SOCRATES, EROS, AND THE CULTURE OF NARCISSISM

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In pre-Socratic philosophy, eros (ἔρτος) is generally the enemy of human reason. In Hesiod's *Theogony,* Eros is one of the three primordial gods, the others being Chaos and Earth. Of the three, Eros has the greatest power, including the power to overcome the reason and courage of gods and man (lines 115-25).[150] A similar conception of eros is found in Sophocles' Antigone. In the chorus that follows Creon's announcement that Antigone must die, Eros is addressed as the god who has caused Antigone's destruction (lines 782-97). An even stronger denunciation of erotic love is found in Euripides' *Hippolytos.* Aphrodite states that "the power I possess is sex, passion, love" (that is, eros), and the play seems to warn that whether one surrenders to love or rejects it, one is doomed (lines 1-64). Phaedra becomes the prototype of a woman ruined by love. There are, to be sure, exceptions to this overall negative evaluation of eros. Empedocles sees love as a universal force that opposes strife (fragments 115, 128, 130). And Parmenides of Elea attributes peace and harmony to the goddess Aphrodite (also Empedocles' name for love) (fragments 12-13). Nevertheless, the basic pattern in pre-Socratic philosophy is that eros is the enemy of reason and hence of what is most distinctly human.[151] This line of thought is certainly found in much of

Plato's philosophy: not only eros versus reason, but a whole host of related dualisms, such as body versus soul, appearances versus reality, the transitory versus the permanent, dualisms that are expressed most strongly, perhaps, in the Gorgias, *Phaedo,* and to a somewhat lesser degree the *Republic.* In these works the body is a virtual prison of the soul, and the goal of the true lover of wisdom is to transcend the body by denying its claims. By contrast, in the Symposium and the Phaedrus, the body and its eros, far from being the enemy, are a source of energy and inspiration that lead man higher, thereby acting as a bridge to the sublime. One sees this most dramatically in Socrates' (Diotima's) discussion of the "ladder of love" in the Symposium (210a-211b), which posits the love of beautiful bodies as the first step toward the love of absolute Beauty. Hans Kelsen expresses it this way:

> What a transformation of views lies between the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedo* on the one hand, and the Symposium and the Phaedrus on the other. The body with its sensuality is no longer the simple earthly evil.. . which he has to leave as soon as possible. That body is now the indispensable presupposition for attaining the goal; the love of it is already the first, the most significant step on the way to the good.[152]

It should also be noted that Plato's ambivalent attitude toward reason and eros is seen not only by comparing dialogues, but also within them. In the Phaedrus, Socrates, following the lead of Phaedrus, praises friendship over love, for love is so passionate and wild as to be destructive (237c-241d). But immediately after, he asks the god of eros to forgive him, and he goes on to

treat eros as heaven-sent madness (244a-b).

In *Eclipse of Reason,* Max Horkheimer (a close associate of Adorno and intellectual co-leader with Adorno of the Frankfurt School), states that objective reason is both a structure inherent in reality and an orientation to this structure—that is, a human faculty. Horkheimer argues that this structure "is accessible to him who takes upon himself the effort of dialectical thinking, or identically, who is capable of eros."[153] Such a view of eros comes close indeed to Socrates' understanding of the term. Eros is a motive force, as well as a bridge, or path, to objective reality. Eros serves reason. Nevertheless, eros is first of all of the body, and

Plato's Socratic dialogues are works of art designed to persuade us to question our beliefs. In this chapter we will be considering how Plato artistically exploited narcissistic motifs in Athenian culture, transforming aspects that were potentially regressive— indeed, infantile—in their narcissism into the foundation of mature narcissism. It is this mature narcissism that is the ground of the philosopher's eros.

Though the eros of Socrates and his philosophy are apparent in many of the Platonic dialogues, it is in the Symposium that Plato establishes the theoretical connection between eros and narcissism, especially in Aristophanes' praise of the unifying power of love. It is a primary

characteristic of narcissism that it seeks unity, ultimately with the cosmos itself. However, the transformation of narcissism that Socrates is able to achieve remains primarily an artistic one. The final speech in the Symposium, that of Alcibiades, reveals not only the strength of regressive narcissistic elements in Greek culture, but also that Socrates himself may not be entirely immune to their influence. I am not, of course, arguing that Plato had an explicit theory of what today is called narcissism, but rather, that the theory of narcissism expresses a profound and timeless human truth. A great thinker's insight into this truth, regardless of what it is called, can be illuminated by the theory of narcissism; and conversely, aspects of psychoanalytic theory can be illuminated by a great thinker's insight into this truth, a point that did not escape Freud's notice.

A word regarding what I am not trying to do may be helpful at this point. Hans Kelsen, in "Platonic Love," attempts to psychoanalyze Plato. He sees Plato's interest in eros, which he interprets almost entirely in terms of pederasty (homosexual eros directed at youth), as an attempt to come to terms with his own homosexuality, which Kelsen argues was much more intense than was the norm in Athens. The problems with such an argument are apparent. We have very little evidence regarding Plato's private life, and what evidence there is, such as the seventh letter, may not be reliable. Hence Kelsen must make a number of assumptions regarding the relationship between Plato's work and life. Further, he assumes that we can know how

Socrates differed from Plato, in spite of the remarkably difficult issues raised by any attempt to distinguish Socrates from Plato. Finally, Kelsen's argument that Plato's homosexuality was abnormally intense—an argument that hangs on slender threads in any case—is difficult to evaluate without knowing what might have been normal, an issue that Kelsen only begins to address.[154] I have used none of Kelsen's arguments or approaches here, although I refer to aspects of his nonetheless interesting work. Nor do 1 go as far as Gomperz, who suggests that there may have been a connection between Socrates' theoretical attitude toward ethical problems and his pederastic inclinations.[155] My approach in this chapter is very much on the surface, as it were. I seek merely to show that narcissistic elements were present in Athenian culture (which is widely recognized), and that Plato sometimes exploited these elements artistically in his attempt to make eros serve philosophy. The historical Socrates and Plato's Socrates are assumed to be identical. While it is unlikely that this was actually the case, there is insufficient evidence to support any other line of argument.[156]

The Agonal Culture and Homosexuality: Evidence of Narcissism?

It is widely recognized that narcissism in classical Athens was intense. But closer examination reveals considerable confusion regarding the relationship between what appear to be cultural manifestations of narcissism and the psychoanalytic theory of narcissism. In The *Glory of* Hera: Greek

Mythology and *the Greek Family,* Philip Slater argues that the system of weak, diluted marriage in classical Athens led mothers to relate to their sons in a profoundly ambivalent manner, alternating between seductive behavior and hostile ridicule. The result was men with a fragile sense of themselves, especially of their masculinity. This fostered a culture in which invidious displays of aggression and unrestrained competition in every aspect of life were common, as men sought to bolster their fragile egos by overcoming other men. It is this agonal culture that Slater equates with narcissism."[157]

In The Culture *of Narcissism,* Christopher Lasch is also concerned with the relationship between competition and narcissism. However, he disagrees with Slater, seeing narcissism as a manifestation of a decline in genuine competition. The narcissist dares not compete, says Lasch, because his rage is boundless, for competition implies struggle according to rules, within limits, something that the narcissist, who seeks to obliterate all who stand in his way, cannot come to terms with. Thus, the narcissist refrains from competition, wanting rewards without competition, fame without risk, celebrity without concrete achievement. Lasch describes this as the orientation of narcissistic entitlement and contrasts genuine competition among the ancient Greeks with the entertainment spectacles that frequently pass for sport in our culture.[158] Thus, we have one author who sees pervasive competition as evidence of Greek narcissism and another who sees the decline of genuine competition as evidence of narcissism and contrasts our

culture with that of the ancient Greeks in order to highlight the narcissism of our culture.

