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The Guise of the Beautiful: *Symposium* 204d *ff*.

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Abstract

A crux of Plato's *Symposium* is how beauty (*to kalon*) relates to the good. Diotima distinguishes beauty from the good, I show, to explain how erotic pursuits are characteristically ambivalent and opaque. Human beings pursue beauty without knowing why or thinking it good; yet they are rational, if aiming at happiness. Central to this reconstruction is a passage widely taken to show that beauty either coincides with the good or demands disinterested admiration. It shows rather that what one loves as beautiful does not appear good, a proposal with ramifications for ethical psychology.

Keywords

Plato – *Symposium* – beauty – *kalon* – good – erotic desire

1 *Aporia*

It is customary to think we know why we pursue what we care most about. So when, in Plato's *Symposium*, Diotima turns to analyze erotic desire (*erōs*) as a fundamental motivation in human life by asking after the point of such passionate longing, it is striking that young Socrates finds himself at a loss (*Symp*. 204d5-11):[1]

1 Translations, from Burnet's OCT, are my own. τί at 204d5-6 may be heard also as 'why'. I render γενέσθαι αὑτῷ literally so as not to prejudice the philosophical issue in Section 3 below. Young Socrates is unlikely to be perplexed because the neuter *ta kala* asks after loving anything beautiful, rather than just beautiful males or a potentially wider class of beauties, as the genitive plural first suggested. *Erōs* traditionally ranges beyond persons, *pace* Diotima (205b4-6, d5-7): Ludwig 2002.

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> [Diotima:] 'A lover of beautiful things loves; what does he love? (ἐρᾷ ὁ ἐρῶν τῶν καλῶν: τί ἐρᾷ;)'
> [Socrates:] 'That they become his (γενέσθαι αὐτῷ),' I replied.
> 'But your answer,' she said, 'longs for a further question: what will be for him to whom the beautiful things come to be? (τί ἔσται ἐκείνῳ ᾧ ἂν γένηται τὰ καλά;)'
> I said I was not at all yet able to answer this question readily (προχείρως).

Socrates cannot say what happens if one finally attains things that are *kalon*, the paradigmatic object of erotic desire and a cardinal ethical value often rendered *fine*, *noble* or *admirable*, but most illuminating *beautiful* in this connection.[2] My aim is to explain what this perplexity shows about the ethical psychology of the *kalon*.

The moment is evidently significant.[3] Not only does Socrates interrupt his narration to report his earlier perplexity directly to his peers, but this perplexity leads Diotima to take her decisive tack. She invites Socrates to answer as if someone, 'changing things around, were to inquire using the good instead of the beautiful' (μεταβαλὼν ἀντὶ τοῦ καλοῦ τῷ ἀγαθῷ χρώμενος πυνθάνοιτο, 204e1-2). Socrates can now answer straightaway that a lover who attains good things (*ta agatha*) will be happy (*eudaimōn*). For being happy just is having good things and an optimally desirable condition; there is no need to ask for what sake someone wishes to be happy (204e6-205a3).[4] These points in hand, Diotima proposes that erotic desire extends more broadly and deeply than sexual passion to motivate all pursuits of a good and happy life (205d1-3). Yet her focus remains how beauty inspires one to create things that promote happiness and immortality (206b1-209e4) and how the philosophical pursuit

2 It is necessary to prioritize strains of *beauty* in the *kalon* to accommodate not simply its role in erotic desire but, more controversially, the way this role raises a question about its value. Conventional but rather more pallid terms, such as *fine* or *admirable*, occlude the issue; yet so does a narrowly aesthetic concept of beauty, as we shall see in Section 3. In this way, the fusion of aesthetic, ethical and social dimensions of the concept of the *kalon* offers resources for reflection upon beauty. Here, it helps to bear in mind familiar concerns about its superficiality and ethical harms.

3 Socrates' perplexity has not received sustained attention, however, but for the notable exception of Richardson Lear 2006*b*. My account complements hers, though diverges in focus and some important details.

4 Previous speakers confirm these conceptual points: 180b7, 188d5-8, 193d6, 195a5-7, 202c10-11. This answer seems complete (τέλος, 205a3). The term anticipates the form of beauty as the τέλος of erotic desire (210e4), but it is less clear than is sometimes suggested (e.g. Sheffield 2006, 77-9, 144) that either use approximates Aristotle's notion of a final end. Kraut 2017 cautions against importing an Aristotelian framework of *eudaimonia*; cf. Vasiliou 2007.

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of beauty best accomplishes this end (209e5-212c2). Clearly, beauty and the good are closely related. But until we understand how precisely Diotima distinguishes these values, we shall continue to lack the substance of her ethical psychology. For this reason, Socrates' initial perplexity is most instructive. Indeed, I shall argue, Diotima bases her account on its insight into the motivational profile of beauty.

Most scholars take *Symp*. 204d *ff.* to show that the beautiful (*kalon*) coincides with or just is the phenomenological appearance of the good. Socrates' perplexity shows rather that what one loves as beautiful does *not appear good*. Because it is immediately attractive, the beautiful need not be conceived, like the good, in terms of benefit (Section 2). However, this psychological distinction does not suggest, as others have argued, that the beautiful solicits disinterested admiration and should not be desired for its benefit to oneself (Section 3). Rather, the distinction underlies two characteristics of erotic pursuits. These pursuits are, first, ambivalent insofar as one worries whether beauty might not promote happiness. They are, second, opaque: like young Socrates, one does not know what one ultimately wants. Diotima distinguishes the phenomenology of beauty from the good, I show, to account for these characteristics. On her account, human beings devote their lives to some attractive end with incredible intensity and risk but without necessarily knowing why or thinking that it will make them happy. As this makes human agency seem irrational, Diotima must explain erotic desire teleologically (Section 4). This reconstruction suggests that Diotima's erotic curriculum works to develop self-knowledge by disclosing that in pursuing beauty one desires happiness. Yet it also offers a more sobering prospect to ethical psychology (Section 5). Desire may be explained under 'the guise of the good'. But we are to confront the richer texture of living under the guise of beautiful.

2 Psychological Distinction

The implications of Socrates' perplexity have seldom been pressed, and perhaps have been suppressed, because scholars typically restrict their concern with 204d-205a to whether Diotima's substitution of the good for the beautiful is logically justified. Against the charge that it is not, since only the converse, that good things are beautiful, had been granted by Agathon (whose position 'young Socrates' conveniently shares: 201c2), the substitution is widely held to presuppose that these values are for Plato *coextensive*, that what is beautiful is good and what is good, beautiful. This hypothesis rightly does not claim identity. If Socrates knows what comes from having good but not from beautiful

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things, their senses must be distinct; and were these one and the same property or ontological item, it would seem less pressing to insist that erotic desire is *of* the good (τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, 206d1; τῶν ἀγαθῶν, 205d2) but *about* the beautiful in the sense of psychically 'concerned with' and physically 'around' (περί, 203c4, 204b3, 206e1).[5] Coextension is plausible, however, not least for pre-theoretical reasons. The *kalon* depends *qua* value somehow on the good, the most basic of ancient Greek ethical concepts and most general object of desire (206a1). There is also pressure internal to the concept of the *kalon* to align with the good. Pleasure, too, is a value, yet cases of akrasia show it often conflicts with judgments about what is best. By contrast, the *kalon* and its contrary, *aischron*, regulate practices of shame and honour, censuring certain pleasures and commending others in light of some conception of the good. This conceptual association receives specific shape in the aristocratic ideology of the *kalos kagathos*, inextricable from institution of the symposium, its concern to educate desire, and thus our target passage. The personal beauty and decorum (being *kalos*) of a wellborn lad, particularly in the context of pederastic courtship, supposedly betray his sociopolitical and ethical status as an *agathos*, a 'good man', who will be able to rule himself and others. Once mature, he must act appropriately to his station, *kalōs*, conforming to social convention but also displaying his excellence through magnificent deeds.[6]

