

Self-Surpassing Beauty: Plato's Ambiguous Legacy

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In the twentieth century, Plato and Nietzsche are often taken as representing radically opposed views concerning a cluster of fundamental philosophical issues. On the one hand, Plato is seen as urging the metaphysical picture of a stable realm of eternal, self-identical forms—the realm of being—as standing as the true world behind the transient sensorily-apparent domain of becoming. In contrast, Nietzsche is taken as the advocate of the reality of this ‘becoming’—a thinker for whom the world of stable forms is nothing but a human construct imposed on the world.¹

From the point of view of late twentieth-century ‘post-modern’ culture, of the two thinkers Nietzsche undoubtedly looks the more contemporary. Probably the closest we can come to conceive of something like the Platonic stance is to consider natural science: substitute the idea of the fundamental laws of nature for Plato’s realm of forms, and our modern scientific world view can seem rather Platonic.² This, however, is a very significant substitution. For Plato, the perfection of one’s theoretical grasp of the world meant the simultaneous perfecting of one’s aesthetic and moral attitudes towards it. So interlocked are these realms that in the *Symposium* he could describe an ‘ascent to the forms’ in terms of an education of the senses that was fundamentally aesthetic. Writing between the 1860s and the late 1880s, Nietzsche was well positioned to appreciate the consequences for aesthetic and moral edification of the growth of science. Through its role in what Weber was later to call the ‘disenchantment’ of the world, science seemed to undermine rather than underpin moral and aesthetic life. Simultaneous with this process, actual aesthetic life itself under conditions of modernity seemed to go in the direction of what Odo Marquard has referred to as a ‘no longer fine art’, an art for which the task of representing the essential beauty of the world was no longer the main criterion.³

But Plato’s legacy for modern life is more ambiguous than a simple contrast with Nietzsche would suggest, and this is an ambiguity which is especially pertinent where ‘aesthetic’ concerns are in focus.⁴ In this paper I will examine very briefly the well-known ‘ascent’ passage in Plato’s *Symposium* from the point of view of a framework Nietzsche

develops for the criticism of the type of metaphysical thinking of which Plato is held as exemplary. Applying a conception of the process of idealisation worked out in *On the Genealogy of Morals* to Diotima's speech in the Symposium, we see that rather than exemplifying that type of thought characteristic of metaphysical Platonism, Plato can also be seen as exemplifying a form of thought which Nietzsche proposes as an alternative. But to see this, we have to adopt a point of view which is more typically 'Nietzschean' than 'Platonic'. In the *Genealogy*, rather than criticise what Platonism takes as counting as the real, Nietzsche develops a critique of the processes by which forms of thought produce their ideas about the real. Thus we find there an implicit sketch of two processes of idealisation, processes via which a thinker will pass from a form of intentionality engaged with immediately, sensuously present phenomena to one more 'ideal'. Using a distinction drawn from Nietzsche's other writings, we might contrast these two processes of idealisation as 'active' and 'reactive'. Such a contrast makes a suggestive contribution to philosophy, I believe, one that is especially important for thinking about value-theoretic areas like ethics and aesthetics from the more 'naturalistic' point of view of the present. But if it allows us to see a more 'Nietzschean' element in Plato, it may also reveal, to a greater extent than is commonly recognized, a more Platonic dimension to our paradigmatic post-modern—Nietzsche.

Throughout his work, Nietzsche was concerned with the diagnosis of a modern pathology—the modern dissociation of intelligence and sense, the mind and the body, morality and motivation, a dissociation which threatened our capacity to value and which was at the heart of the phenomenon of nihilism. In his early *Birth of Tragedy*, he traced back this disease to a type of thought which had emerged within classical Greek culture and which was responsible for the decline of its highest cultural product, Attic tragedy. This thought form which he there referred to as Socratism⁵ involved an idealisation of the world, a movement in thought away from the world as directly perceived and felt. What was found by abstract thought behind or beyond the sensuously present, that is, that which was intelligible, was now taken to be the real. In short, with Socratism or, as he later called it, Platonism, the abstract understanding had replaced the senses as providing the criteria of reality.⁶ In one of Nietzsche's pithy phrases, Socratism turned life into a soluble puzzle.

