

LOVE AND BEAUTY IN PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM

It is a widely held view that according to the *Symposium* the ultimate or 'primary' object¹ of love is the Form of Beauty.² It is almost as widely held that the Form of Beauty is identical with that of the Good.³ In this paper I argue that both of these views are mistaken.⁴ In a first section I present a detailed analysis of Diotima's doctrine, emphasizing features of it which I judge to be often overlooked. In subsequent sections I examine the arguments for and against the claim that Beauty is the primary object of love, and I then do the same for the assertion that the Form of Beauty is identical with that of the Good.

I

The first of Diotima's concerns is with the nature of Love (201d–204d);⁵ the second with its functions, use and purpose (204d–209e); the third with its 'mysteries' (210a–212a). Her teaching on these several issues is as follows.

The nature of Love (201d–204d)

Love is not beautiful or good, nor is it ugly or bad; it is something in between. Nor is it to be numbered among the gods, since it lacks what they, being happy, always possess: it lacks what is beautiful and good. But while Love is not a god, and therefore not immortal, it is not mortal either. Again it is something in between, this time a spirit; and, like all spirits, it acts as mediator between men and gods, binding them together.

We can obtain more light on this if we turn to the origins of Love. Love's father was Resource and its mother Poverty, as a result of which it has many contrasting characteristics. On the one hand it is poor, hard, homeless, shoeless and the like. On the other hand it is endlessly planning to acquire what is beautiful and good; it is brave; it is a seeker after wisdom. In short, Love is neither immortal nor mortal; neither resourceless nor wealthy; and, being but a lover of wisdom (a philosopher), neither wise as yet nor ignorant.

The functions, use and purpose of Love (204d–209e)

According to a view stated earlier by Socrates (201e5), that 'of which' Love is Love—its 'object'—is the beautiful; but if 'beautiful' in this statement is replaced by 'good', an account can more easily be given of the functions, use and purpose of Love (its ἔργα, χρεῖα and ἵνα τί).⁶ For,

¹ In this paper I make no attempt to draw distinctions between primary and ultimate objects. I take both to be those which, if forced to a choice, we prefer to others.

² For scholars who hold this view, see Section II below, and footnote 7.

³ Instances of this view may be found in J. Brentlinger (ed.), *The Symposium of Plato* (Amherst 1970) 22 ff.; R. G. Bury, *The Symposium of Plato* (Cambridge 1932) xlv; F. M. Cornford, 'The doctrine of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*', *The unwritten philosophy and other essays*, ed. W. K. C. Guthrie (Cambridge 1950) 72; J. N. Findlay, *Plato, The written and unwritten doctrines* (London 1974) 150; G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's thought* (London 1935) 105; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A history of Greek philosophy* iv (Cambridge 1975) 392; W. Hamilton, *The Symposium* (Harmondsworth 1951) 20 ff.; A. Macin-

tyre, *A short history of ethics* (London 1967) 53; J. E. Raven, *Plato's thought in the making* (Cambridge 1965) 107; A. E. Taylor, *Plato, the man and his work*³ (London 1929) 231.

⁴ While to the best of my knowledge my arguments are not to be found elsewhere, my conclusions—though reached independently—coincide with some of those drawn by H. Neumann *AJPh* lxxxvi (1965) 33–59 and G. Santas in *The Greeks and the good life*, ed. D. Depew (Fullerton, California 1980) 33–68.

⁵ I write 'Love' with a capital 'L' while analysing Diotima's speech. After that I write 'love', except in those cases where the person of Eros is clearly referred to.

⁶ That Diotima has the *purpose* of Love in mind is clear from what she says at 205a1–3.

given the suggested replacement, what the lover may now be said to love is not the beautiful, but the good; and when we say that he loves the good we mean that he desires it to be in his possession; further, that in desiring this he desires to be happy—since happiness is that which is brought about by the possession of the good. So happiness is what the lover is aiming at, since not only is happiness the purpose (the ἵνα τί) of his desiring what is good, but also it is that which, when once possessed, puts an end to further questions of the kind: ‘What is its purpose?’ (οὐκέτι προσδεῖ ἐρέσθαι ἵνα τί δὲ βούλεται εὐδαιμόνων εἶναι ὁ βουλόμενος, 205a.)

