Schadenfreude, envy and jealousy in Plato's *Philebus* and *Phaedrus*

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Abstract: This paper concerns the conflict between loving and envious feelings in the *Philebus* and the *Phaedrus*. The Greek word *phthonos*, used by Plato in different contexts, characterizes emotions that contemporary theories classify as envy, *Schadenfreude* and jealousy. My claim is that in the *Philebus* Plato characterizes *phthonos* mainly qua *Schadenfreude* (an emotion which plays an important role in comedies). In this case the rivalry towards friends and neighbors neither stops at emulation, nor is explicitly experienced as malicious envy, and laughter offers the opportunity to feel pleasure at the other's misfortune without experiencing guilt or shame. In the *Phaedrus*, *phthonos* initially refers to the jealousy felt by the older lover towards his beloved. As the dialogue progresses, however, Socrates highlights the important role played by malicious envy when the love described is blind to transcendent beauty. Reference is made to Aristotle's account of emotions in the *Rhetoric*, and to Plutarch's treatise *On Envy and Hate* for valuable insights towards differentiating envy from other negative emotions.

Keywords: Plato; envy; jealousy; Schadenfreude; love; friendship; Aristotle; Plutarch.

1. *Introduction*

The general cross-cultural consensus concerning malicious envy is that it is "both morally wrong and socially disruptive" (Sanders 2014: 17). This is true of contemporary evaluations as well as of the theories we find expressed in Plato and Aristotle, in Greek literature, in the Attic oratorical corpus, and, later, in Plutarch's assessment. Ancient Greece was permeated by an agonistic *ethos* that expressed itself at all levels of everyday life, from athletic competitions to the political arena, from the judiciary system to literature and eristic. It is not surprising therefore, to find that Greek thinkers were particularly acute when they highlighted the role of malicious envy in private and public relationships, tried to explain its nature and psychological origin, and suggested strategies to limit its destructive impact.[1]

[1] For an illuminating study of the treatment of rivalrous emotions by Greek philosophers, poets, historians, and in general on the role of envy, spite and jealousy in ancient Greece, see Konstan *et al.* (2003).

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In English usage, when we say we envy someone we do not necessarily mean that we feel malicious envy. In expressions such as "Oh, I do envy you going on vacation tomorrow!" or "I do envy your having seen that exhibit!" the emotion invoked is an innocuous wish typically lacking a motivational component (your going on vacation is no reason for me to act in one way or another). On the other hand, a substantial difference in the motivational component distinguishes malicious envy from benign envy, as argued by Ben-Ze'ev (2016). Both malicious envy and benign envy respond to the perception that one's situation is of undeserved inferiority. However, while malicious envy aims at harming those who, in comparison, are felt to be in a superior position, benign envy does not have the motivational component of harming others; rather, the goal is eliminating the inferiority by improving the agent's situation. In Aristotelian terms, benign envy corresponds to *zelos*, while malicious envy corresponds to *phthonos* (*Rhet.* II, 1388a32-1388b2). However, the meaning of *phthonos* is not exhausted by the correspondence with malicious envy, since it includes also jealousy, begrudging envy and *Schadenfreude*.

In English there is some overlap in the meaning of envy and jealousy, and, as Walcot (1978: 1) pointed out, "there is more than a slight suspicion of malice associated with envy, and this feeling is invariably regarded as bad, whereas jealousy may be commendable as when we talk of a person being 'jealous of his honor'". In order to illustrate the difference, Walcot (1978: 1) quotes George Crabb's *English Synonymes*:

> We are jealous of what is our own; we are envious of what is another's. Jealousy fears to lose what it has; envy is pained at seeing another have that which it wants for itself.

Cairns (2003) clarifies this distinction with an example:

> When I see X with my girlfriend, I'm jealous; when I see him with his, I'm envious; in both circumstances I begrudge his good fortune – I don't want him to have my girlfriend, and I don't want him to have his either. (239)

When we are jealous we are worried we may lose someone, something, a social position, or a privilege. The pain derives from the fact that we deem the person, the possession or the privilege essential to our own identity. As Sanders (2014) puts it, "what we fear to lose is not so much a beloved partner or valued possession, but actually a part of ourselves" (26). If in jealousy our attention is focused on the object we fear we might lose, in envy, by contrast, our main focus is on the possessor of the desired object or quality. The envious person is pained by the fact that the other has something she does not have, but the pain derives not from lacking the desired object, but by the

superiority the other derives from having it.

