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# LOVE AND THE INDIVIDUAL IN PLATO'S *PHAEDRUS*

There are two basic objections to Plato's account of love in the *Phaedrus*, both raised by Gregory Vlastos, both metaphysically important in their own right, and both still unanswered. The first is that the *Phaedrus* sees men as mere images of another world, making it folly or even idolatry to treat them as worthy of love for their own sakes. The other is that it considers the love that we bear for our fellow men to be the result of human, temporal deficiency. If only we could be free of this deficiency, the objection runs, we would have no reason to love anything or anyone except the Forms: seen face to face, these by themselves would absorb all our love.[1]

My purpose in this paper is to meet these objections.[2]

## I

There is little doubt that in the *Phaedrus* Plato wishes to express and evoke attitudes and emotions of metaphysical, religious and epistemological awe towards the Forms.[3] They lie, he tells us, not only beyond the earth, but beyond the very dwelling-place of the gods; they constitute what alone is really real (247c, 249c); they are the proper objects of reason and true knowledge (247c–d); they are holy realities, dwelling in a holy place (250a, 254b);[4] they are the source of the gods' very divinity (249c); they

[1] In this paper Vlastos [44, see Works Cited], pp. 32f., concentrates on the *Symposium* more than the *Phaedrus* but it is clear that his objections apply equally to the latter (see his remarks on p. 20; p. 27 n. 80; p. 31 n. 93). His paper has already received attention from a number of scholars, but the particular objections that I am concerned with have not to my knowledge been met. See, e.g., Kosman [17]; Price [27]; Price [28]; Santas [35]; Nussbaum [23] & [24]; Griswold [10], pp. 128–9; Ferrari [5], pp. 181–4. Price in his excellent paper [27] pays direct attention to the second objection (p. 34), but concludes that it does not in fact constitute a special difficulty: by contrast, I hold that it is a serious objection but can be met. Nussbaum, though she does not attempt to meet the objections head on, says more that is sharply in conflict with Vlastos' views than anyone else: she asserts in various forms that love in the *Phaedrus* is love of individuals *qua* individuals, and that it is intrinsically worth while, and she implies that the *Phaedrus*' lover loves his beloved for the latter's own sake. However, she writes as if love in the *Phaedrus* were concerned solely with humans, a thing altogether of this world. This surely is wrong: the human individual is not even the main object, goal or point of love, and Nussbaum has to contend with a heavy weight of contrary scholarly opinion on this point. To take examples almost at random from the last hundred years or so, see: Jowett [16], pp. 554–5; Zeller [49], pp. 191–6, esp. n. 68; Taylor [40], p. 27; Field [6], pp. 164–5; Hackforth [13], p. 10; Friedländer [7], pp. 55–6; Gould [9], p. 107; Robin [30], pp. 57–8; Diès [4], pp. 437–48, 444–6; Morgan [21], p. 42; Hamilton [14], p. 8; Guthrie [12], pp. 426–7; and, very recently, Santas [35], pp. 111–12; Rowe [31], pp. 172–3; Melling [20], p. 100. The majority of these tend towards the view that according to the *Phaedrus* 'the vision of the eternal forms is the highest aim of divine and human souls; the "desire for the beyond" is the motivating power; the wings, borrowed from the god of love, are symbolic of this striving' (Friedländer [7], p. 55).

[2] Along with Vlastos I assume that Socrates' second speech can properly be taken as Plato's own account of love, in spite of its non-dialectical nature. But see Rowe's [32] useful comments on this, pp. 7–11; and see Rowe [33], *passim*.

[3] While Plato does not talk of 'Forms', it is generally accepted without debate that his 'real Reality' is the world of the Forms.

