

Food, Philosophy and Love

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Abstract

This thesis is a metaphilosophical investigation into how food can be handled philosophically. The first chapter considers the question of whether food can be the subject matter of philosophy, and concludes that there are three possible ways: Foodist Philosophy, Philosophy of Food, and Philosophy and Food. This thesis focuses on the category Foodist Philosophy. The second chapter develops an account of foodist philosophy: it is a *style* of philosophy that assumes that our food and eating practices are fundamental aspects of the human condition. The third chapter analyses Plato's concept of love in the *Symposium* and these conclusions are objected to in a foodist critique in the fourth chapter.

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Chapter 1

Can food be the subject matter of philosophy?

1.1 Introduction

In this thesis I undertake a metaphilosophical investigation into how food can be handled philosophically. Metaphilosophy studies the nature of philosophy. I investigate two main areas: how food can be understood philosophically and what these conclusions can tell us about the nature of philosophy itself. I also offer an example of ‘foodist philosophy’ as a tool to critique and reread Plato’s *Symposium*.

1.2 A Note on Terminology

I use the term ‘food’ in the broadest possible sense to cover a range of substances and practices. Firstly, ‘food’ may refer to the substances that we consume, e.g. avocados, cheese, wine etc. Secondly, ‘food’ covers the human practices that are associated with food in the first sense, such as growing, preparing, cooking, and eating.

1.3 The Philosophy of Food: a History of Philosophical Neglect

Curtin and Heldke (1992: xiii) claim that Western philosophers have “persistently ignored – or marginalized – one of the most common and pervasive sources of value in human experience – our relations with food.” For most philosophers, the subject of food does not warrant philosophical enquiry.

Boisvert (www.siena.edu/boisvert/PhFoodintro.htm) suggests that the denigration of food as a philosophical subject began as early as Plato, who argued that food is an “annoyance” for the “real philosopher”. In *Phaedo*, Plato writes:

‘Do you think it is right for a philosopher to concern himself with the so-called pleasures connected with food and drink?’
‘Certainly not, Socrates,’ said Simmias.

Boisvert further argues that Descartes' dualistic heritage values the abstract above the embodied, and as a result, activities associated with bodily activities (such as food and eating) are unworthy of philosophical enquiry.

Curtin and Heldke offer another reason for the historical philosophical neglect of food. They argue that in most cultures, food practices are generally activities associated with women's work and the work of slaves or the lower classes. Historically, Western cultures have tended to ignore or denigrate the value of women's activities and the absence of the philosophy of food reflects the sexist and classist attitudes that are implicit in the tradition of Western philosophy.

Another possible (comical) answer is one stated by Jeremy Iggers (2001), a philosopher and restaurant critic, who writes that perhaps the "real reason for their [i.e. philosophers] neglect is that food and our habits of eating are too important to us to jeopardise with dangerous philosophical rumination". He continues to offer a bit of what he calls "American folk wisdom: don't shit where you eat," and quotes St Thomas Aquinas, who said at the end of his philosophic career that all of his philosophical work added up to a "pile of straw". Iggers further comments that "it doesn't seem far fetched to imagine that Aquinas had in mind straw that had passed through a horse".

An example that demonstrates this philosophical neglect of food would be how philosophers have persistently ignored and devalued the sense of taste. Korsmeyer's (1999) project in *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* presents a philosophical investigation into the sense of taste. By taste, she means *literal taste*, not merely a metaphor for aesthetic discrimination or artistic judgements. She writes, "philosophers have generally concurred that pursuit of taste for pleasure alone seems an unfit preoccupation for a being whose higher capacities require the efforts of rationality" (Korsmeyer 1999: 1). The reason why taste has been omitted from an epistemological discussion of sense perception is because it is closely identified with our bodies and our animal natures – it is thought to be a "base temptation" that threatens our moral life, and furthermore there is "no disputing about taste" (Korsmeyer 1999: 1-2). Traditionally, philosophers have deemed vision and hearing to be the "intellectual" or "cognitive" senses and hence the "higher" senses, while taste, touch and smell have been thought to be the "bodily" and hence "lower" senses (Korsmeyer 1999: 3). Korsmeyer argues that

eating and food and hence the sense of taste – are important phenomena in our lives and worthy of philosophical investigation.

1.4 Why Food and Philosophy, and Why Now?

Just because the tradition of Western philosophy has ignored food does not explain why it should start analysing food now or why food is worthy of philosophical enquiry. There are subjects and phenomena that do not warrant philosophical investigation, for example tornados or doorknobs. So what is it about food that justifies this research project?

In Elizabeth Telfer's (1996: 1) book, *Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food*, she distinguishes "feeding and watering" from "eating and drinking". The former is necessary for survival of all animals, whereas the latter is only practiced by humans and contains a value that goes beyond mere sustenance. Philosophy can analyse this value. Here are various quotes that attempt to capture the value of eating and drinking:

Food, like sex, is a writer's great opportunity. It offers material that is both universal and intensely personal – something that illuminates the nature of humankind but also offers insights into the unique and intimate foibles of an individual...Food is about agriculture, about ecology, about man's relationship with nature, about the climate, about nation-building, cultural struggles, friends and enemies, alliances, wars, religion. It is about memory and tradition and, at times, even about sex. (Kurlansky 2002: 1)

Food and eating habits are banal practices of everyday life, we all, as living beings must eat to survive. This apparent banality is deceptive. Food and eating habits and preferences are not simply matters of "fuelling" ourselves, alleviating hunger pangs, or taking enjoyment in gustatory sensations. Food and eating are central to our subjectivity, or sense of self, and our experience of embodiment, or the ways that we live in and through our bodies, which itself is inextricably linked with subjectivity. (Lupton 1996: 1)

Man has been defined as a rational animal, a laughing animal, a tool-using animal and so on. We would be touching upon a deep truth about him, however, if we called him a cooking animal. (Versfeld 1991: 16)

A further distinction I would like to make is the difference between hunger, appetite, and eating. Stephen Mennell (1992) in an article entitled "On the Civilizing of Appetite"

argues that we must not conflate hunger with appetite. Hunger is the bodily drive that occurs in all humans whereas appetite is a “state of mind, an inner mental awareness of desire that is the setting for hunger” (Capon quoted by Mennell 1992: 316). While, hunger is physical, appetite is the psychological state of a person’s desire to eat and a person’s hunger and appetite are linked by an “appostat” which is a “psychological (not physiological) control mechanism regulating food intake” (Mennell 1992: 316). The underlying hunger drive, psychological processes and social pressures determine this “appostat” setting. That all humans experience hunger is perhaps not that philosophically interesting, but how humans experience and respond to this biological drive i.e. through appetite and “appostat” – I believe is worthy of philosophical enquiry.

Food has also become an important contemporary issue. Roger Scruton (<http://www.opendemocracy.net/content/articles/PDF/1224.pdf>) shows that food is the single common factor to most “widely mourned developments” in modern society. He lists such phenomena as the clearance of the rain forests, the disappearance of the family meal and the culture of fast food and claims, “the place of food in moral, political and monetary economy has changed radically in the last fifty years”. Hence, the role of food has become highly significant, not only on an individual but also on a global level.

1.5 Philosophy as a Creative Moment

It is a philosopher who understands that things can no longer be seen as they were before. Philosophy starts where the natural stagnation of thought and language is broken in a creative moment of finding new concepts and new ideas. Philosophy is *creation*. (Dorfman 2004: 172)

Given the context of the philosophical neglect of food, I argue that it is important that this area be explored philosophically. I believe that it is important for the discipline of philosophy to explore “new concepts and new ideas” and hence to investigate how philosophy and food can come together and can inform each other. I aim to investigate and, hopefully, to contribute to our understanding of philosophy and food.

The aim of the thesis is to legitimate and illustrate a philosophical enquiry into the subject matter of food. I begin by outlining ways in which philosophy, as a field, can be directed at food. Specifically my goals are:

- to show that philosophical questions relating to food are important, and
- to show that these questions about food can be answered using philosophical methodology.

I suggest a threefold division of ways in which philosophy can be about food. These are 'Foodist Philosophy', 'Philosophy of Food' and 'Philosophy and Food', and can be defined as follows:

a) Foodist Philosophy is a *style* of philosophy that assumes that our food and eating practices are fundamental aspects of the human condition. Curtin and Heldke (1992: xiv) argue that "thinking through food philosophically" will show how "the basic projects of Western philosophical tradition have been skewed". Philosophy has tended to value questions about the "abstract and mental" more than questions about "embodied, concrete, practical experience". Following Curtin and Heldke's (1992: xiv) lead, I aim to justify new categories of inquiry and also to "provide further illumination of traditional philosophical problems". Foodist Philosophy needs to be understood in the same way that Feminist Philosophy is understood, that is, as a *style* of philosophy that approaches philosophical problems from a certain perspective.

b) Philosophy of Food is the category in which one could either undertake a conceptual study of food and all the human practices that surround it or one could offer a normative theory about what humans ought to be doing when they grow, prepare and consume food. Brillat-Savarin (1970) was one of the first philosophers to attempt to offer a normative theory on what and how humans ought to be eating. The sorts of questions that would be considered in this category are:

1. What is food and what is the scope of the concept? Are there necessary and sufficient conditions for its application? Is it a functional concept?
2. What are the norms of eating? For example, what may be eaten, what tastes good or bad, what is the correct conduct associated with eating? What are the goals of eating, is it just bodily nourishment or pleasure or sociality or all three and possibly other things?

3. What is the nature of these norms? For example, what is a gustatory judgement and does it differ from an aesthetic judgement?

This category contains philosophical questions that are uniquely concerned with food

c) Philosophy and Food is the category that takes various philosophical theories and attempts to apply them to food. The purpose of this category is to better understand the philosophical theory, to test the scope of the theory through an application to food, and to gain insight into food itself. Elizabeth Telfer's (1996) *Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food* is an excellent example of work in this category. Telfer analyses philosophical theories about the nature of rights, art, pleasure and even virtues – all through the lens of food.

Although all the above categories are worthy of philosophical exploration, I have chosen to focus on and develop the first category, because **Foodist Philosophy** is the most original of the three and hence has had the least philosophical attention.

1.6 Outline of Thesis Chapters

In my second chapter I discuss **Foodist Philosophy** and begin by examining the differences between a *style* and *area* of philosophy, because an essential feature of Foodist Philosophy is that it is a *style* of philosophy. *Areas* of philosophy are constituted by the subject matter whereas *styles* of philosophy involve the process of handling, or approach to that subject matter. A foodist, that is someone who advocates foodist philosophy, starts with the significance of the fact that all humans eat, and believes that all things are interconnected, none self-sufficient, and advocates the idea of participatory relations between humans. A foodist values the body, an ethic of care and generosity, and values virtues such as hospitality and moderation. The second chapter will offer an explanation and defence of these claims.

I then attempt to show how this *style* of philosophy can be used to critique and reread another philosophical work. I use Plato's *Symposium* as an example, not only because Plato was one of the first philosophers to denigrate eating but also because his play is set, unexpectedly, in distinctively foodist surroundings: a banquet or drinks party. The third chapter gives an overview of the *Symposium* and I discuss the interpretative accounts of

Ferrari (1992), Kahn (1996), Nussbaum (1986), Price (1989), Rutherford (1995), and Vlastos (1999). I argue that although these interpretations vary, we can conclude that the core of the dialogue is Socrates' speech and that Plato's view of love entails a spiritual ascent to the love of the Forms.

In the fourth chapter I offer a foodist rereading of Plato's *Symposium*. I do this in two ways. First, one can accept for the sake of argument that Plato's view of love entails love of the Forms and then, for foodist reasons, object to his account. Second one can argue that Plato's view of love is more complex than the above interpretation and argue that Plato's view of love does allow for a foodist conception thereof.

Chapter 2

What is Foodist Philosophy?

2.1 Chapter Introduction

In the first chapter I discussed the history of the philosophical neglect of food and why philosophy should pay attention to food. I then briefly discussed three possible philosophical approaches to food. My tripartite division is Foodist Philosophy, Philosophy of Food and Philosophy and Food. In this chapter I develop an account of Foodist Philosophy. I begin by explaining the difference between a *style* of philosophy and an *area* of philosophy, and how foodism is an example of the former. I then develop a Foodist Manifesto, using ideas from Curtin (1992), Heldke (1992), Kass (1994), Nozick (1989), and Versveld (1983).

2.2 Terms

Initially I wanted to label this category 'Food Philosophy' but I realised that this term could be misleading. Food Philosophy implies personal philosophies such as 'my food philosophy is to live to eat and not eat to live'. Although personal food philosophies may be interesting, especially when they are the philosophies of famous chefs such as Nigella Lawson or Jamie Oliver, this is not what I want this category to cover because personal philosophies are not philosophically interesting.

My other two options are either 'Foodism'¹ or 'Foodist Philosophy'. I have modelled these names on Feminism and Feminist Philosophy because I intend the former to parallel the latter in many respects. I use Foodism and Foodist Philosophy interchangeably.

¹ Foodism has been used to suggest the contemporary food craze or food fetishism – this is not the meaning that I have in mind.

2.3 *Style of Philosophy vs. Area of Philosophy*

A distinctive feature of this category is that it is a *style* of philosophy, in the same way that African Philosophy, Feminist Philosophy, Continental Philosophy or Analytic Philosophy are *styles* of philosophy. A style of philosophy that becomes popular and widely used becomes entrenched as a tradition². I do not want to discuss all these examples of styles or traditions of philosophy. I mention these examples merely to make a point. I contrast these *styles* of philosophy with *areas* of philosophy. Areas of philosophy include, Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics and Logic. I discuss Longino's (1999) account of feminist epistemology as an example of a style of philosophy.

Areas of philosophy are the basic constituents of philosophy and represent the various subject matters of philosophy. Metaphysics, Epistemology and Ethics are the three main philosophical areas, and Logic is another area of philosophy, although it is of a different kind. Blackburn (2004: xv) discusses philosophy's "truth-seeking aspirations", which he argues is essential to the identity of philosophy. Philosophy's "business of seeking the truth" is fundamentally concerned with four general questions, each belonging to a specific area:

1. What is there in the most general sense? (Metaphysics)
2. What can we know and how? (Epistemology)
3. How should we conduct our lives? (Ethics)
4. What are the most general conditions that must be satisfied by any coherent thought? (Logic)

These general areas of philosophy are subdivided into other areas of philosophy. Although these four questions are the most general questions in philosophy, it is common for a philosopher to ask more focussed and particular questions. Other examples of philosophical subject areas include Aesthetics, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Science, Political Philosophy and even Philosophy of Food. Hence, areas of philosophy are concerned with the subject matter of philosophy and should answer the question: "what is this philosophy about?"

If areas of philosophy offer the content of the philosophy, then styles of philosophy offer ways in which that content is handled. Styles of philosophy answer the question:

² In order for a philosophical discourse to be a tradition, a necessary but not sufficient feature is that it is a style of philosophy.

“how is the philosophical question treated?” and are attempts to answer in unique ways the questions that the areas of philosophy have set up. Styles of philosophy take different approaches, or perspectives, in order to rethink old conclusions and philosophical positions.

Another way to understand this distinction between style and area is that the areas set up the parameters for the possible “truth” and styles are different angles or perspectives that aim at discovering the “truth”. Each style offers a different perspective on metaphysical, ethical and epistemological questions. Logic is perhaps the one area in philosophy that remains constant and does not vary as the style changes. This is why I stated earlier that although logic is an area of philosophy, it is a special kind of an area.

Each style or tradition has a different way of approaching these areas of philosophy and may arrive at very different conclusions because the style determines what issues and problems are to be emphasised. A style of philosophy places certain concerns and issues at its centre and privileges certain positions that may be ignored by other styles. Although styles of philosophy can be loosely categorised, many are interrelated and their boundaries may overlap. Hence, although the distinction between style and area may be clear, the divisions between different styles may be quite permeable. For example, African Philosophy, a style of Philosophy, has both Analytic and Continental styles of writing within its body of work.

In Neil Levy’s (2003) paper “Analytic and Continental Philosophy: Explaining the Differences”, he argues that attempts to capture the differences between these two styles (analytic and continental philosophy) have been inadequate because they have not offered *explanations* of these differences. Levy argues that analytic philosophy should be seen as philosophy conducted within a paradigm (in the Kuhnian sense) whereas continental philosophy shares much less in the way of presuppositions, problems and approaches. Levy considers seven suggestions that attempt to characterise the differences and he shows how each suggestion is problematic. Although Levy’s main argument is interesting

and provocative, it is problematic³ and hence shows how difficult it is to characterise different styles of philosophy.

Before I discuss an example of a style of philosophy in more detail, I offer a food analogy in order to clarify the distinction between areas and styles of philosophy. Food needs to be understood in the same way as the umbrella term 'philosophy'. Just as philosophy is subdivided into different areas, food is also subdivided into different food groups. Different areas of food include proteins, carbohydrates, fruit, vegetables, fats, and proteins, and can be further subdivided into chicken, beef, eggs, chickpeas and so on. There are many ways of preparing or eating food and the different ways of handling the food can be thought of as different approaches to the food. Frying, roasting, boiling, and blending are some of the ways food is treated. For example there could also be a 'raw food style' that advocates eating raw food such as sashimi, salad, or carpaccio. Another style could be roasting food, for example roasted chicken or roasted vegetables. Each style of handling the food has different assumptions about the best way to treat and consume a particular food group. The style will determine the outcome of the final product, which can vary considerably: compare a fried egg to a boiled egg. Some styles are better suited to certain food groups and hence certain styles foreground certain food groups – for example meat is better roasted than boiled. The different styles also bring out different qualities and features of the food such as frying may allow the food to retain its colour whereas steaming food may result in the food retaining its healthy properties.

