

PLATO'S GODS AND THE WAY OF IDEAS

In a well-known reading of the *Symposium*, Gregory Vlastos sees in Diotima's account of the ascent from appreciating the beauty of an individual body to glimpsing the essence of beauty itself Plato's inability to perceive individuals as ends in themselves¹. Individuals are loveable only because and insofar as they instantiate certain qualities, and it would be «idolatry» to love them for their own sakes. Vlastos' interpretation of Platonic erotics follows quite naturally from interpreting Platonic ontology as categorically subordinating individuals to the ideas, reducing the former to mere bundles of qualities. Accordingly, White criticizes Vlastos' reading in the context of questioning this general ontological presumption, at least as it applies to Plato's early and middle dialogues². Nussbaum, in *The Fragility of Goodness*, sees the *Phaedrus* as a sort of palinode in relation to the *Symposium* in which love is of the individual *qua* individual³. More recently, without specific reference to the debate concerning Plato's erotics, McCabe, in *Plato's Individuals*, has argued that individuation, rather than being or form, is primary for Plato, for whom «The problems of «being» ... are attached to whether, and how, we can determine that something is an indi-

1. F. C. WHITE, Love and the Individual in Plato's *Phaedrus*, *Classical Quarterly*, 40, 1990, pp. 396-406; cf. IDEM, Plato's Middle Dialogues and the Independence of Particulars, *Philosophical Quarterly*, 27, 1977, pp. 193-213. White argues that Plato affirms a «tripartite world» consisting of particulars, forms and individual qualities in the early and middle dialogues alike, coming to regard particulars as reducible to bundles of qualities only with the *Timaeus*, if at all.

2. IDEM, Love and the Individual *loc. cit.*, cf. IDEM, Plato's Middle Dialogues *loc. cit.* White argues that Plato affirms a «tripartite world» consisting of particulars, forms and individual qualities in the early and middle dialogues alike, coming to regard particulars as reducible to bundles of qualities only with the *Timaeus*, if at all.

3. IDEM, Love and the Individual, *loc. cit.*, cf. F. C. WHITE, Plato's Middle Dialogues, *loc. cit.*

vidual» (p. 305)⁴. No response to Vlastos' position has taken account, however, of the significance of a particular class of individuals playing an especially important role in the *Phaedrus*, namely Plato's Gods. Commentators such as Griswold have indeed taken account of the Gods inasmuch as they are responsible for certain human «character types», but not with respect to just what sort of beings, and what sort of individuals, they are⁵. I believe that understanding the role the Gods play in Plato's erotics will enrich our understanding of the relationship between individuals and ideas in Plato's thought more generally.

To accord any systematic role to the Gods in Plato's philosophy raises the issue of the degree to which it is appropriate to take Plato's references to them seriously, rather than as allegorical references to ideal principles. Even commentators who have been interested in this aspect of the *Phaedrus* have generally been interested in its subjective dimension, in a putative Platonic «mysticism»⁶. Of the Gods mentioned in Plato's works, only the demiurge of the *Timaeus* usually receives serious consideration from modern commentators *qua* God. One reason for this is surely because the demiurge of the *Timaeus* is more compatible with the creator God of the dominant monotheisms than the Gods of the *Phaedrus*, which features a pluralistic divine field and is concerned primarily with inspiration (in the broadest sense) rather than with creation. Depending upon one's sense of what theology ought to be, then, Plato's 'theology' may be sought preferentially in his account, e.g., of the idea of the Good, rather than where he speaks explicitly about Gods.

Nevertheless, there has been some tendency among recent scholarship to allow for the possibility that Plato and Aristotle may have taken the Olympian theology rather more seriously than is generally assumed, for example Richard Bodéüs in *Aristotle and the Theology of the Living Immortals*, which refers in its title to the description of a God given at *Phaedr.*, 246 d 1-3: «an immortal living being,

4. M. M. MCCABE, *Plato's Individuals*, Princeton (New Jersey), Princeton University Press, 1994.

5. C. L. GRISWOLD, J., *Self-knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, New Haven (Connecticut), Yale University Press, 1986.