[4] On the religious language and tone of the *Phaedrus*, see the excellent article by Seeskin [37], esp. pp. 579–80.

induce in men towards even their images the kind of awe and reverence which is characteristic of worship (251a); they make up that reality which brings nourishment, satisfaction and contentment to the gods (247d); until the fall of some, all souls without exception strive to attain to the vision of them (247b, 248a–b); they are the objects of that recollection which marks off the madness and splendour of philosophers and lovers (249c–d).[5] In short, the Forms are transcendent, real, awe-inspiring and holy, and they play a central part in Plato's account of love – a part which has not always been acknowledged in the recent literature.[6]

However, does it follow from the supposed fact that the Forms possess these arresting characteristics that they alone have intrinsic worth, that they alone are worthy of being loved for their own sakes? Does it follow that all the good, noble and beautiful things of this world, including men, are to be loved only because they are images of Reality, occasioning the recollection and subsequent vision of Goodness, Beauty and the like? Above all, does it follow that in what concerns men 'it would be folly and even idolatry to treat them as worthy of love for their own sakes'?[7]

If conclusions of this sort do follow, doubtless they render Plato's account of love unacceptable to most of us, since they show that of their very nature men cannot be loved as ends, but only as means: they show that even in love we are condemned to use one another. But such conclusions do not follow. Quite the contrary. In the light of what Plato says, we can have good and even compelling reasons for loving men as ends in themselves, as I will now argue.

It is true that Plato often speaks of the things of this world, men included, as images of the Forms and as imitating them (*τι τῶν ἐκεῖ ὁμοίωμα*, 250a; *ἐν τοῖς τῇδε ὁμοιώμασιν*, 250b; *τὰς εἰκόνας*, 250b; *κάλλος εὖ μεμιμημένον*, 251a); and as was said earlier he refers to the Forms themselves as alone being really real (*οὐσία ὄντως οὖσα*, 247c; *τὸ ὂν ὄντως*, 249c). But given the way in which he uses words for 'image' and their cognates throughout the dialogues (*ὁμοίωμα*, *εἰκών* etc.),[8] what he says here in the *Phaedrus* amounts merely to saying that the things of this world are like the Forms

[5] There is little doubt that in Plato's mind the lover and the philosopher are one and the same person. See, e.g., Thompson [43], *ad loc.*; Hackforth [13], p. 83; De Vries [3], p. 143.

[6] See remarks on Nussbaum especially in note 1 above.

[7] Vlastos [44], p. 32. It is perhaps worth noting here that in order to rebut Vlastos' charge it is not enough simply to argue that in the *Phaedrus* the lover *in fact* treats his beloved as worthy of love for his own sake (as several scholars have already argued); it needs first to be argued that this is not a case of folly or idolatry.

[8] Plato does sometimes use the word *εἰκών* of existence-dependent images (see *Rep.* 509e1–2, 510e3), but he also uses it of independently existing items, such as statues and paintings (see *Rep.* 401b5; *Crat.* 432b6; *Soph.* 235d–236b). The word *ὁμοίωμα* etymologically has a broad connotation and is explicitly given this at *Soph.* 266d7; it can therefore be used, and is used, of independently existing items like paintings (*Crat.* 434a1). Concerning the use of the word *εἴδωλα* at *Lysis* 219d, discussed by Vlastos [44], p. 10, esp, n. 23, the following is to be said. Socrates has been discussing what he calls the *πρῶτον φίλον*, that for the sake of which all other things and persons are loved and which alone is *really loved* – that is, alone is worthy of being loved for its own sake. He makes the point that we should be careful not to value the various means to achieving the *πρῶτον φίλον* as if they themselves were really loved. There is a danger, he says, that 'those other objects, of which we said that they are loved for its sake, should deceive us, like so many images (*εἴδωλα*) of it' (219d2–4). In saying this, Socrates is not arguing that things and persons are *εἴδωλα* and therefore not really loved. Rather he assumes in the immediate context that all sorts of things and persons are not really loved, and adds that there is a danger of mistakenly believing them to be so – a danger of being deceived by them in the way in which it is possible to be deceived by images, mistaking them for their originals. Concerning the *Lysis* in general and the bearing of its contents on the question of loving persons for their own sakes, along with Vlastos I take it to be a thoroughly Socratic dialogue.

but are not as real as they. This neither entails nor even suggests that the things of this world are deficient in reality, that they are dependent for their existence on the Forms, and that they are lacking in substance like shadows or reflections in water.[9] Still less does it entail that souls, those realities which number the gods among them and are far from being of this world, are things of a shadowy, insubstantial kind. Consequently, Plato's account of love gives us no grounds for imputing *ontological* folly to loving men for their own sakes: that is, it does nothing to support the view that to love, cherish and respect a man is no better ontologically than to love, cherish and respect his shadow.

