

## CHAPTER VIII

### True Friendship in Plato's *Symposium*<sup>1</sup>

Some important ethical issues are both contemporary and traditional. One good example concerns the general ethical character and the particular moral rights and duties of friendship.<sup>2</sup> This complex subject includes many groups of philosophically interesting issues. Here, however, I would like to focus on just one. That set of issues is the ethical and moral dimensions of the proper care true friends should have for one another.

The issues here are important for many people. I focus on them here because I believe that some persons are not quite sure just what Aristotle had in mind when he famously wrote of “friendship for its own sake.”

Nor am I myself quite sure of the sense and significance of the somewhat different conception that I will be calling here “true friendship” rather than friendship just for pleasure or for advantage, might actually come to.<sup>3</sup> For just how could even

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<sup>1</sup> This text is a revised version of an invited paper first presented at the *Symposium Platonicum Pragense V* in Prague in October 2005 at the Villa Lanna of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. An initially revised text was first published under the title “Eros and ‘True Friendship’ in Plato’s *Symposium*,” in *Plato’s Symposium: Proceedings of the Fifth Symposium Platonicum Pragense*, ed. A. Havlicek and M. Cajthaml (Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2007), pp. 293-311.

<sup>2</sup> For some of the salient differences between contemporary moral reflection and Greek ethical reflection see among others, N. White, *Individual and Conflict in Greek Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 327-345.

<sup>3</sup> One problem with Aristotle’s views on friendship is his insistence that “friendship for its own sake” is always between equals, whereas experience shows that many genuine friendships arise among unequals. This point is one of many I owe to the lively discussion following the presentation of this paper.

the best of friendships be at all worthwhile were they not, in some senses however rarefied, just for pleasure or for advantage or for both?

Before critically reviewing a celebrated example from antiquity of friendship in Plato's *Symposium*, consider briefly a situation in our very different worlds today that many persons are already familiar with in history, biography, literature, and life. An imaginary but concrete situation will help me specify in a moment just what my specific aims here are.

### §1. A Sad Story

Two close friends care much about each other, and especially about their mutual well-being. "True friends," as they like to say, "always do." And the mutual bond between them is strong and sustained.

One friend, however, has come to believe that the other is, well, "too this-worldly." And, freshly concerned for his friend's genuine well-being, he has now resolved, in the altruistic<sup>4</sup> interest of his friend's genuine well-being as he sees it, to turn his friend's attentions definitively away from an exclusively this-worldly view of things to another, a more "idealistic"<sup>5</sup> view of things all-together.

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<sup>4</sup> Altruism in friendship is a complicated subject which I do not treat here. For a standard orientation on the philosophical aspects of altruism, see B. Russell, "Egoism [and Altruism]," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. R. Audi, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), p. 255. See also C. Gill, "Altruism or Reciprocity in Greek Philosophy," in *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, ed. C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite, and R. Seaford (Oxford: OUP, 1998), pp. 303-328.

<sup>5</sup> I am using the expression "idealistic" here not in any of the various philosophical senses, including Plato's, but in the ordinary sense of a close friendship that is thought of as even better than the good friendships we are familiar with in everyday life. See *The Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2003), hereafter cited as "*ODE*" (not to be confused with the older and much more extensive second edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, the "*OED*").

To accomplish this ambitious aim, the idealistic friend has settled on equally ambitious means. He intentionally and repeatedly encourages his friend's affections. Moreover, he does so in such ways that his friend's strong friendly feelings give rise gradually to strong erotic feelings as well.

Once these erotic feelings have become sufficiently strong, he then deliberately and abruptly lets his friend down. And so his friend suffers the familiar physical and psychological frustrations of "unrequited love," a strongly charged affective love between close friends that is not fully reciprocated.

But why does the idealistic friend act this way? Because he believes on what he has come to know on reliable grounds from his justly esteemed spiritual director that obliging his friend to suffer the frustrations of unrequited love will also create a rare, perhaps unique occasion for his friend to sublimate these frustrations.

And, in turn, sublimating the strongly erotic feelings in their close friendship, he also believes, will enable his friend to catch sight of a higher realm of loving friendship than merely any lower and exclusively physical one, a realm perhaps of "true friendship."

An old story then – a "sorry tale of unrequited love"<sup>6</sup> – but one that may help us now understand concretely what I have in mind.

What interests me here are two related issues. One is the question of whether, on "idealistic" grounds only, intentionally frustrating the affections one has deliberately and repeatedly encouraged in one's close friend is morally and ethically permissible. And the other is just what is the nature of true friendship.

