NOTES ON PLATO ON THE *KALON* AND THE GOOD

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I

How the fine (*kalon*) is related to the good (*agathon*) in Plato's thought is a puzzle: we might suspect it was a puzzle to Plato himself.[1] In the *Meno* and *Symposium* the phrase "good things" (*ta agatha*) is substituted for "fine things" (*ta kala*) as if the two were equivalent (*Men*. 77b, *Symp*. 204d–e, cf. 202c–d); Socrates also gets Agathon to agree that all good things are fine (*Symp*. 201c). That what is good or beneficial (*ôphelimon*) is fine is also flatly affirmed in the *Lysis*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus* (216d, 457b, and 87c, respectively).[2] But the converse, that all fine things are good, is argued for only in the *First Alcibiades* (115a–116a). Within the uncontroversially authentic corpus, it is asserted only in the *Protagoras* (359e–360b, cf. 358b), and the context here is heavily dialectical and *ad hominem*—likewise in the *Gorgias*, when Socrates proposes to Polus that the fine is so by being *either* good *or* pleasant (474d–e). In the *Hippias Major*, the fine is at one point defined as the beneficial (296e–297a); but that definition is refuted. On the other hand, it is refuted by *reductio*, and the implication which is assumed to be absurd is that the fine is not good, nor the good fine (297c).

The Fine and the Good are of course two Forms of particular interest to Plato, and in both the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* the *kalon* is presumed to be the object of *erôs*. Since the good is also a characteristic object of desire (*Men*. 77b–78b, *Grg*. 468a–c, *Resp*. 505d–e), we might think that these dialogues would help us to sort out the relation between the two. But nothing is said about the Form of the Good in either; and when Plato does turn his attention to the Form of the Good, in *Republic* 6, nothing is said about its relation to the Fine—though Socrates does emphasize that the Good *is* fine (508e–509a) and that we must know it to know the fine (505b), and even

I am indebted throughout to Nicholas Riegel, whose Ph.D. dissertation (currently in progress at the University of Toronto) deals with the role of the *kalon* in Plato's thought, both for discussion and for his survey of the relevant Platonic texts. I should also note a general debt to Gabriel Richardson Lear, from whose work I have learned a great deal about the *kalon*, and to Brooks Sommerville for editorial help. All translations of Plato are from the various hands in Cooper and Hutchinson 1997, sometimes with slight revisions.

1. I will translate *kalon* for the most part as "fine," but occasionally as "admirable," "beautiful," or "noble," or will leave it untranslated as seems most appropriate to the context.

2. For the near-equivalence of the good and the beneficial (*ôphelimon*), see, e.g., *Men*. 77d–e, *Euthd*. 280c–281e, *Grg*. 474e–475a, *Resp*. 505a, e–506a; I discuss the relation of these concepts in section II below.

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though the *kalon* was his paradigmatic Form in the argument against the sight-lovers not long before (475e–480a).

Plato's last word on the subject does not clarify much. It comes near the end of the *Philebus*, when Socrates undertakes to determine what feature of a mixture (and in particular the mixture that constitutes a happy human life) makes it valuable (64e–65a):

> But now we notice that the force of the good (*hê tou agathou dunamis*) has taken refuge in an alliance with the nature of the beautiful (*eis tên tou kalou phusin*). For measure and proportion manifest themselves in all areas as beauty and virtue.
> —Undeniably.
> But we did say that truth is also included along with them in our mixture?
> —Indeed.
> Well, then, if we cannot capture the good in *one* form, we will have to take hold of it in a conjunction of three: beauty, proportion, and truth. Let us affirm that these should by right be treated as a unity and be held responsible for what is in the mixture, for its goodness is what makes the mixture itself a good one. (trans. Frede 1997)

This vague language of "taking refuge" (*katapepheugen*), together with the invocation of the *kalon* as just one of a triad of relata, again suggests that the fine is something less than identical to the good—yet it comes close enough to serve as a kind of proxy. So there is no decisive resolution here to the puzzle raised by the earlier dialogues, and no obvious developmental story to be told about Plato's views. From first to last, we are faced with a sort of theoretical two-step, in which Plato repeatedly draws together the good and the fine, yet backs away from asserting their identity outright.

Given the metaphysical importance of both the Fine and the Good, we might well ask what it would *mean* for two Forms, and these Forms in particular, to be identical. One thing that seems clear is that two Forms will not be identical, at least on Plato's mature theory, simply by having the same extension, either among participating sensible particulars or in their associations with other Forms. For the *Sophist* shows that *all* Forms participate in at least the three "greatest kinds" of Being, Same and Different, which are nonetheless distinct (254d–257a). And part of the motivation for postulating Forms in the first place is that sensible particulars exhibit compresence of opposites: anything beautiful "down here" is also ugly in some respect (*Phd.* 74b, *Resp.* 479a). So extension "down here" cannot even serve to individuate *contrary* Forms from each other. What does individuate Forms is a tricky question; but obviously it must have something to do with the distinctive causal power that the Form *is*, which an adequate definition of it captures, and by participation in which various other things (Forms and particulars alike) come to be qualified in some way—in short, with what we might call the nature or content of one Form as distinct from another, namely *goodness* and *fineness* in the case at hand.

