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LOVE, SELF, AND PLATO'S *SYMPOSIUM*

BY MARTIN WARNER

Among Plato's major dialogues, the *Symposium* has in recent years been one of those most neglected by philosophers. The reasons are obvious enough: there is comparatively little dialectical argument in the work, what little there is appears to culminate in the paradoxes of self-reference, and the main topic under discussion—the nature and importance of love—is one that most modern philosophers prefer to leave to the theologians. Nevertheless, the account of love presented in Socrates' speech at the climax of the dialogue repays philosophical scrutiny, for not only does it have greater coherence than is often allowed, but its plausibility depends crucially on an account of personal identity which is different from that usually attributed to Plato; further, the conception of love developed here is importantly different from the most influential of those embodied in Christian and post-Christian cultures, and this difference is largely traceable to different conceptions of personal identity. Since many recent accounts of personal identity are far closer to that endorsed by the *Symposium* than to classical Christian ones, it may be that a reconsideration of the dialogue will help to clarify the implications of such accounts for moral philosophy.

I

The *Symposium* has a number of features unusual in a Platonic dialogue. The most obvious peculiarity is the absence of dialectical argument throughout the first half of the work, and its limited role thereafter, even though the various speakers often disagree with each other. A connected point is the way that Socrates speaks for much of the time not in his own voice, but in that of a priestess whom he at one point describes as speaking "like a veritable Sophist" (208c); Socrates appears to endorse her words even though in other dialogues the Sophists are frequently under attack, and even though in this work Socrates opens his discussion with an attack on Agathon's speech partly for its very exemplification of the rhetorical principles of the Sophist Gorgias.

These two features of the work, taken together, provide an important clue to how it should be read. The differences between the various speakers about the nature and significance of love are expressed in terms of the conventions of the type of encomium they are giving, where love is personified and "his" parentage, characteristics, and powers delineated. The differences in their accounts derive from the diverse intellectual, imaginative, and emotional capacities of the symposiasts, informed by their distinctive experiences; that is, from their differing sensibilities. Hence a purely "dialec-

tical" demonstration of inconsistencies in such an account (of the sort Socrates employs with Agathon) is *by itself* of little value. A serious rebuttal of what is only semi-seriously intended, standing on its own, would merely expose Socrates as a clumsy and somewhat tactless philistine. What is required is an account of love which is not only intellectually coherent, but also makes sense of the imaginative and emotional pressures that underlie the less adequate formulations; and it is this which Socrates goes on to provide.

His medium is a form of discourse which employs rhetorical skills but which arises out of dialectical argument with Agathon and continues, at least in the earlier part, by means of a reported dialectic between Socrates and the priestess Diotima, who appears to be both a skilled dialectician and a rhetorician. We seem to have an approximation here to that "noble rhetoric" which had been adumbrated in the *Gorgias* and was to be analysed later in the *Phaedrus*; a rhetoric which is under the control of dialectic and hence concerned with the truth, but is nevertheless able to adjust itself to the requirements of a particular audience[1] in order to persuade its members by means which go beyond the dialectical. In the final part of the dialogue, Plato extends this technique further to provide a commentary by Alcibiades which reinforces through its very down-to-earth particularity Diotima's otherwise inordinately high-flown conclusions about love.

The word 'love' here deserves some comment, for it is both inevitable and unsatisfactory as a translation of ἔρως; there is no better English equivalent, but it is too broad. ἔρως is normally love of a thing in that sense which involves desire for it, hence it is particularly associated with sexual love though not limited to it; purely disinterested love, whether contemplative or altruistic, is not normally covered by the term. The close connection between ἔρως and desire is important for a proper understanding of the way Socrates' speech develops. The other key word which raises translation problems is καλός, for which the usual translation is 'beautiful'; a full consideration of this term would involve an exploration of the competing value-systems of the time, but for present purposes it is enough to point out that the beauty in question can be not only physical but also moral, where a word like 'noble' or 'fine' would be more in place; indeed, the word can be used in certain contexts even more generally to mean 'admirable' or even 'good'. As in certain respects ἔρως and καλός are treated in the dialogue as correlatives (the desire associated with ἔρως should properly be directed at that which is καλός) the possible range of significance of καλός becomes important when the notion of ἔρως is given progressively wider application by Diotima.