I hope to be able to suggest that, among others, these still contemporary questions, or those very much like them, can be properly understood as arising not just out of our lives today

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<sup>6</sup> This is R. Waterfield's phrase from his "Introduction" to his English translation, *Plato: Symposium* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), p. xxxix. His phrase has inspired my title.

but even out of Plato's texts rather than being imposed upon them.<sup>7</sup>

The specific case that I should like to reconsider critically here is Plato's complex literary and philosophical representation<sup>8</sup> in his *Symposium* of the reports of Socrates' "idealistic" friendship with Alcibiades and of Socrates' intentional frustration of Alcibiades' affections.<sup>9</sup>

Does Socrates intentionally mistreat his particular friend Alcibiades in both reprehensible and self-contradictory ways? That is, does Socrates in fact do his friend serious wrong by

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<sup>7</sup> This concern was one of the guiding principles in H.-G. Gadamer's Plato interpretations that I once had the privilege of struggling with over a two-year period of his Plato lectures in Heidelberg in the late 1960's.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, D. M. Halperin, "Plato and the Erotics of Narrativity," in *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues*, ed. J. C. Klagge and N. D. Smith (Oxford: OUP, 1992), pp. 93-129. In his excellent "Introduction" to his translation cited below, Christopher Gill talks about "the differently characterized styles of speech and of subtle interplay between the philosophical ideas and the narrative or dramatic contexts" (p. vii), as well as of the "dramatic representation of characters reinforce[ing] intellectual speech-making and argument" (p. x).

<sup>9</sup> For further presentations of Alcibiades see especially the two dialogues often attributed to Plato, the *Alcibiades* (sometimes referred to as "*Alcibiades I*"; Plato scholars today do not generally agree whether this dialogue is by Plato or not), and the *Second Alcibiades* (Plato scholars today generally agree that this dialogue is not by Plato). See the translations, respectively, by D. S. Hutchinson and A. Kenny in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. J. M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), pp. 558-595 and 597-608. I do not try to discuss critically these dialogues here. Nor do I discuss here Plutarch's celebrated presentation of Alcibiades available in, for example, the bilingual edition, *Les Vies parallèles: Alcibiade ~ Coriolan*, eds. R. Flacelière et E. Chambry (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002). I also exclude from my considerations here further reflection on Plato's most important examination of friendship in the *Lysis*, which is now the subject of the very important and quite substantial commentary of Terry Penner and Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), and his discussions in the *Phaedrus*. By way of some justification for these exclusions I would stress that my major concern is with the nature of what I am referring to programmatically as "true friendship" rather than with Plato's own composite views on the relations between *eros* and friendship in the *Symposium* and elsewhere.

obliging (*anangkazōn*) his friend to sublimate his very strong feelings?<sup>10</sup>

Despite his own moral and ethical views to the contrary, does Socrates do his friend serious wrong intentionally?<sup>11</sup> And what, if anything, does Plato's story suggest about the nature of true friendship as opposed to Aristotle's notion of friendship for its own sake?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> On "sublimation" in these contexts see two references that C. Gill provides in his English translation, *Plato: The Symposium* (London: Penguin Books, 1999); G. X. Santas, *Plato and Freud: Two Theories of Love* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), pp. 169-172; and A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), pp. 250-258.

<sup>11</sup> Besides C. Gill's translation, which I follow throughout, see the relatively recent translations by A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), R. Waterfield (Oxford: OUP, 1994) in the World's Classics series (mentioned above), and C. Rowe in the Aris and Phillips series (Warminster, 1998). For brief remarks on the Alcibiades speech, see especially Gill's "Introduction" to his translation, pp. xxxv-xxxix and Waterfield's "Introduction" to his translation, pp. xxxvii-xl. Each of these two translations has excellent notes and bibliography which have helped me much. Note that C. Gill's translation is of K. J. Dover's Greek text in his edition, *Plato: Symposium* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), whereas R. Waterfield translates J. Burnet's Greek text from the early part of the last century in the Oxford Classical Text of the *Symposium*.

<sup>12</sup> Note that, as John Cleary pointed out in personal conversation, Aristotle's idea of friendship is not Plato's, although Aristotle systematizes much of Plato's views on friendship notably in the *Lysis*. Despite my different reading here, C. Gill's interpretation of the Socrates-Alcibiades friendship should also be kept in mind. "Socrates plays the game of erotic-educational love that is current in these circles," Gill writes, "as a way of arousing the interest of these gifted young men. But he does so only to subvert their expectations by *failing* to show a sexual response when given the opportunity to do so. This produces (as it has produced in Alcibiades) a mixture of humiliation, puzzlement, anger and admiration. It is also designed to stimulate the young men to re-examine their understanding of what 'love' is, although Alcibiades does not go as far as doing this. This technique, if that is what it is, is similar to the way in which Socrates uses dialectical cross-examination to reduce people to confusion and to realize that they need to reconsider what they think they understand." Gill adds in a note: "This suggestion relates to Plato's *presentation* of Socrates... It is much more difficult to say how far it reflects the attitudes and behaviour of the historical Socrates" (Gill, 1999, p. xxxviii and p. xlv, note 82; Gill's emphases).