That envy should be a competitive emotion is intuitively understandable, since it entails a comparison between our situation and that of others. It is painful because in the comparison we lose. Both Plato and Aristotle highlight the pleasure people find in feeling superior to others and the pain derived from feeling inferior. Aristotle writes in the *Rhetoric*:

> And winning is pleasurable not only to those fond of it but to all; for there is an imagining of superiority for which all have desire either mildly or strongly. (I, 1370b33-35)

Plato finds the desire to overcome others a natural expression of one part of the soul: the desire of victory stems from *thumos* (spiritedness), the source of emotions such as anger, shame, pride and indignation. Yet, in Plato's view what is by nature is not also necessarily good. Without the right form of education, spiritedness can grow more and more at odds with reason until it refuses to follow its lead, as is the case with the timocratic individual described by Socrates in Book VIII of the *Republic* (548d-550b).

The desire for victory, for many a fundamental motivation to action, is not in itself reasonable or conducive to happiness. Those who devote their energies to overcoming others, in one way or another misunderstand the nature of what is truly good and worth pursuing, and are doomed to live a life of dissatisfaction and trouble. Plato's strategy is to move our attention away from transient goods such as wealth or the beauty of youth, to goods that are inexhaustible and transcend human limitations. Some might object that since we fall in love with people and not with ideas, Plato does not really offer a solution, but just a way of changing the subject. I will not discuss this objection here. Rather, I will show how in the process of getting to his main argument, Plato draws an impressively realistic picture of human desires and emotions. The picture is not just realistic, but subtle, as we will see following the thread of *phthonos* in two dialogues – the *Philebus* and the *Phaedrus* – and appreciating Plato's reflections on *phthonos qua Schadenfreude*, as well as of *phthonos* qua envy and jealousy (according to the context).

In light of contemporary theories, I will consider *phthonos* within the cluster of emotions that according to Aristotle are addressed to the fortunes of others. In particular, I will concentrate on envious feelings towards neighbors, friends and lovers and address the conflicting nature of the desires involved. In this context, I will have occasion to contrast envy and *Schadenfreude* with pity, indignation and admiration. I will refer also to Plutarch's treatise *On Envy and Hate* (first century AD), which adds valuable insights towards differentiating envy from other negative emotions.

2. *Schadenfreude in Plato's* Philebus

There is no term in English for *Schadenfreude* (pleasure-in-others'-misfortune). This emotion is obviously related to envy, since someone who is disturbed by another's success is likely to be pleased when the other experiences failure or suffers a blow.

As Ben-Ze'ev (2000) points out, three features are distinctive of *Schadenfreude*: firstly, the magnitude of the other's misfortune plays an important role. My pleasure in someone's bad luck will not arise if instead of being exposed to a minor mishap she is struck by unbearable pain or falls victim to a catastrophic event. From being potentially comic, the situation becomes tragic: *Schadenfreude* transforms itself into pity (126).[2] An apparent exception is the pleasure felt when someone who is considered vicious suffers extreme misfortune: the death of a violent dictator may be welcomed with joy rather than sadness or pity. As argued by Ben-Ze'ev (2000) this is due to the comparison between the amount of pain caused by the dictator and the fact of his doom. The dictator's death is not considered a tragic event because the underlying thought is that he got what he deserved (361).

Secondly, the small gap between ourselves and others is an important factor in *Schadenfreude* as well as in envy, while a greater gap characterizes emotions like admiration and pity. The bigger the gap (in time, space, power, perfection, etc.), the more likely we are to move from begrudging someone's superiority to being disposed to admire her. Ben-Ze'ev (2000: 133) observes:

> A typical difference between envy and admiration is that in envy the gap is much smaller. A small gap is also typical of pleasure-in-others'-misfortune and, in general, of emotions in which rivalry is central. Our superior or inferior position is important when the gap is not wide and there is still a chance of changing our current position. When the gap is wide, we often take it as a given, thereby experiencing no rivalry and hence no emotion. Wide gaps are typical of pity, gratitude, and other emotions in which rivalry is not a central concern and we are not expected to try and overcome the gap.[3]

Greek thinkers such as Hesiod, Plato, Herodotus and Aristotle all argued that envy (both benign and malicious) arises between people who for various

[2] Regarding the curve depicting pleasure-in-others'-misfortune Ben-Ze'ev (2000) observes: "until a certain point our pleasure increases as the other's failure increases; beyond that point, even as the other's failure continues to increase, our pleasure begins to decrease until it turns into sorrow" (312).