While Plato's doctrine then gives no justification for concluding that men are ontologically unworthy of being loved for their own sakes, it might seem none the less that he considers them to be thus unworthy on other grounds. For, in the first place, he holds that when a man is loved this is because he serves as a *means* to his lover's recollection and re-communion with the Forms. In the second place, in the course of analysing love Plato depicts Reality as worthy of love for its own sake, while he sees the beloved as a mere *image* of that Reality.

Concerning the first of these supposed grounds of men's unworthiness – the fact that on Plato's analysis the beloved serves his lover as a means to recollection and recommunion with the Forms – little needs to be said. For Plato himself makes plain, in the *Republic* for example, that a thing's being worth while as a means does not exclude its being worth while for its own sake (*Rep.* 357ff.). Thus if the beloved is worthy of love on the grounds that he serves as a means to recollection and re-communion with the Forms, he is not for that reason unworthy of love for his own sake. Concerning the second of the supposed grounds – the claim that Plato sees Reality as worthy of being loved for its own sake while seeing men as mere images of that Reality – a lot more needs to be said. We need to answer the general question whether images *qua* images can properly be loved for their own sakes.

## II

Before the possibility or propriety of loving images for their own sakes can profitably be discussed, some preliminary points need to be made.

To begin with, the expression 'to love something – or someone[10] – *for its own sake*' has at least two senses. The first of these suggests that our thoughts are focused upon our own interests. If I say, for example, that I love music for its own sake, I have in mind that music of itself constitutes or satisfies one of my final goals or ends, and that I do not pursue it for the sake of something else, or solely for the sake of something else. Similarly if I say that I love Mary for her own sake, I mean that Mary constitutes or satisfies certain of my ends, and that precisely because these are ends I do not love her for the sake of something else, or solely for the sake of something else. In the second of the senses the expression suggests that our thoughts are focused upon the interests of some other person or persons (as well perhaps as upon our own). Thus if in this sense I say that I love Mary for her own sake, I mean that among other things I want those of her ends to be fulfilled which I judge to be to her good, and that I want them to be fulfilled because they are her ends, not mine; that similarly I take delight

[9] I have argued the point about the ontological status of images in Plato's dialogues in detail elsewhere: see especially White [46], *passim* & [47], *passim*.

[10] Quinton [29], pp. 104–5, and Taylor [42], p. 146, (quoted by Brown [1], p. 20) hold that only persons can be objects of love, but this seems unduly restrictive. See Hamlyn [15], pp. 11ff. and Brown's [1] (partially persuasive) arguments *contra*, pp. 20–6, 104–5.

in those of her desires being satisfied which I judge to be beneficial or at least not detrimental to her; that I wish to contribute to furthering her beneficial or non-harmful goals and ambitions.

(Because a human being has interests, it is possible in both senses of the expression to love him or her for his or for her own sake. By contrast, it is possible to love Beauty for its own sake, or any other of the Forms, in the first sense only. The Forms have no interests of their own.)

The second preliminary point is this. Loving someone for his or her own sake, in whichever sense of the expression, does not require that he or she be loved exclusively, or loved more than other persons or things. If a Christian loves his God for the latter's own sake, for example, this does not mean that he cannot love his neighbour in a similar way. And if he loves his neighbour for his neighbour's sake, this does not mean that he loves the latter more than he loves his God. There are degrees of loving and many possible hierarchies among the objects of love.

