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# Reason and Eros in the Ascent Passage of the Symposium

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Reason and Eros in the "Ascent"-passage of the Symposium

The passage - Symposium 209e-212c - in which Plato describes man's ascent toward adequate understanding and virtue is one of the best known and most widely read in the Platonic corpus. It has been the subject of a vast literature. It would be impossible to deal with all of the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical questions which are raised by the account of this philosophic odyssey. The purpose of this paper is limited to examining the roles which reason and eros play in the ascent, and to deal with some related ontological issues.

Several commentators have emphasized that both reason and eros play important roles in the passage.<sup>1</sup> My efforts will be directed toward supplying an exact and detailed account of the relationship between these concepts as they appear in this section. The usual analysis proceeds by distinguishing - in accordance with Plato's own summary (211c) - three or four levels of ascent and the final vision. In view of this it might be thought that the movement of the soul should be divided into the same three or four stages. Such a parallel construction, however, would not bring out the full complexity and variety of the soul's path. To be sure, in the summary Plato mentions only the rising of the soul from level to level, but in the actual account we discover a multitude of steps involving the diverse activities of knowing, loving, showing disdain, and creating. There is more than one step to each level, and there are steps connecting the levels. Accordingly, I shall outline a scheme which does justice to this complexity. In this scheme I shall distinguish two kinds of steps; steps of reason (R-steps) and steps of eros (E-steps). Activities of creation seem to be parts of E- or R-steps, and thus they will not be distinguished in the scheme. As to the showing of disdain, this can be regarded as a negative counterpart of love and preference, and thus will be classified as the work of eros.

The mere possibility of such a scheme is of importance. For it shows that though both reason and eros are involved in the ascent, the two must not be identified. It is true that steps of reason and steps of eros are interwoven and interrelated, but it is not true that each movement of the soul is the product of both. Reason and eros are interrelated but separate.<sup>2</sup>

An analysis along these lines yields the following scheme.

- E1. "he should love one body and engender within it beautiful discourse" (210a7-8).
- R1. "after this he should realize that the beauty of any one body is related to the beauty of any other body" (210a8-b1).
- R2. "and if one is to pursue beauty in accordance with form,<sup>3</sup> it is folly not to regard beauty in all bodies as one and the same" (210b2-3).
- E2. "having considered this one is to become the lover of all beautiful bodies and restrain one's zeal toward the one, disdain it and thinking little of it" (210b4-6).

- E3. "and after this to honor beauty in the soul more than that beauty which is in bodies so that if a proper soul had even a little bloom, this would suffice for loving and caring for it, and to seek and bring into being discourse that improves the youths" (210b6-c3).
- R3. "in order that he may be forced to behold beauty in practices<sup>4</sup> and laws" (210c3-4).
- R4. "and to see that all of these belong to the same kind" (210c4-5).
- E4. "so that he may show disdain toward the beauty of bodies" (210c5-6).
- R5. "and after the practices he should be led to the sciences so that he may see the beauty of these" (210c7).
- R6. "and looking at beauty in the many, not with regard to the one instant like a servant caring for the beauty of one child or man or practice, being a miserable slave limited in thought; but turning toward the wide sea of beauty, contemplating it, he would generate many beautiful and noble discourses and thoughts contained within philosophy" (210c7-d6).
- R7. "until thus strengthened and nourished he shall grasp the knowledge of the following sort of beauty (210d6-e1). (a description of the Form of Beauty follows.)

The following considerations support the reason-eros dichotomy of this scheme. The verbs in all of the R-steps ("realize", "regard", "see") belong to that standard vocabulary within which Plato usually describes the work of reason alone. The E-steps as I demarcated them, exhibit a more complex structure. They contain more than simple acts of love. Nevertheless, in E1, E2, and E3 the verb "love" in various forms designates the key notion from which all actions and attitudes - some negative - contained in the steps are derived. The negative attitudes displayed toward previous objects of eros are clearly the result of the new positive reorientation of aspirations, and creativity seems to be dependent on the aspirations which motivate it. It is my construing of 210c5-6 as E4 that needs staunch defense. This step is entirely negative, and its verb, "ἀγνοῦντα" suggests the work of reason rather than eros, especially since it governs what I described above as R2. We have to consider, however, the compound within which this word appears. This compound appears previously in 210b6, in a section which seems to me to be a step of eros, and which appears in the scheme as E2. In E2 the "showing of disdain" is inextricably part of the erotic process of becoming a lover of all bodies. In view of this it does not seem to me implausible to represent the recurrence of a part of a previous E-step as an E- rather than a R-step.

