a very loose sense that surviving in human memory after one’s death is a way of surviving: you and I can remember *that* Odysseus outwitted the Cyclops (at least in Homer’s story), but we can’t, ourselves, remember *outwitting* him. If

⁷ According to *Phd.* 87d9-e1, this process too is the work of the soul. As “mortal nature” (*Symp.* 207d1) evidently signifies the nature of a *living* thing, and the soul brings life to a body (*Phd.* 105d3-4), this is not inconsistent. The *Phd.* shares the *Symp.* view of a human body not as a substance parallel to the soul, and clearly distinct from all other bodies, but as a location of *processes* of decay and renewal.

⁸ It is doubtless only in a derivative and diluted sense that a soul remains alive within some stretch of life, physical or mental, that owes its nature and existence to that soul, but is actually directed by another soul; from which it does not follow that nothing desirable is achieved (cf. Price 1997: 34). A different complaint, ethical rather than metaphysical, might be that the lover is making use of another’s life for the sake of his own vicarious survival (love as colonialism?); for a reply to that, see Price (1997: 98).

⁹ Still less is there any room for human love-making, animalistic or acratia, that lacks any orientation towards *eudaimonia*; for Socratic desire, and emotion in general, is a child of overall judgement. See Price 1997: 254-5, 2011: 95-8, 254-5.

¹⁰ Contrast the “Herostratic fame” (as it came to be called) of the man who burnt down the temple of Diana of the Ephesians in order to be remembered forever.

¹¹ Yet this is a different kind of continuation from a constancy of “traits” and “habits” (*tropoi* and *ēthē*, 207e2): I may now remember doing things that I can, or would, never do again; and I may act in character without recalling how I acted in the past.

Odysseus' life has had an impact upon ours it is through our reading the *Odyssey*, and not through any transmission that could make our lives a partial prolongation of his.¹²

What, anyway, of generation in beauty? It is a familiar point that Plato plays with the ambiguity of *tokos* and *tiktein* between begetting, and giving birth.¹³ Even sexually, male procreation is described in the language of pregnancy and birth-pangs (206d7-e1). Mentally, the lover welcomes the boy both as a mother of their future children, and as a midwife who may relieve him of his own pregnancy (209a8-c7). Talk of “generation in beauty” fits a man’s being inspired by the beauty of a woman or boy to impregnate a body or mind with a continuation of his own life, biological or mental. A branch of his physical life develops within the woman’s body before achieving independence at birth; a branch of his mental life is established within the boy’s mind. What is the initial role of beauty? Physically, Diotima supposes, here in obvious faithfulness to experience, sexual attraction is a condition of a man’s actualizing his reproductive potency (206d3-e1). Assimilating begetting and giving birth, she makes beauty a condition of both, so that both take over the latter’s dependence on Fate and *Eileithyia* (d2-3). What of mental procreation? Diotima pursues analogies: the lover fertile in soul “goes around looking for the beautiful object in which he might procreate; for he will never do so in what is ugly” (209b2-4); at the same time, “he warms to beautiful bodies rather than ugly ones because he is pregnant” (b4-5). She presents her thoughts with a seductive facility that should not silence doubt. Even within personal relationships, why should physical beauty be requisite to the transmission of a mental life? Mental fertility seems well exemplified in Socrates’ narrative of his relations with Diotima, which surely does not presuppose that he was good-looking when young.¹⁴ And why should we not find a paradigm of fertile psychic love not in a lover, however platonic, but in a father and mentor? George Devereux once wrote, I don’t know how truly, “The Greek father usually failed to counsel his son; instead, he counseled another man’s son, in whom he was erotically interested”. (1967: 78). And yet a paternal union of generation, nurture, and education may seem to us to provide by far the fullest paradigm, *both* physical *and* mental, of the transmission first of life and then of a way of life.

