

The Problem of Reported Speech: Friendship and Philosophy in Plato's *Lysis* and *Symposium*

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It is said that Plato's discussions of love and friendship in the *Lysis* and *Symposium*, unlike those of Aristotle, allow little place for love or affection towards individuals.¹ Scholars have arrived at this conclusion by several routes.² It is thought that Aristotle more genuinely appreciates the specificity of human affections and friendships: friends for the Stagirite are considered 'the greatest of external goods'; those who have regulated their passions to such a degree that they are unmoved by particular instances of beauty 'are simply not human'.³

Aristotle's emphasis upon friendship itself as 'the beautiful thing'⁴ has been central to the recent burgeoning scholarly interest in the topic of friendship. Studies have appeared in many disciplinary areas and from many perspectives: historical, philosophical and sociological.

Alongside these, a number of theological reflections upon this theme have been produced, addressing friendship in its late antique context, or else examining mediaeval understandings of charity and its link with protocols of personal affiliation and friendship.⁵ More recently still, Jacques Derrida has produced his ambivalently-received *Politiques de l'amitié*⁶ in which his deconstructive impulse applies itself variously from Plato and Aristotle all the way to Montaigne and the controversial political theorist Carl Schmitt.⁷ There has also been an increasing engagement with classical negotiations of the theme of friendship.

If one situates these developments in the context of other debates concerning reciprocity, virtue ethics, selfhood 'in dialogue', *eros*, community and gift-exchange, one can see that the notion of friendship gathers around it much that is of contemporary concern.⁸

But is there a way of thinking about friendship which avoids theoretical condensation, on the one hand, and ineffable sentiment, on the other? The instinct of many here might be to turn to Aristotle; yet it may be that Derrida is not altogether mistaken in noticing aporetic lacunae in his work which Aristotle himself signalled. Aristotle may not point the way to a middle path, except in negative terms. The

suggestion that, by contrast, Plato does point in this direction is likely to be greeted with scepticism: surely Plato suppresses the ultimate significance of friendship in pursuit of the good, where Aristotle sees friendship as essential to the good—which is the fully lived—life? However, it is just this possibility which I now want to explore.

I propose to examine Plato's presentation not just of friendship, but also of the link between friendship and philosophy, and the representation of this link in certain forms of linguistic mediation in his dialogues. These contain in abundance the kind of language which one might dismiss as mere banter between friends—tokens of reported speech, diegetic redundancies; the kind of language which seems to be at a remove from serious discussion or high philosophy. Its usage must be linked to the presence of various other unusual 'literary' devices in the Platonic dialogues. I shall suggest that attention to these forms casts a new light upon the character of Plato's philosophical treatment of friendship, which is inseparable from his conception of philosophy as a friendly activity.

This inquiry was prompted by an apparent aside in Fergus Kerr's essay 'Charity as Friendship'.⁹ In the course of an analysis of the theory of love attributed to Diotima of Mantinea in Plato's *Symposium*, Kerr observes the way in which, by placing Diotima's doctrine in a report given by Socrates, Plato interposes a certain distance between himself and Socrates, and likewise between Socrates and Diotima.¹⁰ Indeed, although reported speech is a feature of many Platonic dialogues, the *Symposium* is exceptional in the sense that such 'distancing' by indirect discourse is taken to an extreme; much ink has been spilled in manifold attempts to explain why the *Symposium* should have been presented in such a narratorially indirect way.

I hope to show how this feature of the *Symposium* is connected to Plato's conception of the link between *logos*, *eros* and *philia*. Such a reading is enabled if one first of all examines the relation between form and content in an earlier dialogue, the *Lysis*, which is specifically concerned with friendship.

The *Lysis* is generally situated amongst Plato's early Socratic dialogues.¹¹ The work is notorious for its untidy arguments and confusing collapsed conclusion; if one tries to disinter the logic of argument in the *Lysis* for the sake of a critical meta-discursive analysis, one will be disappointed. Such an attempt will yield only muddle and zig-zagging perplexity.¹² How one should read the dialogue at all is not certain. The dramatic setting is as follows: like several other Platonic dialogues, the *Lysis* opens with Socrates en route to a particular place; in general, Socrates's destinations are places associated with the *polis* or its surrounding region (203a).¹³ In the *Lysis*, the discussion takes

place in the Palaestra, a meeting place for aristocratic Athenian youths to play sports and gain instruction. Socrates draws two friends, Lysis and Menexenos, into a discussion about the nature of friendship. At first, the questions Socrates poses appear quite straightforward: Which of you is older (206b ff)? Which is the most beautiful? Which is the richest? The two friends jostle in nervousness and embarrassment, at which point Socrates suggests that such questions are foolish, for friends are perforce equal in everything and hold everything in common (207c8 ff). And here one senses the pall of *aporia* begin to spread: What do friends have in common? If friendship is not the play-ground banter of mutual outdoing, then what exactly is it? What makes friendship take place? Further difficult questions follow: Who becomes the friend of another, the lover of a beloved, or the beloved of a lover? And are friends alike to one another? Is it the case that like seeks out like, Socrates asks, alluding to Homer and Empedocles (214a)?¹⁴ Only those who are good, presumably, are capable of friendship, and only those who are one with themselves—or ‘like’ themselves—can be ‘like’ others (214e3 ff). Friends must surely be alike, otherwise friendship would be compromised by the unseemly calculations of utility, advantage and lack, which would corrode the communal basis of a relationship (eg 218d–e)?