[3] The relevance of the gap between ourselves and others varies according to different factors. Between a vicious tyrant and a common citizen there is a wide social gap, but it can be made irrelevant both by the impact that the tyrant's actions have on the citizens' lives and by considerations of desert (hence the feeling of pleasure at the thought that with the tyrant's death justice has been done).

reasons are very close to each other. "Potter envies potter", (Hesiod, *Works and Days*, verses 25-26) became a proverbial saying.[4] Herodotus describes the debate between the king Xerxes and Acheamenes concerning the advice given by Demaratus: while Acheamenes maintains that Demaratus, a Spartan, is not trustworthy because all Greeks are "jealous of success and they hate power" (Hdt. 7.236), Xerxes, invoking the distance between them, responds that he probably gave his advice in good faith. If they had been citizens of the same country, Demaratus would have been envious of Xerxes, but he is a stranger, hence he is unlikely to be moved by envy.[5]

The third distinctive element in *Schadenfreude* is our unwillingness to be involved in causing the others' misfortune. This is typical of this emotion, in contrast with envy and spite. If out of envy we went out of our way to wickedly attack and destroy our friends' precious possessions, most of us would feel quite bad. From the point of view of our mental energies *Schadenfreude* offers a comparatively inexpensive way to satisfy our ambivalence. Someone envious of his friend's new car will not proceed to scratch it, but may smile upon hearing that someone else bumped into it. *Schadenfreude* satisfies the negative desire caused by envy without involving the subject in any action, and without requiring any acknowledgement that the pleasure felt actually stems from envy. If we can ascribe the other's misfortune entirely to chance or to his or her behavior, we feel relieved of responsibility, and hence more likely to feel pleasure without being encumbered by guilt or shame (Ben-Ze'ev 2000: 139).

Since *Schadenfreude* is, as it were, a contemplative emotion rather than a practical one, it plays an important role in aesthetic experience. When the bad guys undergo spectacular humiliations at the end of numerous action movies, the emotion elicited in the spectators is precisely *Schadenfreude.* This point is important with respect to Socrates's argument in the *Philebus*, since he claims that a form of pleasure felt at the misfortunes of others and caused by envy is at work in the minds of the spectators of comedy. It is obviously relevant to theater performances that the emotions involved provide only aesthetic pleasure rather than inviting the spectators to immediate action. This is why Aristotle speaks of pity, the tragic emotion, in such a way that we should not confuse

[4] In Plato's *Lysis*, Socrates quotes Hesiod's saying and adds that "likest things must needs be filled with envy, contention, and hatred against each other, but the unlikest things with friendship" (*Lys*., 215d). For Aristotle, see *Rhet*. II, 1386b18-20; 1388a1-8.

[5] Hdt. 7.237: "If one citizen prospers, another citizen is jealous of him and shows his enmity by silence, and no one, (except if he has attained the height of excellence; and such are seldom seen) if his own townsman asks for counsel, will give him what he thinks to be the best advice. [3] If one stranger prospers, however, another stranger is beyond all men his well-wisher and will, if he is asked, impart to him the best counsel he has. It is for this reason that I bid you all to refrain from maligning Demaratus, seeing that he is a stranger and a friend". See Walcot (1978: 11 ff.).

it with compassion. In pity the distance between the subject and the object is maintained: as Aristotle explains in the *Rhetoric*, we would not be able to feel pity for people who would invite immediate identification, like our parents and children (*Rhet.* II, 1386a18-22). Both similarity and distance are necessary: we feel pity for someone when we can fear we might undergo a similar kind of suffering (*Rhet.* II, 1386a1-3), but pity would not arise if the destructive or painful event were too close to us or to our kin (we would be terrified instead). The other's undeserved distress is appreciated, but, as Konstan (2001: 128-136) points out, Aristotelian pity differs from compassion because it does not include the immediate desire to alleviate the other's sufferance.[6]

As is well-known, the part of Aristotle's *Poetry* devoted to comedy is lost, so that there can only be speculations on the emotion(s) he would have considered relevant for comedy. Plato's view is that the laughter with which the spectators welcome the ridiculous characters in comedies is caused by *phthonos*. I will not discuss here whether it would be correct to say that according to Plato envy causes that specific form of pleasure which expresses itself as laughter, or whether we should translate *phthonos* directly as *Schadenfreude* in this case. The important point in my view is that without doubt the affective phenomenon Socrates is describing in the *Philebus* is indeed *Schadenfreude*, i.e., a combination of pain caused by the envious feeling, and pleasure caused by the fact that, without our active involvement, the target of our envy is exposed as ridiculous and loses his or her superiority.[7]

It may be worth remembering, in this connection, what Plato has his Socrates affirm before the jury that will condemn him to death. In the *Apology* Socrates claims that the unjust charges of impiety and corruption raised against him have been long familiar to the citizens of Athens, when, still children, they saw him as a character at the theatre "being carried about there, proclaiming that he was treading on air and uttering a vast deal of other nonsense" (*Apol.*, 19c). Concerning Socrates, the Athenians heard accusations dressed up like jokes

[6] Scholars are far from unanimous about the Aristotelian conception of the tragic emotions. For a critical response to Konstan (2001) on fear and pity, see Belfiore (2002); for an alternative interpretation, see Belfiore (2014).

