

Eros as First Philosophy: The Amorous Foundation of Ethics

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Eros as First Philosophy: The Amorous Foundation of Ethics

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Abstract: This dissertation addresses and then attempts to further what could be called the “French” Phenomenological tradition and its developments of a phenomenology of eros in dialogue with—and often as a response to—older Platonic conceptions of eros.¹ Eros, I show, had a foundational role in Plato’s ethics; becoming ethical was dependent on first having an erotic encounter with beauty. However, this connection between love and ethics has been frequently abandoned in 20th-century philosophy. I argue that this move, a side-effect of the development of a philosophy of alterity, was ultimately founded on faulty assumptions about the nature of love, as well as its connection to the good and the beautiful. For that reason, after first elucidating the concerns raised regarding an ethical eros and the reasons for the denial of love’s foundational role, I establish a definition of eros that can once again play the same role as Plato saw for it while simultaneously addressing the 20th century’s concerns about alterity and the recognition of the Other.

Re-establishing this role requires arguing for three key theses:

1. Recognition of the Other is based on recognizing his or her beauty and goodness
2. Love of the Other is love of the Other *as* individual, not in light of some attribute
3. Love of the Other forms the basis of our entering into the ethical attitude.

¹ The title ‘French phenomenology’—widely used—is a misnomer, as many figures, including several large figures, are not ethnically French, or even necessarily Francophone. Shulamith Firestone, included in this work, was an English-speaking Canadian raised in the United States, however, her usage of Beauvoir’s work puts her in the same intellectual tradition. Nor are all those included even properly called phenomenologists, if by that we mean in the lineage of Husserl. Gabriel Marcel, for example, uses the word phenomenology, but had seemingly no direct familiarity with Husserl’s work (he had some knowledge of Heidegger’s), and is more often classified as an existentialist.

Combined, these theses build towards an ethical eros in two senses. First, they show that eros *itself* is an ethical relationship, which will be defined as an encounter with the Other structured by signification (the reasons for this definition will be made clear when I examine Levinas' ethics). Second, the erotic encounter with one beautiful Other (which may or may not lead to a response of love) leads to the development of an ethical disposition toward all Others. In the dissertation, these theses are developed against the background of existing views about eros, in order to show their necessity, as well as to explore the reasons why they have so far been denied. Part I, "Platonic Eros," therefore, is an in-depth reading of eros from the Platonic point of view, as seen primarily in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. Part II, "Impossible Eros," picks up on Plato's failing to recognize the alterity of the Other and begins a critique of Plato from that point, carried out by a variety of early philosophers in the French philosophical tradition, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Lacan, and Shulamith Firestone. Part III, "Unspeakable Eros," is a direct response to Part II, dealing primarily with Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion. Part IV, "Ethical Eros" is the conclusion of the dissertation, in which I argue that love can once again take on its role, assigned to it already in Plato, as the basis of ethics.

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To all those who have loved me,
and who have shown me what it means to love.

INTRODUCTION

We have been told since our early childhood days that everybody is beautiful, and that we should do our best to see the beauty of each person we meet. But what does this statement really mean? What does it mean to say that everyone is beautiful, and, if that is even true, how should we act towards people upon seeing their beauty? Our normal responses to beauty—contemplation or love—seem an inappropriate response. We certainly should not simply stare at everybody as if they were statues, nor does it seem possible to love (romantically or sexually, which seem to be the most accurate love-responses to beauty) every person we encounter. Nor does the premise even seem sound. Not everybody seems to be beautiful to my eyes. In fact, those who are in most need of care from me, the sick and dying, the badly injured, or the malnourished are often nearly impossible to see as beautiful. Rather, the initial reaction is often one of repulsion. It seems it is only by moving beyond the appearance of the person that I can truly respond to her needs, and give her the care she deserve. The ethical treatment of the other person seems to require the abandonment of aesthetic judgement

Perhaps, however, we can find a way around this problem. Perhaps we can better understand beauty so that it is not just the model, but every human being who I am able to see as beautiful. Perhaps I can better understand my response to beauty so that, rather than halting at love or contemplation, it might actually lead to the ethical response. The advantages, if this is true, would be significant. Ethical training could begin at the same young age at which we are first told that everybody is beautiful. Children, before they are

old enough to rationally consider ethics, could be given the important training to experience beauty correctly, to understand what it really means to be beautiful, and to begin to develop the proper responses to beauty. Indeed, this seems to be precisely what Aristotle himself envisions for the ethical training of young people when he notes that they must be raised from an early age to feel pleasure and pain at the right sorts of things—ethical training begins with the training of the passions.

If our immediate concern is beauty, then the passion we ought to be concerned with is precisely love, specifically what the ancient Greeks called *eros*. We can therefore narrow down our question as follows: how does *eros*, if at all, engender an ethical response? This question, in turn, can be asked on two levels, both of which will be addressed here: how is loving somebody *itself* an ethical relationship, and secondly, how does this single love relationship help structure or further develop my ethical relationships with others who I may not love? In order to answer these questions however, it will first be necessary to answer a preliminary question. On what basis, and to what extent, can we treat the ancient Greek conception of *eros* as equivalent to our own use of the word love. Only once this has been shown can we then turn to the discussion of how *eros* can provide a basis for our entrance into the ethical attitude.

§1: Love Languages

This work treats *eros* as something like a passion, while acknowledging that its perfection comes in the form of a relationship. Since both sides of that debate rarely deny that the other kind of love exists at all (and only whether it is what we primarily ought to

mean by the word), one's stance on that issue should not in principle affect his or her ability to be convinced by my argument here.

I also hold, following Marion, that eros includes all love in a univocal way, and that we should not draw strong divisions between various types of love. In this work, however I treat romantic love almost exclusively. As a result the central argument of the thesis ought to still convince someone (such as Nygren or Falque) who does not take eros to be a univocal term for love.

In fact, I believe that this is one of the great virtues of Platonic eros, which has been all too often lost in more contemporary accounts of love, is its ability to hold together a great many different parts. Love was for the Greeks, just as much for us, a multifaceted word (in fact, set of words). In Platonist thought, the goal was not to create a taxonomy of all its types and manifestations, but instead to understand them all together. Eros was at once the intellectual love that seeks the good of the soul and the sensual love of sexual desire. It is concerned bodies as much as it is with souls. It sought education *and* pleasure, transcendence *and* intimacy. Plato and his followers were perhaps not always clear—or even free of contradiction—in elaborating this eros, but it seems to be their goal.¹ Personal eros is used as a starting point for philosophical eros not only because they are analogous, but because they are in fact one and the same act. To love erotically is to love personally and philosophically at the same time. We may at times see Plato or his followers downplay sexuality, but he never seeks its total denial.

In contemporary continental philosophy, on the other hand, we too often see eros fall apart.² Whether it is into passion and desire, or into love of soul and love of body, true

¹ These claims about Platonic eros are subject of chapter 2, and are developed further there.

² The theme of Parts II and III

care and sentimentality or along any other such line, we repeatedly are led toward an eros that fails to hang together. Thus we are left with a choice: either retain a love similar to what the common person might have in mind when he or she says love, or describe a quasi- (or sometimes overtly) theological virtue, which has very little indeed to do with the love of love stories and personal relationships, but instead the perfection of the soul or the self.

This is the trajectory pursued here, as we begin with a view love that tries to hold together many disparate aspects, just as the *Symposium* attempts to hold together seven different accounts of one god, before looking at the effects of the dissociation it has suffered in the last hundred years. One or another aspect of eros is taken for the whole, the others rejected as inappropriate or irrelevant, often to destructive effect. As will be seen, a great skepticism of love has developed in recent times, as philosophers believe themselves to have discovered flaws not seen by the Platonists (along with the writers of medieval chivalric romances and courtly love stories), and proclaim to have defeated a Platonic over-optimism. What they too often miss, however, is that the flaws are merely the holes left behind by the abandoned or forgotten portions of eros. It is as if they themselves have hewn off two legs from a stool, and then protested that it cannot stand upright.

In fact, this is one of the main difficulties of a work seeking to argue about the nature of love through texts written in ancient Greek, French, and English: it is not always clear how the various words intersect. While the movement from French to English or vice versa can be handled fairly straightforwardly, bringing the ancient Greek forward is much more difficult. Greek is typically counted as having four different words: *eros*, *philia*,

agape, and sometimes *storge*. *Storge* is typically said to be the familial love of parents to children. *Philia* is usually translated as friendship or friendly love, while *agape* morphs from affection (the verb is often translated as to cherish) into divine love in the Christian tradition. These categories, however, are not rigid, and the words overlap considerably. Plato will have no problem attributing *philia* related words to the *erotic* lovers he is describing. Aristotle, uses the verb form *stergo* but, at least in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, never the noun *storge* (the noun appears once in the *Metaphysics*, in a quotation from Empedocles),³ uses it to describe the feeling of affection friends (*philoî*) feel toward each other.⁴ Meleager, a first century BC Greek poet goes will even attribute *storges*, a word typically used to express parental or fraternal affection, to the passion shared by sexual partners.⁵

It can thus be very difficult to treat each word as if it can be given its own translation or even group of translations, without running into confusions. *Eros* however, is perhaps seen to have the most rigid meaning: it would be inappropriate to attribute a feeling of *eros* to a love that is not in some way desirous or even outrightly sexual. It is the love felt between lovers (although it is not equivalent to the more emotional ‘romantic love’). However, for Plato this is often stretched beyond the normal usage toward philosophy, with Jill Gordon noting that, for the *Timaeus*, “eros is the moving force behind

³ All word statistics are based on search results in the *Perseus Digital Library*. However, as it does not contain the whole Aristotelian corpus (notably missing both *Physics* and *De Anima*), I am unable to confirm whether *storge* is used more frequently in those texts. In either case, it is clear that *storge*-related words are significantly less common in the Platonic and Aristotelian corpuses than *eros* or *philia* words.

⁴ Plato similarly uses only the verb, most often in the *Laws* (10 times). By comparison *Eros* related words appear in that work over 100 times, and with even greater frequency elsewhere.

⁵ *The Greek Anthology*, Book 5 166, 191 and Book 6, 476. The first reference begins “O night, O insomniac longing for Heliodora, O scratches of her curved nails that delight in drawing tears—is there any relic left of her love (*storges*) for me? Is some memory of my kiss still warm on her cold be?”

our desire to know first causes.”⁶ As it is the springboard for the work as a whole, it is Plato’s own usage of *eros* that I am most concerned with here. However, rather than simplifying the task, this focus actually makes it more difficult, precisely by limiting the available sources that can be referenced. As Dover admits in his work on Greek *eros*, “since Plato’s concept of *eros* differed from everyone else’s, no evidence relating to his use of *eran* and *epithumeian* [to desire] tells us anything about Greek usage in general.”⁷ The reverse claim is equally true. Plato is consciously reshaping and redefining the scope of *eros* in his dialogues; to look to ordinary usage as anything more than a backdrop will provide little clarity.

Thus our first question should be what, if anything, is the best word to translate *eros*? This question amounts to answering in quick fashion a much more difficult question: what are those things that *eros* includes and excludes? The first option is to avoid the problem and leave *eros* untranslated, letting what Plato says about *eros* speak for itself as the meaning. While this may be possible in a strictly Platonic work, it will not solve the problems here. The subsequent use of *eros* in other contexts, particularly its adoption by psychoanalysis has entered into the vernacular sufficiently to mean that *eros* cannot serve as the sort of empty container into which we can interpret the texts themselves.⁸ Thus we must accept that ‘*eros*’ itself already risks becoming a translation of ἔρως, and not merely a transliteration, and that it too potentially fails to avoid the problems of two seemingly different cultures of love. This will become even more

⁶ Jill Gordon, *Plato’s Erotic World: From Cosmic Origins to Human Death* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 8.

⁷ K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 43n11

⁸ The number of books and articles written comparing Plato and Freud should be proof enough of this. See Santas, *Plato and Freud: Two Theories of Love* or Gould *Platonic Love* for two such analyses. In addition, both the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* as well as all major English dictionaries give the Freudian definition of *eros* as instinct or drive alongside one of sexual love or desire.

apparent in later chapters, as theories of *eros* from thinkers as different as Lacan, Levinas and Marion are considered. Eros has a meaning in contemporary language (or at least contemporary philosophical language) that is no less established than love/*amour*.

The tradition has long been to translate ἔρως as love, while including any number of qualifications and footnotes to the pitfalls it introduces. In the introduction to his translation of the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, for instance, Cobb notes that he translates ἔρως as ‘love’ despite admitting that “the term [ἔρως] is primarily used of sexual desire” and that “the greater ambiguity of the English word ‘love’ may be misleading.”⁹ Halperin calls for readers to “realize that by *eros* Plato refers not to love in the global sense in which we often intend that word but to one kind or aspect of love-or, rather, to the intense desire which often goes by the name of love.”¹⁰ Platonic readers are, by now, accustomed to the fact that Greek contains numerous different words for different ‘kinds or aspects’ of love, and the traditional translation simply puts the burden on the reader to continually remember that ‘love’ contains meanings that ἔρως did not. Some, however, including Halperin, see this burden as a reason to surrender the traditional translation (even if they still employ the word), “*eros* is indeed inadequate to the task of explicating the nature of love, and Plato never intended to put it to that use.” He continues “the various defects . . . in the Platonic *eros* when it is construed as love . . . disappear as soon as *eros* is conceived as desire.”¹¹ However, there are, I think, good reasons to continue to conceptually translate Plato’s *eros* as ‘love,’ and to avoid conflating *eros* with desire.

⁹ Plato, *The Symposium and the Phaedrus: Plato’s Erotic Dialogues* (SUNY Press, 1993). 5.

¹⁰ “David M. Halperin, “Platonic Erôs and What Men Call Love,” *Ancient Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (October 1, 1985): 161—204, 164.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 189.

There is no denying that eros does not carry with it *every* variation or attribute of love. On the other hand, it is equally clear that eros is most properly uttered in situations where an English or French speaker would generally be comfortable using the word love. While Plato writes the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* as speaking of an “eros for food and drink” (782e), and Diotima admits in the *Symposium* that she has extended eros to something that everybody has, insofar as they desire happiness, Plato most frequently seeks to restrict it to a more local sense of those who pursue love in a certain way.¹² In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates speaks of the eros that one has when he sees a beautiful boy. The description of a person who is driven to insanity by the sight of the other is precisely what we might today describe as being “madly in love” with somebody. And further, when the speakers of the *Symposium* seek to praise the god Eros, they discuss human relationships, not only desires. Eros is not only a one-sided desire (even if the pederastic relationship was asymmetric in this way), but the gateway to a relationship that contained more than this.¹³

This second point represents perhaps the best reason for continuing to conceive of eros as love: even if eros only represents the portion of love that might be called sexual desire, Plato never restricts his dialogues to only addressing eros. The *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* frequently shift to using words in the *philia* group, just as the *Lysis* (a dialogue nominally on *philia*), will use eros-related words, leading Brian Mooney to note that “the background to the discussion of *philia* is markedly erotic” and that “Plato employs the

¹² Diotima’s assertion is that it is those who do the work [*ergon*] of giving birth in beauty [206b]. We will see in Chapter 1 whether this is Plato’s own position.

¹³ As Sheffield concludes in “Beyond Eros: Friendship in the *Phaedrus*”: “Plato’s account of *eros* is not the end of his account of interpersonal love, but the appropriate starting point for an account of *philia*,” 270. Although Sheffield appears to put more distance between the two terms than I would, it suffices here to show that *eros* and *philia* are considered together for Plato.

terms *eran*, *philein* [and others] sometimes interchangeably, but certainly as loosely demarcated but closely related sub-sets of *philia*.”¹⁴ Dover similarly notes that, even in its ordinary usage, “it is not to be expected that Greek should always distinguish explicitly between eros and love [i.e. *philia*].”¹⁵ Ordinary Greek usage may indeed generally place eros very close, or identical to, sexual desire, but Plato is deliberately pulling it further toward *philia*. For that reason, I think it is best to continue to understand that, although eros strictly speaking refers to the sexual, desirous aspects of what we today might call love in a broader context, Plato is ultimately speaking of something that does not exist in isolation, as if it were a mere desire, but rather, he is speaking of the erotic impetus or aspect of a more relational sense of *philia*-love.¹⁶ This, then, will be the meaning I will assume throughout Part I: eros is the aspect of a relational love that might most properly be called sexual or desirous. It is not, however, fully distinct from a more inclusive, emotional sense of love (what Plato would call *philia*), as if the two are separate phenomena. Rather, *eros* and *philia* are different facets of one experience.¹⁷

While it would be impractical to go through every person cited in this work in advance and attempt to delineate who means what by their words love, eros, *amour*, *l'eros*, etc., a few brief remarks based on the preceding can be made. Every theory will operate between two extremes: a purely emotional love and a purely sexual desire. Different

¹⁴ T. Brian Mooney, “Plato’s Theory of Love in the ‘Lysis’: A Defence,” *Irish Philosophical Journal* 7, no. 1/2 (July 1, 1990), 135.

¹⁵ *Greek Homosexuality*, 50.

¹⁶ This becomes especially clear when Plato assigns the *eromenos* an *anteros*, a counter-love, in the *Phaedrus*. There clearly is a relational aspect to this doubled desire. See Ch. 1, §4.2 for more.

¹⁷ As a result, I have used both eros and love (I use the latter more frequently in the verbal form, where eros-related cognates are less familiar). There are numerous reasons for this, including Plato’s representation of common opinions of eros (which unlike Plato’s own, often skew more heavily to desire) and the dual subject of the symposium of Eros as both god and human passion. However it is often simply a stylistic choice. The reader should thus not assume any distinction between claims about eros and claims about love, unless specifically noted.

theories will fall at different points on this spectrum. Some thinkers will deliberately split the two poles, or use multiple words to indicate different portions. Typically, if the split exists, it is the same claimed by Plato scholars: eros represents the sexual, while love (what Plato might call *philein*) represents the emotional. Yet as the editors of a recent volume on the phenomenology of eros have pointed out:

The amplitude of the multifaceted erotic phenomenon makes it very difficult to construct strict distinctions between eroticism and sexuality, eroticism and desire and furthermore between eroticism and love. This is why different phenomenologies of love, desire, seduction, passions, sexuality and sexual difference are phenomenologies of eros and vice-versa. The title “eros” and “erotic phenomenon” is often used to show the variable interconnection between those meanings and to evoke the platonic and neo-platonic basis for the philosophical treatment of eros and the “erotic” wisdom of philosophy (Lucy Irigaray, among others). From out of different attempts toward a phenomenology of eros, at least one common basis can be affirmed. In its numerous faces and traces, (sexuality, desire, passion, love, friendship, etc), the “erotic phenomenon” appears and becomes central in every attempt to grasp the condition of possibility for oneness and otherness, for selfhood and alterity, finitude and infinity.¹⁸

Wittingly or not, all of the thinkers referenced in this work have taken their stance on love, eros, or *amour* amid a vast web of connotations, connections, and positions. Many have explicitly linked their own terms to Plato’s eros via direct citations of the dialogues (which is not to say that they hold a Platonic theory of eros). While they themselves maybe have only addressed or intended to address certain facets, the word bleeds, sometimes consciously, sometimes not, into other areas. As Jean-Luc Nancy notes,

love and desire govern and exclude one another, each one representing both the finition and the infinition of the other, each one capable of falling outside the other, while neither can subsist in its essence closed off from the other. There must be love in each gesture of desire and vice versa.¹⁹

¹⁸ Jonna Bornemark and Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, *Phenomenology of Eros* (Södertörn University, 2012), 11.

¹⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality* (Fordham University Press, 2013), 20.

When reading a phenomenology of desire, one cannot help but ask how it connects to sex, love, or any number of other terms. Eros, it seems, has a life of its own, which has led Jean-Luc Marion to claim that any phenomenology of eros must draw them together, that any “serious concept of love distinguishes itself by its unity, or rather by its power to keep together significations that nonerotic thought cuts apart, stretches, and tears according to the measure of its prejudices.”²⁰

Although I will attempt to signal when authors are deliberately speaking to only some restricted aspect of love or eros, my ultimate position on the topic will thus bear out the reasons for occasionally glossing over some of the more minute distinctions that different thinkers are drawing between phenomena. The differences that will ultimately exist between Plato and contemporary views, I will argue, are not a result of radically different concepts of love, but rather a disagreement in how these different aspects can or should relate. Plato’s eros includes things that 20th century love or *amour* does not. It similarly excludes things that *do* factor in to love/*amour*. Each view divides the general term into different sub-categories. This is not a reason to surrender the hope of a dialogue, but rather an opportunity to investigate what really ought to be included in the concept, regardless of the name it is given.

§2: What’s love got to do with (it)?

This short discussion of the nature of love will suffice in order to get to the heart of the issue: what are the effects of love? Love, it is almost universally agreed, is a

²⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 4-5.

powerful force.²¹ If eros is something like a passion, its effect on us is surely greater and more long-lasting than perhaps any other emotion. It is only natural to ask whether love exceeds itself, whether love impacts us in ways unrelated to our love-lives and, if so, what it impacts and how. One of the most common philosophical topic in this area has been a dispute over whether love is value-recognizing or value-granting.²² Psychological and scientific research has looked at love's effect on brain chemistry, decision-making, childhood development, and much more.²³ All of these are in fact at stake in the thesis I offer here, but represent just tiny facets of a much larger claim, which is that love answers the most primordial questions about who we are as humans. Love awakens us to (perhaps even creates in us) the reality of intersubjectivity, and thus to the possibility of ethics at all.²⁴ As such, this dissertation talks about a 'sexual ethics' not by way of giving precepts or maxims, but only arguing that, in its very constitution, the ethical attitude is grounded in a prior erotic encounter.²⁵ This does not mean that love replaces ethics, as if I must now feel a love for every person, but rather first, that my love for a *specific* individual is *already* an ethical relationship, and second, that my love for a *specific* individual makes it possible for me to live ethically toward *every* Other. That does not mean, however that no specific ethical claims will come out in this dissertation. On the contrary, the whole of the

²¹ However, whether it is a force *for good*, as we will see especially in Part II, is not as commonly agreed upon.

²² Irving Singer argues for love as value-granting. Max Scheler's middle position holds that there is a latent value that is perceived, but it is also deepened. Gabriel Marcel seems to hold that love only recognizes value, it does not grant it. Dietrich von Hildebrand similarly speaks of love as a value-response, indicating recognition rather than granting.

²³ Ruth Feldman, "The Neurobiology of Human Attachments," *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 21 (2007), 80-99, provides an extensive review of recent literature on the topic.

²⁴ In my usage, I follow Levinas in treating intersubjectivity as the necessary grounds for ethics: without the recognition of the Other as other, ethics is impossible.

²⁵ What exactly the rules of ethics are would need to be worked out separately, if such general rules could be laid out at all. My own position leans toward one that is aretaic or sentimentalist approach, where moral action comes from developed dispositions, not rules of action.

dissertation is premised on the Levinasian thesis that alterity ought to be preserved by whatever system of ethics we end up with. Thus any accounts of love that are predicated on a kind of absorption of the other into myself, on viewing the other as *merely* an ‘other self,’ or denying him or her status prior to my granting it must be ruled out. Similarly, any views of the Other that see him or her as merely a token of a certain type, or as a reflection or imitation of some general principle, or as *merely* dependent on some other reality for his or her loveliness also must be discarded.

Thus, in addition to an eros that is taken to be a unified kind of love, I also seek an eros or a love that is aimed directly at individuals. I love a person ‘for his own sake,’ and not for some principle that he or she stands in for, or some property he or she possesses. In the last part, I take this claim even further, and will argue there that not only do I love the individual, I do so without any reasons. Love could thus be taken as a kind of ‘properly basic’ interaction: it has its beginning not in any other cause or fact, but simply begins.

That does not mean, however, that there are not factors that are recognized in connection with love. Here I focus primarily on two, coming out of the Platonic tradition: the goodness and beauty of the individual loved. While a person’s being good or beautiful is not enough to explain my love for him or her,²⁶ these recognitions seem inextricably tied up with eros. Or, to put the claim of this dissertation even more strongly: Recognizing the beauty and goodness of a person is essential for perceiving him or her as

²⁶ I return to and develop this distinction in Part IV of the dissertation. In brief, a thing’s being beautiful is not sufficient to explain a love-response, nor is the lack of a love-response necessary evidence of a lack of beauty, and thus, although beauty-recognition is connected to love, it does not provide it a *ratio*.

an Other in the first place. A person who does not appear beautiful does not appear as an Other to me.

Thus we have the broad outline of what is to be shown in this dissertation:

1. Recognition of the Other is based on recognizing his or her beauty and goodness
2. Love of the Other is love of the Other *as* individual, not in light of some attribute
3. Love of the Other forms the basis of our entering into the ethical attitude.

§3: General Outline

In order to show the truth of these three theses, I present the reception of Platonic eros in four parts, offering four possible theories of love, with each theory responding to issues raised by those prior to it. In each part, I have, for the most part, eschewed criticism in favor of letting the view speak for itself. In between each section, brief interludes serve as transitions from view to view, summarizing where we have arrived, and what work is still to be done to reach the overall conclusion of the dissertation.

The parts themselves play out as a kind of descent and return, beginning with a received tradition—Platonic ethical eros—that is rejected and abandoned, before being partially recovered. In the final part, I provide a new interpretation that makes the full return of ethical eros possible.

Part I offers an in-depth reading of eros from the Platonic point of view, as seen, primarily in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. Here, I show that Plato meets the first and third theses laid out above for an ethical eros, but fails to extricate eros from a heavily metaphysical view that threatens the status of the Other, if it doesn't destroy him all together. Eros, in its origins in the Platonic dialogues, was already seen as the heart of ethics. Beauty and Goodness were seen as closely linked to each other and to the erotic

drive of lovers. However, Plato's ambivalence on whether one primarily ought to love individuals or Forms, and thus whether erotic ethics is fundamentally relational or individual, opens him up to critique.

Part II picks up on Plato's failing to recognize the alterity of the Other, and begins a critique of Plato from that point. Here I address Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Jacques Lacan, and Shulamith Firestone as representative voices of what I call 'impossible eros.' This view goes further than merely trying to introduce alterity into the Platonic account, and instead, condemns the whole Platonic view for its failure to recognize alterity, and in fact, sees *all* attempts at relational attitudes as destroying alterity, to the point of declaring love itself as impossible. The good life, settling the ambiguity in Plato, must be individual, and not relational. I will argue that these views fail to see the unity of the Good and the Beautiful, which is in part responsible for the perceived failing of love.

Part III is a direct response to Part II, reversing the decision in favor of the self-standing individual, and instead prioritizing the relation to the Other as a primordial truth. Here, I address Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, and Jean-Luc Nancy, all of whom ascribe to what I have called 'unspeakable eros.' A simultaneous reintroduction of the Good, with direct reference to Plato's works, leads to a recovery of non-destructive relations to the Other, and the possibility of love, but the failure to simultaneously recover beauty means love is silenced and cut off from ethics, barely better than a necessary evil.

Part IV, the conclusion of the dissertation, attempts to recover the idea of the Beautiful in similar ways to the already accomplished recovery of the Good, and to rejoin what has been severed by so many since the beginning of the 20th century. Rejoining the two bases for love, I argue that love can once again take on its proper role, assigned to it

already in Plato, as the basis of ethics, and that, with beauty now reintroduced and adapted to the concerns of alterity, love no longer needs to remain silent to remain possible. At long last, having gone through progressive criticisms of the Platonic approach, we arrive back at an erotic ethics, which can finally account for the alterity of the Other, and avoid sinking into a metaphysical love of first principles.

PART I: PLATONIC EROS: DESIRE AND THE *EROMENOS*

My weight is my love; it carries me, wherever I am carried.¹

CHAPTER 1: LOVE IN THE DIALOGUES

In the opening pages of the *Symposium*, we see Socrates make a somewhat surprising claim to knowledge, specifically to knowledge of erotics (τὰ ἐρωτικά). That Socrates lays claim to any knowledge at all is in itself an oddity, that he should do so in regards to the science of eros even more so. Socrates' later definition of the *daimon* Eros as a philosopher perhaps explains this opening boast, with Socrates wishing to do no more than announce his own philosophical interest. This reading is perhaps strengthened even more from outside the text by his remarks in the *Lysis*, where Socrates notes he has an “erotic passion for friendship” (211e)² but that he is “so far from acquiring such a thing, [he does] not even know in what way a person becomes a friend” (212a). Surely one who has no friends, nor who even knows how to make one, cannot possibly make a legitimate claim to the knowledge of erotics, unless we divide eros and philia by a far wider chasm than the Greeks intended.³ It may be compelling, then, to read Plato's ‘erotic dialogues’ (primarily, for my purposes here, the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*) as being not about

¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII, 9.

² πρὸς δὲ τὴν τῶν φίλων κτήσιν πάνυ ἐρωτικῶς

³ Both Plato and Aristotle will regularly discuss the one in the context of the other, with the clear understanding that eros is, at least, a type of friendship.

actual love or desire,⁴ but philosophy. Indeed much of the literature on these dialogues does precisely that, taking the cue from each dialogue's apparent resolution in the sight of the Forms to indicate that the subject is wisdom, not erotic love. The discussions of eros are thus diminished, while the references to the Forms, pedagogy and philosophy expanded.⁵

However, here I wish to offer a more face-value reading. Or as Nicholson puts it, "[Plato] wants to declare a philosophy inadequate that has not taken its start from the deep recesses of our *erōs*, our desire, and our memory."⁶ While there is no doubt that the pursuit of wisdom is a goal of both dialogues, it is not *the only* goal. Or in other words, if both the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* offer a theory of wisdom, they *also* offer a theory of genuine, interpersonal love/desire. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, this reading is by no means novel, and there have always been proponents of reading these dialogues as being theories about love. In fact, they represent, for most later philosophers, the beginning of the philosophy of love as a scholarly field.⁷ Although certainly prior, few are willing to take Empedocles' strongly cosmological account of love and strife as a basis for the topic. On the other hand, despite issues regarding the Athenian practice of pederasty and the marginalization of the feminine, the *Symposium* or *Phaedrus* remain highly relevant for contemporary discussions. Heidegger offers a lecture course on the *Phaedrus* in 1932,

⁴ See the introduction for a discussion of the difficulty of translating *eros* into English

⁵ As one recent example, see Gordon, *Plato's Erotic World*. Chapters on "Cosmos," "Questioning," and "Self-Knowledge" indicate just how far beyond interpersonal love Plato's erotic thought can be extended. Even more strongly, Muir proposes to "analyse the mythological language of 'lover and beloved' in terms of their application to the 'teacher and student,'" D. P. E. Muir, "Friendship in Education and the Desire for the Good: An Interpretation of Plato's *Phaedrus*," *Educational Philosophy & Theory* 32, no. 2 (July 2000), 241.

⁶ Graeme Nicholson, *Plato's Phaedrus: The Philosophy of Love* (Purdue University Press, 1999), 10.

⁷ Although philosophical insight can be gained by the still older works of the poets and tragedians, it would likely be wrong to say that either intended their works as a study of love, rather than an expression of it.

while references to both dialogues preoccupy Levinas in both *Existence and Existents* and *Totality and Infinity*. Both Luce Irigaray and Martha Nussbaum turn to Diotima's speech as inspiration for their work. Thus in a work that is arguing for a contemporary understanding of erotic love, it is eminently relevant to begin with the Platonic conception, that will, in each of the subsequent chapters, act as a conversation partner and a foil, highlighting both the advances and shortcomings of more recent theories of love.

In particular, I will offer a broadly Platonic reading of eros here in which the dual pursuit of beauty and the *eromenos* results in an eros that gives birth to a Platonic conception of ethics, while still functioning inside a metaphysical system. To do so I will explore four general theories of love, pulled from the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, showing the development from a naive understanding to a full theory of Socratic eros.⁸ The first will examine the discussion of Athenian pederastic practices, with both its supporters (§1.1)—Phaedrus, Pausanias and Agathon in the *Symposium*—as well as its detractors (§1.2)—Lysias' speech, as reported by Phaedrus and Socrates' first speech in the *Phaedrus*. In the second sections, I will look respectively at the natural (§2.1) and mythical (§2.2) explanatory theories of eros offered by Eryximachus and Aristophanes in the *Symposium* alongside dramatic parallels to each in the setting and general conversation of the *Phaedrus*. Lastly, I will elaborate Socratic eros itself, as seen in the speeches of Socrates and negatively in Alcibiades in the *Symposium* (§3.1), but finding its fullest expression in the palinode and second Socratic speech of the *Phaedrus* (§3.2). These first three sections will be largely contextual, seeking to explore the range of theories from which Plato attempts

⁸ Throughout this work I take the division of Socratic love vs. Platonic love to be that between the theory expounded in Socrates' speeches alone, vs. a more synthetic reading of the dialogues as wholes.

to make his own argument and will provide in broad strokes, my own interpretation of the dialogues, while chapter two will seek to show, in more detail, the tension in Plato's work between eros as a metaphysical relationship with Beauty and as an ethical relationship with the *eromenos*, as well as exploring one possible overall interpretation of Platonic eros, what is at stake between the two choices.

§1: Cultural and Pederastic accounts of eros

It would be an enormous mistake to reduce the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* down to the main Socratic speeches and declare that these represent, in their entirety and without hesitation, Plato's own theory of love. To dismiss the other speeches out of hand as merely setting up Socrates' reply overlooks a great deal of richness in the argumentation, as well as significant insight into the cultural practice of the day. This is particularly important in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, which stand out in the Platonic corpus for giving large, uninterrupted speeches to Socrates' companions. These speakers are not merely Meno's slaveboy repeatedly stating simply 'it seems so' or even Glaucon repeatedly pushing Socrates to further explain. Rather, I offer a reading of these early speeches that, rather than representing a naive opponent for Socrates to respond to, build the foundation upon which Socrates will overlay his more robust, theoretical account of love.⁹ Socrates' speech takes up and adapts many of the views of the speakers before him, and directly targets others for rejection. To pass over those speeches, then, is to miss significance of many of Socrates' comments. Further, I will argue that, particularly in the

⁹ As Ferrari notes, Socrates "manages to subsume into itself important elements from the entire series of preceding speeches," "Platonic Love," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, 253. If we ignore the context from which those elements are plucked, we will fail to properly understand them.

case of the *Symposium*, we are not meant to unquestionably accept Socrates' account and reject the speeches that come before his.

§1.1: The defense of pederasty in the *Symposium*

While it would be impossible to offer a complete explanation of Athenian pederastic practices here,¹⁰ the speeches of Phaedrus, Pausanias, and Agathon each give an insight into how pederasty, in its ideal form, was seen to benefit those that participated. In this form all three see pederastic eros as serving two primary functions: it was an unquestionably human, societal relationship, as well as a politico-ethical education for the younger *eromenos*.¹¹ Phaedrus notes that true love would inspire all people to be courageous, “mak[ing the lover] as brave as if he'd been born a hero” (179a), and that “the gods honor virtue most highly when it belongs to Love” (180a). Meanwhile, Pausanias concludes that an *eromenos* “is justified in performing any service for an *erastes* who can make him wise and virtuous” (184d). Lastly, Agathon, out of a desire for completeness, notes at the end of his speech that he as “spoken about the god's [Eros']

¹⁰ See Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, which remains one of the standard texts, for such an analysis.

¹¹ I have chosen to generally leave this term untranslated, as the two usual translations, beloved or darling, both seem to connote a much more romantic relationship than the Athenians had in mind. The younger *eromenos* was not expected to bear any romantic feelings toward the older *erastes*. A second word used, primarily in the *Phaedrus*, for the same person is *pais*, or boy. I have allowed this to be translated, as it lacks any major translational issues. It does, however, lose the connection to education (via words such as *paidagogos*, teacher), which does play a role in the pederastic relationship. Similarly, the translation of *erastes* as lover is relatively unproblematic, as it adequately captures the feelings borne toward the *eromenos*, which were the reason one would take an *eromenos*, and in addition more immediately signals the connections Socrates is drawing between the pederastic relationship and lovers of wisdom, beauty, or goodness. For this reason, I have frequently use the translation 'lovers' in place of the greek *erastes*, except when the use is specific to the pederastic relationship, and not extended to 'lovers' in general. When Plato speaks about the two together he simply says the *erastes* and his *eromenos*, as no common term adequately describes them. Any reference to 'lovers' in the plural is always a reference to multiple *erastai*, and not to a lover and his *eromenos*, a convention that I have followed here. See footnote 88 for an eventual exception to this rule. One further caveat to all of this is that Socrates/Plato clearly envision that *eromenoi* eventually themselves become *erastai*, and claims about 'lovers' ought to be generally read as speaking about the potential of all people, not only of a subset.

justice, moderation, and bravery; [only] his wisdom remains” (196d).¹² He thus succeeds in attributing all four traditional cardinal virtues to the god Love, and by association, to those lovers who follow him and receive his gifts. Although certainly self-serving—all three speech givers are themselves involved in pederastic relationships—they nevertheless show us the primary case to be made for pederasty: not that it is a particularly romantic relationship, but instead that it is an educational one. The younger *eromenos* is initiated into city life by being taught the virtues and behaviors of the good Athenian, and who will in turn, become a lover himself, ensuring the continued passing on of virtue. It is for this reason that Socrates conjectures that Alcibiades has not ever taken an *erastes*, because “your own qualities, from your body right up to your soul, are so great there’s nothing you lack” (*Alcibiades* 104a). If a person lacks nothing, then there is no reason to take an *erastes*, since the goal for the *eromenos* is to gain (be it in virtue, status, or wealth), not—at least primarily—to love.

The seeds are therefore seen, already in the very first speeches, for what I am claiming as Plato’s own theory. Love is about ethics and education. The typical Athenian practice of an older man and a younger boy feeds into this interpretation, modeling quite naturally the teacher-student relationship. But so far we have seen only affirmations and a few brief examples to illustrate that this is the case. The early speeches keep well on the task of the symposium—to praise the god of Love—not to explain a philosophical theory. The praise lacks what Socrates will add later: an explanatory account for *how* virtue is inspired by eros. In addition, neither Phaedrus’ nor Agathon’s speech offers any criticism

¹² Agathon’s speech is not, in the order given, one of the early speeches. However in content, it fits best with the two opening speeches, and may simply have been positioned later by Plato to return to those questions and have Agathon in position to be Socrates’ dialogical partner to begin his own speech.

of the god they praise. Love is divine, and therefore perfect, giving all good things to his followers.

When Pausanias chooses to begin his speech by critiquing the naivety of Phaedrus' overly general account (and at the same time, predicting the same naive idealization that will appear later in Agathon's account), the older lawyer chooses to note the divisions that have to be made within love, initiating a long and contentious history of claiming that love does not consist of an overall unity. There is, on the one hand, the heavenly Eros to whom all good things must be attributed, but also the base/common/earthly Eros who is overly sexual and fails to live up to the high standards the speech givers are setting for love. These defensive divisions and classifications unsurprisingly come from the older *erastes*, while both optimistic accounts came from younger *eromenoi*. Pederasty, as I noted at the start, in its ideal form, was seen to serve a societal good. The reality, however was much more questionable, and it would be the elder *erastai* who stood to lose the most if it turned out to be the embarrassment many were already claiming it to be. For this reason, Pausanias sets out to distinguish himself from those who abused the system not as teachers of virtue for young Athenians, but as seekers of base pleasures. In the process, the notion that pederasty was not an individual relationship, but a societal one is highlighted and displayed. What follows in his speech is a variety of distinctions and differentiations. In addition to the two loves, body and soul are divided, along with the male and female, and cities are sorted on the basis of their overly strict or overly lax laws regarding pederasty (182a-d).

This highly dualistic theory of love is never fully overcome by Socrates' later speeches, and many problematic elements first arise here: the identification of the male

with heavenly love and the female with common love, and consequently the assumption that eros is wrapped up with, in at least its ideal, the pederastic relationship. At no point, in either the *Symposium* or the *Phaedrus*, does Socrates ever stop to address with any serious rigor the possibility of an eros between male and female, or even, for that matter, between two equals.¹³ Similarly we see the beginnings of what slowly developed into the poorly named ‘Platonic love,’ whereby pure love is separated from the ‘lewd’ sexual behavior of common love (181c). In addition, foreshadowing Socrates’s remarks in the *Phaedrus*, Pausanias points out that the lover is held by a kind of madness, and that we allow behavior by a lover “so extraordinary, in fact, that if they performed them for any other purpose [than love], they would reap the most profound contempt” (183a). The lover fails to be rational, makes oaths that nobody expects him to keep, and submits himself in a kind of willing slavery to the *eromenos* in order to gain his favors. In order that this relationship not harm the youth of the city, it is, according to Pausanias, necessary and good that Athens has a complex set of laws regarding these relationships. As Pausanias himself notes, Athen’s laws “are designed to separate the wheat from the chaff, the proper love from the vile” (184a). The conclusion that proper behavior in love is not only the responsibility of the lover himself, but also of the city is a startling one, and one that will go largely undeveloped in later speeches. Yet it is precisely this point that I will wish to return to in part IV: the role of the public in what is seen by most as a private affair.

¹³ This despite Socrates describing Diotima in terms that, if it were not for the fact that she was a woman, would lead a reader to suspect that the two were in a pederastic relationship themselves.

§1.2: Critique of Pederasty

Not all of Socrates' interlocutors are so optimistic regarding the benefits of love, most notably Lysias, whose speech is read by Phaedrus in the eponymous dialogue. In the speech, Lysias, takes up the sophistic task of arguing that a young boy should give his sexual favors to the non-lover, rather than the lover. While the speech is presented as if it were merely a rhetorical exercise, it is clear that Phaedrus himself has become convinced by the argument, and the points made within, even if in service of a somewhat absurd conclusion, nevertheless represent a strong condemnation of the typical behavior of lovers.

The first thing to note is that Lysias' speech implicitly endorses many of the same distinctions of love seen in Pausanias' speech. Sex is separated from eros, as the potential *eromenos* is recommended to give his favors to the non-lover, the one who does not follow eros (τοῖς δὲ μὴ ἐρώσιν). Henceforth, we have the possibility (indeed the recommendation) for considering sex as separate from eros. In a second division of love, it is also never suggested that the non-lover is entirely disinterested in the young *eromenos*. Instead, Lysias makes clear that the one who should be gratified is the friend, as he notes “non-lovers . . . are friends with [the *eromenos*] before they achieve their goal, and you’ve no reason to expect that benefits received will ever detract from their friendship for you” (233a). Thus a division is also made between eros and philia. There is erotic love (which is nevertheless not defined by the sexual) and friendship love (which does not rule out the addition of the sexual). Indeed, Lysias concludes his speech by asking the rhetorical question “have you been thinking that there can be no strong friendship in the absence of erotic love?” (232c). The clear suggestion is that Lysias sees the possibility,

indeed the benefit, for friendship-love absent of eros. Despite speaking of the non-lover, Lysias' speech does not argue that sexual favors should go to the disinterested person, but rather to the properly motivated one, the one who loves the *eromenos* in the 'right' way.

What, then, is the characteristic of this 'right' sort of love, if the sexual does not divide eros and philia? For Lysias, the first distinctive marker is clearly motivation. Unlike Pausanias, Lysias is unwilling to praise a lover for making promises with no intention of keeping them, or for sleeping in doorways hoping for a sight of the *eromenos*. These actions, Lysias argues, are not a 'willing slavery' but an obligation placed on the *eromenos*. The erotic lover "keeps his eyes on the balance sheet" (231a), only giving as long as it is in his interest, as long as he benefits from the relationship himself. The non-lover (who might better be called the friendly lover, or even simply the friend) on the other hand "does the best he possibly can for [the *eromenos*], just as he would for his own business" (231a). The non-lover sees his venture of love with clear eyes. The goal is the improvement of his friend, not an exchange where he hopes to come out ahead.¹⁴ In the end it will become clear to the *eromenos* that the lover seeks not to improve the *eromenos*, but "the glory that comes from popular reputation" for having captured the best prize.¹⁵ For this reason, the lover "prevents the boy he loves from spending time with other people" (232c), guarding his claim over the boy from those who may steal him away.

As a second mark of the division, Lysias notes that eros has a fleeting nature, while friendship is long lasting. This results from eros' beginning in the senses: "lovers generally start to desire your body before they know your character or have any experience of your

¹⁴ One sees in this hints of Aristotle's later division between friendships of use or pleasure on the one hand, and friendship of virtue on the other

¹⁵ The use of hunting metaphors throughout Plato's discussions of love reflect this attitude quite accurately

other traits, with the result that even they can't tell whether they'll still want to be friends with [the *eromenos*] after their desire has passed" (232e).¹⁶ Eros and *philia* are distinguished, therefore, not only by the behavior of the lover, but by their *arche*, their beginning principle. Eros will start when the lover catches sight of "a godlike face or bodily form that has captured Beauty well" (251c), as Socrates phrases it later in the dialogue, whereas the friend, is drawn in (Lysias implies) by an appreciation for some trait of the *eromenos*' soul.¹⁷

A third and final division is the rationality of the lover. In fact, as we will see in the third section of this chapter, it is against this point that Socrates reacts most strongly, although he will ultimately accept some version of all three points. "A lover will admit that he's more sick than sound in the head. He's well aware that he is not thinking straight, but he'll say he can't get himself under control" (231d). This mania of the lover, which Pausanias says we excuse in (but only in) those who are in love, is not seen to be beneficial by Lysias as it is by the symposiasts. There is no mention of how great an army would be if only it were comprised by *erastai* fighting beside their *eromenoi* (*Symp.* 178e-179a), but instead, Lysias wishes to name this mania what it is, an illness, and ask why a *eromenos* would willingly take up with the sick.

This final point makes up the bulk of the second speech of the *Phaedrus*, as Socrates sets out to offer, at the prompting of Phaedrus, a better rhetorical speech on the topic than the one Phaedrus has just read.¹⁸ The critique of the speech that Lysias

¹⁶ This is the same division drawn later by Aristotle, who notes that the *arche* of eros is sight, while the *arche* of friendship is perceived virtue

¹⁷ Lysias does not seem to strictly equate friendship with a virtuous friendship, however he does want to rule out that its beginning may be in something as fleeting as physical appearance.

¹⁸ Socrates is obviously speaking in an ironic tone in his first speech, but regardless of his non-belief in it, the speech furthers the argument that the non-lover is superior to the lover, and thus merits examination.

“seemed to [him] to be showing off, trying to demonstrate that he could say the same thing in two different ways, and say it just as well both times” (235a), along with the speech that Socrates offers in response perhaps indicates that Socrates is of the opinion that the other two points are mere repetitions and rephrasing of the discussion of the lover’s illness. Here, Socrates redefines the *hubris* of Pausanias’ common love¹⁹ to be desire taking control and overruling reason and self-control (238a). As a result, eros is characterized as a madness, and then quickly after, an illness: “Now a sick man takes pleasure in anything that does not resist him . . . that is why a lover will not willingly put up with an *eromenos* who is his equal or superior” (238e-239a). The remainder of Socrates’ first speech is a litany of those things that the sick lover looks for in a *eromenos*, and those things that he will deprive the *eromenos* of in order to ensure that he can maintain his position of power over him, and live unworried that he will leave him for another *erastes*. He will keep him ignorant, cowardly, and weak; he will seek out young men who have no family and few friends. The lover, “while he is still in love . . . is harmful and disgusting” (240e), while Love itself is “like food, its purpose is to sate hunger” (241c). Concluding with an allusion to Homer, Socrates notes, “as the wolf loves the lamb, so the lover adores his boy” (241d).

The conclusion of these two speeches is that eros is *not* the social good that its proponents claim, but instead harms Athens’ youth and stunts their development into good citizens in order that their older lovers may derive personal pleasure from them for as long as possible. Both also may be seen as taking Pausanias’ division of love and developing it further, renaming the heavenly love (already defined as chaste and untainted

¹⁹ More generally, *hubris* was the Greek catch-all word used by the Athenians for sexual impropriety.

by desire) for what it would, in fact, look like to those who saw it: friendship. The division of love is no longer between good and bad eros, but instead, friendship (which is good) and eros (which is bad). It is, by the conclusion of the early speeches of the *Phaedrus*, no longer possible to have a praiseworthy eros for the *eromenos*. In comparison to the early speeches of the *Symposium*, which leave us thinking that Love is the source of all that is good and beautiful, the beginning of the *Phaedrus* strives to convince us of the opposite: love is a sickness, ugly and harmful. These contrasting views, no doubt, alter the Socratic speeches that will follow. There is however, another set of preliminary sources of love to examine before we turn to the Socratic: the dramatic structure of the *Phaedrus* and the middle speeches of the *Symposium*.

§2: Explanatory accounts of Eros

If the conclusion of the early speeches of the *Phaedrus* is that we can no longer turn to the supposed social benefits of pederasty to praise eros, then perhaps we can instead find the solution in offering an explanation for why love exists. The *Symposium* accomplishes this by way of the speeches of Eryximachus and Aristophanes, while the *Phaedrus* somewhat surprisingly accomplishes it by the dramatic setting of the dialogue as well as the seemingly trivial discussions that Socrates and Phaedrus have as they are walking to an appropriate site to begin the real philosophizing of the day. In both cases, we get accounts of eros that do not describe or explain how love between two people occurs, but rather explain how it came to be, what its origins are, and that seek to tie human love to the natural cosmos or to the lives of the gods. This is what I mean by

calling these accounts cosmic or mythological. They are explanatory accounts that seek to situate human love into a broader cosmological and metaphysical picture. If it is not unquestionably a social or ethical good, then maybe it can be defended as a natural process or a divine gift, either by more broadly defining love to encompass what we would today call natural processes (Eryximachus) or by telling of its origins and its history (Aristophanes).

§2.1: Natural Eros

Eryximachus' speech begins under somewhat inauspicious circumstances. Aristophanes, the next in line to follow Pausanias, has been struck by a sudden bout of hiccups (perhaps drawn out by his skepticism of Pausanias' account).²⁰ The responsibility is delegated to Eryximachus to not only cure Aristophanes' hiccups (not only is he a doctor, but his name itself might be interpreted as belch-battler), but also to take his place in line while Aristophanes' recovers. We might wonder how seriously the group assembled would have paid attention to Eryximachus' speaking while, beside him, Aristophanes runs through, as he says after the fact (189a), all the possible cures Eryximachus had suggested: gargling, tickling his nose with a feather, and finally forcing himself to sneeze (185d-e). Suggesting that Eryximachus' speech itself may cure his hiccups (perhaps either through its dullness or its laughableness), Aristophanes responds to the list of potential cures not by indicating that he will make use of them, but instead with a common Greek adage: "The sooner you begin to speak, the better" (185e). Whereas the transition from Phaedrus to Pausanias was seamless—Aristodemus as the unseen narrator notes that when he heard

²⁰ This and the following interpretive points regarding Aristophanes' hiccups were first suggested to me in conversation by David Roochnik.

the story, it was noted that there were speeches in between the two that could not be remembered, but otherwise there is no intervening scene between the two (180c)—this abrupt stopping of the dramatic structure, and a change to the agreed-upon speaking order should draw our attention to the sudden shift that follows in the discourse about love.²¹

Eryximachus begins, not by offering (as we might expect from a doctor) to heal the divide made by Pausanias, but by expanding it, calling it “very useful indeed” (186a). A scientist by trade, Eryximachus begins with a surprising claim, which he claims to have learned by studying medicine: “Love does not occur only in the human soul; it is not simply the attraction we feel toward human beauty: it is a significantly broader phenomenon. It certainly occurs within the animal kingdom, and even in the world of plants. In fact, it occurs everywhere in the universe” (186a). Among those things attributed to love throughout the speech are medicine, music, and farming. Eryximachus, mirroring what will be said later by Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, attributes the two loves not to the heavenly and the earthly, but instead to the healthy and the diseased (186b). Eryximachus also introduces a second point, which puts him at odds with many of his fellow symposiasts: that love is between opposites, specifically, finding balance between two opposing elements, for example hot and cold or wet and dry (186d-e). The distinction drawn between healthy and unhealthy love is between the objects each desires. Healthy love has a proper desire for what will bring balance and concord, while unhealthy love desires the wrong objects, introducing and exacerbating imbalance. Here we see

²¹ However, what exactly this shift might represent is not agreed upon. See G.K. Plochmann “Hiccups and Hangovers in the Symposium,” Steven Lowenstrom, “Aristophanes’ Hiccups,” or Paul O’Mahoney “On the ‘Hiccuping Episode’ in Plato’s Symposium,” for some more detailed interpretations of this scene.

Phaedrus' and Agathon's optimistic views of (healthy) love as calm and balanced, contrasted against the unhealthy, manic love Lysias and Socrates elaborate in the *Phaedrus*. On the whole, however, Eryximachus' speech tells us very little about human love, focused instead on the broader implications of love, with the only mention of human sexuality being a reference back to Pausanias' division of love. Eryximachus' speech represents such an explosive expansion of eros as to make it nearly inconsequential on the individual person-to-person level, for if Love is a god who rules over everything in the universe, surely there is little concern for individual encounters.

While no similar speech is given in the *Phaedrus*, the far more extensive dramatic setting of the dialogue provides some similar insights into how the human relates to the wider cosmic order. The first mention of nature is from Phaedrus himself, who notes that he has been told by Acumenus that it is "more refreshing to walk along country roads than city streets" (227a). Acumenus is, as coincidence (or perhaps, Platonic planning) would have it, a relative of Eryximachus, and a fellow doctor. The opening lines of the dialogue also indicate that a clear shift has taken place, with Lysias' own doctrines being expressed in the city, near the temple of Zeus (227b), whereas Socrates' own will soon be given under a tree, under the auspices of the nymphs (230b).

At first, Socrates seems to lean in to the possibility that nature may be a potential source of learning about eros in this dialogue, describing in great detail the beautiful site to which Phaedrus has led him:

The plane tree is tall and very broad; the chaste-tree, high as it is, is wonderfully shady, and since it is in full bloom, the whole place is filled with its fragrance. From under the plane tree the loveliest spring runs with very cool water Feel the freshness of the air; how pretty and pleasant it is; how it echoes with the summery, sweet song of the cicadas' chorus! The most exquisite thing of all, of course, is the grassy slope. It

risers so gently that you can rest your head perfectly when you lie down on it.
(230b-c)

But after this description, Socrates is immediately teased by Phaedrus for appearing as if he is a foreigner in his own land, appearing as if “[he had] never even set foot beyond the city walls” (230c-d). In response, Socrates, contrary to the glowing review he has just given to the landscape, quickly shuts down an investigation into the scenery, noting that he is “devoted to learning, and landscapes and trees have nothing to teach me—only the people in the city can do that” (230d). Socrates is similarly pessimistic about giving a natural account of the myth of Borreas and Oreithuia that supposedly occurred near their location, namely that it may have merely been that the young girl, playing with her friend, was blown over the cliff by a gust of wind (229c). To offer this naturalization of the mythic, Socrates points out, leads to the problem of having to do the same for all myths, at which point he notes, “I have no time for such things; and the reason, my friend, is this. I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself; and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that” (229e). Expanding this claim, we can also conclude that it would be pointless to attempt to naturalize Eros, a similarly divine being. Whatever account, then, we can expect to draw from the *Phaedrus*, we should not look for one that (in the vein of Eryximachus’ speech), changes Eros from a god to a natural phenomenon. Plato, too, seems to steer away from reliance on nature, with repeated references to the strangeness (ἄτοπώτατός, the superlative of ἄτοπος, *lit.* out-of-place or without-place) of Socrates. This is a person, Phaedrus seems to be informing us, who exists outside the place and time he currently inhabits; his teachings, far from being tied to the natural world, exist only on another plane.

At that point, the dialogue transitions into the human-focused speeches of Lysias and Socrates. However, Socrates returns to nature immediately upon ending his first, ironic speech, noting that, if he continued to speak, “the Nymphs to whom [Phaedrus] cleverly exposed [him] will take complete possession of [him]” (241e). Similarly the position of the sun, “straight-up” above them at noon, is presented by Phaedrus as an omen that they ought to remain in the place a while longer, discussing the topic (242a). Socrates submits to Phaedrus’ desire but only because he notes that his daimon has once again intervened, with Socrates noting that it occurs “just as I was about to cross the river” (242b). These natural markers, symbols of something greater, compel Socrates to remain and offer his recantation. Nature appears again, after Socrates’ second speech, when he notes that the whole event has been watched over by the cicadas (mentioned already in Socrates’ opening description of the place), who “will be very pleased and immediately give us the gift from the gods they are able to give to mortals,” namely they will “go to the Muses [who created them] and tell each one of them which mortals have honored her” (258e-259c). Finally, at the very end of the dialogue, Socrates attributes what they have learned (contrary to what he asserted at the start) to the place they have dwelt in, noting “how much more artful with speeches the Nymphs, daughters of Achelous, and Pan, son of Hermes, are . . . than Lysias” (263d). It is thus the various gods of nature to whom Socrates attributes any knowledge of love that he has disclosed to Phaedrus that day, later telling him to “go and tell Lysias that we came to the spring which is sacred to the Nymphs and heard words charging us to deliver a message” to Lysias and the sophists, to Homer and the lyricists, and to Solon and the politicians to compose their speeches “with a knowledge of truth,” and come to deserve the name

“philosopher” (278b-d). The dialogue finally ends with one last ode to the gods of nature, a prayer that Socrates begins, “O dear Pan and all the other gods of this place . . . ,” and that asks (very much in the spirit of Eryximachus’ speech) that Socrates be “beautiful inside, and that his external possessions be in friendly harmony with what is within” (279b).

We thus see, in Socrates and Phaedrus’ comments of the setting of the dialogue a shift from beginning to end, where, as the speeches take (in at least Plato’s editorial opinion) a turn toward the truth, nature and the gods who rule it become more and more central, and are attributed more and more responsibility for what knowledge is gained from them. Although Socrates stops short of ever completely naturalizing eros or assigning an eros to nature itself, these two sources, Eryximachus and the setting of the *Phaedrus*, begin to draw out the tensions that exist within eros. We have already seen eros presented as a human enterprise (even if it owes its virtue to the divine status of Eros), now we see attempts to place it within the natural cosmos, connecting the human with the animal and vegetal. In the following section we will see a third element come in, the emphasis on the divine elements of Eros. These tensions within eros all lead to the larger tension (to be discussed in chapter 2) that exists in the Platonic theory of whether eros exists in the realm of metaphysics (the understanding of how humans, nature, and gods fit into an ordered cosmos) or ethics.

§2.2: Divine Eros

Although the *Phaedrus* does not directly attribute eros to nature, it does attribute it to the divine, which is the subject of a similar discussion within the dialogue’s dramatic

setting, as well as the topic of Aristophanes' lengthy speech at the midpoint of the *Symposium*.²² Rather than attempting to fit the human into its position within the natural cosmos, Aristophanes' speech and the scattered dramatic remarks of the *Phaedrus* seek instead to situate the human realm of eros within a divine context.²³ No doubt the most interesting of the early *Symposium* speeches, and arguably more so than Socrates' own, Aristophanes' breaks from the earlier speeches in a number of interesting ways. Firstly, it takes the form of a myth-telling, rather than an encomium, and secondly he does not seek to praise love, but rather, so that love can be praised properly by the others, to "explain [Love's] power" (189d).²⁴ We are thus presented with a mythological/historical account of love, both as a god and as it exists between individuals, so that we may, according to Aristophanes, better understand him and why he deserves the greatest praise. The implied premise, therefore, is that the previous speakers (Phaedrus, Pausanias, and Eryximachus) have all misunderstood love's nature. Aristophanes' speech therefore, much like Eryximachus,' represents a decisive break in the theory of love being offered so far at the symposium. By the end of his speech we will now have to choose between three different interpretations of love: societal, natural, or mythical.

Aristophanes' highly mythological speech describes human nature as once doubled—each person with 2 faces, 4 arms, 4 legs, and a large, round body—before the

²² Socrates' speech in the *Phaedrus* also deals at length with the eros of the gods, which will be addressed separately in the following section. The discussion here will be restricted to what Plato presents as the common view.

²³ As the many references to the Nymphs and to Pan in the last section should indicate, these are not entirely exclusive categories for the ancient Greeks. However, I have chosen to address the former 'minor gods' in the context of the natural world to which they governed, rather than placing them with the major Olympian gods addressed in this section.

²⁴ There are however, no clear attributions beyond his introductions of Love itself being a god. Hyland takes this to indicate that "Eros is not a god at all! Eros is our *human condition*" Drew A. Hyland, *Plato and the Question of Beauty* (Indiana University Press, 2008), 39. Whether or not this conclusion is accepted, there is no doubt that the divine plays a role in the creation of human eros.

gods grew worried that their power would be usurped by the humans. Unable to kill off humans (lest they lose the source of the sacrifices and offerings they received), Zeus instead splits humans down the middle, dividing the doubled bodies into ones nearly identical to the human body today. Their faces were turned around so that they would see the wound and be reminded of what would happen if they once again threatened the gods. This wound, on what would have been their back, was sewed up, Aristophanes explained, forming the navel, and the head turned around, so that what was once the back became the front.

The new human body was identical to its current anatomy, except for one important difference: since the head had been turned to face the back, the genitals now faced the back of the body, rather than the front. As it transpired, this was a significant flaw, as the newly divided humans spent all their time seeking their other half, and, upon finding him or her, embraced that person and ceased eating and drinking, dying “from hunger and general idleness” (191a). Zeus, “taking pity on them” (191b), moved the genitals to the front, and changed human nature so that they reproduced via intercourse, rather than spawning (191c). So now, when two halves embraced, “they would at least have the satisfaction of intercourse, after which they could stop embracing, return to their work, and look after their other needs in life” (191c). In the case that the two halves were a male and a female, there was the added benefit (for the gods) that children would be produced and more humans to offer sacrifices (it was already noted that, in splitting them in half, the population would be doubled, becoming “more profitable to [the gods],” who would receive additional offerings” [190d]). On the other hand, humans live under the

threat that, should they ever again threaten the rule of the gods, Zeus will split them in half again, so that “they’ll have to make their way on one leg, hopping” (190d).

This myth serves as Aristophanes’ basis for explaining how love functions today, and introduces several important theses into the conversation. First, it transforms love into something highly nostalgic. Love does not seek a new union between two people, but a return to a unity that once existed in the past and was taken away. Love, although it is only in Aristophanes that generation and sexuality is introduced into the dialogue, is not about creating something new, but rather about returning to a previous state that has been lost. Reproduction is only for the benefit of the gods, not the good of humans.

Second, the goal of lovers is to become one, since they were (whether with each other or with others they can no longer find) doubled. Thus Aristophanes argues that if offered to be physically rejoined by Hephaestus, the smith-god, “no one who received such an offer would turn it down; no one would find anything else that he wanted” (192e). It is wrong, then, to think of lovers as being two individuals, but rather as two halves of the same unity.