The theory of narcissism can help us to evaluate the relationship between Greek competitiveness and Greek narcissism. But in order to truly appreciate Greek competitiveness, a factor not considered by Slater must be taken into account: the extraordinarily high death rate among adult men in classical Athens. One historian estimates that only one in five young men of twenty reached sixty years of age, and other historians set the death rate at comparably high levels.[159] Early death, from combat or disease, was thus to be expected. So what we might today regard as an exaggerated pursuit of physical mastery may have been functional on two counts: first, by enhancing an individual's chances of survival in combat, and second, by helping an individual deny his own mortality and vulnerability in what was in fact a remarkably threatening world. However, as Alvin

Gouldner suggests in Enter *Plato*, most people cannot seek mastery constantly; it is too exhausting and denies the real need for secure dependence.[160] The path of regressive narcissism must therefore have been a constant temptation for the ancient Greek.

Drawing upon A. W. H. Adkins's reinterpretation of the so-called Greek "shame culture" as actually a "results culture," Gouldner argues that in

ancient Greece enormous emphasis was placed on effective action. Only results counted; good intentions were never enough. The outcome was an excessive concern with potency and strength, which competed with an unacknowledged desire to be passive, dependent on the strength of another, and secure. In this context, Gouldner suggests that we view Greek male homosexuality as an institutionalized opportunity for men to enjoy respite from their constant competition.[161] From this perspective the Symposium contains an interesting remark by Pausanias, who praises homosexual eros as especially conducive to democracy.

> The reason why such [homosexual] love, together with love of intellectual and physical achievement, is condemned by the Persians is to be found in the absolute nature of their empire; it does not suit the interest of government that a generous spirit and strong friendships and attachments should spring up among their subjects, and these are effects which love has an especial tendency to produce. [182b—c]

Perhaps Pausanias's remarks can be interpreted this way. It is widely recognized that Greek competitiveness, the agonal culture, threatened democracy. The virtues of the proud Homeric warrior were not merely out of place in the democracy of the fifth and fourth centuries, but were positively disruptive of a settled, cooperative society. Adkins's famous studies of the transformation of the meaning of terms such as ἀρετή (excellence, or virtue), which originally referred to excellence in battle, but which in the fifth century came to refer to more cooperative excellences, are exemplary.[162] Greek male

homosexuality—particularly its idealization, perhaps — may have provided a psychological basis for the cooperative excellences, by physically symbolizing the depth of satisfaction available via mutuality. In The Use *of* Pleasure, the second volume of his *History of Sexuality,* Michel Foucault develops a related point. The reason why Greek philosophical "erotics," as he calls it, so thoroughly "problematized" male homosexual courtship had little to do with the moral status of homosexuality per se, but rather with the political problem of how free men might engage in homosexual courtship and relations without submitting to the power and control of another.[163] That is, the extensive concern with male homosexuality in Greek philosophy served not merely an intellectual, but also a social and political function. It addressed how homosexual courtship might be separated out from the agonal culture and thus made less disruptive.

It is apparent that there is no simple answer to the question of the relationship between Greek competitiveness and Greek narcissism. In such a very different world from our own, high levels of competitiveness may have been psychologically functional for the individuals involved. At the same time it is quite apparent that such competition was most disruptive when carried over into all aspects of social life, as it frequently was. Rather than label the agonal culture narcissistic or not, it may be more useful to turn our attention further to the concept of (homosexual) eros that sometimes tempered the agonal culture, the concept on which Socrates builds in his attempt to

overcome the conventional meaning of virtue as excellence in competition.

Socrates talks freely of his erotic responses to young men (Charmides 153b-155e; Phaedrus 227c). Yet, although he frequently speaks "as if his own heart were almost continuously thumping at the sight of beautiful youths and boys," as K. J. Dover puts it, he rejects the physical acting out of homosexual eros.[164] Though he says that he is constantly in love (Xenophon Symposium 8.2) and that eros is the only subject he understands (Plato Symposium 177d), Socrates' eros moves rapidly from youths to philosophy (Gorgias 48ld —482a) to the virtuous in the city (Xenophon Symposium 8.41). Indeed, this seems to be the point. Socrates often employs physical eros as a parable, as a wav of rendering concrete its more abstract manifestations (*Protagoras* 309b-d). He frequently contrasts a thoroughly sublimated homosexual eros, aimed at producing men with good souls, with heterosexual eros, which produces mere children (Plato Symposium 208e-209a; Phaedrus 250e). Nor should it be overlooked that a thoroughly sublimated homosexual eros is highly compatible with the Socratic method of teaching: an emotionally intense dialectic between an older, wiser man and one or a few younger men.

Eros and Narcissism: Freudian or Platonic Sublimation?

Before proceeding further, we must address the question of relationship between eros, particularly homosexual eros (and more particularly still,

pederasty), and narcissism. But to answer this question, we must first address another: that of the relationship between Plato's view of eros and the psychoanalytic view, especially that of Freud. Freud himself was aware of a relationship between his view and Plato's. Against those who objected to his stretching of the concept of eros to include nonsexual relations, he responded: "As for the 'stretching' of the concept of sexuality .. . anyone who looks down with contempt upon psychoanalysis from a superior vantage point should remember how closely the enlarged sexuality of psychoanalysis coincides with the Eros of the divine Plato."[165]

Though qualifications are necessary, it seems fair to state that Plato and Freud shared the assumption that eros is a powerful Protean force, which can be expressed in a wide variety of fashions, from sexual love to love of parents to love of virtue to love of beauty, culture, and philosophy, as Socrates demonstrates so clearly.[166] George Boas argues that there is only a "verbal difference" between the views of Plato and Freud on this subject.

> The libido, as a term for generalized desire ... by reintegrating humanity and its strivings into the natural world . . . has revived in a new form the kernel of Diotimas' speech in the Symposium. Freud, along with most Platonists, would deny this. However, since love in the Symposium is found not only in sexual attraction but also in scientific research and philosophic meditation, there is only a verbal difference between the two philosophies. . . . Although [Freud] may have said that the scientist is dominated by an anal-erotic urge, he did not deprecate science in those terms; rather, he explained what he thought was its general etiology.[167]

However, F. M. Cornford seems closer to the mark when he notes that while eros, like libido, is generalized desire, which can flow either upward or downward, into the physical or the spiritual, there remains a decisive difference between Plato and Freud. For Plato, man is drawn upward, and the self-moving energy of the soul resides in the highest, not the lowest, part of man.[168]

Although Freud and Plato both see the presence of erotic elements in the most rational and sublime pursuits, their attitude toward these elements is quite different. Freud tends to see the most primitive and direct expression of eros, organ satisfaction, as the fundamental reality. Aim-inhibited (sublimated) activities may be satisfying, but they are nevertheless inhibited, a detour from genuine gratification. Plato, on the other hand, sees the ultimate goals of eros, such as the creation of virtue and the experience of beauty, as the fundamental reality, to which physical eros is drawn. That eros is drawn in this direction is in large measure because this is the path of greatest pleasure; for such "sublimated" pursuits are more—rather than less—gratifying, in part because they draw on a wider range of human capabilities. A key reason why the philosopher king is happier than the tyrant is because he experiences the pleasures of reason and desire, whereas the tyrant experiences only the pleasures of desire — that is, he draws on only a restricted, pathologically deformed range of capabilities and talents *(Republic* 582a-b).