6. Cf. e.g., K. R. SEESKIN, Platonism, Mysticism, and Madness, *Monist*, 59, 1976, pp. 574-586.

having a soul and a body joined together for all time»⁷. To the degree that Plato subscribed to traditional Hellenic theology, his «theology» would be external to his metaphysics; Bodéüs sees just this sort of «dissociation of theology from metaphysics» in Aristotle. Moreover, Bodéüs compares the relationship between the Gods and the intelligible in Aristotle to «the theses of Plato's *Phaedrus* concerning extracelestial intelligible entities», which «suggest that the gods' relation to these reputedly divine intelligible beings is not one of ontological identity, but one involving the gods as knowers of those intelligible beings», (p. 40). Bodéüs separates both Plato and Aristotle in this way from the tradition of what he terms «Western onto-theology». As Bodéüs remarks, the term θεολογία, as first attested in *Rep.*, 379 a, «ne désigne pas une science, mais le langage de ceux, poètes ou prosateurs, qui parlent des dieux», (Bodéüs 1992, p. 247 n. 10). Plato's relationship to «theology» in this sense is more complicated than Aristotle's. In the *Republic*, Socrates demands that discourses concerning the Gods conform to certain *tupoi* concerning what a God really is (τῷ ὄντι) which will determine the limits within which a literal reading of the myths is acceptable⁸.

Taking Plato's Gods seriously as a class of beings, however, and not merely as allegorical decoration around the Ideas nor, e.g., as planets⁹, is not without certain important consequences for Platon-

7. R. BODÉÜS, *Aristotle and the Theology of the Living Immortals*, trans. J. GARRETT, Albany (New York), S.U.N.Y. Press, 2000; cf. also R. BODÉÜS, *La philosophie et les dieux du Phèdre*, in L. ROSSETTI (ed.), *Understanding the Phaedrus*, Sankt Augustin, Academia Verlag, 1992, pp. 246-248.

8. The literal reading being as much as children, who are at issue in the passage from the *Republic*, can reasonably be expected to grasp. That Plato is not averse to symbolic interpretations of myth is clear from the «etymological» section of the *Cratylus*—if we choose to regard *that* text as being in earnest. For notable recent efforts at taking the 'etymologies' seriously, cf. D. SEDLEY, *The Etymologies in Plato's Cratylus*, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 118, 1998, pp. 140-154, and J. BRONKHORST, *Etymology and Magic: Yaska's Nirukta, Plato's Cratylus, and the Riddle of Semantic Etymologies*, *Numen*, 48, 2001, pp. 147-203.

9. Cf. BODÉÜS, 1992, p. 247; if, according to *Phaedr.* 246 c-d, we have never seen a God, then the Gods cannot be the planets, which are visible as such—the planets are categorically distinguished by Plato in this fashion from the Gods of the tradition inasmuch as the latter are invisible, manifesting themselves when they will (*Tim.*, 40 d - 41 a).

ic ontology. I shall argue that joining the account in the *Phaedrus* to that in the *Symposium* suggests that the ideas are immanent to the relationship between humans and the Gods and remain, in certain respects, a dependent moment of that relationship. In the Gods, the ideas possess an eternal substrate, a substrate which is not contingent because the Gods exhibit such excellences essentially. In this respect, the Gods are to the ideas generally what, e.g., fire is to the idea of heat (*Phaed.*, 105 c).

This understanding of the nature of ideas could be seen as one way of coping with the *aporiai* arising from the attempt to conceive of the ideas in sovereign independence. Parmenides demonstrates to the young Socrates that the doctrine of the ideas suffers from a number of difficulties arising from conceiving of the ideas as things separate in themselves. These difficulties center on the problem of the relations which would obtain between ideas and particulars, and culminate in a picture according to which if the ideas indeed exist, they are nevertheless quite unknowable. It would take a person of both natural talent and wide experience to disprove this, Parmenides asserts (*Parm.*, 133 b). By characterizing his candidate in such a way, Parmenides seems to intimate that the answer will require inquiries or information transcending the narrowly dialectical. The doctrine of the ideas is on no account to be abandoned while it awaits its adequate defender; nor are we to imagine that the inference of the unknowability of the ideas is correct simply because it will be so difficult to refute it. This cannot be the case, Parmenides assures us, for were it, it would also lead us to the inference that the Gods are not our masters nor have any knowledge of our affairs (134 e). The present essay argues that Plato answers this objection through an account integrating the ontological status of the ideas and the way in which humans achieve consciousness of them into a narrative about the relationship between humans and the Gods which is, at the same time, rich in ethical significance.

