

WHOSOEVER SHALL SAY TO HIS BROTHER, *RACHA*

(Matthew 5:22)

by Warren Johansson

[Editor's Note: The study of the usually condemnatory references to homosexual behavior that are found in the varied body of writings known as the Old and New Testament has given rise to much controversy. Generally accepted, however, has been the conclusion that the four Gospels contain no discussion of the subject — that is to say, that the words and actions attributed to Jesus Christ in these biographical texts yield nothing directly pertinent to homosexual behavior. (Efforts to interpret in this light such passages as Matthew 8:5-13; and John 11:13, 5 and 36, 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7 and 20 — the "beloved disciple" passages — have carried little force of conviction.) Taken by themselves, the Gospels would appear to render at best a Scotch verdict, "not proven," with regard to the views of the founder of Christianity toward same-sex conduct. Any assertions about such attitudes on the part of Jesus himself would have to be inferred from the other opinions attributed to him, situating them in the historical perspective of Jewish tradition, on the one hand, and the intellectual and moral world in which he lived, on the other. In these contexts, with their restrictivist coloration, it would be rash to assume *a priori* that the absence of evidence signifies tolerance or permission. The problem is compounded by the fact that for many years much advanced biblical scholarship has conceded that we can know nothing of the "historical Jesus," but only something of the image that the Primitive Church constructed of his person for missionary and devotional purposes.

Almost two centuries ago, the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham wrote "Jesus has in the field of sexual irregularity preserved an uninterrupted silence." That silence is about to be broken, for in the following article, Warren Johansson explores for the first time in detail the one word which Jesus is reported as having pronounced on our subject: *racha*. Until the discovery of certain evidence from papyri, this word of Semitic origin was truly a *hapax legomenon*, that is, a unique term in our surviving record. This rarity may account in part for the obscurity in which the expression has hitherto been shrouded. In the latter part of the paper Johansson adduces some collateral evidence from various later historical strata in Europe, which while not crucial to his argument, vividly attest to the word's later manifestations and penumbra of meaning.]

The word *racha*, until recently a hapax legomenon of the New Testament, is one of the little riddles of the Gospel text that have not as yet found a satisfactory explanation. The passage in which it occurs reads in the King James Version:

But I say unto you, that
whosoever is angry with his brother [without a cause],
shall be in danger of the Judgment:
and whosoever shall say to his brother, *Racha*,
shall be in danger of the counsel:
but whosoever shall say, Thou fool,
shall be in danger of hell fire.

Modern printings of the KJV have changed the spelling of the word to *Raca* following the edition of 1638, which altered the reading to accord with the *textus receptus* of the Greek Testament and, indeed, all modern editions except those of Lachmann and Tischendorf.

The general meaning of the passage is clear enough: Where the law of Moses forbade only murder, Jesus sets a vastly higher ethical standard for his followers; not merely physical assault and mayhem, but even anger and verbal aggression are condemned and proscribed. It is a standard so high that later editors had to insert the words "without a cause," which have, however, been stricken by modern critical scholarship.

Simple anger at one's fellow man, in this piece of Oriental hyperbole, is a crime for which the offender should be hailed before the court of first instance; the expression of contempt *racha* is an offense that ranks with the capital crimes trial for which is reserved to the Sanhedrin, the highest tribunal of the Jewish nation; and the malicious utterance, Thou fool, is a transgression for which the perpetrator merits eternal damnation. By this picturesque crescendo Jesus drives home his point: The sins contemplated and willed by the heart are as heinous as those contemplated and realized in deed.

I shall not here go into the complex question of the historicity of Jesus or of the authenticity of the Sermon on the Mount, of which this passage forms a part. In general, I agree with Allard Pierson that the Sermon on the Mount is an utterance of Jesus in the same sense that the Book of Proverbs is the work of King Solomon.¹ I should add that the Solomon — not of history, but of Jewish legend — is the prototype of the Jesus of the canonical gospels. His proverbial wisdom, his healing skills, his power over the world of the demonic, his accession to the throne of David his father — all these traits foreshadow the role of Jesus as the Messiah, the anointed king of Israel.²

But what does all this have to do with our subject? This paper addresses the problem: What is the meaning of the word *racha*? The text of the Gospel of Matthew includes no explanatory gloss, as is usual with foreign words that would otherwise have been unintelligible to the Greek reader, yet the commentators and lexicographers of late antiquity unanimously understand the word as Semitic: *raka* = Hebrew *raqā* "empty, emptyheaded, brainless" and thus as parallel to

Greek *mōros* "fool" in the final clause. Alongside this explanation of the word as deriving from the root *ryq* "to be empty", there is another, recorded by the Byzantine lexicographer Zonaras and repeated in the first dictionary of the Greek Testament by Georg Pasor, which would render the foreign *raka* as *κατάψυτος* "fit to be spat upon", hence "despicable", as if from the root *raq* "to spit."