The theory of narcissism favors Plato's view of sublimation over Freud's, though it is not this simple. Eros may be fundamental biologically, but its role in human experience is not adequately grasped in terms of the quest for infantile pleasure per se. Rather, eros is most fully understood in terms of how it serves narcissistic needs, needs that ultimately express the desire for wholeness and the perfection of the self. Conversely, narcissism draws on and uses eros in this pursuit of perfection. As Marion Oliner puts it, "The role of the narcissistic factor within psycho-sexual development rests on its bestowing a sense of worth on strivings that have their foundation in biology."[169] Nevertheless, the goal of narcissism cannot be fully expressed in terms of eros, for it is in some ways more primitive (not pleasure per se, but pleasure in union and merger with the All: Dionysian pleasure, Freud's "oceanic contentment"), in others more sublime (to become whole in oneself: narcissistic perfection). Eros serves the goal of narcissistic reconciliation and gives its pursuit a special intensity, but it is not the goal itself and cannot explain the goal. The goal is explained by man's quest to heal his narcissistic wound. As we shall see shortly, Aristophanes understands that it is the things that men and women do in the name of eros that must be explained, and that such an explanation must look beyond— not only deeper into—eros, but without rejecting eros or leaving it behind. Though Freud draws on Aristophanes' account, he does not see this as its lesson.

Adorno's view of eros and narcissism will be examined in the next

chapter, and Marcuse's in the subsequent chapter. There we will see how a more Platonic view of eros, especially as expressed in terms of the theory of narcissism, can help us to understand, as well as correct, their projects, particularly Marcuse's. In other words, the theoretical advantages of the Platonic theory of sublimation over the Freudian theory will thus be tested.

Eros and Narcissism

It remains to establish the relationship between eros and narcissism. When one considers that Freud sees eros as never losing its archaic traits, but only building on them, and that narcissistic self-love is the most archaic expression of eros, it is not surprising that eros and narcissism are closely linked. Love, says

Freud, "originates in the capacity of the ego to satisfy some of its instincts autoerotically. ... It is *primarily narcissistic,* is then transferred to those objects which have been incorporated in the ego, now much extended, and expresses the motor striving of the ego after those objects as sources of pleasure."[170] Thus, love is originally narcissistic: it is self-love. This is what Freud's postulation of a stage of primary narcissism means (Socrates takes a more object-relational perspective, arguing that love is always love of something [Symposium 199e, 200e[). Only later is love extended to objects, as a convenience to its satisfaction, one might say. However, the narcissistic

origins of love remain. One sees this most dramatically, according to Freud, in the blind love that parents often have for their children; their ability to overlook any faults in their children shows that parental love is a projection of the parents' own narcissism onto the child: '"His Majesty the Baby,' as once we fancied ourselves to be."[171]

Freud also argues, as we have seen, that one of the attractions of reciprocated romantic love is that being loved provides narcissistic gratification, gratification otherwise depleted by loving another. From this perspective, an interesting explanation of the intensity of narcissism at Athens suggests itself. Raymond Larson notes that the distinction between "lover" (erastes) and "loved one" (eromenos) was important in ancient Greece. Whereas we tend to see a similarity and an equality between them (we say, for example, "a pair of lovers"), the Greeks emphasized the difference, conceiving the relationship as resembling that of master and slave, in which the loved one is the master, taking all that the lover gives him, but giving little in return.[172] This may have been because the modal erotic relationship was that between a man and a youth, and that while it was considered appropriate for an older, not yet married man to pursue a youth with feverish intensity, it was thought vulgar for the youth to respond in kind (not entirely unlike the Victorian double standard for heterosexual romantic love).[173] Expressed in terms of libido theory, the loved one depletes the lover of narcissistic libido but gives little back in the form of reciprocated love,

thereby causing the lover to be especially in need of narcissistic satisfaction, perhaps leading him to seek it with special intensity elsewhere—for example, in constant contests with others. Needless to say, this is an especially speculative explanation of Athenian narcissism.

If all eros has narcissistic roots, this is particularly true of homosexual eros, especially that directed at youth. Indeed, such an object choice is narcissistic by Freudian definition. The homosexual chooses the youthful image of his own sexuality, rather than the maternal image, as his love object; which is to say that homosexual eros is narcissistic rather than anaclitic.[174] Thus it is not theoretically farfetched, but, on the contrary, most orthodox, to posit a close relationship among Plato's concept of eros, Freud's concept of eros, and narcissism. According to Plato, eros seeks wholeness, completion, and healing of a fundamental wound in the self brought about by separation. Here the connection between eros and narcissism becomes especially close and fruitful. For the theory of narcissism can be used to elaborate upon and explain this quest of eros for wholeness. It is to this task that we now turn.

Aristophanes' Account of Narcissistic Injury

It is instructive here to consider Aristophanes' account of Zeus' bisection of the human race in Plato's Symposium (189c-193d). No other literary account of the experience of narcissistic injury and longing is as direct

and as profound. Aristophanes states that originally each human being was a rounded whole, with four arms and legs and two faces. These original beings came not in two, but three, sexes: male, female, and hermaphrodite. The strength and vigor of such a race made it formidable, but also arrogant, and Zeus decided to punish it by bisecting its members, so as to make them weaker. The outcome was men and women with the form that men and women have now. But ever since its injury, humanity has been searching for its other half. Eros is the feeling that arises between two lovers when each recognizes the other as the missing complement of him or herself. While all human beings, even lesbians and heterosexuals, seek their complement, the highest form of eros is that between halves who were originally whole males. It is thus male homosexual eros. The proof of this, according to Aristophanes, is that such men are the most active in public life (191a-b).

Aristophanes' speech raises an interesting point. There is considerable scholarly debate over the significance of the speeches of Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, and Agathon in the Symposium. Some, such as Leon Robin, argue that in these speeches Plato is laying out common, but mistaken, positions on love, in order to reject them.[175] Others, such as Jaeger, see Plato as trying to extract the greatest possible truth from each position.[176] Still others, such as Stanley Rosen, see Plato as making an elaborate and sometimes intentionally abstruse— indeed, hermetic— argument, in which even seemingly straightforward speeches contain a

remarkable variety of subtle and sophisticated references.[177]

My inclination is to follow Jaeger's lead. From this perspective (which is not incompatible with Rosen's), it becomes clear that many of the speeches serve a common purpose: namely, to show that eros is not an enemy of civilization, but its friend. Phaedrus talks about how an army consisting entirely of lovers and their beloved would be virtually invincible, because the lover would always prefer death to disgrace in the eyes of his beloved (179a-b). Pausanias, as we have seen, shows how homosexual eros fosters democracy (182a-e). Eryximachus seems to agree, arguing that it is through healthy eros "that we are capable of the pleasures of society, and friendship even, with the gods our masters" (188d). Though Agathon's praise of eros should perhaps be discounted (for the pompous and conventional Agathon, eros is the source of everything good), he too mentions its civilizing force (197c —d). Yet, while the civilizing aspect of eros seems to be a theme that Plato would have us strongly consider, it would be a mistake to follow Agathon in seeing eros as merely a force for moderation. Eros remains a demanding daemon, one that wants complete satisfaction, now and forever.

Why this is so is addressed by Aristophanes, who argues that his elaborate account of love is necessary because the physical pleasure associated with eros is insufficient to explain its hold and the lengths to which it drives man.

> No one can suppose that it is mere physical enjoyment which causes the one to take such intense delight in the company of the other. It is clear that the soul of each has some other longing which it cannot express but only surmise and obscurely hint at. Suppose Hephaestus with his tools were to visit them as they lie together . . . and ask: "What is it, mortals, that you hope to gain from one another? ... I am ready to melt and weld you together, so that instead of two, you shall be one flesh. . . . Would such a fate as this content you, and satisfy your longings?" We know what their answer would be; no one would refuse the offer; it would be plain that this is what everybody wants, and everybody would regard it as the precise expression of the desire which he had long felt but had been unable to formulate, that he should melt into his beloved, and that henceforth they should be one being instead of two. The reason is that this was our primitive condition when we were wholes, and love is simply the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole (dkov). [192c-193a|

The way in which eros may serve narcissistic goals has never been more clearly expressed.