## §2. The Accusation of Alcibiades

Although Alcibiades makes more than one criticism of Socrates, in summarizing his speech he makes one accusation only. Socrates has “insulted” him (the ambiguous word is *hubris*).<sup>13</sup>

In general, in what seems to be a moment in ancient Greek history of Athenian society’s passage from an externalized “shame culture” to an internalized “guilt culture,”<sup>14</sup> Alcibiades’ criticism comes to the claim that Socrates has offended what we today might call his “personal dignity” by causing him to lose face.<sup>15</sup> Just how Socrates has “insulted” Alcibiades we will come to in a moment.

Besides characterizing his speech as more than a traditional eulogy to *eros* as love, Alcibiades also brings a serious charge against Socrates as perhaps the exemplar of *eros* as love. Moreover, Alcibiades says that Socrates has dealt with him, Charmides, Euthydemus, “and many others” in the same reprehensible way.

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<sup>13</sup> *Hubris* can mean many things. Here the expression can mean either contempt or physical abuse. The first meaning is the pertinent one. For the sense of *hubris* as physical abuse in the particular contexts here would refer to rape, and Alcibiades certainly does not accuse Socrates of rape (cf. Gill, note 138, p. 81). See also M. Gagarin, “Socrates’ *Hybris* and Alcibiades’ Failure,” *Phoenix* 31 (1977), 22-37. In general, for a good sense of what the crucial Greek expressions meant in the discussions of Plato’s Academy, see the selection of key terms in the “Academy Dictionary” of 185 expressions in “Definitions,” tr. D. S. Hutchinson, in *Plato: The Complete Works*, ed. J. M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), pp. 1677-1686. See especially R. Radice and R. Bombacigno, eds. *Lexicon Plato* (Milano: Biblia, 2003). I thank Giuseppe Girgenti and Pawel Hobza for several references and help with several terminological questions.

<sup>14</sup> I owe this point to Suzanne Stern-Gillot in discussion.

<sup>15</sup> Throughout this paper I try to avoid anachronisms when discussing Plato’s representations of Socrates’ particular friendship with Alcibiades by using scare quotes for such expressions as “self-respect,” “personal dignity,” and so on. Using such a convention here of course is not without its own problems. For two recent, brief, and authoritative presentations of the general philosophical views of Socrates and Plato respectively see C. C. W. Taylor, *Socrates: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), and J. Annas, *Plato: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2003).

The accusation is that Socrates, celebrated everywhere for his relentless pursuit of truth, regularly deceives his closest friends. "He [Socrates] deceives them into thinking he's their lover and then turns out to be the loved one instead of the lover" (222b; p. 62).<sup>16</sup>

This accusation, however, is ambiguous. For, as stated, we are not quite sure just what Alcibiades is accusing Socrates of.

Is Alcibiades accusing Socrates of repeatedly deceiving many of his closest friends by strongly encouraging their beliefs that he wishes to develop their loving friendship into an actively sexual relationship, whereas in fact he desires a passively sexual relationship?

Or is Alcibiades accusing Socrates rather of repeatedly deceiving these friends by encouraging the same beliefs, whereas in fact, although Socrates desires to develop their loving friendship, he does not want to develop any sexual relationship with his closest friends at all?

Given the stories Alcibiades reports in the course of his speech ("I've... told you *how* he insulted me" – my emphasis), it seems reasonably clear that something like the latter interpretation is the more plausible one.

So, once disambiguated, the accusation seems to be that Socrates has repeatedly encouraged many of his closest friends to entertain explicitly sexual desires in his regard, only eventually to frustrate those desires. Whether Alcibiades thinks that Socrates does this deliberately, that is knowingly and intentionally, is nonetheless left unspecified here. Still, this seems to be the case since, as we remember, Alcibiades has reported that Socrates has acted in very similar ways not just with him but with many other close friends also.