Now in various contexts both goodness and fineness are explained by Plato, if not defined, in terms of appropriateness or fittedness to function. What is good of its kind, by having the proper excellence, functions well (*Resp.* 353c–e); and the most promising definition of *to kalon* in the *Hippias Major*, promoted by Socrates and never refuted, is that it is appropriateness,

that is, suitability to function (290c–291d). Even a wooden spoon is *kalon*—more so than a golden one—if it does well what a spoon is supposed to do (290d–291b). In *Republic* 10, the good and the fine are collocated on just this basis (601d): "the virtue or excellence, the beauty and correctness of each manufactured item, living creature, and action ⟨is⟩ related to nothing but the use for which each is made or naturally adapted" (trans. Grube, rev. Reeve 1992). So both goodness and fineness seem to be teleological norms, constituted by appropriate adaptation to function. Meanwhile, other Platonic texts claim that both goodness and fineness are constituted by order and proportion: "For measure and proportion manifest themselves in all areas as beauty and virtue" (*Phlb*. 64e). The *Timaeus* claims that all that is good is beautiful, adding that what is beautiful is "not without measure" (87c). In the *Gorgias*, Socrates argues that the work of craft is to make its object better by bestowing organization and order (*taxis kai kosmos*) (503e–505c), and sums up (*Grg*. 506e): "[I]t's due to organization (*taxis*) that the excellence of each thing is something which is organized and has order. . . . So it's when a certain order (*kosmos*), the proper one (*oikeios*) for each thing, comes to be present in it that it makes each of the things there are, good" (trans. Zeyl 1987). These two paths of connection are really one, since appropriateness and order are themselves tightly related. Something comes to be appropriately adapted to its function *by* possessing the right kind of order: health in the case of bodies, ethical virtue in the case of human souls, the right kind of shape and other physical properties in the case of fig-wood soupspoons. In acquiring the appropriate order, each becomes at once fine and good; and whatever actions induce such order are fine and good by extension. In the *Republic*, when Socrates defends his alarming recommendation that female Guardians train just like male ones, he notes that in an earlier era it was considered shameful for men to exercise naked (452d3–e2):

> But I think that, after it was found in practice to be better to strip than to cover up all those parts, then what was ridiculous to the eyes faded away in the face of what argument showed to be the best. This makes it clear that it's foolish to think that anything besides the bad is ridiculous or to try to raise a laugh at the sight of anything besides what's stupid or bad; or (putting it the other way around) it's foolish to take seriously any standard of what is fine other than the good. (trans. Grube, rev. Reeve 1992)

Note that here again Plato's concern is to claim that whatever is good is fine, rather than the other way around; and we can now see at least one reason why. He has a point to make about the fine, namely, that it is to be found *wherever* goodness, that is, appropriate order and function, are—no matter how lowly the locale. As with the beauty of the wooden soupspoon, the implications are initially shocking to those accustomed to thinking of the *kalon* in more aesthetic or elitist terms. (It would be more usual to see the *kalon* in the ostentatiously *non*-functional, like the long hair of the Spartans [Arist. *Rh*. 1.9.1367a27–31].) The same point is made with even more emphasis in a famous passage of Aristotle's *Parts of Animals*, in which he passionately defends the study of the lower animals. For here too, he says, there are gods: that is, here too we can see adaptation to ends, which means that here too there is something *kalon* and even wonderful (*thaumaston*) (*Part. an.*

1.5.645a1–25). This bolshevism about the *kalon* is apparently a Socratic inheritance. For in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* too, Socrates insists that the good and the fine alike are constituted by practical utility (3.8.5, cf. *Mem*. 4.6.8–10): "it is in relation to the same things both that the bodies of human beings appear fine and good, and that all the other things people use are considered fine and good—namely, in relation to the things for which they are useful." Along the lines of the soupspoon argument in the *Hippias Major*, Xenophon's Socrates proclaims that a dung basket is fine and a golden shield ugly, if the one is made finely for its *ergon* and the other badly (3.8.6).

So in at least some contexts, Plato's insistence that everything good is fine is intended to have revisionist ethical bite. His point is to press us to think more clearly about the beautiful, and, rejecting shallow aestheticism or elitism, to recognize it wherever we find appropriate order and adaptation to purpose. At the same time, the point also has reverberations for our thinking about the good: whatever we cannot come to see as fine must not be deemed good either. No metaphysical thesis about any stronger identity between the two need be in view.

Still, it is fair to ask: does this relation of joint constitution by appropriate order mean that the Fine and the Good as Forms have the same "content" or nature? And if so, is that sufficient to make them the same Form? Plato does not tell us enough about his metaphysics of identity for us to say. But Aristotle would point out that A and B can be constituted in the same way, and thus be in a way identical, without their "being" or essence being the same—that is, without it being the same thing *to be* A and *to be* B (*Ph*. 202a18–20, *Gen. corr.* 319b4–5, *De an*. 424a25, *Eth. Nic.* 1102a29–31). Political science (*politikê*) and practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) are identical in this way (*Eth. Nic.* 6.8). So far as I know, Plato never picks out this kind of identity relation in the dialogues: but the distinction is a natural one for an essentialist to draw, and it would license him to insist that the Fine and the Good are different even if the very same kind of appropriate order is constitutive of both. One might object that *politikê* and *phronêsis* are not just different in being conceptually distinguishable: they have different spheres of operation and different products, and it is not obvious how this, or anything analogous, could be true of the Fine and the Good. But we might at least insist that the two terms pick out different interests we may have in appropriate order, neither of which is essentially reducible to the other.[3] Roughly (as we will see), I perceive something as good when I note that it has the excellence proper to its kind or that it would be beneficial for me to possess it;[4]

3. This (and much of what follows in sections II and III below) comes close to Aquinas' explanation of the distinction between the *pulchrum* and *bonum* (*Summa Theologica* 1.1.4), on which see Aryeh Kosman's contribution to this volume, p. 341 above.