I. The *Phaedrus*. Beauty, among the ideas, projects itself the furthest into mundane life. The likenesses here of justice and of temperance and the other ideas have no light of their own, Plato explains, and so only a few come, with difficulty, to perceive them through their images (*Phaedr.*, 250 b). But beauty, which illuminates the realm of the Gods, shines its light as well here among us

and is thus perceived immediately by the senses, especially by the sense of sight, and by everyone in one fashion or another. Beauty alone plays this role according to Plato (250 d). What is beauty, in the last analysis? We read that the divine (τὸ θεῖον) is the beautiful, the wise, the good, and «all other such things» (πάν τι τὸ τοιοῦτον) (246 e). This makes it seem that divinity somehow encompasses if not all, then at any rate the noblest of the ideas. But it does not seem as though a merely conceptual analysis of divinity would yield these qualities. The identity of the divine with these qualities must be of a different order.

We see the way in which beauty in particular interacts with the peculiar attributes borne by various Gods in the account Plato offers of erotic attraction. Humans who find themselves on the Earth together at a given moment have been, prior to their return into bodies, followers or attendants of various deities. Socrates explicitly remarks that he was a follower of Zeus, and presumes this of Phaedrus as well (*Phaedr.*, 250 b). This prenatal cultic affiliation, so to speak, manifests itself in our patterns of erotic attraction. Plato goes into quite a bit of detail. The God to whom we are affiliated affects not only the qualities we find attractive in another, but also our style as lovers and the qualities which, once we have found a partner, we seek to bring out simultaneously in them and in ourselves. In loving our human lover, we honor and imitate the God or Goddess whom we love (252 c - 253 c). The beauty of the God or Goddess impresses upon us as well a special receptivity to the virtues they embody. The beauty of the Gods is, so to speak, a delivery device for virtues. The virtues we honor are, therefore, present to us to begin with as an integral part of the individual nature of the particular deity to whom we are affiliated.

Indeed, Plato speaks of the ideas such as justice and temperance as «honored» (τίμια) by souls (250 b 2), and uses the same terminology to refer to the activity of «honoring» one's patron deity in the beloved (252 e 1). The term *τιμαί* was, of course, in use at least since Hesiod to refer to the potencies, the particular spheres of influence, of the various Gods. Here we see that for Plato, the virtues are, from a point of view of their origin, certain potencies or attributes of the Gods. Mortals are sensitized to these potencies by the adoration they experienced before birth for the deity whom they 'followed', and so they seek to bring these attributes out in them-

selves and in their romantic partners. This desire drives them to learn the nature of the attribute (or attributes) from whomever they can, as well as to search within themselves for the traces of the nature of the God which are fixed in their memory (252 e 6 - 8). As Plato explains,

when they search eagerly within themselves to find the nature of their God, they are successful, because they have been compelled to keep their eyes fixed upon the God, and as they reach and grasp him by memory they are inspired and receive from him character and habits, so far as it is possible for a man to participate in the God (253 a 1 - 6; trans. Harold North Fowler, modified).

The recollection of the ideas is integrated here with the factors eliciting it in mundane life in a way that substantially supplements the account in the *Meno*, which simply states that «as all nature is akin, and the soul has learned all things», —i.e., in the discarnate condition—«there is no reason why we should not, by remembering but one single thing—an act which men call learning—discover everything else, if we have courage and faint not in the search», (81 d 1-5; trans. W. R. M. Lamb). To the *Meno*'s account of the conditions of the possibility for recollection, the *Phaedrus* adds the motives and the mechanisms of that particular experience of recollection, namely the recollection of divine beauty, which has the potential to drive the whole process of recollecting any number of diverse ideas from beginning to end, though different individuals may pursue it to different lengths.