[7] Aristotle employs two words, one for the pleasure found in the other's misfortunes (*epikairekakia*), and one (*phthonos*) for the pain felt in the other's good luck (*Eth. Nic.* 2.6, 1107a9-12; 1108b1-7). He claims that these are blameworthy emotions and cannot belong to a good character. Plato, on the other hand, uses the word *phthonos* to indicate both. On *phthonos* qua *Schadenfreude* in the *Philebus*, see Sanders (2014: 102), who refers also to Frede (1993: 56 n. 2), Wood (2007: 78-79, 81), Halliwell (2008: 301), Munteanu (2011: 95-97). Franco Trivigno ("Was Phthonos a Comedic Emotion for Aristotle? On the Pleasure and Moral Psychology of Laughter", unpublished manuscript) maintains that Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* (1387b22-1388a30) and Plato in the *Philebus* (47e1-50a9) were discussing the same emotion in their respective analyses of *phthonos*.

when they were so young that they could only absorb them unthinkingly in their minds. Socrates says he cannot name those who raised those charges "by means of envy (*phthonos*) and slander" (*Apol.*, 18d1), but in the same context he mentions Aristophanes and refers to the *Clouds* (*Apol.*, 18b, 18d, 19c).

In Plato's *Philebus*, at 47e1-50a9, we find the argument connecting *phthonos* with the pleasure of laughter. Socrates initially distinguishes appetites (i.e., affections to which contribute both body and soul) from affections of the soul only, and claims that *phthonos* belongs to a group of affections of the soul that involve mixed feelings (*Phil.* 48a). In order to prove the link between pain and pleasure, Socrates analyses *phthonos* in connection with the ridiculous.

In itself, he affirms, *phthonos* is painful. Yet, he continues, we certainly "see the envious man rejoicing in the misfortunes of his neighbors" (48b). While Socrates initially identifies as the objects of this particular form of *phthonos* those who are near us (*hoi pelas*, the neighbors), later he speaks of friends. That friends are key targets of *phthonos* is not an isolated thesis. Xenophon has Socrates make the same point in the *Memorabilia*:

> Considering the nature of Envy, he found it to be a kind of pain, not, however, at a friend's misfortune, nor at an enemy's good fortune, but the envious are those only who are annoyed at their friends' successes. Some expressed surprise that anyone who loves another should be pained at his success, but he reminded them that many stand in this relation towards others, that they cannot disregard them in time of trouble, but aid them in their misfortune, and yet they are pained to see them prospering. This, however, could not happen to a man of sense, but it is always the case with fools. (Xen. *Mem.* 3.9.8)

In the *Philebus* Socrates claims that, while it would not be objectionable to rejoice at our enemies' bad luck, it is unjust to feel pleasure instead of grieving when our friends incur some misfortune (49d). Socrates does not call this kind of pleasure unjust because we resent the other's superiority (a superiority which, for all we know, could be well deserved), nor because we should feel pain, not pleasure, at the misfortunes of others. Rather, he invokes the difference between friends and enemies: we do not owe everybody a sympathetic response. Our enemies do not particularly deserve our sympathy, while towards our friends we have a different kind of obligation. We should wish good things to our friends: if we rejoice when they are unhappy the sincerity of our friendship becomes questionable.

This point appears problematic. While it is clearly the case that *Schadenfreude* contravenes the obligation to wish good things to our friends (if we rejoice at their misfortune, whether we are aware of this or not we are wishing them bad things), it is not necessarily the case that being pleased by our enemies' misfor-

tunes is a laudable feeling and an example of justice. Not only is this a questionable assumption, but it is something that Socrates *qua* character in Plato's dialogues does not always subscribe to. In the *Republic* Socrates raises two objections to Polemarchus's idea that justice consists in owing good things to friends and bad things to enemies. The first objection shows that loyalty and justice are not the same: from the point of view of justice, if our friends behave badly we do not owe them good things just because they are our friends, and if our enemies behave well, we should not give them bad things just because we consider them enemies. In the second objection Socrates argues that giving bad things to anyone – even if he is an enemy, even if he acts unjustly – means damaging him, and hence contributing to his becoming worse. This can never be just.