It should be obvious at once that all men are lovers in the generic sense adverted to above, since all men desire happiness; from which it follows that love is nothing more than a desire to have the good permanently in one’s possession (ἔστιν ἄρα συλλήβδην, ἔφη, ὁ ἔρως τοῦ τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτῷ εἶναι αἰεὶ, 206a). However, we do not characterize all men as ‘lovers’. We reserve that word for a small subset of them: for those who strive for the permanent possession of the good through begetting in the beautiful (through τόκος ἐν καλῷ)—by means of body or of soul.

What all of this comes to may now be brought out in the following way. All human beings alike are pregnant, both in body and in soul, and when they reach a certain age they desire to beget. But since begetting is something divine, it can take place only in a medium harmonious with the divine—namely in the beautiful. One whose pregnancy is well advanced, then, becomes agitated in the presence of the beautiful, because the beautiful alone is able to relieve him of his pangs.

Thus Socrates was quite wrong in asserting that Love is of the beautiful. It is not. Rather, Love is of engendering and begetting in the beautiful—men seeking this because engendering constitutes a sort of immortality, the only sort possible for mortal nature. It is precisely for similar reasons that animals have so strong a desire to beget: they desire the immortality of their kind. It is because of this too that men love renown; Alcestis, Achilles and others were really in love with immortality.

Men who are pregnant in body, then, turn to women—to engender within their kind; while those who are pregnant in soul conceive and bring forth wisdom (the most important species of which are self-mastery and justice), together with other forms of excellence. Men pregnant in this way—poets, inventive craftsmen and the like—look around for persons who are beautiful, and taking the education of these in hand, at once find much to say on excellence and on how men ought to live. In addition, they produce writings, legal institutions and other things of the kind; and many of them become famous, as did Solon, for their works and other forms of excellence.

The higher mysteries (210a–212a)

For a man who will have been properly taught and guided, all of the above-described actions and undertakings relating to Love occur for the sake of yet higher mysteries, and the course which such a one must follow is this. He must begin by loving a particular body, and in doing this bring forth and express fine and worthy thoughts. Then he must be led to see that the beauty of one body is like that of another, and in seeing this become a lover of all beautiful bodies. Next, he must come to judge that beauty of soul is of greater worth than beauty of body, and as a result of this produce and express such thoughts as will make young men better; in attempting which he will in turn be forced to give thought to admirable customs and ways of living.

But the novice is to be led yet further forward, from considering ways of living to considering forms of knowing; so that thus—being now turned towards the entire ocean of beauty—he may bring forth and express all manner of beautiful ideas. Then, deriving growth and strength from these, he will at length catch sight of a single form of knowledge, the object of which will in a moment be described.

The man who up to this stage has been properly guided is at long last approaching the end of his training in matters of Love. And now of a sudden he catches a glimpse of a being altogether

remarkably beautiful in its nature, something for the sake of which all previous labours have been undertaken. First of all this being always is, neither becoming nor perishing. Next, it is not beautiful in part, nor only at certain times, nor in some respects, nor merely to some observers. Third, it does not present itself as a bodily thing, nor as a form of knowledge, nor as belonging to something else: rather it presents itself as single, eternal, existing by itself, and as that in which all other beautiful things partake.

For the sake of this being, a man must always be climbing upwards: to the beauty of all bodies, starting from one; onwards to the beauty of ways of living; then further still to the beauty of learning and knowledge. Finally, he must come to a knowledge of that being which, as earlier described, is pure Beauty itself.