Freud recognized the relevance of Aristophanes' speech to his account of eros. He introduces it in a discussion of repetition compulsion, in which he is attempting to explain the regressive character of the drives, the fact that they continually seek to return to their first expression. He states that Aristophanes' account "traces the origin of an instinct to a need to restore an earlier state of things." It is this focus—to understand eros by uncovering its most primitive expression, which is also assumed to be its most essential—that distinguishes Freud's approach. After elaborating on the myth recounted by Aristophanes, Freud asks in a tentative manner, "Shall we follow the hint given us by the poet-philosopher, and venture upon the hypothesis that living

substance at the time of its coming to life was torn apart into small particles, which ever since have endeavored to reunite through the sexual instincts?"[178] He concludes by suggesting that after life had evolved to a multicellular condition, it "transferred the instinct for reuniting, in the most highly concentrated form, to the germ cells."[179]

Freud sees the connection between the most primitive and the most sublime expressions of eros but explains the latter in terms of the former. Plato (assuming for a moment that Aristophanes' account accurately represents an aspect of Plato's view) sees this connection too: but, as the dialogue unfolds, it becomes quite apparent that he sees the sublime as more fundamental, drawing the primitive toward it, as it were (the salutary influence of teleology may be apparent here). In some respects the Platonic view is closer to the theory of narcissism. Aristophanes explains that eros cannot be understood adequately in purely physical, sexual terms. Physical pleasure is important, but not so important as to be capable of explaining all that is done in its name. One fully understands eros only when one sees it as the way in which an individual seeks to heal his wounded self, by uniting with another who seems to embody all that he lacks. Aristophanes' account reveals that eros, while having undeniably powerful biological roots, is not best understood by tracing these roots back further and further, ultimately to the fission and fusion of one-celled animals (and their human somatic correlates, sperm and ovum). Rather, eros is best understood in terms of how it becomes

integrated into higher—that is, more complex, manifold, sophisticated, and abstract — human needs and purposes. It is in this context that it is most instructive to consider the so-called ladder of love.

The Ladder of Love

Toward the beginning of the Symposium, Agathon asks Socrates to come and sit next to him, so that he may partake of Socrates' wisdom. Socrates replies: "It would be very nice, Agathon, if wisdom were like water, and flowed by contact out of a person who has more into one who has less, just as water can be made to pass through a thread of wool out of the fuller of two vessels into the emptier" (175c—d). Agathon wishes to be filled with Socrates' goodness as though he were an empty vessel. The regressive narcissistic motif of gaining wholeness through fusion with the strength of another is too prominent to be missed in Socrates' interpretation of Agathon's desire to be relieved of his emptiness. But Agathon, in a speech praising eros, which falls between the speeches of Aristophanes and Socrates, talks of eros like a romantic schoolgirl: eros is supreme in beauty and goodness, richly endowed with self-control, and fosters calm and respite from sorrow (195a—197e). Because he is unable to accept Aristophanes' insight that eros gains its power from the most regressive needs for fusion, Agathon's understanding of eros remains stylized and empty. It is precisely Socrates' appreciation of its regressive roots that gives his account of eros such power.

By eros Socrates means not merely need or desire, but a universal principle.[180] Eros bridges the gap between the mortal and the immortal, and "prevents the universe from falling into two separate halves" (202e-203a). Earlier, Phaedrus said that Eros is the oldest of the gods, preceded only by Chaos (178a —b). One may read Socrates as suggesting that the separation of the mundane from the spiritual would constitute a comparable level of disorganization, utterly disrupting the wholeness that is the universe. Socrates has an intuitive command of narcissistic imagery. Eros, the vehicle of narcissism in Aristophanes' account, comes in Socrates' speech to connect not merely bodies, but the physical and the spiritual, thereby preserving the wholeness and integrity of the cosmos. Eros, in Socrates' hands a philosophical principle, comes to serve a philosophical version of narcissism, concerned not merely with the wholeness of individuals, but with the integrity of the universe. We shall see that it is precisely this aspect of eros that Adorno rejects and Marcuse embraces.

Socrates goes on to employ an interesting personification. The parents of Eros, he says, are Contrivance (riopoc;) and Poverty (Fima). For this reason, Eros is always poor and, far from being sensitive and beautiful, is hard, weather-beaten, shoeless, and homeless, taking after his mother. However, as his father's son, he schemes to get what is beautiful. He is bold, always devising tricks, a lover of wisdom, a magician, and a true sophist (203b-e). This account captures well the universal experience of narcissistic

weakness and what man must do to overcome it. Man is born poor, unable to meet his most basic instinctual needs. Throughout his life he will have to struggle for their fulfillment in a sparse world, which will require boldness, even trickery. However, the need for trickery may not stem merely from the need to outfox others for scarce resources—love, money, prestige, goodness, security, and so on. It may also stem from an inner anxiety that one is not truly worthy of narcissistic wholeness. Thus, it is necessary to trick oneself.

Here we might recall Chasseguet-Smirgel's claim that mature narcissistic satisfaction derives from successful efforts to reduce the distance between ego and ego ideal. In these terms, the trickery that Socrates refers to can be interpreted as an attempt by eros to obtain satisfaction regardless of whether the distance between ego and mature ego ideal is thereby reduced. The cunning of eros seeks satisfaction, free not only of the judgment of others, but also of the judgment of the ego ideal. Yet, such a strategy is ultimately self-defeating, for just as the unconscious knows every guilty impulse, so the ego ideal never sleeps. It is perhaps for reasons such as this that Socrates concludes: "When he [Eros] wins he always loses" (203e). Yet, eros need not forever lose. The father of Contrivance, says Socrates, is Invention (Mqxihoc;, connoting practical wisdom, as in a craft or skill). Eros embodies, albeit twice removed, not merely contrivance, but creativity: the potential to make something new. It is through hard-won mastery of this creative potential that eros can become worthy of its own satisfaction.

What is to be made, of course, is beauty. Indeed, Socrates stresses the active, creative, making aspect. The goal of love, he says, is to procreate (tixteiv) beauty, to bring it forth, to cause it to appear (206c-e). Preparation for this task is best begun in youth, when a young man falls in love with a beautiful gentleman. Later, he will learn that it is the beauty of the soul that is truly to be cherished, and that physical beauty is a fickle guide to spiritual beauty-Ultimately, he will turn his attention to absolute beauty, beauty per se (211a —212a). “This is the right way of approaching or being initiated into the mysteries of love, to begin with examples of beauty in this world, and using them as ascending steps to ascend continuously with that absolute beauty as one’s aim” (211c). This process has come to be known as the "ladder of love” (έπαναβαθμοΐς, literally “steps of a stair”). It should not be overlooked, however, that a ladder is also a bridge, symbol of the connection between regressive and mature narcissism. The ladder of love is the path from immature to mature narcissism: from love of the image of one’s physical self (beautiful young man) to love of that activity in which one seeks to be worthy of identifying with one’s highest values.