Not a few of the modern commentators have been dissatisfied with this solution, inasmuch as it can scarcely be reconciled with the minority reading *racha* supported by α° DW and the totality of the Latin witnesses. — Edgar J. Goodspeed surmised that the epithet was "a bad name, perhaps so vile that Greek literature has nowhere preserved it, except in Matt. 5:22, where the evangelist mentions it only to forbid its use." But it remained for an expert on Syriac and Palestinian Christian Aramaic, Friedrich Schulthess, to make the relevant suggestion that it could represent Hebrew *rakh* "soft", with the emphatic form *rakhhka* subsequently losing the doubled consonant. As a Hebrew (or Jewish Aramaic) word it would therefore mean "weaking, effeminate." The Arabic cognate *rakḥun* commonly denotes the physically or morally inferior. At the time when Schulthess wrote this explanation, no other instance of the word was known in Greek, albeit the Semitic derivatives of the root *rkk* "to be soft" were well attested.

Then, in 1934, a papyrus was published that had belonged to the archive of Zenon in Philadelphia, in Ptolemaic Egypt. Dated February 6 or 9 of the year 257 before the Christian era, it includes the phrase *hoi peri Antiochon ton rachon* "those around Antiochus the *rachos*". The editor, C. C. Edgar, remarks in his introduction to the text: "Amyntas, to whom I have ventured to ascribe this letter, was one of the chief lieutenants of Apollonius" to whom the letter was addressed. "Some of his letters have an individual character rather rare among Zenon's correspondents, and are spiced with uncomplimentary epithets, such as *Kallinax ho kinaidos*". The full reading of the phrase is *Kallinax ho iektōn ho kinaidos* "Kallianax the carpenter the cinaedus", which shows that the second term is not to be taken in the sense of "professional dancer."

This passage strengthens the hypothesis advanced by Schulthess twelve years earlier, that *racha* is the vocative of a word derived from Hebrew *rakh* "soft", but specifically a vulgar Greek loanword in which the Semitic etymon has been assigned the semantic value of Greek *malakos* *málthakós* "passive-effeminate male homosexual", attested in this sense in the title of the play *Hoi Málthakoi* by Cratinus, the older contemporary of Aristophanes. The word is a product of the initial contact between Jew and Greek in the newly-founded city of Alexandria, and belonged to the most obscene stratum of the slang of Hellenistic Egypt. It shows, incidentally, that even in the third century before the Christian era the Jews and the pagan Greeks were one in their contempt for the passive male partner in the homosexual act. The Latin transcription of the word further establishes that it was a foreign expression and should, therefore, be written *rachas*, with smooth breathing, while the vocative form in the New Testament should be *rachā*.

Another point in support of this explanation — and one that has been totally ignored until now — is that in the *Gaunersprache*, the argot of German thieves and beggars, the word *rach* is recorded in the meaning "tender, soft, effeminate, timid, cowardly."¹ Its origin is to be explained by the fact that three-fourths of the distinctive vocabulary of the *Gaunersprache* is taken from Hebrew and Yiddish. Furthermore, the dictionary of Eliezer ben Yehudah offers Hebrew *rakh* as the rendering of German *moll* = Italian *minore*,

English *minor* as a term in music."² Last of all, the glossary of the *jenische Sprache* compiled by Cajetan Karmayer (1788-1847) contains the word *Ruchas* "wine", which can only be explained with reference to the Romany word *möl, möl* "wine".³ Hence the following pairs:

Greek <i>malakós</i> "effeminate"	Hellenistic Greek <i>rachās</i> "faggot"
Medieval Latin <i>molle</i> "minor"	Hebrew <i>rakh</i> "minor"
Romany <i>möl</i> "wine"	Jenisch <i>ruchas</i> "wine"

This table illustrates how the Hebrew term has again and again been drawn into the semantic orbit of Greek *malakós* = Latin *mollis*.