In the later *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche sketched another account of the genesis of the dissociation of feeling and

thought and the subordination of the former to the latter, this time in the realm of ethics.⁷ Here a story was told of an ancient society of slave-owning nobles, a group of individuals who, loving their own way of life, affirmed its goodness on no other grounds than that it was theirs. These noble masters manifested the same sort of unity of sense experience and action that Rousseau had attributed to the noble savage over a century before. In Rousseauian primitivism the pre-social savage had led an authentic and non-alienated existence: here individuals were in tune with the states of their bodily selves. Against the backdrop of such a norm, social life was seen to have induced a reflective grasp of the self, such that individuals now understood themselves, their desires and their satisfactions comparatively, that is, in relation to what was perceived of the states of others. The result of this was to disrupt the unity between the self and its felt bodily states. The modern internally alienated or dissociated individual was born.

But Nietzsche reinterpreted this distinction between natural and social existence in order to distinguish two forms of sociality. He distinguished two ways of life involving different ways in which the self was defined and evaluated in relation to others.⁸ While the lives of the ancient masters instanced one way, a form of life originating in the revolt of their slaves instanced the other. What was crucial was which term of the relation between self and other was the more basic.

The ancient nobles had primarily affirmed themselves and their own way of life and as part of this affirmation had condemned the lives of those who did not live up to such a standard—their slaves. In terms of the quality of the lives being led, they themselves were good and their slaves bad, bad precisely because in being slaves their actions were not grounded in affirmative evaluations, in their own love of their own forms of behaviour, but directed from elsewhere. Simply put, slaves did not live their own lives because they were instruments in the lives of others. But after the fateful revolt of the slaves, an event which seems to have included the development of both Platonism and Christianity, another way of relating to one's life and its activities and objects arose. The slaves had had no way of life of their own to affirm, so they began their revolt by denouncing the lives of their masters—denouncing those lives as evil. Such an act was one of meta-evaluation because it took as its object no specific thing or action but the first-order evaluations of the masters themselves. Its rule was: whatever the master deems good is to be condemned as evil. It was only then that the slaves affirmed their own lives, and they did this by way of a negating contrast. 'We are not like that', they said, 'we

are not evil, therefore, we must be "good".⁹

But this new concept of good had to be structurally different to the old self-referring concept of the masters. The slaves still did not affirm a specific way of life, rather they deemed as good anything that avoided the evil of the masters' lives. Thus a form of morality was born which was uncoupled from any substantial idea of a 'good life'—like the ten commandments its determinate conceptions essentially added up to an inventory of forbidden fruits, those evil acts to be avoided if one were to be good.

What I have been describing is the process that I earlier referred to as reactive idealisation. But Nietzsche also briefly alludes to another form of idealisation which he adduces from etymological evidence surrounding words like good and bad. The nobles' concept of good was also transformed by a type of metaphorical or analogical extension. Starting from a basically political concept of the 'noble', the term was stretched to apply to individuals who manifested certain 'higher' characteristics:

everywhere 'noble,' 'aristocratic,' in the social sense, is the basic concept from which 'good' in the sense of 'with aristocratic soul,' 'noble,' 'with a soul of high order,' 'with a privileged soul' necessarily developed.¹⁰

A parallel type movement is held to occur with the history of 'bad'. What is constant in the evolution of this pair is some sense of the distinction between higher and lower or over and under. This concept of aboveness or overness had originally referred to a relation of power: The nobles held power over the slaves. But this idea of aboveness of the noble was then displaced onto other attributes now valued as being 'higher' than those commonly encountered, resulting in a process of idealisation.¹¹ This process is like that generated by the slave revolt in as much as it accompanied the nobles' loss of political power, but whereas reactive idealisation ended with a negative or reactive concept of good, here 'after the decline of the nobility, the word [noble] is left to designate nobility of soul'.¹²