Immature narcissism seeks immediate gratification via fusion with the sexual mirror image of itself. As we have seen, such a focus is narcissistic by (Freudian) definition: male libidinal cathexis is fixated on the image of its own sexuality, rather than being directed toward an external (anaclitic) object choice. Mature narcissism, on the other hand, recognizes that sublimation and

hard work (object mastery) can lead to even greater gratification: reconciliation between ego and ego ideal at the highest level, at which the ego, rather than seeking shortcuts, aspires to become worthy of its mature ideal. Yet, as Chasseguet-Smirgel points out, even mature narcissism is driven, at some level, by sexual desire, the legacy of the oedipal conflict. One finds an expression of this in the passage immediately following that quoted in the preceding paragraph (211c). Socrates uses the word συνεῖναι (suneinai, the ordinary term for sexual relations) to characterize not only sexual intercourse (211 d6), but also intellectual intercourse with the beautiful and the virtuous (212a2). Indeed, intellectual intercourse appears to have a distinct advantage over its physical counterpart, in that it does not depend on the presence and willing cooperation of others. Its object is always beautiful, always available, and always ready to be loved. Thus, intellectual intercourse exercises omnipotent control over its objects. The last section of this chapter will consider the possibility that Socrates' quest for intellectual control does not wholly avoid the temptations of regressive narcissism.

The Cunning of Eros

Some surprising aspects of eros have been revealed in the preceding considerations. Most important for our consideration of the Frankfurt school is that eros cannot be sharply separated from instrumental reason. Eros, as demonstrated most dramatically in its mythological lineage, is in part cunning

and trickery. The scarcity of love and beauty—and the sheer neediness of mortal men and women—require eros to be shrewd: “All’s fair in love and war." Eros thus resembles — indeed, is embodied in—the wily Odysseus, the figure whom Horkheimer and Adorno invoke to represent the cunning of instrumental reason. To be sure, eros opposes instrumental reason in important respects. For instrumental reason breaks things down into substantively meaningless uniform parts (fungible units of experience), in order to manipulate and control them, thereby disrupting an essential wholeness and objective order in the world. It does not let things be or reveal themselves, seeing them only in terms of human purposes. Eros is quite different, in that it seeks to know and possess the whole (Republic 474-475)[181] The whole is thus the telos of eros, which is what links eros so closely with narcissism.

Yet, eros shares something of the cunning of instrumental reason. It is also hubristic. To seek to know and possess the whole is to go beyond the mean, to transcend human limits, the nomos; not even the Greek gods knew the whole. This hubris is expressed mythically in the circular creatures bisected by Zeus. In Aristophanes’ account, they are punished for their hubris, which is expressed by their wholeness (190b). Yet, although weakened by their punishment, they still seek the whole, perhaps more urgently, even as Zeus threatens to divide them once again. Indeed, Rosen suggests that not merely hubris, but criminal hubris, is the dominant theme of the Symposium.

"The daimonic aura of the banquet is one of criminal hybris."[182] One sees this in the fact that three of the main speakers—Phaedrus, Eryximachus, and Alcibiades—are accused of taking part in the defamation of the mysteries and Hermae. Another aspect of this hubris is reflected in the orientation of eros towards its goal, beauty. Beauty is seen as the prey of eros, which wants not merely to experience beauty, but to own and possess it all, now and forever. This, too, is hubris. Adorno writes of an instrumental reason that sees the world as prey. Eros may have higher goals than merely wresting a comfortable existence from nature; but its attitude to beauty is similar to the attitude of instrumental reason to nature. Both seek total possession and control, thereby exemplifying something of the devouring attitude of the infant toward the good breast, as described by Klein. Indeed, Lasch has equated narcissism with Greek hubris, thereby emphasizing the strong presence of envy and oral greed.[183]

Harry Neumann's fascinating interpretation of the Symposium reinforces these considerations. Most commentators, even those who stress the hubris of eros, such as Rosen, have seen the absolute beauty described in the Symposium (210d6-212a7) as virtually identical with the idea of the Good.[184] Accordingly, the ultimate reality for Plato has been viewed either as an object of reason (the Good) or as the goal of love (the Beautiful). This virtual equation of Beauty and the Good, were it valid, would support an interesting argument regarding the relationship of eros to narcissism. For the

language that Plato employs in the *Republic* to characterize knowledge of the Good stresses imitation of the Good: copying and becoming like it (mimesis).[185]

> For surely, Adeimantus, the man whose mind is truly fixed on eternal realities . . . will endeavour to imitate [μιμεῖσθαί, literally mimic] them and, as far as may be, to fashion himself in their likeness and assimilate [ἀφομοιοῦσθαι, literally to become like] himself to them. Or do you think it possible not to imitate the things to which anyone attaches himself with admiration? "Impossible," he said. Then the lover of wisdom associating with the divine order will himself become orderly and divine in the measure permitted to man. [500c-d; Shorey trans.)

The Republic's language is thus not unlike that of the theory of narcissism, which refers to the ego ideal in terms which suggest that the unconscious goal is to merge with it, to become like it, and so share in its perfection by partaking of it. If the Beautiful were indeed equivalent to the Good, one could connect the narcissistic eros of the Symposium with Plato's larger project in a very straightforward fashion: narcissistic eros would then be the model for all philosophical knowledge, an interpretation suggested by several remarks in the *Republic* regarding the eros of the philosopher (475a-476c).

But the situation is not so simple. In answering Socrates' questions about eros, Diotima reveals a crucial difference between the good and the beautiful (204dl—205a8). The goal of Diotima's love is not the beautiful, but the acquisition of happiness by creating something beautiful. Lovers are not

in love with their beloved: their real object is their own happiness. The eros described by Diotima does not share the yearning for ultimate union with its object that the love described by Aristophanes does. The object is attractive solely as a medium in which the lover may give birth to something beautiful out of himself. Diotima stresses the radical separation of lover and beloved: "Basically sophistical, this eros had little of the grandeur leading Aristophanes' love to sacrifice everything for a kind of mystical union with its beloved."[186] Jaeger is mistaken, says Neumann, in describing Diotima's love as a reinterpretation of Aristophanes' love from a new and higher standpoint. He is also mistaken when he goes on to consider Diotima's reinterpretation of Aristophanes as closely resembling Aristotle's definition of the self-love that is the highest expression of moral perfection (N. *Ethics* 1168a28-1169b2). He is justified in regarding Diotima's eros as a form of self-love: but it is a very selfish self-love, quite unlike Aristotle's conception.[187]

The selfishness of eros is like the selfishness of the virtuousman (not necessarily that of a philosopher king) in the Republic. Whereas the philosopher king is expected to sacrifice some of his individual happiness to the common good by returning to the cave (520a-b), the virtuous man is required to tend his soul well, to make himself the best individual he can be—that is, to found the Republic in his own heart (592a-b). Almost as a side effect, one might say, such a man will also be virtuous in a socially conventional sense. He will be the last person to lie, to steal, to commit

adultery, and so forth, because to do so would disrupt his happiness, which stems from the harmony of reason, spirit, and desire (Republic 442b-443c). Mature eros is also like this insofar as it is the most enlightened form of selfishness. Like spirit in the Republic, eros can serve either reason or desire. It all depends on natural inclination, upbringing, and education. In the language of narcissism, it all depends on how well the ego ideal is integrated with the superego.

The Persistence of Regressive Narcissism

While mature narcissism may serve virtue, the forces of regressive narcissism at Athens were perhaps even more powerful. This is captured well in Alcibiades' speech at the end of the dialogue. Alcibiades loves and admires Socrates with feverish intensity; yet, he is unable to avail himself of the goodness of Socrates, because he cannot internalize it or model himself after it. He is utterly charmed by Socrates, but the effects never last (216a-c). Nor is it a matter of mere forgetfulness. Alcibiades talks as if he must protect himself from Socrates' goodness, as if Socrates were a Siren against whom Alcibiades must stop his ears and take flight, lest he be destroyed (215b-216c).