So it is that Diotima's substitution is found unobjectionable and Platonic interlocutors regularly assume that what is beautiful is good and *vice versa*.[7] Indeed, this pattern would seem theoretically motivated. Coextension supports a conviction that the ethical fabric of the universe does not necessitate tragic choices between irreconcilable values but is rationally ordered toward

5 Concern with justification: e.g. Dover 1980, ad 204c7-206a13; Obdrzalek 2010, 430; justification by coextension: e.g. Janaway 1995, 72; Nehamas 2007*b*, 107 n. 40; Wedgwood 2009, 300. Identical sense: e.g. Allen 1991, 185; Moss 2012, 206; Identical reference: e.g. Bury 1932, ad 201c; Dover 1980, ad 201c1-5, 203d4, d6, 204e1-2, cited approvingly by Price 1989, 16. More cautious, though misleading, is Rowe 1998, ad 201c1-2: 'happily behaving as if "good" can readily be substituted for "beautiful" in any context' but leaving the question of identity 'open' (ad 204e1-2). See White 1989, who notes (151 n. 8) that Diotima attributes to Socrates locutions in which the beautiful is the genitive object of erotic desire: ὁ Ἔρως, ἔστι δὲ τῶν καλῶν, ὡς σὺ φῄς (204d3); οὐ τοῦ καλοῦ ὁ ἔρως, ὡς σὺ οἴει (206e2-3). Section 4 below develops the significance of the grammatical contrast.

6 See further Donlan 1980 on *kalokagathia*, with Konstan 2014, 72-91, Lissarague 1999 on class connotations of *kalos*, and Halperin 1990 on *paiderasteia*. *Symp*. 209b6-c1 echoes the trope: ψυχῇ καλῇ καὶ γενναίᾳ καὶ εὐφυεῖ … τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν ἀγαθόν. Notice that Plato has Socrates habitually pursue attractive aristocratic lads on the assumption that their beauty bears intellectual promise, albeit to challenge aristocratic notions of what it is to be *kalos* or *agathos*.

7 Cf. *Men*. 77b7-9 and e.g. both directions: *Hip. Maj*. 297c9-d1; former: *Lys*. 216d2, *Tim*. 87c5, *Rep*. 457b6 (good *qua* beneficial); latter: *Prot*. 360b3, *Alc*. 115a10-116c10, *Lach*. 92c8-d6.

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human flourishing. It also makes it more plausible to think, as Plato does, that beauty is apt to make this end vivid and attractive to human beings, embodied, socially situated, cognitively limited as we are.[8] This strand of Platonic metaphysics and epistemology might suggest, in a philosophical reworking of the aristocratic scheme, that the *kalon* just is the phenomenological appearance of the good, the '*manifestation* of goodness', or 'the visible *manifestation* of something one *considers to be good*'.[9] Call this characterization of the *kalon* the Appearance View.

Despite its general plausibility, coextension is irrelevant to the present passage, and the Appearance View is contrary to its point. No ontological claim is necessary to render Diotima's substitution valid because its purpose is less argumentative than pedagogical, to move inquiry forward when Socrates becomes perplexed. The inquiry, moreover, concerns the relation among these values only insofar as they show up, or fail to show up, *as* beautiful or good within the psychological perspective of an agent.[10] Thus Diotima evokes from the concept of the good 'resources' that situate erotic desire within a broader framework of ethical motivation.[11] To be good is principally to be good *for*

8 See esp. *Symp*. 210a1-212a7, *Phdr.* 250b1-251d7. There is a long history, reaching back at least to Plotinus (*Enn*. 1.6.6-9), of wondering whether the form of beauty in these passages is identical to the form of the good or specially connected but subordinate to it. Either option remains speculative. That the form of the good is e.g. an 'intractable beauty' (ἀμήχανον κάλλος, *Rep*. 509a8), a phrase that at *Symp*. 218e2 points obliquely to the form of beauty, does not attest their identity (cf. 615a5); that it is 'beyond' being (509b9-10) does not exclude this option. My argument is independent of this question. Either option is compatible with not thinking that beauty is good and the possibility that one would learn it is by contemplating the form of beauty. One consequence of my argument is, however, to remove such ontological matters from the centre of Diotima's concern. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to clarify this position.

9 Richardson Lear 2006*b*, 103 (based on associations with functional order: 2006*a*, 105-7) and Sheffield 2006, 96, citing approvingly Dover 1980, ad 201c2: 'anything which is *kalon*, *i.e*. which *looks or sounds good* (or is good to contemplate) is also *agathon*, *i.e*. it serves a desirable purpose' (emphasis added here and above). Compare Ferrari 1992, 266; Kosman 2010, 355-56; Sheffield 2017, 126 ('how the goodness of a thing … appears to us'). Kamtekar 2017, 199 assumes this view to render Diotima's substitution valid (cf. n. 5 above). More circumspect is Bury 1932, ad 201c: 'It might be near the truth to say that τὸ καλόν is neither more nor less than τὸ ἀγαθόν in its external aspect.' The Appearance View is correct that the *kalon* is an appearance of value. But those cited intend or imply more than this, as *agathon* is not principally or solely 'good' in this most general sense, as I discuss below.

10 Cf. Richardson Lear 2006*b*, 103-4.

11 'Resources' alludes to εὐπορώτερον (204e6), a pun on the nature of Erōs, who thrives when he finds resources (εὐπορήσῃ, 203e2) but is never without resources or aporetic (203c1, e4; 204b7). Such, with Diotima's guidance, is the position of young Socrates. We

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someone by producing beneficial consequences; hence its semantic overlap with what is beneficial (*ōphelimon*). A tiresome bloodletting procedure might be judged good for promoting health, itself (a) good for its own sake but ultimately for the sake of living a *good life*, that is, being happy.[12] Because everyone wants to be happy, and in this very general sense 'people *love* nothing other than the good' (οὐδέν γε ἄλλο ἐστὶν οὗ ἐρῶσιν ἄνθρωποι ἢ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, 205e7-206a1), to explain desire and action it suffices to cite what an agent considers good.[13] But there is special need to explain *erotic* desire, we are beginning to see, because lovers focus blindly on beauty and do *not* consider their beloveds quite *good*.

This is the first significance of young Socrates' inability to connect the beautiful to the good. His perplexity registers not simply that these values occupy different roles in the explanation of erotic desire and different psychological registers, but a more peculiar feature of ethical psychology.[14] In erotic desire—a pervasive context, we are told—what appears beautiful need not appear good in the above sense. There is not the straightforward connection we might have expected but instead a psychological distinction or gap. Although the *kalon* is a mode of attractive appearance best characterized in phenomenological terms, therefore, it cannot be essentially the appearance of the good precisely, as the Appearance View proposes. Indeed, if young Socrates is as typical of lovers as Diotima assumes (211d3-8), however atypical he will become, lovers ordinarily do *not* consider their beloveds good or to promote their happiness—despite how beautiful and how valuable they are. The task of Section 4 below will be to explain how this can be.

