

EROS & POLIS

DESIRE AND COMMUNITY
IN GREEK POLITICAL
THEORY



PAUL W. LUDWIG

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Eros and Polis

Desire and Community in Greek Political Theory

Eros and Polis examines how and why Greek theorists treated political passions as erotic. Because of the tiny size of ancient Greek cities, contemporary theory and ideology could conceive of entire communities based on desire. A recurrent aspiration was to transform the polity into one great household that would bind the citizens together through ties of mutual affection. In this study, Paul Ludwig evaluates sexuality, love, and civic friendship as sources of political attachment and as bonds of political association.

Beyond the desire between persons, Greek erotic theory extended to abstract, impersonal objects of desire, such as imagined communities. Ambition, patriotism, and cosmopolitanism were all diagnosed as erotic wishes. The imperial temptation to transform the polity from a republic to a more “global” community was seen as the desire to partake of foreign customs, fashions, and the commodification of other cultures’ products.

Studying the ancient view of eros recovers a way of looking at political phenomena that provides a bridge, missing in modern thought, between the private and the public spheres, between erotic love and civic commitment. Ludwig’s study thus has important implications for the theoretical foundations of community.

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To my mother and father

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Acknowledgments and a Note on Citations

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Rather than place a formidable list of abbreviations between the book and the general reader at the outset, I have chosen to abbreviate no names and titles of classical authors and texts but only a small number of scholarly sources likely to be of interest to classicists alone, deviating from this rule to include a few works cited so often that economy was called for. Titles of classical journals are cited in full to provide ease of reference for political theorists and other academic readers. A list of the few abbreviations that remain will be found at the back of the book.

Since multiple editions of the same classical texts are sometimes cited for their editors' commentaries, a word about which editions are referred to in my quotations of texts and citations of passages is in order. For the plethora of classical sources cited once or only a few times, the reader is referred to any standard edition of the Greek text; I have tried to note and include in the references sources for which the line numbers are not sufficiently standardized or places in dramas (for example) where scholarly disagreement over the attributions of lines might cause confusion. As for often-used sources, citations of Plato's *Symposium* refer to Dover's Cambridge edition, and citations of the *Republic* refer to the Loeb edition (Shorey). Thucydides citations refer to the Loeb edition of C. F. Smith. Citations of the works of Aristophanes refer to Sommerstein's Aris and Phillips editions (with

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the exceptions of *Clouds*, for which I used Dover's Clarendon edition, and *Knights*, for which I used Hall and Geldart's Oxford Classical Text). Citations of Aristotle's *Politics* refer to the Oxford Classical Text of W. D. Ross. I have sometimes consulted translations, but the reader should be advised that the translations given are my own renderings. The list of works cited is not, needless to say, a bibliography. I have followed the style generally accepted among classicists: for Plato, Stephanus pages are followed by a–d and the line numbers, which differ only slightly from edition to edition; arabic numerals separated by periods refer to book, chapter, sentence or line number, or other relevant subdivisions for several other classical authors (for Aristotle two styles are used simultaneously: the book and chapter numbers found in various editions and translations and favored by political theorists, followed by the Bekker pages, columns, and line numbers used by classicists). "P." and "pp." distinguish the arabic numerals referring to pages in modern works.

Introduction

A recurrent feature of ancient Greek political discourse was the assertion that erotic passion was a causal factor in the emergence and maintenance, as well as the decline, of the Greek polis. Eros, the most private of passions, was believed by ancient political thinkers to be of the utmost public relevance. For them, the term eros included the ordinary meanings of love and sexuality but went beyond these to embrace a wide array of inclinations comprising ambition, patriotism, and other aspirations that were properly political in nature. Not only the soulcraft of Platonic philosophy but also Thucydides' hard-headed and purely political account of the Peloponnesian War makes use of erotic terminology to describe ambition, including, for example, a citizen's ambition to serve the state, a community's ambition to liberate itself from bondage, and an imperial power's ambition to attempt a foreign conquest. The modern reader must question the accuracy of these descriptions, asking, in particular, how closely the concept of eros in ancient psychology resembles our own experience of eros and how instructive the comparison between political passion and eros is, after the differences between ancient and modern concepts of eros have been taken into account.

In classical Athens, the discourse of political eros was both a rhetoric and a theory. The large semantic field of the Greek word *eros*, comprising political and other meanings, had been a linguistic feature of long standing. During the classical period, this existing resource of the language was self-consciously appropriated, in political oratory and in political theory, at times metaphorically and at times literally, to relate levels of human experience among which the connections have not always been perceived. Much of classical thought, explicitly and implicitly, based its notions of

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eros on purely formal resemblances among sexual desire, love, and ambition as well as higher aspirations such as patriotism and cosmopolitanism. Common features in the psychological responses to each of these passions led orators, poets, and philosophers to conclude that said passions were differing manifestations of a single, underlying eros. They were then able to place the apparently diverse passions on a continuum with one another, so that the logical progression, for example, from sexual license to tyranny or from citizen lovers to loving the city, could seem unproblematic to them. Eros therefore provided them with a bridge, missing in modern thought, between the private and public spheres.

As a theory, the ancient conception of political eros has important implications for the theoretical foundations of republicanism, including the foundations of modern representative and participatory democracies. At the core of every republican regime lies a particular political psychology in which a carefully negotiated balance between personal liberty and civic dedication remains satisfying and fulfilling to most citizens. The longevity of modern liberal democracy rests on the beauty or dignity of the life lived in accordance with this balance. Since greater liberty and greater civic dedication are both goods and since the two cannot normally be increased simultaneously, it follows that the republican life will often appear, by turns, restrictive of personal liberty and insufficiently dedicated to the common good. Democratic citizens will therefore be vulnerable to longings that a liberal democracy cannot satisfy, longings both for greater individual autonomy and for stronger ties of obligation and affection among fellow citizens.

These two longings, which have generated the separate streams of individualism and communitarianism in American thought, were the subjects of exhaustive study in classical political philosophy, as the chief psychological factors contributing to both the formation and the dissolution of republican government. Both tendencies, the desire for perfect freedom as well as the need to belong to a greater whole, were diagnosed as erotic wishes by classical authors. Plato and Aristophanes, for example, were particularly interested in the aspiration to transform the polity into one great household, binding the citizens together through ties of mutual affection. Likewise, Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Plato all understood the transformation from republic to empire to be motivated, in part, by a cosmopolitan yearning, the desire to partake of foreign experiences, products, and customs; in their view, many Athenians wished to transcend the confining limitations

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of the local and the particular. In these theories, private preferences have public implications. Defining the limits of those implications, determining when private choices affect and when they do not affect the balance struck by republicanism between individual liberty and dedication to the common good, remains a crucial problem for political theory today.

Aims, Method, Scope

The present study aims to restore a portion of the classical understanding of eros to its place in political theory, in part so that modern debates about privacy and sexuality can utilize the full resources of the tradition. In addition to contributing to our own pressing debates about sexual norms, it is hoped that the concept of political eros will prove to be of value for explaining behavior in areas beyond what are normally considered erotic. Although ancient Greek sexuality has been the theme of much recent classical scholarship, the present study aims to exhibit an equally interesting side of Greek eros lying elsewhere and comparatively neglected by both classicists and political theorists: in the political psychology, aspirations, and idealism animating the classical polis, the failures and successes of which reveal the limits of political possibilities. In making a first approach to a theory of political eros, this study concentrates on building bridges from the existing scholarship on ancient sexuality to the more fully *political* conception of eros. Since what is attempted is to recover an unfamiliar way of looking at political phenomena and since the assumptions behind that unfamiliar perspective are by no means explicit in the texts, the burden of the study is to explore suggestions in the texts of ways in which eros might be political or be made political. Some examples examined are the rivalry between citizen lovers and beloveds, in which the older lover provided a role model for the ambition of the younger beloved; eros as hubris or the aggressive self-aggrandizement implicit in the desire to dishonor others, for example, sexuality used to establish and maintain hierarchies; and finally, the “sublimation” of eros into abstract objects of desire such as love of country.

The methodology is primarily an exegesis of texts: many sections are restricted almost entirely to drawing out assumptions of the discourse and indicating internal implications. The approach is literary and philological, and the interpretations are intended to stand on their own as a new comparative study of several related classical texts. Beyond this literary–critical

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purpose, however, it is hoped that the ancient discourse, both the theory and the rhetoric, can expand our knowledge of the latent potentialities of our nature by showing what happens to human eros under different political conditions. It is conceivable that the small, face-to-face societies that comprised much of the life of the polis schooled eros in ways that enabled ancient thinkers to perceive features of eros that we have not seen or that appear in confusing guise in modern society. Clarity about those features of eros might be expected in turn to shed light on our own political choices. However, the remarkable extent to which modern scholarship, going back at least to Rousseau,¹ has shown eros to be constructed by social forces, necessitates paying close attention to the sociology of eros. Sociology includes not only ancient practices and mores but also the texts that report them; our access to the history of ancient eros is largely dependent on the same texts that are under study. A selection bias of the theorists left out large chunks of fact that can be only speculatively supplied, the most obvious example being their almost exclusive interest in male eros. As will become clear, the male bias of the civilization heavily influenced the politicization of eros. As a supplementary methodology, several sections and one entire chapter (Chapter 3) situate arguments from the political theories of eros in a broader context of Greek oratory, historiography, epic and tragic poetry, and political satire, as well as in the context of ancient philosophy. Although the disagreements among ancient authors can be more instructive than their consensus, a wide range of evidence nevertheless demonstrates the broad currency of this discourse throughout the classical period and traces its roots in earlier Greek thought and language.

In addition, an attempt is made to test the plausibility of the ancient theories of eros against modern experience. Although the many pitfalls of such a comparison are obvious, it would be impossible to engage the texts of Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Plato adequately without assigning to their words some portion of our own experience. Not without trepidation, then, does the study bring to bear modern and postmodern theories of eros, particularly those of Freud and Foucault, on the ancient theories. Keeping the voices distinct has been the paramount concern of this exercise. Throughout, an effort has also been made to bring the ancient political discourse into dialogue with the later history of political thought, including selected contemporary authors. This study cannot pretend to have exhausted the

¹ J.-J. Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, pp. 154–7. Compare *Emile*, p. 333.

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resources of the discourse of political eros, even in the three classical authors chosen as representative of it: for example, *Ecclesiazusae* and *Lysistrata*, two plays in which eros and politics are thematic, have been left for a future study. Much less does it survey the entire scholarship even on the various facets of eros in these authors. The subject of political eros has required ruthless narrowing and narrowing again, as it threatened to grow too broad to be viewed whole. The outcome is a literary study and an attempt to reconstruct a political theory. Although this study sketches the history of a discourse, it makes few claims about political history, and certainly no new ones, although it does offer new interpretations of some documents on which social and political histories are, in part, based.

Including a comic playwright in the ranks of serious political thinkers perhaps requires justification. Aristophanes' political satire held up a mirror to Athenian politics for almost forty years, during a period that witnessed direct-vote democracy in its most advanced condition as well as experiments with broad- and narrow-based oligarchies; Athenian imperialism reached its zenith and collapsed during the same period. In response to these changes, Aristophanes presented on stage a variety of political utopias – agrarian, imperial, and communist – in order to show the psychologies of both expansion and reform while allowing the limitations or folly of the projects to arise naturally out of their own assumptions. The satirist especially excelled at portraying the psychology of political action: what motivates the agents, what they tell themselves, and what they tell others, on their way up or down. In classical studies, a long debate has gone on over whether serious views can be ascribed to plays filled with manic humor.² The carnival excesses

² A. W. Gomme, "Aristophanes and Politics," p. 108, writes that Aristophanes "may, in his youth, have believed, wrongly, that it was his business to direct the counsels of the state . . . mistaking the character of his own genius." Gomme finds Aristophanes' political opinions, even if they could be recovered, irrelevant for his art (p. 97). G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, concerned with Old Comedy's usefulness as a source for ancient history, finds serious opinions "sandwiched" between humorous passages (*Origins of the Peloponnesian War*, p. 357); he finds (p. 363) that the poet identifies himself strongly with the character Dicaeopolis in *Acharnians*, the play arguably most strident about its claims to instruct its audience about politics (e.g., lines 497–501, 644–5). L. Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, also concludes that the poet shows solidarity with such characters or choruses as speak *in persona poetae*; Strauss contends that the poet approves of characters' schemes to the extent to which he makes those schemes succeed (pp. 22, 69, 278), but maintains that even if simple messages can be found side by side with humor, nevertheless more sophisticated thought can be uncovered by taking "the ridiculous [as] all-pervasive" (p. 78). Contrast D. M. MacDowell, *Aristophanes and Athens*, pp. 5–6, on M. Heath, *Political Comedy in Aristophanes*, pp. 16–21. K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, p. 88, denies that *Acharnians* is "a pill of political advice thickly

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in the plays, in my opinion, only serve to throw into relief the motivations of the protagonists; we witness demagogues, cleruchs, yeoman farmers, and imperialists acting entirely in consonance with their own wishes, free of all communal restraint that might necessitate that they dissemble their true desires. Although historians of antiquity must beware of mistaking caricature for accurate portrayal of fact, political theorists will find that such caricature often highlights the character traits of greatest interest: for example, the religiosity of Nicias in *Knights*, 30–4, which was later to play such a decisive role in the Athenian defeat at Syracuse.³ In addition, the playwright, who caters to the masses more often than to the privileged few, provides important access to demotic sentiments (spoken by his characters) in an otherwise aristocratic mental culture. In particular, his satire on elite pederasty allows us to see this sociopolitical phenomenon through the eyes of the rank and file of farmers and (to a lesser extent) urban marketers. Aristophanes' works are a largely untapped resource for political theory.

In attempting to meet the standards of both classical philology and political theory, this study runs the risk of falling in between the two disciplines. Relevance to modern problems is especially prized in political theory, whereas in philology, relevance is the siren song that calls us away from historical contextualization. Study of the classics takes its impetus from love of the books on their own terms, but it acquires depth and gravity only if the books speak relevantly to a felt need. My hope is that the ancient view of political eros presented here will prove a useful supplement to, or correction of, the purely private eros of modern theory. The liberal ideal that eros should be kept as private as possible is a deeply felt ethical intuition that this study would otherwise wish to uphold. However,

sugared with humor"; Dover expands Gomme's catalogue of the many inconsistencies that would have to be explained before any coherent political views could be ascribed to Aristophanes. See also S. Halliwell, "Aristophanic Satire," pp. 16 and 19 as well as his *Aristophanes*, pp. xxxix–xlvii. A. M. Bowie, "The Parabasis in Aristophanes," p. 29, note 14, disagrees with Ste. Croix that the poet has a special relationship with Dicaeopolis and points out that the "author" as he functions in the play "is as much a literary construct as his hero" (p. 40; cf. Bowie, *Aristophanes: Myth, Ritual and Comedy*, pp. 28–29). J. Henderson, "The Demos and the Comic Competition," pp. 273–4 explains that Aristophanes never steps out of the humorous because he would lose his "fool's privilege" of saying precisely what he wishes, no matter how unpalatable politically. The king can pretend not to take seriously what the fool says yet seeks to reconstruct, in private, a serious content from his fool's comical criticism. Henderson alludes to an ancient anecdote that when Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse, wished to study the *politeia* of the Athenians, Plato sent him a copy of Aristophanes (*Life of Aristophanes*, KA, pp. 42–5). "Historical or not, the anecdote expresses the ancient attitude" (p. 272).

³ Thucydides 7.50.4.

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the moral goodness and political prudence of leaving certain erotic phenomena unregulated must be sharply distinguished from empirical claims that those erotic phenomena are without political consequences and that phenomena acknowledged to be political are not erotic in character. Investigating the degree to which eros can possibly remain private should prove instructive. Postmodernism has already abandoned the liberal position, and the vulnerability of privacy to theoretical attack from both left and right leads us to wish to place it on a firmer basis.⁴

Eros Ancient and Modern

In classical Greek, the term *eros*⁵ had a range of meanings covered by the English words love and lust. It emphatically did not extend so far as the modern idea of love as “caring” or altruism. *Eros*, even at its most innocent, never lost a sense of “longing” and usually meant the desire to possess for oneself. The Greeks did not hasten to condemn such a lover for selfishness. Instead, they were keenly aware that people often perform acts of service in hopes of winning favor in the eyes of their beloved. The arguments for the political utility of eros relied on precisely this psychology.

A different group of words, for example, *aphrodisia* and (more rarely) *aphrodite*, was sometimes used to mean, respectively, sexual pleasures and sexual desire, often without reference to love. An amount of overlap existed between the two concepts of love and sex. In Greek texts, *eros* can, but need not, connote sexual arousal. The fact that the specifically sexual signification is covered by the other group of terms frees up the term *eros*, particularly when contrasted with *ta aphrodisia* or cognates, to mean a passion closer to our romantic love.⁶ When not so paired, *eros* can mean either or both.

⁴ See, for example, Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, pp. 45–9. In the realm of practical politics, the rebirth of the movement to legislate morality (e.g., in the Colorado Amendment 2 case *Evans v. Romer*) is far surpassed by national conventions of journalists who solemnly debate the ethics of “outing” people who wish to keep their practices clandestine.

⁵ Italics will mean that the Greek word ἔρως is referred to exclusively. Lack of italics will mean that the modern English word is being used, but the reader should be aware that the English word “eros” will often be used to convey what this study contends is the broader range of meanings associated with the ancient concept in the classical period. For a full discussion, see Chapter 3. As a general rule, less familiar Greek words will appear first in italics, which they will then lose as their meanings are clarified.

⁶ The charge of anachronism, viz., that “romantic” love is a product of the medieval period of western history, does not take into account evidence from, e.g., Plato’s *Lysis*, 204b 1–205d 4

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A tendency of recent scholarship has been to reduce the meaning of *eros* in all instances to sexual desire. For example, K. J. Dover in a dozen dense pages never quite succeeds in distinguishing *eros* from an especially strong desire for sexual intercourse. Love, gallantry and honor, romance, “grand gestures,” and military heroism for the purpose of impressing the beloved, all of which Dover catalogues, remain epiphenomenal to *eros* in his account, each one caused by *eros* but none of them, not even love, falling under the domain of *eros* as strictly defined.⁷ Yet Dover’s alternative for “love” in Greek, the *philia* word group (denoting dearness, belonging, friendship) does not do justice to the vehemence of the previously mentioned acts of passion, nor was it often used in classical Greek to refer to the more passionate aspects of love.⁸ This is just one important instance in which modern assumptions about *eros* color the interpretation of classical texts. Easy acceptance of reductionism (the “order of science”) risks neglecting the phenomenology of *eros* (the “order of experience”). *Eros* in the sense of falling in love, or romantic passion, does not immediately desire genital contact and may, in the young or naïve, even be unaware of sexual intercourse. Sexual reductionism thus simplifies our own experience drastically. While Dover sought to provide a corrective to the chaste picture of Greek homoeroticism promulgated by a previous generation of scholars,⁹ subsequent scholarship no longer has the same excuse for neglecting the

(see the discussion in Chapter 5). Compare K. J. Dover, ed., *Symposium*, p. 3 and Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (hereafter *GH*) pp. 50–2, 123–4. Christianity, however transformative, did not create love.

⁷ *GH*, pp. 42–54 (especially pp. 49–51). Compare Dover, ed., *Plato. Symposium*, pp. 1–2: *Eros* is “desire doubled” in Prodicus’ dictum (fragment 7.2 DK = Stobaeus 4.20.65). Dover’s translations rightly distinguish between English “love” and “in love,” the latter being the more appropriate translation for *eros*, e.g., p. 45 (the translation of *philia* at *Symposium*, 179b, as “in love” is a slip, p. 52). Nevertheless Dover’s assumption is that *eros qua* being in love differs from “[sexual] desire divorced from *eros*” (pp. 44–5) only by being a much stronger sexual desire, one that is “obsessive, more complex” (p. 44; cf. “obsessive focussing of desire on one person,” p. 63). This assumption cannot be made compatible with his subsequent analysis (pp. 63–4, described in note 8 of this chapter).

⁸ It is not accidental that Dover defines *eros* as strong sexual desire when contrasting *eros* with *philia* (*GH*, pp. 49–50) and yet acknowledges the justification for removing the genital dimension from *eros* to leave only “falling in love” when contrasting *eros* with *aphrodisia* (pp. 63–4). This raises the question of what Dover means by obsessively focused sexual desire in the absence of any genital activity. If by “sexual” desire he means not genitally active desire but any desire having to do with the difference between the two sexes (*GH*, p. 206), with homosexual desire shifted under “quasi-sexual” desire (*GH*, pp. vii–viii), it then becomes unclear to what differences between the sexes he refers.

⁹ For example, *GH*, p. vii.

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full range of emotional phenomena, that is, for neglecting, in particular, love.¹⁰ It is difficult to imagine a similar oversight occurring in studies of heterosexual relations in, say, a period of comparable interest in European history.

A less reductive view of eros, which relates eros to sexuality without making the two terms coextensive, can be found in ancient thought. For example, the close relationship between *aphrodite* and *eros* is implicit in the traditional pairing of the gods who bore their names.¹¹ The god of passionate love, Eros, was the son or accomplice of Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, of sexual attraction, and of reproduction. Passionate love, viewed thus, is inextricably bound up with sexuality; indeed, all eros may be seen as arising from sexual desire, its root cause. In Hesiod, however, there are two accounts of the origin of Eros. In one of the accounts, Eros appears after the birth of Aphrodite, as one of her attendants, and this rendering became traditional. However, in another, earlier Hesiodic account, Eros appears as a primary, cosmogonic hunger, which precedes Aphrodite and most of the other gods.¹² In this earlier account, erotic desire ceases to be derivative from something more basic than itself and takes its place as a fundamental category. All intense desires, whether bodily or spiritual, would have to be referred to this basic structure of yearning. Sexual desire, on this reading, would be one (limited) type of eros among other types of eros. Poetic and philosophical

¹⁰ Two studies indebted to Dover but outside the stream of thought he initiated achieve a better balance: A. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (see occasional subsequent references); and C. Calame, *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece* (see especially pp. 13–23, 51, 65; cf. p. 72). Calame includes a brief treatment of the relevance of eros for Greek political institutions (pp. 91–109). He goes too far, however, in assimilating the dominant/submissive dichotomy almost entirely to the inversions of educative initiation rites (p. 55, note 5; p. 100, note 18; pp. 107–8; cf. pp. 198–9), and he becomes oversubtle in attempting to explain away the same dichotomy in comic invective (pp. 134–41). Calame's preference for a more benign view of eros (pp. 27–38) seems to wish away the more violent aspect of hierarchy stressed by Dover and Foucault (*The Use of Pleasure*) a view that then became orthodox (cf. D. M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* and J. J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire*). D. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society and Law, Violence, and Community*, leaves the dominant/submissive hierarchy intact but emphasizes its relation to hubris. J. N. Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes*, attempts to break the orthodoxy by concentrating on natural pleasures; see the critical review by P. A. Cartledge. B. S. Thornton, *Eros: The Myth of Ancient Greek Sexuality*, likewise tacks against the orthodox view by focusing on Greek references to horror at and disgust with eros. My own opinion is that including love within the parameters of eros should not entail forgetting that the full range of eros might also include aggression. Thus in these different streams of modern scholarship, eros seems robbed, by turns, of either its beauties or its dangers.

¹¹ For example, Hesiod, *Theogony*, 188–206.

¹² Contrast Hesiod, *Theogony*, 116–22 with 188–206.

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accounts of political eros in the classical period could look back to this pre-Aphrodite myth of Eros for evidence of his original domain.¹³

Political Eros

The originally wide semantic field of the word *eros* in both Homer and Hesiod enabled the word to become part of political terminology. Analyzing specifically political usages of the term *eros* is complicated by the fact that not only *eros* but also *aphrodite* is at times used in an extended sense to denote any passionate or vehement desire. How metaphorical such instances are and how literally authors such as Thucydides would have intended for their readership to take the connotations of “love” or “lust” in important passages of political history are questions addressed in Chapter 3. What should be clear by now, however, is that when Thucydides’ speaker Diodotus, for example, ascribes the revolt of the Mytilenians to *eros* (3.45.5), the word is not intended to convey that the Mytilenians experienced a sexual arousal at the prospect of liberty. The passage may well mean, however, that the Mytilenians experienced a catching of the breath and a pounding of the heart at the prospect of freedom, symptoms conformal with a passion that, in a very different context, might have manifested itself in sexual arousal. A great deal depends on the psychological questions of whether and how sexual desire, romantic passion, and political passion are in fact related to one another.

When we turn to the question of imperialism and to Thucydides’ similarly erotic descriptions of the lust for overseas empire and the desire to dominate far-off lands, the connection between eros and political passion seems more evident to the modern mind. Enough has been written in postcolonial theory about the erotic aspects of aggression, including the sadistic and sexual aspects of dominating the other, to make this particular connection between eros and politics more plausible *prima facie*.

In nonaggressive contexts as well, however, Greek thought insisted that eros was capable of rising above the bodily. Abstract objects such as the fatherland or an imagined community are treated in some Greek texts as no less desirable and “erotic” than a tangible and concrete human body. These latter accounts inevitably invite comparisons with modern theories of sublimation. For example, in Socrates’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium*, bodily

¹³ For example, *Symposium*, 178a 6–c 2 and context.

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beauty is used to stimulate conversations between lover and beloved, out of which they conceive grand plans and ambitions such as founding the types of regimes that won the lawgivers Lycurgus and Solon undying honor and fame. Sexual intercourse with the beloved is said to defeat this purpose.¹⁴ This theory would appear to describe a sublimation of the sex instinct into ambition. In a related but far more general trend, an unusually high proportion of instances of eros elsewhere in Greek thought and literature refer to strictly visual enjoyment of desire or gazing at the beloved without recourse to physical contact. Speculations about the reasons for this ocular orientation of the Greeks will be entertained in the chapters that follow, but the contribution that an ocular orientation could potentially make to sublimation should be clear. Objects that by their nature cannot be embraced, such as a whole city or a foreign land, can still be possessed with the eyes.

Yet Plato's Socrates would have called a theory of human eros that took its bearings from an act capable of being performed by quadrupeds¹⁵ a theory of "profanation" rather than of sublimation. Eros is most itself when at its highest and rarest; the most natural eros is eros in its fullest flower, not eros in its grubby root. This response begs not only the philosophical question of whether it is the initial causes or the completed results that are more descriptive of a phenomenon, but also the question of naturalness as opposed to the social construction of eros, that is, whether such a result as politicized eros should ever be considered natural. Can a given society construct eros for its citizens out of whole cloth or does all civilization ultimately come at the cost of natural eros? Although the Greek thinkers under consideration seem to have believed that political eros was in some measure a natural outcome of polis life, they at the same time doubted whether politics would ultimately be able to contain eros.

The present study, in an effort to leave these questions open, will retain the term sublimation,¹⁶ not because of any prior commitment, but rather because too much modern philosophy and psychology have intervened between ourselves and Plato for any scholar to accept uncritically the Platonic

¹⁴ Sexual intercourse relegates the lover to a lower form of "conception": conceiving children rather than ideas (*Symposium*, 208e 1–209e 4).

¹⁵ *Phaedrus*, 250e 1–251a 1.

¹⁶ On the modern coinage of the word "sublimate," see Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 189. For a discussion, see W. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, pp. 216–223.

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theories of eros. Plato's thought on eros will be made plausible to us by beginning from where we are now, or it will not be made plausible at all. Furthermore, Thucydides and Aristophanes, in very different ways, both take a more material view of eros than Plato or his characters do. Instead of affirming or assuming that the concept of eros should be expanded to include political passions, this study seeks to show justifications for doing so by identifying links, causal chains, and analogies between eros narrowly conceived and the political passions that all three of those Greek authors contend ought properly to be considered erotic.

Criteria for Applying Eros to Politics

If the term eros is to be stretched to cover so wide a range of human motivations, there is the danger that at some point the concept of eros might lose its usefulness as an analytical tool. If any banal desire, such as the wish for a second helping at the dinner table, could be fitted under this rubric, then to ascribe a given human action to eros would effectively add nothing to the discussion. Where to place limits on the Greek concept is not always easy to determine. One feature, which might be called a necessary condition of eros, is the response to an appearance subjectively perceived as beautiful. Political desires such as the wish to belong to a larger whole and the longing for perfect freedom tend to be pursued even in cases in which their implementation is impractical, that is, their idealized images are attractive by virtue of their beautiful appearances alone. A second, related feature, which some of the ancient texts share with the modern theories of Nietzsche and Freud, is the existence of a barrier that blocks fulfillment, allowing the passions to build up over time, causing a sense of anticipation or frustration. Eros tends to be reserved for situations in which the agent already has his or her basic needs met. The desire to eat, then, would not ordinarily be characterized as erotic in the classical¹⁷ discourse of eros. Indeed, eros is often used to describe situations in which the agent gambles more basic goods, risking life or limb in an attempt to obtain a beautiful object of dubious material or practical value. Stealing apples from the king's orchard might be an example of an ordinary appetite that has become erotic, particularly if a high wall around the orchard keeps intruders out and if a bright red apple hangs on its bough just over the wall, forever out of reach

¹⁷ "Classical" as opposed to Homeric: see the discussion in Chapter 3.

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to the peasant boy who fears to break the law: in other words, a provoking object.¹⁸ Eros occurs in cases in which the desire, whether sexual or not, becomes obsessional and the subject of desire becomes willing to devote nearly all his or her life, time, or resources to achieving the goal. Eros tends to engage the whole self or to throw every other concern into the shade. These limitations on the concept have implications for the paradigmatic case of eros, for the Greeks as well as for ourselves: the intense desire to be with and to embrace another human being. Easily available sex is less “erotic,” according to this account, than unrequited love or any other romantic attachment in which some blockage temporarily frustrates the fulfillment of desire. This principle is implicit in the courting strategy of “playing hard to get”: the way to intensify the desire of a potential partner is to pretend lack of interest or to put up barriers.

Although nothing guarantees that the subject will successfully navigate the sea of beautiful appearances, the enigmatic summons or solicitation of certain true or natural goods for human beings can be discerned behind these appearances in both Platonic and some modern theories. Beauty is not arbitrarily illusory but points beyond itself to the good. The simplest example would be the modern evolutionary biologist’s interpretation of the paradigmatic case of eros, the desire for sexual intercourse. Bodies or genes seek to perpetuate themselves, and the beautiful appearance that invests the object of desire has the purpose of leading the subject to fulfill this biological good. The beautiful appearance is not identical to the aforesaid good and may later be found to have been, in many respects, illusory. The human being is even liable to feel as though nature had cheated him or her in order to get what it wanted, propagation of the species, whereas the expectation of the person under the influence of eros was of something vastly different, for example, a perfect spouse or a never-ending romance. What consciously seems an enhancement of life is unconsciously the subject’s embrace of (nature’s remedy for) his or her own eventual obsolescence and death. Bringing conscious expectations in line with the actual aims of eros, as ancient thought attempted to do (in this case, consciously seeking perpetuation through reproduction precisely because one realizes one’s body is mortal), entails a process of discovery, since it means seeing through the beautiful appearances to the good toward which they point. This third feature of authentic erotic experience could be put into a crude formula:

¹⁸ See Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, pp. 26–9, on Sappho fragment 105a, LP.

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“eros consciously or unconsciously seeks more or better life,” albeit with the caveat that the newfound life might not be one’s own. The political analogues in ancient theory, such as a community’s desire for liberation or its movement from republic to empire, wittingly or (usually) unwittingly embrace the death of the community *qua* its current state of being. Eros drives its subject to transcend the limitations of its current existence, to rise above itself, and therefore in particular to risk losing itself.

An Older Way of Viewing Political Phenomena

What is added to existing explanations of political behavior by adducing eros as a motive? Much current literature in the social sciences reduce political behavior to economic models. The desire for a predictive science leads to simplifying assumptions, many of which hold true within the framework of middle-class freedom. By contrast, ancient theorists were preoccupied with anarchic, tyrannical, revolutionary, and imperial desires that went beyond the boundaries of the maximum allowable freedom, and that presented a danger to others precisely because they had potentially regime-changing consequences, as in the case of Alcibiades, whose imperialism threatened to overthrow the democratic order. These desires, albeit rare, are of such political importance that no theorist can be neutral about their fulfillment. Thus, in contrast to economic models that maximize subjective utility, the theories of political eros are inescapably moral in their intentions. Studying the highest aspirations of diverse human types, determining what they ultimately love, forces the theorist to weigh those loves and to ponder their rank order for the purpose of fulfilling the human good. Such moral weighing is part and parcel of the search for the best political order, in which the most fulfilling loves may be shared. The fundamental question about eros is often the degree of delusion in its perception of the beauty or goodness in the erotic object. Studying the relative goodness of the erotic objects thus comprises a part of the subject matter of the classical theories of political eros.¹⁹

At the same time, the classical theories of political eros were not purely normative in the sense of allowing moral aspirations to override empirical grounding. Under certain conditions, moral aspirations are themselves

¹⁹ The opposite, value-indifferent approach to sexual eros has been attempted by R. Posner, *Sex and Reason*. See especially pp. 85, 111–15; cf. pp. 220, 431.

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treated as erotic (and illusory) in classical thought. Eros is rooted in the stubbornness of human nature; many of its aspirations, particularly those that are most unrealistic, cannot be eradicated, and the study of them would be incomplete if the gap between feasibility and wish were not taken into account. Eros in the narrower, amatory sense has always been a major motivating force for humankind. The expanded sense of eros, on the other hand, depends on the degree of politicization of eros, which differs from regime to regime. The Greek theorists report that eros was highly politicized in their time. Their record is worth sober analysis because it may be the best way of knowing when and in what way eros might be politicized in our own regime. Merely wishing eros to remain private is not sufficient: assertions about what ought to be must pay strict attention to what is and what has been. Accordingly, the ancient theories of eros come already equipped, as it were, with studies of how eros was politicized in two very different regimes in classical Greece: oligarchic Sparta and democratic Athens.

The classical theories of eros, furthermore, by recovering the deep connectedness among easily compartmentalized domains of human experience, give testimony to the wholeness of human nature. Human beings commit more acts out of love and honor than current political theory allows for. During the age of chivalry and courtly love, eros was harnessed to political ends by astute politicians right through to the time of the French revolution. Edmund Burke, in particular, mourned the privatization of eros, reasoning that a queen was a necessary symbol for a nation because of the romantic concern she could elicit.²⁰ This obvious connection between patriotism and love for a person raises real issues. Love would be stretched thin by trying to distribute it over a whole commonwealth, but it is possible fervently to love one who sums up the many in herself. Burke doubted whether political submission could ever again be “proud” in the absence of anything to engage the affections, that is, if the law were obeyed only out of fear and interest. Odd as this older system now seems to us, modernity may be, from a historical perspective, more the exception than the rule in its construction of a purely private, apolitical eros.

²⁰ E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 169–72. For the importance to the regime of the queen’s beauty and virtue, see also the scurrilous or pornographic lampoons of Marie-Antoinette reproduced in S. Schama, *Citizens*, pp. 203–27. Her political opponents seem to have known exactly how to destroy that reverent love for her in the public mind that would otherwise have been difficult to combat. See also Tolstoy’s description of Nikolai Rostov’s feelings for the handsome and gracious young Tsar Alexander (*War and Peace*, pp. 256–7, 265–8, 301–2).

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Contrary to Burke's belief about the absence of love in ancient politics, those "states which flourished in the most brilliant periods of the antique world"²¹ also introduced love into politics, and did so in modes not monarchic but fully republican. Moreover, they brought nakedness into the full light of day, eschewing many of Burke's "pleasing illusions," which he thereby admits were illusory. The Greeks were proud of the rationalism and meritocracy that their nudity signified; Thucydides points to naked wrestling as the hallmark of Greekness over against barbarism.²² Only stripped of all disguise and compelled to prove material superiority in a fair and equal competition could the person of a citizen be deemed worthy of admiration or love. Rule and office were to follow on excellence, not depend on bloodlines and mystification. The questionableness of these premises arises from the fact that much of their eros, and all of their politics, were male. Not only was feminine beauty often considered a specious appearance, but there was no legitimate feminine exercise of political power; female rulers of the ancient Near East were symbols of unearned privilege. What Burke called "subordination of the heart" between knight and lady was to take place in Greece between a male citizen-soldier and his younger male beloved.

Potential Contributions of the Classical Theory of Political Eros

What would a theory of political eros look like today? Such a theory would not seek to replace the motives generally thought to influence the conduct of individuals and nations, for example, security and profit. Nor would the theory simply add a qualitatively new motivation, eros, as one factor among other, standard factors. Rather, eros would be considered as a mode in which traditional motives such as profit are experienced; a political theory cognizant of eros would be sensitive to certain "peak" moments in which the traditional motives become unusually heightened or intense. When profit becomes erotic, it ceases to be an important need and becomes a compulsive urge, that is, it takes on a new character. To cite

²¹ Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 170.

²² 1.6. See the discussion in Chapter 6.

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the simplest example: the political, social, and economic behavior of an ordinary taxpayer with a conservative investment portfolio is far easier to predict than the same variables in a compulsive gambler who cannot resist letting everything ride on the next throw. Both agents are motivated by profit, at least in part, but the inner emotional experiences are so different that they produce radically different behavior. In an analogous way, Thucydides tells of entire cities that were known to have gambled their substance and their existence. In this way, erotic theory has something new to say about ordinary motives under special circumstances.

On the other hand, a political theory of eros would indeed attempt to revive several older, qualitatively different motives that have largely dropped out of the discourse of political theory. One of these is “honor”: although liberal-democratic politics obviously stresses honor less than premodern regimes do, one only has to mention the comparatively new term “recognition politics” to see that both groups and individuals still seek honor within liberal democracies. Our inability to see recognition as a form of honor (in part because democratic citizens often do not in good conscience seek honors beyond the honor of full equality) blinds us to ways in which recognition is the next logical desideratum of the political agent after financial security has been attained. In ancient political theory, profit was not considered lovely enough to compel elites who had never known want. Honor was more erotic than profit to the extent that it was perceived to be more beautiful.

Another rarer but nevertheless important political motive that the theory of eros would wish to revive could be described as the curiosity for or intellectual delight in foreign customs, fashions, and ideas. Particularly in the age of globalization, when market demand for the commodification of cultural products forms a small but important part of the profit motive for global markets, this motivation is making a comeback in ways that have not been seen since the close of the age of modern European imperialism. Postcolonial studies and various humanistic fields know the intellectual eros as the “imperial gaze” or, more narrowly applied, as “orientalism,” even though it is largely absent from mainstream international studies and comparative politics.²³ This motive in both imperialism and globalization is studied and

²³ For the dialectic between “frank covetousness” and an “epistemological impulse to find out, settle upon, to uncover” both in Lord Curzon of the British Raj and in the description of the

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discussed in the former fields largely without the rigor that political theory traditionally requires and with little or none of the psychological subtlety that can be supplied by ancient political thought, which as mentioned above was oriented toward a purely ocular (and mental) eros. Although the relations between culture and imperialism, knowledge and power, had to be rediscovered relatively recently by postmodernists after having been forgotten in modern political theory, those relations had previously been the focus of sustained reflection in classical Greek political theory.

Adherents of a “thick” view of civil society or civic republicanism will find in the ancient theory of eros levels of commitment and dedication rarely imagined and a rich source of new concepts and practices: the real thing, as it were. Adherents of a thin, unencumbered, “procedural” citizenship will find new arguments against such committed politics in the classical theorists’ critique of the dangers of political eros. My own assessment is that eros, like so many aspects of the human condition, is a predicament to be experienced and perhaps ameliorated rather than a problem to be solved once and for all: private eros will always struggle to become public, if only in marriage and recognition, whereas political eros will always seek to reduce politics to a private concern, for example, in ancient and modern communistic attempts to make the polity into one great household, or in the attempts of, say, an eighteenth-century merchant imperialist or a modern-day multinational corporation to commandeer a national economic policy. The point of including eros in modern political theory is to attempt to strike a better balance between individual liberty and civic dedication than is found in current political theories and to obtain clarity about what reforms are not merely desirable but possible. However attractive aspects of earlier political regimes in which eros was public may be, it would be irresponsible to think either that we can return to them or that we should hazard our rights-based, liberal democracies for wholesale reforms. Political theory seeks first and foremost to see clearly; the fact that the object of its vision is of the utmost practical importance to us should not efface this fundamental aim. The claim here is that a political theory that forgets about eros smooths over human motivations, leaving out important, albeit rare, motivations, and misinterpreting the more common ones in crucial situations.

boyhood map reading of Joseph Conrad’s character Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, see E. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 216.

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Themes and Divisions

Three separable strands can be discerned in Greek political discourse on eros: (1) political pederasty, (2) civic friendship or *homonoia*, and (3) the city as an object of eros.

The first, political pederasty, was the belief that the love relationship between an adult male and a boy or adolescent youth was, or ought to have been, concerned with initiation into manhood and with education in civic pursuits such as athletics, soldiery, and statesmanship. Conversely, the presence of the beloved was thought to provide a spur to greater achievements by his lover in those same fields of civic endeavor.

The second strand viewed eros as conducive to *homonoia* or “likemindedness,” and to civic friendship (*philia*). The present study only scratches the surface of this theme, in which love relationships between pairs of free citizens were thought to foster concord and solidarity, first and foremost in heterosexual marriages,²⁴ but later among males as a political or military good, for example, in accounts of the Sacred Band of Thebes. At their most idealistic, apologists for this view envisioned a city composed entirely of males.²⁵ The city itself might then become an erotic association like marriage, that is, an association in which eros was (or contributed to) the cement binding its members together.

The third strand of the discourse concerned the city (or a foreign country) as an object of eros, that is, “political” eros properly so called. Pericles, in his Funeral Oration, exhorts the citizens to become *erastai* (“erotic lovers”) of Athens or her power.²⁶ Patriotism is thus placed on an erotic basis, a project potentially fraught with high risks as well as yielding high returns. Of special interest is whether continuities exist among the preceding three aggregates of practices and aspirations. Does political pederasty foster *homonoia*? Does *homonoia* provide a bridge to erotic patriotism, that is, to loving the city as an erotic object in its own right?

²⁴ J. Redfield, *Apollo, Artemis, and Peitho at Sikyon*, pp. 14–17. The original term, *homophrosune*, can be found in Odysseus’ description of the goodness of marriage to Nausicaa at *Odyssey*, 6.180–85. Compare Redfield, “Notes on the Greek Wedding,” pp. 196–97. For the alternative, but related, tradition that eros (especially when premarital or extramarital) had quite the opposite effect, viz. of breaking up *philia* relationships, see C. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic*, especially p. 30 (which generalizes about the narrow, sexual nature of *eros* from a small number of sources), pp. 86–8; cf. p. 130 for a similar “tables-turned” on *philia* itself.

²⁵ See, e.g., *Symposium*, 178e 3–179a 2.

²⁶ *Thucydides* 2.43.1.

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Part I of this book introduces the subject through a case study of one of the major sources for the ancient discourse of political eros, Plato's *Symposium*. Parts I and II cover some of the same ground twice: certain arguments appear once in the context of explicating the Platonic dialogue (Part I) and a second time, with more documentation, in the context of examining how widespread such thought was in ancient Greece and how much weight such claims should have for us today (Part II). The early chapters lay the groundwork for an interpretation of the dialogue that takes into account the central position and didactic importance of the speech Plato writes for Aristophanes. Chapter 1 addresses the tradition, ideology, and morality of political pederasty with special reference to the hermeneutical problem posed by humor and irony in the *Symposium*. The relation between the speech and the comedies of the real Aristophanes is treated at length. Particular attention is paid to the context of the "masculinist" discourse begun by the previous speakers. Sources and problems related to Greek homoeroticism become especially relevant in Chapters 1 and 2 insofar as the Greeks "gendered" homoeroticism or equated active male homosexuality with manliness. Manliness in turn was a political term, part of the dialectic by which democratic (and sometimes oligarchic) government was distinguished from tyranny. Political synoecism, the birth of the polis, and its relation to eros are treated under different aspects in both chapters. Chapter 2 examines the use made of Aristophanes' *Symposium* speech for recent debates (among natural law theorists, liberal theorists, and Foucauldian theorists); once again a number of allusions to passages in Aristophanic comedy are brought to bear on the interpretation of the speech, highlighting the theme of the naturalness versus the social construction of eros and concentrating on the mutual interaction of eros and law. By staying close to texts and contexts, these preliminary chapters allow the crucial theme of eros for power to emerge in its proper proportions.

Before moving to a major confrontation with the *Symposium* speech of Socrates, Part II steps back from the Platonic dialogue to problematize political eros as a discourse, situating political eros within several broad ancient rhetorical, historical, and linguistic contexts. Chapter 3 argues that Thucydides' history was arranged, in part, to illustrate a theory of political eros. Political theorists may wish to concentrate on the implications for Thucydides' understanding of politics (Section 3.6). The remainder of Part II then addresses two of the problems that the Greek discourse of

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political eros raises for modern readers: the problem of erotic aggression or hubris, in which sexuality was thought to be used to establish and maintain hierarchies (Chapter 4), and the problem of the sublimation of eros into abstract objects of desire such as love of country (Chapter 5). These chapters range freely over many works in the corpus of Greek literature, and an attempt is made to engage the modern theories of Freud and Foucault in order to build bridges between ancient and modern understandings of eros.

Parts I and II thus focus more directly on social and legal aspects of eros and are intended to have relevance for modern debates about privacy and sexuality. By contrast, Part III deals with the tendency, quite alien to modern society, to bring eros into the public sphere, where it can be harnessed to political ends. This “schooling” of eros includes the sexual moderation, egalitarianism and, ultimately, meritocracy enabled by civic nudity in Thucydides’ “Archaeology” and Plato’s *Republic* (Chapter 6). The conclusion of this study (Chapter 7) sketches a theory describing certain “peak” political moments when ordinary factors motivating nations and individuals, such as the desires for security and hegemony, become unusually intense (Section 7.6). Chapter 7 also examines the implications of the theory of political eros for “globalizing” or cosmopolitan desires (7.7–8), as well as for the “thick” view of civil society or civic republicanism (7.3–4, 7.8). The chapter offers an extended comparison between Aristophanes’ and Socrates’ *Symposium* speeches, applying the philosophical categories from those speeches to Thucydides’ earlier analysis of Athenian patriotism and imperialism as erotic phenomena. Although this last project might seem an unusual exercise in light of the anachronism, Plato’s fictional setting for the *Symposium* was an attempt, in part, to recreate the excitement of that highly charged period that represented the peak of Athenian imperial designs. In addition, Thucydides’ history uses erotic terminology with little context and seemingly without explanation; the *Symposium*’s more fully elaborated categories for analyzing eros, including the love of “one’s own” (*oikeion*), ambition or the love of honor (*philotimia*), and contemplation or the purely ocular (and mental) enjoyment of eros (*theoria*), find a surprising number of echoes in Thucydides and therefore can, it is argued, provide a cogent explanation of his usages, at the very least indicating where such erotic terminology can lead, and in a number of cases drawing out the same assumptions from Thucydides’ text and thence shedding light on some of

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the most extraordinary moments in the political and the military history of the Athenian polis, as Thucydides perceived them.

A literary thesis informs the political–theoretical discussion of these questions. Plato’s *Symposium*, the key text under consideration, consists of seven speeches about eros purportedly delivered by the intellectual crème of Athens at a private party on the occasion of the poet Agathon’s first victory in the tragedy competition²⁷ but which in fact were invented by Plato at a later date to represent what such personages might have said in similar circumstances. The two most significant accounts of eros are those of Socrates (who claims to deliver a speech by the otherwise unknown Diotima) and Aristophanes. These two principals maintain opposite views in their speeches. The dramatist tells a cautionary tale of circle-people who attempted to climb into the heavens and attack the gods. As punishment, the circle-people were split in two, giving rise to human beings as each of us is today, restlessly seeking to rejoin with another human and become whole once more, a desire to which we give the name eros. Aristophanes makes a point of exhorting his hearers to be content with this lowly eros and never to be impious toward the gods again. Socrates’ Diotima, on the other hand, singles out Aristophanes’ account as flawed: eros is not horizontal attraction between two persons, but rather a vertical ladder to be climbed, at the top of which the eroticist becomes dear to the gods and, if possible, immortal. Socrates seems to assume that this climb that culminates in self-deification will always prove benign and pacific. Both speakers thus deal with ascension and apotheosis, but they attach opposite valuations to this “vertical” eros. Aristophanes warns against it, whereas Socrates recommends it.

However, Socrates does not get the final word. Aristophanes is about to object to his presentation when a furious knocking is heard at the door. Alcibiades, the imperialist statesman who was later to persuade the city to gamble her empire and her very existence on a scheme of western domination, bursts in uninvited and drunkenly delivers a confession that he cannot live up to the asceticism of Socrates’ philosophic eros but must continue to attempt to realize his ambitions on the political plane (216a 4–8).²⁸

²⁷ Agathon’s victory took place in 416 B.C., which therefore probably represents the fictional date of the dialogue. However, an intentional (on Plato’s part) confusion of language and imagery with the night before the sailing of the Sicilian expedition (still a year away) moves the dialogue in that direction in imaginary time.

²⁸ Other literary devices that link Alcibiades’ speech to the upcoming Sicilian expedition are his playful pretense of divulging the mysteries (218b 3–6) and his anachronistic but heavily

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Alcibiades represents in his person the danger to which Aristophanes was about to allude. Polemically put, Socrates has scarcely finished his benign picture of the “vertical” eros when a circle man walks in.²⁹ The peculiarities of the drama in which the arguments are embedded thus reveal something about the arguments themselves. A portion of Aristophanes’ speech is left standing at the end of the dialogue; it is not knocked down by Socrates’ criticism but only supplemented by it. Although Plato’s Aristophanes fails to understand the eros of the philosophic life, he accurately diagnoses the political potential of eros and warns of its dangers. The case can be made, then, that the unique placement of Aristophanes’ speech in the dialectic of the *Symposium* indicates that Plato intended his brief portrayal of the thought of this prominent Athenian artist and thinker to stand as the dialogue’s most important statement on eros from the limited viewpoint of the purely political.

freighted reference to herm sculptors (215b 1). Parodies of the mysteries in private homes and the mutilation of the statues of Hermes on the eve of the Sicilian expedition eventually caused the ruin of Alcibiades’ western ambitions (Thucydides, 6.27–6.29, 61; cf. 6.15.4). For an interpretation of the complex “frame” of the dialogue and the centrality of Alcibiades’ death date in the levels of narration, see M. C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 167–71.

²⁹ For a similar interpretation, see M. Lutz, *Socrates’ Education to Virtue*, pp. 8–9. See also, with important differences, S. Rosen, *Plato’s Symposium*, pp. 283–5. For ways of approaching Plato’s moral and political philosophy in general, G. Fine, *Plato 2*, pp. 1–33, has a useful bibliography and summarizes some of the major directions taken by Anglo-American scholarship over the past thirty years. H. Thesleff, *Studies in Plato’s Two-Level Model*, pp. 1–5, documents the current lack of consensus on such issues as (1) the importance of Plato’s development as opposed to treating Plato’s oeuvre as a synchronic whole for the purposes of interpretation; (2) the importance of identifying a “spokesman” for Plato in each dialogue as opposed to allowing the meaning to arise from the totality of interlocutors; and (3) the relative worth of the methods of analytic philosophy as opposed to the methods of literary criticism. The methodological confusion makes the present moment a particularly wide-open time in Platonic studies. My own approach to Plato favors the second alternative in each of the foregoing pairs.

PART ONE

POLITICAL EROS: AN ACCOUNT
FROM THE *SYMPOSIUM*

Statesmanship and Sexuality in Aristophanes' Speech

For many of Plato's modern readers, Aristophanes' encomium of eros is the most memorable speech in the *Symposium*. Yet a key passage in the speech is not well understood. Approximately three-fifths of the way through the speech, Aristophanes asserts that boys who are unashamed to lie with men are the most manly boys by nature. A great proof of this, he says, is the fact that they alone end up in politics, where they become "real men."¹ Since the same connection between sex and politics is the object of derision in Aristophanes' comedies,² some commentators have seen irony in this assertion.³ More have implicitly favored a straightforward reading, relying on the strength of the speech taken at face value. If irony were present, the type of irony at issue, dramatic or verbal, would also be open to competing interpretations. Does the irony belong to Plato or to his character Aristophanes? Furthermore, the implications of either type of irony for the rest of the speech and for the dialogue as a whole would have to be adequately dealt with. Does Plato make Aristophanes speak more wisely than he is aware of, in playful revenge for the comedian's own distorted portrait of Socrates?⁴ Or does Plato make use of the professional jester to

¹ For the political sense of *aner*, see Euripides, fragments 787, 788, Nauck². Compare especially Aristophanes, *Peace*, 50–3.

² In *Knights*, 875–80, Cleon claims to have cleaned up public morals by stopping the *binoumenous*. The sausage-seller retorts that the politician stopped their practices only out of rivalry with them, "lest they turn into politicians." See discussions of *Knights*, 423–8 and 1240–3, and *Acharnians*, 73–79, in Section 1.2. Compare also *Clouds*, 961–1104 and *Ecclesiazusae*, 110–13.

³ For example, L. Robin, ed., *Le banquet*, pp. lxi–lxii; Dover, ed. *Symposium*, ad loc., *GH* 142, note 10.

⁴ In this interpretation, Plato would force Aristophanes, against the grain of the comedian's own prejudice, to contribute to the philosophical foundation of pederasty begun by Phaedrus and

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clear the way for Socratic morality, on the assumption that Aristophanes' views about male homosexual eros were sufficiently well known to leave little doubt that his explicit praise of pederasty was tongue-in-cheek? Once the hermeneutical problem of irony and humor has been taken into account, what is left of the connection between statesmanship and sexuality?

1.1. Political Pederasty

All who are sections of a male pursue males; and while they are boys – because they are slices of the male – they are friendly with men and rejoice to lie down alongside and embrace men, and these are the best of boys and lads, because they are manliest by nature. Admittedly, some say that they are shameless, but it's a lie; for not from shamelessness do they do it, but from daring and manliness and masculine looks: clinging to that which is like themselves. And a great proof is that when these types grow up, they alone end up in politics as real men.⁵

(*Symposium*, 191e 6–192a 7)

The safest exegesis would first make sense of what Aristophanes professes to mean, comparing the philosophic content, which ought to stand or fall on its own merits, with the rest of the speech and with the other speeches in the dialogue, especially that of Socrates. Irony could then emerge either as an alternative or as a supplement to the face-value reading. Assessment of the dialogue's own internal logic, as well as comparison with other Platonic dialogues, should precede recourse outside the authorship of Plato, namely, to the Aristophanic comedies.

Aristophanes not only legitimizes male–male desire, he asserts that it is best. He argues for his assertion on the grounds that male–male desire is connected to politics. This argument resonates with two themes sounded earlier in the dialogue by Phaedrus and by Pausanias. Phaedrus praises male–male relations by saying that if by some chance a city or an armed camp could come into being made up entirely of lovers and their beloveds, their desire to refrain from all that is shameful and to seek honor in one another's eyes would result in their city's having the best possible government. If such

Pausanias, on which Socrates eventually bases his own intellectual pederasty. The irony would thus be “dramatic,” i.e., it would belong to the author Plato, not to his character Aristophanes. See M. C. Nussbaum, “Platonic Love and Colorado Law,” p. 1518, note 11. See also, with qualifications, Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 232–33.

⁵ The translations from Greek are my own.

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were to fight side by side, even if their city or army happened to be small, they would well nigh conquer all mankind. For an *aner* (real man) in love would rather die than be seen in any act of cowardice, *anandria* (literally, "unmanliness"), by his beloved (178d 4–179a 2). In other words, lovers make the best citizen-soldiers because the private aim of impressing the beloved serves the public goal of bravery in battle.

Pausanias plays a variation on the same theme. He argues that the barbarian tyrants outlaw pederasty because they are afraid of strong attachments arising among their subjects. Proud thoughts are engendered by love: Pausanias reformulates the unwillingness to tolerate disgrace in battle into an unwillingness to acquiesce in tyranny. He cites the example of Harmodius and his lover Aristogeiton, who, in popular lore, dissolved the tyranny of the Peisistratids at Athens, thus clearing the way for democracy (182b 6–c 7). Like Phaedrus, he mentions unmanliness as the crucial political defect (cf. 178d 4–6 with 182c 7–d 2), which breeds tyranny. Like Phaedrus, he sees manliness as the willingness to take up arms, this time not in battle, but in a tyrannicide. And like Phaedrus, he sees male–male relations as the breeding ground for manliness.