Such queries arise with renewed force when we turn our attention to a wider social context. In invoking the impact of poetry and legislation, she applies the language of generation freely: all poets are “procreators” of wisdom and the rest of virtue, things “that it is fitting for the soul to conceive and bring to birth” (209a2-4); legislators such as Lycurgus and Solon “procreated” laws and virtue of all sorts, which have since counted as their “children” (d4-e4). Yet in this context she makes no mention of personal beauty as a partner or midwife. Are we to suppose that *this* generation is *not* in beauty?¹⁵

¹² As Obdrzalek (2010: 421) notes, leaving behind a reputation is not leaving behind something *like oneself*, which was a requirement of vicarious immortality at 208b1-2. Against that, one might cite Socrates’ anxiety in the *Rep.* that the stories one hears, especially in one’s childhood, must strongly affect one’s character (III, 386a1-392c6). Yet that point is not made here. When propagating virtue is linked to winning a reputation, it is the former that is presented as a means to the latter (209e2-4); that, if little more, I concede to Scott (2007: 150).

¹³ See Dover 1980: 147.

¹⁴ Gill (1999: xxxiv) also well asks how we are to understand the lightly sketched role of the anonymous guide (210a6-7, c6-7, e2-3, 211c1).

¹⁵ According to Rowe (1998a: 255), Diotima is imputing the backroom presence of a *bel ami* – but with evident irony. Apparently serious is Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, preface to Book IV: “Which so who list looke backe to former ages,/And call to count the things that then were donne,/Shall find, that all the works of those wise sages,/And brave exploits which great Heroes wonne,/In love were either ended or begunne.” Which one may doubt.

How do these problems bear on the rival readings of 206b1-3? Should they incline us to interpret the *erōs* that is exercised in generation in beauty as specific, or as generic? One might take the difficulties I have identified to arise precisely out of a reading of the *erōs* of 206b3 as specific and idiomatic; for it falls outside such *erōs* that a mentality can equally be propagated within a personal relationship without sexual attraction, and that it can also be propagated, and more widely, outside any personal relationship. However, it is worth noting what is said, and what is *not* said, about the function of poetry and legislation. As I cited, Diotima is happy here to apply the metaphor of *procreating* (209a4, d7, e2) *children* or *offspring* (d2, e4). Yet she does not speak in this context explicitly of generation *in beauty*. All that mention of Homer, Hesiod, Lycurgus and Solon is asserted to confirm is the superiority of children of the mind to children of the body (209c7-e4). So it may be that she has to be willing to concede that, while generation in beauty, understood as a function of personal *erōs*, is indeed important as a mode of propagating ways of thinking and acting and thereby achieving a kind of immortality, it enjoys no monopoly in this role.

Thus a specific reading of the *erōs* of 206b3 is possible; is a generic one impossible? If the phrase “generation in beauty” is to apply to the operation of generic *erōs*, we cannot think of this beauty as restrictedly erotic. Yet Codrus may have been inspired by the charms of his sons to lay down his life in order to preserve his kingship for their sake (208d4-5); most parents find their children prepossessing. What of poets and legislators? Dover speculates as follows: “Diotima does not explain the beautiful medium ‘in’ which Homer ‘generated’ poems or Solon laws, but it can only be the virtuous character of the societies for which Homer sang and Solon legislated” (1980: 151-2). That is certainly one possibility; it does not tell against it that Plato may himself have taken a dim view of that character – for we know from the *Republic* that he also took a dimmer view of Greek poets and legislators than he puts into the mouth of Diotima. However, we do not have to suppose that the beauty was actual and external; we might rather envisage that the beauty that inspired them, real or meretricious, characterized their own dreams of a legendary past or a reformed future.