The dialectic with Agathon at the opening of Socrates' speech is con-

[1]Officially Diotima's "audience" is Socrates himself, but this is not intended to be taken too seriously. The whole speech of Socrates is constructed with an eye to what the other symposiasts have said.

cerned to establish that in love there is a sense of desire for what is not yet attained or fulfilled, love of its very nature impels us to seek the beautiful; the question immediately arises how it does so. In answer it is suggested that the ultimate good all men seek is happiness; in seeking beauty the lover seeks that which, in the fulfilment of his desire, he conceives of as bringing him happiness. But we are aware that whatever happiness we achieve can be but transitory, for we are mortal; we desire immortality but, at least in the most obvious sense, we cannot attain it.

At this point we have a reference to the earlier speech of Aristophanes, in which love had been presented as a desire for completeness, involving the quest for one's true partner (who had once been literally a part of oneself) with whom alone one can be at peace and without whom we are bound to spend our days frustrated in our isolation. It is not so much, says Diotima, that we seek our other half just because it was once part of us, after all we do not wish to be reunited with a diseased limb we have had amputated; we only wish to be united with that which we perceive to be good. This reinstates the evaluative element in the account of love which Aristophanes had ignored, and it also serves as an introduction to the account of the human person which Socrates is to develop in his account of the only form of immortality available to us, the immortality provided by procreation. A person does not retain his identity throughout his life by retaining the same qualities, either physical or mental; our identity is not threatened by loss of hair any more than by having a limb amputated, and even with regard to less peripheral attributes the continued existence of any organism is constituted by the replacement of what is worn out by something which resembles it. Thus at the physical level we are immortal only in our children. Even at this level procreation requires beauty of a sort—it is difficult for a man to have intercourse with a woman he finds repulsive—and this remains true at the mental level; thus the beauty to which love impels us is a condition for the attainment of those forms of immortality which alone are available to us:

> You are wrong, Socrates, in supposing that love is of the beautiful. . . . It is of engendering and begetting upon the beautiful. . . . Love is of immortality (206e-7a; I have usually, as here, used the Loeb translation).

Heterosexual love, on this account, is essentially bound up with the desire for physical immortality, but this is a lower form of love than that which seeks to beget the spiritual progeny of wisdom and virtue—which alone can be the proper goal of homosexual love. Spiritual immortality can consist merely in winning "fame immortal", as with the Homeric heroes, poets and inventors, leaving in the world offspring of their deeds and thoughts which bear the stamp of their personality, but it is best that such progeny should be conceived in wisdom and virtue, as with the great lawgivers.

Even such love as this, it is suggested, has its origins in the physical,

however sublimated it may become. In all of us there is a sense of isolation which can only be eased by intimate contact with another person, and this is the starting point of love; this love is bound up with a desire for immortality, to overcome our finitude, and hence to create or express that which will endure; such creativity can be realized through contact with the beloved who is perceived as being καλός, though this will not always be the outcome. So long, in fact, as the love is directed solely at the other person little of lasting spiritual value is likely to be created; the power of love to transcend human finitude is released when we are led to recognize the beautiful qualities of the beloved as being exemplified elsewhere (for "if he means to pursue beauty in form, it is gross folly not to regard as one and the same the beauty belonging to all bodies", 210b), and hence to love the qualities rather than the individual, particularly the spiritual qualities, "so that however little the grace that may bloom in any likely soul it shall suffice him for loving and caring".

From beauty and nobility in individuals we may in similar fashion be led to perceive it in the ordering of societies and in all the branches of knowledge, inspiring that love of knowledge which is the mainspring of philosophy as Plato understands it. Through love of the beauty found in knowledge we are not merely able to win an immortal name by passing on our wisdom to the world (such a motive has by this stage passed almost out of sight), but we are brought in spiritual contact with the eternal, and in that find our fullest happiness. The impulse of love, which at the lower levels seeks its release from finitude through as close an approximation to personal immortality as is possible, now finds its fulfilment by going beyond such limited concerns in contemplation of the eternal beauty which underlies and orders the universe. The speech ends with a vision of the contemplation of beauty itself which enables the initiate to direct his life according to true virtue, "since his contact is not with illusion but with truth", and thereby "win the friendship of heaven" (212a).