The life of the initiated who has reached this stage, contemplating and communing with Beauty itself, is a life of very real worth. For in living it the lover begets no longer mere images but real goodness or virtue, having now a grasp upon reality itself; and in this begetting and nurturing of genuine goodness he becomes dear to the gods, and—he if any man—possessed of immortality.

II

According to many scholars, the central theme of the above doctrine is that the primary or ultimate object of love is the Form of Beauty. Thus among such scholars Beauty is variously described as: love's *primary object* (Irwin); its *final object* (Cornford); its *final goal* (Grube); its *final 'why'* (Morgan); its *ultimate objective* (Raven); its *ultimate object* (Teloh); its *ultimate goal* (Grube). Or it is described more simply as *the object of love* (Hamilton); as *the goal of Eros* (Bury); as that reality in which the lover finds his τέλος (Bury); and so on.⁷ In this section I present what I take to be the principal arguments underlying this view.

To begin with, in the course of Diotima's speech we are several times told that the object of love is beauty. More than once it is asserted that love is 'of beauty' (τῶν καλῶν, 201e, 204d);⁸ that it is 'concerned with (περι) the beautiful' (203c); that it is always scheming after what is beautiful and good (ἐπιβουλός ἐστι τοῖς καλοῖς, 203d).⁹

More important, to continue the argument, the whole tenor and structure of Diotima's speech makes it plain that when it comes to Beauty itself, this is not just any object, but the *ultimate* object of love. For, describing first the lesser mysteries (201e–210a, esp. 209e5–210a2) and then the higher (210a–212a), Diotima gradually leads us onwards until she describes the vision of Beauty as finally attained by the lover. And that we are meant to take this vision of Beauty as the culminating point of all that has gone before is brought out in many ways. To begin with, we are told that the lover's vision of Beauty is that for which all earlier labours were undertaken (210e). Then we are told that the life of contemplating and communing with Beauty is the life which, if any, is worth living (211d)—a comment which, given the context, indicates that no other life is to be compared with it. Yet again we are told explicitly that it is for the sake of Beauty that the whole of the ascent is to be made by the lover—from the beauty of bodies, upwards through forms of knowledge, and so on (211c).

⁷ For descriptions of this kind see: Bury (n. 3) xlv, xlix; Cornford (n. 3) 72; G. Grote *Plato and the other companions of Sokrates* iii (London 1985) 18; Grube (n. 3) 105, 116; Hamilton (n. 3) 23 ff.; T. Irwin *Plato's moral theory* (Oxford 1977) 165; MacIntyre (n. 3) 52; D. N. Morgan *Love: Plato, the Bible and Freud* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1964) 36; Raven (n. 3) 107 ff.; H. Teloh *The development of Plato's Metaphysics* (University Park and London, 1981) 96.

⁸ In fact, in the first of these cases (201e) Socrates is explicitly giving his own view, and in the second (204d)

Diotima qualifies her remark with 'ὡς οὐ φησ'. I must confess that what in this section I am doing is attempting to put forward the reasons which I think lie behind the claim that Beauty is the primary object of love. Unfortunately, while this latter claim is frequently asserted as a conclusion, the arguments supporting it are not so well articulated. I hope that I do not appear to be accusing those with whom I disagree of advancing silly arguments.

⁹ See K. J. Dover, *Plato, Symposium* (Cambridge 1980) note to 204d3.

It might be added that we hardly needed to be told that Beauty is love's ultimate aim. For what else could the lover sensibly seek, or wish to commune with, when finding himself in the presence of perfect, unalterable Beauty—Beauty described in religious, mystical, and even Parmenidean terms?¹⁰

The next argument for the view that Beauty is the ultimate object of love is that this way of taking it is supported by parallels between the *Symposium* and the *Republic*.¹¹ In the latter, the Form of the Good is of sovereign value and the source of worth to everything else, and consequently it is the final aim and goal of the philosopher's ascent from the cave of this world into the light of reality. But if the Good in the *Republic* is the final aim of the philosopher's quest and striving, surely Beauty in the *Symposium*, the object of the lover's ascent, will for like reasons be the final object of the lover's quest and striving. The fact that both dialogues describe ascents to the world of true being—ascents considered to be more worth while than anything else—suggests strongly that just as the *Republic's* Good is the ultimate object to be attained by the philosopher in his ascent, so the *Symposium's* Beauty is the ultimate object to be attained by the lover.