But then, does this not promote the opposite argument? If one person is like another, then he has no need of him and is self-sufficient (222b8–10). Surely there will be here no impulse to forge friendships. Socrates cites Hesiod to suggest that envy, jealousy and hatred arise not between unlike people but between like people: ‘See potter wroth with potter, bard with bard, beggar with beggar’ (215c; cf 215c3 ff).¹⁵ Must not friendship pertain then between unlike persons? For do not the rich attract the poor, the strong the weak, the doctor the infirm, the wise the foolish (215d)? But, taking this line of argument to absurd proportions, Socrates notes that, if this is so, then the friend must presumably attract the enemy (216a8–b; cf 220e ff), and one’s own experience tells one that such a notion cannot be sustained.

Socrates proposes a third logical possibility, which is that a person is drawn to another person who is neither like nor unlike himself (eg. 216c–d; 222e); he who experiences friendship with another person sees in that person a kind of future direction which takes him through the allure of beauty away from his own evil further into friendship with goodness itself—beyond his own self-identity or mundane ‘likeness’ towards something greater which might disclose a higher selfhood, more alike than he could have imagined. This higher ‘likeness’ is perhaps something akin to one’s ‘potential’, and it is for this reason that friendship involves a dynamic more complex than that driven by the

circuit of mere lack or need, for the potential glimpsed in the like-unlikeness of the befriended person is not wholly other from oneself, nor is it statically the same; nor can it be attained once and for all. One begins to see just how complicated the relationship of Same and Different really is.

The neither/nor of Socrates's third position seems to suggest that in friendship, one cannot be dear to a person according to the extent to which he is merely useful (*rhemati*) to that person. Rather, he must be dear in reality (*toi onti*). Thus, for friendship to pertain, there must be a primordial being-dear which lies outside the chain of things which are cherished on account of their usefulness as a means to an end.¹⁶ If friendship depended upon a calculation of such conditions, it could never be sustained; conditions are always changing, and one's capacity to fulfil those conditions never remains the same.

This can start to seem like a Kantian distinction between treating people always as ends and never as means. Yet Plato is not doing this. He associates going beyond usefulness with a love that can be returned. We love animals and children (these are ancient Greek children) rather in the manner of objects, in so far as they are useful to us or serve our affective needs, even though they cannot or cannot equally return that love (210c–213a). How then is it that for Plato the transcendence of objectification in the regard of the other is to do with returned love and mutuality? Does this not contaminate the purity of my friendship with something 'objective' which subserves my affections? (This is how Levinas and Derrida would see things).

But the key here is that, in this unemphatic dialogue, Plato does not banish the useful and objective altogether from the field of friendship. He does not allow that one cannot be a friend to children and to animals. In such cases one can befriend (perhaps) without return. Yet this means that Plato links one-way regard with (a relative) objectification and instrumentalisation. How is one to understand this? For Plato both 'subject' and 'objects' reflect the intelligible forms in differing degrees, and, indeed, can reflect each other.¹⁷ Therefore, Plato's pairs and contrasts are not really so absolute as, for example, are Kant's. For Plato, 'objectification' and 'instrumentalisation' are not so absolutely to be banished from the ethical sphere, since he is more concerned than Kant with the ends of use, rather than a purity of freedom regardless of ends pursued. Animals and children made use of through good affections by wise men are brought more within the psychic realm, rather than downgraded from subjectivity as they would be from a Kantian perspective. The Kantian objection that returned affection contaminates non-objectifying love perhaps does not hold for Plato in the instance of reciprocal friendship. For even such friendship

can have asymmetrical moments, which involve a certain deploying of the one by the other in such a way that opens up for the other the path of the good. The lure of the beautiful does in a sense objectify the one lured. This might explain why the *Lysis* does not teach that neither the unreturned love of the lover, nor mutual love is paradigmatically friendship. Instead, it points out the objections to either case.