The psychological gap between beauty and the good opens the question whether the pursuit of beauty contributes to living well. We are bound, if we read coextension and particularly the Appearance View into 204d-205a, to slide silently past or to close this question. However, precisely this question looms in the background of the passage and orients Diotima's account of motivation, I shall argue. For this passage must be understood against a *first* substitution of

might compare, with Sheffield 2006: 68-74, 122-4, the position of the philosophic lover for Diotima and the nature of philosophical inquiry in other dialogues.

12 *Symp*. 205a1-3 does not add the qualification, as do *Rep*. 505a1-506a2, *Men*. 87e3-88c8, *Euthyd*. 280b5-d9, that goods are beneficial or make one happy only if one used well.

13 Sheffield 2006, 227-39 judiciously suspends judgment on whether *all* desire is here for the good, as at *Men*. 77b3-78b2, *Gorg*. 468b1-8, and perhaps *Rep*. 505e1-2. Kamtekar 2017 provides a fresh take on this controversy concerning Socratic Intellectualism.

14 See for the former point White 1989, Sheffield 2006, 94-8; for the latter, Richardson Lear 2006*b*, Barney 2010*a*, and below.

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the beautiful by the good in the prologue, one which introduces the theme of beauty while raising the problem that its attraction may not always help us.[15]

This introduction is most peculiar. Aristodemus happens upon Socrates wearing fancy sandals, washed and preened, as he rarely was. Perhaps disheartening for Aristodemus, who went unshod following the fashion of the philosopher, the sight certainly surprises: Aristodemus wonders where Socrates must be going 'having made himself so beautiful' (οὕτω καλὸς γεγενημένος). Socrates replies suggestively: 'To Agathon's' (εἰς Ἀγάθωνος)—Good-Man's—for dinner to celebrate his dramatic victory the previous day. Agathon is not only good, *agathos*, in name and noble birth, but famously beautiful.[16] Socrates has beautified himself (ἐκαλλωπισάμην), he professes, 'that I may go beautiful to someone beautiful' (ἵνα καλὸς παρὰ καλὸν ἴω, 174a3-8).[17] If Socrates expresses attraction to Agathon, playing lover (*erastēs*) to his beloved (*erōmenos*), he also expresses, more substantially, his thoroughly erotic conception of philosophy and the idea that beauty inspires emulation.[18] Agathon's beauty attracts; Socrates becomes beautiful to match, καλὸς γεγενημένος.

The phrase is pregnant. Its language anticipates the question at 204e8, what will be for someone to whom 'beautiful things become' (τί ἔσται ἐκείνῳ ᾧ ἂν γένηται τἀγαθά;). At the level of philosophical content, Socrates' beautification exemplifies in primitive form the complex process that Diotima prescribes, whereby the experience of beauty leads one to make *oneself* beautiful of soul by producing beautiful discourses and true virtue (210a7, c1, d5, 212a3-5). Most significantly, however, the prologue too moves from beauty to the good, in both Socrates' destination and the cunning way he invites Aristodemus along to go no longer 'beautiful to beautiful' but as 'good men' going 'uninvited to feasts of good men' (ἀγαθῶν ἐπὶ δαῖτας ἴασιν αὐτόματοι ἀγαθοί, 174b4-5).

15 It is sometimes noted, as recently as Hyland 2008, 49, that *Symp*. 204de reprises the question of how the beautiful relates to the good. Yet neither the substance of this question nor how it animates Diotima's account have been to my mind sufficiently developed.

16 The historical Aristophanes lampooned Agathon's youthful good looks in his *Thesmophoriazusae*, a joke on which Plato plays by styling Agathon, and having Agathon style himself in his speech, as an *erōmenos* despite being in his thirties. Agathon, in effect, outdoes the parody: Hunter 2004, 77.

17 Put the man in decent clothes but still he comes indecently late (175c2-6), in this respect not *kalōs*. Agathon's gracious reply to Aristodemus' uninvited arrival registers the social valence of the term: 'Aristodemus, you're here just in time (εἰς καλόν) to dine … Very nice [quite right?—καλῶς] of you to come!' (174e5-6, e12).

18 Note the reversal of sexual roles (175c4-d2), of which Alcibiades warns Agathon (218c3-219d2, 222b3-5). Related to this complication of pederastic courtship, Socrates' beautification anticipates Diotima's position that (*contra* Aristophanes) lovers neither altogether lack nor (*contra* Agathon) already possess what they love.

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The invitation does more than pun on the host's name. It complicates the impression that the pursuit of beauty *is* all to the good, so to speak. Socrates claims to corrupt a proverb (διαφθείρωμεν), apparently that good men go uninvited to feasts of *inferiors*, which Homer allegedly abused (ὑβρίσαι) by making 'soft spearman' Menelaus attend the superior Agamemnon's feast unbidden (174b3-c4, misquoting *Il.* 17.588).[19] To hear the original proverb, as we surely must, we must hear some insinuation that Agathon is inferior with respect to virtue, despite his name, social status and beauty. The garbled Homeric allusion deepens this insinuation. Plato's first readers would recall that Menelaus, though less kingly than Agamemnon, is a valiant warrior who too ranks among the *agathoi* and needs no invitation to the feast because he senses his brother's troubled mind (2.408-9). These philological details have a philosophical point. If perceptions of beauty seem obvious, the curious contrast of Menelaus and Agamemnon and the equalized status of Aristodemus and Agathon reflect the difficulty of determining who or what kind of life is good. But then there is also a question about the proper role of beauty in this determination.

This latter question implies that beauty is a compelling and necessary—but potentially misleading—guide to the good life. This ambivalence turns on a conceptual point: to be *kalon* is to *appear* and attract erotic desire *immediately*. In what becomes a philosophical motif of the dialogue, out of nowhere Aristodemus chances upon Socrates (ἐντυχεῖν, *Symp.* 174a2), just as Socrates will appear, conspicuously like the form of beauty, 'suddenly' to Alcibiades, who himself shows up in his extravagant beauty 'suddenly' at Agathon's door, uninvited with his coterie (ἐξαίφνης, 210e4, 212c6, 213c1).[20] Such immediacy explains why the *kalon* comes apart from and can even come into tension with the good. Unlike the good, the *kalon* is not the characteristic object of rational deliberation, inference, or judgment about what is beneficial overall or in the long run. It works independently of such operations, more quickly and often (though not exclusively) through vision or hearing. So it is that in the cultural scheme of *Republic* 2-3, as Phaedrus' encomium itself demonstrates, nonrational children can and must acquire from beautiful poetry a foundational

19 As Bury 1932 argues ad. loc., it is preferable to treat this proverb, attested at Eupolis fr. 315 Kassel-Austin, as Socrates' basis than to treat as original the received text of 174b4-5, for which see e.g. Bacchylides fr. 4.22-3 Snell. The latter requires us to follow Lachmann's conjecture of Ἀγάθων' at 174b4. Yet so slight a change hardly corrupts (διαφθείρω) the proverb and cannot explain Homer's alleged *hubris* against it. Readers may also recall that it is Apollo who insults Menelaus, unjustifiably, to rile Hector fifteen books after Agamemnon's feast. Ferrari 2016 treats the philosophical theme of invitation.