If this speculation is permitted, it can defend the most generic reading against what may have seemed a fatal objection; for if *erōs* is to be identified with desire in general, as Socrates conceived that, and generation in beauty is its one mode of operation, *every* human action, however mundane, must be ascribable to the inspiration of beauty. This was already not easily applicable to gymnasts and money-makers (mentioned alongside more idiomatic “lovers”, and philosophers, at 205d4-5). However, once we allow the beauty to be prospective, we can suppose that gymnasts look forward to the glory an Olympic crown, and money-makers to the glory of funding a tragic chorus or a chariot team.¹⁶ And the idea can be extended indefinitely: *any* action aims at the good, and is therefore inspired by the prospect of a beautiful goal.

How, therefore, are we to interpret the *erōs* exercised in “generation in beauty”? So far in the *Symposium*, we are left with at least two options, generic and specific. Either of them can be seen to fit what follows. Here *erōs* will be reconceived afresh as generating in a beauty that is increasingly intense, but decreasingly erotic (in any familiar sense). We may read it either as starting with a narrow conception of *erōs* that is gradually extended, or as advancing through a genus subsuming all forms of *erōs*; we do not have to decide. In either case, Diotima carries us along by a continuity that accommodates new conceptions both of beauty and of immortality.

¹⁶ I owe this point to Suzanne Obdrzalek.

III : THE ASCENT

There has been, and will always be, debate about how closely to connect the ascent passage (201a-212a) to what has preceded it. It is here at last that *erōs* is linked to philosophy, and more particularly Platonic philosophy. I have argued in the past (Price 1997: 38-54, 257-60) that Diotima must still have in mind generation in beauty as it has been expounded since 206b7-8 if her line of thought is not to be broken-backed. Taking this to involve a personal relationship (much as Socrates will spell out in the second speech of the *Phaedrus*), I particularly appealed for textual support to her talk of “correctly loving a boy” (or “boys”, 211b5-6), *through* (or *thanks to*) which – and not *long after* which – the lover approaches his final destination. It is now time for a reconsideration, one that will not exclude what I proposed, but set it besides other possibilities.

This passage merits the closest of readings. Though there is not time for that here, it may help to focus on some points of significant detail if I start by taking a structured translation of a single lengthy and long-breathed sentence, lightly revised, from Price (1997: 39):

- A1 (210a7) First, if the guide guides him rightly, he must love one body,
- A2 (a7-8) and generate there beautiful discourse,
- A3 (a8-b3) and then himself realize that the beauty of any one body is closely akin to that of any other, and that, if one must pursue beauty of appearance, it is great folly not to consider the beauty of all bodies one and the same;
- A4 (b4-6) having realized this he must become a lover of all beautiful bodies, and slacken his intense love of the one, disdaining it and thinking little of it;
- B1 (b6-c1) after this he must think beauty in souls more valuable than that in the body, with the result that, if anyone was sound of soul and had even a little bloom, this would suffice for his loving and caring for him,
- B2 (c2-3) and bring forth and search for such discourse as will improve the young,
- B3 (c3-5) in order that he may now be forced to look upon the beauty in practices and laws and see that it is all akin itself to itself,
- B4 (c5-6) in order that he may think the surface beauty of the body a little thing;
- C1 (c6-7) after practices he must be led to branches of knowledge, so that he may now see the beauty of these,
- C2 (c7-d4) and looking towards beauty already in its width he may no longer be base and pettifogging in his slavery to the beauty of one, but having turned to the wide sea of beauty and contemplating it
- C3 (d4-6) he may bring forth much beautiful and fine discourse and thoughts in ungrudging philosophy,
- D (d6-e1) until, strengthened and nourished there, he catches sight of a certain branch of knowledge that is single, and such as to be of the following beauty.¹⁷

I shall now annotate each step in turn.