This defense of E4 rests on the discovery of parallels in the passage, and we shall now consider all parallels in general. We can divide the lower 2/3 of the path into halves, and a comparison of these yields the following "Platonic equation":

E1:R1:R2:E2 equals E3:R3:R4:E4.

The claim that this quasi-mathematical structure is intentional with Plato is hardly in need of support. The need is rather for a detailed examination of the similarities as well as the differences. First we note that the E-R-R-E pattern is common to both halves. The significance of this lies in the fact that it reveals a pattern of interwovenness between reason and eros which shows neither the dominance of one over the other, nor a simple cycle of love moving reason and vice versa (that would be the E-R-E-R pattern). Furthermore, we should notice that this division into halves corresponds to the first two levels of the ascent. Each half represents the sum of all steps taken on a certain plane. This shows that there is an E-R-R-E sequence on each level, and furthermore it shows that the transition from the first to the second level is the work of eros and not the work of reason; it is an E-E move, within our scheme. In addition to these general parallels a comparison of the corresponding individual steps reveals further striking similarities. Both E1 and E3 are positive steps of eros, and both initiate a sequence of steps on a certain given plane. Furthermore, both of these, and these alone within the first two-third of the path, are linked to acts of creation. I would like to claim also that both steps are manifestations of eros toward something particular, and not to something general. This is quite clear in the case of E1, but might be disputed in the case of E3. The first part of this step seems to be a description of a general preference of one kind to another. But it seems to me that reading this in conjunction with what follows, the key description is that of a man loving and caring for a single soul, preferring its beauty, no matter how meager, to the possibly more vivid beauty of other humans on the physical and aesthetic plane. Along with these similarities we find also a significant difference. E1 is purely positive, whereas E3, since it involves a preference, is partly negative. In connection with this we should realize that E3 is the only step in the section which is "trans-categorical". Turning now to E2 and E4, we see at once that both contain a distinctly negative element, and that both complete a sequence of steps on a given level. The differences, however, are more striking than in the case of the other couple of E-steps. For E2 is only partly negative whereas E4 is completely so; and while E2 is negative toward something particular, E4 shows a negative attitude toward a whole class. I shall try to account for these differences below, as revealing something about the difference between the first and second levels of the ascent. In general one might conclude that the E-steps seem to have roughly the same function in each of the segments.

This brings us to the comparison of the R-steps in the two segments. It seems to me that R1 and R3, as well as R2 and R4, perform roughly parallel functions. Both R1 and R3 involve the contemplation of a plurality of related entities, and both R2 and R4 involve the discovery of some sort of unity within this plurality. R.G. Bury had probably this in mind when he identified the role of "nous" in this passage as that of identification and generalization.<sup>5</sup> This realization also places in proper light the relationship between the "ascent"-passage and the "Divided Line" of the Republic. The mathematical imagination used is basically the same, but the nature of the

path drawn in the Symposium and the activities interwoven here are different from - though not incompatible - the scheme in that famous passage of the Republic.

Prior to linking my account of the E-steps with the account of the R-steps, I should like to show that these steps are thought of by Plato as causally connected. This is certainly not the only way to conceive of these, nor is it the way which would fit best the usual accounts of Eros. One might want to view these steps simply as stages; termini at which the soul, guided by causal factors from within or the outside, arrives one after the other. It seems to me, however, that sufficient evidence is provided by the text for the claim of causal connections. To be sure, some of the phrases connecting steps (210a9, b1, b6, c4, c7) indicate merely conjunction and temporal sequence, but the participial construction of 210b4 might be taken as suggesting more than that. The word "ἵνα" is also used (c3, c5-6, c7) with the subjunctive. None of these connectives indicate clearly that one stage causes the following one to occur, though all of them are compatible with such a view. The following two passages, however, seem to me to point clearly toward the interpretation which I am suggesting here. 210c3 links R3 to the previous step by stating that the latter "forced" the soul to turn to something new. This way of connecting steps seems to be accountable only if we assume that the previous step caused R3 to emerge. The other passage in question is 210d6 where R7 is introduced by a reference to R6 which seems to connect the two steps causally. The strength and nourishment which R6 provides seem to lead to R7. This is surely stronger than a mere temporal sequence. To sum up, the connections between steps are such that all of these can be explained along the lines of the causal hypothesis, and two of the passages cannot be explained by any except this hypothesis.

