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# ERŌS AND EDUCATION : PLATO'S TRANSFORMATIVE EPISTEMOLOGY \*

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*RÉSUMÉ* : La notion d'erōs déployée par Diotima dans le Banquet sert ici de clé d'interprétation du discours de Socrate, dans l'Apologie, au sujet de l'engagement. Erōs, en tant que sphère de la vulnérabilité non moins que de la responsabilité, s'avère comme le terrain propre de l'éducation et de la justice. Ceci permet de conclure que le savoir est en effet la transformation de soi à la lumière de son sens du Bien.

*ABSTRACT* : The notion of erōs as it is developed in Diotima's speech in the Symposium is used to interpret Socrates' discussion of taking a stand in the Apology. Erōs, as the arena of vulnerability and commitment, is then shown to define the terrain of education and justice. This allows the conclusion that knowledge is self-transformation in light of one's sense of the good.

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Nature and education (*hē didakē*) are similar ; for education transforms (*metarousmoi*) the man, and in transforming, creates his nature.

Democritus, DK 33

"Not geometrical but erotic necessities," he said, "which are likely to be more stinging than others when it comes to persuading and attracting the bulk of the people."

*Republic* V.458d

Platonic ethics and epistemology are not distinct, and the key to this identity is the essentially erotic nature of the human soul : this means that coming to knowledge should not be conceived as a gathering of information, but as a transformation of one's relationship to one's situation that comes through making the demand upon

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oneself that one be consistent in one's commitments. Section I considers the nature of *erōs*, and finds in this discussion of sex the essential principle of "taking a stand" which, I will argue, is the key to our intersubjective life. Section II considers education, and defines it as learning to be consistent in our commitments ; I will here argue that Plato has an *epistemology of transformation*, which is to say, education means to change oneself. Finally, Section III shows how the project of living up to these commitments — which is itself a commitment we are driven to by our *erōs* — leads us to a commitment to justice as the project of giving others their due, which itself means demanding of others that they be just. This account of justice concludes with an ethics of reading that will be the basis for a program for reading the Platonic texts.

### I. ERŌS

Heraclitus speaks of the *palintropos harmoniē* — the "back-turning harmony" : "they do not understand," he says, "how differing with itself it agrees with itself."<sup>1</sup> A bow is such a back-turning harmony. In a bow, the bow-string is held in a state of tension, and is not allowed to return to its normal state of rest ; equally, the frame is held tense by the short bow-string which, with similar ill-will,<sup>2</sup> refuses to let the frame relax. The bow is precisely the power that results from this internal tension, this self-opposition. This is not like the *kukeōn* — a magic mix of barley, wine and cheese — which, Heraclitus says, "will settle if not stirred,"<sup>3</sup> for the *kukeōn* requires an outside stimulant to set up a tension : the bow will never settle, for it is precisely in the effort of each element to return to rest that the other element is held tense, that is, it is precisely the frame's attempt to straighten that pulls the string tight, and it is precisely the string's effort to fall slack that will not let the frame stretch to its full relaxed length. The *palintropos harmoniē* is this self-opposition that tenses itself through its very effort to relax, that is, it is a unity that is not capable of settling. Book I of Plato's *Republic* gives us in Cephalus a portrait of a human *kukeōn*, that is, a human identity that settles when it is not stirred ; he contrasts, I will argue, with the *palintropos harmoniē* of Socrates in the *Apology*.<sup>4</sup>

Cephalus remarks to Socrates that he has found the calming of sexual tensions that comes with old age to be gratifying, for it has allowed him to engage in the pleasures of philosophic discourse, and this apparent love of philosophy lets Cephalus become the first interlocutor with whom Socrates considers the nature of justice.<sup>5</sup>

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1. DK 51.

2. See DK 80 : "[...] it is necessary to know that war is universal, and justice is strife (*eris*), and all things come to be according to strife and necessity," and DK 53 : "*Polemos* is both father of all and king of all."

3. DK 125.

4. My comparison is indebted to Abraham SCHOENER, "Heroes : an Acephalic Reading of the *Republic*," (unpublished), and *Heraclitus on War* (Ph.D. diss : University of Toronto, 1993). I have developed this notion of the *palintropos harmoniē* in relation to the *Phaedo* in "We Sense That They Strive : How to Read (the Theory of the Forms)," in John RUSSON and John SALLIS, ed., *Retracing the Platonic Text*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1999, p. 70-84, especially p. 73-77.

5. *Republic* I.328d, 329b-d.

