

***Kalos* or That Which is Beautiful**

Introduction

Often when starting a new article I go through a routine which I liken to ice skating. First of all, a more or less general idea of what I want to do pops into my head. Usually this happens without attempting to interject or devise a new idea or something similar. Reading has to do a lot with it as well as having engaged in a conversation or best of all, sitting quietly for an extended period of time. All these fall under the category of prep work, if you will. Instead of giving in to the temptation of following the example of an amateur mechanic who loves to engage in tweaking here and then over there, I prefer to let the insight that have visited me make their own space, hence the value of sitting in the physical sense. In other words, there's a direct correspondence between mental and bodily sitting or to put it another way, letting go. In this way any idea that presents itself does so completely on its own.

Trying to manipulate an insight that comes our way is anathema. If it had legs and became aware of this, it would get up and leave at once. Essential here is showing reverence for the new insight that has graciously made its appearance. Such language doesn't mean it's alive like some kind of spirit, but it does represent in essence a message needing to be unwrapped....from an angel ¹? That would be ideal, so why not entertain the possibility? Should you try to hurry along the unpacking of an insight, like an angel in all its shyness the original idea slips further and further away. If you persist, the idea is pushed way out of reach at the risk of not being able to be recovered. Also you have to be on your toes to recognize an insight when it comes to you. That's how it is with the visitation of an angel or *mala'k* as we see in scripture. Similarly we have to let the angel leave on its own which it usually does in an instant. Thus the time of visitation is generally short but enough to appreciate it's visitation that we may unpack the message delivered to us.

All this is necessary preparation before putting on your skates and getting on the ice which I find is more preferable than hardwood by reason of the smoothness involved. Now you start circling the insight taking care to make long, gentle swishing turns. This is important to keep you in orbit. Start off slowing while getting used to ice, for essentially you're going around in one big circle multiple times. As for the swishing sound, it's a great way to describe the action of the blade which determines everything. You simply don't move quickly across the ice as in a race where everyone goes straight ahead but are learning to make sharp, graceful turns. This infers a gentle yet firm quick push to keep you in the formation of a circle. Another nice feature about this image is that it's largely done in silence.

All the while the circling becomes increasingly tighter without you realizing it. Then intuitively

¹ I use angel in the Hebrew sense of *mala'k*, fundamentally a messenger, not some being with wings dressed in white.

you know when to stop and without realizing it, you've come close to the center, the goal for which you've taken all this trouble. As for stopping, you do it in one quick gesture using your entire body by leaning to one side and turning your skates at an angle which effects the stop. There's something definitely pleasant in doing this as anyone can tell by watching a professional. I might add that in real life skating the sound and spray of ice has a lot to do with the appeal.

As for the center or the reason you're doing all this, you don't enter but remain just outside due to respect, reverence and above all, gratitude. The next step after pausing a while is to reach into your pocket for a pair of specially fashioned magical-mystical scissors and cut out the insight, gently transferring it on your computer. This is a delicate task that needs to be done slowly and with the skill of a surgeon because the insight is being transferred from one environment to another. As for the scissors, they represent our active engagement relative to the insight at hand where we've gained confidence and knowledge to see how an article will take on a particular form and flourish after it had arisen from the original insight that popped into our heads. From that point on we can more easily unravel what we've seen from afar and enjoy the content. This would resemble the unfolding of a scroll in order to read what's on the parchment. While the joy as well as effort that gone into this skating is finished, we've just reached the beginning of what we want to or perhaps better, where we want to go.

+

Some if not most of the material covered here with regard to Plato's **Symposium** has been subjected to intense examination throughout the last two thousand years which in a way gives credence to the observation that it's close to impossible to come up with new insights. However, in the last generation and a half—I add half because temporarily speaking we're not quite up to two full generations—this heritage has been superseded by economic and scientific pursuits which have largely blinded us to other fields of interest. The result? We find ourselves walking around as experts in this and that yet are at a loss as how to live or better, how to flourish. Un-moored might be a better way to put it which means we're adrift without realizing it. Such a state may initially go unnoticed since it implies floating on a smooth, untroubled sea. However, after some time we become distracted by other things that happen to be floating in our vicinity and loose sight of how we got where we're at. In sum, we're simply clueless as how to get our vessel underway ².