Given the "equation" and the causal connections, what can we say about the movement of the soul? On both levels the movement starts with a desire toward some instance which is connected with creativity. It seems that this desire is concerned not with an object per se, but with the characteristics of that object. Eros is desire of something for what it is. This kind of desire causes the mind to turn toward the characteristics which the loved object possesses. Reason then discerns a whole plurality which is related to the loved via its "what"-ness, and then reason concentrates on the nature ("what"-ness) of the plurality. These moves of reason disclose new possible objects of love, and since the love which is linked to creation and to the admiration of the nature of the loved object functions in Plato's scheme as aspiration, it embraces the newly disclosed objects of love which are on a higher plane. This causes also the emergence of negative feeling toward the previous objects of attachment. The "trans-categorical" leap is accomplished through the negative reaction to the instances on the previous level, and the formation of the new aspiration toward the general on that same previous plane, which leads to the formation of a new erotic aspiration toward the instance on the higher level. The move from E2 to E3 is crucial here; the move from aesthetic appreciation to the love

of beauty on the spiritual level. This move is made possible by the previous conditioning of reason and it leads, in turn, to a further conditioning of "nous". This mutual causal influence between reason and eros is significant. It demonstrates on the one hand that Plato did not subscribe to the "reason is but a slave of the passions" type of view. It shows also, on the other hand, that Plato was not an extreme rationalist in the sense that he did not regard the role of reason as consisting simply of repressing the erotic side of human nature. Indeed, this ballance between reason and eros raises some questions as to the nature of eros. For in the Phaedo as well as in other middle period dialogues this repressive and controlling function of reason is brought out. How are we then to think of eros in the Symposium? In view of the above, one could hardly equate it with either the second or the third part of the soul within the trichotomy of the Republic. It seems to me equally clear that it is a notion much more narrow than our usual conception of 'emotion' which we contrast with reason. Finally, given the mutual causal relations, we cannot regard eros as the motivating factor underlying all human actions. On the positive side, however, we can say this about eros. It is conditioned by reason and is in turn conditioning reason. It is "trans-categorical". Finally, it is not mere love or desire, but affection toward something in view of the nature of that object. It seems to me not inappropriate to sum up the positive side of this account as showing that eros is what we call "aspiration" as opposed to mere love or desire. One might venture to say that one of the crucial tasks of the Platonic "paideia" is the transformation of mere desire into aspiration. The crucial difference here is between taking something as a mere object of immediate satisfaction and taking something as an object of satisfaction on account of its nature. The latter move requires the intervening of reason and may lead to the contemplation of that nature, and then to the development of a new desire which with the help of further intervening on the part of reason will become an aspiration.

Brief reflexion should convince us that there are a great variety of aspirations, and that consequently eros, as interpreted here, is not one universal force; rather, the name 'eros' is used to designate a variety of impulses and processes which have the above mentioned three characteristics in common. In other words, I am suggesting that eros is nothing "over and above" the sum of all E-steps. It is not a force behind the E-steps. This is not the usual way of reading this passage, nor is it the traditional Greek way of looking at concepts like eros. The language of the hymns of praise in this dialogue suggests that eros is to be thought of as one force with many different manifestations. This is the way Plato's predecessors thought of all the "daemonic" forces which hold sway over man. But on the basis of the interpretation given above I suggest that Plato poured new life into the traditional framework. According to the usually accepted version the ascent is a sort of ontological elevator, powered by eros, stopping at the various levels which Plato indicates. This interpretation either fuses the notions of eros and "nous", or leaves eros as the only motivating power. In either case, it represents Plato's psychology as something rather primitive. If, however, we view the various steps as events which effect causally one another,

then there is no more reason for the postulation of eros as an additional entity, and we have in outline a psychological theory which is complex, plausible, and accounts adequately for the variety of factors which relate causally to human action. The interplay of reason and eros, as presented, is along the lines of the principle of internal harmony which is stressed so much in the Republic. Thus eros stands simply for the wide variety of aspirations which Plato thinks of as the necessary accompaniments to the "life of reason" which he envisages both as a moral ideal and as a scheme within which knowledge can be gained.