Yet one more linguistic consideration is that the word *mōros* "thou fool" in the last clause of the verse is rendered by *nābhāl* in the Vetus Hebraea of St. Matthew,⁴ and both that word and the abstract *nēbhālāh* "folly" have a strongly erotic connotation, as the Greek counterpart *aphrosynē*.⁵ The *nābhāl* is not merely the one who "hath said in his heart: There is no God," he is also the sexual wrongdoer and aggressor, as in Judges XIX 23-24. Thus the entire passage is not merely a Semiticizing pastiche, it also has an undertone of double entendre and irony that made it too subtle for the pagan readers of the second and third centuries — which is why modern commentators have wrongly attempted to decompose the text and reduce it to a shorter, primary form.⁶

Two other words in the passage require an explanation. The first, *énochas* "in danger of" corresponds to Hebrew *ḥayyābh* "obliged for, answerable to, guilty of, subject to," which causes an apparent loss of parallelism in the Greek, since the first two clauses refer to the venue of the trial and the third to the locus of punishment. The second, *id synedrō* "the counsel" in KJV, must refer to the Sanhedrin, the highest legislative and judicial body of the Jewish nation. As some Jewish apologists in modern times have sought to prove that *id synedrion* in the Gospels does not mean the Sanhedrin, but only a political council convened by the ruler, it is necessary to go into the origin of the term.

The starting point for the whole semantic development is the Hebrew word *kēneset* "assembly," which was the designation of *ha-kēneset ha-gēdōlāh*, "the Great Assembly", the supreme legislative body formed in the days of Ezra the Scribe as the constituent assembly of normative Judaism. In time — possibly after the establishment of the Second Commonwealth — this was succeeded by the *bēt dīn ha-gēdōl*, literally "the Great House of Law." The former term was rendered in Greek by *synedrion*, the latter by *dikasterion* "court, tribunal," and Hesychius obligingly glosses the first by the second.⁷ However, *synedrion* not merely persisted, but gave rise to Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic *sanhedrin*, *sanhedrī*, whence the name Sanhedrin that entered our language in the second half of the sixteenth century, in the wake of the discovery of that tribunal by the Christian Hebraists of the Renaissance.⁸ On the other hand, *bēt-ha-kēneset* became the designation for the house in which the Jewish community assembled for prayer, but this was expressed in Greek by *synagōgē*, whence Latin *synagoga* and French/English *synagogue*. What confirms this interpretation is that the Syriac and Hebrew versions of Matthew render *synedrion* and *synagōgē* alike, the former by *knāšā*, the latter by *kēneset*. The account of the passion of Jesus in Mark and Matthew leaves no doubt as to the import of the narrative: The highest tribunal of Jewry tried Jesus and found him guilty of a capital crime, and the Jewish mob in the streets of Jerusalem ratified the verdict and even demanded that the prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate, carry out the sentence by crucifixion.

3

rach

In conclusion, it may even be admitted that Yoel Arbeitman's rather fanciful interpretation of Matthew V:22 has a core of truth.¹¹ If *rachás* denotes the passive-effeminate homosexual, then *móros* = *núbhál* could apply to the active one, as in the account of the outrage at Gibeah whose perpetrators are accused of committing an act of "folly" (*nebhalah*) without precedent in Israel. The parallelism would be just as in I Corinthians VI:9, where as I have demonstrated, the *malakof* and *arsenokóitai* are the passive and active culprits respectively.¹² Oesterley's observation that "as to many actual words, knowledge of Greek is insufficient for understanding them" has turned out to be doubly true, and the assertion that "Jesus never so much as mentioned homosexuality" has proved to be absolutely false.¹³

Notes:

¹A good summary of the evidence is to be found in the article by Eberhard Nestle, "Raca," in *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ed. James Hastings (New York, 1912), vol. 2, pp. 467-68.

²W. O. E. Oesterley, "The Study of the Synoptic Gospels Exemplified by Matthew v. 21, 22", *Expositor*. 6th series, 12:28-32 (1905).

³Allard Pierson, *De Bergrede en andere synoptische fragmenten, een historisch-kritisch onderzoek met een inleiding voor enkele leemten in de methode van de kritiek der Evangelien* (Amsterdam, 1878), pp. 214ff. See also K. H. Boersema, *Allard Pierson. Eene cultuurhistorische studie* (The Hague, 1924), pp. 310-11.

⁴Moncure Daniel Conway, *Solomon and Solomonic Literature* (Chicago, 1899), pp. 176-233; David J. Halperin, "The Book of Remedies, the Canonization of the Solomonic Writings, and the Riddle of Pseudo-Eusebius", *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 72: 269-92 (1982), esp. pp. 287-92: Solomon's self-inflicted penance = the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus.

⁵Georg Pasor, *Etyma nominum prioriorum itemque analysis Hebraeorum, Syriacorum, & Latinorum vocabulorum, quae in Novo Testamento usquam occurrunt*, pp. 79-80, appended to his *Lexicon graecolatium... in N. Testamentum* (Geneva, 1637). The modern work on the problem is summarized in Robert A. Guelich, "Mt 5:3: Its Meaning and Integrity," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 64: 39-52 (1973), esp. pp. 39-40, where he concludes that even the evidence for *racha* makes "this explanation only slightly less than certain." See also the same author's *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, Texas, 1982), pp. 184-189 and esp. p. 186.