Third, as mentioned above, this is the speech of the *Symposium* that most directly introduces sexuality into love. While Pausanias discusses the sexual immorality of *hubris*, only Aristophanes discusses the purpose of sex, namely: to procreate, in order that a never-ending supply of humans can offer sacrifices to the gods, and so that, upon feeling the pleasure and release of intercourse, lovers can return to the toil of everyday life. Sex gives, Aristophanes argues, a *telos* to the embrace of love, so that it may be completed and ended. However, while this gives some pleasure to humans, it is only introduced by the gods for their own benefit, so that humans are not constantly dying out from starvation.

Consequently, at no point in Aristophanes' speech is love ever connected to beauty, a key feature of all of the other speeches. This helps to show, once again, that eros has been introduced, not for the good of humans, but the benefit and safety of the gods. Whether it is something beautiful for man is secondary to whether it will ensure the continued reign of the Olympians. This is what Aristophanes is referring to at the beginning when he promises to speak of "the power of Love (189c)," through the unity love brings about, humans become powerful enough to challenge the gods themselves.²⁵ Although Aristophanes' speech is full of seemingly comic descriptions of cartwheeling, spherical humans, the result is an extremely tragic eros. Split in half, and threatened by the gods with a second division into quarters, love is the never-ending, unachievable search for reunification with our missing half.

Finally, Aristophanes continues to divide love even further, introducing the premise that there were original three kinds of humans, male, female, and androgynous, accounting for pederastic, heterosexual, and lesbian relationships by an appeal to a threefold human nature. Now, not only may there be a high and low form of eros within pederasty (Pausanias), pederasty itself represents its own form of eros, distinct from other relationships. And it is not only distinct, but superior, as the young men who participate in pederastic relationships are "the best of boys and lads, because they are the most manly in their nature They are bold and brave and masculine [T]hese are the only kind of boys who grow up to be real men in politics" (192a). Again, pederasty is attributed the good of forming good citizens, while those men who come from androgynous natures are often "lecherous" (191d).

²⁵ In addition to beauty never being mentioned, once Aristophanes' myth begins, Love itself is almost never referred to as a god, but only as a feeling between humans.

The importance of myths is (although to a lesser extent than nature) a focus of the dramatic set-up of the *Phaedrus* as well. In the reference to the Boreas myth discussed in the previous section, Socrates notes that, rather than naturalize and rationalize it, he will “accept what is generally believed” (230a). In addition, the second half of the dialogue contains a discussion (also seen above) of the myth of the cicadas, as well as the Egyptian myth of Theuth, regarding the origins of writing as a “potion for memory and for wisdom” (274e). When Phaedrus accuses Socrates of making up the story and unfalsifiably attributing it instead to a foreign people (the Egyptians), Socrates asks him, rather than being concerned with the myth’s origins, why “don’t you just consider whether what [it] says is right or wrong” (275b-c). These various myths set a backdrop against which Socrates will give his great myth of the charioteer in his second speech, a backdrop that sees myths, whether factually true or false, as telling us something true about the state of the world today. As in Aristophanes’ speech, the myths are used, not merely to tell an origin story or a tale that has long since lost its relevance, but instead to give an explanation of how things are in the present. These various mythic accounts of ancient gods serve, not just to present an immemorial past, but instead to justify present behavior.

In addition, finishing his second speech, Socrates notes that they should continue to speak, not because he has a desire to, but because, if they do not, the cicadas will report back negatively to the Muses that they serve (259a). This mirrors the earlier, more well-known scene when, having given his first speech, Socrates is prevented from leaving because “the familiar divine sign came to [him] which, whenever it occurs, holds [him] back from something [he is] about to do” (242b-c). His second speech then, is

immediately motivated, not by the shame he already felt at the first (he notes at the outset that he will give it with his head covered, speaking as fast as he can [237a]), but because the divine has intervened. Here we see the divine operating in a second way—less present in Aristophanes’ speech—not merely as an explanation for the origin of the present condition, but as an immediate actor in events. In doing so, the dramatic setting of the *Phaedrus* returns to the basis of many of the early speeches of the *Symposium*: that it is the gods (specifically Love) responsible for giving good things to lovers.

Thus, we have developed, in both dialogues on love, a third choice for how love operates: we first saw eros presented as a social, ethical or political relationship that instructed young men in virtue. When that account begins to be questioned (either by Lysias and Socrates’ speeches in the *Phaedrus*, or by the arrival of Aristophanes’ hiccups), the ethical relationship is dropped for some sort of explanatory, metaphysical account. Perhaps eros is something that ties us to the natural world, that links our bodies to the animals and the plants, which all feel the same longing.²⁶ Or, if eros does not belong to our bodies, perhaps it belongs to our souls, the divine element within us. Perhaps we can attribute eros to our connection with the gods. In either case, these latter accounts move eros away from the ethical and into the ontological. If eros cannot be trusted to make us just, maybe it simply is part of our nature. But these accounts also raise a host of new questions that Socrates will have to address: is human nature complete in itself, or are we seeking some return and reunification? Where does man sit in between the animal and the divine? And further, what are we to make of the numerous divisions that have cut

²⁶ One of the few references to eros in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* is a quotation from Euripides, that “the earth loves (ἐρᾶν) rain when the ground is dry,” 1155b. Plato is likely aware of this quotation as well, as David Sansone points out at length the influence Euripides had on Plato in “Euripides and Plato,” noting that he is the third most commonly cited author after Homer and Simonides, “Plato and Euripides,” *Illinois Classical Studies* 21 (1996), 41.

eros (supposedly a god, in addition to a human emotion): heavenly and common, healthy and sick, love and friendship, masculine, feminine, and androgynous, etc. Are we no longer able to speak of eros as one concept, but only one of many distinct phenomena, some deserving of praise and others of condemnation? If so, how do we determine which ones to praise?

§3: Socratic accounts of Eros: Kalon and the Other

Perhaps it is a sign that Socrates is unwilling or unable to answer these complicated questions in the *Symposium* that the dialogue provides as an interlude a return to the praise of an ethical pederasty from Agathon. However, there is no doubt that Socrates takes up each of these questions in his speech, whether or not he provides a compelling response to them. This is why the reader looking for a Platonic theory of love cannot skip immediately to the Socratic interventions. What I have shown here is not the central importance of the early speeches, but instead the smaller claim that these early speeches cannot be ignored. The earlier speeches raise three specific problems that will form the basis of Socrates' own speeches: the question of pederasty as a socio-political institution, the situation of human eros between nature and the divine, and in each of these accounts, the division of eros into categories (heavenly/common, male/female, etc.). In addition, although each of these questions is raised in both the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, the context of each Socratic speech differs greatly. The *Symposium* largely praises pederasty and firmly situates eros as a divine element (Eryximachus' speech is the one

exception here), while the *Phaedrus* begins with a strong critique of pederasty, and a dramatic reliance on the natural setting of the meeting between Socrates and Phaedrus.

We must be careful, then, in addition to not reading Socrates' speeches in isolation of what comes before them, of not reading them in an overly syncretic way. What Socrates argues in the *Symposium* is not, *in toto*, what he argues in the *Phaedrus*. There are two reasons for this. First, the standard Socratic *argumentum ad hominem* is at work. Socrates consistently targets his speeches toward his interlocutors in a specific way. A Socratic speech to a general will not be the same as to an aristocrat, even if the topic is the same. So, it is natural that a speech reacting against those strongly praising pederasty will differ from one answering a Sophist who is denouncing the practice. Socrates in both cases is seeking an answer toward the middle, but is approaching it from opposite sides. This point is, I suspect, an unsurprising and uncontroversial one among Plato scholars. The second, more contentious reason is that the *Phaedrus* represents, in several respects, a revision or correction of the theory of eros in the *Symposium*. Here I am very much in agreement with A.W. Price who notes that "as an account of love, Socrates' contribution to the *Symposium* has deficiencies to make one glad that it does not constitute Plato's final word. It invites supplementation in a number of respects."²⁷ In order to highlight these supplementations, the current section will present a general interpretation of each Socratic speech, before proceeding to more extensive evaluations of the two objects of love discussed, the *Kalon* and the *eromenos*, with the relation between these two poles being the fundamental point underlying the difference between the two texts.

²⁷ A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Clarendon Press, 1989), 55.

§3.1: Socratic Eros I: The *Symposium*

Plato makes the *ad hominem* nature of Socrates' *Symposium* speech immediately obvious. Socrates attempts twice to turn the symposium into a more familiar dialogue, first after Aristophanes speech, when he asks Agathon whether or not he would feel more shame for doing something shameful in front of the wise than in front of ordinary people.²⁸ Here, he is immediately stopped by Phaedrus who notes that if Agathon answers Socrates, the job of each praising Eros will never be completed. However, Socrates immediately renews his quest for a discussion when Agathon finishes his speech, recanting his earlier claim to knowledge, noting that he “realized how ridiculous [he'd] been . . . to say that [he] was a master of the art of love, when [he] knew nothing whatever of this business, of anything whatever ought to be praised” (198d). Having negated his early claim to the knowledge of erotics, Socrates positions himself to attempt to draw the answer out of Agathon dialectically rather than offer his own speech of praise. As a result, he begins by targeting the heart of not only Agathon's speech, but the entire night, leading Agathon down a path of questioning to the conclusion that Eros cannot possibly be beautiful or good, since it desires these things, but nobody desires what he already has (201c). Having brought Agathon (whose speech, we are told, was greeted by a large burst of applause by all there, “so becoming to himself and to the god did they think the young man's speech” [198a]) to admit that he did not, in fact, know what he was talking about either, Socrates then turns to recount a similar discussion he had with a priestess named Diotima, who taught him this line of argumentation.

²⁸ The Greek here, αἰσχρόν, is equally translated as shameful or ugly, just as καλόν can be both noble or beautiful.

§3.1.1: Eros' Parentage

Socrates' speech proceeds in three distinct stages, the first mirrors Socrates' own dialogue with Agathon, with Socrates noting that he himself once gave the exact same sort of speech as Agathon to Diotima. After Diotima takes Socrates through this line of argumentation, however, she does not stop, but instead shifts to an entirely different view point, discussing not the divinity Eros, but instead human eros itself, suggesting that eros is a human drive toward immortality. This too, however, comes to an end, and Diotima then suggests that Socrates is perhaps well-disposed "to be initiated into these rites of love . . . the final and highest mystery" (210a). The suggestion here is that what precedes it is merely preliminary, offering not the truth about Eros but instead a convenient story that may give some insight into love to the common person. The idea that there is a secret *gnosis* about Eros, that love is not something available to all, is at first shocking but, as we shall see, not at all surprising when we discover what exactly this secret teaching holds.

Despite the first portion of Socrates' speech repeating the argument that Eros cannot be good and beautiful, and therefore cannot be a god (202d)—since nobody would deny that the gods possess everything good and beautiful—Socrates does not separate Eros from the divine entirely. Eros' lack of beautiful and good things makes him neither ugly nor bad, instead, Socrates reports that Diotima teaches him that Eros is a 'great daimon,' an intermediary between the gods and mortals—between beauty and ugliness—communicating messages and gifts from the gods and delivering sacrifices and prayers from mortals (202e). With that, Socrates mediates one of the debates of the earlier speeches. If we are looking for an explanatory role of eros, we should not look for it in the completely natural (the ugly and bad), nor in the completely divine (the beautiful and the

good), but in between. It is interesting to note here, however, that in the *Symposium*, it is not the human itself, a combination of body and soul that is presented as the in between. Humanity represents the opposite pole from the divine, which needs to be mediated by eros.²⁹ As we will see, the account in the *Phaedrus* will view this slightly differently.

It is Eros' parentage, Diotima explains, that has given Eros this role. The myth that follows contains the heart of Diotima's first description of love. Eros was conceived on the day of Aphrodite's birth, the son of a sleeping Poros (plenty/resource) and Penia (poverty), who sought to ameliorate her position by having a child by Poros. This, Diotima explains, is the reason why Eros always seeks after beauty, because he was conceived on the day of Aphrodite's birth. Eros' fate to constantly seek but never obtain good and beautiful things is likewise explained through his parentage, thanks to his mother, he is "far from being delicate and beautiful . . . he is instead tough and shriveled and shoeless and homeless . . . always living with Need." However, he has also received gifts from his father, who has made him "a schemer after the beautiful and the good; he is brave, impetuous, and intense, an awesome hunter . . . resourceful in his pursuit of intelligence, a lover of wisdom [i.e. a philosopher] through all his life" (203c-d). Caught between the natures of his parents, Eros is "never completely without resources, nor is he ever rich . . . between wisdom and ignorance" (203e). We thus arrive, through Love's origin, to a daimon who looks very much like Socrates himself, barefoot and seeking after wisdom.

²⁹ One of the primary reasons for this is that Diotima's speech appears to present humans as without an immortal soul. Whether this is true however, is debated. Price, *Love and Friendship*, 30-35 gives a good summary of the issue. Hackforth, "Immortality in Plato's *Symposium*," reads the speech as strictly incompatible with the doctrine of the immortality of the soul given elsewhere in Plato's corpus, while others, including Dover, *Symposium*, and Luce, "Immortality in Plato's *Symposium*: A Reply," argue that the text may not be as skeptical as it seems.

There are several major problems with this mythological account, however, and if it were taken to be the true teaching of love, we should, rather than praise it as a seeker of beauty and truth, question whether it is not, in fact, ugly and bad. Firstly, we are told and quickly led past the fact that eros is the child of a rape. Poros is drunk on nectar at the celebration for Aphrodite, and has wandered into the garden and fallen asleep. There Eros is conceived, not in search of beauty or goodness, but out of selfish desire, as Penia seeks to improve her situation. Eros' conception is thus doubly ugly, the product of rape and the result of selfish greed. We perhaps should not expect anything else from an origin story of love (love's very conception could, without risk of mythological contradiction, be the result of a loving union),³⁰ however we should stop and consider that the example of seeking beauty and goodness that eros receives from his mother is not as a virtuous seeker, as Diotima would have us believe, but instead as one who schemes out of self-interest without concern for the consequence of her actions.

Second, we are told that it is due to his father, Poros that Eros received his scheming nature (in an attempt to cover the viciousness of his conception), and yet it is Penia who is the schemer that day; Poros has everything he needs, and, although he is described as the son of Metis (cunning), displays only the excess of his own nature through his drunkenness in the myth. We might then ask, if Penia already represents the poor beggar, scheming to improve her lot, what, if anything, Eros has gained from his father. Eros seems to be his mother's child alone.

This interpretation continues the *Symposium's* general debate regarding the parentage of Eros, with Phaedrus noting that his parents are not mentioned anywhere in

³⁰ This point highlights the need (as discussed in the Introduction) to not equate eros with desire, even sexual desire. It may not be what we mean by 'romantic love' today, but nor is it merely desire.

poetry or legend, but only (quoting Parmenides) that “the very first god [she] (sic) designed was Love” (178b),³¹ attributing Eros’s birth only to an unnamed goddess. Pausanias, in making his divide between heavenly and common eros, ascribes the distinctions to the parentage of Aphrodite, who Eros follows, with the common Aphrodite sharing in both the male and the female (her parents are Zeus and Dione), while heavenly Aphrodite is born from Uranus directly, with no mother. Her virtue is thus attributed to her not sharing in the feminine.³² For Diotima/Socrates to then claim that Eros effectively has *only* a mother, shares *only* in the feminine, should cause us to reflect more carefully on the claims that follow, to ask what the significance is. At least two readings seem possible at this point: either what follows is not in fact a virtuous love, or that the equation of Love with masculinity (and therefore also courage³³) is wrong for some other reason.

A similar debate runs through the dialogue regarding Love’s age, with Phaedrus naming him among the oldest gods, while Agathon makes him the youngest. Pausanias’ division combines the two, noting that, in addition to not sharing in the feminine, heavenly Aphrodite’s virtue (and therefore also the virtue of the heavenly Eros who follows her) comes from being “older, free from the *hubris* of youth” (181c). Socrates, in making the setting for his myth Aphrodite’s birth, as well as mentioning the “garden of Zeus” (203b), is likely discussing the younger of the Aphrodites. Here, we find another surprising fact in the birth of Eros, not only is he for all intents and purposes fatherless—a

³¹ Bury names Birth as the goddess, perhaps due to the inclusion of the definite article in the phrase “δὲ τὴν γένεσιν” (178b), however, this reading is at odds with Phaedrus’ intended use of the quotation, to show that “parents of Love there are none, nor are any recorded in either prose or verse.” Thus, it seems unlikely that he would select a quote that listed any particular goddess as his mother. Indeed, even the interpolation of ‘she’ in the the version quoted above

³² Pausanias glosses over the fact that, despite not having a mother, Aphrodite is herself female.

³³ *Andreia*, courage, could alternatively be translated as ‘manliness.’

sure indication, the previous speech-givers would have us believe, of his viciousness, he is also among the youngest gods, which Pausanias likewise credits with the vice of hubris. While Agathon, on the other hand, will credit the eternally youthful Eros with all of the cardinal virtues, his excessive praise is the target of Socrates' questioning, and Agathon is in the end forced to admit that he "didn't know what [he] was talking about in that speech" (201b). Thus, although Diotima describes him as the lover, rather than the object loved, the daimon Eros does not seem to take the form of the old, male typical of the *erastes* in a pederastic relationship. Despite speaking of Eros in terms that strongly evoke the character of Socrates himself, Diotima leaves us, in this first section, with a young, exclusively feminine Eros—a sure recipe, according to both Pausanias and Alcibiades' earlier speeches, for viciousness and lewdity.³⁴

All of these lead us to see Socrates' speech as drawing a strict conflict, at least in the early portion of his speech, between the explanatory, metaphysical account of love and the social, ethical one. If we accept the origin account of love, then surely it has little concern for ethics beyond the egoistic acquisition of the good and beautiful, through whatever schemes it can think of. Likewise, if we accept the account that the pederastic relationship models a kind of education of virtue, it will be very difficult for the Athenian audience to accept a divinity who is young, feminine, and conniving. It seems that at this point Socrates is forcing us to choose one side or the other; either love improves the

³⁴ Both Pausanias and Aristophanes criticize feminine love while praising all-male love. Pausanias, for example, bases his criticisms of common Aphrodite on the fact that she participates in both female and male (having been born from and similarly criticizes her followers for loving both women and boys. In contrast, virtuous 'heavenly' Aphrodite was born only from Zeus, and is "partakes only in the male and not the female," the basis of its praiseworthiness. Aristophanes similarly accuses those souls born of a Female or Androgynous proto-human of adultery, see Phaedrus' praise of women.

situation of the lover *or* it improves the situation of the one loved. It can't do both. As we will see soon, this also results in a splitting of the object of love.

§3.1.2: Birth in Beauty

If this transformation of Eros into a youthful, feminine spirit went unnoticed by Socrates' companions, they surely did not miss it in Diotima's second approach to Eros, where these aspects are made even more apparent as the discussion eventually culminates in naming eros a desire for giving birth. At the end of the discussion of Love's origins, Diotima explains that Socrates, (and by extension the other speakers) have been mistaken about Love's nature as a daimon because they have mistaken Love for "*being loved*, rather than *being a lover*" (204c). What Love pursues—wisdom—is beautiful, "the most beautiful" (204b),³⁵ in fact. So, if we want to discuss an ethical eros, the *Symposium* speeches may be transformed into speeches in honor of Wisdom, and its ability to bring about virtue, justice, and all good things (a view, Socrates would surely wholeheartedly agree with), but when we speak of Love, we must instead describe the lover. It is after all, the lover, and not the one loved, who will benefit and gain virtue. Here, Socrates asks perhaps the sensible question. If Love is not a god, if he is not beautiful, "what use is Love to human beings" (204c)? This question allows us to transition to the second section of Diotima's speech, discussing not the god of Love, but human eros.

This second part of the speech begins with a rather surprising, un-argued, claim: Love is a desire to possess good and beautiful things, and thus, eros is nothing other than

³⁵ The word here is καλλίστων, the superlative form of καλός.

the desire to be happy.³⁶ As Diotima states: “That’s what makes happy people happy, isn’t it—possessing good things,” and further going on to clarify what she means by “this desire for happiness, this kind of love” (205a). However, love, if taken merely as a stand in for a desire for happiness, is as broad as poetry. Consequently, Diotima continues, we, in general, reserve the term lover to those who pursue happiness in a certain way (205d). So lovers of money, sport or even philosophy, are not generally called lovers, although they each are seeking good and beautiful things.³⁷ The particular way that lovers pursue the possession of good things forever, which sets them apart from other kinds of pursuers, is by “giving birth in beauty” (206b). Thus Diotima once again, without any ambiguity, brings Love back into the realm of the feminine and the youthful.

Giving birth, Diotima explains, “is an immortal thing for a mortal animal to do” (206c), and so, can only happen in beauty and harmony,³⁸ as “ugliness is out of harmony with all that is godly” (206d). At this point, Diotima negates her previous definition of love, suggesting that love is not, in fact, the pursuit of possessing beauty, but rather “reproduction and birth in beauty” (206e). Diotima’s reasoning, here, is a somewhat rare one in the Platonic corpus, particularly as a viewpoint that he seemingly wants the reader to endorse: “it’s because reproduction goes on forever; it is what mortals have in place of immortality” (206e). We are thus led to conclude that the human soul is

³⁶ The relationship between the desire for beautiful things and the desire for good things is not entirely clear in Diotima’s speech, and will be investigated in the section on the *kalon* (chapter 2).

³⁷ This despite Love himself having been named a philosopher in the first section of the speech.

³⁸ The Greek ‘in’ is potentially ambiguous here. Diotima is either suggesting that it within beauty that offspring are born, or else that it is in the *presence* of beauty. Reeve, *Plato on Love* 67n96. While, for the most part, maintaining the ambiguous ‘in,’ I have, consistent with the interpretation I have given here of Diotimian love as feminine, erred on the side of ‘in the presence of’ to avoid the possible (in my view, incorrect) reading that what Diotima is discussing is impregnation, rather than birth-giving.

not, by itself, immortal.³⁹ In order to possess ‘good things forever,’ as happiness requires, we are first required to escape our mortal condition, and therefore “it follows from our argument that love must desire immortality” (207a). The remainder of this second section contains Diotima’s explanation of the various ways that humans seek immortality, first by giving birth to children (the pregnant in body), while others—the pregnant in soul—turn to speeches of virtue, giving birth to children such as the works of the Homer and Hesiod, or the code of law created by Solon (209d). These children, superior to those of the pregnant in body, have the capacity to live on forever. There is no need for the great epics to produce offspring, for they will live as long as they are told. Similarly, Diotima explains, the pregnant in soul are at an advantage since they are able to carry with them the beauty from “a firmer bond of friendship (209c)” than those who are brought together from a pregnancy of the body.

Thus, while the second section of Diotima’s speech has reinforced the feminine, youthful nature of love, by applying birth-giving to the philosophical pursuits of the men in the room, rather than to the birth of any actual children, she has also pushed eros further away from any recognizable form, instead pushing it toward the theoretical ‘eros’ felt by the poets, politicians, and philosophers, whose children are their works, and not their biological offspring. In other words, the description of eros becomes even more abstract, even more metaphysical, and appears to lose its connection to what we might otherwise ordinarily call love. The result is that, despite defining love in terms of giving birth, Diotima’s speech has made it so that the definition continues to accept (and indeed to be best defined by) the all-male pederastic relationship, noting that a man who “has

³⁹ see footnote 29, above.

been pregnant . . . from early youth” will draw close to beauty and “if he also has the luck to find a soul that is beautiful and noble and well-formed . . . such a man makes him instantly teem with speeches about virtue” (209b). Giving birth in beauty, the essentially feminine aspect of eros finds its highest expression in an *erastes* has the fortune of finding an *eromenos* who is beautiful in both body and soul with whom to associate. With that, Socrates has concluded the second section of (what is allegedly) Diotima’s speech as he did the first: putting the philosopher—himself—at the center of eros. In the first section, it was Eros himself who was the philosopher. Here at the end of the second, the philosopher is the one who gives birth to beautiful speeches in the presence of his *eromenos*/student. It is the philosopher, more than any other, who is capable of achieving happiness.

Further, although Diotima once again brings up virtue, and begins to bring the ethical back into contact with the metaphysical, love appears to remain extremely egoistic. There is no discussion of a real relationship between *erastes* and *eromenos*, only that, in the presence of his *eromenos*, he will give birth to speeches about virtue. The relationship thus appears to be one of mere use, where the *erastes* draws near in order to give birth to what has already been inside him “from early youth.” The philosopher gives birth to his own children. The beauty is merely the birthing room, not the father.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ One caveat to this would be to interpret Diotima’s description of “pregnant from early youth” to be a sign of their impregnation from their own *erastes*, thus affirming the cyclical nature of the pederastic relationship. But an eros where fathers are all abandoned, and children (of necessity) are raised by step-fathers, who are in turn impregnated to become mothers to their own children later in life. However this androgynous account of love sounds nearly equally strange to the asexual reading.

§3.1.3: The Final Mysteries

Diotima then begins the final section of her speech, a discussion of “the final and highest mystery” of love (210a). Following the same definition as before, Diotima outlines the ascent of eros from a single body eventually to “the great sea of beauty,” recognizing that everything that is, is beautiful (210d). All of this is accomplished through the guidance of a leader⁴¹ who in one final step leads the lover “to the goal of loving: all of a sudden he will catch sight of something wonderfully beautiful in its nature; that, Socrates, is the reason for all his earlier labors.”⁴² These earlier labors include, at each stage, the speeches that the lover gives birth to, first to seduce the single beautiful body he encounters (201a), later, philosophical speeches at the sight of the sea of beauty (210d), and finally, upon seeing the ‘wonderfully beautiful in its nature,’ he will give birth “not to images of virtue . . . but to true virtue . . . and if any human being could become immortal, it would be he” (212a). Having accomplished the ascent, the lover gives birth to virtue, and accomplishes (as near as is possible for humans) immortality. The work of Love is thus fulfilled.

With the reference to true virtue at the end, Socrates is clearly attempting to show that the metaphysical and the ethical accounts are not just able to be joined together, but that they must be. If we want to attain true virtue, we can only do so by understanding

⁴¹ Who exactly this leader is is a problematic question. Socrates is clearly identifying Diotima as his guide, which makes it difficult to say that it is the *erastes* of a pederastic relationship, especially since the first step sees the person being guided become an *erastes* himself (for a person to simultaneously be both *eromenos* and *erastes* would be highly unusual). Nehamas/Woodruff attributes it to Love (71), but this too is complicated by Socrates’ identifying Diotima as his guide. A third option would be that it is simply someone unrelated to the lover by eros. After all it is not claimed by Socrates that he and Diotima had any relationship other than teacher and student, although this too would seem odd: that eros is explained by the non-lover.

⁴² Precisely what this ‘wonderfully beautiful in its nature’ is, is a discussion reserved to the coming section on the *kalon*. For now, it suffices that it seems to be Beauty Itself.

eros and ourselves metaphysically. He thus navigates the three choices he was presented with by mediating between the natural and the divine explanatory accounts, while asserting that the explanatory and ethical accounts are not two separate options, but instead are two interlinked parts of one eros.

Yet notice that, aside from the problematic guide (see footnote 43), the Lover is alone by the time he reaches the Wonderfully Beautiful. Once again, virtue appears, not as something involving others, but essentially egoistic. Virtue is given birth to, not in a community, but in solitary contemplation of the Beautiful.

§3.1.4: Alcibiades' inversion

Despite the loud applause Socrates receives, Plato does not let this be the final word. Instead, the drunken Alcibiades enters, demanding to know “where Agathon was . . . to be shown Agathon at once” (212d), a rather obvious punning on Agathon’s name, which means ‘The Good.’ While there is more that could be said about this speech than is necessary here, it is important to see the dramatic function it plays with regard to Socrates’ speech, devolving the symposium—which has ascended to the heavens at the conclusion of Socrates’ speech—back to a true, Bacchian symposium, as Alcibiades almost immediately has the slaves bring the wine back into the room. Pushed to offer, as the others have, an encomium to love, Alcibiades instead offers a speech in praise of Socrates (who, Alcibiades claims, will not permit him to praise anyone else in his presence [214d]).⁴³ Thus even as Plato ironically devolves the symposium, refusing to let Socrates’ grand ascent cap the evening, he continues to blur the line even further between Eros and

⁴³ Although Socrates himself states that he is in love with Alcibiades, their interactions here, as well as the content of Alcibiades speech, put that claim in doubt.

Socrates, putting the latter now in the seat of honor to be praised in the final speech. After praising his many features and virtues, Alcibiades concludes by noting “[Socrates] presents himself as your lover, and, before you know it, you’re in love with him yourself” (222b). As a result, Diotima’s correction is inverted; if Socrates has truly taken the place of Love, his status as the pursuer, the one who loves, is only a façade. Who Socrates/Eros really is, is the one he was thought to be by all the previous speech givers: the one loved. We are also forced, more than in any of the scheduled speeches, to contemplate the behavior of the person in love. Alcibiades is driven mad by his pursuit of Socrates, and refuses to let even the beautiful Agathon (the person, but very clearly alluding to the Good itself) come between Socrates and himself on the couch. In this manner the reader is refused the ability to leave the *Symposium* with Socrates’ soaring speech in mind and we are perhaps subtly told by Plato that Socrates’ speech is lacking some truth after all.

§3.2: Socratic Eros II: The *Phaedrus*

The primary source for Socratic eros in the *Phaedrus* similarly takes shape in three main divisions, the first, an argument for the soul’s immortality, followed by a myth regarding the structure of the soul, and concluding with a discussion of human eros in action. Socrates likewise attributes the speech to another person, in this case Stesichorus, son of Euphemus (i.e. the good speaker).⁴⁴ This attribution plays upon Socrates’ intention to offer a palinode, or recantation, of his previous speech. It was Stesichorus who saw the need for such an apology after speaking ill of Helen in his poetry, and subsequently being

⁴⁴ Unlike the *Symposium*, however, it does not seem Socrates wants to actually attribute the words to this person, but merely the ideas.

blinded for his offense (243a). We are told that this represents “an ancient rite of purification” and that “as soon as he completed . . . the Palinode, he immediately regained his sight” (243a-b). Socrates, we are told, plans to preempt any punishment from Eros and offer a Palinode immediately, having been warned by his daimon not to leave his place (242b-c). In the preamble to his second speech, Socrates offers a guideline for judging his upcoming account of love:

Suppose a noble and gentle man, who was (or had once been) in love with a boy of similar character, were to hear us say that lovers start serious quarrels for trivial reasons and that, jealous of their *eromenos*, they do him harm—don’t you think that man would think we had been brought up among the most vulgar of sailors, totally ignorant of love among the freeborn? Wouldn’t he most certainly refuse to acknowledge the flaws we attributed to Love (243c)?

We are thus instructed that any account of love that we offer ought to be recognizable as such by anyone who has ever loved.⁴⁵ While he does not offer a definition at the outset, as he did in the *Symposium*, we are at least left with a measuring stick, so that we may stop at any point in the ensuing speech and ask ‘does this seem like a recognizable love?’ This starting point also accounts for some of the differences between this account and that of the *Symposium*, whereas the latter follows a string of speeches in praise of Love, and therefore seeks to temper that praise, the present speech follows two speeches highly critical of love and seeks to move the conversation in the other direction, showing love to not be totally without merit.

⁴⁵ Whether either of Socrates’ speeches succeeds in this regard will be addressed in the concluding section of this chapter.

§3.2.1: The Four *Mania*

Socrates begins the first section of his speech by stating that, while it is true that the lover suffers from a *mania*, however, “the best things we have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the god” (244a). It is not enough for Lysias to argue that the lover is mad and the friend sane, he further needs to make the case that the madness is not god-given (245b). Therefore, Socrates maintains, even in the recantation, a distinction as in the *Symposium*, a division of Eros into a ‘virtuous’ and ‘vicious’ version, here accounted for by the source of the mania. Socrates outlines at the outset three commonly accepted examples of these divine *maniai*: first, the prophetic, divining the future and giving advice; second, the cathartic, discovering the cause of present hardships and the purificatory rites to resolve them; third, the poetic, giving a voice to past heroes’ achievements and teaching future generations (244b-245b). The remainder of Socrates speech will argue in favor of love as being a forth such divine mania.

To do so, however, requires (at least in Socrates’ opinion) that we first understand the nature of the soul. This sudden shift in topic is not foreshadowed by Socrates, nor does he explain, at least at the outset, why he is including this section. What follows is a short argument for the immortality of the soul, based on its self-motion. While the argument seems to have no immediate bearing on a theory of love, and the claim has not been denied by either of the previous two speeches, it is interesting to note that, as the soul is immortal in this speech, we are bound to encounter a theory of love that differs, at least in some respects, from the one in the *Symposium*. If the human soul is already immortal, then we cannot possibly define love as a mortal’s pursuit for immortality. Indeed this is already the second such change in the account, with Socrates unreservedly

considering Eros to be a god in the palinode (242d), seeing his speech in the *Phaedrus* as given to a god, and not only to a “great daimon.”⁴⁶ It is thus necessary to proceed with caution before assuming that the two accounts of eros will or should fit together without conflict.

§3.2.2: The Charioteer Myth

Satisfied that he has proven the immortality of the soul, Socrates moves to the second portion of his speech, describing the structure of the soul. However, as such a task would take too long to be humanly possible, he instead proposes to describe, via a myth, “to say what it is like” (246a).⁴⁷ Socrates consequently reinforces the importance of myth for human wisdom already seen in the earlier dramatic elements (and described in §2.2). The soul, Socrates explains, is like a chariot being drawn by two winged horses. For the gods, each of the three parts (the driver and the two horses) are “of good stock” (246a) and as a result the driver’s job is easy. For humans however, while one horse “is beautiful and good and from stock of the same sort . . . the other is the opposite and has the opposite sort of bloodline.” The result is that the charioteer’s job “is inevitably a painfully difficult business” (246b).⁴⁸

⁴⁶ While Socrates does hedge by calling Love “a god or something divine,” at 242e, the question preceding notes that Eros is the son of Aphrodite and asks Phaedrus to agree that he is a god.

⁴⁷ Although he does not call it a myth at this point, in the second half of the *Phaedrus*, when proposing to examine it for its use of rhetoric he calls it a μυθικόν ῥήμα, a mythic hymn (265c). This is in keeping with the Greeks’ broader use of the word myth than we generally mean it today.

⁴⁸ Once again, while the psychology offered by Plato in these first two sections is extremely rich, as it plays a rather minor role in the theory of eros as I am arguing for it here, I have largely omitted any analysis of it. See Buccioni, “The Psychological Forces in Plato’s *Phaedrus*” for one such analysis. Although I’m uncertain of her ultimate labels for the three parts of the chariot, she spells out in clear and convincing fashion the reasons for doubting that the tripartite soul of the *Republic* maps neatly onto the three members here.

This job, Socrates explains, is to ascend and make a circuit around the heavens. The gods make the circuit in an orderly procession, led by Zeus with the other Olympians following peacefully in line (246e-247a). Meanwhile the human charioteers—whose horses are made strong in the presence of “beauty, wisdom, and everything of that sort” but whose “wings shrink and disappear” in the presence of “foulness and ugliness” (246d-e)—struggle to make the ascent, burdened by their bad horse who drags the chariot back down toward the earth.

For the gods, they are moved peacefully around the circuit, “stand[ing] while they gaze upon what is outside heaven” (247c).⁴⁹ There they feast on “intelligence and pure knowledge . . . seeing what is real and watching what is true, feeding on all this and feeling wonderful.” There, each god “has a view of Justice as it is, it has a view of Self-control; it has a view of Knowledge” (247d). All of this, Socrates says, they see in the “truly being being” (247c).⁵⁰ Having feasted on this, they calmly descend to their homes, and return their horses to their stables. The journey for mortals is not so easy, however. Although each person attempts to follow a god, the conflict between his horses makes his circuit a

⁴⁹ The gods take their place on τὰ ἔξω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, translated variably as “the summit of the heavens” (Anderson) “the high ridge of heaven” (Nehamas/Woodruff) or “the outer surface of the heavens” (Bury) or “heaven’s rim,” (Nicholson) looking at the ὑπερουράνιος, or what is above or beyond the sky or the heavens. The imagery here suggests that they are looking out at something beyond the cosmos, outside even the world the gods inhabit.

⁵⁰ This phrase too is variably translated by phrases like “being that really is what it is” (Nehamas/Woodruff), “truly existing essence” (Bury), or the “being that truly is” (Nicholson). None of these quite translate the sense of what Plato writes, οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα, a string of three words derived from the verb “to be.” The first, the noun ‘being.’ The second an adverb, a rare word (which becomes more common in Plato’s later dialogues) used generally to indicate that something really is or truly is, which might literally be translated instead as ‘beingly,’ and finally the present active participle, ‘being.’ Thus we might say ‘the truly being being’ or ‘the beingly being being’ (Nicholson, 183), as long as it is parsed in the same way as ‘the truly running man’ and not mistaking the adverb as an adjective ‘the true man running.’ Nicholson explains this by noting that it is “not only something that *is*—it *is* in a special way. It is a certain kind of being or a way of being.” 183. While I agree with Nicholson’s sentiment here, it is odd that, even immediately after noting that οὐσα is a participle, he repeatedly translates it as the present indicative (as do nearly all translators). We will have reason to revisit this translation in chapter 2, in the section on the *Kalon*.

constant struggle. The one who “make[s] itself most like [his] god” (248a) is able to just barely make it up to the top of the circuit, but is constantly distracted by the task of controlling the horses, so only able to glimpse out to the truly being being. Another group, Socrates explains, at time reaches the top and sees some of this highest reality, but at other times falls down and misses other parts. The final group are entirely unable to reach the heights of reality, and do not see anything of it (248a). In the end, all three groups descend, and in the process, many of the horses are trampled and lose their wings. Thus, the process to re-ascend must begin with the regrowth of wings (249a); this is accomplished by eros, a fourth kind of divine *mania*, Socrates explains in concluding the second section.⁵¹

§3.2.3: The Movement of Eros

It is therefore only in the final of three sections that Socrates turns to the immediate matter at hand: eros and the question of whom the young boy should associate with.⁵² Socrates begins by acknowledging the divide between the divine form of eros, and the human madness condemned in the earlier speeches:

[the one] who has become defiled is not to be moved abruptly from here to a vision of Beauty itself when he sees what we call beauty here; so instead of gazing at the latter reverently, he surrenders to pleasure and sets out in the manner of a four-footed beast, eager to make babies; and, wallowing in vice, he

⁵¹ This section also includes an extensive discussion of the progression of souls from Tyrant to Philosopher, as well as a description of the cycle of incarnation. I have omitted it here as it is only very tangentially to an account of Socratic eros.

⁵² Prior to his conclusion at 249d that eros is indeed a fourth mania, the first two sections (244a-250b) contain just two real references to eros. The first (245b) when Socrates states that the goal is to prove that eros is a divine mania, the second (248d-e), where the philosopher (the highest stage of the cycle of reincarnation) is described as “prone to erotic love.” Even the good horse, who is said to pursue beauty, is not explicitly attributed an eros.

goes after unnatural pleasure too, without a trace of fear or shame. A recent initiate, however, one who has seen much in heaven—when he sees a godlike face or bodily form that has captured Beauty well, first he shudders and a fear comes over him like those he felt at the earlier time; then he gazes at him with the reverence due a god, and if he weren't afraid people would think him completely mad, he'd even sacrifice to his boy as if he were the image of a god (250e-251a).

Thus the divide is definitively struck between a human sickness-eros that pursues “unnatural pleasures” and a divine *mania*-eros that recognizes the beautiful other as if he were something divine. The remainder of Socrates' speech offers a description of this divinely inspired lover, thereby offering his recantation of everything bad he said about him in the first speech. This distinction is nearly identical to that drawn by Pausanias in the *Symposium*, and which was never truly overcome in that dialogue. However, Socrates' speech here will at least show the glimmer of hope that this divide may be able to be overcome, or at least softened. As we see in the key passage quoted above, eros is unquestionably felt toward the *eromenos*. It is to him, Socrates claims, that the lover wishes to offer sacrifices. This marks a stark contrast to the lover of the *Symposium*, who almost immediately gives up on the single *eromenos* when he is shown by his guide that there are many more beautiful things. Even if this relationship is not best characterized as a sexual relationship, the divide is not a straightforwardly one between a philosophical eros for Beauty and a common eros for other humans either. We might therefore see how the speech could also be read as a partial recantation or palinode for his speech of the *Symposium* (which by denying that Eros was a god at all, surely would cause equal offense to him as the first speech of the *Phaedrus*). The corrective takes the form of a truly divine love that responds to the individual, not to a metaphysical “wonderfully beautiful in its nature.”

Maintaining the structure of the myth of the charioteer, Socrates explains that it is the sight of beauty in the individual that causes the wings to begin to regrow (mirroring Diotima's remarks that giving birth is only possible in the presence of beauty). It is then the pair together, *erastes* and *eromenos*, who make the ascent to the edge of the world, and not, as the *Symposium* argues, the lover who ascends precisely by leaving the *eromenos* behind. Whereas the lover of the *Symposium* did not need an *eromenos*, but a guide to move him past the love of bodies or souls to the Form of Beauty; here the lover needs precisely that one individual who "has captured Beauty well" (251a). Similarly, it is not Eros himself that guides the lover in the *Phaedrus*, rather his behavior is shaped by the particular god who the *erastes* and *eromenos* choose to follow together, whether it be Zeus, Apollo or one of the other Olympians (252e-253a). So long as they follow their god well, "this friend who has been driven mad by love will secure a consummation [or possibly 'an initiation'] for the one he has befriended that is beautiful" (253c). The *eromenos* will consequently be "train[ed] . . . to follow their god's pattern and way of life, so far as is possible in each case" (253b).

The point of Socratic eros in the *Phaedrus* therefore becomes clear. Unlike the *Symposium*, where the goal was seeing Beauty itself and giving birth by oneself alone to 'true virtue,' the goal of eros in the *Phaedrus* takes place without leaving the mortal world: not seeing Beauty Itself, but "the bodily form that has captured Beauty well," and not perceiving Virtue Itself, but becoming virtuous and inspiring that same virtue in the *eromenos*. It is only then, together, having sprouted wings as a result of their mutual eros, that the *erastes* and *eromenos* will ascend and see Reality together.⁵³ But at no point in the

⁵³ See chapter 2 on the attribution of an *anteros*, or counter-love to the *eromenos*, breaking the common convention that the love of a pederastic relationship was not mutual.

speech does Socrates ever transform the eros, claiming (as he does in the *Symposium*) that the eros changes from being for the *eromenos* to being for some metaphysical principle. The love remains between the two individuals, while they look out together perceiving (but not loving) the things beyond the heavens. The speech then concludes with a discussion of the relationship between eros and sex, declaring that the best lovers will refrain from sex altogether, instead choosing to become true philosophers, but even those lovers who occasionally give in to desire still have accomplished a great deal and “so the prize they have won from the madness of love is considerable, because those who have begun the sacred journey in lower heaven may not by law be sent into darkness” (256d). Thus, although the *Phaedrus* ultimately continues to place the highest praise on the philosopher whose eros is divorced from the sexual, we have an admission at the very end that even the ordinary lover has won a great prize, and that because he has begun his ascent toward reality through love, will not sink back down as a result of his surrender to desire. Further, in a second way, Socrates softens the divide between divine and human love. Not only are both aimed at another individual, but human love is not outright denied as immoral. Although worse than divinely-inspired love, it still carries benefits with it. It is only Lysias’ non-lover who leaves having achieved no benefit at all from his encounters.

This account too, however, is not without issues. Most notably, if this reading is correct, why is so much time devoted to a description of the immortality and nature of the soul, to the circuit of the gods seeing the perfect reality? What is the relationship between the face that “captures beauty well” and the “truly being being?” Similarly, why, at the end, does Socrates award a “great prize” to those who surrender to sexual desire, when earlier, he compares them to beasts seeking unnatural pleasures? There seems to be

a disconnect between the starting point of the speech and its conclusion. While the opening seems set up quite similarly to the *Symposium*, with an ascent to some highest principle and a division between the philosopher and the sexual lover, the second half seems to repudiate (at least in part) this metaphysical, philosophical view of eros through the highly sexually-charged metaphors of the horses drawing near to each other. The result is that, although the *Phaedrus* offers a much more ethically concerned account of love, it still remains firmly attached to a metaphysical explanation of the nature of the cosmos and of man.

CHAPTER 2: PLATONIC EROS

These interpretive problems at the end of the *Phaedrus* also highlight the main tension between the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* for Plato's theory of love. Is the object of love ultimately some metaphysical principle or is it the more ordinary, everyday person on the street?¹ And if it is another person, is it due to some unique factor that he possesses, or is it merely as an avatar of the larger metaphysical principle—in other words, how do we interpret the *eromenos*' "capturing beauty well?"² If we can understand this tension in Plato's works, then we can simultaneously come to understand a deeper tension regarding what role eros is playing in either producing "true virtue" in either the lover alone or in initiating the *erastes* and *eromenos* into virtue together.

§1: The *Kalon*

The questions revolving around the *kalon*, Beauty,³ can be seen clearly in a comparison of the three ascents in the *Republic*, *Symposium*, and *Phaedrus*. Although all three of these follow a similar (although not identical) structure and all seem to be elaborating the same point of Plato's thinking, they each culminate in a different principle. For the

¹This question represents perhaps *the* interpretive question of the *Symposium*, at least in the last half-century. Both choices and their implications for Plato's theory have been defended in numerous forms. Here, I am restricting myself primarily to pointing to the two theories, and avoiding the debates over which one is Plato's true intention, and what the implications for Platonic philosophy are. These sorts of objections will be dealt with in the context of contemporary accounts of love, rather than within Platonic scholarship. For fuller accounts of the issue see Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, and A.W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, as exemplars of the opposing sides of the debate.

² There are also a number of other issues that would have to be dealt with in a full treatment of the topic. For example, is Eros a god or a daimon? Is the soul mortal or immortal? Is eros a remembering of a previously seen reality, or an ascent to something previously unknown? While all of these deserve answers, they are more relevant within the field of Platonic scholarship than they will be to the following chapters.

³ for both Beauty/The Beautiful and The Good, I capitalize when referring to the form as a transcendent principle, rather than an immanent appearance.

Republic, it is the Good Beyond Being; for the *Symposium*, the Something Wonderfully Beautiful in its Nature; and finally, for the *Phaedrus*, the truly being being. If love really is of some first principle, than it must be asked, what principle? Surely *eros*, as a single activity, also has a single end. Thus these three principles are really one, or else, love has one, but not the others, as its final object.

To the ancients, the question was asked, not just in the context of *eros*, but in general, of what is the highest principle. To the Platonists and Neoplatonists, the answer was clear: the Good Beyond Being was the supreme principle, even if they debated on how to interpret that principle.⁴ Plato never answers the question directly, but says in the *Philebus* that the Good has “taken refuge in the beautiful” (64e), which one may interpret either as saying that the Good and the Beautiful are identical, or merely that the Good is known through the Beautiful.⁵ Thus, it seems that we should take the Good to be at least identical to the Beautiful, but possibly beyond it.

Plotinus begins to investigate the equating of Beauty and Goodness (I.6.6 line 24), only to come to the conclusion that Beauty is the Intellect, and therefore beneath the Good, which exists prior to the second hypostasis, noting that “we must ascend again to the good . . . [beauty] is desired as good, and the desire for it is directed to the good” (I.6.7.1-5), and finally concluding that “the Good . . . holds beauty as a screen before it,” and that it is only “in a loose and general way of speaking [that] the Good is the primary beauty,” since in reality, the Good is beyond even Beauty (I.6.9 30-40). Proclus similarly, seems to imply that, when speaking of these first principles, the two are distinct, and the

⁴ See, as one example, Mathias Baltes, “Is the Idea of the Good in Plato’s *Republic* Beyond Being,” for a survey of Platonic views of the Good and its relationship to Being.

⁵ Riegal’s dissertation, *Beauty, τὸ καλόν, and Its Relation to the Good in the Works of Plato* makes a compelling argument for this latter view.

Good higher, as he notes, in his commentary on the *Alcibiades*, “let no one object that the good is beyond beauty, nor that the object of love is twofold, since our discourse is not about the primary principles, but about what is good and beautiful in us” (330). The implication is that, in the world, what is good is beautiful and vice versa; it is only in the case of the primary principles that this equation can be objected to (as seen in Plotinus). If this interpretation is correct, the further question must then be asked, if the two are distinct, which is the true object of love? After all, Socrates at various points in the *Symposium* speaks of both good and beautiful things as love’s object (see, for example, 201c and 204d-205a). F.C. White, for instance, claims that “this way of interpreting the Symposium—asserting that the good is the ultimate object of love—fits and derives strength from Plato’s more general doctrine of the good as the goal of action.”⁶

The solution, however, is simpler than this: the Good and Beauty are in fact identical.⁷ Although there are fewer explicit arguments in favor of the thesis, it is nonetheless often assumed in discussions of Plato’s ascent passages, in an effort to relate the three passages. Even those who reject their identification will often admit that they

⁶ F. C. White, “Love and Beauty in Plato’s *Symposium*,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 109 (November 1989) 153. Hyland draws a similar conclusion in *Question of Beauty*, 49, 63. Santas asserts that the Good is the object of the ‘generic eros’ (referring to the analogy Diotima draws between eros and poetics), whereas Beauty is the object of ‘eros proper.’ He thus connects the ascent of the *Republic* not to the ascent in the *Symposium* as a whole, but only insofar as the *Symposium* ascent may address generic eros, “Plato on Love, Beauty and the Good” in *The Greeks and The Good Life*, 59.

⁷ For some sources that support this view in the *Symposium*, see Robin, *Théorie platonicienne de l’amour*; Follon, “Amour, Sexualité, et Beauté Chez Platon;” Conford, “The Doctrine of Eros in Plato’s *Symposium*,” in *The Unwritten Philosophy and Other Essays*, 72; Schindler “Plato and the Problem of Love;” and Ferrari, “Platonic Love,” 260. While none of these offer much argument in favor of the position, they all either assert or assume it to some degree. Among those who state it most clearly are Robin who states that “les choses bonnes sont par là-même belles,” and pointing to reader to *Symp.* 197C-E as the source for “l’identification du bon et du beau.” Follon similarly notes without qualification that “Cette interchangeabilité du beau et du bien est aussi affirmée dans le *Lysis* (216d) . . . dans le *Protagoras* (360d) . . . et dans le *Timée* (87c) (63n86).” The same view is supported with reference to *Meno* 77b, in Scott, *Plato’s Meno*, 46 and Bluck, *Plato’s Meno: Edited with Introduction and Commentary*, 257-8.

appear to be coextensive or identical in some respects.⁸ For example, Barney takes the position that they may be identical “insofar as they are jointly constituted by appropriate order,” but differ by how the role they play.⁹ Beauty inspires admiration, while Goodness causes desire.¹⁰ This mirrors Proclus’ claim from antiquity that, when speaking of anything but the principles themselves, good is not beyond beauty, nor are they twofold. However, I take it to be Plato’s intention, in his three parallel ascents, to be describing an ascent to the same principle, described in three different ways. This can be seen by the way that the language of the three passages interchanges and overlaps. While the *Symposium* ends in the Wonderfully Beautiful, Diotima repeatedly turns Socrates to think about the Good, as a way into understanding the Beautiful. While the *Phaedrus* culminates with Being, it is traced all the way through by the perception of and chase for Beauty, and while the allegory of the Cave and the Analogy of the Sun end in the Good, it is described in terms of what *is* rather than what merely appears. Each ascent involves one of the descriptions from the others. Consequently, there is no question about whether Love is of one or the other; to love the Good *is* to love the Beautiful.¹¹

⁸ For example, Hyland writes, “the beautiful and the good are not identical, but it may surely be the case that the beautiful is good and the good beautiful,” *Question of Beauty*, 49.

⁹ Barney, 377.

¹⁰ In the same vein as Barney’s claim, Riegall concludes at one point “thus, on the one hand, goodness and beauty are extensionally equivalent but, on the other, the *Symposium* and other passages in Plato, as we shall see, suggest they are not identical,” 193.

¹¹ Leaving aside, for now, the question of whether the first principle (whatever it is) is the object of eros at all, rather than the individual.

But, it may be objected, if all three are in fact identical, why the multiplication of the language?¹² Quite simply, because Plato is trying to describe something that he says himself is “on the back of the universe,” the peak of an ascent that Socrates says can only be spoken of “what it is like” since its nature is “a thing for the gods.” No one of these principles adequately describes the reality, Socrates/Plato is aware, but together they can help us approximate better and better what it is in the same way that he argues in *Philebus* that we can begin to understand the Good through the combination of “Beauty, Measure, and Truth” (65a).

This sort of inexactness seems quite un-Platonic, for whom the Forms were the most intelligible thing. Even if I cannot say *what* the Good or the Beautiful is, surely I am able to give it a name.¹³ But, following the Neoplatonists, it seems to be the case that, whatever this principle is, it is not itself a Form. The Good Beyond Being is, out of necessity, beyond the Forms, as the Forms themselves are the realm of Being.¹⁴ This leads to perhaps the greater interpretive problem than the relation of the Good and the

¹² Steven Berg notes that “Socrates takes this identity of [the beautiful and the good] . . . as the first principle of his account,” but later claims “as the argument develops, however, the assumption that the good and the beautiful . . . are identical is undermined and the possibility of eros possessing the good emerges,” *Eros and the Intoxications of Enlightenment: On Plato’s Symposium* (SUNY Press, 2010), 100. The second half of his argument seems weak, however, as it relies on saying that Eros, as a daimon, shares in *both* the good and beautiful of the gods, and the bad and ugly of man, as a result showing that the ugliness of man can be good (109). This argument seems problematic for a number of reasons, not least of which Socrates’/Diotima’s assertion that Eros is neither good nor bad, ugly nor beautiful. Berg takes these statements to have a hidden, subversive meaning that I simply do not see. His second claim, that eros can possess the good but not the beautiful, simply assumes the point. Thus, I would argue that Socrates never moves beyond the first principle of their identity.

¹³ Hyland uses this for the basis of his argument against their identity. Socrates is able to answer Diotima’s question of what the one who has good things has (happiness), but not her previous question where beautiful is substituted for good. This inability, he claims shows “once again that the two are surely not identical,” *Question of Beauty*, 49. But this could just as easily be an issue of Socrates not knowing the two have the same referent, than that they do not do so (a not impossible scenario, given that Socrates is apparently still quite young when he meets Diotima). In a similar way, knowing that Superman can fly, but not knowing that Clark Kent can does not prove that Clark Kent and Superman are not the same.

¹⁴ This itself is a somewhat controversial position. Baltes rejects this interpretation as a Plotinian invention, while Santas assumes without much question that the Good is a Form. Hitchcock equates the Good with Unity, but seems to assume that both indicate a Form.

Beautiful, which is the relation of either to the third term. If Beauty is the same as the Good, and the Good is beyond Being, how can either be the “truly being being?” Here it is useful to look deeper at the Neoplatonic sources, which, even although they were explicit in the literalness of ‘Good beyond Being,’ were not against, on occasion, discussing the Good as having its own proper being. Plotinus, for example, says “in this way the good is correctly said to be one’s own: therefore it is not necessary to seek it outside. For where would it be, having fallen outside of being? Or how could one discover it in non-being?”¹⁵ Even more strongly, Porphyry, speaking about the One (by then generally assumed to be identical to the Good), states “the one, which is beyond substance and being, is not being, substance nor act, rather it acts and it is pure acting, with the result that it is the ‘to be’ that is before the being.”¹⁶ The claim then, is that there is a proper ‘to be’ even of the Good Beyond Being. Thus, although Porphyry denies the noun form ‘ousia’ to the One in his formulation, we could easily understand Plato’s participial formulation ‘truly being being,’ to be a first attempt to describe the same reality beyond being, a being beyond being, linking together the top of the ascents of the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic*.¹⁷ If we then accept, as I have at least briefly stated a case for, the equation of the *Kalon* and the *Agathon*, all three ascents consequently become three descriptions of the same movement. And therefore *eros*, the method of ascending in two of the three, can be understood as primarily oriented at this first principle, whether it is called the Good, the

¹⁵ Plotinus, *Ennead* VI 5[23] 1.20-23 “οὕτω δὲ καὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ὁρθῶς / εἶναι λέγεται οἰκεῖον · διὸ οὐδὲ ἔξω ζητεῖν αὐτὸ δεῖ. ποῦ / γὰρ ἂν εἴη ἔξω τοῦ ὄντος περιπεπτωκός; ἢ πῶς ἂν τις ἐν / τῷ μὴ ὄντι ἐξεύροι αὐτό” as translated by Gurtler in “Plotinus: Omnipresence and Transcendence of the One in VI 5[23].”

¹⁶ *Sur Le Parménide*, in Pierre Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus* (Études augustinienes, 1968), 104.

¹⁷ As Nicholson puts it, since *ontos* modifies the participle *ousa*, “whatever is *ontos ousa* is not only something that *is*—it *is* in a special way,” *Plato’s Phaedrus*, 183.

Beautiful, or the Truly being being. After all, surely the end of the ascent, and the method of making it, are linked together as a pair.¹⁸

This interpretation of *eros* is particularly compelling if one chooses to focus in on the ascent passages, that is, the Socratic speeches, as indicative of Plato's own view. It is difficult (although not impossible) to argue that it is an individual *eromenos* that is primarily loved, rather Beauty or Goodness itself.¹⁹ What results is the affirmation of an apparently ego-centric *eros*, where the ascent is made for the betterment of the self.²⁰ Immortality is gained, Truth attained, 'true virtue' achieved, but each of these for the self. This last is perhaps the most interesting here: even in the most metaphysical reading of Platonic *eros*, ethics and virtue still show their heads, even if only in a way that seems to completely negate the necessity of any other person. The *eromenos*, if he follows along at all (as he seems to in the *Phaedrus* but not the *Symposium*) is a means to that end. It is the sight of the *eromenos* that allows me to grow my wings back, and to achieve what I really wanted, sight of what is beyond the heavens. Hints of this, however, can already be seen in the various cosmological and mythological accounts that precede Socrates' speeches. Tying human *eros* to a first principle such as the Good or the Beautiful similarly ties the human together

¹⁸ This is, it seems, the standard interpretation of the dialogue, starting with Vlastos' "The Individual as the Object of Love in Plato." Mooney, "Plato and the Love of Individuals;" Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*; and Nehamas, "Only in Contemplation of Beauty is Human Life Worth Living" Plato, *Symposium* 211d" and Gordon, *Plato's Erotic World* are among those who draw similar conclusions, at least in general.

¹⁹ Hyland and Price both attempt to argue that the *eromenos* is not abandoned as the lover moves up the ladder in the *Symposium*. Gordon, in at least one place, also admits this interpretation is possible. Sheffield, in a lengthy discussion primarily of Vlastos' and Price's arguments grants a good deal of Vlastos' conclusions but ultimately rules that many of the complaints he has simply confuses the issue (particularly regarding the differences between *philia* and *eros*), and thus miss the point of Plato's account. She ultimately also partially agrees with Price that there is no immediate conflict between the ascent and the love of an *eromenos*, with the caveat that a lover's *eros* for his *eromenos* is the same as his love of the Beautiful (as Price seems to argue), but a separate endeavor. Frisbee Sheffield, "The Symposium and Platonic Ethics: Plato, Vlastos, and a Misguided Debate," *Phronesis* 57, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 117–41.

²⁰ Kosman even more strongly accuses the theory of being 'auto-erotic,' L. Aryeh Kosman, "Platonic Love," in *Facets of Plato's Philosophy*, ed. W. H. Werkmeister (Van Gorcum, 1976), 61.

with the divine and the natural, as all spheres would now tend toward a common *telos*. An *eros* aimed at the Good allows for humans to fit into a larger metaphysical system in a simple, straightforward way.

§2: The Individual

There is, however, another contender for the object of *eros*: the individual *eromenos*. This option is complicated by the fact that the individual's role seems to be vastly different in the *Symposium* compared to in the *Phaedrus*.²¹ If readers are looking for a Platonic reading of *eros* that appears similar to what we mean by love today—as Socrates is said to be searching for (*Phaed.* 243c)—this is likely the view they will be searching for. However, it is also the more difficult case to make. The *eromenos* is rarely described in the *Symposium*, and it is only in the *Phaedrus* that the erotic relationship seems to involve both *erastes* and *eromenos*. However, because I agree with Price's assertion that it represents a corrective, I will take the *Phaedrus* as the best representative Plato's position. However there are already hints of an *eros* aimed at the individual in the *Symposium*.²²

The early speeches about the praise of pederasty take this position as a given: love is between the *erastes* and *eromenos*. It is only because Socrates moves the discussion of *eros* toward that of the nature of the philosopher that this individual character falls away. Similarly, because Socrates transforms the god Eros from the thing loved to the lover, it becomes less important, in a speech in his honor, to focus on the role of the beloved

²¹ Price, for example, sees the two as contradictory in parts (*Love and Friendship*, 55). Not everyone, however, sees this as the case. Allen, on the other hand, views the differences as merely of the language, not the underlying theory ("A Note on the Elenchus of Agathon: *Symposium* 199c-201c," 461).

²² Although I agree with Mooney that Price's argument that Socrates' speech itself is about an individual-oriented *eros* is overly optimistic ("Plato and the Love of Individuals," 323).

object. Even here, however, as Price notes, it is possible to interpret the move to loving laws, knowledge, and eventually Beauty Itself not as one that leads us away from loving an individual, but that simply leads us to love an individual *for a different reason*.²³ I no longer love an individual because he is physically beautiful, but because he possesses a beauty of soul, virtue or wisdom. Yet, even if this interpretation ultimately fails to fully convince, we must also not make the mistake that so many do: finishing the *Symposium*'s argument at the top of Diotima's ascent. The introduction of the drunken Alcibiades can be interpreted as a Platonic indication of a flaw in Socrates' metaphysical, philosophical interpretation.²⁴ Alcibiades reminds those gathered as well as the readers that love is something carnal and sexual. Giving a speech in praise of Socrates instead of the god Eros seems humorous to the reader, but it should also be seen as reminding us that eros is felt toward another person.²⁵ For that reason, Nussbaum ends her critique of Platonic eros as unfocused on the individual by pointing out that, at very least Plato gives us a choice: "I can choose to follow Socrates . . . [b]ut I cannot take the first step on that ladder as long as I *see* Alcibiades . . . I can, on the other hand, follow Alcibiades . . . [b]ut once I have listened to Diotima, I see the loss of light that this course, too, entails."²⁶

Socrates' palinode in the *Phaedrus* begins, as already discussed,²⁷ by laying out the criterion that a lover ought to recognize love when it is described. It is unlikely that any love that culminates in the abandonment of people for the sake of a first principle will

²³ Price, *Love and Friendship*, 45-49.

²⁴ Nussbaum interprets the speech this way.