At A1, the object of love is “the boy who represents beauty itself to the lover” (Reeve, 2011). This is an individualized version of Hippias’ naïve answer to the question “What is beauty?”: “A beautiful girl is beauty” (*H. Ma.* 287e2-4.) It is an unreflective and indeed

¹⁷ I follow Reeve (1971: 326) in deleting a clause that runs from 210d1 to d3; see also n. 24 below.

inarticulate state that fails to identify qualities that make the boy beautiful. The lover already advances beyond that when, at A2, the guide encourages him to put his love into words descriptive of the boy's physical beauty, most aptly (no doubt) in poetry. While the verb *gennan* can mean "beget" as well as "bear", the adverb "there" (*entautha*, 210a7) rather indicates the presence of an addressee than a joint role in generation (unless the loved one is a Narcissus). John Ferrari (1992: 256) is not quite right to say that the mode of discourse (or of *logoi*) already has beauty as its topic; yet it will have to apply general terms, and so introduce what he calls a "comparison class". Which leads into the generalizing A3: that "the beauty of all bodies is one and the same" (210b3) is the ontological equivalent of a linguistic thesis that "—is beautiful" has the same criteria whenever it is predicated of a body (or such a body). Which in turn leads into A4: as beauty is the ground of love, the lover finds himself loving all beautiful bodies.¹⁸ All this implicitly limits the range of relevant bodies to those that are proper objects of love, and indeed of this kind of love, viz. boys' bodies.

It is most likely not the one body that the lover comes to "disdain and think little of", but his initial "intense love" of it (so Nehamas 2007: 112). On the other side, one might (with Sier 1997: 275) cite B4, to this effect: perhaps the lover thinks little (not nothing) of *any particular body* after A3, just as he will think little (again not nothing) of *beautiful bodies in general* after B3. However, to love *all* beautiful bodies is rather to love *each* than to love either the property or the set. Any instance is only one instance, and so no great matter in itself; but to disdain each is to disdain all, which cannot be the attitude of the lover of all beautiful bodies. So we may follow Nehamas.

The upshot is a promiscuity rather poeticizing than sexual (Price 1997: 47, Nehamas 2007: 114-16). Nehamas questions whether the lover now loves all beautiful bodies equally, citing Socrates himself, widely susceptible, and yet always loyal to Alcibiades.¹⁹ About Plato's general view, he may well be right (if we may cite the reciprocal fidelity celebrated at *Phdr.* 256a7-e2); but what is implicit in our present text? It is a general theme within the ascent passage that *erōs* is a conative response to a cognitive input: one loves what one finds beautiful. Moreover, if the cognitive ascent is bound to weaken one's commitment to lesser beauties, one must love things to the extent that one finds them beautiful. Hence Diotima cannot permit the lover both to find two boys equally beautiful, and to love one more than the other; nor can she permit the lover of one boy who meets another who appears more beautiful not to love the second more than the first. Which, if true, goes to show that there is no perfect match between what Socrates will say Diotima has persuaded him of (212b1-2), and his own way of life (if Nehamas identifies this rightly).

While the transition from A1 and A2 to A3 and A4 was generalizing, that from A to B is ascending. The lover next comes (we are not told how) to value "beauty in souls" (210b6-7) above physical beauty. The generality of this (note "souls", plural) helps disambiguate the ambiguity of the "if"-clause that follows: is it "if *someone* was sound of soul and had even a little bloom", or "if *anyone*" was so, that "this would suffice for his loving and caring for him"? The former (which I had wrongly assumed) returns from the generality of A4 to a single object of love as at A1; the latter (preferred by Nehamas, 2007: 115) remains with a plurality, and so avoids a discontinuity with A4. And yet the new mode of loving, which involves not only

¹⁸ Cf. the general impressionability that Socrates ascribes to Glaucon at *Rep.* V, 474d1-4.

¹⁹ For the love (as Marlowe's *Edward II* puts it) of "grave Socrates" for "wild Alcibiades", Nehamas refers to *Prot.* 309ab, *Gorg.* 481d, *Symp.* 213b-d; one may add *Symp.* 216d2-3. However, Suzanne Obdrzalek points out to me that the *Symp.* passages testify much less clearly to this than the other two.

admiring but finding the time to be caring (*kēdesthai*, c1), will have to be selective, even arbitrarily, of one or a few.