To complete the interpretation of the lower part of the ascent, we have to deal with the acts of creation which are built into the pattern. In view of the fact that there are only three steps related to creation in the entire ascent, we shall deal with all of these; especially since it is my conviction that the interpretation of the "lower" acts of creation depends on how one takes all three of these. The path which precedes the perception of the Forms can be divided as moving on three planes: the aesthetic, the social, and the intellectual. Each of these levels has one act of creation associated with it. The first two creations are linked with steps of eros (E1 and E3) and only the third one is part of an R-step (R6) thus suggesting that only the third type of creation is a work of pure reason. Yet all three kinds of creations are described as the creation of "λόγος" (210a8, c1, d5). It seems most likely that the kind of discourse produced is intrinsically connected with the kind of step to which its creation is linked, with the level on which it appears, and with the degree of rational insight which the soul at that particular stage possesses. In the light of this consideration it seems best to identify the first discourse with poetry, the second with moral edification (of the type that Cephalus gives in Bk. I of the Republic) and the third with science and dialectic (this last identification is made explicitly by Plato in R6).

The creation of discourse is causally dependent on the set of R- and E-steps which appear on any given plane. In addition to that, these discourses play a role in the causal chain which makes up the upward path. Attention to poetry may inspire love, but it can also turn the mind toward the characteristics of the loved object, and thus lead to the contemplation of aesthetic beauty in general. On the second level again, moral edification turns attention not only to a soul or souls, but to their nature; it is their characteristics that moral edification deals with, and attention to these characteristics can redirect eros as well as reason. Finally, it is hardly necessary to point out the influence that the third type of discourse has on the soul. In this manner the acts of creation play an integral part in the sequence which leads to the apprehension of the Form of beauty.

The consideration of the acts of creation led us to a part of the upper third of the ascent. It is time to turn all of our attention to this segment. There are three ways in which the upper one-third is different from the other two parts of the ascent. It is not introduced by a positive E-step, nor are there E-steps within the sequence.

Finally, the relationships between the R-steps seem to be different from those exhibited by the sequences of R-steps within the lower parts of the ascent. The first two differences are due to the entire lack of E-steps within this part of the path. Does this absence indicate that the soul in these final stages is without eros? To conceive of the hero of this philosophic odyssey as a man without passion, "apathetic", strikes one as utterly un-Greek, and such a conception is also difficult to reconcile with the creation of philosophy (within R6) and the "giving birth of true virtue" (212a) which Plato places within the last part. Bury, for one, insisted that eros is still at work in the last part of the path,<sup>6</sup> but he did not account for the absence of E-steps - indeed this way of phrasing the question can not be found in his writings. Now it seems to me that the presence or absence of E-steps do not determine whether or not there is eros in the soul; we may assume that Plato did not think of any stage of the human life as utterly without eros. What the absence of E-steps indicates in the upper part is that eros here no longer functions as a guide. This explains also the difference between the other contestants who praise love as a supreme deity and Socrates who makes it quite clear that he is not doing this. He does not bestow upon love the superlatives which the others failed to spare; he places love in the "intermediate" category. At the end (212b7-c3) he says that he praised eros "as much as he is able to" and he confesses to Phaedrus that this is the best he can do for eros, though Phaedrus might not even want to call this a hymn of praise. The irony of these lines is explained not only by the whole treatment of eros in the speech, but especially by Socrates' calling eros the "best co-worker of human nature" (212b2-4). The "phusis" referred to here is clearly reason, and eros is aptly regarded as its best helper. Eros can serve as a guide, but only up to a point. This parallels the treatment of Virgil in Dante's "Divine Comedy".