²⁵ Even if, in the process, Alcibiades makes it clear that he himself has failed at *eros*.

²⁶ Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, 198. Unfortunately, Nussbaum continues, "at the same time, it makes us see so clearly that we cannot choose anything . . . It is *our* tragedy: it floods us with light and takes away action." Both choices force us to surrender too much.

²⁷ See Chapter 1, §3.2.

sound familiar to the lover.²⁸ It will look familiar only to the philosopher—who may, according to the more metaphysical readings of Plato, be the true lover anyway. Perhaps for this reason, Plotinus is clearer in his description of the lover, in commenting on the *Phaedrus*, clearly separating the philosopher and the lover as two distinct lives (along with a third, the musician), all of whom make the ascent in their own way. He notes that “the lover (into whom the musician may turn and then either stay at that stage or go on farther) . . . ” (I.3.2 line 1), clearly indicating that we should not mistake the Platonic lover to be simply the philosopher in disguise. Plotinus thus refuses the possibility of claiming that the ‘true lover’ is the philosopher. There is therefore reason to hold, even if Socrates appears to be arguing the opposite in the *Symposium*, that love is of the individual, not of a first principle.

There is less ambiguity in the *Phaedrus*, where, as already briefly outlined above, the *eromenos* plays a central and continuous role in the ascent of eros. This can again be attributed to the context, where Socrates is more directly addressing the pederastic relationship, rather than the divinity Eros. The lover reacts toward the *eromenos* when he perceives a reflection of beauty. It is to the *eromenos*, and not the beauty that he reflects, that he desires to sacrifice. The erotic relationship leads them to ascend together, to work together so that both better reflect the god they follow. As a consequence, while the lover may indeed be ascending to the Really Real, the Good, or the Beautiful, the eros is felt toward the *eromenos*, and they together, out of love for each other, begin to ascend. What the lover desires is the Other; what he achieves—through his pursuit of him—is the

²⁸ And therefore, will likely fail his own test, discussed above, that love ought to be recognizable to anybody who has ever loved, *Phaed.* 243c.

Beautiful. In other words, as I stated at the outset, philosophy and education may be *an* end of Platonic eros, but it should not be taken to be *the only* end.

This is not the case unequivocally, however. The individual, even if he is the object of love, is a mere ‘reflection’ of something greater than him; it does not seem Plato envisions the *eromenos* being loved for his own sake.²⁹ I love him because he reflects Beauty well. Thus a Platonic love of the individual in the *Phaedrus* runs directly into the complaint Vlastos levels against the *Symposium*: it seems that, if I love the individual for beauty, what I love is not really the individual at all, but only that which I love him for, in this case, Beauty itself.³⁰ If he were to lose that one aspect, regardless of everything else about him, I would no longer love him.

Even if this is the case as it seems to be in the *Phaedrus*, however, given the identification drawn in the last section of Beauty, Goodness and Being, it becomes difficult to claim that a person could lose his beauty while still remaining identical to himself. For Plato, an object that ceases to be good, ceases to be.³¹ Consequently, when we speak of an object losing its beauty, we do so in one of only two ways. In the first, we understand beauty, incorrectly, to be something very surface-level and ephemeral. But it is precisely the “recent initiate . . . who has seen much in heaven,” and thus the one who best understands beauty, who has this experience. In this case, it is the flaw of the lover, who fails to understand the beauty of the beloved, and not the flaw of the beloved, on

²⁹ It is possible to give an account of love in which “loving a person who reflects beauty well” does not need to be interpreted as “loving a person *because* he reflects beauty well,” particularly by ascribing to a no-reasons account of love, such as is argued for convincingly by Smuts in a different context in “In Defense of the No-Reasons View of Love.” However, given Plato’s broader metaphysical assumptions about participation, such a view becomes very difficult to see in the texts considered here.

³⁰ Gregory Vlastos, “The Individual as Object of Love in Plato,” in *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford University Press, 1999).

³¹ See the Analogy of the Sun, *Rep* 507b-509c.

which the ending of love is to be blamed. In the second, the individual truly does become less beautiful, and, as a result, slowly ceases to be himself, as in the case of the vicious man, who sinks lower than the beasts. In this case, nobody would fault the lover for ceasing to love the beloved, nor are they likely to say that his love for the person never existed since it ended with the loss of beauty.³²

It is for this reason that the end of the *Phaedrus* continues to see the best expression of eros as one that does not participate in sexuality, but which is two lovers turned toward something higher. Love of the individual must always remain tied to the first principles that lurk in the background. I love the individual because I see something in him, and the closer we draw to that ultimate Beauty, the better I will perceive the beauty the individual has captured. However, it would be wrong to interpret this (as some have), as indicating that the two turn away from each other, and instead turn toward the Beautiful itself, sharing in this contemplative life.³³ This is clear from the fact that Socrates attributes to the *eromenos* an *anteros*, a ‘counter-love,’ (255d-e), a strange attribution when discussing a pederastic relationship, in which the *eromenos* is meant to not feel an eros or affection toward the *erastes*, but only give his disinterested favors in exchange for some sort of education or initiation (thus the reason for the argument of the first two speeches of the *Phaedrus*: if the *eromenos* is to be disinterested, why should he choose one who has an erotic ulterior motive?).³⁴ It is even odder—in fact it would be impossible—to attribute *anteros* to

³² This distinction between a rightly and wrongly understood sense of beauty, and its link to personal identity, will be crucial in the recovery of an ethical eros offered in Part IV of the dissertation.

³³ As seems to be the case in Aristotle’s accounts of friendship and contemplation in *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII-X.

³⁴ See Halperin, “Plato and Erotic Reciprocity” for a detailed account. For example “according to the customary Greek idiom, the senior partner in a pederastic love-affair has a monopoly of *eros*; the junior partner . . . expresses *philia* . . . and is moved to *antiphilein*, ‘to feel affection for him in return’ (only women are said to *anteran*, to return their lovers’ sexual desire),” “Plato and Erotic Reciprocity,” *Classical Antiquity* 5, no. 1 (1986), 66.

the *eromenos*, however, if Socrates/Plato intends the object of eros to be the Beautiful, and not the individual. Unless there is love directed toward the *eromenos*, it is impossible to speak of the *eromenos* feeling a ‘counter-eros’ or ‘eros-in-return.’ For the first time, as Halperin notes, “it becomes permissible to speak of the lover and beloved as two lovers.”³⁵

Therefore, choosing between love of the Beautiful and love of the individual will not settle the debate between a metaphysical love and an ethical love. Love of the Beautiful—although fundamentally metaphysical, through its concern for ascending toward first principles—still gives birth to ‘true virtue’ and love of the individual—although fundamentally ethical, through its concern for intersubjectivity—still leads us to a metaphysical first principle. Unsurprisingly for Plato, the ethical and the metaphysical remain tightly intertwined.

§3: A Final Interpretation

At this point then, I will offer, in summary form, what I see as Plato’s conception of eros, which will allow us to proceed through the following chapters and examine how the differences in interpretation have led to a variety of different reactions and responses to Plato. Although I have consciously put many of the evaluations about ethics and intersubjectivity into language that foreshadows and will make easier many of the debates to come over Otherness and authenticity, this also serves as an interpretation of Plato’s

³⁵ Halperin, “Erotic Reciprocity,” 75. Halperin also takes this as evidence that the sexual is to be completely erased from Plato’s account of eros, “no erotic desire, no matter how intense, should (or, indeed, can) be sexually gratified,” in order that the two lovers can avoid the censure from the city for their “shamelessness and perversion,” 67. But as was pointed out in §3.2.3, Plato does not refuse the benefits of *eros* even to those who engage in sexual gratification (256c-e)

works themselves. *Eros* to be the very basis of a possible ethics and of human action. *Eros*' proper object is the individual, although through this relationship, both the *erastes* and his *eromenos* are given the opportunity to be turned toward Beauty and the Good. This argument can be traced throughout the various parts of the dialogues, but can be seen most clearly in a passage at the end of Socrates's account in the *Phaedrus*:

When the charioteer sees the vision of his *eromenos*, his entire soul is warmed by the perception and is filled with longing's tickling and pricking . . . At first the two indignantly resist being compelled to do terrible, unlawful things; but they finally give in to the unending harassment and where they are being led, agreeing to do what is demanded. Thus they come close to the *eromenos* and see his radiant face. When the charioteer sees him, he is reminded of the nature of beauty and sees it again, standing on its sacred pedestal beside judiciousness. Fearful and awestricken at the sight, he falls back, and this forces him to pull on the reins with sufficient violence to set both horses back on their haunches (253e-254b).

Plato acknowledges here that it is possible to profane the *eromenos*. The *eromenos* is the 'pedestal of chastity' in Plato (254b). Because of this, *eros* has a clandestine nature, since "if he were not afraid that people would think he was a raving maniac, he would offer sacrifice to his *eromenos* as to a sacred statue or a god" (251a, emphasis added). Consequently, we must understand that *eros*, at its heart is concerned with the ethical interaction between lover and beloved, and only secondarily (or in service of this primary goal) with contemplating first principles. Likewise, the *anteros* the *eromenos* returns his lover is at least scandalous, and at worst grounds for legal censure. *Eros* is done in secret, away from the eye of the public that is not able to separate *eros* from possible profanation. Here the divisions of love made in the early speeches of the *Symposium* once again appear; no longer as two kinds of love, but instead as its two possibilities: love succeeds or fails to the extent that it manages to avoid profanation.

Nevertheless, Platonic eros lunges at the *eromenos* “as although the *eromenos* were himself the god” (252d). When eros succeeds, the lover does not make the *eromenos* into an object, but the lunging of eros is precisely the profane offerings of sacrifice to a god. The *eromenos* retreats and becomes something that cannot be possessed. He becomes a new god in the pantheon from whom the lover can only fall back in wonder. Again, the cosmological and the mythological portions of the *Symposium* can be senses in the background. Love connects us to something greater than ourselves, the pantheon of the gods and the world around us. But as in Aristophanes’ account, it does not do so by turning us away from the particular beloved, but it is our very relationship to the individual that creates the connection. The lover does not turn away from the *eromenos* and to the Form of Beauty, or even to the traditional gods, but even more it turns the lover to the *eromenos* whom he wishes to make a god himself, “adorning it and holding ritual celebrations in its honor” (252d). The lover in the *Phaedrus* never performs rites to the Beautiful, but rather performs new rites in honor of the *eromenos*, at most merely modeled after the old ways. Nor does the *eromenos* ever cease to be the violable other, despite being elevated to godhood, as Socrates notes, “the two indignantly resist being compelled to do terrible, unlawful things, but they finally give in to the unending harassment and go where they are led, agreeing to do what is demanded” (254b). Demanded, that is, by eros itself.

It is here that eros makes the turn to ethics. “[The lover] come[s] close to the *eromenos* and see[s] his radiant face” (254b). The face shines and the lover sees the *eromenos* anew as a god who may not be violated and the lover must pull back on the reins of his chariot. The *eromenos* also maintains his distance, and what is more, moves both lovers into the realm of the ethical. This is seen when Plato begins to introduce language of the

cardinal virtues, noting that the *eromenos*' face shines and the lover "not pretending but truly lov[ing] him" (255a) begins to live, along with his *eromenos* "with modesty and reason [so that] the better aspects of the mind prevail by leading them into an orderly life and a friendship with wisdom, [and] they will lead a blessed and harmonious life here" (256a). The passage thus links back to the early praises of pederasty, and indeed to the completion of the *Symposium*'s ascent. However it also differs in one significant fact: Socrates here does not attribute the gaining of modesty and wisdom only to the *erastes*, but to both together. No longer is eros merely a transference of what the lover has to an impoverished *eromenos*, but instead the erotic relationship they share inspires ethical growth in both. As a result, we are brought back to the *Symposium* where we get a statement of a possible Platonic, eudaimonistic ethics, when Diotima gets Socrates to answer that to possess good things brings happiness—an answer that, by extension, applies to the previous question of what possessing beautiful things gives a person, and thus answering the larger question of what those who love have (204d-205a). At the end of the ascent, we discover that the primary beautiful thing for man is true virtue. Thus, to possess virtue makes one happy. It should therefore not surprise us that *eros*, which pursues beauty, gives birth to ethics. The lovers are compelled, because of their love, to live a life of virtue. Further it is only because of their love that they are able to do so. For the speakers of the *Symposium*, this generally took the form of Eros inspiring courage in the lovers.³⁶ Here in the *Phaedrus*, however, Socrates instead interestingly locates the birth of ethics in a kind of double piety toward the traditional gods and toward the *eromenos*. This is followed by the moderation of the lovers, who hold their horses at bay, refraining from

³⁶ See 178d-179c for one example. There *Phaedrus* asserts that the best army would be one composed of *erastai* and their *eromenoi*.

sexual immorality. This difference can perhaps be explained by the change from the egocentric ethics of the *Symposium*³⁷ and the interpersonal ethics that is put forward in the *Phaedrus*. Piety is impossible without first assuming the existence of an Other who deserves our reverence.³⁸

The amorous relationship, therefore, gives birth to the ethical relationship, by leading both the lover and the beloved to discover the virtues. By living this erotic relationship, each is taught to live piously, modestly, and wisely. Just as for Agathon in the *Symposium*, Eros contained all of the cardinal virtues, here too in the *Phaedrus*, loving transforms those in the relationship into ethical beings, providing each for the tools to live a virtuous life, not only with the beloved, but in all of their interpersonal interactions.

However, if *eros* in the *Phaedrus* is directed first toward the particular beloved, it still retains some of the metaphysical qualities common to Plato's thought. The Beautiful maintains a place as a guiding principle for action, as well as providing for the possibility of *eros* in the first place (in the *eromenos* who reflects Beauty Itself). Virtue is gained, not directly from the sight of the beloved, but by their mutual ascent to the divine. Similarly, the deification of the *eromenos*, even if it is not objectification, is sure to give pause to an account of ethics. Nevertheless, if this interpretation of Plato's thought is possible, we have at least a baseline for what an ethical *eros* may look like, an interpretation that rejects *eros* as merely a metaphysical relationship of the self to some first principle.

³⁷ See the end of chapter 1.

³⁸ Whether that other is divine or human. The only certainty is that we need not be pious toward the Forms.

§4: The Stakes

It would be impossible to say without question that Plato intended one or the other of these objects to be the definitive answer to what we love. While I favor a reading of *eros* that is oriented toward the particular beloved, and that, through this relationship, fosters the ethical growth of both lover and beloved, as we saw, each interpretation includes portions of the other. The metaphysical relationship to Beauty still gives birth to virtue, while the interpersonal *eros* still assumes some first principle that the *eromenos* resembles, and toward which the lovers are drawn. The question at this point then, is what are the stakes between these two possible interpretations, between the love of the Beautiful versus the love of the individual, or between other interpretative questions such as the divinity of love or the immortality of the soul? Put simply, these questions put Plato's ethics and his metaphysics in an uncomfortable tension, one that, as future chapters will show, will cause a problem for the philosophers trying to break from a traditional metaphysical reading of the person as determined by categories of being and essence.

If love is of the Beautiful, *eros* is a metaphysical relationship, that is, one concerned with revealing the true nature of reality, and the place of the person within that totality. Everything else, including the Other, is nothing but a means to my own *eudaimonia*, my own accomplishment of my ultimate *telos*, within a scheme of the eternal being of the Forms. In addition, the daimonic *eros* of the *Symposium* as an in-between offers a route to comprehending the Other, or to negating the gap between Self and Other that many seek to make impossible. These problems are mirrored in the question

of the immortality of the soul. If the process of love is best understood as a soul's return to a prior state, we are led back to metaphysical understandings about the nature of the Self that elicits a strong reaction from contemporary philosophy. As I will hope to show in the following chapters, the disparate descriptions of love and the reactions to Platonic theories can largely be explained by interpretive differences.

While Plato is not innocent of all charges levied against him by contemporary philosophy, I will show that contemporary philosophy's rejections of eros as either impossible and destructive (Part II) or mute, and therefore excluded from an ethics defined as discourse (Part III), both rest on an incorrect division of the Good and the Beautiful, which, as we have seen above, Plato considers to be either identical or closely connected. By offering a new phenomenological definition of beauty in Part IV, I will once again make it possible to draw the link between a person's beauty and his or her goodness, and show that we can return to a theory that is still 'Platonic' in spirit, modified to deal with 20th century concerns: an *eros* that, by providing the basis for the recognition of the Face of the Other although the encounter with beauty, serves as the grounds for opening the ethical attitude, seen as the encounter with the good.

INTERLUDE 1: A NOTE ON METHOD

Having spelled out a general conception of a Platonic eros, let us now look at a first group of contemporary conceptions of love. Historically, this view is the older of the two general positions I discuss, and represents many of the earliest 20th century attempts to come to terms with love in a new philosophical vocabulary concerned with alterity.¹ It can be found, in some form or another, in the early developments of psychoanalysis, phenomenology, existentialism, and in second-wave feminism. Here, I focus almost exclusively on what might be called the ‘French tradition.’² This is not to say that others did not contribute to a ‘continental eros,’³ rather the decision is a pragmatic one: my goal is not to elaborate what any one historical figure said about eros, but to present two live options regarding the philosophy of eros, and ultimately (in part IV) to offer a rebuttal of both of these general views. Thus the authors mentioned are not intended to be thought of as the sole holders of a single theory, but rather examples of a family of closely related views. I have chosen these particular philosophers for three reasons: first, I find them exceptionally clear proponents of the views I am seeking to refute. Second, they are some of the most important figures in their respective fields, and as a result their works have circulated widely, and thus have had a large (and I would argue destructive) impact on the philosophy of love more broadly. Finally, there is a web of connections between those philosophers I have included, which has made it possible to draw more definitive

¹ Although by no means was it the only such origin point. As is always the case, alternate views existed from the very start.

² However, the shared language is by no means the primary unifying force among these traditions, but a shared set of questions.

³ Two recent works have surveyed several of the important figures and ideas not addressed in this dissertation, Enns and Calcagno, *Thinking About Love: Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy* and Bournemark and Schuback, *Phenomenology of Eros*.

conclusions about the ways that these views have responded to and built on top of each other.

Nor will I take great pains to argue that the reading I give of their texts is the only possible one. Debates internal to each philosopher have largely been relegated to the footnotes. Many have been defended and argued for differently at various points.⁴ While I certainly hold my own interpretations here to be at least fair, if not the most accurate interpretation of each writer's position, the reader may wish to be more sympathetic to any of the individual philosophers covered here. But removing any particular philosopher will not destroy the general thesis; what is at stake is not what view a particular philosopher holds, but rather, that the view itself that (on my reading) they hold needs to be rejected. That such important philosophers hold and disseminate this view is all the more dangerous to our understanding of love.

However, the reader should not expect that all parts of this chapter equally apply to all of the people mentioned within it. While all of the philosophers included agree on the general conclusion that love is impossible, there is disagreement and occasionally even open contradiction in the particular details of how each fleshes out this claim. I have not attempted to resolve these tensions, but instead presented them side-by-side, acknowledging the distinctions, but reaffirming that each, in his or her own way, is arguing toward a common point. These disagreements reaffirm that what is at stake is a widely-held view, that, despite occasionally differing in the details, has pervaded contemporary philosophy's thinking about love. Although certain boundary disputes

⁴ It appears to be a favorite pastime of philosophers of love to seek it even where it does not seem to be. One common example is the many articles written about the theory of love espoused by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, a text where the word only appears a handful of times in footnotes, always in reference to other thinkers, and never of direct interest to Heidegger's main point. For one recent example of this, see the chapter "Heideggerian Love" by Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback in *Phenomenology of Eros*.

provide a fluid set of positions, they all target a common core: loves' impossibility and destructive nature.

Finally, the views presented in both Parts II and III will be given their own chance to speak, with my own criticisms coming up only occasionally. I have attempted to let the views speak for themselves, to make their own case, before finally offering my own alternative in Part IV. These four parts tell a single story: a progression of views that have developed in direct response to what has come before them. Thus I am not concerned first with countering the views directly, but rather locating precisely why the criticism appeared in the first place, so that, in each successive chapter, we can see how a successful response could be offered. As a result, the reader should not take conclusions such as "love is x" in these middle two parts to be my own views, but rather, the conclusions of those who hold the view in question. The interludes following Parts II and III will offer clearer explanations of my own opposition to the views in question, what ought to be kept and what ought to be rejected, as we move toward the final explication of my own interpretation of eros in Part IV.

PART II: UNETHICAL EROS: THE FAILURE TO CONSUMMATE

This is the torture of the impossible love [. . .]: a free being cannot be *had*.¹

CHAPTER 3: THE FAILURE OF LOVE

What then, is this general position? I have called it here ‘impossible eros,’ which may be slightly misleading. It certainly is not impossible on a metaphysical level. Love is not a square circle, it unquestionably exists. Lacan, who infamously stated matter-of-factly that “there is no sexual relation,”² was himself twice married and the father of four children. It would be difficult indeed to claim that, in philosophy, much less in culture more generally, a large portion of people think love is nonexistent, a pure fiction that has been perpetuated by at best, misguided—and at worst, nefarious—actors.³ Rather, it is impossible in one of two formulations:

- ‘it is impossible for . . . to love’ where the blank ought to be filled by an otherwise privileged situation (generally, what Socrates might call the ‘best human’ or ‘best life’), or
- ‘It is impossible for eros to . . . ,’ where the blank ought to be filled by the true goal of eros (generally, as for Aristophanes, some form of unification of the lovers)

Love is impossible because it runs counter to something about what makes us most human, or because it fails to achieve its goal. Thus both the reason—and the irony—of

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (SS), 658.

² Jacques Lacan, *Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and Bruce Fink, (New York, NY London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 12.

³ Although it would not be impossible to find at least some.

the subtitle ‘a failure to consummate’: ‘love’ (or something like it) is undoubtedly consummated (in the ordinary sense) the world over, and yet, as we shall see, this is never enough. Love, eros, sex (different thinkers will pick a different term) is in fact aimed at something more subtle than this, and in pursuit of that, it never reaches completion. We are thus given only two options. Either abandon love altogether, in favor of some other life which has a better chance to reach its goal or, persevere despite it, as Beauvoir commands: “love . . . always impl[ies] a failure, but this failure must not keep us from loving.”⁴

This latter sentiment, in fact, should be held as the constant refrain throughout the chapter. Love’s impossibility is not contradicted by the evidence of love’s prevalence. The very people who repeatedly criticize love in its philosophy as well as its popular media, return every day and convince itself that *their* love is different, *their* love can succeed. This hope, they claim, is not merely a delusion, but a conviction that the eventuality of love’s demise cannot stop us from loving, any more than the inevitability of defeat can stop the patriot from fighting against those wanting to destroy his country.⁵ However, we should consider, along the way, whether we are *right* to do so, or whether the measures taken to continue loving in fact contribute to the fact that love is excluded from ‘the best life.’

⁴ Kristana Arp and Simone de Beauvoir, “An Eye for an Eye,” in *Philosophical Writings* (University of Illinois Press, 2004), 258.

⁵ A typical example employed by Marcel, when discussing the difference between hope and delusion (cf. Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*)

We can see, in the two formulations of love's impossibility,⁶ the germ for using Plato's view of eros as the starting point. The two impossibilities correspond directly to the final choice between Aristophanes and Socrates. Either love is part of the virtuous life, or it is what makes us whole. It was within this division that a second split was discovered: either love unites us with a beloved, or it helps us attain some first principle (for example True Virtue or Beauty). This choice will be raised again and again in the 20th century texts, often with direct reference to the erotic dialogues of Plato.⁷ It is rarely, however, in praise or agreement; rather, we find out that love's impossibility ensures that love can neither gain us virtue *nor* make us whole. Nor can (given its impossibility) love remain the vehicle of transcendence. Instead, these early views will see humans as naturally capable of transcending as a lone individual—achieving their status as transcendentally free, authentic subjects—only for love, in its failing, to inhibit that movement.

Thus, we can treat these views of eros as an alternative to, and in fact a criticism of, Platonic eros even when it has been additionally been shaped by the further developments that have taken place in the interval between Plato and the 20th century. We should ask throughout the whole chapter: 'for what reason has contemporary philosophy and culture soured on love?' If we can identify the points to which they object, we can then also see whether a new formulation of Platonic eros could be found to overcome the objections. We can discover which interpretations of Plato—and what parts

⁶ I have so far been using love and eros fairly interchangeably. However, it is not always the case that a person who believes eros to be impossible will also think love is therefore also impossible or vice versa. These two might not necessarily tied the same fate. I will always clarify, for particular authors, the distinction to be drawn, if one exists.

⁷ Lacan's seminar dedicated most explicitly to love (*Transference*) spends nearly the first half of the course on a fairly straightforward commentary on the *Symposium* before delving into psychoanalytic theory itself. Sartre names Plato's eros a prototype of Bad Faith (*Being and Nothingness*, 56).

of his eros—need to be corrected, adjusted, or eliminated to save the core what I am seeking to save: an eros which opens to ethics.

With that goal in mind, let us examine the two ways in which eros might be found to be impossible: in §1, because the lover has nothing (good) to give the beloved.⁸ Love reaches its object but fails because it is not virtuous (this is the first formulation of impossibility). Then, in §2, because the objects of desire and admiration (goodness and beauty) cannot be unified. Love and Sex become split,⁹ only to discover that, as a result, neither finds it is capable of doing what it sets out to (this is the second formulation of impossibility). Finally, in §3, I will gather together some of the conclusions to be drawn from these positions, to be taken into the rest of the work: what are the failures they find (rightly or wrongly) in Platonic eros, and what has happened to eros and to ethics as a result?

⁸ Now removed from the Platonic discussion of pederasty, it is now possible to speak of lover and beloved—or in fact, of two lovers together—as well as to place any person, male or female, in either position. However, we should not let this stop us from comparing contemporary views to Plato. As Lacan points out (perhaps not unproblematically), Pederasty offers us a microcosm of all forms of love, simplified by removing questions about sexual difference. Thus modern love is not different than ancient pederasty by kind, but only in its details. Some of these details, such as the passivity of the beloved, will be questioned in the main text from various positions. Others, in particular the analogousness of heterosexual and homosexual love, have largely been left aside, except insofar as it factors into discussions of the previous point of activity and passivity. I take it as a simple, uncontroversial point that Platonic eros can, in practice, be extended to heterosexual and lesbian love, and that none of the claims of Platonic speakers to the contrary hold any water.

However, that is not to say the terms are always necessarily played by men and women equally. Both psychoanalysis and feminism argue that very specific roles are played by men and women. Beauvoir, for instance, will argue that it is not capable for the contemporary woman to play the role of Sartre's lover, while the beloved of Greer's and Firestone's feminist critique is necessarily the woman, and never the man. Since the same issue may carry specific gendered terms for some thinkers, but not for others, gender neutral examples extremely difficult. I have made an attempt to distribute pronouns when possible, but otherwise, I do not note every time when the pronouns used are necessary, and rely on the context to indicate when pronouns can be swapped or not.

⁹ This fact will already be presumed by many of the discussions in §1, insofar as it will generally treat love to the exclusion of sex

§1: The Failure of the Lovers

The first way that these views of love can be seen as criticizing love is by contesting Plato's claim that it is the lover who provides benefit to the beloved. As we saw in the first chapter, the lover was the virtuous man, who by loving, was able to instill a similar sense of virtue in the beloved, leading to their mutual transcendence. This is summarized in the *Phaedrus* as the process of *psychagogia*—soul-leading—with the lover “leading them [i.e. the lover and *eromenos*] into an orderly life and a friendship with wisdom, [so that] they will lead a blessed and harmonious life here” (256a), while Diotima promised to ‘initiate,’ ‘teach,’ or ‘instruct’ Socrates in the higher mysteries of eros (210a).¹⁰ However, by the early 20th century this supposition had begun to be questioned. The sources of this questioning are likely varied and impossible to fully uncover, but undoubtedly include—in addition to the questioning of Plato I am focusing on here—the push toward a scientific, rational philosophy in modernity which would not have room for an emotion such as ‘love’ being the source of education, in addition to a growing skepticism regarding the existence of such fully mind-independent, external, universal moral truths, discoverable by any means, whether emotion or reason. But whatever the case for the skepticism, it became clear to several people that, without this purpose, love loses its essential role in the life of the virtuous person. In its absence, philosophers began to question whether love had a place in the virtuous life at all, or if it actually worked counter to the achievement of virtue. After all, it was the reaching toward virtue that separated the divine manic love from the human sickness in Socrates’ second speech of

¹⁰ The Greek verb is *poieō*, which was first specifically “to initiate into the mysteries” (i.e. the hidden or secret—usually divine—truth), before coming to more general usage of initiation or instruction.

the *Phaedrus*, as well as being the basis for the distinction between Pausanias' heavenly and common loves in the *Symposium*.

This objection to love is not always uniform, but exists along a spectrum of views. The mildest position, seen in Lacan's thought, takes a relatively mild stance advocating only that "love is giving what you don't have,"¹¹ and thus (ignoring for now his stronger critiques of the sexual aspects of eros), only that whatever the work of eros, it is distinct from the work of becoming virtuous. A middle view, such as Sartre's or Beauvoir's argues that love is an offer or call to inauthenticity and bad faith which must be rejected in order to live virtuously. Lastly, in the harshest critique of a virtuous love, Shulamith Firestone and several other second-wave feminists suggest that love "is the pivot of women's oppression today,"¹² and that love not only offers, but forces a life deprived of transcendence on women. Regardless of the variance of the first stance, there is a second, more commonly shared belief that it is impossible for love to be mutual (§1.3), and at least the suggestion (sometimes more fully embraced than others) that it is impossible for love to be purified or cured (§1.4).

§1.1: Some Clarifications

Before delving into the argument for this failure of love, it is necessary to take note of some shifts that have taken place in the philosophical discourse, as well as some equivocations and simplifications that will have to be made in order for the sake of brevity. The first is the shift that has taken place in the word love itself. For Plato, as I have

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink, 1 edition (S.l.: Polity, 2017), 129.

¹² Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 126.

already explained (see the Introduction), the primary meaning of eros contains both the sexual desire and the relational, passion/affective aspects of what we might call love.¹³ That is, for Plato, Love—eros in the broad sense—is best exemplified by a combination of the more restricted senses of *eros* and *philia*, while many of the speakers in his dialogue take eros only in the more restricted sense of sexual desire, with no expectation that it is relation or passion. However, due to the expansion of literature about romantic and courtly love in the interval, by the early 20th century, ‘love’ is decidedly emotional, even sentimental, while sexual desire is excised almost entirely.¹⁴ When eros is talked about, it is no longer used as an umbrella term, but rather a related (and usually distinct) experience. We no longer speak of ‘erotically loving’ (at least not in polite society), but of ‘romantically loving.’ Thus, Lacan states that “the *jouissance* of the Other [as we will see, closely connected to eros] is not the sign of love,”¹⁵ while Sartre primarily discusses love in his section on ‘Concrete Relation with Others,’ with his descriptions and illustrations (as well as its link to the following section on hate) making it clear that the fault that he finds exists, primarily, in an emotion felt toward another, not in erotic desire or the sexual act. It is only the feminist writers who refuse to draw this sharp distinction, seeing the sexual roles that women find themselves in as indicative or perhaps even constitutive of the wider cultural, relational roles they find themselves in. As a result, they hold perhaps

¹³ Despite the possible confusion, I opt to use ‘passion’ throughout instead of affect or emotion, as this is the word which ties most directly back to the *pathos* of Plato, and which indicates in its origins the aspect of undergoing or suffering, rather than falsely hinting at some kind of activity. Speaking only about this aspect of eros, love is something that comes over us, it is not something we do. If “love is a verb,” its action is done *to* us, not *by* us.

¹⁴ Charity, or *agape*, tends to be mostly absent from the accounts discussed in this chapter. It reappears prominently in the group discussed in the following chapter, where we will be forced to reconsider the boundary lines once more.

¹⁵ Lacan, *Encore*, 4, cf Jean Allouch, *Lacan Love: And Other Works* (Lituraterre - Lacanian Psychoanalysis, 2007), 87.

the closest view to Platonic eros regarding the integration of the two parts (although they also most strongly disagree with his praise for eros).¹⁶ In this chapter, the love discussed is primarily passion or relational love. Chapter 4 will take up the same group of authors with regard to their views of sexual desire, where a second impossibility of love will appear. Although various authors discussed in this chapter will not always agree with each other on the precise location of this division, that disagreement is inconsequential to the larger umbrella view. It will be enough to note that the authors *do* draw divisions, without pinpointing their exact location. As I will briefly address throughout this chapter (in particular in §4), before returning to it in chapter 4, this split is not entirely incidental to the objections raised; to the contrary, the split is generally made as a last ditch attempt to save some part of love, only to instead end up sealing its fate as impossible.

The second equivocation involves phrases such as ‘virtuous’ and ‘transcendence’ which I have already employed several times. These are words which, even when they reappear across texts, do not map perfectly from Plato to new philosophies. For example, Sartre claims that the issue of authenticity is distinct from that of ethics. Bad faith is not *morally bad* faith. Similarly, although Sartre, Beauvoir and the later feminists all speak of authenticity, the same theory does not underlie all of them. The same is true of transcendence, an idea that already takes on a far different meaning in Sartre than in Plato, and which begins to sound completely foreign to the Marxist-influenced writings of

¹⁶ This view, largely shared by the particular authors I highlight here, was not, however, uniformly agreed upon by feminists, and in fact was made clear in the ending of second-wave feminism as a result of the so called “sex wars,” an internal debate about whether sexual liberation, including prostitution and pornography, were signs of the liberation or oppression of women, with the former opinion being often based upon the possibility of splitting love and sex completely. For one source on this topic, see Ann Ferguson, “Sex War: The Debate Between Radical and Libertarian Feminists.” As we will see in later chapters, other feminists (in particular, I will address Luce Irigaray and Audre Lorde) do not share the same critique of eros, and in fact find it a fruitful tool to draw upon.

later feminists. Lastly Lacan, as primarily a psychoanalyst, is not immediately concerned with virtue at all, but health. Yet even he will eventually offer a seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, looking directly at the question of what the field can offer to ethics. While he admits that the analyst cannot make his patient virtuous, he does not deny that this is the goal of the patient.¹⁷ Despite these difficulties, I have allowed some equivocation on these terms. I will occasionally continue to refer to ‘the virtuous life’ when dealing with parallels to Plato, but more often simply subsume all of the views under the label ‘the best life.’ This is due to the fact that, as already outlined, my goal is not total faithfulness to a single text or author, but the outline of a unified view which has many varied descriptions. I take it that all of the authors discussed here, in their various vocabularies, are aiming at what could eventually be summed up as “the best life.” Whether they would agree that this ‘best life’ is the virtuous man, the healthy patient, the authentic transcendently free subject, or the concretely free woman can be bracketed for the time being. We could translate the opening claim of the chapter from Plato’s language “it is impossible for the virtuous person to love” to a more specific “it is impossible for the authentic person, the just man, or the equal woman to love,” for each author, but all of these, I take it, resolve into a shared umbrella position “it is impossible for the person living ‘the best life’ to love.” Although it being impossible for Sartre’s authentic subject to love does not immediately mean it is impossible for the virtuous person to love, I will bracket this question for the current chapter. While it is my ultimate position that the best life *is* the virtuous life, this is an equation which will be argued for in the following chapter, due

¹⁷ See Mark de Kesel’s *Eros and Ethics* for a thorough commentary on what this ethics might look like. I return to this part of Lacan at the end of chapter 4, to show how Lacan’s conception is quite different than my own.

precisely to the critique of authors discussed here,¹⁸ at which point we can re-raise the question of whether the recovery of the virtuous life *as* best life results in a similar recovery of the importance of love.¹⁹

§2: Love's Separation From the Best Life

This first objection to love is no doubt the most cynical, and perhaps the most difficult to see as culturally relevant in the face of what seems like a relentless onslaught of 'romance' novels, movies, and expectations. And yet, there has been a not-insignificant reaction against the 'culture of love' which has done nothing but expand, first through the birth of courtly and romantic love during the medieval and renaissance periods, to the recovery of these same themes in the poetry of the Victorian era (seen, if not best, at least most familiarly, in the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning), to the continuing market of paperback romance novels, popular love songs, and Hallmark holidays.

The reaction, for many, likely starts as a simple question 'why has love become so important?' Upon probing for an answer, however, many seem to have found that not only has love been over-emphasized in culture, but in fact, is not deserving of any of the praise we have given it. These cracks might first appear when we stop to ask someone "why do you love me?" When Barrett Browning offers to "count the ways" that she loves her beloved, we are perhaps struck by the beauty of her devotion, but upon reflection we

¹⁸ For example, Levinas' critique of Heideggerian (and Sartrean) phenomenology as being too ontological and not focusing on ethics.

¹⁹ The answer to this hypothetical, at least for those discussed in the following chapter, continues to be 'no, it does not.' The need for this interluding chapter then, is to find out what changed in philosophy between Plato and recent accounts of the virtuous life, that lead them to disagree about its relationship to love. I hope to show that it is as a result of the arguments in this chapter, despite them not immediately addressing the virtuous life.

become aware that the beloved could in fact be anyone. We have learned nothing of the beloved himself, a phenomenon that has become even more pronounced in popular music, so that fans all over the world can hear it as a love song sung *to them*. If I am too specific, if I, like Shakespeare, sing of my love of the “dark lady,”²⁰ how can I expect to appeal to fans of fair skin and blonde hair? How are they to imagine themselves as substitutable for the one person the artist has in mind? So instead, we praise her for traits that are not so particular. The beloved is beautiful, but not due to any too-specific trait. She is kind and gentle (a trait few would deny themselves), her eyes or her hair have captured my heart (but I won’t mention how, lest I am forced to specify what he or she *actually looks like*).²¹ But while this may work for record sales, we discover that this substitution happens no less frequently in our explanations of our *own* love. All of the good traits I praise in my beloved are found, and likely to a higher degree in other men or women around the globe. In other words, we are back to one of the original interpretive problems of the Platonic dialogues: if I love the beloved because she reflects Beauty well, do I really love her at all? Or do I simply love what she stands for and—if I were to find a better representative—I would find it no problem to offer my love toward the new exemplar instead. After all, I never loved the original beloved, only what she stood for, and while I may seem to be acting unfaithfully toward the person, I have in fact remained faithful in my love of Beauty.²² Or is it that I love my beloved more than those others due

²⁰ Sonnets 127-154

²¹ Comedian Bo Burnham recently satirized this phenomenon in his own ‘pop song,’ “Repeat Stuff”:
 “I love my baby and you know I couldn’t live without her
 But now I need to make every girl think this song’s about her
 Just to make sure that they spread it like the plague
 So I describe my dream girl as really really vague.”

²² See Price’s claim that the latter “leaves little ground for fidelity,” *Love and Friendship*, 46-7, as well as Nehamas’ rejection in “‘Only in the Contemplation of Beauty is Human Life Worth Living’ Plato, *Symposium* 211d,” 4.

only to some accidental reason, such as having seen her first, or having shared a mutual acquaintance? In either case we are caught in the paradox of wanting to be ‘the only one’ and recognizing that our explanations of love seem to contradict that.

§2.1: The Best Life and Love’s Offer

Although we often speak of “love being blind” or loving “despite one’s flaws,” we cannot, it seems, love merely “in spite of” flaws, but must love *because* of them. Nothing else deserves the name. Love of beauty is aesthetics; love of wisdom, philosophy. No, for love to last—love of a person, not an idea—I will demand that the lover love me for *me*. It is this point that Jacques Lacan says will never work: what makes me *me*—short of a new essentialism—are the very things I find unlovable. With Lacan, like many philosophers, rejecting recourse to some positive individuating property (for example, Scotus’ *haecceitas*), he instead has to resort to one’s symptoms and flaws. As Bruce Fink describes it, “in certain cases, this could even go as far as wanting to be loved for being essentially *unlovable*, disgusting or repulsive (a lazy good-for-nothing or a turd).”²³

Sartre and Beauvoir also arrive at this same conclusion, with Sartre noting that “love can not exist except in the form of a demand on the part of the lover.”²⁴ Love demands me to surrender my existence as transcendent subject, and instead tie my own existence as a concrete, contingent, *factual* being directly to the lover’s transcendent being. My freedom is unreachable and therefore unlovable, and instead the lover reduces me to

²³ Bruce Fink, *Lacan on Love: An Exploration of Lacan’s Seminar VIII, Transference* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 41.

²⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (Simon and Schuster, 1992), 375 (from here on cited as *BN*). Sartre’s discussions here are of the relational aspects of love, primarily. Although he does not draw as strong a divide between love and eros as Lacan, the impossibilities of each do take different forms, and thus will be addressed separately in §2.

what he can love, to those flaws and finitudes of my bodily existence. Love *always* demands that I become an object—my body-object, first of all—and that I identify myself with my concrete existence, rather than my transcendental freedom. It is no surprise that love as a demand—love for the sake of our imperfections—does not appeal to the potential beloved, and for that reason Lacan is often cited as clarifying his definition of love by adding that it is, by nature, always given “to someone who doesn’t want it.”²⁵

Whatever the philosophical framework, all three authors close in on the same cultural fact: the way in which we sing our praises of love make it impossible to actually love *an individual*. With that love, I love only an idealized idea of their traits. Their projects thus take up a purpose parallel to Plato’s, a description of a person’s transcendent movement. For them—as for many interpreters of Plato—relationships with individuals are only stand-ins for our desire for something greater, such as our relationship to Being.²⁶ Thus we could read these views as endorsing the exclusive reading of the *Symposium*’s ascent. In order to reach the higher levels we must leave behind the lower levels.²⁷ Perhaps consciously, I want to be loved for my beauty, virtue, or intelligence. And yet, at some point, Lacan’s idea will always pop into my head: Surely there are others out there handsomer, funnier, or more mentally stable than I. Will you leave me the second you find them? Will you, like Socrates, move from the love of me, the single beautiful body, to the

²⁵ See Fink, *Lacan on Love*, 216n15. There, Fink explains that the remark was originally made by a seminar participant, and not Lacan, although he does later employ it once in seminar XII with reference to Socrates and Alcibiades.

²⁶ See the debate sketched out in §1 and §2 of Chapter 2.

²⁷ Sartre, in one of his few direct references to Plato, refers to eros as a prototype of bad faith, perhaps precisely because remaining in the relationship of love was to keep from making the movement of transcendence. *BN*, 56.

love of all bodies, the second you realize that beauty is not *my own* (or, at least, not mine alone)? The only alternative, the only real *individual* love, rests on a demand that will go undesired by all who recognize it. At best, what we look for in romantic partners is someone who tolerates or understands my flaws, not who actively seeks them out. If someone were to tell me he loved me because my nose were off-center, or because I'm a little too obsessive about people moving my things or eating my food, I would be offended, not flattered. After all, what if I decide to have my nose fixed, or seek treatment for my obsessions? Must I keep from improving myself in order to continue to be loved (a strange inversion of Lysias' position that the lover keeps the beloved from improving so that he will not outgrow the lover)?

There is no response to the question "why do you love me" that will satisfy. At best (according to these views) I will be acutely aware—if I stop to think about it—that the answers are hardly particular to me, or at worst, that they are nothing but a list of my flaws. Nor are we truly satisfied with remaining in ignorance about the object of love; 'love is ineffable' may be philosophically compelling, but it is rarely (if ever) romantically enticing.²⁸ We demand that the ignorance be resolved, only to be disappointed by what we find behind the curtain. As Lacan points out, love, when taken separately from sexuality (a division he thinks is unquestionable), "is a passion that involves ignorance of desire";²⁹ it is "impotent . . . because it is not aware" of what it really is.³⁰

²⁸ Even Scotus' haecceitas is unknowable in this life. And thus, to love for some 'individual essence,' either reduces to "it's ineffable" or else a list of personal attributes, circling back to the first problem.

²⁹ *Encore*, 4. Lacan here uses passion in the same way I have, to signal what is emotional or affective, not what is 'sexually passionate'

³⁰ *Encore*, 6. For Lacan, what it really is is *jouissance*, sexual desire. But this too, turns out to be impossible, as we will see in chapter 4.

Beauvoir highlights the same conclusion regarding the impossibility of love: “many women in love permit themselves to be deluded.”³¹ The only way of loving, of refusing to let love end, is to perpetrate a continual self-delusion, refusing to acknowledge the truth that is right in front of us. This same desire to maintain ignorance is the driving force behind Sartre’s view, premised on bad faith. Love is impossible because it boils down to a pretense; I must pretend to not be aware that the Lover’s love disgusts me. The second I admit to myself what I know lurks behind her love—an offer to be reduced to an object of sexual desire, to be trapped in bad faith and inauthenticity—and assert myself as a free subject, I no longer find any reason to accept the advance of the lover.³² “In love, the Lover wants to be ‘the whole World’ for the beloved” but by this very desire “demands that this freedom [the beloved] as freedom should no longer be free.”³³

§2.2: The Lover’s Empty Promise

But love is not only impossible for the beloved; it turns out to be equally impossible for the lover. In the unlikely scenario that the potential beloved was not already revolted by the thought of being loved only for his or her flaws, a second defect hides behind the lover’s advance. The lover is doomed by the same universality of goods that the beloved is, so that any gift the lover may believe themselves capable of offering could be given even more perfectly by numerous other suitors. As Sartre says, highlighting part of a “triple destructibility of love,” if what we offer is some good, the lover is

³¹ *SS*, 659.

³² Beyond the simple problem here of being reduced to an object being undesirable, I will take up a further discussion on this point in the following chapter, as the reduction from object of love to object of sexual desire runs into additional impossibilities of the sexual relation.

³³ *BN*, 367.

“perpetually *made relative* by others . . . hence the lover’s perpetual shame.” If what I offer is some good, I “would have to be alone in the world with the beloved for love to preserve its character as an absolute axis of reference.”³⁴ Otherwise, I always risk being relativized and destroyed by the appearance of another who offers the same, or perhaps even better. Instead, the lover must search for something that only she can offer, a reason to be differentiated from the crowd.

For Socrates, solving the issue was as simple as convincing the young boy that the *erastes* could instill virtue in him or increase his social standing. However, on Lacan’s reading, this Socratic intervention is undercut by its ironic delivery. Socrates’ speech is not the final praise of love, but an ironic reversal of the praise that precedes it. None of the symposiasts truly have what they profess to give through their love. Contrary to Socrates’ claim (so the argument goes), we are not capable of passing on virtue through love. This should be no surprise, given the preceding; if love is that which attempts to reduce the beloved to her flaws or to an object, it is unlikely to *also* turn her into virtuous subjects. Once again, where the lover was praised in Plato’s dialogues for initiating the beloved into a life of virtue, he now stands accused of degrading the beloved, depriving her of a transcendent freedom.

Even Lacan, who takes a somewhat milder position than this, still does not allow love any greater power than “giving what you don’t have.” As Lacan reads the *Symposium*, love was defined by a lover who has a lack, and a beloved who has *something* that the lover desires, or even needs. Otherwise, the lover would not find any reason to desire the beloved. Contrary to Socrates’ claims that the lover was the one who offered something in

³⁴ *BN*, 377.

the relationship (virtue), it is in fact the beloved who is expected to have a ‘something’ to offer. All the lover has to offer was a ‘lack,’ an empty void which he hopes to be filled by the beloved. In essence, Lacan sees the whole Platonic project as resembling what Alcibiades accuses Socrates of doing: appearing as the lover (the one with something to offer), only to be revealed as the beloved (for Alcibiades, this was the one desired, for Lacan, it is the one who needs to be fulfilled).³⁵ The lover promises virtue, only to be revealed to not possess anything at all, instead forcing the lack on the beloved; requiring him or her to fill the gap. For Sartre this represents a second part of love’s “triple destructibility,” as the lover will remain in a state of “perpetual dissatisfaction,”³⁶ since “to love is in essence the project of making oneself be loved.”³⁷ But, strengthening the scandal of becoming the beloved, Sartre notes that this requires that I objectify myself for the Other:

The lover’s freedom, in his very effort to make himself be loved as an object by the Other, is alienated by slipping into body-for-others Here in fact we encounter the true ideal of love’s enterprise: alienated freedom Each one is alienated only to the exact extent to which he demands the alienation of the other.³⁸

For Lacan, this transforming from ‘lover’ to ‘beloved’ was as simple as appearing as the one who *has*, only to be discovered as the one who *needs*, but Sartre goes further, accusing the lover of a desire for self-alienation or self-objectification through love that he calls *masochism*. But it is important to realize that neither is arguing this thesis as *one* deviant form of love, but as love’s very essence. Love’s desire is truly only ‘to be loved,’ which in

³⁵ Socrates/Diotima similarly accuse the prior speech-givers of confusing the lover and the beloved.

³⁶ *BN*, 377. I will return to the third part of this destructibility in §2.

³⁷ *BN*, 375.

³⁸ *BN*, 375-6.

turn is the desire to be either completed or alienated. “But masochism is and must be itself a failure,”³⁹ Sartre concludes, stating the case definitively for the impossibility of love for the authentic person.

Already skeptical when I am given a gap by another and told that only I can fill it, I am mortified when I find out what he desires that I fill it with. What first appeared as perhaps a romantic confession of the lover “I am imperfect, lacking” turns to a source of anxiety as I am forced to confront either the mirror of all my flaws, a person who desires to be objectified, or else the fact that I am a mere stand-in for what is really loved (beauty, virtue, etc) which may be found in any number of other places. Love fails—love is impossible—because the lover has nothing to offer me, offers me only a lack which I do not want to complete. This impossibility, it ought to be clear, is also a direct confrontation with Plato’s view (although one that is undoubtedly mediated by modern philosophy’s similar rejection in favor of rationalism). Love is no longer a route to knowledge. For Plato, it was precisely eros which brought us to better knowledge, both of the world and ourselves (thus why one of Socrates’ only claims of knowledge is to *ta erotika*). As we saw in the *Symposium*, Eros himself came to be described as the ideal philosopher. Now, love serves the purpose, for as long as it continues, of perpetuating ignorance, often willfully, as the lover is secretly aware that admitting knowledge is to admit that love is denying them the possibility of further self-flourishing. When Beauvoir admonishes that the failure of love “must not keep us from loving,”⁴⁰ there seems to be no other logical way of interpreting this except as a call to remain in ignorance as long as possible.⁴¹ Love endures

³⁹ *BN*, 376.

⁴⁰ Beauvoir, “Eye for an Eye,” 259.

⁴¹ Beauvoir does not outrightly say this in the essay, but rather sees this as a positive exhortation to love as long as possible until it fails. But, and this is my point, the only way to continue is to continue in ignorance.

only as long as I remain ignorant of what it really involves. Upon discovering that fact, I am sure to find it repulsive and abandon it all together; it becomes impossible for the virtuous person, the one living the best life, to love.⁴²

But what has it become instead? The view clearly falls on the side of Nussbaum's or Vlastos' interpretation of the *Symposium*, choosing to see a strong dissidence between our love for an individual and our movement toward transcendence. If we want to maintain the goal of human life as some form of transcendent movement, we have to surrender our individual loves.⁴³ However, we now draw an even stronger distinction here than Plato does. Even in this individualistic reading, Plato describes how individual loves might represent at least the first step to transcendence, opening the lover and beloved up to something beyond themselves. It may need to be outgrown and left behind, but it is at least the beginning of the movement. Sartre and Beauvoir, however, see love as not an entrance to transcendence, but to immanence. This should come as no surprise, as Sartre himself refers to Plato's eros as "a prototype of bad faith"⁴⁴ The beloved is called and enticed to fall into bad faith, as the woman in Sartre's example does, "seek[ing] to affirm their [i.e transcendence and facticity] identity while preserving their difference."⁴⁵ The beloved desires the love of the lover, and sensing that any exercise of his own transcendence will cause the relation to crumble, laying bare the desire of the lover,⁴⁶ the

⁴² It may not yet be fully convincing that Lacan's interpretation of love is wholly incompatible with the best life, rather than merely irrelevant to it. However, we will see in chapter 4 that even greater problems arise when looking at the sexual aspect of eros.

⁴³ As pointed out in §1.1, the form of this movement varies greatly between philosophers, but there always exists some goal of actualization or fulfillment.

⁴⁴ *BN*, 56.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Sartre's views on this offer of love are deeply entwined with his belief that love always misses the Other. We will therefore return to his thought in more depth in chapter 4.

beloved instead takes the offer to postpone and surrender his own transcendent freedom. Lacan's lover similarly offers nothing to the beloved for his troubles, and in fact, fails even to fulfill the Aristophanic goal of completion.⁴⁷ I give my lack to the beloved in hopes that she will fill it, but what could I possibly offer to the lover except those same things, flaws and psychoses? Surely, if what the lover needed was beauty, she could more easily find it in art or music. If she has turned to me, it must be because what she desires is my flaws and failings. What I love is not some *thing* that will complete me, but a lack, complimentary to my own, but which will make me no more complete than I am already. Lacan's love gains us nothing, while Sartre's and Beauvoir's seeks to deprive us of our transcendent freedom.

§2.3: The Best Life and Sexual Difference

But if all of this still seems quite theoretical, and unlikely to find any foothold in our actual, every-day thinking about love, we need only turn to the way that these critiques have been not only adopted by, but in fact strengthened by the feminist cultural critiques of the mid-twentieth century. Starting once again from the basic critique of Platonic eros as a barrier, not an introduction, to transcendence, these writers further strengthen the critique by arguing that the whole project of the 20th century push toward authenticity and transcendental freedom assumes a privileged situation from which the 'self-supporting man' might reach his own transcendence, if he simply ignored the distraction of love. But this, as Beauvoir makes us question, is a view which seems to exclude the feminine. From the sending away of the flute girls to Lacan's claim that the

⁴⁷ Again, a point to be returned to in chapter 4.

all-male of love of the *Symposium* offers us a simplified view of a universal love by simply removing sexual difference,⁴⁸ Beauvoir has raised the question of whether we must consider the cultural position more seriously, whether transcendence, even if it does not begin from love, does begin from a certain concrete position in the world.

The first impossibility of love for Beauvoir is seen in the unequal nature of love. Quoting Lord Byron, Beauvoir claims that “man’s love is of man’s life a thing apart; ’Tis woman’s whole existence.”⁴⁹ Authenticity is possible for man because he can excise his erotic/amorous dimension, and carry on with his life relatively unaffected. Woman, on the other hand, is entirely defined by love. Woman’s particular situation means that she is always dependent, immanent, “an inessential creature” condemned to search for a figure to “enthron[e] . . . as supreme value and reality.”⁵⁰ However, Beauvoir is adamant that this passivity is not a mere biological or even psychoanalytic fact, but is also dependent “upon her social and economic situation as a whole.”⁵¹ Woman’s love, she argues, is not just a relation among other relations, but instead a desperate search for something essential, something which can ground her contingency.⁵² The lover must be deified, made absolute in order to satisfy the complete inessentiality of woman.⁵³ But it is impossible for any finite subject to bear the weight placed upon him by the woman in love, and as a result, the whole project will inevitably fail. It is impossible for woman to love, for in her love, she

⁴⁸ *Transference*, 34.

⁴⁹ *SS*, 642.

⁵⁰ *SS*, 643.

⁵¹ *SS*, 402.

⁵² Men, on the other hand, can ground their own contingency through their various social and economic projects.

⁵³ This also explains, Beauvoir claims, the large tradition of female mystics, who channel their eros into religious life.

necessarily destroys herself and her beloved.⁵⁴ “This is the torture of the impossible love; . . . a free being cannot be *had*.”⁵⁵

Thus while Lacan and Sartre both see the impossibility of love as a universal fact, Beauvoir complicates the situation by arguing that not only is love impossible as such, but it contains an additional impossibility for woman, who is unable to merely leave it behind without denying herself. Woman’s position is “fraught with difficulty and danger, and [is] one that often fails . . . whether she adjust herself more or less exactly to her passive role, woman *is always frustrated* as an active individual.”⁵⁶ Woman’s situation makes it impossible to escape it. The offer of love, the offer to see oneself as a passive subject, is an offer which invites the woman to abandon the possibility of becoming an active subject.

This initial criticism began a broader cultural movement which saw these consequences as even more sinister, even more unavoidable, than did Beauvoir. Beauvoir admits that it is not only man who condemns woman to this fate; rather, “she herself usually forges the chains with which he has no wish to load her: she takes toward him the attitude of the *amoureuse*, the woman in love.”⁵⁷ This may be a perverse desire, treatable by some form of psychological or cultural change, but the offer is (in woman’s current situation) too often willingly taken on, unable or afraid to face society unprotected. But whereas Beauvoir suggests that love offers a safety net which allowed us to escape (however illicitly) from the demands of authenticity, for the feminists who followed, love was a prison which held women back, not by offering safety but by force. Influenced

⁵⁴ One interesting alternative to this is Audre Lorde, “The Use of the Erotic,” where she suggests that it is precisely by recovering the power of the erotic, that women can flourish.

⁵⁵ SS, 658.

⁵⁶ SS, 402-3, emphasis mine.

⁵⁷ SS, 695.

heavily by Marxism and psychoanalysis,⁵⁸ these writers represent some of the harshest critiques of love, writing in the 1970s at the height of second-wave feminism, which saw issues such as sexuality, marriage, and family take center stage following the successes in establishing more basic equality in suffrage and property law.

No longer are women simply disposed by society to be especially susceptible to the offer of inauthentic love, rather as Shulamith Firestone begins: “Love . . . is the pivot of women’s oppression today.”⁵⁹ Women’s forced preoccupation with love freed men up to create culture and society; it is *only because of* women’s preoccupation that men are able to succeed. Thus, far from the praises that the symposiasts sang of, Firestone is clear that “love is not altruistic,”⁶⁰ a view shared by Germaine Greer, who notes that love is simply an “enlarged egotism,” and that what little true altruism does exist in love—particularly on the part of women—is “an absurdity,” “spurious,” and ultimately “merely the inauthenticity of the feminine person carried over into behavior.”⁶¹ Woman’s position as less than man has ensured that any sacrifice that she makes, any supposedly genuine offering is a mistake, ultimately misguided because the woman fails to recognize that her gesture is one-directional. Love is said to be an equal exchange of self, but women soon find out that they have received nothing in exchange for their sacrifices, while men have profited in all aspects of life from the sacrifices made by their lovers.⁶²

⁵⁸ In addition, Firestone’s book is dedicated to—and makes frequent reference to—Beauvoir.

⁵⁹ *Dialectics of Sex*, 126.

⁶⁰ *Dialectics of Sex*, 128

⁶¹ all quotes, Greer Greer and Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, (McGraw-Hill: 1971), 148-9.

⁶² To be clear, this is only one trend of feminism. Many others, including Irigaray and Lorde, both of whom will be addressed later, will praise love and desire.

Woman's inauthenticity, for these authors, is not something unwittingly offered by the man who would not wish to give it,⁶³ to be taken or not, but instead it is forced on her by a hostile other. Women are aware that, in the classical romantic love, they are only loved as an idealized image, and that "this idealization, which she works so hard to produce, is a lie."⁶⁴ And yet they are forced to perpetuate this idealizing love by the need to escape their "class subjugation." If woman is to escape the fate which has been imposed on her by society, it can only be accomplished via a different sort of subjugation, that of being reduced to an idealized object by an individual man, in love. Thus, Firestone, notes, "her life is a hell," while Greer concludes in no uncertain terms:

love, love, love—all the wretched cant of it, masking egotism, lust, masochism, fantasy under a mythology of sentimental postures, a welter of self-induced miseries and joys, blinding and masking the essential personalities in the frozen gestures of courtship, in the kissing and the dating and the desire, compliments and the quarrels which vivify its barrenness.⁶⁵

We have returned then, to the outright rejection of the various praises of love sung by Plato's characters—to the strident criticisms originally voiced by Lysias' speech in the *Phaedrus*. Love is ultimately a dominant party imposing his will on a subservient one (for him it was adult males and the young boys of Athens, for Greer and Firestone it is men and women), forcing her to become a mere object for the advancement of the man's own status. The woman is forced to be inauthentic, so that the man can take up his own position of power.

⁶³ cf SS, 695.

⁶⁴ *Dialectic of Sex*, 132. On the other hand, Firestone later adds a caution that there are "special difficulties of attacking the sex class system through its means of cultural indoctrination. Sex objects *are* beautiful. An attack on them can be confused with an attack on beauty itself. Feminists need not get so pious in their efforts that they feel they must flatly deny the beauty of the face on the cover of *Vogue*," 155. This remark will become particularly interesting when we see in §2.3 how little heed philosophy has paid to this warning.

⁶⁵ *Female Eunuch*, 165.

One need only read the lengthy criticisms of the Disney Princess, the damsel in distress model of story and its impact on the psyches of young girls to see how thoroughly this particular criticism of love as it pertains to feminine subjectivity in particular has permeated our culture far more widely than the academic theories of a few philosophers. It similarly appears in the widespread belief that romantic love was an invention of a medieval religious and political society with a vested interest in ensuring the populace did not become too powerful or too free (echoing the gods' punishment of prelapsarian humans in Aristophanes' myth), love is often viewed as an institution which will prevent 'the common person' (or in this case, women in particular) from asserting their rights too stridently. Perhaps this view could be seen most glaringly in the antebellum American South, where slaveholders tolerated and even encouraged the marriages of their slaves, on the basis that a slave would be less willing to flee or rebel if he has a family who might be endangered by his actions.⁶⁶ Far from Phaedrus' assertion that an army made up of lovers would be strongest of all, slaveholders were aware that a threat to loved ones would paralyzes a population. We see it equally from the other side as well, from those sources that caution us against love, such as when St. Paul cautions that we should marry only if we find it impossible to control ourselves. It is best to be single, but better, he continues, to be married than to burn.⁶⁷ Many strands of Buddhism will similarly call love the sort of attachment which threatens to prevent or postpone the achievement of enlightenment.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ This despite the fact that slaves were seen as holding no *legal* right to marriage, a right which the same slaveowners actively campaigned to prevent, in the interest of slaves being held to be persons capable of entering into contracts (thus endangering the supposed 'right' to hold them as 'human chattel'), see Darlene Goring, "The History of Slave Marriage in the United States," particularly section III.

⁶⁷ 1 Cor. 7:8-9. Many translations clarify "to burn/to be aflame with passion," although the allusion to hellfire seems clear as well. In either case, the message seems to be that marriage is for those who cannot control their love who's love would otherwise prevent them from attaining salvation.

⁶⁸ Buddhist monks are almost universally expected to remain celibate, while lay Buddhists are merely expected to avoid an over-attachment to sexual desire.

Far from love conquering all, these sources would have us believe that we are doomed the moment we begin to love. Love holds us back, prevents us from achieving what we could, if only we could deny our desires.