4. Here and later I shuttle between these two senses of "good," namely, the excellent and the beneficial: more precisely, between the attributive use in which any X that has its proper excellence is "a good X"; and the use in which we might say that wealth, for instance, is or is not "a good thing" for its possessor. Plato never analyzes the relation between these two senses or uses. Since a good X is one that functions well, it will presumably tend to be beneficial in its operation—a good X is usually a good thing to possess. But this is unlikely to hold in *all* cases. I will bracket this intramural puzzle about the good for the purposes of the present paper: I discuss it in Barney 2008.

and I perceive it as fine or beautiful when I am struck by and approve its order and fittingness simply as such.[5]

II

The preceding discussion suggests that to grasp the relation between the Platonic *kalon* and the good we should look not to metaphysics but to their roles in the economy of the psyche. So I turn now to the moral psychology of the early dialogues, where Plato seems to be getting philosophical leverage out of contemporary everyday usage.[6] My question is not so much whether the good and the fine are here identical as what it would *mean* for him to claim that they are, given their different connotations and spheres of operation, and what ethical considerations might tempt him to do so.[7]

In traditional Greek usage, *kalon* and *agathon* are the two most central and powerful terms of approbation, and the overlap between them is considerable. But there is one striking contrast between the two. This is that while it is common to speak of what is *agathon* for someone, using the dative of interest, the same construction is awkward and rare, if not impossible, with *kalon*. This is because what is good is standardly so by being good *for* somebody or other; but what is fine, generally speaking, is just plain fine. Of course, *kalon* can be qualified in various contextual ways, just like *agathon*: something might be *kalon* in one part or respect but not another, from one viewpoint but not another, for one purpose but not another, and so forth. But none of these is strictly analogous to being good *for* someone. The same is true in English, though obscured by some disanalogous senses and constructions in the case of the term "fine": what is beautiful is not beautiful *for* someone (except in the perspectival sense); what is noble is not noble *for*, but noble *simpliciter*. We might use "noble for her" as part of a larger construction: there may be something which it is fine or noble for her in particular to do. But this is not to conceive of that action as having the relational property "noble for her"; rather we envisage the action as done by her in particular, and attribute to it (and perhaps to her) the property of nobility *tout court*.

5. So far the good and the fine sound like coordinate kinds, but Plato's insistence that all the good is fine suggests that it is fine *by virtue of* being good, and we might suspect that the good has a general metaphysical priority. The Form of the Good, like the sun, is said to be the cause of all that is fine; and we must know it to know what things are fine (*Resp*. 517c2, 505b3). But the question is complicated by the fact that *agathon* sometimes seems to be used in a loose sense as the generic term for positive value, thus *including* the fine. (Of course to call this a distinct and looser "sense" is to bracket the substantive question of how positive value in general is related to benefit in particular.) And it is not clear that the good more strictly speaking—that is, the beneficial—is prior to the fine: indeed, one could run an argument for conceptual priority in either direction. What counts as fine must do so for a reason, surely, and that reason must ultimately involve some benefit to someone. On the other hand, on pain of an infinite regress of benefits and beneficiaries, *something* must have value without reference to any effects at all; and that intrinsic value is arguably what we praise as *kalon*. Cf. Barney 2008 and Richard Kraut's contribution to this volume, pp. 450–62 below.

6. On the background senses of *agathon* and *kalon*, see, still, Dover 1974, chap. 2. My understanding of Plato's conception of the *kalon* is very much in line with popular usage as Dover presents it. Cf. n. 15 below.

7. My account here will be much the same as that offered by Gabriel Richardson Lear (2006b, 97): "[O]ur response to things *qua* good is not the same as our response to them *qua* beautiful. Even if, in truth, the class of good things is coextensive with the class of beautiful things; even if a thing's beauty depends on its goodness, the experience of a thing as good plays a different role in our lives than does the experience of a thing as beautiful." Lear spells out these two roles rather differently, however, and her focus is specifically on the role of beauty in the ascent described by Diotima (cf. esp. pp. 112–17).

So it is a short step from ordinary usage to the supposition that "good" by itself is elliptical; or, to put it in substantive terms, that something is good by having beneficial effects. Protagoras in the *Protagoras* resists a Socratic bid to identify temperance and justice with an elaborate disquisition on the relational character and variability of the good and the beneficial: some things are harmful to people but beneficial to some other animal; some are beneficial only to trees, or to the roots of the tree but not to the shoots—or, like olive oil, beneficial to human bodies but not (allegedly, and strangely enough) to our insides (334a–c). Xenophon's Socrates makes a similar argument in the *Memorabilia*, as a preliminary to the argument already noted that the good and the fine consist in appropriate order. Forestalling an attempt at refutation by Aristippus, Socrates grants that the good and the fine are always relational; but, he argues, in each case the good and the fine are identical and are constituted by the same feature, utility, though what this consists in varies case by case (3.8). Likewise the *Dissoi Logoi* argues that the good and the bad are one and the same, by showing that anything good for one person is bad for another: intemperance in relation to food, drink, and sex is bad for the intemperate person, but good for those who are selling the relevant commodities (1.3): "And again, illness is bad for the sick, but good for the doctors. And death is bad for those who die, but good for undertakers and gravediggers" (trans. Dillon and Gergel 2003). It is instructive to compare the next section, in which the author turns to the *kalon* and its opposite, the *aischron*, the ugly or shameful. The form of the argument here is the same, but the kind of relativization in play is very different. Some instances of the *kalon* and *aischron* vary by agent, patient, or social context within a culture (2.3): for women to wash in public would be disgraceful, but for men to wash at the gymnasium is fine. Others vary by cultural perspective (2.9): "For example, among the Spartans it is fine for young girls to practise athletics and to go around with bare arms and no tunics; whereas for the Ionians it is shameful" (trans. Dillon and Gergel 2003). When the fine varies relationally, it is because of contextual factors, including the differing moral perspectives (here taken as authoritative) that govern different societies.