I suggest that these two processes make use of two different logics. The basic concepts of reactive idealisation instantiated in good and evil are logical complements and because of this only one of them will have its own concrete empirical content. But the concepts of active idealisation are polar opposites and here both terms can typically be exemplified. Here further categories can be produced which are related to the original terms, not in terms of logical relations traditionally conceived, but rather in terms of metaphorical linkages which preserve

the sense of what some quality is like and thus, how its bearer can be like other things in the sense of analogous, rather than as like instances of single kind. A noble *qua* member of a political aristocracy and someone who has a noble spirit do not belong to the same class of objects, nevertheless we understand easily enough what it means for a person to have a noble spirit and grasp that it has some sort of connection with the idea of a noble, literally meant.

Recent linguistic studies of metaphorical categorisation have started to fill out what is sketchily but suggestively put forward by Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals*,¹³ but if we want to see an exemplary account of the distinctness of active idealisation we should look no further than Diotima's account of love and beauty in Plato's *Symposium*.

The setting of Plato's *Symposium* is a drinking party given to celebrate the victory at the great Dionysia of the young playwright Agathon and the 'action' consists essentially in a series of encomia to Eros, the god and the thing. The love discussed in the speeches of the six symposiasts (Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon and Socrates) is predominantly homosexual, a significant fact given not only the sanctioning in Classical Greece of sexual relations between an older man and an adolescent boy (the *erastes* and the *eromenos*), but the idealisation of such relations above those heterosexual relations alongside of which they stood. Homosexual love was regarded as potentially a more spiritual form of love than heterosexual love because it involved an educative dimension, the affair being regarded as a context within which the young boy was introduced into the realm of the male ruling elite. It is thus that Pausanias distinguishes vulgar or base love from noble love: vulgar love can be both heterosexual or homosexual and is directed to sexual gratification alone, but noble love is exclusively homosexual and bound up with the concern to educate the boy so that he become a full member of the polis. But noble love can develop from homosexual base love, and it does so by virtue of Nietzsche's logic of active idealisation.

It is the most straightforwardly sexual form of eros, the base form it shares with heterosexual love, which, in Diotima's speech as recounted by Socrates, forms the starting point for the spiritual ascent from sexual desire into the type of loving contemplation of the world as a whole found in philosophy. As with the speeches of the symposiasts, that of Diotima/Socrates freely employs personification: neither a god nor a mortal, Eros is a spirit 'in between god and mortal' (202E).¹⁴ Such spirits are

messengers who shuttle back and forth between the two, conveying prayer and sacrifice from men to gods, while to men they bring commands from the gods and gifts in return for sacrifices. Being in the middle of the two, they round out the whole and bind fast the all to all. Through them all divination passes, through them the art of priests in sacrifice and ritual, in enchantment, prophecy and sorcery' (202 E–203 A)

This 'in betweenness' of love will be the major theme of Diotima's speech and is a central idea for Plato's understanding of beauty. Love is what is responsible for the degree of transcendence of bodily-determined passions possible in humans and the context for its emergence and activity is beauty.

How love of the beautiful in the concrete sense of the sexual desire for a beautiful body is transformed into the love of wisdom is the subject of the famous 'ascent' passage of Diotima's speech. After examining the nature of love and its object, Diotima shifts to the question of the manner in which a lover pursues what is loved—what is it that the lover does 'with the eagerness and zeal we call love'? (206B) Here the overtly sexual dimension of eros is important. When Diotima notes that we all are pregnant 'in both body and in soul' and on reaching a certain age desire to give birth, she clearly includes male sexual activity itself as a type of 'giving birth'. But such 'giving birth' is not possible 'in anything ugly; only in something beautiful' (206C). Beauty is that which incites the actions of love, which result in procreation:

whenever pregnant animals or persons draw near to beauty; they become gentle and joyfully disposed and give birth and reproduce; but near ugliness they are foul-faced and draw back in pain; they turn away and shrink back and do not reproduce (206D)

This rather elastic metaphor of procreative action induced by beauty will be the matrix for the idealisation of love. The relevant elements of this schema are those of sexual passion or eros, beauty as that which attracts eros, and generation or procreation as the outcome of eros. Let us first look at the relation here between sexuality and generation.