20 As do the revelers at 223b2, *sans* beauty. Nussbaum 1986, 184, 192-3 emphasizes this motif to different effect.

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sense of beauty and ugliness that shapes the kind of person they aspire to become. That this sense is essentially communal, transacted in practices of shame and honour, supports the thought that the *kalon* is apparent to and admired by 'everyone'.[21] These features exert pressure to judge what seems beautiful to be good. It becomes critical to wonder whether it is so.

This, I propose, is what Plato wants us to see by having Aristodemus fail to interrogate Agathon's excellence. Aristodemus worries he is a base person (φαῦλος) crashing the party of a man of wisdom or skill (σοφοῦ ἀνδρός, 174c7-8). The terms of wisdom, *sophia*, are ambiguous and contested at classical Athens; hence Aristodemus fails also to distinguish Socrates from Agathon in this regard. Yet he esteems Agathon as he does because Agathon's undeniably beautiful poetry is taken to display wisdom, connected to being a 'good man'. To elevate his intellectual activity above those of his rivals, none at the symposium more so than Agathon, Socrates must contest their interlocked conceptions of beauty, wisdom and the good life by 'philosophical' conceptions based in a novel account of erotic desire.[22] While the details of this contest need not detain us, note that Socrates targets precisely the ethical authority accrued to Agathon's poetry. He playfully mocks the poet, contrasting his own meagre (φαύλη) wisdom with the abundance of beautiful wisdom (καλῆς σοφίας) that Agathon displayed before the crowd, picking up Aristodemus' terms to undercut their force (175e2-7). Later, Socrates criticizes Agathon by emphasizing how he praised Erōs so 'beautifully and magnificently' (καλῶς καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς, 199c7) that anyone would be 'struck by the beauty of the words and phrases' (ἐξεπλάγη … τοῦ κάλλους, 198b2-5). However, to speak beautifully (καλῶς, 198e1, 199a3) is to arrange the most beautiful *truths* in the most attractive way, and truth was not Agathon's concern. This does not imply that Agathon speaks falsely, let alone unbeautifully. It does attempt to undermine his authority, not a little unfairly, by exploiting the familiar concern that beautiful speech may deceive, even as it pretends that genuinely beautiful speech avoids this threat, sidestepping the epistemological question of how to discriminate deceptive

21 Barney 2010*a*, 369 makes a similar point, though it is questionable whether the *kalon* essentially registers 'positive value *without* reference to any envisaged effects': see Section 3 below. On the *kalon* at *Rep*. 2-3, see the programmatic statement at *Rep*. 400d9-402a4 with Richardson Lear 2006*a*.

22 Contest of wisdom: 175e8-10, 193e5-8, 213b2-e6, with Bacon 1958. Contested concept of *sophia*, Kerferd 1976. This is not to presume that Socrates, much less Plato, wholly endorses Diotima's teaching. Socrates' claim to have been persuaded (πέπεισμαι δ' ἐγώ, 212b2) seems to lend it greater authority and less irony than Rowe 1998 suggests; but Socrates invites criticism, e.g. 'just like the consummate sophists' (208c1), and πέπεισμαι δ' ἐγώ elsewhere suggests epistemic limits of eschatological myth: *Gorg*. 524a8-b1, 526d3; *Phd*. 108e1, 109a7. See Belfiore 2012, 140-6 for balanced discussion.

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from genuine cases. This rhetorical strategy treads a fine line, as it cannot deny, and indeed emphasizes, the beauty of Agathon's poetry.[23] Just as beautiful aristocrats may not manifest goodness, awesome poets may not manifest wisdom, a privileged grasp of truth or being. Such ambivalence belongs to the nature of the *kalon* as appearance.

This central problem of the dialogue comes into view only if we remain sensitive to how the *kalon* comes apart from the good rather than take their coincidence for granted.

3 The Long Shadow of Modern Aesthetics

Whereas the dominant approach to *Symp*. 204d-205a neglects its lesson that what appears beautiful does not appear good, several scholars have recently emphasized the distinct psychological registers of these values. A second family of interpretations has converged on the view, which young Socrates' perplexity is taken to show, that to desire some object *as kalon* is properly to desire it *only* for its own sake and *without* considering its potential benefit. This view forms the core of a broader thesis, according to which Diotima aims to correct appropriative desire for good things by 'disinterested admiration' for the *kalon*. This interpretive framework, I argue, misconstrues the motivational role of the *kalon*.

The most compelling argument for the above view of what it is to desire the *kalon* is that, if the *kalon* can be perceived and enjoyed immediately, as by non-rational children and animals, its value is not essentially registered by calculating causal effects. Its value might then seem non-instrumental, *a fortiori* not centred on benefit to oneself. Yet it does not follow that the *kalon* is not desirable for its apparent or potential benefit. To suppose so would be to mistake a part—the experience of non-rational children—for the whole—a more complex array of psychological possibilities. So reductive a characterization would make it difficult to comprehend, for example, the serious proposal in a context remote from erotic desire that something is *kalon* insofar as it seems beneficial or useful by performing its function well (*Hip*. *Maj*. 295c4-297b7; cf.

23 Socrates reinforces the point after Agathon confesses his ignorance: 'And yet you spoke so beautifully!' (καὶ μὴν καλῶς γε εἶπες, 201c1-2). Scholars often judge this praise ironic and Agathon vacuous. This seems to miss the agonistic point of Socrates' rhetoric and the possibility that he praises the content of his speech. As Gonzalez 2017 observes, Socrates adopts from Agathon (1) the distinction between beauty and the good (κάλλος, 195a7-196b3; ἀρετή, 196b5-197b2) and the proposal that (2) erotic desire around beauty is productive (3) of good things that make one happy (196e2-197b9).

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Rep. 601d4-7). If it is a genuine question how the *kalon* relates to the good, these values cannot be quite so neatly distinguishable in conceptual analysis. Our challenge is to consider how, if at all, the concept of the *kalon* was robust enough for its many, sometimes conflicting, strands to hang together.

Yet the more immediate problem concerns the tendency to distinguish the response to the *kalon* by disinterested admiration. This tendency reflects the pressure to understand its aesthetic dimension in terms of the framework that has dominated western aesthetics since the early eighteenth-century. Thus Rachel Barney can proceed in her illuminating treatment of the Platonic *kalon* from its immediate appeal to the claim that the *kalon* is 'simply what appropriately elicits the disinterested approbation of a spectator as having positive value in itself'.[24] Her argument is not without historical precedent. When Shaftesbury introduced the concept of disinterestedness into British philosophical discourse on beauty, he argued *contra* Hobbes that, because infants delight in beautiful shapes, taste in beauty must be independent of and human motivation irreducible to desire for private advantage. Disinterestedness for Shaftesbury, however, did not preclude contemplation of apparent benefit. In this, Barney and others follow Hutcheson, who denied that a rational calculation of effects could affect a perceptual pleasure of beauty but who did not term such pleasure 'disinterested'. Nor was his divorce of beauty from (apparent) benefit orthodox before Kant.[25] Now, scholars confronted by the *kalon* evidently find it necessary to appeal to this conception of disinterestedness but unnecessary to explain their meaning.