Unlike Phaedrus, Pausanias is especially concerned with education. The mature lover is assumed to possess already the civic virtues as well as a modicum of philosophy.⁶ He can initiate his younger beloved into a world of manhood, which includes the basic virtue of manliness or physical courage but also higher, more civilized attainments. This unofficial *paideia*,⁷ which Pausanias treats partly as an ideal not yet fully realized, partly as a system already in force, must be understood before we come to grips with Aristophanes' elliptical praise of it.

⁶ 184c 7–d 3. Philosophy in the sense of freedom of thought is another bulwark against tyranny at 182b 7–c 1; hence philosophy's connection to civic virtue.

⁷ For initiation and pedagogy in archaic Greece and various cultures see B. Sergent, *Homosexuality in Greek Myth*, pp. 11–12, 40–5, 268; H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et courètes*, pp. 456–60; and A. Brelich, *Paides e parthenoi*. For two views opposing Sergent's thesis of Indo-European origins for homosexual initiation rites, see K. J. Dover, "Greek Homosexuality and Initiation," pp. 116–19, 124–6, and D. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society*, p. 181, note 24. For surrogate fathering and tutoring in Sparta, see P. A. Cartledge, "The Politics of Spartan Pederasty," pp. 22, 28, and on Crete see W. A. Percy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece*, pp. 64–7. For closer application to fifth-century Athens, see J. Bremmer, "Adolescents, Symposion, and Pederasty," pp. 137–9, 142–5; E. Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, pp. 28–9, 32–3, 51, 217; also G. Devereux, "Greek Pseudo-Homosexuality and the 'Greek Miracle,'" pp. 70, 77–8, 90–92; K. Robb, *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece*, p. 198; A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, pp. 28–9, 47–9; cf. especially Price, p. 184, with Devereux, p. 78.

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That male–male relations ought to be educative was a corollary of the premise that adolescent youths could not normally be relied on to feel sexual desire for the larger, older, bearded males who approached them.⁸ The youth could easily, however, feel friendly toward the man. He might even “fall in love,” a symptom of adolescent admiration that can still be observed, for example, when a schoolchild has a crush on a teacher or older schoolmate of the same sex. Yet the *Symposium* speeches, like most texts, scrupulously avoid attributing *eros* to the boy. Pausanias unself-consciously mentions that Aristogeiton had *eros* for Harmodius but Harmodius had *philia* for Aristogeiton (182c 5–7); he feels no need to explain the imbalance, which is taken for granted. Similarly, Phaedrus’ ideal beloved receives more esteem from the gods than his lover does precisely because he cherishes (*agapai*) the lover despite feeling no *eros* for him (180b 1–3).

It was the nonreciprocity of desire in pederasty that opened the door to education and to politics. Pausanias’ ideal youth does not give in to his lover’s importunities out of reciprocal desire; he lets the lover have his way because he wants something else: to be made virtuous (185a 5–b 4). It was the boy’s assumed lack of desire that gave rise to the need for some different “coin” to attract the boy into a relationship, something extrinsic to a love relationship, that the older lover possessed but the boy did not.⁹ Doubtless what the lover had to offer was often athletic coaching and advice. Men who had the wherewithal to hold office, however, could also compete for the favors of boys of their own class by graduating from athletic mentorship, as the boy’s intellect matured, to political mentorship and even political preferment. Pausanias condemns, but thereby bears witness to, the fact that some Athenian youths could be bought with political favors and at times even had political power conferred on them by their powerful lovers

⁸ That the *pais* felt neither sexual desire for, nor received sexual pleasure from acts with, the *paidēastes* is the assumption of nearly every allusion to male–male relations in Greek literature and vase painting (D. Halperin, “Plato and Erotic Reciprocity,” pp. 63–6). A complicating factor is that chastity was considered desirable in a love object and therefore the artistic record may present a romantically distorted view of what normally occurred. Contrast the Addendum to Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, as well as Dover’s postscript, *GH*, p. 204. The comic exceptions pointed out by Dover are intentionally debunking, as are some vase paintings, so one is left to pick between two distortions: romantic or debunking. Certainly the lover may have been interested in all parts of the beloved’s anatomy without intending to give pleasure to any. That honorable beloveds felt no desire is an assumption of the discourse (with which an exegesis must deal), regardless of what may have happened in actual practice.

⁹ I am indebted to Jarrell Robinson of the University of Chicago, Committee on Social Thought, for this point.

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(184a 7–b 3; cf. 183a 2–b 2). Such “nepotism” is a far cry from public spiritedness, but the fact that passion was not always mutual did open up male–male relations to the public arena in a way that heterosexuality, whether marital or extramarital, was not open. Not only was it impossible for a man to advance a courtesan or wife politically (because she was disqualified), but there was less need to attract her into a relationship with such a favor. She either reciprocated desire or was otherwise motivated to enter into the relationship by social concerns as, for instance, in marriage.

Obviously a son, the product of heterosexual marriage, could be given political preferment, but the greater disparity of age between father and son made their relationship less potentially political than the relationship between lover and youth. A son might wish to follow in his father's footsteps, and even to surpass him someday, but he would rarely be close enough on his father's heels to compete with him. The father–son and the lover–youth relationships share the property of role modeling. However, rivalry, a second property even more favorable to politicization, would have occurred more often in the lover–youth relationship since rivalry arises when equality is within reach, hence between people who are closer in age.

Little extrapolation from Phaedrus' and Pausanias' positions is required for perceiving the potential uses of role modeling and rivalry. The greater exertions to which the lover is spurred by his desire to impress the beloved set a mark or serve as an exemplar that the boy will wish to emulate. The value of a role model for young men cannot be overstated; the mature lover represents what the immature beloved aspires some day to become: athlete, warrior, citizen, statesman. In modern cultures, too, the interest of boys is often caught at a very early age by athletic role models. Boys desire to have muscles like Charles Atlas or Mr. Olympia: just how intensified such role modeling could become if the body builder showed a no-less-intense interest in the boy, and how gratified the boy would be if, for example, his hero offered to exercise with him, can be imagined. In the Greek world, naked wrestling will have had an impact at this point in the relationship.¹⁰ Athletic hero worship would be extensible, as the boy grew older, to admiration for the lover's observed power and prestige among his peers and, in the case

¹⁰ Compare *Symposium*, 217b 7–c 6, in which Alcibiades, reversing the ordinary course of older seducing younger, wrestles with Socrates as a prelude to intimacy. For Pausanias' perception that naked athletics contribute significantly to Greek political freedom, cf. 182b 7–c 1. See also the discussion in Chapter 6.

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of intellectually gifted youths, to admiration for the lover's eloquence in moving the assembly to vote for his side of an important issue. Rhetorical skill, in the direct-vote democracy, would be an adult analogue of athletic prowess. On a more personal level than hero worship, once a young man began to feel affection for his lover, the same operation of shame and honor that spurred the lover to greater heights would also begin to operate in the beloved (178e 1–3), who would desire to live up to his lover's expectations. If the mark set by the lover was itself higher, as a result of eros, than he would ordinarily have striven for or if he must constantly improve to keep ahead of his younger rival, then we can see the beginnings of a virtuous circle or a positive upward spiral.

Male–male relations, if not reciprocal in desire, could thus be reciprocal in their striving after excellence and therefore could, at least in the ideal, take on some aspects of Aristotle's friendship based on virtue.¹¹ This friendly rivalry stems from the desire to cover oneself in glory in the other's eyes. Phaedrus' word for pursuit of honor (*philotimia*, 178d 2, 178e 6) in fact also means rivalry or emulation.¹² Both participants are taken to a higher level by their desire to outdo one another. If a significant proportion of the entire upper class in Athens was engaged in cooperative emulation of this sort, as well as in more acrimonious competitions for honors with fellow citizens whom they did not at the moment love or admire, then the whole society must have been taken to another level by the military, political, and artistic excellence thereby engendered. Greek homoeroticism, in its encouragement of emulation, seems to have dovetailed with the agonistic aspect of Greek civilization as a whole. One can well understand how E. M. Forster could make one of his characters call male–male relationships “the mainstay of Athenian society.”¹³

This is the context in which Aristophanes praises male–male eros as best because it alone is political. From what we have learned from the previous speeches, his claim cannot be interpreted as ironic or comedic on its face. A

¹¹ *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.3.6–7 (1156b 7–25); cf. especially 9.8.7–11 (1169a 7–b 2). Contrast, however, 8.4.1–2, (1157a 1–14) and 9.1.1–3 (1164a 4–13). Because the lover's excellence depends on honor and shame, it would not attain the highest moral perfection for Aristotle, viz., being virtuous simply because virtue is *kalon*. Compare 3.8.1–5 (1116a 15–b 3).

¹² The *philotimoumenoi pros allelou* at 178e 6 is translated as “vie emulously with, rival” in H. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (hereafter LSJ), s. v. *philotimeomai*. “Seek honor when in each other's presence” is also possible.

¹³ Quoted by Nussbaum, “Platonic Love and Colorado Law,” p. 1515, from Forster's *Maurice*.

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difference of emphasis, however, distinguishes other parts of Aristophanes' speech from Phaedrus' and Pausanias' speeches. Contrary to their high public aspirations, Aristophanes exhibits a concern for the private and the material. Not honor or education but work and livelihood are Aristophanes' ostensible link between pederasty and politics. After the circle-people are cut in two, the halves embrace one another, desperately seeking to grow back together again. Because they are unwilling to do anything apart from one another, they begin dying off from hunger and inactivity. As a mercy, Zeus restructures their genitalia in such a way that they can copulate with one another, whereas previously they reproduced in the Earth. Under the new dispensation, their helpless embracing, hitherto self-destructive, serves the purpose of the survival of the species in two ways, one heterosexual and one homosexual. First, if man embraces woman, they generate a child and the race is renewed. Second, if male embraces male, satiety with, or surfeit of, embracing is made possible by the new sexuality; the pair, satisfied temporarily, can leave off their attempt to grow back together and turn instead to works (*erga*) and also their livelihood (*bios*). In context, work and livelihood refer to actions taken to counteract the hunger and the inactivity mentioned before; they refer to getting the necessities for survival. Only homosexual pairs are said to work.

Why heterosexual intercourse does not generate the same satiety with embracing, which in turn allows people to work, is not made clear. The language of myth is compressed and does not exclude everything left unsaid. Perhaps we may unpack the terse alternatives as follows: children and work are the *major* contributions of heterosexuals and homosexuals, respectively. Obviously heterosexuals also do work, but they work with one eye on the economic well-being of their children. Parents are tied down by their offspring. Homosexuals are free from this concern. They can work with both eyes on their own advancement; their attention is not divided, and their energies are not channeled into a private household.¹⁴

Aristophanes now leaps from survival to politics without any intermediate steps. Between his narrative, which ends with male–male pairs working to secure livelihood or mere life (*bios*), and his assertion that only male–male types go into politics, no items intervene that would clarify the political connection. We are left with only survival value as the contribution of

¹⁴ Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, p. 148.

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male–male eros to politics.¹⁵ The polis may seem oddly demoted to a means of survival¹⁶; however, a parallel myth that Plato writes for Protagoras makes the same assumption.¹⁷ Newly created, man begins dying off, once again because of incomplete operations performed on him by the gods. After “weapons” and tough hide and sustenance appropriate to each have been lavished on the other animals, no means of survival are left that would be appropriate to man, who is left naked and defenseless. Prometheus steals technical wisdom, along with fire, and gives them to man. Man, says Protagoras, now has the wisdom necessary for life (or livelihood, *bios*, 321d 4–5), but he does not have political wisdom. At this point, people are living spread out and hence are at the mercy of stronger animals, who begin killing them off. Protagoras emphasizes once again: the demiurgic art that they now possess is enough for sustenance, but they lack the political art, which presumably would also provide protection. They seek to save themselves from the beasts by banding together and forming cities. But they do injustice to one another, at such close quarters, because they lack the political art. So, dispersed once more,¹⁸ they begin perishing again. Zeus, fearing lest the human race be

¹⁵ “Only survival”: if, that is, we remain on this side of the divine surgery, i.e., with latter-day human nature. To this point in Aristophanes’ argument, he has given us no warrant for thinking that the circle-people’s desire to rise, which might indeed have political implications, remains part of human nature. For consideration of this possibility, see Chapter 2.

¹⁶ For example, Aristotle places a step between survival and the polis: the household is sufficient for daily needs, which are analogous to Aristophanes’ livelihood; but then comes the village for nondaily needs, and only then the polis, which is for the sake of living well (*Politics*, 1.2.5–8 [1252b 9–30]). Aristotle admits, however, that the polis’ actual coming-into-being is for the sake of preserving mere life (*ibid.*, 29–30).

¹⁷ *Protagoras*, 320c 3–323c 2. “Parallel myth”: see A. Sommerstein, ed. and trans., *Acharnians. The Comedies of Aristophanes*, Vol. 1, “General Introduction,” p. 7. The aetiological myth was probably a sophistic genre of exposition. Recall that Phaedrus so admired the encomia of sophists such as Prodicus that he was moved to propose that the evening be spent in imitation of their speeches (*Symposium* 177a 5–c 4; see the fuller discussion in Section 2.2). Aristophanes may be following this directive (to imitate encomia) more literally than necessary. Plato could be said to portray Aristophanes as true to his calling by showing him to be a parodist: although the “paratragedy” that features heavily in Old Comedy would be difficult to deliver at a drinking party without reciting poetry, Plato may have translated Aristophanes’ essence as a parodist onto the plane of rhetoric, as the setting dictates, making him mimic a sophistic genre, i.e., engage in “parasophistry.” However, see also the interpretations of Bury, Reckford, and Robin in note 32 of this chapter.

¹⁸ The theme of strength through unity and weakness in division appears also in the *Symposium* myth. The circle-men, while yet whole, were formidable in their strength and vigor (190b 5); Zeus says they will be weaker after he cuts them in two (190d 1–2). Aristophanes draws the analogy between Zeus’ surgery and political diaspora: the Spartans’ divide-and-rule policy imposed on the Arcadians (193a 1–3; see the discussion in Section 1.5).

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utterly wiped out, sends shame and justice to man as bonds of association. The polis, in other words, and the protection it enables become possible only after the other-directed virtues of justice and shame come to operate in man. Protagoras thus introduces virtue, not as the goal of politics, as Aristotle would have it, but as a necessary means to the end of survival. The sophist and the comedian in their myths both reduce politics to its most urgent aim, survival.¹⁹ The uses to which these "low" views of politics can be put will become evident when we contrast Aristophanes' speech with the speeches of Phaedrus, Pausanias, and Socrates.

How Aristophanes' link between male–male relations and politics fits together with Phaedrus' and Pausanias' treatments of the same theme is not immediately clear from the order in which the speeches occur. Dialogically, one might have expected a progression from Aristophanes' basic level, the utility of eros in material survival, to a middle level consisting of the utility of eros in inculcating the virtues (Phaedrus' courage and Pausanias' moral education), to a high level or culmination: the utility of eros in Socrates' philosophic quest. Instead, the low comes after the middle and before the high.

Socrates takes up the various strands of the theme of political pederasty where the others left them (208c 1–209e 4). He appropriates *philotimia* from Phaedrus (cf. 208c 3 with 178d 2, e 6). He, or Diotima, distinguishes between lovers who are pregnant in body and lovers who are pregnant in soul. This distinction picks up, and elaborates, Aristophanes' terse dichotomy between heterosexuals who generate children and male homosexuals who generate the more valuable product of work. The pregnant-in-soul lovers are the more enviable of the two because their offspring are finer than human children (209c 6–d 2). These offspring, says Socrates, are "prudence and the rest of *arete*," a quotation from Pausanias (cf. 209a 3 with 184d 7–e 1). The great statesmen and lawgivers Lycurgus and Solon partook of this erotic pregnancy (209d 4–6). They were lovers who found beloveds and desired to educate them (209b 2–c 2), as Pausanias said. And through touching (an ambiguous word) and communing with their beloveds, they were able to deliver themselves (209c 2–3) of prudence and the greatest part of prudence: justice (209a 5–8), that is, Law. Their relationships were

¹⁹ It might well be asked, if Aristophanes' myth is a "parody" of sophistic myths like the one in the *Protagoras*, how seriously we should take indications of agreement between the two. Their agreement must remain suspect, but it should be noted that parody need not connote satire: there is humor merely in "singing near" enough to be recognizable, without further need for recourse to ridicule or satire.

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implicitly male–male.²⁰ The theme of political pederasty here reaches its culmination.

Where Socrates' account of political eros differs from the others emerges when he contradicts Phaedrus. Using the latter's own examples of Achilles–Patroclus and Admetus–Alcestis (cf. 179b 4–180b 5 with 208c 1–e 1), he claims that dying on another's behalf has a different motive from the one Phaedrus celebrated. Achilles and Alcestis actually died for the sake of eternal glory. When Phaedrus said that Alcestis died for love, he meant for love of Admetus. Socrates corrects that formulation to love-of-her-own immortal fame. His shift of eros' object, from another person to one's own immortality, makes eros less altruistic, but it also points up a problem with the ways Phaedrus and Pausanias introduced eros into politics in the first place. Socrates' *philotimia* is literally a love of honor; it is an eros.²¹ For Phaedrus, *philotimia* is a by-product of eros, not an eros itself. His lover does not principally desire honor; he desires a beloved first and as a means of impressing the beloved, that is, as a means to the consummation of his desire, he seeks honor and does great deeds. But which is more important, the honorable deeds or the eros? Phaedrus says that eros inspires people to excel, with the result that they become “like the most excellent by nature” (179a 7–8; emphasis added). His example of this most excellent of men, following Greek tradition, is Achilles. The sheer marvel of Achilles' laying down his life for his friend would have been diminished, according to Phaedrus, had Achilles been motivated by eros (180a 2–b 3). Achilles did not need erotic inspiration, since he had virtue naturally. Eros helps a lover come close to excellence, but it is more enviable to be natural, like Achilles. Apparently the excellence, not the eros, is what Phaedrus ranks highest.

Pausanias, too, subordinates eros, when linking eros with education. Pausanias wants to marry two laws together, the law about pederasty and the law about education (184c 7–d 1), in order that a lover might have his way with his beloved without depriving the beloved of his nobility (184d 1–3). If the boy submits for the sake of education, his submission will be noble. But which is more important, love or education? The answer is evident in Pausanias' claim that good men “willingly lay down this law on

²⁰ The topic of the lover–beloved discussions, out of which prudent laws are born, is how to be a good *aner* (209b 4–c 2).

²¹ For the nuances involved in distinguishing words cognate with *philia* from words cognate with *eros* and for Plato's and Aristophanes' appropriations of the *philia* group to mean *eros* in some contexts, see the discussion in Sections 4.2 (note 116) and 4.3.

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themselves" only to sleep with older boys, ones whom they can educate (181e 3–4). That is, they curb their desires or subordinate desire to the higher goal of education. This is not a pure, unrestrained eros such as we find in Aristophanes, but a trammled one. Both Phaedrus and Pausanias want to praise eros by pointing out the civic benefits that accrue when eros is harnessed and its by-products put to use. However, in praising these "higher" benefits of eros, they unwittingly demote eros itself. Cannot eros be introduced into politics in some other way?

Aristophanes and Socrates avoid demoting eros by taking opposite paths. Aristophanes stays low; the narrative portion of his speech remains at the household level, nor does he claim that any specific virtues arise as by-products of eros. Males who desire males turn to works, but not because eros leads them to work harder in order to impress each other. Rather, copulation gives them a respite from eros ("satiety," 191c 6), where eros had previously eclipsed every other concern to the extent that they starved to death. In other words, they must *stop* feeling eros (*diapauointo*, 191-c 7) before they can turn to other matters of life. Those other matters are necessary for survival only, but are not good in themselves. What is good in itself is the lovers' embrace, wherein we would remain together all our lives and into the next life, if Hephaestus would grant us our wish (192d 2–e 9). Finding one's other half is the chief cause of one's greatest happiness and blessedness (189d 2, 192b 5–c 2, 193c 3–d 5); excellence is not the goal. Work therefore remains subordinate to eros. Similarly, politics, the aim of which is also mere survival, remains subordinate to the household, that is, private life and private love.²² Aristophanes thus praises eros for its own sake, although at the cost of leaving out the higher civic benefits of Phaedrus and Pausanias.

Socrates, after criticizing Aristophanes for taking the low road,²³ preserves Phaedrus' and Pausanias' civic benefits but on a new, different basis. He navigates the narrow channel between their harnessing eros to civics and Aristophanes' cessation of eros before dealing with civics by redirecting eros. He contends that the object of eros, properly so called, is not a person. We do not *per se* desire our beloved, who furnishes the beautiful medium in

²² Eros leads us *eis to oikeion* (193d 2). For other cognate plays on household, *oikos* or *oikia*, cf. 192c 1, 193a 2, and note 223.

²³ 205d 10–206a 1. Socrates picks out privacy or love of "one's own" as the heart of Aristophanes' speech (again the word is *oikeion*; cf. 205e 6 with 193d 2). The issue is writ larger in Socrates' abolition of the family as a selfish bastion of private good holding out against the common weal in *Republic*, book 5. See the discussions in Chapters 6 and 7.

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which we generate. Immortality is what we actually desire,²⁴ and the beauty of the beloved only acts as a trigger or catalyst to release either seed or words, which in turn secure immortality for the lover insofar as they can, that is, in children or fame, respectively. From Aristophanes, Socrates takes childbearing, a topic that does not arise in the speeches of the others, and reformulates it into the desire to make a piece of you live on. On analogy with childbearing he defines *philotimia* as the desire to make your name live on, that is, as a higher form of the same desire. *Philosophia* is then the highest form: contemplation of an idea that lives on forever.²⁵ Aristophanes, Phaedrus, and Pausanias would never have had to choose between politics and eros if they had realized that there could be an “eros” for political fame, a desire that in turn ensures civic achievement; they assumed that eros was always directed toward people. Among them, however, only Aristophanes chose eros.

We are now in a better position to see why Plato would have placed Aristophanes’ reductionism in an intervening position between Phaedrus’ and Pausanias’ speeches and Socrates’ speech, which otherwise form a neat progression in the utility of eros. Socrates and Aristophanes share one thing over against the others: they celebrate eros for its own sake and do not subordinate it. Phaedrus and Pausanias are really praising politics, not eros. Theirs is not a foundation on which the true lover Socrates can build. The structure of the dialogue goes by fits and starts because the original basis of eulogy set by Phaedrus, that eros is a useful means to a noble end,²⁶ put Pausanias on the wrong track, and their joint foundation needed to be cleared away before a new start could be made. By reducing eros to its material essentials, Aristophanes clears away their high-minded distractions. Honor, excellence, education? What about embracing someone’s body, what about

²⁴ 206d 7–207a 4. Compare 206a 3–13; also 204d 2–205d 9. Beautiful bodies and souls (209b 4–7), which might be thought to be the proper objects of eros, are demoted to the status of mere media. This is a separate issue from the problem of whether the ladder of love is inclusive or exclusive of the lower, more personal beauties as the climber of the ladder passes them by (J. M. E. Moravcsik, “Reason and Eros in the ‘Ascent’-Passage of the *Symposium*,” p. 293); beauty remains the medium, not the object, of eros all up and down the ladder. Even at the top (at which mention of eros ceases), the Form of beauty still acts as trigger or catalyst to engender true virtue and to secure immortality, i.e., “the good” that is supposed to be the proper object of eros (210d 3–6, 211d 8–212a 7). It should be noted that the lovers in Aristophanes’ speech also desired that their union should outlast death and that they should embrace everlastingly in Hades (192d 8–e 4). On beauty and the good, see G.R.F. Ferrari, “Platonic Love,” pp. 259–60.

²⁵ For the discrepancy between the personal immortality of the previous types of eros and the impersonal immortality of the highest type of eros, see the discussions in Chapters 4 and 7.

²⁶ Compare 177b 4–c 1.

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childbearing? The topic was supposed to be eros, after all. Once Aristophanes has recalled us to the true foundations of eros, Socrates is provided with something solid on which to base a truly erotic *philotimia* and *philosophia*. Thus the "low" view of politics propounded by Aristophanes has its uses in the overall scheme of the dialogue. When we assess the *Symposium* from the standpoint of philosophic content alone, Aristophanes' speech has the function in the dialogue of clearing away mistakes in order to make a fresh start.

1.2. Irony and Political Satire

Irony represents a literary category, but one hardly extraneous to Platonic philosophy. If the function of Aristophanes' materialism is to reduce the high-minded fallacies of other speakers, a second tool in aid of the same reductive function is irony in the form of sarcasm or thinly veiled ridicule. Just as Socrates makes gentle fun of his interlocutors in order to puncture their pretensions to knowledge, cleaning the slate in preparation for real knowledge, so Plato uses Aristophanes as humorist to clear the way for Socrates.²⁷ In the Aristophanic comedies, ridicule often combines with materialism to serve a similarly reductive function of "getting back to nature" from the distortions of political life. The body is used to bring the mind or spirit back down to Earth, as when, in *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis makes a travesty of the ambition and would-be heroism of the general Lamachus by systematically linking his military equipment, in which the soldier takes great pride, to anatomy and bodily function.²⁸ The fact that the comedies stubbornly refuse to build up again from the earthy level to which they reduce matters, ending instead in revelry or indulgence in the bodily and the natural, does not exclude the possibility that Plato uses the methods of Old Comedy as far as they go and then makes Socrates build up from there.

The ingredient of ridicule, so strong in the comedies, is not missing from Aristophanes' *Symposium* speech but rather is curtailed, from travesty to teasing. In the peroration, Aristophanes mocks Agathon's effeminacy by

²⁷ This was the original thesis of G. F. Rettig in his 1860 *Commentatio de oratione Aristophanis in Symposio Platonis*.

²⁸ For Lamachus' pride, see 574, 1105–7. The flashing armor gives Dicaeopolis vertigo, so he uses the helmet plume to tickle the back of his throat to bring on relief from nausea (581, 584–87), using Lamachus' shield as the receiving bowl. He then offers the general a sexual proposition, observing "you're well-equipped" (*euplos*, 592) a linking of his sword or spear with the comic phallus. Compare 1118–19, in which the general's spear becomes a sausage.

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adducing him and Pausanias as evidence for the existence of the “real men” who figure so heavily in his speech (193b 7–c 2). He delivers the insult indirectly, however, putting it in the mouth of Eryximachus and pretending that the doctor, his nearest competitor in the speech-making contest, will wish to undermine Aristophanes’ speech by attaching unlikely examples to it, examples that would contradict his claim that male–male couples are composed of the most manly men. Dover points out that Plato here transforms Aristophanes’ vilification of Agathon in *Thesmophoriazusae* into a “bland cattiness.”²⁹ Why should Aristophanes meow in private when he roars in public? Part of the difficulty of isolating Aristophanic touches in the *Symposium* is that, compared with Dicaeopolis and the other comic heroes, Plato’s Aristophanes is so tame. Everything is muted to fit the occasion: an urbane tone would be called for when insulting one’s host at a fashionable drinking party; the easy slander that Aristophanes serves up to the multitude in the theater of Dionysos is inappropriate in polite company; hence Plato translates Aristophanes’ robust hectoring into a courteous mode, showing how he mutes even the lone personal remark by attributing it to the doctor.

His use of the doctor as a screen or mask, however, opens up a further interpretation of the extent of irony in the speech as a whole. Insofar as *eironia* is a gentle dissimulation or toning down,³⁰ it is not native to Old Comedy; but insofar as irony consists in caustically saying the exact opposite of what one means in order to make the bite all the more hurtful, it certainly does occur in the comedies, and in fact both *Knights* and *Acharnians* exhibit a piece of sarcasm that seems reprised in the *Symposium* passage, as will be subsequently seen.

The exchange with the doctor also points to comedy in a more explicit way. Ostensibly, Aristophanes is shoring up a weakness in his speech, anticipating the direction from which the doctor’s attack will come. However, when he cautions Eryximachus against “making a mockery of my speech” (*komoidon ton logon*), his words can also mean “making my speech into a mockery.”³¹ The doctor is thus warned not to interpret Aristophanes’

²⁹ Dover, “Aristophanes’ Speech in Plato’s *Symposium*,” p. 45.

³⁰ Compare Aristotle’s definitions: “minimizing” and “understating” one’s own attainments (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.7.2–3, 14 [1127a 21–4, b 24]). For the opposite of irony: braggadocio or buffoonery (*alazoneia*), and its relationship to Old as opposed to Middle Comedy, cf. 8.4–6 (1128a 14–25).

³¹ Compare Dover, “Aristophanes’ Speech in Plato’s *Symposium*,” note 25. *Peace*, 751, has the standard meaning.

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speech as satirical or comical: Aristophanes wishes to be taken seriously. He then adds the condition that would in effect make his speech a satire or mockery, namely, if he could seriously be supposed to adduce Pausanias and Agathon as examples. In other words, if Aristophanes' speech actually were a satire, it would make sense for him to bring up his own counterexamples to signal the improbability of it all or to act as the punch line to a long, straight-faced exposition. Here, however, he protests that his speech is not attempting to be funny in this way, and he suppresses the possibility of satire, which the doctor is allegedly on the verge of raising.

In reality, Aristophanes himself is the one raising the question of satire, as well as calling to mind the counterexamples that refute his central point, and putting it all into the doctor's mouth. Does he protest too much? Especially his verb of choice, *komoidein*, is suspicious when used by a comedian: it could be a signal that in his speech he actually is acting in his professional capacity, that is, satirizing.

Would the presence of satire undercut everything said in the speech, or would it necessitate some subtler interpretation, reversing some contentions and leaving others intact? Before launching into his speech, Aristophanes had engaged the doctor in banter about the relationship between humor and seriousness in a speech. Aristophanes picked the fight by wondering facetiously whether the recalcitrance of his hiccoughs does not prove that bodily desire is too disorderly to be subordinated to the medical art, a central contention of Eryximachus' speech having been that medicine should regulate eros (cf. 186c 5–d 5 with 189a 1–5). The doctor retorts that Aristophanes, by playing the jester, is starting off his own speech on the wrong foot since presumably he hopes to be taken seriously. As a scientist, Eryximachus assumes that humor detracts from a serious *logos* or "account" (cf. 189b 1 with b 9) and that if Aristophanes knew what he was doing, he would guard against using jokes. Aristophanes politely takes back his remark, but also corrects the misperception about his own métier of humor. He draws a distinction at 189b 4–7 between *geloia* and *katagelasta*, which can be understood (in the first instance) on analogy with a modern stand-up comedian, who hardly guards against using jokes (*geloia*) to make his audience laugh, but who does indeed fear the laughter or jeering that will greet his jokes should they prove unfunny or ridiculous (*katagelasta*). A comedian can be a formidable opponent, a speaker to reckon with or to take seriously, precisely if he does use humor successfully. This distinction goes over the head of Eryximachus, as is evident from the fact

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that he now makes his demand that the comedian give a serious “account” (189b 9). In the event, Aristophanes does not oblige but delivers a speech both formidable and humorous, thus illustrating his distinction and proving himself the best speaker so far. He wraps up his speech with the words “This, Eryximachus, is my ‘account’ . . . a type different from yours” (193d 6–7).

Thus when Aristophanes pretends that it is the doctor who raises the question of satire (he repeats the word, *komoideseis*, just after the preceding statement of differing accounts), he is attributing an acute interpretation to a man of obtuse taste, an unlikely quarter from which to hear subtle parody. He could be worried that the doctor, noticing that counterexamples inhabit the very room in which they sit, will simplistically point them out as flaws in his argument, assuming the joke is on Aristophanes. A related possibility, however, is that Aristophanes hopes the doctor has learned a lesson from this illustration of the uses of humor; to cap the lesson he here puts Eryximachus in a position to show whether he now understands the nature of satire or not: humor does no harm to a satirist’s speech but injures only the objects that the speech holds up to derision, in this case the person of Agathon and the prior contentions of Phaedrus, Pausanias, and Eryximachus himself. Nor does humor necessarily detract from the seriousness of an account; on the contrary, the comic monstrosity of the circle-people renders Aristophanes’ contentions memorable precisely because it evokes laughter and delight. Because Eryximachus’ cosmology of eros is only gently satirized in Aristophanes’ speech,³² the doctor is pleased to admit that the speech does qualify as an “account,” saying he will obey Aristophanes’ injunction not to satirize it (193e 2), that is, he will refrain from simplistically pointing out the absurdities in it, since he realizes that those absurdities may be intentional. In other words he finally accepts Aristophanes’ initial distinction between playing the fool and being one.

Pausanias and Agathon bear the brunt of the satire, Pausanias for considering himself a manly educator and Agathon as the unlikely product of that

³² R. G. Bury, ed., *The Symposium of Plato*, p. xxxiii: “Aristophanes regards as *katagelasta* theories such as those of Eryximachus and his fellow-Asclepiads. [His wish to parody] helps throw light on the relative position of the speeches. . . .” The comedian jockeys for the position right behind Eryximachus by pretending to be incapacitated by hiccoughs so that he will be able to parody the doctor, according to K. Reckford, *Aristophanes’ Old-and-New Comedy*, p. 70; cf. Robin, ed., *Le banquet*, p. lviii.

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education. Plato takes the material about education-to-manliness and the formation of politicians straight out of Aristophanes' plays. For example, in *Knights*, 423–8 and 1240–3, the proletarian sausage-seller describes how his early education befits him to take the job of the politician Cleon, his rival lover (*erastes*) for the heart of Demos (“[The] People”). The first of his low-life practices has a sexual subtext but in fact only entails stealing meat:

SAUSAGE-SELLER. And they never noticed I did it either. But if one of them did see, I would hide it between my legs . . . ; so when an *aner* among the politicians saw me do it, he said, “It is inevitable that this *pais* will go on to govern the people!”

CHORUS. He equated those well! But it's obvious where his understanding came from. The facts that . . . you stole, and your *proktos* held the meat.

Hiding the stolen goods becomes a pantomime for sexual passivity, and passivity in turn evokes an understanding or sympathy in the politician on which is predicated his ability to predict the boy's political future: it takes one to know one. In Aristophanes' caricature, there is just no substitute for early pathicity in the making of a statesman. This becomes more explicit, if that is possible, in the sausage-seller's second low-life practice: male prostitution. At 1240–43, Cleon is shocked at having been outpoliticianed by a nobody and asks him “What in the world was your trade when you were growing to manhood [*exandroumenos*]?”³³ He responds “I was a sausage-seller and I also *bineskomen*³⁴ a little.” With this revelation Cleon gives up all hope of recouping his political fortunes. The connection between pathicity and public speaking is only too clear to Cleon.

Especially relevant to the *Symposium* is the larger joke of *Knights* about class and education into which the prostitution joke fits. In the plays, Aristophanes wished to show that the new politicians, of whom Cleon was only the latest in a succession, were vulgarians³⁵ who acquired their wealth

³³ *Exandroumenos*: cf. the word *androtiosi* in the *Symposium* speech (192a 7).

³⁴ Elsewhere in Old Comedy, see Eupolis, *Demoi* (frag. 13.1-3, Meineke).

³⁵ W. R. Connor, *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens*, pp. 168–75. Compare *Knights*, 188–92:

SAUSAGE-SELLER. But my good man, I have no education
except my letters, and even those I know badly.

DEMOSTHENES. That alone harms you: the fact that you know them, even badly.
Leading the people is not suited
to the character . . . of an educated man any more,
but to the ignoramus.

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“in trade” and who therefore had no privileged, traditional claim on the allegiance of self-respecting and hard-working members of the demos. He therefore represents them as slaves and marketers, classes far lower than that to which they actually belonged. The limit case of the succession, who beats them all at being base, reveals thereby their true nature. The lowly sausage-seller lacks the prerequisite of an upper-class grooming in the pederastic, *gymnasia ambience*³⁶ that supplied Athens with most of her politicians, but the low-life jobs he did as a boy amounted to the same thing: shameless submission. Sexual passivity is a habit one can acquire as easily from growing up among the urban rabble as from a sophisticated upper-class *paideia*. The play punctures the governing class’ pretensions to sophistication by linking elite pederasty with common prostitution. The joke, and Aristophanes’ distortion, would lose pointedness if elite pederasty were not in fact connected to the wrestling schools and boys’ education. As in the *Knights*, so in the *Symposium*: when Pausanias justifies his “higher” (181c 2) pederasty as a form of pedagogy, in contrast to the vulgar, who take no thought for educating the boy, his elitism provokes a similar satire from Plato’s Aristophanes.

Plato’s Aristophanes takes exception to the moralism in which Pausanias cloaks his pederasty as much as to the desire itself. Frankness, not justification, characterizes the desire for sex in comedy. Pausanias is so conventional³⁷ that he proposes legal reform to square his private desire with convention: “There ought to be a law” (181d 7; cf. 184c 7–d 1, e 2–3). At 184d 3–4, each lover must be armed with a law before he can get into bed. Pausanias maintains that pederasty, far from being inferior to heterosexuality, is capable of superiority. This appeal to the aristocratic impulse in Greek morality is hopelessly paradoxical from the populist perspective, of which Old Comedy never loses sight. Aristophanes accepts the premise that heterosexual love is demotic³⁸ and follows the logic through. Pausanias’ two-tier hierarchy of vulgar lovers versus socially concerned (“*uranian*”) lovers becomes a three-tier hierarchy of convention breakers (191d 6–192a 7): starting with adulterers and adulteresses, then moving to lesbians, and only then to the elite pederasts and their boys. The conventionally embarrassing lesbians are equally a minority and ought by equal logic to constitute an elite. It

³⁶ Depicted in the *mise en scène* of the *Lysis* (203a 1–207d 4).

³⁷ Compare Dover, “Eros and Nomos (Plato, *Symposium* 182a–185c),” p. 31.

³⁸ Compare Pausanias at 181a 7–b 3, c 1–4, with the connotation of Aristophanes’ *hoi polloi* at 191d 8.k

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would be rash to assume, as the doctor originally did, that such mockery is purely nonsense, or that by reducing Pausanias' conventionalism to nonsense, Aristophanes fails to say something true about it. Pausanias' opinions are truly vulnerable, and spearing his conventionalism shows up his lack of grasp of what eros is. The real question (to which we must turn in a moment) is whether the valid method of finding out Aristophanes' own doctrine is simply to reverse Pausanias' conventionalism: for example, eros knows no bounds, owns no legal master.

Pausanias glosses over³⁹ the precise mechanics of what the boys must do to earn their virtue. Aristophanes joyfully lays it bare: the boys lie down alongside (*sunkatakeimenoí*) and entwine themselves around (*sumpeplegmenoi*) the men. The manly excellence thereby engendered turns these boys, and these alone, into *andres* (192a 6–7). It is significant that *Knights* exhibits the same irony in regard to the connection between submission and manliness. Specifically there is a play on the special meanings of the term *aner*: “he-man” but also “leader” or “big man.”⁴⁰ The character Demosthenes cynically uses the term even while attributing to political life the least manly activities imaginable.⁴¹ A clearer case of the identical irony is *Acharnians*, 77–79, in which Dicaeopolis is cutting down the Athenian ambassador to Persia. When the ambassador relates that the barbarians consider to be *andres* only those who can eat and drink hugely, Dicaeopolis scornfully tacks on an Athenian analogy to the Persian he-men: “– like we consider *laikastai* and *katapugones* [*sc.* to be *andres*].” Politics has become so newfangled that all the politicians are pathics: the “big men” no longer include “real men.” The clash of definitions is an opportunity for wry humor. Dicaeopolis does not include himself in the “we” who consider themselves real men; he says the opposite of what he means, that is, he uses irony. It is likely that Plato puts in Aristophanes' mouth the same irony that Aristophanes put in the mouths of his characters.

If irony in the form of sarcasm exhausted Aristophanes' repertoire, a safe exegesis of the *Symposium* speech would be simply to reverse such implications

³⁹ On euphemism in Pausanias and in literary representation of sex generally, see Dover, ed., *Symposium* pp. 3, pp. 95–6; *GH*, pp. 83–4.

⁴⁰ The sausage-seller is recruited for the oligarchic coup by the reactionary Demosthenes with the promise that he will become a very great *aner* (177–79). He is incredulous: “How will I, a sausage-seller, become an *aner*?” Because he is obviously an adult male already, the more specific denotation “big man” is inescapable. Compare note 1 of this chapter.

⁴¹ “. . . *en prutaneioi laikasei*” (*Knights*, 167).

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as “Agathon is manly,” making it “Agathon is *ummanly*.” The latter opinion could then be taken as one datum in the portrait of Aristophanes that Plato paints. A second, related comedic procedure, previously mentioned, is slander, in which characters or choruses may say things about a satiric victim regardless of their truth, hoping the mud will stick. In using sarcasm the comedian hopes the audience will reverse the face value of what is said, whereas in slander he intends for the statements to be understood directly. What his characters or choruses say directly, however, might grossly exaggerate some characteristic of, or even tell an outright falsehood about, the satiric victim. Clearly these two comedic procedures can also be combined: the slander that must possess only a tenuous connection to reality can be expressed sarcastically, that is, indirectly rather than directly. Neither procedure yields particularly trustworthy insights into actual social practices or widespread attitudes. However, some jokes, whether slanderous, sarcastic, or otherwise, seem to be based on actual social practices. The joke assumes that the audience will recognize the connection because otherwise there could be no joke. Political satire’s success presupposes the tenuous connection to the truth embedded in it. A caricature, for example, is humorous precisely because of the truth it exaggerates; if a caricature contained no observable connection to the real-life satiric victim (a politician with an observable mannerism, for example), there could be no joke. The degree of exaggeration involved in these jokes presents difficulties, not to mention cases in which critics see a joke where none was intended. If the connection between elite education and pederasty were not well documented in external sources of evidence, it would be rash to claim such a connection solely on the basis of comedy. Furthermore, it would be obtuse to take literally Aristophanes’ slander that elite pederasty equals prostitution. Rather, the distinctive contribution of such a comedic procedure is different and, in a way, more theoretical: the joke in question asks, “beneath all the differences in form, niceties, protocol – if sex is traded, how is it different from prostitution?”⁴² The audience is asked to *make* the equation between pederasty and prostitution, to “see” the connection (perhaps for the first time), almost as if they were accepting an argument. This comedic procedure is one important way in which Old Comedy was able to make political points.

⁴² For example, Alcibiades (218b 8–219d 2) and, in a more muted way, Agathon (175c 8–d 2) both offer their beauty to Socrates in exchange for education.

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A second politically relevant comedic procedure might be called grotesque fantasy. Comic fantasies usually involve making wishes concrete,⁴³ showing what would logically follow if wishes could be realized. Because the fantasies are politically utopian (for example, the “rejuvenation of the demos” presented in *Knights*, discussed in Section 1.4), insights into political ideas or political thought become possible. At the very least, the audience sees “worse” and “better” (sometimes ideal) political arrangements according to the taste of an Aristophanic hero. Attributing such political ideas to Aristophanes himself is more problematic.⁴⁴ Although the myth of circle-people does not resemble the plot of a comedy, the essence of this fourth comedic procedure of fantasy seems present in the *Symposium* speech in a different way. At 192d 2–e 9, Hephaestus with his tools stands over the couple lying together and asks them what they want. His offer, “which no one would refuse” (192e 6), is to fuse them together so that they may be allowed to remain with each other always. Insofar as this wish is a correct diagnosis of human longing, the wish seems to give the impetus for the myth of circle-people that precedes it, that is, the myth is an explanation for how such a desire or wish came to be.⁴⁵ In other words, a prehistory like that of the circle-people would logically follow from our longing’s being what it is. The comedies typically start with the wish and go forward in time to its fulfillment. The procedure is reversed in the *Symposium* myth, which starts with the wish and goes backward in time to the conditions of its fulfillment. The myth shows what would have to be true in order for our wish to be fulfilled, that is, we would each have another half (which implies we were once wholes, which means we must have been split, etc., and so the story is generated). As we shall see, the speech’s use of this comedic procedure of fantasy shows Plato’s Aristophanes skillfully manipulating important political ideas. In the remainder of Chapter 1 we look at whether any insights into Aristophanes’ political thought, as Plato saw it, become available through the speech’s use of this comedic procedure of fantasy. Section 1.3 takes up the problem of manliness as a political principle. Section 1.4 begins a discussion of the problematic attraction to

⁴³ For a discussion see Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, pp. 30–48, although he draws different conclusions about politics. Compare C. H. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero*, p. 79.

⁴⁴ See the discussion in Section 1.5 in this chapter. For bibliography, see the Introduction, note 2.

⁴⁵ The subsequent claim, “for this is the cause [of our longing],” 192e 9, is followed by a recap of the myth. On aetiological narrative, see the discussion in Section 2.2.

ownness and sameness. Section 1.5 treats wholeness and reunification in light of Aristophanes' explicit analogy between bodily congress and political synoecism.

1.3. Manliness as a Political Principle

Interpretatively, it might be of value, in the first instance, to follow the logic of the comic fantasy without attempting to attribute the conclusions either to Plato or to Plato's Aristophanes. The comic fantasy does more with the concept of manliness in pederastic discourse than simply to reverse Phaedrus' and Pausanias' claim that manliness is a political virtue. Superficially, the case is clear: for a boy to submit to physical indignity raised serious questions about his ability and willingness to defend himself; it therefore called into question his future ability to defend his city. In a widespread if physiologically inaccurate ideology, the passive male partner was thought to imitate the female sexual role. Phaedrus' and Pausanias' praise of pederasty for inculcating manliness (*andreia*) was clearly open to the vulgar objection that pederasty inculcated quite the opposite. For example, Pausanias contended that true love should be permanent: "to be together their whole life and live life in common" (181d 4–5). Aristophanes echoes (or mimics) his sentiment with "[these are the ones] who continue with one another, throughout life" (192c 2–3). Lifetime duration is evidence that partners were erotically meant for one another. Yet in the male–male case, lifetime duration is problematic because it does not describe the conventions of Greek pederastic relationships. Typically, as the boy matured, his eros would be directed outside the relationship toward boys younger than himself. He might not wish simultaneously to break off relations with his own older lover, as the nonerotic benefits that accrue from that relationship need not compete with the erotic benefits of his new relationship. However, as his beard grew, he was considered less and less attractive to a lover. Moreover, convention dictated in no uncertain terms that young men should discontinue the role of *pais* or *eromenos* after reaching adulthood. A Catch-22 of Pausanias' speech, which Aristophanes exploits, is that Pausanias wishes to lay claim, on behalf of pederasty, to both longevity and manliness, while conventionally, the longer Agathon remained a junior partner, the worse the *anandria* attributed to him.

After pinpointing the physical acts as far as possible in polite company, Aristophanes pushes the envelope of his competitors' laudation of the boys,

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deeming them manliest (*andreiōtatoi*). Then he anticipates another potential objection: "Admittedly, some say that they are shameless, but it's a lie; for not from shamelessness do they do it, but from daring and manliness" (or courage, *andreia* again, 192a 2–4). "Shameless" is the real Aristophanes' own word for passive types and politicians in the comedies,⁴⁶ shame being one of the social weapons that keeps behavior within the bounds of convention. In working from shamelessness to daring, Aristophanes deftly turns unconventionality to aristocratic use: the shameless are not afraid to meet with opprobrium or social stigma; a better word for them would be daring. The word for courage, *andreia*, is the same as the word for manliness, so Aristophanes now has all the links in his chain: the unmanly boys may seem shameless, but are actually daring; now daring is a form of courage, and courage is but manliness. So the unmanly boys are manly, Q.E.D.

If this all looks like mere cleverness, in which any "x" could be made to seem "not x," the comic fantasy of circle-people shows instead that the contradiction is actually specific to manliness itself; that is, manliness, in its extreme form, negates itself as a principle. As previously mentioned, the vulgar objection to Aristophanes' account would be that boys who are used like women must be effeminate. However, Aristophanes works out the inevitable logic that his fantasy has set in motion. It stands to reason that a male–male circle-man, possessing no admixture of the feminine, was more masculine than the other combinations: a woman–man or a woman–woman. The all-male circle-man is naturally all manly: a male times two or a male squared, i.e., "a man in full." His halves, who were totally masculine when together, must be deemed masculine when apart as well. The only way to tell which boys once comprised the whole man – nowadays when no one has ever seen one – is to look at their preferences (191e 6–8). A boy who prefers men is *ipso facto* manly because his preference proves him part of the original male. That the junior partner might ever be called on to play a female role is passed over in silence. In fact, Aristophanes argues, the real effeminate are heterosexual males, an astounding reversal but a logical result of the same argument. The original third sex, the androgyne, may have disappeared, but the name remains as a term of opprobrium (189d 7–e 5). Heterosexual males, like any males, hate to be termed effeminate, but their preference proves that they were once half female: the *philogunaikes*, or woman lovers, derive from the androgyne (191d 6–7). This

⁴⁶ "Shamelessness, sole Protectress of politicians" (*Knights*, 324–25; cf. 385, 397, 409).

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reversal of masculinities is the logical extreme of Pausanias' aristocratic, or arrhenocratic, argument that males are the superior sex (181c 4–6); hence love for males is superior love (181a 7–b 1 with 181b 8–c 4), and hence men who experience this love are superior men (181b 1–2). To be truly manly yourself, you have to love manliness in another; that is, manliness must be all in all for you. This line of argument may be thought of as a celebration or cult of masculinity.

The fantasy draws out the contradiction in this immoderate cultivation of manliness. This same “problem” of masculine honor in Greek homosexuality, first made famous by Dover and Foucault, requires only a brief rehearsal here.⁴⁷ The lover ran the risk of dishonoring his beloved. He might love a boy because of the boy's manliness, but sexual intercourse could mean stripping him of that manliness.⁴⁸ Suspicion that he had submitted meant loss of honor for the beloved. In Athens, this dishonor was bound up with the concept of hubris. In the *Symposium*, when Pausanias first introduces the higher love of boys (181c 3–4), he feels the need to deny the popular equation with hubris, saying that pederasty “takes no part in hubris” (*hubreos amoirou*, 181c 4). The word *hubris* could connote rape because the act, if imposed by force, constituted legally actionable violence, that is, it deprived a citizen of his rights. The reverse was also true: deliberate submission was tantamount to giving up one's own citizen status,⁴⁹ although the dishonor was not legally actionable unless money exchanged hands. In context Pausanias refers either back to his category of vulgar, *phauloi* pederasts, who operate “with a view only to the act, not caring whether it is done nobly or not” (181b 1–6), that is, with no thought for education, or else forward in the speech to seduction (181d 5–6) of the very young, akin to our statutory rape.⁵⁰ Forcible rape is excluded by the context in either

⁴⁷ For example, *GH*, pp. 103–4; cf. Foucault, “A Boy's Honor,” in *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 204–14.

⁴⁸ In *GH*, p. 106, Dover argues that the alternative of intercrural copulation remained honorable. In the plays Aristophanes mentions intercrural very little, concentrating on anal, in order to highlight the most shameful, and hence most laughable, variation. It is possible that the descriptions in the *Symposium* speech, “lying down with” and “entwining around” could refer to intercrural (doubtful, since the vase depictions generally show partners standing up). Probably the descriptions are intended to refer exclusively to the boys' affection or desire and do not comment on what the men are doing. For a discussion of the intercrural alternative, see Section 5.2.

⁴⁹ *GH*, p. 104; Halperin, “Plato and Erotic Reciprocity,” note 17.

⁵⁰ For speculation that Athenian hubris law may have been extensive enough to prohibit a non-forcible, consensual statutory rape of young boys and for a review of the evidence, see D. Cohen, *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens*, pp. 155–61.

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case, so it is possible that he refers not to rape but to ordinary pederastic practice.⁵¹ Perhaps a popularly conceived notion of "outrage" conflated the concept of actual violence against the person with the concept of a consensual act that seemed equally to violate or cross a natural boundary. Greek popular morality could not comprehend submission without recourse to the concepts of forcible rape, bribery, or, in the case of political aspirants, a shameless utilitarian calculation that servility today will secure power tomorrow. Aristophanes plays to the popular audience with his paradox that the ostensible big men had to sleep their way to the top. Every current big man was formerly used as a woman. Athenians like Phaedrus and Pausanias cannot elevate the sexual preference for masculinity into a political principle without encountering a dilemma: either they must countenance dishonoring males (including themselves when they were boys) or they must give up pursuing males.

In Athens, one way out of the dilemma of masculine honor was to evade the horn of the dilemma that said the eromenos suffered loss of nobility: if he had not yet come of age as an adult male citizen exercising the rights of freedom and equality, then he had no status to lose. The boy's immaturity could thus fulfill two ends simultaneously, conforming to the imperative to preserve the lover's own masculinity from any suggestion of reciprocal passivity at the same time as it rendered an unequal relationship sufficiently honorable. There is some evidence that preadolescent boys were indeed considered nonmale in Athens.⁵² Choosing this horn of the dilemma to evade, however, entailed that the object of one's love was less than manly and was perhaps even a kind of woman; that is, one's eros was no longer a love of the masculine. This solution to the dilemma of honor thus struck at the heart of the aristocratic valuation that made the pursuit of males worthwhile to begin with in the discourse Aristophanes is manipulating. As Pausanias points out, loving immature boys is no better than loving women. The two

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 7.5.3-4 (1148b 27-35) uses the passive participle *hubrizomenoi* to refer to boys who grow up to desire sexual intercourse with other males "from habit, e.g., for those *hubrizomenois* from the time they were boys." Rather than rape, the denomination "hubris" here represents a negative view of ordinary pederastic practice. This view was by no means universally shared, although it may have been the dominant popular view (see the further discussion in Section 5.2).

⁵² Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 1.20 (728a 10-25); cf. *Problems*, 4.24 (879a 23-26); *Politics*, 1.13.7-11 (1260a 9-33); and *Metaphysics*, 5.12.8, 1019b 18-19, cited in Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society*, pp. 187-95. Cohen seems to ignore the point that the moral problem of "making a boy a woman" disappears if the boy is already a kind of woman.

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blend together in the undistinguished eros experienced by the vulgar (181b 1–3). Yet even Pausanias, as has been pointed out, has to “lay down a law” on himself not to sleep with younger boys, ones whom he cannot educate (181d 7–e 4). Because he needs to restrain himself, he must still be attracted to the immature, ostensibly more feminine boys. A weak point in the cult of masculinity was the fact that most Greek males were not attracted to mature masculinity, that is, to the fully masculine as such. The Greek fear of mutual, same-age male–male relations has been well studied. Aristophanes’ logic militates against the unequal roles of conventional pederasty because he envisions partners of the same age, that is, coeval halves of the same whole. He permits himself to contradict this fundamental tenet only in his ostensible praise of pederasty. He even suggests that the boys are attracted to mature, bearded men, that is, to mature masculinity.⁵³ In Aristophanes’ version of the masculinist discourse, he seizes on extreme positions: that a fully mature masculinity is lovable, that the older partners, too, love boys for their manliness, that both partners remain fully masculine, not in spite of, but because of, whatever sex acts they may commit. Only then does the paradox become evident and inescapable. In theory, loving manliness entailed depriving the male who submitted of the same manliness that awakened the love. An act feminizing the male beloved would mean that the lover of manliness lost what he loved in the moment of attaining it. The celebration of manliness comes around full circle to bite its own tail.

No doubt part of Aristophanes’ theater audience would have been content with the *reductio ad feminam* in *Knights* and *Acharnians*: the “big men” are not real men, that is, the politicians are all effeminate. However, in both the plays and the *Symposium* speech, manliness as a political principle seems as unassailable in practice as it is theoretically questionable.⁵⁴ After the paradoxes of manliness have ended, Aristophanes warns that every big

⁵³ For the crucial question of the nature of their attraction, see the discussion in Section 4.3.

⁵⁴ For example, *Peace*, 50–53. Absurd as the hierarchy of big men is, the lines do not bespeak a society in which manliness as a political principle can be successfully challenged:

2ND HOUSE SLAVE. I’m going to tell the plot to the children,
and to the excuses for men, and to the real men,
and to the very highest men,
and to the ones supermanning it even more over these.

(*Paidia*, *andria*, *andres*, *hupertatoi andres*, and *huperenoreontes* [*enor* = *aner*], respectively.) The last word has connotations of arrogance and “overdoing the manliness” from as far back as Homer; it is often used in the *Odyssey* of the suitors, e.g., 17.482. See LSJ, s. v. *huperenoreon*, *andriou*, and Sommerstein, ed., *Peace*, ad loc.