Their discourse begins with Socrates comparing inheriting and earning : Socrates has noticed that Cephalus is not particularly concerned about his wealth and he asks Cephalus how he acquired it, for, he says, those who have inherited wealth do not seem to appreciate its worth, and are not so vigorous in their defense of it as those who have earned it.<sup>6</sup> This distinction is relevant to their immediate following discussion about justice. Socrates asks Cephalus to define justice, and Cephalus answers, essentially, that being just to others means giving others what they are owed, that is, paying back debts.<sup>7</sup> Confronted with this definition, Socrates poses to Cephalus what is an obvious challenge : is it just to your creditor to pay him or her back if being paid back will not be in the creditor's best interest ? Faced with opposition, Cephalus runs : he passes off the argument to Polemarchus.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the wild Thrasymachus who later cannot hold back his desire to refute Socrates,<sup>9</sup> Cephalus is completely submissive in his discourse with Socrates. However he has acquired his wealth, Cephalus, it is clear, has not acquired his ideas through earning, for he has no zeal or even energy when it comes to defending them. Despite his claims, Cephalus shows no intrinsic drive to philosophy, for he does not see a controversy as something to be mastered but as something from which to run : he is easily separated from his philosophic views, for they have not been won through struggle and opposition, and in these respects he is like the *kukeōn*.

Cephalus began by telling Socrates of the pleasures of old age, noting in particular that he was no longer "disturbed" by erotic passion. This same passion which has left his loins is absent from his mind. For Socrates, on the contrary, philosophy is to be pursued with the same passion with which young lovers pursue each other in bed. Philosophy is not an amusing chat for retired and impotent businesspeople, but is something to fight over : philosophy works in the medium of proof, of justification, which means the ability to maintain the integrity of a claim in a context of opposition. The philosopher enacts in her arguments "a back-turning harmony like the bow or the lyre," as Heraclitus says, a back-turning harmony like Socrates. *Erōs* is Plato's name for this intrinsic tension, and in living the philosophic life and being prepared to die for his values Socrates shows himself to be leading the erotic life which Cephalus has forsaken. I want to study the element of the animating tension of this fulfilled human identity, namely, *erōs* itself.

*Erōs* — passionate desire — presents itself as a *compulsion* that is much more like the plague-arrows of Apollo than it is like the darts of cupid<sup>10</sup> ; it first shows up

6. *Republic* 1.330a-c. I have considered this theme of inheritance in "Just Reading : The Nature of the Platonic Text," in John RUSSON and John SALLIS, ed., *Retracing the Platonic Text*, p. IX-XIX, especially p. IX-XI.

7. *Republic* 1.330d-331b.

8. *Republic* 1.331c-d. The reference to *mania* in this passage should be considered in light of the discussion of *erōs* in the *Phaedrus*.

9. *Republic* 1.336b.

10. See *Symposium* 207a-b, 203b-e ; cf. *Phaedrus* 231a, 237d-238d, 238c-d, 244a-245c, 250c-252c. The theme of *erōs* as madness in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* is dealt with explicitly by Gerasimos Santas in "Passionate Platonic Love in the *Phaedrus*," *Ancient Philosophy*, 2 (1982), p. 105-114 ; see especially p. 108. I cannot agree with Santas' interpretation, for he seems to me to treat the dialogues as stating doctrines, rather than as opening up avenues for thinking, and to treat his task as interpreter as being to list the

as teenage lust, as the uncontrollable desire to be with a beautiful body.<sup>11</sup> *Erōs* does not stop here, however, and what Socrates' conversation with Diotima in the *Symposium* gives us is a vision of an ascending scale of erotic desires, where in each case it is a different object that exerts upon one a compelling attraction, and it is a different action that counts as the fulfillment of the erotic desire.<sup>12</sup>

The first development of *erōs* is the move from being compelled by a single beautiful body to being compellingly attracted by all beautiful bodies, for one finds that it is not the "thisness" but the "bodiness" that is the attractive element; the initial desire for sex, then, leads a soul to look at all bodies as possible sex partners and not just the first one that excited the desire.<sup>13</sup> But, again, it is not just any kind of body that is the object of young *erōs*: it is the body of another person, that is, a body animated by a human soul. But if it really is the case that it is another necessarily human body with which one wants to have sex, then it is really the soul that must be responsible for the attraction, and so the second development of *erōs* is to recognize that it is really a soul that it is desiring when it feels erotic passion.<sup>14</sup> I think the marking of the move from lust for bodies to lust for soul is well-attuned to the human psyche, and I want to pause and defend this first half of the story of Diotima's ladder.

A student once proposed to me the following account of rape: "it happens because the man has an uncontrollable desire to have sex with her." While I think it is inadequate, I think this definition, and especially its use of the word "with," can helpfully elucidate the theme of body and soul in *erōs*. If this definition does capture the essence of rape, then the rapist's action entails treating "with" as meaning simple bodily proximity in the way that one marble is "with" others in a box, for it is bodily proximity that is the only thing achieved through forcing contact. But notice that to be "with" another person normally means something quite different, which is clear when, for example, we see two women walking in close bodily proximity and we say to ourselves, "I wonder if she is with her." This sense of "with" is not guaranteed by bodily proximity but involves some more intimate and substantial contact between the two subjects. Indeed, if the rapist's motivation really were "to have sex with her" in this sense of "with," then the action has failed, for in the enforced bodily contact

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immediate correspondences and variations, rather than asking how these two dialogues could be telling a single coherent story about *erōs*. In general, I believe that it is his conception of reason, rather than Plato's, that generates the tension between the "ultra-rationalistic" (p. 106) *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, which focuses on *mania*; compare my remarks on Charles H. KAHN, "Plato's Theory of Desire," *Review of Metaphysics*, 41 (1987), p. 77-103, n. 28, below. I do agree, however, with Santas' claim (p. 112) that the *Phaedrus* makes the story of *erōs* pivot around one-on-one interpersonal relations as the real dynamic centre of erotic life.