As one ascends towards friendship, one passes beyond the condition of utility and exigency towards what is truly real, *to ontos on*. Those true realities are not exactly 'things we lack', for they are transcendent, and, inversely, the trinkets of utility form connections in an essential chain of mediation. Although these speculations might seem too abstract to be true to actual experience, there is a sense in which they are in fact truer to that experience than the earlier explanations which Socrates successively deconstructs. And simpler too. How can this be? How is the opening up to the path of the Good which is both and neither reciprocal and asymmetrical really envisaged? Much is made in the *Lysis* of the youthfulness of the friends under consideration; and the polemic theatre of the Palaestra is one distinguished by the presence of young people and the disportings of knuckle-bones and other forms of *paidia* (206e). If one thing becomes clear in this aporetic dialogue, it is that the mechanical one-up-manship of *Lysis* and *Menexenos* cannot be taken as true friendship; it depends too much on amounts and calculations of advantage and disadvantage. At the end of the dialogue, when the discussion descends into considerable confusion, Socrates sets out in search of someone 'older' (233a1) with whom to continue the discussion; is it then that the question of the nature of friendship can only be asked of those who are older, just as, for Aristotle, the study of ethics demands that one has reached the age of thirty? Judging by the raucous arid vain behaviour of the elders who arrive at the end of the *Lysis* (223a1ff), Socrates's point is surely not that an older person is wiser by dint of mere age; indeed, the youthful *Lysis* himself shows flickers of quite solemn wisdom (210d9; cf 212a), to no lesser degree than the pedagogues who come stumbling drunkenly into the Palaestra show signs of foolhardiness and vanity (223a).¹⁸ Perhaps Socrates's underlying point is this: that friendship does not flourish when taken out of context and excavations are conducted to determine its essence.

But is there a subtler point lurking here? Towards the end of the dialogue, Socrates appears to undergo a kind of argumentative collapse: 'So what more can we do with our argument? Obviously, I think, nothing. I can only ask you [...] to perpend the whole of what has been said. If neither the loved nor the loving, nor the like nor the unlike, nor the good nor the belonging, nor all the rest that we have tried in turn

[...] if none of these is a friend, I am at a loss for anything further to say' (222e1 ff). This is the kind of collapse which occurs naturally enough in the face of an aporia. But the final exchange of the dialogue seems to hint at the direction in which we should begin our search for an unravelling of the conundrum: 'To-day, Lysis and Menexenos, we have made ourselves ridiculous—I, an old man, as well as you. For these others will go away and tell how we believe we are friends of one another—for I count myself in with you—but what a "friend" is, we have not yet succeeded in discovering' (223c 1ff). One senses that a link between philosophy or dialectic and friendship has been indirectly revealed; that all the time that these interlocutors were engaged in their debate as to the nature of friendship, they were themselves entering into its estate, even without knowing it. The condition of that estate is not one which is disposed to halt and question and measure and apply tests upon itself. Indeed, the aporetic inconclusiveness of the dialogue might suggest to us that even as we edge towards intimations of the link between our theme and the 'way of life' marked out by the philosopher, so also one becomes aware of the zig-zagging haphazardness of real-life friendship, with its discursive detours and blind alleys. If the condition of friendship has been entered into in the course of the dialogue, then perhaps Socrates's neither/nor has been successfully 'proven'; for the interlocutors have paraded their mechanistic notions, and then been drawn to confront their restricted compass. Meanwhile, they have been drawn outward and beyond those restrictions towards a certain way of life, or a certain future, which, it appears from their concluding exchanges, they might share in friendship with one another.

What we have seen so far seems at odds with many commonly held notions as to the nature of philosophy in the Platonic dialogues. One can only defend the essential place of a 'literary' element in Plato's philosophy of friendship by coming to understand how friendship, whose actuality has an ineliminably discursive aspect, is essential to Plato's account of philosophy.

It would be foolish to pretend that elements of the *contemptus mundi* do not exist in the Platonic dialogues; they can be seen in the context of various dualistic notions which derive ultimately from the pervasive ancient Greek division of reality into shaping mind and form, on the one hand, and unformed material chaos, on the other.¹⁹ But if one thing is certain about reading the Platonic dialogues, it is that one can be certain about nothing. Scholars are increasingly approaching the genre of Plato's dialogues with an interpretative caution which seeks to learn not only from moments of speculative clarity (of which there are scarcely very many), but also from the use of myth, citation, generic imitation, use of rhetoric, and, indeed, the dialogue form itself. If one

follows the lead of recent developments, it becomes impossible to sustain any notion that Plato systematically denies mediation, whether inter-personal, mythical, daimonic, linguistic or even poetic.