It isn't so much abandonment but forgetfulness of our heritage extending several thousand years back, of course, is not the full picture of where we are today. However, it seems to be a major cause of many of our troubles. Any interests other than the just mentioned economic and scientific ones are deemed unnecessary and held as a waste of time. That sentiment isn't

² Although it was written some twenty years ago, **Icarus Fallen** by Chantal Delsol offers a good commentary on this state of affairs.

out there publicly but implied. The usual question which has a lot of merit is how can you make a living except engage in something that can be applied to the real world? One of the best ways to counter this is to ask à la Socrates, where is your sense of truth, beauty and virtue? I can just hear him today asking, "Tell me how that contributes to a life well spent."

In this instance beauty or *to kalon*³ is singled out as important ingredient because it has an appeal which is universal and automatic or spontaneous. We don't dilly-dally as to deciding what is beautiful but instead recognize it at once. As we all know, beauty applies to non-material things such as ideas, mathematics and above all else, a life lived in accord with sound moral principles. Implied is that most of us have a similarly automatic distaste for what's ugly in all these fields. There's no need to reflect whether or not something is beautiful or ugly. Most of the time it's self-evident. Certainly there are nuances and exceptions, but I'm speaking about that which applies to most of us on a day to day level of experience.

As for the image of skating with which this article began, I've found it to be helpful the more I get into the subject at hand because despite the fact that beauty is so universal, it proves to be more elusive to grasp. To check this out, go ahead and simply ask someone. Most of the time we get a dumb stare. The same applies to two other universals such as love and virtue (*eros* and *arete*). We hear these words tossed about that rarely do we give them the attention they deserve. Prior to that above mentioned one and a half generation, the case was otherwise. So when we hit upon a text such as Plato's **Symposium**⁴, the language used there is almost other worldly as it pertains to people, things and situations as a whole.

Before getting into a discussion as to beauty in and by itself we have to deal with a myth which Diotima⁵ presents consisting of two children of Aphrodite, Penia and Poros. As for Penia, her name translates as poverty or need and because of this, she's essentially desperate all her life. That means she's always on the hunt to make up for what she lacks, her *aporia* [203.c]. This consists of the noun *poros*, a means of passing prefaced with the alpha privative thereby making it a lack or absence with regard to going or a passage. Thus Penia has to seek compensation which she does by hook or crook. She decides to lay with Poros whose very name conveys self-assurance in his completeness. As a result, the child sprung from their union is Eros or love which has a strong connotation of desire, this being an important

³ *To kalon* or the beautiful almost always defined as such. It also involves admiration, shapeliness as well as elegance. Thus we're dealing with a very inclusive word. More later will be said about the adjective *kosmios* which fleshes out *to kalon*.

⁴ **The English translation usually favored here is from Plato, Complete Works**, edited by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, 1997). The Greek text comes from the series entitled **Platonis Opera** published by Oxford.

⁵ Diotima may or may not be a historical figure. That is incidental to the matter at hand.

constituent.

It so happens that Eros was conceived on the birthday of Aphrodite, goddess of love as well as beauty, *eros* and *to kalon*. By reason of this happy coincidence, Eros was destined to follow Aphrodite and by nature is a lover of beauty (*erastes* as from *erao*, the verbal root of *eros* and *to kalon*). Despite Eros being poor and neither delicate (*haplos*, soft to the touch) nor beautiful, he is tough and a true son of need, *endeia* here equivalent to *penia*, the former also as deficiency and leaning more to having a defect. On the other hand, Eros is like his father *Poros*, “a schemer after the beautiful and good” [203.d], *epiboulos* also as one who plots against (*epi-*, upon). This is important insofar as beauty has...let’s say...a vigorous side, not something to be put on the shelf and to be admired from time to time.

What’s so special about Eros is that he’s “neither by nature (*phuo*, to bring forth, produce) immortal nor mortal” [203.e]. This is a unique insight which pretty much goes against the grain of how we think about love, almost always preferring one to the exclusion of the other. Naturally we’re suspicious of anything comprised of two opposites and believe that something is wrong somewhere. However, this in-between-ness enables us to appreciate both love and beauty in a new way that despite the ancient authority of the text at hand, unfortunately it has been left by the wayside.