11. *Symposium* 210a. Though teenage lust makes sense in our culture as the model for erotic passion, it should be remembered that the basic model in the *Symposium* is that of an older *erastēs* and a younger *erōmenos*. See Kenneth DOVER, *Greek Homosexuality*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1989; and Martha NUSSBAUM, "Platonic Love and Colorado Law," *Virginia Law Review*, 80 (1994), p. 1515-1651, for a summary of recent discussions of Greek *erōs*. See also Jesper SVENBRO, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece*, translated by Janet Lloyd, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993, Chapter 10.
12. *Symposium* 210a-212a; cf. 208e-209e.
13. *Symposium* 210a-b.
14. *Symposium* 210b-c.

there is no mutuality or cooperation, which is necessary to this relevant sense of "with" that pertains in human relations. But it seems that some such thing must be the right way to describe the rapist's desire, or else the compulsion for sex would not have to take the form of rape, but could be satisfied through masturbation or stimulation by any other material object.<sup>15</sup> Rape, then, is a phenomenon in which the action contradicts the motivation, and this incoherence within the practice of rape seems to me to shed light on the phenomena of *erōs* in general. In this case of rape, and in sexual contact in general, it seems clear that it is not simply bodily contact that is desired, but contact with the body of a soul, the body of another person.

I therefore think that the story of Diotima's ladder begins right on the mark, and this or two reasons. First, we fundamentally misunderstand sex if we do not see it as a relationship between two *souls*; and, second, in fact we *do* normally begin with — and often retain — such a misunderstanding, and misconstrue sex as a simple rubbing together of indifferent bodies. I would actually go further with this and say that the key to the erotic desirability of the other body is precisely the fact that *it* is animated by a similar *erōs*,<sup>16</sup> that is, sex is a charged body attracted to another charged body (like the bow) and not two inert pieces of matter externally forced into proximity (like the *kukeōn*).

The initial developments of *erōs*, then, are movements of making manifest and being responsible to what was already operative in an earlier situation: *erōs* moves from one body to many bodies in order to do justice to the fact that it is the bodiliness as such that is attractive, and *eros* moves to the recognition that it is the psychic presence — the erotic presence — within the body that is the real ground for its attraction. Having made this move to the psychic realm, *eros* now looks quite different from what our imagined teenager would recognize as *erōs*, and here we see something crucial: if a soul is only operating at a lower level, it will not recognize the higher levels as its own proper development. This point becomes even more obvious in the next developments along the ladder, for, whereas some lustful teenagers might recognize at least a continuity between lust for a body and love for a soul, I doubt that many see a connection between sex and legislation — a connection for which I will

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15. Compare David HALPERIN, "Platonic *Eros* and What Men Call Love," *Ancient Philosophy*, 5 (1985), p. 161-204, who claims that Plato transforms the notion of *erōs* from the traditional Greek understanding of it as "a physical need for release" (p. 166) to a notion of *erōs* as a psychic pursuit for intersubjective wholeness (p. 168-170 ff.); note p. 174: "Every passionate lover is *necessarily* an idealist, on this view, because [erotic] sexual desire is always mediated by an idea or value in which the erotic object participates." I think, however, that Halperin's view is ultimately marred by an inadequate metaphysics of the body; (for my view on what is at stake in the notion of embodiment, see "Embodiment and Responsibility: Merleau-Ponty and the Ontology of Nature," *Man and World*, 27 [1994], p. 291-308). See also Halperin's discussion of *erōs* as geared to respecting the integrity of the object of the *erōs* in its singularity and particularity (p. 173-174, and cf. p. 185). Halperin, however, seems to me to undermine his own account on p. 175-176 because, I believe, he again operates with an inadequate metaphysical account of the relation of universal and particular; for what I take to be a better metaphysics of universals, see L.A. KOSMAN, "Platonic Love," in W.H. WERKMEISTER, ed., *Facets of Plato's Philosophy*, Assen, 1976, p. 53-69, p. 67; and R.G. COLLINGWOOD, *Speculum Mentis*, Oxford, 1924, Chapter 6.