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man (*aner*, the term for politician, 193a 8) must be exhorted to be pious toward the gods lest humanity incur the divine punishment of being cut in half a second time (193a 3–b 1). This is curious: what danger can come from the politicians, if their “manliness” is like Agathon’s? Apparently it would be imprudent as well as inaccurate for Aristophanes to ignore the fact that, in the ideology that governs such matters, the big men remain formidable. Here again, the myth’s logic is inexorable: the woman lovers are proved effeminate by their preference; their own desire proves that they are not man enough to hunt bigger game. In the nonreciprocal conventions of Greek pederasty, the passive partner, who assumed the submissive posture even though he did not desire it, was often considered unmanly; but no such stigma attached to the older partner in his active role. On the contrary, he could even be considered hypermasculine if playing the dominant role with strong-willed and strong-bodied boys was a more masculine act than playing the same role with weak, submissive women.⁵⁵ In some narrow circles, particularly peer groups composed of younger males, scoring with sexual partners who were conventionally off limits was a hotly contested game; the term *hubristes*, or “rogue,” probably bordered on a mark of distinction.⁵⁶ The charge of hubris against which Pausanias defends his practice was aimed less often at the self-transgression or passive hubris of an Agathon than at the dominant partner’s active dishonoring of citizen boys or men.⁵⁷ Aristophanes’ speech thus vacillates between two strategies of attack: in the earlier passages it calls attention to the self-abasement of the passives; in the present context of exhorting the political men to be pious, it calls attention to the dangerous self-aggrandizement of the active partners. The manliness of a leader, in extreme form, would tend to feminize all around it; that is, one man’s manliness presents a threat to

⁵⁵ See Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society*, pp. 182–7, for evidence that homosexual intercourse was sometimes problematized in this way in Athens. Compare pp. 176–80 with Cohen, *Law, Violence and Community in Classical Athens*, pp. 143–51, for its relationship to *hubris*. As Cohen points out, it is likely that desire for this sort of sexual conquest may at times have constituted part of the attraction in homoerotic pursuits. Compare A. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes. Frogs*, ad loc. line 57. See the discussion in Section 4.1.

⁵⁶ Compare Dover, ed., *Aristophanes. Clouds*, ad loc. 1068. See the discussion in Section 4.1.

⁵⁷ “An Agathon”: or a Timarchus. Aeschines’ contention that Timarchus “outraged himself” in *Against Timarchus* (e.g., 1.185) is tendentious and apropos of the momentary prosecution (cf. “got herself pregnant”). Ordinarily, it was the aggressor or active partner who committed hubris, particularly if rape was implied (cf. *GH*, 103–4, 34–39; Cohen, *Law, Violence, and Community*, pp. 155–61, for possible nonaggressive contexts). For a discussion of hubris and *Against Timarchus*, see Section 4.1.

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every other man's manliness and to the city itself. Furthermore, if the road to office goes through the bedchambers of powerful politicians, then the junior partners, who submit out of admiration and a desire to be educated and initiated into the adult world in order to attain someday the same status as the senior partners, are seeking, at least, to become powerful and manly. Aristophanes can exploit the paradox that the junior partners are willing to do unmanly things in order to become manly (e.g., 191e 8–192a 3). However, neither the slander in the plays nor the theoretical paradoxes of manliness in both the plays and the *Symposium* speech can change the real fact of any power thus conferred on young men who have paid their dues.⁵⁸ Notwithstanding the fact that manliness is not quite what it purports to be, manliness in Athens remains a time-honored "virtue" with real political consequences. The speech thus manipulates an important political concept to show its power and its limitations. What portion, if any, of these ideas to attribute to Aristophanes himself or to Plato's view of Aristophanes, remains a difficulty, in part because of the following problem.

1.4. Love of Same and Love of Other

The attack on pederasty sits uneasily with another contention in the speech. In the speech, the object of our love is always the same as, or like, ourselves. Attacking homosexuality would be in tension with this "love of same." A statement of this doctrine follows the final word of laudation for the manly boys, *arrhenopia*. Because boys are "masculine looking," they cleave to men (192a 2–5), an odd motive except for the elaboration: "clinging to what resembles themselves" (*to homoion autois*, sc. in looks, picking up the *ops* in *arrhenopia*). In consequence of having been sundered from our other halves, we always desire an alter ego, or second self. True lovers were once kindred or cognate because they were born together; hence the doctrine is reprised as "clinging to what is akin" (*to sungenes*, 192b 5). The boys cling to men because they are akin to men.

⁵⁸ An example of comedy's powerlessness in practical politics: *Knights* attacked Cleon with every possible slur and slander, including especially minute deconstructions of Cleon's manliness, in 424 B.C. *Knights* won first prize, but at the following election the demos elected Cleon to the position of general. For comedy to be directly effectual politically, *Knights* would have had to bring about a change in public opinion widespread enough to strike at Cleon's power base in the democracy. For Aristophanes' later caricatures of his mock-heroic struggle with Cleon, see *Clouds*, 449–550; *Peace*, 748–60.

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The doctrine is not “opposites attract,” but rather “like loves like.” Eryximachus had already formulated this doctrine and its corollary, “opposites repel,” into a cosmological and metaphysical principle.⁵⁹ Aristophanes merely draws out the implications. If a woman attracts you, you must resemble a woman, since the opposite of woman would be repelled by her and seek his own kind instead. Loving the same (*to homoion*) is the essence of the myth of Siamese twins sundered; each loves his mirror image. Homosexuality, one type of loving the same, accords better with this principle of nature than loving the opposite sex does. Incest with a sibling would be closer yet to having a cognate second self or to finding the twin who was born along with oneself. If we take seriously Aristophanes' suggestion that the best we can do in these latter days is to approximate the reunion,⁶⁰ then self-love emerges as the most natural love of all, since oneself is the standard against which the likeness or unlikeness of every other is judged. Approximating the reunion means “finding *paidika* natured according to one's disposition” (or “inclination” *nous*, 193c 7–8).⁶¹

This egocentrism is characteristic of Aristophanic heroes in the plays and ties in with the low, materialist view of the speech as a whole.⁶² Nothing of the generosity⁶³ that Phaedrus celebrates can be genuine in this view. Even the willingness to educate another, as in Pausanias' account, must mask an egoistic motive: to have sex. The foundation of Aristophanes' myth seems to be an insight into the centrality (not necessarily the goodness) of self-love. Love cannot easily be extended very far from home. Foremost among our loves is our own: our self first, people like us second, the other last.⁶⁴ The celebration of egoism in the plays and the debunking stance assumed in the speech lead one to believe that this is not a *reductio ad absurdum* of the principle “like loves like.” Plato seems to portray an Aristophanes who accepts the principle. He would object only to the benign view of that principle. He would reduce to absurdity the notion that

⁵⁹ 186d 5–e 1, 187a 1–c 5, 188a 2–8; cf. 186b 5–7.

⁶⁰ “If [finding your other half] is best, it necessarily follows that, at the present time, the nearest to it is best” (193c 5–7).

⁶¹ For the implications of a possible play on this extended sense of the word *nous*, which would literally mean “intelligence,” see S. Benardete, *On Plato's Symposium*, p. 59.

⁶² Compare Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, p. 13.

⁶³ In Phaedrus' ideal couple, each partner *agapai* the other (180b 2–3) to the extent of being willing to die on one another's behalf.

⁶⁴ Compare notes 22 and 23 of this chapter for Socrates' similar assessment: *eros* for Aristophanes is the love of “one's own” (*oikeion*).

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desire, by definition selfish, makes you generous or virtuous or anything else.

Some scholars might wish to object that eros here cannot be entirely selfish because we still love another person in Aristophanes' account. The other person just happens to be related to us. However, this objection fails to take seriously the origin of the peculiar "other" that we seek in this account. If I lost my right arm and sought for it exclusively, no one would contend that I was in love with anything other than my (former) self. If I then accepted a different right arm, solely on the basis of its similarity to the one I lost and because I had given up hope of finding the original arm, no one would reverse his or her initial judgement about what I was in love with. The "other" in Aristophanes turns out to be no other at all (so far as the lover is concerned) but merely an extension of the self. When we reflect that the "right arm" I settle for represents another person who will have to bear the burden of the self-love I am looking to fulfill through him or her (and who will impose a similar burden on me), then the harshness underlying Aristophanes' vision comes into focus.

Part of the rhetorical complexity of the speech consists in the combination of this underlying harshness with the beautiful expression of what most of us want from love. There is no question but that the formula "love means finding your other half" is a vindication of our romantic ideal. Modern-day analogues would include husbands who refer to their wives as "my better half" or the standard hope that "somewhere out there is a person who is right for me." In the comic fantasy, Aristophanes takes such formulations more literally than necessary and shows what would have to be true in order for our longings to be fulfilled. Because the resulting prehistory of eros is obviously and hilariously false,⁶⁵ it follows that human longing will prove (almost) impossible to fulfill. Such a vision appears tragic when we reflect that we ourselves are involved in it, although it must also be admitted that the comedy of errors that would take place among characters in such a

⁶⁵ "False": at least on the literal level. For example, the existence of the belly, "as it is now called" and of "that which they call the navel" (190e5–9) are adduced as physical evidence that proves that the mythical account of divine surgery is true – "to be a reminder of our ancient wound" (191a 4–5). How else do you suppose we acquired a navel? In other words, the singular fact that proves us all to have been born of woman is made to prove the opposite, that we got this way not through birth but through surgery. The essence of the joke here is the barefaced lie, the brazen facing-down of biological reality. See the discussions in Sections 2.2 and 2.10.

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predicament would be admirably suited for the comic stage. In carrying out this project, Aristophanes shows us aspects of our longing that we might have wished to ignore. We should resist the temptation to focus exclusively on the part of the speech that agrees with our preconceptions in disregard of this darker aspect.

Does Plato intend for his readers to generalize and elevate this attraction to oneness and sameness into a political principle upheld by the real Aristophanes? This could be Plato's comment on Aristophanic politics. The results would seem to involve difficulties on any level (whether among citizens or among states) to which it was applied. The intrapolis implications, reversing Phaedrus' army of lovers cemented by eros, would be a selfishness so strong as to render even such a small group as the family, let alone the city, nearly impossible to fashion out of purely selfish individuals. On the interpolis level, the implications could be only a narrow patriotism or xenophobia. Certainly there are sentiments expressed in the plays that, if interpreted in a rather literal-minded way, resemble selfish, apolitical individualism as well as a blinkered patriotism. However, this again implicates the question of where in the plays, if anywhere, Aristophanes' own ideas lie. The speech's embrace of the principle "like loves like" in nature would seem to imply that homosexuality is natural. This would seem to contradict the speech's attack on, or satire of, pederasty. Such a contradiction would have to be explained before we could equate these political ideas with (Plato's view of) Aristophanes' own teachings.

1.5. Love of Wholeness

The fantasy of union that grows out of the everyday wish to find our other half contains at least one other important political idea. A summary passage that defines eros also makes an analogy with political unification and diaspora:

. . . our ancient nature was thus, and we were wholes; therefore eros is the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole. And before this, like I say, we were one, but now on account of our injustice we have been broken up (*dioikisthemen*), much as the Arcadians were by the Lacedaemonians.

(192e 9–193a 3)

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This passage refers to an important political event following the King's Peace,⁶⁶ in which Sparta destroyed the Arcadian city of Mantinea by forcing the citizens to disperse and go back to four different villages in which they had lived before becoming a polis.⁶⁷ The Greek word often used for this divide-and-rule policy is *dioikizein*, literally "to break up house."⁶⁸ *Dioikizein* and its opposite, *sunoikizein*, are of great interest since they entail nothing less than the demise and the genesis of the polis. The synoecism of Athens traditionally was held to have taken place in Theseus' time, and the festival of the Synoecia celebrated the event each year.⁶⁹ The synoecism (literally "joining house") was thought of as the act of union, in which smaller independent villages came together into one body politic. Thus the analogue of splitting the circle-people is the destruction of a polis or depoliticization of a people. As we shall see, the analogue for the reunification of the male-male circle-men is the genesis of the polis or the synoecism of a people.

The passage contains a definition of eros: "eros is the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole" (*to bolon*). A second formula is added at the end of the speech: "eros leads us to our own" (*to oikeion*). The two formulas go together: finding our own (other half) is the missing piece that yields the desired wholeness. Into this overall picture must be fitted the preceding sobering facts: not our other half but only second-best options are available at present (193c 5–7); and barring the help of Hephaestus (192d 2–5), no permanent union or fusion is possible, despite the fact that eros wants it (d 5–e 9).⁷⁰ It follows that the "wholes" to which we will be driven by eros differ from the original wholes we actually seek (cf. 191a 5–b 5). In lieu of the natural wholeness that can never be regained, humans enter the "unnatural" wholes or partnerships that produce children and the city's work. Both of these unnatural wholes involve more people than the initial

⁶⁶ 386 B.C. Plato anachronistically makes Aristophanes refer to the Corinthian War, which took place well after the 416 B.C. fictional setting of the dialogue but might have been fresh in mind to his readership near the time of writing or publication.

⁶⁷ 385 B.C. See Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 5.2.

⁶⁸ LSJ, s. v. *dioikizo*. The root of *dioikizein* is *oikos* or *oikia*, house or home. See notes 22–23 above.

⁶⁹ Thucydides, 2.15, claims that Theseus dissolved the local council chambers and offices, establishing one central council chamber and civic hearth (*prutaneion*) while the people remained living in their fields.

⁷⁰ Zeus invented sexual intercourse to allay the painful, impossible-to-fulfill desire for reunification (191b 5–c 3).

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pair: the male–female union becomes populated with offspring, and the male–male pair becomes part of a larger partnership in which many males make up a polis.⁷¹

Wholeness is related to manliness insofar as manliness is the virtue that enables certain males to unite and form the unnatural whole of a polis. Aristophanes glances back at Pausanias' speech when he warns that political men must be exhorted to be pious lest we be split again and when he reports that the circle-people, before their ascent and punishment, had proud thoughts (*phronemata megala*, 190b 6). Pausanias had used the identical phrase when referring to yet another anachronistic, up-to-date event: male–male relations, he claims, were being discouraged in Ionia, that is, among the Greek cities of Asia Minor that had been abandoned by their fellow Greeks to Persian rule under the same terms of the King's Peace that later allowed Sparta to impose her will on Mantinea.⁷² According to Pausanias, the Asian tyrants know that homosexual unions breed proud thoughts (*phronemata megala*, 182c 2) as well as strong friendships (*philiai*) and communities (*koinoniai*). In both speeches, the manliness of these males enables them to bond into the unions their eros desires. However, the two speeches apparently attach opposite valuations to these unions. It is as though Aristophanes agrees with the Asian tyrant (or identifies Zeus with the Asian tyrant) in his warning against the proud thoughts.

Aristophanes' allusion to Pausanias' speech can be interpreted as a dialogic moment in a Platonic "dialogue" with few conversational exchanges. Reading across the speeches on the subjects of wholeness and manliness opens up a loose correlation between various constitutional forms of government and their relative acceptance or disapprobation of homosexuality. The relatively warlike and (says Pausanias) undereducated oligarchies of Boeotia and Elis actively encourage open homosexual relations.⁷³ On the other hand, customs are ambivalent in Sparta⁷⁴ (Pausanias does not say

⁷¹ For the polis as one means by which humans satisfy the desire for wholeness by becoming part of a whole, see M. Davis, *The Politics of Philosophy*, pp. 93–6, which includes a reading of the *Symposium* speech.

⁷² Dover, ed., *Plato. Symposium*, ad loc. 182b 7; cf. p. 10.

⁷³ Literally, "the law has been laid down that it is a fine thing to gratify lovers." On the difference between democratic and oligarchic attitudes toward homosexuality, see T. K. Hubbard, "Popular Perceptions of Elite Homosexuality in Classical Athens," p. 72, and Section 4.1 of this book.

⁷⁴ Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, 2.12, claims that Spartan men were permitted to love boys spiritually but to have no physical lust. This could be read as romantic obfuscation on

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how) and in Athens, where Pausanias' preference must overcome some forms of active discouragement (182a 1–6, 183c 5–d 2). Likewise, Pausanias' Boeotians glance back at Phaedrus' allusion (another anachronism) to the Sacred Band of Thebes in Boeotia. Phaedrus had mentioned the military value of stationing lovers and beloveds in pairs beside one another in the battle array. The most famous example of such military pederasty in Greek history was the Sacred Band. The Eleans also allegedly stationed lovers and beloveds in pairs to aid military cohesion.⁷⁵ Phaedrus' vision of an armed camp or city made up entirely of male lovers and beloveds looks similar in varying degrees to these actual arrangements of militaristic oligarchies in Thebes, Elis, Sparta, Crete, and elsewhere.⁷⁶

Republicanism and cohesiveness in the governing body emerge as the factors particularly favorable to homosexuality. In the oligarchies,⁷⁷ republican participation is confined to an elite in need of strong bonds of solidarity to maintain itself; hence homosexuality is strongly encouraged. In Ionia under the Persian tyrant, there is no republicanism, and bonding among subjects is discouraged. Under the Athenian democracy, republican participation is widely diffused among a very large number of citizens, too many to be more than loosely bonded; hence the ambivalent, partially negative reception of homosexuality, socially acceptable only among elites who continue to fill the majority of offices even though, constitutionally, the franchise is no longer based on an assessment of wealth.⁷⁸ In this way, Aristophanes' humorous conceit that only pathic boys can grow up to be political men now appears as the most paradoxical rendition of an actual state of affairs in Greek politics. The comic fantasy of circle-people highlights the human longing to achieve wholeness through the polis, in lieu of our lost natural wholeness. Although oligarchy was the rule in most poleis before the fifth

Xenophon's part. For another interpretation, see *GH*, pp. 190–94, which stresses the role of secrecy (and by extension hypocrisy) at Sparta.

⁷⁵ Sparta did not station couples together in battle (Xenophon, *Symposium*, 8.32–5), although Sparta otherwise encouraged homoeroticism to a far greater degree than did democratic Athens.

⁷⁶ For a discussion with bibliography of the aristocratic and military origins of pederasty in archaic Greece, see Section 4.1.

⁷⁷ Sparta, perhaps because of her secrecy, is of course an outlier in Pausanias' description (we cannot supply what would have been Pausanias' judgment of her since he does not tell us in what way the laws and customs governing open homosexuality were ambivalent at Sparta). In Chapter 4 we will explore ways in which Sparta fits a similar pattern admirably.

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Hubbard, "Popular Perceptions of Elite Homosexuality in Classical Athens." For a discussion see Section 4.1 of this book.

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century B.C. and democracy the exception, the principles of cohesion and republican participation can be seen to belong to the polis itself and not merely to governing bodies. The tiny size that was later considered essential to the polis⁷⁹ (in contrast to Athens' exceptionally large numbers) and the resulting face-to-face intimacy of politics, as well as the cohesion necessary for such a small body politic to survive, were conducive, at least in this discourse, to the encouragement of homoeroticism among members.

These connections between the polis and homosexuality involve creating a more perfect union. The stricter the ties that bind (in terms of affection and sentiment), the closer a political community will be. A modicum of political idealism, to say the least, animates Phaedrus' and Pausanias' commendations of these projects. In the plays, by contrast, Aristophanes consistently constructs plots in which heterosexual eros and the rural life, or life of the household (*oikos*) apart from the city, trump the urban sophistication, homosexuality, and militarism of the polis.⁸⁰ Just as pederasty in the polis is the lightning rod attracting a large share of the ridicule in the plays, so heterosexual eros is often the bright-line, memorable message in the plays' ostensible recommendation of good country living. Several of the plays end with weddings, and others end with the protagonist or other characters preparing to enjoy heterosexual intercourse⁸¹ just as they enjoy the bounty of food and wine and the pleasure of song and dance. A hearty appetite for sex often proves to be just the push needed for characters to make peace, with the peacemaking allegorized as sexual attraction to, or bodily embrace of, nubile young women.⁸² This healthy sexuality is frank and unashamed, and it stands in sharp contrast to the politician Cleon's prurient interest in looking at *proktoi* in *Knights*.⁸³

The political analogues of these sexual preferences take Aristophanes back in time, in his search for a utopian alternative, to Marathon and

⁷⁹ For example, Aristotle, *Politics*, 3.3.4–5 (1276a 25–30), 7.4 (1325b 33–1326b 25).

⁸⁰ For example, (passim in) *Acharnians*, *Knights* (see subsequent discussion), *Peace*, and *Wasps*. For the (illustrative) exception of *Birds*, see the discussions in Chapters 2 and 7.

⁸¹ Weddings: *Peace*, 1315–end; *Birds*, 1720–end; cf. *Acharnians*, 1058–68. Heterosexual intercourse: *Acharnians*, 1198–1220; *Knights* (see subsequent discussion); cf. *Peace*, 1351–52. Although *Birds* and *Ecclesiazusae*, 887–1111, fit the heterosexual pattern, a full political reading of Aristophanes would have to explain why these examples of heterosexual intercourse are enlisted in what seem to be political programs antithetical to conservatism. For a view, see L. Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, pp. 191–94, 279–82.

⁸² *Knights*; *Peace*, 520–1015; *Lysistrata*, 1112–1188.

⁸³ *Knights*, 878. See note 2 of this chapter.

earlier, as well as geographically away from the urban center, into the Attic countryside. *Knights* provides the clearest example as it involves both a return to the past and a return to the countryside. The politically hyperactive demos (figured as the “old” man Demos) needs to be rejuvenated or renewed, restored to its former, youthful character by bringing back the ancient Athens of Aristides and Miltiades (1323–5). This strategy accords with the traditional (oligarchic) advice to “send the people into the fields.”⁸⁴ But the “ageing” of the demos, since it fell prey to demagogic “tradespeople” like Cleon (128–149) has transformed it into an urban proletariat, or rabble, rather than a farming people.⁸⁵ The sausage-seller therefore rejuvenates Demos, transforming him from a city dweller into a country gentleman, a step up in class as well as a step back in time.⁸⁶ In the fantasy, this transformation is supposed to cure all of the ills of the democracy, a laundry list of which is aired, along with their corrections, at 1340–83. The good old days are back.

⁸⁴ . . . *es tous agrous* . . . *ienai* (*Knights*, 1394–5, sc. “where you will not be involved in politics”). It might be argued that the demos, far from leaving government behind, is promising to take matters more fully in hand (e.g., “Tell how you’ll politick” followed by Demos’ list of corrections, 1365–1383; cf. a possible implication of Demos’ *kalo*, “invite” or “summon” [the sausage-seller to the prytaneum], 1404–5). However, in place of voting on resolutions, Demos intends to institute hunting with hounds (1382–3). The view that the demos will remain politically active also ignores the larger context of oligarchic political thought into which the passage fits: see Aristotle, *Politics*, 6.4, for the relevant attitudes. See also note 86 of this chapter. Compare the revolutionary project in Plato’s *Republic*, Book 7 (540e 4–541b 1), to send everyone over the age of ten years into the fields, where they will take no more part in cultivating the political and the moral life of city.

⁸⁵ Thucydides, 2.16–17, with *Politics*, 6.4.1–2: “Of the four kinds of democracy, the best . . . is also the *oldest* of all [emphasis added: cf. *Knights*’ project to restore the olden days of the Athenian demos]. . . . For the best people is the farming kind. . . . [It] is unable to hold frequent assemblies” (1318b 5–12). Aristotle goes on to suggest that the people should be empowered only to elect and monitor (and perhaps only to monitor) but not to *hold* office (6.4.4–7). By contrast, “nearly all the other multitudes from which the remaining democracies are composed are far baser than these: their way of life is base . . . mechanics and marketers” (6.4.12; 1319a 24–28), viz., like the “tradespeople” or sellers to whom Demos has fallen prey in *Knights*. “Because [the marketers] always frequent the marketplace and the town . . . they easily attend the assembly, but the farmers, on account of their being scattered over the countryside, neither meet each other nor have any need of this gathering (6.4.13; 1319a 28–32). At the opposite extreme, the “final” stage of democracy, in which as many people as possible are added to the rolls to increase the demos, cannot easily survive because it is disordered, and the preeminent men are galvanized to act against democracy (6.4.15–17), i.e., setting the stage for an oligarchic coup of the type into which the sausage-seller is recruited (but later betrays out of filial piety toward Demos) in *Knights* (cf. note 40 of this chapter).

⁸⁶ 1331, with Thucydides, 1.6.3.

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Demos' step up in class, however, comes at a price. Significantly, the sausage-seller gifts Demos with a boy who bends over for him like a camp stool (1384–7). Demos responds, with what staging may be imagined, “Blissfully am I settling into ancient ways indeed!” Returning to the great days of Athens means returning to the heyday of gentlemanly pederasty as well. Dover has speculated that 550–450 B.C. represents the age of greatest openness and honor for Athenian homoeroticism,⁸⁷ the same period that Aristophanes and the more conservative parts of his audience could think of as representing Athenian democracy in its nascent and advancing, as opposed to its radical and senescent (cf. 1349), stages.⁸⁸ Aeschylus, who fought at Marathon and wrote tragedies for the generation that defeated the Persian invasions, was also the author who eroticized the friendship between Achilles and Patroclus.⁸⁹ Homosexuality was already present in the “best” days of the polis; it is as if homosexuality and the polis inevitably go together. Political pederasty has followed Aristophanes in his return to the countryside and to the Athens of Marathon. But the sausage-seller tempts

⁸⁷ Dover, ed., *Aristophanes. Clouds*, pp. xxv–xxvii; *GH*, pp. 197–98. Because greater vase and literary evidence is available for this period than for any period preceding it (thereby giving more opportunity for homoerotic evidence), one could well speculate that the aristocratic classes of predemocratic Athens held homoeroticism in equal or greater esteem. The homoerotic poetry attributed to Solon provides some support for such a speculation, as does aristocratic poetry from elsewhere in Greece, e.g., the Theognidea, much of which is from the relevant period in nearby Megara. For a discussion, see Section 4.1.

⁸⁸ The regime changes that made Athens fully democratic took place especially under Cleisthenes in 508–7 B.C. and under Ephialtes with Pericles, who in 462 B.C. stripped the Areopagus of judicial powers (*Constitution of Athens*, 21–25; see especially 24.1, which traces the beginnings of imperialism to Aristides' advising the demos to come in from their farms and take up political and military activities; cf. Herodotus, 5.66–73, 6.131). Aristotle's *Politics* cites Cleisthenes' reforms (well before the “olden days” of Aristides and Miltiades) as the type one should follow to produce the “final” stage of radical democracy (6.4.18–20; 1319b 19–32), so the similarity between the *Politics* and *Knights* is hardly exact. In looking back to Marathon (490 B.C.), *Knights* can appeal to the olden virtue of Athens' greatest triumph; perhaps it is not reasonable to expect the play to reach back to implicate the constitutional changes that initially prepared the way for a radicalized demos. Other plays of Aristophanes seem consistent with the idea that the demos did not become completely radicalized until the Archidamian phase of the Peloponnesian War forced the people to come in off the land (for a discussion of the plays' attitude toward democracy, see Section 5.5). Nevertheless, *Knights*, by raising the demos to the class of country gentry or nobility, could be said to be looking further back, to the days before Solon's property-scaled franchise conferred power on smallholders. That is, the fact that the rejuvenation also means a step up in class may represent a winnowing of the voting body or a return to the time of simple aristocracy.

⁸⁹ *Symposium*, 179e 1–180b 5; *Myrmidons*, fragments 228–9, Nauck². For a bibliography, see P. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, Vol. 1, p. 291, note 140.

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Demos away from the camp-stool boy with examples of good clean country living:

SAUSAGE-SELLER. You'll certainly say so when I give you
the thirty-year peace treaties. Come quickly, treaties!
DEMOS. Much-honored Zeus, how beautiful they are! By the
gods,
can I really poke them for thirty years?

Nubile young women eclipse the boy as the rejuvenated Demos is led by his lust from the one to the others. It is no accident that the women stand for peace: men's love for women is pacific and quietist in most of the plays.⁹⁰ Plato in the *Symposium* myth perhaps expressed the same point for Aristophanes better than Aristophanes' own plays did: as we saw in Section 1.3, if you love a woman, you are effeminate (and peace loving), like a woman. Men's love for the masculine, on the other hand, is bellicose, particularly if it means admiring the manly, warlike virtues: if you love a man, then you are manly yourself. The love of the masculine leads ultimately to Phaedrus' vision of an all-male polis, the city as an armed camp.⁹¹ Significantly in *Knights* it was Cleon, the pederast and politician, who had hidden the women, and the treaties, away (1392–3).

Yet if the polis and homosexuality somehow go together, then the return of gentlemanly citizens to heterosexuality envisioned in *Knights* might entail leaving the polis behind entirely. Leaving the polis would mean returning to the pre-synoecism villages, at best, or perhaps even to the household level of civilizational development.⁹² This is precisely where some visions of the plays end up, for example, with Dicaeopolis in *Acharnians* separating himself from the polis and returning to his isolated household in the country. Even the advice to “send the demos into the fields” in effect entails the demos' disfranchisement, as they can no longer take part in the ruling body

⁹⁰ For example, *Acharnians*, 1058–68; *Peace*, 520–1015; *Lysistrata*, 1112–1188.

⁹¹ Phaedrus makes little difference between the two in *Symposium*, 178e 3–179a 2. Compare the modern pejorative “the garrison state”; Greek “states” were almost always in essence identical to their garrisons.

⁹² “Household level” in the Greek imagination: see *Politics*, 1.2.5–7 (1252b 9–27) with *Odyssey*, 9.112–15. The cyclopes might seem to live in a village (their homes are in fact on mountaintops). Aristotle here refers specifically to people living “scattered” in olden times, and Homer's text mentions that each cyclops lays down the law to his wives and children and pays no heed to other cyclopes. As we shall see in Chapter 2, Aristophanes cannot seriously want anyone to return to such a state.

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of the polis; that is, the advice entails their de-politicization.⁹³ In the same way that the circle-people were split because of their dynamism or activism, and in the same way that the political men must be warned lest they be split again, so the vision of *Acharnians* splits up or *dioikizes* a part of the polis (and does so precisely on the grounds of the city's militarism, viz., her prolongation of the Peloponnesian War, e.g., 37–39); that is, this political vision involves de-politicization.

1.6. Preliminary Conclusions

This first pass at reading the *Symposium* speech in light of the comedies has raised more questions than it has answered. The satire in Aristophanes' speech of the masculinist, political discourse about eros, a discourse represented especially by Phaedrus and Pausanias among the speakers who go before him in the *Symposium*, is a close-enough parody that its assertions are highly indicative of the serious discourse itself. Indeed, Aristophanes' speech has often been interpreted as a straightforward part of that serious discourse. Yet, precisely because it is a satire, Aristophanes' speech both highlights (in extreme form) the problems with that discourse and leaves the reader up in the air as to the speech's own positions, if any. In particular, the *nature* of eros remains mysterious in a speech that ostensibly accepts the principle "like loves like" yet also seems to take a stance against homosexuality.

Does Aristophanes uphold heterosexuality? The most lasting image of his speech, that of two lovers lying together with Hephaestus standing over them, ready to grant their wish to fuse them together so that they may leave this world and enter the next as one, is the incarnation of reciprocal, rather than age-unequal, eros; and the Homeric source, Ares bound to Aphrodite, is male–female.⁹⁴ The image could even be said to evoke a "romantic" view of love: in particular, the permanence of the union resembles marriage far more than it does the transience of pederasty. Yet Ares and Aphrodite were adulterers (cf. the speech's adulterers at 191d 6–e 2), stealing pleasure from her loveless marriage to Hephaestus, whose original binding of them was

⁹³ See references in notes 85 and 86 of this chapter.

⁹⁴ *Odyssey*, 8.266–366. "Reciprocal": see Xenophon, *Symposium*, 8.21: "The boy does not share with the man, like a woman does, the pleasure of sexual intercourse, but looks on, sober, at one drunk with Aphrodite"; and 8. 3, in which a man *anteratai* by his wife.

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a trap not to keep them together for eternity but to catch them in the act. Aristophanes' speech can hardly be said to be upholding heterosexual marriage and the *oikos*, except perhaps in a manner analogous to the plays' presentation of the *oikos* as a place where the husband can have sex with his serving wenches when his wife is not looking.

Likewise, the wish to embrace for eternity would seem to describe a person's expectations of the future (cf. *elpides megistai*, 193d 3) at the moment he or she feels desire, rather than describing the actual course that desire takes. That is, the feeling of eternity is part of erotic *desire*, as stated, not part of erotic fulfillment. If and when the desire ceases, the feeling of eternity will cease also. "Forever" is how eros feels at the time. So far as the permanence of marriage and the household is concerned, convention would play a large role in keeping the spouses together. Furthermore, the powerful romantic yearning that the speech so well depicts comes at the price of its harsh, unblinking look at the selfish origin of all love. "Like loves like" in the speech ultimately means that we seek ourselves in our beloveds. It is not clear why homosexuals, who love a separate person who shares one aspect of themselves – the same sex – should be seen as any more problematic than heterosexuals, who in this account love a separate person who does not share that aspect but necessarily shares a host of others.⁹⁵ Both loves could be said to have progressed some distance away from pure self-regard or narcissism, but both select the beloved other only by using the self as the standard of comparison. Perhaps heterosexual love could be said to have progressed farther from self-love, in this lone respect, than homosexual love has progressed. But then heterosexual love would also be farther from nature, or from the natural principle, "like loves like." Aristophanes' stance against homosexuality would be a stance against nature itself.

What seems clear is that Aristophanes' resistance to homosexuality can be folded into a larger problem, his apparent opposition to (some manifestations of) politics and the polis itself, at least on Plato's reading of him. What emerges from his manipulation of the cult and praise of masculinity is that the same manliness that is so useful in militaristic and oligarchic political constitutions leads, if untempered, to the tyrannical domination of the manliest. If Aristophanes does recommend heterosexual eros, it would seem to be because of this adverse political character of homosexuality in

⁹⁵ Plato's Aristophanes would contend, of course, that heterosexual males love precisely their own feminine character, or its facsimile, in the females they choose.

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the discourse under discussion. Aristophanes would uphold the heterosexual eros precisely because he connects it to privacy and political quietism, whereas homosexuality is connected to political ambition. Yet are quietism and agrarianism in fact preferred over urban politicking, dynamism, and activism in Aristophanes' politics? Or are Dicaeopolis' separation from the polis and Demos' return to a pristine apolitical state actually comically unfeasible solutions to intractable problems?

The preceding question is implicated in the further question of whether any important Aristophanic politics exists. As is often the case with satire, the playwright highlights problems without proposing any serious solution in their place. It could be argued that such problematizing is in keeping with political inquiry as opposed to political practice: Aristophanes reveals aspects of the Athenian polis. He is not in the business of recommending real solutions to problems, and many of the problems he reveals are too deeply rooted to be amenable to action. In particular, the comedic procedure of utopian fantasy (such as the rejuvenation of the demos) seems to "wish away" by means of magic problems like the radicalization of the democracy. To show Athens being purified only by means of magic, rather than by some feasible means, would seem to suggest precisely that her problems are intractable. In the same way, the darker aspect of the *Symposium* myth, in which our desires can scarcely be fulfilled, may be Plato's rendering of this (intentional) unfeasibility of the plays' utopias. That is, the *Symposium* speech's unfulfillable desire may be Plato's attempt to be true to the playwright's vision.

A series of important political views has emerged from a comparison of the *Symposium* speech with the plays. We must look further (1) to continue to explicate those views, (2) to see how widely shared such views were by contemporaries, and (3) to see if the views have any basis in nature and society outside of Greek discourse. In particular, how strict is the connection between the polis and homosexuality? What evidence can be found for and against the connection we find assumed, extolled, and decried in the *Symposium* and in Aristophanic comedy? One can easily imagine small, cohesive communities (or cohesive governing elites) that do not encourage homoeroticism. What factors, besides militarism and masculine bias, tiny size and the need for cohesion, republican participation and fierce independence, might have been involved in the encouragement of homoeroticism in the polis? Finally, does political eros in the speech remain a desire for another individual, or does political eros take other, more abstract objects?

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The speech has touched on two of the three main strands of what we are calling the discourse of political eros: political pederasty, and eros conducive to solidarity. Does the speech contain indications of the third strand, which we will meet in Thucydides (not to mention in Socrates' *Symposium* speech): the eros for nonsexual, nonbodily objectives and ideas such as honor, empire, or the fatherland? What, for example, originally motivated the circle-people's ascent, and why does Aristophanes refrain from calling their motive eros?

In Chapter 2 we continue to examine the philosophical and rhetorical use to which Plato puts recognizable Aristophanic ideas and imagery from the plays, in order to gain deeper insight into the political positions that Plato may be attributing to Aristophanes. The focus shifts to the playwright's apparent stances on the naturalness or unnaturalness of homosexuality and of eros generally, and his apparent stance on political dynamism and the lust for power. In succeeding chapters we will turn to the questions of who else in the Greek world shared related ideas (Chapter 3) and of how compelling their arguments are for us today (Chapters 4 and 5).

TWO

Law and Nature in Aristophanes' Speech

2.1. Modern Contexts

Readings of Plato's *Symposium*, particularly of Aristophanes' speech in the dialogue, have played an increasingly important role in scholarly debates over the legal regulation of sexuality. The speech and the dialogue as a whole have served as points of reference in controversies between a liberal theorist (Nussbaum) and natural law theorists¹ (Finnis and George), as well as figuring prominently in debates over the political ramifications of Foucault's theory of sexuality² (e.g., Halperin, Boswell). At issue has

¹ The practical implications of the speech have reached a Colorado district court: a naturalistic interpretation of Aristophanes' *Symposium* speech formed part of Nussbaum's expert testimony in *Evans v. Romer*. See R. George, "'Shameless Acts' Revisited: Some Questions for Martha Nussbaum"; M. C. Nussbaum, "Platonic Love and Colorado Law"; J. Finnis, "Law, Morality, and 'Sexual Orientation,'" and "'Shameless Acts' in Colorado: Abuse of Scholarship in Constitutional Cases." See especially R. Clark, "Platonic Love in a Colorado Courtroom."

² For the politics of Foucault's social constructionism, see D. M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, especially pp. 5–7, 18–21, 41–53. The absence of age-matched male couples in Aristophanes' speech figures heavily in Halperin's arguments against the myth's scientificity (cf. Section 1.3). Halperin's original opponent was J. Boswell, who argued for a stable, diachronic category of homosexuality, based in part on the apparent innateness of homosexuality in Aristophanes' speech, in "Revolutions, Universals and Sexual Categories," which was reprinted in J. Corvino, ed., *Same Sex: Debating the Ethics, Science, and Culture of Homosexuality*, pp. 185–202. In attempting to refute the Foucauldian view, J. Thorp, "The Social Construction of Homosexuality," bases his critique of social constructionism almost entirely on Aristophanes' speech. See also D. Cohen, "Law, Society, and Homosexuality in Classical Athens"; A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, pp. 225–6. An indication of the *Symposium* speech's relevance to modern debates can be seen from its inclusion, in its entirety, among the recent works reprinted in Corvino, *Same Sex*.

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been the justice of legally regulating sexuality, with arguments based on the naturalness or unnaturalness of homosexual desire as opposed to the social construction of eros generally. Of these readings, only that of a self-professed Foucauldian, Halperin, has enlisted Aristophanes' speech in support of the social construction of eros. Most other readers have been impressed by the naturalness of eros in the speech.³ Indeed, the myth of the circle-people would seem, on first view, to offer a taxonomy of desire based on our former biologies, in which all orientations arise naturally. Men seek men, women and men seek one another, and women seek women, in accordance with the other halves that have been predetermined for them by their original, unitary nature. As we shall see, however, readings that remain wholly naturalistic do so at the expense of ignoring a great deal of Platonic and Aristophanic context.

This chapter offers a synthesis of the naturalistic and the social-constructionist positions, attempting to establish the relative weight of nature and convention for the formation of human eros in Plato's portrayal of the thought of one prominent Athenian artist and thinker. Plato's intellectual portrait of Aristophanes shows that Plato was aware of an account of law and nature that overcomes many of the difficulties inherent in modern thought about eros. As shall be argued, the dichotomy between nature and social construction that informs the interpretations of thoughtful modern scholars does not carry the reader as deeply into the issues as does careful attention to source material, to related fifth- and fourth-century B.C. political thought, and to humor. Once again a substantial part of the methodology used here is to trace allusions in the *Symposium* myth to the political comedies of the real Aristophanes, particularly the *Birds*.⁴ The legal and political ramifications of pederasty in Aristophanes' speech give the initial impetus for the discussion: the law that forces marriage and child production onto the male homosexuals cannot change their underlying desire to live unmarried with a member of the same sex, and this desire is said to be "by nature" (*phusei*) and not "by law" (*hupo tou nomou*; *Symposium*, 192a 7–b 3). Although the speech explicitly deals with law's effect on eros, closer inspection reveals a comprehensive meditation on a reciprocal relationship between law and

³ For example, Nussbaum, "Platonic Love and Colorado Law"; Thorp, "The Social Construction of Homosexuality"; Boswell, "Revolutions, Universals and Sexual Categories."

⁴ Some interpretations of the *Birds* on which my own draws include J. Henderson, "Mass versus Elite and the Comic Heroism of Peisetairos"; W. Arrowsmith, "Aristophanes' *Birds*: The Fantasy Politics of Eros"; and L. Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, pp. 160–94.

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eros, in which law constrains eros but eros also has a strong effect on law, and the two interact, wielding mutual influence over one another. Plato's Aristophanes relates the ambition of the political men and their boys to the original ascent of the circle-people, and he locates the emergence of law in an attempt both to tame and to fulfill eros. From the perspective of modern debates over the legal and political ramifications of social constructionism and essentialism, the contribution of the *Symposium* speech is to move the discussion beyond the influence of social forces such as law on eros and to begin inquiring into the origins of law itself. From the perspective of the larger ancient discourse of political eros, the *Symposium* speech will now be seen to exhibit the third and arguably most interesting strand of that discourse: the desire for nonsexual, nonbodily consummations with abstract, impersonal objects and goals such as power and prestige.

2.2. Myth and "Nature"

The naturalism in Aristophanes' speech shows a number of affinities with that of the "physiologists" or natural philosophers of the day, represented in the dialogue by the doctor, Eryximachus.⁵ How seriously intended are the naturalistic credentials of Aristophanes' speech? The comedian's relation to the doctor is antagonistic.⁶ Eryximachus' own speech displays defects that are characteristic of a narrowly scientific approach. The doctor manages to reduce the human pageantry of love to evacuation and repletion (186c 5–7). By contrast, Aristophanes' speech, although it remains resolutely low and materialistic, expressly denies that mere sexual intercourse is what true lovers want (192c 5); rather, the soul wants something else, which it cannot say, but it divines what it wants, and it speaks in riddles (192c 7–d 2). As though to give the lie to his own reductionism, Eryximachus' subjective hopes and desires go well beyond mechanical attraction between bodies; indeed, he projects his hopes for science onto the cosmos. Positing a science for every subject matter, he asserts that eros has power over everything (186a 6–7; 188d 4–5) but science has power over eros (186c 5–d 5, 187c 2–d 4), the implication being that, in principle, everything in the universe can be controlled by the

⁵ Compare Robin, *Le banquet*, p. lxi; Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 2, pp. 200–11, especially p. 205. Eryximachus' doctrine of eros as a universal attraction is derived from Empedocles' Love. Strife, however, is neglected by the doctor.

⁶ See the discussion in Section 1.2.

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scientist.⁷ This is a kind of divine control⁸ because, instead of letting himself be moved by eros, he sees himself injecting eros wherever he diagnoses it beneficial (186d 1–5). The likelihood is that Aristophanes' intention toward Eryximachus would be to puncture such pompous pretension through satire rather than to embrace similarly naturalistic stances. For example, he implicitly rejects Eryximachus' contention that eros needs a physician to diagnose its good and ill conditions (186b 7–d 1) when he says that Eros the god is himself the physician (189d 1). Aristophanes' poetic account of eros is clearly superior to Eryximachus' scientific account. The heroic folly of ascending into the sky, the divine retribution, and the restless searching afterward: these better express eros as we experience it than does pleasurable evacuation, eased by a benign doctor—hero, an Asclepius unconsciously inflated to cosmic proportions (186e 1–3). The motive to satirize would go some ways toward accounting for Aristophanes' use of one of Eryximachus' sources, Empedocles.

The evolutionary account of Empedocles had theorized that the present age of the world, in which human beings generate sexually, was preceded by successive epochs of asexual reproduction (cf. *Symposium*, 191c 1), most notably an age characterized by people “born with faces and breasts both front and back, . . . and mixtures partly of men and partly of woman's nature, equipped with sterile members,” a description very like that of the circle-people, particularly the androgynes.⁹ One of the images the androgynous

⁷ Eryximachus' assertion that weather patterns are governed in accordance with the same theory of eros which, in areas such as astronomy, is an empirical science, recalls Empedocles' promise that whoever becomes his student will be able to control weather (fragment 111 DK). The need to order and control explains why Eryximachus chooses only those examples of *phusis* that are easily mathematized. For his “posting guard” over eros at all levels, see 187e 6–8, and especially 188c 2 for guardianship on the grandest scale. The doctor also attempts to guard Aristophanes (189a 8–b 2, 4–5), and he assumes control of the evening at 176b 5–e 10, 189a 8, b 4–5, 8–c 1, 214a 6–e 2. So authoritative is the doctor that he seems to affect judicial and legislative terminology, e.g., *apheso se* (“I'll let you off,” 189c 1). Perhaps even the more ordinary *doxei moi* (“I resolve,” *ibid.*) here echoes the common phrases of Athenian government “the assembly resolves,” and *touto dedoktai* (“it has been resolved,” 176e 4–5).

⁸ For Empedocles' own assertion of self-apotheosis, cf. fragment 112 DK.

⁹ Fragment 61 DK. “Was preceded by”: or else precedes. Because the process or processes are cyclical, distinguishing which came first loses some of its importance. The androgynes in the *Symposium* appear at 189e 2–4; they have the private parts of both sexes at 190a 3. Compare especially 189e 7–190a 4: “two faces on a circular neck, alike in every way, one head for both faces, which were positioned opposite one another.” A less certain echo is Aristophanes' “*he arkhaita phusis bemon en kai enen holoi*” and “*tau holou oun tei epitumiai kai dioxei eros onoma*” (192e 9–193a 1) compared with Empedocles' *oulophueis men prota tupoi kbthonos ex anetellon* (fragment 62 DK; emphasis

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circle-person was probably intended to evoke is "the beast with two backs,"¹⁰ man and woman locked in face-to-face embrace, that is, the position to which the halves attempt to return by throwing their arms around one another (191a 5–7). This is the extent, then, to which Aristophanes' account resembles a naturalistic or scientific account. The conspicuous difference between the double-people's transformations in the separate narratives of Empedocles and Aristophanes is the physiologist's concentration on material causes,¹¹ for which Aristophanes substitutes the direct influence of the Olympian gods. The divine in Empedocles is limited to the remote, impersonal forces of Love and Strife,¹² whereas Aristophanes brings in the anthropomorphic gods of the poets, which the physiologist had eschewed as unscientific. This use of the gods yields a further clue to whether we should interpret the naturalism in Aristophanes' speech straightforwardly or rather treat it as a gentle satire aimed at the doctor through opportunistic exploitation of one of his sources.¹³

added to both). Compare also the language of Empedocles' *tupoi kbibonos ex* with the *Protagoras* myth's *tupousi auta* (i.e., *thneta gene*) *theoi ges endon* (320d 2), which is followed by an Empedoclean mixing of roots or elements. The linguistic parallels in Aristophanes' speech are *etikton ouk en allelois all' eis gen* (191c 1), in addition to the *ektetupomenoi* at 193a 6. Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, in *The Presocratic Philosophers*, p. 305, gloss Empedocles' *oulophueis* as "organic wholes (not adventitious collections of parts)" that are therefore the first compound beings with (any) survival value in the evolutionary process. Unlike Aristophanes' original wholes, who were stronger and more complete than we are, Empedocles' organic wholes are not superior to current humanity (who are also organic and therefore also have survival value). This would be a valuation added by Plato's Aristophanes that is not found in the original. Abstractly considered, however, Love draws Empedocles' elements together into wholes, just as Eros attempts to bring the halves together to form a whole in Aristophanes' speech.

¹⁰ 189e 5–190a 4. Only "back and sides" are mentioned of the original circle-person; the "belly as it is now called" and chest are created with surgery and belong to the separated half (190e 5–191a 5). The genitals of course are not together in the original embrace but rather are placed in back, where the buttocks of each would be. In Empedocles, the location of the "sterile members" is unclear and their significance is debated.

¹¹ Compare Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 2, p. 204, note 1.

¹² Empedocles' forces might as well be called "attraction" and "repulsion" for all the personification that they evince. In the religious poem *Purifications*, Empedocles calls the force of Love "Cypris," a name of the goddess Aphrodite. Even this fragment (128) suggests that "she" ruled alone, without the other Olympians, at least in the bygone happy age (Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 2, p. 248).

¹³ Bury, ed., *The Symposium of Plato*, p. xxxiii, includes another possibility of satire, i.e. the somewhat less convincing parallels between the combinatoric (of male–male, male–female, and female–female) in Aristophanes' speech and in Hippocratic writings on reproduction to which the doctor might in theory be said to be indebted. Empedoclean influences are more clearly marked in Eryximachus' speech than this aspect of Hippocratic thought is.

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As we saw in Chapter 1, Aristophanes' myth is also closely related to the myth that Plato writes for the sophist Protagoras (*Protagoras*, 320c 3–323c 2), particularly in its portrayal of the gods.¹⁴ In the *Symposium* myth, after the divine surgery, the halves begin dying of hunger because they refuse to do anything but cling to one another in an attempt to grow back together. Their deaths were not part of the original plan, and Zeus is forced to think hard¹⁵ before he can come up with a second scheme: he rearranges their genitals to enable copulation with one another, inventing sexuality (*Symposium*, 190c 1–191c 2). Likewise, in the *Protagoras* myth, the creation of humankind and the operations performed on humans by the gods prove to be inadequate, and humans again begin dying off, as they did in the *Symposium*. The other animals have been given tough hides and the means to defend themselves, but the humans are left naked and defenseless. Even after Prometheus' philanthropic intervention (the gift of technical wisdom), Zeus fears for the survival of the human race; he finally gives humans the political virtues of shame and justice to enable them to bond together successfully. Both Aristophanes and Protagoras, in Plato's intellectual portraits of them, depict gods who initially botch their operations on humankind, only to redress the situation later.

The use of nature or naturalism in the two myths reveals a yet closer conformity between the way Plato interpreted the thought of the comedian and the way he interpreted the thought of the sophist. Before speaking, Protagoras wonders aloud whether, because he has been asked to make a display of his talents, he should tell a story (*muthos*) or else canvass his subject thoroughly with an "account" (*logos*). Taking note of his company, the great sophist decides that a story would be more elegant (320c 3–7). Ostensibly, then, Protagoras does not demonstrate that virtue is teachable, as he had agreed to do (b 8–c 4), but rather tells "how virtue came to be." This type of aetiological narrative is found in many folk tales: "how the leopard got his spots."¹⁶ Clearly Protagoras was capable of using either vehicle – *muthos* or *logos* – to carry his point. No listener would dream of interpreting the myth literally or pointing out unlikelihoods such as naïve belief in Titans like Prometheus. That would be to mistake metaphor for

¹⁴ See Section 1.1.

¹⁵ 190c 6. Bury, ad loc., notes the incongruity of the master of the universe being forced to "cudgel his brains."

¹⁶ See Dover, "Aristophanes' Speech in Plato's *Symposium*," pp. 42–44, 46.

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substance¹⁷ (cf. 316d 4–8). Likewise, the naturalism (hide, hair, formation of creatures under the earth) does not provide a literal history or taxonomy of the animal kingdom. The fact that narrative was only optional implies that the thesis is synchronic or static, not truly diachronic or historical. Which of the two preceded the other in human prehistory, political virtue or “technical wisdom,” is not really disclosed by the myth. However, by showing humankind in possession of technical wisdom and yet dying off still, Protagoras brings home forcefully the philosophical, if not historical, priority of virtue.

As in the *Protagoras*, so in the *Symposium*, the aetiological narrative in question is preceded by deliberation over whether a strict account (*logos*) would be more appropriate. Despite Eryximachus' insistence that he render an account (189b 1–9; cf. 193d 6–e3), Aristophanes' speech, replete with giants and gods, is scarcely rigorous enough to qualify as a *logos* in the doctor's view. At issue between comedian and scientist is not only the proper use of humor,¹⁸ but also the proper use of myth. An aetiological narrative can use a notional history of olden times in order to bring to light the current, not past, being of a thing. At the level of folk tale, aetiology teaches the child that the leopard is the spotted cat, and the charm of a (false) evolution imprints on the child's memory the salient aspect that distinguishes the leopard from the striped cat. The child learns the bestiary as it currently stands, not items from a remote past that can never be known and must therefore remain notional in any case. From the point of view of both Plato's comedian and his sophist, it is better to admit the fictionality of one's account by indulging in a fabulousness that cannot be mistaken for

¹⁷ Protagoras claims that even the theological poets Homer and Hesiod were sophists like himself, who merely hid their rationalism behind a screen of poesis (*Protagoras*, 316d 4–8). On Protagoras' “agnosticism,” cf. *Theaetetus*, 162d5–e1 and Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 3, pp. 234–5 as well as pp. 64–5. Protagoras' myth is concocted rationalistically, without regard for the received tales. Theological “machinery” could be used in this way for purposes of illustration or to recommend a certain moral course of action, as in the display speech by the sophist Prodicus known as Heracles at the Crossroads (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.1.21–34). Phaedrus is reported as mentioning the speeches of Prodicus in *Symposium*, 177b 1–c 4, when he and Eryximachus first propose that the evening be spent with each member of the company giving an encomium of eros in imitation of Prodicus' genre. For Prodicus' sophisticated stance toward the gods of story, see Guthrie, pp. 238–42, 274–80. Compare Phaedrus' own literary enjoyment of myth and yet simultaneous surprise when Socrates seems to put any real credence in a myth (*Phaedrus*, 229b 4–c 5).

¹⁸ See Section 1.2.

natural history.¹⁹ When Aristophanes' myth is finished we are no wiser about how eros came to be, but his specious aetiology has reminded us of each salient feature of eros as it is experienced by humans of the present day. His speech constitutes a phenomenology of eros rather than a genealogy. What place nature has in Aristophanes' thought remains to be seen, but it is clear that the reader must beware of being too literal about finding nature in myth.

2.3. Erotic Gods and Heroic Humanism

The treatment of the gods in the *Symposium* myth contains a number of allusions to the comedies of the real Aristophanes. Both the *Symposium* and the comedies highlight a problem with the gods as they were depicted by poets: their susceptibility to "human" needs. The Greek poets portrayed the gods in constant enjoyment of the goods that humans seek. "Blessed" is a common epithet used of the gods, and their blessedness is understood in material terms: an eternal festival in the Olympian halls, replete with eating and drinking. Zeus and other gods also indulge in sexual adventures, especially during sallies to their earthly holdings, where they play the role of the ultimate aristocrats preying on mortal women and boys who cannot resist their sovereign power. The Olympian gods are supposed to be guardians of justice: they impose limits on human desires by laying down the law. Yet the gods keep humankind from unjust and selfish acts by occupying the territory themselves or by establishing a monopoly on *pleonexia* and selfishness, and they ruthlessly guard their privilege against human encroachments. Greek gods do not lead by example. When the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob says²⁰ "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy," that is, you shall refrain from unlawful things, it is inconceivable that He Himself would wish to indulge in those very things. By contrast, Zeus has human longings and the power to fulfill them. *Non bovi sed Jovi* means that Zeus has prerogatives that mortals may not share; they must refrain from the things that Zeus has the right to enjoy fully. If the erotic crimes such as adultery, rape, and elopement are properly Zeus' prerogative, then the implication is that the guardian of justice, Zeus, is not just himself. Zeus emerges as a tyrant rather than as a benevolent king or

¹⁹ This self-awareness, or awareness of limitations, may contribute something to Protagoras' notion of "elegant" (*kbariēis*), which carries overtones of taste and refinement.