The only philosophical text I know of that speaks of things being fine *for* someone in just the way they are good for him is *Eudemian Ethics* 8.3. This very odd passage seems to return, in a kind of ring composition, to the opening of that work, where Aristotle affirms that happiness is at once best, finest, and most pleasant (1.1.1214a1–9). Here at the end of the work he turns to argue that all three properties do indeed converge in the happiness possessed by the fully virtuous person, the *kalos k'agathos*. Aristotle begins by giving his own take on the familiar Platonic point that things like wealth, health, and power are often harmful (*Men*. 87e–88e, *Euthd*. 280d–281e). He insists that these are genuinely good for the good person (1248b26–27): "a good man is one for whom the natural goods (*ta phusei agatha*) are good" (trans. Woods 1992).[8] He then contrasts the *kalos k'agathos* with the Spartans,

8. Translations from the *Eudemian Ethics* are by Woods (1992), sometimes with slight revisions.

who value virtue only instrumentally, that is, for the sake of the natural goods. The *kalos k'agathos* chooses what is fine as an end in itself; and, Aristotle adds, by doing so he renders what is in itself merely good *fine for himself* as well: "not only those things, but also the things not fine by nature, but good by nature, are fine for them (*toutois kala*)." He explains (1249a7–12):[9]

> For what is just is fine; and that is what is in accord with desert; and this man deserves these things. And what is fitting is fine; and these things befit this man—wealth, noble birth, power. So, to the *kalos k'agathos*, the same things are both beneficial and fine; but for the many there is a divergence here.

The nobility of the good person's actions rubs off, as it were, on the natural goods that he merits by them and uses in them. "Fine for" is still an odd-sounding predicate; but it does seem intelligible and even reasonable to say that it is a fine and noble thing *for a good person* to be rich, powerful, and handsome. This is arguably not really a relational predication of "fine for" after all, since it seems to reduce to the "fine [for-X-to-do-Y]" construction I noted earlier. But it is as close as Aristotle can get to pressing the fine into structural conformity with the good and the pleasant, which are properly realized only in the activities of the good agent (cf. *Eth. Nic.* 3.4, 10.3).

This difference in usage brings out a conceptual division of labor between the fine and the good. What is good is so by virtue of its effects on some subject: "good" is thus a causal concept, closely tied to the "beneficial" (*ôphelimon*) or "advantageous" (*sumpheron*), and the appropriateness (or not) of predicating it depends on the presence (or absence) of the relevant effects. Thus in the *Meno* and *Euthydemus*, Socrates takes good as tantamount to synonymous with "beneficial"; and he takes benefit to consist in the promotion of happiness. So goodness is the dispositional property that is actualized when someone is benefited and made happy;[10] and what is not reliably beneficial is, as Socrates infamously argues, not really good at all.

This leaves the *kalon* as the unmarked concept, used for what has positive value *without* reference to any envisaged effects. *Kalon* has no operationalized counterpart analogous to "beneficial": what is fine is not fine by *doing* anything to or for anyone. This is one reason it is hard for Socrates, when interrogated by Diotima, to say what beautiful things will do for their possessor, whereas he is clear that good things will produce happiness (*Symp*. 204e–205a). Not only may the fine not benefit, it is most clearly visible where benefit is *absent*; this is at least part of what Aristotle means

9. At 1249a13–14, Aristotle arguably contradicts this principle: "to the *kalos k'agathos* they [the natural goods] are also fine. For he does many fine actions because of them"—if the "because of them" (*di'auta*) here is read as specifying a motivation. But this cannot be right: the whole point of the passage is that the *kalos k'agathos* acts for the sake of what is fine by nature, in contrast to the Spartans who are virtuous only for the sake of the natural goods. Both text and sense throughout the passage are highly problematic, but Aristotle presumably means that the natural goods *enable* actions that are done for the sake of the fine. That would be part of why those goods are appropriate to the *kalos k'agathos* (they are tools which he alone uses correctly), and this appropriateness makes their possession fine for him as well.

10. There is a potential problem of circularity here, on which the *Hippias Major* plays: we call something good because having or using it benefits us directly, but we also call beneficial whatever helps us to *obtain* something good. Thus the beneficial can seem to be both the cause of the good and its effect (296d–297c).

by saying that the virtuous person acts "for the sake of the fine." Obviously the "for the sake of" relation here does not pick out, as it often does, a beneficiary—it is not that the fine is somehow in need of our help.[11] Rather, the virtuous person acts to promote the fine; he is motivated *by* the fine; and he is *not* motivated to benefit himself. (That is why Aristotle can speak almost interchangeably of doing an action for the sake of the fine and doing it as an end in itself.) In the *Rhetoric*, to praise the *kalon* and deprecate the *aischron* is said to be the task of epideictic rhetoric (1.3, 1.9), and Aristotle's list of conventionally noble and praiseworthy actions is unified by the absence of any benefit to the agent (1.9). The canonical case is Achilles' avenging of Patroclus, which he chooses as the nobler course of action while realizing that it will lead to his death (1.3.1359a3–5). Thus the most important locus of the fine is morally virtuous action, here presented by Aristotle as beneficial to others and to the community rather than to the agent (1366a33–1367a33). But the beneficial (to us) does not exhaust the fine: praise is not always of a human or divine being, but also of inanimate things, or of even the humblest animals (1366a28–30), just as in the case of *Parts of Animals* 1.5.