Despite this close to almost one hundred percent abandonment, Eros has the potential of springing to life and dying all in the same day. If that pertains to one day, certainly it applies to the others. It’s Eros’ paternal side...Peros or means...which enables him to pull this off. As the text has it, “Love (*eros*) is never altogether in or out of need and stands, moreover, midway between ignorance and wisdom” [203.e] ⁶. This position described as midway or literally “in the midst” (*mesos*, also as middle) is where the action’s at, so by reason of it Eros is neither fish nor fowl. Indeed, it takes some getting used to in order to appreciate this. Closely allied with *mesos* is the adverb *metaxu* or in-between with regard to the good and the not so good which plays such an important role with Poros and Penia, becomes something of great value should we choose to capitalize upon it. We’re certainly aware of it primarily through the senses, sight being the dominant one. Hearing comes is second. I wonder about the other three. Is taste beautiful? What about something we touch? And smell, which like taste, gets inside us?

As for the sense of sight, everyone agrees that it’s Number One. We can’t avoid it unless we shut our eyes or hole up in some dark room. The other way to avoid beauty—and this is the most common of them all—is simply to ignore it or more directly, not to see it even while we’re looking at it straight in the face. The fundamental reason is that we’re too preoccupied with

⁶ I prefer the rendition here of **The Collected Dialogues of Plato** edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairnes (New York, 1961). Actually it’s helpful to read this edition as well as Cooper’s for a broader understanding of the text.

either thoughts or more commonly, with our electronic devices. Hearing follows pretty much the same pattern. The major difference is that to hear beauty we have to focus more and not be distracted by anything that crosses our attention, notably thoughts. Music is the first thing that comes to mind as well as natural sounds such as rain and the chirping of birds. Yes, we can continue seeing but do so in an unfocused manner. On the other hand, should we combine both sight and hearing as often is the case, we get a double treat when it comes to something beautiful. That, of course, requires more attention; I prefer this word over concentration because the latter connotes something that's forced and devoid of fun.

As for taste, smell and feeling, I don't know any instance where the adjective "beautiful" is applied though each of these senses have their own words of approval, usually adverbs. I guess an adverb fits because when coming to describe how something tastes, smells or feels, the demand is for words which apply to the quality of a relation. So when asking someone about their experience we say something like how does it taste? How does it smell? How does it feel? As Socrates says in the **Symposium**, these senses are subservient to Beauty in and by itself. The way that works will be described a bit later.

All five senses operate pretty much continuously and at all times even if we may be less attentive to their operation, especially the "adverbial ones" just described. While obviously important, they aren't as essential as seeing and hearing. As for these two, we know people who function well even though they cannot see. The same applies to those who are deaf. Though I haven't read any scientific proof, it seems that not being able to hear is a more difficult handicap to bear than not being able to see. I thought it'd be the other way around, but confirmation came my way from three people with that handicap. I guess that's proof enough.

It seems a given that each and every one of us has an inbuilt sense of beauty. It's a stable ⁷ reality whether we're good, bad or as in most cases, a combination of both. So should you want to win a person over, acknowledge that he or she has this inbuilt capacity, that it doesn't exist outside oneself but is part n' parcel of our human constitution. Talk about a level playing field. Nothing could be more appealing and non-invasive. As for beauty, it has a way of capturing our attention and not letting it go. The senses—and again I mean primarily sight and hearing—play a more active role in bringing it from outside into ourselves. The other three are wholly interior. Some would say they are more primitive, but one thing is certain, they are more immediate and have a way of keeping what comes from the outside inside us where they tend to linger in a very physical manner. Interestingly the Cistercian monastic tradition speaks of reading the Word of God through the practice of *lectio divina* in terms of chewing followed by digesting it. St. Bernard of Clairvaux is big on this. Suffice to mention this

⁷ I prefer "stable" over "unchanging," the latter often used in such instances. The reason? It connotes something static and therefore less than attractive. "Stale" might be a good way of putting it!

fascinating topic in passing. So all in all we as persons function as one big intake machine. It never rests, even apparently during sleep, always drawing conclusions as to what is beautiful and what is not though the latter doesn't have to be downright ugly or despicable.