²⁰ Leviticus 19:2.

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father, and he civilizes humankind not for their own good but only with a view to his own self-interest in order to keep mortals low.

The selfishness and tyranny of the gods are evident in the *Symposium* in the punishment of the circle-people who rebelled. Their punishment is strictly designed with the welfare of the gods, not humanity, in mind. Zeus and the other gods would have preferred to make the race disappear, as they did previous rebel races (190c 3–4; cf. 7–8), except that then their own honors and sacrifices from humans would disappear (190c 4–5). From the gods' point of view, the attraction of Zeus' plan is that humans become "more useful" (*kbresimoteroi*) to gods on account of doubling their number (190d 2–3). Twice as many humans means twice as many sacrifices.

This greediness of the gods for sacrifices is an Aristophanic topos that Plato lifts from the comedies, in which the gods' greed is cast in material terms as desire for meat and the Homeric smoke or aroma of meat being cooked or burnt as a sacrifice.²¹ In the play *Peace*, the gods leave Hermes behind as guardian or watchdog of the heavenly abode that they vacate (196–202); when Hermes savagely attacks the mortal Trygaeus for trespassing on the heavenly property, Trygaeus produces some meat and buys off the god the way an ordinary trespasser or housebreaker brings a piece of meat in case he needs to deflect the savagery of a guard dog (182–94). The joke about meat is later tied neatly onto the ordinary practices of Greek religion, where it says much about the thin line between sacrifice and bribery. When Trygaeus pleads with Hermes not to annihilate him and his Panhellenic chorus for resurrecting Peace in contravention of the gods' express orders, he swears by the gods (*pros ton theon*), but when that avails him nothing, he changes his oath to *pros ton kreon* ("By the meats!" 378–81). The implication of the rhyme, that the gods cannot control their own bellies or that they are no more than the meat that is sacrificed, is confirmed when the chorus thereupon says a prayer reminding Hermes of the piglets he ate when they sacrificed to him in prior days (385–8). Eventually Trygaeus promises that Hermes will hereafter receive all the sacrifices that at present belong to other gods, and Hermes ends up directing their impious action (458). The gods are so susceptible to bribes that they fail even to protect their own precincts and pronouncements.

²¹ Compare the *Birds*, 190–3, with Homer's *Iliad*, 1.317. For Plato's gentler treatment of the same subject, see the Athenian stranger's critique of appeasing the gods with sacrifices in *Laws*, Book 10 (906c 8–907b 4). See also *Peace*, 406–13.

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The gods' immoderate greed reveals their actual neediness and weakness. Their dependence on humankind for sustenance means that their fate is inevitably bound up with that of the human race. For the gods of the *Symposium*, ridding themselves of a pesky humankind is not an option, and only Zeus' brainstorm (190c 6–7) gets the gods out of a real predicament. This abjectness of the gods becomes so acute in the *Birds* that they “un-god” themselves. The protagonist, Peisetaerus, instructs the birds to intercept the sacrifices, thus making the gods so hungry (1516–20) that they are forced to come to the negotiating table, where food becomes the lever by which they are persuaded to step down. Strategically, Peisetaerus receives the divine ambassadors while cooking. His side, he says, is willing to make a treaty, so long as the gods are willing to do what is just, and what is just is for Zeus to hand over his scepter to the birds (1579–1601).

PEISETAERUS. And if we reconcile on these terms, I shall call the ambassadors to lunch.

HERACLES. That's enough for me, and I vote in favor. (1602–3)

Peisetaerus has correctly diagnosed the inverse relationship of the gods' justice to their enforcement of man's justice: the less just they are themselves, the more justice they force on humans in order to ward off competition for the scarce goods. The gods' desires, on the other hand, are in direct proportion to said enforcement: the more they grasp for themselves, the less humans are allowed to have. Peisetaerus turns these proportionalities against them and lets the system work to the advantage of humans for once. The less humans give up to the gods, the less “justice” would humans be forced to practice themselves. Withholding sacrifices frees humans to do what they want.

These Aristophanic sources for the circle-people's rebellion are evidence that Plato intended his Aristophanes to sympathize with the revolt of his original humans, if only it had been feasible. Greek religious thought contained a humanistic strain in which rebellion against the Olympian system took place not out of impiety but out of a profound sense of the system's injustice. Euripides, the most sophisticatedly influenced of the three great tragedians, made use of this topos in many of his tragic protagonists, who expound a “heroic humanism” in which the injustice of the Olympians and their inadequacy, specifically the way eros drives them to commit follies and crimes, lead to disbelief in the whole religious system created by poets: “I do not believe the gods desire unlawful beds or bind each other's hands

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in chains. . . . Nor that one god becomes tyrant over another. If god is truly god, he has *no needs*. These are the worthless lies of singers."²²

This loss of plausibility and esteem suffered by the gods is related to the withholding of sacrifices that caused them such anxiety both in the *Birds* and in the *Symposium*. Sacrifice is only the material expression of esteem (*time*, 190c 4), and the latter can likewise be withheld from the gods. Sacrifices are sustenance for the gods in the larger sense that human esteem sustains them. Part of the joke in the *Birds* is that the Olympians are supposed to be immortal yet Aristophanes proceeds on the assumption that they are in danger of starving to death. Peisetaerus calls it the "Melian famine" (*limos Melios*, 186), a reference to the siege that cut off food supplies from the island city of Melos, starvation being among the levers intended to force her to surrender to the Athenian empire.²³ In a religious context, however, "Melian" connotes atheism, after Diagoras of Melos, whose notoriety for atheism during this period earned him mention later in the play.²⁴ An atheist deprives the gods of sustenance by withholding his belief. If everyone did likewise, the gods would "die." Plato's Aristophanes, like the real Aristophanes, implies that the gods exist only by convention: that is why, metaphorically, they are dependent on the human race for their existence. Zeus in the *Symposium* cannot annihilate humankind because doing so would entail his own demise.

2.4. The Return to Original Nature

The influence of convention, however, can be great despite fundamental inconsistencies or injustice. The radicalness of the change that belief makes in man is signaled in the *Symposium* myth by the wholly different physical shapes that man is given, depending on whether he is influenced by the Olympians or by the cosmic gods: Sun, Moon, and Earth. The cosmic gods appear briefly in order to explain the circle-people's spheroid shape:

[The circle-people] were like this, and were three in kind, on account of the following: because the male was originally the Sun's offspring,

²² Euripides, *Heracles*, 1341–6; emphasis added. "Heroic humanism": the term is appropriated from the rather different concept of C. H. Whitman, *Sophocles*, pp. 223–9.

²³ Thucydides, 5.115.4.

²⁴ Diagoras the Melian is mentioned at line 1073 (Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, p. 318, note 49). Compare *Clouds*, 830, in which Strepsiades, explaining Socrates' doctrine of Zeus' nonexistence to his son (and getting it wrong) refers to Socrates simply as "the Melian."

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and the female was the Earth's, but the type sharing in both [sexes] was the Moon's, because the Moon also shares in both. Revolving they were, both in themselves and in their gait, on account of their likeness to their parents. (190a 8–b 5)

The original people get their roundness from the heavenly spheres. They change to an upright, bipedal shape only after the Olympians eclipse the cosmic gods in the lines sequel to these; significantly, the Olympians are also upright and bipedal. Circular gods for circular people; human-shaped gods for human-shaped people. This notion that every people resembles its gods (or that their gods resemble them) is also found in the plays. In the *Birds*, the Greek gods are Greek: they speak Greek, dress as Greeks (1565–72). The gods of the barbarians, on the other hand, are “barbaric” (1572–3). Poseidon has to help the Triballian god dress properly. The poor god also speaks unintelligibly (1615–6, 1628–9, 1678–81). This is the crux of anthropomorphism: each nation makes up gods in its own image, endowing them with its own conventions and language; man's *eidos* or “look” always gives rise to the *eidos* of his gods.²⁵

In myth, however, the direction of influence is the other way around, from god to man, and Plato's Aristophanes appears to accept that myth may contain important grains of truth. The Sun, Moon, and Earth at least lent us their round shape naturally, through birth. The Olympians use artificial means, surgery and sewing:

[Zeus] cut the humans in two, the way they cut sorb-apples with the intention of pickling them, or the way they cut eggs by means of hairs. . . . [Apollo,] drawing together the skin from all sides . . . made one mouth and tied it off in the middle of the belly. . . . (190d 7–e 9)

It would be difficult to draw a starker contrast between nature and artifice, and the artificiality of the gods seems to stand for convention. Aristophanes repeats several times that our round shape *was* nature (*phusis*, 189d 5, 189d 6, 191a 5, 191d 1, 191d 3, 192e 9, 193c 5, 193d 4). The implication is that the Olympian gods denatured us. Nature tries to thwart the artifice of the gods by drawing the halves toward one another in order that they may renature or regrow together (*sumphunai*, 191a 8). But so powerful is the sway of convention that the new eros is now ennatured in us (*emphutos*, 191d 1); nature has literally been changed.

²⁵ Compare Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.2.7, 1252b 24–7.

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The unnaturalness of the Olympians' operations on humankind throws into relief the naturalness of the nature gods. Earlier humans, in their freedom from need, resembled their stately, self-sufficient parents, just as later humans came to resemble the needy, contemptible Olympians. The apparent changelessness of the Sun, Moon, and Earth, the way they keep their courses across the sky, never deviating, implies that they are self-moved, instead of being forced by need or desire to go out of their way, as the Olympians constantly do.²⁶ Like deities, like worshippers: the circle-people possessed the lost wholeness that the human halves now busily seek. The sphere, the most perfect geometrical shape because it is congruent with itself at all points, symbolizes the perfection both of the primitive humans and of their gods. In addition, the heavenly bodies have the advantage of being evident to the senses of all: they at least exist. No one has ever seen the Olympians; they are known to exist only by report. Furthermore, it is the Olympians who are responsible for humanity's unnatural condition and incomplete shape.

This malleability or plasticity of the physical self in the *Symposium* (e.g., *ektetupomenoi*, 193a 6) contains a comic literalism that is also a feature of Aristophanic comedy. In *Acharnians*, the poet pretends to take literally a pompous title from the Persian court: "King's eye." The ambassador from Persia, when announced, comes on stage in the form of a giant with one Big Eye in the middle of his forehead (91–7). According to official protocol, the political bond between courtier and king was supposed to metamorphose into an organic relationship, as though the king, a mere man, could become so omnipresent as to use others for his organs. Aristophanes merely takes the protocol at its word: the king's courtier is one big organ who has no independent existence but lives only to serve. The barbarism of such servility makes Pseudartabas not even human: he is a cyclops, the symbol of violence, inhumanity, and lack of civilization, cyclopes never having gotten beyond the household level.²⁷ The Persian tyrant's speech-act has denatured Pseudartabas, reduced him to his inhuman *eidōs*. Nomos, a state of mind, abstract and therefore hard to grasp, is made palpable by reducing it to physis, concrete and therefore evident to the senses.

²⁶ For example in the *Iliad*, Books 14 and 15, Zeus loses his concentration while Hera seduces him. Hera's faction first visits the battlefield to stir the humans to fight each other; they then leave again when Zeus wakes up, causing the human battle to change from moment to moment.

²⁷ Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.106–15; cf. Euripides' *Cyclops*, 116–128. See also Sections 1.5 and 2.6.

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Aristophanes' penchant for talking about convention in physical metaphors sheds light on the question concerning the place of nature in the poet's thought, at least in Plato's interpretation. In the *Symposium* speech, the omnipotence of *nomos*, bending phusis to fit any form, could be taken to imply that human nature is infinitely malleable. Zeus threatens, and Aristophanes pretends to believe, that humans may someday be sawn in half once more, this time between the nostrils, making them monopods (190d 4–6) in bas-relief (193a 4–7). If physical form is taken to imply a psychic condition, however, then the facts of material nature could remain hard and unyielding while man's perception and interpretation of those facts, and of himself, changed enormously. From a phenomenological perspective, psychic change is more important than physical continuity. Neither Plato nor his Aristophanes wishes to imply that man was ever spherical, or cut in two, but rather that the difference that *nomos* makes to man and to man's view of himself is so great that he might as well have been both.

The round, "whole" *eidos* (193b 3–5) of the circle-people represents the psychic condition of natural man, before the imposition of *nomos* on him, a Rousseauian vision of lost wholeness. The original people were literally twice the men of later generations. Their terrific strength (190b 5) signifies the greater freedom of primitive man unfettered by the constraints of law. By becoming civilized, humans have curbed their powers, cut their robustness by half, literally maimed themselves. The circle-people's completeness signifies self-sufficiency. They are literally well rounded. They do not seek mates because each is already whole in himself or herself. They have the advantage of being autochthonous, for although they originally descended from three different celestial bodies, in later generations all three sexes come out of the earth mother (190b 7–c 2).

Eros in the *Symposium* speech is defined as that which pushes humans to regain this original nature (191c 8–d 3). The theme of the return to nature, of liberating the natural self from the stifling norms of convention, also occurs many times in Aristophanes' plays. The *Birds* in particular merits an extended comparison with the *Symposium* myth. Two companions in the *Birds* set out to find the birds, fleeing legalism and litigation at Athens (34–41). They desire a simpler, more natural life. Their desire to get back to nature is called *eros*. Peisetaerus is introduced to the birds as an *erastes* of their community (324). *Eros* (411) guided him to the birds: *eros* for their existence and their way of life and *eros* to dwell with them and to consort with them in every way (412–14). This bird existence is characterized by

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Euelpides as the life of the newly wedded (161), that is, the brief time in each person's life when nature is allowed to take its course. It is only law and custom that artificially limit nature, as when in the parabasis the bird actors say "Whatever is shameful here, dominated by *nomos*, is all beautiful with us birds" (755–6).

The artificiality of civilization is represented in the *Birds* by the Athenian empire. Athens does not rest content with imposing her *nomoi* on her own citizens but travels the globe imposing them on all peoples. Almost nowhere is safe: even the Red Sea is not far enough away because the S.S. *Salaminia* can find you anywhere and summon you back to trial (144–7). The artificiality of the gods is tied directly onto the artificiality of Athens. When the goddess Iris invades Cloudecuckootown's air space, the provenance of the gods is made clear:

IRIS. I am from the gods, the Olympians.

PEISETAERUS. And what is your name? The *Paralus*? Or *Salaminia*?

(1202–3)

The state ships and the city's gods are equally tools of control in the empire of *Nomos*. Leaving the city means leaving the city's gods, since the gods are products of the city. Peisetaerus drives Iris away the same as he drives away the other imperialists, tools sent by Athens to ensure that the new city accepts Athenian weights, Athenian measures, Athenian statutes (1040–2), as well as the Athenian jury system (1022–3, 1032), which the companions particularly sought to escape. Peisetaerus says "Today I'll show you some bitter *nomoi*!" (1045), meaning the blows he is raining down on them as he drives them out. Natural justice is swift and clean compared with legalism.

However, *nomos*, as if by an iron necessity, gradually reasserts itself. Imperceptibly at first, for example in slips of speech such as newcomers make when they naturally fall into the plural when using the name Cloudecuckootown (just as the word Athens is plural; 819, 917, 1023), then gathering steam in the debate over who the patron deity of the new city should be (Peisetaerus suggests Athena; 826–8), the natural city transforms itself into the conventional city once more. The jig is up when Peisetaerus contemplates the list of items he will control once the gods are out of the way: shipyards and jury pay *inter alia* (1537–41). The betrayal of the revolution, man's struggle against *nomos*, is best revealed, as usual, in the case of the *nomos par excellence*, the gods. The stunning success of Peisetaerus'

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liberation from the gods is immediately followed by the shocking ascension of a new god: Peisetaerus. The mere man assumes the role of Zeus and becomes keeper of the thunderbolt (1745–54). The tyrannicide without a decent interval begins styling himself the new tyrant (1708, 1764–5). This substitution of one *nomos* for another *nomos*, rather than substituting nature for *nomos*, was actually long prepared for. Even while one man was seeking to liberate himself from the gods, the mass of humans back on earth was merely switching allegiances and beginning to worship the birds (561–9, 716–36, 1235–7, 1277–1307). This result should have been predictable, but human hopes are such that everyone needs to learn it for himself or herself. If Everyman could travel to heaven and see with his own eyes that it was empty, would he return to earth to spread the news among his fellow man, or would he take up residence in heaven himself? In the latter case what would then keep him, and others, from believing in his divinity? Aristophanes presents a *reductio ad absurdum* of human desires, first getting his audience to identify their own desires with Peisetaerus' and then showing the folly to which such hopes really lead.²⁸ The humanist revolution in Aristophanes falls short of liberation, but that failure results from man's own desire. The desire for liberation does not differ from the *libido dominandi* except in degree. This admonition was latent all along in the humanist critique of the gods, viz., that we create them in our own image. If such images are tyrants, then it follows that we humans are tyrants too, potential ones, just waiting for our chance to get free and lord it over others.

In mistaking the character of man's desire to be liberated, the humanist critique of the gods arrives at an overly benign view of eros. Giantism is the truth about natural man's desire. The circle-people are identified with the Homeric giants Otus and Ephialtes (*Symposium*, 190b 7–8), just as Peisetaerus is identified with the Pindaric giant Porphyryon at the moment he conceives his city plan (*Birds*, 553; cf. 1249–52). When his city is complete, Peisetaerus himself identifies it with the battleground where giants battled gods (821–5). When specifically threatening to attack the gods, he compares his armies of birds to Porphyryon (1249–52). Giants in Homer and Hesiod are in-between creatures, stronger than humans yet less than gods. Given their halfway status, giants are in an impossible position: they cannot accept the lower status of mere men, yet they are also incapable of replacing the gods. Hesiod's account of how the gods came to be gods is a series of

²⁸ Arrowsmith, "Aristophanes' *Birds*: The Fantasy Politics of Eros," p. 155.

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battles in which each successive generation attempts to differentiate itself from a pack of competitors; the pantheon comes to a rest only once the children of Cronus have put distance between themselves and everyone else. In like manner, the Gigantomachy must occur because giants are too close to divinity simply to submit to the new tyrants without a fight.

This drama of giantism is played out in the *Symposium* by the circle-people when they think "high thoughts" and make an anabasis into the sky to attack the gods.²⁹ Natural man was a giant who had to be put into his place the hard way. As Arrowsmith points out, Aristophanes' use of the giants myth in the *Birds* recalls archaic Greek aristocratic poetry, perhaps typified by one of Pindar's later odes, the eighth Pythian. Myths about flying too high, as in the cases of Icarus and Bellerophon, and about the folly of competing with a god, which Arachne and Niobe do, demonstrate the dangers of overweening, of arrogating to oneself powers that one cannot control or does not truly possess. Their moral is the moral of the story of the magician's apprentice. The message is that great fortune and power can cause a great man to lose his wits and briefly consider himself a god. Know thyself, the Delphic oracle's admonition, means "know you are not a god."

Peisetaerus' actions evoke this response from Iris, who says in the language of tragedy: "Fool, fool" (1238) and "Truly my father will stop you from hubris" (1259). Hubris in this context may connote a luxuriant growth, something that sprang up naturally but then grew outsized.³⁰ Giants in Homer are the "tallest the earth nourished."³¹ Their greatness is not purely a figment of their own imagination but real. It is the overestimation of admitted greatness that sets the tragedy in motion; there would be no drama if the relative standing of all parties were clear at the outset. Hence the drama unfolds in the crucial area of uncertainty, in which, when one is looking up from below, the higher does not seem out of reach, whereas, when one is looking down from on high, the lower looks big enough to pose a threat. Miscalculation or "overweening" in the literal sense is crucial to the sin of the circle-people; hence their high thoughts.

²⁹ Compare the *Symposium's* language, *eis ton ouranon anabasis* (190b 5–c 1), with that of the account of Otus and Ephialtes in the *Odyssey*, 11.316: *hin' ouranos ambatos eie*.

³⁰ LSJ, s. v. *hubris* (I.3). Compare A. Michelini, "HYBRIS and Plants." The attestations are, however, late: Aristotle and Theophrastus. See also Herodotus, 1.189. A connection between hubris and nature also seems attested in the famous (and textually vexed) passage of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*: "hubris breeds [or more literally, "natures"] the tyrant" (*hubris phuteuei turannon*, 873).

³¹ *Odyssey*, 11.309.

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The naturalness of hubris, the innate tendency in each of us to grow rankly until pruned back, calls for a reconsideration of the necessity of nomos, however disfiguring. The differences between Peisetaerus and the circle-people are many: they represent early man, he represents late; Peisetaerus lives at the peak of civilization, or a little past the peak, whereas the circle-people antedate civilization and all its makings; they specifically antedate the Olympians, whereas he postdates them or gives them the *coup de grâce*. In addition, his is a humanist revolt, an attempt to regain the lost human nature out from under the disfigurement caused by the gods, whereas the circle-people have not yet lost pristine nature nor been disfigured. Yet for all that, the separate stories of Peisetaerus and the circle-people both reveal what the pristine nature really is: a desire for self-deification. If the circle-people are natural, then their attempt to storm heaven is natural, too. Peisetaerus gets back to nature; that is, he regains real manhood and, to use the language of the *Symposium*, essentially becomes whole and circular once more. However, the original nature turns out to be a monstrous growth, and the nomoi that disfigure men also keep them from giantism. To read the *Symposium* back onto the *Birds*: Peisetaerus becomes a circle-man, but then he only stands in need of surgery again.

2.5. Law and Civil Religion Reconsidered

Law in Aristophanes' speech thus presents itself as a layered, highly nuanced problem to which Greek religion is intimately related. By relegating the gods to the realm of nomos, both the *Symposium* speech and the comedies use the nomos–physis dichotomy in a way (initially) similar to the way the dichotomy was used by various contemporary sophists.³² Some critics have

³² On the nomos–physis distinction generally, its origin in pre-Socratic thought and influence on Greek philosophy, and its relation to religious belief, see H. D. Rankin, *Sophists, Socratics and Cynics*, pp. 112–15, 129–31; W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists*, pp. 55–134, 226–34; G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, pp. 111–130. Some readers may be surprised at this claim of rapprochement between Old Comedy and sophistic thought. It is possible to read the comedies (as so many of the older critics did) as simply upholding a conservative stance against modern upstarts such as Socrates, Euripides, etc., without seeing that the plays that castigate newfangledness typically do so by “fighting fire with fire,” portraying protagonists (and sometimes the “author” in cameo appearances) as battling the forces of political, social, and sophistic modernism by means of a sophistic rhetoric, a political cynicism, and a vanguardism very similar to those that characterize the forces of evil. For example, Dicaeopolis borrows (literally) disguises and sophisms from Euripides' highly rhetorical protagonists in order to vindicate a peaceful, agrarian, nonurban way of life in which Euripides and sophistry have no place (*Acharnians*, 383–479). Socrates *qua* sophist

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explained away Aristophanes' impious treatment of the gods in his comedies as a carnival convention or as otherwise a requirement of his genre.³³ It can even be argued that the obscenity to which Aristophanes indiscriminately subjects every victim, both human and divine, bolsters a low, traditional piety because bodily eruptions puncture the pretensions of those who in their hubris would forget the rooted, earthy side of man.³⁴ However, Aristophanes' ability to orchestrate the drama of the *reductio ad absurdum* of human desires implies a critical distance from his subject matter that is not simply identical to the peasant's rueful jesting about his human and divine masters. The satirist knew the humanistic arguments well enough to construct intricate jokes and stunning reversals of expectation out of them. It would detract from his achievement and depreciate the subtlety of the humor not to acknowledge his detailed grasp of humanist and sophistic thought. It could be argued that the poet merely played with ideas, but then we would have to ask what "play" means when it includes such deep understanding. Although it is therefore doubtful that his thought was immune to such influences, it is nevertheless true that the plays usually "reject" modernism, at least in tongue-in-cheek fashion, ostensibly in favor of the tradition.³⁵ An ambivalent or bilevel stance can thus be seen in the plays. This is no less true of the *Symposium* speech. The pious sermonizing that Plato writes for him is difficult to reconcile with the intentional coarseness of his characterization of the gods in the myth. For example, the same speech that begins with sacrifices and altars (189c 5–8) and ends with *eusebeia* and singing hymns (193d 4–5, a 8, c 8–d 1) in the middle deconstructs

and scientist is burnt out and driven away at the end of *Clouds*, a play in which the chorus lays claim, on the playwright's behalf, to avant-garde, sophisticated poetic and dramatic techniques (518–62). Aristophanes' contemporary and rival, the comic poet Cratinus, had no illusions about Aristophanes' sophistic predilections, coining a word that combined the name of Aristophanes with that of (his alleged artistic and moral archfoe) Euripides: "euripidaristophanize" (fragment 307 KA; cf. Sommerstein, ed., *Acharnians*, p. 6). A major piece of evidence adduced by critics (e.g., Gomme, "Aristophanes and Politics" and W. G. Forrest, "Aristophanes' *Acharnians*") in favor of the argument that no important political and social thought can be found in Aristophanic comedy, is in fact this close relationship between sophistic modernism and Aristophanes. Such rapprochement with sophistry defeats the expectation of finding, in Aristophanes, a conservative social critic delivering "serious messages." However, if this initial expectation was a straw man, then the possibility remains that important thought can emerge from the plays in other ways.

³³ For example, Dover, ed., *Aristophanes. Frogs*, 41; J. C. Carrière, *Le carnaval et la politique*, pp. 51–55.

³⁴ S. Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, pp. 125–26.

³⁵ "Ostensibly": e.g., *inter alia*, in *Frogs*, Aeschylus rather than Euripides is chosen to save the city; in *Clouds*, Socrates' think tank is burned down. See also Section 1.5.

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those sacrifices (190c 4–5) and shows the Olympians to be, at best, worthy of fear (193a 3–4).

Only among certain of the sophists are positions found that shed light on this alliance between the cynical and the pious. Aristophanes' satire against sophists is not monolithic; for example, he turns Socrates into a sophist in *Clouds* and makes him a scapegoat with specific reference to the religious question.³⁶ Yet Socrates' new nature gods, the clouds, who by all rights should be as specious as the way of life that discovered them, eventually turn against the sophist who introduced them into the city, styling themselves as protectresses of the traditional pantheon; and they take up the playwright's own cause with the judges.³⁷ Aristophanes reserves the right to select from the sophistic menu what items seem good to him. Similarly, the birds declare war on the gods, yet they also single out for blame published atheists such as Prodicus and Diagoras.³⁸ These paradoxes disappear if Aristophanes' stance is understood to be dual: both that man is in dire need of gods and that gods, at least as described by the poets, do not exist. Such a position is not self-contradictory; traditional piety may be ignorant of the true origin of its gods in the psyche alone, while simultaneously, the self-proclaimed atheists are oblivious to the enormous need that causes the psyche to create gods. The latter group serve no good purpose by undermining the society's religion. Vanity would compel the playwright to include sophistic arguments in his dramas in sufficient abundance to ensure that none of the wise mistook him for a pious simpleton.³⁹

As we shall argue, Aristophanes' stance on law and the gods is considerably subtler than are most extant fragments of sophistic thought on the same topic. We have already seen in the *Birds*, for example, a *reductio ad absurdum* of the humanist hope. But just as we could not feel the full force of that *reductio* without first entertaining the humanist position, so it is not possible adequately to grasp the problem of law in Aristophanes' speech without taking a first approximation from the comparable stances

³⁶ *Clouds*, 1506–9.

³⁷ 1452–64, 1115–30.

³⁸ *Birds*, 688–92, 1073–4.

³⁹ It should be clear that nothing in the evidence considered here precludes either Aristophanes' or Plato's acceptance of a supreme being or divine intelligence on other grounds. In the case of Plato, in particular, much evidence could be adduced from the dialogues in favor of such a conclusion. What the evidence does suggest, however, is that Aristophanes rejected, on intellectual grounds, the gods of story, who were also, crucially, the civic gods. Plato preserves this skeptical aspect of Aristophanes' thought. See also W. R. Newell, *Ruling Passion*, pp. 73–4, 43–57.

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of the sophistic fragments on the place of religion in law. These thinkers had concluded that Greek religion was mainly or merely "civil"; that is, it had the aim of political utility rather than truth about the divine and the cosmos. Whatever the value of their conclusion, their influence was profound, and aspects of Aristophanes' thought betray evidence of that influence. For example, a fragment of a satyr play, *Sisyphus*, attributed to Critias, states that nature was originally brutish and violent and that law was therefore invented by men, but all law was and is by convention only. Law, the passage continues, prevented people from doing violence only in public view; in secret they could still do as they liked. Therefore someone of clever intellect invented fear of the gods to keep potential wrongdoers in line even when no witnesses were present. The use of the gods, then, is to plug a specific gap in criminal psychology which the law is otherwise unable to reach. The gods are invisible presences, witnesses at every human event.⁴⁰ Antiphon the sophist also pointed out the implications of this gap: "A man would then behave in accordance with justice, if he should observe the major laws when with witnesses, but when he is apart from witnesses, observe the things of nature." Antiphon defines this hypocrisy as justice because, in his understanding, as we saw also in Critias' statement, law is completely conventional in character: "justice is: not transgressing the customs of whatever city one happens to be a citizen in."⁴¹ This conventionalism naturally gives rise to hypocrisy, and it is hypocrisy that the gods function crucially to combat. The gods in this sense are the most effective *nomos* of all: they are the *nomos* to save all *nomoi*. That gods are vital for this function adds no credence to

⁴⁰ Fragment 25 DK; Rankin, *Sophists, Socratics and Cynics*, p. 73; Guthrie, *The Sophists*, p. 243–4. Critias lived ca. 460–403 B.C., was a student of Socrates, uncle of Plato, and one of the Thirty Tyrants in the oligarchic coup of 404–403. The fragment is sometimes attributed to Euripides (e.g., H. Yunis, "The Debate on Undetected Crime and an Undetected Fragment from Euripides' *Sisyphus*"). Because only a fragment is extant, there is no way of investigating whether this view represents the author's own view: satyr plays were sometimes "satiric," and the possibility remains open that Critias (or Euripides) was parodying the philosophy of another thinker. Even parody presupposes the broad currency of such a view, however, as the audience would have had to be familiar enough with such arguments to recognize them in a play, regardless of whether the arguments belonged to Critias or to some other intellectual. Certainly Critias' known political violence in the oligarchic coup does nothing to dispel the impression of disrespect for convention and for the gods. For speculation and debate about why Critias presented this material in the way he did, see Guthrie, *The Sophists*, p. 243, note 3, with text. Compare Plato's portrait of Critias rationalizing the legend of Phaethon in *Timaeus*, 22c1–d3.

⁴¹ Fragment 44 DK.

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their ultimate existence. On the contrary, because this necessity alone is a sufficient explanation of why they were invented, it lends weight to the opposite conclusion. No less an authority than Aristotle would later arrive at the same conclusion about this strict tie between the Greek gods and the law. In the following passage, he adds an important distinction between cosmic and anthropomorphic gods, a distinction that we have already observed both in Plato's *Aristophanes* and in the *Aristophanes* of the plays:

It is handed down from the very early ancients in the form of myth that these [planets] are gods and that the divine embraces the whole of nature. But the rest was added mythically with a view to the persuasion of the many, and with a view to utility for the laws and for expediency; for they say that [gods] are anthropomorphic [*anthropoideis*] and like some of the animals. . . . If one separated these, taking only the first, viz. that they thought primary substances to be gods, he would deem that they spoke divinely. . . .⁴²

Primary substances here mean the planets. Considered strictly from this legal and utilitarian point of view, anthropomorphic gods are more effective at upholding the law than are Sun, Moon, and Earth. The heavenly bodies are too remote to care very much about human doings. Perfect in themselves, needing nothing, never leaving their courses, they do not come down to interfere in human affairs. With the exception of the Earth, they are detached. The same self-sufficiency that made them seem divine proves to be a drawback. Man needs more active, participant gods to enforce the law. In our experience only human beings care what other human beings do; therefore gods who care must be humanoid. The way to ensure that they care enough is to make them passionate, erotic, susceptible to the same beauties that people are moved by, and in competition for the same goods people seek. Only then will a god feel slighted when a mortal surreptitiously breaks one of "his" commandments. Only then will mortals refrain from breaking the commandments even when they could get away with it. Hence, from the standpoint of crass utility, the erotic weakness of the Olympians is also their strength.

⁴² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 12.8.19–20, 1074b 1–10; cf. *Politics* 1.2.7, 1252b 24–7; cf. Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, p. 121, note 7.

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A further drawback of the cosmic deities, who do not exact justice but who do inspire the circle-people to attempt to emulate or rival them, is that their absolute spherical perfection points up the relative deficiencies in natural man, no matter how round and whole he may be. In the discussion of the circle-people's gait or motus, Plato's Aristophanes indicates that they had two separate means of locomotion: upright, as in the present day (190a 4–5), and rolling or revolving, like acrobats turning cartwheels, with their eight limbs as spokes (190a 6–7). Only this revolving motus is said to resemble their parents, the spheres, in the same way that their roundness does (190b 3–5). The upright motus, on the other hand, suggests instead a kinship with the latter-day, maimed humanity (190d 4–6). Nor are the circle-people, although approximately circular, quite congruent at every point as spheres are: their heads are upright, and their feet point down to Earth. Their eight appendages are growths that mar their spherical perfection. Like the giants, they are at an intermediate stage between the all too human, with their feet on the ground, and divinity. Their project of ascent into the sky is a way of overcoming their human deficiency in an attempt to become like their parents. They must become all one thing or all the other, totally divine or totally human.

The cosmic gods alone would have been insufficient to stop the gigantic enterprise had the Olympians not come to their aid. The reader may infer that worship of the stars does not give the worshippers an adequate formation. Their *eidōs* is left too close to and too far from perfection. The formation that nature gods give is a perfection in strength, robustness (190b 5), not morals. To become perfect in strength, omnipotent in their spheres like the Sun and Moon, is impossible for earthbound creatures. Boundedness or weakness implies the need for a different kind of formation: a formation in morals, which only the watchful, concerned Olympians can provide.

2.6. Synoecism and the Emergence of Law

In the lines following the failed anabasis, details emerge about the circle-people's relation to the Earth that shed a less flattering light on the original nature. No love or sexuality existed back then. All people were born out of the earth mother in whom, like insects (191c 1–2), they also generated and fathered offspring (191b 7–c 1). Aristophanes pretends that genitalia originally had no directedness toward one another, but had to be turned

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round to the front in order that sexuality might begin (191b 5–c 8). Because the men sow in their own mother, there is enough here to support the interpretation that, underneath his skein of biological unlikelihoods, Aristophanes is suggesting that natural man propagated himself by means of incest. The reading is worth exploring because it parallels the picture of man's loveless origins and incest painted in Rousseau's conjectural prehistory of humankind:

What! were men born of the earth before that time? Did generation succeed upon generation without union between the sexes. . . ? No, there were families, but there were no Nations . . . *there were marriages but there was no love*. Each family was self-sufficient and propagated itself from its own stock alone. Children born of the same parents grew up together . . . the distinction between the sexes appeared with age, natural inclinations sufficed to unite them, *instinct took the place of passion, habit took the place of predilection*, people became husband and wife without having ceased to be brother and sister.⁴³

Aristophanes' autochthony seems to mean the same thing: not that people actually sprang from the earth, but that they might as well have for all that their reproductive life meant to them spiritually. Eros did not exist, if by eros is meant love, or the passionate longing to live together with another person, as Aristophanes conceives it (192e 1–2). The word *eros* does not occur in the myth until after the surgery (at 191d 1).⁴⁴ Aristophanes' account of the unerotic origins is more radical or subhuman than Rousseau's, however, if the earth mother in whom the circle-men sow is a cipher for the human mother of the clan. On this reading, the siblings would be more attracted to their mother than to one another. Instinctual self-love and love of one's own would direct each toward his or her own origins, the nourishing source from which all life sprang – all life, that is, in their narrow experience, limited to one brood.⁴⁵

The original *nomos* that tamed the circle-people (presumably the first law) thus happened to coincide with the end of incest. Rousseau, for his part, sees the abolition of incest and the origin of exogamy in the

⁴³ Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, Chapter 9, p. 278 (emphasis added). See also J. Redfield's caution against confusing such speculative prehistory with history, "Notes on the Greek Wedding," pp. 183–85.

⁴⁴ See the discussion in Section 2.7.

⁴⁵ Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, p. 277–8.

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need to establish bonds between families, for example, in the giving and receiving of brides, as the distant beginnings of political life.⁴⁶ A comparison with Aristotle's *Politics* shows that both the *Symposium* speech and the *Politics* anticipate Rousseau in regard to the centrality of incest laws; furthermore the *Politics* makes it possible to pinpoint the stage at which *nomos* emerges for the first time. In the evolution of the polis, *nomos* will be seen to emerge at the juncture between household and village, that is, when several households join together to form a village, a kind of presyn-oecism or prefiguration of the final synoecism of villages joining to form the polis.⁴⁷ Although Aristotle's language is circumspect, his account of the household stage is far removed from pastoral simplicity and goodness, as is clear from his reference to the cyclops,⁴⁸ another giant in Greek myth like the Homeric, Hesiodic, and Pindaric giants on which the circle-people were modeled. To describe *homo domesticus*, Aristotle alludes to the original Homeric description of the cyclopes who, isolated in their households, were said to be "lawless" (*athemistoi*).⁴⁹ Later in the same chapter, Aristotle states that, without law, man is the worst animal of all. Man is the most unholy and savage, and "the worst (of animals) concerning sex and food" (*Politics*, 1.2.16, 1253a 35–7). Food refers to the cannibalism practiced by the

⁴⁶ Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, p. 277, note on p. 278.

⁴⁷ *Politics*, 1.2.5–7, 1252b 15–22. The disparate households that come together might be all blood kin proliferating from an original, single household (cf. 1252b 18, *homogalaktas*, with note 54 in this chapter).

⁴⁸ *Politics*, 1.2.7, 1252b 20–24.

⁴⁹ *Odyssey*, 9.106. See Sections 1.5 and 2.4. However, does "lawless" mean they were transgressors of (a not-yet-promulgated) law? Or that they were innocent of law, and e.g., Polyphemus' cannibalism must be forgiven because it was not yet illegal (for him)? To complicate matters, each *chef de famille* lords it over his wives and children, "laying down the law" or "divine decree" (*themistevai*, 114; Aristotle cites this line, not line 106 at *Politics*, 1252b 22–3). Either line 114 contradicts line 106, and the cyclopes really do have laws (but see Aristotle's interpretation below), or else the "laws" in inverted commas that the cyclopes privately lay down actually transgress the true laws that must be established if the isolated households are ever to bond together to form a village. S. Benardete, *The Bow and the Lyre*, p. 67, cites the *Odyssey*, 17.363, for a Homeric use of *athemistoi* to mean transgression of law as opposed to innocence of law, although Benardete ultimately favors the latter reading (p. 74). Transgression, however, is likely to be the civilized person's description of Polyphemus' private "legislation" of cannibalism. Transgression would also describe the incest Aristotle alludes to later in the chapter (1.2.16, 1253a 35–7). Elsewhere, in a passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* on legislative neglect, Aristotle cites the same Homeric line, glossing his own phrase "each lives as he wishes" to mean "cyclopicly laying down the law" (*kuklopikos themisteuon*, 10.9.13, 1180a 29). In other words, cyclopic legislation means no law at all restricts any man's will; each is effectually lawless. This gloss is evidence that Aristotle interpreted the Homeric passage to mean that the cyclopes did not have true laws.

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lawless cyclops Polyphemus. The sexual savagery almost certainly refers to incest.⁵⁰ Aristotle, like Rousseau, is engaged in a thought experiment about the endogamy that must have been practiced when the household was on its own. For Rousseau, and apparently for Aristotle, the original law prohibiting endogamy was actually a law commanding exogamy; the law resulted not from revulsion at incest but from the political or prepolitical necessity of making each member-household of the new village equally interdependent on the other member-households.⁵¹ Any household that had not given a daughter but continued to propagate itself endogamously was reaping the material benefits of village life while remaining unbonded, self-sufficient, and proof against outside control. The law of exogamy is the law that enables the households to come together on a relatively equal footing.⁵² The *Symposium* speech suggests incest in the original condition of the circle-people in order to show their natural, apolitical state before the emergence of law.⁵³

⁵⁰ Compare 8.4.3, 1338b 19–24, *anthropophagia*. Cannibalism is explicitly included under “bestiality” (*theriotes, theriodes*) in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle asserts that bestiality is characteristic of uncivilized barbarians, particularly some races of remote barbarians who are naturally irrational and live by sensation alone (7.1.1–3, 1145a 15–35; 7.6.6, 1149a 9–15). The archetypal Sicilian tyrant Phalaris is cited as (an ostensibly civilized man who returns to?) living in such a bestial state, desiring to eat a child or desiring strange (*atopos*) sexual pleasure. Here again, the language of sexual description is too circumspect to admit precision. However, homosexuality is excluded from under the heading of bestiality, being instead a “sickness” (7.5.3, 1148b 27–30), and rape is a less likely candidate. Incest, a remaining possibility, is characteristic of tyrants in Greek thought generally (e.g., Plato, *Republic*, Book 9, 571c 10–d 2; Herodotus, 6.107; *Oedipus Tyrannus* passim), and the attribution of incest to tyrants leads one to wonder about the sexual transgressions of the heads of early households (cyclopean men), whom Aristotle euphemistically calls “kings” (*Politicus* 1.2.5, 1252b 19–27).

⁵¹ Rousseau’s note hastens to reassure the reader that “the law that abolished [incest] is not less sacred for being a human institution. Those who view it solely in terms of the bond it established between families fail to see it in its most important aspect. In view of the intimacy between the sexes that inevitably attends upon domestic life, the moment such a sacred law ceased to speak to the heart and to awe the senses, *men would cease to be upright*, and the most frightful morals would soon cause the destruction of mankind” (*Essay on the Origin of Languages*, p. 278, emphasis added).

⁵² “Relatively equal”: this would be true even if one household were forcing its hegemony on several other households. So long as the ruling house allowed intermarriage, the other households could at least hope for a future share of rule through a marriage alliance.

⁵³ For another Platonic dialogue’s account of synoecism and the emergence of law, in which once again the ambiguity occurs between household “laws” (*nomoi*) and the laws passed after the “origin of legislation” (note 49 in this chapter), see *Laws*, Book 3, 681a 7–d 5. After the rise of lawgivers to sort through the various household *nomoi*, the latter are renamed *nomima* and the ones chosen for the new political body are the *nomoi*. Incest is not mentioned in this context. However, see also Dover, “Eros and Nomos,” pp. 35–6, for the naturalness of incest in the

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The content of the first law is of crucial importance for Aristophanes' speech: was it exogamy, as in Aristotle and Rousseau, or some other commandment or prohibition? The circle-people's more overt transgression was their anabasis into the sky to attack the gods. Here it is important to note that the only gods mentioned thus far in the myth are the nature gods: Sun, Moon, and Earth. It would be in keeping with the barbarous or uncivilized nature of the circle-people⁵⁴ if the Olympians implicitly do not exist for them yet. In one Greek view, only fully human or civilized men have anthropomorphic or civilized gods. For the Olympians to be created by humans at a certain point in history, that is, when the need for them arose, would also be in keeping with the sophistic fragments quoted in Section 2.5. The gods whom the circle-people attack may well be the nature gods. Because the circle-people already have contact with the Earth mother, it is principally the Sun, father of the males, who is under attack. The androgynes are also said to have risen up against their parent, the Moon, but Aristophanes' preoccupation with maleness and manliness implies that the former attack is the one that matters to him. The males' urges are Oedipal, as they sow in their mother and they intend to vanquish their father, or to take their father's place, in a kind of patricide. With the quashing of the rebellion, the mother-son incest is also brought to an end. Exogamy, then, and the prohibition against patricide constitute two aspects of the first law in the *Symposium* speech.

This first crime calls the anthropomorphic gods into existence to ensure that it is never attempted again. The advent of Zeus and the Olympians takes place simultaneously with the need to punish the circle-people. As previously mentioned, the joke is that upright, bipedal gods cut the circle-people in half in order to make them upright and bipedal, that is, in order to make them look like the Olympians. This is a comical account of the civilizing changes that take place in humans who create and then worship humanoid gods. To demonstrate just one more modern parallel: the similarities between Aristophanes' myth and Freud's account of the origin of theism are striking. Before the first murder, Freud theorizes that the clan worshipped an animal deity, a nature god who proved insufficient to prevent

Laws. Only *nomos* or *pheme*, report or reputation, is responsible for the fact that the desire for incest never "enters the heads of most people" (*Laws*, Book 8, 838b 4–d 1). Dover points out that Plato's Athenian Stranger wishes to make homosexuality equally unthinkable.

⁵⁴ Herodotus notes that the gods of the barbarians are not anthropomorphic; see especially 1.131. for the Persian worship of nature, and 2.24 for the Sun as a god. *Pace* the *Birds*, 1572–3, cited above, see *Peace*, 406–13.

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the murder, just as the circle-people's cosmic gods were insufficient.⁵⁵ The rebellion in Freud is by brothers who band together to kill their oppressive father. This act calls an anthropomorphic god into existence: the emotional reaction to their deed causes the brothers to deify the dead man or make him into a totem.⁵⁶ The new deity presides over a new law, the first law: Thou shalt not kill. Freud's god springs into being in the minds of the brothers when, in revulsion, they lay down a law on themselves not to kill again. Similarly, in the *Symposium* speech, the Olympians spring into being in answer to the first crime, which likewise includes patricide.

Would the preceding interpretation of the *Symposium* speech, by comparing the speech to modern accounts of Rousseau and Freud, violate our earlier, key contention about its feigned naturalism, viz., that the *Symposium* speech is a phenomenology, not a genealogy? Both the *Symposium* speech and the modern accounts purport to take place in the remote past, before civic accretions had effaced natural man, that is, back in "nature." This chronological pretension is not quite literal, however, because even modern accounts such as Rousseau's state of nature, which claims to isolate important steps on the climb to civilization, have the character of thought experiments about the present rather than reports of unique events in the past.⁵⁷ The origin of nomos out of patricidal rivalry in Freud (or the need for exogamy in Rousseau) is posited as occurring at many different times and places. This is even more the case with ancient thought: to reconstruct the *Symposium's* world view, the reader must project himself or herself back to a time when there was no supposition of a one-world system.⁵⁸ If the marooned descendants of shipwrecked families should ever lose their cultural formation, these would be the mechanisms by which they would regain it, at least in its rudiments. The satirical point behind "starting over" in *Birds* is that the nomoi in question are not optional: they keep coming back like a stone thrown straight up. Similarly, the *Symposium* myth is an insight into human nature, not history. This is the sense in which the myth is a

⁵⁵ S. Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, pp. 22–3 (Chapter 4, Paragraphs 6–8). Contrast the animal deities paired instead with the Olympians in the *Metaphysics* quotation, Section 2.5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 41–2 (Chapter 8, Paragraph 4).

⁵⁷ To cite a related example, heads of state still exist in the state of nature in regard to one another (and in regard to their subjects) in Hobbes; see *Leviathan*, Chapter 13, pp. 89–90.

⁵⁸ *Laws*, Book 3, 680d 6–681d 5 deals with the origin of nomos (although again, incest and patricide are not mentioned in the immediate context). The origin of nomos is posited as repeating itself each time a natural disaster, such as a flood, destroys the former civilization, returning humankind (again and again in a cyclical process) to their pristine state (cf. 677a 1–680d 6).

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phenomenology, not a true genealogy. The past-historic tense is used in part because, if we are discussing the question in a civilized manner, then the advent of *nomos* (for us) must have taken place in the past. *Relative* chronology is important for a given community insofar as the advent of *nomos* marks a decisive break between before and after. Again, nothing prevents a particular, isolated community from losing its cultural formation at some point in its future. The assumption is that human nature somehow stays the same underneath the laws imposed on it at the same time as those laws make the human being experience that nature in ways so radically different that he or she might as well have been cut in half.

2.7. Prepolitical Eros?

What motivates the circle-people's anabasis? In the supplementary accounts that we have used to unlock the Oedipal aspects of the *Symposium* speech, the polis (or rather its prefiguration, the village) has emerged as a response to violence, in the patricidal account; or, in the exogamy account, the exchange of brides has functioned as a security against violence or domination to permit the synoecism to take place. Both motives are defensive. Although Aristotle supplies a positive human good motivating synoecism (to meet nondaily needs), no positive political motive has yet emerged in the *Symposium* speech. In Chapter 1, we saw that bare survival motivated the initial polis activity in the speech (Section 1.1). But what about the prepolis activity, the anabasis into the heavens, which seems so intimately bound up with the later political activity of the halves? It is surely significant that Plato's Aristophanes never calls the circle-people's motive *eros*. Eros is explicitly and resolutely reserved for the human being under *nomos*. It was stated in Section 2.6 that the original males' urges are Oedipal, as they sow in their mother and they intend to vanquish their father or to take their father's place. Their violent desire to rise, like their incest, is in keeping with Aristophanes' fundamental principle of *eros*: like desires like (*homoion*, 192a 5; or "that which is akin," *sungenes*, b 5). Like wishes to join with its like, hoping to become part of it again (as perhaps they hope to do with their mother) or to *become* it (as they hope to do with the father). Like the boys who are friendly to politicians later in the speech (191e 6–192a 7), the circle-men wish to rival their elders, to become equals, or even become superior. Their desire is directed half toward their objects of admiration and half toward themselves, or toward a mental image of themselves as they hope to be.

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Is this violent admiration – loving a more grandiose version of oneself – an example of eros? Later in the dialogue, Socrates or Diotima will indeed advocate honorable political ambition (*philotimia*) as a form of eros (e.g., 208c 1–e 1). The circle-men’s abortive struggle to achieve greatness is more in keeping with a dark side to such erotic ambition than it is with the ostensible thrust of Aristophanes’ speech: the homely search for one’s other half. However, both the author who brought us Peisetaerus and the character in Plato’s dialogue who dreamed up the circle-people seem to recognize the existence, if not the goodness, of a violent, status-seeking desire. Aristophanes’ resistance to this kind of desire may explain why the word *eros* is not mentioned in his myth prior to the artifice of splitting. But the character of his resistance needs to be examined. Did Plato in his intellectual portrait of Aristophanes neglect or suppress the *libido dominandi* that figured so largely in *Birds*? Or did Plato intend to express some meaning by making Aristophanes pointedly neglect or suppress all specifically erotic reference to this original, violent desire? The circle-people clearly feel a desire or else they would not struggle to attain anything. Are all desires erotic, if intense enough? Aristophanes, in *Birds*, associates Peisetaerus’ cosmic ambition and winged ascent with *eros*, both word and concept, in no uncertain terms, and in the other plays, too, he divides eros into both pacific and status-seeking kinds, among others.⁵⁹ Likewise, in the *Symposium* speech, if we seek the concept rather than the word, it would be easy to interpret the circle-people’s desire as eros.⁶⁰ Nomos invents one kind of eros in man, but there is a raw material on which nomos operates: a more primitive desire that resembles eros. This *Ur-eros* belongs to the original nature of the circle-people, and it arises from their lack of perfection, their imperfect sphericity, that is, like eros later in the speech, it is a need or lack. Likewise, the explicitly denoted *eros* between halves that nomos invents seems to point back to the *Ur-eros* as its ultimate ground. As every undergraduate points out, if the halves could reunite into circle-people again, their desire would only be redirected to the heavens once more.

In modern terminology, the circle-people feel a kind of *amour propre* because they envy those higher than themselves and wish to improve their

⁵⁹ See, e.g., *Birds*, 1737, and Section 7.5 of this book. “Pacific”: see Section 1.5.

⁶⁰ For the more common view that no eros exists in the myth until after the surgical splitting, see A. Bloom, *Love and Friendship*, p. 483.

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own status.⁶¹ Aristophanes insists that such a feeling is part of the natural state. This "political" eros would thus have to be called "prepolitical," even if such desire for self-aggrandizement turned out to be a major motivating factor behind political synoecism. Whereas Rousseau posited only a mild sex instinct in the natural state, viewing invidious comparisons and their resultant bloodshed to be creations of society, Aristophanes reverses these two: the murderous or violent struggle is part of nature long before society and society's nomos have even created (specifically) *sexual* desire. In this way his view of the natural state is more Hobbesian than Rousseauan. The ugliness of the circle-people, as well as the insectile analogy, makes Aristophanes' second round of assurances that the spheroid nature was human nature (191d 1, 3, 192e 9, 193c 5, d 4) increasingly suspect. Human nature is inhuman in Aristophanes' account. Only nomos confers on man the human *eidōs*. Civilization is a disfigurement, but the original nature it effaces is not pretty either, unless it were an austere beauty, as we admire a shark for its symmetry or purity of function. Likewise, in the plays, the hopelessness and sheer wrongheadedness of going back to nature was implicit in the opening lines of *Birds*, in the idiom used by the companions to describe their plan of finding the birds: "going to the buzzards" (28), a piece of graveyard humor as the English equivalent is "going to hell." To get back to nature, to find the birds, you have to become the carrion that birds pick in Homer (e.g., *Iliad*, 1.4–5), that is, you have to die. Carrion is nature. Killing and being killed are nature. Tyrannizing over others until a stronger strikes you down in your turn is nature for Aristophanes.⁶²

If the circle-people's violent desire is to be properly interpreted as eros, then some motive would have to be supplied to explain why Plato's Aristophanes, unlike the real Aristophanes, would not explicitly acknowledge both the status-seeking and the pacific desires as eros. The brutal view of nature in both Aristophanes might supply such a motive: if Plato does indeed intend for his Aristophanes to see danger or folly in the failed attempt of natural man to aggrandize himself, then Plato's Aristophanes would have a reason to reject nature as a standard for politics and morality. Rejecting

⁶¹ Compare Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, pp. 151–7, 218, note 15.

⁶² For the sophistic parallels on this view of brute nature, see Guthrie, *The Sophists*, pp. 99–101. As we shall see, however, Aristophanes far outdistances the sophists in his view of the reciprocal relationship between nature and law.

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the standard of nature and embracing the standard of culture would entail a rhetorical burden to uphold culture and denounce or at least downplay nature or natural desires. Rhetorically, he might be expected not to make natural man attractive, if he understands natural man not to be a feasible moral or political alternative. If he felt that self-aggrandizement to the extent of desiring apotheosis remained a possibility of human longing, then he might be expected to attempt to counter that longing, (1) by showing the hubris of desiring apotheosis punished, and (2) by presenting a winsome picture of settling down with one's other half. To call both desires *eros* would undercut point (2) by showing the ugly or violent roots of the pacific passion that he particularly wishes to recommend. As it stands, the speech already goes rather far in the direction of showing the seamy underside of *eros*. But it remains possible to ignore the violent roots if the new *eros* is taken to be different in kind (rather than merely in degree) from the *Ur-eros*. Different in kind is, in fact, how most scholars have implicitly interpreted the newly created *eros*. In sum, if Aristophanes' rhetorical aim in the speech is to praise *eros* and there is nothing praiseworthy about the *Ur-eros*, then it follows that he would downplay its connection to the good or civilized *eros*.

In Chapter 1 we established that self-aggrandizement remains a danger, in the speech, because of the tendency of the "big men" in politics to vaunt the city and themselves. Paradoxically, the reconstitution of man's original, self-aggrandizing nature becomes possible in the most civilized, least "natural" state (in Aristophanes' sense): the polis. Only in the unnatural whole of the polis can leaders use the combined might of many to further their own aims, not excluding even self-apotheosis. In this account, each of the two end points in the civilizational progress – the isolated household and the polis – comports to its own particular sexual and erotic irregularities. The subpolitical, cyclopean, quasi-subhuman level of the solitary household with its lawlessness comports to incest. The fully civilized polis, by contrast, comports to homosexuality. Furthermore, because the non-sexual or presexual *eros*, that is, the *Ur-eros* or vertical *eros*, for apotheosis can return at the peak of civilization, each civilizational end point also comports to the dangerous desire for self-aggrandizement. *Homo domesticus* with the petty tyranny in which the eldest or strongest male rules as a god "divinely decreeing"⁶³ his will is figured in the circle-people's revolt against

⁶³ *Themistueon*; see note 49 of this chapter.

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their parent-gods, an attempt to deify themselves. *Homo politicus* likewise attempts to win immortal fame through his military and political policy, perhaps through tyranny or imperialism. This is why the political big men must be exhorted to be pious (193a 7–b 1). The ambition for political power is a civilized version of earlier humanity's desire to become the Sun.