From Alcibiades' perspective, then, Socrates has undoubtedly conducted his particular friendship with him in reprehensible

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Gill's remark (pp. xxxvi-xxxvii): "The pattern of loving assumed by Alcibiades is the kind of erotic-educational relationship described by Pausanias, in which the lover develops the ethical character of the boyfriend in return for sexual gratification (184c-185b [pp. 16-17])."

ways. Moreover, he implies that true friendship does not intentionally arouse expectations that are not meant to be fulfilled.

### §3. The Truth About Socrates

Is Alcibiades telling the truth when he accuses Socrates of causing him a unique (“He’s the only person...”) and totally disorienting (“I act like a runaway slave and escape from him” [216b; p. 55]) feeling of shame? But is Alcibiades also telling the truth when he accuses Socrates not just of shaming him (that is, of losing face), but of insulting him, of abusing him, of bewitching him, of casting a spell on him, of overwhelming him, of “disturb[ing] my whole personality,” of making him “dissatisfied with the slavish quality of my life,” of making him admit that he neglects himself, of deceiving him, of even making him think that his life is not worth living?<sup>17</sup>

If not “the whole truth” (217b; p. 56), then Plato does seem to be representing Alcibiades as mostly telling the truth.<sup>18</sup>

For one thing, Alcibiades explicitly makes a point of his having truthful intentions – “I’ll tell you the truth,” he says directly to Socrates just before beginning his speech. And, in view of Socrates’ reputation for being someone who is always in search of the truth, he even adds the barb: “will you let me do that?” To which Socrates can, for once, but lamely reply, while nonetheless insisting on his domineering role in his close friendship with Alcibiades: “But of course I’ll let you tell the truth; indeed, I order you to” (214e; p. 53).

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<sup>17</sup> One major problem for interpretation here is whether Socrates, in his dialectical discussions with Alcibiades, is mainly ironizing or not. That is, despite Socrates’ protests that he is working for his interlocutor’s good, are Socrates’ methods actually those of an enemy and not those of a true friend?

<sup>18</sup> The general frame between Apollodorus and an unknown friend that Plato has devised for the *Symposium* introduces still further complications for evaluating the representations of truthfulness and of truth (see Gill 1999, pp. xviii-xx). “Apollodorus’ whole account,” Gill points out, “is in double indirect speech: in Greek, he frequently says, ‘he (Aristodemus) said that he (e.g. Socrates) said’, though this is too clumsy to convey in English translations” (p. xviii). I leave these complications aside here.

For another, Alcibiades explicitly calls on Socrates himself, whom he is about to accuse of serious wrongdoings, to witness to the truth of what he is going to say. "If I say anything that isn't true," Alcibiades says to Socrates, "interrupt, if you like, and point out that what I'm saying is false." He repeats his intention to tell the truth – "I don't want to say anything that is false" (215a; p. 53).

And Plato, perhaps to reinforce the verisimilitude of his extraordinarily artful representations of Alcibiades' apparent drunkenness, has Alcibiades repeat himself when he says a little later on: "Yes, I must tell you the whole truth; so pay careful attention, and, if I say anything that's not right, Socrates, you must contradict me" (217b; p. 56).<sup>19</sup>

Further, Alcibiades also says that, although he plans to use a number of images in his speech in praise of Socrates, they "will be designed to bring out the truth and not to make fun" (215a; p. 53).

But Socrates neither interrupts Alcibiades nor contradicts him.

Of course, Plato does represent Alcibiades at the symposium as being very drunk ("He was brought in, supported by the flute girl and some of the other people in his group" [212d-e; p. 450]). Plato also has Alcibiades garlanded with ivy like the wine god, Dionysus. And Alcibiades insists that everyone start taking their wine neat as he does.

Alcibiades himself calls attention to his drunken state ("It isn't easy for someone in my condition..." (*Ibid.*). And he adds, emphatically: "If it weren't for the fact that you'd think I was completely drunk, gentlemen, I'd take an oath on the truth of what I'm saying about the effect his words have had on me..." (215d; p. 54).

Should we then believe a drunken man who insists that he is telling the truth? Probably not. Should we believe the same

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<sup>19</sup> See, notably, C. H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), *passim*.

man who goes on to invite the main person concerned in what he is saying, who is sober and present, to interrupt him if he says anything false, and that person doesn't do so, and that person is Socrates? We probably should.

Moreover, we need to consider too that, at the very end of Alcibiades' speech, Socrates himself says, although once again perhaps playfully, "I think you're sober after all, Alcibiades" (222c; p. 62). And indeed, Plato seems to have represented Alcibiades as sober enough to tell the truth, as explicitly declaring his intention to tell the truth, and as actually telling the truth about Socrates.

In short, I think it quite plausible that Plato has represented Alcibiades as telling much of the truth about Socrates and himself, if not the whole truth. That is, quite plausibly Socrates is indeed represented as treating Alcibiades badly in just the ways that Alcibiades recounts in his speech.