This, as Lee Comer points out, is why for so long the institution of marriage and the feeling of love were kept separate. The ideals of monogamy *and* a love-filled marriage are impossible to fulfill at the same time. We marry those who are like us in societal status and roles, and “optimistically, love is the last additional factor,” but even this is rarely the case.⁶⁹ And over time, this is just further confirmed, as it is within marriage when the primary social oppressions of women commence. The single woman is turned into wife, mother, caretaker, cook, housekeeper, etc. When at one time it may have been, if only rarely, possible for woman to enter society as man’s equal, marriage spells the end, once and for all. Ultimately, even the woman who succeeds, becomes a wife, of whom the husband says ‘what would I do without you?’, her victory “is Pyrrhic . . . both of them have sacrificed so much of what initially made them lovable to promote the symbiosis of mutual dependence that they scarcely make up one human being between them.”⁷⁰ Love, if it does not fail straight-away, will nevertheless ultimately destroy itself when it realizes what has been sacrificed to attain it. Love is impossible, it is doomed to failure before it begins, even if this fact does not prevent us from continuing to love in spite of its impending collapse.

⁶⁹ Lee Comer, *Wedlocked Women* (Feminist Books, 1974), 223.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 157.

§3: Non-mutual Love

What Sartre calls masochism—what the feminist writers see as the fundamental ways male and female loves differ—also hides a second impossibility: love is never mutual. Each lover desires only to be loved, while neither actually loves the other.⁷¹ We are instead left with dual seductions or conflicts. One party's love is never equaled by the other's and thus we are left to turn to what Sartre calls the second series of attitudes toward the other: indifference, desire, hate and sadism.⁷² Love is impossible because it appears to me (as either lover or beloved), that the other will never actually love *me*, but only give me an offer to become otherwise than myself. Thus my fledgling love (of which I am not self-aware enough to realize it is not, in fact, any purer than the other's) turns to hatred.⁷³ Beauvoir, as we saw, goes further, locating the non-mutuality in the unequal status of men and women in eros. For each, erotic life is a kind of surrender. However, for the man, this surrender is not total, nor does it go uncompensated. The man receives enjoyment as a definitive end of sex. This is not the case, Beauvoir holds, for women. For woman, there is no single moment, no single locus of pleasure.⁷⁴ The goal of sex is less certain, less clear than for the man. This is in part due to the fact that the ends of pleasure and reproduction are split for woman. Neither is required for the other, whereas both are accomplished for the man in climax. Thus it is possible (and as we will see in chapter four, perhaps necessary) that what the woman gives in eros is not reciprocated, cannot be

⁷¹ There is again an interesting parallel here to what Alcibiades accuses Socrates of: "he presents himself as your lover, and, before you know it, you're in love with him yourself," (222b).

⁷² *BN*, 379.

⁷³ Even this mood is impossible, as Sartre finally concludes "hate too is in turn a failure," *BN*, 417.

⁷⁴ This idea is expanded on even further in Irigaray, "The Sex Which is not One."

reciprocated. These same biological facts also account for the temptation for the woman to be seen (and to see herself) as an object, reduced to a passive role while the man assumes the active one.⁷⁵

Later feminists continue Beauvoir's thought, with Greer summarizing that—following the Platonist tradition—“women were not capable of love at all, because they were men's inferiors.”⁷⁶ This view, both Greer and Firestone agree, is in practice accurate; women have been forcibly made men's inferiors (even if they are not so by nature), and, as a result, it is impossible for woman to love. She is not capable, due to the erasure of her self-standing, to take on the egotistic, narcissistic role of the masculine lover. It is thus impossible for woman to love. But that very description shows us why it is also impossible, as Firestone elaborates, for men to love.⁷⁷ They cannot love because they will eventually discover that their idealized image is a lie, and that there is, in fact, nothing lovable about a woman who has been degraded into an inferior position. He will instead shift from woman to woman, attempting to keep from discovering their flaws for as long as possible, in order to maintain the image of a being worthy of his love.

In contrast, Lacan suggests that “love is always mutual.”⁷⁸ However, it seems that even here the hypocrisy of the lover will always come out, as a result of Lacan's reliance on the ‘split subject.’ I am both lover and beloved. Part of me lacks, while part of me has what the other needs. Perhaps I even accept the lover's demand because I feel the same (or at least, an equivalent) lack. Thus the relation is not the straightforward one of

⁷⁵ Again, a fact which Beauvoir sees not as biological but based “upon her social and economic situation as a whole,” *SS*, 402.

⁷⁶ *Female Eunuch*, 136.

⁷⁷ “Men can't love,” a conclusion she draws from various psychoanalytic accounts as well as Beauvoir's claim that “the word love has by no means the same sense for both sexes,” cited from *SS*, 642.

⁷⁸ *Encore*, 4.

abundance and lack (as with the *erastes* and *eromenos*), but rather a complex relationship where (as lover) I have a lack I cannot fill myself, but also (as beloved) have a *something* which, despite not being able to resolve my own lack, might resolve another's. But this is not the same movement, but rather, two distinct movements of my 'split self.' I will seek out whatever I need to fill the lack I feel as a lover, without any real concern for how that appears to the beloved, but when it comes to myself, I become disgusted if I discover I am loved for my 'unlovableness.' Loving is easy, but love is impossible, barring the appeal to the miraculous,⁷⁹ because nobody would respond to such a disturbing demand on themselves. The lover offers a lack, and as a result, will always be rejected. Thus, although Lacan calls love mutual, we might better picture it as two love one-directional relationships, running parallel, but in opposite directions.

We can therefore see a second way, in addition to its inability to offer anything good, that these views raise issues for Plato's view of eros, this time going back to the very heart of the issue: the definition of eros. As I highlighted in the introduction, and further developed in part I during the discussion of *anteros*, for Plato, *eros* was something which was naturally directed toward mutuality, at least in the *Phaedrus*. However (in a theme that is common throughout the 20th century), these accounts have instead chosen to draw Platonic eros from the *Symposium*, a text which is far less clear regarding the issue of mutuality, and lends itself to an interpretation where love becomes a one-directional use

⁷⁹ "The miracle of love" is the fact that "it is always inexplicable that anything whatsoever responds to [love]." Jacques Lacan, *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (S.I.: Polity, 2017). cf Fink, *Lacan on Love*, 44.

of the other, or at best, two symmetric, but separate, *erotes*.⁸⁰ But by doing so, these commentators once again open eros up to the dangers of an overly strong individualism which sees the beloved as a mere tool for the lover's own advancement. Lacking the philosophic grounding for a sense of mutuality between the self and the other (or more concretely, between the man and the woman), the dynamic of the powerful self against the weaker other suddenly makes it more difficult to explain why the best life includes love. No longer does this imbalanced power dynamic aid the older man in educating and improving the younger *eromenos*, but instead, transformed into the love of supposedly equal, consenting adults, the remaining inequality of the two lovers (according to the feminist writers) highlights the social dynamic at work, while for Sartre and Lacan, the inability to unite the two loves results in a failed endeavor which is unable to achieve what it desires. Love becomes impossible for the best life, not only because it in itself is destructive, but in addition because, even in this destructive form, love turns out to be impossible to return, a fundamental part of what it means to love.⁸¹ Thus, even if we were somehow able to reconcile love's draw toward immanence with the subject's goal of transcendence, we are nonetheless prevented from making love possible as a result of its reciprocity being found supposedly impossible. As we will see in the following chapter, it is the return of mutuality, or at least, the reversal of the power dynamic that reintroduces the most sustained discussions of love. But for these authors, the account of otherness as

⁸⁰ Lacan, for example, explicitly engages the *Symposium* for the whole of his lecture course *Transference*, Sartre mentions "Platonic Eros" without specifying which text he is thinking of (*BN*, 56), although his account of eros contains many parallels (noted also by Hazel Barnes in her introduction to the translation) to the account of the *Symposium*. Beauvoir engages Aristophanes' myth while discussing the idea of sexual difference (*SS*, 43 and 215).

⁸¹ This claim, while commonly made of love, is not necessarily universal. I ask the reader extend a credit regarding this claim until the final chapter, where I offer an argument in favor of its requirement for a coherent theory of love.

strictly what is unrelatable and irreconcilable leads to a denial that love is necessary (or indeed even possible) for the best life.

§4: Unfixable Love

It may at this point be objected that Plato too agreed that some forms of ‘love’ would be ruled out for the virtuous man. For the current view to truly be a critique of Plato, we must see whether the various statements that “it is impossible for the virtuous man/woman/person to love” rule out love as such, or merely those common *erotes* or sick loves discussed by Pausanias in the *Symposium* and Socrates in the *Phaedrus*. If it is the latter, we may find a simple solution to the apparent tension between a Platonic ethical love and an impossible love by acknowledging that love contains both possibilities.

Despite the fact, however, that many do *seem* to claim such a way out of this impossibility, in every case, we see that the solution differs in significant and important ways from Plato’s own solution to the duality that exists within eros. Lacan, for instance, appeals to the “miracle of love,” the fact that “it is always inexplicable that anything whatsoever responds to [love].”⁸² Loving is easy, but love is impossible, barring the appeal to the miraculous, because nobody would respond to such a disturbing demand on themselves. The lover offers a lack, and as a result, will always be rejected. Although Lacan himself counts on this miracle (after all, he was a therapist who continually saw

⁸² *Transference*, 52.

patients who were, in fact in love, and who sought to be loved),⁸³ we will see in the next chapter, this was not the only difficulty that love encounters for Lacan. But even here, Lacan's miracle is not, as it might be for Plato, one that will save love; it does not transform love, but only makes a love that, due to its elements, ought to never exist, to nonetheless endure. If we were to describe a 'miracle of love' for Plato, it would be that some *maniae* are divinely inspired—made good by their good origin. But Lacan's miraculous love is not a good and virtuous love cured of the psychoses of ordinary love. In fact, it is the exact same love; the miracle changes nothing, but only makes the impossible love itself exist. Thus we cannot speak of a good and bad eros for Lacan, but only of one bad, impossible love, which through some miracle, seems to exist.

Both Sartre and Beauvoir rely on a similar 'miracle' to Lacan's. Sartre's takes the form of "a radical conversion,"⁸⁴ about which he defers in *Being and Nothingness*, and only later discusses in his posthumously published *Cahiers pour une morale*, while Beauvoir's is to be found in the ideal of cultural revolution, seen best in "what the Soviet Revolution promised."⁸⁵ However, it seems to be that at best Beauvoir's woman may be able to move from the particular impossibility of woman's situation to Sartre's general impossibility of all authentic subjects, while Sartre's "radical conversion," is similarly unsatisfying as a parallel to Plato's eros. Both ultimately give authentic love the same basic form: man and woman must be able to love freely, in a way that does not confine the other, take away their freedom, or inhibit their self-transcendence. Beauvoir goes so far as to describe it as

⁸³ Although, it is worth pointing out that those he saw were obsessives and neurotics, what love would look like for healthy people, Lacan could not say. However as Fink points out, in Freud's (and likely Lacan's as well) view there are very few "normal men," referencing "On the universal tendency to debasement in the sphere of love," *Lacan on Love*, 17.

⁸⁴ *BN*, 417n14

⁸⁵ *SS*, 724.

no longer being love at all, but in fact simply friendship,⁸⁶ *philia* cleansed of eros.⁸⁷ However, this is antithetical to Plato's position, where *philia* and eros are inseparable. We may have friendships which are not strictly speaking erotic, but they involve eros nonetheless.⁸⁸ Further, what friendship does remain must be incidental to self-fulfillment, rather than essential to it. For those holding this view, transcendence is still ultimately an individual project. It may simply be possible that others are alongside us as we each work on our own project. We will return to this point in both Parts III and IV, but it is enough to note here that, from the perspective of those who most strongly reject it, love can only be saved by being made weaker. Sartre and Beauvoir's authentic love turns out to be similar to what we found in Lacan: a love which plays no role in the self-standing subject's transcendent movement. Whereas for Plato, love was the vehicle of transcendence, now, in order to bring it back in at all, we must do so in a way which will simply prevent it from interfering with an already possible self-transcendence.

It may further be objected that, for Beauvoir, as for the feminists who followed her, the discussions were not about a metaphysical reality, but a cultural one. Beauvoir's work is not one on the essence of woman, but on her "life today," as the subtitle of her work states. So, again, it may well be that the claims of 'impossible love' are not absolute, but only relative to a changeable situation. However, for all of them, it is not enough (or even possible) for an individual woman to be 'liberated' from the aggressions of today's love. As

⁸⁶ For example, she praises marital fidelity, through which erotic attraction "dies . . . in esteem and friendship; two human beings who come together in the very movement of their transcendence through the world and their common projects no longer need carnal union; and further, because this union has lost its meaning, they are repelled by it," SS, 467.

⁸⁷ There is an interesting parallel here to Aristotle, who in bks VIII and IX of the *NE*, repeatedly refers to eros as an excess of friendship, seeming to indicate that *philia* (which he says is, or at least involves virtue) is put on the same excess-mean-deficiency schema, with eros being the excessive vice.

⁸⁸ Thus why he can say in the *Lysis* that he has an erotic longing for friendship.

Comer concludes her work, “there are no personal solutions. As long as the majority of women are underpaid and overworked . . . no woman can proclaim herself liberated.”⁸⁹ Not until all love is transformed, can any individual love be saved.⁹⁰ Thus we cannot simply say that ‘while it may still be impossible for some base men to love, and thus for women to love them back, on the whole, feminism has succeeded and love has been made better.’ Feminism’s victory must—all three are clear—be total, before it can be considered a victory at all. What is needed is nothing short of a total cultural revolution. Beauvoir prophesies that only

on the day when it will be possible for woman to love not in her weakness but in her strength . . . on that day love will become for her, as for man, a source of life and not of mortal danger. In the meantime, love represents in its most touching form the curse that lies heavily upon woman confined in the feminine universe, woman mutilated, insufficient unto herself.⁹¹

But it is unclear whether “that day” will ever actually arrive. Beauvoir says that it will come for woman ‘as it is for man,’ and yet the analyses of Sartre have drawn into question whether even men can both love and attain freedom. While she has raised additional gendered issues to the impossibility of love, it is not clear that Beauvoir’s optimism that ending the *gendered* issues will end *all* issues is well placed. She at one point locates this possibility in “what the Soviet Revolution *promised*,”⁹² however, even if it were possible to deliver culture in this way, we are already talking about a different sort of distinction than Plato’s. For Socrates, it is entirely possible that the philosopher has a virtuous love, even if everyone around him is living by a vicious one. For Plato, both loves

⁸⁹ *Wedlocked Women*, 273. Firestone similarly states that “when love takes place in a power context, everyone’s ‘love life’ must be affected,” *Dialectic of Sex*, 146.

⁹⁰ An interesting prelude of the thesis I am attempting to build to, that love and ethics cannot be separated.

⁹¹ *SS*, 669.

⁹² *SS*, 724.

can live side-by-side, whereas the feminists see that impossible love must first be entirely torn down, to be entirely replaced by virtuous love. For Plato, it was the responsibility of each individual to love rightly or wrongly, regardless of what society around him does; the solution now is all or nothing, either all love will be virtuous, or else all love remains vicious. Thus, for the holders of this view, *any* evidence of *any* non-virtuous love (of which there undoubtedly continue to be many), is enough evidence to show that virtuous love remains—at least for the time being⁹³—an impossibility.

⁹³ And it remains, at least for me, an open question whether such a radical change in culture is actually achievable. It seems any change will be incremental and unfinished.

CHAPTER 4: THE FAILURE OF SEX

However, as seen in the introduction and first chapter, there is more to eros than just affection. In fact, it perhaps plays only a secondary role to the more important sexual aspect. While Socrates and Plato made an attempt to link eros more closely with *philia*, it is possible that it is only this linking that is impossible. Perhaps Aristophanes and the others were correct, and eros should be understood not as romantic love, but as the sexual relation. If this is the case, it may still be possible that eros remains possible, even in the face of the failure of love. After all, the failure of love returned again and again to the claim that love cannot offer anything to the beloved. In sex however, nothing is offered. Rejecting the Socratic thesis altogether, sex can be seen not as an expression of love or an admiration for the beloved, but—true to the Aristophanic myth—an attempt to become one. Sex desires, it does not offer.

Many authors have indeed attempted to save eros in this way; seeing the failure of love, they excised it from eros, hoping that, separated from love, sexual desire and the sexual relation might be protected from the impending collapse of love. However, as we shall see, this too turns out to be impossible, but here, not under the formulation in the first section “it is impossible for . . . to love” but rather, under the second form, “it is impossible for eros to . . .” Here, the issue is not the lovers who fail to live the best life if they submit to love, but rather it is love itself that fails, under the guise of sexual desire, to attain the object that it seeks. This happens for a number of reasons; the primary, and most obvious, was apparent already in Plato’s (re)telling of Aristophanes’ position: two people are not made one through sex. If unification is what is actually sought, sex fails

(§2). This, as we shall see, is true whether the unification sought is physical or spiritual.¹ These original problems become all the more troubling, as we shall see when sexual difference is accounted for (§3) and the problem of unification becomes further specified. However, even if we were to find some way to overcome this obstacle (Aristophanes appeals to the blacksmith-god Hephaestus), additional problems remain.² The very split of sex and love condemns it to a failure: desire for a good (sex) and admiration of beauty (love) become separated, and thus, their objects, the Good and the Beautiful, also become separated. As I have argued in chapter one, this is already a view contrary to Plato's,³ but further, I will attempt to show here, their separation inescapably condemns each side to failure. The good cannot be reached when it is separated from the beautiful, and vice versa (§4). This third section will force us to confront the relationship between eros and desire more directly and to see how desire functions as a motivational force. All of this will show us that, if unification is a goal, it can only be accomplished by the destruction of the other.

§1: Some Preliminary Remarks

In chapter three, we saw that the apparent impossibility of love that resulted from a confrontation with Plato's theory of eros—i.e. that eros was a key component of the virtuous or best life, either by initiating the beloved, or by identification with the principle

¹ There is actually a third possibility as well, that unification is brought by the birth of the child. However, this view has not typically been seen as an option for the thinkers included here. I will return to it in Part III, however.

² Notice that, similar to the recurring theme of chapter 3, the saving of an impossible eros happens only as the result to the appeal to the miraculous.

³ It is, in fact, a contrary view even to the more moderate position that the Good and the Beautiful are related or even co-extensive, but in some way distinct, as many interpreters have claimed.

of virtue. However, this was not the only theory of eros advanced in the Platonic dialogues. As we saw there is also the possibility that love seeks unification with an ‘other half’ (see Ch. 1, §2.2), a view raised primarily by Aristophanes in the *Symposium*. So if the first option turns out to lead to an impossibility, we might still be able to choose the second. Eros’ impossibility in the life of ethics might simply help us solve the puzzle of what eros’ true purpose is (as pointed out in chapter one, the Good and the Beautiful are conspicuously absent from Aristophanes’ speech).

Having said that, however, many of the same authors who discovered the (apparent) impossibility of eros in the first sense, similarly found the goal of unification to be impossible. For Aristophanes, the goal of unification was closely linked to desire and sexuality. Aristophanes does not have in mind a mere ‘two souls intertwining,’ but rather the physical unification of two people, in an effort to heal the physical division dealt out by Zeus. The impossibility of this model ought to be (as it was already to Aristophanes) immediately obvious. Sex does not meld two people together. It is only in the face of this first impossibility that Aristophanes (and those who will follow him), turn to spiritual unification in its place. Perhaps we can never be made whole in body, but we can have hope that some unification is still possible. Aristophanes himself suggests that, if we live in this way, the gods will “restore us to our ancient life and heal and help us into the happiness of the blest” (193d). If we live *as if* we are united, perhaps some relief will eventually come.

This, as I have said already, is not an option for the early 20th century philosophers of love. Lacan most forcefully expresses his opposition with his simple

declaration that “*il n’y a pas un rapport sexuel* / there is no sexual relation.”⁴ The heart of the impossibility in the 20th century spawns from an issue not sufficiently addressed by Plato, and which became a more and more urgent issue for contemporary philosophy: alterity. The defining feature of the 20th century’s alterity principle is that the Other always repels any attempt of synthesis with the Self or the Same. They cannot be brought under any umbrella term—the Other *always* remains other, logically and metaphysically.⁵ But for the Platonists, the self and other *are* brought together under the Good, and our separation⁶ is something temporary, a result of the soul’s descent into matter. But matter is also something unintelligible, and therefore unlovable.⁷ If love is about unification, then—for Plato—the only option is that what I desire to be unified with is not the beloved *herself*, but something that she shares in (the Good, the Beautiful, etc.) as we see when Diotima prophetically rejects Aristophanes’ argument on the basis that “what men love is simply and solely the good” (206a).⁸

However Diotima’s claim has a more subtle conclusion: A love that seeks unification with the beloved is impossible for Plato *not* (as is the tragic conclusion of Aristophanes himself, as well as of the early 20th-century philosophers) because separation could not be overcome, but because there is, in reality, no relevant separation

⁴ Translated by Lacan and his translators as “There is no sexual relation.” However, as we will see in part III, the term *rapport* contains other translation options

⁵ This covers over a myriad of differences between various notions of alterity, however those differences are not essential at this point.

⁶ Both from the Good, and ultimately, from each other.

⁷ Plotinus also posits individual forms (see *Ennead* V.7), which could conceivably be thought of as that which we desire unity with. However, these are, at best, implicit in Plato’s own works, and seems to be a somewhat minority view among early Platonists (Rist, “Forms of Individuals in Plotinus,” 229). Even if they do exist however, the transparency of individual forms to each other and all other Forms will create a similar problem for a unificatory love, which could be based around a distinction between individual and separate.

⁸ This statement does not necessarily imply that love is *not* between individuals. Only that, if love is about unification, what I desire must be unified with must be something the beloved *has*, not the beloved herself.

to begin with. As Diotima says just prior, “love is neither for half nor for whole, unless, of course, my dear sir, this happens to be something good” (205e), and, ultimately, as we saw in chapter one, not only ‘something good’ but the Good Itself.⁹ But for Plato, on the level of reality, nothing is ever separate from the Good; if what I love is the-Good-in-the-beloved, there is no need for unification—I eventually recognize that the goodness in her *is* the goodness in me, revealing (in experience) the unity in the Good that we have shared (in reality) from the beginning.¹⁰ As the lover proceeds up Diotima’s ladder, reaching the great sea of Beauty, the lover will realize not just that *all* things have a share in the same Beauty as the beloved, but more importantly, that *the lover himself* already has a share in it. His desire for the Beautiful (or the Good) will be resolved not by acquiring the beloved’s beauty, but by recognizing he already has it. Having rejected Aristophanes’ halves and wholes argument, Plato can only appeal to the Good as the basis of love, and this, in turn, will always threaten to destroy the Other and transform love into a metaphysical relationship of the Self to the Good.¹¹ And it is precisely this transformation that the 20th century philosophers seek to prevent by introducing alterity.

Recognizing the full philosophical urgency—both metaphysically and ethically—of developing an account of alterity, 20th century philosophers rapidly developed the concept, but found that, rather than saving eros from collapsing into egoism, their new

⁹ As Schroeder points out in his study on this point, “there is no suggestion . . . in Diotima’s account that we may appropriate Goodness or Beauty as our own because it was our former nature or because it is a whole of which our present existence is a sundered part,” “Prophecy and Remembrance in Plotinus,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium of Ancient Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (1996), 7. However, it *is* clear that for Plato (and Plotinus) that the Good is already something which “is indeed our own” (ibid.).

¹⁰ Cf. Plato’s discussion of the Forms in *Parmenides*, 131b “it might be like day, which is one and the same, is in many places at once, and yet is not separated from itself.”

¹¹ Schroeder, who at times attributes to Plotinus a view which seems similar to what I have expressed here, ultimately concludes that, “he is not discussing a relationship between two persons, but the relationship between the soul and the Good,” “Prophecy and Remembrance in Plotinus,” 19-20.

insights were putting the failures of an eros seeking unification into sharp relief. While they all agree on this conclusion, the rapid development also means that authors in broad agreement about love in chapter three have more significant differences regarding alterity. Whereas the trio of philosophers I have primarily been making reference to so far (Sartre, Beauvoir, and Lacan) could be more or less treated as emblematic of a single wider school of thought, circling around the same impossibility of love, their accounts of alterity have rapidly departed from each other. This means that the impossibilities seen in an early account such as Sartre's are quickly refined and strengthened, with later authors finding even more serious difficulties lurking beneath. Thus, while these three authors were treated as largely in agreement in chapter three, here they will be treated as separate, each representing a different web of conclusions.¹² In addition, I will paint the accounts in somewhat broader strokes, as alterity in these accounts remains somewhat fluid. While it is still too early to draw any conclusions about the general positions of Otherness, I will take up this task again in Part III, where we will see Levinas' and Marion's further developments regarding alterity.¹³

§2: Naive Otherness and Objectification

For Sartre, the question of the other is raised when he realizes that, in the attempt to become 'one' with the beloved, I actually destroy the reason I wanted to unite with her in the first place. For example, he gives as the final principle in the "triple destructibility

¹² Nevertheless, each person should still be seen as emblematic. That is, Sartre's view, for example, although it is different than Beauvoir and Lacan's, is nevertheless shared by a wider group of philosophers and popular writers.

¹³ We will also see in that chapter, as a result of its head start in development, how love is saved from its impossibility much sooner than sex.

of love” that “at any moment he can make me appear as an object—hence the lover’s perpetual insecurity.”¹⁴ This problem, which we could locate even in the love relationship, becomes all the more pronounced in the sexual relationship. Sex is defined and structured by desire (a point to which we will return to in §4), and as such there is the constant risk that the other will be reduced to an object used to fulfill desire, a tool for experiencing pleasure. As Sartre points out, this is not something we can avoid, even by recourse to a division of good and bad or right and wrong intercourse. The threat *always* looms over love, and thus *always* makes me insecure, regardless of whether it ever actually occurs. It is precisely in light of this, Sartre claims, that we make “a new attempt to realize the identification of the Other and myself.”¹⁵ This new attempt tries to reverse the intentionality of love. Our first attempts at unification (seen in what Plato says as much as in what precedes in Sartre) are always attempts to assimilate the Other into the self, into the Same, where we discover that, rather than assimilating, we annihilate. Thus, Sartre attempts an erotic Copernican turn, instead seeking to assimilate Self into Otherness; attempting (this will become a primary feature of the theories in Part III) to transform eros from a desire into a gift. If I cannot achieve this unification for myself, perhaps I can offer it to the beloved, and in the process, achieve unity, so to speak, through the beloved.

This reversal represents more a departure from than an objection to the Platonic project, since—as we have seen—there is no true ‘Otherness’ in Plato, all unification must become unification into the Same and the One. It also represents one of the first attempts

¹⁴ *BN*, 377. See chapter 3 for a discussion of the other two parts of this schema

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

at thematizing Otherness as its own concept, alongside the Identity of the Self.¹⁶ As a result, Sartre's definition of Otherness remains somewhat naive, largely defined negatively as simply what refuses assimilation into the Self: I cannot make the Other mine, *me*, in the same way as I might make food mine by consuming it, or my house by identifying myself with my possessions.

This description should already make it apparent, however, that Sartre's attempted turn will not work. The Self cannot be unified into the Other any more than the Other can be unified into the Self. The reversal is simply an effort—which Sartre calls *masochism* (see chapter one, §2, where this was already briefly discussed in a different context)—to prompt the willful annihilation of Self for the sake of preserving the Other, “but masochism is and must be itself a failure.”¹⁷ It is not enough, in masochistic love, to debase myself, to make myself an object. My true desire is to make of myself an object-*for*.¹⁸ However, in order to maintain the intentionality of myself as object, I must posit myself as transcendent; the very directedness of my self-object demands that it exist as *more than* object, *more than* in-itself, lest it be available for any and all equally. Ultimately, Sartre concludes, masochism reverts to the original problem of love and sex. In the contradictory transcendent movement toward his own objectivity, “the masochist ultimately treats the Other as an object.”¹⁹ The Other becomes nothing more than a tool, whose debasing actions are *used by* the masochist to become an object. It is not—as we

¹⁶ Sartre's analyses are developments of Husserl's own, which appeared roughly a decade earlier in *Cartesian Meditations*. Although there are certainly forerunners to phenomenological accounts of Otherness, including, perhaps most preeminently, Hegel. Hegel's project of otherness, however, was not primarily the Otherness of intersubjectivity.

¹⁷ *BN*, 378.

¹⁸ cf *BN*, 378: “this object such as it is *for the Other*”

¹⁹ *BN*, 379.

might suspect it to be—the Other who objectifies the masochist, but quite the reverse; the masochist objectifies the one who abuses him.

This impossibility of unification between Self and Other in the Sartrean ontology is a result of the ambiguity of the subject. It exists equally as subject and object, being-for-itself and being-in-itself. But our intentions cannot ever be directed accurately. Our initial feeling of love, the desire to be unified, is always directed toward the Other as subject. Yet in attempting to reach him, we always fall short, reaching instead the Other as object. Intentionality, at least as it was available to Sartre (we will see in Part III how intentionality begins to be described as reversible) always intends an object.²⁰ Common language reveals this fact, speaking of “the object of desire,” and a language of love which posits the beloved as the object possessed: she is *my* beloved, or when (in a light form of Sartrean masochism) we promise the beloved that “I am yours; I belong to you.”²¹ As it is especially defined by desire, sex—even more than romantic love—is particularly guilty of this sin; sex, in its seeking pleasure, will inevitably result in the objectification of the Other. Either directly, by turning the beloved into the object to satisfy me, or indirectly, through the masochist desire to offer pleasure—that is, to objectify myself for the beloved—which will inevitably revert to objectification.

²⁰ For more general descriptions of this phenomena in Sartre, see his examples of bad faith, and in particular, that of the woman on a date.

²¹ Irigaray highlights this point well in her essay “I love to you.”

§3: Sexual Difference and Otherness

However, it was quickly recognized that this naive, negative conception of alterity was not sufficient for the weight it had to hold. Thus, almost immediately, work turned to trying to develop a more rigorous, positive account of how alterity is constituted. Among the first developments was the recognition that one of the most apparent sources of otherness was sexual difference.²² In a direct parallel to the impossibility of love, this version of the impossibility of sex was critiqued by feminists, beginning with Beauvoir, for similarly being androcentric. It begins to become apparent that Plato's account of love and sex, predicated on a homosexual relationship, can only speak about love from a male point of view.²³ Thus, Sartre's account of alterity and objectification must be seen as the particularly *male* phenomenology of sex. If we are to give an accurate account of otherness and unification in sex, Beauvoir argues, we will need to give two accounts, the male *and* the female.

As she explains, the idea of objectification in sex is peculiar to men, for whom “erotic pleasure is objectified, desire being directed toward another person Erection is the expression of this need; with penis, hands, mouth, with his whole body a man reaches out toward his partner.”²⁴ Erection, the male role of penetration in intercourse,

²² Although seemingly based on the same recognition, accounts, such as Levinas,' which specifically identified the Feminine as the principle of alterity represent a slightly different argument, to be dealt with in chapter three.

²³ Although it is true that the *eromenos* was seen as a passive role, it was seen as dishonorable for him to take on a feminine role, a rule which, among other things, was meant to prevent penetrative sex. See Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 103: “an honorable *eromenos* . . . never assimilates himself to a woman by playing a subordinate role in a position of contact” and “it is not only by assimilating himself to a woman in the sexual act that the submissive male rejects his role as a male citizen, but also by deliberately choosing to be the victim of what would be, if the victim were unwilling, hubris.” ‘Hubris’ being the catchall term for a variety of illegal sexual acts.

²⁴ SS, 371.

functions to indicate to the man that he needs to find an object, outside of himself, by which to fulfill his desire. Woman, on the other hand, is not this way. Female sexual desire is not as outwardly directed, not as oriented toward a single moment (as male desire is oriented toward ejaculation)²⁵, but instead seems to always take on the role of “the prey of the species.” For the woman, penetration “always constitutes a kind of violation.”²⁶ Woman’s autonomy is violated, disrupted by the male penetration.

This description, although perhaps exaggerated, further highlights the impossibility of sex. The woman, unlike the man, actually *can* lay claim to the ‘assimilation of the other.’ The woman receives the Other within her. But this is felt, Beauvoir and others have argued, not as success but as violation. The Other never ceases to be Other, foreign to the woman’s self. What may originate from a desire for unification is instead completed in a feeling of being violated, invaded.²⁷ This point adds an important step in the trajectory of the phenomenon of alterity. It is recognized that Same and Other,²⁸ can exist ‘together’ without being united.²⁹ The Self can *impose* itself on the Other, but it cannot successfully join itself with alterity. The Other, under the guise of the feminine, may play a passive role, but it does not simply receive the Self without difficulty or objection.

²⁵ See again, Irigaray’s “The Sex which is not One,” which further develops the consequences of this difference in particular

²⁶ *SS*, 372.

²⁷ One can speak of a woman he has slept with as one of his “conquests,” as having “had her.”

²⁸ Or *Self* and Other, the meaning is the same here

²⁹ As briefly argued in chapter 3, this is precisely why Plato’s *Form of Difference* is not comparable. The great paradox of Platonism is that the Forms of Same and Different already *do* exist in unity, not that they can’t be unified.

Lacan similarly draws on the idea of sexual difference to level perhaps the strongest critique of love or sex's ability to unite self and other.³⁰ He is also the one who most forcefully investigates the hypothesis that love seeks fusion, attributing this particularly to the imaginary order, when I form my identity by what I see of my body-image.³¹ Essential to this is the narcissism which leads to attempting to conquer and incorporate the other into myself.³² It is in the movement to the symbolic order, to speech and language from this initial step, that the hypothesis of unification is left behind, and the impossibilities of love discussed in chapter three return. However, this drive does not disappear entirely, and instead remains in the background, removed from love, but remaining instead as the goal of *eros*.

This division shows how for Lacan, following Freud more than Plato, *eros* ceases to be able to be used relatively interchangeably with love, and instead takes on a more specific meaning. Love is the passion, the concrete experience felt and sought after by the patients the psychoanalyst treats. *Eros*, on the other hand, is the drive (in Freud's sense), connected to the 'mythical' explanations of human desires and decisions (although there

³⁰ Despite the psychoanalytic background of Beauvoir, and many of her fellow second-wave feminists, Lacan's ideas about sexual difference and Woman have been met with harsh criticism as well as high praise. In particular, concerns are often raised about whether his work is problematically phallogocentric, relegating women to a secondary status not by a mere cultural or psychoanalytic fact, but by a normative fact based on natural, biological differences between the sexes. Beauvoir and Lacan were familiar with each other and their respective works, and seem to have shared at least some common ground in their separate readings of Freud; however, the work focused on here—Lacan's *Encore*—appeared relatively late in Beauvoir's life, and there seems to be no direct response from her regarding the arguments it contains.

³¹ It would be impossible to fully examine the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real here, for treatments of their relation to love and *eros*, see Fink *Lacan on Love* and Marc De Kesel, *Eros and Ethics: Reading Jacques Lacan's Seminar VII* (SUNY Press, 2009), both of which I have relied on heavily for what I say here.

³² Other becomes a very technical term in Lacan, and in particular the difference between 'le grand Autre' and 'le petit autre' or, the Other with a capital O and the other, lower case o. The former is always language, symbolic associations of the other person, while the other is the imaginary, the altar ego of the mirror stage.

is not an identification of eros and desire,³³ and at times, Lacan asserts that they are in fact opposed.³⁴) and defined by *jouissance*—sexual pleasure.

It is the idea of *jouissance* that stands at the heart of the impossibility of the sexual relation for Lacan, and, even deeper, the distinction between masculine and feminine *jouissance*. Lacan separately addresses the failure of the sexual relation from both the masculine and feminine perspectives, noting how each partner's particular form of *jouissance* causes their sexual endeavor to fail. The sexual relation fails “in the male manner” by turning into love and language. Discussing how romantic writing is a substitute for a physical relation, Lacan notes that “the alternation [of the *epithalamion*, the nuptial song], the love letter, they are not the sexual relationship. They revolve around the fact that there's no such thing as a sexual relationship.”³⁵ Sensing the impossibility of unification through the sexual relationship, the male *jouissance* turns to language and to mastery. If I cannot physically possess the other, then I will comprehend her by creating a symbolic Other, a system of symbols I can master. Male *jouissance*, then, as we shall see further on, turns from sexual eros to romantic love (one of Lacan's recurring examples is the development of courtly love in response to the prohibition of sex), which will inevitably fail for the reasons already seen in chapter three. Lacan says “the universe is the place where” the sexual relationship fails, precisely because Male love fails by creating a world of meaning.³⁶ The Male—male *jouissance*—is everything, it is the whole (as opposed to the female, who is dependent on the male, a parallel to Beauvoir's point regarding the

³³ Fink, *Lacan on Love*, 132.

³⁴ Fink, *Eros and Ethics*, 48.

³⁵ *Encore*, 57.

³⁶ *Encore*, 56.

‘default’ and second sexes). For male *jouissance*, everything is understood, including itself, in a web of meanings and symbols, because (again paralleling the claims made by Beauvoir), male *jouissance* represents desire—an outward impulse. It is able to subsist on its own, reaching out to form its world around itself.

Female *jouissance*—and the woman herself—on the other hand, is characterized by the *not-whole*, the *pas-tout*. As a result, it is also has a different cause for the failure of sex; next to the ‘male manner’ of failure is another: “the female way. It is elaborated on the basis of the not-whole.”³⁷ The whole of *Encore*, his 1972-73 lecture course, is devoted to this way of failure. The ‘not-whole’ of female *jouissance* is in part responsible for the failure of unification. Drawing on the story of Don Juan, Lacan explains that the essential fact is that he has his women “*one by one*,”³⁸ without ever being able to say that he has had ‘woman’ (as a universal or a whole), and without having become unified with any of them. They remain listable, nameable, countable. Each of Don Juan’s conquests remains separate from all the others and resists being unified, either with each other or with himself.³⁹ On the contrary, “*woman* does not exist, woman is *not whole*,”⁴⁰ later clarifying:

Woman can only be written with a bar through it. There’s no such thing as Woman, Woman with a capital *W* indicating the universal. There’s no such thing as Woman because, in her essence—I’ve already risked using that term, so why should I think twice about using it again?—she is not-whole.⁴¹

As the translator, Bruce Fink, notes in his footnote, the French does not ask to bar ‘Woman’ (although this is how Fink employs it in the chapter title), but rather the ‘*la*’ of

³⁷ *Encore*, 57.

³⁸ *Encore*, 10.

³⁹ *Encore*, 10.

⁴⁰ *Encore*, 7.

⁴¹ *Encore*, 72-3.

'*la femme*.' As Lacan's clarifications show, he does not want to deny that there are women;⁴² it is the universal Woman, the Platonic, ideal Woman, that does not exist. There is no essence of Woman because every woman remains a not-whole, a non-unity.

Already failing to be a unity of her own, it is also impossible for a woman to become unified with another person in sex; on the contrary, the male remains the whole, the self-unity, who does not need the woman; "there is no woman except excluded, by the nature of things . . . being not-whole, she has a supplementary jouissance compared to what the phallic function designates by way of jouissance."⁴³ Woman—woman's jouissance—is excluded by the sexual relation because it is supplementary, extra, excessive.⁴⁴ Phallic jouissance self-constitutes its own whole and gains nothing from woman's jouissance. This, for Lacan, is the meaning of the statement "there is no sexual relation."⁴⁵ Not that sex does not take place, but that it does not constitute a relation. Male jouissance and woman's jouissance are not two poles of a relationship, one self-complete pole (male jouissance), and another excluded altogether (feminine jouissance). As Lacan puts it at one point, "man does not come (*n'arrive pas*), I would say, to enjoy woman's body, precisely because what he enjoys is the jouissance of the organ."⁴⁶ All sex, from the male point of view, is ultimately masturbatory, self-enjoyment.

Thus we return to something very similar to the feminist account where the absolute otherness of the other is accounted for by sexual difference,⁴⁷ with the

⁴² As he claims some feminists of the time accused him of (*Encore*, 57).

⁴³ *Encore*, 73, substituting in, for the first phrase, the alternate translation provided in 73n30.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ *Encore*, 126.

⁴⁶ *Encore*, 7. The meaning of "*n'arrive pas*" is as euphemistic in French as it is in English

⁴⁷ Although as already pointed out, the two do not necessarily agree on the meaning or origin of this, and some are quite opposed to Lacan's reading

differences between male and female marking out the basis for two fundamentally different ways of interacting with the world around them, and with each other. Further, this absolute difference between man and woman, the un-relatability of the two *jouissances*, makes the unification of bodies impossible. Male jouissance will always exclude the female, treat it as unnecessary or extra. In response to this impossibility, Lacan moves from the chapter on woman's jouissance to one on 'A love letter,' that is, from *eros* back to love. But as we saw already, "love is impotent" precisely because "it is not aware that it is but the desire to be One."⁴⁸ The love that replaces *eros* (see chapter three) fails *because* it tries to replace *eros*, tries to exist without it.

§4: Jouissance, Desire, The Good and the Beautiful

Both of these accounts of otherness have questions of desire and jouissance at their heart, which leads to the perceived impossibility of sex. It is *because* sex is desire, *because* it is structured by jouissance that it fails, by destroying the other. In the same way, we can look back at love in Chapter Three and say that it is *because* love was reduced to admiration of beauty that it fails; as mere admiration, love failed to be a motivating factor for ethics (since desire, following the Platonic model, only desires the good, not the beautiful).⁴⁹ One of the key features of Plato's account of *eros* was that it combined admiration and desire by combining their objects, the Good and the Beautiful (see Chapter Two). But in the 20th century, this hypothesis is no longer commonly held, and

⁴⁸ *Encore*, 6.

⁴⁹ Rachel Barney, "Notes on Plato on the Kalon and the Good" has had a significant influence on the development of the argument in this section. "Notes on Plato on the Kalon and the Good," *Classical Philology* 105, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 363—77.

by separating them, philosophers have also separated (as we have seen in the divisions of this Part) love and sex. Having seen the reasons specific to each for their failure, beginning with the failure of love, which as we have now seen in this chapter only came about as a result of the original failure of sex, and the attempt to salvage at least a portion of eros, we can now peel the layers back even further to see how both were doomed to failure by their very splitting.

§4.1: Beauty's Divorce

As we saw especially in the way that Sartre and Beauvoir speak of the alleged possibility of authentic love,⁵⁰ the ideal of love is defined in this group of thinkers by its separation from desire. But is it truly possible to reshape our thinking of love to be divorced from sexual desire, and instead be based on respect, admiration, and recognition? To do this, love had to be separated from sex (even if they may both be directed toward the same person). Now that we have seen the impossibilities raised by sexual desire for accounts of otherness, we can better see what the reason for this divorce is: early accounts of otherness, whether in the abstract or based more narrowly on sexual difference, are negative formulations of that which we cannot come into a relation with, that which opposes our attempts to incorporate it into the self or the ego. But love, even more than sex, is predicated on the idea that it is love *of another person*. Self-love simply will not do.⁵¹ Eros is ecstatic, it requires something outside of us. That sex apparently wants,

⁵⁰ See Chapter 3, §4 for the explanation of their position and why, ultimately, I think that their solutions would not work.

⁵¹ Nor, I think, will seeing interpersonal love (as Augustine, in late antiquity, and Marion more recently see it) as a hidden form of love of God. However, the refutation of this will have to wait until Part IV.

on the contrary, to envelop or consume what it sees, makes it unfit to remain in a theory of love as long as it retains only this naive, negative understanding of otherness.⁵²

So, removed from desire, only half of the Platonic picture can remain in an account of love: admiration.⁵³ Gone is the possibility that love begins in lust after the body of a beautiful boy, the desire of the pegasus that lurched and pulled the charioteer nearer and nearer to his beloved. In its place remains only the contemplation of beauty; the looking out toward what is beyond the heavens or contemplating together with the beloved. The lover, if he is to respect the otherness of the beloved, can no longer look at her as a good to be possessed, something that is *good-for* him. But shorn of this *good-for* aspect, it no longer makes sense to speak of the beloved as being good as she relates to the lover (whether she is—on her own—‘a good person,’ is irrelevant). Rather, she is beloved because she is beautiful (remember that, for Plato, a person could be beautiful not just in sight, but also because she was just, or honorable, or wise). If I were to see her complexion, or her virtue as *good*—that is, *good-for* me—in some way (either because she might teach me virtue by association, or more cynically because people might simply *think* me more virtuous or beautiful due to our association), love quickly turns the beloved into an object to be had, a tool to better myself. Worse still, as we have seen in Chapter Three, even if I attempt to love her because I perceive her as *good-for*, this turns out to be a

⁵² It is interesting to note here, although somewhat tangential to the argument, that Plato too tries to limit desire's role in eros by encouraging lovers from refraining to indulge in sexual pleasure. Pleasure for Plato does not play nearly as central a role as jouissance does for 20th century philosophers. However, Plato never attempts to rid eros of desire. The desire for the beloved remains a central facet of Platonic love, even when its fulfillment is discouraged. As we saw in chapter one, Plato does not deny the benefits of eros even to those who do occasionally indulge in sexual pleasure.

⁵³ This love can, at this point, be called *eros* only equivocally. It now refers to a very different set of principles than it did for Plato. Nevertheless, it remains true that both are speaking of the same phenomenon. Contemporary philosophers have drawn the division line differently than Plato, but they are still attempting to carve up the same bit of reality.

mistake. Love cannot offer me any good. At best, it offers me nothing, and at worst it offers evil. No—I must love her virtue *because it is virtue*, love her beauty *because it is beauty*, and not because it may impact or benefit me. But this, as I have said, reduces love to the mere admiration of beauty.⁵⁴

It is this constriction that leads Beauvoir to define authentic love in what sounds very much like terms of friendship, where each lover is called on to respect the other's freedom. It is why authentic love's highest command becomes not interfering with, confining, or inhibiting the other's self-transcendence. I am good without my beloved, and he has nothing which can make me better, nothing that is *good-for*. Instead, I recognize in him what I see in myself. Self-achieved authenticity and transcendence. I admire him for it, but I do not desire it. Even Lacan, who ordinarily (as we saw) wishes to show that a love that seeks beauty ends up being unsuccessful, notes that beauty (as the object of love in Plato), is “the last barrier or mask before death,” that it halts desire, and is closer to the Real—and therefore Evil, as we shall soon address in more detail—than it is to the Good.⁵⁵ Thus, even before we discover that beauty too is unsatisfying, we have already brought a halt to the desire of the Good, placing love (and in particular, the sexual restrictions of courtly love) as a mask and a barrier, holding back the terror of the Real, of evil and of death.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Barney speaks of this as “‘dead’ admiration” (“Notes on Plato,” 374), a view she attributes to Polus in the *Gorgias*, when he claims that injustice is shameful (*aischion*, the antonym of *kalon*), but better (*ameinon*, the comparative of *agathon*), at 368e-374d (371), i.e. indicating that justice may be beautiful, but it is not good, or at least, not good in proportion to its beauty.

⁵⁵ Fink, *Lacan on Love*, 129, also cf 134. Referencing Lacan, *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 217: “the beautiful is closer to evil than to the good.”

⁵⁶ As noted previously, there is not space to go in depth about the Real in opposition to the Imaginary or Symbolic, except to note here that Lacan sees it as the *unmediated* experience of otherness. It is the body, not as seen or signified, but as pure flesh. It is against this void of meaning that we construct the barriers of taboos, ethical commands, and a system of symbols such as beauty.

The Good instead remains with what remains of eros once the interpersonal, *philia*-aspects have been torn away from it: sexual desire or *jouissance*.⁵⁷ Plato, as I have shown in Part I, would not endorse this connection in whole: There, eros—sexual desire—led to the Good because it was transformed through its joining together with *philia* and the admiration of the beautiful that constitutes contemplation.⁵⁸ Without that transformation, eros is never a divine *mania*, it is never the heavenly eros that Pausanias speaks of. Instead it is all too human: the pursuit of pleasure or benefit; the *erastes* finds an *eromenos* in order to relieve his desires, to find pleasure. The *eromenos* consents because society tells him it is a requirement if he is to become a good citizen. He can expect favors and consideration for socially and politically respectable positions in return for submission. What good remains is at best lesser goods and more often than not merely perceived goods.

The Platonic rejection is continued by the authors considered in these chapters, who—with the notable exception of Lacan, who we will discuss separately—all see ethics as something separate from eros. They are separate, not just because ethics doesn't involve eros but because, by its very nature, eros presents itself as *unethical*. It is the erosion of alterity, which becomes for the 20th-century continental writers the new basis for ethics. In this context ethics is too often portrayed as the rejection of a communal dependence and the assertion that each person, in his or her own self-standing, can achieve authenticity/transcendence/etc. Ethics becomes characterized by a “letting-be” which leaves no room for the desire for unification. ‘Desire and Ethics’ becomes an opposition

⁵⁷ The potential differences between these terms, and how they are employed across different authors, is irrelevant for this point.

⁵⁸ That is to say, as Barney argues, admiration is not dead for Plato, precisely because Beauty is not disconnected from the Good.

never anticipated by Plato, for whom desire for the Good is the vehicle for leading us to virtue.

So it is clear that, if eros-as-sexuality retains a hold on the good, it does not keep hold of the *ethical good*, the *ultimate* good for the best life. But nor are we able to return this to love-as-relation, except that we might perhaps love someone because *she* is ethically good (a possible kind of beauty). But this cannot mean, as I have just argued, that we love her because *by loving her*, I might be made ethically good. To do this would illicitly return the *good-for* to love. Admiration will never result in conversion; I am not made beautiful by observing beauty, whether it is a painting or an ethical person.

But doesn't admiration *motivate* us to become beautiful? Perhaps by loving the virtuous person, I will come to desire to *also* be beautiful. Perhaps. But the cause of this motivation is not essentially based in love. I could just as easily gain this same desire by observing a total stranger. Nor is the motivation itself erotic. My love is not my motivation to better myself; it is only my admiration of something already beautiful. Thus, if love inspires us to desire to become better, it is only in a tangential sense; only in a way that would cause us to say that anything that might cause us to become motivated is the basis of betterment. For example, I might become motivated to get in better physical shape if, upon climbing a flight of stairs, I find myself exhausted. But none, I suspect, are willing to call climbing stairs (or the exhaustion caused by it) the basis or cause of physical fitness; it is merely the occasion during which an independent motivation arose. Just as I could desire physical fitness without ever encountering stairs, I could desire to become the

ethical person without ever having loved. And this latter point is a thesis which Plato would never accept.⁵⁹

Thus, sex and love not only both ultimately fail to accomplish their individual goals, they are both predicated on a more original failure: a failure of the Platonic project's overall goal of developing ethics, as a result of the separation of the good and the beautiful, of desire and admiration. If love-as-relational cannot give rise to ethics, it is no surprise that it fails to play any role of importance in the best life, and in fact turns out (as seen in Chapter Three), to often be directly opposed to the best life. Similarly if, as pure desire, sexual-eros turns out to be directly unethical by erasing otherness, it is no surprise that we find it impossible to unite with the beloved in a way that lets each remain their own self. Eros, it turns out, was doomed to failure and impossibility the moment it was split into two halves.

§4.2: Lacan and Psychoanalytic Ethics

There is one apparent exception to this final claim about eros and ethics, however: Lacan's account, which has led at least one commentator to claim that "our relation to the moral law is profoundly 'erotic.'"⁶⁰ But to see how this claim does no better in terms of salvaging a Platonically erotic ethics, we will have to dive further into what Lacan might mean by this.

⁵⁹ While Plato *does* think that loving something beautiful will lead us to want to become more beautiful, this is only because he has already linked the good and beauty, admiration and desire. Without this link there is no sense to something like "creative desire," (seen, for example, in Diotima's turn to eros as a desire to give birth) and the division of the two partially explains the focus on desire as lack in Levinas and others we will see in the next part. As Barney explains her main thesis, for Plato, our recognition of a things beauty should lead us to recognize that it *must*, as a result, be good as well.

⁶⁰ Kesel, *Eros and Ethics*, 6.

For Lacan, ethics is erotic, not because it is through eros that we become ethical, but because eros—desire—is the very content of ethics. The goal of the analyst, he says, is not to instruct the analysand in the nature of the Good, but to reveal his desires,⁶¹ to make his desires explicit, so that he can openly desire. For this reason, he upholds the Marquis de Sade’s ‘erotic’ stories as the “truth” of Kantian ethics.⁶² Similarly, at the very start of his seminar, Lacan makes clear that the ‘truth’ of Aristotelian ethics is not in eudaimonia, the good, or the beautiful, but in its opening statement that all pursuits “aim at” the good (or even more clearly, that all men *desire* to know, in the *Physics*).⁶³ Ethics is about desire not—as Aristotle himself claims—because its origin is in the ordering of desire, but because its very content and goal is desire.⁶⁴

That the goal of this desire cannot be the Good—which is to say that Lacan’s erotic ethics is not Plato’s erotic ethics—is most clear in the ways that Lacan develops and departs from Freud in saying that desire, *jouissance*, reaches *beyond* the pleasure principle, beyond happiness, beyond the Good, eventually reaching toward pure evil. It is for this reason, as we saw with love, that Lacan notes that Beauty is more closely connected to Evil than to the Good.⁶⁵ Instead, Lacan speaks of desire circling a lack, enjoying its own enjoyment, perverting any object presented as the supreme good. Desire perverts it

⁶¹ Kesel, *Eros and Ethics*, 5.

⁶² Kesel, *Eros and Ethics*, 104. Cf. for example, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 80: “in brief, Kant is of the same opinion as Sade,” or Lacan’s essay “Kant with Sade.”

⁶³ Lacan sets as a goal for the seminar as a whole “to consider why he [Aristotle] emphasized the problem of pleasure, its function in the mental economy of ethics from the beginning. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960* (Norton: 1992).

⁶⁴ This change also exemplifies why the very word ‘eros’ has become problematic post-psychoanalysis, as in their content, Platonic and Psychoanalytic eros share almost nothing in common, except a basic link to passion and sexuality.

⁶⁵ *Lacan on Love*, 129, referencing Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 217: “When one aims for the center of moral experience, the beautiful is closer to evil than to good.”

because it treats the object (whether it is an object or a person), as a *sexual* object. It desires it not to possess, but to derive enjoyment from it.

Thus, our desire will never be satisfied by an *achievement* of happiness, nor of the Good; our ethical commands are not (as they would be for Plato, or a more traditional reading of Aristotle) designed to aid in the achievement of happiness, but instead, for the creation of pleasure. Ethical laws are nothing but taboos, placing a protective wall between us and the Evil toward which desire moves. The Supreme Good (which is only a created fiction), Lacan explains, is like a dam that protects us from the suffering that would result from surpassing it, from reaching toward evil.⁶⁶ And yet, the dam fails to do what it intends because, precisely by putting the prohibition in place, the possibility of enjoyment through violating the command is created. In the creation of courtly love, for example, we create a *sexual* enjoyment—*jouissance*—that can be found in romantic pursuit itself by erecting barriers against actual consummation by substituting in the woman to the place of the Real—the Evil toward which our desire really aims.⁶⁷ This pleasure would not exist, Lacan argues, if the taboo against sex were not in place. It is not the possibility of sex which excites us, but the possibility of *prohibited* sex, the possibility of what we cannot have.

Much more can be said of Lacan's psychoanalytic ethics and his theory of drives, but we can already pull out the two relevant conclusions from this short digression. Firstly, Lacan, just like those thinkers discussed in the previous section, sees that the Good will always be reduced to an economy of the goods in eros. He does not, however, wish to

⁶⁶ Kesel, *Eros and Ethics*, 134.

⁶⁷ "The 'elevation' of the woman in courtly love is not because she represents an absolute value in herself but precisely because she *does not*. *Eros and Ethics*, 179. See Lacan's section "Courtly Love as Anamorphosis" in *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.

separate eros from the Beautiful entirely. It is true that beauty is what is sought in love, and, Lacan concludes from this, ethics is found in “the function of the beautiful,” and not “the function of the good.”⁶⁸ Immediately clear from this is that—whatever else Lacan believes—the original point that the Good and the Beautiful have been split apart remains true even in his account. Less clear is that Beauty has become separated from eros. However, Lacan does not view the “function of beauty” as grounding an erotic ethics by being its object, but quite the contrary, as we have seen. Beauty is admired, not desired, and as a result, Lacan says, it has the power to paralyze us, to stop us from pursuing any further.⁶⁹

Eros and ethics are created by the admiration of beauty (which is the proper object of love), not because either is connected to beauty, but because beauty marks out our eros’ territory.⁷⁰ By erecting the mask of beauty in front of the Evil or the Real, a space is created in which we can construct our taboos and seek our erotic, desiring pleasure without reaching all the way toward the Real. For example, in love we may admire the beautiful Lady, which in turn creates the rules of courtly love to provide us with a perverse *jouissance* of romantic pursuit in the absence of the possibility of sex. Beauty tells us where the limit is; where we must stop to avoid transgression, and thus, creates ethical prohibitions. Within that realm, eros creates a new economy of goods through its taboos and prohibitions. Eros therefore does not admire beauty, it desires the

⁶⁸ See the sections with these names in *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.

⁶⁹ “It keeps us under the spell of a beauty that paralyzes, for a moment, our envious struggle for the good,” Kesel, *Eros and Ethics*, 200.

⁷⁰ “At the level of sublimation the object is inseparable from imaginary and especially cultural elaborations. It is not just that the collectivity recognizes in them useful objects; it finds rather a space of relaxation where it may in a way delude itself on the subject of *das Ding*, colonize the field of *das Ding* with imaginary schemes. That is how collective, socially accepted sublimations operate.” *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 99. Cf. Kesel, *Ethics of Eros*, 153 “the law, precisely through its prohibition, makes *jouissance* possible.”

Good; and further, it substitutes (sublimates)—in place of the Good—a series of sexual goods. The ‘Function of Beauty’ that Lacan specifies is therefore merely to mark out a safe realm within which to pursue those goods without the risk of shooting too far, and ending up instead in Evil. Love and Eros work in tandem, but they do not ever become joined. We love (romantically) beauty (see Chapter Three), and out of this falls an economy of goods to be desired by (sexual) Eros.⁷¹ Sexual-eros, as in the previous discussion, remains a pursuit of goods, and passion-love remains an admiration of the beautiful, even if, for Lacan these two functions have a causal link not seen by the others.

In this context, we can once again see how the splitting of love and eros set each up for failure. Love, pretending to be a noble admiration of beauty, turns out to merely be a set of rules for creating eros, and, as Lacan says is “impotent . . . because it is not aware that it is but the desire to be One.”⁷² We love without realizing that its very function is to create an economy of sexual desire, to pervert the loved-object into a source of pleasure. Similarly, when the enjoyment of eros is linked so closely to taboo, and only seeks after its own enjoyment, we see that eros is doomed to fail the minute that the taboos fall. Every sexual object is at constant risk of becoming *boring*. It is no surprise, then, that Lacan will build an account of sex where the Other cannot be reached, cannot be *transgressed*, and yet, as we saw, this is not enough to save eros, and in fact, dooms it from the other direction.

⁷¹ It is important to note here that the economy of goods is not necessarily those things we find beautiful. In fact, both Freud and Lacan suggest that the mixing of the love object and sex object is perhaps impossible, there are “Madonnas” and there are “whores,” and the two “can never be united in any one woman. Where such a man loves, he does not desire, and vice versa,” Fink, *Lacan on Love*, 20, referencing Freud, “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love,” 183.

⁷² *Encore*, 6.

Secondly, following from this, we see that Lacan reverses the structure that Plato asserts: ethical culture grows out of eros. For Lacan, the opposite is true. Erotic enjoyment, *jouissance*, grows out of culture. It is cultural taboos that lead to the space for erotic pleasure. For the Platonic lover in the *Phaedrus*, it is the recognition of the beautiful boy as divine that leads to ethics, leads to the desire to erect an altar in the boy's honor, as well as the cultivation of modesty and wisdom. The lover's piety grows from his eros, the lover and beloved situate themselves in a newly created ethical community as a result of their original erotic encounter. For Lacan, the lover would desire to erect the altar *precisely and only because* society says he ought not. The boy would not appear desirable in this way if it were not for the fact that his approach would be considered a transgression. He is not led to ethics through his eros, but led to eros through the ethical commands and taboos.

§5 Conclusions and Stakes

Now that we have seen the various causes and features of an impossible eros, let us gather together some of the preceding points to look at the importance of this apparent rejection of Platonic eros. As I asked at the outset of Part II, 'for what reason has contemporary philosophy and culture soured on love?' If we can overcome this impossibility, it can only be by understanding and responding to the legitimate puzzles it has raised. We can now answer that question, having seen that the abandonment of a Platonic, erotic ethics resulted from two main developments: the more apparent reversal is the recognition of the need for an account of otherness. As seen at the end of Part I, this was already a problem within Plato's own work, when attempting to mediate between love

of an individual and love of some first principle. However, the urgency of this problem has now been amplified thanks to the more subtle reversal of the Platonic view seen in Chapter Four: the abandonment of any metaphysical aspects of love. The views discussed within the last two chapters largely eschew anything akin to Plato's Good beyond Being, and, as a result, Plato's connection between the Good and the Beautiful can no longer be maintained. What remained were simply good things and beautiful things. Without a common origin, there is no longer any reason to maintain that these are identical, or even necessarily coextensive categories. With eros now limited to being expressed toward specific beings, rather than a first principle, it becomes all the more urgent, in the case of love of persons, that we account for what love is *about*. No longer is the problem disguised by an ambiguity of whether love is about individuals or metaphysical principles. It has been judged (at least according to those holding to this theory) that only love of individuals is possible.

In part, these reversals have advanced our thinking of love, and there is a great deal to be commended. Again, as I stated at the outset, the goal here was not just to elaborate a new theory, but to see what it revealed about Plato's position and our interpretations of his texts. Here I want to suggest that we have seen three, interconnected points. The first point, which I have only hinted at throughout this part (and which will become an even larger issue in Part III) is that many of the flaws found in Plato seem to have the *Symposium* as their reference point. As I suggested in Part I, there may be a good reason to instead turn to the *Phaedrus* as our ground for a Platonic eros. The reason for this is clear in the second point clarified in this chapter: Plato's eros, they claim, cannot explain the love of individuals without it collapsing into love of a first principle. As we

saw in Part I, this was particularly problematic in the *Symposium*, where the text has traditionally lent itself to seeing the individual beloved falling away at the first stage of love's ascent. The rejection of 'philosophical eros' calls on us to reject the highly divisive interpretations (such as those of Vlastos or Nussbaum) that put Socrates and Alcibiades in direct opposition. Rather, we should be attempting to read the two together, seeing how philosophical and common love go together. However, as I argued there, and will continue to argue throughout the dissertation, this tension is better handled in the *Phaedrus*, and Plato's position is done a disservice when we do not take his remarks there into consideration. The failure of eros in this part is (I will argue) not necessarily a condemnation of Platonic eros, but more narrowly of certain interpretations of Socrates' intervention in the *Symposium*; they are simply more evidence that we should be turning instead to Plato's later dialogue, and taking seriously the changes we see in it. However, not all will be saved even in that case. This is due to the third issue raised here: in stressing the necessity that a philosophy of love be able to explain *interpersonal* love, these thinkers saw the need to make an addition to the philosophical vocabulary with the concept of alterity. Plato's eros (in either formulation) lent itself too easily to substitution, and alterity was proposed as one way of avoiding the relativization of love.⁷³

But, in these early accounts of alterity, we have seen that the introduction of a concept of otherness, rather than solidifying Platonic eros against its flaws, destroyed it all together. This was true in the general case, but exasperated when otherness was further developed to also refer to the otherness of sexual difference. Contrary to Lacan's claim that the *Symposium* could be a useful guiding light so long as we "assume that Greek love

⁷³ It is not, however, the only possible explanation. It would, for instance, be a worthwhile endeavor to examine to what extent something like Scotus' *haecceitas* might similarly resolve the issue.

allows us to isolate in a love relationship the two partners in the neuter,”⁷⁴ we saw that we cannot take sexual difference for granted, and that male and female experiences of eros must each be understood in their own way, if we are to ever hope of returning to a Platonic eros. This problem carried over also into the romantic aspects of love, as we saw that, given the presuppositions here, it is impossible for love to ever be mutual. The strict, negatively defined accounts of alterity leads to the conclusion that love cannot be ‘shared’ between two lovers—that two loves always remain two loves.