2.8. The Natural Origins of Nomos

A key question about the emergence of law is the degree to which law should be considered an artificial construct that thwarts or changes nature (cf. the *Symposium* speech's cutting and sewing), and the degree to which law should be considered a natural outcome of natural needs. It is possible, for example, to imagine a feud between two isolated households (such as that between the Hatfields and the McCoys) ending with an insight into the mutual advantage to be gained by calling off the feud, for example, by intermarrying and establishing norms for mutual protection. On the other hand, if the patricidal scenario of Plato's Aristophanes and Freud is to be preferred, a related question is whether each member of the rebellious band of natural men independently conceives of the same law or whether both the law and its new anthropomorphic god are the invention of one member. The *Symposium* myth and Freud's account each speak of the offenders as both acting and suffering in concert, leading one to wonder: who imposed and promulgated the original law?

Comparison with the comedies sheds light not only on the origin of eros in the *Symposium* speech but also on the origin of law in the speech. A synoecism, for example, is portrayed in the *Birds*: the birds who initially live dispersed in the fields and in the air are persuaded by Peisetaerus to live all together in one place, fortifying a city in the air, since the polis is the only mortal instrument by which a successful assault on the gods is possible. In the process of synoecism, as we have seen, nomos returned to haunt the natural life so ineluctably that nomos itself seemed a part of nature. It would be a mistake to assume, however, that nomos first arose as a way of restricting violence. Nomos reenters Cloudcuckootown as an instrument of tyranny, not as a guard against it. Law is an accessory to brute nature. On his path to power, Peisetaerus finds it useful to invent many nomoi in order to establish and consolidate his hegemony. For a while, his nomoi pass under

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color of “natural” *nomoi*, as when he initially uses birth or primogeniture to establish the birds’ claim to the crown: leadership naturally devolves on the eldest (467–82). Yet since the arriviste Peisetaerus will eventually lord it over the ancient society of birds, it follows that naturalness is just a pretext that people use when they want to impose a *nomos*. Natural law, from this perspective, is nothing but the advantage of whoever is intelligent enough to pretend that his law is natural. By the same token, however, every *nomos* is a disguised power play which, if stripped of its stately mask, would be revealed as naked *phusis*, a burgeoning selfish desire.⁶⁴ In this account *nomos* and nature are strictly intertwined. *Nomos* is nature pursued by other means. *Nomos* is a part of *human* nature because speech is one of humankind’s major weapons. Persuading people that they have suffered a wrong, convincing them of what ought to be done, threatening them with punishment if they disagree: humans would be unnatural if they did *not* use these ploys to get their way.

Yet *nomos* is also an agreement. Peisetaerus could never master the birds with brute force; they are on the verge of killing him when he delivers his first speech (337–8). The intellect takes up where muscle must leave off. Once again the viewpoint anticipates Hobbes.⁶⁵ Although he is a reconstituted natural man, Peisetaerus retains the civilized acquisition of rhetoric. After his initial lie that the birds’ former realm included “myself here, first of all” (468), the birds never again recall, until it is too late, that Man intends no good to birds (322–35, 361–74). At their peak of confidence they call themselves omniscient and omnipotent (1058–9). By the end Peisetaerus is roasting birds for a feast, allegedly because they rose up against the bird democracy (1583–5). Peisetaerus always takes what he wants justly. It is the birds’ own lust for power that undoes them; the laws and the new polity intended to serve their lust unforeseeably serve Peisetaerus’ too.⁶⁶ *Nomos* does not thwart nature but organizes the selfish individual natures into an aggregate of collective selfishness; it acts in accordance with nature. In this account, *nomos* arises out of the lust for power, the *libido dominandi*.

⁶⁴ Arrowsmith, “Aristophanes’ *Birds*,” p. 159.

⁶⁵ For Rousseau’s rejoinder, see *Second Discourse*, pp. 151–2. Contrast *Politics*, 1.2.16, 1253a 33–35 and note 49 in this chapter.

⁶⁶ Compare Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, p. 183.

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Freud, too, doubts that the first law was born from any insight into social need, such as staving off blood feuds and other destructive behavior.⁶⁷ Freud admits that the original commandment likely prohibited only the killing of the father-successor,⁶⁸ that is, the one brother who was able to lord it over the rest. Only the other brothers were bound by the first *nomos*. The new patriarch could kill whom he wished. In other words, the first *nomos* must have been an instrument of policy: not an insight into the overall good of the clan but an insight into what was needed to maintain his new power.⁶⁹ The failure of the rebellion in the *Symposium* also leaves open the possibility that *nomos* was an insight or policy belonging to the old patriarch or father, here figured as the Sun, to protect himself from his sons, as an alternative to filicide, and to achieve a power much greater than his size and age had previously granted him. Heretofore, only fear and reverence guarded the patriarch's position. Henceforth, law will be added to his arsenal. However that may be, Freud and the *Birds* are in broad agreement: *nomos* initially aided, rather than restricted, the tyrannical nature, the violent admiration of, and desire for, greatness.⁷⁰

To look closer at the *Birds*: just as the tyrant's nature leads him to impose *nomos* on his own community, so the imposition of *nomoi* on foreign nations, that is, imperialist adventures in the best Athenian tradition, also arises naturally out of the exigency of home rule. Peisetaerus must rid the city of all who present a challenge to his power. He therefore drives out, among others, the rebellious types: the types like himself. One of the humans from Athens to arrive at the new city is a rebellious young son. Like Euelpides and Peisetaerus, the young man uses the language of desire to express his yearnings for the naturalness of the bird laws: "I am desirous of your *nomoi*" (1345). By this point in the *reductio*, the mask has slipped to a large extent, and the boy's desire to get back to nature is patently tyrannical rather than pacific. The law of nature, usage of the birds, is that strangling and biting one's father is O.K. (1347–8; 757–9). The young man wishes to kill his father in order to "have it all" (1351–2) in terms of wealth and

⁶⁷ Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, pp. 41–2 (Chapter 8, Paragraph 4) with 40–41 (Paragraphs 2–3).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 41–2 (Chapter 8, Paragraph 4).

⁶⁹ As Freud writes earlier in *The Future of an Illusion*, even a tyrant would wish his subjects to obey one command: not to kill [him] (p. 15; Chapter 3, Paragraph 1).

⁷⁰ Shifting the original nomothesis to the father, however, changes the initial desire (which was to rise) into a desire to defend: see Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part 1, Chapter 11 (p. 70), for the erasure of the distinction between offense and defense.

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autonomy. The nakedness of his aggression, that is, his frank confession of purpose, in contrast to Peisetaerus' discretion, means that the boy is not too bright. Peisetaerus therefore suggests that he channel his aggressions in a manner useful to the city. Instead of harming his father, the boy is to join the army (1363–8). Because he is warlike, he is to go out and make war on Thrace (1368–9). Apparently it was not through mere perversity that Athens kept sending imperialist lackeys to try to take over Cloudcuckootown. The bad old empire was driven by the same necessities that govern the new one. Aristophanes implies that the dynamic of expansion is merely an entailment of the need to consolidate power internally.

The desire of the rebellious son yields a closer look at the origins of *nomos* in the *Symposium*. Rebellion against the father was also the crime of the circle-men when they attempted to scale the heavens to attack their father, the Sun. The *Symposium* speech and *Birds* both return to the fundamental law against patricide, a combination of Honor thy father and Thou shalt not kill. This prohibition, taken together with the incest law, may be said to constitute the minimum basis on which a city is founded. Birds, who do not form cities, observe only the law of the stronger, which entails father-beating. Peisetaerus conspicuously fails to uphold the bird law: he admonishes the boy not to harm his father and sends him far away from Attica where he will have no opportunity to do so. If humans are going to be accepted into the new city, as apparently they will be accepted (1313–14), a less-than-natural *nomos* must prevail.

The bird law seems savage by comparison with the human law. Interestingly, however, the opposite is the case. Peisetaerus initially commends the boy's aggression: chicks who peck their father are considered manly by the birds (1349–50). But then he informs him of a corollary bird *nomos*: that the young stork, having left the nest, returns and nourishes his father (1353–7), that is, their roles are reversed. Birds are unreflective and guilt free about their power struggle. If the father bird is forcibly deposed by his younger, stronger son, neither bird feels guilty, or embarrassed, about the new power relation; life goes on. The facts that a human son has difficulty bringing himself to strike his father and that, once having committed the deed, has more difficulty yet turning around and caring for his father, are revealing of human as opposed to bird nature. Birds do not feel the primitive awe and reverence for the father figure. It was that admiration or wonder that first drove the circle-men to worship the Sun. Birds recognize order of rank, but they do not stand in awe of it: superiority is a fact and no

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more. Human self-consciousness, by contrast, brings with it desires that go beyond the need to sustain life. Mere survival value, therefore, would not be a sufficient causal explanation for the synoecism. The "prepolitical" desire for self-aggrandizement would constitute the more remote, necessary cause motivating synoecism, whether offensively, if one household attempted to impose its hegemony on other households, or defensively, if several households banded together to prevent such an attempt.

That the human being is an aspiring animal also emerges from the argument in *Clouds*, by which Strepsiades gets the better of his son during their debate over father-beating. Pheidippides, influenced by Socrates' physiology, had anticipated the plot of *Birds* by adducing the example of roosters and other beasts, who chastise their fathers. "How do they differ from us, except that they don't write decrees?" (1427–9). But politics is precisely the difference. Strepsiades' simple retort: "So since you imitate roosters in everything, why don't you eat dung and sleep on a perch?" (1430–1) reduces Pheidippides to a feeble appeal to Socrates' authority (1432). There can be no rebuttal because man clearly refuses to live the lowly life of birds. The human animal has aspirations; he senses his baseness and he looks up to greatness. He makes something of himself in the barest sense of "making up" decrees. Peisetaerus would never have been content with the original plan of communing with the birds. The recognition of greatness is what caused primitive man to worship the planets as his deities in the first place. However, the same desire for greatness causes him to emulate the nature gods and to rival his own father.

2.9. The Reciprocity of Eros and Law

How natural, then, is eros? The *Ur-eros* cannot have been invented by *nomos* if the advent of the Olympians represents the first *nomos*. It could be argued that primitive admiration is not entirely free from *nomos* because belief that the stars are gods is itself a *nomos*. The passivity of the nature gods, however, argues that whatever formation they gave merely enhanced, but did not change radically, the primitive feelings of natural man. The nature gods are only objects of desire, whereas the Olympians are both objects and agents. On this reading, then, there is a place for nature in Aristophanes' speech. Nature would not be, however, of such a kind as most of us erotically assume: not the life of newlyweds, as Euelpides hoped. The natural life would contain no weddings nor any affection of

the kind that would make weddings, but only a bestiality that wished to skip humanity on its way to divinity.⁷¹

In eros, is the phusis prior to the nomos? Two types of eros are present in the *Symposium* speech: an original “eros” untutored by nomos and a civilized eros that is a mixture of phusis and nomos. On this reading, nomos is secondary, arising out of the original, violent phusis, the desire to ascend into the heavens. This natural eros gives birth to nomos, but then nomos changes eros. Law and religion prune back the original, tyrannical eros for apotheosis, shaping it into a more humane eros, the desire to love and be loved. The taming or domestication of eros is evident in the several formulas that use cognates of the Greek words for house or household, *oikos* and *oikia*, in the speech (e.g., *Symposium*, 193d 2). Crucially, one of the principal emotions in the speech’s phenomenology of eros is yet another household cognate: the feeling of belonging, or being at home (*oikeiotes*, 192c 1), that is, a sense of proprietary rights and a contentment with what one has, rather than an urge to risk it by seeking to add to it.⁷² The possessiveness of eros in Aristophanes’ account is so emphatic that embracing comes to define eros itself.⁷³ However, full possession, that is, subsuming the spouse into oneself (or oneself into the spouse, to form a new entity), is not possible (191a 5–b 5), except with the help of Hephaestus (192c 4–e 9). As if in lieu of accomplishing this desire, copulation takes on a larger meaning

⁷¹ Describing the view of human nature in the *Birds*, Arrowsmith, “Aristophanes’ *Birds*,” cites the famous paragraphs of Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part 1, Chapter 11 (p. 70), containing the phrase “perpetuall [sic] and restlesse desire of Power after power.”

⁷² “Domestication”: but would not such domestication reverse the progress of civilization, going back to the household-level cyclopes (and circle-people)? Just as we saw in note 49 with Aristotle’s interpretation of “legislation” among the cyclopes, a semantic problem haunts the terminology of the “household.” What we have been calling the isolated household is of course no more equivalent to a member-household in a village than the cyclops’ “law” was the equivalent of the true laws that obtained after the synoecism. A lone, sovereign household cannot think of itself as a household, because “a” household is always one household among other households. The original household was all in all for its family members. In the new dispensation, the new or true households are subunits of a village. Formulaically, to use sexuality as shorthand: a distinction must be drawn between exogamous, heterosexual marriage under the dispensation of the village or the polis and the endogamous, incestuous, loveless heterosexuality of the isolated household not under any political dispensation. A tamed or domesticated human in the new sense is thus not the equivalent of *homo domesticus* (= the cyclops or circle-person, as we are using the term) but a subspecies of *homo politicus*.

⁷³ 191c 8–d 3. For the thesis that the embrace equals eros, cf. the repetitions of *sumpleko* (191a 7, b 3, c 4, e 8). Eros is distinctly not sex: Zeus devised sex as an anodyne for eros because the goal of eros, permanent bodily reunion or fusion, could never be achieved (191a 5–b 1, b 5–c 8).

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in the domesticated eros than it formerly had, and this is the significance of Zeus' "invention" of sexuality as an anodyne to allay the painful desire for reunification (191b 5–c 3). The higher goals that natural man once cherished, such as apotheosis, perfect satisfaction, and sovereign power, are all relegated to the gods. The new humans even attribute to the gods the new sexuality that has become so important to them, even though a real god, as opposed to a useful one, would not be sexual. The gods are thus related to human eros in two ways: as vicarious fulfillment and as the *nomos* that keeps humans from desiring to rise.

This lower fulfillment of human longing, finding an unnatural or quasi-natural wholeness in coupling, although far less dangerous than the original longing for sovereign power, retains a threatening aspect. If eros, albeit tamed by *nomos*, nevertheless still aims at reconstituting the natural man in each of us, then the fulfillment of eros would entail becoming lawless once more. That is, the imposition of *nomos* and the return to naturalness would in fact be two moments in a cyclical process.

How does the cycle renew itself? After the anabasis or attempted patricide, the new tyrant, armed with his anthropomorphic deity, radically excises the others' desire to rise up against himself, that is, he curbs their lust for power. Initially, only his subjects are under the restriction of the law, and the tyrant remains in a "state of nature" vis-à-vis his subjects. How does the new tyrant's eros come under the sway of *nomos*? At Athens and elsewhere, the tyranny was eventually abolished; all citizens were brought under the rule of law. Even if the process is cyclical, and tyranny always remains a potentiality, it is nevertheless true that potential tyrants like Peisetaerus do not grow up in a state of nature vis-à-vis their fellow citizens; they must first liberate themselves from *nomos*. Therefore it follows that, at some point in the cycle, *nomos* conquers all. How does *nomos* progress from being an adjunct to the selfish nature of one man to being the protector of the common good?

If the many can kill or expel the tyrant, then a form of republicanism is born. The many weak must act in concert to perform (or at least to consolidate) the tyrannicide. Schematically, this coming together, whether of a few or of many, into a fellowship or conspiracy (different from a family or village) is analogous to the formation of a fully *political*, as opposed to despotic, regime. Yet how could a desire to slay the tyrant arise from the new *erotes*, each of which is now meekly seeking its other half? What would

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motivate the transition to the next stage? Particularly if the longing for wholeness remained unsatisfied, in some subjects, by the wholeness of their member-households, it seems possible that the longing for some greater fulfillment could arise. As was argued in Section 1.5, all of the wholes through which the domesticated eros attempts to fulfill itself are now unnatural wholes. The greater wholeness of the fellowship or conspiracy, the proposed regime, would beckon the more manly natures among the dissatisfied, the ones whom the *Symposium* figures as stemming from the original all-male circle-man. Nomos does not have full efficacy in restricting natures. In the discourse that Plato's Aristophanes is manipulating, these are the daring types with proud thoughts (*megala phronemata*; see Section 1.3) who refuse to acquiesce in tyranny. Once the essentially republican polis has been established, political unity and the strength made possible by the combined might of the city permit men to think high thoughts once more. Further opportunities arise for eros to become vertical, directed upward, once more. The way is now clear for the polis to become an imperial city. The goal of apotheosis and the desire for it once more become possibilities, and with them tyranny reemerges. The cycle is ready to be replayed, this time at the peak or end of civilization rather than at the beginning.

In Aristophanes' speech, the respective types of eros, domestic and political, differ only in the degree to which each has been shaped by, or liberated from, law. In the reciprocity of eros and law, each one has its moment in a cyclical process. The original eros of the circle-people is forced into conformity by the guardians of justice and law, the Olympian gods, and human desires are radically rearranged. Law sees to it that eros remains the safer, unambitious desire characteristic of the household, and law prevents eros from becoming, once again, the hierarchical urge to dominate or violate. As the *Birds* reminds us, however, tyrants in their desire to dominate often invent gods in order to support their self-serving laws or, as in the case of Peisetaerus, they simply deify themselves. Thus the same law that constrains eros and protects humans from one another may be only the vestige or remnant of what was, originally, someone else's hierarchical urge.

The ostensible definition of eros as a lowly and homely search for one's other half is therefore intentionally undercut in Aristophanes' speech. Plato's Aristophanes knows, and shows, that eros also has an upward,

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transgressive side.⁷⁴ However, because there is no effective terminus to the aggressive eros, short of self-deification, he encourages the lower eros and grants the name “eros” to it alone. When he warns that every big man (*aner*) must be exhorted to be pious toward the gods, “as Eros is our leader and general” (193a 7-b 2), he refers to the lower, homely eros and conceals the upward eros, although the latter peeks out through his military language. His concealment is a prudential and rhetorical stance, not a philosophical thesis. Nevertheless, Socrates will treat it as a thesis in his (or Diotima's) speech (205d 10–206a 1), ignoring its prudential warning, and, in the dialectic of the *Symposium*, Socrates will take the opposite extreme, that all eros is vertical: even the lowly deed of child production is a self-conscious grab for immortality (208e 1–5).

2.10. Modern Contexts: The Theoretical Implications

Because sexual desire, being a later addition, is extrinsic to eros in Aristophanes' myth⁷⁵ (191a 5–b 1, b 5–c 8), it follows that homosexuality does not cause the upward, political eros; rather, it is the upward eros that causes this politically relevant type of homosexuality. Paradoxically, the upward eros is prior to domesticated love in the cycle and is therefore more, not less, natural. Priority perhaps loses some of its importance as the process is cyclical; nevertheless the eros for the polis is closer to reconstituting the original desire to rise than is the domesticated, household eros. The hubristic desire for political ascension and the hubristic desire to possess or join with other males sexually both stem from the same source: the original, tyrannical eros for apotheosis. In one way, then, the politicians' eros displays less deformation at the hands of convention than the domestic eros does. Their eros is thus said to be “by nature” (*phusei*) rather than “by nomos” (*bupo tou nomou*; 192b 2). The incest of the uncut circle-people is yet more venerable and more natural. The politicians with their hubris in Aristophanes' account partially retrace the steps through which nomos emerged to tame eros. Their

⁷⁴ To see another place in the Platonic corpus in which Plato entertains as a serious contender the thesis that eros is transgressive, in contrast to the benign view of the “vertical” eros presented by Socrates and Diotima in the *Symposium*, see the definition of eros as *hubris* in the preliminary speech of Socrates, arguing for a “Lysian” thesis, in *Phaedrus*, 237d 3–238c 4. G. Santas, *Plato and Freud*, p. 62, perceives that while the definition is not exhaustive Socrates concedes the existence of such eros, e.g. among sailors (243c).

⁷⁵ See note 73 of this chapter.

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political ambition approaches the original eros, the violent admiration of the circle-people. The final step, which they stand in danger of taking, would mean progressing from statesman to tyrant, whose characteristic act in Greek thought generally, like the act of the circle-people, is incest.⁷⁶

The implications of the *Symposium* speech for modern legal debates over sexuality thus differ significantly from what they have sometimes been understood to be. In the first place, Plato's Aristophanes takes exception to a scientific view, represented in the dialogue by Eryximachus, according to which human nature is easily accessible to reason. Most of what humans perceive to be natural about themselves is, for Plato's Aristophanes, convention masquerading as nature; a difficult hermeneutic is required for disentangling nature from the social constructions placed on it. Plato's Aristophanes would therefore greet skeptically any theory in which human biology is said to determine sexual orientation directly. Until very recently, much modern liberal thought about sexuality rested at least partially on this scientific view that orientation is determined naturally, like skin color⁷⁷; the most common misinterpretation of Aristophanes' speech has been that it upholds a version of this biological view. Thus Plato's Aristophanes, in his emphasis on social construction, appears postmodern. His social constructionism remains more moderate than that of Foucault, however, because he insists on his ability eventually to separate out natural givens that are not constituted by human discourse. His view of nature nevertheless shows an affinity with Foucault's view of discourse in that both privilege power: in the speech, domesticated love is only a weakened form of aggression, a maimed self-assertion or desire to dominate, that is, a mutilated desire to ascend into the heavens and become a god. Unlike many Foucauldians (such as Halperin) who still manage to advocate liberal sex laws, Plato's Aristophanes draws the likely practical conclusion from the premise that intimate human relations are based on power: the antiliberal conclusion that sexuality must be strictly regulated by society. Although sharing the latter conclusion with natural law theorists,⁷⁸ his premises are at the farthest possible remove from natural law premises,⁷⁹ because for Plato's Aristophanes, homosexuality

⁷⁶ See note 50 of this chapter.

⁷⁷ Contrast, e.g., Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp. 47–53. For a later shift in Nussbaum's position, see M. C. Nussbaum, "Constructing Love, Desire, and Care."

⁷⁸ See note 1 in this chapter.

⁷⁹ J. Finnis, "Law, Morality, and 'Sexual Orientation.'" See, however, R. George, "Natural Law and Human Nature," for the important contention that knowledge of natural law principles is not

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is, if anything, more natural than the domesticated, household eros. The restriction of desire to heterosexual marriage is, on this view, not natural but conventional; therefore homosexuality, like incest, is an example of nature bursting the bonds of convention. Yet Plato's Aristophanes might be hard put to produce a moral reason for his choice against homosexuality⁸⁰ (or against incest, for that matter) beyond the danger of collateral harm that, for example, surrounds the ascent of tyrants. Nothing in the nature of human beings militates against such choices in his view; indeed such choices represent precisely where human nature wishes to go. Plato's Aristophanes, like the Aristophanes of the plays with his celebration of the simple, pleasurable, pastoral existence, attempts to attract his listeners away from the hubristic eros with a winsome portrait of the lower, homelier eros rather than attempting to produce moral reasons why they should not indulge in the more dangerous eros. He also warns of punishment; that is, he offers a stick and a carrot.

Because Aristophanes regards the moral stricture against incest as originally a political expedient, it would be in the same spirit if he argued that moral strictures against (and, in some ancient cities, for) homosexuality were also originally or fundamentally political expedients around which sentiments of moral reverence or moral repugnance grew up.⁸¹ As has been argued, the moral component of the questions of legalization and liberalization must be sharply distinguished from empirical claims (usually intended to buttress the case for liberalization) that erotic phenomena such as homosexuality are without political consequences.

How far can the speech's principles of political prudence regarding sexuality be extricated from their sociohistorical contexts and applied to

derived from prior knowledge about human nature, even if said principles *are* grounded in human nature. Compare J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, pp. 33–6. For a debate about liberal and natural law positions on homosexuality, see S. Macedo, "Homosexuality and the Conservative Mind," followed by responses from R. George, H. Arkes, et al., in the *Georgetown Law Journal*.

⁸⁰ If, as we speculated in Section 1.6, nonincestuous heterosexuality has progressed further from the love of one's own and, ultimately, further from self-love than either incest or homosexuality has done, one would still need a moral basis on which self-love could, under all circumstances, be judged less choiceworthy than altruism or love of others. The modern moral objection to homosexuality *qua* narcissism (based on essentially Kantian moral premises with a leavening of Levinas) would be that self-regard displays inadequate care or regard for the other. Lack of altruism fails the test of generalizability: if everyone behaved in such a manner, there could be no human community. This type of moral argument, although powerful in other areas, has conspicuously failed to be convincing in the realm of sexual morals. See R. Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Moral Philosophy of the Erotic*, pp. 305–11, criticized by Posner, *Sex and Reason*, pp. 228–30.

⁸¹ Compare note 53 in this chapter.

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modern society? The differences between modern homosexualities and ancient pederasty seem at least as vast as the differences between ancient and modern concepts of, say, gender or ethnicity. Precisely if the influence of law is as great as has been argued, a vast gulf separates our perception of our nature from ancient Greek perceptions. Particularly *political pederasty* is an alien mode.⁸² Yet the *Symposium* speech claims to have glimpsed more than a palimpsest of nature underneath the legal and cultural overlays. This nature is alleged to be always capable of reconstituting itself. The modern analogue is again Freud, who found sexuality to be polymorphous by nature, and only by custom did categories such as monogamy, homosexuality, and so on, emerge. The advance of civilization (an advance away from natural pleasures for both Freud and Aristophanes) can be effectively charted by looking at the changing sexual norms. In the ancient discourse that we have exhibited, the act of incest, for example, presupposes a set of political assumptions and consequences regardless of whether the practitioner of incest understands them or not. An incestuous parent destroys the household *qua* household-under-jurisdiction of the larger polity and replaces it with the solitary, untutored household characteristic of a precivilized age in which the parent exercises tyrannical power. Whereas modern moral philosophy might focus on the human and legal rights of the children involved, Aristophanes has little to offer besides the political caution that incestuous ruling households are in a position to place the state under a tyranny. But the application to modern politics is tenuous: needless to say, quite a number of households in a modern liberal state could become endogamous without entailing precisely this threat to the regime.

Likewise in the case of homosexuality, Plato and Aristophanes might not have sufficiently foreseen an important feature of *liberal* democracy: the tendency to tame all unconventionality by rendering it conventional. Precisely by depriving antinomianism of the glamour of breaking law and convention, liberalization renders the antinomian nomian. Perhaps the gentle homogenization of liberal democracy has succeeded or will someday succeed at domesticating even the restless, upward orientation of male homoeroticism. The *Symposium* speech sees no limit to the egoism and destructive behavior of the natural eros. Given such a state of affairs, the speech essentially asks

⁸² To take just one example, the closest analogue to political pederasty in medieval thought and literature is the relationship between cavalier and lady, i.e., a relationship that is not (at least not overtly) homosexual at all.

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what prudential action is to be taken to ameliorate it. Looking for a natural brake on desire, it finds one in the offspring produced by domesticated heterosexual eros. A broad formula from the speech is that homoeroticism leads to work and achievement; by contrast, the heterosexual household is static, necessarily reproducing itself but not necessarily advancing over generations.⁸³ The issue is between citizens who merely replace themselves, as opposed to those with higher ambitions. So many different combinations exist in modern life to thwart these distinctions that to be applicable, the categories of children and work from the speech would have to be transformed. One category might consist of people who are, or allow themselves to be, tied down by the cares of the nurture, education, and economic well-being of their children and family. The second category of people would be broadly careerist, people wishing to make their principal contribution in the larger society outside of the household. Because many people struggle to perform in both activities, the distinction should not be taken as a rigid dichotomy. Rather, it is a question of which category takes precedence as the focus of life's activity and which would ultimately be sacrificed to the other, if the individual were forced to choose.

The specific tie between reproduction and political prudence is evident in the text of the myth. One of the images the circle-people are intended to evoke is that of the pregnant human female together with child in the womb: the only true circle-person we know of. The surgery and sewing that separate the halves of the circle-person are analogous to the cutting and tying of the umbilical cord. Narrating how the belly "as it is now called" was created, Aristophanes avers that Apollo drew the surgically opened skin together like a drawstring purse, as previously quoted; he made one mouth and tied it off in the middle of the belly, which mouth "they call the navel" (190e 9). The analogy goes deeper because Zeus orders Apollo to "twist around the face and the half of the neck towards the cut, in order that, by contemplating his own cut, the human might be more orderly" (190e 1-5). The human is forced to look at his or her navel; if we heed this advice and contemplate our navels, it calls to mind how each of us came into the world. We were all once literally part and parcel of another human being, radically connected and radically dependent, differing little from other animals and in no ways grand. The "moral" of contemplating one's navel

⁸³ Males and females "generate and the race is renewed" and males together "turn to works" (*Symposium*, 191c 5-6; see Section 1.1.)

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is the same as the moral of contemplating the surgery that Zeus intended: “think lowly thoughts.”⁸⁴ Once again it shows Aristophanes’ antagonism toward the upwardly mobile, self-regarding passion. The procreative eros wittingly or unwittingly embraces eventual obsolescence since replacement with children means that the progenitor will no longer be around. Accepting death is practically or effectively humble and hence safe.⁸⁵

The single greatest obstacle to applying the speech’s conclusions to modern society, if practical (i.e., legal) application is intended rather than theoretical “application,” is that no evidence shows that Aristophanes, either in his own right or in Plato’s view of him, seriously proposed legal regulation of sexuality as a solution to what he perceived to be the central erotic problem of his own society.⁸⁶ As we argued in Section 1.6, the

⁸⁴ It is no accident that “contemplating one’s navel” has come to be a cliché for “accomplishing nothing.”

⁸⁵ The alternative to reproduction is when the sex act produces only satisfaction or satiation (*plemone*, 191c 6). Elsewhere *plemone* often refers to a surfeit or overindulgence. One might characterize the distinction as one between pleasure serving nature’s end as opposed to our end, i.e., whether nature is using us or we are using nature. The tyrant of Plato’s *Republic*, Book 9, instead of “starving” or “putting to sleep” the desirous part of his soul characteristically overindulges it (literally, “gives until satiation,” *plemone*), a habit ultimately related to his intention to attempt intercourse with his mother and anyone else, humans, gods, beasts, as well as his not scrupling to eat any terrible food, i.e., to commit cannibalism (571c 10–572a 2; 575a 1). Again, the choice between offspring and satiation is not a dichotomy but rather how the balance tips: the first category includes all people for whom the primary good and purpose of sexual intercourse is satisfaction, the second category all people who may even share that purpose yet are willy nilly defeated by nature’s end and who in the end allow themselves to be tied predominantly to the nurture of the children who arrive.

⁸⁶ This point is crucial because in the plays Aristophanes certainly does combat male homosexuality with every weapon at his disposal, and Plato appropriately portrays him building a case for the absolute necessity of societal restrictions on eros. In fact, it could be objected that the harsh attacks on male homosexuals in the plays must originally have been intended to serve a *practical* purpose, i.e. that of keeping behavior within moral bounds through shaming the transgressors of morality, whatever intellectual purposes might have been simultaneously served by these or other aspects of the plays. Such an objection would be correct, on my reading, so long we recognize the strictly prudential, non-moral, reasoning behind Aristophanes’ stance against homosexuality as well as the primacy of intellectual enjoyment and insight over whatever practical considerations may also have obtained. More importantly, however, Plato nowhere portrays Aristophanes implying that increased legislation or heavier penalties would provide a solution to Athens’ central erotic problem as he sees it, nor that stricter enforcement of existing laws and penalties would provide such a solution. Likewise, such slogan-like practical recommendations as are found in the plays (along the lines of “throw the buggers out”) are offered in the context of the utopian fantasies examined in Chapter 1, not offered as serious solutions. Although Athenian law (according to the speech, *Symposium* 192a 7–b 3), forces reproduction (through marriage) on the male homosexuals, this legal imposition is reported as a fact rather than as Aristophanes’ recommendation of a new solution to the perceived connection between

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principal political contribution of Aristophanic comedy is to achieve intellectual clarity about political problems rather than to propose solutions or even to advance editorial opinions, as many critics have tacitly assumed. Both in the plays and in the speech Plato writes for him we find modes of political inquiry taking primacy over political practice. As such, the speech uses the societal alternative of mere reproduction under divine supervision to clarify the quite different societal path that Athens has taken. That clarification also sheds light on the course charted by our own, liberal-democratic societies today. The belief that humans should achieve more than mere reproduction is nearly universal in liberal societies, which (like classical Athens) have made a choice to liberate human desires in an attempt to utilize the resulting activity or dynamism.⁸⁷ Yet mere reproduction under divine supervision is precisely the standard of prudential safety against which the *Symposium* speech measures democratic society. Plato's Aristophanes shows us what is gained and what is lost in such a choice, clarifying what is risked and what are the stakes for which the risks are taken. Nothing in the speech suggests the possibility for such a society to turn back once it has embarked on such a path, even if it were desirable to do so. The choice (that has gone by) was between boundedness on the part of the citizens and unboundedness, a choice between citizens who accept limitations and citizens who believe their horizons are virtually limitless. A modern sensibility might wish to object that humility can be achieved in nonerotic ways, but that objection would fail to take into account the widely encompassing ancient definition of eros. It may be unwise to think that human beings can separate their eros (i.e., that which they ultimately desire), from their prudential lives (i.e., the means chosen to fulfill those desires), or to suppose that human beings do not live out the roles they enact sexually and erotically.

It remains to examine how much the views presented here should still compel our assent today (see Part II of this study). Now that their

male homosexuality and political dynamism at Athens. Historically, conventional pressure on citizen men to produce citizen offspring at Athens was related to maintaining and increasing the number of citizen soldiers and rowers who could be mobilized for war at any given time. Such conventional pressure could thus play into the hands of the very imperialism and dynamism Aristophanes seeks to avoid (see, e.g. Thucydides 2.44.3). Nor did such strictures, needless to say, prevent dangerous political adventures on the part of individual leaders such as (the sexually profligate) Alcibiades.

⁸⁷ See the discussions in Sections 3.5 and 7.2.

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theoretical implications have been clarified, our stake in the debate should also be clear. At the very least, such views help us to gain clarity about ourselves and our regime by way of the contrast. We will have perspective neither on theories of natural law, for example, nor on modern liberal assumptions without first fully entertaining the major views which preceded them. This particular view of nature leaves no ground for specifying what law ought to prevail nor provides any basis for “ought” at all. Aristophanes’ view of nature is so dark that it could never harmonize with moral principles except perhaps in a negative, Hobbesian manner. It should also be pointed out that his view is not altogether satisfying *qua* view of nature. The original eros to rise is a desire for an inhuman wholeness and perfection that as such cannot be fulfilled in human nature. The natural desire for self-apotheosis has no *natural* fulfilment; hence nature is working against itself. The harshness of this “pre-Socratic” view of nature, its inhumanity, and its unsuitableness as a guide for law and morality, compelled Plato and Aristotle to look for a different view of nature, for examples, in analysis of the *eide* and in teleology rather than in genetic accounts, natures on which alone, if anywhere, a truly “natural” justice or law could be based. In the particular case of eros, it will be instructive to see precisely how much the *Symposium* as a whole concedes to the views that Plato is attributing to Aristophanes.

A full confrontation between Socrates’ and Aristophanes’ speeches is best reserved for succeeding chapters, in which the dialectic between their two loves (the love of one’s own and the love of beauty and goodness) becomes thematic for various political phenomena, including ambition, patriotism, and imperialism. With the foregoing exegesis of the *Symposium*’s most political speech having now presented political eros once in broad outline, the remainder of the book, Parts II and III, will proceed thematically rather than by text and author in order to focus on the topic of political eros rather than on the exegesis of the texts that present it. As the succeeding chapters will show, the *Symposium* concedes a considerable amount to Aristophanes’ view. The love of one’s own constitutes the entire lower half of the spectrum of all human loves,⁸⁸ and that lower half turns out to have far greater relevance for politics than does the upper half. The major portion of the dialogue’s political teaching is contained in the

⁸⁸ See the discussion in Chapter 7.

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speech, although Aristophanes' speech does not exhaust the intellectual and moral aspects of eros, which arguably take precedence in the *Symposium*, in contrast to the more political dialogues, such as the *Republic* and the *Laws*. The political ramifications of the love of one's own constitute a major part of the substantive view arising out of Plato's *Symposium*.

In the meantime, the ancient discourse we have exhibited raises a number of problems, particularly for modern readers. In the first place, the aggressiveness of the original eros in the speech with its implicit warning that human eros is naturally aggressive does not sort well with several modern assumptions about desire. Desiring to dominate another person is certainly a political passion, but some argument (and ideally, empirical data) would be required to convince us that eros does indeed aim to dominate its object. A second, related problem is that desires for nonsexual, nonbodily consummations such as the circle-people's desire for self-deification or the politicians' desire for self-aggrandizement seem dubiously erotic. When the object of eros becomes an abstract idea, as opposed to a concrete body, then some theory of sublimation or "profanation" seems implicit. Whether one considers, with Freud, the higher loves to be refinements of sexual desire, or whether one considers, with Plato, higher aims such as honorable ambition and the love of wisdom to be the more fully natured, fully human expressions of eros, arguments and evidence would be required for showing that (and how) such disparate desires are actually related. Moreover, the idiosyncrasies of the Platonic dialogue, not to mention those of Aristophanes' genre, raise questions about how widespread such notions of eros were in Greek thought and literature. Accordingly, in Part II the study is expanded to include a broad history of a discourse in which *eros* was applied by poets, orators, historians, sophists, and philosophers to nonsexual, nonbodily objects. In particular, we add a third major author, Thucydides, arguing that Thucydides' erotic concept of imperial ambition was intended to be a literal and naturalistic use of the Greek term *eros* (Chapter 3). Part II continues with an examination of the problem of erotic aggression, arguing that the traditional Greek concept of hubris did indeed include the possibility of a violent eros, particularly on the bodily, sexual level, in which sexual acts were thought to establish and maintain hierarchies. Plato then amended this tradition by introducing (or elevating the status of) the concept of the *thumoeidetic*. As we shall see, the latter concept will prove crucial to deciding issues between Socrates' and

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Aristophanes' speeches in the *Symposium* (Chapter 4). Finally, an attempt is made to explain how nonviolent desires for abstract objects, such as honorable ambition and intellectual curiosity, might be related to sexuality in the plays of Aristophanes and in the Platonic dialogues as well as in certain strands of Cynic and Epicurean thought (Chapter 5). In an attempt to show the continuing relevance of these ideas for us today, Chapters 4 and 5 bring the ancient debates into dialogue both with modern theories of eros and with modern empirical studies of rape and related phenomena.

PART TWO

THE DISCOURSE OF POLITICAL EROS

THREE

Scientific and Poetic Traditions of Eros in Thucydides

“Contemplate the power of the city, day by day, and become her lovers.” (Pericles’ Funeral Oration, Thucydides 2.43.1)

Eros fell upon all alike to sail forth. (Thucydides 6.24.3)

In Part I of this study we analyzed the discourse of political eros as it appeared in a small number of texts: the *Symposium* and the highly eccentric comedies of Aristophanes. The implications of that analysis now force us to look beyond those texts, to ask whether and how the ideas propounded there were situated in contexts of wider contemporary belief. As a wide variety of sources will show, the diverse contentions of Plato and of Aristophanes did indeed belong to a larger erotic discourse, the existence of which can be seen in several poetic, rhetorical, and philosophical strands, including, in particular, Thucydides’ history of the Peloponnesian War. In all of these contexts, eros was applied to nonsexual, nonbodily objects. It should be stressed that the three major exponents of political eros, Plato, Aristophanes, and now Thucydides, are each *sui generis*. Thucydides is no more “representative” of the times than Plato or Aristophanes is. Certainly no widely shared “theory” of eros and politics developed during this period, and each of the three authors can be seen to disagree with the other two in important respects. The evidence does suggest, however, the existence of a long poetic tradition of nonsexual or extrasexual eros, of a brief rhetorical fashion in the fifth century, as well as of a persistent sophistic and philosophic tendency to impose conformity on human desires by grouping them all under the rubric of eros. The evidence also suggests that Thucydides’ erotic discourse

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was neither primarily poetic nor rhetorical but theoretical and naturalistic. Sections 3.1–3.4 sketch a brief survey of usages of the term *eros* and its cognates in references to politics from Homer through the fourth century. With the exception of a few significant departures (e.g. *aphrodite*), the survey is restricted to cognates of *eros*. In general, cognates of *aphrodite* referred to sexual arousal and were rarely used in political contexts.¹ By contrast, cognates of *eros* mainly referred not to genital arousal but to the amatory passion that sometimes accompanies sexual desire and that, in Greek thought, may sometimes accompany certain other strong needs as well.² Falling in love, obsession, intense passion, joy, madness: these are some of the connotations of the *eros* word group.³

From the perspective of political theory, the most important question is whether the ancient discourse of political *eros* continues to shed light on politics, providing a framework within which political phenomena such as patriotism and imperialism, for example, may be better understood. Surveying the history of the ancient discourse is propaedeutic to reconstructing the theoretical claims of the discourse and evaluating them. A number of difficulties, however, arise to complicate any straightforward procedure of extracting theoretical claims from the ancient discourse: (1) words for love, in Greek as in English, have notoriously wide extensions; they need not denote any passionate intensity. “I love cake” would be an example. (2) In Homeric Greek, *eros* demonstrably means any mundane desire, such as the desire to eat. Therefore any analysis wishing to argue that Greek authors of the classical period imported amatory passion into political discourse would necessarily entail demonstrating how the meaning of the word had changed or why the more passionate meaning is to be preferred over this existing resource of the language. (3) Much erotic discourse occurs in poetry. It would be obtuse, for example, to make Aeschylus defend a metaphor comparing patriotism to *eros* outside of the passage in which the metaphor is found. In other genres, too, the theoretical status of any connection between erotic

¹ For exceptions, see Section 3.3 in this chapter.

² A wealth of passages in Greek literature make use of the discourse of political *eros* without explicitly using the term *eros* or its cognates, but because the interpretation of such passages *qua* erotic depends on the more explicit passages (of which there are many examples), it seemed wise to restrict the survey, in the main, to the explicit passages.

³ The contrast between *eros* and *aphrodite*, i.e. between passionate love and intense sexual desire, became important in later discourse about the superiority of pederasty (which evoked *eros*, love) over heterosexual relations (which evoked merely *aphrodite*, sex). See Plutarch, *Eroticus* 750b–752b; cf. Foucault, *Care of the Self*, pp. 192–210.

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passion and political passion is difficult to recapture: when does an author understand himself or herself to be making a relatively durable insight into human psychology? (4) Even if a literal connection could be demonstrated, much Greek thought about eros and about human motivations in general is dependent on religious beliefs that modern political theorists cannot seriously incorporate into their own thought. When, for example, Achilles restrains himself from killing Agamemnon, his restraint appears to him (and to the poem's audience) as a god: Athena grabbing his hair.⁴

One might wish, in an analysis of this sort, to discover more naturalistic uses of *eros* based on empirical evidence rather than on traditional myths, as well as uses of *eros* that seem literally to attribute erotic dynamics to the political arena, without self-conscious metaphor. Ideally, one would find instances in which *eros* is used to make a theoretical insight into political psychology, that is, in which the speakers or writers understood themselves to be making a relatively durable point that they would be willing to defend outside the immediate context in which the connection was initially made. Metaphorical usages of *eros* occur in sufficient numbers to show the existence of a larger erotic discourse. But they contribute no evidence for the existence of a theoretical or naturalistic erotic discourse that could, in principle, be taken over into modern political theory. Since distinguishing literal from figurative language is problematic, particularly in poetry and in highly colored oratory, a useful procedure might be to focus on the self-conscious attempts or claims of a writer or speaker to rely on observation. The author who most strove for exactitude of description and reportage, to the point of disowning the entire poetic tradition, was Thucydides, whose evidence is, in this regard, probably the strongest available.⁵ Thucydides'

⁴ Homer, *Iliad* 1. 188–222.

⁵ See 1.20–22, especially 1.22.4 and 1.21.1. For many years, the majority of Thucydides scholars (particularly the school of historical “positivism” but more recently including the “realists” of international relations theory) contended that Thucydides was the first objective historian. Even critics who attempted to expose bias or factual error in certain areas (e.g., Gomme) held Thucydides to (and thereby tacitly assumed) the standard of modern (i.e., nineteenth-century) empirical historical study. See V. Hunter, *Thucydides the Artful Reporter*, pp. 3–9, for a brief review of the literature and the positions. Recently, scholars following W. R. Connor have sought a “post-modernist” Thucydides, in which the history is assumed (in the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary) to be a narrative like any other, utilizing strategies of evasion, distortion, and rhetorical embellishment (see Connor, “A Post Modernist Thucydides?”). My own approach steers a middle course between the modern and postmodern approaches. I take at face value Thucydides' own remarks that he understood himself to be conducting an inquiry based on evidence, fundamentally different from the stories of the “logographers” (see the discussion in

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full descriptions of the erotic character of Athenian behavior during the preparations for the Sicilian expedition give the modern reader enough purchase to begin to compare Thucydides' concept of political eros with his or her own experience of politics. In Section 3.5 we examine this crucial instance in which Thucydides uses *eros* in such a way as to underline precise resemblances between amatory or sexual *eros* and political passion. Before Thucydides' theoretical claims can be evaluated, his debt to the poetic tradition must be scrutinized and the limits of that debt must be shown. The influence of scientific traditions on Thucydides' thought is sufficiently problematic to raise questions about from which traditions he derives his concept of eros.⁶

3.1. Eros in Homer and Archaic Poetry: Semantic Issues

A common assumption has it that the Greek term *eros* means sexual desire. Yet in Homeric Greek, the semantic camp of *eros* was wide enough to include appetite for food.⁷ The concept included, but was not limited to, Zeus' feelings for Hera and mortal women. It additionally covered desires to weep, to dance, as well as to make war. This broader concept of eros smoothed out differences in human motivations that a narrower definition

Section 3.5). On the other hand, I agree with the postmodern critics who argue that Thucydides should not be held to an alien standard of nineteenth-century positivist historiography – particularly if holding him to that standard entails (as it seems to entail, e.g., for Hunter) that we consider any departure from the bare cataloguing of facts on Thucydides' part, any selection among facts, and any generalization from particulars to arrive at overarching principles of human nature or historical process, to be necessarily Thucydides' attempts to impose his own preconceived notions (perhaps even metaphysical notions) onto facts that will not bear these (or any?) generalizations. Thucydides clearly saw it as his privilege to move carefully beyond such reverence for the particulars. Finally, Connor has reinterpreted what he calls Thucydides' "objectivity" (a modern term alien to Thucydides, by which Connor means, among other things, Thucydides' tendency to refrain from moralizing and from obtruding himself into the narrative) to be the author's device for producing a more intense and vivid experience for his readers rather than the author's stance toward accuracy in dealing with his subject matter (Connor, *Thucydides*, p. 6). These two options do not seem mutually exclusive to me (obviously it is possible to be both rhetorically skillful and painstaking). For difficulties involved in making history itself "scientific" (as opposed to exhibiting scientific influences), see Section 3.5.

⁶ See J. H. Finley, *Thucydides*, pp. 36–73 on, e.g., sophistic influences and on the influence of Hippocratic (medical) writings and procedures. On sophistic influence, cf. Finley, "Euripides and Thucydides" in *Three Essays on Thucydides*, pp. 1–54.

⁷ See the following formula: "But when they put aside the desire for drinking and eating" (*ex eronento*, e.g., *Iliad* 1.469). *Eros* has a short o here.

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of eros throws into relief. Far from simply denoting sexual desire, it is unclear whether the word even had any special sexual connotations.

Eros does play a role in scenes describing sexual love in the works of Homer, albeit a role very different from what it was to play in classical Greek. Sexual intercourse is often denoted by the verb *mignumi* (to mingle), and the sexual love or desire that accompanies intercourse is not *eros* but *philotes*.⁸ Penelope did, however, beguile suitors by means of *eros*, and each suitor prayed to take her to bed.⁹ In a remarkable sequence at the close of the *Iliad*, Book 3, *eros* “wraps around” Paris’ diaphragm more strongly than the first time he took Helen from “Lacedaemon the lovely” (*erateinos*, cognate with *eros*). He remembers when they mingled in *philotes* in bed, and tells her that he now desires (*eramai*, cognate with *eros*) her and says that sweet longing (*himeros*) is seizing him (441–7). The noun *eros* affects what are literally the lungs, considered the seat of sensation as well as thought. The sexual union is more a matter of *philotes*. The cognate adjective *erateinos*, tossed off lightly as a geographical description in the same breath as the speaker describes real and present *eros* for Helen as wrapping itself around his chest, alerts us to the fact that different cognates of *eros* will have different force in different passages. “Lacedaemon the lovely” is, in fact, formulaic.¹⁰ Similarly, in the *Iliad*, 14, when Hera wishes to seduce Zeus sexually, she asks Aphrodite to give her *philotes* and *himeros* (198, cf. 215), not *eros*. But here, too, *eros* does the work at the most basic, physiological level, wrapping itself around Zeus’ compact diaphragm/thoughts, leading the couple to mingle in *philotes* (294–5) and mastering Zeus’ spirit in the same way (and with the same word choices) as a stone thrown by Ajax that hits Hector in the chest temporarily masters his spirit (315–16 with 439). Impressive as the operation of *eros* is, however, none of these uses of the noun *eros* is incompatible with a basic meaning of mere “desire,” to which only context adds the sexual element.¹¹

The nonsexual uses are very telling. Priam tells Hecuba he does not care if Achilles slays him, with his son Hector in his arms, after he puts aside

⁸ For example, *Iliad* 3.445. The word *philotes* is cognate with *philia*, which in classical thought is often contrasted with *eros*. Both *mignumi* and *philotes* have other, nonerotic meanings in political and martial contexts: e.g., 3.48, 3.55, 3.73, 3.453.

⁹ *Odyssey* 18.212–13. *Eros* has the long o here, as it does in the *Iliad*, Book 3, passage.

¹⁰ *Philotes* can be *erateine* too (*Odyssey* 23.300). It would be wrong to translate “erotic.” Cognate adjectives will sometimes have a weaker force than the noun in later Greek literature as well.

¹¹ For example, no one would argue that *epithumia* in classical Greek means “sexual desire” on the basis of its appearances in passages describing sexual love. Its meaning would continue to be construed as “desire.”

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his *eros* for weeping (*Iliad* 24.226–7). Lamentation is, of course, intensely passionate. But elsewhere *eros* extends its meaning in directions neither sexual nor passionate. In perhaps the most important of the passages showing this tendency, Menelaus vents his spleen against the Trojans by complaining that Trojans are insatiable for war. “In all things there is satiety: both in sleep and *philotes* and sweet singing and faultless dancing; one wishes to satisfy *eros* for [all of] these more than for war” (13.636–9). Here *eros* extends its meaning to include apparently trivial pursuits such as singing and dancing in addition to “love” or “lovemaking” (*philotes*) and war.¹² The notion of *eros* for *philotes* shows how far away this broader Homeric meaning stands from modern English usage as well as from the classical Greek meaning. It is a “desire for love” rather than a “love for Helen.”¹³ Homeric *eros* seems to mean mere desire of any kind, for any object or aim, no matter how mundane, no matter how intense or lacking in intensity.

The difficulty for readers who wish to reduce *eros* in all instances to sexual desire is not to explain how sexual desire could be used metaphorically of so many mundane objects (that would be quixotic), but rather to show any passages in which *eros* conclusively means “sexual desire” (as opposed to “desire”).¹⁴ The problem begins in Homer, but, as we shall see, continues

¹² A complicating factor in this important speech by Menelaus is that the usage of *eros* is metrically identical to the familiar, quasi-formulaic usage “when they had put aside *eros* for eating” (*ex eron heinai* with *ex eron bentos*; cf. note 7 in this chapter and accompanying text). The two short syllables of *eros* admirably fit into the penultimate position of a hexameter, the one place in the line where two shorts are normally required. The broad semantic field of the noun *eros* in Homeric Greek could conceivably owe a debt to metrical necessity.

¹³ Neither English “I want love” nor “I want Helen” stretches the meaning of want. However, between “I am in love with love” and “I am in love with Helen” there is a difference; the first stretches the sense of being in love. Therefore if we wished to translate both the Homeric noun *eros* and the verb *eramai* as “love” in the sense of being in love, we would have to interpret *eros* for *philotes* (as well as all the quotidian objects and aims in the present paragraph) as similarly stretching the meaning of being in love. Hence “desire, want” might seem more appropriate for both noun and verb. Yet for *eramai*, note the distinction between person and thing as object of desire in the genitive case: “I want Helen” (of persons) occurs only in sexual situations in Homer, whereas in English “I want Helen” could mean I am selecting Helen for one side in a football match. See G. Kloss, *Untersuchungen zum Wortfeld “Verlangen/Begehren” im frügrösischen Epos*, pp. 24–43, for a useful review of the evidence and a bibliography.

¹⁴ For an alternative view, see F. Laserre, *La figure d’Éros*, pp. 19–24, and S. Fasce, *Eros: La figura e il culto*, pp. 9–13, who make the important case that two forms of *eros* exist in Homer, one of which has the long second syllable (cf. the instances with “wrap around” previously cited: *Iliad* 3.442, 14.294) and a more specific meaning, which was the “amorous” passion, while the short-o variant meant mere desire. Difficulties with this view would include *Iliad* 14.315, *eros* (short o) for a

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in lessening degrees to haunt literary Greek throughout the archaic and the classical periods. Plato would later make a distinction between “specific” and “generic” eros.¹⁵ The generic eros is mere desire of any kind, that is, desire in general. The specific eros is the passionate, intense love associated with (but not identical to) sexual desire, that is, a special case of the generic eros. Although in Homer it remains unclear whether such a specific meaning has separated itself from the generic meaning, in later poetry the issue will be deciding whether to construe a given case as specific or as generic.

In Hesiod, Zeus “desired memory” (*erassato mnemosunes*; *Theogony* 915); the use seems generic. But Mnemosyne is personified, as are a host of Zeus’ other brides; Zeus “loved Mnemosyne” could be specific. In Hesiod we see for the first time a deity Eros, who, like the bare passion in Homer, “masters” the mind and will in the chest of all gods and humans¹⁶ (*Theogony* 120–22). As was pointed out in the Introduction, the separate accounts of Eros’ birth show his relation to Aphrodite (and by metonymy to sexual desire) on the one hand, and his independence from her on the other hand: his original, cosmogonic force.¹⁷ The two accounts correspond to the difference between specific and generic eros. However, the lack of intensity of the

goddess and a woman, a scant twenty lines away from the long-syllable *eros* at 14.294. Both would seem to have the same denotation, albeit one “wraps around” and one “masters.” The short-o noun is used in tandem with the athematic verb *eramai*, which has the alpha element etymologically associated with the long-o noun (cf. 315, 317, and 328 with E. Beneviste, *Origines de la formation des noms en indo-européen*, pp. 124–5). To rescue the sexual specificity of the long-o noun, Kloss, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 32–4, conjectures that whenever *eros* (short o) is for a person in the genitive, *philotetos* (“for love making [with]”) must be understood to come between them (“desire for [sexual intercourse with] someone” = “sexual desire for someone”). Adding another epicycle, the long-o variant creeps in when the same concept is used absolutely, i.e. without the person (= “sexual desire”). But see the problem in note 22 of this chapter.

¹⁵ See the discussion of the *Symposium* passage in Section 3.4.

¹⁶ Compare Pauly s. v. Eros. Fasce, *Eros*, pp. 11 and 73, however, argues for a latent, implicit tendency to personify eros (long o) in Homer on the basis that eros “wraps around,” as do death, sleep, and destiny (*Iliad* 5.68, 12.116; *Odyssey* 20.86). But Hesiod’s god has the short second syllable, always generic in Homer. Lasserre, p. 23, divides Aeolic short-o (= long-o meaning) from generic short-o. The unpersonified passion also appears in Hesiod, e.g., coming off the eyelids of the Graces (*Theogony*, 910). Is this use specific? The Graces are lovely girls from a lovely mother (the cognate forms *erateinos* and *polueratos* are used in the context). Both the passion and the god “loose the limbs” (911, 121), an epithet of sleep in the *Odyssey*, 20.57, 23.343.