It is in any event made clear in the *Republic* that the philosopher is the lover, and made clear in the *Symposium* that the lover is the philosopher.¹²

Parallels of this sort strike some commentators so forcefully that they judge the *Republic's* Good and the *Symposium's* Beauty to be the selfsame ultimate, perhaps mystical reality.¹³ They see it presented in the *Republic* as the final object of knowledge, in the *Symposium* as the final object of love. Further, according to at least some of these commentators, the doctrine of the identity of Beauty and the Good gains support from Plato's more general identification of the beautiful with the good. This identification, they claim, is to be found not only in other and quite diverse dialogues, but in the *Symposium* itself. Diotima, they recall, invites Socrates to substitute 'good' for 'beautiful', so as to remove a difficulty arising from her question concerning men's desire for the beautiful. But she would not have made this suggestion, they argue, unless she had considered 'good' and 'beautiful' to be equivalent—only equivalence being able to produce a satisfactory answer to the question at issue. But in any event, it is said, the identification of good with beautiful is 'axiomatic for Plato', and stated more than once even within the *Symposium* (cf. 197c, 201c, 203d, as well as 204e).¹⁴

III

In this section I wish to challenge the arguments outlined above, since I do not consider them to be satisfactory.

My first reason for taking this view is that Diotima makes the outright, unqualified statement that love is not of the beautiful.¹⁵ Socrates, she says, had thought it to be so, but Socrates was mistaken (ἔστιν γάρ, ὃ Σώκρατες, ἔφη, οὐ τοῦ καλοῦ ὁ ἔρωσ, ὡς σὺ οἶσι, 206e). Furthermore, not only does Diotima tell us that love is not of the beautiful, but while engaged in

¹⁰ On the Parmenidean influence see F. Solmsen *AJPh* xcii (1971) 62–70; Teloh (n. 7) 89 ff.

¹¹ On this supposed parallel see for example: Cornford (n. 3) 75–7; Guthrie (n. 3) 392; Hamilton (n. 3) 21, 24; Raven (n. 3) 107 ff.; Taylor (n. 3) 230 f.

¹² On this point see, for example: Bury (n. 3) xlvii seqq.; T. Gould *Platonic love* (London 1963) 99; Grote (n. 7) 10 ff.; Hamilton (n. 3) 21; Raven (n. 3) 109; G. Vlastos *Platonic studies* (Princeton 1973) 19.

¹³ Several writers hold very strongly that mystical teachings are at stake. See, for example: Bury (n. 3) xlvi–l; Hamilton (n. 3) 211 ff.; Raven (n. 3) 116; Taylor (n. 3) esp. 231 f.

¹⁴ See, for example: R. A. Markus, in *Plato* ii ed. G. Vlastos (New York 1970) 137, and Dover (n. 9) comment on 203d4. For more general views on this point see: Bury (n. 3), note on 201c; Guthrie (n. 3) 247, nn. 1, 2; Taylor (n. 3) 231.

¹⁵ Diotima is making more than the limited claim that love is not of the particular beautiful objects referred to in the immediate context—namely those objects in which procreation and generation are to take place. She is explicitly rejecting Socrates' general belief that love is of the beautiful: ὡς σὺ οἶσι, she says, referring to such claims as those made at 201e5 and 204d3.