The lover himself may seem undemanding: he is satisfied by a *sound* soul with a *little* physical bloom. Yet while this is sober in tone, it is not so very new in content: the pederast of the lesser mysteries *had* to prefer beautiful bodies to ugly ones, and selected a soul “beautiful and well-born and of a good natural disposition” (if those are fair renderings of *kalos*, *gennaios*, and *euphyēs*, 209b6); one may compare the “fitting soul” at *Phdr.* 276e6, which (in the language of Mark iv 3-9) is good and not stony ground for yielding fruit out of seed. There must be some presence of physical, and more promise of mental, beauty.

The upshot is again a kind of discourse: the lover is motivated to “bring forth and seek out such discourse as will improve the young” (210c1-3). Unfortunately, this is a crux: Bury (1932), Dover (1980), and Vicaire (Robin/Vicaire 1989) all delete “and seek out” (*kai zētein*), which, put *after* “bring forth”, is at best an instance of *hysteron proteron*. Bury (1932: 126) is splendidly dismissive of attempts to ascribe a point (with the put-down “But this is futile”). Yet Sier (1997: 276) aptly contrasts a previous passage (209b7-c2). How, we may ask, can the lover at this stage of the ascent, who has yet to attend to good practices and laws, make a better job of ethical education than the lover of the lesser mysteries who, once he has selected a recipient, is *immediately fluent* (*euthys euporei*, b8) in words of edification? Well, being a seeker, he lacks the complacency that reduces the fluent to the facile.²⁰ We might still prefer him to hold back for a time. Yet he will look around, and take advice; he should do little harm, even if he is not yet ready to do much good. To the extent that his project succeeds, any selected beneficiary will *become* deserving of his predilection.

At least *he* benefits: it is because he is trying to do better that he is *compelled* (210c3) to advance towards an appreciation of the beauty of practices and laws. This compulsion comes from what the guide already knows, and he is coming to know, to be necessary for cognitive progress.²¹ It is a compulsion to *look* (c3, c7, d4, e3), and so to *see* what is there to be seen (c4, c7, d7, e4). These are both things that the lover has to do *for himself*, even under guidance.²² He will now (where the “now”, *au*, marks a parallel with the generalizing move within A3) look at the beauty in practices and laws (which direct the soul in decision and action), and see that it is all akin. “Akin” (*syngenēs*, c5) is weaker than “closely akin” (*adelphos*, b1), most likely for a conceptual reason: while boys’ bodies are all of a kind, practices and laws are of different categories (though they connect, for laws prescribe practices). The upshot may puzzle us: B4 chimes neatly with A4 (“thinking little of”, c5-6, echoes “thinking ... a little thing”, b6), thus confirming A and B as just *two* levels; and yet what does B4 add to the starting-point of B1 in ranking beauty of soul above beauty of body? However, it is an easy suggestion that what is added is *consolidation*: what was in B1 a presumption necessary for further progress has by B4 become an inference from a clear grasp of the unity within variety of the ethical world.²³

²⁰ In a phrase let drop in another context by David Wiggins, the *logoi* of 209b8 are “low-octane, readily available”. Ferrari (1992: 256) observes relevantly, “The mark of the individual suitable for the ascent is that he does not take the nature of the beautiful for granted.” He alone “approaches these things correctly” (210a2), and so is led from and by the Lesser to the Greater Mysteries.

²¹ Sier (1997: 277) cites parallels that are recurrent in *Rep.* VII: 515c6, d9, 524c7, e4, 526b1-2, e3, e7, 529a1.

²² This was already emphasized at 210a8: the lover must *himself* grasp the close kinship of physical beauty, where the *auton*, though grammatically “rather otiose” (Bury 1932: 125), is well explained by Rowe (1998b: 194-5).

²³ Nehamas complicates the relation to A to B by supposing that beauty of character is manifest in the body (2007: 122). Which is attractive, but dubiously Platonic; cf. Price 2002: 178-81.