16. See Thomas NAGEL, "Sexual Perversion," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 66, 1 (1969), p. 5-17.

now go on to argue by looking again at how this development makes manifest commitments that are already latent at the lower level.<sup>17</sup>

Just as within the realm of the body *erōs* develops from an attraction to one body to an attraction to many (or all) bodies, so does *erōs* develop from having one soul to having many (or all) souls as its object.<sup>18</sup> But, whereas at the level of bodily attraction the body can be construed by the erotic individual as something it can utilize for its own pleasure, at the level of psychic attraction the erotic individual must recognize that that to which it is attracted is something to which it has a commitment, a responsibility. Indeed, this is precisely what it means to recognize the other as a soul and not a body, that is, to want a soul is to want something that has a will, that makes decisions, and the desire to be *with* such an other (as was illustrated by the failure of rape) is the desire to have the other choose you, that is, it is the desire to have yourself live up to what the other wants. The desire for the other soul, in other words, is the desire to be desired, which is to say it is the recognition that one is subject to the other's will, and that is why I say to desire a soul is to be committed to that soul.<sup>19</sup> But the reasons that one is *responsible* to another soul are not reasons that attach to the idiosyncracies of that soul : as with the rape example, it is because the person is *a chooser* and not because the person is one's friend Robin that that person's consent matters. The reasons that make us responsible to one soul, then, make us responsible for the well-being of all souls with whom we have dealings, and for that reason the next move up the ladder is the *erōs* for laws and customs, that is, the commitment to the ways in which many souls in community represent their interests and upon which they depend for well-being.<sup>20</sup>

Beyond customs and laws, knowledge is the object of *erōs*, which means *erōs* moves to a commitment to what in principle is essential and valuable to any soul *qua* soul, irrespective of the determinacies of its involvement in this or that set of particular circumstances.<sup>21</sup> Beyond knowledge, finally, soul can move from this whole

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17. Compare G.M.A. GRUBE, *Plato's Thought*, Hackett, 1980, p. 114-115 ; see D. HALPERIN, "Platonic *Eros* and What Men Call Love," p. 185-186.

18. See *Symposium* 210c-d.

19. I thus take the view of Gregory VLASTOS, in "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato," *Platonic Studies*, Princeton, 1972, p. 4, that the Platonic view is a view of love as utilitarian self-interest to be the very opposite of the truth ; I take it that Vlastos has mistaken the *logical preconditions of any love* (i.e., the story of love as intentional, or "lacking") to be the marking out of a particular type of love. For an intelligent study of the issues involved here, see L.A. KOSMAN, "Platonic Love," especially p. 64. This desire to be desired by the other is anticipated in the speech by Phaedrus, for his focus on the motivating power of shame and glory is a focus on the desire to appear beautifully to another ; see *Symposium* 178c-e. I have developed this notion of the "with" in relation to the *Phaedo* in "We Sense That They Strive : How to Read (the Theory of the Forms)," p. 71-72, 77-80. See also Francisco J. GONZALEZ, "Giving Thought to the Good Together : Virtue in Plato's *Protagoras*," in JOHN RUSSON and JOHN SALLIS, ed., *Retracing the Platonic Text*, p. 113-154.

20. *Symposium* 210c. Darnell RUCKER, "Plato and the Poets," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 25 (1966-1967), p. 167-170, gives an interesting reading of the *Republic* based on an interpretation of this stage of Diotima's ladder.

21. *Symposium* 210c-d.

list of attachments to attractive things to an attraction to that which made them all attractive, namely, the Form of Beauty itself.<sup>22</sup>

That is the path through which the object of *erōs* develops, and for each object the corresponding activity of loving would likewise differ : loving the body would involve rubbing bodies, or something similar, loving a soul would presumably involve discourse and shared activities, loving souls would involve law-making, loving knowledge would involve study and teaching, and so on. Just as the last step in this ladder is coming to be attracted to the principle that will explain the unity of all the stages of the development of the object, I now want to determine the single principle that will explain the unity of all these stages of the development of *erōs* itself, that is, I want to ask : “What is *erōs* itself ?” I said above that this *erōs* is the Platonic version of Heraclitean tension : I will now claim that it is the essential tension of human intersubjectivity, the tension between my soul and the souls of others.

Socrates' discussion of *erōs* in the *Symposium* begins by focusing on the notion of what one needs and does not have, a “lack,”<sup>23</sup> emphasizing that *erōs* means a commitment to — an attachment to, desire for and need for — that which one's identity defines as one's relevant other ; in other words, to be erotic is to be tied to what is alien to you.<sup>24</sup> To be committed to your other, however, is to define yourself by your ability to be defined for that other, that is, it is to set your own identity up on its terms. What is crucial to *erōs* is thus that it gives up its control over itself, over its own identity, and puts itself — puts its destiny, its well-being — into the hands of something *essentially* other to it. In body-rubbing, it means losing yourself to the compulsion to getting the other body to touch you, losing yourself to the commitment to getting the other body to find a place for you. In commitments to other souls it means re-defining your own values and actions according to the values of others. What this means in each case, then, is that in *erōs* one defines oneself as *essentially* under the gaze of another, that is, one is committed to a project of having the other evaluate one. (No doubt rape is an attempt to bypass this essential vulnerability.)