¹⁷ *Theogony* 188–206 and 116–22, respectively. Although we must beware of reducing the goddess to “sexual desire” and the god to “passionate love;” we would lose a lot if we forgot entirely that such gods do represent passions. For example, Odysseus, giving orders that the serving maids be slaughtered, intends to make them “forget Aphrodite, whom they used to place under the suitors when they secretly had intercourse (*misgonto*)” (*Odyssey* 22.443–5).

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generic eros in Homer sits uneasily with the cosmogonic hunger in Hesiod. To specific and generic, a third category might need to be added: a category transferring¹⁸ (literally or metaphorically) the passionate intensity of the specific eros to a wider range of objects found only in the generic eros.¹⁹

The merely generic uses, which we shall continue to see in later poetry, prove that eros was not always limited to the sexual; but the generic lack of intensity also presents a complication for our study. The *eros* word group needs some amatory connotation to exploit if political discourse in classical times actually does transport some of the passionate intensity of love into the realm of politics. It cannot be said, for example, that there is any discourse of *political eros* in Homer. The lone political reference in the preceding examples, viz. the desire for war, collapses back into the general anonymity of the other references. Many desires come into play in politics: it is quite another thing to say that some of them resemble the specific eros. Ascertaining where the generic eros remains a resource of the language is crucial because its existence raises the bar of evidence required for showing that, for example, Pericles' erotic rhetoric belongs in the third category, transferring the intensity of the specific eros to a new, generic object: the city. Not only will it sometimes be difficult to tell apart specific from generic, but distinguishing generic from this third category may be very difficult indeed.

Calame makes fine distinctions among "aspirations" (positive, negative, and "general"), metaphorical uses, and "eroticized" uses of *eros* cognates in archaic lyric.²⁰ Presumably a poet would not defend a metaphorical connection outside the context in which it was made. But to "eroticize" a desire is to claim that a generic object is desired with specific intensity.

¹⁸ Only grammatical "transfer" is intended: no assumption about psychic mechanism (such as "sublimation") is involved. Metaphorical uses need presume none; we will meet with literal uses that beg the question of the mechanism without answering it in the context.

¹⁹ In the Homeric Hymns, the noun *eros* (short o) and the verb *eramai* have generic tendencies. For example, in the *Hymn to Hermes*, the god Hermes *erasato* the meat offering (4.130, parodied by Aristophanes in *Peace* 182–381; cf. the discussion in Section 2.3). In the *Hymn to Demeter* (2.129), one's soul can "desire" (*erato*) an evening meal no less than Aphrodite herself "desired" (*erasat'*) the mortal man Anchises in the *Hymn to Aphrodite* (5.57). Anchises' *eros* for Aphrodite has the short o (5.91, 144), and metrically the noun can take the same place as it does so often in the Homeric line (3.499, 513). Here, as in Homer, only context and the distinction between person and thing on the receiving end of the desire allow any possibility of the specific eros. The long-o noun, along with joy and sleep, is evoked for Apollo by Hermes' music (4.449) with a sequel that could conceivably be interpreted as pederastic.

²⁰ Calame, *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece*, p. 22; see especially note 22.

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Distinctly political usages of *eros* do appear in archaic lyric: for example, the Archilochus fragment, “I do not long for a great tyranny” (*megales d’ouk eroo turannidos*, 19.3 West; Calame: “probably metaphorical”).²¹ The association of *eros* with tyrannical ambition will later find resonances in the classical period, for example, in the works of Herodotus, Sophocles, Plato, and others. For Archilochus’ use to be an amorous metaphor would mean that the specific *eros* is transferred, metaphorically, to tyranny. Therefore it presupposes that the specific use of *eros* exists in Archilochus. Otherwise the generic *eros* would serve as well.²² Of course the specific *eros* will have its adherents here, but we are looking for proof.

In looking for a control on such interpretations, Sappho is attractive: given the amorous context of many of her lyrics, it is natural to suppose that *eros* and cognates are often specific.²³ Sappho’s famous priamel fragment suggests that *eros* is evoked by the beauty of an army in the field:²⁴

Some say, an army of cavalry. Others, infantry.
Still others say ships are the most beautiful thing
on the black earth. But I say, it is whatever
one desires [*eratai*].

Here the potentially infinite number of objects of desire could be taken as evidence that the verb is generic. The sequel, the story of Helen, makes the context sexual and amatory, however. The juxtaposition of *eros* with military imagery makes an effective surprise or exploits the paradoxical similarities between love and war²⁵ only if the verb retains some force of the specific *eros*.²⁶

²¹ Gyges, king of Lydia, is the exemplary “tyrant” mentioned in line 1.

²² If the fragment containing *erastes*, discussed in Section 3.4, note 80 is rightly attributed to Archilochus, then no more need be said. If the same *eroo* is found in fragment 125 West, it looks generic. Fragment 191 West is clearly erotic, but *philotetos eros* (long o) is otherwise identical to the Homeric phrase. Which word adds the sexual denotation? We do not say “*eros* for sexual intercourse.” Lasserre, pp. 22–3; in supplanting short-o, long-o lost specificity.

²³ For example, fragment 15 (b), line 12, LP, according to Page, ed., *Sappho and Alcaeus*, p. 10 (ad loc. fragment 1, line 19): Page’s comment contains a vocabulary of desire with shades of meaning.

²⁴ Fragment 16 LP.

²⁵ Reemphasized in lines 16–20.

²⁶ But an inscription at Delos bears comparison with Sappho’s fragment:

Most beautiful is justice, and most agreeable is health,
but most pleasant by nature is achieving what one desires [*erai*].

(*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.8.14 [1099a 25–8])

The sense of the verb looks generic.

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In the Theognidea, straightforward distinctions between specific and generic are possible. For example, in the specific, amorous sense, “Blessed is the one who, in love (*eron*), trains naked (*gumnazetai*) and, going home, sleeps (*heudei*) with a beautiful boy the whole day.”²⁷ But the broader sense is also found, as in the sentence “I do not long for wealth” (*ouk eramai ploutein*, 1155 West). Some evidence would be required to show that the poet intended the latter instance to exploit an amatory connotation of the verb, rather than merely using *eramai* in one of its customary senses, the generic sense.²⁸

Pindar also uses both specific and generic.²⁹ He at times seems to bring the two together or to provide a link between them. In the third Pythian, Coronis, mother of Asclepius, did not wait for her wedding day with Apollo but instead, crazed, “loved far-away things” (*erato ton apeonton*, 3,20): specifically, she loved a stranger from Arcadia. Calame calls this an “eroticized” use, presumably because far-away things are not necessarily desirable in their own right (and hence *qua* objects of desire would ordinarily be generic) but some of the specific love for the stranger spills out into the more general category of far-away things, in which he is included, eroticizing the things of that category. Would the poet stand by the eroticization outside the immediate context? Pindar’s context of marriages and secret liaisons is immediately generalized by the poet to include all desires, sexual or otherwise: “many have suffered that sort of thing./ There is a quite worthless clan among humans which disdains what is of [one’s own] country and looks searchingly for things afar” (3,20–22). Generic? Here we perhaps have a literal connection in which generic objects are desired with specific intensity.³⁰ It would be interesting to find out if Calame is mistaken, and the far away is erotically desirable *because* it is far away.³¹

²⁷ 1335–6 West. See also, e.g., 1345–50; 1341–4. Compare J. M. Lewis, “Eros and the Polis in Theognis Book II.”

²⁸ For other generic objects (in the genitive case), see, e.g., 654 West (*arete*), 1160 (wisdom); Calame: “positive aspirations.” See also 886 West (evil war), verb negated as with wealth.

²⁹ Generic: e.g., Nemean 1,31, “to have wealth” (*ouk eramai plouton echein*).

³⁰ For a similar pattern, see the tenth Pythian, in which he first anticipates how his songs will make Hippocleas of Thessaly an object of interest to maidens (specific), then generalizes: “Since *eros* for various things has tickled the minds of various people” (59–60).

³¹ An equally strong formulation that seems to suggest this occurs at Nemean 3,30–1: “Nor are loves of alien things [*allotriou erotos*] better for a man to have; search at home [*oikothēn*].” Far-away things will be an important erotic object in Thucydides (see Section 3,5).

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The noun *eros*, even when it occurs in generic contexts for which the reader is hard put to find any amatory reference at all, can nevertheless possess specific intensity, for example, at the end of the eleventh Nemean:

The clear sign to humans from Zeus does not follow,
but all the same we set out in manly haughtiness
yearning for many deeds; for our knees are tied by shameless
hope, and the river of foresight lies far off.
It is necessary to hunt for a measured amount of gain.
Piercing is the madness of unattainable desires. (*erotes*, 43–8)

Here the usage looks generic in the scope of its objects but with the *intensity* normally reserved for the specific *eros*. Here, then, is an example of the third category mentioned earlier: specific intensity transferred to generic objects. The *erotes* are a piercing madness. “Our knees are tied,” admittedly attributed to hope rather than to *eros*,³² may be significant: the epithet “*eros* which looses limbs” is applied to *eros* (or Eros) by a number of writers.³³ It is noteworthy that this Pindaric passage contains many of the same *topoi* that Thucydides will also connect with *eros*: daring or shamelessness, hope, compulsion, lack of foresight, disproportion, gain, madness, unattainability.³⁴

3.2. Eros in the Tragedians

The generic sense of *eros* continues to occur in the Attic tragic poetry of the classical period: the number and range of objects of desire are both impressive and banal.³⁵ As we shall see, one explanation for so wide a range

³² For the interplay of Hope and Eros, see the discussions of F. M. Cornford and of Diodotus’ speech in Thucydides in Section 3.5.

³³ See note 16 in this chapter; cf. Sappho 130 LP, Archilochus 196 West (*potbos*). “To unstring” in Homer is often associated with killing.

³⁴ See the discussion in Section 3.5; contrast T. G. Rosenmeyer, “Eros-Erotēs.”

³⁵ Banal: because undifferentiated. A small sample of generic instances: the fragment from Aeschylus’ *Niobe* reads, “Alone of the gods, Death does not desire gifts” (*erai*; fragment 161.1 Nauck² = *Frogs* 1392; cf. Section 2.3). Middle and passive forms of the verb (*eramai*) can be used promiscuously, often seemingly without much added emphasis or importance, as in *Oedipus at Colonus*, 511, *eramai puthesthai*, in which the chorus say they long to hear Oedipus’ tale of suffering. See also Euripides’ *Hecuba* 775: “He was desirous of getting gold” (*kbruson erashe labein*; cf. *Theognidea* 1155, above). The verb in the active voice (*eran*) and the noun (*eros*) are perhaps slightly more likely to appear in contexts in which the specific, amatory sense is possible: the thought of suicide, for example, at *Antigone* 220, “in love with death” (*erai thanein*); the specific (transferred) reading is perhaps justified by the fact that the young Antigone as the bride of death is a theme later

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of objects is that eros is a tragic passion; the tragedians “eroticize” whatever objects of desire might cause the protagonist to change his or her fortune. Of the specific (transferred) eros, marginally clearer examples (than the eleventh Nemean) can be found in tragedy. Often the context surrounding an ostensibly generic object will nevertheless contain language or imagery evocative of pederasty or marriage. Several of these are properly “political.” *Eros* is used to mean patriotism in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (458 B.C.): the chorus asks the herald of the returning Achaeans if he felt eros for the fatherland (*eros patroias tesde ges*, 540).³⁶ On hearing the herald’s answer in the affirmative, the chorus begins to recharacterize the herald’s longing as a reciprocated, not primary, love. As a way of recommending themselves and their own loyalty and patriotic sentiment (as men who have stayed at home because of age rather than helping to fight the war and who fear that matters on the home front they were supposed to have been watching over have taken a bad turn that they are powerless to control), they cryptically ask the herald if he felt a “pleasant sickness.” When he professes not to know what they mean, they define it as *anteros*, that is, loving someone back. The primary eros, in their estimation, was their own eros for the departed army, not the army’s for the land left behind. The herald is then glad to know that he and the army are as beloved as they are loving. Only then does the chorus begin to animadvert that all is not well at home. The specific (transferred) eros is tolerably clear from two factors: (1) the “pleasant sickness” is more indicative of amatory passion than it is of the Homeric desire for food, or for singing,

in the play, in which her execution in the cave becomes systematically erotic on analogy with marriage and the wedding procession to her new husband’s house. Yet cf. *Oedipus at Colonus* 436, for the noun used similarly of Oedipus’ *quondam* desire to die, which seemingly contains less erotic specificity. In Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, Neoptolemus uses both *eran* and *eros* to convey his desire to examine Philoctetes’ famous bow: “Indeed I do desire [*ero*] it, but the desire [*erot*] I have is like this: /if it is lawful for me, I would be willing; if not, let it go” (660–61). Readers will search in vain for a sexual or amatory referent in the context. Of course, for Neoptolemus passionately to desire to handle Philoctetes’ bow indirectly lends awe and mystery to the bow.

³⁶ Other love of country (again longing caused by absence) in the *Oresteia*: at *Eumenides* 852, Athena warns the Furies that if they leave Athens, they will begin to yearn for her (*ges tesde erasthesesthe*). For a less honorable eros, see a few lines later, at 865, where Athena again uses erotic language when urging the Furies to accept the apparently less exalted job of civic protectresses. Instead of intestine strife, Athenians will hereafter fight against only outside enemies who have been seized by a “terrible love for renown” (*deinos eros eukleias*). Specific (transferred)? The intensity of “terrible” (*deinos*) argues for the specific *eros*, although the specific *eros* might be thought sufficiently intense on its own so as not to need an intensifier.

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dancing, or other objects of the generic, undifferentiated desire; (2) *anteros* or “reciprocated love” would soon become and probably was already (for the author who made Achilles and Patroclus lovers) a preoccupation of pederastic discourse. Aeschylus works through a suggestive analogy that, within its own limits, reveals a great deal about the character of the chorus; of the political psychology of patriotism in general, the passage does not speak.

Violent, penetrative imagery associated with *eros* used in a military context is found elsewhere in the *Oresteia*. “Let not an *eros* first fall upon the army [*eros empitpei*], to ravage what they ought not.” The speaker professes to be worried that the conquerors of Troy may become conquered by their own desires; the victors become victims (341–2). *Eros* here primarily refers to the lust for rapine animating the Achaeans in their sack of Troy. Should the conquerors observe no measure in their plunder, the gods may take away their homecomings (341–7). Violating temples is specified as the crime that will anger the gods. Yet the speaker, Clytemnestra, may also be thought to have in mind the liaisons, rapes, and enslavements attendant on sieges and the sacking of cities. Her words “you hear this from me, a wife” (or woman, *gune*, 348) point the minds of the audience, at least, toward the war brides Chryseis and Cassandra,³⁷ who, as the human spoils of war, particularly demonstrate the insolence of Clytemnestra’s husband. The violation of the Trojan women and the violation of Trojan sacred space seem to link up, as does the narrow, sexual aim of *eros*, with a wider, theologico-political aim, the desire to violate.³⁸

The classical locus of the tragic conception of *eros*, in which *eros*, like pride or madness, precedes the fall from grace of the protagonist, occurs in the second and the third stasima of the *Antigone*. The passages are particularly important because they contrast what we have called the household *eros* with political *eros*.³⁹ The chorus sings the second stasimon after Creon’s

³⁷ Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, pp. 156–7. Compare Euripides, *Trojan Women* 69–70, for Locrian Ajax’s rape of Cassandra in the very temple of Athena, a linking of two violations, one sexual and one religious.

³⁸ For another example linking *eros* with violence, see *Seven against Thebes* 392, *eron maches*. Specific or generic? For a view from the next generation of Athenians, see Aristophanes’ appreciation of this sort of Aeschylean phrase at *Frogs* 1022, where he puts into the mouth of the tragedian Aeschylus down in Hades the opinion that merely viewing the *Seven* would make any man alive “fall in love with being destructive” (*erasthe daios einai*).

³⁹ See Chapters 1, 2, and 7.

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enforcement of political (over familial) *philia*⁴⁰ reaches into his own household to lay the seeds of destruction for his son Haemon⁴¹:

Nothing great
comes to the life of mortals without madness.

For much-wandering hope . . .
is, to many men, a cheat of their light-minded desires [*eroton*].

...

Evil seems to be
good to him whose mind
god leads to madness

Creon's civic hopes are deceptive: he had hoped to make loyalty to the city paramount over family ties. But Antigone has a loyalty to her own flesh and blood that goes far beyond anything a citizen could feel for a city. After Haemon has pleaded with his father and left in a suicidal rage, the chorus rue and fear the effects of Haemon's eros for Antigone, eros that has set him into conflict with his father (and ruler). They respond with the third stasimon, the famous Eros chorus (781–800):

Eros unconquerable in battle, Eros, you who fall upon possessions,
who keep the night watch in the soft cheeks of a young girl,
you go to and fro overseas and in dwelling-places in
the fields.

...

...

Victory belongs to desire [*himeros*], shining from the eyes of a
well-bedded
bride, coadjutor in office of great
institutions; for the goddess whom no one can fight,
Aphrodite, mocks.

In these odes, eros haunts the highest offices of the land no less than the cheeks and eyes of young brides; the political is juxtaposed with the personal. Creon's civic hopes are identified with a light-minded eros, a political desire that is forgetful that eros proper builds households first and foremost, cities only secondarily, and that no political rule can withstand

⁴⁰ See especially *Antigone* 187–90.

⁴¹ 614–24. Madness or “ruin” is *ate* in each case. Jebb takes *eroton* (genitive plural) as a subjective genitive, i.e., “Desires deceive us” and hope is one of their deceptions. Compare Thucydides 3.35.

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the powerful force bringing young lovers together. His all-encompassing political rule eventually jeopardizes the household, which is the basis of all rule and all life.⁴² Here, as in Pindar's eleventh Nemean, unattainable eros goes together with high hopes and madness.

The lust for conquering (and plundering) Troy is also eroticized by Euripides, in what will be a recognizable pattern in Greek literature generally. *Iphigenia at Aulis* 808–9, reads “strange [*deinos*] eros for the expedition has fallen upon Hellas” (*empeptok'*, cf. Aeschylus' *empiptei*). Later in the play, a term with stronger sexual connotations is substituted: “the army of Hellenes has some crazed *aphrodite*/to sail with all speed to the land of the barbarians.”⁴³ The fatherland and tyranny continue to be political objects of eros in Euripides⁴⁴: these, too, will become patterns in Greek generally. Euripides outstrips the other tragedians by the frequency of his erotic language (not only in plays in which eros is thematic) as well as by its broad range. The “objects” of eros include (among others): horses, unjust marriages, killing one's brother, money, the lotus, learning, hunting, foals, and being split with a double-edged sword.⁴⁵ Cases for specificity and transferral can be made (e.g., Phaedra's eros for Hippolytus arguably eroticizes other items

⁴² The comparable hymn to Eros in Euripides' *Hippolytus* 525–64 emphasizes his (and Aphrodite's) destructive power. Compare *Trachiniae* 351–65, 431–3, in which Heracles' eros for Iole causes the downfall of a city.

⁴³

memene d'aphrodite tis Hellenon stratoi
plein hos tachista barbaron epi kkhthona
... (1264–6)

Generic? The context is Agamemnon's justification for why he must sacrifice Iphigenia. For desire and politics in the play, cf. 384–7, 411, 1264–75, 543–97. “Sexual connotations”: e.g., Xenophon, *Symposium* 8.21. Sexual desire and war: compare Hesiod's coupling of Aphrodite with Ares, the god of war (*Theogony* 933–7), as well as Homer's joining of the two in the *Odyssey*, 8.266–366 and the *Iliad*: they are on the same side of the war (the Trojan side). The causal link between sexual desire and the Trojan war is so clear that the two deities are almost equally hateful and odious to the mortals whom they animate (cf. *Iliad* 3.369–440; 5.352–63).

⁴⁴ At *Phoenician Women* 359 and *Heracles* 66, respectively. Another line connecting eros with tyranny is pointed out by W. R. Connor, *Thucydides*, p. 178, note 53; fragment 850 Nauck²: *he turannis pantothen toxoutai/deinois erosin, hes phulateon peri*.

⁴⁵ Respectively (noun, in singular or plural): *Rhesus* 859 (839 has the verb); *Helen* 668; *Phoenician Women* 622; *Suppliant Women* 178; *Trojan Women* 439 (verb); *Hippolytus* 173, 219, 235, 1375. Even in his quite specific, nonmetaphorical usages of sexual eros, Euripides strives for interesting effects. Linguistic: the cognate accusative, e.g., *eran erota, erasthe erota* occurs at *Hippolytus* 32, 337. *Medea* 697–8, “loved [with] a big love.” Moralizing: in a very humorous passage (*Cyclops* 58off.), the nonreciprocity of pederasty turns into a positive horror at the prospect of receiving attentions from the unlovely lover, Polyphemous.

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in the play). Here, as with Aeschylus and Sophocles (and Pindar), eros is a tragic passion: protagonists often experiences eros before their fall. The tragedians tend to “eroticize” everything, practically as a requirement of their genre. To call any desire “eros” makes the question flash through the audience’s mind: “Is this it? Is this the desire through which he embraces his own destruction?” Perhaps such considerations are sufficient to explain such uses.⁴⁶ However, the sheer banality of the uses forces us to entertain the suspicion that Euripides was not interested in drawing clear distinctions between specific and generic: that, if anything, he wished to blur the line of demarcation. What motive he and other writers might have had for blurring specific and generic will be discussed in the following section.

3.3. Eros in Natural Philosophy and Sophistic Thought

A tendency of science is to normalize or regularize phenomena under a few manageable concepts. We saw this earlier in the *Symposium*, in which the doctor, Eryximachus, gives his doctrine of universal attraction the name *eros*. All attraction between bodies, from gravity to magnetism to friendship: the doctor wishes to show how they are all versions of the same force. Empedocles’ theory, which makes Love (*Philotes*, *Philia*) one of the two fundamental principles of the universe, is an example of this tendency. Such a theory seems represented in a Euripides fragment⁴⁷: “[when dried,] earth desires [*eran*] rain. And the revered sky filling up with rain desires [*eran*] to fall to earth.” Aristotle calls the quotation a “physical” explanation, presumably because it privileges natural causes over divine intervention. On Aristotle’s reading, these lines from tragic poetry would belong in the same company of naturalistic ideas as those of Empedocles and the Ionian “scientists.” Here would be one case in which a tragedian’s use of *eros* might owe more to the new learning than to the poetic tradition.⁴⁸

In examining scientific and sophistic thought, we abandon classification by genre (and chronology) and begin grouping together diverse writings on the basis of empirical or rationalistic claims. Works of the Ionian

⁴⁶ For evidence, see *Suppliant Women*, 1086–8, with note 88 and accompanying text in this chapter.

⁴⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.1.6 (1155b 2–4). It should be noted that Aristotle’s context is a discussion of *philia*, not *eros*.

⁴⁸ More than the other tragedians, Euripides tends to conflate the gods Eros and Aphrodite, making it difficult to distinguish them and their respective works. See, e.g., *Medea* 527–31, 627–30; cf. 842–5, in addition to notes 42 and 43 in this chapter with accompanying text.

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“scientists,” of Empedocles and other natural philosophers including the Hippocratic physicians, and of the sophists, cover an imposing range of periods, topics, and genres, comprising prose and works in meter, including tragedies. Their main difference from the poetic tradition is the way they ground their truth claims. Broadly speaking, impersonal causes (e.g., the action of the aether) replace the whims of the gods in explaining physical as well as human phenomena.⁴⁹

Since the distinction between the “new learning” and the poetic tradition will be crucial for Thucydides, a brief rehearsal is required here. First, we must not overplay the contrast with religion: religious and scientific ideas appear side by side in most writers. Empedocles sometimes refers to Love as Aphrodite and Cypris.⁵⁰ However, as Vernant has pointed out, primitive cosmogonies often explain the universe in terms of sexual mating; giving an account means specifying the genealogical tree: who copulated with whom to produce whom.⁵¹ By contrast, Empedoclean Love brings many entities together into combinations: from the elements to organs and from organs to monsters. Sexual differentiation of animals that experience sexual desire and procreate sexually begins to occur only in a later cycle (or later stage of the cycle) than the most triumphant cycle of Love; that is, sexual desire requires an admixture of Strife with Love. The primary forces are far more basic than any emotion that animals or humans or, crucially, anthropomorphic gods could feel.⁵² This constitutes a drastic downgrading of anthropomorphism in the cosmos. Gods still exist, but as causal agents they have given place to more basic, impersonal forces.

External and internal forces are often described with the term *ananke*⁵³ (“necessity” or “compulsion”) in these discourses. Motion or *kinesis* was the principal thing to be explained; “locomotion” was included but the rubric covered “change” of any sort: of place, size, and kind as well as the change from existence to nonexistence and vice versa. Internal causes of motion, such as the tendency of fire to climb upward and earth to fall

⁴⁹ See the *Iliad* 16.611–13, 17.527–9, for the way divine causation can be invoked to explain the simplest physical phenomena. Overdetermined: 13.442–4.

⁵⁰ *Philotes*; Aphrodite and Eros are grouped together in fragment 27.

⁵¹ J. P. Vernant, *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, pp. 344–9. Compare Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp. 28, 69–70, 91. See, however, the caveats of R. Buxton, *From Myth to Reason?*, pp. 1–11. For Orphic and other cosmogonies, see J. Rudhart, *Le rôle d’Éros et d’Aphrodite dans les cosmogonies grecques*, p. 18.

⁵² For Empedocles on the gods, see M. R. Wright, *Empedocles*, p. 22.

⁵³ The word had a prescientific history, e.g., it occurs in Homer (*Odyssey* 22.451).

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down, were described with the term *phusis*. Perhaps even more significant than the depersonalization of external causes (from agents to forces) was the recognition that individual substances have natures (*phuseis*). The root of the word has to do with growth and “springing up.”⁵⁴ Empedocles, for example, posited internal causes of motion for each of the four elements: earth, air, water, and fire, each of which contained a principle of change within itself.

As we turn to erotic usages in the Hippocratic corpus and in sophistic thought, we find that the new context of impersonal *ananke*, *kinesis*, and especially *phusis*, transforms the way eros is conceived. For example, human “nature” was a theme of Hippocratic medicine.⁵⁵ Like the Ionian physicists, Hippocratic physicians do not stop with nature but go on to describe natures: humankind has a *phusis*, but individual humans each have their own, significantly different *phuseis*. Different treatments work for different natures, and diseases also have natures. Eros was one of the diseases affecting human natures.⁵⁶ The Hippocratic corpus often uses *eros* generically for any desire.⁵⁷ One erotic disease was the *eros* for (addiction to) playing dice.⁵⁸ It should be noted that the Hippocratics were also concerned to remove the will of the gods from their explanations: the Scythians blamed male impotence on a god, but the writer of *Airs, Water, Places* countered that the affliction was indeed divine, but “all afflictions are divine. There is none that is more divine or more human than another, but all are alike and all divine. Each one of them has its own nature and none occurs without nature.” Because everything equally comes from the gods, divine causes may be set aside, and the physician can continue to look for natural causes: in

⁵⁴ In Homer, the *phusis* of the plant moly had been its unusual looks: white flower but black root, as well as an unusual power of resisting Circe’s enchantment. Among Ionian philosophers such as Thales, *phusis* was a self-moving, quasi-living substance. Similarly, in Empedocles, when fire seeks the sky, it is not “attracted” there by a law of gravitation (Love); rather fire moves under its own internal compulsion: it is self-moving and self-changing. An additional force (Love) is then brought to bear on fire externally. By admitting of both internal and external forces, Empedocles’ theory takes a compound stance toward causation. See Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp. 64–5, 82–3; Vol. II, pp. 163–7. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy*, pp. 230–1 does not accept this distinction but relates Love and Strife to *phusis*.

⁵⁵ One of the Hippocratic treatises was entitled “On the Nature of Man.”

⁵⁶ (Probably late:) Epistle 17, line 165, implies that people in love (*erontes*) are sick with a very harsh disease. Lines 221–5 use *erotes* seemingly specifically (of a bed) and, in context, generically, with love of money (*philargurie*) mentioned as a related disease. Cf. notes 57–8.

⁵⁷ For example, *The Art* 7: “not wanting (*erontes*) to die, but unable to grow stronger.”

⁵⁸ *Humors* 9.

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this case, Scythian males spent too much time in the saddle. The passage is related to the argument put forward in *Sacred Disease*, which attacks the dualism inherent in calling some phenomena natural and some phenomena divine.⁵⁹ The same treatise attributes epilepsy, the disease often believed to originate in possession by a daemon, to purely natural causes. Eros can thus cease to be a divine visitation and take its place as an aspect of human nature.

Sophistic writings are fragmentary. Given the exiguous evidence, it is impossible simply to assert that the sophists shared with the natural philosophers the tendency to order or impose conformity on the many human desires, grouping them under a single rubric.⁶⁰ Certainly the available evidence does not contradict such a supposition. Many sophists took over concepts from the natural philosophers, for example, applying *ananke* to the human realm (especially in rhetoric), and drawing a sharp dichotomy between *phusis* and human convention. Among the extant fragments and titles are found several generic treatments of *eros*. Critias is believed to have written a treatise about eros, and the following tragicomic lines have been attributed to him⁶¹:

Desires [*erotes*] of our life are of all sorts;
one yearns [*himerai*] to get nobility,
but to another, there is no thought of this, but a father
wishes for his house to be reputed for much wealth;
and it pleases another – though saying nothing sane
from his thoughts – to persuade his neighbors with evil daring;
others seek shameful profits ahead of the good of mortals.
Thus the livelihood of men is a going astray.
But I want to meet with none of these:
I wish to have a glorious reputation.

⁵⁹ *Airs, Waters, Places* 22; the argument commences at the beginning of the *Sacred Disease*. Compare C. N. Cochrane, *Thucydides and the Science of History*, pp. 11–12.

⁶⁰ Perhaps it is not accidental that our philosophical source (and advocate) for the concept of generic *eros*, Plato's Diotima, is said by Socrates to be "like the accomplished sophists" (*Symposium* 208c 1). Her teaching style of direct assertion and her manner of scientific certitude (*inter alia* in imposing conformity on human desires) as opposed to Socratic zetetic skepticism, may account for the appellation.

⁶¹ From the *Rhadamanthys*, Critias fragment 15 DK. The play has also sometimes been supposed to belong to Euripides. Critias' treatise has come down to us only in the form of a curious title: "On the Nature of Eros or Virtues" (*Peri phuseos erotos e areton*, fragment 42 DK). Critias' "floruit" is significantly later than Thucydides', but we are seeking a sense of sophistic attitudes in general.

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Perhaps the most sophistic aspect of the Critias fragment is his idea that there is an “eros” for the power of persuasion exercised over one’s neighbors.⁶² The sophist Gorgias exonerates Helen in his display speech, the *Encomium of Helen*,⁶³ by making the claim that persuasive speech has the same power as compulsion (*ananke*, Section 12). Helen deserves no blame because she was utterly compelled against her will – by speeches. To assert this, Gorgias must narrow the gap between violence and persuasion.⁶⁴ Although people might heretofore have perceived thought and speech to be a realm apart from force and violence, they are in fact a power struggle carried on by other means.⁶⁵ The physical theory according to which the stronger force prevails also governs the human realm because consistency requires that the human realm be essentially the same as the natural realm.

Of the forces operating in those realms, eros is omnipotent, according to Gorgias:

If, then, Helen’s eye, pleased by Alexander’s body, furnished the readiness and the striving of *eros* to her soul, what wonder is that? If [*eros*] is a god wielding a god’s power, how would anyone weaker be capable of resisting and warding him off? And if [*eros*] is a human sickness⁶⁶ and a mindlessness of the soul, such is not to be blamed as a misdeed but deemed a misfortune. For it comes, when it comes, by the snares of the soul, not by the plans of purpose, and by erotic necessities . . .

(*erotos anankai*, Sections 18–19).⁶⁷

⁶² Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 3, p. 303.

⁶³ In both *Helen* and *Palamedes*, Gorgias chooses well-known characters of bad repute to exonerate. To take on a hopeless case and win it nonetheless was a way of displaying the omnipotence of rhetoric. Gorgias seeks a case stacked against him precisely to show that his causal explanations apply to any blame at all. In the *Helen*, he does this as a “liberal” art (he calls the speech his “plaything,” *paignion*), i.e., for the pure joy of displaying his rhetorical dexterity before an audience. Gorgias’ “critical” morality in challenging the traditional assumptions about Helen should also be noted.

⁶⁴ *Logos dunastes megas estin*, “speech is a powerful master” (Section 10); cf. *bosper ei biaterion biai herpasthe* (Section 12). The parody of sophistry in *Clouds* does the same with its repeated analogy between wrestling and logic. Several puns on *strepbo* (134, 434) relate to twisting the truth or to obtaining a hold over an opponent: “I’m dead if I don’t learn tongue-wrestling” (*glottotrophein*, *Clouds* 792). The Weaker Argument says, “Right away I’ve got you round the middle in an inescapable hold” (1047). Here, an “Argument” itself admits to being a kind of wrestling.

⁶⁵ For the relevant attitudes portrayed in *Birds*, see the discussion in Section 2.8.

⁶⁶ *Anthropinon nosema*; cf. the language of the Hippocratic corpus, notes 56–59 and accompanying text in this chapter.

⁶⁷ Compare *Clouds* 1075, in which adultery is caused by *bai tes phuseos anankai*.

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Thus eros as an impersonal, physical *ananke* has moral repercussions which, *pace* Gorgias, did not always obtain for eros conceived of as a divine visitation. Crimes of passion, being natural, now contain built-in extenuating circumstances. Euripides, too, among other sophisticatedly influenced writers, makes his characters use similar arguments about *eros* and *ananke*,⁶⁸ and we shall see in Section 3.5 that Diodotus' extenuation of the Mytilenian rebellion in Thucydides' history is based precisely on the argument that *eros* is too strong: the Mytilenians could not help themselves. The combination made by the sophists between *eros* and the *ananke* of the natural philosophers yields a very new, untraditional view of human nature and responsibility.

3.4. Eros in Political Oratory and Prose: A Fashionable Fifth-Century Rhetoric?

The rise of prose brought with it more opportunities for eros to find its way into extant writing, for example in history, in records of political deliberation and, ultimately, in political theory. Herodotus, in such tropes as "Tyranny has many *erastai*,"⁶⁹ made use of erotic terminology to describe the lust for tyranny. The coupling of eros with tyranny, which recurs several times in Herodotus, had already been observed in archaic lyric.⁷⁰ What is new in the Herodotean quotation is the transferred sense of the word *erastes*, the specific meaning of which is the active lover or suitor of a boy in a pederastic relationship and, to a far lesser degree, the male partner in heterosexual relations leading to adultery, concubinage, or (rarely) marriage. The prose tradition of political eros begins here in earnest. A possibly prior⁷¹ use of *erastes* referring to a political object is in the great Funeral Oration of Pericles, delivered in 431 B.C. Pericles reportedly exhorted the Athenians to

⁶⁸ At *Medea* 530, Jason claims that eros compelled (*enankasen*) Medea to save his life (against her better judgement?). Phaedra says "I shall be weaker than a bitter eros" (*Hippolytus* 727); cf. *Clouds* 1081, 1102.

⁶⁹ 3.53.

⁷⁰ 5.32, 1.96.2; cf. 9.3. Compare the Archilochus fragment in note 21 and accompanying text of this chapter.

⁷¹ Even assuming an early date for the Histories. *Acharnians* 513–56 may be a parody of their beginning section, in which case the Histories would already have to have been well known in Athens in 425 B.C. However, contrast S. Hornblower, *Thucydides*, p. 29, who speculates a completion date for the Histories as late as 414 B.C. Compare C. W. Fornara, "Evidence for the Date of Herodotus' Publication."

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become “lovers” or suitors (*erastai*) of Athens although Thucydides’ actual writing and publication were almost certainly after Herodotus’.⁷²

Two questions arise: (1) How influential in practical politics were such ideas, that is, how often in actual political deliberations were erotic terms used? (2) Were such erotic terms generic or specific (transferred)? Unfortunately, independent evidence of oratory from this period, whether ceremonial, deliberative, or forensic, is fragmentary.⁷³ Much more erotic rhetoric, now lost, may have been in circulation, or none at all. Most of our evidence for fifth-century rhetorical usage comes from Thucydides himself. The sample is limited (and suspect: see subsequent discussion). Three speakers in the history (besides Thucydides in his own voice) make explicit use of the discourse of political eros: Pericles in his Funeral Oration, the (unknown) speaker Diodotus in the debate against Cleon over the fate of Mytilene, and Nicias in his debate with Alcibiades over the Sicilian expedition.

Specific or generic? Nicias’ use of the terminology of eros occurs at 6.13.1, where he argues against undertaking the hazard of the Sicilian expedition. He appeals to the older men to guard against “sick loves for far-away things” (*duserotes ton aponton*), a lovesickness that Alcibiades and the younger men are suffering from. Older men should recognize that few things have been accomplished by mere desire (*epithumia*). Nicias’ bifurcation into age groups anticipates Thucydides’ classifications in his own voice at 6.24.3, as does the longing for the far-away, literally “absent” things (cf. Nicias’ *ta aponta* with Thucydides’ *he apouse opsis*). Both uses are probably indebted to the influence of such poetic passages as Pindar’s third Pythian and third Nemean, discussed in Section 3.3.⁷⁴ We speculated that Pindar’s use was specific (transferred). The same may well hold true for Nicias’ political use.

Other sources for fifth-century oratory are (even) more problematic. Although no poetic work exactly represents the spoken Greek of the Athenian marketplace or the Greek of the still-developing language of prose, the language of Euripides, among tragedians, tells us the most, because he sought to imitate natural speech. Certainly nothing in Euripides would dispel the

⁷² Thucydides 2.43.1. For an account, see S. Monson, “Citizen as *Erastes*,” also found as Chapter 3 of Monson, *Plato’s Democratic Entanglements*.

⁷³ The earliest extant forensic speech preserved in its entirety, Antiphon’s “On the Murder of Herodes,” is dated 417 B.C.

⁷⁴ Compare *Alcestis* 866.

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impression that erotic language in nonerotic contexts was commonplace, even banal, on the streets of Athens. Euripides passes easily from generic to specific to specific (transferred) and back again in brief compass.⁷⁵ Yet that such talk was common must remain only a possibility. Euripides' audience let him get away with it (he did not always win first prize), but this says nothing about whether Euripides is an erotic innovator or an erotic imitator. It is certainly safe to assume that Euripides wished to be avant-garde in his treatment of ideas and language. If, as has been argued, imposing conformity on human desires under the rubric of eros was an aspect of the "new learning," then Euripides' use of erotic rhetoric may have been relatively innovative. As previously argued, Euripides had tragicomic reasons for his erotic rhetoric, and he differs only in degree (i.e., frequency of generic uses) from the other tragedians. Nevertheless, Euripides represents one small piece of evidence for a fashion in erotic rhetoric in the last half of the fifth century, a fashion cutting across several genres.

A third source for fifth-century political oratory is Old Comedy. Diction or register in comedy is mostly that of talk heard on the street. Aristophanes, like Euripides, prided himself on sophistication and innovation. Significantly, Aristophanes' uses of *eros* cognates outstrip even Euripides' in sheer frequency. Of the four major dramatists, the frequency of erotic terminology is highest in Aristophanes. In comedy, unlike in tragedy, actors actually pretended to be political figures of the day and to mimic political rhetoric. The representation of deliberative and forensic oratory is tainted by caricature, although its evidence may be accepted when a joke would appear pointless without the assumption that the audience had heard a given usage often enough in actual oratory to recognize the same usage in a parody. For example, in a passage from *Knights* (424 B.C.), the sausage-seller tells how speakers in the assembly deceived "Demos" (the people) by saying (1341–2):

⁷⁵ *Medea* 663–718 runs the gamut. Aegeus meets Medea, relates that his childlessness has driven him to consult the oracle; Medea wishes him good luck in attaining "what you desire" (*erai*s, generic) and complains of Jason's malfeasance. Aegeus asks if Jason has fallen in love (*erastheis*, *sc.* with another woman, specific); Medea answers ironically that Jason is breaking his *philia* relations (*sc.* with her and their children) because of "a big *eros*" (specific, but . . .), elaborating that what he actually has fallen in love with (*erasthe*, specific–transferred) is a marriage connection (not the woman) with tyrant men (or royal men: *sc.* Creon). Then, in exchange for asylum, Medea promises to cure Aegeus' childlessness, "so that your *eros* for children may be fulfilled" (generic again).

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Demos, I'm your lover and your friend,
and I care about you and I'm your only counselor.

The word for lover in this passage is *erastes*. Apparently an orator could recommend himself to the people on analogy with courtship, adducing the devotion, sacrifice, and subservience of one stricken by eros. Perhaps the brazenness of the suggestion that a politician's devotion to the people could be capable of erotic intensity provoked the comedian's satire. The analogy between politics and pederasty is taken to its logical conclusion in *Knights*, with the unattractive old man who represents the people cast in the unlikely role of a beloved boy who gives himself to worthless suitors (736–40; cf. 1162–3), while the sausage seller casts himself as Cleon's "rival suitor" or rival-in-love (*anterastes*, 732). Here, Cleon, the politician of the moment, and not Pericles who died in 429 B.C., is the real-life orator taken to task for using the language of love (e.g., 732).

If there is any truth to the caricatures, the insouciance of the politicians who used erotic rhetoric could even extend the compliment to foreigners when describing their pro-Athenian leanings. In *Acharnians* (425 B.C.), an Athenian ambassador misleads the assembly, describing the Thracian king Sitaces in glowing terms (142–4):

Really he was a tremendous Athenophile
[*philathenaios*],
and he was such a true lover [*erastes*] of you all, that
he kept scratching "Athenians are beautiful" on the
walls.

The erotic graffiti used to express political sentiment may be pure invention by the comedian, who deftly conveys his opinion that the people will believe anything. In these comedic instances, the eros in question is almost certainly specific (transferred).

The preceding evidence could never prove that the historical Pericles, Cleon, Nicias, and other politicians practiced erotic rhetoric in actual Athenian oratory. Possibly they did, but the evidence is embedded in the texts of authors who were themselves major practitioners of erotic rhetoric. Thucydides may have put words in the mouths of Pericles and Nicias for purposes of his own.⁷⁶ Moreover, Aristophanes, unlike Thucydides, makes

⁷⁶ To provide a contrast, for example, between the erotic patriotism of the Funeral Oration and the erotic imperialism of the Sicilian expedition. See the discussion in Chapter 7.

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no attempt to quote accurately. Watching politicians grovel on stage and declare their undying love for the people would be funny even if no real politician had ever used such language. Aristophanes' parodies of deliberative oratory mirror his other usages of erotic terminology in diverse contexts. The erotic usage could form part of the same comedic rhetorical strategy or style.

But if so, then that rhetorical strategy was also, as we have seen, a tragicomic strategy and, in diverse ways, shared assumptions with scientific and sophistic discourses. In the cases of Thucydides and Aristophanes, the dichotomy of *either* accurate quoting *or* manipulation may not be exhaustive. A third possibility is equally likely, viz., that both Thucydides and Aristophanes were very interested in an erotic rhetoric that was ongoing in the oratory of their day, and that they reported on (or mimicked, in Aristophanes' case) that discourse at the same time as it informed their own thought. In particular, the older poetic tradition of eros from Homer up until the fifth century would seem to argue that Athenian oratory had a store of erotic tropes to draw on and that Thucydides and Aristophanes could not have invented erotic rhetoric (although their own views on it may have differed from the views of their contemporaries). Even if we do not accept Thucydides and Old Comedy as evidence of actual oratory, the evidence for a fashionable erotic discourse in the fifth century is mounting. It would be unusual if political oratory had gone entirely unscathed by such a fashion.

Before we turn to the vicissitudes of said fashion in fourth-century prose and oratory (which is much better attested), it would be of interest to know whether Pericles' use of *erastes*, in particular, is generic or specific (transferred). At issue is the degree of amatory intensity involved. In view of the strong generic tradition still alive in the poetry of the time, as well as the scientific tendency to render all desires generic (a tendency perhaps now wielding influence over other genres, e.g., the poetry of Euripides), a case could be made for generic. As was pointed out, the distinction between generic and specific comes from Plato's Diotima, who draws an analogy with the way the word *poiesis* in general means any act of making, yet the name "poet" (*poietes*) is reserved for makers of compositions in words and meter. One species gets the name of the whole genus, even though many other species exist. By analogy, one specific type of *eros* (the amatory type, that intended by the word *erastes*) has usurped the name of the whole (205a 9–d 3), a synecdoche disguising the latent wide range of *eros*. Plato almost certainly has in mind here the broad, generic sense of *eros* we saw beginning in Homer and persisting side by side with specific *eros* throughout later poetry.

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His Diotima wishes to reform the language by elevating this generic sense, regularizing linguistic usage. No builder of houses (for example) should be considered any less a “poet” (maker) than Homer or Euripides. In the same way, no one oriented toward any kind of goal (e.g., money making) should be considered any less a “lover” (*erastes*, 205d 3–8). This is the same normalizing tendency we saw in Euripides, the scientists, and the Critias fragment. However, the analogy is instructive because Diotima’s prosaic take on poetry seems to rob poetry of its distinctive excellence by seizing on an accident of the language (that poet means maker). One would still want a word to distinguish poetry (assuming Diotima would be disappointed if she went to the tragedy contest and found that, because all makers are the same, a bricklayer was filling in for Euripides that year). By analogy, to say that Don Juan, for example, and an athlete oriented toward training are both “lovers” is a curiously unerotic view of love. On this type of generic-only reading, the *erastes* in Pericles’ Funeral Oration would be anyone who loves, and Pericles would be exhorting the Athenians to love their city. Specific connotations, such as sexual or amatory associations, would not come into play.

This reading seems mistaken for several reasons. In the first place, there are indications that the semantic field of *eros* and its cognates was narrower in prose than in poetry. Diotima’s own generic *cri du coeur* implies that, in prose and in everyday spoken Attic, the specific sense of *eros* tended to win out and the generic *eros* was less available than she would have preferred. Plato’s Diotima wishes to expand the meaning of the word to cover the generic areas. It seems unlikely that Plato would make her undertake this expansion or censure the state of the language, if the contemporary prose usage of *eros* was as wide as it remained in poetry. We have already observed the prosaic slant of Diotima’s perceptions. If Diotima were consciously excluding poetry from her censure and concentrating wholly on prose and the idiom of everyday speech, it would explain why she passes over so many obvious poetic usages. For example, she explicitly asserts that people oriented toward money are not said to be “in love” or to “desire” (*eran*, d 4–6). But they are: the poetic tradition is shot through with this very idiom, from Theognis to Pindar to Euripides, as we saw in Sections 3.1–2.⁷⁷ Plato would have had to ignore all these uses if they were current in the prose language and everyday speech of the late fifth century (the fictional time of the *Symposium*) or of the early fourth century (when the dialogue

⁷⁷ Compare the Theognidea’s *ouk eramai ploutein* and notes 29 and 35 in this chapter.

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was composed). If, on the other hand, Plato's Diotima was talking about prose, and such usages were reserved for poetry only, then her attempt to make prose as promiscuous as poetry would have some point.

Many hypotheses could be put forward to explain why prose would have differed from poetry, but none of the evidence is inconsistent with the hypothesis that the literary language never perfectly mirrored the spoken language. The semantic field of eros was always broad in the literary language, which continued to look back to Homer for some resources of its idiom, whereas in everyday speech the usage of eros either narrowed between Homer and classical times or had always been narrower. In the development of prose, the spoken language may have governed the usage of the *eros* word group. The poetic and the prose meanings of eros would thus have developed in different directions. The two begin to converge again under the influence of the scientists and sophists, but the generic eros did not come into fashion fast enough to please Plato's Diotima.

If, in prose and spoken Greek, the specific eros prevailed, then the likelihood is that Pericles and the later politicians of the fifth century (or, at the very least, the authors who reported on them) exploited the amorous and pederastic associations of *erastes*. A second reason to believe they did so is the inherent specificity of the word *erastes* itself. This argument would hold even if we were wrong about the specificity of other eros cognates in prose. This distinction can be seen on analogy with English, which, like Greek poetic diction, has a strongly generic semantic field for "love" and its cognates in general. One can say "I love cake" with banality in both intention and result. As James Redfield has pointed out, however, it is quite another thing to say "my cake has a lover."⁷⁸ Lover, like *erastes*, denotes a social role. The primary meaning of *erastes* is the older, active male partner in the relationship of pederasty. To use the word in other situations was to wrest it out of the amorous context in which it was almost always heard when spoken. Some background against which to gauge the relative intensity of the word will be seen from the following uses.

Unlike its cognate relatives, *erastes* never had a wide semantic field. The word does not occur in Homer. Its uses in archaic poetry are few but

⁷⁸ This is even more true of Greek than of English. While in English, in composition "lover" can be rendered generic (e.g., in a compound word such as "cake-lover"), the composition *paiderastes* is quite specific. The later composition *demerastes* is used by Plato (*Alcibiades I*, 132a 4) in a specific (transferred) context alien to English compounds such as "cake-lover." Moreover, in Greek the weaker sense of lover, viz., "one who loves" can be covered by the participle (e.g., *bo eron*).

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appear to be uniformly narrow. Possibly the earliest extant use occurs in an Ibycus fragment (sixth century) with context destroyed. The text has been reconstructed to refer to a “lover beautiful [or noble] all over” (*perikalle' erastan*).⁷⁹ Although it is difficult to be certain without context, there is no evidence here for the generic sense. An elegiac fragment uses *erastes* in a context so explicitly sexual as to leave nothing to the imagination. Someone, apparently a boy, enjoys being “pricked” by the *erastes*, in an act which is described in detail with verve and admirable economy.⁸⁰ The usage of *erastes* here is the narrowest imaginable. Another, more unusual usage of the word that nevertheless remains sexual occurs in an epigram attributed (perhaps falsely) to Simonides, in which sometime lovers give sacrifices to the love goddess Aphrodite.⁸¹ With Simonides we come down to the first half of the fifth century. These earlier instances of *erastes* all seem to be specific.

The next extant use of *erastes* is either that of Herodotus or that of Pericles in 431 B.C. (if we are to believe Thucydides), depending on the publication date of Herodotus. Coming against the background of the preceding specific (not generic) uses, the word as used by Pericles and Herodotus is probably specific as well. Their intention would have been to inject (or transfer) into political discourse the passionate intensity connoted by the ordinary signification of *erastes*. The sense of acting out the social role of courting or wooing a political entity (e.g., “tyranny has many suitors”) is crucial to understanding both uses. If we are correct in our assessment, then Pericles does not only ask his fellow citizens to feel passionately about the city; rather, he asks them on the basis of their passion to play, in relation to the city, the social role that lovers play toward a beloved. They are to serve her chivalrously, sacrifice for her, compete for her favors, rival one another to show who is most worthy.⁸²

⁷⁹ S 181.10 Page. Specific *eros* (pederastic) figures largely elsewhere in Ibycus.

⁸⁰ Attributed (perhaps mistakenly) to Archilochus, which would make it seventh century, the oldest extant use (fragment 327 West, under *spuria*). Although other poetry of Archilochus is equally explicit in contexts not univocally denigratory (cf. the Cologne Epode, fragment S 478 Page = 196a West, in which slander hardly exhausts the poet's intention), the continuation asks Zeus to destroy the *kinoumenoi*. West conjectures *hetairoi* for *erastes*.

⁸¹ EG 60 (Simonides). Curiously, *erastai* here includes females. In a stretch, this fact could be thought to raise the possible (but unlikely) meaning “devotees” i.e., admirers of the love goddess herself.

⁸² See Monoson in note 72 of this chapter and the discussion in Chapter 7.

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From here on, transferred uses of *erastes* begin to accumulate.⁸³ The next instance is probably Euripides' *Heracleidae*, which may have been produced in the year following Pericles' Funeral Oration.⁸⁴ *Polemon erasta* ("lover of wars," 377–8) recalls *Iliad* 9.63–4, in which the original Homeric passage reads "Brotherless, lawless, hearthless is he /who desires war" (*polemou eratai*). For the less specific verb form, Euripides substitutes the more specific noun *erastes*, which is likely to have sounded strikingly new and unfamiliar in the context as it is not found in previous extant tragedy.⁸⁵ The next instance may be Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, although the play is difficult to date. Sophocles, like Thucydides' Pericles, transfers *erastes* to the political realm, but, like Herodotus, he reserves the political use of the term for tyranny or despotism⁸⁶ rather than democratic citizenship. When Creon defends himself against the suspicion that he is aiming to seize Oedipus' throne for himself, he claims it is not his nature to yearn (*himeiron*) to be tyrant, but rather only to *do* tyrannical things, just as any other sensible person (*Oedipus Tyrannus* 587–9). He reiterates: "It is not in my nature to be a lover of this purpose" (*erastes tes gnomes*, 601), meaning the purpose of becoming tyrant. The use of an *eros* cognate in this context of tyranny is absolutely traditional; only the more specific term *erastes* is relatively new in the context. The next extant instances of *erastes* in political contexts are probably the previously quoted parodies of demagogic political rhetoric in Old Comedy (425 and 424). Aristophanes would add many more over the years⁸⁷: the next instance was in *Wasps* (422), in which "lover of monarchy" becomes a democratic accusation.

Erastes with its inherent specificity thus provides a "control" on the other *eros* cognates: for scholars skeptical about whether specific (transferred) senses were ever intended, it provides evidence of one *eros* cognate for which the transferred sense is tolerably clear. And if one, why not other cognates

⁸³ This may also be due to the fact that so much more literature is extant.

⁸⁴ On stylometric and other considerations for the dating of the *Heracleidae*, including a possible allusion to Pericles' Funeral Oration, see R. Gladstone, "Introduction to the *Heracleidae*," pp. 111–112.

⁸⁵ The intriguing word *erasteuein* (object: marriages) occurs at *Prometheus Bound* 893. The verb might appear to be a denominative formed from the noun *erastes*, hence "to play the lover". However, Chantraine and Frisk, s. v. both find it a denominative from the adjective *erastos* (desirable); hence *erasteuein* would mean "to desire."

⁸⁶ The context is not entirely pejorative; see *Oedipus Tyrannus* 939–40, in which the *turannis* comes close to being an elected office.

⁸⁷ For examples, *Clouds* 1459; *Peace* 191, 988; *Birds* 324, 706, 1279; *Wealth* 245.

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as well? The English analogue “love” once again shows how the specific sense persists within a semantic field that is very broad. Context and other niceties (e.g., auxiliary verbs) tell English speakers when love means love, and very little real confusion ever occurs between the specific and the generic meanings. If a modern politician stood up and asserted that he loved his country, no one would take notice. But if he said that he had “fallen in love” with a party or a policy, his hearers would register the transfer. It will be subsequently argued that Thucydides’ use of the noun *eros* in his own voice at 6.24.3, in the context of the Sicilian expedition, also has all the earmarks of specific (transferred).

Some readers will object that a cannon has been wheeled out to slay a gnat: love always means love. However, this ignores the generic uses, which accumulate rapidly in the hands of a select stream of intellectuals from Euripides on, albeit particularly in prose. Distinguishing generic from specific (transferred) becomes increasingly difficult. Once again, *erastes* tells the story best, evolving from specific, to transferred, and finally undergoing “genericization,” at least in a select stream of writers. Perhaps as early as 422 B.C., Euripides, in *Suppliant Women*, speaks of a person desirous of begetting children as an *erastes paidon* (1086). In any other context the phrase could mean only “an erotic lover of boys,” that is, a pederast. Various explanations are possible: perhaps Euripides has exploited the fashion of erotic rhetoric in order to create a cognitive dissonance between two kinds of love, hence giving his line an added liveliness. Perhaps because desire for children will implicate the protagonist in a change of fortune, *eros* as the tragic passion is here extended to children.⁸⁸ But it is also a plausible conjecture that Euripides, with his strong genericizing tendency, believed, like Plato’s Diotima, that the word *erastes* should be regularized. If *eros* means any desire, *erastes* should mean any desirer. Euripides’ is the first likely generic use of *erastes*. However, this genericization will not become widespread in the fourth century.

⁸⁸ “Seeing others procreating, /I became a lover of children and by this yearning [*potbos*] was destroyed” (1087–8). Compare *Ion* 67, 1227. See also the important comments of D. Mastronarde, ed., *Euripides. Phoenissae*, ad loc. 356, on women and the love of children in Euripides. Even the ostensibly specific uses of *erastes* in Euripides, at *Suppliant Women* 899 and *Trojan Women* 1051, could with circumspection be read as generic. These instances cast doubt back on *Heracleidae* 377–8. Why read it as specific (transferred) when Euripides prefers generic? The innovation of using the noun generically would have been just as striking as specific (transferred). Neither reading would cast any doubt on the evidence that, traditionally, *erastes* was exclusively specific.