If we remember the difference between envy and *Schadenfreude* (while envy moves to action, *Schadenfreude* does not) we can see that the *Republic*'s argument does not really apply here: the kind of *phthonos* described in the *Philebus* is not such that it would move us to do actual damage to our friends and enemies. Our pleasure derives precisely from the fact that the world does it for us. What is unjust then? Well, as we just saw, Socrates argues that wishing bad things to our friends is in itself wrong: it shows our ambivalence, even if we do not act on it.

It must be stressed that Socrates is speaking of minor misfortunes, not of disaster and ruin: if there is a conflict between the demands of friendship and those of envy it is impossible to wish for truly bad things without giving up the friendship altogether. Plutarch stressed this point when he distinguished hatred from envy:

> The intention of the hater is to injure, and the meaning of hate is thus defined: it is a certain disposition and intention awaiting the opportunity to injure. In envy this, at any rate, is absent. For there are many of their intimates and connections that the envious would not be willing to see destroyed or suffer misfortune, although tormented by their good fortune; and while they abridge their fame and glory if they can, they would not, on the other hand, afflict them with irreparable calamities, but as with a house towering above their own, are content to pull down the part that casts them in the shade. (Plutarch, *On Envy and Hate*, 8)

Friends who find themselves in competition with each other and suffer from *phthonos* can be tempted to harm their friends just enough to "abridge their fame and glory."[8] Ideally, however, the envious person would like to see the other's fame overshadowed without having to do anything. This is the situation described in Plato's *Philebus*, where the pleasure stems from being just a

[8] On *phthonos* and *philotimia* see Cairns (1996: 19).

spectator while friends and neighbors are exposed as ridiculous in comedies. In the context of love, as we are about to see, *phthonos* can take a much more destructive impetus. The mad lovers described in the *Phaedrus* do not limit themselves to mere wishes; they act, and they do not merely produce minor damages: they can ruin the beloved's life.

There is another reason why *phthonos* (both *qua* envy and *qua Schadenfreude*) can be called unjust. Differently from indignation, *phthonos* does not arise simply in connection with goods of fortune (such as wealth and honors of various kinds) that we believe someone does not deserve to have. The envious are not moved by concerns related to merit. What counts is the other's success: whether it is deserved or not is irrelevant. For example, Aristotle says, people renowned for their wisdom are prone to envying the wise and knowledgeable for their own achievements, and this shows that envy is morally inappropriate. While one can feel justified indignation at the success of a villain, the Athenians' envy of Socrates's virtue was, in Plato's and Aristotle's view, clearly blameworthy.

Since envy is insensitive to desert and moral virtue one may wonder what triggers it. Plutarch's answer is "apparent prosperity":

> Now hate arises from a notion that the person hated is bad either in general or toward oneself. Thus it is men's nature to hate when they think they have been wronged themselves; and again men reprobate and view with disgust all who in any other way are given to wrongdoing or wickedness. Whereas to attract envy all that is required is apparent prosperity. Hence it would appear that no bounds are set to envy, which, like sore eyes, is disturbed by everything resplendent; whereas hate has bounds and is in every case directed against particular subjects. (Plutarch, *On Envy and Hate*, 2)

If we go back to the *Philebus*, what is it precisely that makes our friends and neighbors ridiculous and causes the pleasure of laughter? How to ridicule someone envied for his or her wisdom? Plato does not answer this question directly, but has Socrates give a fairly straightforward recipe for comedy: people become ridiculous when they show that particular kind of ignorance that consists in being conceited.

Ridicule is a vice that involves lack of self-knowledge, especially with respect to wealth, physical qualities, and wisdom, and people make themselves ridiculous when their behavior shows that they think very highly of themselves and are quite wrong about that. Arguably, then, even the wisest among us can be made to look ridiculous by portraying them on stage as unaware of having some obvious flaws while at the same time being full of themselves. Vanity is the most widespread vice.