We are accustomed to think of the ideas as something separate from the Gods, and yet the account in the *Phaedrus* never explicitly indicates this. Rather, it indicates that the ideas πάντοτε! — at least the ones of which it treats — are bound up intimately in the organic unity of each divine person. Hence it is beauty, which pertains more immediately to the utterly particular and unrepeatable than any other idea, which delivers the ideas to the lover, who separates it out at last because their prenatal affiliation to a particular deity has sensitized them to it. For such a lover, the distinction of the form from its sensible bearer is a way of drawing nearer to the form's original, divine bearer.

The ideas, as they appear in the account of the supracelestial place in the *Phaedrus*, are not so much distinct and separate forms but rather attributes of real being and properties of the «suprace-

lestial place» itself. It is the Gods who are the prominent individuals in this place; Plato says that the Gods at their banquet «behold the things beyond heaven», (247 c 3) that the region or place itself possesses truly existing essence or substance (247 c 8 - d 1). There is talk of the justice, temperance and knowledge to be beheld there (247 d 2 - e 4), as well as other, unspecified real beings (247 e 3) and truths (248 c 3). But Plato is as likely to refer to these as food for the Gods as he is to refer to them as spectacles enjoyed by them (247 e 3 - 4, 247 d 2 - 3). And he seems to make the distinct essences of the ideas less important than their common orientation to real being: the knowledge beheld by the Gods, for instance, is «that which exists in the essence of real being», (247 e 1 - 2). «Real being» (ὄντως ὄν) is the quality of the place, and the sense of place dominates the passage. The knowledge in that place is surpassing knowledge because it is the knowledge that is there, and similarly for the justice, the temperance, and so forth.

What gives to this place such an aspect? Why should we imagine it to be other than that it is the place where the Gods hold their banquet? Plato cannot have meant any actual spatial 'place', for Aristotle attests that for Plato there is no extracelestial body, and that the Ideas are «nowhere» (*Physics*, Γ 3, 203 a 8 - 9). The «place» Plato speaks of in the *Phaedrus* is, rather, uniquely defined by the presence of the Gods. Similarly, why should we imagine that what nourishes the Gods at their banquet is something other than the society and fellowship existing among them, where jealousy is unknown (247 a 9) and every virtue is there to be seen in one another¹⁰? In the *Protagoras* (347 c-e), Plato stresses that the symposium of the καλοὶ κάγαθοὶ requires no «extraneous voice» of flute or harp «but only the company contenting themselves with their own conversation»—and this would be true *a fortiori* regarding a gathering of the Gods, the supreme καλοὶ κάγαθοί.

The remark at 249 c, which might be taken to imply the subordination of the Gods to the ideas, says only that those things which collectively constitute real being are those things with which the

10. Cf. the reference to the «spiritual sustenance... deities bring to the feast» in the *Laws* (653 d; trans. A. E. Taylor).

God is engaged *qua* divine (πρὸς οἷσπερ θεὸς ὧν θεϊός ἐστιν)¹¹. The significance of the supracelestial place, what gives to it its special quality as a place, is that it is a gathering together, in common, of the Gods who are otherwise «attending each to his own duties» (247 a 7 - 8)¹². In this respect, one might compare the supracelestial τόπος of the *Phaedrus* to the «space» or «receptacle» of the *Timaeus*, inasmuch as the latter is the medium for the appearance of forms in sensibles while the former is the medium for the appearance of divine virtue at the «symposium» of the Gods¹³.