This explanation of the role of eros still leaves us with the question of how the "trans-categorical" move from the social to the intellectual is possible without E-steps. Certainly E4 does nothing more than turn the erotic from the aesthetic and physical plane to the spiritual. Thus while the transition from the aesthetic to the social required eros, the transition from the social to the intellectual seems to be accomplished by reason alone. The explanation lies in the nature of the beauty of social rules and institutions. This beauty lies in the fact that social and moral maxims - for Plato the two are not separated - are founded on knowledge. Our understanding of rules of action according to Plato is not complete until we see their derivation from the Forms. Thus it requires aspiration to move from the physical realm to that of the soul, but once we turn with "care" to the contemplation of the soul, our examination of its nature and excellences will lead us to consider rules of action, the sciences, and eventually the Forms.

R5 represents one of the turning points of the ascent. For the beauty of the sciences according to Plato lies in their having the general and the abstract as their subject matter. That which is contemplated at this stage is no longer connected to the particular and the concrete. Thus we could not expect the movement from R5 to R6 to



be - in parallel with the moves from R1 to R2 and R3 to R4 - a move from instances to the general, or a move which enables one to see unity within a given class. Given Plato's conception of knowledge, the contemplation of its beauty leads one to turn away completely from the instance, the particular. And this is exactly what takes place within R6. This step provides the chief prerequisite for the ability to practice the dialectic method; the "turning toward the wide ocean of beauty", referring obviously back to the sciences mentioned before. This "turning" is simply the determination to think in terms of general concepts and not in terms of the empirical and the particular. The process of gaining adequate understanding of the general is the process of "creating" philosophy; an act of creation which is linked with R6. How dialectic leads to R7, the apprehension of the Form of beauty, needs no explanation.

This analysis of the ascent has shown us how Plato combines in a single scheme a picture of the entire ontological landscape and a view of the educational process. We should not interpret the latter as entailing that each human has to traverse the entire path. For those whose life is dominated by physical eros each of the steps is a necessary condition for the attainment of the next one. But the more gifted need not begin at the bottom; Plato does not rule out the possibility of the young mathematical genius. It should be noted also, that for any given step the traversing of the previous steps is not a sufficient condition. What combination of factors within the soul are required for progress is problematical; any answer here will depend on what Plato took to be the imperishable part of the soul, and what this was is by no means obvious. We should remember here that the first step by itself indicates a certain degree of achievement. For E1 is not simply lust, but the sort of love of the physical which is linked with poetry. Many people never arrive even at E1. The progress from E1 upward is not merely a movement from certain fields of study to others, but a movement which leads to the appreciation of the beauty of various fields. For Plato this means at least partly that one has to see how all the fields "point beyond themselves". The beauty of moral practice is that it can be justified on the basis of a priori truths, and this leads one to consider the sciences and dialectic which establish these truths. Thus the consideration of the various types of beauty helps to direct attention to higher and higher levels of knowing. Each of the types of beauty is incomplete in itself; it is only with the final vision that we come in contact with the entity that is beautiful "in itself".

It is agreed by all that the object of this final vision is the Form of beauty. The interpretation of the characterization of this Form, given in 211a1-b5, is also beyond controversy. But we need to consider the relationship between the Form of beauty and the objects of the previous levels. The Form seems to be something hitherto unknown. Its perception is said to be that for the sake of which all the previous labors were endured (210e5-6). On the other hand, the Form is also said to be that of which all other beautiful things partake (211b2-3). The former description suggests that the Form is a supreme, standard entity, standing alone, separate from all other beautiful things. The latter description suggests that it is somehow

a common denominator. We might look for help to a suggestion made recently<sup>7</sup> according to which partaking amounts merely to approximation. It becomes clear, however, from 211b3-5 that Plato does not have approximation in mind when he talks here about participation. For it is said that despite the participation the Form suffers no increase or decrease. If partaking meant approximation, this statement would be unnecessary. It seems to me that Plato wants the Form of beauty to be both a common denominator and a standard. This is by no means an inconsistent position. To say that the Form is a common denominator does not mean that it is a "compromise" or "mixture" of the subordinate levels. It means rather that all beautiful things partake of it in some respect, and thus to some extent. The Form characterizes these pluralities deficiently in the sense that nothing particular is beautiful without qualifications.<sup>8</sup>