Grunberger writes that narcissism "is in principle opposed to introjection,"[188] the active mental process by which, inter alia, the values of others are internalized and taken over as one's own. It is largely through

introjection that the conscience (superego) is formed, and in this respect the capacity for introjection is a sign of maturity. A less mature alternative is identification,[189] a process represented by Agathon, who wishes merely to absorb Socrates' goodness (175c-e). Identification involves "borrowing" the goodness of another, rather than making it one's own. But Alcibiades resists both introjection and identification. Grunberger argues that both processes are seen by the narcissist as a visceral intrusion, which challenges the fantasy of narcissistic omnipotence. As a result, the narcissist becomes "fixated at the level of counteridentification."[190] Not only does he fail to identify with and introject the values of the adult world; he pursues the opposite course, as though to deny that the adult world might have anything to offer him. For to admit that it might be tantamount to admitting his own imperfection and incompleteness. Counteridentification, a normal part of adolescent protest, represents a last-ditch effort to hold onto one's primitive narcissism. In Alcibiades, it is especially intense and is never overcome.

This is one of the reasons why the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades is so fascinating. Socrates exemplifies mature self-control, Alcibiades the opposite. Socrates accepts willingly his city's verdict of death, rather than betray his values. Alcibiades serves no values, but only his own self-glorification. The idea that he might betray his city by defecting to Sparta, rather than stand trial at Athens, is inconceivable to Socrates; it is his city that has betrayed him (Thucydides *History* vi.92). This is the viewpoint of the

consummate narcissist, for whom even the normal relationship between an individual and his country is inverted. Alcibiades sees himself, it appears, as the true polis. Yet, Alcibiades' arrogance, like that of most narcissists, is coupled with a profound vulnerability to narcissistic injury and humiliation, which is why he can learn nothing from Socrates. Socrates, says Alcibiades, "compels me to realize that I am still a mass of imperfections. ... So against my real inclination I stop up my ears and take refuge in flight, as Odysseus did from the Sirens.... He is the only person in whose presence I experience a sensation of which I might be thought incapable, a sensation of shame" (216a-b).

Alcibiades represents the regressive pole of the Athenian "culture of narcissism." At this pole the strength of narcissistic elements is so intense and so unmodulated that identification with and introjection of mature ideals is compromised. In such an environment men compete with each other to inflict narcissistic injury and humiliation on each other, rather than suffer it themselves. This is the agonal culture at its worst. Plato possessed marvelous intuitive insight into the psychological sources of the "Greek disease," as it has been called; and, rather than seeking to obliterate Greek narcissism at its roots—an impossible task, in any case — he sought to transform its expression. The speeches of Pausanias (182b—c) and Aristophanes suggest that Plato found enough precursors of mature narcissism in the culture to work with and build on—for example, in Aristophanes' claim that "if we

conduct ourselves well in the light of heaven," Eros is more likely to "make us blessed and happy by restoring us to our former state and healing our wounds" (193d). In other words, it is the pursuit of narcissistic wholeness under the reign of the superego—that is, the integration of narcissistic needs with the demands of morality and society—that is most likely to lead to genuine fulfillment. The progressive pole of narcissism was thus not unrepresented in the culture. It was extremely vulnerable, however; and in the end Plato seems not to have been optimistic. Regressive narcissism is not merely resistant to mature values; it seems set on their rejection. Socrates' teachings frequently fall on intentionally deaf ears.

The Hubris of Socrates

Plato's Socrates does more than merely express the virtues of mature narcissism. He is himself a narcissistic ideal: complete and whole in himself, utterly without need for individual, personal others. As such, he reveals how close progressive narcissism stands to its pathological counterpart. The primary purpose of the second half of Alcibiades' speech (beginning at about 218c), according to Rosen, is to charge Socrates with hubris.

Socrates spends his entire life playing with mortals. Although he pretends to be constantly attracted to young men, he secretly scorns human eros (216d2ff., 219c4-5, 222a8). In his complete and perfect temperance he

denies the human order, just as Alcibiades does with his extravagance. "The hubris of Alcibiades is overreaching ambition, whereas Socrates' hubris is temperance or moderation."[191] Socrates is unique. He drinks but is never drunk. He flirts with boys but never falls in love. Even his wife and family seem to be a social convenience, an expression of his willingness to meet the conventions of Athens halfway. At least, there is no evidence that his attachment to them is erotic, and some evidence to the contrary *(Phaedo* 116b). As Rosen puts it, "Socrates is wholly wonderful because he is whole or complete if only in the negative sense of being unique and not needing anyone."[192] But it is precisely in this that Socrates is hubristic. He transcends the normal human order, which is to need real individual others and in this sense, at least, to be always incomplete.

To be whole, complete, and unique, never needing anyone, is the narcissistic ideal. Many strive for this ideal, including Alcibiades, but only Socrates succeeds. That he succeeds so perfectly is what angers Alcibiades; the tone of resentment in Alcibiades' speech is too prominent to be missed (217e, 218d, 219b-d, 222a). Yet, Alcibiades is not only resentful; he admires Socrates profoundly and has no wish to spoil and devalue his goodness. In other words, there are limits to Alcibiades' pathological narcissism. It is important to be clear about why Alcibiades is resentful, however. It is not simply that Socrates has spurned his advances; it is also because Socrates needs no one. (He may need the attention of some of the young gentlemen of

Athens in order to practice his calling, but he does not need them qua individuals.) The autonomy of Socrates reveals, by contrast, Alcibiades' own neediness. But Socrates exemplifies not only progressive narcissism, but also the hubris of narcissism. The implicit claim to completeness and perfection that Alcibiades sees in Socrates' scorn of human eros avoids hubris only because Socrates is a little more than human. Socrates' incompleteness can be measured only against higher, divine standards—which it sometimes is, by Diotima, for example (207b-208c). Others have to come to terms with their own incompleteness and dependence in this world. But perhaps this way of putting it lets Socrates off the hook just a little too easily.

The Acceptance of Contingency

Martha Nussbaum, in The *Fragility of Goodness: Luck and* Ethics *in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy,* takes quite a different view of Alcibiades' speech. She sees it as marking a turning point in Plato's philosophy, the point at which Plato comes to recognize the costs of his attempt to transcend the constraints of worldly contingency. From this point on in his work, says Nussbaum (making certain not especially controversial assumptions about the order of composition of the dialogues[193]), Plato becomes far more open to the value of the unique, the particular, the individual. She sees the *Phaed*rus as the culmination of this development.[194] Since the quest to transcend contingency (τύχη, tuchē, which means not merely luck, but all that happens to a man that

is beyond his control) and thereby achieve utter mastery over self and world is a central feature of narcissism, Nussbaum's is an argument worth pursuing.

In fact, argues Nussbaum, the attempt to control contingency, to transcend tuchē, is hardly unique to Plato's work. It was a cultural ideal. Echoing Gouldner and Slater, she argues that among the ancient Greeks there was a terrible fear of passivity and a consequent agonal relationship to everyone and everything. The Greek always strove for mastery and control over people and things, lest his own limits, his own weakness, his own vulnerability to luck, become apparent to himself and others. As we saw earlier in this chapter, this is precisely the orientation that makes ancient Greece a culture of narcissism (though it should not be overlooked that in many respects this orientation is more mature than one that seeks mastery by drastically reducing the sphere over which it may be exercised—the strategy of the minimal self). Adorno writes of "idealism as rage" at a world too sparse to be dominated.[195] Nietzsche put it a little more generously when he said: "To imagine another, more valuable world is an expression of hatred for a world that makes one suffer; the ressentiment of metaphysicians is here creative."[196] Our considerations of the origins of philosophical eros in poverty, need, and cunning support this interpretation of the origins of idealist philosophy.