With these preliminary points made, the issue of love and images may now be turned to, and it will be useful to distinguish henceforth between 'loving something for its own $sake_1$' (the first sense of the expression) and 'loving something for its own $sake_2$'.

*Loving a person for his own sake in the first sense of the expression*

The first important question to be answered here is this. Is it possible, and perhaps at times even right and proper, to love an image for its own $sake_1$ when we already love it because it is an image of something else which we love for its own $sake_1$? More specifically, is it possible and in fact sometimes right and proper to love a person for his own $sake_1$ when we already love him because he is an image of Beauty which we love for its own $sake_1$? I will argue that it is.

If we love a thing for its own $sake_1$, we have *eo ipso* good grounds for loving an image of that thing for its own $sake_1$ too, provided that the image in question sufficiently resembles its original in those qualities for which we love the latter in the first place. To illustrate the point, if we love a sunset for its own $sake_1$ in virtue of its visual beauty, we have good grounds for loving its reflection in the waters of a lake for its own $sake_1$ too. Or if we love Helen for her own $sake_1$ in virtue of her physical beauty, we have similarly good grounds for loving a portrait of Helen for its own $sake_1$, provided that the portrait adequately captures her beauty. In such cases we can love the image because it is an image, and at the same time love it for its own $sake_1$. We can love the portrait of Helen because it is an image of her, recalling her to mind when she is absent and so on, and also love it for its own $sake_1$ – for the beauty of form which it itself possesses.

It follows that the doctrine of the *Phaedrus* in no way makes it inconsistent to love a human being for his or her own $sake_1$ while loving him or loving her *qua* an image of Beauty.

Behind this reasoning lies the assumption – admittedly not universally approved of, and not approved of by Vlastos[11] – that when we love something for its own $sake_1$,

[11] The very general thesis that in all cases x loves y in virtue of some or all of y's qualities, is defended by Taylor [41], *passim*, and supported from Plato's point of view, though not always in the same form, by such commentators on the *Phaedrus* as Kosman [17], pp. 56–7 (commenting on Nygren [25]) and esp. pp. 64ff.; Price [27], pp. 32–4; Price [28], p. 98; Griswold [10], p. 129; Ferrari [5], p. 182. It is also splendidly argued for in relation to the *Symposium* by Warner [45], *passim*. But this general thesis is much disputed. For opposing views of various kinds, in addition to that of Vlastos [44], p. 31, see: McTaggart [19] (quoted by Warner [45], pp. 334–5); Pitcher

we love it in virtue of all or some of its qualities. It assumes, for example, that if we love a silver vase for its own sake$_1$, we love it in virtue of such qualities as its shape, colour and lustre. This assumption is reasonable – *pace* Vlastos and others – because it is hard to know how else properly to explain our loving the vase and not, say, the bronze medallion standing next to it. And the same holds *mutatis mutandis* of persons. The assumption is that we love them in virtue of some or all of their qualities, and this assumption is similarly reasonable because it is difficult otherwise to give a genuine explanation of our loving Martha rather than Mary.[12] Equally it is difficult to lend sense to the suggestion that we love persons for their individuality or particularity, not for their qualities.[13]

On kindred grounds it is reasonable to assume that there are limits to what kinds of person we can reasonably love, since it seems absurd to suggest that we might love a person *whatever* his qualities, however evil or repulsive.[14]

It follows as a corollary to these assumptions that the more closely one thing resembles another that we already love for its own sake$_1$, the better grounds we have for loving the first thing for its own sake$_1$ too. For example, if a piece of jewellery that we love for its own sake$_1$ has a near pair, we have good grounds for loving that near pair for its own sake$_1$ too. If Helen resembles a film-star that we idolise for her own sake$_1$, we have good grounds for loving Helen for her own sake$_1$ too.[15]