In this discussion it has been assumed that there is only one Form within the ascent, and that what one comprehends on the subordinate levels are pluralities of particulars. This reading is supported by Robin's observation that whereas the ascent is gradual, the final vision comes suddenly<sup>9</sup>. Still, this is not the only way of reading the passage. One might think that what the soul comprehends on each level is a species-Form. The object of the final vision is then a "second-order", generic Form of beauty which is above the Forms of Aesthetic, Social, and Intellectual beauty. The language of 210b2-3 (R2) seems to support such a reading, and this view would also bring into harmony the ascent with what is called in the later dialogues the method of collection and division. Nevertheless, this reading does not seem acceptable. The language of R2 can be explained in terms of the language of R4. Moreover, aside from Robin's point there are two considerations which count heavily against this reading. One is Plato's summary of the ascent (211c). In this summary Plato describes the movement of the soul not as one from Form to Form, but as a rise from one plurality to another, with the apprehension of the Form coming only at the end. The other consideration is the content of R6. Unless the perception of a Form came at the very end, one would be hard pressed to explain why the penultimate step should be the turning away from all instances.

The account of the nature of the Form which was given above leads us to the problem of self-predication. It is undeniable that according to Plato the term 'beautiful' can be applied in the "fullest" sense only to the Form of beauty. The question which confronts us is: what sense does the term 'beautiful' have when applied to the Form? What is this "fullest" sense? It will not do to raise the question of self-predication as the issue whether or not Plato believed that 'Beauty is beautiful' is an a priori truth. It is possible that Plato was committed to a theory of self-predication without having been aware of it, or without having been able to formulate it clearly. The realization of all of the consequences of a metaphysical theory is a most difficult task for the philosopher. The crucial question is this: does Plato apply 'beautiful' to the Form of beauty with descriptive force or not? Those who do not believe that Plato was committed to self-predication must deny that he applied 'beautiful' to the Form with descriptive force, and have to construe this word as the

proper name of the Form. Those who ascribe self-predication to Plato need to claim only that he believed 'beautiful' not to be a mere proper name but a term applied descriptively to the Form. It seems to me that the view according to which 'beautiful' is the proper name of the Form of beauty is most implausible. For proper names, in contrast with descriptive terms, do not tell us anything about their bearers; they do not tell us what the bearers are, they do not indicate the nature of the bearers. To say of Mr. X that he is a fine citizen, a loving father, and a good lawyer is to say something about what he is. It is to describe him. But to say merely that his name is John is not to say anything about him. It is merely to name him. There seems to be little doubt that Plato thought of terms<sup>10</sup> like 'beautiful' as not only baptizing the Forms but also indicating their nature. This does not mean that these terms have the same meaning when applied to the Forms as when applied to particulars. It has been said recently that once we recognize the ambiguity in Plato's use of general terms, the charge of self-predication disappears<sup>11</sup>. This is a non sequitur. Terms like 'beautiful' may apply descriptively both to Forms and to particulars, but in different ways. This is indeed the case. What may have tempted scholars into construing general terms as proper names of Forms is that according to Plato, any given general term designates uniquely one and only one Form. And yet, we should add, it does so while indicating the nature of the Form. Thus we should say that general terms apply to their respective Forms without qualification, and it is only to Forms that they apply thus. In this way, applied to Forms, general terms function for Plato as definite descriptions. When furnished with the suitable qualifications they function as general descriptions of particulars.

So far I have shown only the plausibility of self-predication within the theory of Forms. Let us now survey the evidence which shows that in the ascent passage Plato thinks of 'beautiful' as applying to the Form of beauty with descriptive force. In 210e4-5 where Plato describes the object of the final vision he talks of it as "beautiful in nature". This beauty is presumably indicated by the term 'beautiful' as applied to the Form; but it could not be if the term were merely a proper name. In 211a it is said that the Form, in contrast with the particulars, cannot be said to be both beautiful and ugly. Obviously, Plato is not ruling out the absurd possibility that both 'beautiful' and 'ugly' should be proper names of the same Form. Rather, he is concerned to say that only one of these descriptions apply to the Form of beauty. Again in 211b2 Plato talks of all the other beautiful things partaking of the Beautiful. Finally, it is worth mentioning 211c1-2 where the many beautiful things with which we start the ascent are contrasted with this "beautiful" for the sake of which the journey is undertaken. Only the most tortuous reading of the Greek will make a proper name out of "ΤΟΥ ΚΑΛΟΥ" (211c2) in this context. It seems to me that these passages present adequate evidence to support the claim that in this section of the Symposium Plato is committed to self-predication.