Although we take in beauty through our senses, our understanding of it remains somewhat limited. Yes, our enjoyment of it is real, but we have a slightly uneasy feeling that something is lacking. By that I mean we'd rather have a more comprehensive grasp of it and best described by the alternate Greek verb *kosmeo*. Furthermore, it's the source of the adjective *kosmios* and the noun *kosmos*, all really quite loaded words⁸. Both pertain to qualities that evoke admiration or delight, an expression of high regard for a person, that which is respectable, honorable. What all three have in common is a sense of order as well as good behavior and decency. Thus the verb infers a whole array of characteristics that apply to how we respond naturally to whatever is beautiful and without any restrictions. These words have a special way of imposing an order on our perceptions of beauty which we'd otherwise lack, for that is the fundamental meaning of the noun. In other words, *kosmeo* is universal ranging from human flourishing to the heavenly cosmos which is derived from this verbal root.

Another attractive feature of *kosmeo* is that it can apply to how a woman adorns herself such as by the dress she wears. The dress has a way of amplifying her beauty which we take in whole and entire, not in bits and pieces. You neither see nor hear someone so adorned; rather we behold her neither here nor there but all at once. Such a woman has an innate order, something we're attracted to naturally. Another manifestation of this comes across by her hair style. If I recall correctly, the English word *cosmos* mentioned in the last paragraph ties in with the adornment associated with a woman's hair. The reason? When we look up at the night sky the myriad of stars are scattered...waved across our viewing area...much like the long flowing hair of an elegantly dressed woman. As for that flowing, the rotation of the Milky Way is representative of it.

As for the technical definition of the cosmos, I got the following from one of the first sites that popped up on the Internet and seems as good as any: "The cosmos is an alternative name for the universe or its nature or order. Usage of the word cosmos implies viewing the universe as a complex and orderly system or entity. The cosmos is studied in cosmology—a broad discipline covering scientific, religious or philosophical aspects of the cosmos and its nature. Religious and philosophical approaches may include the cosmos among spiritual entities or other matters deemed to exist outside the physical universe." What's nice about this definition is its broad, all-at-one scope. By that I mean it's more than the usual scientific view as associated with our use of the term universe. Universe belongs to prose whereas cosmos to poetry. Perhaps this might not be the best way of putting it, but I was delighted the definition

⁸ A great quote pertain to this: "When the philosopher, by consorting with what is ordered and divine and despite all the slanders around that say otherwise, himself becomes as divine and *ordered* as a human being can." **Republic** 500.c

for including religious and philosophical elements.

Another word worth mentioning here related to *to kalon* and *kosmeo* is *arete* generally rendered as virtue which, of course, is true. However, it implies that which is excellent or standing out from the background of other things deemed more or less as neutral. So as you go through life and encounter all sorts of people, situations and things, how do you know which word to apply? That's a rhetorical question, of course, because you don't walk around all uptight and armed with knowledge of the definitions of these three words and waiting to see which one fits into which situation. Rather, pausing to lovingly waste time by admiring how each one applies is the key. Then with time...and not much, really...we're sufficiently armed to let each one find its application. This it does without our interference.

The Symposium Excerpt

With this brief outline in mind relative to *to kalon*, we can now turn to perhaps the most outstanding example of beauty from the Dialogues of Plato. The excerpt at hand comes after the discussion about Poros, Penia and Eros in the **Symposium** (210.a-212.b). After each paragraph are included some brief notations with regard to beauty. Awkward as these may be, they're done in an attempt to flesh out what Socrates means by love or *eros*. I return to that word whose proper form (Eros) is the name of the child of Poros and Penia. From what I gather, *eros* is tied in with beauty, and without it you can't get very far because the two are intimately connected. The person speaking here is Diotima⁹.

#1 Even you, Socrates, could probably come to be initiated into these rites of love. But as for the purpose of these rites when they are done correctly— that is the final and highest mystery, and I don't know if you are capable of it. I myself will tell you," she said, "and I won't stint any effort. And you must try to follow if you can."

In a loving, familiar way Diotima puts down Socrates which reveals the close bond between the two. At issue is being initiated, *mueo* also as to be instructed which means that the person involved must be of noble character before receiving special training. In the case at hand, Socrates fits the bill quite nicely. The initiation at hand has to do with love, *ta erotika* or "those things of love" or caused by love obviously inferring a description of *eros*. After all, what's involved is the final and highest mystery, *teleios* and *epoptikos*. The former is that which tends towards an end or completion and the latter, that which is of the most extreme or highest indicated by the preposition *epi-*.