II. The *Symposium*. Having referred to the banquet of the Gods, it is appropriate to turn to the *Symposium*, to an account which, as both the subject matter and the motif of the banquet would lead us to expect, both parallels and elaborates upon that in the *Phaedrus*. In the *Symposium*, however, the viewpoint remains within the human domain; hence, instead of a discourse about the Gods by a philosopher, there is a discourse by a priestess about the intelligible qualities of the divine, the two discourses thus forming a kind of chiasm¹⁴. Diotima thus parallels in some respects *Timaeus*, who de-

11. In contradistinction to, e.g., Rowe, who reads «those things his closeness to which gives a god his divinity». But note that the πρὸς οἷσπερ here corresponds neither to the causal dative of, e.g., *Phaedo*, 100 e 5-6 nor the διὰ + accusative of *Phaedo*, 101 a-b, which can be regarded as characteristic of the ways in which Plato expresses the causality of forms in the relationship of participation (on which see S. YONEZAWA, Are the Forms αἰτίαι in the *Phaedo*?, *Hermes*, 119, 1991, pp. 37-42. The Neoplatonist PROCLUS, for his part, explicitly denies that the Gods participate anything (*in Tim.* I, 364 Diehl); we should not assume without good reason that Plato imagines the Gods as participants in any sense which would subordinate them.

12. Cf. PROCLUS, *Theol. Plat.*, I, 107: through divine beauty «the Gods are united to and rejoice in each other, admire and are delighted in communicating with each other and in their satiety/complementarity (πλήρωσις)».

13. Cf. the discussion of the significance of the *symposium* for Plato, with special attention to the discussion of drinking parties in the *Laws*, in M. TECUSAN, *Logos Symptomikos: Patterns of the Irrational in Philosophical Drinking: Plato Outside the Symposium*, in O. MURRAY (ed.) *Symptomica: A Symposium on the Symposium*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990, pp. 238-260.

14. To be sure, Diotima's discourse is still semi-mythical, just as Socrates' discourse, although he modestly describes it as a «game» (*Phaedr.*, 265 d 1) nevertheless embodies the principles of dialectic (265 d 2 - 266 c 1).

livers a speculative discourse about cosmogenesis while leaving to the poets the empirical accounts, as it were, of the activities of particular Gods. Both discourses, however, are framed by an explicit respect for such Gods, the individual objects of cult: Timaeus begins his discourse with an invocation (*Tim.*, 27 c), while Diotima is clearly one of those «priests and priestesses who have studied so as to be able to give a reasoned account of their ministry», (*Meno*, 81 b, trans. Lamb).

In the *Phaedrus* beauty and love act as the triggers to elicit the recollection of a host of different ideas; in the *Symposium* the nature of love itself is analyzed. Love is explained by Diotima as an intermediate nature connecting humans to the Gods, a δαίμων conceived during the celebration among the Gods of the birth of Aphrodite (*Symp.*, 203 b ff.). Love is thus distinct from Aphrodite, but occasioned by her. Love is a manifestation of the intermediate nature of humans, neither divine nor utterly estranged from the divine, but desirous of the qualities possessed by the Gods which we are close enough to them, at certain times, to perceive. Philosophy is of a similar intermediate nature (204 a 8 - b 2), bearing the same relationship to the generic divine attribute of wisdom as love bears to the generic divine attribute of beauty.

Two of the three generic attributes of the Gods from the *Phaedrus*, namely the beautiful and the wise, have thus been seen to yield daimonic strivings peculiar to them. Is there such a striving corresponding to the third attribute, the Good? To the good which is beyond being and source of being and essence to beings (*Rep.*, 509 b 5 - 9) must correspond the most elemental of strivings, the striving to exist. For Neoplatonists the good becomes the principle of individuation *par excellence*, the σωστικὸν ἐκάστου, that which «conserves and holds together the being of each several thing», (Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 13; trans. E. R. Dodds). In desiring the One or the Good, entities desire their individual integrity. The striving after the One is individuating, just as the striving after wisdom makes one a philosopher and the striving after beauty makes one a lover. The striving after the Good makes one whatever and whoever one is. The quality, therefore, which it is most natural to identify as that quality in the Gods denoted by the generic divine attribute «the good» (*Phaedr.*, 246 e 2) is the attribute of perfect, integral individuality. The individuality possessed by each God impresses

their attendant souls so indelibly that they seek its likeness throughout their embodied lives. They must seek it, however, through *qualities*, and in order to do so effectively, they must go at least some way along the philosopher's path by understanding something of the essence of those qualities.