Bearing all of this in mind, we can now ask if the lover described in the *Phaedrus* has good grounds for loving his beloved for that beloved's own sake$_1$, in addition to loving him as an image of Beauty. The answer to the question is plainly 'Yes', because the beloved as Plato portrays him resembles Beauty not just adequately but to a striking degree. Plato tells us that the lover sees the godlike face or body of his beloved closely imitating Beauty (*κάλλος εὖ μεμιμημένον*, 251a3), and that consequently he feels in the presence of this resemblance the sort of awe which recently he felt in the presence of Beauty itself (251a); that when looking upon the beauty of his beloved the lover is moved to worship him as if he were a god (251a); that the lover feels reverence for his beloved because the latter is possessed of such beauty (252a–b); that when the soul of the lover draws near, he sees the brilliant vision of his beloved, and consequently at once recalls the true nature of Beauty (254b); that the beauty of the beloved sends the lover into a frenzy, into sleeplessness and so on (251dff.). There is

[26], pp. 341–2; Scruton [36], pp. 41–2; Hamlyn [15], p. 13; Scruton [37], pp. 525–6; Goldberg [8], pp. 38–9; Brown [1], pp. 24, 41–6, 102–10. However, for the purposes of this paper, although I do in fact hold to the general thesis, I need only the 'true and even trivial' (Taylor [41], p. 153) thesis that in *some* cases x loves y in virtue of certain of y's qualities. More specifically, all that I need is that it be consistent with Plato's doctrines to hold that the lover loves his beloved in virtue of the latter's beauty and other qualities, and that this justifies his loving his beloved for his own sake as well as as a means to recollection and so on.

[12] I take the view (perhaps stipulatively) that to assert that you love Mary because she was the first girl to dance with you, or something else of the sort, is not to give an explanation of your love at all. It is not uncommon to feel a sentimental attachment to the girl who first danced with you, but if in addition you actually love her, your appropriate emotional feelings and behaviour need to be based on beliefs about her lovable qualities.

[13] Few of us would be flattered to learn that it was not in virtue of our qualities that we were loved.

[14] But see: Hamlyn [15], p. 13; Lyons [18], pp. 78–9 and Brown [1] on Lyons, pp. 114–15; Brown [1], pp. 117–24 on Pitcher [26], pp. 341ff.

[15] In the case of loving a person as a sexual partner the grounds here are *prima facie* grounds only, and can be overridden by such things as obligations to keep promises. Thus, for example, I may have good grounds for loving and living with Angela while being morally barred from doing so by the fact that I have obligations to Mary, my wife. But see Newton-Smith [22], pp. 124ff.

no doubt then that the beloved resembles Beauty so plainly as fully to justify his being loved for his own $sake_1$, in addition to being loved as an image. In fact, given that the beloved closely resembles or is a good imitation of Beauty (251a), surely reason demands of the lover that he love him for his own $sake_1$. And the same holds of Justice, Wisdom and the like. The beloved resembles these before he is chosen (252e), and comes increasingly to resemble them as love develops. And though this resemblance is less obvious than resemblance to Beauty, there is no reason to believe it less real or less discernible to the lover.

All of this is a far cry from the assertion that on Plato's account of love it is 'folly and even idolatry' to love a human being for his own sake.

*Loving a person for his own sake in the second sense of the expression*

The second important question that needs to be answered is this. Does Plato's account of love in the *Phaedrus* make it inconsistent, foolish or even idolatrous to love a person for his own $sake_2$ – to wish for his (good) ends to be fulfilled because they are his ends, to take delight in the satisfaction of his (good) desires because they are his desires, and so on? The answer is 'No'. Helen may properly be loved for her own $sake_2$ in virtue of her beauty, wit and charm, just as she may be loved for her own $sake_1$ in virtue of those or other like qualities. Moreover, if at the same time she is lovable as an image of Beauty or some other Form or Forms, this does not affect her lovability for her own $sake_2$ any more than it affects her lovability for her own $sake_1$.