Further we saw how the erasure of a guiding principle akin to Plato’s Good beyond Being resulted in the two parts of eros—passion-love and sexual desire—coming unglued. One of the great benefits of Plato’s joining of the Good and the Beautiful is that it resolves a motivational problem: we are attracted to beautiful things, but only desire things that we perceive as good for us. Without the necessary link between the two, we are left to admit that there may well be beautiful things (such as virtue) that do not create a desire in us.⁷⁵ We could therefore conceivably love a virtuous person (that is, admire her beauty), without desiring to possess what she possess or to become like her. Without this connection, love cannot make a person ethical, except accidentally. For this reason we saw the explicit claims that love failed to give any benefit—and may in fact cause harm—to the beloved, resulting in its inevitable failure. To refute this claim, and return once more to an ethical eros, we will now have to move on to more recent accounts of alterity, to see how we might resurrect the possibility of eros.

⁷⁴ *Transference*, 34.

⁷⁵ See Barney, “Notes on Plato,” 371ff, where she discusses the example of Polus in the *Gorgias*, who finds it more beautiful to suffer injustice than to commit it, but that it is better to commit injustice than to suffer it (468e-474d). This indicates that, despite recognizing the *beauty* of being just, Polus does not necessarily recognize its goodness, and is thus not motivated to live the just life.

INTERLUDE 2: REFOUNDING EROS

Having seen how far early 20th century accounts of love differ from Plato's, we have now arrived at the lowest foundation of the question erotic ethics, and can begin to reconstruct a positive argument for Plato's overall position, while correcting for the errors rightly noticed in his own theory. Recall the three theses that will structure the ultimate claims of this dissertation:

1. Recognition of the Other is based on recognizing his or her beauty and goodness
2. Love of the Other is love of the Other *as* individual, not in light of some attribute
3. Love of the Other forms the basis of our entering into the ethical attitude.

While we saw that Plato held that eros leads to the formation of the ethical attitude in at least some form, in the case of each of these three theses, Plato's account failed to sufficiently delineate love of the other person as an individual from love of the form of Beauty or the Good beyond Being as metaphysical first principles.

In Part II, this failure has been problematized, and as a result, the Platonic praise of eros has been inverted. Far from being a route to wisdom, Sartre, Lacan and others claim that love endures only on the basis of the ignorance of the lovers, ignorance of who they really are, of what the best life is, and what the lover is promising and capable of delivering. What I have argued so far is that this inversion takes place because, unlike Plato, these philosophers no longer see a link between goodness and beauty. Rather than arguing for a broad definition of eros that responds to both, sexual desire and emotional love have been split in two, with the former responding to goods, attempting to possess them, while the latter responds to beautiful objects, always holding them at the distance of admiration. As a result neither half is able to succeed in leading to ethics. On the

contrary, sexual desire reduces the other into an object, while love places an impossible demand on the other, forcing him to choose between his own freedom and becoming the idealized object of love. In brief, from both sides of the issue, the first thesis has been strongly rejected: neither the recognition of a person as good (now always good-for) nor beautiful enabled us to reach the other person as Other. Without this first thesis, the second and third must necessarily fall.

The first step in overcoming these objections must therefore be to offer what has so far been missed: a description of non-destructive relations with the Other. Part II's split of goodness and beauty, on the other hand, is an indirect rejection of the Platonic project as a whole. The rejection of the Platonic role of love took eros to be essentially tied to an outdated metaphysics. Once the metaphysics (in particular the metaphysical link of the Good and the Beautiful) fell, it was seen as a necessary conclusion that Plato's eros fell with it. Thus, love was not directly attacked, but only the victim of a more fundamental criticism. To resurrect the ethical role of eros, then, I will attempt to show that it is possible to relink the good and the beautiful without reinstating them as Platonic Ideas, and therefore that it is possible to hold the first thesis from the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions of the 20th and 21st century. In accomplishing this, the truth of the third thesis will also be shown, and I will conclude by showing that the Platonic role of eros in ethics can still find a home in a decidedly non-Platonic form of philosophical description. That is, it will no longer be possible to reject Platonic eros and ethics simply by rejecting his metaphysical project.

Yet, as we shall see in Part III, these goals have so far not been accomplished at an equal rate. As accounts of alterity have been further developed, the claim regarding love's

failure—its impossibility—has frequently been rejected as a misjudgment due to deficient accounts of alterity. This new account of alterity is given in terms which bear a striking similarity, and occasionally a direct link to, Plato's discussions about the Good beyond Being. Despite these connections however, it will become clear that Levinas' Good and Marion's God, although discussed in the context of Platonic and later Neoplatonic patristic discussions of the Good, are not mere reassertions of the Platonic Forms, but rather, a critical adaptation and re-development of the term in a radically new context

However, this success will highlight just how far removed these new discussions are from the Platonic position, as a result of the continued split between goodness and beauty. Neither Levinas nor Marion performs a similar recovery of the beautiful, and instead, the division between the good and the beautiful becomes the basis of a split between ethics and love. In separating love and ethics, philosophy has effectively separated the public and private spheres. Further, eros has been separated from the public sphere in such a way that eros can no longer exert an influence on ethical development. The continued division between goodness and the beauty has made it impossible for the link between eros and ethics to be seen. As we shall now see, love has so far been saved only at the expense of hiding it away.

PART III: UNSPEAKABLE EROS: A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

A Frenchman does not philosophize when he is writing pornography. Most of the time he is satisfied with a happy Epicureanism which takes pleasures for what they are¹

CHAPTER 5: THE RECOVERY OF THE GOOD

The pushback against the Sartrean project of the authentic *ego* began almost immediately² with Levinas' *Existence and Existents*.³ However, it would be more extensively attacked in his later works *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being* (1974). It is in these works that Levinas began his own project arguing for ethics, rather than ontology, as first philosophy. For the purposes here, we will need to deal only obliquely with this inversion, insofar as it directly impacts the question of eros. What will be of importance for this section (before shifting, in the following chapter, to Levinas' account of love and eros themselves), is that, with the focus shifted to ethics, Levinas' own reading of Neoplatonism saw the idea of the Good beyond Being returned to a place of prominence, although now understood, not in a system of Forms, but in connection with phenomenology, and, in particular, to Levinas' careful development of alterity as a

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, "The Understanding of Spirituality in French and German Culture," 5.

² And, along the same line, against Heidegger's focus on the being of *dasein*.

³ Published in 1947, it was written during Levinas' imprisonment during World War II. This time spent in the stalag, Levinas offers in the preface, is the "explanation for the absence of any consideration of those philosophical works published, with so much impact, between 1940 and 1945." We must assume he means, among others, Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, published in 1943.

principle part of philosophy. It is this idea of the Good, which I will address in §1 of the current chapter.⁴

However, whereas Levinas' Good beyond Being has unquestionable Platonic roots, there is a second, more recent attempt to return the Good beyond Being to its former place which also deserves attention: Jean-Luc Marion's early development of a *God Without Being*, the title of one of his early works, that is, a God *beyond* Being. While this too, has neoplatonic roots, they are more primarily *Christian* Neoplatonic roots, unquestionably rooted in scriptural discussion and the writings of the patristic period and the early middle ages, in particular the work of Dionysius. While this second account, which we will address in §2, differs significantly from Levinas,' both show the possibility of returning to something like Plato's Good beyond Being within the new vocabulary of phenomenology. While this recovery makes it possible to speak of ethics from the point of view of phenomenology, as we shall see in the following chapter, neither Levinas nor Marion will return eros fully to its position alongside ethics. Both authors ultimately conclude that while ethics involves participation in a realm of discourse, eros remains mute.

This continued 'unspeakability' of eros—which as we will see in the first two sections is closely connected to its being outside of ethics—results, it seems to me, from the overlooked need of recovering the Beautiful alongside of the Good. The beautiful, addressed in §3, is still seen as tied to Platonic notions of Form and being, and in philosophies that are now trying to overcome ontology in favor of ethics, that means it must be left behind. But as we have seen in the first two parts, beauty plays a crucial role

⁴ The discussions of Levinas' alterity will be reserved, in large part, to the following chapter.

in the success of eros, and its continued absence will account for the view of eros that we will see as we transition into the second chapter of this part.

In contrast the previous part, which presented a theory of love as largely contrary to Plato's, a roadblock which needs to be overcome if we are to return to a form of Platonism, this chapter and the one that follow it will, it becomes clear, represent a partial overcoming. My disagreements in this part will largely be in the form of minor corrections or calls to go further, rather than a call to begin anew from the ground up, as was often the case in Part II. There, love failed as a result of the premises it was based on. Goodness and beauty have been split apart and removed from their roles explaining ethics, eros, and the connection between the two. What we will see in this chapter is that phenomenology has found new ways of speaking of the Good as the experience of alterity, but failed to find a similar phenomenological explanation of the role of beauty. As a result, in the following chapter, we will see that these later phenomenologists read eros in a more positive light than the philosophers addressed in Part II, but still do not see it as playing a role in ethics. Finally, in the final Part, offering a new account of phenomenological beauty as well as the effects of the erotic encounter with it.

§1: Levinas' Good Beyond Being

One of Levinas' most revolutionary ideas for phenomenology is his recovery of Plato's Good beyond Being as a model for the encounter with alterity.⁵ Interestingly, despite being an important metaphor in each of his three main books: *Existence and Existents*, *Totality and Infinity*, and *Otherwise than Being*, it is not until the third that we truly get lengthy analysis of the term itself. In the first two texts, the references remain much more oblique, and require the reader to be familiar with the Platonic discussions of the Good to fully see how it is employed in Levinas' writings. Here, looking forward to chapter 6, where love will be described as taking place in "the night of the erotic"⁶ it will be most important to look at how Levinas uses the Platonic imagery of light and distance to develop the Good beyond Being, changing it from Plato's metaphysical first principle and into the description of what is always behind the encounter with alterity in the face of the Other. The Good is one of Levinas' most common names for that which leaves its trace on the face of the Other.⁷

⁵ Marry-Ann Webb, "Eros and Ethics: Levinas' Reading of Plato's Good Beyond Being" is perhaps the fullest account on Levinas' reading of the Good beyond Being, but there are substantial differences between the account offered there from my own, particularly regarding the role of eros. It also does not contain any references to *Existence and Existents*. Deborah Achtenberg, "The Eternal and the New: Socrates and Levinas on Desire and Need," in *Levinas and the Ancients* contains a thesis closer to my own regarding differing views of eros, although the section directly involving the Good Beyond Being is quite short. The last important source, Sarah Allen, *The philosophical sense of transcendence : Levinas and Plato on loving beyond being*, takes up the question of the Good Beyond Being in and through the questions of eros, desire and transcendence. On many points I am in tacit agreement with her work, although here I focus instead on the importance of the Good in the immanent life, rather than as the target of Metaphysical Desire or the end point of Transcendence.

⁶ *TI*, 258

⁷ Levinas will later speak of the 'Trace of God' or the Holy as additional names for this.

§1.1: *Existence and Existents*

Levinas' recovery of the Good is made clear already in the preface of *Existence and Existents* (*EE*), where he states that “the Platonic formula that situates the Good beyond Being serves as the general guideline for this research.”⁸ For Levinas to complete his project of ethics as first philosophy, he will need, first and foremost to dislodge Being from the privileged place at the top of food chain. Plato's formulation of the Good beyond Being, the Good *without* Being, provides just that, a principle, at once ethical and ‘non-existent.’ The good neither simply ‘unreal’ nor a transcendence as if raised to a higher kind of existence or being, but an ‘*ex-cendence*,’ a “departure from Being and from the categories which describe it.”⁹

Despite this guideline, Levinas, true to the second half of his prefatory remark, the Good beyond Being “does not make up [the book's] content,” and Levinas mentions the Good directly only three times in the rest of the work.¹⁰ Levinas' goal is not to recover the Good by redescribing it or investing it with a new meaning, but by *using it*. The question of what the Good *is* is already misleading, since the Good *isn't* (it is otherwise than being). What is important is how it functions. Thus, the larger focus of *EE* is not the Good itself, but its light. As he says toward the beginning of chapter two: “the wonder

⁸ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Existence and Existents* (Duquesne University Press, 1978). 15 (from now on, cited as *EE*). For more general accounts of Levinas' encounter with ancient philosophy, and Plato in particular, see Brian Schroeder and Silvia Benso eds., *Levinas and the Ancients* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Tanja Staehler, *Plato and Levinas: The Ambiguous Out-Side of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Adriaan Peperzak, *Platonic Transformations with and after Hegel, Heidegger and Levinas* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).

⁹ *EE*, 15. One should contrast the language of the *Phaedrus* here of the *ontos ousia ousa*, which I have, in Part I, equated to the Good Beyond Being. I do not, however, see this as a refutation of either my argument in Part I, nor of Levinas' own here. As I attempted to argue there, we need not hold Plato to a standard of clarity that simply cannot be met due to its subject matter. Even the *ontos ousia ousa*, despite the triplet of being-words, is clearly *ex-cendent*, resting outside the cosmos, outside of the whole. And, as Levinas notes, “ex-cendence and the Good necessarily have a foothold in being.”

¹⁰ Excluding irrelevant usages, and a few references to the ‘good will.’

which Plato put at the origin of philosophy is an astonishment before the natural and the intelligible. It is the very intelligibility of light that is astonishing.”¹¹ Here we have returned, unquestionably, to the analogy of the sun in the *Republic*, the Good which shone on everything giving it its being and truth.

The light comes from the beyond, beyond truth and being, and therefore, our response to it “do[es] not take form like answers to questions,” since it is the very condition for intelligibility. It is only within the light that questioning becomes possible, illuminating a space of possible relations. For Levinas, illumination is the right word here, as the light does not shine into the void, but into the dark; “light is doubled up with a night,” the night of being.¹² The night (an important concept in itself, which we will return to when we discuss Levinas’ phenomenology of eros, where he speaks of a second, erotic night)—what will soon be linked to the *il y a*¹³—is the realm of Being, which “is essentially alien and strikes against us. We undergo its suffering embrace like the night . . . There is a pain in Being.”¹⁴ Being, like the dark, closes in on us and traps us, and it is only the shining of the Good, *astonishment*, which free us. Not in order to understand the darkness, but to escape it, to escape to the light of the Good. Philosophy as the questioning of being (*pace* Heidegger, Sartre, and others) is to do nothing but grope around in the dark, never even trying to escape it. To ‘shine light’ on the darkness is to destroy it and leave it behind.

¹¹ *EE*, 22.

¹² Importantly, however, Levinas will move away from this illumination and light metaphor in *Totality and Infinity*, replacing it with discourse.

¹³ the portion of *EE* cited here was originally published as an article entitled “Il y a.”

¹⁴ All quotes, *EE*, 22.

Levinas notes that, not realizing this destructive nature of the light of the Good, “Western philosophy and civilization never gets out of ‘numbers and beings’ The problem of the Good is formulated as a problem of ends.”¹⁵ This structure of ‘negative desire,’ the desire *qua* lack going all the way back to Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium* is exactly what Levinas will seek to overturn throughout his work. We are not led steadily along a path to the Good, we do not transcend to another place; there is a moment of rupture and shock as we are dislocated, removed, and separated from our comfortable surroundings, without arriving at another ‘place.’ The light of the Good does not draw us to it, nor do we follow it like the magi to its origin. The light breaks in and overcomes us. These moments are “events that break with the world, such as the encounter with the other.”¹⁶ This last quote shows that Levinas is already thinking of the Good in connection to the other in *EE*, although its meaning is not as clear as in later texts. The Good, ever only seen through its trace left in the world, breaks us out of the egoistic night of being. As he notes in his preface, “the relationship with the other [that is] a movement toward the Good.”¹⁷ Thus, we can already begin to situate Levinas’ repurposing of Platonism in the context of what we have said in Part I. The Good is not achieved alone, nor directly. Our route to the Good is always inscribed in the world of beings, as “excendence and the Good necessarily have a foothold in being.”¹⁸ Our relation to the Good is always mediated— experienced not directly, but through the other, the one who (as he will develop much later in *Otherwise than Being*) has been marked by the Good: “the trace [of

¹⁵ *EE*, 38.

¹⁶ *EE*, 39.

¹⁷ *EE*, 15.

¹⁸ *EE*, 15.

the Good] lights up as the face of a neighbor.”¹⁹ He has also strongly broken with Diotima’s description of desire (including the desire for the Good) as a desire born of lack. Instead, the Good breaks with and begins reversing intentionality²⁰ and desire completely, overwhelming rather than calling.

As Levinas notes later in *EE* that “in Plato, Love, a child of need, retains the features of destitution. Its negativity is the simple ‘less’ of need, and not the very movement unto alterity.”²¹ That is, Platonic eros will fail the test (as we saw through the analyses of Part II) if we are looking for our relation to the Other—and, by transposition, to the Good—because it fails to break out of the desire of means and ends. “Even love,” he notes earlier “is conceived as the attraction of the desirable, and the ‘young man’ and the ‘beautiful girl’ only pretexts.”²² Thus, Levinas’ reading of Platonism, already in the brief discussions of *EE*, is clearly targeted at recovering the ethical aspects discussed by Plato in light of the criticism seen in the previous part, and even already in the interpretive questions raised at the end of Part I. A clear choice for the individual other over the universal Form is made, and interpretations that would see the beloved used as a tool for my own transcendence are rejected.

Levinas then promises, cryptically, that “eros, when separated from the Platonic interpretation which completely fails to recognize the feminine, can be the theme of a

¹⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2013), 12 (cited as *OB*).

²⁰ Marion develops the idea of a ‘reversed intentionality’ even further in his own work.

²¹ *EE*, 85. Although Plato never seems to have broken out of the intentionality structure, we could see the origins for such an overturning in the being overcome by beauty in the *Phaedrus* (251a).

²² *EE*, 38.

philosophy which . . . will concern us elsewhere.”²³ What is clear from this is that the standard ‘Platonic eros,’ the way it is ordinarily interpreted, will not work. If eros is to lead us to the Good, it will have to be reinterpreted and redeveloped. What remains unclear, as we will see in the following sections, is whether Levinas actually delivers on this promise, or if his views on eros have shifted even further in the interim.

§1.2: *Totality and Infinity*

It is not until his next major work, *Totality and Infinity* (*TI*), that these themes regarding the Good start to take on their full significance.²⁴ While the text is now dominated by the titular concept of Infinity, as the name for what transcends the totality of being, frequent mention to the same light-metaphor of *EE* is maintained, while the Good or Good beyond Being remains a term more often alluded to than directly referenced.

Although the Good is absent from the original preface, there is a discussion of the infinite as the subject of an “eschatology [that] institutes a relation with being *beyond the totality*,” and which “is a relationship with a *surplus always exterior to the totality*.”²⁵ The totality is Levinas’ term for the realm of being, and thus it is safe to say that the infinite here

²³ Some remarks are worth making here, but which affect the current analysis only tangentially: as I attempted to show in Part I, Platonic eros in the *Symposium* does not completely ignore the feminine, making it increasingly, young, feminine, and child-bearing as Diotima’s speech progresses. I am thus inclined to interpret Levinas’ remark regarding eros’ “Platonic interpretation” to be read as an ‘interpretation of Platonic eros’ rather than ‘Plato’s interpretation of eros.’

²⁴ As Peperzak notes, “the Good beyond Being [continues] to dominate all of Levinas’s work, but Platonic reminiscences are less frequent in the later work. They are found in his early writings, and they abound in *Totalité et Infini* . . . but diminish thereafter . . . This reticence did not undo the Platonism of his earlier work, however. We may therefore conclude that Plato’s actuality is proven by at least one of the key figures of twentieth-century philosophy.” “The Platonism of Emmanuel Levinas” in Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, *Platonic Transformations: With and after Hegel, Heidegger, and Levinas* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 119-120.

²⁵ *TI*, 22, emphasis original.

names the same thing the Good did in *EE*.²⁶ The role of light is also developed further, with *TI* taking up the ethical question in a much more direct way than *EE* did. Levinas speaks of the “‘vision’ of eschatology,” that is, of the beyond being, and explains that “the experience of morality does not proceed from this vision—it *consummates* this vision; ethics is an optics.”²⁷ As we will see shortly, this statement foreshadows Levinas’ switch from visual to auditory language, replacing the ‘light’ with ‘discourse.’ The vision of the Good does not lead us to the ‘true virtue’ of Plato in successive process; the Good does not transform us into ethical persons, sending us back down into the cave. Rather, the experience of ‘true virtue’ and the vision of the Good are concomitant. The one *is* the other. As he says shortly after, this claim amounts to attempting to destroy the division drawn between theory and practice. Learning about (that is, having a vision of) the Good cannot be accomplished except through practice, and morality cannot be practiced without simultaneously experiencing a vision of (that is, learning about) the Good itself.²⁸ The whole of *TI*, Levinas notes in the preface, is aimed at describing the nature and method of this vision.²⁹ As we will see shortly, the concomitance of theory and practice is a result (as was already the case in *EE*) of Levinas’ location of the Good behind the face of the Other. As he says much later, “things have a form, are seen *in* the light—silhouettes or profiles; the face signifies *itself*.”³⁰ This means that, for Levinas, the face is not shone

²⁶ Ignoring the question of whether Levinas’ understanding of the underlying reality has changed or developed in any way between the two texts.

²⁷ *Totality and Infinity* (*TI*), 23, emphasis original.

²⁸ *TI*, 29.

²⁹ *TI*, 23.

³⁰ *TI*, 140.

upon by the Sun, but shines as an appearance of (or, in the later language of *OB*, a trace of) the Sun itself.³¹

That is not to say that the face *is* the Good Beyond Being, as if the Good has entered into the world or that the transcendent has become immanent but that our ‘vision’ of the face opens up the vision of transcendence. As Levinas says in Part III of *TI*, finally specifying the nature of this vision:

if the transcendent cuts across sensibility, if it is openness preeminently, if its vision is the vision of the very openness of being, it cuts across the vision of forms and can be stated neither in terms of contemplation nor in terms of practice. It is the face; its revelation is speech. The relation with the Other alone introduces a dimension of transcendence.³²

The Other leads us to recognize the transcendent, just as was the case in the preface of *EE*, where “the relationship with the other [is] a movement toward the Good.”³³ The transcendent only ‘enters into’ the immanent as a rupture, as a break with the immanence of being. Not as the descent of the infinite into the finite, or the Good into being, as the Incarnation of the God-man.³⁴ The other “introduces the dimension of transcendence,” he is not the transcendent *made immanent*.

Even more interestingly in that quote, however, Levinas here abandons the metaphor of ‘vision’ altogether. The ‘vision’ of the Infinite (the Good Beyond Being, the

³¹ This claim also amounts to (as will become important in §3) saying that the face does not have a Form, as it was the sun shining on the world that gave them their being, their form, in the *Republic*.

³² *TI*, 193.

³³ *EE*, 15.

³⁴ As Levinas says, “the Other is not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed.” *TI*, 79. Elsewhere, in a talk entitled “The God-Man,” Levinas remarks that “The relation with the Infinite is not a knowledge, but a proximity, preserving the excessiveness of the uncontainable which grazes the surface,” again affirming that the “transcendent . . . is the face” only as showing what can’t truly enter into being. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other* (Columbia University Press, 1998), 58.

Other) isn't actually a vision at all, but discourse.³⁵ It is in *speech* that we 'see' the face of the Other. Levinas thus links vision of the Good to the discourse with the Other, tying together the two halves of ethics. As he says, this vision, this discourse "can be stated neither in terms of contemplation nor in terms of practice." True to his word in the preface, ethics no longer contains two halves: theory-vision and practice-discourse, but one, combined element; theory-as-practice, vision-as-discourse.

With ethics now 'defined' as discourse, we can see more of Levinas' reinterpretation of Platonism: what Levinas sees as important from Plato is not the sight of the Good, the Beautiful, or the 'truly being being,' but the account of the speeches they produce. In the case of the *Republic*, the descriptions given when the philosopher returns to the cave, in the *Symposium*, the speeches that are birthed all along the ascent, until we reach the top, when instead of speeches (or, as Levinas sees it, as a kind of speech) the philosopher gives birth to "True Virtue." Similarly, the whole of the *Phaedrus* happens in the context of speech giving, culminating in an extended treatment of rhetoric and dialectic. For Levinas, the question of the unity of the *Phaedrus*, then, would be easy: it is the unity of ethics as theory and practice: speaking and the science of speaking, the two halves of ethics itself.³⁶

Given that our contact with the Good is now in discourse, and not in vision, it is perhaps surprising that we do not get a more extended treatment of the Good in *Totality and Infinity*, with the explicit references to the Good being no more numerous than the

³⁵ Discourse already played a small role in *Existence and Existents*, but it is less clearly developed as the main way of knowing the Good, in large part due to the concept of the other playing a much more minor role there. We will revisit his comments about discourse in that text in chapter 6, as they play a much more direct role in his comments on eros in that text.

³⁶ Levinas, on the other hand (as we shall shortly see) would be less comfortable putting eros at the center of ethical speech-giving.

much briefer *EE*. But Levinas will inevitably depart from Plato, however, is that we can no longer talk of speeches apart from their speakers. Levinas' discourse is not philosophical dialogue, but the direct face-to-face with the Other, the command that says 'thou shalt not kill.' Thus, to write *about* the Good is of no interest to Levinas' project. Nevertheless, he rhetorically asks at the end of his 1987 preface to the German edition whether the project of *TI* had

not been foreshadowed by the Good beyond essence and above the Ideas of Book VI of Plato's *Republic*? A Good in relation to which being itself appears. A Good, from which being draws the illumination of its manifestation and its ontological force. A Good in view of which "every soul does all that it does."³⁷

Once again, just as in *EE*, we have Levinas stating in a preface to his work that the whole project is captured, in some form, by what Plato means by the Good beyond Being. Thus, we should continue to look at the text itself to ask, if Levinas believes this to be the case, what can we discern regarding Levinas' interpretation of the Good, and how he has repurposed it in service of a phenomenological description of alterity.

In the text itself, the Good itself makes its first meaningful appearance in the section "The Face to Face—an Irreducible Relation," in which Levinas sets out to indicate precisely how he understands the idea of the Infinite, indicating that "in Plato it is found in the transcendence of the Good with respect to being," and lamenting that "it should have served as a foundation for a pluralist philosophy in which the plurality of being would not disappear into the unity of number nor integrated into a totality."³⁸ It is precisely this sort of pluralist philosophy that Levinas himself seeks to build.

³⁷ "Preface to the German Edition of *Totality and Infinity*," 200, published in *Entre Nous*. Levinas' change from writing, in *EE* "le Bien au-delà de l'être" to "le Bien au-delà de l'essence," i.e. from the Good beyond being to the Good beyond essence is mediated by the publication of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* 15 years prior to the publication of the preface in question.

³⁸ *TI*, 80.

Levinas' most explicit description of the Good, however, comes in the section "Separation and Absoluteness," where he once again tries to describe the nature of the separation, the nature of the 'irreducible relation' of Self and Other. As he says, "Greek metaphysics conceived the Good as separate from the totality of essences, and in this way . . . it caught sight of a structure such that totality could admit of a beyond."³⁹ Levinas thus recovers from Greek metaphysics, not necessarily a *ontological* first principle but a way of talking about the un-totalizable, that which escapes return to the same. In other places, Levinas employs Descartes' idea of the Infinite to the same end, in both cases using both as stand-ins, on the level of experience, not of some transcendent God or reality toward which we go, but for what stands behind the face of the Other we confront in the streets. The Other signals transcendence, Infinity, the Good—signals to us that our egoist drive toward the Totality of the Same is unethical, which is only possible through violence.⁴⁰

Thus, Levinas once again attacks the philosophical discourse of ontology and sameness not by exploiting a flaw in the arguments, but by inverting the whole orientation of the self. Whereas someone like Sartre asks the question of how the self-standing ego relate to the Other, Levinas instead asks the rhetorical question of how there could ever be a self-standing ego apart from the Other in the first place. To be a self is to always be related to—or better, confronted by—the Other, just as beings were always related to the Good, or as the Cartesian ego is always related to the Infinite, the source of its certainty (and, ultimately, existence), and the one thing it could not have invented as part of its own effort. While shedding the metaphysical aspects of these examples, Levinas retains this

³⁹ *TI*, 102.

⁴⁰ The original preface draws an extended analogy between ontology and war.

idea that the question of relating to the Other has been founded on a faulty premise: there never was a self-standing, transcendently free ego. We take on our true selfhood *only* as a response to the Other who calls me, and to the Good that he or she reveals to us.

The Good, in one sense, then, is negatively defined, that which cannot be subsumed into the Same of being. However, Levinas explicitly rejects the more common negative formulation of the Good as relating to lack, averring that “the Good is Good *in itself* and not by relation to the need to which it is wanting; it is a luxury with respect to needs. It is precisely in this that it is beyond being.”⁴¹ The Good is the Good *in itself*, and therefore, it is impossible for us to suppose that the Good is *merely* a lack, a ‘void’ outside the totality, beyond the cosmos. The Good is neither a void itself, nor is it only for filling the void of lack or *penia*. Just as in *Existence and Existents*, however, Levinas still does not try to offer a metaphysical description of the Good, referring back, instead to an earlier discussion on the difference between disclosure and revelation, a reference that seems to make it clear that the Good should not be thought of as a *metaphysical* first principle, but one rooted in discourse and signifyingness.

To signify, Levinas says there, “is not to give” but instead “the presence of exteriority,” that is to signify is to point to something *beyond*. It is no longer the mere giving of names, or presentation of forms, but revelation, *presentation*. As he says much later, in the section on the “phenomenology of eros” (a point we will return to more in depth in chapter 6), “exteriority is signifyingness itself To signify is . . . [equivalent] to expressing oneself, that is, presenting oneself in person.”⁴² The Good, then, hides behind

⁴¹ *TI*, 103. As we will see in chapter 6, Levinas draws careful distinctions between need and various kinds of desire. Here Levinas has in mind the most ordinary sense of the hungry man needing food, and the sick man needing medicine.

⁴² *TI*, 262.

the face of the Other, which in turn, is found in language, discourse.⁴³ It is only through ‘seeing’ its trace in the face the Other that we can hope to glimpse the Good, and to ‘see’ the face is, in turn, nothing other than to be in dialogue with the Other.⁴⁴

This is why Levinas concludes a brief discussion of Plato’s Good by noting that it is not ontology that is at issue when we speak of the good, but “an order where the very notion of the Good first takes on meaning; what is at issue is society.”⁴⁵ The Good is not the subject of an *ontological* metaphysics, but as Levinas is seeking to develop, an *ethical* metaphysics. Our goal can thus never be to simply ‘describe’ the nature of the Good, but instead for it to serve as the basis for the possibility of discourse with what is other than the self. The Good, through the cry of the other, calls me to speak, not about it, but to it. The face of the Other calls me to respond. It is with this understanding of the Good that Levinas affirms that “the Place of the Good above every essence is the most profound teaching, the definitive teaching, not of theology, but of philosophy.”⁴⁶ The Good, the beyond being, is that which is completely separate from the self and the same. Its position there prevents us from ever giving it a definitive description, but at the same time, enables the possibility of contact between Self and Other.

Levinas’ point is made even more strongly in his “Conclusions” section on “The Finite and the Infinite” where he states definitively that “the social relation *engenders* this surplus of the Good over being, multiplicity over the One.” It is not only in society that

⁴³ The Good as ‘signifyingness’ is greater than any single signifying face, but also unencounterable except through the individual face.

⁴⁴ As can be seen here (and as we will return to shortly) this resurrected Good will manage, by its very formulation, escape the critique of Plato raised in Part II, that the individual was abandoned for first principles.

⁴⁵ *TI*, 103.

⁴⁶ *TI*, 103.

the Good “first takes on meaning” as was said originally, but society *births* the Good itself, creates the Good, via “a rigorous concept of creation, which would be neither a negation nor a limitation nor an emanation of the One.” Not as a mere concept or artificial value, and not as the offspring of the Sameness of Being, but a true exteriority outside Being, “a marvel.”⁴⁷ In other words, the Good is engendered or created by the existence of discourse. If there were no possibility discourse, there would be no possibility of contact with what is outside the Same. The Good is engendered by the very reality of something outside the totality.

While it is not necessary (nor indeed possible) in this dissertation to take up the question of what discourse is in depth, two short remarks are necessary here. First on the source of discourse, Levinas repeatedly turns to the second half of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, frequently enough for Tanja Staehler to remark that it is the most alluded-to dialogue in Levinas’ work.⁴⁸ For example, he repeatedly makes use of “Plato’s expression,” pulled, uncited, from the *Phaedrus*, “to come to his own assistance.” The full phrase appears three times (uncited, but referenced to Plato each time).⁴⁹ It also appears, in various modified forms several more times throughout the text, without the nod toward Plato.⁵⁰ Each time, Levinas makes use of this to speak of the one who ‘comes to his own aid’ by speaking, by manifesting him or herself in discourse. This adoption of the Platonic reference (in fact, *Phaedrus* 275e), which Socrates uses to critique the writing of speeches which—apart from

⁴⁷ All quotes *TI*, 292, emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Tanja Staehler, *Plato and Levinas: The Ambiguous Out-Side of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2015). This will be in stark contrast to the sections on *eros*, where Levinas alludes almost exclusively to the *Symposium* instead.

⁴⁹ *TI*, 66, 71, 181. The grammar is slightly changed, according to the sentence containing it, the first time “... porte, selon le mot de Platon, secours à lui même,” the second “... pour Platon, peut se porter secours à lui-même,” the third, referenced negatively, “... n’a pas porté secours à lui même.”

⁵⁰ “... peut porter secours à son discours,” (96); “... se porte secours, assiste à sa propre manifestation,” (98); “... peut ‘porter secours’ à sa propre manifestation,” (298)

their ‘fathers’—have “no power to protect or help” themselves, solidifies Levinas’ own argument that it is in discourse, specifically, between the self and Other, that ethics takes place. The signification involved is always in the face-to-face, never the second hand accounts of ethics or anthropology. To separate discourse in this way is to illicitly separate the ‘said’ from its ‘saying.’ “True discourse,” he says, echoing Plato, “is inseparable from him who has thought it—which means that the author of the discourse responds to questions.”⁵¹ In this way, Levinas reaffirms the point that the Good is not to be spoken about, elaborated or defined, but rather, that it should serve as the basis for the possibility of discourse with the Other.

Second, a short remark on the content of this discourse. According to Levinas, the face of the Other speaks first; speaks to me—in fact, commands me. The Other appears, first of all the one “over whom I *cannot* have power [*je ne peux pas pouvoir*] whom I cannot kill,”⁵² and later “this infinity . . . is the primordial *expression*, is the first word: ‘you shall not commit murder.’”⁵³ The face, however, issues this command in virtue of its Infinity, in virtue of it being the shining of the Good and nothing more. This means, *inter alia*, that every face (which is to say every possible person) issues the same command equally. The invasion of the Good shocks me, shining through—overcoming and cancelling out—whatever finite good or evil a particular person represents. The Other is spoken of repeatedly by Levinas as “the widow, the orphan, and the stranger,” but is equally the murderer, the rapist, and the terrorist. Each and every one has “power” over me, as each reveals themselves to me as Other than myself. Just as with Plato’s

⁵¹ *TI*, 71.

⁵² *TI*, 84, the bracketed French and italicization appear in the translation cited.

⁵³ *TI*, 199, emphasis original.

formulation of the Good, as beyond being, it is beyond every ethical distinction. The Good that leaves its trace in the face is *not* moral good opposed to moral evil, the goodness of character or of talent, but the pure, unadulterated—unadulterable—Good of alterity.

This, for Levinas, is the primordial ethical encounter, structured by nonviolence, by the negative command ‘thou shall not’ But this encounter never remains at the level of ethics, but instead immediately erupts into a Justice that is concerned for all others, as “everything that takes place here ‘between us’ [i.e. between me and the face of the Other] concerns everyone, the face that looks at it places itself in the full light of the public order The epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity.”⁵⁴ The singular ethical relation of the face is never truly singular, but is always one that is doubly ‘universal.’ It could have been *anyone*, and it involves—from the very first moment—*everyone*. That the face that shocks me from my egoism is this one rather than that one is a point of circumstance and coincidence, *not* because anything about the other as Other—including his relation to me as Other—is unique.⁵⁵

§1.3: *Otherwise than Being*

While Levinas is hesitant to address the Good in *EE* and *TI*, *Otherwise than Being* (*OB*) makes frequent, direct use of it—a result, in part of *OB* breaking with Levinas’ ties to the phenomenological method, attempting to describe his ethical metaphysics in a different, less constricted register. In this however, *OB* also represents the most difficult challenge of the three texts, as it gropes for new expressions, partially fulfilling Levinas’

⁵⁴ *TI*, 212-213.

⁵⁵ I am indebted to Jean-Luc Marion’s reading of Levinas on this point. See for example “The Intentionality of Love,” in *Prolegomena of Charity* for one version of Marion’s critique on this point (this essay will be discussed further in the following section)

promise in *EE* that “a philosophy which, detached from the solitude of light, and consequently from phenomenology properly speaking, will concern us elsewhere.”⁵⁶ Here, as the subtitle announces, the focus is explicitly on the “beyond essence,” about which he indicates, in the opening lines, that “since the *Republic* there had been question of what is beyond essence,” showing that once again, we will be circling around Plato’s Good beyond Being.⁵⁷ *OB* also represents, however, the text where Levinas shows his breaks with what would traditionally be labelled “Platonism” the most clearly. Despite indicating that Plato’s Good is once again at the heart, it quickly becomes clear that much of the meaning Plato invested the Good with has been altered or abandoned altogether.

Echoing the language of *TT*’s preface, Levinas first introduces the Good in *OB* through the context of war and peace, noting that while “war is the deed or the drama of the essence’s interest [i.e. *esse*’s *interesse*] . . . in peace the Good has already reigned.”⁵⁸ Ontology—the *conatus* of Being—is, for Levinas, always the strife of the same and of totality. It is only in the ‘peace’ of ethics, when the Other is allowed to remain other, that the Good reigns.

However, Levinas’ formulation of this ‘peace’ is not uncontroversial. As he begins to explain soon after, combatting the interpretation that our relationship to the Good may be one of fall and recovery, of bringing the Good into the presence, we do not choose the

⁵⁶ But, at least in my view, only partially, as there he asserts that this new philosophy will have “Eros, when separated from the Platonic interpretation which completely fails to recognize the role of the feminine,” as its theme. The erotic however, is almost entirely missing from *OB*, and is explicitly differentiated from the grounds of discourse given there.

⁵⁷ *Otherwise Than Being (OB)*, 2. As Levinas says in the opening note to the text, essence merely indicates *esse* as opposed to *ens* or *Sein* as opposed to *seiendes* (xli). This language is thus does not seem a significant change from his earlier discussions of the “Beyond being,” where he similarly did not merely mean beyond beings, nor from Plato’s definition of the Good *epekeina tou ontos*, as Plato and the Neoplatonists understood it.

⁵⁸ *OB*, 4-5.

Good, nor are we free with respect to it. The Good is an immemorial past which is always past, “a non-origin, an-archival,” We are linked to the Good as an origin before every origin; at the first moment of our existence, we have already entered being, and become separated from the Good. While we may be free in Being, this primordial choosing ensures that we are never free with respect to the Good: “it has chosen me before I have chosen it,” before I even existed in order to choose.⁵⁹ And yet Levinas says, “subjectivity sees this nonfreedom redeemed, exceptionally, by the goodness of the Good. The exception is unique. And if no one is good voluntarily, no one is enslaved to the Good,”⁶⁰ later adding that “such service is not slavery but it is a necessity, because this obedience is prior to any voluntary decision.”⁶¹

The Good, then, is not a tyrant or slavemaster, not because we are free with respect to it, but because it is the Good. by its nature, our indebtedness to it is not (Levinas claims) a slavery, even if it is not a freedom either. In slightly softer language, he parses this in a footnote as “the Good invests freedom—it loves me before I love it.”⁶² Even in this softer formulation, however, Levinas comes dangerously close to asserting that the benevolent dictator is not a dictator at all, that our non-freedom with respect to the Good should not be taken as an enslavement, *not* because of some characteristic of the relationship, but only because the Good (despite all evidence to the contrary when the relationship is investigated) is not the sort of thing capable of enslaving; “being the Good

⁵⁹ The similarity of this formulation to God’s calling of Jeremiah was unlikely to have escaped Levinas’ notice: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart,” (Jer 1:5).

⁶⁰ All quotes *OB*, 11.

⁶¹ *OB*, 54.

⁶² *OB*, 187n8. However this apparent softening raises only additional problems, and, as I will try to argue in part IV, turns out to be an impossible formulation: to love before being loved is in fact not possible, a mistaken formulation which both Levinas and (as we will shortly see) Marion both adopt.

it redeems the violence of its alterity.”⁶³ He makes his point even stronger later, when he declares that “its value, that is its excellence or goodness, the goodness of goodness, is alone able to counterbalance the violence.”⁶⁴ As it stands, the Peace where the Good reigns is one that is *enforced*, this is not the peace of coming to terms with the Other, but of being restrained and held back.⁶⁵

We can note here the difference in language between Plato or the Platonists on the one hand and Levinas on the other. The Good for Plato was an *arche* to which we were called, toward which we moved as our *telos*.⁶⁶ It did not, however pull us to itself. Our movement toward or away from the Good was our own, even if it was not proper to call us ‘free’ to pursue or not pursue our *telos*. Levinas, on the other hand, does not put the Good in front of us, something toward which we are called or even pulled, but behind us. It is the “immemorial . . . the past that bypasses the present, the pluperfect past [that] falls into a past that is a gratuitous lapse. It cannot be recuperated by reminiscence . . . because of its incommensurability with the present.”⁶⁷ In this way, the structure of beings to the Good is not one of being called into the future, toward a *telos*, but of being held captive from the beginning.⁶⁸ “It provokes this responsibility against my will, that is, by substituting me for the other as a hostage.”⁶⁹ No longer do I move toward or away from

⁶³ *OB*, 15.

⁶⁴ *OB*, 57.

⁶⁵ This, in turn should remind us that the primary command of the face in *Totality and Infinity* was always “thou shall not . . .,” a command to restraint, not a call to action.

⁶⁶ Which is not to deny that it was *also* (especially for the Neoplatonists) an origin, something from which we have descended.

⁶⁷ *OB*, 11.

⁶⁸ An odd inversion of the Allegory of the Cave, where there is a movement from chained imprisonment to freedom in the ascent to the Good. There it is Being by which we are imprisoned, and the Good in which we are freed.

⁶⁹ *OB*, 11.

the Good as if from a neutral point; movement toward is no movement at all, being already possessed, held hostage, while movement away is escape (although, in this ‘unique exception’) not an escape toward freedom, but condemnation.⁷⁰ It is this very reversal of the future-always-future to the past-always-past that accounts for the Good appearing in Levinas not as the *telos* of man but his an-arche, his originary non-freedom.

Thus, the Good also does not appear as rest, as it typically would have for the Platonists. The activity that we are called to in the Good is not of peaceful contemplation, but of substitutionary justice. the necessity of our relation to the Good “overflows the same that is at rest, the life that enjoys life, since it is the necessity of a service. But, in this restlessness, it is better than rest. Such an antinomy bears witness to the Good.”⁷¹ Thus, the Good is no longer *telos*, and is no longer a call ‘to be at home’ in any sense, but instead a call to arms; the Peace over which the Good rules is thus additionally not one of a life at ease, of relaxation, but of constant movement outside oneself.⁷²

It is this same reversal that accounts (at least in part) for the separation of the Good from eros (a topic which will be addressed more in depth next chapter). As he says in the same footnote cited earlier, “The Good could not be the term of a need susceptible of being satisfied, it is not the term of an erotic need.”⁷³ The change from future to past can thus be seen as part of the project of removing the Good from Plato’s more general schema of desire for what one lacks. So long as the Good remains in the future, our relation of the Good is inevitably susceptible (as was clear in Plato’s dialogues themselves),

⁷⁰ Again in a mirror of the Allegory of the Cave, the escape of this time would be going down into the cave, not as a return to help those who left behind, but as an abandoning of the Good and taking refuge in Being.

⁷¹ *OB*, 54.

⁷² One could contrast here Aristotle’s comments at the end of the *NE* of the role of war and peace with respect to virtues like justice compared to contemplation.

⁷³ *OB*, 187n8

as merely the erotic pursuit for what I lack, and thus susceptible to an egoist pursuit for completeness and totality, not—as Levinas is trying to develop—a term that refuses such receptions, a term that is structured not by lack but by surplus, by being something *extra*. Its position, instead, in the past, something to which we have always belonged, breaks with desire, ensures that the Good cannot be misunderstood as just the Self’s search for wholeness.

Additionally, it remains clear in *OB* that the Good does not call everything to it in the same way. Although he is occasionally more willing to use reciprocal language than he was in *TI*, Levinas insists on the unique election of the subject, of the I, in respect to the Others. It is the exposure to, the being held hostage by the Other that first makes me a subject, it “is not something added to the one [i.e. to the self] to bring it from the inward to the outward.”⁷⁴ Rather, this exposure is always in the first person, it is always my exposure to the Other (even if, rarely, Levinas admits that I may also represent an Other to others). The name ‘I’ is “only the mask or the person of the unique one.”⁷⁵ The subject, the I is unique among all Others.⁷⁶ But as the chosen one, the responsible subject, he is not a volunteer, his “uniqueness not assumed, not subsumed, is traumatic; it is an election in persecution. Chosen without assuming the choice!”⁷⁷ The subject of responsibility is thrust into his situation from before he could choose it, hostage to the Good and to the other from the very start. Indeed, it is this very being-held-hostage which makes him a subject, which structures his identity.

⁷⁴ *OB*, 56.

⁷⁵ *OB*, 56.

⁷⁶ Cf the description at the end of *TI* of the chosen son among chosen sons for a similar sense of the possible reversal, if not reciprocity, of this structure.

⁷⁷ *OB*, 56.

Although seemingly extreme, it is this being-held-hostage which is necessary for Levinas to achieve his project, since having been elected “he cannot evade without denying himself.”⁷⁸ Election guarantees that ethics is established as first philosophy, and that the Good rules, rather than being. Were the Good a choice, were there an option to be free or not free, we would have to speak of a subject existing *before* the call of ethics. To speak of being free or enslaved is to already assume a subject, a *being* toward which the Good acts. It is only without these terms that Levinas guarantees that the Good is beyond—before—essence.

This before, the past-always-past, is, as in *TI*, seen in the present through the face. The Good “bypasses the present,” leaving a “trace [that] lights up as the face of a neighbor.”⁷⁹ As with *TI*, the face should be understood also as the ‘saying’ of the Other, his speech, which call us, toward which we respond as responsible. Thus, for *OB*, it is once again that “signification” is the meaning of subjectivity and of the for-the-other of substitution.⁸⁰ Not as language specifically, but as the pre-linguistic having-been-called; “signification is witness or martyrdom.”⁸¹ However, this is no longer simply the negative command to leave the Other alone, the ‘thou shall not kill’ as it was in *TI*, we are now held hostage, we are put into the service of the other, such that the signification of the face is “to give, to-be-for-another, despite oneself, but in interrupting the for-oneself, is to take the bread out of one’s own mouth, to nourish the hunger of another with one’s own

⁷⁸ *OB*, 122.

⁷⁹ *OB*, 12.

⁸⁰ *OB*, 77.

⁸¹ *OB*, 77-8. As nearly the entirety of *OB* is dedicated to the meaning of signification, it would be impossible to do a proper study here. For our purposes here, it suffices to take note of the fact that ethics *is* signification, as Levinas’ claim about *eros* will be precisely that it does not signify.

fasting.”⁸² *OB* clearly leaves behind the possibility that the ethical command (as it often appears in *TT*) is one of letting-be. Instead, it is the martyrdom or sacrifice of substituting my own suffering for the others, to give from my own lack. Just as it is not letting-be, it is not the charity of surplus. “One has to first enjoy one’s bread,”⁸³ it cannot be “the superfluxion of the superfluous, but the bread taken from one’s own mouth.”⁸⁴ To be hostage of the Good—that is, hostage of the Other—is to be infinitely indebted, to owe everything.

§2: Marion’s God Beyond Being

Marion, following Levinas, retains many of the same features of the now-recovered Good itself, however, his description of our approach toward it, and our way of relating to it is significantly altered. At the heart of the differences is the fact that Levinas is reluctant to mix theology and philosophy, and thus hesitant to name the Good as God in anything but a general sense. To the extent that his theology *does* influence his philosophy, we can see his insistence on the separation of the Transcendent and the immanent as based in his Judaism. As discussed above, the idea of the God-Man, transcendence made finite seems impossible. At most what we have is transcendence entering into, as a breaking into or disrupting, the immanent, but never taking on finitude itself. Marion, on the other hand, directly identifies the Good with God of Catholicism, and thus is fully willing to consider the possibility that the Good enters the world, both as

⁸² *OB*, 56.

⁸³ *OB*, 72.

⁸⁴ *OB*, 77.

the Incarnation of the Son, and as the ongoing entrance into finitude of transubstantiation. The result is that, unlike in Levinas, in Marion, there is the possibility of encountering the Good through its own face (what Marion will develop as the ‘Icon’), rather than only through its trace left in the face of the Other. While ultimately both of these are still structured by a similar discussion of discourse, these differences shed light on differing interactions with Platonism that warrant their own elaboration here. Although the texts addressed here represent some of Marion’s earliest works on topics that have become his primary focus, I focus on them primarily due to their more direct focus on Dionysius and other patristic writers, through whom Marion interacts with the Platonic idea of the Good.⁸⁵

§2.1: *The Idol and Distance*

Marion first takes up the issue of the Good in dialogue with Dionysius’ negative or mystical theology as an equally inapplicable name for God, quoting Dionysius that “nor One, nor Unity, nor Divinity, nor Goodness.”⁸⁶ However, what is at issue here is that even the Good can become an idol, in the sense that it deflates God into a concept-object, or perhaps even a being. Marion will draw out his idol/icon distinction further in his later texts, in relation to his development of the ‘saturated phenomenon,’ however at this point the crucial point is that the icon captures our gaze, and holds it there, while the icon

⁸⁵ See Tamsin Jones, *A Genealogy of Marion’s Philosophy of Religion: Apparent Darkness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), for a more in-depth discussion of the Patristic sources that Marion uses. As she points out in her first chapter, Marion makes a “unsupported” claim that Dionysius work “has no reliance on Platonic or Neoplatonic thought,” nevertheless, Jones counters that “an indebtedness to Neoplatonic ontology is necessary to understand Dionysius’ use of the term.” *Genealogy of Marion’s Philosophy of Religion*, 23. It is this indebtedness of his sources that I take as Marion’s link to the Platonic Good, whether he himself acknowledges it or not. Naturally, given that he refuses the connection himself, what Marion ultimately makes of the Good, or of the *aitia* will be quite different than any standard Platonic account.

⁸⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies* (Fordham Univ Press, 2001), 146, quoting *Mystical Theology*, III.

moves beyond the image, and in fact serves as a screen of the Infinite.⁸⁷ In fact, Marion notes that rather than looking at the icon, the icon gazes at us. Thus, any attempt to name God, to give him a concept, turns that concept into a placeholder that maintains our gaze, rather than allowing us to see beyond it. What is at issue then, is not that God is not Good, but only that God exceeds our understanding of the Good. In this, although the language is quite different, we should not take Marion to be too far from Levinas, who sees the Good, the Infinite, as exceeding our thinking.⁸⁸

The Good for Levinas, as it was for the Platonists themselves, was not something understood and contained, but only glimpsed in its trace left by its shining on the world. The Good is never seen directly, never seen fully. We see only the mark it has left behind. It is in this sense that Marion will later reference Levinas in a footnote, quoting from *TI*, “the good is transcendence itself,” as expressing what Dionysius means by the hyperbole of the Good, and approvingly noting that it is this transcendence that he discusses throughout *Idol and Distance* under the name “distance.”⁸⁹ For Marion, reading Dionysius, God is Good as the cause (*aitia*) of everything, and in the first place, the cause of the distance between Himself and the world. This separation of the cause from the effect ensures that God remains distant, he remains withdrawn from the world. As he adds, “the hyperbole of Goodness, become synonymous with the transcendence of the cause, requires that one perceive that very transcendence as the face proper to Goodness.” Thus,

⁸⁷ I will say more regarding the saturated phenomenon when I turn to beauty, and then finally the erotic phenomenon, which will take us to Marion’s later texts, where the saturated phenomenon plays a more prominent role.

⁸⁸ Recall that one of Levinas’ frequent examples for the Infinite is Descartes, for whom the infinite was precisely that thing which we could not have thought or imagined.

⁸⁹ *ID*, 155n32.

for Marion, as for Levinas, the Good is the Transcendent, our recognition of the Good is (or is only possible) as the transcendent, that which is beyond the realm of beings.

However, this quote also shows the departure from Levinas. The Good no longer is seen in the face of the Other [person], but takes on its own face.⁹⁰ That is, the ‘face’ of the Good is its own face—distance; it does not need the human face to show itself; “the unthinkable distance, as cause, manifests Goodness, or better manifests itself as Goodness.”⁹¹ Here we see the distinctly Catholic nature of Marion’s engagement with neoplatonism, God shows himself to us in his transcendence.⁹² We are no longer confined to the ‘traces’ of a Good which has passed over (“bypassed”) the present, but which manifests its distance to us in the present.⁹³ He thus quotes from the Gospel of John to note that this Good-as-transcendence “came down [to us] from heaven.”⁹⁴ God, the hyperbole of Good, becomes the Other par excellence for Marion, in a way he never could be for Levinas, and our relationship to the Good is spelled out directly with the ‘Good itself’ and no longer through the mediation of others.⁹⁵ Because God became (a particular) man, we no longer need people (in general) to see him.⁹⁶

With this God-Other, however, our relationship of inequality is still similarly structured as the self-Other relation of Levinas. That, is, it is still structured by discourse,

⁹⁰ Or in fact, many faces. We are seen by God through the Icon, one of his saturated phenomena. We feel our gazes and our intentions overwhelmed and reversed, until it is not us who look at the icon, but God who looks at us through the icon.

⁹¹ All quotes *ID*, 154-5, Dionysius quoted from *Divine Names*, I.

⁹² Again, a neoplatonism that Marion himself denies is neoplatonic.

⁹³ Manifests as the hyperbole of Goodness, perhaps as the *hyperousia*, the heart of Derrida’s critique of “metaphysics of presence” as it pertains to Marion.

⁹⁴ *ID*, 155, quoting John 6:50. Brackets in original.

⁹⁵ If anything, Marion reverses this order, when, in his later readings of Augustine, he parses love of neighbor (as Augustine does) as a kind of love of God, as only possible through a love of God.

⁹⁶ As we will see in the following chapter, this reversal also means that Marion will have to account for our relation to others differently, coming closer to a relationship structured by love.

so that God speaks (reveals himself) to us, “in order to ascend,”⁹⁷ that is, so that we can break out of the realm of beings and witness Transcendence. In the same way, our response to the Other is similarly structured by discourse, not inscribing him or her in description, but prayer. We move beyond the predication of attributes to God, and further beyond their denial, until finally we get to a speech that does not signify, but rather ‘*speaks to*.’ Prayer is the address of love that does not attempt to signify at all: “[by] praying, man acknowledges the unthinkable, which anteriorly exceeds the traverse where its perpetuity is attested.”⁹⁸ Constantly resisting the urge to ‘idolize’ God by containing him in description, Marion builds on his understanding of God through apophatic, negative, theology. God is unable to be spoken *about*, but instead is praised.⁹⁹

This distinction is important because this means that, for Marion, even the discourse of the good does not signify, as it did for Levinas. The face of the Other signified itself, by presenting itself to myself. For Marion however, even the interaction of self and Other occurs without signifying anything. This change, as we will examine in the next chapter, is due to Marion’s altered account of the encounter with the face within eros, rather than within ethics. Eros, even in its much broader equation with *caritas*, does not signify. Nevertheless, it is as if Marion has shifted the whole discussion. Whereas for

⁹⁷ *ID*, 159.

⁹⁸ *ID*, 160.

⁹⁹ See especially the first section of the chapter “Of the Eucharistic Site of Theology,” “let it be said . . .” Elsewhere in that chapter, Marion quotes Dionysius approvingly that “before all things, and particularly before theology, one must begin by prayer,” 157, quoting *Divine Names*, III, 1. This is made clearer in *In the Self’s Place*, where Marion notes that praise is not only “one speech act among others . . . [but] offers the sole way, the sole royal road of access to [God’s] presence,” (14).

Levinas, ethics is the site of the Good eros the site of beauty, for Marion, the Good (God) is discovered in love, while beauty falls short of even this.¹⁰⁰

While the specific nature of prayer will inevitably result in changes compared to the discourse with the neighbor (notably, prayer is conceived by Marion as an expression of love, where discourse with the other is the event of ethics), in both cases, we see the abandoning of metaphysics of the Good in favor of a dialogically-conceived Goodness. The Good is not, it speaks and is spoken to. Similarly, it should be clear from the theological nature of Marion's discourse, that it is God as supreme Other, who always calls first, a point made even clearer in his later discussion of Augustine's *Confessions*.¹⁰¹ For both Levinas and Marion, the Other (be it the individual or God) speaks first and is met in dialogue, *not* understood by explanation.

§2.2: *God Without Being*

Marion re-enforces the notion of the God-Other in his next published work, *God Without Being*, which presents itself as an non-Thomist (perhaps even anti-Thomist) work of philosophy and theology. Signaling his on-going reliance on Dionysius, Marion notes in the introduction that

in the tradition of Denys's treatise *On Divine Names* and its commentaries, Saint Thomas certainly marks a rupture: contrary to most of his predecessors (including Saint Bonaventure), as well as to several of his successors (including

¹⁰⁰ As Milbank says, "Marion protects the eroticization of the flesh from the seductions of bodily beauty in order to save its sublime impulse toward the infinite," John Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror: On the Philosophy of Love," in Kevin Hart, ed., *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 272.

¹⁰¹ Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine* (Stanford University Press, 2012), but see also, already in *God Without Being*, "one could not do a 'Theology of the Word,' because if a *logos* pretends to precede the *Logos*, this *logos* blasphemes the Word (of) God," 143.

Duns Scotus), he substitutes *esse* for the good (*bonum, summum bonum*) as the first divine name.¹⁰²

While Marion has, over time, softened his stance on Thomas' appellation of God as *esse*, it has remained true that, for Marion, we should still prefer the name Good over Being, when speaking of God.¹⁰³

By linking the Good to God,¹⁰⁴ however Marion undoes and changes Levinas' determination of the Good as only past, tying it to the statement that "God is Love,"¹⁰⁵ and quoting from Dionysius the fact that God "'charms' all beings at once by 'goodness, charity and desire.'"¹⁰⁶ Indeed it is precisely this idea of 'charming,' of calling into the future that marks the real debate between the Good and Being, as "the debate between the *ens* and the good, in a sense [is] the debate between the *ens* and agape, which crops up therein."¹⁰⁷ When Thomas speaks of the Good, it is only as static, the Good 'thing.' It is only with the appellation of the Good over Being that the Good is infused with the sense of desiring as well as desired, calling and charming.

However, if Levinas' interaction with Platonism is one that retrieved and reformulated the Good by ridding it of its teleological 'calling,' Marion develops it by

¹⁰² Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte, Second Edition* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), xxv (from now, cited as *GWB*).

¹⁰³ See the essay "Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theo-logy," in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, 38-74 for this partial recantation.

¹⁰⁴ In most of *GWB*, Marion has styled 'God' as crossed out (similar to Heidegger's crossing out of Being) to signal the distinction between an idolatrous and iconic God, a practice I have not mirrored here, as the idol/icon distinction will not be a focus.

¹⁰⁵ *Agape* in the Greek, *Caritas* in the Latin, we shall see in the following chapter to what extent it is correct to call this love, or to consider it erotically. In this section, I wish to address the Agapic God only insofar as it pertains to Marion's conception of the Good.

¹⁰⁶ *GWB*, 74, quoting from *Treatise on the Divine Names*.

¹⁰⁷ *GWB*, 74.

downplaying the role of the individual person.¹⁰⁸ As will become even clearer in the following chapter, love of the individual is only possible due to a prior love of God.¹⁰⁹ We are therefore seemingly returning to those interpretations that imperiled Platonism in the previous chapters, one which privileged a first principle, over the individuals we encounter every day.

This is seen particularly in what Marion calls the “gaze of boredom,”¹¹⁰ a gaze which is not destructive or nihilistic, but simply uninterested. It sees nothing in the world, in the sense of not caring, not distinguishing, what it sees. It sees no Goodness in the world, insofar as it sees nothing *beyond* the finite, immanent world it gazes at. As a result, the whole world appears as vanity.¹¹¹ To save us from this is only the loving vision of God: “for God loves, and from the gaze of charity comes the ‘goodness’ of the gazed at.”¹¹² The world thus appears good, rather than vain, not of its own accord but because it is being ‘gazed at,’ ‘shone upon’ by the Good, by God.

As the Principle of the Good is now personal in a way that it was not for Plato nor for Levinas (but was for Marion’s later, *Christian* neo-Platonic sources), it is now possible to speak of the Good not only as static beloved but as loving.¹¹³ Although even Plotinus

¹⁰⁸ It may be noted that Marion seems to think himself opposed to Neoplatonism in some way, perhaps most strongly in the “Nietzsche” chapter of *Idol and Distance*, where he equates (certain conceptions of) Platonism and onto-theology (see also Hankey, “Jean-Luc Marion’s Dionysian Neoplatonism”). However, his main reason for this seems to be that the ‘Good’ is also too conceptual, too ‘ontological’ to avoid becoming an idol. In reality, his naming of God as ‘love without being’ or ‘love before being’ is not so different from what the Neoplatonists had in mind.