The trouble is that the concept of disinterestedness is not innocent. It inclines scholars to oppose admiration and appropriative desire in a way that constrains interpretation of 204d-205a and Diotima's account. Conceiving of the *kalon* in terms of disinterested admiration, Suzanne Obdrzalek, for example, assumes that young Socrates misconceives the *kalon* as a mere means when he asks what use or purpose (τίνα χρείαν, 204c8) Erōs has for human

24 Barney 2010*a*, 370, citing *Symp*. 204e at 369. So too Wedgwood 2009, 322 ('disinterested appreciation and delight'), on the assumption that 204de shows the *kalon* to be, unlike the good, 'agent-neutral' (302); and Obdrzalek 2010, 420 ('disinterested admiration' devoid of 'self-serving pursuit'). Compare the Kantian drift of Janaway 1995, 62-9 toward 'pure pleasure'. Thanks to Giulia Bonasio for sharing unpublished work in which she raises similar concerns with this scholarly tendency.

25 See further Guyer 1993: chh. 2-3; I refer to Shaftesbury, *Moralists* III.ii, 'disinterested' at II.iii, and *Inquiry* II.ii; Hutcheson, *Inquiry* I.xii, 11; Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, esp. §§2, 4, 7, 15; but see §16 for adherent beauty. Richardson Lear 2006*b*, 121 dissociates the *kalon* and beauty from an attitude of disinterestedness opposed to '*practical* attitudes such as *desire*' (so Wedgwood 2009, 322, oddly in discussion of erotic desire). However, one sometimes meets with subtler motivational versions, as in Shaftesbury.

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beings and, after Diotima rephrases the question, replies that a lover wants beautiful things to become his own (γενέσθαι αὑτῷ, 204d7).[26] Diotima unmasks this misconception in two stages, Obdrzalek argues. First, she substitutes the good for the beautiful to appease Socrates, providing a *false* conception on which erotic desire aims to benefit oneself through possession of goods (κτήσει ἀγαθῶν, 205a1) and immortality. Her ascent to the form of beauty then prescribes how to love correctly to show that 'the proper object of *erōs* was beauty all along, but that the appropriate relation to it is one of selfless contemplation'; the *kalon* harbours the solution to a problematic 'possession-based model of love'.[27] Much recommends this ingenious interpretation; but its animating problem is not evident.

It is true that 'possession', κτῆσις, applies to goods, rather than beautiful, just or other valuable things, sometimes conceived as property over which one may claim ownership.[28] Yet Diotima's use is rather less imperious. It picks up Phaedrus' use: Erōs best helps human beings in acquiring virtue and happiness (ἀρετῆς καὶ εὐδαιμονίας κτῆσιν ἀνθρώποις, *Symp*. 180b7-8).[29] Not only is concern with benefit appropriate to an encomium on the role of erotic desire in human life, which explains why Socrates asks innocently after the use of Erōs; it *is* unclear how a spirit lacking wisdom, beauty and goodness *could* benefit human beings and facilitate their communication with the divine (203d4-204c5). But such concern reflects a basic starting point of ethics that one wants to have good things that make one happy. If desire to 'possess' goods is not ethically

26 But would Socrates then not have in mind some sake for which lovers want to have beautiful things? Obdrzalek 2010, 417 n. 4 may be correct to reject the possibility that beauty is here a constituent of happiness. Yet her argument neglects the fact that one can pursue beauty for the sake of being happy (along with immortality) and for its own sake, as do e.g. Neumann 1965, 42-4; White 1989, 154; Scott and Welton 2008, 110.

27 Obdrzalek 2010, 439, 432. Cf. Halperin 1985, 177-8. Frank 2018, 154-5 similarly supposes that mention of possession and benefit works to undermine Diotima's authority. None of this is to deny that erotic desire seeks not simply to have but to *create* something beautiful (206c1-207a4).

28 Cf. LSJ s.v. κτῆσις and, close to the present context, Meno's rapacious sense of κτάομαι at *Men*. 78c7.

29 At *Rep*. 505b1-2, having (i.e. understanding) the good (κτῆσιν … ἀγαθήν) is the principal goal without which one cannot benefit from understanding anything else. Dover 1980, ad 204c7-206a13, perhaps concedes too much, then, in noting that 'it is absurd to say that we wish to treat as items at our disposal those whom we love. Hence this [κτῆσις] is the last we shall hear from Diotima about "possession"'. To suggest that desire for possession cannot coincide with appreciative admiration because, for example, someone who appreciates a meadow (cf. Shaftesbury, *Moralists*, III.ii, 2) or a painting does not 'simply' desire to own it (Obdrzalek 2010, 432 n. 43) is to ignore how often such desire expresses and enables admiration.

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problematic *per se*, it is unnecessary if not inappropriate to seek its correction by some opposed form of admiration for the *kalon*.

This is not to deny a deep insight in this vicinity: that Diotima, like Socrates elsewhere, exhorts one to care less about amassing material and zero-sum goods, such as money, fancy clothes and honours, and more about cultivating goods like wisdom and virtue that cannot be acquired quite the same way. And it is plausible to think that by admiring goods *as beautiful*, one learns not only what is truly desirable but *how* to desire it and what it means to *have* goods that matter most in a worthwhile life. The greed of a Thrasymachus will not do: rather, one longs to draw closer to, have kinship with, and so become like what one finds beautiful, changing oneself in response in unknown ways, as one does with a friend but ultimately in response to the superior nature of the divine.[30] Yet to act so for the sake of (ἕνεκα: 210e6, 212c2) the *kalon*, indeed for the form of the *kalon* is equally to act for the sake of oneself.[31] One does not seek to benefit the form. Rather, by contemplating it, one will come 'to give birth to' true virtue (γενήσεται … τίκτειν, 212a3-4) and, rearing it in others, become dear to the gods (θεοφιλεῖ γενέσθαι, 212a6)—phrases that unmistakably address the puzzle about what comes from loving beauty. The partial back-reference to 'becoming one's own' (γενέσθαι αὑτῷ, 204d7, e4) shows that Diotima does not oppose admiring and appropriative, or disinterested and self-interested, attitudes but blends these attitudes in one complex motivation. In this, I would suggest, young Socrates proves philosophically acute. One does desire that beautiful things become one's own: one longs to make what one finds beautiful a meaningful part of one's life, while becoming vulnerable to being changed by it completely.[32]

We find ourselves in a delicate position. We should like to rule the appearance of the good neither automatically into nor out of the response to the *kalon*. This is precisely where we should be to appreciate how Diotima analyzes erotic desire in response to Socrates' perplexity. His perplexity reveals that the *kalon* inspires pursuits so intense and risky as *not* to seem good but whose purpose is opaque: lovers do not know what their immense efforts are for. To show that human beings are not fundamentally irrational, Diotima must explain that lovers are trying to become happy. But to take the full measure of her account, we must relocate beauty from the concept of disinterestedness to the centre of agency.