For Diotima it would seem that the felt desire of eros cannot simply be thought as aiming at sexual union: rather, in some sense it is the generation of the species which is what is desired when we experience sexual desire. This reflects the Greek tendency to take a less subjective approach to intentions than we do. Because sexual desire is subjectively experienced as desire for union, we tend to think of this union as its goal. But the Greeks conceived this more objectively: because in the

natural order of things sexual union was linked with generation, it must be generation which is the real object of sexual desire. But what is the desire for generation? For Diotima it is a manifestation of the desire for immortality. We mortal beings being denied immortality, desire a type of proxy version—we desire to have the offspring within which something of us will be carried beyond the grave (207A–D).

Next, the meaning of generation is metaphorically expanded from meaning the mere biological generation of offspring. The life of the individual is also seen as a process in which phases or stages follow each other in succession as if each new phase is born from out of the old, and this even applies to the phases of the individual's mental life (207E–208B). Furthermore, it is extended to the 'giving birth' of words and deeds. And if immortality can be extended to the idea of being kept alive within the biological existence of one's offspring, it can be extended to the idea of being kept alive via their own verbal and conceptual 'offspring'—we desire to be kept alive in the memory and talk of those who succeed us.

This basic schema of reproduction is rich for metaphorical elaboration, an elaboration which can apply also to the nature of erotic desire. Thus there are the two forms that this eros can take: those who are simply 'pregnant in the body ... turn to women and pursue love in that way' (208E), while there are others who are 'pregnant in the soul', such as the poets who bear and bring forth wisdom and other virtues, as well as 'the craftsmen who are said to be creative' (209A). Among the creative activities of the latter, the highest form is that which gives rise to well ordered and just states—the creations of legislators.

What is the necessary context within which this type of cultural or spiritual production takes place? What are the factors and conditions which promote this form of generation and what are the conditions that impede it? Here we must remember that eros is always desire for 'generation in the beautiful', and it is here that Plato brings in the culturally sanctioned relation of the *erastes* and the *eromenos*.

When someone has been pregnant with these in his soul from early youth, while he is still a virgin, and, having arrived at the proper age, desires to beget and give birth, he too will certainly go about seeking the beauty in which he would beget: for he will never beget in anything ugly. Since he is pregnant, then, he is much more drawn to bodies that are beautiful than to those that are ugly; and if he also has the luck to find a soul that is beautiful and noble and well-formed, he is even more drawn to this combination; such a man makes him instantly teem with ideas and arguments (or speech or ideas—*logoi*) about virtue—the

qualities a virtuous man should have and the customary activities in which he should engage; and so he tries to educate him.... And in common with him he nurtures the newborn; such people, therefore, have much more to share than do the parents of human children, and have a firmer bond of friendship, because the children in whom they have a share are more beautiful and more immortal. Everybody would rather have such children than human ones, and would look up to Homer, Hesiod and the other good poets with envy and admiration for the offspring they have left behind—offspring, which, because they are immortal themselves, provide their parents with immortal glory and remembrance (209B–D)

This, then, is the conceptual and figurative framework within which 'ascent' from the first and most immediate manifestation of eros to its most complete and essential state—loving intellectual union with the forms—takes place. Eros starts with the vulgar attraction to the beautiful body, and as such is centred on those base desires of the *erastes*, for whom the boy is as yet only the promise of gratified desire. But even here, among the acts to which the lover is inspired will be the giving birth of beautiful words and ideas (*logoi*) directed at the boy, and this form of generation has an important transformative effect on the *erastes* himself. Such acts in which the desired object becomes bathed in words lifts it, as it were, from out of its brute sensuously-perceived particularity, and it does this because of the very generality of the words themselves. The boy's body now becomes an instance or exemplar of something greater than itself, a beauty which can now include the boy's soul. The soul, of course, displacing the body, will become the new 'object' of love, but the soul only becomes disclosed to the lover *because of* his original ardour for the body. This has all occurred only because the *erastes* had come to grasp his loved one as held within the magical web of *logoi* that he himself had spun—initially there had been the mere brute fact of the *erastes* arousal by the boy, but the *logoi* induced then allowed the *erastes* to understand his arousal as a type of appreciative registering or acknowledgment of an abstract quality, the beauty instantiated or exemplified in the boy. Thus although a lover must have started by 'devot[ing] himself to beautiful bodies', by virtue of his subsequent altered orientation to the world, he will come to realise