II

This account is clearly open to a number of objections, of varying force. The least satisfactory part from a psychological point of view is probably the insistence that the whole process can only be set in train with a beloved partner; the metaphor involved in the notion of "spiritual begetting" appears to be masquerading as an argument here, though perhaps a partial defence could be mounted by appealing to the importance of a partner in the conduct of Socratic dialectic. But if we drop this insistence, and merely hold that Socrates sketches one starting point for the love he delineates, a great deal is still left—most of which is much more defensible.

Objection may also be raised, of course, to the transition from loving members of the class of beautiful things to loving beauty itself, this beauty being described as self-subsistent and eternal. That Plato himself became

dissatisfied with this way of speaking is clear from the *Parmenides* (though it is doubtful whether he ever thought it wholly misguided) and as it stands it is no doubt incoherent; but perhaps something can be saved from the wreck. There is little problem in conceiving of a property so generally that —in that form—it cannot be instantiated; the familiar example of triangularity is enough to make the point. The difficulty comes when we wish to speak of triangularity as itself triangular or, as in this case, of beauty as itself beautiful. But given the way the term καλός has been extended in the course of the discussion, from 'beautiful' or 'noble' to something close to 'admirable', perhaps the difficulty is not insuperable. The principles of ordering which underlie all beautiful, noble and admirable things are themselves fit subjects for admiration; in loving them the lover himself becomes admirable. No doubt in the context of the Platonic metaphysics of other dialogues, whereby things are beautiful by participating in the form of beauty, such a move is still vulnerable to some version of the Third Man argument; but this metaphysics is not essential to Diotima's discussion, and we need not introduce it if it reduces her account to incoherence. The "eternity" of such principles of ordering can be read as similar to the "eternity" of those mathematical principles that a modern physicist employs in his understanding of the world; there seems no need to invoke anything more mysterious.

But if the edge of such standard criticisms can be blunted, we are still faced with the issue of how we are to assess Socrates' account of love; is it such that we should accept it—that is, believe in it and attempt to live by it?

The obvious historicist response is that this is impossible. Plato's culture is so different from our own that we cannot share his sensibility, and this difference is ingrained in the concepts we use. Plato's ἔρως is so unlike our 'love' that glosses have been necessary even to render his account intelligible. But this answer is too easy. There are clear connections between the Christian concept of love, which still affects modern sensibility, and Plato's ἔρως; and the Christian notion has often been elevated to a very similar role to that which Plato provides for ἔρως. The differences between Plato's ἔρως and Christian love can be precisely pinpointed and traced back to underlying metaphysical differences. A rejection of the metaphysics which gives point to the Christian understanding of love reopens the question of whether we should revert to a more Platonic conception (doubtless with all sorts of modifications) if we wish some such concept to retain a central place in our ethical, imaginative and emotional lives.

The issue can be sharpened by reference to one of the main points where Plato's account appears to clash with modern sensibility; that of the apparent impersonality of love in Diotima's later stages. In Christian and post-Christian cultures the most important forms of love are seen as essentially personal; even at the highest point the God encountered in the beatific vision is seen as a personal God, unlike the abstract form of beauty of which

Socrates speaks, and at less exalted levels it is the person rather than his qualities which it is said we ought to love. So Plato's transition from love of the individual to love of his qualities, and thence to love of those qualities wherever they are to be found, strikes a jarring note. A love which is of the qualities a person has rather than of the person himself may be seen as a poor form of love.

This is not merely the teaching of Christian theologians. It is the doctrine of Shakespeare's 116th Sonnet ("Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds"), and is so familiar that it can be parodied by Wilbye in his madrigal "Love me not for comely grace". In more recent times McTaggart finds this still the dominant conception of love, in one of the most perceptive accounts of that concept in the philosophical literature.[2] Love, he maintains, "as we find it in present experience", while it may be "because of qualities", is "never in respect of qualities":