explicitly describing its nature and functions she is careful not to slip into saying that it is. Instead she makes use of the word 'περί' to express what she considers to be the relation between love and the beautiful. Love, she says, acts 'in the area of' the beautiful—ἔρωσ δ' ἐστὶν ἔρωσ περὶ τὸ καλόν, 204b—that is, it is concerned with it. But it is not 'of it', and this for the simple reason that it is of something else. The *sole* object of men's love, Diotima announces, is the good (οὐδέν γε ἄλλο ἐστὶν οὗ ἔρῳσιν ἄνθρωποι ἢ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, 205e7–206a1); more properly, love has as its object the lasting possession of the good (τοῦ τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτῷ εἶναι ἀεί, 206a). This doctrine is repeated on other occasions (cf. 207a, 207c), and is given application both within the lesser mysteries and within the higher. Within the lesser mysteries, the lover attempts to achieve the lasting possession of the good through bodily procreation, leaving his progeny behind him as a memorial. Or he attempts it through creativity of soul, producing all kinds of excellence (ἀθάνατον μῆμην ἀρετῆς πέρι, 208d). He produces, for example, wisdom and the other parts of virtue (φρόνησιν τε καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετὴν, 209a), or orderliness and justice in cities and smaller communities, or again he produces the means of realizing all of these: educational discourses, for example, or such works of literature as bring their authors (Homer, Hesiod and the like) immortal renown; or systems of laws like those left by Lycurgus and Solon. Productions of this kind are responsible for every sort of excellence (παντοίαν ἀρετὴν, 209e), and sometimes even shrines are set up in honour of their creators.

When it comes to the higher mysteries (210a ff.), Diotima again speaks of the lover as producing such discourses as will make others better. And finally she describes how the lover, having attained to the vision of Beauty, will bring forth no longer images but real excellence, and so attain to immortality—in so far as this is possible for any man (212a).

Thus at every stage of her discourse Diotima states in one form or another that the object of love is the good, embodied in forms of excellence which acquire quasi-permanence—in the memories of others or in physical shrines and memorials—or genuine permanence through the attainment of godlike immortality.

Given all of this, surely there is no room for doubt that in Diotima's mind neither beauty nor Beauty is the ultimate object of love: goodness alone plays that rôle. Beautiful things and Beauty itself provide a needed environment for the creation of what is good. Sometimes the creation of the good is to the benefit of what is beautiful—as when discourses or written works are created for the sake of producing excellence in the lover's partner. At other times this is not the case—as when forms of knowledge are involved, or Beauty itself. But in all cases the beautiful plays the secondary rôle of that which initiates and facilitates. For this reason, Diotima tells us, one who is pregnant and ready to give birth, whether in body or soul, becomes agitated in the presence of beauty; because he knows that beauty alone can enable him to bring forth, and so be relieved of his discomforts.

In short, it may well be a traditional and popular view that the ultimate object of love is beauty, but it is not Diotima's. On the contrary, she is at pains to correct it, arguing at length that whatever rôle beauty plays in love, it is always subordinate to that of the good.

It is worth mentioning in passing that this way of interpreting the *Symposium*—asserting that the good is the ultimate object of love—fits and derives strength from Plato's more general doctrine of the good as the goal of action (cf. *Lys.* 222a–d, *Gorg.* 467–8, *Men.* 77–8, *Symp.* 205a, *Rep.* 586e). It fits also with the central message of the *Republic*, according to which not only is the good the goal of action (504d ff.), but the Form of the Good itself is the unique source of what is worth while, and the uniquely adequate end of man—the goal therefore of the philosopher's ascent.

However, interpreting the good as the object of love, and the beautiful as consequently subordinate to it, presupposes that in Plato's judgment the beautiful and the good are not the same. But, as was mentioned earlier, according to many scholars they are. Their arguments therefore need to be looked at. But before I turn to them I wish to consider two lesser difficulties facing the claim that the ultimate object of love is not beauty but the good.