that the beauty of any one body is brother to the beauty of any other and that if he is to pursue beauty of form he'd be very foolish not to think that the beauty of all bodies is one and the same. When he grasps this, he must become a lover of all beautiful bodies, and he must think that

his wild gaping after just one body is a small thing and despise it.

After this he must think that the beauty of people's souls is more valuable than the beauty of their bodies (210A–B)

With this the lover now becomes more capable of perceiving beauty in more and more abstract, and therefore intelligible, rather than sensuous things—laws and institutions, the sciences and so on, thus:

The result is that he will see the beauty of knowledge and be looking mainly not at beauty in a single example—as a servant would who favoured the beauty of a little boy or a man or a single custom—but the lover is turned to the great sea of beauty, and gazing upon this, he gives birth to many gloriously beautiful ideas and theories, in unstinting love of wisdom, until, having grown and been strengthened there, he catches sight of such knowledge, and it is the knowledge of such beauty (210C–E)

In his descriptions of the ultimate end of the process of idealisation, the entirely intellectual grasp of an eternal realm of forms, Plato is true to his reputation as a 'Platonist'. While in Nietzsche's more naturalistic account of idealisation, ideals are generated from the life-process itself, in Diotima's account, Eros is ultimately drawn towards something already existing, the eternally existing forms of Plato's metaphysics, which seem incompatible with the modern naturalistic world-view. But when we focus on Diotima's treatment of the mode of Eros's movement, she is clearly describing what we have characterised, after Nietzsche, as *active* rather than reactive idealisation. Diotima does not see each step in the ascent as emerging out of the imposition of a negating meta-judgment. A lover does not have his ardour transferred to 'higher' things because he is somehow converted to a view of the sensuous body as ugly or hateful. Rather, the lover only comes to 'despise and deem a small thing', the single thing as object of his violent genital love, the boy as simply beautiful body, *after* his love has been transferred to its new object, here the boy as bearer of a beautiful soul. That is, the possibility of the new 'higher' object appearing for the desiring subject has been secured by desire having been attached to the quality of an attracting 'lower' beauty.

Only once the concept of beauty has been extended in a metaphorical way to the soul from the body can the subject then reflectively compare the two sources of attraction and reassess the first, such that it may now seem 'a small thing'. But the position from which a comparison could be made could not have been attained had not the attraction to the body been real and compelling. We might imagine what a 'reactive' equivalent would be like. The sexual attraction experienced initially

would undergo some condemnation—‘that is not love, it is simply lust; whatever true love is, it certainly is not like that!’¹⁵

Plato’s dialectic reappears in a more modern and Kantian form in the late eighteenth century in Friedrich Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, where his concept of the ‘play-drive’ plays the role of the mediating ‘in between’, allowing desires to transform themselves in a process of active, aesthetically directed idealisation. Like eros, the play drive also starts from a base form:

The aesthetic play-drive ... will in its first attempts be scarcely recognizable, since the physical play-drive, with its wilful moods and its unruly appetites, constantly gets in the way. Hence we see uncultivated taste first seizing upon what is new and startling—on the colourful, fantastic, and bizarre, the violent and the savage—and shunning nothing so much as tranquil simplicity. It fashions grotesque shapes, loves swift transitions, exuberant form, glaring contrasts, garish lights, and a song full of feeling. At this stage what man calls beautiful is only what excites him, what offers him material—but excites him to a resistance involving autonomous activity, but offers him material for possible shaping. Otherwise it would not be beauty—even for him. The form of his judgments has thus undergone an astonishing change: he seeks these objects, not because they give him something to enjoy passively, but because they provide an incentive to respond actively.¹⁶