⁶Edgar J. Goodspeed, *Problems of New Testament Translation* (Chicago, 1945), p. 22.

⁷Friedrich Schulthess, "Zur Sprache der Evangelien. Anhang. A. *racha* (*raka*), *móre*," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 21: 241-43 (1922).

⁸C. C. Edgar, "A New Group of Zenon Papii", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 18: 112-13 (1934).

⁹In a letter from Amyntas to Zenon of 258/257, published as No. 483 in the *Pubblicazioni della Societa Italiana per la ricerca dei papiri greci e latini in Egitto*.

¹⁰Goodspeed had already suggested such a reading on pp. 22-23 of the work cited.

¹¹Christian Heinrich Schweser, *Des klugen Beamten idgheles Hand-Lexicon... Nebst einem Anhang eines vollständigen Wörterbuchs von der Südisch-teutschen und Rothwelschen oder sogenannten Spitzbuben Sprache, zum Gebrauche derjenigen, so mit Juden handeln, oder über dieselben gerichtliche Verhöre und Inquisitionen halten müssen...* von Germano Philoparcho. Aufs neue vermehret von Christoph Friederich Krackherr (Nuremberg, 1768), p. 508: *Rach*, *weich*; Friedrich Christian Benedict Avé-Lallemant, *Das*

Deutsche Gaunertum in seiner social-politischen, literarischen, und linguistischen Ausbildung zu seinem heutigen Bestande, vol. 4 (Leipzig, 1862), p. 456 (*rach* in Judeo-German), p. 588: *Rach*: *zart*, *weich*, *weichlich*, *furchtsam*, *verzagt*; Günter Puchner, *Kundenshall, das Gekasper der Kirschenpflecker im Winter* (Munich, 1974), p. 262: *rach*: *zart*, *weich*. It is noteworthy that the *Gaunersprache* also has the words *reck*, *reckam*, *reik* in the meaning "empty, hollow", hence clearly preserving the distinction between the Hebrew etyma. A possible use of *Racha* in the sense "Pfui, Verräter" = "Get lost, stoolie" is recorded by Ernst Rabben, *Die Gaunersprache (hochum loschen). Gesammelt und zusammengestellt aus der Praxis - für die Praxis* (Hamm in Westfalen, 1906), p. 109 (with specific reference to Matthew V 22).

¹²Éliezer Ben Jehuda, *Thesaurus totius Hebraicitatis et veteris et recentioris*, vol. 13 (Jerusalem, 1951), p. 6587, quoting Moritz Steinschneider, *Die hebraeischen Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Berlin, 1893), p. 970, n. 159. The word figures in an elementary treatise on music translated from Italian into Hebrew.

¹³Hans Gross, "Das Gauerglossar der Freistädter Handschrift", *Archiv für Kriminal-Anthropologie und Kriminalistik*, 3: 305 (1900): *Rachas* (*der*): *Wein* (*der*); Franz Nikolaus Finck, *Lehrbuch des Dialekts der deutschen Zigeuner* (Marburg, 1903), p. 74. The *Jenische Sprache* is the argot of South German thieves and vagabonds in contact with the Gypsies.

¹⁴Adolf Herbst, ed. *Des Schemtob ben Schaphrut hebraeische Übersetzung des Evangeliums Matthaei nach den Drucken des S. Münster und J. du Tillet-Mercier neu herausgegeben* (Göttingen, 1879), p. 9.

¹⁵Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und chaldäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*. Siebente Auflage, bearbeitet von Franz Eduard Christoph Dietrich (Leipzig, 1868), p. 348; William F. Wyatt, Jr., "Sappho and Aphrodite," *Classical Philology*, 69: 213-14 (1974).

¹⁶Konrad Köhler, "Zu Mt 5, 22", *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 19: 91-95 (1920). See also Éd. Massaux, "Le Texte du Sermon sur la montagne de Matthieu utilisé par saint Justin", *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 28: 439-40 (1952).

¹⁷John Selden, *De Synedrüs & Praefectura iuridicis veterum Aebraeorum*, Liber Secundus (London, 1653), pp. 105-09, 674-76; Jacob Levy, "Die Präsidentur im Synhedrium," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 4: 266-74 (1855).

¹⁸See the historical dictionaries of English and the other modern languages. The responsibility of the Sanhedrin for the death of Jesus is a problem of pietistic Christian scholarship, not of medieval theology.

¹⁹Yoel Arbeitman, "Look Ma, What's Become of the Sacred Tongues," *Maledicta*, 4: 80 (1980).