Among the conceited and vain, however, only those friends and neighbors

who are weak and unable to take revenge attract the pleasure of laughter caused by *phthonos*. If they are ignorant and conceited but powerful, strong and capable of revenge, they are no longer envied. Rather, they will be hated and feared:

> Those […] who have this false conceit and are weak and unable to revenge themselves when they are laughed at you may truly call ridiculous, but those who are strong and able to revenge themselves you will define most correctly to yourself by calling them powerful, terrible, and hateful, for ignorance in the powerful is hateful and infamous—since whether real or feigned it injures their neighbors—but ignorance in the weak appears to us as naturally ridiculous. (*Phil*., 49bc)

Out of *phthonos* we laugh at the false conceits of our friends concerning their wisdom, their beauty, their wealth and their other virtues when such foolishness is "possessed in its harmless form" (49e). Hence, the condition of harmlessness applies not just to the kind of misfortune suffered by the target of laughter (which, as we saw, prevents *Schadenfreude* from turning into pity), but also to the kind of damage of which the object of our laughter is capable. We would not be able to laugh at the misfortunes of friends if their overconfidence and boastfulness were felt to be disastrous for us, or if we thought that we could be singled out for revenge: we would be terrified instead. Sanders (2014: 102) observes that this applies well to satirical comedy: in the midst of a crowd of spectators we can safely laugh at the powerful, while we would fear their revenge if we were mocking them to their face. As to the consequences on the lives of those who are exposed to ridicule, we saw that the spectators would not be able to laugh if their friends were shown as characters exposed to great and ruinous misfortunes. Of course this condition applies only to the moment of laughter. Socrates's exposure to ridicule may have well appeared innocuous to those attending a performance of the *Clouds*. According to Plato's reconstruction, however, the comedy contributed in a significant way to spreading the rumors and instilling the beliefs that ultimately led to Socrates's unjust death.

In the history of philosophy the tale of Thales falling into a pit is a good example of laughter caused by *Schadenfreude*. The story shows someone famous for his wisdom who clearly does not know what he is doing. Without moving a finger the Thracian servant and all those who subsequently found the story amusing enjoyed the phantasy of a world teleologically oriented by their wish that people full of themselves should fall. The hope that the world be not only teleologically oriented, but bound to satisfy our petty desires is, I suppose, what makes Socrates claim that this particular kind of *phthonos* is not only unjust but also foolish: a "childish envy with its absurd mixture of pleasure and pain" (*Phil*., 49a).

Plato was well aware of the substantial difference between the childish emotion he described in the *Philebus* and *phthonos* in the sense of jealousy and malicious envy. Let us turn to the *Phaedrus* and see what the other kinds of *phthonos* can do to love.

3. *Jealousy and Envy in Plato's* Phaedrus

Of the three speeches delivered on *eros* in the *Phaedrus*, the first two (a text written by Lysias and read aloud by Phaedrus, followed by a speech given by Socrates) severely criticize love as destructive and insane, while in the third speech, Socrates's so-called Palinode, the philosopher praises love and defends it from the previous attacks. The contradiction is only apparent, since the first two speeches address a form of vulgar *eros*, while the third speech extols a noble form of *eros*, nourished by knowledge and capable of generosity and respect. Jealousy in Phaedrus's speech and envy in Socrates's subsequent harangue are shown to be typical expressions of vulgar *eros*, while in the Palinode Socrates explains that noble *eros* is without *phthonos*, both in its divine and in its human incarnations.

The relationship between beauty and *eros* is central in the dialogue (cf. Hyland 2008: 64-90). In the first speech Phaedrus impersonates a non-lover who tries to persuade a boy that non-lovers are better than lovers. One of the reasons adduced against lovers is that they are fickle: as the bloom of youth fades, they abandon their beloved, fall in love with a younger boy and break all their previous promises (*Phaedr.*, 234ab). Here the main stress is not on the damage lovers can cause to their beloveds while they are in love, but on the bad consequences of their falling out of love. Lovers are more irksome than dangerous. One quality that makes them particularly bothersome is their jealousy, of which, Phaedrus claims, non-lovers are free:

> [lovers] prevent their loves from associating with other men, for they fear the wealthy, lest their money give them an advantage, and the educated, lest they prove superior in intellect; and they are on their guard against the influence of everyone who possesses any other good thing. […] But those who are not in love, but who have gained the satisfaction of their desires because of their merit, would not be jealous of those who associated with you (οὐκ ἂν τοῖς συνοῦσι φθονοῖεν), but would hate those who did not wish to do so, thinking that you are slighted by these last and benefited by the former, so that there is much more likelihood that they will gain friendship than enmity from their love-affair with you. (*Phaedr.*, 232c-232e)

In the second speech against *eros*, delivered by Socrates in competition with Lysias, the fictional speaker is a concealed lover who passes as a non-lover. His

attack on lovers is stronger and more daring. Socrates aims to show that lovers are a calamity for their beloveds not because they will abandon them, not because they are fickle, but because love itself, while it lasts, is folly and sickness.[9]