Despite these elements which seem to favour certain forms of mediation, one still has to fight the instinct which tells one that philosophy just isn't done like that, and so the centrality of mediation is not philosophically established. Invocations of mythic tales, comical allusion, linguistic banter: these surely are decadent accretions with which one should have nothing to do. But perhaps it is arrogant to suppose that one knows where decadence reaches its last gasp and philosophy begins? Even in philosophical terms, it is not clear that the philosopher can advance to pure apprehension of unmediated truth.²⁰ If one can observe, on the one hand, a certain optimism as to the scope of human knowledge, as for example in the case of the philosopher-guardians of the *Republic* who are able to be transported beyond the occlusions from knowledge in the ordinary realm, one can also observe, on the other hand, many instances where the scope of knowledge is regarded more negatively. This latter view often finds expression in a pessimism about the capacity of language to communicate such knowledge. Plato's *Seventh Letter* is frequently cited as an illustration of this view.

How can one hope to express the intelligible realm in words?²¹ Knowledge of anything comes about through names, definitions and figures, and even knowledge is not the thing itself (342b–d), with the consequence that these signs and shapes are not really left behind.²²

The embodied soul cannot attain unmediated contemplation of the Forms. This is not only because it cannot fully escape materiality in this life, but also because it cannot even advance towards the forms simply by escaping. Since the forms are not to be seen once and for all, and more and more of them are disclosed in particular instances, Plato advocates not simply a leaving behind of the material, but much more a zig-zagging play between leaving-behind, returning and remaining.²³ Unlike Plotinus later, Plato's soul in this life is never outside the forward flow of time, and for the operation of recollection, this forward flow has a positive relation to our acts of knowing.²⁴ There is an implication, then, in the *Seventh Letter*, that knowledge is itself defective (343b). And Plato never presents Socrates as having obtained entire understanding.²⁵

Furthermore, if we are for now bound to matter, we are also bound to time. There are many indications in the dialogues of the temporal contingency of all human endeavour, even that of dialectic. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates' life is not long enough for the logos (108d), and his philosophising must be broken off by necessity (114c). In the *Timaeus*,

the speaker asks on two occasions for a fresh beginning (48d–49a; 69a) and asks his audience to assume the conclusions of a discussion which has not yet taken place (61d); there is concern as to the fate of argument in the *Republic* (89b); and the discussion of the Good must be postponed until another occasion (517b); the Philebus ends with a discussion from which the reader is excluded (67b).

There are further restrictions still. If language is essential to thought, it is also unstable. This is thematised in the *Cratylus*: ‘Speech signified everything (*to pan*) and is always moving things in circles and revolving and has two forms, true and false’ (408c2–3). Socrates explains that this dual nature of language is a crucial problem: How can one distinguish between true and false speech? Falsehood lives in the majority of men (408c), and philosophers are able to come closer to truth in language than such men. And yet, if one removes the lower aspect of speech, one will destroy speech altogether. Words are images that resemble the realities they represent, and yet there remains a gap between image and reality, more in some cases than in others (432b). In the present state of affairs, resemblance must be supplemented by convention (435c). The best speech has the greatest resemblance to reality, but Socrates immediately qualifies this: it will only occur as far as possible (435c–d). The ideal situation would be to learn from the truth itself without the use of images, but this project may be beyond the scope of Socrates and Cratylus (439a–b). The philosopher has at his disposal only the sensible, conventional image of language, in which true insights can only be suggested.²⁶

Given the restrictions upon the compass of human knowledge caused by the nature of truth itself, our own time-bound situatedness and language’s own instability, it seems strange that Plato should have presented Socrates as effectively compounding the partiality and closedness of our capacity to know and express our knowledge by linking philosophy and friendship; in the *Lysis*, a philosophical discussion is occasioned by the local circumstance of Lysis and Menexenos’s friendship, just as it is also apparently circumscribed by their own peculiarities and intellectual shortcomings. But perhaps this thematisation of limitation and mediation can be seen in another way; perhaps it is only by being reconciled to our local circumstances and elective affinities, that one attains a glimpse of the highest realities at all.

In the *Symposium*, the presentation of this demur of language and the situatedness of human expression seems particularly marked.²⁷ The dialogue opens with an exchange of remarks in dramatic form, between Apollodorus, a follower of Socrates, and some unnamed listeners. Apollodorus has apparently been asked to relate the events and

discussions of Agathon's victory party, a story which he has related already only two days before. This narrative forms the basis of the rest of the text, and we are not told how his listeners respond to his story. This might seem straightforward enough, but the layers of narrative authority begin to become more complicated; Apollodorus was not himself present at Agathon's symposium, which, as we know, occurred ten years before the present dramatic presentation. All he can do is recapitulate the story as it was given to him by Aristodemus, an earlier devotee of Socrates, who *had* been present. Inside Aristodemus's reported narrative there is a further reported narrative, that which took place between Socrates and Diotima, a Mantinean prophetess.