> Love is not necessarily proportional to the dignity or adequacy of the qualities which determine it. A trivial cause may determine the direction of intense love. It may be determined by birth in the same family, or by childhood in the same house. It may be determined by physical beauty, or by purely sexual desire. And yet it may be all that love can be.
>
> Other emotions, no doubt, may be determined by causes not proportioned to them in dignity and adequacy. I may admire a man passionately because he plays football well. I may be proud of myself because of the virtues of my great-grandfather. And so also with acquiescence. I may acquiesce in a state of civil war because it makes the life of a spectator more exciting. But the difference is that, in the case of the other emotions, and the acquiescence, we condemn the result if the cause is trivial and inadequate. The admiration, the pride, and the acquiescence which we have just mentioned would all be condemned because they would be held to be unjustified. But with love, it seems to me, we judge differently. If the love does arise, it justifies itself, regardless of what causes produce it. To love one person above all the world for all one's life because her eyes are beautiful when she is young, is to be determined to a very great thing by a very small cause. But if what is caused is really love—and this is sometimes the case—it is not condemned on that ground. It is there, and that is enough. This would seem to indicate that the emotion is directed to the person, independently of his qualities, and that the determining qualities are not the justification of that emotion, but only the means by which it arises.

This is not the place to consider McTaggart's battery of supporting arguments and qualifications, but it is worth pointing out that the account is not so unrealistic as to deny that even love of this sort can be changed by a perceived alteration of qualities in the beloved; Shakespeare here exaggerates, but no doubt a sonneteer is not upon oath. McTaggart considers cases in

[2] J. McT. E. McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, vol. II, (Cambridge, 1927), book V, chapter xli, sections 465-8.

which

> a man discovers that a person, whom he has loved because he believed him to have a certain quality, has ceased to have it, or never had it at all. With other emotions, such a discovery would at once condemn the emotion, and in many cases, though not in all, would soon destroy it. . . But with love it is different. If love has once arisen, there is no reason why it ought to cease, because the belief has ceased which was its cause. . . It often happens, of course, that such a strain is too hard for love, and destroys it. But while such a result would be accepted as the only reasonable course with any other emotion, it is felt here as a failure. Admiration, hope, trust, ought to yield. But love, if it were strong enough, could have resisted, and ought to have resisted.

The conclusion of this line of thought is clear enough. Love involves a connection between two people of peculiar strength and intimacy;

> qualities and relations can only prevent love by preventing the union, or the sense of it, and can only destroy love by destroying the union, or the sense of it. Love is for the person, and not for his qualities, nor is it for him in respect of his qualities. It is for him.

Although McTaggart was no orthodox Christian, he is here stating a position profoundly affected by Christian assumptions; and the conception of the human person here presupposed, such that there is more to a person than his qualities, is essentially a classical Christian one. In part he may be read as replying to G. E. Moore's discussion of the same topic in the final chapter of *Principia Ethica* where Moore, with a very different conception of the human person, attempted to revive a much more Platonic conception of love. For Moore, although

> the appreciation of a person's attitude towards other persons, or, to take one instance, the love of love, is far the the most valuable good we know, and far more valuable than the mere love of beauty, yet we can only admit this if the first be understood to *include* the latter, in various degrees of directness (*Principia Ethica*, Cambridge, 1903, §122).

Since Moore and McTaggart, philosophers have tended to turn away from such matters in the English-speaking world, leaving the field to the theologians. The most relevant exception here is D. W. Hamlyn, who has recently revived and defended much of McTaggart's thesis in "The Phenomena of Love and Hate", *Philosophy*, 53 (1978). He argues that it is possible "to be loved full-stop", that is, "without there being anything that the love is for" even though "there is likely to be some explanation why the love came into being"; all that is required is the "merely formal condition" that the lover "must see the beloved as an object for love". Given her account of personal identity Diotima would have difficulty in making sense of this formal requirement where it is maintained that there is no quality or set of qualities "that the love is for"; thus for Diotima it is impossible "to be loved full-stop" in Hamlyn's sense.

On the Continent, however, philosophers in the phenomenological and

existentialist traditions have remained interested in the phenomena of love. Perhaps the best known such account is that of Sartre, whose somewhat Proustian conception of love as irresoluble conflict is firmly anchored in his account of what it is to be a person, in particular of the relation between the *pour soi* and the *pour autrui*. Even if his analysis of what it is to be a person has the consequence that love, in both Platonic and Christian conceptions, is an impossibility (and his analysis is also open to challenge on other grounds), it at least has the merit of displaying the close connection between our understanding of human personality and our central ethical conceptions.