In recent discussions the notion of self-predication fares badly. Those who like Vlastos think that Plato held this theory<sup>12</sup> speak of it with regret. Those who wish to "defend" Plato against the ascription of this doctrine talk of it as "puerile confusion"<sup>13</sup>. Reading

these interpretations one might come to the conclusion that only in a moment of utter confusion, and possibly poetic madness, could a philosopher entertain this theory. Now it would be useless to deny that self-predication leads to logical difficulties. On the other hand, it seems to me that self-predication performs a useful and much needed function in the theory of Forms, and that without it this latter theory hardly says anything at all. After all, the postulation of the Forms and the accompanying epistemology are supposed to explain how we are able to describe and understand - as far as possible - the external world. Our ascription of general terms to particulars is presumably in some sense a derivation or imitation of the proper ascription of these to the Forms. Our understanding and describing of the Forms is supposed to function as a paradigm of how we should understand and describe particulars. But how could this be if general terms are merely naming the Forms? Furthermore, there must be something within the nature of the Form that makes it the entity to which a general term can be applied without restrictions, in a paradigmatic way. But if general terms do not apply to Forms with descriptive power, these applications can not function as standards from which all the other applications are derived. To explain our ability to describe and to understand by referring to unique, timeless, and immaterial entities which we can only baptize is to explain things only in the sense in which Molière's good doctor "explains" the capacity of opium to put people to sleep with reference to its dormitive power. Objectionable as it may be, it is self-predication that gives explanatory power to the theory of Forms as we find this in the middle dialogues.

In conclusion let us consider the "end product" of the ascent. With the Greek ideal of "anēr kaloskagathos" in mind we would expect the man at the end of the ascent to have assimilated all of the beauty of the successive stages, and to have arrived at a synthetic vision within which there is room for the aesthetic as well as the social and the intellectual. Indeed, this is how Stenzel has interpreted the final state of the soul<sup>4</sup>. Such a picture of harmony is hardly in conflict with Plato's moral philosophy. Nevertheless, this conception must be rejected, for it does not agree with the text. The negative steps of E2 and E4 indicate clearly that the successive stages are not to be incorporated into one another, but that each step and each level has to be transcended and abandoned as the soul rises gradually higher. The final vision is not an act of integration and coordination, but the intuiting of an entity not comprehended previously. 212a shows that Plato thinks of man in the final stage as being solely occupied with the contemplation of the Form of beauty. As Robin has pointed out, there are many parallels between the development of life in the course of the ascent, and the description of the philosophic life in the Phaedo. This places the ethics of the Symposium together with the more ascetic writings of Plato. The reconciliation of this view with the doctrine of internal harmony which we find in other middle period dialogues is a problem that lies beyond the scope of this paper.

## FOOTNOTES

1. E.g. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Stenzel, Shorey, and Grube.
2. For the opposite view, see R. Hackforth, "Plato's Phaedo" p. 12.
3. There are, of course, two ways of reading this expression. My preference is based on my interpretation of R-steps in general. For a discussion of the alternatives see R.G. Bury's "Symposium" p. 125.
4. The translation is here closer to that of Robin (Bude ed. p. 68.) than to the Jowett or Loeb renderings.
5. R.G. Bury op. cit. p. XLVI.
6. R.G. Bury op. cit. p. XLVI.
7. R.E. Allen, "Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues" Philosophical Review vol. 69 (1960) pp. 147-164.
8. There is no mystery about how a particular can be characterized by a Form deficiently. The deficiency is manifested in the qualifications and restrictions that accompany the predication. Of course, I am assuming here that for Plato only the "simple" predicates and not all predicate expressions stand for Forms.
9. L. Robin, op. cit. p. 69.
10. We have to be careful to preserve the general and non-technical meaning of "ἄνολα". This word means "term" in general, or at most "noun" in particular. It does not have the technical meaning of "proper name" though it covers proper names too.
11. R.E. Allen, op. cit. p. 148 ff.
12. G. Vlastos "The Third Man Argument in the Parmenides" Philosophical Review vol. 63 (1954) pp. 319-350.
13. R.E. Allen op. cit. p. 148.
14. J. Stenzel "Platon der Erzieher" p. 277.