The text comprises a series of embedded narrative reports, each of which contains a further reported dialogue, and each receding further from the contemporary dramatic setting. Interestingly, Plato does not attempt to make the reader's task easier by dissolving the sequence of narrative frames so as to produce the effect of dramatic immediacy. To the contrary, it is almost as if Plato wishes to accentuate the layering of transmissions by emphasising the reported nature of the accounts.²⁸ He does this by means of constant reporting clauses: 'he said that he said' (*ephe phanai*) (see 174a; 193d etc); these remind us that Apollodorus is not an eye-witness but a reporter of what he heard from Aristodemus (177e–178a). The clauses are so plentiful that translators tend, for the sake of elegance, to omit them.²⁹

The sense of confused narrative focus is heightened when one situates this complex structure in the context of the opening dramatic exchanges; for these thematise the idea of displaced authority. When we enter upon the opening scene, we learn that Glaucon tells Apollodorus (in the latter's own recounting of their conversation) that someone who had heard the story of Agathon's party from Phoenix narrated it to him (ie. Glaucon), though had done so rather unreliably. This is why he now calls upon a further narration of the same event from Apollodorus. Glaucon also seeks to establish the authority of Apollodorus's account; Socrates's own account agrees with Aristodemus's account. This seems to satisfy Glaucon. Apollodorus decides that he will narrate the story from beginning to end, as Aristodemus had related it to him (172b–174a). We know from asides in other dialogues that Plato was aware of the redundancy of such exchanges;³⁰ so one must suppose that these receding narratives have some overall significance.³¹

If one thing stands out from the opening dramatic exchanges, it is that there is an anxiety to be true to the facts, but, equally, a sense that truth to the facts is scarcely possible when one is dealing with events in the past. We know that even though Aristodemus had been present at

the symposium, Apollodorus had checked that his account matched Socrates's in every particular (173b). The outcome of these documentary verifications is that the presentation which Plato offers us is curiously advertised as the privileged and definitive version with all the various advantages of the written text.³² And yet the authority of this version is unsettling; it is in a sense too proud of itself. But perhaps this is part of a more serious point, namely, that like the comings and goings of *eros*, the ebb and flow of the narrative authority in this dialogue dramatises our own human epistemological instability, or the precariousness of our acquaintance with truth.³³ Throughout the *Symposium*, we are reminded that although a discussion may be illuminating and disclosive, there is always something occasional and contingent about it, dependent upon the reports of certain people, responding to the interests of particular human preferences, arising at a specific time and place, and so on.

If such a conclusion is correct, then it might shed light upon Plato's frequent recourse to different forms of mediation: literary, linguistic, mythical, daimonic, rhetorical and dialogic. Many of the sources of truth seem unreliable and multiple and various. But rather than being seen as the meanderings of an unphilosophical or muddled mind, one could situate their dislodged or strange character in a different context; for do they not dramatise the problem of human knowledge and the impossibility of verification? The proliferation of authorities and disclosures express a concern for the conditions of truth in language, a concern which arises because of the gap between the sensible and intelligible realities.³⁴

The crucial aspect of this acknowledgement of the restrictions upon our knowledge is the necessity of being true to our own situation, which includes acknowledging our specific affinities and preferences, even though this will necessitate various apparently arbitrary exclusions. Such sensitivity might seem to lend our pursuits a quite unnecessary instability; and yet, such instability is in some ways far sturdier than any attempt to bypass such vicissitudes. Why? Because if one tries to circumvent contingency and preference, one must exercise an enforced abstraction from reality and a denial of our finite ontological status. Such abstraction depends upon a far greater arbitrariness than that occasioned by our own affiliations. A commitment to local circumstance will involve an acknowledgement that philosophy is not a matter of abstract definitions and an isolation of essences from the flow of time, but a way of life and a commitment to truth.

Of course, if the reported speech of the *Symposium* reminds us of the occasional nature of all human philosophical endeavour, and reminds us of the vanity of all attempts to disinter accurate facts about

reality, this suggests that all human speculation is subject to perpetual zig-zagging and changes of course. To suggest that one must pursue one's commitments might seem an unsatisfactory counter-balancing of all these other vicissitudes—something rather like Heidegger's 'resoluteness'. But the *Lysis* and *Symposium* suggest a further way in which one's search for knowledge and linguistic expression can be stabilised. In the *Lysis*, friendship arises not as a self-cancelling circuit of lack and supply, but more as a pathway of future harmonic assimilation-with-difference. This future is seen as impelling an individual to fulfil his own potential and to become more himself, but without in any way becoming fixed. It is as if the affiliation between two people in friendship, even though it depends upon a certain exclusivity, since one cannot be friends with everyone in equal degree (cf *Symposium* 210a–b), nonetheless causes a kind of outward-bending or openness. This has very important implications not only for the individual and his friend, but also for the community, since it is through friendship that discord can be resolved and harmony established (*Lysis* 207c; *Symposium* 186a–187a), not only between the parts of the human body, but between the body and the soul, one person and another person, and, by extension, throughout the community (cf *Symposium* 188a ff; 197d). This can be linked with the presentation in Diotima's speech of *eros* as a principle of mediation between the divine and the earthly realms (202e), the one and the many: 'being midway between, [*eros*] makes each supplement the other, so that the whole is combined into one' (202e). The shuttlings of *eros* seem to carry unity beyond itself.