Ascent to the next level is instigated by the guide, who persuades the lover that good practices, though directed by the laws of society, need to be grounded in an understanding that both confirms and enhances their value. On the Platonic principle that if one thing lends beauty to another, it is itself beautiful (indeed, more so), the beauty of branches of knowledge becomes apparent as progress is made. The lover now has a view of beauty in its full extent, and can escape any limited preoccupation with just one locus of value.²⁴ Turning his eyes to the wide sea of beauty and contemplating it, he can “bring forth much beautiful and fine discourse and thoughts in ungrudging philosophy”.

Especially worthy of attention here is the term “ungrudging” (*aphthonos*, 210d6). It doubtless applies to the guide, who is already a philosopher; yet in fact it is applied to the lover. “In relation to whom?”, we have surely to ask. Most pertinent may be a passage in the 7th *Letter*, whether it be authentic Plato or not (though of course it is less significant as *evidence* if it is not):

Only when all of these things – names, definitions, and visual and other perceptions – have been rubbed against one another and tested, pupil and teacher asking and answering questions in good will and ungrudgingly (*aneu phthonōn*) – only then, when reason and knowledge are at the very extremity of human effort, can they illuminate the nature of any object (344b3-c1, tr. Morrow).²⁵

Of course, *logoi* have many purposes. As the ascent has proceeded, they were first expressive of an emotion (a7-8), but preparatory of a shift into generality (a8-b3); then they were ethically edifying (c1-3), but preparatory of a wider view of the ethical world (c3-5); finally, here (d4-6), they are preparatory of the climactic vision that will come of the final ascent to a vision of the Form (d6-e1). Within A, they were addressed, and doubtless communicated, to the boy who inspired them, but not as a mode of education. Within B, they were communicated to anyone with both a native ability to benefit, and the opportunity to enter into a significant relationship with their author. Within C, if they are to count as constituting *ungrudging* philosophy (d6), the philosophy must be imparted to one recipient or more. Here, in inviting German (Schirlitz 1890: 30-2, Gilbert 1909: 58), a learning (*Lernen*) by the lover is also, and even (if we trust the 7th *Letter*) at the same time, a teaching (*Lehren*) of one disciple or several.

Finally, at level D, the lover’s view of *all* beauty becomes a vision of a *single* thing, Beauty itself. Ferrari expresses this with great felicity (1992: 258-9): at C2, “he is looking back from the height he has scaled, and sees beauty as a whole, but a whole of great multiplicity”; now, within D, “he turns his face to the peak, and comes to see beauty as a unity”, viz. as a Form. Here there is no further talk of *logoi*. This need not mean that the achievement is his alone. Beauty itself is “beyond words” (Ferrari 1992: 259): it can be adumbrated apophatically (211ab), but not articulated in a *logos* (211a7). If an understanding of it can be shared, this must be not through verbal communication by one person to another, but within participation in a vision, or joint achievement of insight. The ascent is complete, though the lover’s labours and rewards are not yet exhausted.

²⁴ Once we follow Reeve’s deletion (n. 17 above), we can take the “one thing” which the subject now appreciates within a wider perspective as not particularly an individual (man or boy) or practice, but any isolated object of enthusiasm. If Reeve is right, it was doubtless the unclarity of this which gave rise to an inept gloss.

²⁵ Other exclusions of *phthonos*, all in interpersonal contexts, include *Prot.* 327a7-8, b5, *Phd.* 61d10, *Rep.* V, 476e6, *Phdr.* 253b7, and especially, since they apply to the gods (which will be crucial to my conclusion), *Phdr.* 247a7, *Tim.* 29e2, *Ep.* 988b7. As is clear in these passages, a lack of *phthonos* is displayed in a willingness to pass on a privilege – whether virtue, knowledge, or skill – to another.