In Schillerian aesthetic education as with its Diotiman precursor, the idealisation of desire does not proceed from the negation or repression of its vulgar precursor but rather from a growth from it, a growth allowed by the active response which has been elicited by the lowly, and which in turn allows a re-evaluation of its initial stimulus. The process Schiller describes is one in which, say, the love of Bach does not emerge from a hatred of the Beach Boys. Rather, the love of Bach is that very love which earlier had been attached to the Beach Boys, and the beauty of Bach had been disclosed to music lovers only in virtue of their own active love for and response to some earlier, cruder exemplar of musical beauty.

With his invocation of ‘drives’, Schiller was sounding a note characteristic of the distinctively modern mode of comprehension—natural science. In the nineteenth century, Darwin’s theory of evolution would propose a naturalistic way of understanding human ideals by grounding them in nature in a way that typically is taken as threatening their normativity. Feeling this threat acutely, Nietzsche

embraced the nihilistic consequences of naturalism, not to celebrate the loss of value, but to attempt some sort of reconfiguration of our understanding and adherence to it, a reconfiguration appropriate to the conditions of modernity. But his method seems to come straight from Diotima, once he has persuaded her to abandon the metaphysical framework of her author, Plato.

In the view of Nietzsche's Diotima, the ideal of beauty might itself be seen to evolve under the pressure of a type of 'selection', but one in which the intentional response of the beholder of the beautiful plays an active role. We might, in Darwinian spirit, describe the first paradigm of beauty in the *Symposium*, the beautiful body of the boy, as the imposed product of sexual drives determined by natural selection.¹⁷ But human intentions necessarily generalise, perhaps simply by dint of their tendency to be expressed in the generalities of language, and the body thereby becomes an instance, although an exemplary or paradigmatic one, of something more general—beauty itself. Placed in the world, the desired body illuminates other aspects of the world which might then be seen as having an analogous quality. But as these new examples of beauty are appreciated and responded to, the paradigm of the beautiful itself becomes free to shift. What was once a model of beauty can be pushed aside by something new, that which was the exemplar now becomes a peripheral and 'small thing', a mere drop in the sea of beauty.

At first, such a picture seems compatible with a naturalistic outlook. For example, empirical studies of the nature of human conceptualisation have shown that the common categories in terms of which we judge the external world indeed have central and peripheral members: sparrows but not emus can be 'prototypes' of birds. And there is no reason to think that what could count as a prototype for some empirical category should be fixed. Thus according to the Darwin-inspired neuroscientist Gerald Edelman, the brain is able to reconfigure continually the perceptual categories encoded in it.¹⁸ This means that although the evaluative dimension of human experience is grounded in the limbic or 'hedonic' system, that ancient part of the brain concerned with appetite and sexual and consummatory behaviour, our evaluative responses to the world need in no way be seen as fixed by such a grounding.

Thus stripped of its *telos* in a metaphysical fantasy, Plato's view seems to offer a remarkably modern way of conceiving of the developmental continuity of an individual's evaluative experience of the world, with its biologically given constitution, while nevertheless not reducing the former to the latter, and it does this by offering a sketch

of a process through which these initially somatic desires are metamorphosed or transfigured into something more 'ideal' *via* language.¹⁹ Our experience and affective response to the world may be initially structured by factors given to us from our biology, but once they are put into words in a process which allows for the creative and figurative transformation and extension, it becomes open to further reinterpretation and recategorisation. Vulgar eros is here a good, in as much as it directs us to the world and engages us with others, but once engaged we may on reflection realise that other forms of eros are possible and even better. And as the forms of our involvements in and talk about the world become more diverse, and as such involvements and talk disclose further aspects of the world to be appreciated and valued, we pass from the rather uniform and repetitive realm of sex to such highly diverse realms of engagement and experience as those of love and aesthetics.