Diotima is careful to say that these rites must be done correctly, *orthos* also as rightly with the verb *meteimai*, literally as to go with. *Orthos* turns out to be an important adverb in this lengthy excerpt which shows that she's serious about her words taking effect as intended.

⁹ Even though beauty or *kalos* occurs frequently in this extended excerpt, it's noted by reason of its importance. The same applies to other words despite their frequency.

Therefore it's worth paying attention to when it occurs. And so Diotima decides she will give all the effort she's capable of in order that Socrates won't leave her behind. Here the noun is *prothumia* or eagerness (*pro-* or before + *thumos*) rendered as all one's heart, and the verb pertaining to Socrates is *apoleipo*, (not) to leave Diotima behind.

#2 A lover who goes about this matter correctly must begin in his youth to devote himself to beautiful bodies. First, if the leader leads aright, he should love one body and beget beautiful ideas there; then he should realize 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 this wild gaping after just one body is a small thing and despise it.

Another example of *orthos* or correctly in the sense of going about the matter of love as it pertains to those who are young when it comes to things that are beautiful (*kalos*) as applied to the body, *pragma* usually associated with business. Due to the young age involved, an instructor (*ho hegoumenos*, one who leads...as Diotima) is important insofar as the person under her tutelage loves (*erao*) one body and gives birth to beautiful ideas there, *logos* or word-as-expression modified by *kalos*. The idea of *logos* implies the ability to communicate not so much by speech but by a transmission of the insights at hand through *mueo* or initiation.

Next he's to realize that the beauty (*to kallos*¹⁰) of one body or *soma* equals the that of all *soma*, *katanoeo* also as to perceive (*kata-*, in accord with). In other words, both are the same. Should he devote himself to the beauty of form...*eidos* (essentially that which is seen) with *epi* or upon and *kalos*, it will be absurd (*anoia*, lacking mind or *noos*) to maintain (*hegeomai*, also as to lead) that the beauty (*kallos*) of a given body is the same for others. Having come to this realization (*ennoeo*, to place in the *noos*), he will set himself (*katistemi*, *kata-* or in accord with) to be the lover of every beauty body, *erastes* and *kalos*. Thereupon he'll consider (*hegeomai*) this a small thing and despise it, *kataphroneo*, to look down upon with the adverb *sphodra*, exceedingly.

#3 After this he must think that the beauty of people's souls is more valuable than the beauty of their bodies, so that if someone is decent in his soul, even though he is scarcely blooming in his body, our lover must be content to love and care for him and to seek to give birth to such ideas as will make young men better. The result is that our lover will be forced to gaze at the beauty of activities and laws and to see that all this is akin to itself, with the result that he will think that the beauty of bodies is a thing of no importance. After customs he must move on to various kinds of knowledge. 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 favored the beauty of a little boy or a man or a single custom (being a slave, of course, he's low and small-

¹⁰ *Kallos* is simply a variation of spelling, that is, with regard to *kalos*.

minded)—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 be strengthened there, he catches sight of such knowledge, and it is the knowledge of such beauty.

Next it's important to consider (*ennoeo*: to place in or *en-* one's *noos* or mind) that the beauty (*kallos*) pertaining to the soul is more honorable (*timios*). Thus when a person's soul is fitting (*psuche* and *epiekes*), even if it's in the husk (*anthos*, also as blossom) of a despicable (*smikros*, small) body, this will suffice (*exarkeo*, *ex-* or from giving it emphasis) to both love and to cherish (*erao* and *kedeuo*, the latter also as to attend to). Not only that, it will engender ideas (*logos*, word as expression) which contribute (*poieo*, to make) to the betterment of the young.

The result? From here one will be compelled to consider the beauty (*theaomai*, to look upon, to view with *kalos*) of institutions and laws. He will conclude that the beauty (*kalos*) associated with bodies is of little importance (*smikros*, small). After this he advances to various types of knowledge (*episteme*, acquaintance with) and sees (*blepo*) that beauty (*kalos*) is not confined to one example. Instead, one turns (*trepo*) to beauty which resembles a great sea. Gazing (*theoreo*, to behold as a spectator) upon this he gives birth to many wonderful ideas and theories (*dianoia*, thought, notion). Also he attains a bountiful harvest in *philosophia* which essentially is the knowledge of beauty, *episteme* and *kalos*.