From the above analogy it should be evident that areas are the content whereas styles constitute the way that the content is handled or treated. Clearly, certain styles are better suited for certain content, but each style will have its positive attributes. Each style has the ability to illuminate and bring out different features and qualities in the content. I now offer a detailed example of a style of philosophy, namely feminist epistemology.

Helen Longino (1999) argues in "Feminist Epistemology", that feminist epistemology is not a certain doctrine of epistemology but rather a certain way of doing epistemology. She begins her account by stating that epistemology is a general inquiry into the meaning

³ Levy accounts for the difference between analytic and continental philosophy by arguing that the former needs to be understood as an ongoing research program whereas the latter is not. He offers interesting but contestable points in favour of his argument. I shall not discuss his paper further, as this is really a tangential point.

of knowledge claims, conditions for the possibility of knowledge and the nature of truth and justification. Longino emphasises that although one of the aims of feminist epistemology is to be critical of mainstream western philosophy, she does not aim to give up entirely on all of philosophy's constraints and aspirations. She aims is to find new directions but with old tools.

Feminist epistemology in Longino's account, is not concerned with reconceptualising the entire area of epistemology, but rather to rethink various attitudes and concepts that are "tainted with masculinism" (Longino 1999: 330). Longino states that the feminist epistemological enquiry is concerned with how concepts of truth, rationality, objectivity and certainty can be "rethought" but not thrown out, in order to rid this area (epistemology) of its gender bias. Longino states that it is not the entire area of epistemology that is at fault, but rather certain attitudes and concepts within it. The role of feminist epistemology, according to Longino, is to sort through epistemological concepts in order to see what should be retained, transformed or jettisoned in the area of epistemology.

Longino (1999: 331) argues that feminist epistemology is "like the rest of philosophy". She offers a brief account of what is generally assumed to be philosophical methodology. Particular topics are taken up, understood from different angles and then contested. From this, certain problems and issues emerge as central and certain theoretical formulations are examined, and used or discarded. Longino points out that there is "no single feminist epistemology" and there exist many approaches, ideas and arguments. The common link is the philosophers' agenda to expose and reverse the gender bias in the former, traditional formulations.

This approach rejects the traditional Cartesian understanding of epistemology and instead insists on a conception of the knower as embodied. Longino argues that this insistence on embodiment leads to several consequences: knowers must be understood as situated in specific contexts, the knowing subject and object can no longer be conceived as distinct, and knowers also need to be understood as being in various relationships of interdependence with other knowers. These consequences will have a converse influence on how we understand epistemic justification.

Longino argues that feminist epistemology is important because it has placed certain questions –largely neglected in recent analytic epistemology– on the agenda of contemporary philosophy. For example, given the Cartesian legacy (the identification of knowledge with certainty) that is so entrenched in the area of epistemology, historically, philosophers have focussed their attention on skepticism and its refutation. However, through an affirmation of embodiment, feminists have drawn attention to a variety of epistemological issues other than the refutation of skepticism.

An example of an issue that has been foregrounded is epistemic justification. If knowing subjects are embodied, then it follows that knowers are situated and there are relations of interdependence between them. A consequence of this view is that there can be “no place of transcendence” or “unsituatedness” for which epistemic privilege can be claimed (Longino 1999: 332). This means that all beliefs will be influenced and mediated by the features of the situations in which they are formed. This has lead many feminist theorists to reject the strategy of epistemic privileging and to rethink alternative approaches to justification. Longino (1999: 333) discusses three possible responses to the situatedness of subjects although the most radical move is known as “socialising or contextualising justification”. This is an alternative to foundationalist and coherentist theories of justification⁴.

It is clear that Longino is a ‘reformist’ feminist philosopher rather than a ‘radical’ feminist philosopher. The former refers to feminists who aim at rereading and reconceptualising concepts in philosophy rather than rejecting the whole project of Western philosophy. It should be noted that Feminist philosophy is often critiqued and rejected because its opponents claim that it lacks a coherent project. In the “Feminist History of Philosophy” (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-feminist/>), Gosselin states that it is “perplexing” how some feminist philosophers hail Nietzsche as a supporter of feminist issues, while others claim he is a misogynist. Not only have feminist philosophers reached different interpretations of the history of philosophy but many of these interpretations conflict. This ambivalence regarding feminist interpretations of canonical philosophers and the history of philosophy raises questions

⁴ More specifically, contextualism is the alternative to foundationalism and coherentism as descriptive theories, socialism is the alternative to foundationalism and coherentism as normative theories.

about the coherence and unity of the feminist project. Many argue that this lack of coherence or unity undermines feminist philosophy as a style of philosophy. I argue that this view is incorrect because one of the main features of the notion of a 'style of philosophy' is that it is difficult to define and pinpoint the boundaries and positions of each style.

Stroud (2001: 32-33) argues that philosophy is an activity and not a set of doctrines or truths as there can be no "philosophical creed". He also argues that the aim or goal of philosophy should not be to discover any philosophical creeds or doctrines. He describes philosophy as "making no progress" because philosophers agree on very little. He points out that unlike science, philosophy has no "body or a doctrine that can be called truths [like those] of physics or chemistry". If philosophers do agree on something, this does not mean that they have discovered "philosophical facts or truths" but rather have simply attained "widespread agreement". For Stroud (2001: 34), it is the philosophical "works" and not their "results" that constitute a tradition of philosophy. Unlike the enterprise of science that is defined according to its results, philosophy is defined and categorised according to its "interests and approaches and procedures".

Longino and Stroud suggest that we must not understand styles of philosophy as categories that contain a unified set of truths that are related and coherent. That feminist philosophy has conflicting approaches and contrasting positions does not undermine it as a style of philosophy. That there are many internal debates within these various styles of philosophy is a healthy condition and reinforces the project of philosophy as being an activity rather than a creed.

Stroud (2001: 41-42) uses an analogy from Wittgenstein to describe the active nature of philosophy: "the philosopher treats a question; as an illness is treated". For Stroud, the stress is on the verb. *Treating* a question is different to *answering* a question. Treatment involves identification and understanding of the origins and causes of the disease. Just as different health practitioners use different approaches to treating an illness, so too, do philosophers of different styles use different approaches and methods in treating a question. Stroud argues that in philosophy, "we need to identify the assumptions, the demands, the preconceptions, and the aspirations that lead to a question's having the particular significance it now has for us". For Stroud, philosophy is inseparable from the

history of philosophy because “philosophy is always in part a response to a previous philosophy”. Each new style of philosophy is a response to previous, more dominant styles of philosophy.

A potential objection to this concept of a style of philosophy, is that given that styles may lack unity and coherence, how does a philosopher identify and differentiate between different styles? I think that this objection focuses on the difficulty in defining and categorising styles of philosophy given their fluid boundaries and varying projects. Earlier on I stated that I was not going to attempt to define different styles, as there are many debates about what constitutes (for example) African Philosophy or Continental Philosophy. However, if one were to attempt to define a style of philosophy where would one begin? I think that all styles have basic assumptions and approach philosophical areas from a particular angle or framework. For example, Longino argues that feminist philosophers all presuppose that human beings are embodied beings and that this embodiment has various implications. Not only do styles contain various assumptions, but it appears that styles seem to have certain agendas too.

Longino’s paper shows how feminist epistemology is united by its common (political) agenda. For ideas, concepts or arguments to be labelled as part of the “feminist epistemological” style, the epistemologists must have an agenda that involves resisting the gender bias that exists in the area of epistemology. While it may not be immediately evident that all styles have agendas, on closer examination, they do indeed involve particular assumptions about their projects.

As I have already noted, each style carries various assumptions. These basic assumptions inevitably inform particular agendas and projects. Not all agendas are as explicit as the agenda of feminist epistemology. Marxism critiques philosophical concepts and theories that serve the interests of the ruling classes against the exploited classes. Foucaultian styles of philosophy critique traditional concepts of power and challenge ‘normalised’ concepts that essentially act as oppressive devices. Nietzschean philosophy aims to ‘overcome’ the Christian-Platonic tradition by embracing perspectivism. Even Analytic Philosophy, whose supporters claim that it is neutral, objective and value-free, has hidden agendas.

An objection to my claim – that all styles of philosophy have agendas – could be that I have used the word ‘agenda’ loosely and its meaning has shifted depending on the style I am discussing. However, I believe that it is not the meaning, but the visibility of the agenda that shifts. Although certain agendas are strongly political and explicit, as in the case of Feminist Philosophy, other styles may have implicit, and less obvious agendas, as in the case of Analytic Philosophy. It follows, then, that one of the functions of styles of philosophy, is to uncover and critique these various agendas, explicit or implicit.

Not only would some Analytic philosophers deny that there is an inherent agenda in the tradition of Analytic philosophy but more importantly “Analytic Philosophy” is not a style. For many “ultra-faithfuls”⁵, analytic philosophy is the only legitimate form of philosophy, and the concept of “styles of philosophy” is redundant.

One reason for this attitude is that analytic philosophy models itself on mathematical and logical methodology. As noted above, logic is the one area of philosophy not susceptible to shifts in style. Laws of logic are universal and hence do not change even if the context does. For this reason, many analytic philosophers believe that philosophy should be universal i.e. that it is possible to do it from your armchair and that it cannot be qualified by modifiers such as African. Therefore, for many analytics, African Philosophy is not considered philosophy (Eze 2001: 206).

Eze (2001) argues that African Philosophy is indeed a legitimate style of philosophy because African issues are *human* issues and therefore universal. Eze (2001: 212-213) defines African Philosophy as “a body of reflections, texts, institutions, and professional societies committed to easily historico-political agendas”. He makes the further claim that Analytic philosophy merely “pretend[s] that it is itself ahistorical and apolitical”.

I agree with Eze that Analytic philosophy does indeed have certain agendas (although perhaps not explicit ones) and that it is indeed one of many styles of philosophy. Analytic philosophy makes certain assumptions and privileges logical and mathematical methodology. These assumptions inevitably inform the approach of analytic philosophy and the sorts of areas and issues that are addressed. The assumption that logic is the best methodology creates certain agendas.

⁵ Eze (2001) uses the term “ultra-faithful” to describe proponents of analytic philosophy who believe that “the history of philosophy is really the history of *analytic* philosophy”. Ultra-faithfuls are those who believe that there is only one, universal discipline of philosophy i.e. analytic philosophy.

The difficulty that Analytic philosophy has in addressing certain areas of philosophy also indicates that it is a philosophical style. The following statement by Danto (although slightly modified by an anonymous source) makes this point quite clear: “how incorrigibly stiff *analytic* philosophy is when it undertakes to lay its icy fingers on the frilled and beating wings of the butterfly of love”. In my opinion, subject matter like the human condition, emotions, love and so on are often better handled by traditions such as Continental philosophy, whereas Analytic philosophy is more appropriate for approaching subjects related to philosophy of language or epistemology.

To summarise: there are certain features that different styles of philosophy have in common. First, each style has a different way of approaching, handling or treating the various areas of philosophy. Some styles are better suited to particular areas. A style of philosophy is a way of *doing* philosophy. Given the various treatments of philosophical questions, each style will generate unique solutions or conclusions to philosophical problems. It is difficult to characterise a style of philosophy because within each style there are divergences and differentiations. Styles of philosophy are constantly changing. Each style has what I have termed an *agenda*, which may be explicit or implicit. This agenda critiques other styles of philosophy, usually more dominant or mainstream ones.

Given these general features of styles of philosophy, the stylistic nature of foodist philosophy should be apparent. It is a way of *doing* philosophy and approaches philosophical questions from a particular foodist perspective. Foodism has an agenda – to assert value on the activity of eating and hence to foreground the role of the body. I now offer an account of Foodism.

2.4 Foodist Manifesto

a) Structure of foodist account

First steps:

1. Focus on the ordinary as opposed to the extraordinary (Nozick)
2. Eating as the ordinary AND tied to human nature (Kass)

Incorrect steps:

Total rejection

- a) Everything is food (Zen's Radical Foodism)
- b) Everything is a process (Heraclitus' Flux-Foodism)

Next step:

Develop a Foodist Metaphysics, Epistemology and Ethics (Kass, Curtin, Heldke and Versveld)

b) Noting the Ordinary

The first move a foodist needs to make is it to focus on the ordinary as opposed to the extraordinary. In his *Examined Life*, Nozick (1989) argues that the most ordinary objects can yield surprises to attentive awareness. He uses the examples of human activities associated with food and air. Although eating and breathing are part of life's ordinary necessities, when we actually attend to them we realise that through eating and breathing we can have a "profound experience of nonseparation from the rest of existence" (Nozick 1989: 58).

Through eating we form a very intimate relationship with external reality. When we eat, we literally consume the outside world and incorporate it into our bodies. In this way the world enters us and essentially becomes us. Another feature of eating is that it represents our essential mode of sociability, especially as we often eat with others. However, eating also has an individual non-social aspect. When we eat, we open ourselves to the food and hence get to know its essence in a very intimate way and then allow it to be incorporated into our own flesh.

Nozick's point is that even life's necessary banalities such as eating and breathing, can offer profound insights if we attend to them. By "attending", Nozick means contemplating these phenomena in a philosophical way. Philosophy tends to ignore these

'trivial matters' in favour of 'higher' ones exclusively associated with the rationality of human beings: thinking and believing.

Curtin (1992: 3) makes a stronger claim than Nozick: while Nozick advocates consideration of the ordinary, Curtin argues that there are "deep structural reasons" why traditional philosophy has neglected discussion of the ordinary. Traditional philosophy tends to value subjects that are public, masculine, and universal. The ordinary aspects of our lives such as eating and breathing can only be understood as concrete and embodied. For this reason, Curtin argues that traditional Western philosophy has been uninterested in common everyday experiences that "add spice to life". Traditionally the focus has been on the aspects of life that can be ordered by theory making, i.e. the "reduction of temporal events to abstract, disembodied, atemporal schemata" (Curtin 1992: 3). Curtin (1992: 3) quotes Nietzsche who was one of the first philosophers to acknowledge the philosophical neglect of the ordinary:

Something for the industrious... So far, everything that has given colour to existence still lacks a history: or, where could one find a history of love, of avarice, of envy, of conscience, of piety, or of cruelty?...Does anyone know the moral effects of food? Is there a philosophy of nourishment? (The ever-renewed clamour for and against vegetarianism is sufficient proof that there is no such philosophy as yet).

Therefore the first move a foodist should make is to revalue objects and activities that are physical, transitory and ordinary. A foodist would claim that food and eating, although ordinary, are worthy of philosophical attention.

c) Eating Reveals Human Nature

An immediate response to the foodist's focus on the ordinary is the question: "what counts as the ordinary?" Does this mean that philosophy can be about everything and anything? There are many objects from doorknobs to trees that we could describe as 'ordinary'. Would a foodist claim that we ought to contemplate all these objects in a philosophical way? The foodist, therefore, needs to qualify which ordinary objects are worthy of philosophical inquiry.

Objects and activities that reveal insights into human nature are the sort of ‘ordinary’ things that philosophy should focus on. In the following section, I describe an argument by Kass (1994) for eating as an ordinary activity closely linked to human nature.

Kass is the quintessential foodist because he uses the common phenomena of eating as a starting point, or “evidence” in his search for what is “universally, permanently and profoundly true about the human animal and its deepest hungerings” (Kass 1994: xi). In *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of our Nature*, Kass argues that there is a deep connection between human eating, human freedom and human moral self-consciousness.

Kass’ (1994) project aims to show how both modern corporealists (those who deny or deprecate the soul) and their opponents, modern rationalists (those who deny or deprecate the body), are both mistaken about living nature and about humans. It is through an examination of eating that Kass (1994: 9) argues for a view of nature that sees humans as “psychophysical unities who are enlivened, purposive, and open to and in converse with the larger world”.

Kass (1994: 11) argues that not only is eating an interesting topic in its own right but that it is eating that is the “perfect subject” for reopening the question about nature, human nature and ethics. Kass (1994: 11-12) argues:

1. Every animal eats.
2. Animals mostly eat other living things or their products; and eating necessarily implies and illuminates the relations between living beings. Thinking about eating also implies thinking about relations between animal’s nature and the larger world – i.e. nature as a whole.
3. Understanding human nature also expresses the relation between the nonrational and rational in humans and between the natural and cultural or ethical.
4. Nature, correctly understood, may offer insights into the framework of the good and virtuous life.

Kass (1994: 14) describes his argument as an “ascent” from nature to human nature through justice, nobility, and holiness.

Kass (1994: 83) cites Rousseau, who emphasised the correlation between human freedom and human appetite. Human difference is demonstrable in diet. Animals are driven by instinct to select the correct foods whereas humans choose food and its amount

using their will. The human appetite is distinctly flexible and this is reflected in human omnivorousness.

Kass (1994: 91) further discusses how the “openness of human taste” allows for the distinction between what is pleasant and what is nourishing for the human being. That humans have been partially emancipated from instinct means that we have simultaneously acquired both the need and the capacity to concern ourselves with questions of what is good and bad. For Kass (1994: 91), the human “uninstructed appetite for food” illustrates that humans are by nature “ethical animals” in that we know that there is a good and a bad between which we need to choose.