²⁰Warren Johansson, "Ex parte Themis: The Historical Guilt of the Christian Church," in *Homosexuality, Intolerance and Christianity: A Critical Examination of John Boswell's Work*, published by the Scholarship Committee of the New York Chapter of the Gay Academic Union (New York, 1981), pp. 2-5.

²¹Oesterley, p. 17. Some homophile apologists have assumed that simply because homosexuality is not mentioned in the Gospels, Jesus condoned it or would have regarded it with toleration. Certainly his strictures on divorce and adultery do not imply any relaxation of Jewish moral teaching on those subjects; if such analogies apply, and no one can say conclusively that they do not, his attitude toward homosexual acts and feelings could scarcely have been positive or approving.



THE DEFINITION OF LOVE IN PLATO'S *SYMPOSIUM*

BY DONALD LEVY

For anyone who wants to think philosophically about love, the only way to begin is to reflect on the problems first raised in Plato's *Symposium*. The dialogue is original in at least two ways—in that it exposes the presuppositions of Greek sexual morality to the sort of critical scrutiny practiced by Socrates, there is simply nothing like it by anyone else before. In addition, the new theory of love and the new ideal of it developed in Diotima's speech appear to be Plato's own equally original advance over Socrates' philosophy.

The dialogue records the brilliant conversation at a dinner party at which Socrates is a guest. Those who speak before Socrates mainly share what Jeffrey Henderson refers to as the typical Greek tendency to glorify the instinct of sex rather than its particular objects (*The Maculate Muse*, [New Haven, 1975], 205). For them, love (*eros*) is a god whose beauty and goodness they compete with one another in praising. Even Pausanias, who takes care to distinguish noble from base love, claims that "it is always honorable to comply with a lover to attain excellence" (185b)—even if the lover turns out to be bad, it does the boy credit to have been so deceived! It is this almost universally held belief in the intrinsic value of sexual love against which Socrates sets himself from the start; love, he says, is neither beautiful nor good (though he does not mean it is ugly or bad, either). Love cannot be beautiful because it is the desire to possess what is beautiful, and one cannot desire that which one already possesses, Socrates argues. That love is nothing good in itself, but is merely a means to the attainment of things that are good in themselves is emphasized again at the very end of Socrates' recital of Diotima's speech when he says "human nature can find no better helper than love" (212b). Even Socrates' own love of testing the opinions of others is not exempt from this new test; just as Socrates had surprised Agathon by claiming love is not beautiful, so Diotima bewilders Socrates with the idea that "the object of love is to procreate and give birth in the presence of beauty" (206e). It is not enough, she seems to say, for a philosopher; a lover of wisdom, merely to assist at the birth of ideas in others, playing the midwife, herself barren (to which Socrates often compared himself), examining the new-born ideas for soundness. Such activities have no intrinsic worth; they are of value only if they lead the philosopher to bring forth theories of his own. The genuine lover of wisdom must himself conceive.

The new account of love introduced in the final part of Diotima's speech is one she is not certain Socrates can understand, she says. This appears to be Plato's way of signalling the radical shift in what follows from the comparatively simple attempt to define love by finding the element common to all types of love (typical of Socrates' method) when no distinctions of value among types of love are made (202d-209e), to Plato's new approach. Now the different types of love are to be ordered hierarchically, one being judged superior to another because its object is in-

herently better. Further, this hierarchy of love-objects involves another non-Socratic idea—that there is one ultimate object of love to which all the others must be tending in order for them to be objects of love at all. For those who seek to understand love, this absolute beauty, existing apart and alone, is the final goal of all their previous efforts. To achieve the vision of absolute beauty one must first progress from love of physical beauty in an individual to love of all physical beauty; then, love of beauty in the soul leads to awareness of the beauty of activities, institutions, and sciences. Upon surveying all these different kinds of beauty, one will be led to a glimpse of the science whose object is absolute beauty.

This theory of love has appeared defective in at least two ways to Gregory Vlastos, whose "The Individual as Object of Love in Plato" (in *Platonic Studies*, [Princeton, 1973]) is the most important recent discussion of Plato's views. According to Vlastos, the defects in Plato's account of love can be seen by comparing it with the definition of love Vlastos accepts, and which he adopts from Aristotle—"Love is wishing good things for someone for that person's sake." Vlastos's first objection is that since Plato has already defined love as the desire for oneself to possess what is beautiful, his idea of love, however spiritualized it may be, remains essentially ego-centric (*ibid.*, 30). Secondly, Plato does not see that love fundamentally and primarily has persons as its object; for Plato, the love of persons is placed far below the love of an abstract entity, absolute beauty. "What we are to love in persons is the "image" of the Idea in them" (*ibid.*, 31). In a note Vlastos says "This is all love for a person could be, given the status of persons in Plato's ontology."