So, when in the *Symposium*, we are repeatedly reminded of the precariousness and partiality of our attainment of truth by the reporting clauses and other expressions of philosophical and linguistic restriction, we are perhaps also being reminded that the friendship in which such exchanges are grounded is the condition of possibility for our attainment of truth in the first place. At the point where friendship is friendship because it moves outwards to constitute the *polis*, it seems also to do the work of the logos, and opens human beings towards the forms.

Yet can the Platonic zig-zag of friendship and dialectics offer an alternative to the deconstruction of Aristotle operated, for example, by Derrida? It does seem that Aristotle is situated half-way between Plato and Kant, even though his parity is far greater with the former. For Kant, we cannot be 'friends' with things (or owe categorical respect to them—though this is purer than friendship for Kant), nor with less than autonomous human beings. Even though this would be one-way relationship, it would not be disinterested since it would involve a

coalescence between the thing or less-than-subject (since things are 'objects' as the reductive correlative of the representing subject) and myself. For Aristotle, like Kant, we also cannot be friends with things in the full sense, though friendly love for them is certainly more significant here than for Kant. We can only enjoy primary friendship with other male, wealthy and so relatively autonomous rational animals. However, unlike Kant, Aristotle maintains that in its ideal form, this relationship involves reciprocity. One might be tempted to see this mutuality as escaping Kant's formalism, and yet in some ways it does anticipate it: what circulates in this mutuality is predominantly the same general virtue and love of the same good. Moreover, Aristotle emphatically privileges, within reciprocity, the giving over the receiving of love, and, in this way, he tends to conclude to one side of the aporia, in favour of autonomy and magnanimity (and 'rights', one can say anachronistically) and subordinates the chances of affinity and the event of fraternity (with the same anachronism). This is why he also celebrates the disinterested love of the mother who hands her children over to the care of a nurse. Here, as for Plato in the *Lysis*, one-way love is also friendship. However, Aristotle's example concerns disinterest rather than Plato's element of 'deploying' in a sense that must be distinguished from mere utilitarian 'use', nor Plato's notion of 'rising upwards'—for indeed nurture has been farmed out.³⁵ To escape formalism, one has to go beyond both Kant's one-way regard of the other and Aristotle's symmetrical reciprocity. Perhaps a balance can be found in Plato for whom there is an ethical one-way³⁶—as seen in the dynamic of lover and beloved in the *Phaedrus* where it is unclear how the beloved could ever reciprocate—which, unlike Kant, involves a certain action upon the other in his objectivity, and which thereby extends friendship also to things, even though there remains an hierarchical scale from unsouled things to the higher modes of soul. This is not Aristotle's maternal disinterested abandoning, but rather a bonding with the lower thing or person for the sake of its elevation. In Plato, the zig-zag between the mutual and the one-way offering of love is also, with astonishing philosophical rigour, the zig-zag between seeing the other as subject and seeing the other as object. The latter is not so shocking if one is willing to meet the other in her visibility and if one remembers that for Plato, there is an ethically right mode of blending with things as well as persons.

Whereas Aristotle's universal virtue of love will tend to fall into a contradictory relation with the contingent, as Derrida discerns, Plato's transcendent good welcomes the particular in its mysterious arch-exemplarity, and, inversely, the particular in its surprising openness always betokens a way to the transcendent. For Plato, the specificity of

friendship as friendship raises us to the divine, because it is in the very nature of friendship to enter into the gift of the other as psyche which elevates us in its very specificity to the universal. Choice, election, arising affinity are only arbitrary if one does not believe that time participates in the eternal; if one does, then friendship, as specific and ineffable, mediates the nomic and the anomic.

Christianity says a similar thing more specifically, and says it is true for all human beings, when it declares that beyond the law of commandment there is the law of charity, even though love cannot be commanded, but arrives. For Aquinas, charity is friendship, as Fergus Kerr has elaborated,³⁷ and we enter into this friendship through grace; we cannot simply will it, though we must also will it. Beyond Aristotle, Aquinas sees friendship (charity) as itself the form of the virtues, and so the mutuality of same in different becomes the end of virtue, and friendship ceases to be sharing in 'the same' virtue.³⁸ Implicitly, this takes us back to Plato (though to texts of which Aquinas knew nothing). If the goal is mutuality and blending, then friendship now coincides with justice and only occurs where universal and particular are in balance. Also, since the creation is the work and object of divine charity, a friendship with things—as St Francis realised—is again understood. For this outlook, the specificity of friendship can only lie within distributive justice and as Plato saw, it is cosmic and ontological. If this has been hidden from us, then it is re-instated when, in the Incarnation, God is shown as charity, or friendship, in His own inward being. This could not be revealed as a general idea but could only arrive as a life, as an event, including the event of entering into friendships through the offering of gifts and the experiencing of particular attachments and affinities. (John is the most loved disciple; Jesus requires Peter to love him most of all).