It follows that humans are the only species who have norms governing their eating practices. Kass (1994: 131) states that the manner of eating, more than what is eaten reflects the “humanity of the eaters”. We are the only animal species that is self-conscious of what and how we eat. It is therefore evident that although eating may be a banal everyday necessity, it is a human practice that expresses our human nature. Through the lens of eating we are able to see more clearly the various facets of the human condition. Eating forces us to acknowledge our bodily existence, including our drives and desires. Eating also illuminates the distinction between us and other animals in that it reflects our rationality, self-consciousness and freedom. Most importantly, eating is a human practice that clearly captures the necessary ethical aspects of our nature. Therefore, eating represents the uniqueness of the human condition – it reminds us that we are embodied, rational beings who are necessarily ethical.

d) A Brief Classification of Foodism

Foodism is a style of philosophy that attempts to make an everyday activity – eating – the focus or starting point of philosophical enquiry. Foodism asserts that eating is a significant part of being human and that the practice of eating must be foregrounded, not ignored, if we are to understand the human condition and the world in which we live. A foodist’s motivation for foregrounding eating is that eating is a universal human activity that represents the ambivalent aspects of human nature.

On the one hand, we are animals who are slaves to our hunger drives, while at the same time our eating reflects our rationality as it is a symbolic and meaningful activity for us. Although we are like animals in that we have to eat in order to live, we *eat* rather than merely *feed*. It follows that Foodism involves the discussion of philosophical concerns that refuse to identify the human experience exclusively with disembodied rationality.

Writing from various perspectives, a foodist challenges several areas of traditional philosophy on the grounds that it fails:

1. To take seriously the practice of human eating and the implications that this universal activity generates, and
2. To recognise an eater's (that is an embodied) way of being, thinking and doing are *as valuable* as contemplation of abstracts.

Foodist philosophers fault traditional metaphysics for splitting the self from the other and the mind from the body, for wondering whether 'other minds' exist and whether personal identity depends more on memories than on physical characteristics. Foodism rejects all forms of ontological dualism. Rather it stresses the ways in which individuals are psychophysical embodied beings, who are defined by their relations to other embodied beings and to their relations with the world. Foodists value the body as much as human rationality, whereas traditional philosophers tend to privilege the rational and abstract above the embodied and concrete.

Foodism also critiques traditional ethics for its basis in rules and principles. Traditional ethics involve maximising utility for the aggregate or doing duty for duty's sake, and hence measure human conduct against a set of universal, abstract, impersonal norms. This view of ethics has been labelled a justice perspective of ethics. A foodist on the other hand, would promote what is commonly known as a care perspective of ethics and stresses responsibilities and relationships rather than rights and rules. A foodist attends more to the particular features of each moral situation than to its general implications.

e) Two Extreme Types of Foodism

Before I present a positive foodist account, I will discuss two hypothetical cases of foodism that ought to be rejected. Zen-Foodism and Flux-Foodism are extreme forms of foodism that claim that everything is food or everything is a process respectively. These examples of foodism advocate positions that are too far removed from traditional philosophy to enter into dialogue and therefore cannot be useful as a critique of traditional Western philosophy.

Zen-Foodists are radical foodists who will support any view that is associated with food. Radical foodists would reject Western philosophy in its entirety and embrace Eastern philosophy because of the central role food plays in Eastern metaphysics. Versveld (1983: 27) discusses the Taittiriya and Maitri Upanishads, where the ultimate reality is said to be food. Food is understood in a spiritual dimension and the food in us is one with 'The Food'.

Food has a nourishing and sustaining quality for both biological life and thought and spirit, for example:

From food, verily, creatures are produced,
Whatsoever creatures dwell on the earth.
Moreover by food, in truth they live.
Moreover into it also they finally pass
For truly food is the chief of all beings;
Therefore it is called the essence of things.
Verily, they obtain all food
Who worship Brahma as food.
For truly, food is the chief of all beings,
Therefore it is called the essence of all things.
From food created things are born.
By food, when born, do they grow up.
It is both eaten and eats things.
Because of that it is called food.

(Taittiriya Upanishad 2.2)

This doctrine is similar to the Zen Buddhist doctrine found in the *Vimalakirti Scripture*: “when one is identified with the food one eats one is identified with the whole universe; when we are one with the whole universe we are one with the food we eat” (quoted in Curtin and Heldke 1992: 153). Radical foodists would therefore claim that the ultimate reality is food.

Through a complete rejection of Western philosophy, Zen-Foodism has lost any common ground that would permit dialogue and critique between the two. Zen-Foodism and Western philosophy are mutually exclusive paradigms and this disables any meaningful communication.

Flux-Foodism is another type of extreme foodism. Flux-Foodists use Heraclitus’ theory of universal flux as a starting point for their views. Given that humans are in a constant need of sustenance – our need to eat is never sated – a flux-foodist denies the existence of anything that is constant or fixed. For a flux-foodist, the food we eat is in a continual process of change, and for them it follows that everything is in the process of becoming. The human condition, and more broadly, the world in which the human is situated, is marked by flux and change. A flux-foodist would quote Heraclitus:

20. Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed.

21. You cannot step twice over the same river, for other waters are continually flowing on.

22. Cool things become warm, the warm grows cool; the moist dries, the parched becomes moist.

23. It is in changing that things find repose.

(quoted in Wheelwright 1959: 29)

Wheelwright (1959: 29) writes that the theme of “unceasing change” is a very old one in philosophy and that for many the notion that “everything changes” is merely only partially true. Although the physical world may be in constant flux, things like mathematical truths and laws of logic are constant and fixed. However, Heraclitus’ response to this would be that “permanence is but a relative term” because what we would call permanent is simply an example of “change in slow motion or in hidden

guise” (Wheelwright 1959: 30). A flux-foodist would therefore advocate that everything is a process.

This view, however, is clearly mistaken when we consider that the laws of logic are examples of things that are fixed and constant. To hold such an extreme view – such as reality is a process – is to once again disable dialogue and critique between foodism and Western Philosophy. Although many foodists would not want to deny that there are many things that are processes – eating being a prime example – they would also assert that certain things are fixed and constant. That all living things require sustenance is an example of a physical law that is constant and unchanging.

Hence, although a case can be made for extreme foodists, I believe that their style of philosophy would fail as an adequate tool to critique a text like Plato’s *Symposium*. For this reason, I will now develop an account of Foodism that will not be so extreme as to disable dialogue between it and traditional Western Philosophy. My positive account of foodism will use ideas from Kass (1994), Curtin (1992), Heldke (1992), Telfer (1996) and Versveld (1983).

f) A Foodist Metaphysics

Kass (1994: 34) argues that most biologists and philosophical corporealists are firm believers in the “primacy of the material” and that the motto “you are what you eat” could well be theirs. However, he argues against this and in favour of the necessary supremacy of the living form. Material and form are relative and correlative terms: form is something made of certain materials and materials are *of* and *for* the thing as formed. To be material means to be potential and to be able to receive a certain form. Marble is the material for the form that is a sculpture. Form and material are interdependent at multiple levels of organisation. At the lowest level of organisation is the ultimate material – *matter*. Kass (1994: 36) claims that corporeal science aims to explain all organisation in terms of this “ultimate matter”. Form on their account would be at all levels an accident. This is the view that Kass is challenging.

For Kass (1994: 36) form is often associated with shape and figure, yet the form of living beings is more than simply the aggregate of the living parts. Form is what makes a being a unity and a whole. Form provides specificity and identity. Although form is

immediately recognisable in the organism's surface appearance, Kass claims that there is more to form than its visibility. Living organisms are not only visibly ordered, but they are also internally organised.

Another observation that Kass (1994: 54) makes is what he refers to as "that great paradox of life" that he believes is evident in the necessity of eating. All living forms need to threaten other life forms in order to maintain their own life and form and eating is simultaneously form preserving and form destroying. From this claim, Kass infers that life is an advance over non-life and that living things have "more being" than non-living things. This is because living things are dependent on the world and participate in meaningful relationships with the world that transcend their own boundaries of here and now.

Thus, we can make some inferences about nature through the examination of eating. First, we can divide the world into living and non-living things. Living things have to ingest external substances (other living things or nutrients or minerals) in order to maintain their form. All living things have similar material compositions, yet are distinct because of their form. The state of living things is constantly changing. Living things participate in relationships with the world, acting on the world and simultaneously being acted on by the world.

Versveld (1983: 24) states that "an eaten world is an intelligible world" and it necessitates human perception and awareness that the "world as food is a humanised world". In the same way that it is logically impossible to have freedom without obstacles, Versveld believes that it is impossible to have the concept food without human existence. Versveld writes, "I may not be the bread of life, but I am the life of bread" and "when you eat bread, you are eating reality".

Kass and Versveld are making similar claims. What makes the human species distinct from other living beings (besides their form) is an awareness of the necessity of not only acting on the external world, but the necessity of ingesting the external world to maintain the human form.

Heldke (1992) offers an account of the participatory conception of self and how the moral agent is deeply connected to others in a complex pattern of defining relations. According to Heldke (1992: 11), we have "participatory" and "objectified" relations to

food. An objectified relation to food implies an indirect, external and non-defining relation between the subject and the food in which food is objectified. Proponents of this view are dualists who insist that the mind is autonomous and independent and food cannot define what it means to be a person. Heldke, Kass and Versveld reject this view and argue for what Heldke calls “participatory relations” to food. A foodist also asserts that not only do our participatory relations to food, but also to other humans and the world at large, define us.

Heldke stipulates that a participatory relation is a “defining relation”. A person cannot be described in terms of essential, internal and immutable qualities, but progressively becomes a person through “relational openness to others”. This relational understanding of self leads to the view that we are partially defined by our relations to the food we eat.

Heldke (1992: 12) makes two claims about the distinction between participatory and objectified relations, “one ontic and the other epistemic”. Ontologically, she believes that humans are constituted as persons by the food that they eat and what they consider food. Epistemically, she claims that it is unhealthy to view ourselves as autonomous entities that only enter into non-defining relations. Heldke argues that to ignore that food is both physically and politically defining is to risk both physical and political health.

Therefore a foodist would hold that living beings are in a constant state of becoming and are defined by their various participatory relations. Humans are embodied beings who are defined by many interdependent relationships.

g) A Foodist Epistemology

In a paper “Recipes for Theory Making”, Heldke (1992) argues for a new understanding of epistemology. In order to develop a foodist epistemology, I have used many of her insights because not only does she use the example of cooking to substantiate her arguments but also her project – inspired by feminist concerns – complements the foodist project. The next section is a summary of Heldke’s paper, with foodist parallels inserted.

Heldke claims that traditional epistemology sets up dichotomies such as realism/antirealism and foundationalism/relativism. Bernstein (cited by Heldke 1992:

252) claims that many epistemologists suffer from “Cartesian Anxiety”. They believe that epistemology is a “bifurcated terrain” in which there is either a firm foundation for knowledge (foundationalism) or there is an abyss of intellectual and moral indecision (relativism). Heldke (1992: 251) argues that there are alternative ways to engage in epistemology and that these dichotomies are not exhaustive: she refers to her approach to epistemology as the “Coresponsible Option”.

The term “coresponsible” refers to the “atmosphere of cooperation and interaction which characterises inquiry activity” (Heldke 1992: 253). When we engage in enquiry we enter into relationships with other enquirers and with the things⁶ about which we are inquiring. This option rejects the strict subject/object dichotomy and its implications of hierarchy and separation and that we should rather think of inquiry as a communal activity in which the relationships between the inquirers and inquired are emphasised. Heldke (1992: 253) quotes Dewey who claimed that inquiry is “the correspondence of two people who ‘correspond’ in order to modify one’s own ideas, intents and acts”. The term “option” suggests that there are many ways to think about the world and inquiry. Theories are merely tools we choose to use and outlooks that we decide to assume. Some theories may be more useful than others but none are universally reliable.

Heldke’s motivation for developing the Coresponsible Option is her feminist agenda. She wants to develop ways to approach feminist inquiry that are respectful and illuminating of women’s issues without slipping into the uncomfortable space of acknowledging *all* positions just because they represent a different perspective. Heldke (1992: 252) emphasises that her belief in the “respect for difference” should not be translated into the acceptance of misogynist, racist, classist or any oppressive views. She claims that foundationalism and relativism are inadequate frameworks for this sort of inquiry. Foundationalism simply treats difference as a stage that must be overcome in order to construct an adequate theory. Foundationalists consider difference a weakness or inadequacy in a theory. Although relativism allows and welcomes difference, it does not allow for any critique of these differences. Heldke’s solution to the inadequacy of both foundationalism and relativism is the Coresponsible Option.

⁶ In traditional accounts these things about which we enquire are called the *objects* of our inquiry.

There could also be foodist motivations for why the Coresponsible Option is an attractive alternative to the absolutist/relativist dichotomy. A foodist's basic assumption is that all humans eat. However just as one cannot make universal claims about all women, one cannot make universal claims about how all humans eat. We also cannot claim that there is only *one* way of eating – some people use utensils, others their hands, some eat meat, others eat insects, some eat anything and everything. However, just as we need a theory to account for all these differences in eating, we also want to make some claims about better ways of eating or what constitutes healthier foodstuffs. We would also want to make claims like cannibalism is wrong or that eating in moderation is preferable to gluttony.

Another aspect of eating that makes it difficult to constrict into the absolutist/relativist dichotomy is that although eating is a necessary universal practice; it is also a highly individualistic activity. Although we all have to eat, the matters of how, when and what we eat differs greatly in every individual. The act of eating also involves intimate knowledge between the eater and the food. Eating is perhaps the most thorough and intimate way of getting to know another object. When I eat, it is possible to use all five senses in the process. I see the food, I smell the food, sometimes I can hear the food cooking or whilst I chew it in my mouth, I touch the food with my hands and then tongue and finally I taste the food. Not only can I use every sense to get to know a foodstuff, but I eventually assimilate the food into my system and make it part of me. Hence, eating reveals the relationships that form between an inquirer and the inquired. For these reasons, foodists would find Heldke's Coresponsible Option appealing and relevant to their projects.

Heldke situates a discussion of cooking within the context of rejecting this absolutist/relativist dichotomy. She uses cooking⁷ to show that it is possible to think about inquiry and theorising in a ways that avoid the absolutist/relativist dichotomy. Heldke (1993: 254) believes that activities that fall under the category of "cooking" manifest qualities that should appear in the activity of philosophising. She believes that cooking is a kind of enquiry, and quotes Dewey's definition of inquiry as "the controlled

⁷ Heldke (1992: 255) explains that she does not use cooking simply as an analogy to, or a metaphor for, philosophical and scientific inquiry. She considers cooking qua inquiry.

or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole” (Heldke 1992: 254). This definition is applicable to cooking because cooking challenges the strict dichotomy between theory and practice. Dewey argued that these are not separate areas of human life but rather two interrelated, interdependent domains. The difference between theory and practice is one of degree and not kind.

Heldke offers an account of a philosophical investigation into cooking with the aim of exploring possible ways of engaging in philosophical theory. She focuses her analysis of cooking on aspects of recipes and recipe-cook relationships and how each aspect can offer insights into philosophical theorising.

First, Heldke argues that when we think about how and why recipes are created, we cannot make any essentialist claims. Cooks create recipes for a variety of reasons – some enter competitions, others out of economic necessity, and some for fun. Sometimes the aim of recipes is not even to produce food – Heldke mentions an example of people who create recipes for competitions that they have yet to literally try out. Similarly, there is no one reason why people come up with different theories. It follows that theories, like recipes, need to be considered as tools that we use to help us do things.

Many people do not use recipes when they cook, or they experiment in the kitchen and this often has beneficial results. Experimentation can be useful and rewarding because it can lead to wonderful new taste sensations or it can result in a feast, in spite of a relatively empty refrigerator. Similarly, Heldke argues that it is beneficial to explore and experiment with new theories. People who exclusively advocate one theory run the risk of being irrelevant, harmful or destructive. Failure to experiment with cooking may result in a boring diet, whereas failure to experiment in theorising may lead to an “arrogant, unperceptive inquirer” (Heldke 1992: 258). On a similar point, Versveld (1983: 17) states that his principle in teaching philosophy is that his students must not merely “regurgitate” his soup but rather “concoct” their own. Versveld claims that to “concoct” is the right word because it is difficult to offer recipes for soups, as they often tend to be an “*omnium gatherum* of what’s at hand”.

Second, Heldke (1992: 258) considers how we collect, store and swap recipes in the same way that we collect, trade and develop philosophical theories and that when she thinks about theorising, she sees herself writing an “epistemological cookbook”. This “epistemological cookbook” contains many ways to think about a large variety of issues and is arranged in a systematic order that serves her needs and would not necessarily be useful to anyone else. Her point is that theories, like recipes are tools that we can use depending on the situation. It is misguided to think that one recipe or theory will be sufficient or reliable or that only one system of theory organisation could be useful.

Third, Heldke argues that thinking about how we use recipes shows us how we can avoid the absolutist/relativist dichotomy in our theorising. A recipe is a description or explanation of how to do something – specifically, how to prepare a particular kind of food. A recipe is *one* approach to preparing a certain dish – not *the* approach (the opinion of some cooks notwithstanding). Also a recipe does not suggest that this is *the* food to eat (the opinion of some eaters notwithstanding). Heldke suggests that we should think of theories in this light – as developing and exchanging them with friends and she labels this approach as the “recipe plan” for theorising (Heldke 1992: 259).

On this “recipe plan” the theoriser does not assert that others must take up her project. She does not set absolutist agenda that the other theorist must work on. Rather, the theoriser presents issues that she finds important, suggest reasons why others should agree, and then suggests a methodology for approaching the issue. Heldke (1992: 259) claims that philosophical theories created on this recipe plan will be formulated as an if/then statement, that is “if you find this project compelling, then you might find this approach useful”. For example, you can ask a friend if they like strawberries because they are in season and inexpensive. You can then offer them your fabulous recipe for a strawberry dessert. For Heldke, this way of thinking about theorizing, and about how to offer theories to others, avoids absolutism. However, she also argues that this recipe plan avoids relativism too.