Since it need not be operationalized, the *kalon* has its natural range over goods conceived as objects of contemplation, as opposed to objects whose value can only be realized when they are acquired and used. This is where the "aesthetic" dimension of the *kalon*, in which it is best translated "beauty," comes in. As Aquinas notes, the *kalon* is what evokes the approval of the spectator rather than the desire of the agent:[12] it represents a kind of value which is *complete as it stands*. This completeness is perhaps one reason why Plato seems to think of the *kalon* as by nature manifest or radiant, immediately experienced and easily recognizable.[13] We discern *to kalon* perceptually, not inferentially, without having to calculate its causal relations; this is why it can be appreciated and valued by nonrational agents (*Resp*. 401d–402a), and some of its manifestations can be accessible to sense perception (*Phdr*. 250b–e). This response of intuitive approval may be interpreted as moral, aesthetic, or simply as an expression of conventional social values, depending on the object which evokes it; but it would be a mistake, I think, to elevate these spheres into different "senses" of *kalon*. The *kalon* is simply what appropriately elicits the disinterested approbation of a spectator as having positive value in itself, wherever that value may be found. It is the natural object of praise.

If all this is on the right track, Plato's handling of the fine and the good is a bit surprising. For we would expect him to campaign for the claim that

11. Cf. Aristotle's distinction in *Metaph*. 12.7 between the two ways of being *hou heneka* (1072b1–4).

12. Throughout, I mean claims of this form in both a descriptive and a normative sense. That is: (1) the apparently good and apparently fine—what we perceive as good and fine—induce appropriative desire and disinterested approbation respectively; (2) the really good and the really fine are what we *should* desire and approve.

13. This is presumably what lies behind the idea of the fine as the cause of the apparent good, explored in the *Hippias Major* (294a–295a). Cf. Lear 2006c, on beauty as *manifest* fittedness to function in the *Republic*: "a thing seems beautiful when it appears to be (in some respect) perfect; it is beautiful when its proper power or excellence shines forth for us to see" (109, cf. 107–8).

whatever is fine—in just this sense of eliciting disinterested approval, and with its consequent special bearing on the moral and aesthetic spheres—is good. After all, the whole argument of the *Republic* amounts to a proof of the point for the hardest and most critical case: justice is a fine or noble thing par excellence, and the central project of the *Republic* is to show that it is beneficial to its possessor. But even there Plato's strategy does not take the form of an argument *from* fineness to goodness. And as I noted earlier, Plato throughout the dialogues is concerned instead to make the converse point that everything good is fine. Socrates' deglamorizing revisionism about the scope of the *kalon*, to include soupspoons and dung baskets, is certainly part of the explanation; but I think there is more to it than that.

III

To see how the spheres of the fine and the good are related in the early dialogues, one revealing place to look is the *Gorgias*, and Socrates' discussion with Polus in particular. Both the good and the fine figure prominently here. Socrates argues early on that all action is in pursuit of some good, and counts as the action the agent wanted only if it results in that good: thus the unjust tyrant does not do as he wants if his actions backfire—which they will, since his good in fact requires justice (467c–468e). The fine comes to the fore immediately after, when Socrates and Polus confront each other on the question whether it is worse to suffer injustice or to do it. Socrates insists that to do injustice is both worse and more shameful (*aischion*); Polus, that it is more shameful but better (468e–474d).[14]

Polus' position is clear, and perfectly in line with the conventional division of labor between the good and the *kalon* that we have explored. The doer of injustice elicits opprobrium in the spectator where the sufferer does not: his actions are seen as having negative value not just for his victim but in themselves. We find it natural to say that they are seen as *wrong*: as the natural object of disinterested approbation, the *kalon* in ethical contexts can easily be understood as the *right*. Polus shows no inclination to depart from this common usage. By insisting that to do injustice is nonetheless *better* than to suffer it, Polus means to insist (again with conventional common sense, as articulated for instance by Glaucon in *Republic* 2) that it is more beneficial to the agent.

Socrates responds by eliciting Polus' agreement to a general thesis: what is fine is so by being pleasant or good, so that if A is finer than B, A must be either more pleasant than B or better than B, or both. This is made plausible by an induction: bodies, colors, shapes and sounds, practices, laws, and fields of learning are all deemed *kalon*, as Polus agrees, by virtue of being pleasant or beneficial (*ôphelimon*) (474d–475a). Socrates' analysis clearly does not represent an adequate definition of the fine, given our evidence elsewhere

14. Shame is a prominent theme of the dialogue, put to complex use both in the content of Socrates' arguments and in Plato's depiction of the dialectic: see McKim 1988, 34–48, as well as Dodds 1959 and Irwin 1979.