30 Thus Barney 2010*a*, 373-7.

31 Here I agree with Kraut 2008, 292-4; Sheffield 2017, 137. Cf. Aristotle, *NE* 1168b28-1169a11.

32 See Nehamas 2007*a* for sensitive discussion.

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4 The Structure of Erotic Pursuits

Recall Diotima's pivotal question: what does the lover of beautiful things love? It implicitly distinguishes between what Gerasimos Santas termed the 'object' as opposed to the aim of erotic desire.[33] The object is the intensional description under which something is desired. The aim is what one's desire is ultimately directed toward, whether desired under that description or not. When Diotima asks what (τί) lovers of beautiful things love, she refers to the intensional object and seeks the aim of erotic desire. Young Socrates grasps the question but answers inadequately. To have beautiful things cannot be the aim, since one can ask further what will be for this person (τί ἔσται, 204d8-9), *for what* or *why* he wants this (ἵνα τί, 205a2). Diotima marks the distinction grammatically. Erotic desire is *about* (περί) the beautiful (*qua* beautiful) as its intensional object, not *of* the beautiful (οὐ τοῦ καλοῦ, 206e1-3) but *of* the good (τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, a1) as its aim, elliptical for being happy by having the good forever and thus some mortal share of immortality.

The psychological distinction set out in Section 2 above underscores that this aim is first and foremost formal. Erotic desire does not first and foremost represent its object *as good*, but it is to be explained in terms of an orientation toward the good. This formal role illuminates how Diotima first deploys the concept. Whereas Aristophanes proposed that lovers seek their 'other halves' to unite with what is one's own (τὸ οἰκεῖον, 193d2-3), Diotima objects that, because one would amputate diseased limbs that seem harmful (δοκῇ … πονηρά), one desires one's own only if 'it happens somehow to be good' (τυγχάνῃ γέ που … ἀγαθὸν ὄν, 205e1-4). This argument has raised controversy whether the conclusion, that everyone loves nothing other than the good, should be read *de re* or *de dicto*. Either reading brings difficulties. The former saddles Diotima with equivocation or an objectionably naive assumption that lovers invariably go after genuine goods. The latter makes her imperceptive in supposing, despite the drift of her own account, that lovers represent their beloveds as good. However, were Diotima concerned not with the extensional object or the intensional content but with the formal aim of erotic desire, then her thought becomes subtler: erotic desire is constitutively an attempt to attain whatever promotes happiness.

On this reading, Diotima means to clarify two normative commitments implicit in the structure of erotic desire. One is that real value is independent of desire. The other is that desire should be brought in line with that reality. Briefly: lovers are committed to desiring what is desir*able*. This interpretation

33 Santas 1979, followed by Halperin 1985, 77-80. I employ the distinction differently.

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somewhat deflates the metaphysics of the good, but that, I would contend, is all the more appropriate to the humdrum example by which Diotima criticizes Aristophanes. Just as nobody wants diseased limbs, nobody wants the ends to which she is attached to be harmful. As if to confirm this commonplace, even a drunk and tortured Alcibiades stumbles into the dialogue after Diotima's speech asking where to find 'the good', the host Agathon (212d5-7).[34]

In hindsight we can see that Diotima substitutes the good for the beautiful to evoke this aim. But why must she deftly introduce it in this way, only to revert almost immediately to the role of beauty? One significant reason, I have argued, is that beauty does not straightforwardly seem beneficial. Indeed, in the background of this passage is a question thematized throughout but emphatically at the outset of the dialogue: might the pursuit of beauty *fail* to promote happiness? But this explanation intersects with another. The need to progress inquiry 'using the good' after Socrates becomes perplexed reflects that the aim of erotic desire is first and foremost not simply *formal* and *distinct* from the intensional object but *opaque* to agents themselves. The pursuit of beauty is from their perspective deeply ambivalent, risky and blind; and were it not aiming at happiness, human agency would be unintelligible. This we must now bring into relief by noting that 204d-205a reiterates an earlier perplexity, highlighted by Aristophanes, that shows lovers unable to articulate their aim. While Diotima's criticism of the comic poet is familiar, it has not been observed that she directs erotic desire toward the good because she preserves, though reinterprets, his proposal that we do not know why we undertake the pursuits that organize our lives.

The fortunate among Aristophanes' mythical semi-circular folk, we will recall, find their other halves and live out their lives together 'yet still cannot say what they want to come to be for themselves from one another' (οὐδ᾽ ἂν ἔχοιεν εἰπεῖν ὅτι βούλονται σφίσι παρ᾽ ἀλλήλων γίγνεσθαι, 192c2-4). Not for sexual pleasure do they enjoy being together with such 'great zeal' (μεγάλης σπουδῆς).

34 See Barney 2010*b* for defence of much this 'cognitivist' account of Platonic desire for the good in general, though the above is restricted to *Symp*. 205e1-206a1 and understands by the good some contribution to happiness rather than positive value generally. Barney's account explains why desire for what *is* good is presented above as a corollary of desire for what *appears* good (or not harmful); cf. *Prot*. 358b7-c1. As *Rep*. 505d6-e4 suggests, only the good clarifies the normative commitment of desire: most are content to have, do or believe what seems just or beautiful (τὰ δοκοῦντα, 505d6, 8) but nobody to have what merely seems good. To say, then, that 'all soul (ἅπασα ψυχή) pursues the good and does all it does for its sake' (505e1-2) would be to relate the apparently beautiful or just, e.g. a reputation for justice, to an agent's desire to live well. Kamtekar 2017 pursues a similar approach but reads *Symp*. 205e1-4 *de re* and, it seems, *de dicto* despite recognizing that lovers represent their beloveds as beautiful and the good is a theoretical posit (198-9).

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Their aim lies, obscurely, at greater psychological depth: 'it is clear the soul wants something else that it cannot say (ὃ οὐ δύναται εἰπεῖν) but divines (μαντεύεται) what it wants and hints at it (αἰνίττεται)' (192c7-d2).[35] Aristophanes develops the point by imagining Hephaestus offering to fuse together the lovers in their embrace. Whatever the darkly comical implication of reworking the divine smith's *punishment* when he catches his wife and half-brother, Aphrodite and Ares, in his marriage-bed at *Od.* 8.264-365—an episode with its own blend of pathos and laughter—Aristophanes might seem to paint too pessimistic and irrational a portrait of human beings by emphasizing that they cannot say what they want. But if so, there is some pressure to say the same of Socrates' self-portrayal. Notice this deep and deliberate accord: lovers would consent to Hephaestus' offer, Aristophanes supposes, only after having to be asked '*What is it* you human beings *want to come to be* for yourselves from one another?' (τί ἔσθ' ὃ βούλεσθε, ὦ ἄνθρωποι, ὑμῖν παρ' ἀλλήλων γενέσθαι;), and '*being perplexed*' (καὶ εἰ ἀποροῦντας), asked specifically whether they want to be together as far as possible (192d3-5). Likewise, Diotima introduces the good only after Socrates cannot state *what will be* for someone to whom *beautiful things come to be* (τί ἔσται … γένηται τὰ καλά), an *aporia* eased (εὐπορώτερον, 204e6) by asking specifically about goods.[36] To be sure, the budding philosopher recognizes and voices his perplexity, indicating and enabling further a self-knowledge that the mythical lovers lack. But this difference reinforces that Diotima's analysis is oriented from the same condition. Indeed, this psychological structure is characteristic of erotic desire: the beloved-turned-lover of Socrates' palinode in the *Phaedrus* 'indeed loves but is at a loss as to what' (ἐρᾷ μὲν οὖν, ὅτου δὲ ἀπορεῖ, *Phdr.* 255d2).