IV

The first difficulty is that when at 206e Diotima announces, contrary to the views of Agathon and Socrates, that love is not of the beautiful, she does not follow this up by repeating what earlier she had proclaimed, namely that love is of the lasting possession of the good. Instead, she now asserts that love is 'of generating and begetting in the beautiful' (τῆς γεννήσεως καὶ τοῦ τόκου ἐν τῷ καλῷ, 206e); from which it might appear that she has changed her mind about the object of love. However, this difficulty is soon cleared up, once account is taken of the context. Diotima had already made plain in the following way that the possession of the good is not just any object, but is the ultimate object of love. First she brought out that *happiness* is the ultimate object of human activity, by drawing attention to the fact that while happiness explains the pursuit of this or that good, it itself neither requires nor can receive justification. Then, having done this, she makes clear that happiness just *is* (or at any rate is very intimately tied to) the permanent possession of the good—from which it at once follows that the latter is the ultimate object of love.¹⁶ She had also, immediately afterwards, explained the subsidiary rôle of beauty—that of relieving the lover of the pangs of pregnancy. Now, at 206e–207a, she goes on to spell out for us how generation and begetting fit into the scheme of things. Since love is of the lasting possession of the good, she points out, 'necessarily the lover desires immortality together with that good' (ἀθανασίας δὲ ἀναγκαῖον ἐπιθυμεῖν μετὰ ἀγαθοῦ, 207a). But for mortals *qua* mortals, she adds, generation brings the only kind of immortality within their grasp. In brief, the lover is aiming at immortality, but since he can achieve this only through begetting and generation, these latter are the objects of his more immediate desires.

Thus, in saying that love is of begetting and of generation—or, for that matter, of immortality (207a, 208e)—Diotima is not retracting her claim that it is of the lasting possession of the good. Rather she is explaining how it is possible for mortal love to be fulfilled, and in doing this she makes plain that the concept of beauty is to be accorded only a modest position in the analysis of love. Τόκος ἐν καλῷ is no more than a means.

The second difficulty arises from the fact that in spite of her blunt assertion that love is not of the beautiful, Diotima under various forms of expression seems to say that it is. For example, she says that whenever love is present, the 'object' of that love (τὸ ἐραστόν) is that which is really beautiful (204c). She describes Love's father, the source of Love's positive characteristics, as constantly scheming to acquire the beautiful and the good (203d), a description which has been taken by some to mean the same as the assertion, or at any rate to endorse the assertion, that love is of the beautiful.¹⁷ She says more than once that love is 'concerned with' the beautiful (ἰσπερὶ τὸ καλόν, 203c, 204b). Yet again, in the course of describing the higher mysteries she says that the novice must be led from loving one body to becoming a lover of all beautiful bodies (πάντων τῶν καλῶν σωμάτων ἐραστήν, 210b)—from which it follows that, in a very obvious sense, she considers beautiful bodies and the like to be the objects of love. She even says, though this time by implication, that it is the beauty of people, ways of living and so on—their κάλλος itself—which is loved (210d2).

However, there is no inconsistency behind all this. Diotima's concern was first to put forward and elucidate the doctrine that the primary or ultimate object of love is not the beautiful or Beauty, but the good; and secondly to bring out that beauty is subservient to the good. But neither of these points is at odds with the assertion that the beautiful and Beauty are objects of

¹⁶ Diotima spends a lot of time saying what happiness is, and it seems pretty certain that her intention in the long passage from 204e to 206a is to *define* it, doing so in terms of 'good' (and ending up with: ἔστιν ἄρα συλλήβδην . . . ὁ ἔρωσ τοῦ τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτῷ εἶναι ἀεὶ, 206a). Her remark that the happy are those in possession of the good *and* the beautiful comes (at 202c) before she gets down to her careful analysis,

and in any event is not inconsistent with her definition. For if 'good' and 'beautiful' are co-extensive, as they seem to be in Plato's mind, it follows that the happy are those who possess both the good and the beautiful, but nothing follows making 'beautiful' part of the definition of happiness.

¹⁷ Dover (n. 9) seems to imply this in his comment on 204d3.

love. In fact they are. But in the light of what has been said in previous sections it should be clear that, while truly objects, they are but proximate and secondary.