It might of course be objected that without both the idea of a *telos* to this process and the idea of some complete overlapping of the ideals of truth, beauty and goodness occupying this *telos*, the Nietzschean picture can only result in a nihilistic collapse of the objectivity of value, leaving us with the experience of our moral, aesthetic, epistemic lives as being without justification. But it is here, I believe, that the aesthetic medium of this process is crucial.

One of the founders of modern aesthetics, Immanuel Kant, pointed to the peculiarity of aesthetic experience in that its normativity functions for us without our having any conscious access to its norms: we judge some singular thing to be beautiful without being able to give the 'rule' which would justify that judgment. In this way aesthetic experience becomes a vehicle for the presentation of norms which cannot be presented in alternative modes, especially in more 'cognitive' modes of experience. But as we learn from Diotima, the experience of beauty provokes a reaction, a need to acknowledge and name it. We might see Plato's own metaphysical images, such as that of the lover turning towards the sea of beauty, as itself a response to a certain type of world experience, a form of verbal appreciation or acknowledgment of the normative role played by the world itself within our aesthetic, epistemic and moral lives. So understood, it would be judged in terms of the degree to which it conveyed a sense of that experienced normativity.

Understood metaphysically, however, Plato's images are thought of as being meant to capture cognitively those normative essences which explain and justify our practices—in the case of beauty, to capture cognitively what it is about some particular beautiful thing that makes it beautiful. But this is precisely what Kant denied we could

know; and it was precisely an analogous denial that Nietzsche extended to the realms of truth and goodness. That is, in Nietzsche's aestheticised metaphysics, neither are there any extra-experiential, cognitively-graspable principles that we can appeal to as grounds for our epistemic and practical judgments. Thus it is meaningless to search for what it is about ethical action that makes it ethical (that is, some entirely cognitive principle or ground; for example, that the action conforms to the categorical imperative) or what it is about knowledge that makes it knowledge (again, some cognitively graspable criterion; for example, that a belief 'corresponds' to the 'the facts').

Against the expectations generated from Platonist metaphysics, Nietzsche's aestheticisation of other realms of value are often understood as sanctioning a denial of objectivity, and a relativistic attitude of 'anything goes'. Nietzsche saw it the other way around, we feel the normativity of the beautiful, we feel the demand to acknowledge it when we are in its presence despite the fact that we cannot simultaneously cognise the ground of this demand. And if we can experience the compulsion of beauty, we can experience the compulsion of truth and goodness as well. With his metaphysics Plato might have presented us with the problem, but with Diotima's speech on Eros and beauty, he presented us with the solution as well.

Notes

- 1 Other oppositions flow from this: thus, for example, if what is real is the stable realm of being, then knowledge will be conceived as a process of discovery and will aim at some ultimately definitive account; but if being is really a human construct imposed on a flux of becoming, knowledge will be understood as creation and, like other realms of human creativity, admit of plurality.
- 2 And of course, even this residuum of Platonism is denied by many post-modern thinkers.
- 3 Odo Marquard, 'On the importance of the theory of the unconscious for a theory of no longer fine art', in *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism*, ed. Richard E. Amacher and Victor Lange, trans. David Henry Wilson *et al.*, Princeton, N. J., 1979, and Gyorgy Markus, 'Hegel and the End of Art', *Literature and Aesthetics* 6 (1996): 7-26.
- 4 'Scare quotes' because aesthetics is, in the modern sense of a neatly demarcated autonomous domain, unthinkable for Plato.
- 5 In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche told the story of a fall from a golden age of pagan aestheticism in a way different but nevertheless related to his later genealogy. Socratism, a type of hyper-rationalistic orientation to life for which the character of Socrates was the leading example, was there