22. *Symposium* 210e-211b.

23. “Such a man or anyone else who has a desire (*epithumia*) desires what is not at hand and not present, what he does not have, and what he is not (*ho mē echei kai ho mē estin autos*), and that of which he is in need (*hou endeēs esti*) ; for such are the objects of desire (*epithumia*) and love (*erōs*) [...]” (200e, translated by Nehamas and Woodruff). Notice the stress on necessity, *i.e.*, need. L.A. KOSMAN, “Platonic Love,” p. 58 ff., is an excellent study of the real meaning of this notion of “lack” ; on p. 58 he gives a nice account of the significance of this issue of love as lack for Socrates' rhetorical strategy.

24. Diotima herself defines *erōs* in terms of a relationship to a beautiful object, but it is not the possession or contemplation of this object itself that is the goal of *erōs* ; rather, she defines *erōs* as the longing to “give birth in beauty” (*Symposium* 206b-e). I take it that the point here is that in the presence of what we recognize as beautiful we have an uncontrollable urge to “out” ourselves — to express ourselves, that is, to create an image or presentation of ourselves. Beauty is thus not the real object of *erōs* but the medium or catalyst that stimulates us to show ourselves off, where this self-expression is the real goal ; *erōs* is thus the ground of discourse. D. HALPERIN, “Platonic Eros and What Men Call Love,” gives a nice treatment to this point (p. 180-182) ; see especially p. 182 : “Despite its apparent fixation on the beloved object, the lover's desire aims in fact at a liberation and release of his own creative energies. *Erōs* is thus the desire to realize the objective potential in the self” (Halperin [n. 122] also acknowledges L.A. KOSMAN, “Platonic Love,” at this point ; see n. 29, below).



What this means is that, in *erōs*, one sets oneself up for view, that is, one appears, as it were, naked before the judgment of the other ; indeed, my being defined both as this limited self and as what the other sees my self as — this simultaneous setting up and overstepping of the boundary between myself and others — is my being a *palintropos harmoniē*. This tension of being a limited self and being a relation to a defining other is why sex is the sphere of shame, embarrassment and power relations,<sup>25</sup> and it is also why Socrates defines the sphere of conscientious commitment to values as developed eroticism. The commitments of erotic life bring responsibilities : to be anything is to be something for others, which means right from the start our *erōs* makes us responsible for the image we are making, for our public expression.

This Platonic notion of erotic responsibility allows us now to differentiate the *kukeōn* and the *palintropos harmoniē* in human life. To live as a *kukeōn* means to let one's actions commit one to things and then to let oneself not be driven by that commitment : this is the same as not being the same self in both situations, that is, the later self enacts a denial of the self who was performed in the earlier action, and the two selves fall apart from each other, "settling if not stirred." This irresponsibility undermines equally the identity of the earlier and the identity of the later self. The identity of the earlier self is built on the promise of subsequent defense and development : the possibility of its words, for example, meaning anything at all is that they can be taken up by others and developed, and if this is denied we really see that they were not words all along. The later self is undermined to the extent that it portrays itself as later, that is, as a development from the earlier, for no memory can define the soul without an attendant responsibility to living up to that past identity. This human *kukeōn*, then, is a (literally) self-contradictory stance on the responsibilities that its own self sets up for it.<sup>26</sup>

Enacting a human *harmoniē*, on the contrary, means being driven by one's already established commitments, which means letting one's own past *direct* one's future. Whereas Thrasymachus, for example, kids himself that he can change his meaning at any moment, Socrates knows better.<sup>27</sup> Socrates knows that past action

25. See the speeches by Phaedrus and Pausanias, *Symposium* 178a-180b, 180c-185c ; cf. 208c-d, 209b-c.

26. See Stanley ROSEN, "Sophrosune and Selbstbewusstsein," *Review of Metaphysics*, 26 (1973), p. 617-642, p. 623, for a different but related treatment of the theme of the inseparability of justice and self-knowledge.

27. Thrasymachus begins his definition of justice by violating the very rules of definition he himself laid out (*Republic* 1.336c-d, 339a). He proceeds to offer a definition and an explanation of that definition that leads to a contradiction (1.338d-340c) ; there is a short dialogue within this section between Polemarchus and Cleitophon that explicitly makes this point, and that shows why Thrasymachus is not entitled to deny this conclusion. Thrasymachus, however, does deny that he is subject to this conclusion, claiming he meant something different by his words ; his new definition of his terms leads to a comparable problem (1.340c-342e). Thrasymachus is again unwilling to accept that he is responsible for the results (1.343a). This basic structure is repeated a number of times. Thrasymachus eventually claims that Socrates does not let him speak (1.350e) and claims he is just going along blindly without being responsible for his answers (1.350d-e). At each point, Socrates demands only that Thrasymachus be responsible to what he has already said ; at each point, Thrasymachus refuses, with the result that he makes the establishment of a shared understanding through discourse impossible. This situation is roughly mirrored in Meletus's dialogue with Socrates about the meaning of his accusation (*Apology* 24b-28a). With respect to each point of the accusation, Socrates makes Meletus work out in discourse the implications of his own charges to the point that it is clear

does have a way of dictating the future. The erotic life, then — which is the only non-self-contradictory life and therefore the only life that is itself — is the life that has to learn about its future from its past, which means it has to be open to finding out to what it has already committed itself through its actions. This is Socrates' way.<sup>28</sup>