Why then did Diotima assert in so unqualified a manner that love is *not* of the beautiful, implying that Socrates was altogether mistaken in thinking it to be so? Because she wanted to bring out forcefully and dramatically how subservient is the rôle of beauty in love, and how mistaken is the popular view—repeated by Agathon and Socrates—that love is to be described *sans phrase* as of the beautiful.

V

To turn now to the question of the identity or non-identity of the beautiful and the good. As was mentioned earlier, there are scholars who hold that according to Plato the terms 'good' and 'beautiful' are interchangeable, and that also according to Plato the Form of Beauty, the object of the lover's contemplation, is no other than the Form of the Good 'in its aspect as Beauty'. But if this is true, the relevant arguments in preceding sections of this paper are idle. For it is vain to insist that the good, as opposed to the beautiful, is the ultimate object of love, if all the while 'good' and 'beautiful' are interchangeable and their referents identical. What then are the arguments for this supposed identity, and are they convincing?

The first argument appeals to Diotima's suggested substitution of 'good' for 'beautiful'. In the course of their conversation, Socrates says that in loving what is beautiful a man desires to possess it; but he admits to being unable to say what further such a man will acquire as a result of this. Diotima thereupon suggests that he substitute 'good' for 'beautiful', and armed with this substitution see if he can discern what the lover will further acquire. Socrates is at once able to say that in loving what is good the lover will acquire happiness.

This has led some scholars to conclude that Plato here considers 'good' and 'beautiful' to be interchangeable. They appeal at the same time to the passage (201c) where it is argued that because love lacks the beautiful, *eo ipso* it lacks the good—an argument which they take as further support for the interchangeability of 'good' and 'beautiful'.¹⁸ Yet again, they appeal to passages in other dialogues where they claim to find interchangeability (e.g., *Prot.* 360b; *Hipp. Maj.* 297b–c; *Phil.* 64e ff.). But, more importantly, they see all of these passages as reinforcing their belief in the identity of the Forms of Good and Beauty; an identity for which, as we have seen, they claim to have independent evidence—based on parallels between the ascents of lover and philosopher described in the *Symposium* and in the *Republic* respectively.

VI

What are we to make of these arguments? To begin with, there is a general consideration weighing at least *prima facie* against the identities so far referred to (identities concerned with sense, reference, Forms and particular instances). This is that Plato never says that the good and the beautiful, or the Good and the Beautiful, are identical. He never says that they are ἐν τε καὶ ταῦτόν. But, given that there are numerous contexts in the dialogues which would be suitable for an assertion of identity, if that were Plato's belief, and some which fairly clamour for it, it is implausible to interpret silence as indicating anything other than non-belief. For after all, if Plato had believed in these identities, his silence would have been incomprehensible. If he had really held, say, that the Form of the Good, the keystone to his metaphysics in the *Republic*, was the same as the Form of Beauty in the *Symposium*, the object of the lover's ascent, what conceivable reason could he have had for not saying so? In fact, although he had pretty thoroughly discussed the Form of Beauty previously as an object of philosophical knowledge, it is not Beauty but the Good which he goes on to single out for a unique place—ontological and epistemological—among the Forms. More compelling still, if all the time he had considered Beauty and the Good

¹⁸ See Bury (n. 3) note on 201c.

to be the same, why should he have gone out of his way, as he does in the very middle of his discussion of the Good, carefully and deliberately to posit two separate Forms, the Good and the Beautiful (507b)? Or again why should he have contrasted the beautiful and the good so strongly in other ways, as he does for example when he argues that men are prepared to put up with apparent beauty, but not with apparent good (505d)? More generally, why should he so frequently have referred to things as both good *and* beautiful, if he judged there to be no difference between these two? It is more sensible to believe that he continued to distinguish good from beautiful along more or less traditional lines,¹⁹ while conceding that he was puzzled about the nature of both.