The agonal orientation gives rise to a philosophical program that

attempts to achieve absolute self-sufficiency by denying human dependence (or at least the dependence of human reason) on anything transitory, finite, or mortal. One seeks the Good in order to transcend one's own limits, one's own finiteness, by participating in the Good, identifying with it, sharing in its perfection (Republic 500c-d). "Limits are always narcissistic injuries," says Rothstein.[197] The quest for transcendence in Plato's program is driven by narcissistic injury but not bound by it. Were it bound by narcissistic injury, it would seek the quickest route to fulfillment, as Agathon does (Symposium 175c-d). But Plato stresses the lifetime of hard work necessary to share in the universal Good (Republic, book 7).

He also emphasizes that we seek the Good not merely to fill a lack in ourselves, but also because there is something in us that seeks transcendence (Republic 583b-587b). We are not Nietzsche's "last man." There is something in human nature — what has here been called "progressive narcissism"—that desires to associate with something transcendent, something better and more beautiful than we are, in order to give our finite lives a meaning touched by the infinite. Plato's insight is a fine expression of the duality of narcissism. For, while all individuals experience narcissistic injury and the consequent feeling of deficiency or lack, some are able to draw on their earlier experience of narcissistic perfection not merely as reparation, but as a kind of signpost to the genuinely transcendent. That Plato may have something like this in mind is suggested by his claim in the

Phaedrus that the soul knows the way to the transcendent because it has been there before, prior to birth (247c-249d).

In her discussion of Socrates' (Diotima's) speech in the Symposium, Nussbaum stresses not the rootedness of philosophical eros in the body, but the goal of eros to transcend the body. Whereas I have stressed the location of the bottom rungs of the ladder of love in the needs of the body, Nussbaum stresses the distance between top and bottom, how the uppermost rungs are in the clouds, as it were.[198] This perspective leads to a tendency to equate the active, creative character of philosophical eros in the Symposium with the mimetic character of reason in the Republic.[199] Even if this is not quite true to some of the differences between the dialogues, it nevertheless leads to an important insight: that once one has reached the top of the ladder, one cannot go back. One must blind oneself to earthly beauty in order to seek its heavenly counterpart. This is the source of Socrates' hubris. Alcibiades, flawed as he is, appreciates this. He recognizes that Socrates has made a tragic choice, tragic in that he has sacrificed one good for another, since he cannot have both.

What is it that allows Alcibiades such great insight into the character of Socrates, an insight that has no equal in any of the other dialogues? Nussbaum argues that it stems from Alcibiades' genuine love for the unique individual that is Socrates. Through this love for an individual, Alcibiades gains insight into the particular and the unique. Because Socrates is free of this love for

particular individuals, he "goes about his business with all the equanimity of a rational stone."[200] Alcibiades' speech seems to reflect a recognition on Plato's part that this equanimity, this total control, this almost complete transcendence of worldly contingency, has costs associated with it, epistemological as well as personal. Just as Alcibiades cannot reach the truth at the top of the ladder, because he is too undisciplined, so Socrates can no longer recall the truth at the bottom, the truth associated with the unique and the particular (Republic 517c-518b). Each has made a tragic choice.

Nussbaum explores the truth of the bottom rungs in an intriguing fashion. She recalls Plutarch's account of the death of Alcibiades, in which Plutarch states that shortly before his death Alcibiades dreamed that he was dressed in the clothes of his mistress and that she was holding his head in her arms and painting his face with makeup, as though he were a woman (Plutarch, "Alcibiades," Lives 39). She sees the dream as expressing the wish for unmixed passivity, the wish to abandon the agonal struggle for mastery over others.[201] It was suggested above that this cultural agon is carried over into Plato's philosophy in the form of a quest to identify with the permanent and the perfect and so partake of its attributes. What would the lesson of Alcibiades dream be, were it, too, carried over into philosophy? Perhaps that knowledge is not all of a piece; that unless we love the imperfect and mutable, we cannot know it. Does Socrates blind himself to that part of knowledge which is not gained by intellectual mastery of the whole—that is, knowledge

of the unique and the particular—because in some way the struggle for mastery of the whole is easier than the acceptance of worldly contingency and human finitude? Perhaps it is easier to hold onto one's primitive narcissism by transforming it into philosophy than to abandon it so as to come to know the variegated richness of this world. We shall see below, as well as in chapter 7, that Socrates comes to appreciate the truth of Alcibiades' dream, the truth of the bottom rungs of the ladder. However, unlike Adorno, whose fascination with the partial and the particular is discussed in the next chapter, Socrates is frequently able to integrate part and whole. He is not incapable of descending the ladder.

The Phaedrus

Nussbaum argues that it is only in the Phaedrus that Alcibiades' insights come to be reflected in the arguments of Plato's Socrates. "What the Phaedrus will be saying, in effect, is that it was over-simple and unfair to use Alcibiades to stand for all mad people: that a lover can deliberate in a mad way without being bad and disorderly in life and choice."[202] In the *Phaedrus* physical eros is no longer represented solely by the bottom rungs of the ladder. It is also present at the top. Or rather, physical and philosophical eros are bound together all the way up and down the ladder. One sees this in the fact that eros itself comes to serve a cognitive function, by pointing the way to the beautiful and the good, by giving a person information—experienced as a

heightening of desire — as to what goodness and beauty truly are (249e-250e). Marcuse draws on Plato to make a similar point, stating that pleasure, properly educated, has an ethical function. Good and evil, beautiful and ugly, are differentiated on the basis of what gratifies and what does not.[203]

Unlike the purified soul that Diotima praises in the Symposium, the developing soul in the *Phaedrus* grows only because it is watered by the springs of physical eros, understood as the love of a particular person. It is love for a particular boy's beauty, not beauty in general, that is required for the growth of the soul's wings, by which the soul becomes capable of associating with the transcendent (251a-253c). The view of the good life in the *Phaedrus* is correspondingly different. Unlike the purified ideal life of the Symposium or the *Republic*—Nussbaum is correct in stressing the continuity of these dialogues in this regard—the good life in the *Phaedrus* involves ongoing devotion to another individual (255a-256d). It involves not only shared intellectual activity, but also shared erotic desire, even if—ideally—this desire does not culminate in physical relations. The lovers' erotic madness is tempered, not transcended. The lovers "do not move from the body to the soul to institutions to sciences. They pursue science or politics in the context of a deep love for a particular human being of similar commitments."[204] That this is the message of the Phaedrus is seen clearly in Socrates' concluding advice to Phaedrus, in which he states that only the friendship of a lover enables one to approach true beauty and goodness, to

transcend one's finitude. Love of philosophy is not sufficient. Only a person in love with another human being can offer anything of lasting value (256e-257a). From this perspective it is Alcibiades, not Socrates, who has the most to offer. Only now it is Socrates who has taken the lesson to heart.

For our purposes the lesson of this story is that the best life is one that abandons the quest for total mastery and total control and accepts that happiness, as well as wisdom, may in some measure depend on another and on worldly contingency. If one is not fortunate enough to find a lover or one's lover leaves for another or perishes, then one will be less happy, less fulfilled, and perhaps less wise. There are ways of avoiding this outcome, but all, in one way or another, involve the invocation of narcissistic omnipotence: making oneself tantamount to the entire world; depending only on objects that can never leave, never disappoint— that is, internal, fantasied objects, rather than actual people. In invoking this strategy, however, one guarantees that there are certain things that one will never know and will certainly never feel. The Symposium suggested that these are the things at the bottom of the ladder. The Phaedrus suggests that they are also the things at the top. In terms of the philosophical moral of Alcibiades' dream, it is the unique, the particular, and the individual that we shall fail to know if we invoke the strategy of philosophical narcissism. Otherwise expressed, there are some things we can know only if we approach them with an open, receptive, "feminine" attitude and abandon the attempt for total control. One sees this too, perhaps, in the

way in which Plato utilizes what can only be the imagery of female sexuality (or perhaps passive male homosexuality) to express the way in which beauty affects the soul (251b—c).