Socrates calls upon himself and others to be responsible to the stands they have already taken. He leads people to see that the implications of their words or deeds are not as they would have expected : he leads people to turn away from their preferred objects to which their attention is usually directed, and instead to turn around to look at themselves, to look at what they are already committed to via the implications of their self-expressions. This "turning around" — *periagōgē* from *Republic* VII — is the essence of Socratic education, and the key to dealing with Socrates is to be prepared to learn about who one already was, even though it may not be who one took oneself to be.<sup>29</sup>

## II. PERIAGŌGĒ

This idea of "turning around" implies that knowledge is not primarily a matter of acquiring actualities, that is, of gathering pieces of information ; more fundamentally, coming to knowledge means transforming the nature of our relationship to our own situation, that is, developing our powers of relating to our world. Advancing knowledge by gathering information presupposes that a stable relationship of oneself to reality has already been established, that is, the basic orientation of things is under-

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that the charge is either ill-founded or incoherent ; Meletus at each point refuses to own up to these implications.

28. See S. ROSEN, "Sophrosune and Selbstbewusstsein," p. 638 : "The philosopher is the erotic man par excellence, but Eros is in itself tyrannical, or leads, unless properly transformed, to the tyrant rather than to the philosopher." C.H. KAHN, "Plato's Theory of Desire," p. 96 ff., likewise considers philosophy as a form of *erōs* ; he makes a comparable point about philosophy and tyranny on p. 98. See also F.M. CORNFORD, "The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*," in G. VLASTOS, ed., *Plato : A Collection of Critical Essays* II, Anchor, 1971, p. 119-131, especially p. 121.
29. S. ROSEN, "Sophrosune and Selbstbewusstsein," studies the notion of self-consciousness in the context of the *Charmides* and the *Republic* and he notes (p. 622, n. 14) the connection of self-consciousness and "turning around," but he does not investigate this point further. C.H. KAHN, "Plato's Theory of Desire," also compares erotic ascent with turning around (p. 94, 101), but he does not develop the parallel. See p. 101 : "In the *Symposium*, the rechanneling of desire from physical lust to metaphysical passion takes place by an essentially epistemic process of *altering the description under which the object is initially described*, and thus *converting* the lover's attention [...]" (my emphasis). I am sympathetic with much of Kahn's project here, but I believe that the contrast he sets up on p. 78-80 is based on a straw Aristotle, and I believe that Kahn himself ends up (by p. 99) attributing to Plato something like the alienation of reason and desire that he attributes to Aristotle : I think his view that *erōs* in the *Symposium* must mean a "rational concern for what is good" (p. 98-99) ends up, if I understand it, introducing a dualism into desire that precisely abandons the significance of Diotima's story of development as I have tried to articulate it in this paper. L.A. KOSMAN, "Platonic Love," p. 60-61, gives an excellent account of how the proper object of our love is really "our true and fugitive nature" (based in part on *Lysis* 218d-222b) ; *erōs* is thus "the desire of each thing to become what it is." Compare *Phaedo* 74d-75b. See also D. HALPERIN, "Platonic Eros and What Men Call Love," p. 184 : "It is necessary to receive proper guidance in matters of erotics from the time of one's youth, as Diotima advises (210a), in order to learn how to match what one seeks (or demands) with what one really wants (or desires)." Compare *Gorgias* 468b-c for the notion that we may be mistaken about what we really want.

stood, and all that is left is the detail work of cataloguing all the precise twists and turns : such a situation is not challenged by what it encounters, and therefore does not have its identity uniquely committed to that which it discovers, rather as Cephalus has no commitment to the “information” that justice means paying debts. For Socrates, on the contrary, advance in knowledge means waking up the sleeping horse that is our assumptions about the nature of things and coming to see for the first time what we have already been committing ourselves to through our behaviour.<sup>30</sup> It is our sense of ourselves, and our habitual way of seeing our world, that in knowledge is thus the matter for transformation : thus, to come to knowledge means precisely to be prepared to let the sense of oneself that one finds oneself given be challenged — (Socrates’ demand that one recognize one’s ignorance) — and responsibly to attend to the commitments implicit in one’s words and deeds in order to let oneself be told who one is. Knowledge is thus, so to speak, “the soul’s dialogue with itself.”<sup>31</sup>

To learn, then, is to change one’s explicit commitments ; such an advance, however, is inseparable from a change in behaviour, and this in three ways. These necessary behavioural dimensions of learning are (i) appropriate preparations, (ii) a changing of focus, and (iii) acting according to new compulsions.