¹⁰⁹ “Creatures, myself or my brother, can therefore be loved, and even loved *with enjoyment*, provided that they come to be loved in the enjoyment of God,” *In the Self’s Place* 277.

¹¹⁰ *GWB*, 115.

¹¹¹ The idea of vanity returns to play a significant role in Marion’s *The Erotic Phenomenon*, which I will address in the next chapter.

¹¹² *GWB*, 132.

¹¹³ Recall Diotima’s criticism of Socrates (and by allusion all the *Symposium* speakers) for thinking of *eros* as the beloved rather than the lover.

occasionally would speak of the *eros* of the One and the Good, these were never personal. By making the Good personal, Marion could respond to the possible objection raised in a different context by Sartre, Lacan, and others, that he is putting love of the ‘Universal’ above love of individuals by reminding his objectors that God is not a Universal Good, but a person; God is Love, not a static metaphysical entity. To love the Good is not to abandon individuals, it is not to love a *property* that makes individuals lovable, but to love the Person who makes them lovable.

Lastly, it should be noted that Marion is opening up a possibility not seen by Levinas, through his personalization of the Good. We can now relate to the Good, to God, through his own face that appears in the icon. God gazes at us directly and envisages us, overwhelming and reversing out intentionality. We no longer deal exclusively with the intermediary of human faces; we no longer must content ourselves with ‘traces’ which will never lead us to the Good itself. instead we can speak to God himself in praise. Fitting in with Marion’s apparent tendency to fall back into a Platonism which abandons the individual for the sake of the universal,¹¹⁴ Marion no longer focuses on the relationship to the other (person) as our relation to the Good, but instead on our direct relationship to God. To the extent that the individual shows us the Good, he seems to be abandoned (just as in certain readings of the *Symposium*) as a first step toward a more perfect relationship.

¹¹⁴ Which is redeemed, for Marion, by the fact that the universal is God himself.

§3: The Refusal of Beauty

While both Levinas and Marion have found their own ways to recover the Good in service of an anti-metaphysical project, neither has attempted a similar phenomenological description of beauty. Having been split apart, as shown in the previous part, it is not possible to assume that a recovery of the Good necessitates a similar recovery of the Beautiful. Thus, we cannot, in advance, take the relative silence of each on the topic of beauty to be an indication that we should think of the arguments regarding the Good to likewise apply also to beauty.¹¹⁵ As we will see, the few times that each *does* address beauty, it is clear that for neither thinker does the Beautiful warrant the same praise that the Good does.

§3.1: The Beautiful in Levinas

Beauty is almost entirely unthematized in Levinas' work, beginning with *EE*, where it receives only one, slightly cryptic, direct reference: "Beauty, perfect form, is form *par excellence*." Beings, he says just prior, "are clothed with a *form*." This, in turn is in contrast to real Otherness, where "the relationship with nudity is the true experience of the otherness of the other."¹¹⁶ When we experience the Other, we experience him as nude, in both senses: we experience the nude-Other, and we are denuded by the experience of the Other. The "clothes" of form hide us in the universal language of

¹¹⁵ While Marion has written extensively on the work of art he has only recently offered an extended treatment of beauty itself, in the essay "le phénomène de la beauté." More often (as I will detail below) he prefers to use other words to describe the experience of the work of art. In addition, what Marion does have to say about beauty makes it clear that it cannot serve as well as the good as a name for God.

¹¹⁶ All quotes *EE*, 40.

being, but in the nudity of the experience of alterity, I encounter the Other outside of being.

This contrast of nudity and beauty is continued in later texts, with Levinas expanding that the being who is “*kath’auto*,” is “completely naked.”¹¹⁷ Language itself

consists in entering into a relationship with a nudity disengaged from every form, but having meaning by itself, *kath’auto*, signifying before we have projected light upon it, appearing not as a privation on the ground of an ambivalence of values . . . but as an *always positive value*. Such a nudity is the face.¹¹⁸

Thus, the nude Other, that is, the face, bears the trace of the Good.¹¹⁹ This explains the Other’s appearance as vulnerable, violable.¹²⁰ In contrast, beauty is once again the prime Form. It “introduces a new finality, an internal finality, into the naked world . . . [we] find a place for [a thing] in the whole by apperceiving its function or its beauty.”¹²¹ This is the flaw in beauty: it reintroduces the teleology and the drive to totality that Levinas is seeking to escape. To see a person as beautiful is to fail to see him as the Other.¹²² Everything is beautiful in the same way (the quote makes clear) that it is useful: it has a part to play in a whole. We can thus see certain ancient assumptions about beauty being retained, that beauty has something to do with symmetry or being “fitting” in the sense not only of

¹¹⁷ In another inversion of Plato. One of the places the phrase “*auto kath’auto*” appears there is in the *Symposium*, where it is precisely Beauty that is described as “itself with [or ‘by’] itself.” *Symp.* 211b.

¹¹⁸ *TI*, 74.

¹¹⁹ And not in reference to some form. Here, Levinas is critiquing the Platonist view that individuals, material things, are ugly except in reference to universal forms.

¹²⁰ Peperzak explains this shift to the Good as vulnerable rather than desirable, by arguing that Levinas has shifted the meaning of the Good to “the God of another, pre-Platonic and non-Greek tradition: the God of intersubjective goodness (*bonté*) and social justice; the Good of human proximity.” “The Platonism of Emmanuel Levinas,” 118. In other words, Levinas has shifted the discourse of the Good from Platonism back to the Jewish tradition.

¹²¹ *TI*, 74.

¹²² Levinas makes this point in extremely strong language much later in life, when he declares that “the best way to meet others is to not even notice the color of his eyes.”

appropriate, but “fitted to the purpose.”¹²³ Levinas has thus seemingly reversed the situation in Plato (and described, through contrast, in the last part), where the Good is good *for* while beauty is beauty *simply*.¹²⁴ Now it is the Good which is absolute and without relation or reference, while beauty forces the other back into its part to play in a totality, its beauty *in relation to* the whole.

However, beauty still does not relate *to me*, except insofar as I am also part of the totality. It is still Expression, the Good, “radiates” by “invok[ing] the interlocutor and expos[ing] oneself to his response and his questioning . . . The being that expresses itself imposes itself.”¹²⁵ In other words, the Good is Good *for me* in the sense that it “solicits” me, places a demand on me (prefiguring the un-freedom language of *OB*). It is still not in a *relation* with me, but its shining is always purposeful (Levinas would hesitate to call it intentional or conscious) command on the self. Beauty, Levinas says in contrast could potentially be defined as a radiation or “a splendor that spreads unbeknown to the radiating being.”¹²⁶ Beauty shines, in the most banal sense of artwork, simply as a *thing* to be beheld, to be admired and fit into something. A beautiful painting does not shine *for me*, it shines indiscriminately to the whole crowd or to the empty room; it does not issue forth deliberately, nor does it place any command on me, it is simply an appearance. And as art paintings “offer themselves to enjoyment . . . they are playthings [*jouets*] . . . they are immersed in the beautiful, where every going beyond enjoyment reverts to enjoyment [*où*

¹²³ As Rachel Barney argues to great effect (“Plato on the *Kalon* and the Good”), we can see this view throughout Plato’s dialogues, perhaps most clearly in the *Hippias Major*, where Socrates argues that a wooden ladle is more beautiful than a golden one, since it will better function as a ladle (290d-291b).

¹²⁴ See Ousager, “Plotinus on the Relationally of Plato’s Good” for an extended argument that “‘the Good’ always will be a relational notion,” (141).

¹²⁵ *TI*, 200.

¹²⁶ *TI*, 200.

tout dépassement de la jouissance, retourne à la jouissance].”¹²⁷ Thus the Beautiful, as it was for Lacan, is a screen, which invites the transgression of sexual pleasure and use, *jouissance*, not an introduction into alterity.¹²⁸ Again reversing the Platonic distinction of Good and Beauty, we see that it is beauty, not the good, that leads to sex, while the Good (to the extent that Levinas seeks a ‘love without eros’¹²⁹) is the source of love. This is equally a reversal of the role of the principles as read by the philosophers discussed in the previous part: where the Beautiful, the admirability of a person, led to no motivation or desire at all (sexual included), thus failing to engender ethics, whereas the good lead to the use and abuse of the other.

Levinas’ critique is strengthened even further in *OB*, where the notion of nudity takes a central role, and where Beauty is denounced as the root of metaphysics: “The said is reduced to the Beautiful, which supports Western ontology. Through art, essence and temporality begin to resound with poetry or song.”¹³⁰ While the discussion of art will eventually also lead Levinas to the reduction, it is only by going underneath it, by speaking of something *otherwise* than the display of essence in art, by abandoning the saying of essences seen in poetry, and getting at a “saying without the said.”¹³¹ What matters is not what the poem says, or what the artwork depicts, but only speaking and depicting as activities. Likewise, Levinas later marks out beauty as something that should be left behind with the method of phenomenology, the science of essences, if we are to get to the “otherwise than being,” since a phenomenology of the face is always betrayed

¹²⁷ *TI*, 140. The first bracketed text appears in the original, the second is added.

¹²⁸ A theme which will return next chapter.

¹²⁹ In “Philosophy, Justice and Love,” an interview published in *Entre-Nous*, 105.

¹³⁰ *OB*, 40.

¹³¹ *OB*, 45.

by “the still essential beauty of a face.”¹³² In other words: phenomenology cannot separate the face from its *appearing* as a physical face, confusing the saying and the speaker and finding—instead of the true face of the Other—the physical visage of the particular other.

Beauty then gets its final condemnation (once again tracing very closely the same view developed in Lacan¹³³), where the Beautiful becomes the last idol, our attempt at essentializing the Good, so that we can “go seek it, like an idol, or assume it like a logos.”¹³⁴ As he elaborates in the footnote attached to that sentence:

The immemorial past is intolerable for thought. Thus there is an exigency to stop: *anagkè stenai*. The movement beyond being becomes ontology and theology. And thus there is also an idolatry of the beautiful The movement beyond being is fixed in beauty. Theology and art “retain” the immemorial past.¹³⁵

That is, just as in Lacan, the dread of a truly beyond being, a truly immemorial past, an infinite regress without end, is unthinkable, and thus, to put our minds at ease, we substitute for the Good a mask of beauty, a *thing* on which we can fix our intentions. Beauty is therefore not a way of understanding the world and the individual that merely *not yet* the ethical but instead it is a *betrayal* of ethical thinking, a reducing of the Good beyond Being itself into the beautiful as the reducing of a God into an idol.¹³⁶

¹³² *OB*, 90.

¹³³ See Chapter 4, §4.1

¹³⁴ *OB*, 150.

¹³⁵ *OB*, 199n21.

¹³⁶ Peperzak summarizes this by noting that “[The Good] is moral, much less aesthetic than Plato’s *Agathon*. It demands justice before beauty,” “The Platonism of Emmanuel Levinas,” 118.

§3.2: The Beautiful in Marion

Whereas Beauty as the idol of the Good occurs only at the very end of Levinas' remarks on beauty, the idol/icon distinction is at the very heart of Marion's discussion of beauty. The Beautiful, just as the Good, when used as a name of God, turns out to be an idol, and thus we could substitute the critique of the Good for one of Beauty when Marion (as already discussed in the section above), notes that "the debate between the *ens* and the good, in a sense, [is] the debate between the *ens* and agape, which crops up therein," and that, for Thomas "the good does not add anything to being [the *ens*] either really or conceptually, *nec re nec ratione*."¹³⁷ The Good, recall, was not saved for Marion until it was turned into an iconic good, a loving good. In the icon, intentionality is reversed, and we are looked at by the gaze of the icon. When instead it remains considered as a static or impersonal 'first principle,' it remains an idol. However, Marion has more recently directly identified the phenomenon of beauty with the idol, and so there does not seem to be the same possibility of an 'iconic beauty' as there is for the 'iconic good.'¹³⁸

In *God Without Being*, the argument is between Thomas and Dionysius, between whether Being or the Good is the first name of God. Neither, however, was willing to give Beauty the status of the first name. The beautiful did not benefit, as the Good did, from a long Platonic tradition of being named as "beyond being." Indeed, for most of its history, the Beautiful had been taken as the Form of Forms, or the most perfect form. Beauty was

¹³⁷ *GWB*, 74.

¹³⁸ "Phénomène de la beauté." The relation of beauty and the idol had been made earlier, for example in *Being Given*, however, this article is noteworthy, as it directly denies that beauty can serve as an example of any of the other types of saturated phenomenon.

intimately connected to the *esse* of a thing, as a result of beauty being understood as its imitating well the form it exhibited.

It is this formliness (which appeared in the critique by Levinas as well) that dooms beauty. If we compare what Marion has to say about the idol vs the icon, they are spelled out precisely in this sense of form, with statements that “the infinite depth of the icon . . . withdraws the icon from all aesthetics: only the idol can and must be apprehended, since it alone results from the human gaze, and hence supposes an *aisthesis* that precisely imposes its measure on the idol.”¹³⁹ This final phrase indicates that it is not *merely* sensation, or the fact that the idol, unlike the icon, is seen *by* us, captures our gaze, that is at issue here, lest we say that beauty can be saved simply by removing it to the kinds of moral beauty Plato speaks of: “the icon recognizes no other measure than its own and infinite excessiveness.”¹⁴⁰ To be “without measure,” is to say the icon is *without Form*. There is no exemplar or template against which to judge it, physical or conceptual. On the contrary, it is the face: “only the icon shows us a face (in other words . . . every face is given as an icon).”¹⁴¹ And just as we saw for Levinas in the way phenomenology betrays the face of the Other by seeing a particular human face, Marion remarks that “a face appears *only inasmuch as* the perfect and polished opacity of a mirror does not close it; that a face closes up implies nothing but its enclosure in a radiant mirror: precisely, nothing closes a face by a mask more than a radiant smile.”¹⁴² The moment we do not allow us to

¹³⁹ *GWB*, 20.

¹⁴⁰ *GWB*, 21.

¹⁴¹ *GWB*, 19. In *Being Given*, Marion further explains that the icon “no longer offers any spectacle to the gaze and tolerates no gaze from the spectator, but rather exerts its own gaze over that which meets it. The gazer takes the place of the gazed upon,” *Being Given*, 232. That is to say, when we encounter the icon, the face, we do not see it, rather, we are seen *by it*.

¹⁴² *GWB*, 19, emphasis mine. Marion here plays with the idea of a *persona*, a mask, as compared to a *visage*, a face.

be seen by the face, the encounter with the icon fails. The moment we contain it within our gaze, as soon as one of its features catches our eye; that is, as soon as it appears *beautiful*, it ceases to play its role as face. Our gaze turns to it as a *thing*, and refuses to let ourselves be seen *by* the face, as a way to see and be seen by the infinite that stands behind it.¹⁴³

It is likewise in the ‘radiance’ of the smile that we see what Marion thinks of beauty. While beauty itself never appears in these early works, we can now see in his earlier section on “Dazzling Return,” the place of beauty, the idol at which we gaze.¹⁴⁴ There we get the description of the visible idol “dazzling” and “ravishing,” we read of the idol’s “brilliance” and “splendor,” but most of all we read of the ways in which it “freezes the gaze.”¹⁴⁵ Once again, we see beauty (if we are right to read this as a description of the role of beauty) playing an identical role to that of Levinas and Lacan: Beauty freezes us, stops us from going further than the painting in front of us, from going toward the infinite.¹⁴⁶ Even if it is possible to cross the infinite for Marion, it is no less the stuff of dread than it is for Lacan and Levinas; beauty allows us to stop, to put an end to an endless drive and to reach a comfortable landing spot. Beauty presents a mask for the Good, for God, a *place* which we can contain him and enclose him. But this containing is

¹⁴³ The word ‘thing’ here would, in a more extended treatment need to be qualified for Marion. In *Being Given* (42-53), Marion discusses beauty and artwork in a slightly different context, seeking to remove the idea of ‘being’ and ‘thing’ from the ‘givenness’ of the phenomenon. However, we should not take this ‘without being’ to be the same as the ‘without being’ or ‘beyond being’ proper to God. At the conclusion of that work, Marion counts *both* the idol *and* the icon among the kinds of ‘saturated phenomena.’ But we should not think of the ‘idol’ as being ‘without being’ in the sense of the *hyperousia* or hyperbole of the Good or God, but of some more banal sort.

¹⁴⁴ *GWB*, 14-15.

¹⁴⁵ *GWB*, 14.

¹⁴⁶ As he says in *Being Given*, “[the idol’s] splendor stops intentionality for the first time; and this first visible fills it, stops it and even blocks it,” *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford University Press, 2002), 229. This being stopped or frozen does not completely halt us, but rather, is indicative of the reversal that occurs in saturation. We no longer *intend* the painting or the idol, but are overwhelmed by it.

always the sign of idolization. In Plato, it was the sight of the something wonderfully beautiful that threw us back toward the vision of the Forms and inspired the birth of true virtue. In fact, Diotima outlines how we only give birth at all as we draw near to beauty, as if beauty induces birth.¹⁴⁷ On the contrary, we now see that for Marion, as for those before him, beauty paralyzes us. It doesn't inspire action (ethical or otherwise) but brings an artificial end to our pursuit. For Marion, the 'contemplation' of beauty brings all other activity to a halt.¹⁴⁸ We become possessed by the painting, and (insofar as the painting saturates and overwhelms us), we return to it again and again.¹⁴⁹ But as a result, it should be clear, cannot be included in any description of the birth of ethics. It is only the Good, the appearance of the face as face, as formless pointing toward infinity, that inspires the birth of action.

§4: Transitions

What we have seen in this chapter is the recovery of the Good as an ethical 'first principle' which remains divorced from the question of being (and thus, the question of whether the universal Good *exists* is irrelevant), whether through Levinas' appearance of the Infinite in the face of every Other, or in the particular case of Marion's God. Both developments resituate the Good in the context of the face of the Other, whether it be the

¹⁴⁷ *Symp.* 206d.

¹⁴⁸ Milbank, in a strong critique of Marion's view of beauty, notes that "for Marion, beauty does not mediate in its visibility the invisible, but rather forecloses a world of idols or the merely visible and radically finite as reduced to our representing awareness," "The Gift and the Mirror," 272. It is this separation, between the visible and invisible, or between the infinite and the finite, that I ultimately wish to heal by reconnecting the Good and Beautiful.

¹⁴⁹ Again, as he says in *Being Given*, "the intuitive given of the idol imposes on us the demand to change our gaze again and again, continually, be this only so as to confront its unbearable bedazzlement," 230. We are continually called back to the painting, but never called to move past it.

human face or the icon, and thus the possibility of ethics as the confrontation with something outside the self/same becomes possible, partially resolving the problems seen in Part II. It can no longer be an issue (as it was in Sartre) of reducing the being-for-itself to the in-itself, since the Other is not a *being* at all. The Other is interacted with as absolutely Other, who first places the command on me. At this point, however, it remains to be seen whether this encounter with the Other structured by the Other as the face of the Good can lead us to recover the specifically *erotic* relation.¹⁵⁰ In advance of the full treatment we can already see the issue arising that Beauty has not been resurrected alongside the Good. Beauty has remained (to the extent that it is said to be a real ‘universal’ at all) a matter of being and of fittedness and formliness. It is beauty that mistakes the Other for a particular other, fails to see the Other, and instead interacts with the individual in the realm of totality and being. Thus, if eros is to come back at all, it will have to be a much different account than Plato’s, which linked these two together so necessarily. Rather (as we have already occasionally foreshadowed here), it seems that love will have to choose: will it relate to the Other as Good *or* as Beautiful; will it relate to the other as unconditioned Other, or will it, as it was already claimed by Sartre, Lacan and others in Part II, reduce him to an object of perception and forms to be possessed?

¹⁵⁰ We have, thus far, largely eschewed the question of how the relation with the Other is structured as, in itself, it is irrelevant to the current work beyond noting its origin as a relation to the Good, and insofar as it is relevant, will be taken on in the following chapter in comparison and contrast to the erotic relationship.

CHAPTER 6: THE SILENCE OF EROS

Although we have seen a renewed interest in the Good beyond Being once again raise the possibility of a non-destructive encounter with the other within a phenomenological tradition of alterity and discourse, any idea of beauty has been removed from the encounter. For both Levinas and Marion, as we saw, it was the function of the Good or of God that enabled us to encounter the Other, whether it be in hearing the call, or in being seen by the Other's gaze. To see the other person as beautiful, on the other hand, is to reduce him to my horizons and to wrongfully exert a power over him. For Plato, it was the intimate connection between beauty and the good that made eros a privileged route to the ethical life: recognizing the beauty of a thing, person, or action keyed us in to the fact that it was also *good*. The truly beautiful person was the *virtuous* person; the truly beautiful act, a *virtuous* act. For Marion and Levinas, on the other hand, seeing the Other as beautiful prevents us from seeing the face of the Other, prevents us from encountering her as Other. Thus, Marion and Levinas have continued the divide seen in Part II, and although they re-establish the possibility of relating to the Other, we no longer can guarantee that beauty indicates goodness, nor even that beauty *leads us* to recognize beauty. As a result it becomes questionable that eros similarly can lead us to ethics.

Paralleling the trajectory of chapter 5, this *unerotic* ethics similarly takes two different (although closely related) forms; the first, represented by Levinas sees eros as *outside* ethics, eros relates us to the Other in a way that is not necessarily *unethical*, but it is *an-ethical*, *otherwise than* ethical (§1). The second form, championed by Jean-Luc Marion

(and also Jean-Luc Nancy, who plays a more minor role here), does not put eros outside of ethics, but privileges it over ethics. (§2). In essence, Levinas excludes eros from ethics, while Marion excludes ethics from eros. Although their appearances will be quite different, the result will be the same, eros is returned only to be silenced. As we will see at the end of this chapter (§3) it is only the return of a Beauty parallel to the Good that we will enable us to once again speak of our love.

§1: Levinasian Eros

As we saw in chapter five, one of the key ways that Levinas discusses the Good in his early works was by reference to the light. Thus, one of the first ways we can get a sense for what Levinas means by eros, and its relation to ethics is by looking at his discussions of light in relation to eros.¹⁵¹ What we find, in fact, is that eros must be hidden from the light—or, perhaps more accurately, the light does not shine on eros (§1.1). Disconnected from the light and the Good it represents, we then discover, unsurprisingly, that it is also cut off from the way of seeing the Good—discourse and signification (§1.2). It is only through fecundity, which results from—but breaks with—eros that we can re-enter ethics, having diverted, temporarily, into the un-seriousness of eros (§1.3).

Although eros turns up in all of Levinas' works, its most extensive treatment occurs at the end of *Totality and Infinity*, a text where the Good was already understood to

¹⁵¹ For Levinas, *amour* and *eros* are distinct. Eros concerns the specifically sexual encounter. *amour*, on the other hand, is connected to justice and, at least at times, to charity. He thus (like many in Part III) has something far more restricted in mind than Plato did. Here we will focus only on his remarks on eros, which are significantly less positive, ignoring his more positive (at times) claims regarding *amour*. The split, however, will be taken up in part IV, as my ultimate claim will be that—just as in Part III—the split of love and eros is wrong to make in the first place. All references to love in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, should be read as regarding specifically *erotic* love, in Levinas' restricted sense.

show itself in the face of the Other but, importantly, where Levinas consistently denies the possibility of the reversibility of the ethical relationship. In that text, I am never an Other for others.¹⁵² However, it is similarly before Levinas' strongest statements about being un-free with respect to the Good or to the Other. The command remains 'thou shall not . . . ,' and not the later forms such as 'the bread from my very mouth,' or substitution. It is thus primarily with this conception of ethics which we will need to contrast his remarks regarding eros. In comparison, in *Existence and Existents*, eros has not quite been formulated fully, while in *Otherwise than Being*, eros is silenced nearly to the point of non-existence (as we will see in §1.2).

§1.1: Sex in the Dark

For Levinas (at least in *Totality and Infinity*), the location of eros is somewhat unclear. It appears at the end of his work in a section titled "Beyond the Face," but the 'place' of this beyond remains unclarified. Despite being the concluding section of the book, Levinas makes it clear throughout that it is not that *toward which* ethics and the face point; it is not 'beyond' in the sense of being further. Nor can it possibly be (as we will see clearly once we discuss the section 'The Ambiguity of Love') the beyond of transcendence, even less of ex-cendence. Rather, it seems only that this beyond must mean 'outside of.'¹⁵³ Eros is 'beyond the face' in the way that a shadowy corner is beyond

¹⁵² Although Levinas continues to insist on the asymmetry of the relation throughout his work, he does note in *OB* that justice depends on the possibility of the I "becom[ing] an other like the others," 161.

¹⁵³ For a more in-depth analysis of this point, see Richard Cohen, "The Family and Ethics: The Metaphysics of Eros in Emmanuel Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*." For example, he notes that eros comes "from 'below' or 'beyond' ethical responsibility. To be sure, this does not make the encounter with erotic nudity immoral or unethical. It rather places it outside, otherwise, differently than the straightforwardness of the ethical encounter," 1. Much of what follows in this section follows Cohen's analysis closely.

the reach of the light.¹⁵⁴ Not, it should be clear, as an object in the corner, which could be illuminated if only we redirected the light, rather it is *the shadowy corner itself*. To shine light on it would not be to welcome eros into the light, but to destroy it. The moment the light touches it, it ceases to be a shadowy corner. The significance of this fact, as I will explore throughout the rest of this chapter, is as an indication of eros' an-ethical nature, its inability to participate in the signifying vision-discourse of ethics.

However it is not a shadowy corner simply because ethics refuses to admit it into the 'light' of signification. Rather eros conspires to remain hidden as much as ethics works to stop it from entering into ethics. This is the ambiguity of love, as "in love, transcendence goes both further and less far than language," that is, than ethics. It is in this ambiguity that Levinas says "through the face filters the obscure light coming from beyond the face." Eros, as the dark corner, sees the light in the distance which does not quite reach it. However, it is enticed by this light and attempts to draw near it; but in seeing it from 'beyond the face,' it does not do so in the same manner as ethics. Eros does not let the face shine but "goes beyond the beloved." Love transgresses because, in reaching toward the light, it does not let the Other shine, but instead reaches out, as if attempting to reach the transcendent Good itself directly.¹⁵⁵ As we will see further down, this reaching out threatens to profane the Other, to fail to respect her as other than myself. The ambiguity brings together a legitimate metaphysical desire for transcendence with a Platonic or Sartrean model of love that Levinas calls "the most egoist and cruelest of needs." As Levinas says, this is the moral of Aristophanes' *Symposium* speech, where

¹⁵⁴ One of Levinas' primary metaphors throughout the sections on eros concerns the "night of the erotic," *TI*, 258.

¹⁵⁵ Jeffrey Bloechl explains this by noting that "erotic desire seeks eternity. It lusts after the absolute," "How Best to Keep a Secret?," *Man and World* 29, no. 1 (January 1, 1996), 9.

“love reunites the two halves of one sole being, interpret[ing] the adventure as a return to self.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, eros transgresses not by going too far, but by going ‘less far’ than ethics, failing to go beyond the sameness of the same, failing to reach the Other in his or her alterity.

Aware of its own ambiguity, love’s “‘intention’ no longer goes forth unto the *light*,”¹⁵⁷ but instead opts to remain in the dark, attempting to enjoy transcendence without ever attaining it.¹⁵⁸ However, this is not the night of the *il y a*, described at length in *Existence and Existents*,¹⁵⁹ where the night was the weight of Being bearing down on us, the night that signified the solipsistic drive of ontology, but another night “alongside” the first, “the night of the erotic . . . the night of the hidden, the clandestine, the mysterious.”¹⁶⁰ Inside this night, eros “does not see. *An intentionality without vision*, discovery does not shed light: what it discovers . . . illuminates no horizon.”¹⁶¹ Not only does the night of eros keep the face hidden and mysterious, but the erotic intention does not even seek to find it, does not seek to shed light into the darkness.¹⁶² These many references to light and darkness within Levinas’ discussion of eros are by no means accidental to his project. Rather they directly connect back to what we saw in chapter 5, regarding the

¹⁵⁶ All quotes, *TI*, 254. Here we begin to get a sense of how Levinas read’s Plato’s love: it is one which goes beyond the individual, aiming at the Good itself. The individual, the first step of Diotima’s ladder, is sacrificed in my attempts to move higher.

¹⁵⁷ *TI*, 257.

¹⁵⁸ Again, Bloechl notes that “erotic love is individual desire born from and aiming toward the face of the other. It is irremissible egoism testing its own limits,” “How Best to Keep a Secret?,” 7.

¹⁵⁹ see chapter 5, §1.1

¹⁶⁰ *TI*, 258-9.

¹⁶¹ *TI*, 260.

¹⁶² Levinas is far more liberal with vision-metaphors in this section of *Totality and Infinity* than perhaps any other. In the first three sections of the books, Levinas tries to distance ethical discourse from ethics, but it is not that ethics ‘does not see,’ in a similar way as eros’ own blindness. Rather ethics speaks and hears (see the previous chapter for a discussion of the shift from vision to discourse). As we will see below, the same shift is presumed here, Eros’ blindness is nothing other than its inability to speak and to hear the call of the Other.

connection of the Good, of the vision-discourse of ethics, and the encounter with the face of the Other. We see here, by the denial of the possibility of sight, the exclusion from the light, that eros cannot serve as a possible route to the discovery of the face. In fact, as we will see in the following section, eros must presuppose the face, even in its failure to properly see it, that is, its failure to hear the call of the Other.

§1.2: Speechlessness

If there be any question that this erotic night represents its distance from the Good and from ethics, Levinas notes that in “no longer go[ing] forth unto the *light*,” eros no longer goes “unto the meaningful.” As we saw in the previous chapter, it was the realm of meaning and signification which defined ethics; it was the move from vision to discourse that enabled Levinas to recover and adapt Plato’s Good beyond Being to its new purpose. Likewise, eros’ avoidance of the light, its inability to move toward the light signals that eros will not provide the possibility of encountering the face and hearing the signifying call of ethics. Instead, eros “play[s] . . . between speech and the renouncement of speech, between the signifyingness [significance] of language and the non-signifyingness of the lustful which silence yet dissimulates.” Eros, according to Levinas, is characterized by “voluptuosity” and “profanation,” and rather than encountering the ethical face, instead encounters “the feminine . . . a face that goes beyond the face.”¹⁶³ The feminine, for Levinas (at least in this section of *TI*) seems to stand for nonsignifyingness itself, as

the face of the beloved does not *express* the secret that *Eros* profanes; it ceases to express, or, if one prefers, it expresses only this refusal to express, this end of

¹⁶³ *TI*, 260.

discourse and of decency In the feminine face the purity of expression is already troubled by the equivocation of the voluptuous, already laughter and raillery.¹⁶⁴

This equation is the locus of a significant feminist criticism, including by Luce Irigaray, who asks first of all “is there otherness outside of sexual difference?”¹⁶⁵ repeating the same question raised by the feminists addressed in Part II: is it not first of all sexual difference which accounts for alterity? However, Irigaray takes this question in radically new ways, in “re-reading” and responding to Levinas. Irigaray sees once again the same sort of concrete implications in a concept of the feminine that “appears as the underside or reverse side of man’s aspiration toward the light.”¹⁶⁶ The captivity of women is now no longer framed as merely the (im)possibility of authenticity, but the split between eros and ethics. Seeing the same problems which will be expanded upon in the next subsection, Irigaray notes that “Levinas substitutes the son for the feminine,”¹⁶⁷ and as such, the transition from eros to ethics is the transition also from the feminine to the masculine. Out of a feminine-structured eros, Levinas

abandons the feminine other, leaves her to sink, in particular into the darkness of a pseudoanimality, in order to return to his responsibilities in the world of men-amongst-themselves. For him, the feminine does not stand for an other to be respected in her human freedom and human identity. The feminine other is left without her own specific face.¹⁶⁸

Here, Irigaray takes ‘feminine’ to stand for women as a sex or gender class, and thus women, as women, are left to participate only in the dark and speechless eros, while men

¹⁶⁴ All quotes, *TI*, 259-260.

¹⁶⁵ Luce Irigaray, “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas on the Divinity of Love,” *Re-Reading Levinas*, 109. In his earliest works, including *Time and the Other*, Levinas draws this exact equation between the feminine and alterity. His use of the feminine here, however, differs significantly, and no longer represents a true alterity at all.

¹⁶⁶ Irigaray, “Questions,” 109.

¹⁶⁷ Irigaray, “Questions,” 111.

¹⁶⁸ Irigaray, “Questions,” 113.

(and only men) and their sons (and only sons) are free to return to the serious world of ethics.

While others have defended Levinas' employment of the feminine as a category term rather than a classification of women specifically in opposition to men, it is clear that the feminine—the erotic—is understood as outside of ethics.¹⁶⁹ As Levinas says, “the principle ‘you shall not commit murder,’ the very signifyingness of the face, seems contrary to the mystery which *Eros* profanes.”¹⁷⁰ As Irigaray interprets this, “when the lovers, male or female, substitute for, occupy or possess the site of those who conceived them, they founder in the unethical, in profanation.”¹⁷¹ Thus, while Levinas could perhaps be defended against a strong reading of gender or sex essentialism of his claims of alterity, Irigaray's broader claims still land with full force: a deep division is drawn between the Good and ethics, which were structured by discourse and light on the one hand, and eros and the feminine, which find themselves structured (or perhaps better, without structure) by the absence of the same on the other.¹⁷²

Although eros, in various ways, assumes the ethical, Levinas draws a strict division between ethics as a public, social, signifying relationship, and eros, which remains private, asocial, and does not speak.¹⁷³ Our relationship to the Good—our ethical relationship to

¹⁶⁹ Levinas himself seems to try to pre-empt this criticism when he writes in an earlier section that “the empirical absence of the human being of ‘feminine sex’ in a dwelling nowise affects the dimension of femininity which remains open there,” *TI*, 158. For various discussions of this point, see Tina Chanter, *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas* and Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, *Re-reading Levinas*.

¹⁷⁰ *TI*, 262.

¹⁷¹ “The Fecundity of the Caress: A Reading of Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, ‘Phenomenology of Eros,’” in *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, 187.

¹⁷² A significant part of Irigaray's work in this area has been to outline a feminine way of discourse. When applied to Levinas' readings of eros, we can see that this could amount to an *erotic* way of discourse, and thus, will be a point to which I will return in the final part.

¹⁷³ Levinas draws a connection between all of those when he notes that “social life in the world is communication or communion,” *EE*, 41. Eros, on the other hand is characterized as an “asocial relation,” or an “inverted signification, a signification that signifies falsely,” *TI*, 263.

the other—is always one structured by language and speech. Love is characterized, contrary to ethics, by “the non-sociality of the society of lovers.” Unlike in Plato, eros in Levinas “excludes the third party, it remains intimacy, dual solitude, closed society, the supremely non-public.”¹⁷⁴ Levinas’ criticism of a Platonic eros—the sense of eros that I am attempting to restore—could not be more complete: eros will *never* lead to ethics, because by its nature, it desires to stay hidden, to stay between the lovers themselves. Eros does not turn outward to the world, but returns always to itself.

But this is far from a neutral proposition for Levinas, given his link of community and ethics. Rather, in eros, “the beloved, returned to the stage of infancy . . . has quit her status as a person.” Rather than through communication and communion, eros meets the other only in play.¹⁷⁵ This is the second characteristic of eros alongside voluptuousness/profanation. The feminine face is not met in serious discourse, but rather “‘discovered’ in the non-signifyingness of the wanton.”¹⁷⁶ Similarly, it does not speak the command ‘do not kill,’ but merely “laughs . . . signaling the less than nothing.”¹⁷⁷ It is not unethical, since Levinas warns us that “disrespect presupposes the face In the inversion of the face in femininity, in this disfigurement that refers to the face, non-signifyingness abides in the signifyingness of the face,”¹⁷⁸ but *is* an-ethical. It is a withdrawnness from ethics which does not necessarily contradict it. The tension between profanation and true transcendence is built upon the premises that make ethics possible: the existence of the

¹⁷⁴ *TI*, 265.

¹⁷⁵ “relations with the Other are enacted in play; one plays with the Other as with a young animal,” *TI*, 263.

¹⁷⁶ *TI*, 261.

¹⁷⁷ *TI*, 264. As Richard Cohen puts it, “eros, then, stands to the fully human tasks of ethic and justice as an interlude, intermission, or vacation. It is play, the lighter side of life,” “The Family and Ethics: The Metaphysics of Eros in Emmanuel Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity*,” *Contemporary Philosophy* 15 (1993), 2.

¹⁷⁸ *TI*, 262-3.

ex-cendent Good, and a face which makes it visible. If it were not for this, eros would be impossible. And yet, eros does not *do* the work of the Good either. It is for that reason that, “in its frankness [language as the presence of the face] refuses the clandestinity of love, where it loses its frankness and meaning and turns into laughter or cooing.”¹⁷⁹ Love is excluded from ethics because love is excluded from discourse.¹⁸⁰ Love laughs and coos, it does not speak. As a result eros, it seems, is incapable of seeing (that is hearing and speaking) the Good.¹⁸¹

Levinas’ stance on this is more severe in the earlier *Existence and Existents*, where he already discusses loves ambiguity and its voluptuousness:

There is also the ridiculous and tragic simulation of devouring in kissing and love-bites. It is as although one had made a mistake about the nature of one’s desire and had confused it with hunger which aims at something, but which one later found out was a hunger for nothing. The *other* is precisely this objectless dimension. Voluptuousness is the pursuit of an ever richer promise; it is made up of an ever growing hunger which pulls away from every being. There is no goal, no end in view. Voluptuousness launches forth into an unlimited, empty; vertiginous future. It consumes pure time which no *object* fills nor even stakes out.¹⁸²

Here (in slight contrast to *TI*¹⁸³) the ambiguity is presented as a misunderstanding, a confusion about what love really is. Along the same model of anxiety and fear, voluptuousness, endless desire, is reduced and inscribed into desire-as-lack, hunger. A goal is created where previously there wasn’t one, not out of necessity on the part of love, but

¹⁷⁹ *TI*, 213.

¹⁸⁰ This point is the topic of the following chapter, and the reasons for it will be taken up more fully there.

¹⁸¹ Levinas here uses “*l’amour*” but when he takes it up again in the final section, transposes instead to “*l’eros*.”

¹⁸² *EE*, 43-4, emphasis original.

¹⁸³ The change can, I think, be at least in part be attributed to the Good becoming more immanently discoverable in the face of the Other in *Totality and Infinity* than in *Existence and Existents*. The choice between the Good and enjoyment is no longer so strongly dualistic between a here and a there, and thus, the ambiguity is not between two choices, but two ways of seeing the same thing.

for the lover, who cannot contain voluptuous love, who cannot understand a desire that does not consume. Love *itself* is not ambiguous, but the lover makes it so. His inability to communicate with the beloved (because the love doesn't aim at the beloved qua object or goal) compels him to change the relationship. Just as for Sartre, love turns to masochism and then to hate and sadism as each failed, so for Levinas, voluptuous love turns to possessive, desirous, or acquisitive love in order to provide structure and comprehensibility. But communication fails here too; the other *qua* other is destroyed by being transformed (just as in Sartre) into an object to be had. This Sartrean attitude of eros is seen, perhaps most clearly, in the final epigraph to *Otherwise than Being*, taken from Pascal: "they have used concupiscence as best as they could for the general good; but it is nothing but a pretense and a false image of charity; for at bottom it is simply a form of hatred."¹⁸⁴ For love to succeed, it must remain voluptuous, without goal, but also without communication.

In *TI*, on the other hand, voluptuosity does not lead back down to possession, it is not a mistaken hunger-pang, but enjoys precisely because of its ambiguous nature. It can only profane when it first understands the feminine other as both "violable and inviolable" as "virginity," "the untouchable," the "ungraspable," "modesty," "tenderness," and "frailty."¹⁸⁵ Eros bears witness to the inviolable nature of the Other even when it transgresses it. It does not quite yet pay heed to the ethical command, but in an inverted way, is aware of its existence. Its ambiguity, then, is not in turning away from ethics or

¹⁸⁴ The clarity of the connection of Pascal's concupiscence and Levinas' eros can be seen in his declaration in an interview that he is searching for a "love without eros . . . [a] love without concupiscence" (*Entre-Nous*, 103) In general, *OB* seems more directly opposed to eros than *TI* (as I will briefly explore at the conclusion of the next subsection), however, even in *TI* it is clear that eros is a poor substitute for justice.

¹⁸⁵ We once again see in these words, scattered throughout "Phenomenology of Eros," the locus of the critique of Levinas' employment of the word 'feminine.' Whether it is intended to be the woman herself as opposed to the man, it is undoubtedly one that links femininity to weakness.

turning back to totality and metaphysics, but in remaining speechless. It hovers in between the two poles, not really speaking and not really hearing the call of the face.

§1.3: The Escape to Ethics¹⁸⁶

However, in the final pages of the “Phenomenology of Eros,” we learn that despite its an-ethical nature, eros does actually give birth, quite literally, to ethics with the birth of the child.¹⁸⁷ However, this birth is not the goal of eros, nor is it the work of eros, rather the child comes from “beyond every possible project, beyond every meaningful and intelligent power.” Thus we have to understand eros in its two directions, first, what it itself aims at: “voluptuosity of voluptuosity,”¹⁸⁸ and secondly what it creates, as if by accident: a community of sons.¹⁸⁹

In its work, the voluptuosity of eros is the same *jouissance* as seen in Sartre and Lacan. Eros is pleasure seeking pleasure. Eros, for Levinas as for Lacan, does not seek an object beyond its enjoyment. In fact it is “the enjoyment” [*la jouissance*] of reunion that Levinas points out is used to justify the Aristophanic interpretation of return to self.¹⁹⁰ There *is* a pleasure in finding our other half, but this is precisely the definition of love that Levinas seeks to overturn by instead claiming that “my voluptuosity delights in [*se réjouit*]

¹⁸⁶ Much of this section was previously presented in a different context as part of a paper “Paternity and Responsibility in Levinas and Marcel,” presented at a joint SIREL/NALS conference “The Neighbor and Stranger,” in 2016.

¹⁸⁷ At the end of “Phenomenology of Eros,” Levinas speaks of “l’enfant,” before immediately switching to “le fils” at the beginning of the next section, “Fecundity.” Here I follow Levinas’ usage and speak always of the child in masculine terms.

¹⁸⁸ *TI*, 266.

¹⁸⁹ A second locus of criticism, Levinas switches almost immediately from ‘the child’ to ‘the son,’ reinforcing Irigaray’s (and others) criticism that the move from eros to ethics leaves the feminine and women behind.

¹⁹⁰ *TI*, 254.

in his voluptuosity.”¹⁹¹ Voluptuosity, jouissance, does not enjoy an object, it enjoys enjoyment, a never-ending perpetuation of itself. This, Levinas says, is in contrast to friendship, which *does* go “unto the Other.”¹⁹² Eros’ enjoyment is based on an “erotic nudity” that “delineates the original phenomenon of immodesty and profanation.”¹⁹³ In this erotic nudity, we see the final reason that eros can be only an accidental ground of ethics. Unlike the nudity of the face, as a freedom from Form,¹⁹⁴ erotic nudity is not the pure experience of alterity and the Good, nor, as it becomes in *Otherwise than Being*, the nudity that signals the leaving of our shelter¹⁹⁵ and the exposure to the possibility of harm.¹⁹⁶ Instead, erotic nudity is “exhibitionist,” or “wanton.”¹⁹⁷ Thus, eros can be the direct source of nothing but profanation and enjoyment. All “moral perspectives” opened up in eros “are situated already in the singular dimension” that nudity creates.¹⁹⁸ How, then, could we ever hope that eros leads to ethics if it will forever be entrapped in the dimension of exhibitionist enjoyment and profanation? After all, this erotic nudity does not even “precede the signifyingness of the face as the obscurity of formless matter precedes the artist’s forms.”¹⁹⁹ Here we have the most direct rejection of the thesis I am drawing from Plato, and to which I intend to return: for Levinas, eros is (despite its

¹⁹¹ *TI*, 266. Not coincidentally, Levinas, just as Sartre before him, thinks this unificatory goal is inherent to Plato’s account of eros, that on this point Plato and Aristophanes align, even if the myth is rejected by Socrates.

¹⁹² *TI*, 266.

¹⁹³ *TI*, 257.

¹⁹⁴ See chapter 5, §3.1 for the discussion of this prior sense of nudity

¹⁹⁵ *OB*, 49.

¹⁹⁶ *OB*, 72 Levinas also speaks in that work of a “non-erotic openness,” further demonstrating that the nudity which is the possibility of being wounded is not the one which contains the possibility of the erotic encounter

¹⁹⁷ all quotes, *TI*, 256-7.

¹⁹⁸ *TI*, 257.

¹⁹⁹ *TI*, 261.

appearance) not ‘beneath’ ethics in a way that it could bring it into existence, being shaped or sculpted into an ethical attitude; ethics does not bloom from eros. Rather ethics ‘comes back’ from the future. The birth of ethics is always a *rebirth*, a *re-entry* after exiting into the erotic attitude. “The chaste nudity [that is, the nudity which shows the Form-less face of the Other] does not vanish in the exhibitionism of the erotic,” or, in other words, as we saw in the previous section, eros is not quite un-ethical, it does not destroy the face, and yet eros “remains mysterious and ineffable” because of “the exorbitant inordinateness of this indiscretion.”²⁰⁰ To be erotic, we saw, presumes that the face, the vulnerable nudity of ethics, is already there, but precisely because eros denudes in another, exhibitionist way, it must remain silent. To provide an account of eros would be to destroy the face, to reduce it to an object of enjoyment. It is only in its silence that eros can maintain its harmless character as an-ethical.

This silence is rewarded when finally, “beyond every possible project, beyond every meaningful and intelligent power—[the lovers] engender the child.”²⁰¹ While the lovers aim at their own enjoyment, at their shared erotic nudity, endeavoring to keep their actions an unspoken “secret,”²⁰² even from themselves, the child comes upon them. The child, “a future never future enough, more remote than the possible”²⁰³ appears, not as the accomplishment of the lovers, but as their salvation. It is not truly accomplished (a word he hesitantly uses at the end of ‘Phenomenology’), but—as he begins the following

²⁰⁰ *TI*, 261.

²⁰¹ *TI*, 266. As with the move from child to son, Levinas moves from speaking of the lover and beloved together here at the end of “Phenomenology of Eros” to speaking only of fathers in the sections which follow it.

²⁰² *TI*, 267.

²⁰³ *TI*, 254-5. Note here that the directionality of time is changed from how Levinas generally talks about the Good: The good was the past always past, eros, and particularly the child it engenders, come to us from an always future.

section ('Fecundity')—discovered.²⁰⁴ The child arrives for the parents as it does for the readers, as a surprise, as something beyond every intention. "No anticipation represents him nor . . . projects him." Rather, "the child come[s] to pass from beyond the possible."²⁰⁵ Transcendence, in the form of the child, comes upon the lovers.

Although it provides for the transcendence of the self, the child of Levinasian eros, as it does for Diotima, represents an immortality that is only vicarious. The future that is created "is the child, mine in a certain sense or, more exactly, me, but not myself; it does not fall back upon my past to fuse with it and delineate a fate . . . [an] alteration and identification in fecundity." In the fecundity of paternity, the self seeks to engender itself again, only to discover that, beyond its every capacity, it has engendered something radically *new*. As Levinas concludes, "Fecundity continues history without producing old age . . . across the discontinuity of generations, punctuated by the inexhaustible youths of the child." The child is Other, even while remaining the same. To give birth returns us to the realm of ethics and of discourse; gives birth—just as the Platonic lover does—at the same time to the Child and to *logoi* (in this case no longer rehearsed speeches, but the open signification of the face). Arriving once more at the top of the Platonic ascent, Levinas notes that "fecundity engendering fecundity accomplishes goodness;" not only the "goodness correlative of the face," but beyond even this to "a more profound relation: the goodness of goodness."²⁰⁶ However, for the father, the ambiguity of desire and ethics remains; Self and Other exist in uneasy tension in the child. Levinas is quick to dismiss

²⁰⁴ *TI*, 267: "The profanation . . . does not 'discover,' beyond the face, another more profound I which this face would express; it discovers the child." This is also precisely why we can call eros an accidental ground of ethics, but not an essential one.

²⁰⁵ *TI*, 267.

²⁰⁶ All quotes *TI*, 269.

the possibility that the child represents a mere ‘avatar’ of the self, but it is impossible, as he points out, for the Father to not see “himself not only in the gestures of his son, but in his substance and his unicity.” The son is not found like the ‘stranger, the widow, and the orphan’ already in the world at the limit of the ego, but rather “his I qua filial commences . . . in election. He is unique for himself because he is unique for his father.” The father initiates the son, wholly Other despite being the Father, not only biologically into life, but into the realm of language and discourse. “The I engendered exists at the same time as unique in the world and as a brother among brothers.” Paternity engenders in the son the ethical command, “because it does not place [the son] among the other chosen ones, but rather in face of them, to serve them.”²⁰⁷ In other words, ethics results from eros, not for the lovers themselves, as the son is still too much of themselves to properly appear as the Other. It is only for the son that ethics arises. Ethics, just like the son, is born out of eros as a new entity, same and other to eros.

Without eros, the community of elected sons would never exist, the brotherhood which necessarily underlies ethical relationships depends on fathers (and mothers) who give birth to their sons. And yet, for those involved in the erotic, the third (the child) does not bring them into an ethical relationship that would fan out from their singular erotic one. The lovers remain under their vow of silence. They may, at any moment *return* to the ethical situation they have been in since *their own* birth and election, but they have gained no ethical insight from their eros. Nor does the son, as a radically new being, share any part of his parent’s eros. He does not serve as a record of eros, nor is his ethical being in any way tied to the *eros* of his parents, rather it is tied to his ‘election.’ The child’s

²⁰⁷ All quotes *TI*, 279.

inauguration into Ethics, into the light of the Good, is also his separation from what came before him—his separation from eros.

§2: Marion's Erotic Reduction

Although the strongest apparent critique of Levinas by Marion regards the relative exclusion of love from ethics,²⁰⁸ Marion himself does not actually end up at a position significantly different from his predecessor. His early critiques of Levinas' overly general account of the face and its role in ethics (§2.1) is followed not by accounts of eros' more direct or public role in ethics (despite arguments for the univocity of love), but instead Marion's 'erotic reduction' eventually ends up similarly placing eros as an 'erased phenomenon,' something that disappears before it is made public (§2.2). Eros then remains useless for providing insights for a community ethics: it continues to withdraw from society, and to constitute an essentially private union between only the lovers themselves. Finally, Marion returns to a discussion of the connection of human and divine love, and therefore (following the analysis of the previous chapter), establishes a second form of eros' relation to the Good alongside Levinas' account (§2.3).

²⁰⁸ A critique that Marion repeats against Descartes in particular ("of all the supposed errors for which Descartes has been taken to task, this one alone [i.e. omitting *amans* from the list of capacities of thinking substance]—doubtless his only error . . .," 7) and against philosophy in general ("philosophers have forsaken love," 1) in his work *Erotic Phenomenon*.

§2.1: The Critique of Universality

One of Marion's first critiques of Levinas appears in the essay "The Intentionality of Love," which he dedicates "in honor of Emmanuel Levinas."²⁰⁹ Here, Marion critiques a Levinasian position in which "we love arbitrarily, or rather, we believe that this arbitrariness still deserves the name *love*."²¹⁰ In other words, that every face presents itself as a face, every face equally shows forth the light of the Good, and our being struck by any particular face is a matter of accidental circumstance, and not of any fact regarding the other person or her relation to myself. As we saw in part II, this brings about the perpetual relativization of our love seen by Sartre.²¹¹ Nothing certifies my love as being genuinely for *this one here*. Recalling Levinas' (and even earlier, Pascal's) hesitancy that love may in fact be one of the worst forms of immanence—what he terms "amorous autism"²¹²—Marion is determined to find a love that will escape this paradox, that will not only truly love myself in the other. In doing so, the other will have to exceed any intention or consciousness I have in regards to her "beauty, loyalty, intelligences, riches," etc.²¹³ I cannot love the other for something I desire in her and "thus it becomes definitively clear that the other, which my love claims to love, will always have to transcend my consciousness by overstepping it."²¹⁴ Here, Marion is constructing his own account of the appearance of the Other—of the face—as that which opposes the Self-same, who takes on an infinite character over and above my own consciousness, and who

²⁰⁹ Published in Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

²¹⁰ *Prolegomena*, 71.

²¹¹ See chapter 3, §2.1.

²¹² *Prolegomena*, 75.

²¹³ *Prolegomena*, 75.

²¹⁴ *Prolegomena*, 79.

cannot (without being killed or destroyed) be contained by my consciousness. Like Levinas, Marion sees the Other as primary, as constituting the Self of the *I*, investing or disclosing myself to myself;²¹⁵ however, unlike Levinas, he notes (playing on a French double meaning) that the Other both is and is not *le premier venu*. This phrase, in its positive usage, takes its literal meaning—to be *le premier venu* is to be the first to arrive—however, when it is employed in a negative phrase, it takes an idiomatic meaning—*il n'est pas le premier venu* describes someone who is not ‘just anybody.’²¹⁶ According to Marion, therefore, the one who comes first is a specific person not just the anonymous Other put forward by Levinas.

Thus we do not arrive, Marion claims, at duty, at “the injunction [that] enjoins to any other whatsoever, indeed to every possible other, simply inasmuch as it offers the face of a man,”²¹⁷ nor, as Marion interprets Levinas as mistakenly holding, at an ethical attitude which sees the Other as ‘any other,’ and not ‘this one here.’ To say this is to anonymize the other, to substitute—in place of persons—universals and abstractions. This would also rule out the possibility that it is love (remember that, here, Marion is thinking love as univocally both eros and charity), since we never love people in general, nor humanity in the abstract, but individual humans.

Levinas’ Other, Marion sustains, is simply a partial incarnation of Humanity, specific enough to take root in a living person, but never so specific that we can attribute anything of its obligations on me as merely particular to this one here. That the Other in front of me has the rights to ‘the bread from my very mouth’ immediately commands me

²¹⁵ *Prolegomena*, 83-85.

²¹⁶ Marion’s translator points out this double meaning, and its polemical usage against Levinas in *Prolegomena*, 83n10.

²¹⁷ *Prolegomena*, 92.

that *all* Others have a right to my bread. The immediate hunger of the one in front of me, in short, may make me aware of my obligation, but the obligation is in no way tied to the particulars of this other here and now. This leads the Levinasian to two difficulties, the second and more formidable being “can the other, designated to me by a face, individualize himself to the point of becoming unsubstitutable for every other other?”²¹⁸

Here we see re-appear, within a whole new vocabulary, the question that has been plaguing love ever since Plato’s *Symposium* (and which, in that context, continues to plague scholars of Plato): can I love an individual, or do I only love him under the guise of some universal concept? Do I love the person, or do I ‘love’ the Good, Beauty, Alterity, etc.? And, if the latter, by what right can we even call this experience love? According to many, it seems that love must be directed at individuals rather than abstractions or generalities; but many also doubt that this can ever truly happen (thus the complaints against love lodged in Part II). The question takes on a new problem here (and one which will have to be returned to in the final part), since, even if we arrive at the possibility that love of an individual is possible in the first place, have we not now so individuated it that it will become impossible to see it transformed into the basis for ethics? Isn’t the move from love to ethics just one that admits that what I loved in the individual can somehow be expanded and universalized to a sense of justice or duty to all other Others? After all, “ethical responsibility cannot, and even must not make distinctions between faces.”²¹⁹ To base my ethics off of a love particularized to a single individual is to go against this, it is to

²¹⁸ *Prolegomena*, 94. The first difficulty for Marion is how the disfigured face can appear as a face; what distinguishes a face appearing as disfigured from a face not appearing? But this seems to be answered precisely by Marion’s critique of Levinas: the face is something universal. Anything (as I also addressed in chapter 5) can appear as a face, and in fact, the disfigured face appears perhaps more than any other, since it shows my obligation most strongly to substitute myself for him.

²¹⁹ *Prolegomena*, 94-5.

pick and choose those faces that seem similar to my beloved's in some way. Love (so it seems on this account) can never lead us to ethics as formulated by Levinas. Instead, love itself provides us with all the necessary tools to encounter the Other. Indeed, it does it, according to Marion, in a more perfect way than in Levinas' ethical description.²²⁰

Who then, is the other we meet in love?²²¹ For Marion, "if we want to secure responsibility all the way to the point of love," the other must be "unsubstitutable and strictly irreplaceable."²²² However, this also means that he or she would be radically individual, containing nothing of universals (Marion here is subjecting Levinas' concept of the face of the Other to the same critique Levinas levies against Forms and being), and as such are also *unknowable*. The other is a named individual, a grammatical subject who cannot be subsumed to any predicate in a proposition 'X is Y,' since any such proposition would subsume him or her in a universal. Marion pulls the name for this radical individuation from Duns Scotus: *haecceitas*.²²³

Marion thus finishes his critique of Levinas by locating the call that exposes us in love (as charity) rather than ethics. We stand together, the other and myself, not as two random passers-by in the street, but two beings uniquely related in an unrepeatable moment of interaction. However, in the process, Marion has also put forth his own

²²⁰ For a further exploration of the differences between ethics and caritas, and an argument that the difference is not as severe as Marion (and I) makes it to be, see Christina Gschwandtner, "Ethics, Eros, or Caritas? Levinas and Marion on Individuation of the Other," *Philosophy Today* 49, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 70—87.

²²¹ The answer here differs greatly from what eventually becomes the case in Marion's *Erotic Phenomenon*. The answer to this question given in that work will be addressed in §2.3

²²² *Prolegomena*, 95.

²²³ Marion does not reference Scotus (or any who used the word after him) directly, but his usage certainly fits with the Scotian definition, as a radical this-ness principle responsible for the individuation of members in a species, not a negation, but not a form either. For Scotus, although in principle knowable, it was unknowable in this life, as it was undiscoverable through any sense impression, which always led to universal thoughts.

account of love: it no longer loves—as Plato, but also Sartre, Levinas, and much of the tradition would argue—because the beloved is good or because he or she is beautiful, but it aims at the individuality of the individual. Thus again (from the Platonic argument), we see why love does not lead to ethics: love of the individual does not bring me to anything beyond the individual to show me something like the Good or True Virtue. Love always remains at this particularized level.

§2.2: The Erased Phenomenon

But, even as particularized, Marion speaks of *charity* not eros. Why is this love not simply universalizable? Why is the argument not only a rather minor one about whether charity or ethics is the best name for the same relationship? After all, Levinas' critique was particular to eros, it said nothing in regards to charity. The answer to this comes in Marion's *The Erotic Phenomenon*. There, Marion announces that the *Erotic Phenomenon* is the book that had

obsessed [him] since the publication of *The Idol and Distance* in 1977. All the books published since then bear the mark, explicit or hidden, of this concern. In particular, *Prolegomena to Charity* was published in 1986 only to give witness to the fact that I had not given up on the project, despite the delay in completing it. All of my books, above all the last three, have been just so many steps toward the question of the erotic phenomenon.²²⁴

In short then, despite the prior work being a prolegomena to *charity*, the whole trajectory of Marion's work had been one extended prolegomena to *eros*.

²²⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 10.

Nor do these truly represent two separate projects, as Marion reaffirms in *EP* his radical claim for the univocity of love, unified particularly under eros.²²⁵ As he says, “a serious concept of love distinguishes itself by its unity, or rather its power to keep together significations that nonerotic thought cuts apart.”²²⁶ Thus, the heart of all love, including the charity discussed in the previous subsection, is always eros. Thus, the encounter with the other is always structured as an *erotic* encounter, even if in its more general appearance, we might call it one of charity, friendship, fraternity, etc. Marion doubles down on this claim in *In the Self's Place*, where he says that (in direct opposition to Nygren's *Eros and Agape*) “the univocity of love thus permits converting *cupiditas* (which wants to enjoy without ever succeeding in it) into *caritas* (which alone permits enjoyment because it alone enjoys God, the sole *enjoyable*),”²²⁷ and again that “we can conclude that love for the other . . . authorizes the passage, which univocity maintained, from *caritas* to *dilectio* and back. Nothing but the erotic reduction itself is at issue.”²²⁸ Love is univocal in its convertibility, with eros (or *cupiditas*) being its primary name.²²⁹

Yet, these quotes also show that sexual love is not the only expression of eros. While Marion at times has the same sort of sexual, desirous love in mind for eros as Levinas, univocity also opens eros up to possibilities that Levinas did not see. But when

²²⁵ Marion is hesitant to define love, however, its univocity under the name eros is clear from two statements in the introduction. The first, is his apparently paralleling of “amour et charité (eros et agape)” and second a more clearly, his conclusion that “love falls under an *erotic* rationality” (*EP* 5, emphasis original). For more on the univocity of love, a position I share with Marion, see the general discussion regarding various love terms in the introduction. For further discussions of Marion's claims for univocity, see, Kyle Hubbard, “The Unity of Eros and Agape: On Jean-Luc Marion's Erotic Phenomenon,” and Natalie Depraz, “Théo-phénoménologie I: L'amour—Jean-Luc Marion et Christos Yannaras.”

²²⁶ *EP* 5.

²²⁷ *In the Self's Place*, 277, emphasis original. *Cupiditas* here is love defined as desire, and therefore akin to the Greek eros. In contrast, *Caritas* (and also *dilectio*, which Marion also discusses) both translate the Greek agape (a claim Augustine makes himself, cf. 275).

²²⁸ *In the Self's Place*, 280.

²²⁹ Although not necessarily its highest expression.

instead we take eros in its form as *caritas*, when the erotic reduction structures our relationship to the Other, not in sexuality, but in kenotic self-giving, charity becomes a kind of parallel to Levinas' ethical project. It is now in the erotic reduction, rather than the ethical face-to-face that the self is granted to me. What I am in search of (or better, in need of, since there is in fact no *I* before the question is answered) is the single instance of the one who loves me. On the answering of this question, the world is given to me, not as the mathematical, flat world of certainty, but a space, time and ipseity structured by the love I am waiting for, and eventually, the love that I am given.²³⁰ The love of a single other opens up the very possibility of relating to other others.