The erotic lover is distinguished from the lovers of other things — money, athletics, even philosophy (*Symp.*, 205 c 9 - d 8) — because it is erotic love or love of beauty which is ontologically fundamental, the other loves being derivative. It is the love of beauty which brings the idea to birth in us, born out of mortals' nostalgia for the society of their chosen deities. This means that when they fall in love, the object, it is true, is not simply the beloved. The essence of the erotic bond is for Plato a sort of procreation (206 b 7 - 8), because there is a third created in any erotic bond. This mediating term stands, in some respect, between the lovers; and yet it also engenders a reciprocity which is as novel in Plato's context for the heterosexual as for the homosexual couple (206 c 6 - 7). Love in the primary sense is of generating or begetting in or upon the beautiful (206 e 5) any of the manifold of ideas which we know from the *Phaedrus* to be carried within the image of beauty impressed upon mortals by the vision of the deity in whose company they traveled. This 'begetting' is the joint work of the lovers of generating virtue in each other and in the society.

The martial valor of Ares, the royalty of Hera, the intelligence and leadership of Zeus, the inspiration of Apollo (Ares: *Phaedr.*, 252 c 8; Hera: 253 b 1; Zeus: 252 e 1 - 6; Apollo: 253 b 3, 265 b 4), and other virtues corresponding to the other Gods are brought to birth among mortals, both in thought and in action, as a product of mortals' yearning for the virtues' original, divine bearers. Nor does each God represent but a single virtue; each one must rather exhibit a mixture of many virtues, just as would any virtuous human. Thus White remarks (White 1990, p. 402 & n. 21) regarding *Phaedr.*, 252 c-d that the lover models himself on the God whose follower he is, «in all the latter's characteristics, not just those that distinguish him from the other gods», from which «it follows that he strives to imitate his god in point of those qualities shared by all the gods». At the same time that it implies the possibility of an account which would abstract from the distinguishing characteristics to speak only of the qualities shared in common by all deities, di-

vinity as such, it would also follow from this aspect of the *Phaedrus* account that the deity him/herself is not reducible to a single quality, and that the Gods, whatever else we might say about their place in Plato's thought, do not simply stand for the ideas.

Collecting the many sensible instances into one logos was the human side of recollection in the *Phaedrus* (249 b 8 - 9); the ascent of Diotima's ladder, which begins from the encounter with a beautiful body, an encounter which already engenders beautiful *logoi* (*Symp.*, 210 a 9 - b 1), constitutes a λόγος of beauty itself through the vertical series of beauty's manifestations. This pursuit of the idea as idea is what distinguishes the *Symposium* from the *Phaedrus*. The lovers in the *Phaedrus* are indeed driven to learn as much as they can about the virtue they seek to cultivate in their beloved and in themselves (*Phaedr.*, 252 e), but the point of this is to get the cultivation right, that is, the process which is spoken of in the *Symposium* as an engendering of virtue in one another by lovers. This fostering of virtue in the *polis*, as eminent a goal as it is, is spoken of by Diotima as being itself «for the sake of» certain «rites and revelations», (*Symp.*, 210 a 1 - 3) in which one participates by ascending the ladder until one reaches the «essence of beauty» (211 d 1) or «uniform (μονοειδὲς) divine beauty itself», (211 e 5).

But the breeding of virtue in the *polis* is by no means forgotten by Diotima: seeing the beautiful in that which one sees—that is, seeing the idea of the beautiful—ensures that one will breed, not phantoms, but true examples of virtue (212 a 4 - 6). This throws into question the notion that the breeding of virtue was only «for the sake of» the ascent up the ladder. But it becomes clearer when we read that by engendering true virtue and rearing it, a person becomes θεοφιλῆς, beloved of the Gods (212 a 8). One has become generically pleasing to the Gods in the process of becoming pleasing to the particular God with whom one is enamored. The accounts in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* thus complement each other: the ascent up the ladder to the pure idea was for the purpose of ensuring that the virtue propagated in the πόλις was genuine and not counterfeit, because it is the cultivation in the πόλις of the virtues embodied by one's patron deity that wins the love of that deity. Instead of the erotic cultivation of virtue in the πόλις being for the sake of the ascent up the ladder, according to this view it is for the sake of becoming beloved by the God, to which end the ascent up the

ladder is also subordinated.