Socrates may have at times been ironizing in his dealings with Alcibiades. But can we plausibly enough argue here that, in his representation of this relationship, Plato has mainly been ironizing too?

#### §4. "Personal Dignity"

Socrates has certainly made Alcibiades feel ashamed. Indeed, Alcibiades makes a point of the unique experience of a kind of shame he has experienced with Socrates and with no one else.

In speaking so dramatically about his "shame," is Alcibiades now suggesting that his listeners, whom he calls the jury, consider whether Socrates, by shaming him in an exceptional way, has in fact offended him in a major way? That is, has Socrates, precisely by shaming Alcibiades in a quite singular way, seriously injured Alcibiades by violating what we might call today his "personal dignity"?

But just what Socrates has done to Alcibiades to make him feel a special kind of shame, shame that might be linked with

his dignity as a person, is not clear.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, perhaps the problem lies with Alcibiades and not with Socrates at all.

That is, perhaps Alcibiades has experienced a special kind of shame because – whether on account of his marked political ambitions, or his passionate nature, or his commitment to force and power – he has not been capable of following to the end the movement of Socrates' therapeutic dialectic. Alcibiades has, so to speak, gotten "stuck in the process."<sup>21</sup>

But however that may be, was what Alcibiades himself called "Socrates' proud action" – his non-action, what he refused to do – was this what caused Alcibiades' special shame? Or was "Socrates' proud action" rather Socrates' speaking biting words to Alcibiades ("I've been struck and bitten by the words of philosophy," we remember Alcibiades saying)?

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<sup>20</sup> What, for example, would Socrates himself say by way of reply to Alcibiades? Tom Robinson has suggested to me in discussion that, since Socrates's central aim is to realize the truth, Socrates might well concede that he has not been the perfect friend. But he might go on to add that after all what is at issue between himself and Alcibiades is not friendship and "personal dignity" (or the Athenian equivalent) but *eros* and truth. More succinctly, the question that Plato wants to discuss is not the nature of true friendship but the role of *eros* in *philia*. And, as Francisco Lisi added in the same discussion, we need to remember that the relations of *eros* and *philia* are strongly determined in Athenian society of the times by the proper roles of the *erasteis* and the *erasthenon*. As the younger man, Alcibiades' taking the initiative in his particular friendship with Socrates complicates any non-anachronistic judgment on the proprieties of Socrates' relationship with him. In short, I think one may plausibly argue that Socrates, *pace* Alcibiades' complaints, was not clearly in the wrong in his difficult relationship with Alcibiades. But that is not what I argue here.

<sup>21</sup> This was the substance of a question that Thomas Szlezák posed in discussion. I think, however, that, given the actual details and progression of Socrates' dialectic with Alcibiades, this suggestion is not very plausible. Moreover, were it substantiated, the suggestion would then expose Socrates to the objection that, at the very least, the good and wise Socrates was guilty of poor judgment. For he would have submitted Alcibiades to a completely humiliating dialectic with almost no reasonable hope of a positive outcome, despite his extensive antecedent knowledge of Alcibiades' character being such that Socrates could more likely foresee that Alcibiades would "get stuck in the therapeutic process" than not.

Was the “proud action” both a “proud action” as a non-action and a “proud action” as a verbal performance? His listeners cannot be sure because Plato does not allow Alcibiades to tell them clearly enough.

What Alcibiades does report is that, after intentionally encouraging such advances in various circumstances (“He wasn’t quick to accept my invitation,” we remember Alcibiades saying, “but eventually agreed to come” [217d; p. 56]), Socrates deliberately rejected his advances. This completely unexpected behaviour, Alcibiades says, confused him, leaving him in a peculiar state of mind.

Moreover, his confusion was such that he continually felt an extraordinary shame whenever he saw Socrates. And he now does everything he can to avoid Socrates (although he also says, somewhat contradicting himself as Plato knew drunken persons often do, that he cannot “do without his company” [219d; p. 59]).<sup>22</sup>

Still more, Alcibiades no longer acts like the noble, talented, and courageous Athenian citizen he is. He now finds himself running away from Socrates. And he does so in such an undignified way that he repeatedly acts like a runaway slave. He thinks now of “the slavish quality of my life” (216a; p. 54).