IV : BECOMING AS IMMORTAL AS A MAN MAY

A significant sentence, looking both behind and ahead, is this:

When someone goes up by these stages, through loving boys in the correct way (*dia to orthōs paiderastein*), and begins to catch sight of that beauty, he has come close to reaching the goal (211b5-7, tr. Gill).

Sier (1997: 150 n.) objects that *dia* with the accusative indicates a cause, and not a continuing role. The English “through” may signify either, but is his term “Ausgangspunkt” (“starting-point”) adequate to the case? Discarding boys at an early stage hardly counts as loving them rightly, which rather demands educating them as best one can (Price 1997: 259).

There has indeed been a change in the lover’s direction of attention. It is not that he is now described as “loving” impersonal objects; for talk of “loving” (*eran*) falls away after its personal applications at 210a7 and c1 (Ferrari 1992: 258). Instead, the lover is related to them by a language of “seeing” (*horan*), “looking” (*blepein*), “looking at” (*theasthai*), and “contemplating” (*theōrein*). There now applies a well-known saying by Saint-Exupéry: “Aimer ce n’est point nous regarder l’un l’autre mais regarder ensemble dans la même direction” (“To love is not for us to look at each other but to look together in the same direction”, 1939: 203). Even where just a pair of lover and loved one remains (which is one possibility), neither monopolizes, or even particularly occupies, the attention of the other. As I have put it before, “The person one loves becomes a drop in the ocean *qua* object of contemplation, but a major investment *qua* recipient of a mentality” (1997: 208, n. 5).²⁶ Love has been transformed; personal love may not have been discarded.

It is striking that the lover’s goal is not quite yet reached (211b6-7) when he catches sight of Beauty itself. Reeve (2012: 183) identifies it with generating true virtue (212a3-5), and it must be that, or what comes of that.

So how does the ascent culminate?

Do you think, she said, that it will be a poor life that a man leads who looks thither and views that (sc. Beauty itself] with that by which it has to be viewed, and consorts with it? Or do you not reflect that there alone he will succeed, seeing Beauty with that to which it is visible, in generating not images of virtue but true virtue, inasmuch as he is laying hold not of an image but of the truth? And that, generating and nurturing true virtue, he will have the privilege of becoming dear to the gods and, if any man can, immortal himself also (211e4-212a7)?

This links viewing Beauty (which may have seemed to *constitute* a liveable life, 211d1-3) to consorting with it in a fertile way. It identifies a *means*, generating true virtue, and an *end*, achieving immortality of a kind. How is either to be interpreted?

“True virtue” clearly contrasts with the unphilosophical virtue of 209b7-c2 (and of *Phd.* 82a11-b3, *Rep.* VI, 500d1-9). About whether it is generated *in anyone else* the text is silent. In this respect, and in several details, one may compare *Rep.* VI, 490a8-b7: there, if one “lays hold”

²⁶ It is thus that I would apply a remark of Richard Kraut’s (2008: 298): “A beautiful *soul* cannot be loved to excess – so long as one goes about loving that person in the right way.” As he also notes (2008: 299), we can re-apply here what was said before: a “firmer friendship” should ensue on sharing in “more beautiful and immortal children” (209c6-7).

of the nature of each thing “with the appropriate part of the soul (b3-4), and “mingles” with reality (b5), one may “bring forth intelligence and truth” (b5-6). (The last is not distinct from true virtue as conceived by Socrates.) However, how one interprets the silence here may depend on how one reads what follows. There would seem to be just two alternatives that at least fit *either* what we have read in the *Symposium*, or what is well evidenced elsewhere. I believe (cf. Price 1997: 259-60) that these are compatible, and even connected.

If we wish to rest 212a5-7 solely on what has come before, we have to read it as an intensified, if inexplicit, offer of vicarious immortality. Comparable then must be a passage in the *Phaedrus* (276e2-277a3): in contrast to “the man who is able to amuse himself with words, telling stories about justice and the other subjects you speak of” (which applies to the poets of the *Symposium*),

It is far finer if one is in earnest about them; when a man make use of the science of dialectic, and taking a fitting soul plants and sows in it words accompanied by knowledge, which are able to help themselves and the man who planted them, and are not without fruit but contain a seed, from which others grow in other soils, capable of rendering it forever immortal, and making the one who has it as happy as it is possible for a man to be.