Plato's lover does not, therefore, love the human beloved alone. But the primary mediating entity in the erotic encounter is not an idea, but the reminiscence of Gods who are themselves individuals and even, in some sense, personalities, though perhaps not so anthropomorphic as in Homer. The *Phaedrus* does, as well, speak of human lovers journeying on together indefinitely through the rounds of metempsychosis (256 d 9), and so human individuals, too, hold their own in the triangular relationship of humans, Gods and ideas. In this triangle, the idea is a measure deriving its value from its position in an economy of human and divine in which the human is not opposed to the divine as mortal to immortal, because all soul is immortal, but as forgetful to mindful or unstable to stable. The instability displayed by human souls has a benefit, however, insofar as it results in humans begetting virtue in society, which makes of them something more than mere spectators of their tutelary deities, allowing them to manifest something of the Gods' presence in their human lives.

Contra Martin Warner, therefore, the individual is loved «full-stop», if it is qualities that provoke the question¹⁵. Warner finds the difference between the Christian concept of love and Platonic ἔρως in that the former is «essentially personal» whereas the ultimate object of the latter is «the abstract form of beauty». But this is wrong on both counts. First, because as L. A. Kosman points out, the «agapic» or «unconditional» love Nygren and others oppose to Platonic ἔρως does not have the individual as its object either, except accidentally¹⁶. In fact, the object of «agapic» love is merely another universal, the human as such. Secondly, the abstract form, as I have argued, ought to be seen not as an end in itself so much as a moment in the begetting of virtue in our realm. Hence the persistence of the mundane being through time is assimilated by Diotima to the account of metaphorical procreation: the sort of creatures that we are must beget ourselves anew all the time to persist, and

15. M. WARNER, Love, Self, and Plato's *Symposium*, *Philosophical Quarterly*, 29, 1979, pp. 329-339.

16. L. A. KOSMAN, Platonic Love, in W. H. WERKMEISTER (ed.) *Facets of Plato's Philosophy*, Amsterdam, Van Gorcum, 1976, pp. 56 ff.

thus we require the application of the paradigm if we are to grow into/beget our best possible self. There are more than two individuals involved in the bond of love; but the ontological framework of an economy of individuals is not compromised by the recourse to forms.

Conclusion. Do we love virtue because it reminds us of the Gods, or do we love the Gods because they manifest virtue? The preceding account has alerted us not to be too quick to hypostatize the ideas when the Gods are in the picture. The souls of mortals are unstable, and therefore the virtues are, and must be, conceivable as separate from them; and it is thus accidental for forms to be instantiated or known in beings such as these. The Gods, by contrast, are not in the same predicament. They are immortal, as is their virtue and their knowledge; the virtues and the forms need no separate eternity, if to be a God is something more than merely to be immortal, but also implies immortality in the state Plato knows as «blessedness». As Socrates states in the *Republic*, «It is impossible for a God even to wish to alter himself; rather, it appears that each of them being the most beautiful and the best possible abides forever simply in his own shape», (*Rep.*, 381 c 6 - 9); and for Aristotle (*Politics*, H1, 1323 b 23 - 26) the God is blessed «not because of any exoteric good, but through himself, on account of being a nature of a certain kind», and the well-being of the Gods, like that of the cosmos as a whole, lies in that they «have no actions concerned with externals beyond the things proper to them», (H3, 1325 b 28 - 30).