As I argued earlier, if a person closely resembles Beauty, *eo ipso* he is worthy of being loved for his own $sake_1$, precisely because Beauty itself is worthy of being so loved. By contrast, if a person closely resembles Beauty or any other Form, he is not thereby rendered worthy of being loved for his own $sake_2$. This is because the Forms, having no interests, are not themselves lovable in that way. So we cannot argue that Plato's beloved in the *Phaedrus* is lovable for his own $sake_2$ on the grounds that he closely resembles Beauty which itself is lovable for its own $sake_2$. Beauty is not lovable in that way. However, what we can argue on the strength of Plato's position is this. The Forms of Beauty, Wisdom, Temperance and the like are not lovable for their own $sakes_2$, since they do not have interests. But a person who resembles those Forms, and thereby has the qualities of beauty, wisdom and temperance, is lovable for his own $sake_2$. For in addition to having these and similar qualities he is a person, and being a person he has interests.[16]

[16] Two points are worth noting here. One is that Vlastos' first objection has already been answered: there are no grounds for saying that it is folly to love a man even *qua* image for his own sake. What follows is an argument to show that there are often positive grounds making it unreasonable not to. The second point is that a number of scholars have already drawn attention (for reasons different and sometimes opposed to mine) to the part that individuals play in the *Phaedrus*' account of love (often as opposed to that of the *Symposium* – but see Rowe's [32] sober comments on this point, p. 190). See, e.g., Grube [11], pp. 112–13; Gould [9], p. 120; Sinaiko [39], pp. 85–6; Price [27], pp. 30–1; Price [28], pp. 96–7; Santas [35], p. 112; Nussbaum [23], [24], *passim*; Ferrari [5], p. 184. Nussbaum [24] is particularly insistent on the place of the individual *qua* individual in the *Phaedrus*' account, though the textual basis for her claims is not always clear. She says of the beloved that 'this person is loved and valued in a unique, or at least a rare and deeply personal way', and 'that this unique person is valued, throughout, as a separate being with his or her own self-moving soul' (p. 218). Again she tells us, concerning pairs of lovers, that having found one another 'they treat one another with respect for the other's separate choices, fostering one another's continuing development towards the flourishing of their deepest aspirations, "using not envious spite or ungenerous hostility" towards the other, but genuinely benefiting him for his own sake' (p. 219). Yet again, she says that love is 'a thing of intrinsic value and beauty, not just a way-station toward the good'; and that the 'best human

Needless to say, Plato himself does not argue in this way: Plato himself, that is, does not argue about the interests of persons *qua* persons. But he has no call to. His principal concern in the central part of the *Phaedrus* – *pace* some – is to bring out precisely and solely that persons in respect of certain qualities are images of the Forms and thereby lovable as means to recollection and re-communion with those Forms. Even so, much of what he says in the course of describing love's transcendent function suggests that he could well have argued in such a way had he chosen. For what he says makes plain that a lover loves his beloved because the latter possesses beauty and other godlike qualities, qualities such as love of wisdom and capability as a ruler (252e). In addition he makes plain that once the lover on the basis of these qualities has fallen in love with his beloved,[17] he instantly begins to act with zeal to further what he judges to be the genuine interests of that beloved. For he seeks to obtain for him everything that he desires and seeks for himself, namely a growing resemblance to his god (253b–c).[18]

It does not follow from what has just been said that the lover pursues the interests of his beloved for the beloved's own sake; he could be a total egoist pursuing things for his own sake, even the interests of his beloved.[19] However, there are things said in the *Phaedrus* suggesting that the lover views his beloved as worthy of consideration in his own right, as an end in himself.[20] To begin with, in his behaviour towards those whom he loves, and towards others, the lover is said to model himself on the god whose follower he is (252d), from which it may be inferred that he strives to imitate all of the latter's qualities, including those that the gods have in common.[21] From this in turn it follows that he will behave as the gods in general behave towards men; and this is exemplified in the *Phaedrus* by the gods' gift of love to men for men's benefit and greatest happiness (245b–c). It is more generally exemplified by their begrudging men nothing in respect of happiness (247a). On the plausible assumption then that in Plato's view the gods do not act from self-interest,[22] we have no grounds for imputing self-interest to the lover. Again, the lover is said to revere his beloved and stand in holy awe of him (254e), attitudes of mind which are hard to reconcile with his

life involves ongoing devotion to another individual' (p. 219). Finally, she asserts that instead of 'loving one another as exemplars of beauty and goodness, properties which they might conceivably lose without ceasing to be themselves, these lovers love one another's character, memories and aspirations – which are, as Aristotle too will say, what each person is "in and of himself"' (p. 220).