#4 Try to pay attention to me, she said, as best you can. You see, the man who has been thus far guided in matters of Love, who has beheld beautiful things in the right order and correctly, is coming now to the goal of Loving: suddenly he will catch sight of something wonderfully beautiful in its nature; that, Socrates, is the reason for all his earlier labors:

Diotima ask Socrates again to pay attention as best he can, *prosecho* literally as to have towards-which) his *noos*. The person who thus far is guided (*paidagogo*, to train and to teach) in matters pertaining to love (*ta erotika*) and who has seen (*theoreo*) beautiful things in the proper order (*kalos* and *orthos*) is approaching (*pros*) the goal or *telos* (also as end) pertaining to love (*ta erotika*). Now he'll see (*katorao*, to look down upon) something most marvelous and beautiful in nature, *phusis* modified by *thaumastos* and *kalos*. Such...says Diotima directly to Socrates...is the reason for the lover's earlier efforts (*ponos*, pain).

#5 First, it always is and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes. Second, it is not beautiful this way and ugly that way, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another; nor is it beautiful here but ugly there, as it would be if it were beautiful for some people and ugly for others. Nor will the beautiful appear to him in the guise of a face or hands or anything else that belongs to the body. It will not appear to him as one idea or one kind of knowledge. It is not anywhere in another thing, as in an animal, or in earth, or in heaven, or in anything else, but itself by itself with itself, it is always one in form; and all the other beautiful things share in that, in such a way that when those others come to be or pass away, this does not become the

least bit smaller or greater nor suffer any change.

Gignomai, apollumi, auxano and *phthio* or to become, to perish utterly, to increase and to waste away: four verbs put in the negative or not pertaining to beauty or *kalos*. The same applies to being shameful (*aischros* and *pros*, direction towards which) with regard to *kalos*. And so the rest of the paragraph continues in a kind of apophatic manner with the conclusion that beauty is by itself with itself, the two prepositions being *kata* and *meta* or according to and with as accompanying. Another way of putting it is that beauty is of one form, *monoeides*, the verbal root being *eido* or to see...seen as one or as one whole. Everything else shares in this, *metecho* literally as to have with.

#6 ¹¹ So when someone rises by these stages, through loving boys correctly, and begins to see this beauty, he has almost grasped his goal. This is what it is to go aright, or be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning of this very Beauty, so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful.

Another example of the adverb *orthos* or rightly which is important for Diotima, especially in a case as *paiderasteo*, that is, having *eros* with regard to children or boys. Equal importance here is upon the preposition *apo* or from this starting point, if you will, when one begins to see beauty (*kalos*), *kathorao* literally as to look down upon. This means he's near his goal, *telos* as end as well as completion, *hapto* being the very to touch. The noun *epanabasmos* or step is crucial (*epi-* and *ana-* or upon and upward prefaced to the root *baino*, to go). Such is what's meant by being led correctly into the mystery of love, *orthos* and *ta erotika*.

A person always ascends because of this beauty, *epaneimi* and *kalos* until he knows the end of true beauty, *ginosko* and *teleutao*, the latter as to bring to pass.

#7 And there in life, Socrates, my friend, said the woman from Mantinea, there if anywhere should a person live his life, beholding that Beauty. If you once see that, it won't occur to you to measure beauty by gold or clothing or beautiful boys and youths—who, if you see them now, strike you out of your senses, and make you, you and many others, eager to be with the boys you love and look at them forever, if there were any way to do that, forgetting food and drink, everything but looking at them and being with them. But how would it be, in our view, she said, if someone got to see the Beautiful itself, absolute, pure, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great nonsense of mortality, but if he could see the divine Beauty itself in its one form?

¹¹ The text does not break here. Instead, I've inserted a break due to the length of this paragraph so that it's more manageable.

Diotima tells Socrates that one should live with the end of beholding beauty, *theaomai* and *to kalon*. One look at it suffices, *eidon* as to behold which precludes a natural tendency to yield to measuring, the verb here being *dokeo* as to think, to expect or to suppose. Diotima poses a rhetorical question which goes unanswered where it's up to each person to answer as it pertains to seeing beauty (*kalos*) in one form, *monoeides* and *kateidon*, the latter as to look down upon.