We are to love the persons so far, and only insofar, as they are good and beautiful . . . the individual . . . will never be the object of our love in Plato's theory . . . [which] does not provide for love of whole persons, but only for love of that abstract version of persons which consists of the complex of their best qualities. (*Platonic Studies*, 31)

So, for Plato, our affections for concrete human beings are "lesser loves," as Vlastos paraphrases it (*ibid.*, 32), to be used "as steps" (211c) to the attainment of absolute beauty. Vlastos concludes his criticism by noting the emphatic frequency of this idea (*ibid.*, 32).

Without trying to deal with the entire array of evidence Vlastos presents to support these criticisms, it is enough to point out in reply to the first objection that Vlastos's definition of love, compared to which he finds Plato's defective, seems a definition not of what love is, but of what love ought, perhaps, to be. Fairly clear examples of love abound which do not always conform to our moral ideals of love; the love of children and parents for one another—often negligent, selfish, confused, slow to develop—is one. So it is probably wrong, in defining love, to lay down as a necessary condition of one's loving a person at all that one seeks what is good for the other for the other's sake. At least some of the time when we love, we may be seeking what is good for others for our own sake, not theirs, as Aristotle recognizes (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII, ch. 1); and we must also consider the possibility that we may not even be seeking what is good

for the other at all—"smothering" mothers, murderously jealous husbands are clear examples. (This matter is discussed in some detail in Alice Balint's "Love for the Mother and Mother Love" in Michael Balint's *Primary Love and Psycho-analytic Technique*, [New York, 1965]). If these examples are granted, then Vlastos's definition of love does not state a necessary condition of love. Accepting his definition would make it impossible to distinguish between a person's loving well, and that person being a genuine instance of a lover.

Vlastos's definition seems not to state a sufficient condition of love any more than it states a necessary condition, since there are cases of persons who seek what is good for others for the sake of the others (i.e., because the others need or deserve good) when love for the others is not the motive, and may not even be present. Nurses, firemen, teachers take care of, seek to do what is good for others, even if love for the others is wholly absent. It may be, as Diotima argues, that love motivates us whenever we achieve anything good; the nurse, firemen, teacher might love the science, art, skill to which each is devoted. But granting this point does not at all narrow the distance between Plato's theory and the requirement laid down by Vlastos.

I have restricted myself to arguing here that Vlastos's definition of love is defective;¹ but even if it were accepted, his conclusion that Plato's idea of love is an egocentric one does not directly follow. For his argument to work, Vlastos must show that desiring for oneself to possess what is beautiful never consists in wishing good things for someone for the person's sake; Vlastos must show that the first *cannot* consist in the second. But suppose the beautiful thing one desires for oneself to possess is the good (*Symposium*, 204e). Further, suppose that some of the time the good one desires for oneself to possess is virtue. At least some of the time, desiring to possess virtue for oneself *consists* in wishing good things for someone for that person's sake. It would not be correct to say that wishing good things for someone for that person's sake is merely a *means* to acquiring virtue for oneself; the good one seeks to possess for oneself is—to be the cause of what is good for another person for that person's sake.²

¹ Whether Vlastos is right to suppose that his definition is the same as Aristotle's is a complex question. Certainly most scholars have agreed with Vlastos's interpretation of the definition of love in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. An excellent opposing interpretation can be found in W. W. Fortenbaugh's "Aristotle's Analysis of Friendship: Function and Analogy. Resemblance, and Focal Meaning." *Phronesis*, XX, #1, 1975, 51-62.

² One obstacle to seeing that there is nothing essentially egocentric about Plato's definition of love probably comes from our imagining an incompatibility between it and Paul's "Love seeketh not its own" (1 *Corinthians* 13). If Paul is interpreted to mean "Love consists in seeking only what is good for others, never for oneself" perhaps there is something to fear here. But, as modern translations make clear, what Paul meant to say was "Love does not insist on its own way" (*Revised Standard Version*), "Love is . . . never selfish" (*New English Bible*). To be selfish means to ignore or neglect the needs and wishes of others in pursuit of one's own good. Not being selfish then consists in not ignoring or neglecting others; it need not consist in not pursuing any goods

Vlastos's second objection is actually three tied together—(1) Plato ranks love of persons far below love of other things such as absolute beauty. According to Vlastos, Plato does so because (2) Plato takes love of individuals in themselves to be impossible—only their good qualities can be loved; and partly because (3) Plato understands love of persons to consist in nothing more than love of absolute beauty by way of individual persons. The individual person we love is merely of use as an image of beauty, as a means to it.