Lovers are a ruin to the beloved because of *phthonos*. This time, however, *phthonos* is not jealousy but primarily envy. The beauty that fascinates and conquers the older man and makes him fall in love with the boy soon starts causing him pain. A sense of inferiority insinuates itself in the lover's thoughts and with it an envious desire to make the boy less and less attractive, less and less interesting. The story between lover and beloved thus becomes a nightmarish ordeal, developing along the following lines:

1) The older man is initially attracted by the beauty of the boy and falls in love (*Phaedr.* 238b-c).
2) In order to make the boy *his* boy he has to "make his beloved as pleasing to himself as possible" (*Phaedr.* 238e).
3) "To him who is of unsound mind everything is pleasant which does not oppose him, but everything that is better or equal is hateful" (*Phaedr.* 238e-239a).
4) The lover, now in competition with the beloved, feels threatened by the good qualities that would make the boy better than himself. Older and uglier than the beloved (240d8-e1), he resents the very beauty that attracted him in the first place:

> So the lover will not, if he can help it, endure a beloved who is better than himself or his equal, but always makes him weaker and inferior; but the ignorant is inferior to the wise, the coward to the brave, the poor speaker to the eloquent, the slow of wit to the clever. Such mental defects, and still greater than these, in the beloved will necessarily please the lover, if they are implanted by Nature, and if they are not, he must implant them or be deprived of his immediate enjoyment. (*Phaedr.*, 239a)

5) Instead of honoring and protecting the beloved, the lover degrades and destroys his physical beauty (239c3-d8), as well as hampers his potential for mental growth (239a2-c2). The same actions that in the first speech were described by Phaedrus as dictated by jealousy and possessiveness, in Socrates's first speech are described as originating in envy.[10] The lover

[9] On the difference between the first two speeches in the *Phaedrus*, cf. Griswold (1986); Ferrari (1987).

[10] *Phaedr.*, 239b: "φθονερὸν δὴ ἀνάγκη εἶναι, καὶ πολλῶν μὲν ἄλλων συνουσιῶν ἀπείργοντα καὶ ὠφελίμων ὅθεν ἂν μάλιστ' ἀνὴρ γίγνοιτο, μεγάλης αἴτιον εἶναι βλάβης, μεγίστης δὲ τῆς ὅθεν ἂν φρονιμώτατος εἴη" ("and he is of necessity jealous and will do him great harm by keeping him from many advantageous associations, which would most tend to make a man of him, especially from that

will do all he can to prevent the boy from spending time with other men, not because he fears he might lose his beloved to someone else, but because he fears that by spending time with better people the boy might prove superior and end up despising him. He will have an analogous behavior towards the boy's possessions and money, which would give him some independence:

> The lover must necessarily begrudge (*phthonein*) his beloved the possession of property and rejoice at its loss. (*Phaedr.*, 240 a5)

6) The boy, now the older man's prisoner, responds to his sexual demands with growing and barely disguised revulsion:

> Now compulsion of every kind is said to be oppressive to every one, and the lover not only is unlike his beloved, but he exercises the strongest compulsion. For he is old while his love is young, and he does not leave him day or night, if he can help it, but is driven by the sting of necessity, which urges him on, always giving him pleasure in seeing, hearing, touching, and by all his senses perceiving his beloved, so that he is glad to serve him constantly. But what consolation or what pleasure can he give the beloved? Must not this protracted intercourse bring him to the uttermost disgust, as he looks at the old, unlovely face, and other things to match, which it is not pleasant even to hear about, to say nothing of being constantly compelled to come into contact with them? (*Phaedr.*, 239c-240e)

Several things go wrong in this version of vulgar love, but one stands out above all: if beauty is conceived as an object over which to compete, either out of jealousy (other people can steal it) or out of envy (because the beloved's beauty makes the lover look ugly in comparison), love becomes hell. Not surprisingly, Socrates's teaching in the Palinode is that the beauty that makes us fall in love does not, like the goods of fortune, belong to the realm of competition. Its value lies in its transcendence, and this means that it is indestructible, infinitely superior to each of its earthly instantiations, available to all, generous.