However, it is as if the sexual aspect of eros is lost in this opening up of *caritas*. The sexual encounter of eros, the event of the erotic reduction, is not the primordial origin of the past always past, but neither is it an origin that continues into its future. Rather, Marion introduces a new concept to phenomenology, labeling it the 'erased phenomenon.'²³¹ It seems that sexual eros, if it is to transform into *caritas*, must also disappear in the process. Eroticization, the orgasm itself ("the only miracle that the poorest human condition can definitely experience"²³²), is like an apotheosis of the self. I move from the physical body of an object, to the flesh of a person, and further to pure eroticization. In the aftermath, we forget what we have experienced and are thrust back into the real world. I become aware that I am a body here and now, no longer even flesh. *La petite mort* leaves us as just two corpses, objects to be touched, but no longer flesh to

²³⁰ 'Space,' 'Time,' and 'Ipsity' correspond to the titles of the final three sections of the first 'meditation' of *EP*.

²³¹ *EP*, 138. To the best of my knowledge, this concept is invented by Marion, and first appears in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, so far its only appearance in his work. In the French, it is a play on the saturated phenomenon (*raturé* versus *saturé*).

²³² *EP*, 138.

feel and be felt, even less so eroticized flesh to kiss.²³³ Orgasm represents as much a consuming as it does a consummating, and as Marion notes, “orgasm is not a summit, from which one would descend in stages; it resembles a cliff that opens onto a void, where one falls all at once. All at once, then, nothing remains.”²³⁴ And here lies the problem for sexual eros in Marion: it disappears as soon as it is completed. We are not left with the indelible mark of the erotic experience, but as one who has lost and forgotten from where he came.

In forgetting what happened, we also find ourselves unable to speak of it. Our language in the world is completely foreign to the experience of eroticization, and therefore of it, “one can say nothing, even to oneself, even from lover to lover. The words are lacking.”²³⁵ The various vocabularies of “erotic speech” that Marion delineates are all grounded in a kind of meaninglessness. Eros speaks without saying anything.²³⁶ The first way it does so (the same as Levinas’ raillery or cooing) is through “puerile words . . . those words said by those who do not yet know how to speak correctly.”²³⁷ Eros speaks in a direct way, “freed from” the need to theorize or conceptualize any of the lovers’ experiences. The childish babbling of lovers is pure immediacy and as such meaningless.²³⁸ When we enter back into the seriousness of the world, however, we set

²³³ This progression is the best way to understand the movement of the erotic reduction: from being touched, to being felt, to being *baisé* (politely, to be kissed, but almost universally used in France now to mean [and the double meaning is clearly intended by Marion] to be fucked.) A similar progression could be read into Levinas, although his eros culminates in a much less vulgar ‘la caresse’-the caress.

²³⁴ *EP* 135.

²³⁵ *EP* 144.

²³⁶ In “What Cannot Be Said: Apophasis and the Discourse of Love,” the sixth chapter of *The Visible and the Revealed*, Marion parses this by arguing that “I love you” is a perlocutionary act, not a locutionary one. That is, love puts a demand on the other to respond, rather than saying anything in a predicative way. Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed* (Fordham Univ Press, 2009), 101-118.

²³⁷ *EP* 149. In Marion’s presentation, this is in fact the second lexicon he gives, but the order of them is in no way essential.

²³⁸ *EP* 149.

aside childish things, no longer finding it appropriate for the ‘serious man’ to speak in such a direct way of everything that impresses upon him. But in doing so, we also lose our first way of speaking about eros.

The second ‘lexicon’ of erotic speech is no more successful in making the transition erotic experience to meaningful speech: “the language that is called obscene, the language that reduces each one to his or her sexual organs.”²³⁹ Here, vulgar language serves a direct purpose to eroticize flesh, in naming these organs, and identifying the other with her very sexuality, I eroticize the other, I denude her by speaking of her in the language of the naked body. The dirty talk of the bedroom does not so much name or describe parts of a body, but calls for them to be performative: I speak in order to provoke action.²⁴⁰ But again, in re-entering the world, this vocabulary is forced to disappear. The sexualization of the body that occurs in this kind of speech, when it comes too soon or too late, does not arouse us but disgusts us. Bedroom language, outside the bedroom, comes as an assault on our very self; the same words which once invested me with my eroticized flesh now reduce me to an object. Once again the erotic language fails to describe, in public, what came before in private.

The final lexicon, Marion admits, comes “in apparent contradiction with the first two;”²⁴¹ eros speaks with the language of mystical theology.²⁴² Eros expresses itself as in search of union of lovers, but this is nothing else (for Marion, at least) than the same speech that speaks of the “spiritual union of man with God.” Eros, which in this register

²³⁹ *EP* 148.

²⁴⁰ In other essays, Marion speaks of this explicitly as the perlocutionary speech act.

²⁴¹ *EP* 149.

²⁴² There is an interesting inversion here. Many choose to interpret mysticism as making use of erotic language, if not reducing it to eroticism altogether. Marion on the other hand, comes close to reducing eroticism to nothing but theological mysticism.

speaks of a never ending future, of a revelation of a yet to come. Indeed, Marion describes the progression of language in here as asking “Again,” which is in reality only an announcement “here I am,” which in turn is the command to the other “come!”, also announcing, at the same time “I am coming.”²⁴³ This is nothing less, Marion says, than the very last word of the Book of Revelation (Rev. 22:20 “He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”). This last lexicon is in many ways the most perfect way to express the erotic, as it speaks always of a future yet to come, about to come. It puts the present in suspension, always aiming at a beyond, an enjoyment without end—as Marion says, “according to the erotic future, one question appears meaningless—the one that asks: “When will this be enough?”; for the correct measure in love must pass beyond ever measure: unless there is too much, it is still not enough. In the erotic future, “Here I am!” says, “Come!”²⁴⁴ Thus we arrive back by an eros structured by *jouissance* (the last quote comes from a section entitled “To Enjoy”/“*Jouir*”) an eros that seeks enjoyment in enjoying, an activity without fulfillment or *telos*. This aiming beyond every finitude explains why mystical language comes in as the third vocabulary of love.

In all three languages however, we see the common thread of language that is performative, not indicative, and as a result remains radically individual. I speak my love to the beloved directly in terms that signify nothing to the outside world. As a result, we find that the language of eros needs to be excluded from discourse ethics. The speech of lovers will never give way to the call of the Other as it is seen by Levinas, nor even to the

²⁴³ The French verb *venir* can be used in many of the same sexual contexts as the English ‘to come.’

²⁴⁴ *EP* 130.

more particularized form of *caritas* in Marion. It speak only of the immediacy of love, it performs love itself without signifying anything.

In this final point, Marion comes to the same conclusion that Jean-Luc Nancy will by reinterpreting Lacan's slogan that "there is no sexual relation/*il n'y a pas un rapport sexuel*" by taking up the secondary sense of the French word *rapport*; not a relation, but a relating or a report: "the oldest senses of the word [*rapport*] have to do with 'revenue,' or 'giving an account' or 'narrative.'" ²⁴⁵ The issue is thus no longer (as it was for Sartre and Lacan) that it is impossible for lovers to overcome their differences and come together, but instead, having come together, the lovers find it impossible to speak (to others, to each other, or even to themselves) of what has taken place. Intimacy, Lacan says, again mixing the erotic and the mystical, "is the superlative of interiority (*interior intimo meo*: perhaps the whole history of sex in the West has to do with this Augustinian god who is so intimate with the subject)." ²⁴⁶ But how are we to share something so intimate? How can we possible make the most interior of experiences external in a report, the language of sex "is itself in fact nothing but a saying, although a saying whose sense is *jouissance*, not signification." ²⁴⁷

Thus we see in Nancy clearly what is implicit in Marion: eros is *made possible* by its being made silent. Sexual relation becomes possible because sexual reporting is impossible. We salvage the possibility of eros at the expense of its speakability. What happens in eros, if anything happens at all, is transgressive of social norms, and thus, to

²⁴⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality* (Fordham University Press, 2013), 4.

²⁴⁶ *Corpus II*, 12.

²⁴⁷ *Corpus II*, 12.

allow it to happen, we must have it in secret.²⁴⁸ The world of ethics or of charity cannot handle the erotic, which as Marion points out, takes place precisely by transgressing the command of the face: “in hearing ‘thou shalt not kill,’ I can and must, by virtue of being a lover, hear ‘Do not touch me.’”²⁴⁹ While at first, this command holds for the lover (who, according to Marion, must wait, must be loved before he can love) it is inevitably crossed, the lovers touch, they each advance to the place of the other, receiving their flesh, their selves, from the very ‘place’ of the other.²⁵⁰ The command of the lover “do not touch me,” is not the unbreakable law of Levinas’ ethics, but the transgressable (and necessarily transgressed) taboo of Lacan: it locates *jouissance*, and makes it possible, so long as it hides what it has done. The moment that the lover tries to provide an account of what has happened, he reduces the beloved to an object, and fails to address her in her *haecceitas*.

As a result, for Marion as for Levinas, eros succeeds only by keeping its silence; eros stays between the lovers themselves. As Marion notes:

The lovers pass to the third in order to radicalize the apparition of their own shared erotic phenomenon—not first in order to show it publicly and socially to others remaining outside of the erotic reduction, but in order to show it to themselves and thus render *themselves visible to themselves*.²⁵¹

The lovers are not able to assure themselves of their eros in front of a third party, nor to use any insights gained through their erotic encounter to relate to any other Others. Despite recovering the value of eros for itself, Levinas and Marion, have not fully returned the role that Plato ascribes to it as a method of ethical awakening or

²⁴⁸ “Erotic speech thus provokes a transgressive language—because it transgress objectivity, transports us out of the world and also, by simple consequence, transgresses the social conditions (the decency of conversation) and the public finalities (the evidence of knowing) of worldly language.” *EP* 148.

²⁴⁹ *EP* 101.

²⁵⁰ Cf. *EP* 129.

²⁵¹ *EP* 197, emphasis original.

education.²⁵² Instead, eros and ethics (which I continue to define, following Levinas, in the context of the signifying encounter with the face of the Other in language) remain walled off from each other.

§2.3: Loving Through the Good

There is however, one other that Marion allows to break into the erotic experience, in fact, which *must* break into the erotic experience in order to render it possible:

The lovers accomplish their oath in the *adieu*—in the passage unto God [*à Dieu*], whom they summon as their final witness, their first witness, the one who never leaves and never lies. For the first time, they say “adieu” to one another: next year in Jerusalem—next time in God. Thinking unto God [*penser à Dieu*] can be done, erotically, in this “adieu.”²⁵³

Now thinking of eros eschatologically, the question “does anybody love me?” has only one original answer, one first case of being loved which enables me to love *as if* eternally:

God. In moving from that first question to the second, “can I love first?”²⁵⁴ we discovered that the best we could do is to love *as if* I could love first, to love *as if* I could love at all.

And then, in the end, we discover that only God can definitively be the referent of the “final swing of the center of gravity [that] can be expressed thus: ‘You loved me first.’²⁵⁵ ‘For God so loved the world’ that it was made possible for the world to love.

In fact, it is not only love’s possibility, but the very *question* of love’s possibility that requires this divine love. I could not have even entered into this erotic reduction “could

²⁵² This is not to say that *every* ethical encounter must be an erotic one, but rather only that any single erotic encounter can provide the lovers an ethical formation. The lovers, when their shared eros is allowed to speak publicly, can directly enable both to turn toward a wider public in an ethical way. The explanation of this transition will be the subject of the final part of this dissertation.

²⁵³ *EP*, 212. The bracketed texts appear in the cited translation.

²⁵⁴ This question is first asked on page 71, and repeated throughout the text.

²⁵⁵ *EP*, 215.

[never] have asked myself ‘does anyone out there love me?’ if another did not love me first.”²⁵⁶ Thus, not only the answer, but the question itself, is only raised on account of God first loving. Thus the first instance of love, the most true instance (just as was the case for the Other in general, in chapter 5) is God. It is also this fact which secures Marion’s arguments for the univocity of love: all love is made possible by this first love. While Marion’s arguments in favor of the univocity of eros and *philia* are somewhat more hesitant,²⁵⁷ he concludes with a strong push for the univocity of eros and *agape*, between my love for any other other, and God’s love. For if “God names himself with the very name of love,” it is a necessary conclusion that “God loves like we love, with the same love as us, according to the unique erotic reduction.” There can therefore be no question that God is the first and the best lover, for

when God loves (and indeed he never ceases to love), he simply loves infinitely better than do we. He loves to perfection, without fault, without an error, from beginning to end. He loves first and last. He loves like no one else. In the end, I not only discover that another was loving before me, but above all I discover that this first lover, from the beginning is named God . . .

God precedes and transcends us, but first of all in the fact that he loves us infinitely better than we love, and than we love him. God surpasses us as the best lover.²⁵⁸

We are able to love other people because God himself, The Good beyond being, who is Love beyond being loves us first and most of all. All of our loves are just so many attempts at returning this first love. Our loves for humans multiply and redirect the love that we have received from God.

²⁵⁶ *EP*, 215.

²⁵⁷ *EP*, 219-220.

²⁵⁸ *EP*, 222, the closing words of the book.

§3: Conclusions

We have now seen, through two very different (yet linked) approaches which have sought to recover eros as a serious philosophical concept, but where are we left as regards the possibility of erotic ethics, or ethical eros? In both cases, we have seen that eros' return came from a prior resurrection of the Good beyond Being, not as a purely Platonic Idea, but in a renewed register of phenomenological description.²⁵⁹ With the recovery of the Good seen in Part III, the objections of Part II that all other-relations boiled down to relations of use, that the other is good only as good-for, can be overcome. Our relationship with the Other, whether Levinas' ethics or Marion's charity, is made possible as a result of the Other's connection to the Good, whether this is the Other as the trace of the Good, or the making possible of love by first being loved by God.

Both Levinas and Marion were then led, for their own reasons, to give an account of eros within this new framework. Notably absent however, is any attempt to resurrect the Beautiful to once again join the Good. In its place, eros continues to be structured by the same *jouissance* introduced to eros by Sartre and Lacan: eros is no longer a pull between Good and Beauty, but between the Good and enjoyment. In this tension, both Levinas and Marion essentialize an ambiguity that Plato saw as an either/or choice: the tension between love of an individual or love of the transcendent universal is no longer an either/or option but a necessary aspect of love: love is *always* torn between a

²⁵⁹ The vast differences between the two formulations of the Good, Levinas' as spread throughout the world in every face of the Other vs. Marion's locating it in the transcendent God-Other, or its location as the immemorial past or the eschatological future, although interesting in the terms of their own connections to Platonism, will (as I will hope to show) be less important than their shared recovery when it comes to reviving an ethical eros. Either can ultimately serve the same goal. My own inclinations are more toward the eschatological and transcendent reading.

contemplation of the Good (Levinas' vision-as-discourse of the Good or Marion's prayer and praise of God) and the enjoyment of sexual pleasure. This ambiguity in turn made it necessary to silence eros, to relegate to speech which signifies nothing beyond itself and to nobody beyond the lovers themselves. To attempt to speak publicly of my eros is to cover over the ambiguity of the relationship and, as a result, to fail to reach the Other through the erotic approach, instead to reducing him or her to my intentions, to an object to be had.

What then, can we make today of Plato's eros which found its very structure in giving birth to speeches, speeches not just about the 'sweet nothings' of my love, but of True Beauty and Virtue itself? What can we make of a love which does not merely give birth to ethics (through the birth of the child) and then abandons it to its own devices, but which structures ethics through and through?

INTERLUDE 3: THE *PHAEDRUS* TEST

As we move into the final part, I will put forward once again the claim that ended both Part II as well as chapter 5: an eros that does not correspond to Beauty will never succeed as ethical. It is precisely this new ambiguity which shifted many of the attributes of and attitudes toward Beauty to the Good that draws this new, sharp division between public ethics and private eros. Primarily, the Good is now completely independent from desire, no longer good-for, and as a result, our response to it is not pursuit, but a quasi-admiration. Beauty is not redeemed, but condemned anew as the pinnacle of the old, metaphysical thinking. Whereas thinking the Other in the Good beyond being enabled me to encounter him in his alterity, thinking him as Beautiful just redoubled his place in the totality of forms, as one part of a totality. To see the face as beautiful was to fail to see the face at all.

Unable to contemplate, that is, to recognize the beloved as a beloved in a way that does not fall into ethics and the Good on the one side or enjoyment and use on the other, there is no longer room for eros to make its own public contribution. Therefore, just as eros' return required the return of the Good beyond Being, its reintroduction to ethics will require a similar return of transcendent Beauty—parallel to the Good—to allow for lovers to speak meaningfully of the eros they share, and thus make their own, erotic contribution to the ethical.¹

¹ Throughout this section, I continue to take 'ethics' to refer to a Levinasian conception of ethics-as-discourse, the signification of the face that gives me the originary command of ethics, 'do not kill.'

It is my contention that an eros founded on the redefinition of beauty that I put forward better passes the ‘*Phaedrus* test’ than the views of eros seen in Parts II and III.

That is, to recall the words of Socrates:

Suppose a noble and gentle man, who was (or had once been) in love with a boy of similar character, were to hear us say that lovers start serious quarrels for trivial reasons and that, jealous of their beloved, they do him harm—don’t you think that man would think we had been brought up among the most vulgar of sailors, totally ignorant of love among the freeborn? Wouldn’t he most certainly refuse to acknowledge the flaws we attributed to Love (243c-d)?

The task then is this: to provide an account of eros that would be accepted by those who are or ever have been in love.

Nevertheless we cannot simply ignore these critiques of eros as if they had not happened, so let us recount where we have been. Eros and ethics for Plato were closely intertwined, a result—I argued—of Plato’s identification of the Good Beyond Being of the *Republic* and the Something Wonderfully Beautiful in Its Nature of the *Symposium*. However, by the 20th century, it began to become clear that both Platonic eros and ethics, whatever their value, had fatal flaws. Namely, the beloved became substitutable, and was reduced to his role as a stand-in for these first principles, and as a result, ethics became problematically egoistic. Thus, what follows is I believe properly called ‘Platonic’ in the broad sense, but it cannot simply be an argument for Platonic eros reinstated. We must meet the criticisms of the last two parts, and offer an eros that does not erase the Other.

I have so far shown that, in the work of Levinas and Marion, the truth of the second thesis of this dissertation has already been partially shown, we can now provide an account of alterity that describes the encounter of the Other as taking place on its own terms, rather than being mediated by some principle or concept. To fully prove this thesis, however, will require that we first re-establish the first. Recall once more all three theses:

1. Recognition of the Other is based on recognizing his or her beauty and goodness
2. Love of the Other is love of the Other *as* individual, not in light of some attribute
3. Love of the Other forms the basis of our entering into the ethical attitude.

Once the link between goodness and beauty is shown, it will be possible to describe the precise nature of the erotic relationship, as well as how eros allows us to reach the Other as a unique individual. Having shown these, it will be possible to once again describe how our erotic encounters with beauty can enable us to encounter all Others, whether they appear as beautiful or not, whether I relate to them erotically or not, to appear as Other, as connected to the Good, and to hear, in the encounter, the call of ethics.

PART IV: ETHICAL EROS

Oh, would that you would kiss me
With the kisses of your mouth
'Cause your mouth is sweeter than wine, and has
A more complicated history than the American South²

CHAPTER 7: RECOVERING THE BEAUTIFUL

If I am right, and beauty is the source and target of erotic speech, it is no surprise that phenomenology has largely imagined eros to be mute, as the development (or better, recovery) of a phenomenology of the beautiful has lagged far behind that of the good. Whereas Platonic ideals of the Good have (as seen in the previous chapters) re-entered into the vocabulary of phenomenology, beauty seems to remain a taboo. Even with an increasing amount of work on phenomenology of art,³ these rarely seem to take on a full account of beauty itself as a topic-either eschewing it altogether⁴ or leaving it to the reader to impart his own understanding of the term (either naively or imported from

² John Darnielle, “New Chevrolet in Flames,” paraphrasing *Song of Songs* 1:2.

³ Michel Henry, most notably, but also Jean-Luc Marion, John Sallis, and many others.

⁴ Marion’s *Crossing the Visible*, his first book exclusively on art, contains almost no direct mention of ‘beauty’ or the ‘beautiful.’ Of the few that are there, one is in quotation from Malevitch, calling for the construction of a mental space of viewing art *not* structured by beauty, while another proclaims that “beauty is a screen” preventing the visible from being successfully crossed; preventing the painting from becoming an icon.

early, Kantian, Hegelian or Heideggerian aesthetic analyses).⁵ However, even if these works did more explicitly offer their theories of beauty (drawn as they are from those earlier sources), it would seem to only return us to the problems of chapter five: Beauty is what is appropriate to the object, the painting, not to the Other.⁶

However in the critique, explicit or implicit, of a Platonic or metaphysical account of beauty, these authors fail to recognize that Plato understood well that the beauty of objects was not appropriate to the person. The ascent passage of the *Symposium* moves from one beauty to the next, it does not merely see *the same* beauty in different places. The through-line that the ‘Something Wonderfully Beautiful in its nature’ offers is a connection between one beauty to the next, not a flattening of all beauty to aesthetically pleasing appearances. However, there is a through-line. This is what draws us up from one to the next, what enables us, by experiencing the beauty of the physical world, to be conditioned and trained to see the beauty of souls and of virtue. This will be the line that I will attempt to walk, in offering an account of beauty that accounts for eros’ ability to speak, and its ability to contribute to ethics: It must, retain its connections to the beauty of form and appearance,⁷ but must not reduce it to that.

⁵ Sallis’ *Transfigurements*, which makes frequent references to beauty, seems to adapt this approach, at least in large part. Even here, however, Dennis Schmitt asks critically why Sallis chooses to focus on ‘*shining*’ rather than beauty, and also why, given the Kantian origins of Sallis’ works, any connection to the ethical seems to be absent. “In Kant’s Wake: On *Transfigurements*” in David Jones, Jason M. Wirth, and Michael Schwartz, eds., *On the True Sense of Art: A Critical Companion to the Transfigurements of John Sallis* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2016). In his own response, Sallis answers only that beauty is related to ἡθός when we take it not as ethics, but in the Homeric sense of our ‘abode.’ Art shows us elemental nature, not the moral principle of human action, “On Shining Forth: Response to Günter Figal and Dennis Schmidt,” *Research in Phenomenology* 40, no. 1 (2010), 117-119.

⁶ As Heidegger says in “Origin of the Work of Art,” “beauty is one way that truth occurs as unconcealedness,” but this is the truth of metaphysics, of Being. If Beauty’s function is to show us the capital-T Truth, it is no surprise that it does not show us the Other. *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 56.

⁷ While it is not a focus of this work, a necessary corollary of it will be (it should be obvious) that all experience of beauty conditions us for and leads us toward ethics, because all experience of beauty is erotic, even if the *inter-personal* erotic experience provides the most direct leap toward it.

Here, following primarily on work that Jean-Louis Chrétien has done regarding the Platonic tradition, but drawing also from other smaller sources, that beauty is a call that asks for a response, and as a result both is and provokes speech.⁸ In the first half (§1), I will treat the call of Beauty itself: how beauty speaks, what it speaks of, and whom it speaks to. In doing so, I will attempt to differentiate how ‘objective’ beauty speaks from the beauty of the Other, arguing that the Other’s beauty is not their formliness but (modifying Marion’s analysis) their haecceital nature. In the second half (§2), I will begin to look at the reverse: at the response to the call of beauty. This will be a direct overturning of the previous parts, offering a way for eros to speak to—and of—beauty, in the voice of beauty and not (yet) the good. This response enables eros to break free of the dichotomy placed upon in in part III, no longer merely in tension between the transcendence of the Good and the unethical immanence of desire. In this chapter, I treat the response first and foremost as contemplation.

From there, I will transition into the 8th and final chapter, giving the argument, at long last that this speech of beauty is not merely *another* way of interacting with the Other, but that it is (at least generally speaking) our *first* way of interacting: It is only through hearing and responding to beauty that we are led to hear (as if from behind or beyond it) the speech of the Good. Far from placing a screen in front of the Good, Beauty is the spyglass showing us—from across an unbridgeable distance—the Other, the Good, *Ethics*.

⁸ In his own work, Chrétien also wishes to ‘give voice’ to silence, suggesting that listening and falling silent too, can be the appropriate responses to the call. In fact silence is necessary for speech to be meaningful at all (cf Christina M. Gschwandtner, “Jean-Louis Chrétien: A God of Speech and Beauty,” in *Postmodern Apologetics?: Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy*, 145-146). While it is beyond the scope to discuss fully here, the important distinction between Chrétien’s silence, and the ‘silence’ that Levinas has imposed on eros is that for Chrétien silence conditions and makes possible speech, whereas for Levinas, the ‘silence’ of eros is its exclusion from discourse. The non-signifyingness of erotic speech in no way prepares the signification of the voice of the Other in Levinas’ work.

§1: The Call of Beauty

To be beautiful is, at the most basic level, to be appealing, that is, it *appeals* to another, calls upon him or her and makes a demand. Thus across a millennium, and across unconnected terms, English has settled on a metaphor that existed already for the ancient Greeks, for whom *kalon*, Plato informs us, is *to kaloun*, i.e. that which calls (*kaleo*).⁹ Chrétien, in his survey of the Platonist reception of *kalon*, finds references to beauty's 'calling lovers to itself' in Proclus, Hermias of Alexandria, and Marsilio Ficino, among others.¹⁰ To appeal carries (although in a slightly different sense than *kaleo*) the sense of both a speaking and a demand to be spoken to. To appeal is to ask for a response or judgement. The speech of beauty is thus always a demand for conversation, an interplay between beauty and the viewer (whether this conversation is verbal, bodily, or otherwise).¹¹ But how does beauty call? What does it say? Unsurprisingly, beauty speaks in many ways, through many voices, since, in the same way, beauty demands many different kinds of responses. The beauty of a flower is not the beauty of a gesture of kindness. We should not expect them to speak in the same way. For the sake of simplicity, I will address the two clearest, and most clearly opposed, kinds of beauty here: 'objective' beauty—the visible beauty of an object, either artistic or natural and 'personal' beauty, the beauty of

⁹ *Cratylus*, 416c. The sense of 'appeal' in the sense of 'to be attractive' is a late 19th/early 20th century development. No romance language seems to share this feature, although several Germanic languages do (*ansprechen* in German is both to address and to appeal to). Plato's etymology is plausible, although has no real etymological basis.

¹⁰ Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response* (Fordham Univ Press, 2004), 10-17.

¹¹ In this way, my position is in fact not far from Marion's position regarding love. Beauty speaks in a perlocutionary way, imposing a demand on me (cf *The Visible and the Revealed*, 101-118). However, Marion argues that 'I love you' perlocutes without locuting: "'I love you,' then, neither produces a proposition with a reference (a signification), nor does it predicate a meaning, nor does it even mobilize identifiable interlocutors. It thus does not constitute a locutionary act," 107. I argue on the other hand that in the case of both beauty and love, locution and perlocution go together.

the Other (§1.1). From there, we will look at beauty's particular voice (§1.2), and how eros calls differently than the Good, or the face, as well as how it can lead to the seeing the Good (§1.3).

§1.1: “Plastic” and Personal Beauty

The beauty of the object, what Ortega y Gasset calls “objective plastic charm,”¹² is that view of beauty critiqued by Levinas and Marion for the harm it does, when it is attached to the other. In the realm of things however, it is wholly appropriate: paintings, statues, natural landscapes show themselves in their forms, their beauty entrances us. At no point in seeing these plastically beautiful things are we led upward on a Platonic ascent, or outside of a totality toward something other than the self. What do these beautiful things tell us? It is, as Levinas and others have said, “beauty becomes a form covering over indifferent matter, and not harboring mystery.”¹³ The beauty of a thing announces itself to us, *names* itself. As a being, as a thing. In the case of the person, “plastic charm” is “so decidedly esthetic that it converts the woman into an artistic object, and by isolating her, places her at a distance.”¹⁴ At this level, the beauty of a body or a painting does not draw us any further, it only requires that “we must, at regular intervals, come and to re-see it”.¹⁵ As Marion continues, “things rightly only show a facade, even and especially in art (painting), but never a face.” A painting does not open up like the

¹² Jose Ortega y Gasset, *On Love: Aspects of a Single Theme*, trans. Toby Talbot, Later Printing edition (Meridian Books, 1964), 91. Ortega, seemingly coincidentally, hits on a second etymology that Plato offers of the *Kalon*, that it charms (*kelein*), which Chrétien points out is likewise inextricably connected to speech; “there is no magic without words” (12).

¹³ *Totality and Infinity*, 263.

¹⁴ Ortega, *On Love*, 91.

¹⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess*, 70.

face of the other, but instead “closes itself,” reducing everything it shows to flatness and visibility.¹⁶ The invisibility from which the face of the Other gazes at us is covered over by the visibility of the painting. By announcing itself, it also restricts itself. If its beauty is an announcement of its own boundaries, any pointing beyond itself is outside the realm of beauty. To see Rublev’s *Trinity* as a beautiful work of art, Marion would say, is to encounter it only as the Idol, the second type of saturated phenomenon. By seeing it as beautiful, we fail to let ourselves *be seen* by the gaze of other (in this case the gaze of the Divine Other). That is, we fail to encounter the Icon, the third type of saturated phenomenon, which is precisely where Marion locates the appearance of the face as Levinas describes it.¹⁷ Thus, beauty, the idol, does not open us up to alterity, to infinity, to the Good. This beauty, it would seem, does not lead to anything beyond itself.

And yet, in the particular case of the person, this is not actually so. As we draw near to a person, as Plato saw, we begin to see a different kind of beauty, a beauty of character and virtue. Ortega again details this experience:

It is important to emphasize the role which facial details and gesture play in love, because they are the most expressive means of revealing a person’s true character . . . That kind of beauty which, when viewed from a distance, reveals *not only* a personal character and a mode of being, *but also* an independent esthetic value—an objective plastic charm—is what we allude to by the noun *beauty*.¹⁸

These words, first published in 1927 in a series of essays for the newspaper *El Sol*, clearly show how this personal beauty both breaks with and maintains continuity with the ‘plastic

¹⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena* (Fordham Univ Press, 2004), 77.

¹⁷ As he puts it succinctly in “Le Phénomène de Beauté,” “quand le phénomène concerne la beauté, il ne s’agit pas seulement d’un cas du phénomène saturé en général . . . mais un type de phénomène saturé très particulier: l’idole/ When the phenomenon concerns beauty, it is not a matter of the saturated phenomenon in general, but of one type of saturated phenomenon in particular: the idol,” 63 (translation my own). As a result, it would be incorrect to speak of beauty when addressing the appearance of any of the other types of saturated phenomena (event, flesh, icon).

¹⁸ Ortega, *On Love*, 91, first two emphases added.

charm' of objects. When the Other is seen not merely as 'plastically charming' but truly as *beautiful*, in the sense that Ortega recognizes, we see *beyond* the physical body in front of us, the physical face of the other draws us in and shows us what is behind it, what Ortega calls 'personal character and a mode of being,' what Plato would call the soul and its virtue (or lack thereof), but what I will call, partially following Marion, the *haecceitas* of the Other.¹⁹ This is the Other specified as the other person, not (as Levinas fears) as a physical body and an object but nevertheless as an unrepeatable, recognizable distinct Other among others. I will argue in what follows that it is this *haecceitas* that serves as the basis for all beauty, when properly understood: the beauty of person, painting or object stems from being a unique and unrepeatable individual.

This new beauty also calls to us, not by announcing the Other as a being or a thing, but as an individual.²⁰ The beautiful Other names herself, not as a *what*, but as a *who*.²¹ She names with a personal name, a name which does nothing to define or confine the Other. By not naming herself as a 'what,' the Other gives name to her face (no longer the mere physical visage) in a way that shows, by omission, that she is not a mere object.²² The Other is, as Ortega points out, *also* seen in the physical face, his gestures and features. But in choosing to name themselves with a personal name, and not the name of species or type, the Other immediately shines through his face. And here again, we see the way

¹⁹ Recall that, for Marion, however, there seems to be a strict division between the *haecceitas* and the concept of beauty.

²⁰ Throughout this analysis, 'individual' should not be understood a unified self or whole, but rather a 'unique, unrepeatable.'

²¹ The fact that people's names are generally given to them without their input is irrelevant here. Parents do not *define* their children by naming them, but rather give them names to use *as their own*.

²² Despite personal pronouns here (and elsewhere in this chapter), this analysis, as I will make clear at certain points, is equally applicable to paintings and other beautiful 'things.' In appearing to us, paintings name themselves in the same way as Others do, with personal names—*Starry Night*, *Mona Lisa*, etc.—and not simply as 'a painting' or 'a canvas.'

the ascent of beauty draws the lover from one beauty to the next. We are drawn in by the physical body, only to discover, as if from beyond it,²³ the face, that, as in Levinas' analyses, denudes itself of its physical form by naming itself otherwise. And yet, if it were not for our being drawn in by the beauty of his or her face, I would have never heard the call of Other's voice in the first place. The face and the physical visage become inextricably tied, one leading to the other, calling me to see (to hear) beyond its surface. Plastic beauty works in service of real beauty. The evidence of this is seen throughout history, by those who found faith, who experienced the Divine Other in the beauty of buildings in which they worshipped, and in the ceremonies they participated in.²⁴ Thus we can see how the call of beauty reaches us from across the physical, incarnates itself within 'plastic' beauty, not to trap itself, but to shine through it. It is a result of rejecting the connection between beauty and the face that Levinas and Marion are led to condemning the depictions of the human face in art.²⁵ The plastic beauty of the face seemingly becomes detached from the personal. Behind the eyes of a painting lies not the soul, but simply a canvas.

Yet is even this true? Is it not the case that we hear the cry of the Other, no less in a painting or a photograph than we do face to face? Do we really only see plastic beauty

²³ The parallel language to Levinas' 'beyond the face' here is intentional, although the 'beyond' is now, it should be clear to the reader, operating in a different way, to be addressed more fully in the following section.

²⁴ The case of Augustine comes to mind, when (having within himself a debate about the plasticity of beautiful music, notes its ability to inspire people, "that so by the delight of the ears, the weaker minds may rise to the feeling of devotion." *Confessions* X., 33. Likewise, Joseph Ratzinger expresses this view in his essay on beauty: "when the last note of one of the great Thomas-Kantor-Cantatas triumphantly faded away, we looked at each other spontaneously and right then we said: 'Anyone who has heard this, knows that the faith is true,'" "The Feeling of Things, The Contemplation of Beauty."

²⁵ Remembering that, for Marion, there is, it seems, a sharp division between icons and art, as two distinct types of saturated phenomena, and at least in some places, a seeming equation between art depicting the human form and the idol. Similarly it is the division in Levinas between the face of the Other and the face that is given in eros.

in Dorothy Lange's photograph *Migrant Mother*, or William Merritt Chase's portrait-painting of *The Young Orphan*? Or can we hear, coming through these depictions, the exact same cry of "the widow, the orphan and the stranger" that the face itself confronts us with? Portraits, depictions of human life and human suffering speak to us. They tell us their stories and the impress on us the importance of responding. We may well notice that our *response* must be different in the case of the artistic portrayal (the *depiction* of the migrant mother does not need our food, and the woman herself will not be aided if we offer it to the portrait), but the call is the same.²⁶ The expression of the young girl in Chase's portrait, sad, distant, almost empty captures my own gaze and confronts me as any face would. But, contrary to Marion's description of this under the name of the icon, the beauty of the portrayal does not fade away, nor has it prevented me from seeing it. Rather, it is precisely the contrast of the girl's solid black dress against the deep red background and chair that pulls me close to see her face in the first place. The beauty of composition calls to me, and brings me to see, at a much deeper level, the beauty, the unique, unrepeatable individuality, of the weather-worn migrant mother. Were it not for this, I would perhaps have not even stopped, continued walking along the gallery hall, and failed to hear the call at all. Instead, the beauty of the painting itself has interrupted my path, and created a space for me to be confronted by the other depicted.

To deny, as Marion and Levinas have, that a portrait can call to us in the same way as the human face does is to deny the connection between these two levels of beauty, to deny that one leads to the next in an erotic progression. On that interpretation, plastic beauty *always* covers over and masks personal beauty (just as eros masks the Face in

²⁶ Again, we must hold off on the discussion of *how* until the following section.

darkness), rather than establishing a platform from which it can speak. There is of course, always the risk of *reducing* the painted person to his or her plastic beauty, of failing to see in the migrant mother's face a call to respond to her suffering (and indeed, the suffering of all who are like her) but this is no different than the case of any Other in the world as well.²⁷ The potential danger of overwhelming the face, and failing to see it properly should be the cause of careful aesthetic and ethical education, and not a prohibition of painting faces.

§1.2: Beauty's Voice

If we already hear the call of ethics in the voice of beauty, however, how does it differ at all from the voice of ethics and the good, as already developed by Levinas? Are we not simply relocating the exact same voice from the undifferentiated Other to the other who is in front of me? Are we not just incorrectly naming 'beauty' the suffering or vulnerability that the face shows us? Simply put, no, for two reasons. First, because the voice of ethics (that is, the voice that speaks of the Good) is truly uni-vocal, because it is universal.²⁸ One and the same call, one and the same voice issues forth from every encounter of the ethical Face, first and foremost saying 'Thou shalt not kill me.' The voice of eros, the *haecceital* voice (the voice that speaks of beauty), on the other hand, is

²⁷ In her chapter "Art and the Artist," Gschwandtner moves from Marion's descriptions of 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' paintings by Marion to the proposal for something like 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' ways of viewing, to explain why "the *same* phenomenon can hence appear as saturated to one person but as poor to another," in Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion* (Indiana University Press, 2014), 77. These would map exactly onto this discussion of viewing different levels of beauty. There, however, the concern is not levels of beauty, but levels of experience of saturation.

²⁸ Here, as in Part III, I follow Marion's critical reading of Levinas, in which he links the Levinasian encounter and a almost Kantian form of duty: "the injunction gives rise not so much to love as to duty, for, like duty, the injunction concerns every other, universally," *Prolegomena to Charity*, 92. He adds a few pages later that "the unconditioned nature of responsibility implies its universality, from face to face, up until the last, whoever that might be," 94.

irrepeatable and unique. Eros issues forth a command (as in Marion's 'Love me') which cannot and does not allow for substitution.²⁹ It will not do, when the beautiful other asks to be loved, to love any other other in his or her place. From this first reason, a second follows: the beautiful voice speaks differently than the ethical voice; because the beautiful face names itself in a personal, *haecceital* way, the beautiful voice of necessity must offer a call that is different than ethics, is different than a call not based on the differentiation of faces.³⁰

Let us first look examine the unique, irrepeatable voice of beauty, before turning to an elaboration of its call. If beauty does not speak in a uni-vocal way as ethics does, if every beautiful voice speaks *haecceitally*, how do we hear it at all? If every beautiful voice speaks differently, it would seem that any 'shared' sense of beauty would be impossible. Chrétien opens his own discussion of beauty by citing Joseph Joubert's aphorism that "in order for a voice to be beautiful, it must have in it many voices together."³¹ From this starting point, Chrétien develops his argument for the immemorial call. But we can also understand these multiple voices not just as having always been called ahead of time; not just the call of the first Beauty in every voice, but of the many voices we here in every encounter of personal beauty. These multiple voices are nothing else than the voices of goodness and beauty, of ethics and eros. If beauty spoke with *only* its voice, the situation would be as Levinas or Marion sees it: either it speaks by profaning ethics *or* it speaks

²⁹ Again, it is precisely this point that Marion critiques Levinas for, noting that "the face itself neutralizes unsubstitutable individuality," *Prolegomena*, 94.

³⁰ This section puts aside the issue (to be addressed briefly in §2, but at length in chapter 8) that, although different, these two calls are connected, one leading to the other, just as recognizing plastic beauty leads to recognizing personal beauty.

³¹ *Call and Response*, 1, the quote is uncited, but from *Carnets*, 571 (1938 N.R.F edition). The full entry on that day (September 21, 1806) is "Il faut qu'il y ait plusieurs voix ensemble dans une voix pour qu'elle soit belle. Et plusieurs significations dans un mot pour qu'il soit beau."

merely in its own private vocabulary, at most unfolding into charity, but never leading to ethics. The speech of eros, as we saw in Part III, when separated from the voice of ethics, remains effectively private and individual, perhaps even “solipsistic.”³² It is only because of beauty’s speaking *together* with the Good that enables each to be heard. This link, however needs to be further examined. What does beauty’s voice add to the call of ethics? and further more, in what sense is it necessary for the two voices to go together? To see this, we must take a more critical look at the univocal nature of Levinas’ call of the other.

The Good’s voice calls, as Levinas envisions it, is the call of the widow, the orphan and the stranger. It is the command ‘do not kill,’ the universal signification that *here*, the place of the Other, is a place that must not be trespassed, must not be consumed into the totality of being. From out of this primordial call, grow the more generic, banal ethical calls: do not steal, cheat, lie, etc.³³ This is, it could be argued, already an ensemble of voices (insofar as the Other ‘speaks’ for every other Other) and therefore, by the rule of Joubert, already capable of being beautiful—confirming a similar link between goodness and beauty as that in Plato’s writings. While there is some truth to this, it is not the beauty to which eros is drawn, but yet another step up on the ascent of beauty, akin to those steps (love of laws, sciences, or the sea of beauty) where, on many readings of the *Symposium*, the metaphor of eros begins to fall apart (who is the beloved in these cases?). The beauty of the other, however, does not need to be put aside, put *outside* ethics, as Levinas has

³² As Christina Gschwandtner notes in “Praise—Pure and Personal? Jean-Luc Marion’s Phenomenologies of Prayer,” prayer, the most proper language of love, “has to remain an intensely personal, if not solipsistic, exercise,” in Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, *The Phenomenology of Prayer* (Fordham University Press, 2005), 178.

³³ As Jill Robbins notes, Levinas is concerned with “ethics in the most originary sense—the ethicity of ethics,” in Claire Elise Katz and Lara Trout, *Emmanuel Levinas: Beyond Levinas* (Taylor & Francis, 2005), 356. In other words, Levinas is not primarily concerned with a specific ethical system, but rather the basis for any possible ethics.

done, in order for the ‘beauty’ of the Good to be seen.³⁴ Rather, seeing the beauty of the Good enables us to see personal beauty in a different light, just as personal beauty allows us to see plastic beauty in a different light.

But even the multiple voices of the Good only ever speak in unison. In the cry of the Other I hear my indebtedness to *every* Other. I am put in an asymmetrical relationship to each and every Other I encounter, a fact that is given to me already in the very first encounter with the face.³⁵ The recognition that I am obligated to give the bread from my mouth to the Other in front of me immediately (in hearing the cry of every Other in his voice) awakens me to the fact that I owe the same to *every* other. There is no step between my responsibility to the other in front of me and to every Other I encounter. It is immediate, because I hear it already in his voice.³⁶ The Other, although not a universal category, is nevertheless flat: to be an Other is simply to be other than the self. Any further specification of who is facing me is outside the bounds of alterity, and threatens to cover over or destroy the otherness of the Other. There is, as it were, no true plurality in the voice of the Good, in the call of ethics, every Other speaks in the same voice.

The call of beauty, on the other hand, precisely supplies this polyphony. This is seen even in the different ‘command’ which beauty issues, ‘love me’ rather than ‘do not kill.’³⁷ At the level of beauty and eros, the command of beauty asks for me to respond to

³⁴ A formulation, to be clear, Levinas would likely never use.

³⁵ This seems to be what Marion means when he notes that “this other remains only the lieutenant of the other”

³⁶ There is, however, a step between this ethical responsibility toward every Other and the reciprocal relationship of justice, when, rather than discussing each and every other as I encounter him, Levinas moves to the discussion of the third, which goes beyond what I am discussing here.

³⁷ In the case of beauty, this is not truly a command, but a simple calling, Beauty does not command itself to be loved, but offers its self up to be loved freely. This distinction will be discussed in more length in chapter 8.

nobody but the speaker.³⁸ I hear (again, still at the level of eros) no other voices. It is truly the beauty in front of me (visible or otherwise) that speaks to me, and that imposes on me to respond. Even although this voice issues the same ‘command’ as every other beautiful voice, every voice is heard differently, it is as if the timbre of the voice comes through for the first time.³⁹

What is this timbre? As above, we can think of this timbre as the *haecceital* quality of beauty—of the Other. As Marion describes *haecceitas*, it is no mere reduplicating of the *I*, no *alter ego*,⁴⁰ but is simply what makes him “*just such* an other.”⁴¹ Here, Marion follows (developments aside) the original description of *haecceitas*. *Haecceitas* is a primary difference-marker—that is, it shares no common term with any other *haecceitas*, unlike species which resolve into a shared genus. As Emmanuel Falque adds, “this makes otherness the most elevated form of all *haecceitas*.”⁴² The connection seems obvious, however we should not mistake them simply for their familiar formulations. *Haecceitas* is not Levinas’ alterity, it is not only a primary difference-marker, but also the principle of unity and self-identity. Every *haecceitas* is unique. This means that *haecceitas* is otherness only if we understand every Other to also be other to all other others. On this formulation (and this was Marion’s objection to a beauty-based love), the links between levels of beauty would need to be broken. If beauty and *haecceitas*, understood this way,

³⁸ As I will show in the final chapter, the beautiful Other also issues an ethical command, to which I must also respond.

³⁹ This raises a question, far beyond the current project, and perhaps without a satisfactory, why we sometimes hear this call and other times do not. There seems to be no connection between some objective standard and beauty, and the voice we hear. It may well be, in a ‘no-reasons’ kind of way (cf Aaron Smuts) that we simply hear some voices and not others. And that, of those we hear, we simply respond to some and not others.

⁴⁰ *Prolegomena to Charity*, 97.

⁴¹ A phrase Marion employs repeatedly in *Prolegomena*, 94-99.

⁴² Emmanuel Falque, *God, the Flesh, and the Other: From Irenaeus to Duns Scotus* (Northwestern University Press, 2014), 279.

are identified, then each ‘beauty’ is primarily different, and even naming them all by ‘beauty’ would be to cover over or destroy each one.

This objection can, however, be avoided, if we understand not beauty itself as the *haecceitas* of the other, but the Other’s particular voice. Again, to return to Scotus’ original formulation, he was adamant that the *haecceitas* was not its own form or entity, but as it has been more recently understood, something akin to the actualization or modalization of the common nature.⁴³ Thus, in speaking of *haecceitas* of ‘*this* beauty,’ of “*just such* an other,” it is no mistake to allow that these final terms are shared or common, so long as we understand the *this* to be truly and primarily different.⁴⁴ Or, to return to the metaphor of voice and timbre: the command given, the song sung can be a shared song, so long as the timbre is truly unique. In this way we can speak of beauty, the *voices* of beauty, as speaking together, even although each is their own. Every beautiful face encountered is different, the lines and features and expressions, the character that shows from beneath it is irrepeatable, but they all indicate, in their own ways, a common beauty.

In fact, it is *only because* the other is *this* other that he or she is beautiful. To speak of a Universal Beauty exterior to individual beautiful faces becomes a fruitless endeavor.⁴⁵ What we encounter instead is a face that is beautiful *because* it is *this face and no other*. It is the recognition of this face as unrepeatable that makes it beautiful. And it is this

⁴³ See, for example, Peter King, “Duns Scotus on the Common Nature and the Individual Differentia,” *Philosophical Topics* 20, no. 2 (1992): 51—76 for a discussion of this point in Scotus’ thought

⁴⁴ That is *this beauty* has a single referent, it is not an abstract general term. In fact, we should, in theory always name the *this*, a practice that has some traction among Scotus scholarship, to speak not of Socrates’ *haecceitas* and Plato’s *haecceitas* (Socrates’ and Plato’s thisness) as if it is a shared thing, but simply the ‘Socratizer’ and ‘Platoizer,’ which are simply distinct from each other. King, “Duns Scotus on the Common Nature,” 60.

⁴⁵ This however, does not rule out something like a theory of the transcendentals (Good, Beauty, One). Beauty is not an external Universal term, however, the beauty of the face is not simply pure difference from every other face. In medieval terminology, beauty is common, without being universal. The significance of this point would need to be worked out in further detail elsewhere.

unrepeatability that is heard in the voice of the Other when it cries out ‘love me,’ which in eros is always followed by an (at least) implicit “and no other.” Beauty speaks its own unsubstitutability. However, do not forget that alongside this voice is the voice of ethics, through which the Other declares just the opposite: that she is an Other among Others, or rather, which announces her non-*I*.⁴⁶

§1.3: Toward the Good, Toward Ethics

But it is not enough to simply say that the two voices speak beside each other, as if in equal pitch. In fact, it is the voice of Beauty that we hear first, that announces itself, but carries with it the call of ethics. For Plato, this was obvious. Recalling the myth of the *Phaedrus*, it is the sight of the beautiful boy that brought us back to The Beautiful itself, and in turn, it is in and through beauty that the Good beyond being reveals itself.⁴⁷ The Good, which is unreachable (recall the discussions of the previous part) is made reachable by its appearance in beauty. As Chrétien, in one of his first books, a work focused on beauty in Plato, reflects on the event in which the ‘recent initiate’ sees the face of a beautiful boy, and is thrown immediately back to the sight of that which is ‘beyond the heavens,’ noting “the manifestation of beauty suddenly renders the furthest thing near.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Marion’s mistake, in declaring that the Other’s *haecceitas* does *not* declare its own unsubstitutability, its irreplaceability (95-99) is not recognizing the simultaneity, the harmonization, of these two voices. The Other’s unsubstitutability is always self-contradicted by his replacability. The full implication of this paradox cannot, unfortunately, be taken up here.

⁴⁷ This is seen in the *Philebus*, and developed to the extreme by Plotinus and others. In its extreme form, the Good and Beauty are distinguished more than I intend, Beauty does not announce the Good as if it were the one to come after itself, but rather as a side of itself not immediately grasped.

⁴⁸ Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L’effroi du beau* (Cerf, 1987), 55. All translations from this work are my own, and often lean toward literalness over style. I include the originals in footnote for comparison. “La manifestation de la beauté rend soudain proche le plus lointain.”

Whereas the Good “blinds and dazzles” us, beauty “accommodates itself to our vision.”⁴⁹ Beauty allows itself to be heard, speaks in order to be heard, whereas the Good deafens us, overwhelms us. The Good, however also remains that which is farthest off. Either it or we must be moved in order to hear it. And this is precisely what beauty does. Beauty calls to us, announcing the Good, and giving way to the Good to announce itself. Thus there is a double shock: The first, Chrétien’s “shock of beauty,”⁵⁰ which breaches and bridges the gap between being and non-being, and then secondly, the ‘shock of the good,’ which is exactly Levinas’ shock at encountering the Face, where we are overwhelmed, overpowered. But this second shock could not happen without the Good first being brought near.⁵¹

And yet, paradoxically, it is beauty that demands more of us: beauty’s call to be loved is a command without end, without limit. It calls for excessiveness, calls for me to give without holding back, and then to give more. Thus Chrétien calling beauty ‘accommodating’ cannot merely mean that it is quieter, as if it is the easier yoke. Rather, beauty accommodates us by preparing us for the Good, by bringing us to the face of the Other, where we can encounter him in his alterity. Beauty is able to announce this infinite demand in a way that not only sounds possible, but in fact, like one that is no burden at all. I *want* to love beauty, I do not even for a brief moment feel that I am *obligated* to love

⁴⁹ Ibid. “Elle [la beauté] s’accommode à notre vision, tandis que . . . le Bien par lui-même aveugle et éblouit, comme le dit la *République*.”

⁵⁰ Referencing *Phaed.* 251a “when he sees a godlike face or form which is a good image of beauty, shudders at first, and something of the old awe comes over him . . .”

⁵¹ Levinas himself felt that the face itself could bring the Good near. But the face’s distinction from any physical face does not yet answer the question of how I ever encounter it in the first place, to see from where it shines.

beauty.⁵² And in that accommodation, beauty has prepared the way for the command of ethics: what will inevitably come as the blinding, deafening call of the Good will nevertheless arrive as the easier command. If I have already been called to love the beauty that I see infinitely and excessively, the call to not violate or to not murder seems, in comparison, the least I can owe. What would not merely shock us but actually paralyze us can now be surmounted. The command, to be clear, remains the infinite demand that it is for Levinas, but is nevertheless (as Marion also sees) not as large—not as demanding—as the call to love.

In fact, however, the call of beauty never calls only ‘at the level of beauty’ that we have been addressing so far. The call of beauty already contains in it the call of the Good. These two calls are not walled off from one another as they have been described by Levinas and Marion, instead, the call of the Good is nested within the call of beauty. This is the full meaning of beauty’s accommodating me to the call of the Good: the call of beauty carries with it the call of the Good, enabling me to hear it for the first time. Thus although my encounter with beauty may fail, although I may not respond with love (which I am in no way obligated to do), I have at the same time received the call to ethics, to treat this beautiful Other, if not with love, than at least with respect (with regard to the call of ethics, I am obligated to respond). The call to love *just such* an other *already contains* the ethical command of *any such* Other. While the call to love, the call of beauty is individual—it asks only for this one to be loved—it is not isolating. Love’s command already insists that the lover, if he is to love right, must *also* be disposed ethically to the Other. But this command that I treat the Other if not with love, at least with respect

⁵² Here again we run up against, and must prematurely postpone a discussion of our response to beauty until later.

opens me up to all others. In moving from love to respect, I move from the irreplaceability of the beautiful Other to the shared place of height of all others. As a result, the experience of beauty opens me up to the ethical command to treat *all* others with the same ethical respect. Indeed love demands that I treat all Others according to the command of ethics. While the call of beauty calls me to love *this* beautiful Other and no one else, if in the call of beauty I also hear the call to treat the beloved ethically as *any* such Other, it follows from this that I ought to relate to *all* such Others in the same way. Indeed, for love to truly be love, it demands that I acknowledge this fact. This can be seen at the level of everyday experience: were I to be loved by somebody who universally treated all others unethically or disrespectfully, I would not only *not* love her in return, I would question the very truth of her supposed love for me. It would occur to me, inevitably, that her disposition toward me is not out of some response of love, but out of some pursuit of benefit. I would immediately ask myself ‘what does she want from me?’ Love calls for the single individual alone to be loved, but it demands that I treat all others in a certain manner, recognizing their status as persons, as the Other (that is, it carries within it the demand of ethics).

From these observations, we can begin to make clear where this call of beauty situates itself with regard to its two closest cousins: Levinas’ face and Marion’s eros. Beauty takes up a kind of middle ground between them, granting to Marion that Levinas’ Face of the Other is too abstract, not only in principle, but in fact, too abstract to even be heard: I will never encounter this abstract Face, but only the individual’s face in front of me. It does not however, grant Marion’s objection that an ethics of the face *itself* is therefore too abstract to be a part of love, that only eros or charity, freed from duty, can

reach the fully individuated other.⁵³ Rather, beauty (no longer the complete radical individuality of Marion's *haecceitas*) offers that individual entry point *into* the universal command of ethics. Ethics, beholding (that is, hearing) the Good is rendered possible by its being brought near by beauty.

§2: Responding to Beauty

All that is left to ask, then, is how we are to respond to that call. If I have succeeded in finding a phenomenological description of beauty that both echoes what Plato sought to develop *and* accounts for the objections of section II that it ought not reduce the other to an object, I still have not yet addressed the objections of section III, that love (in order to be love) needs to remain silent. I have argued extensively for understanding beauty as a call, particular to an individualized face. However, there is, so far, no reason why the *response* to this call must be love and, even if it is, why the response must be *sayable*. After all, Levinas' eros responded to voluptuosity (a kind of substitute for beauty), but only by signifying nothing. Insofar as it said anything at all, it responded via ethics, not eros. To meet this objection and return to a Platonically-inspired ethical eros, we must proceed, then, on two levels: first, we must show that it is love, and not some other attitude, that responds to beauty, and then secondly that, when love responds, it responds by signifying. This second task—which will be the content of the final chapter—can itself be subdivided, between love-speech that testifies to beauty itself, and its broader discourse, which introduces ethics.

⁵³ As he notes, “the formal universality of the obligation becomes thinkable only once persons have been abstracted from it, such that the other opened by the injunction can be played by anyone,” whereas correctly speaking, “the injunction therefore *must* be singularized for my gaze,” *Prolegomena*, 92-3

We have, at times in the previous chapters, run up against a fundamental distinction drawn by Platonic philosophy: that good things inspire desire, while beautiful things inspire admiration or contemplation.⁵⁴ This schema—complicated by Plato’s assertion that all beautiful things are also good⁵⁵—is seen most clearly by approaching it negatively: things are only desired insofar as they are good, and thus, we do not desire beautiful things because they are beautiful. Our attitude must therefore be something different than straightforward desire. The Platonic alternative, evidenced by some translators’ desire to simply translate *kalos* as ‘admirable’ rather than ‘beautiful,’ does not concern a desire to possess, but a satisfaction in beholding (as the gods are said to do toward true virtue in the *Phaedrus*, and men are said to do toward the ‘something wonderfully beautiful in its nature’ in the *Symposium*). Beauty can be said, in Plato, to inspire a ‘desire’ (misusing the term) to see, to behold, whereas the Good inspires a desire (rightly said) to possess. I want good things, I want to see beautiful things.⁵⁶

However, Plato never intended these two attitudes to be split (this was, recall, the main response to the objection of Part II), in splitting the Good and the Beautiful, we split desire and ‘contemplation,’ that is, split eros in to sexual desire and ‘romantic’ love. Ever since this split has occurred (both in this work but also in the course of history itself), it has been nearly impossible to speak of love and eros as synonymous, without first making a string of qualifications. This split was only reinforced by Levinas’ attempt to absolve the encounter with the Other from any sort of desire. Eros is problematic *precisely because* it involves desiring the Other. To be ethical, one has to *encounter* the Face without

⁵⁴ See Rachel Barney “Notes on Plato on the *Kalon* and the Good,” for a discussion of this point.

⁵⁵ Even if they are not held as strictly identifiable, as I have argued (see chapter 2).

⁵⁶ Insofar as I say I ‘want’ this, what I am actually saying is that seeing beautiful things is *itself* a good. Thus, I do not desire beautiful things as such, I desire *vision of* beautiful things, as a kind of meta-act.

desiring it. The first way this is done is by reversing the intentionality of the act. The Face confronts us, not from within our intentionality, but from beyond it. We no longer, like the follower of Diotima's higher mysteries or Socrates' charioteer, go out in search of ever more—more in number but also in quality—beautiful things, rather they confront us, shock us from our slumber, and surprise us. This reversal is completed by Marion's development of the saturated phenomenon, an event that always overwhelms us and our intentionality, and in particular, the gaze of the icon, where we no longer look at a painting, but rather *are seen by* the icon, seen by the Divine itself.⁵⁷ By reversing the direction of intentionality, by no longer placing the Other at the end of a 'search,' Levinas and Marion succeeds in separating out desire, which is precisely the 'going in search of.' The Other arrives *despite* my projects, not because of them.

The task for an ethical eros therefore becomes clear: it must reconcile desire and love (since, as seen in Part II, each fails if separated) but must not do so at the expense of destroying Otherness (which, as seen in Part III, was the main reason for not fully reintegrating eros). Anything less, and we do not arrive back at eros, anything more and we fall short of ethics. This can be shown in two steps, firstly, that the beautiful-Other is in fact the locus of a kind of contemplation or admiration, and secondly, that this contemplation necessarily carries with it a kind of desire—love—that nevertheless does not destroy the Other or reduce him to an object. This task, however must be further subdivided, and I will deal in this section only with what can properly called 'contemplation,' that is, a 'disinterested' appreciation for beauty (§2.1), as well as the immediate action inspired by contemplation, the creation of new beauty (§2.2) before

⁵⁷ The 'crossing' of gazes, as Marion speaks of it in *GWB*.

showing in chapter 8 how this represents only the first steps of eros, and serves to draw us further to love and finally to ethics.

§2.1: Contemplation of Beauty

As we saw in section 1, beauty is not a fully univocal term: we can speak of plastic beauty or *haecceital* beauty. Nor, however, is there a complete break between these terms (they are not simply equivocal), rather, plastic beauty has the power to lead us to *haecceital* beauty. Nor is it simply an issue of looking at the same beauty differently. An object or a person that is plastically beautiful may not be *haecceitally* beautiful. That is, plastic beauty may mask evil, as Snow White's poisoned apple or even the original 'poisoned' fruit of the Garden of Eden.⁵⁸ This insight, perhaps simple, highlights a difficulty to be overcome: being able to recognize plastic beauty is not yet enough to move us toward *haecceital* beauty. Similarly something or someone that is *haecceitally* beautiful may not immediately strike us as plastically beautiful. The face of the Other, marred by violence, hunger, or pain is difficult, if not impossible to see as beautiful. And yet, each and every person, insofar as he or she faces us, must ultimately be *haecceitally* beautiful. We must therefore develop some sense of the link between these two beauties, in order to know when plastic beauty or plastic ugliness is *simply* plastic, and when it might serve as a guide to see *haecceital* beauty.⁵⁹

This is the importance of the *shock* of beauty, which Chrétien, interpreting Plato, develops.⁶⁰ Beauty never simply appears in front of us, it unsettles us, and forces us to

⁵⁸ Joseph Ratzinger uses this latter example in "Contemplation of Beauty, Feeling of Things."

⁵⁹ Or, as Plato would put it, when what *appears* beautiful is not *in reality* beautiful.

⁶⁰ As we will see in the following, this same shock is also what accounts for the reversal of intention and the kind of desire appropriate to eros.

gather our bearings, reassess what we are seeing.⁶¹ This disruption, however, is not the same as confusion, and our reassessment is not to be taken as an attempt to understand and comprehend: Beauty does not elicit rational knowledge. What beauty does elicit, on the other hand, is *eros*. This eros is a Platonic *mania*, explicitly opposed to the cool-headed rational thinking of the non-lover in the *Phaedrus*. Although, as Chrétien says, “*eros*, for Plato, is indivisibly both a seeing and a knowing,”⁶² it is also a knowing that

at first knows nothing at all, prey to the obscurity of its passion. It does not know exactly what it loves nor even what eros is [. . .].

Indeed, eros begins only in the lover finding his origin in beauty itself. It is not the lover who gives the beloved their loveliness, but the loveliness of beauty that gives the lover the ability to love. Beauty would be lovely even if nobody was standing there who could love it. Eros is born from the force with which beauty manifests.⁶³

Our response to beauty then, is not the egoistic desire as Levinas argues, but in is *given to us* in the vision of beauty.⁶⁴ Eros does not seek out beautiful things; on the contrary, it results from being first confronted by beauty. Eros *reacts* to the appearance of the

⁶¹ As Sallis says, “Beauty—in art and in nature itself—can let the elements be seen or heard in their elemental character, in contrast to the way in which ordinarily they are more or less passed over and taken for granted.” “Response to Figal and Schmidt,” 119.

⁶² *L’Effroi*, 52. “L’amour est pour Platon solidairement et indissociablement un voir et un savoir.” I de-translate amour here as eros rather than love as I think it better captures Plato’s thought. Chrétien’s mention of “la *mania* de l’amour” makes it clear that he is using amour to translate Plato’s eros. Lost in the English translation is the French play on *voir* and *savoir*.