Although, theorists may select problems at random and then proceed to use the methodology they deem most appropriate, Heldke believes that relativism is avoidable. Recipes allow cooks to fiddle with the ingredient list and vary their preparation techniques. Some recipes are considerably more flexible than others, although most of

them will have their breaking point. If I make too many changes, my product may not have the intended outcome. Hence changing the ingredients or preparation methods may not only destroy the integrity of the final product, it may also result in an inedible stuff. A recipe plan is not relativist because once you decide to cook something – take on a certain philosophical problem – some methods of proceeding will be closed to you because of the nature of your project. The number and nature of limitations will vary with each project, although each project will have its limitations. So although it is true that there is no baklava that is more baklava than any other, it is also true that certain things just are not baklavas because as Heldke (1992: 260) writes, “recipes are not infinitely flexible”.

Fourth, Heldke (1992: 261) argues that we need to understand the relationship between “me and my recipe”. Given that recipes are flexible, cooks have the challenge of guessing how flexible a new recipe is. Learning the limits of a recipe is part of the process of learning how to cook. This is a *self-reflective* process because in deducing the flexibility of a recipe, I need to know my own proficiency and how I will be able to work and interpret the instructions. Heldke (1992: 261) claims that the cook needs to think about how “I-and-the-recipe work together”; that is, how the cook needs to interpret the instructions given by the writer of the recipe. The implication of this claim is that it is important to consider the source of the recipe/theory if one is to figure out its flexibility and that the commands in recipes are better understood if the motives of the recipe-giver are known.

Fifth, Heldke (1992: 262) offers a solution for how we can overcome flops in the kitchen: *thoughtful practice* – this includes following the recipe more carefully, making your own changes and asking others for advice. It is also possible that your recipe fails because the recipe creator has intentionally exchanged an ingredient or instruction, to ensure the “superiority” of their products. The implications of these recipe failures in terms of theory-making is that we must not think of the theory-creator as this “semi-omniscient” person who “unveils a set of universally-applicable laws about a bunch of mute, lifeless Stuff of the Universe” (Heldke 1992: 262). Nor must we think of the theory-recipient as being able to simply take up another’s theory and follow its “unambiguous universally-applicable instructions” in an unproblematic way, and apply it to the same phenomena successfully, and hence theorising is not a “one-sided activity of

a detached subject” (Heldke 1992: 263). When cooks use recipes, they enter into a kind of relation with the ingredients. Cooks are not completely separate from the ingredients, nor do they have total power over them. Bread making is a good example of this point because it is a process that is seldom perfected on the first attempt.

Heldke (1992: 264) claims that this assertion is most obviously true when we theorise about other people, although she argues that it is relevant even for the “hard sciences”. When we approach another person’s theory, it is useful to inquire about the conditions that prompted the development of that theory. It is also necessary to see how their experiences relate, challenge and conflict with ours and this knowledge will help us to consider how their theories fit or challenge our theories and hence their usefulness and applicability. The relation between the two theorists is always central to the theorising process and the more developed the relation, the better equipped the theory-receiver is to modify and use the theory.

Heldke’s “methodological cookbook” attempts to offer a unique way to think about philosophical theorising. A foodist doing epistemology would advocate Heldke’s “Coresponsible Option” and assert that theories are merely tools, where there is not one better theory. This idea reinforces the claims from the previous chapter in which I discussed styles of philosophy. Just as some styles are better suited to certain subject matter, there cannot be one style that reigns supreme. Foodists would assert that inquiry is a communal activity in which the relationships between the inquirer and inquired need to be emphasised. Heldke’s summary also shows how it is possible to rethink old assumptions such as the absolutist/relativist dichotomy. Through thinking about cooking, she has shown that there are novel ways to understand philosophical theories.

h) A Foodist Ethics

Kass (1994: 97) argues that humans connect the domain of nature with the domain of the ethical and that humans are the only species who engage in “ethicising”. Humans are the only species that are self-conscious of how best to live and who aspire to have knowledge of the good. Humans have a unique feature: both our physiques and psyches are adapted for “openness”. Humans are open in awareness and appreciation, receptive to all forms of

pleasure, free to act and most importantly, to engage with other humans. Kass claims that there is a “great paradox of life” evident in the necessity of eating. All living forms need to threaten life and form, in order to maintain their own life and form and eating is simultaneously form preserving and form destroying. This paradox of eating reflects how human eating is necessarily linked to ethics. Kass claims that generally ethics is concerned with restrictions and “nay-saying”. Given humans’ indeterminate omnivorous appetites, he argues that limitations and constraints are necessary.

Although Kass is involved in a foodist project, other than connecting eating to ethics, he does very little meta-ethical analysis, hence before I discuss the virtues and vices of eating, I offer a meta-ethical account that represents the sort of approach a foodist would take regarding ethical issues.

In the ‘Foodist Metaphysics’ section, I discussed the conception of the participatory conception of self and how the moral agent is deeply connected to others in a complex pattern of defining relations. This fact of human connectedness has implications for a foodist ethic. Curtin (1992: 124) cites Thich Nhat Hanh, who claims that a participatory understanding of self results in an ethic “in awareness” of our ineluctable connectedness to others. A foodist would adopt both the feminist ethic of care and the Buddhist ethic of compassion in order to affirm the participatory character of a healthy self. Both the ethic of care and ethic of compassion “understand the process of living in terms of a context-specific moral/aesthetic narrative which is guided by an awareness of one’s defining relations to others” (Curtin 1992: 124). Curtin states that it is neither possible nor desirable to offer a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the ethic of care or compassion because both are pluralist and affirm difference as real. Curtin’s (1992: 124) project involves the consideration of the “transition from a food-based conception of personhood to a re-oriented conception of value”.

Here is a summary of Curtin’s (1992: 124) account:

1. Curtin offers a description of how a dualist hierarchy, which constructs food as objectified (external and objectified), might value food.
2. There is a characterisation of a participatory understanding of value as a direct or authentic presence to food.
3. This “mindful” focus on food reflects our relatedness to what we choose to count as food.

4. Therefore, our food choices represent who we are morally.
5. Ethic of care or compassion is sympathetic to the idea of an authentic presence to food.
6. The connection between awareness of food and value has implications for how we value other human beings and things with which we may enter into relations of compassion and care.
7. Contextual moral vegetarianism is an example of a meaningful response to an acknowledgement of ourselves as directly related to the food we eat.

I now expand on the most relevant foodist features of Curtin's account. Curtin (1992: 127) cites the Japanese philosopher Dōgen who was interested in the relationship of food in the understanding of personhood and value. During a trip to China in 1223, Dōgen learnt that enlightenment should not be separate from ordinary life. He discovered that forming a mindful relationship to ordinary things like food could forge the path to self-understanding. Dōgen is famous for making the *tenzo*, the temple cook, one of the most important positions in the temple after the abbot. Dōgen understands our participatory relations to food and he claims that we must be present to the food we eat. This means that we must discover our ordinary selves simply through eating. Being mindful of the food we eat allows us to be aware of the temporality and relationality of life. It also allows one to acknowledge the self and the food uniting in each moment.

The idea of the "authentic presence to food" that the Dōgen advocates expresses the idea that eating is an act *in relation* to others (Curtin 1992: 128). Food therefore becomes something that we consume with others in mind. Curtin argues that there are moral and aesthetic consequences that emerge in the act of mindful eating. Our choice of food is therefore a conscious expression of who we are morally. An authentic presence to food makes us aware of how our food becomes part of us physically, politically and spiritually. Curtin (1992: 130) concludes that having an authentic presence to food can lead us to acknowledge our responsibility within our context and food practices. Bound up in the idea of mindful eating are both the ethic of awareness and the ethic of care. An authentic presence to food leads to an awareness of the relations we have with food and other humans. This knowledge of our connectedness to others inevitably leads to an ethic of care in which we respect and nurture our relationships with other humans and the world at large.

Versveld (1983: 27) makes a similar claim to Curtin's although he approaches the subject matter in a different way. Versveld develops his account of the ethic of awareness and ethic of care through a discussion of human food production, specifically agriculture. Versveld claims that human advancement is evident in the advancement of human food production. Agriculture is a good example of humans manipulating, controlling and acting upon the world in which they live. Versveld (1983: 27) believes that we "humanise the landscape by producing food", that human knowledge and virtue are visible in our ploughed fields and that our food production also signifies humanity "living together" and "giving mutual aid". Versveld (1983: 27) describes this human communalism that is apparent in our food practices:

That landscape is something that *we* made, that we have lifted up to a person. *I* see it because *we* see it. Our very sense perceptions are communal. It is not simply a matter of 'I see a plough' but of 'we see a plough through me'. The plough is history. It took many ages to invent. Only co-operation makes history, and there is a very real sense in which time itself is man-made.

Versveld's description of the ethic of care is developed through the acknowledgement of human communalism and necessary sociality. On Versveld's account a foodist ethic would look similar to an "African"⁸ ethic of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* expresses the idea that "I am because we are" and hence reinforces the earlier claim that as we are defined by our relations to others and that we need to live in awareness of these relations.

A further implication of a foodist's ethics of care and compassion is that we not only enter into defining relations with other human beings, but with the environment too. The legacy of dualism not only left its imprint on the way we understand the nature of a human being but also how we understand our world. There is a Cartesian assumption that parts are individual and autonomous entities and are independent of the whole. Jackson (1992: 360) argues that the consequence of this view is that we conceive of "the environment" as something "apart from us". But as Jackson, Kass and Versveld have argued, humans are made from the environment and maintained by it: we are not distinct from our environment, we are our environment. Jackson argues that we must rethink 'the

⁸ The idea that *ubuntu* is exclusively an "African" ethic, has been critiqued by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Tutu claims that *ubuntu* needs to be understood as a universal ethic that loses its force if not applied and practiced generally and by everyone.

problem of agriculture” as rather a problem of our culture and society. As long as humans continue to objectify nature, our environmental problems will never be solved. Jackson discusses how we need to rethink our understanding of the concepts of part and whole. He cites Levins and Lewontins who advocate a view of the concept of a part and whole as a dialectical relationship i.e. that parts and wholes evolve in consequence of their relationship and that the relationship itself evolves.

From this meta-ethical discussion of foodist ethics it should be evident that foodism advocates a unique approach to ethical issues. Foodists are not so much concerned with developing universal laws and rules but rather with considering the relationships within a particular situation or context. Foodists acknowledge that our participatory relations with others and the world define us. It follows from this assumption that foodists value these interdependent relations and practice an ethic of care and compassion in order to maintain and nurture these relationships.

Within this framework, foodists would value certain virtues more than others. Telfer (1996) discusses two moral virtues that are specifically related to food, namely hospitableness and temperance. Telfer’s use of hospitableness mainly refers to the hosting of friends for a meal, whereas Kass’ account of hospitality refers to the hosting of strangers for a meal. Implications of their accounts remain similar. Hospitableness is concerned with how a host treats her guests and temperance is concerned with an individual’s eating habits. Telfer (1996: 82) argues that the former is a virtue in its own right and not merely an agreeable quality as commonly thought. The latter is considered a traditional virtue and gluttony its opposing vice. She attempts to rescue temperance from its rather narrow and negative conceptions.

Telfer argues that hospitableness is a moral virtue because it is closely linked with friendship, and foregrounds the question of whether morality can be partial, and entitle us to favour some people over others. It also raises the question of whether a moral virtue is one to which all people should aspire. She believes that certain virtues are optional and are related to particular choices of how to carry out more general moral obligations, and that hospitableness is an optional virtue. Telfer argues that hospitableness is not based on any one motive, but derives its distinctive character from the value that hospitable people attach to a particular ideal (Telfer 1996: 82).

Kass (1994: 106) discusses the virtue of hospitality and how this virtue is connected to that virtue of eating, which is connected to the realisation of the good life and how hospitality recognises the vulnerability, neediness, and ultimately the humanity of the stranger. We are self-conscious of our neediness. It reflects our mutual vulnerability and dependence on others. Hospitality also recognises the home and nature's beneficence. Although a host is mimicking nature's generosity, nature's gifts are unintended whereas human hospitality is deliberate and self-aware. Kass argues that the virtue of hospitality is an example of how humans are superior to other animals. Feeding oneself is obligatory, but feeding *another* is liberal, that is free. Hospitality brings together generosity, needy vitality and human self-consciousness and the recognition of preserving, yet moderating the distinction between the self and other.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has defined and explained a particular style of philosophy – foodism. My account of foodism is merely one example of many possible foodist accounts. The aim of this chapter was to show how foodism could be used as a tool to approach philosophical problems in a new and creative way. This chapter has set the foundation for my critique of Plato's *Symposium*. In the third chapter I will offer an account of Plato's *Symposium* and an analysis of certain interpretations of it. In the fourth chapter I will reread *Symposium* from a foodist's perspective to test whether Plato's conception of love could be read as a foodist's conception of love.

Chapter 3

What is Plato's conception of love in the *Symposium*?

3.1 Chapter Introduction

In this chapter I analyse Plato's *Symposium*. The *Symposium* is a play about *erōs*, simply translated as love⁹. I summarise the *Symposium* and then discuss various interpretations of it according to: Kahn (1996), Ferrari (1992), Price (1989), Vlastos (1999), Rutherford (1995) and Nussbaum (1986). I argue that this is indeed a play about *erōs* and that Plato's view of love is expressed in Socrates' speech. I prove that the *Symposium* suggests that love – for Plato – is an ascent to love of the Forms.

3.2 Summary of Plato's *Symposium*

The *Symposium* presents a convivial gathering in 416 B.C. narrated by Apollodorus to a friend some years later. Apollodorus was not present at this dinner party but claims that he heard about it from his friend, Aristodemus. The narrative looks upon a time when the Athenian Empire was still powerful. Although the person who relates the events of the dinner was absent from it, Plato creates vivid scenes in which the reader is always aware of the physical context of the play.

The play is about a symposium, or “drinks party”, a ritual gathering in Ancient Greek Society at Agathon's house. This “drinks party” was a convivium of men from the upper echelons of Greek society and it involved eating and drinking (Waterfield 1994). The consumption of alcohol was more highly valued than that of food, and always followed the eating. The rituals of eating were primarily concerned with the distribution rather than consumption of sacrificial meat. However, it was the drinking of wine that involved the most elaborate ritualisation. There was a distinctive ‘symptotic space’ in which participants would sit on reclining couches that were arranged in the shape of a horseshoe

⁹ A more substantial discussion about the word *erōs* and its possible meanings will come later in the essay.

(Murray 1990). Schmitt-Pantel (1990: 19) discusses how Archaic pottery reflects the main elements of a symposium:

- the equal distribution of food and wine;
- the exchange of conversation, of singing, and of different forms of pleasure;
- the insertion of commensality in a whole framework of civic activities.

Entertainment at a symposium included female pipe-players or dancers, acrobats and mimes, conversation, songs, riddles, and party games. However, in Plato's *Symposium*, the guests agree to send away the hired entertainment and to amuse themselves by presenting speeches (encomia) in praise of the god, Love personified. Another feature of this party at Agathon's house is that the guests agree not to drink excessive amounts of alcohol, as they are suffering from the after-effects of the previous evening's party. Given these features, this particular symposium is a relatively sober and restrained affair in comparison with the typical debauchery that was commonplace at these functions.

Another pertinent feature of Plato's *Symposium* is that the characters in this play are based on people who really existed in Athens at that time. The host, Agathon, was a famous tragic playwright, and Plato's *Symposium* is set in the winter of 416 B.C., just after Agathon's earliest play won first prize at an Athenian dramatic festival. Phaedrus was a famous poet, Pausanias was Agathon's lover, Eryximachus was a professional doctor, Aristophanes was the greatest playwright of Athenian Old Comedy, Socrates was the famous philosopher and Alcibiades was the charismatic and wealthy Athenian hero who squandered all his talent and opportunity. Rutherford (1995: 190) describes how the styles of all the speeches reflect the characters' real life personalities. Phaedrus' speech is filled with mythical illusions; Pausanias' speech offers a sociological analysis; Aristophanes' speech is comical and focuses on the physical aspects of love; Agathon's speech is an "ornate but vacuous eulogy"; Socrates offers a dialectical argument in which Love and the lover become a seeker of goodness; and Alcibiades' speech is a personal account of his love for Socrates.

Eryximachus proposes that they should each present a speech in praise of Love, as poets and writers of prose *encomia*¹⁰ have unfairly neglected this god. Phaedrus presents the first speech, which is poetic and filled with literary references. His main point about love is that Love is the “primordial god” and a potent force for moral behaviour (*Symposium* 178c). Pausanias is mostly concerned with the “social ethos of homosexuality as practised in Athens” (Rutherford 1995: 186). His speech highlights the “moral ambivalence of love” and the “educational potential of a love affair” (Waterfield 1994: xxiii). The third speech is that of Eryximachus, who offers a “pseudo-scientific exposition” in which he claims that Love is necessary for the science of medicine, gymnastics, farming, poetry, and music (Rutherford 1995: 186). Eryximachus extends the concept of *erōs* beyond the scope of human relations to things like harmony and health. Thus he “dilutes the term so far as to make it almost meaningless” (Rutherford 1995: 187).