We shall pursue this general line of inquiry in chapter 7. Here it is appropriate to turn to the philosophical program of Adorno; for Adorno rejects every expression of philosophical mastery, the desire to know the whole.

Notes

150 References to classical sources are given in the text in the form that is usual in classical studies.

151 This pattern is identified by Werner Jaeger. Paideia, vol. 1, pp. 65, 433. See too George Boas, "Love." For Thucydides' views on the socially disruptive character of eros, see Steven Forde, "Thucydides and the Causes of Athenian Imperialism," American Political Science Review 80 (1986): 433-48, esp. pp. 440-44.

152 Hans Kelsen, "Platonic Love," pp. 75-76.

153 Max Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason, p. 11.

154 Kelsen, "Platonic Love," pp. 4-50. K. J. Dover's Greek Homosexuality, perhaps the best book on this topic ever written, does not really support Kelsen. Dover contends that homosexuality was the norm among young men. However, George Devereux's "Greek Pseudo-Homosexuality and the 'Greek Miracle' " casts this norm in an interesting light. By calling the phenomenon "pseudo-homosexuality," Devereux means to suggest that it served an important cultural and psychological function for adolescent boys in a society in which the father was generally absent. As Devereux puts it, because the Greeks "overvalued, discussed ad infinitum, and ostentatiously practiced homosexual courtship" does not mean that it possessed deep psychological significance for the individuals involved. It

may have been “a kind of luxury product," a “'conspicuous display' in Veblen’s sense" (pp, 81 -82). Nothing in my argument depends on the intensity of homosexuality in Athens. Even "pseudo-homosexuality," centering on the praise of homosexuality, rather than its practice, is significant, insofar as it idealizes a narcissistic object choice. Indeed, this is precisely what one sees in Plato's Symposium.

155 H. Gomperz, “Psychologische Beobachtungen an griechischen Philosophen,” p. 70; cited in Kelsen, “Platonic Love,” p. 45.

156 Although it is possible to cross-check Plato’s Socrates with Socrates as he is portrayed by Xenophon, Aristophanes (especially in Clouds), and other lesser sources, such as Aristoxenos, it is not necessary for our purpose.

157 Philip Slater, The Glory of Hera, pp. 420-22.

158 Christopher Lasch. The Culture of Narcissism, chap. 5, esp. p. 374.

159 A. II. M. Jones, Athenian Democracy, pp. 82-83; A. W. Gomme, The Population of Athens in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C., pp. 67-70. Jones’s estimate is for the late fifth century. For more details on the population and death rate, see my "Plato’s Protagoras: An Institutional Perspective."

160 Alvin Gouldner. Enter Plato, pp. 60-64.

161 Ibid., p. 61. Adkins, Merit and Responsibility, pp. 48ff. Dover (Greek Homosexuality, pp. 201-03) makes a similar point regarding its psychological function.

162 Adkins, “Arete, Techne, Democracy and Sophists: Protagoras 316b-328d”; idem, Merit and Responsibility; idem, Moral Values and Political Behavior in Ancient Greece.

163 Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, pp. 242-53.

164 Socrates clearly rejects this for himself (Plato Symposium 216c-219e). Though he is tolerant of active homosexuality in his friends (Meno 70b; Republic 474d-475a), he appears to regard its physical manifestation as base (Xenophon Memorabilia 1. 2.29ff). See Dover, Greek Homosexuality, p. 160.1 follow Dover (pp. 153-70) closely here.

165 Sigmund Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, Preface to the 4th edition, p. xviii.

166 Lysis is not really an exception. As Paul Friedlaender observes, "behind the Philia of this dialogue is really hidden Eros.... From the first words the atmosphere of. . . [eros] is perceptible" (Platon, vol. 2, pp. 95-96); translated and quoted by Kelsen, "Platonic Love," p. 22. Both authors suggest that in this (presumably) early work Plato is still attempting to formulate his views on eros, views that will undergo several changes: to his later embrace of the divine madness of eros over friendship in Phaedrus and his still later explicit fear of the power of eros in the Laws (8.835d-8.842a). See too the Timaeus, also generally regarded as a late work, in which Plato treats erotic intemperance as a disease of the soul (86b-87c; 90e-9ld).

167 Boas, "Love," p. 94.

168 F. M. Cornford, "The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's Symposium," pp. 71, 78.

169 Marion Oliner, Foreword to Narcissism, by Grunberger, p. xii.

170 Freud, "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," p. 81, my emphasis; quoted by Thomas Gould, Platonic Love, p. 13.

171 Freud, "On Narcissism," pp. 90-91.

172 Raymond Larson, trans. and commentator, The Apology and Crito of Plato and the Apology and Symposium of Xenophon, p. 121, n. 26. Xenophon Symposium 8. 2-3. See also Plato Lysis 205e-206b.

173 Dover, Greek Homosexuality, pp. 29-32.

174 Freud, "On Narcissism," pp. 87-88.

175 Léon Robin, La théorie platonicienne de 1'Amour, p. 9; cited by Gould, Platonic Love, p. 23.

176 Jaeger, Paideia, vol. 2, pp. 174ff.

177 Stanley Rosen, Plato's Symposium, p. xvii and passim.

178 Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, p. 80.

179 Ibid., pp. 80-81.

180 In the discussion which follows I assume that Diotima (from whom Socrates claims he learned his account of love) serves a strictly literary function, by saving Socrates from being put in the position of praising himself. For he clearly represents what Diotima praises; thus, Diotima = Socrates. Thus, I will interchange the names Socrates and Diotima, according to which seems most appropriate in the particular context. Not all scholars treat Diotima in this fashion, however; see e.g., Rosen, Plato's Symposium, pp. 197-277. Rosen also finds much of value in Agathon's speech (pp. 159-73).

181 Rosen, Plato's Symposium, pp. 3, 309. See also idem, "The Role of Eros in Plato's Republic," p. 453.

182 Rosen, Plato's Symposium, p. 8.

183 Lasch, The Minimal Self, p. 169.

184 Rosen, Plato's Symposium, p. 155; idem, "The Role of Eros in Plato's Republic," p. 472. Contrast Harry Neumann, "Diotima's Concept of Love," p. 37.

185 Eric Havelock, Preface to Plato, p. 269 and n. 34.

186 Neumann. "Diotima's Concept of Love," p. 47.

187 Jaeger, Paideia, vol. 2, p. 189; Neumann, "Diotima's Concept of Love," p. 47.

188 Grunberger, Narcissism, p. 290.

189 That identification is less mature is suggested by Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," pp. 105-11.

190 Grunberger, Narcissism, p. 292.

191 Rosen, Plato's Symposium, p. 309.

192 Ibid., p. 317.

193 See Martha Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy, chap. 4, n. 5; chap. 5, n. 21; chap. 7, n. 5, on the order of composition. George Klosko generally supports Nussbaum's position on the order of composition (The Development of Plato's Political Theory, pp. 15-22). Though this is not the place to develop this point, I believe that it is impossible to understand Plato without making certain assumptions about the order of composition of the dialogues.

194 Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, pp. 200-03.

195 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, pp. 22-24. "Rage is the mark of each and every idealism" (p. 23).

196 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, p. 519 (see also p. 576); quoted in Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, p. 161.

197 Arnold Rothstein, The Narcissistic Pursuit of Perfection, p. 300.

198 Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, pp. 181-83.

199 Ibid., p. 181.

200 Ibid., p. 199.

201 Ibid.

202 Ibid.. p. 204.

203 Herbert Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation, p. 32.

204 Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, p. 220.

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