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Later prose shows the vicissitudes of the erotic fashion in rhetoric, its demise and afterlife in the fourth century. In brief: the fashion dies out quickly in actual spoken oratory but catches fire in a select stream of prose writers: the Socratics. In the written versions of Attic oratory that we possess, love means love. The generic sense of *eros* is conspicuously absent from all cognates of the *eros* group. No specific (transferred) uses exist in the extant speeches.⁸⁹ This is true even though many ordinary, specific uses do exist in the speeches. All of the uses of the *eros* word group are narrowly amatory in Antiphon, Andocides, Lysias, Isaeus, Hyperides, Dinarchus, Aeschines, Lycurgus, and Demosthenes.⁹⁰ The lack of generic uses of not merely *erastes* but also of any *eros* cognate is more evidence in favor of the thesis that the meaning of the word group in prose language (and probably in spoken language) was always narrower than in literary language and that the genericization we have detected was not widespread. Furthermore, the fact that the orators refrain from injecting the passionate intensity of the specific *eros* into realms such as politics says something about the fifth-century vogue. It was short lived. Its associations with the new politicians following Pericles may have given it a reputation of being demagogic.

However, while erotic rhetoric was being ignored in actual oratory, it was reaching its full flower in the written word of Socratics such as Isocrates, Plato, and Xenophon. The overwhelming majority of instances occur with these writers. Isocrates, in his *Helen*, used the Aeschylean phrase (*eros enepesen* 10.52.1; cf. *eros empiptei*) in “So much *eros* fell upon them for the expedition and the labors of it” (*sc.* the Trojan war); the identical phrase had captured the mood at the outset of the Sicilian expedition in Thucydides (6.24.3). Other Isocratean erotic rhetoric includes such uses as “fall in love with [*erastheien*] the ability to persuade hearers” and “passionately desire [*erasthenai*] friendship with the Spartans and an alliance with them.”⁹¹ Of the Socratics, Plato is of course the prime example. Plato’s Socrates is willing to drag the term into the seemingly far-removed field of philosophical investigation.

⁸⁹ The writings of Isocrates, a Socratic, are exceptional and must be treated separately. See the subsequent discussion.

⁹⁰ One probably spurious exception is recorded, a Byzantine attribution (by Tzetzes) to the politician Demades, who opposed the warlike stance toward Macedon. Demades supposedly called himself an *erastes* of peace (*Chiliades*, 6.18).

⁹¹ *Antidosis*, i.e., 15.275.4 (cf. 245.5) and 318.8, respectively. Compare also 10.55.5; 8.65.2 and 113.8.

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For example, when Socrates says that he is a “lover [*erastes*] of separations and collections” (*Phaedrus* 266b 3), he means that philosophy requires its adherent to woo the methods of inquiry, an intensity of commitment in which he or she frequents them daily or lives with dialectic.⁹² Such instances are so many and so various in part because a new theory of eros is in play here. Even in Plato, however, the vast majority of uses of the *eros* word group refer to the ordinary, amatory passion without extending it into philosophical or other realms.

Not surprisingly, Xenophon, another Socratic, makes use of erotic rhetoric almost as frequently as (and in some ways more promiscuously than) Plato. Many of Xenophon’s usages are also amatory or sexual. But Xenophon uses *erastes* and other cognates in a myriad of political, philosophical, and still other contexts. For example, at *Hellenica* 5.2.28, he gently disparages Phoibidas for being “much more an *erastes* of doing something illustrious than of staying alive.” This usage corresponds to the erotic love of honor in Plato’s *Symposium*.⁹³ Elsewhere Xenophon uses a striking periphrasis to describe Agesilaus’ ability to make friends: “he made many into *erastai* of his friendship” (*philia*, 1.19). These Xenophontic examples are important because they are candidates for a fully fledged generic sense of *eros* in prose, albeit in an idiosyncratic genre. The object of desire, friendship, seems unerotic. Xenophon imports the word *erastes* with its amatory connotations into realms where it is practically forced to lose them.⁹⁴ Such usages seem to fulfill Diotima’s dream: a generic erotic language that extends to any object under the sun, that is, eros for goods (not necessarily beauties). How much passionate intensity does such a concept of eros retain? Some idea can be gleaned from a definition of *eros* found in the *Memorabilia*: “one calls strong desire ‘*eros*’” (3.9.7). Xenophon would therefore wish to preserve some strength or modicum of intensity in his concept of *eros*. That

⁹² The explicit connection between eros and wisdom had begun (in tragedy) as early as Euripides’ *Medea* (431 B.C.): the *Erotes* are “*paredroi* to Wisdom”; cf. the earlier political use of Eros as “*paredros* in office” in Sophocles’ *Antigone* 796 (possibly 441 B.C.).

⁹³ Compare *Cyropaedia* 1.5.12: “lovers of praise” (*epainou erastai*).

⁹⁴ A curious usage occurs in *Hunting with Dogs*: “men fell in love with hunting with dogs (*andres kunegesion erasthesan* 13.18). For Xenophon, a certain quota of intensity must be met, but any and all objects of desire may be affected. Perhaps Xenophon does not mean that every individual could (even potentially) be so enamored of hunting with hounds that his or her fondness achieved the requisite intensity. Rather, a few individuals could conceivably become so enamored, and therefore hunting, too, can be an erotic object. In modern terms, people have their own private fetishes and obsessions; the fact that their fetishes are not shared by everyone does not entail that said fetishes are not intense objects of desire for the individuals themselves.

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intensity might fall short of what we would expect of erotic love,⁹⁵ but it would still have to be stronger than any quotidian desire. In any case, the Xenophontic examples are highly unusual. The Socratics created their own idiom and treated language the way they pleased. They almost certainly wielded some influence,⁹⁶ but they are not representative of their time.

3.5. Thucydides' Concept of Political Eros

The preceding survey has shown that the erotic discourses found in Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Plato were not simply idiosyncratic but were in fact influenced by a variety of traditions in which eros was used in nonsexual contexts in Greek thought and literature. Furthermore, the preceding survey has put us in a better position to decide two questions: (1) Is Thucydides' use of *eros* in his own name specific or generic? and (2) Does *eros* represent for Thucydides a "scientific," naturalistic category, or a metaphorical, poetic, or religious category? To begin with the religious question: a consistent theme has accompanied eros in texts ranging from the eleventh Nemean to the *Antigone* to Thucydides' Nicias: desire, like pride, goes before a fall. As we shall see, this motif is shared by Thucydides' Diodotus and seems worked into the very structure of Thucydides' own narrative of the Sicilian expedition. A second motif that emerged from the survey is the association of eros with tyranny: Archilochus, Herodotus, and Sophocles (and later Plato) all wrote of the erotic aspect of despotism. Here, too, it worth considering whether Thucydides wished to signal, by introducing the concept of eros into the Sicilian expedition, the increasingly tyrannical tendency of Athenian imperial democracy. These two motifs, of erotic tyranny and of desire going before a fall, were related to one another in the moralistic intentions of poets such as Pindar and Sophocles: the hubris of tyrannical ambition punished.⁹⁷ This moral viewpoint was closely related to honoring the gods in Greek cult and religious practice. It remains to be seen if Thucydides in

⁹⁵ *Oeconomicus* 12.13. "sick desires for sexual pleasures" (*duserotes ton aphrodision*) approaches the Homeric generic sense in which an amatory modifier must be added (e.g., *eros philotetos*, discussed in Section 3.1) to make *eros* sexual at all. Without it, *eros* almost means mere "desire."

⁹⁶ See, e.g., Aristophanes of Byzantium, *On Animals* (Aelian's epitome) 2.111, 1.127; Polybius, *Histories* 2.43.4. Various political and generic uses can be found in later Greek: e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 6.30.2; Synesius, *Epistles* 93.2; Sopater, *Diairesis Zetematon* 8.157.29, 8.4.14. These examples are by no means intended to be representative, let alone exhaustive.

⁹⁷ See also the discussion of citations from the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the eighth Pythian in Chapter 2, notes 29 and 30 and accompanying text.

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his concept of eros subscribed to the same moral outlook or whether his more naturalistic approach to eros privileged a different aspect of Athenian imperialism.

The word *eros* is used sparingly in Thucydides' history. Of the usages denoting political or public (as opposed to private) emotion, the highest concentration occurs in the reported political rhetoric previously mentioned.⁹⁸ In his own name, Thucydides uses the word most frequently in the account of Harmodius and Aristogeiton to denote their specific sexual and amatory passion.⁹⁹ The single instance in which Thucydides applies *eros* to public emotion in his own name occurs at the crucial juncture of the Sicilian expedition (*eros enepese*, 6.24.3). Thucydides reserves the political sense of the word *eros* for the moment in Athenian politics when their imperialism finally overreached and laid itself open to a crippling blow. This was the main usage that Cornford wished to assimilate to tragic poetry and myth. In the most comprehensive study of Thucydides' debt to the literary tradition, Cornford argued that the tragic folly of the Sicilian expedition and the quasi-divine punishment inflicted on Athens practically forced the historian *qua* literary artist to make use of the existing worldview of the tragedians.¹⁰⁰ Because the term *eros* in some tragic choruses (like the personification of Eros in art) is used in a prescientific sense to denote one member of a whole category of attendant daemons of divine justice, such as Ate (ruin or madness), sent from heaven to mix up the minds of those whom the gods would destroy, it seems to follow that Thucydides' own concept of political eros is likewise dependent on supernatural beliefs that could effectually vitiate the concept's meaningfulness for modern political theorists. On this reading, Thucydides' psychological insight requires a religious worldview in which Eros is a divine agent acting on the human psyche. Cornford's best evidence is very telling, viz., that Thucydides' ordering of his history is "dramatic": literary choice rather than chronology led him to commence the Sicilian narrative immediately following the Melian narrative. The hubris that it would not have been difficult for his readership to discern in the Athenian speakers on the island of Melos is followed close on by the infatuation of the Athenian public for a much larger isle and one not so defenseless.

⁹⁸ See Section 3.4. Compare S. Forde, *The Ambition to Rule*, p. 33 note 24. The three occurrences are 2.43.1 (Pericles), 3.45.5 (Diodotus), and 6.13.1 (Nicias).

⁹⁹ 6.54.1, 6.54.2, 6.54.3, 6.57.3, 6.59.1. See the subsequent discussion.

¹⁰⁰ *Thucydides Mythohistoricus* 216–20; 221–50, especially 227.

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In choice of language, too, Thucydides' *eros enepese* ("eros fell upon") is clearly indebted to the tragic tradition, e.g., in Aeschylus' nearly exact same wording *eros empiptei* ("lest eros fall upon"), as well as in Sophocles' Eros chorus: "fall upon possessions" (*en ktemasi pippteis*).¹⁰¹ In this contextualization, Thucydides' declared independence from the poetic tradition¹⁰² looks less than independent. In particular, "to fall upon" or "attack" contains an implicit metaphor of a live animal or person leaping upon the prey or victim. Such language suits the religious, personified causation rather than natural causation. However, a brief look at usages of *empiptein* elsewhere in the history complicates this picture. Emotions and sudden disasters do indeed appear with *empiptein*: fear (*phobos*), consternation, and disorder "fall upon" armies and navies.¹⁰³ Laughter likewise falls upon people, as do somewhat more abstract notions such as reversals, a death penalty, and the impulse (*horme*) to build a wall.¹⁰⁴ Another usage is purely mechanical: the Plateans defend their city with a machine that enables a wooden beam to fall upon the Spartans' battering ram.¹⁰⁵ Significantly, dry retching is a symptom that falls upon patients during the plague (2.49.4). The plague itself "falls upon" the Athenians in a slight variation of language (*epipesoi*, 2.48.3). Likewise the horrors of civil strife "fell upon" the Greek cities in the same passage in which Thucydides speaks of them as a *kinesis* and relates them to the nature of human beings (*epepese*, 3.82.2). On this linguistic evidence alone, to affirm that Thucydides' concept of *eros* was mythic in the strong sense sought by Cornford, we would also have to believe that Thucydides conceived of the plague and civil strife as avenging daemons too. It seems rather that personification is a possible but not a necessary connotation of *empiptein* and *epipiptein*.

The main reason not to read these usages as personified is that Thucydides never explicitly personifies a passion or explicitly prefers divine intervention to natural causes. But Cornford's larger thesis is that Thucydides

¹⁰¹ See also *Bacchae* 818, *Iphigenia at Aulis* 808.

¹⁰² For example, 1.21.1, where Thucydides recommends his evidentiary (cf. *tekmeria*) approach over that of poets who beautify and magnify and over that of "logographers," such as Herodotus or his predecessors, who put their stories together more for catering to recitals than for truth, since the stories are incapable of refutation and most of them, because of time, are untrustworthy, having conquered their way into the realm of myth (*to mythodes*). Compare 1.22.4: "with a view to recitals, perhaps my non-mythical [*to me mythodes*] account will appear less pleasing."

¹⁰³ 2.91.4, 4.34.2, 7.80.3.

¹⁰⁴ 4.28.5, 2.61.2 (Pericles), 2.53.4, 4.4.1.

¹⁰⁵ 2.76.4.

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does not need to personify them: they are already personified for him in the tradition that informs his viewing equipment. Cornford claims that Thucydides had extricated himself from literal and obvious forms of personification without eradicating the more deeply embedded impulse to shape his story around the *pattern* or “mould” of a mythic theme such as crime and divine punishment.¹⁰⁶ Eros in this view could even be a purely natural phenomenon that Thucydides overemphasizes or gives a larger place in his political thought on account of his subliminal preset mold in which some force or emotion must lead the Athenians into temptation. Modern political theory in general disagrees with Thucydides about eros, downplaying the importance of eros in all but the private sphere. Cornford’s thesis of residual superstition could, then, explain why Thucydides placed much greater emphasis on eros and how such emphasis was misplaced.

Yet the excluded middle in this dichotomy between scientific and tragic worldviews contains much that is crucial. Human beings routinely experience temptation without need to postulate divine beings. It would not be very “scientific” for a historian to ignore the psychological insights and experiential wisdom to be gained from a full engagement with the thought of the tragedians, while at the same time exercising caution and skepticism about divine agency in cases where nature sufficed to explain the occurrences. Thucydides’ closest gloss on the Athenians’ *eros*, viz., his term *pleonexia* – meaning the desire to “have more” regardless of the object of the desire, be it more money, more fame, or in Hobbes’ phraseology, “power after power” – is an observable tendency in human beings of a certain character type in certain situations. This tendency can exist in human beings without recourse to gods and heroes, although Cornford may well be correct to the extent that a thinker in a society that takes gods and heroes seriously might be a more sensitive psychologist than modern social scientists whose easy, inherited (rather than hard-won) disbelief makes them poorer judges of human irrationalities.

As recent scholarship has shown, the picture of Thucydides as a “scientific” historian has been overdrawn. However, because the current tide is all the other way, it might be worth reviewing the aspects of Thucydides’ thought that were self-consciously and obviously theoretical rather than poetic. Sophistic aspects in the style and content of Thucydides’ history

¹⁰⁶ *Mythistoricus* 131–5.

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have been documented.¹⁰⁷ But it is the Hippocratic writings that have most often been claimed as the scientific precursor to, and greatest scientific influence on, Thucydides.¹⁰⁸ The arguments are based on textual similarities and contain at least one likely error (on the use of *prophasis*).¹⁰⁹ But the textual similarities remain striking. Chief among these is Thucydides' own foray into medical writing: his account of the plague at Athens. Thucydides' motive for describing the plague, he says, is to provide foreknowledge so that anyone who might in future be looking could recognize the same disease if it should ever happen again (2.48.3). Thucydides proceeds to describe the symptoms with minuteness of detail taken from his own observations, having personally fallen sick with it as well as having looked at other patients. This notion of foreknowledge (*proeidōs*) may be compared to the Hippocratean notion of *prognosis*, which corresponds less than our own medical term does to prediction; rather, *prognosis* describes the whole course of the disease in order to classify it according to its character or characteristic behavior. *Prognosis* is thus the basis on which prediction is made rather

¹⁰⁷ For example, H. D. Rankin, *Sophists, Socratics and Cynics* pp. 92–121. Chief among those aspects of, e.g., Diodotus' speech that answer to the thought of certain sophists is his naturalistic approach to morality: he apparently eschews all concern for justice, effectively making himself appear tougher than Cleon by showing how the latter's punitive justice is rooted in a sentimentality that clear-sighted imperialists can ill afford. Textual evidence for the existence of this amoral strain in sophistic thought can be found in the discussion in Section 2.5.

¹⁰⁸ For example, D. L. Page, "Thucydides' Description of the Great Plague"; K. Weidauer, *Thukydides und die Hippokratischen Schriften, passim*; C. N. Cochrane, *Thucydides and the Science of History*, pp. 14–34; J. H. Finley, *Thucydides*, pp. 67–73. It is difficult accurately to date the Hippocratic writings; it is possible that some or all came after Thucydides. Hence no influence can be asserted without danger of anachronism. The most that can be said is that such ideas were "in the air" in the latter half of the fifth century and had an oral tradition before being written down. These interpretations should be read in tandem with the criticisms of A. Parry, "The Language of Thucydides' Description of the Plague"; Parry sets the bar for Page's "technical" language rather too high (pp. 165–8) while conceding that terms indicated by Weidauer are "scientific" (p. 160). For scientificity used as rhetoric, see note 5 of this chapter.

¹⁰⁹ *Prophasis* in a Hippocratic sense: "others for no reason given [*prophasis*] suddenly from being healthy were first seized with strong heats in the head" (Thucydides 2.49.1–2). Compare 2.50.1: Thucydides admits that his description fails to capture the *eidos* of the disease. Note Thucydides uses *aitia* for cause at 2.48.3. *Prophasis* used in the political realm: the "truest reason given" for the war was the growing greatness of the Athenians and the fear it inspired in the Spartans, which "necessitated" the war (*anankasai*, cognate of *ananke*); in contrast to the grievances spoken more openly, this "truest *prophasis*" was least evident in the speeches of the day. *Prophasis* in this crucial passage is probably closer to "truest *allegation*" as in the unscientific Greek prose of the period (the history contains a number of colloquial uses of *prophasis*), than it is to the above Hippocratic sense. See C. Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, pp. 32–38, 213–14, for a review of the literature with a discussion of the passages.

than prediction itself.¹¹⁰ Thucydides accordingly describes the progress of the disease up to its high point on the seventh or ninth day, at which the patient either died or underwent (an often harrowing) recovery (2.49).

The similarities with Hippocratic *prognosis* recur in the political realm: Thucydides claims to be writing a possession forever for those who wish to see clearly the events that happened as well as to see (not foresee) events when they happen in the future, events which will be the same or nearly so, because of human nature (1.22.4). His stance toward the future, like that of the Hippocratic writings, is less predictive than descriptive; here, as with the plague, forewarned is not quite forearmed: the astute reader living through similar events in a later time will recognize them for what they are (if he or she is looking).¹¹¹ Thucydides grounds his assertion that similar events will recur in future on the permanence of human nature. For example, “many harsh things befell the cities because of civil strife – events which occur and will always occur so long as the nature of humans is the same” (*he phusis anthropon*).¹¹² Later in his description of civil strife, Thucydides uses a similar expression: “once it had overmastered the laws, human nature [*he anthropoia phusis*] . . . gladly showed itself mastered by passion” (*orge*, 3.84.2). As we shall see, one such passion that will master the human nature of the Athenians is *eros*. In Thucydides, as in the Hippocratic writings, *phusis* is applied to human beings. Like the Hippocratics, Thucydides characterizes individuals as having diverse natures: he speaks of Themistocles’ “strength of nature” and the “power of his nature,” manifest in his genius of political judgment.¹¹³

At crucial moments, Thucydides also relies on two other scientific terms: *kinesis* and *ananke*. In grounding his assertion that the war between the Peloponnesians and Athenians was worthiest to report on of all the wars that had gone before, Thucydides claims that this was the greatest motion (*kinesis*) that had ever happened to the Hellenes (1.1.2). Thucydides here

¹¹⁰ Cochrane, pp. 8–9, 26–34.

¹¹¹ Contrast Cochrane, p. 8. The Hippocratics’ further step of “treatment” or therapeutics has almost no analogue in Thucydides. One thinks of Diodotus “curing” the Athenians of their anger against the Mytilenians and saving (some of) them from death and enslavement, a temporary cure at best. Parry, pp. 159–61, 172–3, makes the best case against “optimism.”

¹¹² 3.82.2. The continuation of the passage also sounds Hippocratic: “But the events are greater or quieter, and different in their forms (*eide*), according as the changes of circumstances occur in each case.”

¹¹³ *Phuseos ischus*, *phuseos dunamis* (1.138.3). This description of Themistocles is as close as Thucydides comes to ascribing to anyone the ability to predict future events. Even then, effective intervention is not always possible (1.138.4). Such genius is not, of course, a science that can be promulgated.

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seems to begin the history with the widest lens possible, placing the human struggle in the cosmic context of the fundamental categories, such as motion and rest, that govern the universe. He returns to the same terminology in the description of civil strife. Again, the description is globalizing: “so to speak the entire Hellenic world was moved” (*to Hellenikon ekinethe*).¹¹⁴

Versions of the self-exculpatory use of *ananke* that we saw in the sophists are expounded by (mostly Athenian) characters throughout the history.¹¹⁵ In the strongest formulations, the human world, like the natural world, would be without moral blame. For example, the Athenian envoys to the Peloponnesian congress claim that they were “compelled” (*katenankasthemen*) to expand their empire (1.75.3). The same *ananke* would have influenced the Spartans or anyone else in their position (*anankasthentas*, 1.76.1). The Athenians were conquered, they say, by the greatest things: honor, fear, and profit (1.76.2). The fact that they could not overcome such great temptations was only in accordance with the law that the weaker is constrained by the stronger (1.76.2). Orwin has noted the similarity between this line and a fragment of the atomist Democritus: “By nature, ruling [*archein*: also “initiating”] is the property of the stronger.”¹¹⁶ Thus the same reason the other Greeks must yield to Athenian hegemony is the reason why the Athenians must yield to their desires: both groups are mastered by forces greater than themselves. Thucydides entertains but does not explicitly embrace such views. Fitting *ananke* together with human will becomes a dialectical problem in the history rather than an axiom, and the problem is examined over and over again in the speeches and set-piece debates between the Athenians and representatives of more traditional Greek views, as well as in Thucydides’ own descriptions.¹¹⁷ These brief indications show a fundamentally different view from (for example) views ordinarily associated with tragic choruses.

It is also noteworthy that the one area in which Thucydides claims that the Athenians were particularly prone to mythologize their own history, a tendency he claims to be most on guard against, was in the founding of

¹¹⁴ Note the apologetic “so to speak” (*hos eipein*) repeated from 1.1.2 in 3.82.1.

¹¹⁵ Notably in the Athenian envoys’ speech to the Peloponnesian congress, in Diodotus’ speech in the Mytilenian debate, and in the Melian dialogue.

¹¹⁶ Fragment 267 DK; *Humanity of Thucydides*, p. 47.

¹¹⁷ For firm distinctions in Thucydides’ own voice that resolve some of the issues, see 7-57. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, pp. 65–8, criticizes Thucydides’ view of history as premodern for its stress on human will and individual motive, to the detriment of blind forces and laws such as economics. See the discussion in Cochrane, pp. 17–19.

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their democracy, particularly in the political and psychological motivations that the Athenians attributed to the founders, Harmodius and Aristogeiton. (His account of their true motivations constitutes the main explicitly erotic narrative in the history.) A look at these passages is in order, because it bears on the way Thucydides treats evidence. The Athenians' account, he says, overestimated the duo's patriotism in their performance of the great deed of tyrannicide. In discussing his new, evidentiary method and his departure from the poetic tradition, Thucydides singles out the story of the founders Harmodius and Aristogeiton as the prime example of political myth-making¹¹⁸ that his methodology will correct (1.20). Crucially, he returns to their story in a digression intended to illuminate the desires, hopes, and fears surrounding the Sicilian expedition, offering the following revisionist version of the founders' motivations (6.53–6.60): the wish to reestablish liberty was a motive that the pair hoped to exploit in others, in order to use the momentum of the crowd (6.56.3). Overthrowing the tyranny was ancillary to Aristogeiton's primary objective: to retain possession of Harmodius (6.54.3). In the event, personal rather than public motivations prevailed to the end, when the pair struck down the politically less significant Hipparchus, brother to the tyrant, because he was the one who had originally insulted Harmodius (6.57.2–6.57.3). The word that Thucydides uses over and over to describe their motivation is *eros* (e.g., 6.54.1, 6.54.2, 6.54.3, 6.57.3, 6.59.1). He raises the question whether their love was in any way directed toward the fatherland or whether it was a purely personal, sexual passion. He admits in several places that the attempt was indeed daring (6.54.1, 6.56.3, 6.59.1), but he questions on whose behalf the daring was actually committed: beloved Athens or a beloved youth.

Monoson has recently analyzed the story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton and reconstructed some of the ways the political myth of the founding may have operated in the imagination of democratic Athens.¹¹⁹ Although modern readers are prone to reconstruct a Harmodius myth in which public spiritedness and self-sacrifice were upheld as the Athenian ideal (thereby turning Thucydides' erotic account into an exposé of a merely selfish, perhaps even tawdry, love affair), Monoson shows that the myth's likely significance was rather a celebration of that very love affair and its seemingly

¹¹⁸ Compare *to mythodes* and *to me mythodes* (1.21.1, 1.22.4).

¹¹⁹ S. Monoson, "The Allure of Harmodius and Aristogeiton: Public/Private Relations in the Athenian Democratic Imaginary" in *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, pp. 21–50.

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happy coincidence with the public concern of antityranny. In particular, the Athenians' explicit celebration of the fact that Harmodius and Aristogeiton were lovers and the "lack of any effort to conceal the essentially private motive behind the pair's great public act in sources sympathetic to the legend,"¹²⁰ undercuts the interpretation that Thucydides is exposing their passion *qua* purely private in any simple sense. Instead, the myth of Harmodius and Aristogeiton operated to show Athenians how private eros could provide a path to public deeds, that is, how an erotic relationship could be, and properly should be, politicized. The myth is a key example of one strand in what we have called the discourse of political eros, in which the erotic bond between two males engenders political virtues: manliness and the unwillingness to acquiesce in tyranny.¹²¹ By infusing citizens' private, erotic attachments with civic meaning, the story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton represented to Athenians the potentially happy coincidence between their private longings and their public duties.¹²² Sexual love can help make you a good citizen. The best citizens were lovers. For an audience steeped in this political mythology, it is unsurprising that Pericles could effectively use his striking metaphor of the city's *erastai*. Defending a boy's honor from a tyrant's lust is dimly symbolic of defending Athens' honor: both are the work of passionate, strong men who do not suffer an insult readily and who are willing to defend themselves and their own.

This reconstruction of the myth of Harmodius and Aristogeiton throws into relief the central problem of Thucydides' critique. If the standard story about Harmodius and Aristogeiton already emphasized their eros explicitly, resting their patriotism, as it were, on their eros, then what did Thucydides intend to accomplish by stressing eros? For he does stress eros relentlessly. "The daring deed of Harmodius and Aristogeiton was attempted on account of an erotic circumstance" (*erotiken xuntuchian*, 6.54.1). "When Harmodius had become radiant through the bloom of his youth, a man of the commoners, Aristogeiton, a citizen of middle rank, became his *erastes* and possessed him" (6.54.2). "[Aristogeiton] felt great pain erotically" (*erotikos*, 6.54.3). "Straightaway without circumspection they fell

¹²⁰ Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, p. 37. The "sources" include Aeschines (1.132), Plato's Pausanias in the *Symposium* (182c), and the group statue of Harmodius and Aristogeiton that stood in the agora.

¹²¹ Monoson, pp. 38–9; cf. Sections 1.1 and 1.3.

¹²² Monoson, pp. 42–3.

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upon him [*prospesontes*], even as though especially through passion [*orges*]: the one's was erotic [*erotikes*, *sc. orges*], the other's because he had suffered the insult of hubris" (*hubrismenos*, 6.57.3). "It was with this sort of character, through an erotic condition [*erotiken lupen*, literally "pain"] that the beginnings of the conspiracy and the irrational daring came to Harmodius and Aristogeiton out of their great alarm at the moment" (6.59.1). Yet this eros was no news to the Athenians, who celebrated Aristogeiton's eros as the bulwark of liberty. Why did Thucydides labor the obvious?

The answer must lie in a similarity between Aristogeiton's *eros* and the Athenians' *eros* during the Sicilian expedition. Connor, Rawlings, Orwin and Monson¹²³ have explored a number of analogies suggested by the placement of the Harmodius and Aristogeiton story in the midst of the recall and arrest of Alcibiades, which left the Sicilian expedition without its most able commander. The initial analogy that causes the Athenians' fear was the analogy between the tyrant Hippias (or Hipparchus) and Alcibiades, who was suspected of aiming at the tyranny. The popular leaders who speak in favor of Alcibiades' recall and arrest are, in the public mind, the new tyrannicides, the latter-day analogues of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, who vanquish the new threat to Athenian freedom. However, as Connor points out, Thucydides turns this analogy on its head. The demagogues actually hope that by driving out Alcibiades they will themselves be able to seize the preeminence (6.28.2, 6.29.3). Thucydides makes a point of saying that the harshness of Hippias' tyranny did not cause the tyrannicide. Rather, the botched attempt at tyrannicide caused the tyranny to grow harsher from that point on (6.59.2). The Athenians have mixed up cause and effect. By analogy, the alleged plot of Alcibiades does not cause the demagogues to arrest and recall him. Rather, their arrest and recall of Alcibiades cause him to plot with Sparta against Athens after escaping the arresting officers.¹²⁴ Athens had been fine under the Pisistratid tyranny (6.54.5–6); Harmodius and Aristogeiton harmed the city in furtherance of their own private eros when the effects of their love spilled over into public affairs.

¹²³ Connor, *Thucydides*; Rawlings, *The Structure of Thucydides' History*; Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*; Monson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*. See page references in subsequent notes.

¹²⁴ Connor, *Thucydides*, pp. 178–80; Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, pp. 125–6. Compare Rawlings, *The Structure of Thucydides' History*, pp. 100–17. See also J. Allison, *Word and Concept in Thucydides*, pp. 182–5. In his eulogy of the Pisistratid tyranny, Thucydides seems to show himself capable of contemplating its analogue, a new benign tyranny or benevolent despotism under Alcibiades. Compare Thucydides' embrace of the broad-based oligarchy of 411 B.C. See M. Palmer, *Love of Glory and the Common Good*, pp. 111–14.

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This latter seems to be the lasting analogy with which Thucydides wishes to leave his readers. In wanting Sicily so much that they feel eros for it, the Athenians (like Aristogeiton with his “erotic condition”) are likely to put the state at risk. As Connor has put it: “The Athenians, like Harmodius and Aristogeiton, are under the influence of eros and engaged in an act of unwarranted boldness” (cf. 6.54.1 and 6.59.1 with 6.31.6 and 6.33.4). More specifically, in feeling eros, both cities and individuals are vulnerable to fears and pains which make them lash out (as well as embrace) without circumspection. Just as Aristogeiton could not bear the thought of his beloved wrested away by Hipparchus, so the demagogues of 415 B.C. (6.51.1) cannot bear the thought of a triumphant Alcibiades returning with Sicily in hand, prepared to offer Athens such a jewel for her crown that she would be tempted to give herself into his hands perpetually. The same holds true during the rest of Thucydides’ history (and beyond). The same demos that in 415 B.C. could be convinced to indict Alcibiades for high treason was to recall and embrace him as supreme commander in 407 B.C., strip him of that command several months later, and desire him back again in 405 B.C.,¹²⁵ a love–hate relationship that compromised their war effort. Under the influence of eros, Athenians were not likely to conduct their policy rationally, whether foreign or domestic.

On this reading, Thucydides labors the obvious, that is, he labors the erotic passion with public consequences, which was the accepted version of the political myth, because he agrees with the Athenians that the founders’ motive was eros, and he agrees with the political myth that the Athenian regime is indeed characterized by erotic, daring citizens.¹²⁶ Just as the Athenians think they are replaying the drama of Harmodius and Aristogeiton in conducting a witch hunt during the Sicilian expedition, so Thucydides thinks that the Athenians are indeed engaging in daring acts to secure erotic desires in their witch hunt as well as in the larger project of the Sicilian expedition. He uses his disagreement with the Athenians about whether the public consequences of eros were benign in the case of Harmodius and Aristogeiton to point out what was wrong with the Sicilian

¹²⁵ The polis “yearns [*pothei*] for him; it hates him; and it wishes to have him” (*Frogs* 1425). Compare Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 34.6: in 407 B.C., after leading the procession to Eleusis, Alcibiades “so demagogued the rustics and the poor that they desired with a marvelous desire [*eran erota*] to be tyrannized by him.”

¹²⁶ S. Forde, *The Ambition to Rule*, p. 35.

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expedition.¹²⁷ The author who uses eros to dismiss, coldly, the romanticized version of the founding at 6.53–6.59 is unlikely to have lapsed into Cornford's mythologizing view of eros at 6.24.

Did Thucydides believe that there can be no public, communal eros, of the sort Pericles sought to encourage in his Funeral Oration, but that eros is essentially private? Such a conclusion seems likely, particularly in view of his description of how the war was lost, viz., that the Athenians “conducted their politics in accordance with private ambitions and private gains” (*kata tas idias philotimias kai idia kerde*, 2.65.7). Interestingly, however, such is not Thucydides' conclusion. He carefully catalogues what appears, within limits, to be the self-sacrificing aspect of the Athenians' communal infatuation with Sicily, to which we will turn in a moment.

Specific or generic? Thucydides' inclusion of the pederastic affair of Harmodius and Aristogeiton in the Sicilian narrative would seem to argue that Thucydides' *eros enepese* is intended to convey the specific (transferred) sense of eros, if we apply the same criterion we used to distinguish generic from specific eros in the tragedians and elsewhere, viz., allusions to (or juxtaposition with) pederasty, marriage or some other more straightforwardly amatory or specifically erotic contexts.

Metaphoric or literal? It was previously argued that durability and portability should be the criteria for determining whether an author wished to sustain a connection between eros and politics outside of the passage in which the connection was first made. If the connection was dropped as quickly as it was picked up, then the likelihood of its being a temporary, metaphorical connection was higher than the likelihood of its being a durable psychological insight. If the psychological insight recurred or was elaborated, however, the chances were better that it was intended literally. The durability of Thucydides' conception of eros is most evident in his sustained observation and painstaking recounting of the details surrounding the Athenians' passion for the Sicilian expedition. For example, Thucydides does not stop after achieving a rhetorical effect with the term *eros* but continues on to describe different classifications of hopes and desires,

¹²⁷ For example, Alcibiades embraces a “forward” policy rather than adhering to Pericles' defensive policy, in part because he needs to start a whole new war in order to fund his lavish displays of wealth and, more importantly, to win universal acclaim. Similarly, the demos embraces the Sicilian expedition because they desire soldier's pay and booty, in the short term, as well as “eternal” monies in the public coffers that will eventually accrue to them (6.24.3).

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based on age groups and economic classes: the elite elders experience the eros one way, the elite youth in a second way, and the masses in a third.¹²⁸

In his detailed description of this mass psychology, Thucydides reports a number of features that can be fruitfully compared to our own modern, everyday experience of eros. The primary stress is laid on the fantasy inherent in the scheme. Thucydides introduces this portion of the history (6.1.1) by pointing out that the Athenians had no idea of the sheer size of the island and the magnitude of the task of conquering it. A component in many people's experience of eros is the feeling of being seized by an irrationality that causes behavior of a sort the subject would ordinarily consider too unrealistic and too untoward to engage in. Love finds a way mentally, replacing the real object of desire with a facsimile easier of access. Mental imagery and fantasizing about possibilities become the first in a chain of experiences at the outset of an amatory affair.

A second, related feature of eros is a sudden increase of daring. Thucydides writes that the enormous risks of the Sicilian expedition were discounted, although the expedition was noised abroad for its daring (*tolme*). Words for "hazard" figure prominently in the debates (e.g., 6.9.3, 6.12.2), and Thucydides observes that the project displayed the greatest hopes, considering its real resources, of any expedition ever attempted (6.31.6). Analogously in amatory affairs more narrowly considered, daring plays a prominent role, with the literary commonplace of audacity being to climb a shaky trellis up to the beloved's window.

It is significant that eros is said to have struck the Athenian assembly not during the conception of the scheme but during the second debate, the one concerning ways and means. Nicias calculated that he could dissuade the multitude with the great cost needed to equip his vision of a vast, unsinkable armada (6.24.1–2; cf. 6.21–3). Contrary to his intention, however, contemplating their own military might awakened a new desire to use it (cf. 6.31.1), just as eros in the individual sometimes arises out of a narcissistic exultation in his or her physical prowess. The extraordinary allocation of resources that followed the debates, an almost thoughtless generosity or liberality of expenditure (6.31.1–5) and total commitment to the task can all be seen to conform with erotic passion. This is a third component of erotic experience that most people have felt: a surprising resourcefulness, a

¹²⁸ 6.24.3. See the treatment in Section 7.6.

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heightened ability to accomplish any task or overcome any obstacle to win the beloved. Eros allows access to hitherto untapped physical and mental reserves.

Fourth and finally, Thucydides stresses the gratuitousness of the attempt to increase the size of the empire, undertaken despite the fact that Athens was having difficulty holding on to the empire she already possessed, a gratuitousness analogous to the experience of sexual temptation. An example would be a needless adultery that puts a treasured marriage at risk. In the cold light of day, or after the feeling has passed, the disproportion between the worthlessness of the gratification gained and the importance of what was gambled becomes clear.¹²⁹

Of these conformities with eros more narrowly conceived, many commentators have pointed out the first and the last, irrationality and gratuitousness, and these two have usually been taken to express Thucydides' own opinion of the Sicilian expedition, especially in light of his explicit statement that straying from the Periclean strategy of attempting no new acquisitions was the ruin of Athens (2.65.7). Thucydides does, however, give full play to his descriptions of the other two experiences as well – the liberality of expenditure and the exceptional daring of the scheme – descriptions which capture the buoyant energy and high spirits of the Athenians and which border on the celebratory. Thucydides relates that the entire city went down to the Peiraeus on the day of departure. The enormity of what they were about to undertake struck them more fully at the last minute, but they took courage when they saw the sheer magnitude of their armed might. Foreigners, and the rest of the crowd who were not going, came for the spectacle, which Thucydides says was at once worthy of description and so incredible as to be beyond the mind's capacity to grasp it. The armada was the most expensive and splendid ever to come into existence up to that time (of those from a single city and with Hellenic forces; 6.30.1–6.31.1). Costly figureheads and furnishings were used in the ships. Each man outfitting a trireme exerted himself to the last degree to make his ship excel the others in splendor and speed. Among the land forces, a zealous contestation one against the other broke out over arms and bodily apparel. Strife among themselves was raised wherever any of them were posted; and it seemed, to the rest of the Hellenes, more in the likeness

¹²⁹ For a fine evocation of the connectedness of eros with (insubstantial) hope, see A. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, pp. xi–xii.

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of an exhibition of power and wealth than a preparation against enemies (6.31.3–4). Once the fleet had sailed out, the ships raced one another as far as Aegina (6.32.2).

This intense rivalry, to the extent of preening themselves on the beauty of their equipment and their heraldry, and fighting over such items, perhaps more than any other single feature resembles the actions of rival lovers vying for the hand of a beloved.¹³⁰ Like the suitors whom Pericles exhorted them to become, the Athenians pay their courtship to the city Athens, wooing her in a contest in which each strives to show himself worthiest, emulating his competitors in hopes of having the honor of presenting her with a more splendid gift than anyone else could give.

It is difficult to believe that the historian, who in his opening pages reduced the human struggle of the Peloponnesian war to the amoral forces of natural philosophy in order to report on the greatest motion (*kinesis*) of all time, did not share the exhilaration of contemplating the greatest motion of that war, despite the fact that the pageantry, magnitude, and splendor of the Athenians' armada were all in service of destroying themselves and others. Wade-Gery wrote persuasively on Thucydides' consistent preference for concentrations of energy and power as goods.¹³¹ Yet the fact remains that Thucydides will also recount how the Athenians were "punished," if not by the gods then by nature, and if not for their hubris then for their miscalculations. However good the concentration of energy that was Athenian imperialism, the narrative implies the existence of a good beyond empire, that is, an aim or an end in which, if an observer is unable to foresee and deflect the city's trajectory from such a tremendous fall, he or she can at least see that trajectory for what it is. That clear vision (*to saphes skopein*, 1.22.4) of the political requires paying attention to the psychology of political action, which in turn requires, for Thucydides, an account of human eros.

Thucydides' theory of human nature and its susceptibility to eros have sometimes been thought to be contained in the speech given by the otherwise unknown orator Diodotus during the debate over how to punish the

¹³⁰ Compare the exhibition behavior of peacocks and the altercations of bachelor males of many species during mating seasons.

¹³¹ *OCD*³ s. v. "Thucydides." The passage is worth quoting from: "concentrations of energy (like Athens or Alcibiades) were to his taste. Their impact on a less dynamic world was likely to be disastrous – but whose fault was that? The world's, he says, consistently (1.99; 1.23.6 etc.; 6.15; 6.28; cf. 2.64.3–5) . . .".

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Mytilenians for rebelling.¹³² Crucial to understanding the speech is recognizing Diodotus' focus on self-interest to the apparent exclusion of justice. The Athenian assembly could be moved to passion, but it could also be relied on to accept seemingly sophisticated arguments based on self-interest over arguments based on justice. As Diodotus puts it, "You might be drawn to [Cleon's] speech because it seems juster [*dikaioteros*] in your present anger against the Mytilenians. But we are not sitting in a courtroom about their case, so as to have need of justice; rather, we are sitting in a council about how they can be made useful [to us]" (3.44.4) The Athenian majority to whom Diodotus appeals does not believe in unmotivated acts of justice, but they do trust the Mytilenians to act predictably, that is, to act in their own (apparent) interest. Diodotus goes on to link self-interest to *eros*: in rebelling, the Mytilenians were acting under the influence of an erotic passion for liberty (3.45.4–7).

Capital punishment in such a case is ineffectual, Diodotus says, because greater forces are at work in human nature than any rational deterrent. "It is absolutely impossible – and the mark of great simplemindedness to think – that there is any hindering, whether by strength of laws or other fear, human nature rushing eagerly to commit an act" (*tes anthropoias phuseos*, 3.45.7). Men are driven to take risks because they are mastered by something ineradicable (or "incurable," *anekestos*; 3.45.4):

hope and *eros* everywhere, the latter leading, the former following on – [*eros*] conceiving the plot, [hope] guaranteeing the resources for a good fortune – do the greatest harm and, though invisible themselves, are stronger than visible terrors. And fortune in addition to these contributes no less to the excitement: unlooked-for, [fortune] is present, leading men on to gamble with inferior means, and this is no less the case with cities, in proportion as they concern the greatest things: freedom and empire. (3.45.5–6)

A number of features are noteworthy here. In the first place, the language describing *eros* once again recalls the naturalistic terminology of the Hippocratic physicians. Not a divine visitation from without, *eros* is located inside human nature, in which it is an incurable condition. It should also be noted how mechanistic this vision of nature is: either some force stronger than *eros* must be found or it must be admitted that restraint is useless.

¹³² For example, Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, pp. 121–6, 135.

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There is a balance or a preponderance of forces in play; there is nothing a hegemonic power like Athens can do to change this balance in human nature. Here, then, is one case in which several of the strands analyzed in the earlier sections of this chapter – natural philosophy, sophistic rhetoric, and the discourse of eros – all come together. In the last sentence quoted, Diodotus ascends from the individual eros to the communal eros. Cities experience eros no less than individuals, particularly when cities are faced with the greatest temptations: the prospect of winning their freedom and the possibility of ruling over other cities as an imperial power. It is difficult not to apply this conception of eros to the later attempt of the Athenians themselves for western empire. In particular, the perception of plenary resources that hope gives rise to, contrasted with the actually inferior means with which the individual or city gambles, is echoed in the debate over ways and means and in the observation at 6.31.6, which we examined. The risk and daring, the seizure by irrationality, the simultaneous impossibility of erecting adequate barriers to this behavior, are all reprised there.

In Chapter 7 we will return to Thucydides' history in order to study his treatment of patriotism and imperialism as erotic phenomena. Before turning to his treatment, however, in the remainder of Part II we begin in earnest the investigation of how compelling the ancient discourse of political eros should be for us today. We examine the problems raised for modern thought about eros by the ancient view of eros as it has emerged from the texts studied so far: the problems of aggression (Chapter 4) and sublimation (Chapter 5). Both chapters deal with the problematic connection between the sexual desire of the body and the political desires of the heart and mind, bringing the ancient views into dialogue with modern theory and, where possible, with modern empirical studies. If we agree with Thucydides that the Athenians' and Mytilenians' passions were indeed erotic, some argument would still be required to explain the connection between the sexual and the political, and how human psychology either transforms one into the other, or else how two desires so apparently diverse could come to resemble one another closely.

FOUR

The Problem of Aggression

At this juncture it seems proper to begin to bring the ancient discourses of political eros into closer dialogue with modern theory. Was there an eros in ancient Greece, or in any other time or place, that drove people to desire domination over others? The problem of aggression still bedevils liberal and postmodern interpretations of rape, which for a time had ceased to be an erotic crime. The commonplace that rape is a crime of violence, not sex, was an assumption of the Left for the better part of the twentieth century and remains the liberal account today.¹ In the liberal account, violence and eros are unnatural partners. During the sexual revolution this dichotomy was bolstered by a psychological theory: repressing sexual energy leads to violence, whereas removing the impedances to sexuality accordingly enables the individual to choose the natural, pacific outlet. “Aggression reduces to sex.” This formula contained more optimism than Freud’s repression theory originally intended.² More recently, all thought about sexuality has been rewritten by Foucault. The new account is pessimistic and owes its underpinnings to Nietzsche.³ Power is a fundamental component of sexuality in this theory. Intellectual honesty about liberation, viz., that the act

¹ The liberal position has been challenged by C. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, pp. 134–5; *Feminism Unmodified*, pp. 85–7, 92. Cf. J. A. Allison, *Rape*, pp. 3–5, 31, 54–9.

² Contrast Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, pp. 16–18, 28–9, 134, 139, 234–5, with Freud, e.g., *The Future of an Illusion*, p. 15 (Chapter 3, Section 1); *Civilization and Its Discontents*, pp. 108–45 (Chapters 5–8).

³ For the interplay of power with sexual desire in Foucault’s thought, see *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, pp. 45–9. Not only repressing eros but also the liberating of eros is “a means through which power is exercised” (quoted in L. D. Kritzman, ed., *Michel Foucault*, p. 117; cf. pp. 118–20). Compare also J. Miller, *The Passion of Foucault*, pp. 200–3, on the television appearance with Chomsky. Contrast, however, the shift in Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 6, 10.

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of liberating oneself is an exercise of power in its own right, gives rise to the suspicion that, contrary to the earlier hope, “sex reduces to aggression.” Acceptance of the latter formula would seem to signal the death knell of liberal public law regarding sexuality.

In Greek legal thought, aggression and sexuality came together in the concept of *hubris*. This complex idea, which included the violence inherent in sexual licence, was the focus of several politically charged prosecutions in which orators played on the demos’ very real fears of upper-class ambition and violence perpetrated against the people. Of greatest interest to us is whether violation emerges from these prosecutions as the aim, or object-choice, of *eros*, or whether violation is only ancillary to an object-choice which in better circumstances would have no need of violence. In Platonic psychology, a different passion from *eros* was often used to account both for honorable ambition and for antagonistic behavior of a more destructive kind. *Thumos*, or pride, the angry or spirited reaction to an affront to one’s honor, is the central political passion of Plato’s *Republic*.⁴ Warlikeness and defensiveness characterize Plato’s Guardian class, and both were necessary components of ambition at Athens, where the highest elected office was *strategos* or general.⁵ Political ambition would thus appear to stem from *thumos* rather than from *eros*. Yet when Plato treats of the far more aggressive, prideful, and bellicose ambition of the tyrant, his terminology becomes almost entirely erotic.⁶ What are the contributions of *thumos* and *eros* to such diverse political passions, and how do they differ in each? Why does the Foucauldian account seem to slight certain erotic phenomena, such as vulnerability and loss of ego on the part of the lover? Perhaps by expanding the discussion to include the concepts of *hubris* and *thumos*, we may recover a more recognizable form of *eros*.

4.1. Hubris and Class Domination in the Ancient Democratic Ideology

Although the English language does not have any single word to cover the full concept of *hubris*, the various aspects of this nexus of violation,

⁴ For example, Book 2, 375a 9–b 3; Book 4, 439e 1–440c 3.

⁵ *Constitution of the Athenians* (Aristotelian) 43–63. The nine archons were not elected but chosen by lot.

⁶ Book 9.

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arrogant superiority, and the deliberate humiliation of others can be found in disciplines as diverse as psychoanalysis, the history of sexuality, feminist theory, and the sociological study of rape. The Greek concept is complex, and the definition of the word will be subsequently revisited. Parts of a definition from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* follow: "Hubris is the doing or saying of that by which shame exists for the one suffering it." And, "the cause of the pleasure for those committing hubris is that they think that, by doing an ill turn, they themselves rise above."⁷ Rape was an important subcategory of hubris because forced or otherwise undesirable intercourse was one means of shaming a victim. For example, at *Hippolytus* 1073, Theseus uses the word *hubrizein* to describe the act alleged by Phaedra, viz., that Hippolytus has raped her.⁸ Hubris as rape created shame on the part of the victim and a perverse sense of honor or "rising above" on the part of the perpetrator.

Because hubris involved honor and could take the form of rape, hubris was one of the principal connections between sexuality and politics in Greek thought. In particular, orators of the fourth century focused on hubris as they picked up and elaborated the democratic criticism of elite pederasty found in Old Comedy. Their prosecution speeches are exercises in rhetorically biasing an audience, and the democratic fears on which they play verge on the alarmist. The democrat's quick identification of sexual deviance with oligarchic tendencies could at times reveal a comical pettiness.⁹ The class bias of pederasty made it easy to equate with the parties leaning toward oligarchy. Above all, the democracy feared and loathed the elite clubs or *betaireiai* that served as political, social and sexual nuclei. Because Athens had known its own oligarchic revolutions, had viewed many coups of more permanent character in other cities, and at times numbered among its citizens men of huge ambition and large followings (such as

⁷ *Rhetoric* 2.2.5–6 1378b 23–8. Compare especially N. R. E. Fisher, *Hybris*, pp. 7–35. Caution should be exercised before ascribing to Aristotle's own thought *topoi* from his *Rhetoric*. The *Rhetoric* seeks "persuasives" rather than factual or theoretical truths. Aristotle may only be demonstrating the kind of hubris arguments that have been found to be persuasive in the past or are likely to prove persuasive in future.

⁸ Compare 885–6: "dared to touch [her] bed with violence." The connection between hubris and shame is apparent from Theseus' later euphemism for the same act: "... someone [else] whose wife he shamed [*kateisxun'*], like his father's, by violence?" (1165).

⁹ For example, *Wasps* 488–502, especially the following passage:

XANTHIAS. And the prostitute who visited *me* yesterday noon – just because I was telling her to play "back in the saddle"! – became very sharp with me and asked if I was bringing back the tyranny of Hippias. (500–2)

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Alcibiades), the Athenian demos may perhaps be excused for believing that any and all upper-class clubs, with which pederasty and sexual hubris were particularly associated, were in league to put down the democracy.¹⁰ Yet despite its biases, the democratic perception of elite pederasty finds many instructive parallels in modern theory on aggressive male sexuality. Some of the parallels include the typology of the young, privileged rapist, the enforcement of class boundaries, and the behavior of men in groups.

In the democratic imagination, pederasty was associated with an old guard of aristocratic holdovers who perpetuated themselves by initiating boys into their practices. In part, this class distinction of pederasty was real.¹¹ Historically, the advent of pederasty as an institution coincided with the rise of the polis, forming a cultural pattern that included symposia, aristocratic clubs (the *hetaireiai*), and gymnasia.¹² Socially esteemed male homoeroticism occurred within warrior aristocracies during the formative periods of many Greek poleis long before the rise of full democracy.¹³ Although little is known of the Dark Age that separated the collapse of the Mycenaean palace-oriented civilization from the age of the polis, the absence or suppression of overt homosexual references in Homer argues for a later development of socially esteemed homoeroticism.¹⁴ The rise of

¹⁰ This was in a political environment in which members of oligarchic regimes and conspiracies swore oaths such as "I will be ill-disposed toward the people, and I will plot whatever evil for them I can" (*Politics* 5.9.11, 1310a 9–11). Compare Thucydides 8.54.4 on the function of sworn groups [*xunomosiastai*] in the actual oligarchic revolution of the Four Hundred.

¹¹ T. K. Hubbard, "Popular Perceptions of Elite Homosexuality in Classical Athens." Men of leisure had more time and means to pursue erotic relationships that, unlike marriage, had no utilitarian end in view. J. J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire*, pp. 62–4, contends that the sexual behavior of the political class was merely scrutinized more carefully.

¹² The Theognidea are usually cited as evidence for attitudes from the archaic age, although the dating is uncertain and many poems may be of much later vintage (for bibliography see K. Raaflaub, "Poets, Lawgivers, and the Beginnings of Political Reflection in Archaic Greece," note 33). The erastes of "Cyrnus" speaks for a hereditary aristocracy and disdains the new money obscuring its genealogy (Theognidea 183–192 West). On the ideology of symposiasts as constituting the ideal community, on symposia as politically formative and performative, and on the special place of pederasty in them, both in Theognis and elsewhere, see D. B. Levine, "Symposium and the Polis"; J. Bremmer, "Adolescents, *Symposion*, and Pederasty"; P. Schmitt Pantel, *La cité au banquet*. On Cretan ritual pederasty, see W. A. Percy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece*, pp. 59–72, for a suggestive pastiche of many sources.

¹³ The homoerotic poems attributed to Solon, who was himself of noble family, may be thought to coincide with the partial breakup of "feudal" land ownership and indentured servitude. The franchise came to be based on a property assessment. (139–56 West; *Constitution of the Athenians* 5–13; *OCD*³ s. v. *thetes*).

¹⁴ That pederasty should be considered an aristocratic and oligarchic practice more than a democratic practice is in accordance with Aristotle's opinion in the *Politics*, in which open homosexual

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political regimes in Greece, in the distinctive, republican sense of oligarchies and (later) democracies as opposed to hereditary monarchies, has usually been seen as the extension and restriction of the franchise to warriors or the classes of inhabitants fit for war.¹⁵ The stages of development, by no means uniform, seem to have progressed from regimes based on a wealthy, landed aristocratic class of horsemen to governing bodies inclusive of a more sizable middle class of hoplite soldiers who owned some land. The homosexuality associated with these elites has been explained as resulting from their martial values: they admired (and then desired) courage or manliness, bodily prowess, and the requisite physique, in short, fitness for war; perhaps they denigrated nonmartial, feminine virtues for the same reason.¹⁶ Masculine admiration spilling over into attraction between males can be found in various eras and cultures, particularly martial ones.¹⁷

relations are thought to characterize warrior peoples, for whom the highest value is the virtue necessary for war: courage or manliness, precisely the connection made in the *Symposium* by Phaedrus, Pausanias, and Aristophanes. "Open" (*phaneros*): said of the Celts, who are exceptions to the rule of gynocracy because of their homosexuality. In their militarism the Spartans are comparable with the Celts (2.9.7, 1269b 25–36, cf. 7.2.9–19, 1324b 4–14). Note the derogatory term *thrasutes* standing in for the full virtue, *andreia* (1269b 35 with *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.7.7–9, 1115b 24–34); Aristotle thought the Spartans focused on warlike (*polemi*ke) virtue to the detriment of other virtues (*Politics* 2.9.34, 1271a 42–b 2).