#8¹² Do you think it would be a poor life for a human being to look there and to behold it by that which he ought, and to be with it? Or haven't you remembered, she said, that in that life alone, when he looks at Beauty in the only way that Beauty can be seen—only then will it become possible for him to give birth not to images of virtue (because he's in touch with no images), but to true virtue (because he is in touch with the true Beauty). The love of the gods belongs to anyone who has given birth to true virtue and nourished it, and if any human being could become immortal, it would be he.

Another example of the verb *horao* or to see with regard to beauty (*kalos*). By so doing, one won't give birth to images (*eidolon*, also as phantom, form) of it but to true virtue, *arete*. i.e., being in touch with true beauty enables one to be so with true virtue, the two being interchangeable. Immortality is equivalent to giving birth to this true virtue and nourishing (*trepho*) it. *Alethes* is the adjective for true which literally means unconcealed and thus exposed to sight.

+

There's only one response to this excerpt presented in an imperfect and awkward manner, and that is total wonderment and awe at Diotima's words to Socrates, and even more so, the bond that exists between them. Instead of focusing upon my inability to adequately grasp her words, they are an invitation to read the text over multiple times which by no way exhausts the contents. If I were to sum up my response in one word, it is gratitude.

When I approached this excerpt from the **Symposium** I knew it was a magnificent piece relative to beauty but didn't realize it was enough to stop anyone dead in his or her tracks, gratitude again having a large role to play though it remained in the background. Then there came to mind Socrates' use of *aporia*, literally no passing or difficulty in going ahead. This doesn't mean you've run up against a brick wall or you lost your way. In the case at hand *aporia* applies to a situation where I started out with gaining insight into the text which after a while had the effect of making me know less about it than when I had started out. No dead end here, to be sure, because this ignorance turned out to be an invitation to move on with a desire to investigate the text even further. Thus instead of an *a + poria*, it transformed into a

¹² The text does not break here. As with the above example, I've inserted the break due to the length of this paragraph to make it more manageable.

poros, a means of passing.

And so this *aporia* made me wanting to read the Greek text more closely because of the richness and precise way the subject at hand is described, namely, beauty. As soon as I was finished with one round, if you will, it was time to start over as if I had never read it. That compels you to stop and rest quite often while reading the excerpt, continuously wondering what the heck *to kalon* happens to be. Then, of course, toss in *eros* and *arete*. It's the wonderment that impacts you which, I believe, is a familiar description of doing philosophy.

Everyone has an appreciation of what is beautiful whether through the senses, mind (ideas, concepts) or spirit (prayer, meditation). What's attractive about *kalos* is that it's so much broader or inclusive including that which is shapely, of fine quality and noble. You might say, that it has a tinge of *arete*, originally the best of anything and as applied to virtue. *Arete* as the best quality indeed goes a long way by removing the drudgery sometimes associated with virtue along with any moral imperatives (Do this, don't do that). We distinguish beauty not so much from the ugly (that's obvious) but from the daily humdrum experiences of life. Often we're caught by surprise all at once but pleasantly so when space and time are suspended. They are not held in abeyance but are stopped or perhaps better, put into low-low gear like we sometimes see in a movie.

I get the impression from hanging around with *kalos*, *eros* and *arete*—using that image neither loosely nor non-nonchalantly but deliberately out of our need to be familiar with their realities—that we hit upon something we often overlook. I might add my personal preference is for *kosmios* over *kalos* since it's more appealing due to a definite air of elegance hard to describe but very much real. I think it's because *kosmios* is more dynamic, not static. While the discussion presented in the **Symposium** excerpt speaks in a compelling fashion, there's the danger of the words going right over our heads. That happens when it's dissected according to academic standards for which we are grateful, but that isn't enough.

On top of this we have a long list of those who have commented on the **Symposium** down the centuries trying to decipher it in light of their own culture and point they wish to get across. Yet sometimes there seems to be something missing. Often they're spot on with regard to the mechanics of the text which is most helpful, even enlightening. Nevertheless, the Good Stuff goes right over our heads even if it's right there in front of us. We may be experts while at the same time we're asleep, a paradox if there ever was one. While asleep we can perform all sorts of complex tasks which indeed benefit society. However, there remains a huge difference between sleeping and being awake.