that Plato takes it to consist in appropriate order: and by the end of the *Gorgias* we should be skeptical of the role given here to pleasure, which is at best instrumentally valuable (506c). Socrates also drops several hints at the time that his proposal is *ad hominem*. He introduces it only after pointedly clarifying Polus' own stance: "Evidently you don't believe that *admirable* (*kalon*) and *good* are the same, or that *bad* and *shameful* are" (474d). He himself has tied the two together early on in the case of human character: "the admirable and good person, man or woman, is happy, but . . . the one who's unjust and wicked is miserable" (470e). So Socrates' proposal looks less like a definition or an account of what it is to be fine than a checklist of features in virtue of which we deem fine the things we do: fine shapes are pleasant, fine laws are beneficial, and so forth. And at that superficial level, Socrates' thesis is not obviously wrong: compare Aristotle's suggestion in the *Rhetoric* (also at the superficial level of conventional usage) that the *kalon* is that which is good and pleasant *because* good (1.9.1366a33–35, cf. 1.6.1362b8–9; cf. also *Hipp. mai.* 297e–299c7 for the association of the *kalon* with the pleasant). Moreover, though Socrates' proposal seems to treat the beneficial and the pleasant as independent, coordinate factors, he does not actually say that they are, nor does the argument require it. That is, it might be that the pleasant (as a vehicle for the fine) always tracks the good, or at least never outweighs it.

In any case, this analysis of the fine in terms of the beneficial and the pleasant puts Socrates in a position to present a snappy refutation of Polus' claims about injustice. As he points out, to suffer injustice is less pleasant than to do it; so if it is finer, as Polus himself claims, it must be by being better (475a–d). Moreover, to be punished for one's injustices is to suffer something fine, yet unpleasant; so it must be beneficial (476a–479a). Thus Polus must have been wrong in claiming that to do injustice is better than to suffer it, and to escape punishment better than to receive it. More generally, his error seems to be in assuming that the good and the fine can come apart; in the following debate, Callicles repairs this defect, agreeing with Socrates that whatever is good is also fine, and what is bad shameful (483a–486d). According to Callicles, the life of "natural justice"—as he construes it, the ruthless self-assertion of the predator, the exceptional man who takes from others as his due—is both better *and* finer than the conventional justice of the many. Callicles holds that such aggression and inequality are endorsed by nature itself as just, and that the life of the successful predator is happy and free. In all this Callicles' theory is a kind of mirror image of Socrates' own. Both believe in a justice in accord with nature (cf. 508e), and hold that only obedience to its dictates will make us virtuous, happy, and free. Where the two disagree is on how this common framework is to be filled in: what nature dictates, what our happiness consists in, and what the virtues are.

The conception of the *kalon* that emerges from Socrates' debate with Polus is shaped by a number of factors. One crucial feature is that it is the polar opposite of the *aischron*, the shameful, ugly, or disgusting. Like the *kalon*, the *aischron* is at home in both aesthetic and moral contexts, and it too refers to an intrinsic value, a badness that elicits distaste directly. Ugly

things, like fine ones, are not "ugly for." The *aischron* is simply what I despise and avoid, and fear being seen as—not as potentially harmful in its effects but simply as repulsive. The *kalon* is the contrary of this; so understood, the closest word we have for it in English is, it seems to me, *admirable*, and (as seen above) Donald Zeyl translates it that way throughout the argument with Polus.[15]

So to understand the relation between the Platonic good and the Platonic *kalon*, we need to understand the relation between desiring and admiring. But what is it to admire something? Plato has little to say about this, but we may speculate. As a starting point, admiration clearly is or can be a motivational power: there are things I do because I admire someone or something. But *what* admiration motivates seems to be underdetermined by admiration itself. If three teenagers admire Michael Phelps, one might express it by trying to meet him, another by plastering photos of him all over the dorm, a third by training endlessly at the pool. If the primitive sign of wanting is trying to get, what then is the primitive sign of admiring? Imitation seems most clearly diagnostic: we naturally suspect that Callicles is going to attempt a career along the lines of his role models, and E. R. Dodds speculates that this led to disaster so swiftly as to explain why he left no trace in the historical record.[16] But the admirer can be a hanger-on as easily as an imitator. Admiration seems to seek *intensified contact*: but that contact might consist in emulation and a seeking of kinship; or some kind of interactive exchange (writing a fan letter); or expressive activities (a fan club, cheerleading); or simply a contemplative prolongation of the admiring gaze itself. It may well lead to no detectable action at all; for admiration at its most intense takes the form of a crush—Callicles, we might say, has a crush on his "superior man"—and crushes are notoriously ineffectual. One reason is perhaps that admiration, even at lower levels of intensity, involves a forgetfulness of self. It borders on surprise and wonder (*thaumazein*): the admired object absorbs our full attention. When action comes into prospect, this forgetfulness of self then flops over into self-abasing awkwardness, or ineptitude, or panic. Admiration is a motivational power; but *how* to be motivated by it is a problem that the admirer may struggle to solve.

All this is by way of trying to sketch the psychological response natural to the Platonic *kalon*: my claim is not that the English term "admire" captures this condition particularly well. In fact that term is often used in a very attenuated and misleading sense; and this too, I think, can tell us something interesting about the *kalon*. Consider again Polus' uses of *kalon* and *aischron*. In both his claims about injustice and his assent to Socrates' inductive analysis, Polus shows himself a competent user of the term *kalon*, with no revisionist intent; he is the voice of mainstream common sense here, not sophistic corruption. But he also agrees with Socrates that we invariably

15. This is perfectly in keeping with conventional usage: cf. Dover (1974, 70): "*Kalos* thus most often corresponds to our 'admirable,' 'creditable,' 'honorable' "; cf. 72–73 on idiomatic uses of *kalon* to "express, and hope to cause in my hearers, a feeling of admiration."