Aristophanes is the fourth speaker whose speech takes the form of a myth¹¹, in which he tells an aetiological tale about the suffering of humans because of love. Waterfield (1994: xxiii) describes this speech as “exceptional for its Rabelaisian whimsy, its pathos and psychological insight”. Aristophanes tells the myth about how once humans were whole creatures¹² who were punished by Zeus because they attempted to climb to heaven to attack the gods. Zeus punished them by dividing each whole into two halves. Since then, the human condition involves a constant search for our lost halves in a “painful quest for completeness” (Rutherford 1995: 187). This speech attempts to offer an internal account of love: to describe what love actually feels like. Love may be a “universal

¹⁰ *Encomia* were works that praised certain subjects, often deities, and had distinct stylistic characteristics. In Plato's *Symposium*, it is Agathon's speech that most closely resembles an *encomium*. *Encomia* were composed in a highly Gorgianic style in which rhetorical grandiloquence resulted in much untruthfulness, a common trait of this genre.

¹¹ Plato often used myths in his dialogues. Not only was he a myth-teller (i.e. recounted versions of traditional Greek myths) but he was also a myth-maker (invented his own myths) too. For Plato, a myth as a whole must be taken as false, but there are truthful insights in it too. Myths are not only fictional (made-up), but they are fantastical (unrealistic). He used myths as he considered them to be an efficient means of persuasion. He also thought that myths are sometimes the only device that allows us to explore matters that are beyond our limited intellectual powers. It is myth that allows us access to approximate truths about what lies beyond experience (Partenie 2004). I would liken Plato's myths to our modern day philosophical thought experiments.

¹² According to this mythical tale there used to be three human genders, namely male, female and androgynous i.e. both male and female. Each person's shape was round with their backs and sides forming a circle; four hands, four legs and two identical faces on a cylindrical neck (*Symposium* 190a).

cosmic force”, but Aristophanes’ speech shows how in humans, love is a longing for lost happiness and completeness (Waterfield 1994: xxv).

The rhetorical structure of Agathon’s speech comes closest to that of a conventional encomium. Agathon does not offer an argument; rather he waxes lyrical about Love’s beauty, in the most extravagant poetic style. His speech leaves an impression that Love is beautiful like all the nice things we notice around us when we are in the throes of love.

Socrates speech is often described as the climax of the dialogue. However, before he begins, he offers a “mischievous refutation” of Agathon’s position in order to pave the way for his own teaching (Rutherford 1995: 191). He then introduces the Matinean priestess Diotima, who he claims taught him all he knows about love. Socrates offers a radical redefinition of love in which he describes the abandonment of individual love in favour of a gradual ascent to love of purity and virtue itself. He describes the ascent as one from imperfect instances of love to love of the absolute world of the Forms. For Socrates, the lover becomes the philosopher, one who aspires to beauty and goodness that can only be found in the divine and eternal and love is the desire for goodness (Rutherford 1995: 193). It is through Beauty that the object of love is reached. The object of Love is happiness, or permanent possession of goodness. Although we are attracted to beauty, our real goal is happiness (Waterfield 1994: xxxii).

Alcibiades, who stumbles in late and drunk and has not heard any of the previous speeches, presents the last speech. Instead of praising the god Love, he praises Socrates. He is not concerned with Love in general but rather with his own particular experience of love. His speech is disorderly, chaotic, unstructured and contains many contradictions. He inverts the role of the *erastes* (lover) and *eromenos* (beloved) and his speech is essentially a tale of unrequited love for Socrates. For Alcibiades, the love he understands can only be consummated in physical sex.

The play concludes with Socrates arguing with the comic poet Aristophanes and the tragic poet Agathon, about how a tragic poet can be a comic one and vice versa.

3.3 Discussion of *erōs*

In the introduction I claimed that Plato's *Symposium* is commonly described as a dialogue about *erōs* and that the most common translation of *erōs* is love. However *erōs* also carries connotations of a particular sort of love. Kahn (1996: 258) points out that the Greeks have two words that correspond to the English word "love", namely *erōs* and *philia*. The former denotes sexual passion whereas the latter refers to milder forms of affection and is generally translated as friendship. Vlastos (1999: 138) writes that *erōs* is more intense, more passionate; more heavily weighted on the side of desire than of affection; and it is also more closely tied to the sexual drive – whereas *philia* is "non-incestual familial love". Nussbaum (1986: 167) translates *erōs* as "passionate erotic love".

Kahn (1996) offers an alternative interpretation of *erōs*. He believes that Plato uses *erōs* to suggest the strongest form of desire. Kahn states that Plato's interest is not desire in general, but rather desire of what is beautiful (*to kalon*) and what is beautiful is closely linked to what is good (*agathon*). Kahn (1996: 260) also discusses the structure of *erōs*. Kahn claims that *erōs* can be asymmetrical, whereas *philia* is properly reciprocal. Reciprocity is secondary or accidental in the case of *erōs*. This structure maps onto the Greek view of boy-love (the *paidika*) in which the object of passion – the *eromenos* – is not expected to feel passion or desire in return. It is in Plato's *Phaedrus* in which the notion of erotic reciprocity is introduced – *anterōs* (*erōs* in return) that is explained as the result of the beloved seeing his own reflection in the lover's eyes (*Phaedrus* 255c-d). Kahn believes that *erōs*, unlike *philia*, can point in only one direction. Kahn (1996: 261) explains how this asymmetric structure of *erōs* fits the relation between the human psyche and the good-and-beautiful. Kahn states that reciprocal relations between persons would have to be treated in an account of *philia*.

Although I agree with Kahn that *erōs* can be an asymmetrical relation, it is not necessarily so and although reciprocity may be secondary, it is certainly possible. For this reason *erōs* can be understood as a relation between two individuals in love with each other. Clearly in an ideal situation, both individuals experience *erōs* to the same degree.

I believe that Plato uses *erōs* to describe passionate erotic love, and not just the "strongest form of desire" as Kahn supposes. Kahn's translation is far too vague, and

could include the desire to survive, desire to eat or to drink – all of which could become the “strongest desire”. Alcibiades and Aristophanes are not referring only to strong desire, but particularly to passionate erotic desire that is associated with sexual intercourse.

Kahn’s point about the asymmetrical structure of *erōs* is also incorrect. *Erōs* is not necessarily asymmetrical, although it can be. Aristophanes’ speech is an example of *erōs* that is reciprocated and Alcibiades’ speech is an example of unrequited *erōs*. Kahn’s mistakes are a result of a common error of exclusively reading Socrates’ speech and ignoring the other six speeches in the dialogue.

I will now discuss the various interpretations of Plato’s *Symposium*, beginning with the accounts that claim that this is not a play about *erōs*.

3.4 Interpretations of Plato’s *Symposium*

a) The *Symposium* is not about *erōs*

I will begin with Kahn’s (1996) interpretation of Plato’s *Symposium*. Kahn acknowledges that *erōs* was independently established as a central theme in Socratic literature, but that Plato’s account of *erōs* was developed less for its own sake than for a further philosophical purpose. Kahn (1996: 258) argues that Plato’s theory of *erōs* provides an “essential link between his moral psychology and his metaphysical doctrine of the Forms” and that the *Symposium* provides a “transitional moment between the inconclusive treatment of virtue, knowledge, and education in the aporetic dialogues, and the great constructive theories of the *Phaedo* and *Republic*.” He is primarily concerned with the broader function of Plato’s theory of *erōs*, which has moral and metaphysical implications.

Kahn believes that Plato does not offer a comprehensive theory of love, but rather he is concerned with *erōs* as the strongest form of desire. He states that Plato’s interest does not lie in desire in general but rather desire of what is beautiful (*to kalon*) and what is beautiful is closely linked to what is good (*agathon*). For Kahn, the *Symposium* offers an

account of rational desire for the good understood as the “good-and-beautiful” and not a theory of love.

This account is the result of a reading of the *Symposium* that is exclusively focused on Socrates’ speech. This speech represents an exposition of an ascent to the Forms, and fits into Plato’s other theoretical frameworks. However, to maintain this view is to ignore some valuable insights about love that the *Symposium* has to offer. The *Symposium* is a dialogue of seven speeches, and to focus on only one of them, is to miss Plato’s other objectives. Perhaps Plato’s work in the *Symposium* does have implications for his moral and metaphysical theories, and hence a broader function, but I still believe that this was not Plato’s only purpose in writing this play. Although I concede that Kahn’s argument is valuable, it misses many of Plato’s insights.

Ferrari (1992) is another theorist who argues that the *Symposium* is not ultimately about love for love’s sake. However, unlike Kahn, he does not base his argument on an exclusive reading of Socrates’ speech. Ferrari’s main claim is that Plato does not have a comprehensive theory of love, but rather that he uses common ideas about love towards his own philosophic ends. His argument is based on a comparative analysis of love in the *Symposium* and love in the *Phaedrus*. Ferrari believes that in these two works, Plato is not offering the reader an account of what it would be like to live with someone as a platonic lover but rather that Plato’s aim in the *Symposium* is to construct a bridge between love and philosophy.

An interesting claim that Ferrari (1992: 248) makes is that the “speechmaking in the *Symposium* is rooted in bad faith”. Ferrari offers two reasons for this claim. Firstly, praising *erōs* is not as inviting or as easy as *Phaedrus* suggests because love for the ancient Greeks, was a bittersweet source of ambivalence. Love was thought to be the source of one of the greatest of human pleasures, but also of agony and madness. Secondly, Ferrari (1992: 249) points out that the speeches are the “epitome of moderation”, reflecting the speakers’ limited intake of alcohol and he thinks that the previous evening’s binge is an “insalubrious motive for self control”. The implication of this sober state of affairs is that the speeches (barring Alcibiades) are abstract and lacking in excitement. The result is that none of the first six speeches praise love for how is

makes a person feel, but rather for the moral growth, wholeness, social peace, graceful living, and philosophic enlightenment that proceed from it (Ferrari 1992: 250).

Ferrari (1992: 250) also points out that the chief structural marker is Aristophanes' attack of hiccoughs (*Symposium* 185d-e). These hiccoughs serve to change the order of speakers as Eryximachus and Aristophanes are switched. The result of this switch, according to Ferrari, is that the speeches are divided into two groups. The first group is Phaedrus, Pausanias, and Eryximachus and the speeches in this group distinguish between good and bad forms of love (Phaedrus implicitly and the others explicitly). The second group is Aristophanes, Agathon, and Socrates, and these speeches all allude to the idea that love is directed at one object and that all love is praiseworthy.

For Ferrari (1992: 261), the first five speeches are part of Plato's rhetorical strategy in which he builds his account of what love can do for philosophy. Ferrari's view is thus similar to Kahn's in that the *Symposium* is not really an account of love for its own sake. In the earlier speeches, Phaedrus and Pausanias describe what love can do for manly virtue, Eryximachus describes what love can do for the sciences, Agathon describes what love can do for the appreciation of beauty, and Aristophanes describes what love can do for piety. The climax is where Socrates explains what love can do for philosophy.

It is Alcibiades' speech that Ferrari thinks addresses the traditional bittersweetness of love. Alcibiades is *in* love rather than *understands* love. He is the first to praise the object of his love – Socrates – for how he makes him feel. Alcibiades falls in love with the wise philosopher, instead of loving wisdom.

Although Ferrari does analyse the other speeches, his position is similar to Kahn's, in that he also thinks that we need to read Plato's theor(ies) of love in the light of his other philosophical works, and not merely for its own sake. Although the *Symposium* appears to be concerned with love, Plato uses ideas about love for his other philosophic ideas.

I believe that both Kahn and Ferrari's accounts are incorrect and miss important insights of this play. Certainly, the *Symposium* will have important implications for Plato's other theories, but first and foremost this is a play about love. Why would Plato offer seven speeches in praise of love if he were not concerned with love for love's sake? Plato has dedicated an entire work to the discussion of love, and to deny that this is a play about love is to misconstrue Plato's intentions.

I believe that these arguments reflect the confusion about what Plato's actual conception of love is. Plato is not particularly clear about which view of love he is advocating, especially as on the surface, he seems to be offering seven different perspectives. Although there is ambiguity about what Plato considers love to be, I do not think that it should follow that this is then not a play about love. Another possible reason is that many have interpreted Plato's view of love to be love of the Forms. Given that Plato's love is distinctly different from our traditional conceptions of love, people have said that this is therefore not a play about love.

b) The *Symposium* is about *erōs*

The following five theorists all agree that this is indeed a play about love. What distinguishes their interpretations is how they read the dialogue. Price (1989) and Vlastos (1999) focus exclusively on Socrates' speech; Rutherford (1995) analyses both Socrates' and Alcibiades' speeches as complements of each other; and Nussbaum (1986) considers the arrangement of Aristophanes', Socrates', and Alcibiades' speeches. As each interpretation focuses on different aspects of the *Symposium*, each interpretation offers a different view of Plato's conception of love.

Price's account offers an analysis of Socrates' description of the ascent. Price argues that Plato believes that the forms are the most worthy objects of our love. However, Price still thinks that Plato's account has room for the beloved to accompany the lover, although their relationship at the peak of the summit is remarkably different to that at the start. Price's account attempts to retain all aspects of love: physical, intellectual, individual and general.

Price (1989: 15) begins with a discussion of how Diotima defines *erōs*. For Diotima love is "for the good to belong to oneself always" (*Symposium* 206a 11-12) or, as Price translates it: "love is for the possessing the good oneself for ever". This definition is extended and stipulative and, ultimately, a statement of the final goal of all desire (Price 1989:15). Diotima states that love's central activity is the mental or physical generation of beauty¹³.

¹³ Socrates uses an analogy of pregnancy (procreation) to make this point.

Price (1989: 15) explains how the ‘beautiful’ (*to kalon*) is central to love. Firstly, beauty is love’s goal (i.e. the lover desires to possess beauty within generic *erōs*) and secondly, beauty is love’s occasion (i.e. the lover is inspired by someone else who already possesses beauty within specific *erōs*). Price (1989: 17) clarifies the claim that beauty is the goal of love: this needs to be understood in a wider sense – the goal aims to acquire the good forever. Central to this idea is goodness, and not beauty, ownership or immortality¹⁴.

Diotima then explains how love’s goal – beauty-and-goodness – can be reached and this is commonly referred to the ascent passage. Briefly, she describes the lover as advancing from a single beautiful body to all beautiful bodies,¹⁵ then to the beauty of practices, then to the beauty of sciences, and finally to the Form of Beauty itself (Price 1989: 37). Price points out some absurdities of this explanation of the ascent to Beauty: either we are in love with the Form Beauty, which is a mystery (only “dimly lit by sexual metaphor”) or else it starts to look like Don Juanism – love for all beautiful bodies.

Price (1989: 36) explains that there are two possible moves that can be made in order to avoid these absurdities of an “impersonal eroticism without denying any erotic losses to be set against intellectual gains.” Either one can attempt to personalise the later stages or de-eroticise the starting point. Price (1989: 36-37) quotes Walter Pater who attempts the former by making Beauty an object of personal affection by claiming, “abstract ideas themselves become animated, living persons, almost corporeal, as if with hands and eyes” when one is in love. Although Pater’s account maintains the erotic aspect throughout the ascent, he does so by misconstruing Plato’s conception of the Forms. Price (1989: 37) correctly points out that the Forms according to Plato are “pure, clear, unalloyed, not full of human flesh and hues and much other mortal trash” and therefore Beauty cannot reciprocate affection.

The other option is to intellectualise the ascent from the very beginning. Price (1989: 37) cites J.M.E. Moravcsik, who denies that love is even initially sexual desire. For

¹⁴ Price enters into an in-depth discussion about how we should understand Diotima’s reference to immortality. He brings in a discussion of personal identity. For the purposes of this chapter, I cannot go into further details of his discussion.

¹⁵ Price points out that we should understand the concept of the “Platonic body”: which is not “unconscious and Cartesian” but rather a “partaker of pleasures, passions, even opinions, of a kind” (Price 1989:36). Hence what Plato means when he says we must love a body, is that we must love a person.

Moravcsik, love is not merely sexual desire, but rather an aesthetic aspiration. *Erōs* is defined as the “over-all desire or wish for what is taken to be good” (Moravcsik quoted in Price 1989: 37). Price (1989: 38) argues that Moravcsik is wrong to ignore or devalue the passionate aspect of *erōs* because it is that passionate aspect that Plato uses as the impetus for the ascent. Price believes that in the ascent passage, Plato links the intellectual with the erotic. Given that neither option is successful as a solution, Price claims that the way to understand the ascent is to accommodate all its aspects, namely, personal and aesthetic, emotional and intellectual.

Price (1989: 39) proposes a structured translation of Diotima’s programme:

A1 He must love one body,

A2 and generate beautiful discourse,

A3 and then realise that the beauty of any one body is closely akin to that of any other, and that, if one must pursue beauty of appearance, it is great folly not to consider the beauty of all bodies one and the same;

A4 having realised this he must become a lover of all beautiful bodies, and slacken his intense love of the one, disdaining it and thinking little of it;

B1 after this he must think beauty in souls more honourable than that in the body, with the result that, if someone was capable in his soul and had even a little bloom, that would suffice for his loving and caring for him

B2 and bringing forth such discourse as will improve young men,

B3 in order that he may now be forced to look upon the beauty in practices and laws and see that it is all akin itself to itself,

B4 in order that he may think the surface beauty of the body a little thing;

C1 after practices he must be led to sciences, so that he may now see the beauty of these,

C2 and looking towards beauty already in its width he may no longer be base and mean-spirited in his slavery to the beauty of one (loving, in a menial way, the beauty of a certain boy or man, or of a single practice), but having turned to the wide sea of beauty and contemplating it

C3 he may bring forth much beautiful and fine discourse and thoughts in unlimited philosophy,

D until, strengthened and nourished there, he catches sight of a certain science, which is single and such as to be of the following beauty.