Such talk about being awake is what, it seems, the **Symposium** excerpt is inferring albeit indirectly but in a way where the adjective *kosmios* fits the bill as a means to describe this. It's difficult to adequately express how we access beauty, love and virtue (*kalos*, *eros*, *arete*). Words simply escape our experience, even more so in translation. Yet if we approach the way Diotima presents them, we see that she's attempting not so much to communicate to Socrates

(and to us, fortunate enough to be privy to her discourse) but to initiate him into the fact that we are made whole and entire, *mueo* as in excerpt #1. There's nothing to add to such wholeness. What sounds so preposterous, even blasphemous about such a claim is that everything we see around us, let alone inside us, is contrary to such a position. It flies right in our faces like nothing else, striking us with a "how dare you" response or more accurately, a challenge. Our first response is to wholeheartedly agree. The evidence is overwhelming.

Yes, but don't forget those in the cave as recounted in Book Seven of **The Republic**. Everyone was physically fettered to their seats and more so, mentally to the images being projected onto the wall. All this, of course, is taking place in a gloomy dank place the inhabitants call home. Only one person managed to make good his escape. Despite the fact that everything and everyone may seemingly conspire against us, their position is...well...subterranean and hence in the realm of unreality, of images. As for the single person who leaves this place, note that he doesn't do it on his own initiative. "When one of them was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up" [515.c]. The two verbs are *luo* and *anagkazo* or to loosen as from bonds and to force, to constrain. Reference of course is to being fettered like everyone else.

The person so released didn't decide one day to do this on his own...that would be a big mistake...but the *luo* and *anagkazo* happened to him and did so in a manner which was *exaiphnes* or suddenly, in an instantaneous fashion with him hardly realizing what had happened¹³ which might be the best way to describe it. So this man was no different from his compatriots in the cave where the education or *paideia* (cf. 514.a) was designed by the puppeteers to keep them sedated as we might say in a modern context.

Although the text is silent on the manner, it'd come as not surprise that the man was fortunate to have been exposed to *kalos* (*kosmios!*), *eros* and *arete*. He realized that the images he had been watching on the cave were completely deficient in this regard. And so he got up and left. Such a radical change applicable to one human being among myriads is left somewhat as a mystery which is the best way to leave it. I was attempted to add "since birth" but it seems improbable. The denizens of the cave don't seem to have been born there. Rather, they entered it from the outside, from the place to which the freed prisoner made his way but have forgotten where they had come. This situation arose by reason of despite having the faculty of *anamnesis* or recollection, they failed to recognize it. Above all else, that's what the puppeteers want to maintain, *lethe* or forgetfulness. Talk about *anamnesis* here is interesting, but that would be straying too far afield. Nevertheless, it's worth sneaking in here.

Although the **Republic** doesn't get into the origin of the troglodytes and what was just presented is reading into the text, it says a lot about what's outside the cave once the man has

¹³ Healing of *iasis* shouldn't be overlooked but often is the case. Inferred is that the imprisonment had been a form of illness which those in the cave continue to be afflicted. So the person who walks out on his own steam has had a remedy applied to him not on his own initiative but bestowed.

walked out. Note the lack of words relative to an exit where he faced no opposition. He just left. Once outside he's in the same realm from where both he and the cave inhabitants had come. Actually it's hard to call them prisoners even though 514.a says they're fettered but fettered willingly, if you will. Again, with regard to our faculty of *anamnesis*, could the man be called someone who had activated it to the full?

So getting back to our unity of *kalos (kosmios)*, *eros* and *arete*, the **Symposium** suggests that they are characteristics of someone who had been in the cave but made good his exit. Translation? This person has realized that he is made whole and entire and requires nothing added nor subtracted. The same applies to the troglodytes. The only difference is that they're subjected to what the puppeteers project onto the cave wall, these being *thaumatapoios*, literally makers of wonders or marvels. These are the true inhabitants of the cave, the ones whom we might say have completely lost their faculty of *anamnesis* which prevents them from leaving the cave. As for the one and only individual who got up and left, both inhabitants and puppeteers could care less. If they glanced over at his empty seat they'd pity him for missing out on the images be projected on the cave wall.

+