A more significant point pertaining to the *Symposium* is that an equation of good with beautiful would have undermined Diotima's analysis of love, relying as the latter does upon a contrast between the two. For, *pace* some, Diotima does not say that the sight of beauty causes the beholder to bring forth beauty. The essence of her story rather is that beauty produces something beyond it—the good. Had Plato meant the story to be understood in terms of beauty alone (the lover begetting further beauty, and so on), he could easily have said so. It is unlikely that he would have told so complicated a story, contrasting the rôles of beauty and goodness, if from the start he had meant merely that beauty begets beauty, or that good begets good. It is more plausible to conclude that he did not consider the two to be the same, nor their terms interchangeable.

It remains in conclusion to comment briefly on those passages in the *Symposium* which scholars rely on for the claim that 'good' and 'beautiful' are interchangeable and their referents identical. The first of these is the passage where Diotima encourages Socrates to substitute 'good' for 'beautiful'. As was said before, some writers conclude from this that in Plato's mind 'good' and 'beautiful' are universally interchangeable. But this is not so. Or, at any rate in the light of all that is subsequently said about love, it is more likely that Plato was thinking of the particular context before him. For only when 'good' has been substituted for 'beautiful' can Diotima's analysis of love get under way, positing good as its ultimate end, and beauty as its means. The substitution, in short, is the first step in correcting the false view of love as 'desire for beauty' without further qualification. It is worth adding that without an explanation of this kind Diotima's proposed substitution is baffling, seemingly a piece of gratuitous obfuscation.

The second passage is the one which argues that because love lacks the beautiful, *eo ipso* it lacks the good. But surely nothing follows from this about the sameness of good and beautiful; and, once more, if Plato had held that there did, he could have told us so. For example, at 201c he could have made Socrates ask of Agathon: τὰγαθὰ καὶ τὰ καλὰ οὐ ταῦτόν δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι? Instead, he has him merely ask: τὰγαθὰ οὐ καὶ καλὰ δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι? In brief, the only point that he makes is that good things are beautiful. He says nothing of identity.²⁰

¹⁹ On this see, for example: I. M. Crombie, *An examination of Plato's doctrines* i (London 1962) 204–6; G. C. Field, *Plato and his contemporaries*³ (London 1967) 102 ff.

It is worth noting here that while for Plato the properties of being good and being beautiful are not identical, nor consequently the expressions 'good' and 'beautiful' in all contexts substitutable, it does not follow that the two properties are not co-extensive. To illustrate the point with a further example, Plato in *Republic* vi says that no one will have an adequate grasp of the just and the beautiful before he knows in what way they are good (ὅτη ποτὲ ἀγαθὰ ἔστιν, 506a)—a claim which makes sense only on the supposition that the properties of being good and beautiful are different. But their being different does not entail that there exist beautiful objects which are not good, or good objects which are not beautiful.

²⁰ If my main thesis is correct, the *Symposium* cannot

be thought to furnish the following moral theory (*cf.* Irwin [n. 7] 164 ff.). The primary object of love is Beauty, and the lover having attained to the vision of this is henceforth able to see why and how those lesser embodiments in men, laws, institutions and the like are beautiful. Further he will not cease to love those lower manifestations of Beauty; on the contrary, he will be more anxious than ever to bring them to birth, having now the full backing of reason for creating virtue in man and in their institutions. This theory cannot be found in the *Symposium*, because Beauty is not the primary object of love there. Moreover, given Diotima's views, there is no evident reason why a lover in communion with Beauty should want to create imperfect manifestations of it: on the contrary, when the lover comes to appreciate the contrast between the mortal and the divine, he discerns at once that the former is but trash.

I conclude that in the *Symposium* Plato did not consider 'good' and 'beautiful' to be interchangeable, and did not consider either their referents or their corresponding Forms to be identical. Consequently I judge my principal thesis to stand, that he thought of the beautiful and Beauty as subservient to the good.²¹

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²¹ I am most grateful for comments from the editor and referees of this journal.