[17] καὶ ὅταν αὐτὸν εὑρόντες ἐρασθῶσι, 252e3–4. It is clear that although love is described as a form of madness, it is none the less based on reason: the lover looks first for the right qualities in his prospective beloved. And surely there is no suggestion that *qua* philosopher the lover is mad, whatever the majority may think. But see Vlastos' [44] comments, p. 27 n. 80. Nussbaum [24], pp. 213ff., wishes to treat the *Phaedrus*' love as a more extreme form of madness than seems warranted: she speaks as if according to Plato being in love were incompatible with possessing the virtue of σωφροσύνη. For some useful comments on the madness and rationality of the lover–philosopher, see Rowe [33], pp. 117–19.

[18] See the quotation from Hermias, Ferrari [5], p. 184.

[19] Cf. Vlastos [44], pp. 8f.

[20] The following remarks attempt to meet Vlastos' [44] 'selfishness objection' (p. 4). For very different and more radical attempts to meet it see Kosman [17], pp. 54ff.; Price [27], esp. p. 30. See also Price [28], pp. 97–8.

[21] In other words, I interpret Plato to mean at 252c–d that the lover, once seized by love, honours and strives to imitate his god in all the latter's characteristics, not just those that distinguish him from the other gods. From this it follows that he strives to imitate his god in point of those qualities shared by all the gods.

[22] It is clear from *Republic* 377ff. that the gods are perfect and unable to change, and it is made explicit at *Symposium* 203e–204a that the gods, being in no way deficient, can desire nothing.

supposed intentions merely to make use of his beloved. Yet again, it is reasonable to infer from what is said of the false lover in Socrates' recanted speech – he prefers his beloved to be weaker than himself, more ignorant, more cowardly, to be kept from advantageous associations, and so on – that the true lover by contrast genuinely values his beloved's independence, both of body and of mind (239ff.). Finally, to switch to the beloved, the latter judges the lover's love to be genuine (255a), and he is described as being altogether amazed at the goodness of will displayed towards him. The friendship of his lover, he is convinced, surpasses that of all his other friends (255b).

The simplest way of interpreting what Plato says, then, is to see the lover as pursuing with unselfishness the best interests of his beloved.[23] Of course his notion of what constitutes those best interests, namely that his beloved should become like the gods in wisdom, justice and other virtues, may not entirely accord with what in the twentieth century many are prepared to allow as the best interests of those whom they love. Some of us set great store by the freedom of those that we love to make their own choices and have their own values, even when these conflict with ours. But differences of that sort could scarcely warrant the conclusion that the lover in the *Phaedrus* does not really love his beloved for his own $\text{sake}_2$.[24]

## III

The following further argument – expressing Vlastos' second objection – needs yet to be looked at: according to Plato, men are not worthy of love for their own sakes – in either sense of that expression; for if all that Plato says is true, it follows that when we love a human being we do so merely as a consequence of a deficiency or incompleteness which characterizes our mortal condition. Our longing to remedy this incompleteness expresses itself at times in a passionate craving for a particular human person, which craving we describe as love. However, while in truth this craving is for Reality, to us it seems to be for the human person in question; consequently we think that we love that person for his own sake, and that he is correspondingly worthy of our love. But here we are in error. For given Plato's theory of Forms in conjunction with his theory of love, surely it is obvious that 'were we free of mortal deficiency, we would have no reason to love anyone or anything except the Idea: seen face to face it would absorb all our love'.[25] It follows that we do not really love human beings for their own sakes: we love them because they remedy our mortal deficiency, leading us towards fulfilment through re-communion with the Forms. But once this re-communion is attained, having served their purpose our fellow men are no longer needed: the Forms in all their perfection and transcendence now totally absorb us.