16. Dodds 1959, 13.

pursue the good; so when he insists that (in the case of injustice) the good and the admirable come apart, Polus is effectively *denying* the admirable any motivational power. For Polus, the perception of something as *kalon* is affectless, inert, motivationally dead. And this "dead" admiration too is a familiar attitude. The adjective "admirable" in particular often seems to be used for a canceled-out "admiration-but": as in "Ralph Nader may be an admirable man, but you mustn't vote for him"; or "Pollini's playing is admirable, but I don't much like it." We often use "admirable" to acknowledge a social expectation that we approve some worthy object, while politely registering its failure to move us.

This "dead" usage opens a range of psychological possibilities. Perhaps Polus uses *kalon* as he does because for him the *kalon* is *always* dead—merely a sociological category, one that he deploys as others do precisely because he has no independent use for it. (For this possibility, compare Thrasymachus' use of the equally normative term "justice" for the behavior that is generally considered so, despite his contempt for it.) Perhaps Polus has lost his sense of what it would *be* to admire something. Or perhaps, as Callicles later claims, Polus is distorting and concealing his real values: in fact, though embarrassed to admit it, what he admires is the successful doing of injustice, though he purports to find it *aischron*. This seems plausible enough in principle: as Adam Smith notes (in a remark so apropos that George Grote cites it ad loc. and Terence Irwin cites it from Grote), "The great mob of mankind are the admirers and worshippers, and, what may seem more extraordinary, most frequently the disinterested admirers and worshippers, of wealth and greatness."[17] Certainly Polus is not merely envious of the tyrant Archelaus; he is *impressed*. But to be impressed is not yet quite to find something *kalon* ("The Beijing Olympic ceremonies were certainly impressive, but . . ."). Perhaps when admiration disappears as a psychological possibility, what is left is "dead" approval on the one hand, and being impressed—bedazzlement without any real approbation—on the other.

Callicles does know how to admire, and the object of his admiration is in a way very traditional: his self-assertive superior man is a lineal descendant of the boasting, competitive Homeric hero whose excellence entitles him to prizes and spoils. But for this very reason Callicles' motivational economy suffers from breakdown in a different spot, one that is brought to light dramatically when Socrates queries him on whether the catamite is happy (494e), and then is pressed harder in his final refutation (497e–499b).[18] Callicles has committed to a stark hedonism, claiming that pleasure is the good. But what then is valuable, exactly, about the excellence of the superior man? Callicles' hedonism provides no obvious basis—or even room—for the admirable as a distinct kind of intrinsic value, and thus no obvious way for him to warrant his admiration. He could own up to recognizing two independent kinds of value—to discovering, indeed, an embryonic "dualism of practical reason."

17. Smith [1790] 1976, 1.3.3.2, p. 62; cited in Grote 1865, 2: 107 n. z, and Irwin 1979, 138.

18. I discuss Callicles' predicament in Barney 2004. For a properly detailed account and evaluation of Socrates' argumentation in the final refutation, see Irwin 1979 ad loc., 202–6.

But that would immediately raise the question whether and why anyone should strive for the admirable when it and the good come apart. An easier solution would be to affirm the value of an admirable character as instrumental for obtaining the goods of pleasure. However, Socrates' refutation seems effectively to block just this avenue: after all, as he points out, the coward is just as likely to feel pleasure as the brave man—and he certainly does not become a better person when he does, as he would if pleasure were the only intrinsic good (cf. *Phlb*. 55a–c). More crudely, if the pleasant were the good, the life of the thoroughly satisfied catamite would be a good and happy one, something Callicles is very reluctant to admit. Just like Socrates, Callicles wants to think of happiness as a prize reserved for the people he admires; but since there is no natural connection between the constituents of happiness as he conceives it and the traits he deems admirable, he cannot plausibly claim any necessary or even regular relation between the two. In the end, one cannot coherently hold, as Callicles tries to do, both that virtue is *kalon* and that pleasure is *the* good (i.e., that it is the only locus of intrinsic value). For to say that virtue is *kalon*, in anything more than the "dead" usage, is precisely to claim that it has motivational power over us, one independent of any instrumental use.

IV

There is an obvious objection to all this. Plato tells us what attitude is prompted by the *kalon*, and it is *erôs*, not admiration (however exactly one would say "admire" in Greek: *thaumazein*? *timân*?). Moreover, *erôs* is a species of *desire*, and just as appropriative as any other kind. Just how *erôs* relates to desire in general, or to desire for the good, is murky; but the point stands that it is differentiated by its object and not by the kind of motivational attitude it is. It is an impulse to appropriate what is *kalon*—in the paradigm case, the body of a beautiful boy—for oneself.