These moments characterize human motivation by a certain self-opacity or lack of self-knowledge. It is not that one thinks one knows the nature of some value but does not, as Socratic questioning often reveals, nor that one mistakes what would satisfy one's desire, as when one reaches for active medicine but unknowingly takes placebos or, more urgently, wants a good life but goes after wealth and becomes wretched. That is a lack of self-knowledge about one's epistemic condition or one's relation to what is desirable and a concomitant

35 The sense of the last clause is difficult, as μαντεύομαι and αἰνίσσομαι are the province of oracles. 'Riddles' for αἰνίσσομαι might suggest that the soul disguises what it *knows* it wants. 'Hints', I think, is nicely ambiguous between guessing and giving a clue; presumably, the soul addresses itself. μαντεύομαι presages Diotima as a 'mantic' woman from Mantinea (201d1-5), but, more substantially, cf. again *Rep.* 505e2-3: the soul divines (ἀπομαντευομένη) what the good is and is puzzled (ἀποροῦσα) about what it could be.

36 Between knowledge and ignorance, Erōs cannot give the reason for its correct beliefs: ἄνευ τοῦ ἔχειν λόγον δοῦναι (202a5).

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lack of knowledge how to specify what, say, happiness consists in. This is a lack of self-knowledge about what one desires. One does not know even one's general purpose and direction, *that* one desires happiness.

If Diotima corrects Aristophanes and young Socrates by explicating the aim of erotic desire, she takes her bearing from their intimations of what it is like to be in love. Her account answers to two conventional features of *erōs* that make agency under its direction look irrational: its intentional focus on beauty and its extraordinary intensity.

The first of these two features has concerned us so far. To say that one wants to have beautiful things does not exhaust why one desires them. To motivate the second, notice that the good does not require introduction simply because this account is incomplete or, relatedly, because one is unaware of what one ultimately wants. Even if the concept of the *kalon* retains connotations of danger and it is assumed that one does not want what seems harmful, to pursue the *kalon* is intelligible because the *kalon* is desirable in some respect; it is a good sort of thing in the very general sense of having positive value, if not obviously beneficial consequences.[37] So it is not compulsory and perhaps overly intellectualist to expect someone pursuing a mid-level good she finds attractive—political office, wealth, social recognition, artistic brilliance—to explain what she is doing and why in terms of the good or happiness. She can make herself perfectly intelligible in thicker evaluative terms, including the *kalon*, in much the way Anscombe thought one explains and justifies action if pressed 'Why?' one does what one is doing.[38] Diotima would not agree that such appeals put an end to 'Why?'-questions—they 'long for' another—as pursuits motivated by erotic desire gain their point from a desire for happiness. But this is a theoretical disagreement, meant to offer an explanatory framework for *erotic* pursuits, not a mandate that one's desire for happiness be explicit to explain ordinary action. That is because erotic pursuits are in a way not ordinary at all but extraordinary. Unless apprised of their aim, Diotima insists, 'you would be amazed at the irrationality' (θαυμάζοις ἂν τῆς ἀλογίας, *Symp*. 208c3). Here enters the second feature.

Lovers look irrational because they devote their lives to pursuing beauty so intensely, risking life and limb—without knowing why. Recall, Diotima is analyzing a specific sort of motivation. In her technical sense, *erōs* drives what I

37 A difficulty is to understand how to relate in the concept of the good positive value in general and benefit in particular. It suffices for present purposes that the latter is focal and not neatly distinguishable from the former. This perhaps underlies its conceptual tensions with the *kalon*.

38 Anscombe 1957 and cf. Murdoch 1970 on the importance of 'secondary normative vocabulary'.

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have been calling *pursuits*. These are not small-scale desires, like to drink a cup of coffee, but long-term projects that organize one's life; not passing wishes but sustained attempts to produce and preserve something of value. Initial paradigms are making money, athletics and philosophy (205d2-5). When she returns to the essential role of the *kalon* in the structure of valuing, Diotima emphasizes, like Aristophanes, the intensity of pursuits (ἡ σπουδή, 206b2, 208a6). One goes to extraordinary lengths for what one loves. One becomes obsessed; other concerns become marginalized as one is willing to suffer, toil and sacrifice personal safety.[39] As Diotima first discusses having and raising children, we might imagine a parent taking a second job to send them to university or, like other animals stricken 'terribly' by love (δεινῶς … νοσοῦντα, 207a7-b6), starving herself to feed them and risking her life to protect theirs. This case of perpetuating the species prepares the way to understand the seemingly crazier way human beings pursue honour and fame. Diotima takes Phaedrus' examples of Achilles avenging Patroclus' death and Alcestis dying on behalf of Admetus to illustrate how 'terribly' people suffer (δεινῶς, 208c4) and how much they risk and endure (κινδυνεύειν, 208c7; πονεῖν, c8) so that their name and virtue may be remembered forever (208d2-6 with 179b4-180b5).[40]

One is right to wonder what lovers must be thinking. For such intense passion, suffering and sacrifice seem irrational precisely because lovers seem to be *not* directed toward happiness but toward other, indeed contrary, things entirely.[41] While guided by thoughts of virtue, lovers of honour concentrate their minds on the beauty of renown. They set their imaginative sights on an evaluative store in the prospective brilliance of beautiful deeds (καλὰ ἀποφηνάμενοι ἔργα, 209e2), aspiring to *appear beautiful* in the eyes of others, whether by dying nobly in battle, creating enduring art or achieving political reform. This is the distinctive quality of the *kalon* by which one stands out to be admired, like Achilles, Homer or Solon, by future generations. So arduous, almost impossible, an ambition demands the motivational energies of erotic desire. But any such pursuit does not readily seem beneficial to or for the lover herself. If erotic pursuits lend structure and meaning to human lives, Diotima argues, human agency would be unintelligible unless we suppose that these pursuits are attempts, often unawares, to achieve some conception of a good life.

39 Cf. 183a2-b2, *Phdr*. 252a1-6.

40 Compare Aristotle's examples of tension between the *kalon* and the good or beneficial: e.g. *Rhet*. 1359a5 (Achilles), 1366b35-1367a5; *NE* 1117b7-15, 1168a30-5 (but see b29-30).

41 Thus, the reasonable impression among scholars that the aim of erotic desire shifts. But see Sheffield 2006, 82-94, 101-9 for defence of a unified aim, with bibliography.