It should be noted, in reply to (3), that Diotima does in a sense speak of using particular objects of affection, for example, other persons, to gain knowledge of absolute beauty—but the use to which they are to be put is as examples, instances of beauty, as W. Hamilton's interpretive translation (of 210d and 211c) suggests. If we use a person in this way, it does not follow that that person cannot really be loved by us—any more than our using Thomas Jefferson as an example of a great president implies that we do not really admire him. Of course, to use a person in that way implies that we do really admire or love him, or in Plato's case, that we do regard the person as a genuine instance of beauty.

Besides, when Diotima speaks of using examples of beauty, she is speaking of those who seek to be initiated into love's mysteries, who seek to learn what love really is. For that, a person must understand absolute beauty, and to achieve that, one must use the objects of one's love as examples, images of absolute beauty. In saying these things, Diotima seems to be thinking of a quite distinctive imaginative process—one people might engage in without being obliged to treat the objects of their affections merely as examples of something else. Certainly, a person might engage in such an activity without necessarily believing that all anyone is ever really doing in loving is using the objects of love as examples of something else, or that using the objects of love as examples of something else is all that we ought to do with them. Diotima's recommendation of this imaginative process does imply that if (and when) we wish to understand the mysteries of love we must go about it by thinking of the beautiful objects to which we have formed attachments as examples of absolute beauty, leading us onward. But not everyone is always engaged in seeking this, and when not so engaged it would be absurd to treat others merely as instances of something else. It does not appear correct to attribute to Plato the view that we cannot love individual persons, or that we can love them only instrumentally, or that we ought to love them only instrumentally. Diotima does say "This above all others . . . is the region where a man's life should be spent, in the contemplation of absolute beauty" (211b); that region is not the only region in which we can spend our lives—or even the only region in which we ought to spend our lives; of all the regions in which life should be spent, it is the highest, Diotima says—so there are others.

of one's own at all. It would be an error to make it a necessary condition of love that the lover not be seeking what is good for himself. If this point seems trivial or obvious, the reader might consult Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros* to see the crucial role played in the minds of some scholars by the interpretation of Paul's remark which I have criticized.

If Vlastos's objections do not reveal any basic flaws in Plato's theory, as I have argued, this does not mean there are no problems in it. The real trouble may be, not as Vlastos thought, that Plato ranks the love of persons far below other sorts of love, but rather that love itself, regardless of its object, has no intrinsic value for Plato, and therefore ranks below things that do have it. The value of love is entirely dependent upon the worth of its object, Socrates had emphasized at the beginning of his discussion; love is at best a mighty helper to human nature—but nothing more.

The oddness of this cannot be avoided, though the logic of the argument may seem good; knowledge, virtue, beauty seem to be inherently superior things to the love we have for them. Whereas they are inherently good, our love for them seems to be good only insofar as it helps us to acquire them. As plausible and insightful as this may sound, it is nevertheless natural to protest that life devoid of love would be worthless, and that love itself therefore must have some great inherent worth. Perhaps Pausanias was not so wrong after all to judge the deceived lover as he did.

But it would be a mistake to suppose that the only alternative to Plato's treatment of love as merely instrumental in value is the typical Greek view Socrates reacted against. That view saw value in love—but merely because it was pleasurable in itself and productive of excellence. Is there no intrinsic value to love higher than mere pleasure? One solution to this problem would be to argue that the intrinsic value of love is to be found in its being constitutive of the soul; that is, to claim that love is the fundamental activity (or one of them) all souls are necessarily always engaged in, whatever else they may be doing. Then, the worth of love is established, if the worth of the soul is. Such a claim is clearly not part of Pausanias's commendation of love, nor is it part of any of the praises of love pronounced by the speakers in the *Symposium* before Socrates. Such a view of love as constitutive of soul might seem to be the one Diotima expresses (205a; 205c) when she says

Now do you suppose that this desire [for what is good] and this love are characteristics common to all men, and that all perpetually desire to be in possession of the good, or what? (205a)

But Socrates' response leaves it unclear whether he accepts the whole of this view: "That is exactly what I mean; they are common to all men." Diotima made two distinct claims, and Socrates assented only to the weaker of the two, it seems, that is, to the claim that all men love, at some time or other, we might add. This view is associated with the idea that every man has a master passion—love of money, or of physical prowess, or of wisdom—which are all expressions of the desire for good and for happiness, according to Diotima (205d). This view requires that (a) all men love at some time or other, and (b) each man loves some one thing more than any other thing. It is consistent with these conditions that much of what men do is not done out of love at all. We must keep separate the stronger thesis that all human activity is motivated by love, as well as the thesis that love is the essential activity of the soul. These three views are not equivalent, and Plato does not accept the last one. This we know from the *Phaedrus*, where the essential activity of soul is said to be eternal motion, self-motion