In the *Symposium*, Plato is also clear about this connection. Diotima is made to integrate into her account of love an analysis of what it is for a human being to persist through time, according to which there is no more to a person than his qualities. As we have seen, Diotima holds that the continued existence of an organism is constituted by the replacement of what is worn out by something which resembles it; hence we may be said to be immortal in our children and other offspring. Crombie is highly critical of this account:

> This is odd doctrine because it assimilates the relation between Jones at fifty and Jones at seventy with the relation between Jones and his son, treating both as cases of similarity. But this overlooks the fact that Jones at fifty is continuous with Jones at seventy whereas Jones' father is discontinuous with Jones' son. Leaving behind a replacement in the sense of remaining alive is very different from leaving behind a replacement in the sense of having a son.[3]

But this criticism is too quick. In the first place, there *is* spatio-temporal continuity between Jones and his father and between Jones and his son (providing neither are adopted sons), so the word 'discontinuous' here cannot be construed strictly. No doubt it is intended to be read in terms of the succeeding sentence. But, secondly, although leaving a son is no doubt "very different" from remaining alive, so is remaining alive between the years, say, of one and five and the years thirty and thirty-five; the crucial question is why the one sort of difference should be taken to be so much more important than the other. An answer can readily be given if we think of the essential human person as a substance underlying all his changing qualities, as Plato seems to have done in the *Phaedo*, but it is much less easy to do so if, like Diotima, we reject any such account.

This can be seen by looking at contemporary debates about the nature of personal identity, in which many writers come much closer to Diotima's analysis than to that presupposed by Christian orthodoxy, McTaggart and (probably) Crombie. The most obvious response to the question posed above is that identity is a one-one relation, whereas that of parent to child is a many-many relation; even if Plato's mistaken beliefs about human reproduction led him to think of the relation of parent to child as being a one-many

[3] I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* (London, 1962), vol. I, p. 362.

relation, this still could not count as a form of identity. Since what matters in talk of immortality is preservation of identity, remaining alive is more important than having a son in the context of such a discussion. But such a response presupposes that our criteria for 'remaining alive' are immune against the same objection, and this is notoriously open to question. The difficulties into which we are led when we try to apply the notion of identity (understood as logically a one-one relation) to the continued existence of human persons has led at least one contemporary philosopher to the conclusion that we can and should free our talk about the survival of human persons through time from questions about identity (so understood), and that when we do so we can see that "what matters in survival need not be one-one".[4] On this "revised way of thinking" it would be perfectly in order to speak of "successive selves", and the logical gulf between remaining alive and having a son which Plato is supposed to have "overlooked" would become much less significant than it at first appeared.

Not many philosophers, of course, would accept this whole programme. Nevertheless, it is by now widely held that there are very great difficulties in finding a set of necessary and sufficient conditions which will satisfactorily specify what is involved in personal identity through time. Such considerations have led many to the conclusion that in looking for logically necessary and sufficient conditions for reidentifying a person through time we are looking in the wrong direction. We have our concept 'human person', not because of the existence of a logically elusive metaphysical "self", but because of our beliefs about the world and the sort of things that happen in it. As Wittgenstein argued some time ago,

> Our actual use of the phrase 'the same person' and of the name of a person is based on the fact that many characteristics which we use as the criteria for identity coincide in the vast majority of cases. . . For the *ordinary* use of 'person' is what one might call a composite use suitable under the ordinary circumstances.[5]

On this account, our concept of a person is fixed by multiple and overlapping criteria; if the world were very different from what we believe it to be we should need a different concept or set of concepts; as Daniels puts it, "vastly different cultures might not find our concept of person useful and might employ another".[6]

But if this is so, then in talking of the human person we are not picking out an underlying substance, but a set of overlapping similarities and continuities through time; the changing mental and physical qualities of which Diotima speaks. And this raises the question of why we should pick out

[4]Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity", *Philosophical Review*, 80 (1971), p. 10.

[5]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and the Brown Books* (Oxford, 1958), pp. 61-2. For a recent invocation of Wittgenstein's discussion in the context of the contemporary debate, see Godfrey Vesey, *Personal Identity* (London, 1974), ch. 8.