The eternal perfection of the Gods is such that beauty and the rest are not in them as «somewhere» and «in something different» (*Symp.*, 211 a 9). In this sense, it is for us that the ideas come into being *qua* «separate» ideas, because it is we who perceive them always with some constitutive non-identity, whether in recollection of our Gods, or as present in our beloved, perhaps unsteadily and yet compellingly, but always also «somewhere else». We love virtue because it reminds us of the Gods, but that does not mean that virtue is not loveable in itself; it is, but it requires an individual locus from which to shine forth. This position corresponds in certain respects to that of Eric Perl¹⁷, who argues for understanding the transcen-

17. E. PERL, The Presence of the Paradigm: Immanence and Transcendence in Plato's Theory of Forms, *Review of Metaphysics*, 53, 1999, pp. 339-362.

dence of the forms in such a way that «while the forms cannot exist without instances, they are not therefore dependent on them», (p. 351); that is, the transcendence of forms is compatible with their requiring a locus of some kind:

[T]he insistence that in all periods of Plato's thought the forms are present in instances does not in any way compromise or diminish their transcendence ... But this transcendence must not be conceived in dualistic terms ... The fundamental point of Plato's theory, rather, is that transcendence is not elsewhere but in our very midst (p. 361).

Whereas Perl, however, finds the locus of the forms in sensible particulars—where indeed they are, insofar as it is constitutive for the form *qua* form to appear in sensibles from which it also separates itself as its «presentations» or «appearances» — the present essay finds their ultimate, eternal and necessary locus in the Gods. This position might seem to be in starkest contrast to the «extreme monadism» advanced by Mohr¹⁸, for whom the forms are «both fundamental individuals and fundamentally individuals» (p. 115). The present essay agrees, however, with the latter characterization while disputing the former. That is, Mohr makes a strong case for the forms being fundamentally individuals but not for *which* individuals they are. And the characteristics which he attributes to «the Platonic 'to be'», viz. «to be actual», «to be substantial», «to be there in such a way as to provide an object to point at», «to present itself», (p. 125) are surely most appropriate to the Gods, and one cannot at any rate claim without argument that Plato would have denied this sense of «being» to the Gods in favor of entities (the forms) whose ontological status he does not clearly explicate.

Furthermore, we must recognize that Plato does not attempt a comprehensive catalog of the ideas or the virtues, nor should we thus assume a God is exhausted by one or two virtues abstracted from them. The nature of individuality is such that we can never exhaust an individual conceptually; instead we must, in the words of the *Philebus*, after discerning as many forms as we can within the unit we are analyzing, «let each one of all these intermediate forms pass away into the unlimited», (*Phil.*, 16 e; trans. R. Hack-

18. R. D. MOHR, *Forms as Individuals: Unity, Being and Cognition in Plato's Ideal Theory*, *Illinois Classical Studies*, 11, 1986, pp. 113-128.

forth). The limit of intelligible determination is the unique individual, and the richest sense of individuality, that is, personality, implies its expression in an inexhaustible dialogical intersubjectivity¹⁹. Griswold is correct to say that the *Phaedrus* indicates that «[t]o be a god is to live beyond the split beyond the subjective and the objective», but he is mistaken to construe this as «freedom from perspectivity». There is also in intersubjectivity something transcending the split between the subjective and the objective, but it lies not in simple identity, but in reciprocity. Is the «perfect objectivity» of «thought thinking the purely intelligible» only to be found in, e.g., the geometry of the *Meno*, or is it to be found as well, and even primarily, in divine intersubjectivity? The separation between the intelligible object — the «nourishment» — and its contingent instantiation would belong, then, to our mode of being, which is why we need to abstract the forms as measures. Failing to accord the proper status to the Gods as individuals makes it likely we shall undervalue human individuals, misidentifying that which is mortal, so to speak, in the mortal individual as the latter's «perspectival» mode of being, as if because we are individuals «the preservation of our humanity is not wholly desirable». On the other hand, one might find the value of humanity to lie in the degree to which it formally underdetermines²⁰ the individuality of beings in whom the transcendent ideas show themselves.

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19. Cf. D. NIKULIN. *On Dialogue*, Lanham (Maryland), Lexington Books, 2006.

20. *Protagoras*, 320 d ff.; *Timaeus*, 90 e ff.