Now there is a grain of truth to this objection, but it is misleading as it stands; to explain why, I will have to say a bit, all too briefly, about both *erôs* and desire in general. I cannot here engage fully with the complex accounts of *erôs* given in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, or enter into the important differences between them. But for present purposes what matters is a shared point that can be briefly put: in both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, Plato emphasises that *erôs* is *not* constitutively about the kind of appropriation and possession that it seems to be at first. In the *Phaedrus*, the highest, philosophical lovers exercise physical restraint (253c–256e); more tellingly, both Lysias' speech and the first speech delivered by Socrates plead for sex on behalf of the "non-lover," a position that is intelligible only if *erôs* and sexual desire are not coextensive. As for the *Symposium*, exactly what it is that *erôs* desires is subject to a dizzying series of shifts as Diotima's speech progresses (204d–212b); and the actions motivated by that desire range from sexual activity to legislation to virtuous activity. At the highest peak of erotic ascent, the most perfect realization of *erôs* is to give birth to "true virtue" through prolonged contemplation of and communion with the Beautiful Itself (210a–212b). So not only is *erôs* not constitutively about sex: for Plato, *sex* is not

really about sex. That is, the physical act is just the most defective species of a kind of activity that is not inherently tied to the physical at all, and is in fact most fully realized by a communion of the mind with unchanging objects of knowledge. Now I argued earlier that real admiration (not the "dead" kind) involves a longing for intensified contact, evoked by our perception of something as *kalon*. And I noted that in admiration we may seek this contact through a range of different strategies, including communion, contemplation, imitation, and various expressive activities. What these surprising features of the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* accounts show, I would suggest, is that Plato appropriates the term *erôs* for just this intense but polymorphous motivational attitude.[19]

Plato's more generic conception of desire or wanting may seem straightforward by comparison.[20] Plato thinks of desire as a kind of movement of the soul in the direction of its object, a nod of assent to some prospective course of action (*Resp*. 437b–d). It is the cause, of which action to obtain some good is the effect. But on reflection, it is not always so clear what desire motivates either. For "to want some X," where X is any kind of noun, is almost always elliptical in several ways. Socrates takes it that we want what we want qua good—that is, as beneficial and contributing to our happiness. And to say that we want such an object is, uncontroversially, elliptical for saying that we want to possess it (*Men*. 77c, *Symp*. 204e). But this is still incomplete and misleading in at least two respects. First, possession is not sufficient for benefit: what will really contribute to our happiness is to use good things, and more specifically to use them well, which requires wisdom. So our desire for happiness is not properly understood as a desire for the *possession* of goods, but for their right use and enjoyment (*Men*. 87e–89a, *Euthd*. 280b–281e). Second, it is not always clear what it *is* to possess and use some good. The good things that will contribute the most to our happiness—justice and education, moral virtues and knowledge of the Forms—are not chattels to be grabbed. They are not zero-sum or exclusive, and do not passively await our manipulation. To acquire and use them is really to change oneself in various complicated ways, by a kind of communion that is less like ownership than friendship with another person. In the course of hanging out with my friends the Forms, I become like them: the order that makes them good and fine comes to characterize my soul as well, and I become able to impart it elsewhere in turn. Thrasymachus and Callicles are mistaken not just because they are wrong about what the good is, but because they are wrong about what it would be to possess it.[21]

19. Cf. Aristotle's claim that the Prime Mover is a final cause by being an object of *erôs* (*Metaph*. 1072b3, cf. 1072a26–29)—an account to be supplemented, on the usual interpretation, by understanding the cosmic rotation as an *imitation* of divine thought.

20. I here mean to include *epithumia* and *boulêsis* alike: in Barney 2010 I argue for the essential interchangeability of the two in Plato's early dialogues.

21. This line of thought is not as explicit in Plato's works as the former, but I think it is important for the confrontation between Socrates and Thrasymachus in *Republic* 1: I try to bring out this theme, especially as regards 349a–350e, in Barney 2006, 44–62.

So progress toward real happiness involves not only coming to see what things really are good, but a complementary rethinking of what it means to have those things. We need to learn to desire differently: to recognize the desirable as something not to be seized, bought, or jealously guarded, but to be communed with, imitated, and expressed. And what this amounts to is that the truly desirable is more perspicuously conceived as the admirable. This is, I think, what Plato wants us to see when he emphasizes that what is good is fine, rather than the other way around.

V

Earlier I sketched the case for saying that the good and the fine are identical for Plato, insofar as they are jointly constituted by appropriate order. But it is clear that they are also different, individuated by their roles in our psychic economy. Even if everything fine is good and everything good is fine, and even if the same set of properties constitute both fineness and goodness in their possessors, there is still a difference between what it is to be fine and what it is to be good. To be fine is to be the appropriate object and characteristic cause of admiration; to be good is to be the appropriate object and characteristic cause of desire. So Plato's reluctance to simply identify the two is well-founded.[22]

But we can now see that Plato's repeated feints toward identification of the fine and the good do important work as well. For Plato holds that we take an important step towards ethical enlightenment when we recognize, Socratically, that everything genuinely good is admirable, even a fig-wood soupspoon or old women exercising naked. And to recognize this should prompt us to see that what we *cannot* admire—injustice, say, unless you are Callicles—must not be good either, whatever appearances there may be to the contrary. The converse psychological step is perhaps even more important. This is to use our recognition of the good as *kalon* to learn how to desire rightly: to learn, that is, to replace appropriative impulses with admiration.

At the outset I suggested that one might see Plato's unresolved treatment of the *kalon* and the good as expressing a tension or even puzzlement on his part. But we might better see it as perfectly deliberate, and as Plato's way of urging on us just this sort of reflection as to how far the two might converge. The question is, of course, not one of merely theoretical interest. And to grapple with it seriously, in the spirit Plato intends, involves an imaginative engagement—a kind of intellectual ascesis in which we learn to use each concept to bring the other into focus. (To cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul, perhaps, as Dorian Gray tries and fails to do.) It is this psychological exercise that Plato is trying to induce in us when he repeatedly draws together, yet never quite identifies, the good and the *kalon*.

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22. Cf. again Aquinas and Lear 2006b, as cited in nn. 3 and 7 above, respectively.