The first behavioural dimension to learning I refer to as preparation. Making the turns of education is the same as advancing up the ladder of *erōs*, first to a love of one other soul, then to a love of many souls, then to a love of what is universal in soul. But moving up the ladder in each case requires increase in sophistication, and presupposes that the preceding step has been made. One who cannot see the need to take responsibility for her own speech, and who cannot act on this — such as Meletus or Thrasymachus — can never develop this discourse to the point of recognizing either its social grounds or its grounds in the structures of soul in general, for these higher erotic actions are actions of discourse, that is to say, these further turns are turns *within the context* that has been established through responsibly communicating with others.<sup>32</sup> Thus, without establishing a coherent *erōs* for single souls, one is not in a position to establish an *eros* for customs. It is only through achieving a responsible “lower order” relation that the object of the “higher order” relation even becomes available for one.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, like Aristotle’s view that we must first develop the habits of good behaviour in order eventually to be in the position to recognize explicitly what good behaviour is, coming to knowledge in this Platonic account of *erōs* and education means coming to find out what commitments have already been animating one’s

30. The image of the sleeping horse is derived from *Apology* 30e ; see also Heraclitus, DK 1, 73. On education, see *Theaetetus*, 167a.

31. *Theaetetus* 189e.

32. Interpersonal discourse is committed in principle to community, but the irresponsible treatment of this (e.g. by Thrasymachus or Meletus) keeps a coherent community from being established precisely because of the self-contradictory nature of the irresponsible communication ; this denial of community in the very act that enacts the community keeps this self-contradictory situation from being able to be developed to a point of turning to recognize the dimensions of its social commitments. See n. 27, above.

33. See *Symposium* 210a1-2.

action, so one must already be engaged in the appropriate kinds of behaving if one is going to be able to advance to the higher level of relation.<sup>34</sup> To become educated requires that one already be acting in a way appropriate to making a turn, where the very principle of this propriety is necessarily unknown to the practitioner. To become educated, then, we must either be fortunate in happening to act the right way or we must give ourselves over to the judgment of another who will lead us, that is, we must trust our teachers to lead us into the right kinds of preparatory actions, (hence the critique of the sophists).

The second requisite behavioural change comes in that even noticing one's implicit commitments demands that one stop attending to the features of one's day-to-day life and instead to *turn* one's focus to precisely that upon which it would never normally focus. The whole idea of a "turn" is, in other words, a behavioural idea, and the point here is that it is *the single self itself* who must *perform this turn*. (This necessarily singularity in education is, of course, what lies behind Descartes's *cogito* argument.)

There is, finally, a third change in action that *must* accompany a coming to knowledge. What we have seen is that knowledge is coming to recognize the commitments one has already endorsed and of which one is ignorant, or which are in opposition to the explicit values one advocates. To recognize a commitment *qua* commitment, however, is precisely to let it compel one's action. Not thus to change in learning of the contradiction, that is, to continue trying to endorse an explicit value (content) that is at odds with the implicit values expressed through one's actions (form), is precisely to fail to know oneself and still to be in contradiction. As long as one maintains that (i) one has seen the commitment but (ii) one is still going to continue opposing it, one is operating like two independent senses without a common faculty of sensing to effect a comparison,<sup>35</sup> that is, it is not one and the same me that is facing both commitments, or again, the one who says (wrongly) "I see both" is not seeing the implicit commitment *as* a commitment, that is, not as something about which she does not have a choice. One cannot know it *as the commitment it is* without changing one's actions, for the key to a commitment is to see it *as* necessary, which means to find it running oneself.

This, then, is an epistemology or transformation, for advance in knowledge is inseparable from a fundamental change in behaviour that essentially embodies that knowledge. One must already be acting in a way adequate to make a recognition possible, and without this kind of behaviour there can be no coming to knowledge, and equally one must then engage in a whole-hearted effort to change one's life *in order to reconcile* the compellingness of the commitments that one comes to recognize : the recognition of them is *nothing other than* the change in behaviour. Epistemology, then, is ultimately about the demands on behaviour, which means knowledge

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34. Knowledge, in other words, is not moving outwards to something new so much as it is taking account of what one is already doing. See ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.1, *Metaphysics* A.1 ; these themes should be borne in mind when interpreting *Phaedo* 72c-76c.

35. *Theaetetus* 184b-186e ; ARISTOTLE, *De anima* III.2.426b17-427a14.

is an issue of ethics.<sup>36</sup> I want to conclude now with a short statement of where these reflections on *erōs*, commitment and knowledge leave us ethically.