A little later Alcibiades says, “I went around more completely enslaved to this person than anyone else has ever been to anyone” (219e; p. 59).<sup>23</sup> He no longer can think of himself in

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<sup>22</sup> Alcibiades’ “extraordinary shame” seems to include not just feelings of shame but also feelings of guilt. To the extent however that what is “extraordinary” about Alcibiades’ shame is its incorporating guilt, Alcibiades cannot reasonably make Socrates completely responsible for this “extraordinary shame.” For Alcibiades’ guilt feelings can most readily be understood as arising from self-accusation, and hence Alcibiades himself, and not Socrates, is responsible for these feelings of guilt. Alcibiades’ shame, however, can be most readily understood as arising from how Socrates has publicly treated Alcibiades, from his special social context, and hence Alcibiades can reasonably claim that Socrates is indeed responsible for those feelings of shame.

<sup>23</sup> Of course this “enslavement” is of a different kind than that of the Athenian household slave.

the same way as before his friendship with Socrates became particular.

In short, Socrates has demeaned him. Socrates made him "suffer." Socrates has caused Alcibiades to suffer a very severe loss of "self-respect." Socrates has insulted him, abused him, humiliated him.

That is, Socrates has not taken him seriously as a "person." Socrates has made Alcibiades, a free man, an Athenian citizen and aristocrat, a ward of Pericles himself, feel and act like a slave. Socrates has violated Alcibiades' "personal dignity."

Moreover, Socrates has not just done this to him, Alcibiades, whose life he once saved on the battlefield and whose honour he once preserved and who counts himself with reason among Socrates' closest friends; Socrates has seriously offended in similar ways "many other" close friends as well. And the very same Socrates evidently intends to do the same all over again and now with one of Athens' greatest artists, Agathon.

So far, then, as friendship is concerned, Alcibiades' view seems uncompromising. If speaking and acting (or not-acting) in the ways he has spoken and acted with his close and utterly devoted friend, Alcibiades, is what Socrates understands by true friendship, then there is a serious problem.

For on the incontrovertible evidence that Alcibiades has put on exhibit – without interruption or protest by the very man concerned, for Socrates continues to remain silent – at least Alcibiades' personal suffering in undergoing Socrates' knowing, intentional, and serious violation of his "personal dignity" raises very hard questions indeed about the satisfactoriness of Socrates' practice of friendship and his ideas about friendship.

Socrates it seems has done Alcibiades serious wrong. And, in contradiction with his own most considered views, Socrates has done Alcibiades serious wrong knowingly and intentionally. Although he indeed saved Alcibiades' life and then tried to help Alcibiades reform that life, Socrates has not been a good and true friend to Alcibiades.

Thus, Alcibiades believes that his friendship with Socrates has made him suffer a serious loss of “self-respect” and in this way has seriously offended his “personal dignity.” True friendship, he implies, always respects “personal dignity.”

### §5. Ethical Valency?

Generally, many philosophers today think of ethical matters as having a larger scope than moral ones. For moral matters are often, although not always, matters mainly concerned with duties and obligations, rights and responsibilities, and so on. Ethical matters, however, are often matters mainly concerned with values, hierarchies among values, goodness and its varieties, good and bad actions, and so on.

And when philosophers focus on issues concerning friendship, both ethical and moral matters seem to be involved. For the myriad practices of friendship often do include important roles for serious and sustained considerations about both duties and obligations, and similar kinds of considerations about acting well and acting badly.

In what concerns, however, the “ethical” or “moral” valency, of friendship’s doings, “not-doings,” “undergoings,” its acts omissions and sufferings, I suspect that what should concern us most on critically reviewing Socrates’ particular friendship with Alcibiades from our contemporary perspective is more the ethical than the moral valency of their difficult friendship.

And that is the case because the major focus here has been on neither the duties nor the obligations nor the rights of Socrates’ friendship with Alcibiades, however morally charged these indeed are. Rather, the focus is on certain kinds of supposed responsibilities true friends ought to have for one another.

But if on rehearsing once again Plato’s dramatic story of “unrequited love” I have tried to focus most of our attention on the supposed ethical aspects of true friendship, why now introduce for discussion such an obscure, figurative expression as “ethical valency?” By way of response, note two brief points only.

Firstly, recall the distinction between chemical valency and linguistic valency. The first, the sense of the word "valency" in chemistry, as in the example "carbon always has a valency of 4," has to do with how many electrons the element carbon has involved in or available for chemical combinations. And the second, the sense of "valency" in linguistics, has to do with "the number of grammatical elements with which a particular word, especially a verb, combines in a sentence" (*ODE*).

Now, secondly, when I speak of "the ethical valency" of friendship, of a whole set of acts and behaviours among close friends who experience together a strongly affective mutual attraction and who therefore may be exposed eventually to suffer some kind of "unrequited love," I am trying to refer to "the aptness of combination," the responsiveness or not of certain friendships as a whole to general values such as ethical goodness or ethical badness.