(245e), of which love is perhaps a resemblance. To be sure, love is "the greatest benefit that heaven can confer on us" (245b)—but it is not constitutive of soul.³ Indeed, that love is said to be a type of madness conferred on us at all implies that we are able to exist without it.⁴

A complete resolution of Plato's doubts about the role of love in the soul would have to take up and reply to his view of the emotions (and therefore of love as well) as alien to intellect, "the best part of the soul" (*Phaedrus*, 248b). Part of the answer might also draw upon features of his theory of knowledge as essentially recollection. That is, if there were something which, to be known at all, must be loved, it would be difficult to deny that loving it was intrinsically good if knowing it was held to be good in that way. Even if it were granted that knowing it was intrinsically better than loving it, the intrinsic value of loving it would not be undermined. Whether there are any such objects of love and knowledge is a question lying outside the scope of this paper, though it is at least plausible to say that God is such a being, since it is hard to make sense of the claim that someone knows God but does not love God.

Perhaps a different type of case of the following sort illustrates the same point; suppose the only way, the only conceivable way, to gain self-knowledge (or any other kind of knowledge) is through loving others.

³ Does the claim that love is the greatest benefit that heaven can bestow upon us imply that love must be greater than knowledge or justice, which are inherently good? The implication would succeed only if it were possible for knowledge or justice to be conferred. However, if we take seriously Plato's doctrine that knowledge is recollection, then even heaven cannot confer knowledge upon us—it must be recollected. That justice cannot be conferred either follows from another of Plato's views—that virtue (and hence justice) is a kind of knowledge.

⁴ J. M. E. Moravcsik considers, but dismisses, the idea that when the soul reaches the higher stages of the ascent in the *Symposium* "it no longer has passions or aspirations." ("Reason and Eros in the Ascent Passage of the *Symposium*," in Anton, J. P., and Kustas, G. L., eds., *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, /Albany, 1971/, 285-302 at 294) He is forced to consider this possibility because there is an evident absence of emotion-steps in the higher stages of the ascent, in contrast to the lower ones. He concludes that though "eros is still at work in the soul in the later stages, it no longer functions as a guide, thus not appearing in the sequence of steps described. No change in over-all aspiration is needed in order to lead the soul from the contemplation of the sciences to the comprehension of the Forms. Like Virgil in the "Divine Comedy" eros helps as a guide only until we reach the final stages; there contemplation becomes self-sufficient" (*ibid.*, 294). But it is unclear how eros can still be at work in the soul when contemplation becomes self-sufficient, since Moravcsik noted earlier

"in general one can say about the causal influence of eros on the mind that eros is what pushes the mind to new investigations" (*ibid.*, 292).

Presumably, when contemplation becomes self-sufficient, eros ceases to be that which "pushes the mind to new investigations." Incidentally, the Virgil analogy seems unsuited to Moravcsik's point, since Virgil vanishes when he ceases to serve as a guide (*Purgatorio*, Canto XXX); he does not continue to accompany Dante in some non-guidance role.

Further, suppose that loving others well is sufficient for self-knowledge. It would then be hard to deny that love was intrinsically valuable, if the knowledge depending on it was assumed to be intrinsically good. These cases suggest that Plato's worry about love's inherent worth rests upon a presupposition hard to justify, namely, that any knowledge or other good reached as a result of love necessarily can be obtained or possessed without love. This presupposition must be false if, as I suggest, love is at least sometimes a necessary condition of recollection.

The subsequent history of philosophizing about love reflects some of these concerns; it is not until Plotinus, I believe, that love is conceived to be constitutive of the soul.⁵ (The idea seems wholly absent in Aristotle's psychology; love is purely an ethical problem for him.) Augustine's famous remark, "My love is my weight. To whatever place I go, I am drawn to it by love" (*Confessions*, Book XIII, chapter nine) implies both that love is constitutive of soul (as he takes weight to be constitutive of body), as well as that whatever good, e.g., knowledge, he achieves, it is the result of that love; this essential connection between love and knowledge receives extended examination in *On the Trinity*. Both of these thinkers can be seen as struggling with the same problem inherited from Plato—that of understanding love in such a way that its intrinsic as well as its instrumental value is made clear.

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⁵ "This being, Love, has from everlasting come into existence from the soul's aspiration toward the higher and the good, and he was there always, as long as Soul, too existed." (*Ennead* III. 5.9, translated by A. H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library, [Cambridge, Mass., 1967], *Plotinus*, volume III, at 203).