Here, “the one who has it” applies not just to the present possessor, but to any man, within a would-be never-ending sequence of recipients, who is thereby made happy in his turn. The conclusion is parallel to *Symp.* 212a5-7, though that offers as much not of *happiness*, but of *immortality*, as is possible *for a man* (emphatic in both passages).²⁷

Yet I doubt whether this captures the sense of 212a5-7, not so much because of the silence as for this reason: to create her climax, and justify its tone of triumphalism, Diotima needs to hold out the promise of a kind of immortality that is no longer subject to contingency; but vicarious immortality must depend upon the chances of transmission and survival. Even if she wishes the lover to generate true virtue in another, she cannot allow his own immortality to *depend* upon that. Otherwise, a Socrates whose chosen disciple turns out like Alcibiades must fail of his goal through bad luck. (Here a later speech clarifies an earlier one.)

What sort of immortality, then, does 212a5-7 promise? It is one that comes as the reward for an assimilation to the divine: “The way to escape [from earth to heaven] is assimilation to a god so far as is possible; and assimilation is becoming just and pious together with wisdom” (*Tht.* 176a8-b2; cf. *Rep.* VI, 500d1-2, X, 613a7-b1). This is achieved by becoming oneself perfectly virtuous, and thus similar (*Tht.* 176b8-c2), and therefore dear (*L.* IV, 716d1-2), to the gods. The immortality that follows cannot be reduced to the essential and inescapable quality assigned to the soul in the *Phaedo*, though it is consistent with it, and makes the best of it. It is one that the soul *comes* to enjoy (note *genesthai*, 212a6), most likely as a “grant” from the gods (O’Brien 1984: 201) that they “confer” or “bestow” upon him (Sedley 2009). It may rescue the soul from any risk of perishing (if the human soul is not everlasting by nature); it must preserve it against any danger of lapsing. Guaranteed become both the *quantity* and the *quality* (in Bury’s terms, 1932: xlv, n. 2) of its ensuing life.²⁸

²⁷ “If any man can” (212a6-7) does not suggest that perhaps no man can, but rather signifies “more than any other man”; see Bury 1932: xlv, O’Brien 1984: 197-8. Rowe (1998b: 200) compares a similar “if” at 211d2.

²⁸ For a close linkage between immortality, divinity, and *eudaimonia*, cf. *Tim.* 90b6-c6. That then prescribes conforming the motions of one’s understanding to the harmonies of the universe (d1-5), which is itself a purely intellectual achievement. Given the theoretical concerns of the *Tim.*, this should not surprise us. For a succinct statement of a multi-faceted conception of assimilation to the divine, see Obdrzalek 2011: 10-13.

Where does this leave the recipient (or recipients) of “ungrudging philosophy” (210d6)? The demiurge of the *Timaeus*, who, being himself good, was free of *phthonos*, wanted “all things to become like himself”, so far as is possible, and “everything to be good and nothing to be bad” (29e1-30a3). It holds generally that, if acquiring true virtue is to render a man *dear to the gods, he must *practise it for others*.²⁹ In the present context, he must take advantage of any opportunity to imitate their generosity and *transmit virtue to others*; this has been for Diotima a recurrent theme. Thus vicarious immortality is not set aside; for achieving it can be contributory, though it is not essential, to the best of immortalities. What this last demands is a willingness that it be shared; men must wish the best for one another if they are to become themselves like gods.

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²⁹ This is indicated at *Rep.* X, 612e2-6, 621c4-7, *Phil.* 39e10-11, *L.* XI, 931e4-5, *Alc.* 134d1-2.

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