I do so because I think that these general ethical values are what finally determine the particular moral permissiveness and moral reprehensibility of certain acts and actions in close friendships.

Thus, I take it here rather generally that the ethical valency of certain friendships refers to these friendships as a whole having metaphysical components (properties or predicates or "tropes"<sup>24</sup>) that in certain behaviours have strong or weak propensities (powers or capacities) to combine with considerations of what is ethically good and what is ethically bad. That is why I want to talk of the ethical responsiveness or non-responsiveness of certain close friendships.

More particularly, I also take it here that certain components of a close friendship rather than their composition as a whole may exhibit either morally positive (praiseworthy), morally neutral (indifferent), or morally negative (reprehensible) features.

Accordingly, I would also like to refer figuratively to these particular component features of a close friendship as exhibiting

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<sup>24</sup> For some recent work, see for example A. Oliver and T. Smiley, "Multi-grade Predicates," *Mind* 113 (2004), 609-681.

a moral valence rather than an ethical valency. And that is why I would like to talk not just of the ethical responsiveness of certain friendships but also of the moral responsibilities of certain friendships.

In other words – to exploit a difference between British and American English – I find it useful as a Canadian to speak generally with the British of the “ethical *valency*” of certain close friendships to refer holistically to their responsiveness or not to ethical values. But I also find it useful to speak particularly with the Americans of the “moral *valence*” of various components within certain close friendships to refer non-holistically to the moral character of certain acts and actions within such friendships.

With these distinctions provisionally in place, I think we can now address more substantively our two initial concerns.

### §6. Friendship’s Unrequited Loves

We first need to bring together our progressive approximations to answering our two main concerns here. These questions, we recall, concerned the character of Socrates’ particular friendship with Alcibiades, and, more generally, the nature of true friendship.

Reviewing critically Plato’s representations of Socrates’ friendship with Alcibiades, we progressively noted several points.

- (1) Both Socrates and Alcibiades, and not just Alcibiades alone, have certain reserves about their friendship.
- (2) Whatever Socrates’ views might be (Plato has not had Socrates say what they are), from Alcibiades’ perspective, Socrates has conducted his particular friendship with him in reprehensible ways.
- (3) Moreover, rightly or wrongly, Alcibiades believes that his friendship with Socrates has been deceptive.
- (4) Similarly, Alcibiades also believes that his friendship with Socrates has shamed him by wrongly making him feel guilty of his behaviour.

- (5) Further, Alcibiades believes that Socrates has not taken his friendship with him seriously enough.
- (6) Alcibiades believes too that Socrates has abused his friendship with him by too often painfully speaking with him moralistically, about how one ought to act if one is to become a good person.
- (7) Still more, Alcibiades believes that Socrates' friendship with him has publicly humiliated him.
- (8) Finally, Alcibiades believes that Socrates' friendship with him has made him suffer a serious loss of "self-respect" and hence has seriously offended his "personal dignity."

We also saw that, very plausibly, Plato represents Alcibiades as telling the truth.

On this evidence then, and without turning to Alcibiades' later career, I think we need to conclude that Plato's representation of Socrates' particular friendship with Alcibiades was not a good friendship.

But if not good, was his friendship with Alcibiades nonetheless a "true friendship?"

Again, reviewing critically the implications of Alcibiades' friendship with Socrates for at least one idea (one of Plato's ideas) of true friendship implied at least in the *Symposium*, we progressively noted several further points.

- (9) True friendship is, at least in some ways, not exclusive.
- (10) True friendship does not intentionally arouse important expectations that are not meant to be fulfilled.
- (11) True friendship is not deceptive.
- (12) True friendship does not give rise to mistaken guilt feelings.
- (13) True friendship is serious.
- (14) True friendship is not moralistic.
- (15) True friendship, is mutually respectful.

- (16) True friendship is mutually respectful in particular of what we call today “personal dignity.”

With at least these salient features of true friendship before us, I think we also need to conclude that Plato represents Socrates’ particular friendship with Alcibiades as not a true friendship either.

So much then for a summary of our tentative findings.

May I now finish, if not conclude, by offering three suggestions for further critical discussion of the still vague notion of “true friendship?”

### §7. Three Suggestions

The first point is particular and concerns the moral valence of “friendship’s unrequited love” in Alcibiades’ unrequited love for Socrates as Plato has represented that particular friendship in the *Symposium*. My tentative suggestion here is that Socrates seems to conduct his particular friendship with Alcibiades in such a way as to contradict one of the basic ethical principles that Plato has represented him elsewhere as holding.