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In arguing that erotic desire is rational, Diotima does not dissolve its air of paradox. She explicates it.[42] She does so by preserving the psychological gap between the *kalon* and the good evidenced by young Socrates. In turn, she preserves the self-opacity of lovers and the sense of insecurity and risk that attends attractions to beauty. This interpretation is confirmed by a literary detail passed over a moment ago, Diotima's emphasis on how terrible, *deinos*, are the throes of erotic desire. The term works to subvert a view familiar from tragedy that *erōs* is a destructive force in human life. Aphrodite designs a 'terrible love' (ἔρωτι δεινῷ) to drive Phaedra mad for Hippolytus and to suicide (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 28). Euripides elsewhere uses the phrase to describe the passion that has overcome Greeks to leave their homes and families and sail to Troy, ensuring many of their deaths and, imminently, Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter, Iphigenia (*Iphigenia at Aulis* 808). Sophocles' Heracles sacks Oechalia but becomes undone from 'terrible longing' for Iole (δεινὸς ἵμερός, *Trachiniae* 476; ἔρως, 489), for which his wife, Deianeira, takes revenge. That 'terrible love for renown' (δεινὸς εὐκλείας ἔρως) is toward the conclusion of the *Oresteia* a motivation that Athenians must combat in their enemies (Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 865). In so richly allusive and poetic a passage, Diotima's vocabulary cannot but evoke this tradition and the threatening potential of beauty in this connection. Her purpose is to appropriate its insight into how intense, fearful, and complicated it *feels* to be in love but redirect this motivation toward our greatest boon.[43]

5 Ramifications

I have argued that Plato shows the difficulty of articulating why one loves beautiful things to emphasize how our most significant pursuits in life are characteristically ambivalent and blind. Ambivalent, because in the context of erotic desire what appears beautiful (*kalon*) need not and typically does not

42 Here I have benefited from Vogt 2017, ch. 6, esp. 151, who takes the paradox to be that desiring happiness involves pursuing goods that go beyond one's life and happiness. This fits the motivational structure I attribute to Diotima, but as Vogt sets aside the *kalon* to focus on goods (146 n. 5), does not obviously admit the self-opacity that lends, in my view, to its apparent irrationality.

43 This reorientation is prepared by characterizing philosophy as a *deinos erōs*: 198d1, 203d8, 207c3; cf. *Tht*. 169b6-c3, *Phdr*. 250d3. See Sophocles, *Antigone* 781-800, Euripides, *Medea* 945-50 for the tragic view, lurking also behind Alcibiades' speech, as Kraut 2008, 302-6 observes. Yet it overstates the case to say either that 'Diotima says nothing that even suggests that *erōs* can be a destructive force' (302) or, with Politis 2016, that, for Diotima, *erōs* may be harmful without wisdom.

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appear good. Its pursuit might indeed seem to mislead one from living well. Blind, because we are unaware of what we ultimately want. We might then seem irrational; Diotima explains that erotic desire aims at happiness to show that we are not.

This account strikingly pictures human beings, as Aristophanes did, devoted to some inchoate end, though it is now about the point of loving beauty that lovers are in the dark. Can the pursuit of value be so self-opaque? Consider, at the suggestion of Diotima and not inappropriately to the context of classical Greek ethics, an athlete training to excel at her sport, perhaps to win an Olympic medal. Each day her mind and body ache. She regiments sleep and diet; she sacrifices time with, or having, friends or family to compete around the globe. To practice, she puts her education on hold. This, she knows, will limit her opportunities when by injury or age, but doubtless early in life, her career ends, if it ever begins. She clearly deliberates about how best to achieve her goals and may reflect on whether she can or should achieve them. It is tempting to suppose she is intentionally guided by some conception of a good life and, in particular, pursues certain things as beautiful—flawless slalom technique, donning a gold medal, overcoming her limits—because she thinks they best realize this conception. This temptation reflects an assumption that, if one is rational, one can and must see the point of one's desires, not least those central to one's life and practical identity.[44] Plato challenges this assumption, we now appreciate.

Far from implausible, I would suggest, Diotima's account of motivation captures the ordinary yet genuinely puzzling fact that we often cannot articulate why, amid suffering and sacrifice, we pursue what we care most about, be it athletic excellence, the education of students or the formation of one's mind as one toils over a book manuscript. We find these pursuits somehow valuable, attractive, fascinating or worthwhile but do not know why or what for.[45] Of

44 See Tenenbaum 2007, 28 for a clear statement of this tendency of contemporary moral psychology, Sheffield 2006, 94-9 for the above construal of the *kalon* ('fitting to one's conception of happiness', 96). A related tendency to model practical rationality on decision-making (e.g.: 'chooses certain kinds of beauty for the sake of procuring certain kinds of goods', 98) distorts the experience of beauty in erotic pursuits, particularly if those pursuits exemplify what Callard calls aspiration, as her similar discussion of Alcibiades (2018, 15-31) suggests.

45 What drives one to climb a legendarily difficult and deadly Himalayan peak? asks a reviewer of the documentary *Meru*, which chronicles its first successful ascent. Diotima could well explain: erotic desire. And this would explain why, after a punishing first attempt and a life-threatening brain injury, one climber offers simply that summitting the mountain was worth dying for. To complain that the film does not plumb the 'psychological energies' behind such 'seemingly superhuman behavior' is to miss the point that this

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course, we can become more richly aware of what our projects and our motivations involve, in part by stepping back to reflect on our lives and recognizing that we want them to go well. The account I have reconstructed can accept this. Indeed, it brings into sharper focus how the prescriptions of Diotima's erotic curriculum work to clarify for lovers their aim by closing the psychological gap between the beautiful and the good. By learning to love more estimable orders of beauty, one arguably learns that they are beautiful because they are *better*, that knowledge is more beautiful and worthier of love than political institutions, for example, because it better promotes human flourishing. One comes to discover that in pursuing beauty one ultimately wants to live well. Fittingly, philosophical education in beauty develops not only knowledge but self-knowledge.

But it proceeds by self-opacity, I have argued, and I might in closing suggest a broader reason why this should be. By reducing the *kalon* to the appearance of the good, we neglect the tension between these values but also the way this tension can be a positive, if not necessary, condition of Plato's ethical psychology and, to the extent it resonates with us, our own. Plato invests in beauty the unique power to reorient one's entire way of living. This role requires that the sudden experience of beauty present *some* dimly grasped value that *cannot* yet be conceived as good because it does not fit or promote the ends one already has. The point is to ensure psychological space to unsettle those ends and reimagine what a good life might be. Witness Alcibiades at the close of the *Symposium*. So stricken is he by Socrates' wondrous words (ἐκπεπληγμένοι, *Symp*. 215d5-6; πληγείς, 218a4)—like other lovers, including Socrates, by the beauty of their beloveds (ἐκπέπληκται, 216d3; ἐκπέπληξαι, 210d5, after Aristophanes' ἐκπλήττονται, 192b7)—that, heart pounding and tears streaming, he of all people feels ashamed that his life of political ambition is not worth living. Alcibiades has become sensitive to the value of wisdom yet remains attracted to popularity and power and becomes committed to *avoiding* Socrates and his own character (215e1-216c3). He has not so much acquired a new positive conception of happiness as had his current conception thrown into abeyance. Were he, then, to pursue the beauty he glimpses in Socrates—an 'intractable beauty' (ἀμήχανόν … κάλλος, 218e2), Socrates calls it, which leaves one at a loss—his clearly agonizing pursuit would remain fraught with a risk borne of not understanding the value he seeks, where it will lead, or why he is venturing his life on this course.[46]

(lack of) response is part and parcel of those energies. (Caron Lund, 'Review: Meru', *Slant Magazine*, 12 Aug 2015, <https://www.slantmagazine.com/film/meru/>.)

46 That Alcibiades mimics Socrates' idiom, indeed to try to bed Socrates, when he claims that Socrates can help him become as good as possible (218d2-3), suggests that Alcibiades

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No small wonder young Socrates cannot say what comes of loving beauty. Such is the texture of our psychological lives as we learn how to live.[47]

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does not find Socrates beautiful in light of some prior conception of happiness, much less a clear one.

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