If we understood that we can all be equally nourished by beauty without consuming or destroying it, *phthonos* would not arise. The gods, who derive their divinity from their communion with truth (*Phaedr.*, 249c6), know this well, and this is why they are not jealous of their privilege: whoever wants to

which would do most to make him wise"). Fowler translates the adjective "*phthoneron*" in this sentence as "jealous." I am not suggesting that it should be translated as "envious." Rather, my claim is that this passage speaks of actions typical of a jealous man, but the motivations belong to the script of envy more than to the script of jealousy. For justifications of an approach based on scripts rather than on lexical analysis only, Kaster (2005), Cairns (2008), Sanders (2014: 1-12), Edinow (2016).

follow them and is able to do so, is welcome to the plane of truth, "for jealousy (φθόνος) is excluded from the celestial band" (*Phaedr.*, 247a).[11] Not surprisingly, the absence of *phthonos* is also the noble lover's main trait, since he understands that in the beloved's beauty there is something divine, and does not feel threatened by it. Indeed, philosophical lovers

> exhibit no *phthonos* or meanness toward the loved one, but they endeavor by every means in their power to lead him to the likeness of the god whom they honor. (*Phaedr.*, 253bc)

I left *phthonos* in this sentence un-translated. Fowler translates it as "jealousy." If my reconstruction is correct, "envy" would be more accurate, since the claim is not that the true lover does not fear losing the boy to other competitors, but that he does not feel threatened by a boy who might be (or become) "better or equal" to himself, as was the case with the vulgar lover described by Socrates in his first speech (cf. *Phaedr.* 238e-239a).

One may wonder why Socrates claims that the perception that the beloved's beauty is divine allows the philosophical lover to be free of envy. I am not raising another version of the metaphysical objection to which I hinted earlier. I am not asking if it makes sense to recommend that, in order to be free of envy, we should stop loving beautiful people and recognize that the only thing worthy of love is the idea of beauty they just happen to instantiate. I am asking why, if we were to perceive the idea of beauty *in* the beloved, our love would become free of envy.

The psychological answer, I believe, is that by seeing the divine *in* the beloved we would become capable of admiration, and the pain of rivalry would thereby be extinguished. I mentioned in the introduction that the difference between envy and admiration is, as Aristotle first noticed and Plutarch understood well, mainly a matter of distance. Aristotle observes in the *Rhetoric*:

> It is evident, too, whom people envy; [...] for they envy those near to them in time and place and age and reputation, whence it has been said, "Kinship, too, knows how to envy." And [they envy] those they rival; for they rival those mentioned, [feeling] the same way toward them and on the same grounds, but no one rivals people ten thousand years in the future or dead nor those who live at the Pillars of Heracles nor those they or others regard as inferior or much superior. (*Rhet.*, II., 1388a9-14)

[11] We are miles away from the gods described by the poets and criticized by Adeimantus in book II of Plato's *Republic*. That envy is extraneous to the divine is repeatedly asserted in the Platonic dialogues (see *Tim.* 29e; *Epinom.* 988b). As observed by Walcot (1978: 68), in obvious contrast with the traditional view we find in Plato an invitation to emulate the gods and to imitate their perfection (see *Rep.* 500cd, *Theaet.* 176bc, *Tim.* 90bc). On divine and human *phthonos* in the Greek tradition, beside Walcot (1978), see Cairns (1996; 2003); Harrison (2003).

From this teaching Hobbes (1994) derived the conclusion that those who are keen on quoting ancient authors do so only because they are long dead:

> But if it be well considered, The praise of Ancient Authors, proceeds not from the reverence of the Dead, but from the competition and mutual envy of the Living (496).

The distance required for an object to stop being envied and begin being admired is not just a matter of space and time (a distant future, a distant past, a distant place). It can be a distance in other personally relevant factors such as the degree of power, or, to come back to Plato's example, the level of perfection.

Plutarch observes:

> On the other hand supreme and resplendent good fortune often extinguishes envy. For it is hardly likely that anyone envied Alexander or Cyrus when they had prevailed and become masters of the world. But just as the sun, when it stands directly over a man's head, pouring down its light, either quite obliterates his shadow or makes it small, so when good fortune attains great elevation and comes to stand high over envy, then envy diminishes and withdraws, being overcome by the blaze of glory. (Plutarch, *On Envy and Hate*, 2)

An echo of Socrates's account of philosophical love can be perceived here. Not in the ironical suggestion that in order to find respite from our neighbors' envy we need only take those few steps that will make of us masters of the world, but in the suggestion that when the sun is at the highest the shadow it projects is the smallest. Philosophical love perceives in the beloved the resplendent light of transcendent beauty. It basks in that light rather than being scorched by it.[12]

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[12] Pia Campeggiani, David Hacker, Raffaele Rodogno and David Roochnik read previous versions of this paper and provided some very useful comments. I wish to thank them warmly.

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