Price (1989: 39) claims that there are two progressions in this ascent, namely generalisation and ascension. Generalisation occurs within the levels namely A3, B3 and C2 and ascension takes place between the levels A, B and C. Generalisation transpires because of reflection, and results in a realisation or understanding that beauty in one person is equally present in other persons. According to Price (1989: 40) there are two roles of generalisation, namely “consolidation” and “intimation”. The former refers to an awareness of a reduced commitment to or valuation of an inferior object for example individual physical beauty. The latter refers to the ability to grasp universals (i.e. interrelated beauties of souls, practises and laws) and hence develop a proficiency in the ability to understand the Form Beauty. According to Price (1989: 40), generalisation arises out of reflection, but what gives rise to ascension (i.e. movement between the levels) is not so obvious.

I agree with Price’s second point, although I disagree with his claim about generalisation. Just because I have experience of beauty in one person, does not necessarily mean that beauty is equally present in other persons or that through reflection I can know this. Perhaps I can imagine through reflection, the possibility of other persons instantiating beauty, yet surely it is only through experience of another person’s beauty that I can know that other persons have beauty. Is it really possible to believe that beauty in one individual is the same as beauty in another individual? Given Western conceptions of beauty and how it is closely linked with conceptions of originality and uniqueness, I think that the process of generalisation is more obscure than Price is willing to admit. Even if generalisation is possible, is it something that can arise exclusively out of reflection? I think that generalisation would only arise through extensive experience and that would lead to Don Juanism.

Price (1989: 40-42) offers a few unsatisfactory reasons for wanting to make the Socratic ascent, including a guide’s influence such as Diotima, and Irwin’s suggestion that the process is elenctic.¹⁶ Price (1989: 42) prefers the view of “retrospective justification” because Diotima describes the ascent as a series of attractions rather than a series of

¹⁶ Irwin’s explanation (as cited by Price 1989:42) rests on the idea of dissatisfaction. At each stage the individual tests his/her aspirations against his/her present objects of admiration and discover that they are inadequate. This view requires that the individual has his/her heart set on reaching the summit of the Forms or as Price states, “a prenatal apprehension of the Forms”.

dissatisfactions. Retrospective justification means that each stage justifies itself once the guide has prompted the movement up i.e. to perceive the new beauty is to appreciate it. Price also explores the lover's interest in beauty. The ascent-passage only refers to the Form of Beauty, yet the passage also states how this ascent will yield "true virtue" (*Symposium* 212a5-6). True virtue necessarily includes both justice and wisdom. In the *Republic*, it is evident that Goodness plays a unifying role. Price (1989: 43) also claims that for Plato, 'good' and 'beautiful' have the same extension but not the same sense, as the good is good for me, while the beautiful is good to contemplate. Beauty is relevant to the ascent passage because to be a beautiful object, is also to be an appropriate object of love. Hence the Forms are the most appropriate and ultimate objects of love. Price also considers what happens to the old objects of devotion as the new ones come into view. He argues that they are demoted rather than discarded; this is what Price describes as an "inclusive reading" (Price 1989: 45). A further question that Price considers is what happens to the beloved as the lover makes the ascent. He thinks that it is possible to imagine that both the lover and beloved mutually develop their interests in beauties that are more universal, as they make the ascent together.

Price (1989: 53) concludes that an individual is retained as an object of love throughout the later stages of the ascent, yet the kind of life that the lover and beloved will eventually achieve changes considerably. Hence he attempts to avoid the objection that Diotima has quietly changed the subject by introducing philosophy at the summit of the lover's activity. It appears that Diotima ends up praising something other than love. Price maintains that even though Plato's theories of love include many unfamiliar aspects, his theory essentially amounts to a programme for how to live the good life. This necessitates an intimate relationship with another individual on earth, as well as an ascent towards the Platonic Forms. For these reasons, Price concludes that individual love is not replaced by the ascent but rather glorified.¹⁷

Price's account attempts to 'keep his cake and eat it too'. He argues that Plato's conception of love includes individual love, love for the Forms, and physical, emotional and intellectual love. Nussbaum (1986) on the other hand, argues that Plato offers the

¹⁷ Price's original account is very dense and detailed. I have merely isolated his key claims. I have not had the space to go into all his arguments and subtleties of his position. My aim in this chapter is to merely reflect various interpretations of Plato's *Symposium*.



reader an impossible choice between individual love and love of the Forms. Before I discuss Nussbaum's account, I will present Vlastos' (1999) objection to Price's account. Nussbaum, in turn, offers objections to both Price and Vlastos.

Unlike Price who believes that the beloved accompanies the lover to the summit of the ascent, Vlastos argues that love at the summit is most removed from love of concrete human beings. Humans as the objects of love are left somewhere in the middle of the ascent in favour of abstract concepts such as science and philosophy. His account is based on the "metaphysical core of the dialogue," where priestess-prophetess Diotima instructs Socrates in the "things of love" Vlastos (1999: 151).

Vlastos (1999: 152) begins by explaining why beauty moves us: it enables us to release our power to create. For Plato, the attraction of feminine beauty lies in the potential for paternity. Procreation, then, is a low-grade form of creativity. The next step is the realisation that what one loves in one individual, is similar to the beauty in many individuals, all of whom release the power to create. At the next level, Plato describes how physical excitement transforms into imaginative and intellectual energy. He places higher value on love of mind for mind, claiming it is an experience that is more intense than physical love. The lover now disdains physical beauty and becomes aware of the beauty of poetry, political institutions, science and philosophy. Eventually the lover sees "a marvellous sort of beauty" – the Form of Beauty – the climax of the ascent (*Symposium* 210e).

Vlastos (1999: 153) argues that the ascent passage contains "the thick of Plato's ontology" – in other words – "for every generic character which spatio-temporal objects may have in common, Plato posits an ideal entity in which particular things 'participate' so long as they have that character". Thus Plato has a tripartite ontology:

1. The transcendent, paradigmatic form: say, the Form of Justice;
2. The things in our experience, which may have or lack the corresponding character – the persons, laws, practices, states, which may or may not be just;
3. The character of those things – the justice they instantiate if they are just.

Vlastos (1999: 155) suggests that a proper study of the *Symposium* would need to consider at least three facts about its creator, Plato: that he was a homosexual, a mystic, and a moralist. So, according to Vlastos, in order to reach a fair and balanced interpretation of Plato's theory of love, one would have to undertake at least three complementary investigations. One would first have to investigate the effect of Plato's belief that heterosexual coupling is natural whereas anal intercourse is degradation not only of man's humanity, but of his animality too. Being homosexual and holding these beliefs would surely distort Plato's overall view of sexual fulfillment. In addition, his theory of love may be affected by his religious mysticism, and finally, his moral philosophy may have affected his view of love in the pattern of interpersonal relations – the latter of which Vlastos investigates.

Vlastos argues that Plato's theory of love is not concerned with personal love for persons. He argues that the *Symposium* is really about "love for place-holders of the predicates 'useful' and 'beautiful'" (Vlastos 1999: 156). For Plato, individuals evoke *erōs* if they have beautiful minds, bodies, or dispositions, but so too do impersonal objects such as political states, poetry, science, philosophy, and most importantly, the Idea of Beauty itself. By placing the impersonal objects higher up on the ascent, Plato signifies their superiority to persons as objects of love. Vlastos raises an interesting point about Plato's life: that even Plato's two strongest personal attachments – his love for Socrates in his youth, and his love for Dion of Syracuse later on, would only feature less than halfway up the summit of the ascent.

For Vlastos (1999: 157) the great achievement of the *Symposium* is that Plato is the first Western man to acknowledge the intensity and passion that humans may feel towards abstract objects such as social reform, poetry, art, and philosophy. Plato's view has traces of Freudian erotic fixation, yet instead of explaining his motivation, Plato, invokes another drive – the hunger to create. This suggests that the erotic attachment of the lover is not directed to an individual (correctly or incorrectly), but rather to a complex set of qualities that the lover identifies in the beloved.

However, the greatest problem with Plato's theory of love, according to Vlastos (1999: 160) is that as a theory of interpersonal love, it states that one must love the 'image' of his beloved, as far as they are beautiful and good. Thus the quirky,

individualistic traits of other individuals can never be desirable and it is never possible to love whole persons – only the abstract version of a complex of their best qualities. This contradicts the common view that true love is of the good and bad qualities that together constitute the whole person. For Vlastos, the climax of the summit – the fulfilment of the ascension – is a state that is the farthest removed from affection for real human beings. Thus, although Plato's theory of love is deficient in its application interpersonal love, it could be thought of as an account of a path to spiritual achievement.

Vlastos (1999: 162) concludes by indicating the similarities between the structure of Plato's description of the ascent and the way he describes knowledge in epistemology, the world-order in cosmology, the interrelation of particular and universal, time and eternity, the world of sense and the world of thought in ontology. In each case the analytic pattern is the same: a transcendent Form at the one extreme, a temporal individual at the other, and in between the various stages of the individual's becoming. In all of his writings, Plato gives the Forms pre-eminence.

Although Vlastos argues that the *Symposium* should be understood in the context of Plato's other theories, his position is different from Kahn's and Ferrari's, both of whom argue that the *Symposium* was written not for love's own sake but as a tool for Plato's other philosophical purposes. Vlastos asserts that this is indeed a play about love, although in order to understand Plato's view of love, we must read *Symposium* in light of his other accounts.

One objection to Kahn's, Ferrari's and Vlastos' accounts is their exclusive focus on Socrates' speech. The result of this move is to charge Plato for being unaware of the other six speeches he has written. Both Rutherford and Nussbaum object to Price and Vlastos using evidence from the other speeches. Although Nussbaum's account is stronger, I will begin with Rutherford's as it lays the foundation for her argument.

Rutherford (1995: 194) objects that Plato's metaphysical account of love in Socrates' speech is not recognisably concerned with love – at least to the modern reader and suggests that Plato's account is really about “contemplative ecstasy, the enthusiasm of a mystic rather than a lover”. Socrates' speech changes our perceptions of love, which is not a self-contained activity that is pursued for pleasure, but rather to the “high road to salvation and purification”(Rutherford 1995: 194). Rutherford questions whether Plato's

account leaves room for the reciprocal feelings of the beloved. The beloved is not so much loved for his own sake, but rather as a useful instrument by which the lover can begin his ascent. Rutherford then alludes to Vlastos' objection that Plato "glorifies a spiritualised egocentrism" and leaves no room for "private experience, individual preference or love of whole persons" (Rutherford 1995: 194). Plato's spiritual ascension, in other words, has a high human cost.

Rutherford (1995: 198) then turns his discussion to Alcibiades' speech, which he claims is simplistic to classify as "bad" or "wrong" and Socrates' speech as "right". Rather, he argues that Plato has deliberately contrasted two different characters that represent incompatible ways of thinking and living. Alcibiades' late entry is an important structural marker in the *Symposium*. It can be read in two ways: either he has missed everything – including, perhaps, the 'truth' of love – or he supplies what is missing from the account and thus offers the case for other side. Rutherford points out that Plato does not conclude the *Symposium* with the triumph of Socrates speech fresh in our minds, but rather with Alcibiades' speech about his physical longings. The effect is that Socrates' metaphysical aspirations are qualified by Alcibiades' physical account. Rutherford believes that this is Plato's way of returning to the real world – a world in which humans have physical drives and desires. Thus, Rutherford claims that we need to read these two speeches as complements of each other if we are to understand Plato's theory of love.

Socrates' Speech	Alcibiades' Speech
His speech is dialectical and systematic.	His speech is disorderly, chaotic, and unstructured.
He is inspired by passionate desire that is guided by reason.	He is inspired by passionate desire that is guided by emotion (and alcohol).
He is detached from his own emotions.	He is absorbed in his own feelings of shame, longing, and resentment.

He says very little of everyday life and is rather focussed on the highest aspirations of human creativity.	His speech contains many particulars that evoke a very clear image of Socrates' way of life (what he looks like, style of speech and so on).
He describes the intellectual ascent to the ideal of beauty.	He describes the world of physical pleasure.
His account tends towards the universal.	His account rejoices in the particular.

(Rutherford 1995: 199)

Perhaps one of the strangest features of Alcibiades's speech is that he reverses the traditional ancient Greek roles of the *erastes* and the *eromenos*, emphasising his inverted scheme of values, and reinforcing the absurdity of his position (Rutherford 1995: 203). However, as Alcibiades discusses Socrates' life in vivid details, Socrates' strangeness becomes more apparent. He compares Socrates to a satyr or silenus, implying that he is an unrealistic character with non-human characteristics. Hence Rutherford (1995: 204) questions whether the Socratic ideals can ever convince weaker and more worldly followers.¹⁸

Because Alcibiades' and Socrates' speeches are complementary, Rutherford believes that both speeches offer valuable insights into love. Socrates' speech presents an ideal to strive towards, although the reader may have difficulty in understanding the path of the ascent to Beauty. Although it is easy to criticise Alcibiades' emotional outburst, as embodied readers in a physical world, we are more likely to relate to Alcibiades' position. While Socrates speech describes the general nature of love, Alcibiades describes the particular experience of it.

Nussbaum (1986) extends Rutherford's account by offering an even stronger case for Alcibiades' speech. She believes that we should read the *Symposium* against the real lives

¹⁸ Perhaps Socrates' speech is aimed at the converted in the same way that Aristotle aimed his *Nicomachean Ethics* to those people who already had good upbringings.

of the characters, and not as a text isolated from its context. Nussbaum (1986: 167) argues that this is a play about “passionate erotic love”, although she claims, “this is not always evident from the criticism that has been written about it”. Nussbaum (1986: 167) agrees with Vlastos’ objection that Plato ignores the value of love between individuals, although, she points out that this charge is only applicable if one focuses exclusively on Socrates’ speech. Vlastos’ objection implies that Plato was unaware of the other six speeches he has written.

Nussbaum, on the other hand, argues that we should read the whole of what Plato has written, and attempt to make sense of the *Symposium* by finding the meaning that emerges from the arrangements of its parts. She focuses on three speeches: Aristophanes’, Socrates’ and Alcibiades’, arguing that Socrates’ speech on goodness is central while Aristophanes’ and Alcibiades’ speeches offer the most serious objections to Socrates’ programme for the ascent of love. Nussbaum argues that Aristophanes’ myth captures both the wholeness and uniqueness of *erōs* that Vlastos accused the *Symposium* of lacking.

However, Nussbaum (1986: 174) also points out how this myth demonstrates “the sheer contingency of love, and our vulnerability to contingency through love”. Nussbaum questions how something like love that is so vital to our goodness can simply be a matter of chance. Aristophanes’ myth leaves no place for practical reason and this is why Nussbaum thinks that it fails as an adequate account of *erōs*.

In her discussion of Aristophanes’ speech, Nussbaum (1986: 176) writes that in the myth “*erōs* is the desire to be a being without any contingent occurrent desires” and that it is a “second-order desire that all desires be cancelled”. She refers to this as the “self-cancelling character of *erōs*”, and questions whether we are willing to “risk immobility for love”? As humans we would like to find a way to retain our identity as desiring and moving beings, and at the same time, maintain our self-sufficiency.

Nussbaum then turns her attention to Socrates’ speech, which accommodates practical reason. I will not elaborate on her explanation of this speech, as her insights are very similar to earlier accounts I have described. She reiterates how the lover’s final “contemplative activity” meets the *Republic*’s standards of value in every way (Nussbaum 1986: 182). At the summit of the ascent we are engaged in a “stable activity”

in which our objects are “unalloyed, pure, unmixed” (Nussbaum 1986: 182). Through the ascent we are able to achieve a “blissful contemplative completeness” (Nussbaum 1986: 183). We will ascend into a world in which erotic activity, as we understand it, will not exist. In this way, *erōs* a “longing to end all longing” reaches its goal.

Nussbaum’s project, however, involves considering Plato’s characters in the context of their real lives, and she turns her discussion to the life of Socrates. This is important because Socrates is the living example of what Diotima can only abstractly explain. Socrates is Plato’s example of a man in the process of making himself self-sufficient. In the *Symposium* Plato paints a vivid picture of Socrates’ physical and intellectual traits. From the beginning of the play we are aware of his distinct qualities – forgetfulness, self-absorption, abstinence from sex, and physical ugliness. We see a picture of a man whose mind and body are unique in that he is able to distance himself from his bodily desires. In fact, Socrates seems almost inhuman, and according to Nussbaum (1986: 184), “weird”. She points out that although we are “awestruck” by his super-human qualities, we are also queasy at his bizarreness. Nussbaum questions whether this is a life that any human would really want.

Nussbaum (1986: 184) then turns her attention to Alcibiades who arrives at the scene of the dinner party, bearing a “revelation”¹⁹. His beautiful physical presence is felt and contrasted with the “rarefied contemplative world of the self-sufficient philosopher”, as his entrance jolts the reader back into the physical world of “mixed impurity of mortal flesh” (Nussbaum 1986: 184). He shares his understanding of *erōs* that he has achieved through his own personal experience, and through his descriptive narrative attempts to make the audience feel, from the inside, what it is like to actually be in love.

His speech is jumbled and contradictory but according to Nussbaum (1986: 187), it is exactly this “groping, somewhat chaotic character” that makes his speech a “movingly convincing” account and expression of love. For Alcibiades whose youth was epitomised by his narcissism and self-absorption, love has allowed him to experience a “sudden openness” and also “an overwhelming desire to open” (Nussbaum 1986: 188). This image of “opening up” has both sexual and intellectual connotations. Alcibiades’ speech

¹⁹ Nussbaum contrasts this revelation with the revelation of Diotima’s ascent.

demonstrates the structural parallels between sexual desire and the desire for wisdom, as both are directed towards objects in the world and aim at possession.