That is, in his relationships with his close friend, Alcibiades, Socrates seems intentionally to go wrong (*oudeis hekôn hamartanei* [*Prot.* 345e]).

Moreover, despite the unchallengeable evidence of his clearly unsuccessful moral strategy with Alcibiades (recall Plutarch’s biography of Alcibiades), and whatever may have been his results with the “many others” that Alcibiades cites, at the very end of the *Symposium* Socrates seems quite ready intentionally to do the same kind of wrong all over again, this time to his close friend, Agathon. And Socrates seems ready to do this at the expense of Agathon’s close, exclusive, and long-time friend, Pausanias.

Thus, I suggest that Socrates’ occasioning his close friend’s Alcibiades’ unrequited love is morally reprehensible.

Socrates’ intentional incitement and then considered and repeated encouragement of Alcibiades’ love just with a view ul-

timately to obliging Alcibiades to renounce that love with the admittedly noble intention of opening Alcibiades to the several goods of non-corporeal loves and perhaps even to a vision of the good itself is an instance of intentional moral wrong doing.

My main reason for making this tentative judgment however is not that in treating his close friend the ways he does Socrates seems to have contradicted one of his own principles. Rather, I think Socrates' general behaviour with Alcibiades is morally reprehensible because it very seriously violates Alcibiades' "personal dignity" as a human being by making him act no longer as a free man but as a slave, a slave to his passions.

Moreover, I suggest that Socrates' occasioning his close friend's Alcibiades' unrequited love is not just morally reprehensible; it is also ethically reprehensible.

Socrates' intentional incitement and then considered and repeated encouragement of Alcibiades' love just with a view ultimately to obliging Alcibiades to renounce that love with the noble intention of opening Alcibiades to the several goods of non-corporeal loves and perhaps even to a vision of the good itself is also an instance of intentional ethical wrong-doing.

My main reason for making this second tentative judgment is that the soundness of Socrates' intentions is not evident. To the contrary. Some serious considerations suggest that these intentions are not sufficiently well-founded in that they depend on highly questionable assumptions.

These dubious assumptions include Alcibiades' being able to sublimate his physical and psychological frustrations effectively, and indeed his being able effectively to sublimate them in just such a way as for him to catch sight of a vision of the non-physical good itself.

But such questionable assumptions and the unsound intentions to which they give rise do not constitute sufficient grounds for Socrates' putting at risk Alcibiades own "self-respect" and "personal dignity" as he intentionally does.

My second point is general and concerns the ethical valency of "friendship's unrequited love" *tout court*.

And my tentative suggestion for further discussion here is that, however morally and ethically neutral most instances of unrequited love may in fact be, at least some instances of unrequited love between friends bear both a strongly ethical as well as a strongly moral charge.

That is, some instances of apparently true friendship that intentionally result in unrequited love, provided their basic intentions are demonstrably sound and their actions selflessly carried through, seem to be ethically admirable. (Recall here Agathon's insistence in his speech on friendship having to involve the four classical virtues he lists in the order of justice, moderation, courage, and wisdom [196b-e; p. 30].) For these friendships exhibit holistically a responsiveness to a higher order of ethical values of good and evil that effectively controls the positive moral valence of the most important individual behaviours constituting those friendships.

And my third point is also general. My again tentative suggestion here is that what people ordinarily call "true friendship" where we are to understand friendship neither for pleasure alone, nor for advantage alone, may be helpfully parsed with Plato's dramatic representations of the close friendship between Alcibiades and Socrates in mind.

That is, true friendship is a mutual and sustained bond of affection between persons that is habitually responsive to a general, objective realm of ethical values. This realm of values regulates the moral valence of the important acts and actions that continue to constitute that close friendship.

With respect then to our initial two questions, I conclude that, on "idealistic" grounds only, intentionally frustrating the affections one has deliberately and repeatedly encouraged in one's close friend is both morally and ethically unacceptable.

And I also conclude that whatever the nature of any Aristotelian "friendship for its own sake" might finally come to, what I have been calling "true friendship" probably should be understood as banning at least such features as exclusiveness, deception, deliberate frustration, guilt, disrespect, and moralizings.

## Envoi

True friendship probably should be understood as incorporating at least such features as inclusiveness, truthfulness, moral and ethical seriousness, deliberate expansiveness, and mutual respect especially of individual personal dignity.

With respect to my three tentative suggestions here however – one concerning Socrates' particular friendship with Alcibiades, one concerning anyone's similarly particular friendship with someone, and one concerning the nature of true friendship – each certainly requires further critical scrutiny.