The Platonic dialogues and the Gospels both suggest that we can make friends and enter into preferences without injustice, because reality when truly perceived is the ceaseless arrival of a network of interlocking affinities; friendship is the way to be 'judicious', the way to discover our own place in this arrival. In consequence, friendship is political in a way that goes beyond aporias. It anticipates the interplay of same and different in the mind of God and a Beatific vision that, as Augustine shows at the end of the *City of God*, can only be enjoyed by the assembled collection of resurrected bodies bound together in charity.

For Aquinas, charity is the work of grace; it is a supernaturally infused virtue. All too often, Christian theology has seen this as an extrinsic fact in relation to the ethical practice of charity.³⁹ Yet here Plato's vision is immensely instructive. As we have seen, friendship

occurs only as the mediation of the arrival of the divine, and as our opening towards the divine in the other who is both like and unlike, as unable to reciprocate in kind, and yet as responding in mutuality. This escapes the Aristotelian stifling sense that friendship happens only between equally well-educated male adults; friendship that stoops lower and abases itself is able to reposition everything that falls within its compass; through friendship, we ecstatically exceed our mere humanity.

This may be the crux of the matter. Aristotle's view is too humanist. To proffer a philosophical humanism is to remain in the space of 'pure nature' which early modern theology inverted for philosophy, out of its piously-motivated desire to preserve grace as 'extra' to human reason. Within this space, as Jean-Yves Lacoste points out in his brilliant interpretation of Henri de Lubac, it was supposed to discover a 'natural beatitude' which corresponded to what the good pagans had been able to work out.⁴⁰ Instead, of course, only philosophers who were really theologians discovered this, while the rest either naturalised or historicised Christian beatitude, or else rediscovered Stoic resignation to immanence in one mode or another (Nietzsche, Heidegger). Where Aquinas had accorded a natural knowledge of God to pagan philosophers, this was a much more apophatic matter and assumed that human reason was already remotely instigated by our natural desire for the supernatural, whose centrality for Aquinas was reinstated by de Lubac. Within the latter perspective, as Lacoste argues, since there is no pure nature, there is also no notion of a philosophy that would define human nature only in terms of what is possible for human reason and will and in terms of its being towards death.⁴¹ To put this more simply: it did not conceive of a philosophy for which there was no truth in hope.

But what the notion of a natural orientation to the supernatural suggests is that the key to our humanity lies in our exceeding our humanity, which, if it is natural, as given, must also be supernatural as exceeding. Theology makes hope and desire hermeneutically primary. And so it makes that which exceeds what we are capable of by will and reason ontologically primary. An anticipated absence is more crucial than a presence which 'metaphysical reason' (in the modern sense) might hope to grasp. Lacoste goes on to point out that if desire is in this way primary, then something which is rooted in the body is also primary.⁴² The promptings of the body beyond the capacities of our own reason and will yield a more emphatic eschatology and final presence before the transcendent: the resurrection of the body, of which only the body, and not reason, could have dreamed, is proclaimed a reality by revelation.

If the pagan philosophers did not yet operate in the space of

'nature', since they did not yet know of the supernatural, then they should not be read as if they were philosophers in the modern sense, exploring the limits of human and finite capacity, but often rather as expressing the natural desire for beatitude, however inchoately. And here the Platonic presentation of friendship helps us to understand Christian charity. For Plato proclaimed a logos which only existed in the opening of our own capacities to new things made possible by the other, and saw this as an unlimited possibility extending upwards to encounter the divine. He saw also that this impulse towards friendship was rooted in passionate corporeality, and expressed itself kenotically in reaching downwards towards things as well as upwards through the psyche. He helps us to see just how charity as friendship is a higher mode of reasoning. Charity reveals itself again, even today, in the Platonic zig-zag.