Alcibiades' speech also alludes to Socratic knowledge, which is a particular kind of knowledge that Nussbaum (1986: 191) describes as "knowing how", which is neither propositional knowledge nor knowledge by acquaintance. Knowing how is a kind of practical understanding that "consists in the keen responsiveness of intellect, imagination, and feeling to the particulars of a situation" (Nussbaum 1986: 191). Alcibiades knows Socrates, although his speech suggests that without physical intimacy, a certain part of practical understanding is lost to him.

Nussbaum also points out that Alcibiades' account defends 'physicalism' of the souls of lovers: he describes how he is "inwardly bitten" and how his soul is "very like body", and appeals to the subjective experience of suffering. Alcibiades' speech is a powerful account of what it is like to be in love, and to be rejected. He is a victim of *hubris* as he is mocked and dishonoured for being the "comic poet of his own disaster" (Nussbaum 1986: 194-195). Alcibiades' speech raises the issue of the activities associated with *erōs*, both internally and in relation to the lover's plan. Alcibiades represents a man gripped by his passions like a victim of slavery or madness. His account shows how attributing value to an unstable external object, like another individual as opposed to the Forms, leads to the corresponding activity being unstable too.

Nussbaum (1986: 198) argues that in the *Symposium*, Plato presents two mutually exclusive worldviews: on the one hand, we can strive for true goodness in which the object of our love is the Form of Goodness, or we can experience the pleasure of the opened and unstable body. One can have knowledge of the Good or knowledge of the flesh, but not both at the same time.

Thus, Nussbaum (1986: 198) thinks it is an "alarming" and "ambiguous" book because Plato forces the reader to see that whatever path they choose they will be sacrificing one type of beauty. Although Plato depicts this choice, he simultaneously takes away our power to make it. We cannot choose Alcibiades' vision with full knowledge of Socrates' vision, yet we could not embark on the ascent if we feel that we are sacrificing a beauty. As Nussbaum (1986: 198) puts it, the play "floods us with light but takes away our action". The implication is that "philosophy is not fully human; but

that we are terrified of humanity and what it leads to” and that this is the human tragedy (Nussbaum 1986: 198).

3.5 Plato’s conception of love

Symposium is certainly a work about *erōs*, translated as passionate erotic love. I believe that it is a mistake to only read and analyse Socrates’ speech. Although, I do believe that this is the core of the play, the other speeches all contribute to Plato’s image of love – barring Agathon’s who is refuted by Socrates. Although Rutherford and Nussbaum offer strong cases for a positive reading of Alcibiades’ speech, I argue that Plato included it in support of Socrates’ account in order to show why love is not Alcibiades’ kind of love.

Socrates’ speech describes Plato’s distinctive image of love, which fits into his other theoretical frameworks and repeats previous analytic patterns. Love, here, is an ascent from the love of a particular body to the love of the Form of Goodness, the object most worthy of our love is the Form Beauty. Love of the Forms leads to a life of completeness and spiritual self-fulfilment, and it is a stable activity, in which enlightenment is possible. As Nussbaum (1986: 182) writes, the ascent of love “meets the *Republics*’ standards of value” in every way. Thus, I believe that the ascent passage (although mysterious in many ways) is Plato’s ideal i.e. this is the sort of love that humans should strive to have in their lives.

It is important, however, to consider the characters in the context of their real lives. Plato presents Socrates as a living example of a human who is in the process of the ascent. Socrates has transcended love of the individual and loves abstract things like philosophy and wisdom. Alcibiades, on the other hand, is depicted as a slave to his bodily desires, and a victim of mockery and *hubris*. Not only is he made to look like a fool, and rejected by Socrates, but also in real life his projects came to tragic ends. Nussbaum (1986: 166) writes, “his story is, in the end, a story of waste and loss, of failure of practical reason to shape a life”. Given these details, it is evident that Plato’s believes that the love ought to look like love at the summit of the ascent.

Thus, there are good reasons to believe that Socrates’ speech represents Plato’s view of love. The next chapter explores various Foodist responses to Plato’s description of love as love of the Forms.

Chapter 4

A Foodist Rereading of Plato's *Symposium*

4.1 Chapter introduction

In this chapter I use the foodist manifesto as a foundation to critique Plato's conception of love in the *Symposium*. There are three main sections in this chapter. First, for the sake of argument, I accept that love for Plato is love of the Forms, and then raise foodist objections to his account. In section two, I offer a positive account of a foodist's conception of love, while in section three, I challenge my third chapter's conclusion and argue that Plato's conception of love involves more than love of the Forms. Through a foodist re-reading of the *Symposium*, I show that Plato's theory of love can accommodate certain foodist conceptions. The purpose of this chapter is not only to offer a philosophical analysis of love, but also to show how foodist philosophy can enter into dialogue with traditional philosophy and simultaneously be a tool to critique it.

4.2 Plato's conception of love: burnt

In my third chapter I offered a detailed analysis of Plato's *Symposium* and discussed the varied interpretations of it. I concluded that we should read Socrates' speech as central to the dialogue, and Plato's ultimate vision of love. For Plato, the most worthy object of our love is the Form Beauty, and through its contemplation we will access the Form Goodness and achieve happy and enlightened lives. This structure fits into his other accounts and complements his overall philosophical framework. I will now offer foodist reasons for why Plato's view of love is not useful and insightful.

a) First Foodist Objection: Focus on the Ordinary

A central foodist assumption is that philosophers should focus on the ordinary, which can yield insights into our human nature. The first main foodist objection to Plato's account

of love is that the goal of his ascent is anything but ordinary. Platonic Forms are difficult to define and understand, and according to Plato, few will have access to them.

Love is a universal human experience, and a necessary condition for the good life. As something so central to the human condition, can we then really take Plato seriously when he advocates this extraordinary and abstract conception of love? Especially as on his account, few people will ever get to experience it. It may be argued that Plato is offering an ideal, and that his conception is something that we should all strive for, even if it is in vain for many people. A foodist, on the other hand, would disagree with this line of reasoning and argue that rather than looking for abstract and extraordinary objects to love, we should look at concrete and ordinary objects to which we all have access.

Another objection that a foodist would raise to Plato, is his focus on beauty. For Plato, love of one beautiful body is the impetus for the ascent. Given the foodist's framework of valuing the ordinary, she would question why it is necessarily a *beautiful* body that attracts us. Is it not possible to fall in love with ordinary attributes – perhaps even ugly ones? Implicit in Plato's account, is unattractive people will never be desired or loved. However, this does not reflect the world in which we live, as people of all kinds (beauties and beasts) experience *erōs*. Perhaps Plato did not exclusively mean bodies in the physical sense, but people with beautiful souls or personalities too? But even this qualification cannot deny this objection because many immoral, boring and stupid people have ignited *erōs* in others.

Although this objection may seem superficial, it reflects a deeper worry both raised by Vlastos (1999) and Nozick (1989). Vlastos (1999: 161) argues that Plato's account of love does not allow for love of whole persons, but only of the abstract version of their best qualities. According to Vlastos, Plato's account leaves no room for love of an entire individual, 'warts and all'.

Similarly, Nozick (1989: 75) argues that Plato's account implies that we love a *feature* of a person, rather than the individual himself, in their entirety. He argues that loving someone simply for their beauty is like loving them for their money. Nozick (1989: 76) argues that if this were the case of how we loved others, then we would constantly be "trading up" for people who have more of the quality we love and "this does not fit with our attitude of love" or how we experience it.

Hence, this objection captures the foodist's belief that love, although necessary for the good life, can be found and experienced in ordinary things, like ordinary fallible human beings. Plato's emphasis on the ascent, beginning with a beautiful body and climaxing at the Form Beauty, misses the ordinary experience of love.

b) Second Foodist Objection: Eating Emphasises the Body

Foodists believe that eating is one of the most fundamental human activities. Therefore, the body and embodied subjectivity are valued. A second foodist objection to Plato's account of love is that it is far too abstract. Barring Alcibiades' speech, the other six speeches, particularly Socrates', are focused on abstractions. Foodists aim to revalue physical activities that are transitory or temporary.

Although the ascent begins with the desire for a beautiful body, the body is soon replaced by the love of abstract things like mathematical proofs and philosophy. A foodist would not deny that one could feel *erōs* for these abstract phenomena, although a foodist would not value them *above* love for a body.

In my third chapter, I briefly discussed how Socrates was the living example of a human being in the midst of the ascent. Socrates is the concrete example of what Diotima can only describe in the abstract. However, Alcibiades (*Symposium* 221c-d) points out:

... what's absolutely astonishing about this man [Socrates] is his uniqueness: there's no human being, from times past or present, who can match him...But this man is so out of the ordinary that however hard you look you'll never find anyone from any period who remotely resembles him...All you can do, in fact, is what I did, and compare him and his arguments not to any human being, but to Sileni and Satyrs.

Although, Socrates may be Diotima's concrete example of a man making the ascent, her example is unsatisfactory because Socrates is so "un-human" that no one can really relate to him or fully understand him. Nussbaum (1986: 183-184) describes in detail how "weird" Socrates is: he is "forgetful of the world", he sees himself as a "being whose mind is distinct from his body", and whose "personality in no way identifies itself with the body and the bodies adventures". For example, Alcibiades describes how Socrates was able to sleep naked next to him without getting aroused, and is immune to the effects

of alcohol. Socrates' self-sufficiency makes him like a stone statue and very similar to a Form itself, "hard, indivisible, unchanging" Nussbaum (1986: 195).

If Socrates were indeed an example of a person making the ascent and becoming self-sufficient, then a foodist would say that self-sufficiency, at the loss of bodily pleasure is a bad deal. To deny the role of the body in living is a deeply flawed approach to life, according to foodists. The fact that Socrates is "un-human" reinforces the foodist's point. Plato's conception of love ultimately denies the role of the body and the implication is that his account can have no bearing on a human life. Foodists would also insist that to even strive for an ideal that ignores the value and role of the body, is to be in bad faith and in denial about the true human condition.

c) Third Foodist Objection: Valuing the Particular

Although eating is a universal human activity, it is also a highly individual activity. For this reason, foodists can see the value in the particular. A foodist ethics is based on an ethic of care that considers the particular situations rather than general, abstract rules. Plato's ascent of love moves from love for a particular body to love of all beautiful bodies. Although Plato begins with the particular, he ends with the general.

Nozick (1989: 81) claims "Plato got the matter reversed". As our love deepens for another individual, it is not their general features that we love more but rather their particular attributes. You may have been attracted to your lover's sense of humour, but as your love grows, you find that you don't love just any sense of humour in general, but your lover's *particular* sense of humour. If your lover is generous, then it becomes love of your lover's particular way of being generous. The more we love another individual; the more we love their individual traits and qualities. This is another reason why we do not simply "trade up" for a better lover. The deeper we love someone, the more we love their particularities and this makes them more difficult to replace. Hence, a foodist would argue that Plato's move of generalisation in the ascent is an incorrect description of how we as humans experience love for other beings. This objection makes the technical problems of the ascent clearer. In spite of Diotima's persuasion, the ascent is not as easy and accessible as it initially appears.

d) Fourth Foodist Objection: Relationships

Foodists assert that as humans we are fundamentally linked to the world and to other human beings. We do not exist as autonomous entities, but rather as beings in participatory relations with others and the world at large. Given this assumption of interconnectedness, a foodist would assert that human beings can never be fully self-sufficient and that our dependence on others is what makes us human. For this reason, a foodist would argue that Plato's goal of the ascent is problematic, unattainable and self-defeating.

First, it is problematic because it aims at an existence that is unnatural to the human condition. A foodist would claim that to be devoid of other human contact is unnatural and opposes our intrinsically social natures. Second, it is unattainable because as humans we can never be truly self-sufficient and live in total solitude. Even Socrates, who was making the ascent, had yet to reach the climax, and we are often reminded just how unique and exceptional Socrates is. If Socrates could not even reach the climax of the ascent, what chance does a human being of average intellect have? Third, the ascent is self-defeating because it makes no sense to struggle for something that is unattainable. A foodist would argue that living the good life means revelling in pleasures of the body and mind, and in conviviality with others; and to deny one aspect is to fail to flourish. The ascent deprecates the role of the body, and the role of others, and for a foodist this means that the good life will never be achieved.

Although Price's (1989) account attempts to argue for an interpretation of the ascent in which the lover and beloved journey together, I think that he misconstrues Plato's argument. Nussbaum (1986) offers a stronger argument for how either you love a particular body, or you love the Forms, but that it is impossible to love both. The aim of the ascent is "blissful contemplative completeness" in which there is no room or need for the beloved (Nussbaum 1986: 183). Even if we accept Price's argument, he admits that the relationship between the lovers differ remarkably at the base and the climax of the ascent. At the climax, the lovers are not focussed on each other, but rather on the abstract

forms. Foodists would deny that this situation, as described by Price, represents a loving relationship.

In this first section I discussed foodist objections to Plato's conception of love in the *Symposium*. In the following section I offer a positive account of how foodists would define *erōs*.

4.3 A Foodist's Conception of Love: simmering

Eating the World

I was born with my mouth open...
Entering this juicy world
Of peaches and lemons and ripe sun
And the pink and secret flesh of women,
This world where dinner is in the breath
Of the subtle desert,
In the spices of the distance sea
Which late at night drift over sleep

I was born somewhere between the brain and the pomegranate,
With a tongue tasting the delicious textures
Of hair and hands and eyes;
I was born out of the heart stew,
Out of the infinite bed, to walk upon this infinite earth.

I want to feed you the flowers of ice
On this winter window,
The aroma of many soups,
The scent of sacred candles
That follows me around this cedar house,
I want to feed you the lavender
That lifts out of certain poems,
And the cinnamon of apples baking,
And the simple joy we see
In the sky when we fall in love.

-Excerpt from the poem by James Tipton, 1995 (cited by Allende 1998: 198)

Isabel Allende (1998) has written a book entitled *Aphrodite*, in which she explores the close relationship between food and love. In her conclusion she writes:

Appetite and sex are the great motivators of history; they preserve and propagate the species, they provoke wars and songs, they influence religions, law, and art. All of creation is one long uninterrupted cycle of digestions and fertility; everything in life is reduced to a process of organisms devouring one another, reproducing themselves, dying, fertilising the earth, and being born transformed.

Allende is not the first writer to acknowledge the close link between eating and love. Freud is famous for his psychological theories about the “oral stage” of sexual development in which breastfeeding is simultaneously a baby’s first sexual experience. I have emphasised the link between food and love/sex in order to make it clear how an account of *erōs* is relevant to the programme of foodism. I argue that for foodists *erōs* necessarily entails sexual intercourse, although it cannot be reduced to it. What will become apparent in this section is that the phenomenon of eating is remarkably similar to the phenomenon of love that culminates in sexual intercourse.

Foodists’ primary assumption is that eating is a fundamental human activity. They also believe that contemplating the activity of eating leads to profound insights into other aspects of human lives. The close link between eating and sexual intercourse means that foodism may be the best style of philosophy to handle an account of *erōs*. Although foodism as a style of philosophy can be objected to on the grounds that eating has nothing to do with certain subjects – for example mathematical proofs – when it comes to the subject of *erōs*, I believe that foodism is the most appropriate style of philosophy to address the subject of *erōs*.

The parallels between eating and sexual intercourse are strikingly evident in Nozick’s (1989: 55-60) description of eating:

Eating is an intimate relationship. We place pieces of external reality inside ourselves; we swallow them more deeply inside, where they are incorporated into our own stuff, our own bodily being of flesh and blood. It is a remarkable fact that we turn parts of external reality into our own substance. We are least separate from the world in eating... This raises primal issues. Is it safe to take in? How do we come to trust it or find this out? Does the world care enough about us to nourish us?... First awareness is focused upon the activity of taking in the food, not simply on the food’s qualities. We meet food in the anteroom of the mouth and greet it there. We probe and explore it, surround it, permeate it with juices, press it with our tongues against the roof of the mouth along the hard ridge directly above the teeth, place it under suction and pressure, move it around. We know its texture fully; it holds no secrets or hidden parts. We play with the food, we make friends with it, we welcome it inside. We open ourselves, also, to the

specific character of the food, to the taste and the texture, and to the inner quality of the substance. I want to speak of the purity and dignity of an apple, the explosive joy and sexuality of a strawberry...I have not myself tasted that many foods, but the times I did seemed a mode of knowing them in their inner essence...I think that many foods open their essence to us in this way and teach us...Eating with awareness also brings powerful emotions: the world as a nurturative place; oneself as worthy of receiving such nurturance, excitement, primal contact with a nurtrative mother; the security of being at home in the world...The mouth is a versatile arena, the location of eating, speaking, kissing, biting...

If one were to replace the object of food with another human being, Nozick's description could easily apply to the experience *erōs* that culminates in sexual intercourse. The most relevant and similar features between eating and a foodist's conception of love are:

Eating	<i>Erōs</i> for Foodists
1. Intimate relationship between eater and food.	1. Intimate relationship between lovers.
2. Humans are least separate from the world in eating.	2. Humans are least separate from other humans when in love and especially in the culmination of sexual intercourse.
3. Food becomes part of our own substance.	3. Through sexual intercourse and procreation, the lovers become physically part of each other.
4. Eating is about opening ourselves to the world, which makes us vulnerable to the food we eat.	4. <i>Erōs</i> is about opening ourselves to other human beings, which makes us physically and emotionally vulnerable to the individuals for which we feel <i>erōs</i> .
5. Eating is about trusting the food we take in.	5. Feeling <i>erōs</i> is about trusting the other lover to have reciprocal feelings.
6. Eating allows us to become knowledgeable of food's "inner essence".	6. Feeling <i>erōs</i> allows us to have a particular knowledge of our lover; it is a model of knowledge that Nussbaum (1986: 191) refers to as "knowing how".
7. Eating can create powerful emotions in us – bliss, disgust, contentment and so on.	7. The experience of <i>erōs</i> can create powerful emotions within us – happiness, hatred, shame and so on.