⁶³ *L’Effroi*, 53. “L’amour est savoir qui d’abord ne sait rien, en proie à l’obscurité de son pathos. Il ne sait pas ce qu’au juste il aime, ni ce qu’est l’amour . . .
L’amour ne commence en effet dans l’amant qu’à prendre dans la beauté même son origine. Ce n’est pas lui qui donne à l’aimé d’être aimable, mais l’amabilité du beau qui nous donne de pouvoir aimer. Aimable serait le beau même si nul ne se tenait là qui sût l’aimer. L’amour naît de la force même avec laquelle le beau se manifeste.” I translate aimable and amabilité as lovely and loveliness here, rather than the more natural lovable, in order to better capture the intrinsic nature of the loveliness, vs a potentiality with respect to a lover.

⁶⁴ Here I deviate from both Plato and Chrétien, at least insofar as he takes his task to be interpreting Plato and not critiquing him, who both fall into the trap that Levinas spies for love, noting that beauty functions as “the light in which we have access to the Ideas and to Being/le beau . . . devient pour nous . . . la lumière en qui nous avons accès aux idées et à l’Être,” 53. See the previous chapter for the further discussion of Beauty’s lighting not Being, but the Good.

beautiful-other. This initial disruption is what leads to its first manifestation in contemplation.

But what is this contemplation? Firstly is what we are not looking for: what the painting is, or is of. Fully understanding an artist's intentions in a painting rarely makes a beauty more beautiful.⁶⁵ This is perhaps the greatest insight of recent phenomenology of art's focus on non-figural art: Beauty is a result of appearing to us, the being of what appears does not factor in.⁶⁶ Even in plastic beauty, we are not contemplating *what* a thing is, but its beauty.⁶⁷ This is to say that, in order to see something as plastically beautiful, we must simply allow its visible appearance to appear, to let the beauty speak. Learning of the methods of its creation (i.e. its origins) will not aid me. Nor will learning the *telos* for why it was created. When I glimpse the beauty of a painting, I glimpse the painting as a whole. This is the first positive attribute of contemplation: Contemplation takes hold of the beautiful painting *all at once*, as an indivisible whole.⁶⁸ Here we can see the first point of connection between plastic beauty and *haecceital* beauty: beauty is the experience of individuality. But, whereas (as we shall shortly see) *haecceital* beauty refers to something truly individual, contemplation of plastic beauty gives us something merely as a self-contained 'whole,' something that plays no role in something bigger. The beautiful work of art *seems*, in our contemplation, to give us something *outside* of Levinas' totality. But if we do not first shed the painting of its status as an 'object,' it will never be able to appear

⁶⁵ Regardless of whether it makes the painting more "meaningful" in any number of other ways.

⁶⁶ This point is, on the other hand, often taken too far, by rejecting figural art for preventing this showing, or at least making it more difficult to occur.

⁶⁷ What Sallis and others call merely its *shining*.

⁶⁸ On the contrary, in art criticism we are immediately and inevitably sucked into the *what* of a painting, so that we can describe its parts in their minute details. Learning the various ballet positions will therefore be a great boon to the art critic, who's job is not to see beauty (it is taken as a given) but to explain what makes a particular work of art 'good,' that is, well-executed.

as a whole, because it will always be contextualized into its context as a created object, the intentions of its creator, etc.⁶⁹ It is only once we let the beauty itself show, when we separate the painting from its context as a created object, that we can see the painting for itself, standing apart from everything outside of it. But at the level of plastic beauty, this sort of individuality is mere unity. But none of this truly shows me an unrepeatable face. A replica of the *Mona Lisa* would look just the same as the original. If we are to find a beauty that would show us more than this, show us something that is truly other, something that might lead from beauty to the Good, we must find a beauty that does not merely withdraw from its connections and networks, but that shows us something truly individual, something unique and unrepeatable.

§2.2: Creation of Beauty

As mentioned already previously, so much of phenomenology has remained only at the description of what might be called plastic beauty, and why eros has been so widely criticized as a result. But if eros can be, as I am claiming, something more, how do we escape from plasticity? How do we ascend? The answer lies in the creative element of eros. When we first encounter the beauty of a painting, our response can be diverse, but it always has one thing in mind: the creation of beauty. Whether this creation takes the rather ordinary form of trying to reproduce the beauty for another (whether it is by calling a painting to a person's attention, or by sharing a print or photograph of what I

⁶⁹ Notice although that this definition of contemplation is a complete reversal of Levinas' conception of beauty, where beauty was the way we understood an object as 'fitting' in the sense of 'fitting into' the whole. Levinas' view has its Platonic roots in Socrates' remarks in the *Hippias Major* that a wooden ladle is more beautiful than a gold one, because it functions better as a soup ladle. In lieu of a much longer discussion of why defining beauty fails in that dialogue, allow me to simply note here that Socrates immediately starts asking about the beauty of parts (why are a statue's eyes made out of one material, but the torso another?) showing that we have already left contemplation.

have seen with him or her) or perhaps, or by attempting to create something beautiful myself (why so many museums encourage their visitors to sketch something during their visit).⁷⁰ Thus, our response to beauty now has two aspects: both the quiet contemplation, a listening to the way that beauty announces itself, but also a creative drive, which seeks to repeat or reproduce the beautiful. But these are not two separate acts, but really one and the same eros, the recognition of beauty, and the desire to give birth to it.⁷¹

However, whereas contemplation does not concern itself with the *what* of a painting, dissembling it into parts,⁷² the desire to reproduce it immediately raises the questions of *archai* and *tele*. In the most banal sense, this is the museum-goer looking beside the painting to the tag that tells us of painting's creator, or gives the story of why it was painted in the first place. Such questions, as I have argued, are unnecessary for contemplating the plastic beauty of the painting, but they become essential if we are to reproduce it. Because in attempting to reproduce it, we immediately raise for ourselves the question of *why* the painting is beautiful. Why was it made? For what purpose?

These questions show the way that (merely) plastic beauty has led us to something deeper, because we are no longer concerned only with how the painting appears to us. It is enough that we feel the 'shock' of seeing it. Our response, understandably, amounts to finding our footing anew, having been shaken from our relative comfort. In attempting to recreate it however, we now need to understand. But we do not need, as Levinas sees the

⁷⁰ Note that, even when the encounter is at a gallery, and my response is to purchase the painting, this is not a desire to possess, but to repeat the experience of beauty for myself (and perhaps others) repeatedly in the future. Beautiful art is bought not to have, nor to consume, but to behold.

⁷¹ I am reminded here of Gabriel Marcel's formulation of *creative fidelity*, which seeks to renew by returning to what has always been, "as before, but differently and better" (*Homo Viator*, 61). The erotic encounter with beauty seeks always to recognize what it is, but also to repeat it in the future in new ways, to new people.

⁷² Or if we do, we—like Plato and Hippias—find that the parts cannot explain to us where the beauty of the whole came from.

issue of love and beauty, to understand *what* the painting *is*, rather, we go in search for *why* it shocks us.

This question, as we shall now see, leads to yet another ambivalence when we say that we attempt to ‘understand beauty.’ Just as in the first case, our understanding was not rational knowledge but erotic contemplation, here to, our ‘knowledge’ is a kind of *unknowing*. Since, if we attempt to comprehend the beautiful object, we miss its ability to shock. The more familiar it becomes, the less beautiful it seems (or at least, the less we recognize its beauty).⁷³ Thus, we abandon the contemplation-response, if we ask not about the *beauty* of the object, but rather the *object* of beauty.

The contemplative search for the source of our shock, is the very search for origins described by Plato in the *Phaedrus* when, having seen a beautiful boy, the lover is transported back to his prior life of Beauty itself, a beauty that (if it is truly identified with the Good as I have argued) is free of all being. Thus, the second attribute of our response to beauty: we leave behind considerations of Being.⁷⁴

What does it mean to leave Being behind, although? The first thing to notice is that it is in part the leaving behind of plastic beauty. We are now witness to a beauty that is more than superficial, because we are witness to a beauty that has a power. Whereas *merely* plastic beauty announces an object as itself, as a whole to be contemplated, now, the painting announces itself as something other than itself. It gives us our eros, not in order to respond to it as an object, but to something beyond its surface. Thus we can even more accurately separate the *beauty* of an object from the object itself, since the beauty here

⁷³ Again, recall Sallis’ point that art can show us nature by making it un-ordinary.

⁷⁴ This attribute straddles the action/passion line, as it could equally be said that beauty transports us. However, note that for Plato, it is only the well-dispositioned lover who is transported. There is thus still something of activity even in the passivity

speaks *through* the object, not from it. That is, it is now *haecceital* beauty that speaks from beneath the surface. Note here that the kind of ‘individual’ we are now contemplating changes as well from the previous analysis. In plastic beauty, we took an object ‘as a whole,’ something that was at once indivisible and complete. It needed to reference neither its parts nor a larger system to explain its beauty. But this is in reality a kind of lie. As Plato’s golden ladle example points out, once the ladle is considered in the context of a pot of soup, we learn that a wooden spoon is in fact more beautiful, because the system of ‘pot, soup and wooden ladle’ is more beautiful than that of ‘pot, soup and golden ladle.’⁷⁵ The wooden ladle adds a fragrance to the soup and does not risk damaging the pot. Thus, although when considered separately, the golden ladle had a greater plastic beauty than the wooden one, if we instead consider it as one part of a larger whole, we find that the situation is reversed. Thus, contemplation of plastic beauty, the beauty of being, always involves a kind of abstraction.⁷⁶ With *haecceital* beauty, on the other hand, beauty does not only appear as indivisible and complete, but truly individual: unrepeatable and unique. The golden ladle is no longer beautiful because it glistens, nor the wooden one because it functions well as a ladle, but each because they are *themselves*, they are beautiful because they show us a unified, unrepeatable individual—in short they show us something *other*, something outside a totality.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Hippias Major*, 290d.

⁷⁶ However, it is not, as a result, an act of will. Beauty impresses itself on us. We do not control in what context it appears. Whether my eyes are drawn, upon entering into a room, to the beauty of the whole, or merely to the beauty of a particular painting on the wall is the result of no conscious decision.

⁷⁷ It may seem absurd to claim that a ladle might give us the alterity structure, be a possible face, or even at the more basic level that something as mass-produced as a ladle should be seen as unrepeatable. While it is, I grant, more difficult to have an experience in reference to an ordinary object, it does not seem to me impossible. The limit is on our ability to see beyond plastic beauty in this case, not on the object itself.

This also introduces the new reason why our erotic response cannot be a comprehending: we cannot grasp the truly individual by any means other than acquaintance. As unique and unrepeatable, there is no predicate term that could accurately be attributed to it. To assert '*Starry Night* is a painting' is true, but it has no bearing on *Starry Night's* *haecceital* beauty. Its *haecceital* beauty comes from beyond or beneath the painting, not from the physical canvas itself, and thus, facts about the painting (as a type of object) have no bearing. Our erotic contemplation thus becomes one of drawing near, becoming acquainted to, so that what I can say of the erotic experience is that '*Starry Night's* beauty shows itself in and through the canvas.'

That I cannot 'know' the beauty becomes apparent to me in my attempts. If I begin to analyze the canvas, the brushstrokes, the paint, I quickly find myself back in the realm of plastic beauty, and soon, out of contemplation altogether. My search is frustrated, and I come away knowing only that, somehow, I missed the beauty that I originally saw. Instead, I respond to the beauty by chasing after (or better, allowing myself to be thrown after) the beauty itself, beyond the surface of the painting. My goal, once again, does not have any quality of a desire to possess or contain the beauty of the object, rather, having received this 'shock' of beauty, having been destabilized and thrust into the erotic attitude, what I go in search of is solid ground to stand.

This is why I go in search of *achai* and *tele*. If I can understand the why and for what, perhaps I can learn something about it itself as well. But here too, our erotic search will come to a dead end: while I can certainly come to understand the details of *Starry Night's* origins, and what Van Gogh hoped to convey through it, I once again find these facts utterly useless in understanding its *beauty*. These are facts about what it is, not about

its beauty. My erotic search, inevitably, leads me to only one conclusion: beauty has no *telos* beyond itself, and no *arche* other than itself.⁷⁸ This, ultimately, is the meaning we should take from Marion's claims that idol and icon show us the Divine: beauty shows us the radically unconditioned. It also accounts for Plato's description in the *Phaedrus*, which begins to show us how this contemplation, which has brought us to seeing beauty itself (although no longer as a universal concept, but as a *haecceital* identity), opens us to the second half of eros, its desire: the lover "reveres the beautiful one as a god, and if he did not fear to be thought stark mad, he would offer sacrifice to his beloved as to an idol or a god," and later "he fashions [the beloved] and adorns him like a statue, as although he were his god, to honor and worship him."⁷⁹ The beautiful is recognized as divine, and in this, the desire to give proper homage arises.

To see this in its fullness, however, it is necessary to transition from the beauty of paintings to the beauty of the other person. But this is not an entirely unfair shift. It is only natural that, in becoming attuned to beauty, to feeling the shock more often, we will begin to experience this shock not only in a museum, where beauty is the goal of the painter, but in the world as well, in nature and in others, whose beauty is not designed. Thus, we should, at long last, move to seeing how exactly, the response to beauty leads to love and to ethics.

⁷⁸ Let us not misunderstand this, however, as the impoverished "art for art's sake" movement.

⁷⁹ *Phaed*, 251a, 252d-e.

CHAPTER 8: LOVE

Thus far we have been talking only about contemplation of beauty, a kind of removed viewing. This, it should be obvious, should not be taken as sufficient as a definition of love. And yet, contemplation is *erotic*, contemplation *leads to* love, and is itself *part of* love. Love recognizes, and stands in view of, beauty. Common experience should make it obvious that this is the usual way that love begins at all. Our brief discussion of art should also show that contemplation is not merely a looking-at, but an attunement of myself. The more beautiful things I see, the more I contemplate them, the more well-disposed I am to recognize any beauty at all. Since every beauty is a whole or individual, this means (see the previous section) that finding or even approximating a universal theory of beauty is impossible. Each new beauty will shock me, just as the first did, because each beauty is unique. We will never be able to ground ourselves in any kind of knowledge that would, in advance, prevent us from being shocked, that would let us encounter beauty on our terms instead of its. Thus, the word ‘attunement’ is well-chosen here, rather than any kind of knowing or learning. I do not learn how to not be surprised at beauty, but only (if we are to speak of learning at all) to let myself be shocked and to prepare a proper response to our inevitable shock; to find our ground when it happens. The only ‘learning’ that can be properly spoken of is the un-learning of our desires to search for outside *archai* or *tele*. We begin to learn that, when we find a beautiful object, that our questions ‘from where’ and ‘for what’ are of no use. We learn to be at peace and to contemplate.

This is what Plato attempts to describe, in metaphysical terms, by the “recent initiate, someone who has amply observed things from that past realm.”⁸⁰ This recent initiate is not one who is *not* shocked, but rather, the one who most acutely feels the shock.⁸¹ Rather than being completely dumbfounded by the feeling however, this recent initiate, the one who ‘understands’ beauty well, reacts almost instantaneously, “rever[ing] the beautiful one as a god.” This response, this reverence is nothing else than the opening up of ethics. But what exactly is this response?

The briefest answer, it is already obvious, is that we respond to beauty with love. But this tells us nothing. What is love, how does it respond to beauty (at all its levels) and most importantly, how, contrary to the analyses of Levinas, Marion, Nancy, and others, does this response *speak*? How does love of beauty escape the confined realm of secrecy and shadows, a feat it will have to accomplish, if we are to have any hope of claiming that it is this love itself that carries in it the call of ethics, because this is to say nothing other than that the response to beauty is *already and in its own way* the ethical reply. Not, to be sure, the only ethical response (I do not respond to *every* Face with love) but an ethical response nonetheless. In brief, what will be seen is that, having heard the erotic-ethical command from the beautiful Other, we take on the ethical attitude in and through our attempt to respond with love. That is to say, our becoming ethical is our own attempt to become beautiful. We can therefore move now into the final chapter, and at long last answer the two questions with which we started: What is it to love (§1), and how does it lead to ethics? This second question, following the critiques of Parts II and III will

⁸⁰ *Phaedrus*, 251a.

⁸¹ It is the “person who has been corrupted,” who does not understand beauty, that does not feel the same shock, who does not “quickly rise.” 250e.

proceed in two parts, first, we will see how love transforms desire (§2) to avoid turning love into some kind of egoism, and finally, how language can speak and signify (§3).

§1: What is Love?

First, let me offer a definition of love as I will be treating it from here on out or rather, an apology for the lack of a true definition. As we have seen throughout this work, love is notoriously difficult to pin down, and each philosopher has drawn the lines between desire, love, and eros at different points. While each contributes to a shared philosophy of love, the very definition of the topic is at stake in each account. However, this attempt to arrive at a precise definition of love will always end up misrepresenting the phenomenon in some way. Recall the guiding measure from the *Phaedrus*: that any lover, should he or she read what is said, would recognize the subject as love.⁸² Discussions of precisely where the boundaries of eros and agape, or eros and love, or love and friendship, etc. fall quickly move us away from satisfying this test.⁸³ Our various loves inevitably overlap, and to correctly define one particular kind of love at the exclusion of the others will therefore be impossible. As Marion puts it, we must attempt to hold together what reason attempts to tear apart.⁸⁴ However, I will offer some general principles that guide what I have to say about love. Above all, what is said here is directed

⁸² Smuts formulates a similar sentiment more accusatorially, that “the notion is so common, it is fair to doubt the sincerity (or the humanity) of anyone who claims to not know what I am talking about. Having gotten this far in life, I fear that, as Louis Armstrong said about jazz, if you have to ask what love-the-feeling is then ‘you ain’t never going to know,’” “In defense of the No-Reasons View of Love,” 5.

⁸³ As Solomon puts it, discussing *eros* and *agape*, “much of the history of Western love, written primarily by theological scholars and German philologists, has consisted in the mock battle between these two Greek words, complete with shifting definitions, which in any case, would not be recognizable to the Greeks who used them in the first place,” Robert C. Solomon, *Love: Emotion, Myth, and Metaphor* (Prometheus Books), 9.

⁸⁴ *EP* 4-5.

at an account of something like ‘romantic love’ or better ‘erotic love’ (properly understanding eros). Much can be said about other forms of love: parental, friendship, charity, etc., but they are not the immediate subject here.⁸⁵ As for this kind of love: first, love responds to beauty. This much should be clear from chapter seven. It is also what most immediately puts what follows at odds with the theories of parts II and III. Secondly, there are no reasons for love. If love is a response, it is a free one, I cannot be criticized for my loving or not loving any particular beauty.⁸⁶ Thus, from these two principles—along with a general principle that all persons have *haecceital* beauty⁸⁷—we can synthesize a first rule of love: loving a person is always permitted but never required. From the second principle follows a third: love is ineffable. ‘Why do you love me’ does not have any more of an answer than does ‘why are you beautiful.’ Both are questions that aim at reasons that do not, in fact, exist. Fourth and finally, however, despite its ineffability, love is never mute. In this way, the speech of love will be of something *new*; love is a recognition of a person’s beauty, but it is also a creation of value (what kind and on whom will be fleshed out soon). Thus a second rule of love: For love to be love, it must be creative.⁸⁸

That love is a free response puts it somewhat at odds with Levinas’ account of the Face. Every Other represents a face that we ought to see and acknowledge for Levinas, this is the first principle of his ethical stance. Even if, in actual fact, it is only very rarely that we are actually struck by the Face of the Other, and most of our experiences

⁸⁵ However, see my introduction for an argument that these, nonetheless, contain something of the erotic in them.

⁸⁶ Aaron Smuts, in an unpublished draft, “In defense of the No-Reasons View of Love,” offers a compelling argument for this view, although from a much different philosophical background than what I address here.

⁸⁷ This follows from the fact that all persons are individual.

⁸⁸ Marcel’s formulation of love shows this clearly: ‘To love a being is to say you, you in particular shall not die.’ This is no *mere* recognition of personal immortality, or else the ‘you in particular’ would be meaningless. Rather, it is a declaration of a new future.

transpire without that recognition. At this first moment, love and ethics parallel each other. I do not, in fact always see somebody as beautiful. This is not (experience will tell us) necessarily because the person is 'not beautiful.' The common experience of there being 'no connection' or 'no spark' when meeting a blind date is not always an acknowledgement of a lack of beauty (or at least, not when these statements are made in good faith), but simply that we have not been moved by his or her beauty. While there are certain things we can do (recall the introduction of this section) in order to dispose ourselves into seeing beauty more frequently, we are ultimately not in control of when we feel 'cupid's arrow.' However, even if we acknowledge that every Other is beautiful, we do not admit (indeed we should not admit) that we should respond to every face with love.⁸⁹ Few are willing to admit that Don Juan is the best at love due to the multitudes of his 'conquests,'⁹⁰ in fact, we are more likely to condemn him of not understanding love at all. The usual ideal for love is not the person who has loved briefly and frequently, but the couple who have loved each other for decades. Love, it seems, involves some level of exclusivity, and is judged by relative intensity, not, like ethics, by its universality. Treating all equal in ethics is a virtue, in love, it is a farce.

Nevertheless, our response is not simply a free willing or choosing, in a way that makes the whole encounter subject to our own subjectivity. Recall that the encounter is sparked, not from my own eros, but from the beauty. My erotic response is free, but it is not self-initiated. Eros does not even become a possibility before I feel this shock of beauty. For Plato, this event caused a kind of remembering of what I once was. Chrétien, shedding this 'past life' metaphysics, simply describes the present moment when he says

⁸⁹ Or at least, not with the romantic/erotic love I am speaking of here.

⁹⁰ Except in a euphemistic usage of him as 'the best lover.'

that “the loveliness of beauty that gives the lover the ability to love.”⁹¹ In seeing beauty, I am not only given a beauty to love, but indeed the ability to love, and even the ‘knowledge’ of what love is. The sudden desire that I feel is a kind of unexplainable madness, a wholly new feeling.⁹² All that I know at first, like Plato’s lover, is that if we truly acted fully on this sudden flood of eros,⁹³ we would “be thought stark mad.”⁹⁴ We can sense rationality leaving us, the calm approach to the world that has defined us up to this point, as suddenly the whole world, centered around this singular beauty, appears to us completely different. So if I do not initiate the contact, and if the world, at an instant, is completely changed, in what respect is it free at all? Quite simply, it is this decisive point of the being “thought stark mad” if we continue on the path that has been laid out for us. I can, despite the knowledge of how I will appear, press on, love this beautiful person without reservation, or I can hold back, let calm reason take control, and deny the path of eros.

Socrates himself, it seems, advocates the philosopher take this second path, taming and reining in the madness of eros, always pulling back before eros fully takes over.⁹⁵ For Socrates, this was, at least partially, a call to live a life of virtue. While I think Socrates is

⁹¹ *L’Effroi*, 53. “Ce n’est pas lui qui donne à l’aimé d’être aimable, mais l’amabilité du beau qui nous donne de pouvoir aimer.”

⁹² This is undeniably true, I should think, the first time. However, I think it is equally true for every successive encounter. No encounter of beauty is the same, and no love-response is the same.

⁹³ I want to hold off, at least for the time being, on the question of exactly how either passion or will (or both) factor into eros

⁹⁴ *Phaedrus*, 251a. See also any number of similar remarks in the *Symposium* about the relative madness of lovers, who will promise the world, sleep in doorways, and all-around act irrationally in pursuit of their beloved.

⁹⁵ Whenever the lover draws near, he sees the beloved “standing with modesty upon a pedestal of chastity, and when he sees this he is afraid and falls backward in reverence” *Phaedrus*, 254b. The word chastity here, ἁγνός, could also be taken to mean ‘holiness or sacredness’

wrong in offering his highest praise to these philosophers,⁹⁶ here, at long last, we see the central claim to which I have been trying to build from the start, and why it was necessary to first detour through love's failings before returning it to its place: love gives birth to the ethical attitude, even when love is denied.

For Levinas, the ethical encounter happens on its own terms, and the erotic encounter is either beyond or beneath or behind this. But not so if I am right about beauty and its role in dislocating us and introducing the possibility of eros. We see the face not of its own accord (or by virtue of its shining with the Good) but because we are first shocked by its beauty. Whereas Levinas cannot provide a sufficient account of why the face sometimes confronts us while at other times we pass by in ignorance of the Other who faces me,⁹⁷ we now have our answer: the person's beauty shines forth, shocking us out of our monotony. The whole of my life now hangs in the balance as I choose how to respond to this sudden rupture, and while the choice of which path to take is free, there is no heading back, there is no 'undoing' the earthquake that has just taken place, only deciding how to proceed.

The first option, let us call it the 'Levinasian' option,⁹⁸ is to deny the mania of eros, to deny its excessiveness, and unintelligibility.⁹⁹ Instead of proceeding by eros, we investigate what has just taken place and what is it that has shaken me in this way. In my

⁹⁶ Or at least, in praising less highly those who live according to eros. See Part I for a fuller discussion of this, and the possibility of eros as its own route of ascent within Platonism.

⁹⁷ For Levinas, the face is entirely other, entirely transcendent. Any 'explanation' for why the face appears would be to reduce its otherness in some way. This is particularly true since the Face is, ultimately, disconnected from any physical faces.

⁹⁸ However, it should be clear that this is not Levinas' account of ethics, given its changed origin in the encounter with beauty.

⁹⁹ These, ultimately, were the complaints of voluptuousity and the face that signified nothing, or that signified only its nonsignifyingness.

search, behind the shining of beauty I find what is brought along with it, the shining of the good.¹⁰⁰ From there, the ethical attitude arises much in the way that Levinas himself outlines it. It is only its origins, its cause, that I wish to contest here. The Good does not first speak only for itself, but in and through the more original call of Beauty.

But to understand this ethical call, to understand how we come to understand what the Good demands of us, it is necessary to look into what happens when eros is not denied, when we embrace the mania suddenly appears as a possibility. In this route, it will become even clearer how ethics grows out of eros, since this ‘Levinasian’ option, while praise-worthy in its own right, represents more of a false start than a true success.

So what happens when, faced with our decision, we choose to allow eros to continue, not taking into account the potential reaction of those around us?¹⁰¹ Plato repeatedly compares this decision to a deification of the beloved, setting him up as a god. But let us not mistake this for an idolization or idealization. We do not treat him as a god by destroying what makes him who he is (to do so would destroy the very source of his beauty, in his individuality), rather we recognize him for what he truly is: an individual who has reconstituted my world, with him at the center.¹⁰² The entirety of my world now becomes understood in a *new, different* way.¹⁰³ But this new center also revolutionizes what happens to my desire. In the prior (call it metaphysical) arrangement of the world, it was

¹⁰⁰ See the previous chapter.

¹⁰¹ In a paradoxical fact, which I will return to shortly, those very others with whose reactions we are concerned are but so many other lovers. We expect (perhaps rightly) to be condemned by people who, in our situation, also chose to proceed.

¹⁰² Although, it should be obvious, not by some conscious effort on their part. As Marcel, notes, hitting at part of this restructuring, “the only thing worth preoccupying . . . us [is] the death of someone we loved.” Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond* (Northwestern University Press, 1973), 131.

¹⁰³ Again, although the structure is the same for each love, note that the different locus will make each love unique.

myself at the center, and so desire took the structure of trying to gather things to myself, to form a net out of my world which connected me to all the good things that I see.

The reversal, placing the beautiful other at the center, also breaks with this sense of desire. I no longer wish to gather everything to myself, nor even is it my desire to place *myself* at the center (to do so now appears as only a kind of auto-eroticism, an attempt to make myself the beloved and, I should think, recognizable as a broken eros by all). Rather, my desire functions in the same way, desiring to gather things to the center, with myself still on the outskirts. That is, I attempt to gather things not to myself, but to the beloved. The whole world becomes structured by the gift. My desire becomes a desire to give, not to acquire.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the person who has seen this most clearly is Luce Irigaray, who notes that in the suggested change to ‘I love *to* you’:

The ‘to’ prevents the relation of transitivity, bereft of the other’s irreducibility and potential reciprocity. The ‘to’ maintains intransitivity between persons, between the interpersonal question, speech or gift: I speak to you, I ask of you, I give to you.¹⁰⁵

And again,

I love to you thus means: I do not take you for a direct object, nor for an indirect object by revolving around you. It is, rather, around myself that I have to revolve in order to maintain the *to you* thanks to the return to me.¹⁰⁶

In these two short statements, Irigaray makes a myriad of important clarifications to her suggested grammatical change: the indirectness of ‘love to’—no longer treating love as a verb taking a direct object—does not turn the other into an object to be

¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the real meaning behind Diotima’s cryptic ‘giving birth to beauty’ is not to produce a child for myself, but for the beloved, a gift of new beauty.

¹⁰⁵ Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch for a Felicity Within History* (Psychology Press, 1996), 109.

¹⁰⁶ “I Love to You,” 110. Despite by and large agreeing with the definition of love Irigaray is pushing for, I do not see the language change as a necessary move in order to change conceptions.

possessed, but nor does its indirectness (loving to, rather than loving) put the beloved as the rigid center of our reconstructed world, around which *I* revolve (to do so would amount to the deification I have denied above), lest we are drawn all the way back to Sartre's masochism where I become just one more 'good object' to be gifted to the beloved. In other words, 'I love to you' does not merely *reverse* the intentionality of love. Love is no more the Other's acquisitive desire than it is my own. Instead, as she puts it, I continue to 'revolve around myself,' as if an eddy in a larger body of water, swirling, but nevertheless aware that I am not the true center-point. I self-revolve, not as the all-important subject I was in my previous world, but in order to maintain myself in an orbital relation to the beloved. I must exist in perpetual distance to the beloved to continue to love her, to fulfill the purpose which has become apparent to me. Only in this way, can love avoid falling into the trap of the objectification of either lover or beloved. To do this however, means to no longer view the world as merely a collection of good objects to be possessed. Love, if it is to be good, cannot be structured on a desire-as-lack.

In fact, it is in the continual insistence throughout parts II and III that we can see how the whole thread of love presented here has taken its start from the wrong place: Plato's *Symposium* which continues to be much more commonly referred to in contemporary philosophy of love than the *Phaedrus*.¹⁰⁷ In the *Symposium*, Plato is equally guilty of defining eros by a desire to possess what one lacks. It is only in the *Phaedrus* (and even then, only with a generous reading of some of Socrates' remarks), that we begin to see a different kind of desire being developed for eros. By following the *Symposium*, and a love defined by lack and possession, we get the critiques of Sartre and Beauvoir where

¹⁰⁷ As noted in the previous section, Levinas' references to Platonic *eros* are universally to the *Symposium*, despite the *Phaedrus* being used in his parts about signification in the middle sections of *Totality and Infinity*.

love objectifies the beloved, forcing him or her into just another ‘good thing’ to be desired. Levinas, in attempting to free alterity from these problems, can only do so at the expense of eros altogether, which he cannot free completely from desire.¹⁰⁸ By returning to Plato, and starting from a new point, we see how it can become possible to circumvent many of the problems that have been found with eros, and instead, put forward a theory of love which can plausibly play a role for ethics.

§2: Beautiful Desire

What might an erotic desire structured not by lack, but by the gift look like? As already said, this is not just a kind of *alter ego* desire, where I “wish good things” for the beloved,¹⁰⁹ it is not only the target that is changed, but it ceases to be a desire structured by need or lack altogether. I do not wish good things to the beloved because I think he or she needs them in some way, but out of a kind of excessiveness, because it is, in some sense, *good* for me to give the gifts. This is seen in Socrates’ analogy between the lover’s immediate reaction to the beautiful beloved and divine sacrifices, where we do not sacrifice to the gods because the gods lack or need our offerings, but because we have an existential need to offer them.¹¹⁰ Our *purpose* is fulfilled in the giving, which is to say our *love* is enacted by the offering.

¹⁰⁸ The “Ambiguity of Love” that Levinas speaks of is not between two competing conceptions of love, but of a necessary ambiguity within love itself. Love is *always* a mix of Need and Desire.

¹⁰⁹ Such as in Aristotle’s account of friendship.

¹¹⁰ This claim is perhaps contentious in a more ordinary sense of greek mythology, and Plato himself will occasionally write (such as in Aristophanes’ speech) that the god’s need the sacrificed food, or at very least, need to be appeased by the act of offering. The comparable statement in the *Phaedrus* however, seems to suggest the offerings go to the god-beloved simply because we wish to honor her, not because she has any need for them.

But beyond simply enacting our love by the giving, it seems that this desire has a second aspect: we seek to make ourselves lovable *to the beloved*. It simply will not do if our attempted gifts are rejected by the beloved. While we may continue on with our unrequited love, it is always with the desire to be loved in return. Being loved by a third (and experience should tell us this as well) is no salve for being rejected by the one I love.¹¹¹ Thus, we also cannot substitute this need to be loved with the much simpler desire to become lovable, that is to say, to become beautiful. Rather, I must become lovable *for* the beloved, appear as beautiful *to* the beloved. But here we run into a problem: the appearance of her beauty to me was not structured by any logic. It was a kind of ecstatic moment, not governed by my intention or foresight.¹¹² Given that this is the case, my own attempt to appear to the beloved as beautiful seems off to a hopeless start, as I do not know how to create the same moment of ‘shock’ which happened for me. Thus, although it is for this particular person that I want to appear beautiful (so that I may appear lovable¹¹³), all that I can try to do is become more beautiful in general.

It is this attempt to become more beautiful that, at long last, introduces ethics: returning to Ortega’s definition of what I have called *haecceital* beauty, “that kind of beauty which, when viewed from a distance, reveals *not only* a personal character and a mode of being, *but also* an independent esthetic value.”¹¹⁴ Although common experience will tell us that the person looking to ‘become beautiful,’ looking to ‘find love’ will often do so by working out, grooming, and otherwise preening, this is clearly not enough, and

¹¹¹ It would, however, be fascinating to dwell more on the very real phenomenon of ‘moving on.’ At what point do we sever the ties with an uninterested love, how does it affect us?

¹¹² Why Marion has called the encounter with art a saturated phenomenon.

¹¹³ We will see soon the distinction between wanting to be seen as lovable, and wanting to be loved.

¹¹⁴ *On Love*, 91, emphases added.

indeed, is a relatively small part of what seems to be required, rather it is that whatever outer, plastic beauty we have—Ortega is particularly concerned with facial features as a kind of window to the soul¹¹⁵—needs to be transformed and put into service of a deeper beauty. This beauty, I claim here, is accomplished by becoming ethical.¹¹⁶

But why does becoming ethical make us beautiful, and not merely good? Firstly, because its origins are precisely in recognizing the beautiful Other. Our escape from egology, from solipsism is sparked by beauty, and thus, it should only seem appropriate to call this escape itself—our entering into the ethical attitude—beautiful. Thus, even although we can speak of the ethical attitude as good, it *also*, and perhaps *primarily* involves the beautiful. However, more importantly, *how* we become ethical shows its structure in beauty. Our connection to the Other more generally is now no longer structured by a purely universal command ‘do not kill,’ but instead is first structured by this new erotic desire to give gifts. To truly arrive at ethics from eros, however, it is necessary to link these two commands. The call that we hear must move us from the desire to give gifts to the beautiful beloved to our response to the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. This is the point that it seems Marion cannot follow through on: for him, my love will always remain only a deeply personal thing between the people involved; my love can neither be witnessed by, nor witness to others. As a result, Marion’s erotic call will

¹¹⁵ One could think of Aristotle’s ‘sufficient external goods’ here, and indeed one of his claims is that a person needs to be attractive enough to not be outcast from society, but by no means needs to be a beauty such as Helen. Ortega likewise notes that it is in fact only rarely that it is the ‘official beauties’ who we fall in love with, *On Love*, 91.

¹¹⁶ Key to this claim although, is that, as Ortega spells it out, *haecceital* beauty is not ‘merely’ the inner beauty, but involves the plastic beauty. This is important, because without the connection, the whole system falls

never lead to a Levinasian discourse ethics.¹¹⁷ Whatever is involved with my particular love relationship, structured around the Other's *haecceitas*, will remain radically individual.

In transforming mere *haecceitas* to *haecceital* beauty however, a single beauty can open me up to others. In my new-found erotic desire to love the beloved, I must put myself among others, now recognizing the contingency of this particular appearance of the shock. An eros that does not situate itself amongst others, that is to say, in which the lovers find themselves surrounded by a community of others, will always end up in a false idealization or idolization. While it is true that I only love (and wish to be loved) by this one person, I am aware that I might have equally first encountered a different beautiful face, given any number of variables. It is not the case, however, that upon recognizing this relativity, I come to love every Other. Erotic desire remains essentially restricted.¹¹⁸ Upon recognizing that I could have loved another, I cannot now choose to love everyone. The excessive nature of the giving means that I cannot possibly have a plurality of poles around which erotic desire is structured. If I am to interact with other Others as a result of my love, it will have to be through a different attitude.

For Sartre, this was the death of my love: upon recognizing that my love is ultimately relativized by all other possible loves, I found no more reason to love. However, this followed only because Sartre conceives of love as giving something 'deserved' by the beloved. In the relativity of love, Sartre claims, I discover that the beloved is no more 'deserving' than any other, and my love becomes meaningless. As spelled out here

¹¹⁷ As we saw in the previous part, it may, in some ways lead to *charity*, but not in a way that will be analogous to what follows.

¹¹⁸ Whether it is essentially 'monogamous' or not would in part depend on what we include in eros properly speaking. I am inclined to say that romantic love requires a kind of serial monogamy. It is not possible to love multiple romantic partners at once (the gift structure of the erotic world cannot be shared or split in any way that would be acceptable).

although, I do not gift to the beloved because I think she ‘deserves’ these good things, I give beyond any sense of desert, freely and excessively. Thus it is of no consequence that I see that these gifts could have been given to another instead, since—despite being sparked by an encounter of beauty—my giving is in no way commensurate with any quality of the beloved. Thus the beloved seems no *less* ‘deserving’ of the gift simply because her quality is outshone by another.

This rules out three alternate ways of interacting with others from out of my relationship of love: they cannot be included in my love nor wholly excluded from it. Further, their connection to it does not invalidate the love itself. Then how *does* love branch out to these others? By universalizing the drive that I ‘appear as lovable.’ This is the new first principle of ethics.¹¹⁹ This is nothing other, however, than acknowledging the same inversion that happened in the encounter of love with the beloved. No longer am I the center of my universe, but I become even further de-centered. Having already been dislodged, and put into an orbit around the beloved, it immediately becomes clear that this cannot be a kind of *égoïsme à deux*. I cannot simply substitute the dyad of lovers into the privileged place at the center. Rather lover and beloved together, if we are to love rightly, must now similarly position ourselves among a world of others. Aware of the accidental features of our love, that this love was formed spontaneously and freely, I now must comport myself, in a similar (although not identical) way, toward all others, whom I am now able to encounter on their own terms, as unique, unrepeatable others. There is a demand placed on me to comport myself, not just toward the beloved Other, but toward

¹¹⁹ I hesitate to label this in the form of a command “thou shall be lovable,” since, if we imagine the command being issued from the beloved, the gift exchange becomes extremely transactional. Whether we could imagine a command being issued from somewhere else, I’m not sure.

all Others. My love for *this* beautiful other enters me into an ethical attitude, surrounds me in a world of others, who each have, as a result of their equal status as the Other person, as a beautiful (that is to say, a unique and unrepeatable) Other. While it is not required that I love each one in the way that I love my beloved, I must nevertheless acknowledge them as others, and treat them with the respect deserved by such a person. This command goes beyond the traditional formulation that Levinas gives in *Totality and Infinity*, ‘do not kill,’¹²⁰ since merely keeping one’s distance will not fulfill the mission of appearing lovable. We are instead brought closer to the revised command of *Otherwise than Being*, where not merely distance, but giving the bread from my mouth is required. To be lovable, to be ‘worthy’ of love requires that I take on a positive disposition toward the other, not merely refraining from doing harm, but actually owing something to her. My ethical relation with all Others, although necessarily attenuated compared to my love for the beloved other, remains structured by what I owe the Other, a duty that is impressed upon me by the very fact of their status as others.

Here, however, another mistaken view needs to be rejected, which might on first glance appear: that the structure of this new ethical formulation reduces my relations with others to simply a matter of a means to my being loved by the singular relationship of love. However, the obvious absurdity of such a reading should instantly become clear if we analyze the first moment of this new erotic ethics: the erotic desire to appear as lovable to the beautiful other. If the corresponding drive to appear as lovable to all other Others were used as a mere means to this goal, it would ironically fail in its purpose—common sense tells us as much: if a person is treating others well, not out of a disposition,

¹²⁰ See the previous part for a discussion of how the command may change in *Otherwise than Being*.

but in order to gain something from me, the moment that becomes clear to me, the other would become despicable. By observing their relations with others as never escaping the transactional (which Sartre believed would always be the case), I would have no reason to believe that interaction with me (supposedly structured by the gift) is anything different. Any gift that she has offered immediately becomes just so many favors to be called in at a later date. Thus, while my ethical treatment of Others may be used as proof of the sincerity of my erotic desires, I cannot cultivate it *in order* to be used as proof. In short, having encountered this first principle only because of my erotic desire to appear as lovable to the beloved, it is now necessary that I act ethically toward all others *regardless* of its effect on my relationship to the beloved, since (paradoxically) it is *only* in that way, that it can affect the love relationship at all.

There is one further distinction that needs to be made here, before moving to the last section, on love's speech, on 'appearing lovable' as compared to a number of other dispositions. The easiest to set aside is that instead I desire to be loved. As Marion has analyzed quite well,¹²¹ it simply is impossible to do anything to cause another person to love me. As noted in §1, love is without reason, or more specifically, without any *justificatory* reasons. There may well what Smuts calls "causal or explanatory reasons," which would include biological or neurological explanations, but I can never give an account of why it is impermissible, morally or otherwise, *not* to love.¹²² Love may very well have an explanatory or causal connection to the sight of beauty, however, it is never required of

¹²¹ And therefore why his investigation changes track from the question "does anybody love me?" to "can I love first?"

¹²² Smuts "No-Reasons View," 2-3, Smuts describes this as arguing against love's 'appropriateness,' but as he himself acknowledges, this word opens up to confusions and misinterpretations. The word 'fittingness' is perhaps better, although still not perfect.

me that I respond with love.¹²³ As discussed above, love, if it is to be love worthy of the name, must be a free choice. As a result, there can never be any blame placed on a person for *not* loving something, even the most lovable thing.¹²⁴ Thus, if my drive is to *be loved* by the beloved, I am placing a perverse demand on her, asking for something that she cannot fully control. Next, we should not mistake ‘appearing lovable’ with ‘being worthy of love.’ Again, this creates a structure whereby I make a claim that I *ought* to be loved, or at very least that it would be good for me to be loved. Yet what we find is that, if love has no justifying reasons, we cannot speak of good or bad loves.¹²⁵ Lastly, I have consistently spoken of ‘appearing lovable’ rather than ‘being lovable’ primarily to reinforce the point, made above, that in fact, I cannot control the situation. I can make myself ‘objectively’ beautiful (by becoming ethical), but I cannot make myself lovable, as I am in no way in control of whether my beauty affects any person. And yet, it is not my desire to simply *be beautiful*, but to *appear to a specific other* as beautiful, that is, as lovable.

With these distinctions in mind, we can progress, at long last, to the benefits of an ethical eros, the ability of eros to speak publicly, to bear witness to itself and to the ethics which it births.

¹²³ The important distinction here is that, although the love may have been sparked by beauty, It is still incorrect (or at least deficient) to answer that I love ‘because you are beautiful.’ This does not explain why I chose to respond to the beauty, only the bare fact that something was there to be responded to.

¹²⁴ This must entail, and I think rightfully so, that we cannot interpret the commandment that we love God as an absolute dictum.

¹²⁵ Indeed Aaron Smuts, who I follow for many of the definitions of this ‘No-Reasons Account of Love,’ goes so far as to say we cannot call the *love* of an abusive spouse or even Hitler bad, although we might otherwise argue that the relationship is harmful.

§3: Eros Speaks

Recall the reasons for silencing eros in the first place: that public eros inevitably gives rise to pornography or voyeurism, letting the public in on an act that is meant to be the most intimate. This is true even on a reading like Marion's, where eros becomes almost completely divorced from physical sex. Thus, although tempting, we cannot circumvent the issue by reclaiming the full extent of eros as we have done with regard to the private recognition of beauty. Even in its speech, Marion says, it cannot signify, eros speaks in vulgarities, childish babbling, or mysticism.¹²⁶ Eros could never escape the radical individuality of the *haecceitas*. Even the birth of the child itself, born from eros, proved unable to bear witness to its origins.

Given how I have laid out some basic definitions for eros in this chapter, namely its ineffability, it seems that even in this new ethical form, it will be relegated to the same silence, the same non-signifyingness. But recall the second maxim about eros' speech, that, despite being ineffable, it never stops speaking. The question then, cannot be simply how to make eros speak, since all will have to agree that it in fact never stops, but how can it signify, how can it attest to its love? Much later, having given his own interpretation of this key passage of the *Phaedrus*, Chrétien poses the question for himself as well, "But has love, if it remains mute, truly responded? What is the place or the word that could speak this proximity of the unreachable?"¹²⁷ If the encounter of beauty, already an erotic

¹²⁶ *EP* 148-150.

¹²⁷ *L'Effroi*, 70. "Mais l'amour s'il restait muet, lui répondrait-il en vérité? Quel est le lieu où la parole peut dire cette proximité de l'insaisissable." Chrétien's answer, similar to how Marion develops his negative theology, is that all speech must become praise, a word that calls without 'naming' in the sense of defining. I will not follow that analysis here, as I think it falls into the same 'non-signifying' trap as Levinas and Marion's work on eros. He will go on to develop that theme much more fully in the later *Call and Response* (see above for the discussion of beauty as a call).

experience, can so radically reshape our world, it only makes sense that our language would likewise be revolutionized. This is what I want to develop here, that love's speech is not simply speaking *about* love, but speaking *out of* love.¹²⁸ The beauty of love's voice is not in what it says, but how it says it.

In brief, what this should mean is that, even when a lover and the non-lover say the 'same thing,' it is said differently, differently enough to have a different signification. This claim should not seem immediately absurd, as we are very likely to acknowledge that someone who has loved deeply could deliver Juliet's balcony monologue in a way that non-lover never could. Indeed, we should also expect to find that Shakespeare could only have *written* such a monologue if he first had loved. To imagine what it is to love is not like imagining ourselves in a different time or a different place. It would be to imagine ourselves in a totally different mode of existence. There is, it seems, no analogy between how the lover and non-lover view the world.¹²⁹ If this is correct, we must find out why. What is it that we hear in the writings of Shakespeare that we would not in the writings of a person who has never loved? What witness do they bear to love? Nothing other than the very fact that the lover's world has been revolutionized in the way described above. When the lover speaks of her love, she do not speak of simply another person in her field of vision, nor even of an Other, either unique or in general, who evades her comprehension, but of the unique beautiful other who takes up a very specific fixed point

¹²⁸ Marion frequently reduces love's speech to this, a perlocutionary act that does not signify anything. However, as will become clear, I want to suggest that we cannot separate the locutionary and perlocutionary aspects of love.

¹²⁹ In the same way, we could note that Levinas could have never written his ethics of the face if he had never himself encountered the face, if he had lived his whole life in the ontological, egoistic attitude. One could not imagine themselves in the face-to-face.

of a world that can no longer be called her own.¹³⁰ The world of things is transformed, so that the standard division drawn between object and subject no longer makes any sense from either direction. It now no longer makes any sense to speak of subjects (following Levinas' and Marion's critiques) nor now even of objects and certainty.

If we allow for the erotic reduction to bring the world of objects with it, so that even 'objects' are not primarily wrapped up in the "the certainty of the world of beings [that] works like the 'call of being,'" ¹³¹ but instead in their ability to be given as a gift, all of a sudden, we introduce a whole world to talk about. While it is still possible for the lover to (as Marion puts it) return to the world of certainty to make his "owner's rounds," ¹³² dealing with a world of scientific or logical argument, this world is not only *not* the world I inhabit, it is not even the one that things properly exist in. The lover has discovered, and attempts to communicate to others (both the beloved and the outside world) that they are not merely existing objects, indifferent to the human world, but are in fact more primordially structured by their gift-nature, where their transference from one person to another is not merely an economy of exchange, a changing of ownership, but in fact that in the giving itself the 'object' takes on its proper form as an expression of love rather than a being.

Thus, love's speech does not need to be restricted to trying to speak its love, looking to establish a relationship with a third-party to whom we could give an account of the erotic act, or who could later himself bear witness on my behalf, as Marion searches

¹³⁰ It is important to keep Irigaray's warning that the lover does not orbit around the beloved in mind here, lest this description become one of an abusive subordination or subservience. The lover must retain his own independence in order to remain a giver of gifts.

¹³¹ *EP*, 17.

¹³² *EP*, 17.

for, but rather the witness to my love can be made by the entirety of my speech, which signifies the world in its fullness as a world of the gift, which has only been given to me in the erotic encounter with beauty.¹³³ For erotic love, this is the essence of what Gabriel Marcel calls ‘creative fidelity.’ Faithfulness, in this case faithfulness to the promise of love made to the beloved, cannot be mere preservation.¹³⁴ I cannot content myself with maintaining a status quo, crystalizing a moment in time. Love’s ineffability ensures this: my inability to speak to the oath’s basis in the first place (the ‘why’ of my love), any attempts at merely preserving it will be doomed to fail, I cannot actually express the oath, and in my failing to express it, will fail also to uphold it. If love is truly a promise of an eternity, we must continue to reaffirm it at every moment of love.¹³⁵ But, love does not accomplish this by finding a way to speak of what it cannot, but instead continuing to speak of something new, something future, in response to its inability to speak of itself. As Marcel notes, “in reality the truest fidelity is creative.”¹³⁶ He elsewhere provides a very specific definition of what it is to be creative, noting that “it denotes the active contribution each soul is at liberty to bring to the universal work which is accomplishing

¹³³ A separate question is whether this speech could be understood at all by the non-lover, or whether it would only be reduced to the economic exchange of a world of objects. As with the ladder of beauty in general, it seems the best we can do is try to put the non-lover in a disposition to encounter beauty. Thus, while he/she may not understand our speech fully, it may have a rhetorical function of pointing to something which they have not yet attained.

¹³⁴ “A fundamental error or illusion must be disposed of concerning fidelity. We are too much inclined to consider it as a mere safeguard, an inward resolution which purposes simply to preserve the existing order. But in reality the truest fidelity is creative,” Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope*, trans. Emma Craufurd and Paul Seaton, (South Bend, Ind: St. Augustines Press, 2010), 90.

¹³⁵ Marion has provided an excellent account of love’s lasting forever (even if a relationship ends), as well as the need to continually reaffirm the process, although in the case of this second point, comes to a significantly more pessimistic conclusion than I do here. *EP*, 187.

¹³⁶ In *Homo Viator*, Marcel analyzes creative fidelity in terms of familial relations, noting that we must repay our indebtedness to our parents not directly, but by ‘transmitting’ what we have been given, by passing on the gift we ourselves have been given. When fidelity is viewed in this lens, the idea of ‘indebtedness’ is erased by the gift, as no person is the rightful possessor of anything which she may give, but merely its most recent steward. Indebtedness only returns when a person fails to understand their situation, and views as ‘hers’ something which she in truth have no ownership over (“the denial of the more than human by the less than human,” *Creative Fidelity*, 10), a parallel situation to those here who do not love.

itself in our world and doubtless far beyond it.”¹³⁷ Although his own metaphysics differs rather substantially from what has been outlined here, the common thread can be spotted here, in the free giving that is made possible only by the transformation of love. It is only in this creative love, only in a love which speaks about a possible future structured by the gift, which can truly claim the name.

Without wanting to state the case too strongly, the situation is analogous when we look at the *ethical* speech of the lover and the non-lover. If ethics is birthed in the erotic encounter of beauty, we should question whether it is possible at all for a non-lover to be ethical, or whether we simply read an ethical signification into actions. Ethics, to use Marcel’s phrase, is precisely that ‘active contribution’ that we can contribute with our speech of love; our love enables us to participate, for perhaps the first time, in a universal discourse of ethics. It is my love for a particular beautiful other that enables me to see, and to speak to, the status of all others as beautiful, unique and unrepeatable others. My love for the beloved provides me the insight to speak ethically about my altered relationship toward all others. However, this raises some problems since we cannot expect everyone to have this encounter, and certainly not at any early age. Is all hope lost for those who have not encountered beauty, who have never loved? Recall that above we have already differentiated two different routes to ethics, the ‘Levinasian option,’ where an ethics of the good falls out from the encounter with beauty without having loved, a second, which came about from the full restructuring of the world, and a desire to appear as lovable to the beloved. Yet, even the ‘Levinasians’ cannot fully be called non-lovers.

¹³⁷ *Homo Viator*, 88. Marcel often waivers between claims that can be interpreted in many ways and ones that strike as quite theological. Despite the claims of a ‘universal work’ operating far beyond our world, he also notes that, in his view, “creative fidelity . . . depends in no way upon the acceptance of any special religious belief.”

They have not loved, but they have had this erotic encounter.¹³⁸ Their ethics is born out of a kind of false-started love, and draws its logic from the roots of love. Its relationship to the Good, shining in and through the Beautiful, ensures that it is never fully separated from love.

Thus, when the 'Levinasian' talks about ethics, she uses a much different language, and one which, as I have argued in part III, is deficient in many ways, in particular, its inability to distinguish the Other in any personal way. All Others have an infinite claim on me, and ethical language cannot find a way (without simply allowing it to be reduced to simply practical reasoning) to demand that we (for example) give money or aid to those who are most in need of it. The language of substitution and duty is not the language of gift, and the language takes its signification directly from an attempt to relate to the Good beyond Being, which has been spied in the encounter with the beautiful-Other. This attempted relation, even mediated by the Other, accounts for the abstractness or disinterested way in which ethical language addresses the Other. The Other is simply that by which we hear the Good. By comparison, the true lover's ethical relation is not structured by a relation to the Good, nor some 'Beauty,' but a single, beautiful-Other. While this immediately personalizes and singularizes my love-speech, it also singularizes my *ethical* speech, because (as said above) my relation to every Other is now structured by my seeing him or her as somebody before whom I desire to appear lovable. Not simply, before whom I desire to be beautiful in some universal sense, but a person who could (as if I could control such a thing) cause the 'shock of beauty' which I myself felt in connection with the beloved. Thus the distinction between the true lover, and the one

¹³⁸ It should be noted once more that this erotic encounter is much broader than what Levinas would have had in mind when he spoke of eros, which was nearly reducible to sexuality.

who has simply had an erotic encounter with beauty, is the distinction not between ethics and a lack thereof, but the difference between an ethics which treats the Other as a particular and one that treats the Other as an abstract entity.

The situation however, is much worse for the true non-lover, the one who has never had this erotic encounter with beauty. Without this encounter it is impossible to see further to the Good, it is impossible to see the proper ordering of the world as structured by the gift, and it is, as a result, impossible to encounter the face of the Other.¹³⁹ This fact becomes important because it tells us how we should direct our language in order to have the most effect on the world: the public speech of the lover, far from descending into pornography, or opening up to voyeurism, ought to be directed, toward inspiring the encounter with beauty in those who have not felt it. Nor should we think that this encounter is so rare that we have suddenly made ethics unattainable for the many. Beauty is perhaps one of the first things we encounter.¹⁴⁰ The task then, is first: to get others to encounter beauty, and second, to move them from the encounter of plastic to haecceital beauty.

This first task is perhaps the more complex, since, as I have said, beauty is (usually) one of our first encounters. Here, then, we must follow Aristotle's own advice for ethical education, that ethical education begins, first of all, with the training of the passions, to feel pleasure and pain at the right sorts of things.¹⁴¹ But what else is this except to return to where we started, in Plato, to the lover taking the role of educating the beloved, of

¹³⁹ I have already offered at least a partial critique, *via* Marion, of Levinas' claim that the Other can appear on its own in Part III.

¹⁴⁰ Young children are continually 'shocked' by experiences of beauty, whether it be a sunset, or fireworks, or simply a place they have never been before.

¹⁴¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104b.

introducing him into ethics, not in its deficient form of the *Symposium*, where he became just the route to my own transcendence, but to that of the *Phaedrus*, where I try to shape the beloved and myself after the god who we follow, growing together and becoming more perfect? The lover then, first and foremost toward the one whom he feels the shock of beauty, but then to the world as a whole, takes up his role of transitioning the uninitiated to first feel the call of beauty, and then to follow it to its end, in love and ethics. Thus, eros gives birth to love, not only in the lover himself, but to the whole community, providing, from his own experience of love and beauty, a discourse to lead others where he has already gone.

POSTLUDE

This new, phenomenological description of eros is one that is both itself an ethical encounter with the Other as well as the basis for the encounter of other Others. Eros encounters the *haecceitally* beautiful Other, unique and unrepeatable; it also teaches us to better see all Others as beautiful, that is, to see each face, when it appears to us, as the face of an Other who commands us. Eros' encounter with beauty better disposes us to see the Good to which it accommodates us.

In this new formulation, we have arrived back at an eros that is Platonic in spirit, even if its specifics differ significantly in certain aspects. Plato's initial concern—the description of how eros can lead the philosophical soul to true virtue—returns in a Levinasian ethical project structured by the discourse of the Other. Eros leads to ethics, no longer as leading the ascent of a soul toward perfect virtue, but by leading the self to recognize and submit to the command of the Other. In this transformation, we have responded to the dilemmas first raised in Part I. Whereas Platonic eros remained ambiguous, moving back and forth between the love of the individual beloved and love of the Forms, eros as I have argued for here is unquestionably an eros for the beautiful beloved standing in front of me. It is her uniqueness, her unrepeatability that I respond to. Whereas finding other people, customs or knowledge beautiful led Plato to posit a kind of serial infidelity where I ascend the ladder by leaving behind our previous loves, since all beauty ultimately sprang from a single source, recognizing the *haecceital* beauty of another makes the beloved no less unique or unrepeatable. His or her beauty is not lessened at all by the existence of other Others. Each beauty is singular and unique, even

if they are all structured by the same logic (thus enabling us to continue speaking of their beauty as being a common term, even when it is not a universal one). Likewise, Plato, frequently spoke of eros as ultimately valuable only to the lover, with the beloved serving only as a tool for the advancement of the lover, particularly in the *Symposium* (as seen in Part I). Eros as described in Part IV however, supplements eros with an account of alterity that not only allows for eros to be directed toward the beloved himself, but also requires that any account of an ethical eros not be reduced to a narcissistic drive for perfection.

By making these alterations to the Platonic account, eros is better able to overcome the strong objections against even love's possibility made by the philosophers included in Part II of the dissertation. destabilizing subjectivity, by putting the encounter with Other before the subjectivity of the self, Levinas creates the possibility for a "non-allergic relation" with the Other.¹ The reunification of the beautiful and the good, with one leading to the other, made it possible for eros to no longer remain a divided phenomenon, of sexual desire on the one hand and a romantic passion-love on the other. Instead, these two halves could be brought together, ensuring that desire did not become a purely destructive encounter nor that love became simply idealization. Rather, the admiration of beauty and the desire of the good can work together, each leading the lover toward ethics, as the Good reveals itself (as in Part III) to actually be the figure of alterity, of that which goes beyond the realm of the same and the self. Love's supposed impossibility was overcome by this reunification, its viciousness by the argument (in Part IV) that eros leads not to perversion or imprisonment, but the ethical attitude. Eros no longer corrupts the Other, nor plays out as a kind of masochistic desire for self-negation.

¹ *TI*, 51

Rather eros' seeking beauty enters the lover into an ethical encounter with the Other, where interpersonal relations become possible for the first time.

Likewise, although the accounts of eros in Part III and IV share many similarities, we see the primary difference in the possibility of speaking of and from our eros. It is this fact that allows eros to once again play a role in ethics, allowing for a link between the singular relationship of love and the global relationship of ethics. For Marion, eros, even as charity, speaks only to induce a response. As a result, eros never goes beyond the one-to-one relationship, as eros' speech can only impress upon the person to whom it is addressed. Levinas' ethical discourse similarly requires a response from me—the Other faces me, commands me, and requires a response of me. However, unlike Marion's erotic speech (which follows Levinas' own account of erotic speech), ethical speech also signifies. First and foremost, the speech of the Other signifies the other himself. The Other announces himself and addresses me. But his self-signifying and his commanding are not two separate acts, but two parts of the same act. Thus, when Levinas suggests that erotic speech is non-signifying, he is saying that erotic speech does not announce the Other. The face we meet in eros is not the properly ethical face described in the first three sections of *Totality and Infinity*. In Part IV, however, I have offered an account of how eros too might signify in its speech. This is not to say that eros does not speak in a perlocutionary way. Rather, that it does not speak *only* in a perlocutionary way. Eros also announces itself. The lover announces herself in her speech, the beautiful beloved announces himself as an Other when he appears to me (or rather, his announcing himself is his appearing to me). Whereas ethical speech signifies the Other as other than myself, erotic speech signifies beauty, signifies the Other as *this one here*. The beloved other signifies his very *haecceitas* as a

unique and unrepeatable Other among others. The lover likewise signifies herself in response. However, love's speech is not restricted (as the case seems to be for Marion) to the lovers themselves. Rather, through the erotic encounter of beauty, the lovers have been opened up to seeing the world in a new way, to seeing the Other in a new way. The encounter with beauty enables the lovers to see every other they encounter as beautiful, to recognize the unique, unrepeatability of every other. This quality, which Marion likewise sees as essential to his account of love and missing from Levinas' account of ethics. By linking the good and the beautiful together; however, by allowing them to be encountered one through the other, we no longer have to maintain the distinction that Marion describes between the encounter of the icon (the face of the other) and the idol (the beautiful). Rather, beauty can lead us to the good, to the face of the other, and as a result, our speech about beauty, can likewise contribute to the discourse of ethics.

Thus what has preceded has made the case for the three theses laid out at the beginning of the project. By defining beauty as *haecceital* beauty, and by linking it to the other's role as the trace of the Good, the trace of God, we can now understand the encounter with the Other as the recognition of the Other as good and beautiful, and likewise, we can describe the encounter of love as an encounter strictly with the alterity and individuality of the Other as other than myself. Although we can describe it as an encounter with beauty, this beauty is nothing other than his or her own individuality, and thus, the encounter of love, like the encounter of ethics, is one that takes place on the terms of the Other him or herself, and not by the structure of beauty-as-formliness or any other ontological structure. Finally It is this encounter with beauty, this possible love, that first leads us from beauty to goodness, and first enables us to enter into the ethical

attitude, showing us, for the first time, the face of the Other, and disposing us to encounter the face of the other throughout the world, by coming to experience the beauty of the face of the other as the radical individuality, the unique, unrepeatable character of every other, who, regardless of whether this recognition turns into love, is heard as the other who commands my response.

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