- discussed as emerging within the artistic tradition of Attic tragedy only to kill it off. The murderer here was the Socratic dramatist Euripides. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, New York, 1968.
- 6 Indeed, it is easy to see the poetics of Aristotle, himself an enthusiast of Euripides, as a codification of such a 'Socratic' approach. For Aristotle, the poetic structure of tragedy is conceived in terms of plot structure and the well-formedness of plot hangs entirely upon the intelligibility of the action it represents. This was linked to Aristotle's support for the secularisation that tragedy had achieved with Euripides. Tragedy must eschew divine influence on events such as the actions of cosmic justice or fate. Rather, what was responsible for apparent turns of fate were factors pertaining to the ethical competence of the characters, importantly, those characteristic flaws within an agent's ethical fabric that Aristotle referred to with the term *hamartia*.
 - 7 Nietzsche's account scandalised because of its overtly anti-Christian flavour, but such anti-Christian sentiment was probably only a making explicit of what had been implicit in earlier forms of a line of thought which has been termed pagan aestheticism. At least since that crossing of pantheism and Hellenism found in the late eighteenth century, a picture of a pre-Christian form of human existence in which value was celebrated as immanent within nature rather than projected beyond it was held up against the other-worldly aspects of Christianity.
 - 8 Nietzsche's approach here might be thought as belonging to that tradition of 'pagan aestheticism' which had been an essential part of the Hellenist revival of the eighteenth century, but Nietzsche seemed to give this tradition a new twist. See Josef Chytrý, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought*, Berkeley, 1989.
 - 9 For Nietzsche, the deed and creation of the rebelling slave is to conceive '“the evil enemy”, “the Evil One”, and this in fact is his basic concept, from which he then evolves, as an afterthought and pendant, a “good one”—himself!', 'On the Genealogy of Morals' in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, p.475. I have explored the logical structure and the consequences of the slave's meta-evaluation in more depth in 'Nietzschean Perspectivism and the Logic of Practical Reason', *Philosophical Forum* 22 (1990): 72–88.
 - 10 The opposing terms for 'bad' similarly had developed from the terms used by such groups of masters to designate the social underclass. Thus the development of the word for good 'always runs parallel with that other in which "common", "plebeian", "low" are finally transformed into the concept "bad"', Nietzsche, 'On the Genealogy of Morals', pp.463–4.
 - 11 Nietzsche gives the concrete example of the ancient Greek term *esthlos*. This term had at one stage signified 'one who is, who possesses reality, who is actual, who is true', that is, true in the sense of a true or full human being. But during the decline of the nobility, the term underwent a

'subjective turn' and now came to designate the nobility in terms of something they 'had' rather than something they 'were'. It became regarded as one of their essential qualities or habits—truthfulness. Thus the Greek nobility started to refer to themselves as 'the truthful', contrasting themselves to the lying commoners. We might think of this change as resulting from the fact that the nobility had lost sufficient power to force them to start answering the question posed: 'What makes you more fully human than me?'; see Nietzsche, 'On the Genealogy of Morals', pp.465–68.

- 12 'On the Genealogy of Morals', pp.465–6.
- 13 For example, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago, 1980, and George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*, Chicago, 1987.
- 14 Plato, *Symposium*, trans. with Introduction and Notes by Alexander Nehemas and Paul Woodruff, Indianapolis, 1989.
- 15 As in Nietzsche's suggestions about the nature of active idealisation, the metaphorical link between the concepts of love and beauty involved here allow something of the preservation of the experience of qualities. Plato's metaphors testify that for him there is, in what it is like to be attracted to a beautiful soul, some continuity with attraction to the body. The beauty of the soul strikes the lover in the way that he can be struck by physical beauty: it can arouse an ardent activity, the begetting of words and deeds, by means of which the lover connects with his beloved.
- 16 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. E. M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, Oxford, 1967, letter 27, 4.
- 17 Of course to be effective in the evolutionary terms sexual drives must promote heterosexual behaviour. But it is clear that the desirable *eromenos* has a distinctly feminised quality and that the *erastes* is attracted to a member of the same sex in only a limited sense. The appearance of masculinised traits in the boy, the first signs of the beard, for example, marked the point at which the love was meant to be 'elevated' to the more Platonic variety.
- 18 Gerald M. Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind*, New York, 1992.
- 19 It is not unusual for Plato's account of love to be compared in this way to that of Freud. See, for example, Gerasimos Santos, *Plato and Freud: Two Theories of Love*, Oxford, 1988.