I will use these similarities as a basis for my foodist account of *erōs*. First, in an ideal foodist's account of *erōs*, both individuals in the relationship would be referred to the "lovers" rather than the "lover" and the "beloved". In Plato's account, *erōs* is a one-way asymmetrical relation: the lover loves the Forms (i.e. subject loves object or in ancient Greek terms the *erastes* loves the *eromenos*). In a foodist account of *erōs* it is possible for love to be a one-way relation, but this would be an unsuccessful love affair or rather an example of a foodist loving an object such as food. In an ideal foodist account, the feelings of *erōs* are reciprocated and both lovers are active participants, simultaneously acting as the lover and being the beloved.

An obvious objection to this analogy of eating and *erōs*, is although they both form intimate relations with their objects, symmetry of the relations is not identical. In the case of eating, it is an asymmetrical relation: the subject eats the object and the object – the food – can in no way reciprocate. Whereas in the case of *erōs*, the relation has the potential to be symmetrical as the beloved has the capacity to become the lover.

Korsmeyer (1999: 176) raises a similar point in her discussion of the comparisons between "gustatory and sexual appetites".

Korsmeyer (1999: 177) claims that a distinction can be drawn between the objects of the appetites. She argues that not only is one for food and the other for sex, but that they are also parts of different emotions. Sexual appetite can be considered the foundation of erotic love and the lover has a particular individual who satisfies their erotic desire. Gustatory appetite can be the foundation of sophisticated tastes but also for ordinary likes and dislikes and the eater's desire for cheese is not particular as long as the cheese is "compositionally identical" (Korsmeyer 1999: 177). Korsmeyer believes that it would be an odd eater who attaches desire to that *particular* piece of cheese and not to another. She also points out that sexual desire can also be "general and not specific" but this is rather a description of "brute promiscuity" rather the "nobility of romantic love".

Hence there are two parts to this objection. First, the analogy is problematic because the relations between eater:food and lover:lover are not both potentially symmetrical. Second, an eater's attachment to her food is a general one, any food of a certain kind will

do. Whereas, a lover's attachment to her lover is a particular one, the desire for the lover is to be with that particular individual.

In response to the first part of the objection, a foodist asserts that we need to understand eating in a broader sense. Although I have focused on an individual who eats food, we could also imagine other relationships between an individual and food. First there is a cook who becomes intimately involved with the food she is prepares, for example the activity of bread making. Although the cook is the subject, and the bread dough the object, the dough is not an object in a sense of being a passive lump of stuff. The dough literally responds to the cook – it breathes, rises and reacts to the kneading and rolling of the cook's hands.

Second, eating has also been elevated to the holy and sacred. In many religions, to eat a certain food is to eat more than merely the food itself. Christians believe that the communion bread *is* Christ's body and the wine *is* his blood (not simply representations of his body and blood respectively). Thus, it can be argued that on a spiritual level, the food takes on subjective qualities and represents more than merely a means to an end.

On this point, eating for many people holds more than instrumental value. The food is valued not only for its nourishing qualities, but for its intrinsic qualities too. People who "eat with awareness", as Nozick (1989: 58) would say, have respect for the food they eat and value it beyond its usefulness as an object. This point is particularly relevant to gourmands like Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1970:132) who defines "gourmandism as "an impassioned, reasoned, and habitual preference for everything that gratifies the organ of taste". For gourmands, food is loved and respected for the pleasure it can give them.

Third, eating food with a group of people also changes one's relations to food. Eating with friends and family is a common way to cement bonds of friendship and love, and to create a feeling of well-being in the eaters. The short story *Babette's Feast* by Isak Dinesen, which has been made into an excellent film, is a good example of this point. Nozick (1989: 56) discusses how eating food with another person can be a "deep mode of sociability". He describes how eating, the act of opening ourselves up to food, allows us to drop our boundaries and hence the sharing of a meal can be a truly rewarding and happy experience. Nozick (1989: 56) writes:

The loving preparation of food, the visual beauty it presents, sensuousness in eating, the daily sharing of such meals in leisure and loveliness – all these can be a romantic couple's way of being lovingly together, a way for one or both to create a piece of the world they treasure.

Hence, that food can respond to a cook's hands or that food can be the cause of feelings of well-being in the eaters, means that the relation between an individual and food does have the capacity to be reciprocal and hence symmetrical.

In response to the second part of the objection – that eaters love food in its generality – I appeal to the idea of gourmands or sophisticated eaters. There are eaters who are very particular about the food they consume – only *Beluga* caviar will do, or wine from specific regions because of the particular *terroir* or only free range chickens for ethical reasons and so on. Alternatively, some people will only eat food that is prepared in a particular way (Kosher) or by a particular person (their mothers). In fact, I think that some people are more particular or finicky about the food they eat compared to the lovers they choose. Therefore, I do not think that Korsmeyer's point poses a fatal objection to the analogy of eating and *erōs*.

Another worry with the analogy is whether *erōs* can simply be reduced to sexual appetite. Foodists assert that humans *eat* rather than *feed*. In the same way, foodists would hold that although there is a physical component to *erōs*, i.e. sexual intercourse, *erōs* is not only about sexual gratification. Given the foodist's framework of valuing the body and all things concrete, foodists would argue that sexual intercourse is one of the best ways of expressing *erōs* for another human being. Phrased slightly differently, sexual intercourse is the climax of the experience of *erōs*.

Sexual intercourse is also important for foodists because it is through sexual intercourse that we tangibly experience our connectedness to and dependence on other human beings. Not only is our relationship with our lover physically intimate, but it is emotionally intimate too. For Nozick (1989: 82) "romantic desire is to form a *we* with that particular person *and* with no other". Nozick's idea of *erōs* being the desire to form a "we" captures the foodists idea that *erōs* is about forming an intimate relation with another human. The relationship is so intimate that Nozick argues that we need to understand *we* in the strongest sense of the notion of identity – just as I cannot have

multiple individual identities, so too I cannot have multiple *we* identities. In a *we*, I share my identity with my lover and for this reason it is evident that loving another human is not simply about a physical connection. Nozick describes how when I love someone, my well-being is tied up with his well-being.

When we eat, we physically and sometimes intellectually open ourselves up to the ingestion of the food. I say “intellectually” because sometimes we have to be persuaded to try an exotic dish and hence have to be open to listen to the reasons for how a certain food is tasty or healthy. Similarly, a foodist would claim that an individual has to be “open” to experience *erōs*. Love is about letting down our emotional and physical boundaries so that another human may enter emotionally, intellectually and physically. It is important to be “open” to one’s lover, because loving another human is about knowing them in a unique and intimate way.

Nussbaum (1986: 191) refers to this model of knowledge as a kind of “knowing how”. “Knowing how” is about having a personal understanding of your lover’s “complex network of intellectual, emotional, and bodily needs” (Nussbaum 1896: 191). Loving another person means knowing how to touch them, pleasure them, look at them, understand their moods and emotions and so on. When we love someone we aim to get to know their “intimate essence” or knowledge of as much of their inner-self as possible. By “essence” I mean the individuals’ qualities, quirks, vulnerabilities, fears, desires and so on. Although “knowing how” relies on intimate acquaintance and leads to the ability to tell truths, it is a unique model of knowledge that cannot be reduced to propositional knowledge or knowledge by acquaintance.

Foodists also advocate this model of “knowing how” when they attempt to describe the knowledge needed to cook certain dishes. Verta Mae Smart-Grosvenor (1992: 294) describes her cooking method as “vibration”. She says, “...I never measure or weigh anything. I can tell by the look or smell of it”. According to Heldke (1992: 219), Smart-Grosvenor’s ability to prepare good food “by vibration” reflects her “bodily understanding of (and connection with) the foods she’s cooking”. Smart-Grosvenor’s method of cooking contrasts with Suppes’ (1992) account of recipes. Suppes argues that recipes are rational explanations complete with justifications of how to do something. Suppes (1992: 236-237) writes how recipes are “non-trivial procedures” that aim at the

“preparation of food of a certain quality and taste”. Although Suppes makes an interesting point about the rationality implicit in all recipes and hence cooking, I think that Smart-Grosvenor’s account captures this model of knowledge that Nussbaum refers to as “knowing how”. This model of knowledge emphasises the centrality of bodily experience in learning to cook and also in loving another person. Things like pastry making cannot really be taught through words alone, it is an activity that needs to be physically shown to the learner. In the same way, Alcibiades was unable to know Socrates fully, because he was never physically intimate with him.

From this brief account of a foodist’s conception of love it is clear that a foodist feels passionate desire for another ordinary human. Although a foodist expresses her love through her body, it transcends the merely physical. Love for a foodist is about forming a *we* with another person, in which the well-being of both lovers is intimately linked. A foodist is open to love, and this openness can lead to great pleasure, but also to vulnerability and the possibility of rejection and pain. Love for foodists is not a guaranteed stable activity, but this does not pose a problem for them. Eating is not a stable activity either because we are never sated, never completely nourished or fulfilled. Thus, the foodist does not yearn for a complete or unchanging state, as there is more to happiness than permanence.

With a clear picture of how a foodist understands love, I now discuss whether Plato’s *Symposium* contains elements of love as understood in a foodist way.

4.4 Plato a Foodist? A New Concoction

Nussbaum (1986) offers a case for a positive reading of Alcibiades’ speech in the *Symposium*. In this section I use many of her insights, as just as Socrates is commonly held to be the archetype of Plato’s conception of love, Alcibiades represents the foodist’s epitome of love. However, the purpose of this section is not to merely resurrect a case for Alcibiades, but also to show how traditional Western Philosophers have misinterpreted Plato’s conception of love. I aim to show that it is possible to reread Plato’s *Symposium* in such a way that Plato could be considered a foodist, advocating a foodist conception of love.

Nussbaum (1986: 186) writes:

Socratic philosophy, then, cannot allow the truths of Alcibiades to count as contributions to philosophical understanding. It must insist that the non-repeatable and sensuous aspects of the particular case are irrelevant, even a hindrance to correct seeing. And it is not only the philosophy of Socrates against which Alcibiades must defend his claim to teach. It is also most of the tradition of ethical discourse that got its start with Socrates. Very few moral philosophers, especially in the Anglo-American tradition, have welcomed stories, particulars, and images into their writing on value. Most have regarded these elements of discourse with suspicion.

Nussbaum illustrates why philosophers tend to focus exclusively on Socrates' speech: the assumptions of the analytic tradition blind them to other options, in this case the six other speeches, especially Alcibiades'. Thus, there is the need for new styles of philosophy that allow us to see old texts in refreshing ways. A foodist rereading of Plato's *Symposium* aims to do just this.

First, what is most striking about Plato's *Symposium* is its distinctively foodist context: a convivium of men who are at a dinner party. Another salient feature is that although this play is recounted through someone who was not even present, the characters and their activities vividly depicted. Right from the onset the readers are made aware that this play is about *real* people – not only that they really existed but also that they are embodied, living beings. We hear about the dinner they eat, the wine they will only drink in limited amounts and then we read about Aristophanes' attack of hiccoughs because he ate too much food! Then Socrates (*Symposium* 207e) says "...a person in fact never possesses the same attributes, but is constantly being renewed and constantly losing other qualities; this goes for his hair, flesh, bones, blood, and body in general..." All these aspects remind the reader just how *human* and embodied the characters are.

The dramatic entrance of Alcibiades – "he stood at the door wearing a chaplet of leafy ivy entwined with violets, and with ribbons galore trailing his head" (*Symposium* 212e) – drunk and dashing, further reinforces the physical imagery of this play.

Alcibiades is also the only person to claim to tell the truth about love, although his tool is wine: "...but from now on you'll hear things I wouldn't have told you except that, firstly, truth comes from wine..." (*Symposium* 217e). I do not know how seriously we should take this last point but it is important to note how even Plato thinks that one's body and

the substances it consumes, affects one's intellect. This point reinforces the foregrounding of the body in the *Symposium*.

Second, Nussbaum is correct in claiming that it is wrong to focus exclusively on of the Socrates' speech. The problem with basing Plato's view of love on this speech is that Socrates does not have this knowledge from his own experience, but Diotima has merely persuaded him. Although we can hypothesise that Socrates is somewhere up the ladder of love, he certainly has not reached the ascent. Although, Socrates account neatly fits into Plato's other analytic patterns, this is not reason enough to assume that this is Plato's only conception of love.

A feature of the *Symposium* is the structural distancing or "elaborately nested reports" (Nussbaum 1986: 167). It is narrated by Apollodorus to a friend some years later. Apollodorus was not present at this dinner party but claims that he heard about it from his friend, Aristodemus. Nussbaum (1986: 168) suggests the reason for this narrative distancing is that Plato is making us aware of the "fragility of our knowledge of love" and "our need to grope for understanding". If this is indeed the case, then perhaps Plato did not have one fixed idea about love, and his creation of the seven speeches is merely an attempt to cache out a few of his conflicting ideas.

Aristophanes' speech about the quest for the soul mate also emphasises the role of the body and sexual intercourse in *erōs*. His speech depicts the intimate and unique relationship that lovers form. Aristophanes' mythical human creatures could be an example of Nozick's ideal instantiation of the *we* that is formed through love. His speech reflects the intellectual, emotional and physical bonds we experience when we are in the throes of love.

Alcibiades' speech is a fine example of "openness" to love. In this play, his openness leaves him vulnerable and rejected, as he is a victim of *hubris*. However, it is important to remember that although Plato depicted Alcibiades' love affair as doomed – this does not mean that it is necessarily the case that all love affairs of this nature will have an unhappy ending. Perhaps the unhappy ending is Plato's attempt to avoid romanticising love as Agathon does. Comte-Sponville (2003: 258) cautions against the "intoxication of love", whilst asking "what could be easier to love than a dream? What could be harder to love than reality?" Perhaps Alcibiades tragic love story is Plato's way of being realistic

about the risks of loving another human being. However, just because an activity is risky, does not necessarily mean it is unworthy of pursuit. Alcibiades also shows how lovers can have intimate knowledge of each other. However, his failed attempt to have a physical relationship with Socrates suggests that certain knowledge about Socrates is lost to Alcibiades (Nussbaum 1896: 191).

Nussbaum (1986: 194) discusses how Alcibiades' crown of ivy is symbolic of Dionysus – god of wine and irrational inspiration and how he is the god of annual ritual death and rebirth: a “cutting back and resurgence, like the plant, like desire itself”. He is the only god who is not self-sufficient; he is acted on by the world. However, in spite of his vulnerability, he restores himself every year. Nussbaum (1986: 195) points out that this might be Plato's way of saying that “an unstable city, an unstable passion, might grow and flourish in a way truly appropriate to a god”. Even though Socrates rejects Alcibiades, Alcibiades still has the chutzpah to flirt with and tease Agathon. Perhaps this is Plato is suggesting that even if one love affair fails – there can always be others.

One might object however, that in Plato's early work he clearly contrasts “symptotic values” (i.e. pleasures of eating, drinking and love-making) with real virtue, arguing that the Guardians have the duty to rise above such pleasures (Tecuşan 1990: 240). Tecuşan (1990: 238) argues that throughout Plato's works, he denigrates the symptotic institutions and that “he revealed himself scarcely inclined to accept the hedonistic reality of such a practice”. Even in the *Symposium*, Socrates needs to be invited twice and then he wanders in aloof and late for dinner.

However, Tecuşan (1990: 244) argues that in Plato's last works –*Laws* – there is a change in attitude towards symposia. She claims that these books aim at a “complete restoration of the symptotic custom”. Her evidence lies in the contrast in the two analogies used by Plato. In the *Republic* “democratic leaders appear as evil wine-pourers who quench the people's thirst for freedom with vile intoxication”, while in the sixth book of the *Laws* the most desirable form of government is described using a comparison with wine-mixing (Tecuşan 1990: 244). Tecuşan (1990: 245) believes that Plato's change in attitude towards symposia reflects his change in understanding of the human soul.

Plato came to view the human soul as a mixture of rational dispositions and deep irrationality. Tecuşan believes that this point can be substantiated with a close reading of

Plato's *Laws* in which there is a deeper interest in drinking parties than in any of his earlier works. Tecuşan (1990: 246) argues that Plato came to the realisation that the human community, with its "deeply irrational nature", could not be brought to virtue by purely rational means. In the *Laws* Plato seems to advocate symposia or conviviality as the "aptest form for revealing the truth". He also changed his views about wine and drinking, and according to Tecuşan (1990: 251) seems to suggest two functions of wine: to arouse deep irrationality, and also create the "aptest state of the mind for education".

If we are to be persuaded by Tecuşan's (1990: 257) argument that Plato did indeed end his career with a "more realistic view of the human soul", we can certainly see a positive case for a foodist rereading of Plato's *Symposium*. Perhaps it was this work and its contemplation about love that was the catalyst for Plato's change of heart, or perhaps love was the one subject that just would not realistically map onto his analytic pattern of the Forms. Socrates' speech certainly attempts this feat, but Alcibiades exposes the futility of Socrates' vision.

In conclusion, the aim of this chapter was to offer a soupçon of foodist philosophising and I trust that it has whet the philosophical appetite.

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