This argument is less than compelling for two reasons. First, even if it were true that seen face to face the Forms would 'absorb all our love', this would not render us unable in this world to love human beings for their own sakes, nor would it render them unworthy of such love. For, as was pointed out earlier, if we genuinely love a

[23] This is not in conflict with Plato's general doctrine that whatever a person does he does in some sense for his own good, since it is possible to view acting with unselfishness as in part constitutive of one's own good. (The latter view is what I believe Plato to have held as early as the *Gorgias*: see White [48].) On the other hand, the apparent conflict between egoism and loving someone for his or her own sake cannot, I believe, be resolved simply by distinguishing between the object and the aim of love. (See Santas [34], p.54.)

[24] See Ferrari's [5] brief discussion on these points, pp. 183–4. For a useful discussion on behavioural criteria of love, see Brown [1], pp. 33–5, in criticism of Newton-Smith [22].

[25] Vlastos [44], pp. 32f.

person for his own sake, this does not mean that we love him exclusively, nor that we love him better than anyone or anything else. Nor again does it mean that he cannot be replaced in our love by someone or something else. Conversely, if he is replaced, it does not follow that our former love for him was not real. If we come to love John, or we come to love Beauty, in such a way that Peter is thereby replaced in our love, this does not mean that we never loved Peter for his own sake in the first place, nor that he was unworthy of that love.

The second reason is this. To assert that the Forms would absorb all our love if seen face to face is to assume that our souls would lack the capacity to love anything further, or that they could have no reason for doing so – no reason for loving the imperfect when in possession of the perfect. But there are no *a priori* grounds for believing such assumptions; and, more important, they form no part of Plato's doctrines. This is clear from what he says about the gods.

The gods, he tells us, experience the fullest contemplation of the Forms, and they do this without suffering periods of forgetfulness in the way that humans do. In fact it is plausible to assume that on Plato's view the gods' vision of Reality is continuous.[26] Yet the gods are not so engrossed by that vision as to want either capacity or reason for being considerate of others. Quite the contrary. Zeus, we are told, benevolently cares for and governs the inanimate universe (246e); it is the gods who send us the greatest of goods in the form of various sorts of madness (244a); it is the gods who send us love for our greatest happiness (245b); the gods begrudge happiness to no one (247a).[27] But there is more to be said. Not only does the vision of Reality fail to exhaust the gods' love and attention, but in the light of the following points from Plato's doctrines it is easy to see why.

No souls, divine or human, are unaffected by Reality. Rather, in the course of contemplating Reality the gods feed upon it and are nourished by it (247d–e); Reality is the fitting pasturage for the wings of human souls and it constitutes their nourishment (248b–c); the Forms make the gods what they are (beautiful, wise and good, 246e) (249c); the Forms make souls resemble them, rendering them just, temperate and the like (250a–b). In short, souls in contemplating the Forms are nourished by them and are made to resemble them,[28] thereby becoming among other things good. But souls which are good, as we have seen from the behaviour of the gods, are other-regardingly good, benevolent towards others. Contemplation of Reality then, on Plato's own doctrine, far from being all-absorbing, renders souls benevolent and caring of others. The closer souls approach to the Forms and the fuller the vision they obtain of them, the more other-regardingly good they become.

The *Republic*'s analogy of the sun and the Good reinforces this conclusion. It tells us that the Good is essentially radiant, out-pouring and creative of good beyond it. In proportion then as souls share in the Good and resemble it, they too are radiant, out-pouring and creative of good beyond them.[29]

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[26] See Hackforth [13], p. 80.

[27] It is worth relating 252d–253b to all of this – the passage in which the lover is eager to discover within himself the nature of his god and to become like that god, and to make his beloved like him too.

[28] Cf. Seeskin [38], p. 583.

[29] Compare Cooper [2], esp. sections II & III. I am grateful to the Editors for their carefully-worded comments; I have made use of them at many points in this paper.

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