### III. DIKAIOSUNĒ

Mostly, we have seen that ethics and epistemology in human life are geared (necessarily) towards the soul's coming to recognize its implicit commitments. *Erōs* is the demand that we be true to our own natures through being open to the education that will lead us to behave responsibly. What our story of *erōs* and education has shown us is that fundamentally we are committed to others, in that we are defined by them : by being erotic creatures, we are *automatically* committed to others, whether we like it or not. Thus the only way to be true to our own natures — and being true to our own natures is an *ontological* demand, that is, a commitment about which we have no choice — is to pursue *dikē* — justice — that is, to work at being true to others, at “giving what is due.”

But, according to our argument, giving others their due ultimately must mean demanding of them that they be true to themselves, for precisely what *their* nature is is a need to be self-equal, self-consistent ; thus our most essential task is to help others to transform themselves out of contradiction. As Socrates says in the analogy of the cave, the one who has “seen the light” precisely sees that this light takes the form of a demand to go back into the cave and help others — to drag others out kicking and screaming.<sup>37</sup> This dragging amounts to two things. It means (a) encouraging others to develop the habits of behaviour that will *enable* them for the first time to *make* the changes in their life that they are not otherwise *immediately* able to do, and (b) doing this by way of leading them to see the contradictions between the form and the content of their actions, between the implicit commitments revealed through their behaviour, and the explicit commitments endorsed in their behaviour. (Notice, by the way, that this epistemology of transformation has the implication that the students cannot be blamed for resisting, and cannot be held responsible for not being able to change on their own ; and this is essentially what Socrates maintains in his second argument against Meletus in the *Apology*, to the effect that one is not willingly unjust, and that injustice requires education, not punishment.) What then is the form that ethical action towards others takes ?

Ultimately, one's *erōs* completes itself in the commitment to *admitting* that one is out for others' best interests, that is, taking one's stand on this. This commitment then means, in action, a serious effort to use one's life to enact a medium within which the soul of the other can have a dialogue with itself.<sup>38</sup> Coming to knowledge means be-

36. I was happy to discover that these points have also been noted explicitly by D. HALPERIN, “Platonic *Eros* and What Men Call Love,” in almost the same language as I use, although he does not work them out as I have in this paper ; see p. 182 : “Unlike the acquisitive response to beauty [...] the procreative response vouches for the radically transformative power of *erōs* [...]” ; and p. 180-181 : “[...] under Diotima's description, therefore, ethics and erotics are the same science.”

37. *Republic* 519d, 520a-e, 515d-516a.

38. See *Symposium* 209c.

coming a therapist — a *therapōn* or ritual substitute — for others. This is what Socrates does in discourse with others by being their memory for them, and showing them what they said and what it meant, in an effort to lead them to make the comparison within their own souls and to recognize their need to make changes because of their self-contradictions.<sup>39</sup> It is likewise what the lover of laws will do by developing laws that aim to produce a society that is organized around commitments — laws — that do justice to the necessary commitments of human life.<sup>40</sup> We could work out similar points with respect to the actions of the lover of knowledge, but instead I will end with what this proves about how the Platonic philosophy itself demands that we must read the Platonic texts and it is simply this : to read a Platonic text *erotically* is to read it with the demand that it be true to itself, which means to read it to see if it lives up to the commitments it itself puts forward.

A Platonic dialogue is to be treated the same way Socrates treats the discourse of Thrasymachus or any interlocutor, namely, he follows what it says and demands that each new thing said be measured according to what else has been said. The Platonic texts are not written in Plato's voice, and do not have the status of a set of doctrines to be taken in as filling for the soul<sup>41</sup> : the Platonic texts exist as tasks for reading, which means they make the demand on us that we must make demands on them, and the only way to be true in the reading of them is to be midwives for them and thus to work to force them to answer to themselves, and to use the very principles they endorse to challenge whatever doctrines they try to put forward. In teaching us to be erotic, the Platonic dialogues lead us to demand of them that they be allowed to be self-critical. What we are now prepared to do, then, is to launch a new project of reading Plato, and it will be a project of reading for contradictions within the text in order to enact in our reading that *palintropos harmoniē* that would be the real identity that the *erōs* of the Platonic *corpus* is struggling to realize.<sup>42</sup>

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39. Compare the image of the philosopher as midwife, *Theaetetus* 148e-151d ; see the image of "pregnancy in soul" in *Symposium* 206c, 209a. See L.A. KOSMAN, "Platonic Love," p. 60-61, on love as the recognition of the other that calls that other to live up to her/his true self.

40. This should be borne in mind in interpreting the dialectic of unjust states in *Republic* VIII.

41. See Diskin CLAY, "Reading the *Republic*," in Charles L. GRISWOLD, JR., ed., *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, Routledge, 1988, p. 19-33 ; L.A. KOSMAN, "Platonic Love," p. 59.

42. I have tried to enact this project in relation to the *Ion* in "Hermeneutics and Plato's *Ion*," *Clio*, 24 (1995), p. 399-418.