- 1 I am grateful for conversations with Dr Thomas Harrison, Professor John Milbank, Archbishop Rowan Williams, Mgr Robert Sokolowski, and Professor David Burrell C.S.C.
- 2 G. Vlastos. 'The Individual as an object of love in Plato', in G. Vlastos (ed), *Platonic Studies*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 3–42; see Catherine Osborne's excellent critique of Vlastos's position in *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), Appendix II. See also Fergus Kerr, 'Charity as Friendship' in Brian Davies OP (ed), *Language, Meaning and God: Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe OP* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), pp. 1–23; Kerr cites *Nicomachean Ethics* III 1119a; *NE* IX, 1169b; 1166a
- 3 *NE* 1169b; *NE* III, 1119a.
- 4 *NE* 1155a
- 5 B. P. McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience 350–1250* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1988); David Moss, 'Friendship: St Anselm, theoria and the convolution of sense' in Milbank et al (eds), *Radical orthodoxy: a new theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 127–142. See also Osborne, *op.cit.* *Eros Unveiled*.
- 6 Jacques Derrida *Politiques de l'amitié* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1994).
- 7 On the controversy surrounding Carl Schmitt, see G. L. Ulmen, 'Between the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich: Continuity in Carl Schmitt's Thought', *Telos* 119 (Spring 2001), pp. 17–42.
- 8 Christopher Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); John Milbank, 'Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian metaphysic' *Modern Theology* 11.1 (January 1995), pp. 119–161; Jean-Luc Nancy in *The Inoperative Community*, Peter Connor (ed), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Osborne, *op. cit.*, *Eros Unveiled*.
- 9 F. Kerr, *op cit.*, pp. 1–23.
- 10 *Ibid.* pp. 7–8.
- 11 Osborne, *op.cit.* p. 58; M. M. Mackenzie, 'Impasse and Explanation: From the *Lysis* to the *Phaedo*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 70 (1988), pp. 15–45; David Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship* (Ithaca: SUNY Press, 1979); Vlastos *op.cit.* See, for example, Brian Carr's attempt to distil the dialogue into analytic formulae, in 'Friendship in Plato's *Lysis*', in Oliver Leaman (ed), *Friendship East and West: Philosophical*

- Perspectives* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), pp. 13–31.
- 12 See, for example, Brian Carr's attempt to distil the dialogue into analytic formulae, in 'Friendship in Plato's *Lysis*', in Leaman *op.cit.*, pp. 13–31.
 - 13 *Phaedrus and Symposium*, though see Osborne *op.cit.*, p.86.
 - 14 Homer, *Od.* Xvii.218: 'Yea, ever like and like together God doth draw.'
 - 15 Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 25.
 - 16 Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Logos and Ergon in Plato's *Lysis*' in *idem.*, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, P. Christopher Smith, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 1–20; p. 13 ff.
 - 17 Cf. *Phaedo*, 73d, 74a.
 - 18 See *Republic*, Book One, 328e.
 - 19 C. J. Pickstock, *A Short Guide to Plato*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
 - 20 K.Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
 - 21 *Phaedo* 114d; Morgan *ibid.*, pp. 12, 199.
 - 22 Gadamer, 'Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's *Seventh Letter*' in *op.cit.*, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, pp.103–5
 - 23 See especially *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*.
 - 24 Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L'inoubliable et l'inespéré* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), pp. 9–56.
 - 25 Morgan *op.cit.*, p. 181.
 - 26 Morgan, *op. cit.* pp. 182–183.
 - 27 See also *Parmenides*.
 - 28 But see 174a. Diotima's speech, for a few pages, occupies narrative foreground. See D. Halperin, 'Plato and the erotics of narrativity' in J C Klagge and N D Smith (eds.), *Methods of Interpreting Plato and his Dialogues* OSAPh suppl. Vol 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 97.
 - 29 Aristodemus's speech is reported in three styles: first, there is straightforward 'reported speech', as in 'he said that...'; secondly, there is reported direct speech, where the 'he said that...' is elided but implied, sometimes introduced by the redundant 'hoti' or 'that'; see 174a5. Thirdly, Apollodorus sometimes omits Aristodemus's mediation altogether, as in 174a8 and 174b3, and leaps straight over him to Socrates.
 - 30 *Theaetetus*, 143b
 - 31 Halperin, *op.cit.*, p. 100–1
 - 32 *Phaedrus*.
 - 33 *Symposium* 208a ff.
 - 34 *Cratylus* 408c; 432b–d; 440c, 439a–b. See Morgan, *op.cit.*, pp. 24–5, 38–44, 54–58, 116–9, 287–8.
 - 35 E.E. VII 3 1238b 15–1239b NE 1158a31 –1159a9 *Lysis* 212e ff
 - 36 *Lysis* 212e ff
 - 37 Fergus Kerr, *op.cit.*
 - 38 See David Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth* (South Bend: Notre Dame University Press, 2000), pp. 74 ff.
 - 39 See Cornelius Ernst OP, *The Theology of Grace* (Dublin and Cork: Mercier Press, 1974)
 - 40 Jean-Yves Lacoste, 'Le désir et l'inexigible préambles à une lecture', *Les Études Philosophiques* 2 (1995).
 - 41 Lacoste, *op.cit.*
 - 42 Lacoste, *op.cit.*