[6]Charles B. Daniels, "Personal Identity", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 6 (1969), p. 231.

some such likenesses and continuities rather than others to constitute a pivotal concept like 'person'.[7] There are no doubt good evolutionary explanations why Jones should regard what will happen to Jones in forty years' time as of particular concern to him now,[8] however different the Jones of that date may be, and insurance companies are built on that fact; but to explain emotions and predispositions is not to justify them. Less individualistic cultures than our own already give such concepts of personal identity less centrality than we tend to do, and the Buddhist denial of the "self" reflects an awareness of the conventional nature of the criteria available for the identification and reidentification of individuals; so it is not humanly inescapable for us to think as we do. The interpretation and value our culture gives to the concept 'person', as in the case of the concept 'love', is a function of the Christian traditions we inherit; if we reject the metaphysical underpinnings we should be prepared to reassess the concepts themselves.

For, metaphysical preconceptions apart, it is not at all clear why I should put more value on a mentally and physically diminished person, who may well have qualities and beliefs I have no time for, but who happens to be connected by a series of continuities over a number of decades with my present "self", than on others (either now living or putative future children) who are or will be much more like what I now am or want to be. And if we once accept this, then Crombie's criticism of Plato falls flat.

Diotima, then, needs to be taken seriously in her account of the identity of the person; on her account there is no underlying metaphysical "self", but rather a collection of qualities. This at once legitimizes her extensions of the notion of "immortality", and her notion of love's being properly of qualities. I shall conclude by taking these in turn.

First, she does not ignore the very human instinct to wish for the immortality either of one's own body or else of something as like to it as possible; those who are trapped by fleshly considerations procreate children as the nearest approximation to immortality they can reach. What she claims is that this concern can be transcended and that the things of greatest value are created when it is; but this "higher" concern can still be intelligibly related to that desire for immortality in terms of which she grounds her analysis of the sense of loss at the heart of love. That there is such a sense of loss, of course, testifies to the strength of the pull to conceive of ourselves in the "conventional" way encouraged by evolution.

[7]Bernard Williams has recently attempted the beginnings of an answer to this question, though in what he himself describes as "an obscure, promissory and allusive manner" ("Persons, Character and Morality", in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley, 1976), p. 201).

[8]Cf. Arnold Zuboff, "Moment Universals and Personal Identity", *PAS*, 78 (1977-8), p. 154. Arguing that our ordinary conception of personal identity is confused, and advocating an even more radical revision of it than that of Parfit, he discusses "the tremendous survival value for the psycho-physical organism of its taking itself the wrong way", and adds that "the fact that this view of ours has survival value independent of its being true in itself casts great suspicion on it".

Second, given Diotima's account of the self, the Christian and post-Christian conception of love's being "for the person, and not for his qualities" is simply incoherent. Even if we extend the notion of "qualities" to include relational properties like 'father of', and use such properties as criteria for the individuation of people, the conclusion still follows. On this account, I may properly pick out Jones not merely under such descriptions as 'that white-haired nincompoop', but also under such descriptions as 'the man who fathered me'; I may love him in virtue of my belief that the second description is true of him, regardless of whether I believe the first to be so, and thus in that sense my love will not alter "when it alteration finds". Nevertheless, my love is still in respect of empirical facts about Jones, for on this account he is constituted by such "facts"; there is no room for McTaggart's conception of a love which could and should survive the discovery that Jones did not father me after all. If there is no more to the person than his qualities, then in loving a person we are loving (some at least of) his qualities.

But if this is so, it immediately becomes appropriate to ask questions about the worth of those qualities; there are some qualities (for example, maliciousness) which it is plausible to say should not be loved. Thus it becomes legitimate to claim that our love should be proportioned to the worth of the qualities loved, and that we should love those properties that are worthy of love wherever they are instantiated; thus the move to the more "impersonal" stages of Diotima's account of love is difficult to block. Further, if the highest kind of concern we can have for others is of this sort, then the love in question is liable to be either linked with desire for the worthy qualities (ἔρως desiring that which is καλός), or else purely contemplative (as it comes close to being at the final stage of Diotima's spiritual journey); the distinctively Christian conception of altruistic love (ἀγάπη) finds it difficult to retain a foothold here, for it is difficult to be altruistic on behalf of a set of qualities. Thus given Diotima's account of the self the Christian understanding of love is incoherent, while the Platonic is immensely plausible. The argument can, of course, be reversed. If we have independent reasons for accepting altruistic love as a central virtue, then these cast doubt on contemporary Diotima-like doctrines concerning personal identity.

It is not always recognized how close is the interdependence of our ethical conceptions with our understanding of the nature of man. It is not the least merit of Plato's *Symposium* that it brings out and insists upon this interconnection.

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