¹⁵ Aristotle (*Politics* 4.13.10, 1297b 16–24): in the first postmonarchical regimes, the governing bodies consisted of those who fought most effectively: first the relatively small body of wealthy horsemen, then later, with the rise of a middle class, the much larger body of hoplites or heavy-armed soldiers. (Whichever way the process of cause-and-effect worked, a similar connection can be seen in the democratization of Athens with the enfranchisement of the poor laborers or *thetes* who served as rowers when sea power became preeminent.) For an interpretation, see V. D. Hanson, *The Other Greeks*, pp. 108–26, 365–9; see also Raaflaub, "Beginnings," p. 47.

¹⁶ The alternative views have much to recommend them: (1) as a holdover from ritual initiations that inverted ordinary sexual roles. See especially Calame, *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece*, criticized in the Introduction, note 10. For the strong view of "Indo-European" pederasty, see J. Bremmer, "An Enigmatic Indo-European Rite: Paederasty"; B. Sergent, *Homosexuality in Greek Myth*; H. Patzer, *Die griechische Knabenliebe*. For Dorian only: E. Bethe, "Die dorische Knabenliebe." Contra: Percy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece*, pp. 15–35; Dover "Greek Homosexuality and Initiation," pp. 116–19, 124–6. (2) As "situational" or "opportunistic" homosexuality – the absence of women on long campaigns: thus Posner, *Sex and Reason*, pp. 149–50 explaining the prevalence that genetic arguments fail to explain. Contra: Dover points out that "the behaviour of the inhabitants of a barracks in the middle of a town is not the same as that of an expeditionary force in a desert . . ." (*GH*, pp. 192–3).

¹⁷ Among the Samurai: G. Leupp, *Male Colors*, pp. 47–57, emphasizes physical culture and battle preparation (for politics see pp. 48–9), but also stresses isolation from women as well as later androgyny under the influence of a priestly, nonmilitary tradition. Other cultures: see D. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality*, pp. 110–16. Posner, in *Sex and Reason*, shrewdly brings the issue closer to home by citing latent examples in the ostensibly heterosexual literature of

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Thus Greek pederasty, like the elites who practiced it, can be viewed as the leftover business of democratization. One of the principal insights of the *Symposium* was that pederasty was not entirely at home in democracy; it flourished in regimes consisting of much smaller, more cohesive groups. However, besides this political problem, the democratic fear of pederasty exposed a contradiction at the heart of Athenian morality, which retained an aristocratic strain revering activity, mastery, and freedom and shunning any behavior that could be construed as subordination, dependence, or passivity.¹⁸ These aristocratic ideals, which before the democracy had been the preserve of a privileged few, were now held out to all male citizens. To forgo pursuing beautiful youths would have been to place an intolerable limitation on masculinity and freedom. Yet this “master” morality¹⁹ entailed depriving the male who submitted of that same masculinity, mastery, and freedom that the society revered.²⁰ Although the brunt of democratic ire, when it flared up in a case like that of Timarchus, was primarily reserved for the passives who had betrayed the ideal by giving up their own freedom and masculinity, behind the scapegoat it is possible to discern the fear that members of the upper class who took the active sexual role were growing too big and too bold.

The synergy between ambitious flatterers like Timarchus and the even more ambitious men to whom they sold themselves is illustrated in a passage from the *Republic*²¹ (575e):

[Tyrants] in private life, before they rule, are like this: either . . . they have intercourse with their flatterers, who are ready to service them in every way, or, if they have need of something from somebody, do themselves fawn and dare to assume any posture, as though they belonged to him.

older British and American male fiction, in which the motif of the female love interest being favorably compared to a boy occurs often enough to give the reader pause. The positive valuation of female boyishness, particularly in their athleticism and demeanour, occurs more often in, but is not limited to, masculine genres.

¹⁸ See Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, pp. 34–5 for the persistence of aristocratic values among the demos in Athens.

¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, especially 260–2; *The Genealogy of Morals*, “First Essay,” especially Sections 5–10. Compare Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2, Part 1, Chapter 3 (p. 413), Chapter 15 (pp. 450–1); Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, Vol. 1, pp. 178, 326; Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 29–32; M. Poster, “Foucault and the Tyranny of Greece.”

²⁰ For example, Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 219–21, 206–7.

²¹ *Suneinai* can also mean “social” intercourse but in the context of *huperetein*, “to serve under,” bears a sexual connotation. Compare also the identification between sexual submission and flattery (*kolakeia*) that Pausanias feels the need to refute at *Symposium* 184b 6–c 7; some young men let themselves be taken in order to gain political power (184a 7–8).

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The ambitious gained power only if they attracted a following. If a politician like Timarchus became the dependent client or proxy of another man's interest, then he became inherently untrustworthy. Patronage was not a democratic political mode.²² Sexual submission signaled that a man had abandoned his honor and that his potential for political corruption was limitless.²³ In addition, democratic envy of the sort that Aristophanes' satires exploited (e.g., that all politicians have slept their way to the top) may have played a role because the aspersions came true in a case like that of Timarchus: his rank and stature in the assembly seem clearly ill gotten, the result of private, rather than public, preferments. Sexuality among men in groups naturally gives rise to charges of promotion on grounds other than merit.²⁴ Democrats could take comfort in speeches which, like the *Republic*, collapsed the distinction between tyrant and flatterer by showing the tyrant's cravenness and his willingness to assume the passive role.

Aeschines, in his prosecution of Timarchus, invokes a variety of dangers coming from the upper classes. He begins with the fear of "tyrannies and oligarchies governed according to the habits of their overseers" as opposed to the democratic constitution that looks to the rule of law for its salvation (1.4). In a striking rhetorical portrait, Aeschines anticipates (or else he interpolated for the published version) the long speech of a witness for the defense, conjuring up the image of a military general from the old school,²⁵ a traditionalist who mounts the platform in defense not of Timarchus but of the whole practice of pederasty. The military man will attempt to illustrate in his own person that a pederastic upbringing has no ill effects: he enters the scene languidly, inspecting himself, a self-conscious product of the wrestling schools (132). He contends that a prosecution like the present one actually represents the beginning of the end of education at

²² P. Millet, "Patronage and its Avoidance in Classical Athens." For flatterers (*kolakes*) carrying on a vestigial form of patron-client relationship with wealthy and powerful men in democratic Athens, see pp. 30-7.

²³ The legally actionable offence for which Timarchus was disfranchised was not submission but rather exercising his political rights after being known to have received money in exchange for sexual submission (*GH*, pp. 19-109). Had Timarchus adopted a retiring, apolitical existence he would have never been brought to trial, having in effect voluntarily given up the franchise. Instead, he became a chief collaborator with Demosthenes in a power struggle against Aeschines over Athenian policy toward Macedon.

²⁴ Compare B. R. Burg, *Sodomy and the Perception of Evil*, pp. 124, 131-132, for the problems arising around boys who became objects of sexual attraction aboard ship.

²⁵ The general shares several characteristics with the "Better Argument" in Aristophanes' *Clouds* 889-1104; see the discussion in Section 5.4.

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Athens. Aeschines plays to populist sentiment by portraying the general as contemptuous of the demos and its lack of learning: “as if the jury members had never heard of education” (141). By responding with an array of educated literary allusions of his own, Aeschines vindicates, at least vicariously, the honor of the common man. At the same time, he walks a rhetorical line between the need to uphold the egalitarian order and the need to retain for the democracy (and not to disown) the glorious achievements of the aristocratic past. Aeschines must come out in favor of the same gymnasia, palaestras, pederasty, and tyrannicide lovers that the general embodies (136–40). By the end of the speech, Aeschines proves himself willing to take a page from the oligarchic Spartans: in an argument *a fortiori*, even the Spartans do not allow a man who has lived shamefully to address their assembly (180); much less, then, should democratic Athenians.

By taking over the best of aristocratic practice as his own and transposing it into democratic practice, Aeschines steals the fire from the defense. Throughout, however, he continues to portray the active partners, or keepers, of Timarchus as members of a privileged elite that think of themselves as above the law. The violent Hegesandrus had been a corrupt official on the Hellespont (56, 58–9). His brother Hegesippus was also embarked on a career in politics. Aeschines refers to the brother only by his nickname, Crobylus, possibly in order to highlight his aristocratic affectation. The most retrograde types in Athens still wore their hair in a top knot.²⁶ The members of this network of elites, bound by familial and sexual ties, help themselves to the treasury: the year Timarchus was in the *boule* and Hegesandrus was treasurer of the goddess, a speaker rose in the assembly to say, in a riddle, that a man and woman (Hegesandrus with his Timarchus) were conspiring to steal 1,000 drachmas, a deed the couple accomplished with “comradely affection” (*philetairos*, 110–11), Aeschines’ word to describe their private pact, true to one another instead of to the public. The word *philetairos* probably also glances at a real or alleged association among Hegesandrus, Timarchus, Hegesippus, and other *betairoi*, “comrades” being the simple name adopted by members of the upper-class political clubs or brotherhoods known as *betaireiai*.²⁷

²⁶ For the word *krobulos* and its significance, cf. Thucydides 1.6.3 with *Clouds* 984 and *Knights* 1331. On Hegesippus, cf. Aeschines 1.118.

²⁷ Compare Thucydides 3.82.4–3.82.6 for the adjectival form *philetairos* (short o) used in the same context with *betairia*, *betairikos*, and *xunodos*.

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These private societies, which afforded wealthy young men the opportunity to socialize as well as to manipulate the courts and control offices,²⁸ were mainstays of the oligarchic wing of Athenian politics. Modeling themselves on the barracks lifestyle instituted at Crete and Sparta, *hetaireiai* prepared the ground for the revolution of the Four Hundred as well as for the Thirty Tyrants and were considered such a danger to the democracy as to be partially banned in the fourth century. Their social activities included symposia, initiations, and religious parody, as well as midnight vandalism; the club to which young, aristocratic Andocides belonged was suspected of carrying out profane parodies of the Eleusinian mysteries in private homes and mutilating the statues of Hermes around the city on the eve of the Sicilian expedition.²⁹ The politics of the brotherhoods made them admirers of the Spartan regime, and some adopted the austere lifestyle, dress, and manners of Laconizers,³⁰ including a taste for boxing, wrestling, and rough play beyond that normally found in Athenian gymnasias and wrestling schools. Callicles in the *Gorgias*, his political cynicism notwithstanding, bristles at Socrates' undemocratic arguments and retorts with what amounts to an accusation of treason: "you're hearing these things from the ones with cauliflower ears,"³¹ the physical deformity referring to their overindulgence in boxing. The altercations for which these young men came to be known often arose around erotic rivalries over flute girls, courtesans, prostitutes of both sexes, and citizen boys.³² Their pursuit of boys earned them the sobriquet "Laconizers" also in the sexual sense of the word, joining to the Spartan emphasis on elitism, secrecy, and brawn the penchant for what Athenians told themselves was the Spartan vice.³³ When Aeschines anticipates the defense by admitting that he himself has

²⁸ Thucydides 8.54.4. Compare G. M. Calhoun, *Athenian Clubs in Politics and Litigation*. For a qualification, see N. F. Jones, *The Associations of Classical Athens*, pp. 223–7.

²⁹ *On the Mysteries*.

³⁰ On Laconizing in general, cf. *Protagoras* 342 a6–e9 with Demosthenes 54.34.

³¹ 515e.

³² Aeschines 1.135–36; Demosthenes 54.14. Compare Lysias *Against Simon* (3.1–8). At *Wasps* 1322–1449, the brawling that results from Philocleon's abortive elopement is intended to illustrate not only regained youth (1355–7) but also Philocleon's rise in class as per Bdelycleon's project (Section 4.2 in this chapter).

³³ Dover's caution over the hypocrisy as well as the unspecificity of the word *lakonizein* in the Athenian ideology about Sparta (*GH*, pp. 187–8) seems partially answered by Foucault's discussion of the elasticity of the similar term "sodomy" in a very different era: it could be used to refer to a wide range of unacceptable male–female as well as male–male acts (*The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, pp. 37–9).

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often been involved in beatings, shouting matches, and fights with other men over boys (135–6), he puts the finishing seal on his own aristocratic credentials; involvement in beatings is a badge of honor, like a dueling scar.

The clearest portrait of the behavior of young men in a social club, at least as they were perceived by the democracy, is offered by Demosthenes in his prosecution of Conon. The self-styled “Ithyphalloi” prided themselves on their virility. Conon’s sons, as members of the gang, seek to create situations in which honor may be won or lost. They allegedly begin unprovoked abuse of the plaintiff’s slaves and later abuse the plaintiff himself. It is impossible fully to understand their aggression without first understanding what has been called the “zero-sum” game of honor.³⁴ In one version of the game, the antagonists begin a contest of verbal or mild physical abuse in which each seeks to escalate the stakes until the other grows afraid and backs down. The winner then departs in possession of the loser’s honor. If they come to blows, the loser retains some honor if he never stops trying to fight or continues to send signals that he has not given up;³⁵ ideally, the winner imposes unmanliness on the loser in some form, a humiliation that he forces the loser to accept. Each antagonist thus looks for a form of submission in the other. “Enemies” are a necessary adjunct to one’s own honor in this game; if circumstances do not provide them, the principals must and will pick a fight in order to create them on their own.³⁶ Brute force, applied against the principal target, is not the only means to victory in the game of honor. The attack may be indirectly aimed at the mark through the intermediary of his household or possessions; as subsequently discussed, Conon’s sons begin their aggression through Ariston’s slaves. Stealth and seduction may be used to separate a man from his wife or loved ones. Although the seclusion of women effectively prevented anything like the full flower of Donjuanism as it was known in later European culture, Cohen has written persuasively

³⁴ The concept is well laid out with a variety of cross-cultural evidence in Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society*, pp. 66–9, 183–7. The preoccupation with “dissing” (disrespecting) in modern U.S. gang culture is a recent example. It is significant that the neologism has changed the noun “disrespect” into a transitive verb. Typically, a gang member’s belief that he or his gang is being shown disrespect is expressed as a *defense* of honor, so that, in theory, it would be possible for rival gangs to leave one another alone; in practice, however, going on the offensive to gain honor by actively *disrespecting* another, is the highly sought-after prize of the game. Compare K. Polk, *When Men Kill*, pp. 189–90; see also Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire*, pp. 47–9.

³⁵ Compare D. G. Mandelbaum, *Women’s Seclusion and Men’s Honor*, p. 95.

³⁶ In the Pukhtun culture of Pakistan and Afghanistan, a limit case of this tendency, an anthropologist quotes a village elder as thanking God for his many enemies (Mandelbaum, p. 94).

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on adultery in Athens as a crime against the husband's honor.³⁷ Even housebreaking,³⁸ because it penetrated the sanctity of the inner portion of the home, the women's quarters, tarnished the honor of the men as too weak to defend their own, and the women came under the cloud of unchastity.

The insult from which a man had to defend his family extended not only to his wife and daughters but also to his sons.³⁹ The latter were particularly vulnerable as they had relative freedom of movement outside the house. Seducing a man's son struck a blow at the family honor,⁴⁰ which honor then accrued to the seducer, at least in the eyes of his peers; the boy was a status marker in the game of honor between the father and his antagonist. Graffiti of uncertain but early date, uncovered on Santorini from the Spartan colony of Thera, reveal the sexual honor game as it was played in one Greek city. In the context of other self-honoric graffiti proclaiming the writers to be "good," "best," "first," "a good dancer," and "the best dancer," several artists proclaim their conquests of citizen boys. Crimon penetrated a boy, "Bathycles' brother." He did the same to Amotion, etc.⁴¹ It is significant that many of the graffiti include not only the name of the active but also the name of the passive partner, a secret that a magnanimous lover would protect. Such inscriptions almost certainly were aimed at deliberate public humiliation of the boy who submitted.⁴² The young wolves raised their own esteem just insofar as they lowered the boy's, or took away (some of) the honor that formerly belonged to him. The station of the boy's family in society was therefore important to the seducer, hence the inclusion of the designation of a well-known family member, for example "Bathycles'." At least one graffito records a group action: Pheidippidas, Timagoras, Empheres, and the "I" writing the inscription all took part in the active role.

The sex act in these cases, although not necessarily forced, is perceived by the participants as a shaming action. Aristotle's definition of *hubris*

³⁷ Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society*, pp. 82–6, 98–132, 185.

³⁸ *Toichoruchia*, literally wall digging, because burglars tunneled through the walls separating public from private. At *Clouds* 1327, Strepsiades, apoplectic at being beaten in his own home by his own son and at a loss for a bad-enough name to call him hysterically resorts to "housebreaker," which otherwise would not describe Pheidippides' behavior at all. Psychologically for Strepsiades, however, it is as if a stranger broke in and took away his son. "Homewrecker" might be a more accurate translation.

³⁹ Compare Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.12.35 1373a 34–5; Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society*, p. 178.

⁴⁰ Fisher, "Hybris and Dishonour," pp. 186–7.

⁴¹ *IG* Vol. 12, 3-536–47. Compare Percy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece*, pp. 31–2; *GH*, p. 123.

⁴² Percy, p. 32. Obviously, no passive partner inscribed his own name.

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brings out the anatomy of deliberate shaming.⁴³ “The one committing hubris . . . thinks little of [*sc.* his mark]; for hubris is the doing or saying of that by which shame exists for the one suffering it.” Aristotle then goes on to discuss motivation: “not that anything may be produced for him other than what happened; rather, in order that he might feel pleasure. . . . The cause of the pleasure for those committing hubris is that they think that, by doing an ill turn, they themselves rise above.” Because in the case of the Santorini graffiti hubris is connected with sexual aggression or assertiveness, it seems important to establish the precise character of this pleasure that Aristotle says is characteristic of hubris. In his treatment of the precursors of hubris (looking down on people, thinking little of them, and deliberately vexing them), Aristotle duplicates the motiveless motive of not wishing to produce anything by such actions: no material good is the aim. “For vexation is an impediment to the will [of the other]: not in order that one may have something but that the other may not have it” (2.2.4, 1378b 17–20). Thus the motivations behind both vexation and hubris are *other* regarding. They seek to cause a change in the psychological state of another person. They are goods of the spirit. The hubris of sexual conquest is thus not primarily concerned with bodily pleasure. In the game of honor, sexual aggression is a bodily means to a nonbodily end. It remains a question whether the sexual pleasure is displaced by the pleasure specific to hubris (the pleasure of dominating or rising above the victim) or whether the latter pleasure combines with and enhances sexual pleasure.⁴⁴ In either case, the extrasexual, political aim seems connected to the bodily, merely sexual aim.

Conon's sons first abused the slaves of the plaintiff, Ariston, when both parties were on military maneuvers; they allegedly beat them and urinated on them (54.4). Because no honor can be taken from slaves, the likelihood is that the young men intended the abuse as a deliberate provocation to the slaves' master, whoever he might be; they hoped to initiate a series of exchanges that would escalate into a confrontation with a citizen.⁴⁵ When Ariston, instead of confronting them himself, complained to the general, they knew they had a easy mark in their sights. After one unsatisfactory (because interrupted) beating while still in the field, one of the young men and his father, Conon, and other associates catch Ariston back at Athens in

⁴³ *Rhetoric* 2.2.5–6 1378b 23–8.

⁴⁴ Compare Fisher, “*Hybris* and Dishonour,” p. 186.

⁴⁵ Compare Cohen, *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens*, p. 123.

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the agora with a lone companion. In the course of the assault, they subject him to four shaming actions. They strip his clothes off,⁴⁶ smear him with mud, and give him a beating (54.8). When he is no longer able to struggle, the father, Conon, engages in a bizarre ritual of insult that, because the victim would ordinarily not allow it, shows symbolically that he has submitted, that is, he is no longer fighting back. Conon stands above the victim and crows over him like a cock, flapping his elbows like wings. Conon's son and friends cheer him on to perform this ritual display (54.9). Cohen has pointed out the mock rape implicit in Ariston's account.⁴⁷ If the Ithyphalloi actually raped him, Ariston could have been prevented from testifying to that effect for fear of losing all honor himself, to the possible, although unlikely (since no money exchanged hands) extent of being disfranchised from the citizen body for continuing to exercise citizen rights after having submitted to another man or men. A man who cannot protect himself is not fully a man. The now-famous vase cited by both Dover and Cohen,⁴⁸ depicting a Persian bent over for the Greek who approaches him from behind, demonstrates how sexuality can be the symbol for a conquest of a nonsexual kind, in this case probably a Greek military victory over the Persians.⁴⁹ Conon's victory dance⁵⁰ stands in for the rape, whether in Ariston's narration or in the actual event, at the moment it would ordinarily have happened, that is, when the victim was subdued.

Demosthenes implies that sexual and other assaults on outsiders were practiced by the Athenian clubs. He imagines Conon announcing, "We are an association called Ithyphalloi, and when we feel eros, we beat and choke

⁴⁶ Until he was naked he says (54.9), although the word *gymnos* would still be used properly if Ariston meant that he retained an undergarment.

⁴⁷ Cohen, *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens*, pp. 124–6.

⁴⁸ *GH*, p. 105; Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society*, pp. 184–5 and *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens*, p. 126 note 11. For a nonpolitical reading, see G. F. Pinney, "For the Heroes are at Hand," with J. N. Davidson, *Countessans and Fishbeaks*, pp. 170–1. A. C. Smith, in "Eurymedon and the Evolution of Political Personifications in the Early Classical Period," argues for retaining some political significance. See also M. F. Kilmer, "'Rape' in Early Red-Figure Pottery," pp. 135–8. Pinney's reading is certainly possible, but seems to have a prior commitment to removing the violent or hierarchical aspect of eros stressed, e.g., by Dover.

⁴⁹ The Athenians and their allies led by Cimon defeated the Persians at the river Eurymedon in Pamphylia (southern coast of Asia Minor) ca. 466 B.C. (Thucydides 1.100.1).

⁵⁰ The imitation of a fighting cock may be significant. For the psychological and metaphoric connections between fowl of all kinds and phalluses in Greek iconography, cf. Arrowsmith, "Aristophanes' *Birds*: The Fantasy Politics of Eros."

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whomever we please.”⁵¹ Beating and choking, which eros is said to inspire, are subduing actions correlated with rape.⁵² Whether or not eros entered the assault overtly (Ariston is portrayed as a very young man at the time of the assault⁵³), the four actions that Ariston does admit he suffered were all undertaken for the sake of that pleasure that Aristotle says is specific to hubris, the pleasure of shaming and thus of rising above the victim.⁵⁴

This desire to commit hubris, both sexual and otherwise, revealed the fault line between classes in Athens. Aristotle characterizes two groups as prone to hubristic behavior: young men and wealthy men: “For they think that they rise above by committing hubris.”⁵⁵ The sexual honor game was one means by which the young and the wealthy could rise above. Dover reminds his readers that sexuality in many places and times has not been an exercise in mutuality but rather “the pursuit of those of lower status by those of higher status.”⁵⁶ Rape and seduction, like other forms of hubris, reaffirm class or superior status.⁵⁷ The two groups mentioned by Aristotle indicate not so much the notables of unquestionable status, deriving from old, established families, but rather their younger scions and, more importantly, men from families whose only claim to attention was their wealth. The Athenian attitude toward mere wealth or “new money” ranged from condemnation to, at best, the hypocrisy of looking the other way, as the judicious use of money could often gain a new man entry into elite circles.⁵⁸ The merely

⁵¹ “. . . erontes bous an bemin doxei paiomen kai ankbomen,” 54.20. This passage was pointed out to me by M. Crawford; see his treatment in *Eros under a New Sky*, pp. 57–8.

⁵² M. Amir, *Patterns in Forcible Rape*, p. 342.

⁵³ Ariston was an ephebe doing his military training at Panactum, a fort on the border with Boeotia (54.3), when the first assault occurred. The two years mentioned at 54.7 probably refer to the two-year tour of duty as an ephebe, which would establish Ariston's age as approximately eighteen at the first assault and twenty at the second. Twenty-two would be the upper bound for his age at the second assault.

⁵⁴ Modern parallels: Amir's classic study of rape found that U.S. street gangs practice group rape on outsiders as a rite of passage and to establish group cohesion (*Patterns in Forcible Rape*, pp. 189–91). The incidence of group rape was much higher than popular perceptions would indicate (43%; cf. S. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p. 187). There was a significant correlation between group rape and shaming actions against the victim, with the types of sexual acts selected to produce intentional humiliation (Amir, pp. 222–3).

⁵⁵ *Rhetoric* 2.2.6 1378b 28–9. Compare Lysias 24.15–18.

⁵⁶ *GH*, p. 84.

⁵⁷ For rape conceived of as a tool to keep women, as a class, in their place, cf. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, p. 127; Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p. 15.

⁵⁸ W. R. Connor, *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens*, judges that aristocratic distaste for Cleon arose not because his family had been in trade a generation earlier (that was true of a number of new families) but because he repudiated his *philoi* to court the masses.

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wealthy were therefore likely to be more sensitive about their honor than were the older noble families. The task of the nouveaux riches, at least in their own minds, was to separate themselves from the common run and to show their superiority to it in order that they might rise to the next level. For entirely different reasons, young men not yet come into their own, whether scions of notable families or other families with the privilege of leisure, may have felt a need to assert themselves and to prove their independence from their fathers. Young men coming of age, like the newly rich, have doubts about themselves and must combat the doubts of others as well. Both the young and the newly rich have something to prove. It is important to see the relevance of shaming actions to these types. Shaming humiliates or humbles the victim; by climbing over, or literally mounting the victim, these types undergo a corresponding exaltation.

Demosthenes anticipates the defense's argument that young men in groups sowing wild oats is commonplace enough not to warrant a prosecution, and he turns that commonness into a point for the prosecution by playing on his democratic audience's unease about the frightening normalcy of such behavior: the city contains many sons of noble men (*kalon k'agathon andron*) who, sporting as young people will, make up names for themselves such as Ithyphalloi and Autolecythoi, literally "self-flaskers," meaning that no personal slaves accompanied them to carry their flasks (or to witness their deeds).⁵⁹

The countercultural aspect of these clubs was symptomatic of the change from aristocracy to democracy. The need to fabricate distinctions for themselves over against the egalitarian order, no matter how empty of content or purely formal such distinctions might be, is characteristic of privileged elites when they are not simply allowed to rule.⁶⁰ Fraternities, secret societies, and organizations of illuminati offer their members mutual admiration when the public denies them their "due." Both a wealthy class of pretenders to high station and an aristocracy driven in on itself by the influence of the democratic regime tend to throw up caricatures of nobles, dandies such as Crobylus with his topknot hairstyle, if not darker reversals of prevailing virtues and pieties. One society of self-styled atheists in Athens solemnly

⁵⁹ J. E. Sandys, *Select Private Orations of Demosthenes*, pp. 212–14. Even loyal slaves could turn evidence after having been put to the torture. Compare *Triballoi* (below) and *Kakodaimonistai*. For an account, see Jones, *The Associations of Classical Athens*, p. 225.

⁶⁰ Aristotle, in the *Politics*, observes that the notables are content if given office.

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gathered in observance of religious holidays, on which they performed ritual sacrilege in order to demonstrate to one another their contempt for the gods and the belief all around them.⁶¹ The inner dynamic of groups that set themselves in opposition to the larger society around them practically demands that the members perform some action in concert against non-members; the group loses its distinctiveness and the reason for its cohesion during a period of prolonged inactivity.⁶²

Beyond assaults on outsiders, a second aspersion against some clubs was that the members performed sexual acts and rape on one another inside the organization, especially as rites of passage. While pretending that such private initiations are irrelevant to the prosecution, Demosthenes nevertheless finds room for Ariston to mention them. "For these are the men who initiate each other with the ithyphallus⁶³ and do things of a sort which hold great shame for moderate men even to talk about, let alone to perform" (54.17). Demosthenes lets the minds of his audience roam freely over what such initiations might consist of. On analogy with the religious parodies carried out by other clubs, the young men's initiations may have revolved around images of the sacred object carried in the Rural Dionsysia, although their club name obviously refers to their own self-image.⁶⁴

Why initiates had to undergo what the group saw as humiliation before becoming fully fledged members was related to the group's dynamic.⁶⁵ Beyond the obvious connection with hierarchy and seniority, ritual shaming functioned to artificially fabricate trust among the members.⁶⁶ As with the religious parodies and blasphemies, which could not be revealed to outsiders, sexual submission made each new initiate vulnerable to the other members. Kagan has argued that the profanation of the mysteries in private homes at the time of the Sicilian expedition probably functioned as such an initiation: "a pledge by which each member opened himself to denunciation by any of the others and thereby assured them of his loyalty."⁶⁷ In the

⁶¹ Lysias fragment 53.2 in Athenaeus 12.551c; cf. Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 3, p. 245.

⁶² Compare Amir, *Patterns in Forcible Rape*, pp. 189–91. Non-empirical: W. H. Blanchard, "The Group Process in Gang Rape"; contrast A. N. Groth, *Men Who Rape*, pp. 113–15 and note 66 below.

⁶³ Or "who consecrate one another to the Ithyphallus."

⁶⁴ Compare *Acharnians* 241–79.

⁶⁵ Compare Crawford, *Eros under a New Sky* p. 61.

⁶⁶ Cf. P. R. Sanday, *Fraternity Gang Rape*, p. 169. The idea of H. Bloch, *The Gang*, pp. 103–6, that homoeroticism underlies gang behavior, goes back to Freud, *Group Psychology*, pp. 91–2.

⁶⁷ D. Kagan, *The Fall of the Athenian Empire*, pp. 205–6 Compare Sanday, *Fraternity Gang Rape*, pp. 13, 124.

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quite different context of the Corcyran revolution, Thucydides speaks of *hetaireiai* which sealed their oaths by means of mutual lawbreaking.⁶⁸ Any action which compromised the honor of new initiates and which the senior members had also undergone in their time, that is, any act which mutually shamed, was an act that militated in favor of group cohesion. Sexual submission would be one such act because, by submitting, each member opened himself to public dishonor and disfranchisement like Timarchus. In this way, secret shame vis-à-vis outsiders was the precondition of honor toward one another.

Each of these aspects of the *hetaireiai* was in imitation of the Spartan system, and the Spartan system lay at the basis of democratic fears. The efficacy of oligarchic systems in molding character is undeniable and offers a variety of historical parallels.⁶⁹ Inflicting humiliation on initiates has functioned to edify elites and to create group solidarity in many times and places. By shaming new members, the system imposes its stamp on them. It is important to see how the existence of a servile class is useful for the formation of the aristocrats, for “widening of distances within the soul itself,” as Nietzsche put it.⁷⁰ At Sparta, the Helots or noncitizen serf class routinely underwent deliberate humiliation to remind them of their inferior status, including regular whippings regardless of whether they had committed an infraction. In an ancient analogue of the fagging system, citizen boys not yet come into man’s estate were forced to live like Helots or worse, sleeping rough and stealing for food, and were publicly flogged if caught. Beatings also followed on minor infractions, such as poor physical fitness. In addition, the boys were subjected to extraordinarily brutal hazing as their preparation for citizenship. Apparently this liminal status of the boys, between free and slave, seared into their consciousness the value of

⁶⁸ “And their trust toward one another . . . was strengthened . . . by means of the commission of some deed of mutual *paranomia* (*kai tas es sphas autous pisteis . . . ekratunonto . . . toi koinei ti paranomesai*, 3.82.6).

⁶⁹ For example, British public school hazing and the fagging system. Each class of schoolboys had to form tight bonds among themselves in order to protect one another from their elite tormenters. In a separate strategy, by forming an alliance with one of the elite, a boy could find a protector. Pressure from such institutions contributed to the famous school friendships or homophilic bonding between peers, as well as in the exploitative relationships in which older boys with a special claim to status through blood, athletics, or wealth accepted service as tarts from their younger fags. Popularly, in C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, pp. 83–100; see also G. F. Lamb, *The Happiest Days*; A. Sutherland and P. Anderson, *Eros*, pp. 413–15.

⁷⁰ *Beyond Good and Evil*, “What is Noble,” 257.

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being a member of the elite as well as the abject consequences of failure to achieve that status.⁷¹ Only those who could endure the abuse without crumbling proved their worthiness for admission to the men's dining clubs or *sussitia*, of which the Athenian hetaireiai were tame echoes. Citizenship itself, at Sparta, was membership in an elite.

The Athenian demos understood the significance of the Helot class at Sparta, and their ever-present fear was that the hetaireiai, with their frightening solidarity and secrecy, would set up their own polis of peers within the larger polis, and the demos would wake up one morning to find itself disfranchised, a Helot class in its own city.⁷² As previously mentioned, one imperative of the ancient initiatory practices associated with the Spartan *agoge* and Athenian hetaireiai alike was for initiates to share in the commission of an otherwise forbidden act against the lesser mortals around them in order to bond together. At Sparta, a select cadre of youths, before finally gaining admission to a men's dining club, went into hiding (*krupteia*) for one year, emerging by night for the purpose of assassinating prominent Helots.⁷³ The murders apparently functioned as the final stage in their initiation to manhood. As a vastly more intensified version of the daily abuse of Helots by all Spartan citizens, this aggression kept the servile class down by means of terrorism at the same time as it served to edify the future citizens. Group action against outsiders reinforces the relative position of both groups. Similarly, in Athens, Demosthenes imagines elite, Laconizing *hetairoi* preying on ordinary citizens as part of their class interest and then colluding to perjure themselves in order to cover up such actions (54.34–35). In the same way, Aeschines can imply that Timarchus, Misgolas, Hegesandrus, his brother, and the rest are all in it together (e.g., 1.46, 67), an old-boy network in the most literal sense.

Because of these connections among the hetaireiai, sexual initiation, oligarchic politics, and the more normal pederasty of the wrestling schools, the democracy suspected active, predatory men of having been passives themselves before acquiring the audacity to take the active role. Aeschines

⁷¹ See especially Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, Vol. 1, pp. 132–3. A further test to determine fitness for yet another elite was in store for those who reached man's estate and gained entry into a dining club: competition for membership in the 300 *hippeis* or knights, the king's bodyguard.

⁷² On the quietness of the revolution of the Four Hundred, see Thucydides 8.69.2. For democratic suspicion and how mistrust played into the hands of the conspirators, see 8.66.3–5.

⁷³ See especially P. Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter* 147–51; also Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, Vol. 1, p. 304, note 114. On the Spartan *agoge*, see A. Brelich, *Paides e parthenoi*, pp. 113–207.

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can therefore speak of the “training” (*epitedeuma*) Hegesandrus shares with Timarchus. The language is discreet, but by training Aeschines means habitual sexual intercourse with other men, a regimen productive of a kind of man who looks down on the *nomoi* (1.67, 154). Hegesandrus is one of the active keepers of Timarchus; he steals Timarchus away from the house of another man, Pittalacus, and on a return visit accompanied by Timarchus gives Pittalacus a severe beating⁷⁴ (57–8). His aggressive masculinity could be thought to imply that Hegesandrus has taken the active role exclusively. In fact, however, Hegesandrus’ former life was similar to Timarchus’. In the anecdote of the man and woman stealing 1,000 drachmas, Aeschines makes his fictive citizen point out the couple Hegesandrus and Timarchus in the audience, saying “Don’t you know what I mean? The ‘man’ is Hegesandrus there, at present – though formerly he was himself also the ‘woman’ of Leodamas. And the ‘woman’ is Timarchus right here” (111). Timarchus is only the latest in a procession of powerful *andres* who used to be women. The sexuality of Leodamas, in his turn, is allegedly notorious enough to cause an outcry among the jurymen at the mere mention of his name in the affidavit prepared for Hegesandrus (69). No matter how active Hegesandrus may currently be, he remains open to the same prosecution that would prevent Timarchus from addressing the assembly (64), and Aeschines claims insider knowledge that Hegesandrus was once successfully threatened with such a suit (154). The disturbing fact about actives, only partly covered over by their current activity, was that they were previously passives, whether as boys or, worse, more recently. The *demos* suspected many upper-class *erastai* of having to give in order to receive.⁷⁵ Although the existence of eros between males was taken for granted, actually to mount another male was still seen to require great audacity,⁷⁶ particularly if it was performed on a routine basis. For the active partner to let himself go so completely, he had to be inured to the practice; his lack of restraint was thought to be the result of prior habituation (Aeschines 1.11).⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Compare Lysias 3.5–8, 3.11–14.

⁷⁵ Compare *Clouds* 1085–94.

⁷⁶ For example, Plato, *Symposium* 181c 2–4; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.30.

⁷⁷ Likewise, as a result of his habituation, Timarchus’ character has no inner restraints (95–6). Only his innate weakness keeps Timarchus from taking the active role with other males in his turn, as Hegesandrus had done; Timarchus by contrast allegedly stops at adultery with the wives of other men (also a shaming action) and a habit of female prostitutes and flute girls that depletes his resources to the extent that he must continue to prostitute himself to support the habit (42, 75–6, 107; cf. 95). Compare *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.5.3–4 (1148b 25–35). Compare Posner,

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The further fear of the Athenian demos was that the clubs' initiatory shaming actions inured men to tyranny, stealing potential citizens away from the democracy and hardening them to a way of life in which there was no middle ground between domination and being dominated.⁷⁸ The sexual aspects of such initiations seem to have had their source in the innate human capacity for shame and the potential to combine sexual desire with the desire to shame others. The combination of the pleasure of shaming, that is, the pleasure specific to hubris, with sexual pleasure must have yielded a potent cocktail.⁷⁹ The resulting mixture formed a temptation to tyranny that could be perceived as almost irresistible. Once a youth was initiated into the mysteries of hubris, his character became unrestrained and he became, on this view, a physical and political danger to his fellow citizens.⁸⁰

The extent to which Aeschines' characterizations were factual about elite pederasty (they obviously were not exhaustive) is less important than their believability to Aeschines' audience and the extent to which they reveal a paradigm that Aeschines could ask the mass jury to work with. In this paradigm, insolent treatment breeds insolence, and the outraged go on to

Sex and Reason 399, note 45, for studies on the sexual abuse of boys predisposing them to male prostitution. Contrast Posner, p. 105, on actual orientation.

⁷⁸ Aeschines asserts that the law prohibits hubris against slaves not in order to protect slaves, but in order to habituate (*ethisai*) men to hold off from committing hubris against the free. "[The lawgiver] held that in democracy, a *hubristes* against anyone at all was not fit to be a fellow citizen" (fit: *epitedeios*, related to the bad training, *epitedeuma*, Timarchus and Hegesandrus received, and to the good training they did not; 15–17).

⁷⁹ The construction of a sexuality based on shaming, in which the subject is excited by humiliating or being humiliated, is central to the Freudian interpretation of sadomasochism (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, pp. 23–4). Although an alternative explanation is based on the physiological sensation of pain and the desire to inflict or feel pain, as well as the desire to harm, Freud found that among his Viennese patients with sadomasochistic tendencies, few had ever been beaten as children, whether at home or at school, and none had the courage of their convictions to enjoy an actual beating or to contemplate real injury done to another human being. On this basis, Freud concluded that the sadistic impulse was a universal component instinct of sexuality, which could be developed prematurely or encouraged in isolation from other component instincts to produce the bourgeois sex play as well as more serious versions ("A Child is Being Beaten," pp. 97–101, cf. pp. 107, 110; cf. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, p. 97). See also MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, pp. 126–54 and *Feminism Unmodified*, pp. 46–59. In the ancient world: Attic vases contain sadomasochistic depictions, in which a sandal is sometimes brandished (see M. F. Kilmer, *Greek Erotica*, pp. 103–32, 199–215). Sterner variations: Arcadian women were flagellated in the Dionysian mysteries (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 8.23.1) and Spartan boys whipped one another during a ritual ordeal at the temple of Artemis Orthia.

⁸⁰ For example Aeschines 1.11. Compare Plato, *Republic*, Book 9, 571a 1–576a 7.

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commit outrages in their turn. Only because Hegesandrus was degraded does he feel a need to degrade Timarchus, since he cannot understand any other way. Every slave wishes to become master because he has never been exposed to anything but the two conditions.⁸¹ The freedom of the city depended on the inculcation of habits of freedom in the boys. Habits of freedom not only meant shunning the inculcation of passivity, which has often been pointed out in the scholarly literature; they also meant avoiding the inculcation of hubris. In this strain of Greek thought, the morality of mastery was a mistake. The opposite of slavery was not mastery over citizens; rather, slavery and mastery were two sides of the same coin, which stood over against political freedom. This line of thought did not achieve full expression until Aristotle's *Politics*: mastery over one's slaves is a merely necessary art with no inherent dignity.⁸² All barbarians are slavish: that is why they treat one another as slaves (1.2.3–4; 1252b 1–9); they are incapable of *political* government because they cannot rule and be ruled in turn. The unsaid but powerful corollary is that the Great King of Persia is himself slavish. An astute rhetoric was required to convince people that tyrants were not supremely free. It is news to Polus and Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*, for example. Plato's theme of self-mastery, as opposed to (or as a precondition of) ruling over others⁸³ reaches its culmination when Socrates identifies Callicles' tyrannically desirous man with the *kinaidos*⁸⁴: both are essentially enslaved. The conflation of the active with the passive role is of the essence here and totally counterintuitive to Greeks. In the same vein is the characterization in *Republic* Book 9 of the tyrant as the most wretched of men because internally he suffers under the tyranny of his own eros.

⁸¹ For a modern analogue of the relevant attitude, see an anonymous 1830 *Edinburgh Review* article (quoted in I. Gibson, *The English Vice*, p. 76) on how the flogging system replicated itself:

A boy begins as a slave and ends as a despot. Corrupting at once and corrupted, the little tyrant riots in the exercise of boundless and unaccountable power, . . . and while he looks back on his former servitude, is resolved that the sufferings which he inflicts shall not be less than those he has endured."

⁸² 1.7.4–5 (1255b 30–40). On the psychological compatibility of slaveholding with democracy and the firm distinction drawn between treatment of slaves and treatment of citizens, see P. A. Cartledge, "Greek Political Thought," p. 16. It could be argued that the Athenian democracy duplicated the oligarchic mistake of defining citizens in contrast to outsiders, only at a level of greater inclusion, with the excluded consisting of slaves, women, etc.

⁸³ *Gorgias* 470e 4–5; *Alcibiades I* 105c 5–7, 119b 1–120d 1–2, especially 122a 5–8; cf. *Laws* Book 8, 836d 8–e4.

⁸⁴ *Gorgias* 491b 7–494e 9.

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True freedom wishes neither to dominate nor to be dominated. Wishing to dominate is proof of an unfreedom inside, an illiberality of character.

The “eroticization of hierarchy” as one potentiality of eros with political implications is thus not only an important theme in recent (especially feminist) thought about sexuality,⁸⁵ but also an ancient theme. As we shall see in *Wasps*, the erotic pleasures of dominating were not the sole property of the Athenian upper classes; the demos was also prone to this temptation. But is important to note that the imposition of hierarchy is separable from, and touches an emotional core deeper than genital arousal narrowly considered.⁸⁶ Seeing the nomos imposed contributes to the attractiveness.⁸⁷ It is important to ask how natural or inevitable the connection is between sexual desire and hierarchy. It remains to be seen whether the tendency toward hubris, the enjoyment of violation, is a feature of eros alone or only a feature of eros in combination with another political passion, *thumos* or the thumoeidetic.

⁸⁵ See MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, pp. 126–54 and *Feminism Unmodified*, pp. 46–59. The eroticization of hierarchy includes the submissive acquiescence in one’s own domination by others. Freud believed that “a sadist is always at the same time a masochist” (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, p. 25), with the perversion preventing the individual from discovering the middle ground of love between the two extremes. For a bibliography on psychological and philosophical theories of feminine masochism, as well as feminist responses, see MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, p. 283, note 42.

⁸⁶ Anecdotal: note the high emotion (not sexual arousal) in the following description of a school caning (quoted in Gibson, *The English Vice*, p. 102):

Several dozens of fellows clambered upon forms and desks to see Neville corrected, and I got a front place, my heart thumping, and seeming to make great leaps within me, as if it were a bird trying to fly away through my throat. . . . [A]nd when the Lower Master inflicted upon his person six cuts that sounded like the splashings of so many buckets of water, I turned almost faint. I felt as I have never felt but once since, and that was when seeing a man hanged.

The greatest physical sensations described here take place in the breast and throat, making the punitive passion more like the emotions associated with falling in love or with romantic passion than with sexual arousal alone. The euphemism “corrected” points up the importance of the mask of judicial propriety: the spectators could not enjoy, or would enjoy far less, mere savagery without any sense of justice served.

⁸⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 187–9, has pointed out the importance of visibility and spectatorship at public punishments. A remarkable sequence from the John Ford film *The Quiet Man* shows the rumor running like wildfire among Irish villagers that a husband is going to discipline his young wife. Eventually the entire community, both male and female (one of whom hands him a stick), joyfully come outdoors to watch him exercise his rights, and a festive atmosphere is created. Cross-cultural evidence exists for the whipping of the bride as part of the wedding ceremony in early Russia and among Teutonic tribes.

4.2. Eros and the Thumoeidetic

Many ancient sources stress the nonviolent potential of eros to build *philia*: friendship or “belonging.” Even the violence and hierarchy stressed in the preceding sources could at times become ritualized or make-believe. Ephorus’ description of the ritual abduction of boys on Crete gives some indication of the conventions of pederasty in one aristocratic society. Although it is an extreme example, the parallels with what is known of Spartan pederasty seem to vouch for the historicity of the account, and the way the families of the boys welcome their abduction provides an interesting contrast with Athenian democratic anxiety. The Cretan conventions were for a warrior to abduct a boy and live with him for two months as part of the boy’s rite of passage into manhood. The boys’ families only feigned or put up a token resistance to the abduction and in fact connived with the abductor to allow it to take place. A boy’s family felt it was an honor for the boy to be thus chosen. The family might say no on class grounds, that is, if the abductor’s family were not of a rank at least equal to their own. In some cases it was considered a disgrace if a boy was not chosen by anyone.⁸⁸ From the point of view of Athenian fathers who refused to let their sons even speak to lovers and who enjoyed Old Comedy’s caricature of politicians, the Cretans could only be servilely attempting to improve or maintain the standing of their families in an aristocratic pecking order. But if the whole regime rejects the democrat’s claim that his family is no worse (at least) than the wealthy and powerful, then the settled distances between families in aristocratic society and the need to maintain themselves as a class effectually remove the democratic fear. A wellborn lover might even raise, rather than lower, a young man’s honor if he selected an eromenos from a slightly lower family, like Zeus raising the mortal Ganymede to heaven.

The Theognidea is a principal source for eros conducive to *philia*. Analogously to the way that giving a daughter in marriage built political alliances, love relationships between older and younger males were often predicated on existing *philia* relations among families and were thought to help create and cement new *philia* alliances.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the institution of the

⁸⁸ Ephorus, quoted in Strabo, *Geography*, 10.4.21.

⁸⁹ See J. M. Lewis, “Eros and the Polis in Theognis Book II,” pp. 221–2 on eros conducive to *philia* as well as to hubris. Lewis emphasizes the “reconceptualization of eros” that took place between archaic aristocratic society and democratic society as revealed in Aristophanes. L. Edmunds, in

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symposium offered a forum in which the class interest of solidarity could be pursued, that is, an interest that went beyond narrow family parochialism.⁹⁰ Solidarity was especially important to present a united front against pretenders to tyranny from within the enfranchised classes and against pressure to extend the franchise downward, as well as to compete with other aristocratic factions. No firm distinction can be made between personal and political friendship⁹¹: clientage and nepotism are aristocratic political modes. Eros as a binding force cut both ways, because, by attracting an individual out of the sphere of his current *philia* relations, eros severed the old ties while helping to form new ones. This is clear in the use of erotic magic spells by heterosexual lovers who wished to separate a woman from her relations.⁹²

The idealized polis of symposiasts in the Theognidea, a body small enough to be composed of friends who are like minded, an ideal acted out in the symposium itself, is in a sense the model of later theoretical and actual eroticized political associations. The tiny size of most actual poleis,⁹³ which often meant a face-to-face intimacy among those sharing in the regime, helped perpetuate the ideology that the polis could be, and ought to be, perfectly unified. Chief among the eroticized communities was the Sacred Band of Thebes, which was Phaedrus' model of good government in Plato's *Symposium*.⁹⁴ In Chapter 6, we will discuss the purposes of *philia* (in the sense of kinship) and *homonoiia* behind the temporary marriages and promiscuous, incestuous mingling in Plato's *Republic*. The Stoic idea of a city cemented by erotic love (giving way to friendship) seems based on concerns that differ only slightly.⁹⁵ Zeno the Stoic brought Eros together

"Foucault and Theognis," has questioned whether eros was thought to be the cause of *philia* or its condition.

⁹⁰ For the symposium as the idealized polis, see W. Donlan, "*Pistos Philos Hetairos*," 237–8.

⁹¹ G. Nagy, "Theognis and Megara: A Poet's Vision of his City," p. 27; Donlan, "*Pistos Philos Hetairos*," p. 230; Schmitt Pantel, *La cité au banquet*, pp. 36–8; O. Murray, "The *Symposion* as Social Organization."

⁹² Compare C. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic*, pp. 86–7.

⁹³ On the average numbers, which resemble those of a small- to medium-sized American high school, see P. Cartledge, "Greek Political Thought: The Historical Context," p. 11. Aristotle normatively set an upper bound of being easily surveyed, meaning that citizens must be acquainted with one another's character (*Politics* 7.4.13–14, 1326b 14–25).

⁹⁴ Contemporary sources on the Sacred Band are scanty. Plutarch, *Pelopidas* 18.1–19.4, which was written, of course, centuries after the fact, contains some of the relevant attitudes.

⁹⁵ M. Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City*, pp. 22–56; for one important contrast with Plato's *Republic*, see p. 44.

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with *homonoia* in a single formula; the god Eros brings about friendship, freedom, and concord.⁹⁶

In our own attempt to theorize the cohesion postulated of eros in these sources, we should not neglect the upshot of Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium*. There, sexual eros and sexual relations are not the cause of political bonds; rather, it works the other way around. Political (and familial) bonding gives rise to sexual relations. The desire for a wholeness that can never be achieved drives humans to bond into households and cities, and sexual relations salve the pain of their inability to cohere together fully. Bonding is the fundamental tendency in this account. An undercurrent we saw in the *Symposium* was that even our choice of sexual object is effectually determined by our desire to bond: exogamous heterosexual choices are a substitute for the endogamy originally desired, and homosexual choices are a more satisfying substitute for fulfilling that same desire. The love of same in the city, like *homonoia*, is part and parcel of the drive for homogeneity, forming citizens into relatively interchangeable parts of the whole.⁹⁷ As shall be argued in Section 4.3 and in Chapter 6, Plato's *Republic* goes one step further, substituting literal homogeneity: "same birth" for all members, through its planned program of eugenics and incest.

In separating the ostensibly peaceful associations of eros with *philia* from the aggressive eros canvassed in Section 4.1, we must beware of driving too firm a wedge. One can easily imagine, for example, anger (and from anger, aggression) arising out of broken *philia* bonds. *Philia* and one kind of aggression would thus be two sides of the same coin. The concept of

⁹⁶ Fragment 263, *SVF* 1. See G. Boys-Stones, "Eros in Government"; Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City*, pp. 48–50; cf. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, Vol. 1, p. 119.

⁹⁷ Aristotle adds a more mundane but nonnegligible motive for homosexual (i.e., nonprocreative) relations: the small elite class had an interest in keeping their class from becoming overpopulated. Too many heirs to the property allotments that were the basis of the franchise meant not enough land to go around, and the dispossessed wealthy were likely to desire revolution (*Politics* 2.7.5, 1266b 8–14). On the Spartan mistakes of allowing too much territory to be concentrated in a few hands through their inheritance laws while tax incentives and military exemptions encouraged the Spartiates to procreate in large numbers, further dividing up the territory, see 2.9.14–19, 1270a 15–b 6. For the disfranchisement of poorer Spartiates, see 2.9.30–32, 1271a 26–37. The Cretan regime segregated women more completely than did the Spartan regime, and the legislator specifically made sexual relations between males an institution in order to prevent them from having many children (2.10.9, 1272a 22–6). Aristotle declines explicitly to judge the prudence or morality of this sexual legislation, although his argument supports it. Like Xenophon and Plato's Pausanias, Aristotle also declines to characterize Spartan customs as openly homosexual.

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the *thumos* or thumoeidetic, spirit or spiritedness, is the link between the two. Aristotle asserts that “*thumos* creates the disposition to love [*to philetikon*], for *thumos* is the power of soul by which we feel *philia*.”⁹⁸ His proof is that our *thumos* (in one of the word’s main senses, “anger”) flares up more against friends and relatives (*philoï*) than against strangers when we believe ourselves to have been insulted. If aggrieved *philia* causes anger, then anger and *philia* must both, he reasons, be aspects of the same power of soul.

A second definition of *thumos* further explains the link with aggression. *Thumos* can also mean pride. The passion that most characterized the violent designs of the circle-men in the *Symposium* was egotism or pride (*phronemata megala*, 190b 6). “Thinking big,” *mega phronein*, is synonymous with high spiritedness,⁹⁹ both in humans and in animals. A passage from Xenophon may imply that *orge* was the word of choice to describe human spiritedness by his day: *thumos* had become reserved for horses.¹⁰⁰ A desirable trait in racehorses and warhorses is an indomitable spirit; for example, the great thoroughbred Secretariat was known for “heart” or the refusal to lose to another horse.¹⁰¹ In Homeric Greek, *thumos* appears frequently in descriptions of the heroes; it differs from *eros* in the following pairing: “they dined, nor was *thumos* lacking anything of a fair portion. But when they had put aside *eros* for eating and drinking . . .” (*Iliad* 1.468–9). *Eros* here is of material sustenance, whereas *thumos*, at least in this one formula, responds to a sense of fairness or proportionality vis-à-vis other members of the group. Regardless of whether a hero is hungry, receiving a portion less than commensurate with his status would mean a loss of face. *Thumos* is thus a wish or will that may include desires but goes beyond desires. In Homer, *thumos* is also a faculty associated with the breath of life.¹⁰² It wanes when a hero loses consciousness and his shade is about to fly. *Thumos* seems to be the “holding” of soul in body.¹⁰³ As such, it is vulnerable to desires but also capable of mastering them: “never before has *eros* gushing over

⁹⁸ *Politics* 7.7.5–8, 1327b 40–1328a 15. See P. Meyer, *O THUMOS apud Aristotelem Platonemque*, pp. 1–7.

⁹⁹ LSJ, s. v. *phroneo* (II.2.b).

¹⁰⁰ *On Horsemanship* 9.2, pointed out in S. Benardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing*, p. 55. The difficulty in disaggregating *eros* from angry passion is evident s. v. *orge*’s related verb form, *orgao*, to swell with lust, to be in heat (LSJ II.1). Both anger and lust put one “under the influence.” Compare the pairing in Italian epic, Boiardo’s *Orlando innamorato* with Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*.

¹⁰¹ W. Nack, “Pure Heart.”

¹⁰² Compare C. P. Caswell, *A Study of Thumos in Early Greek Epic*, pp. 13–50.

¹⁰³ For *thumos* as the connecting principle of the soul’s activities, see, with a wealth of citations, R. Padel, *In and Out of the Mind*, pp. 27–30.

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it so dominated the *thumos* in my chest” (*Iliad* 14.315–6), describing Zeus’ unmanning by the seductive Hera at a crucial moment in the war. Just as a hero loses his soul at death, so Zeus loses himself, that is, his sense of duty and office, his “self,” when overcome by eros. In Homeric psychology, the seat of rationality was the *phrenes* or lungs, through which the *thumos* or moist wind breathed. The soul also included passions such as eros, but it was the *thumos* that experienced eros and the other passions. *Thumos* was thus basically coextensive with the whole soul.

By the time we get to Thucydides, however, *thumos* is chosen (over *orge*) only to describe rash or mindless actions.¹⁰⁴ Benardete speculates that Plato went back to the antique word in describing his Guardians in the *Republic* because he intended to portray the Guardians as uncivilized: like Homer’s warriors, they literally think with their chests, not with their heads. A related explanation of Plato’s word choice is that Plato steadily builds up his Guardians from below: they are initially animalistic. Socrates first broaches the subject of *thumos* by means of an analogy with dogs and horses (Book 2, 375a 9–b 3). Erotically, too, the breeding program and the brief couplings permitted to the Guardians are instituted on analogy with horses, dogs, and other domesticated animals (*Republic*, Book 5, 459a 2–461e 4; cf. especially the use of the word for “pen” at 460c 2).

Plato’s added suffix *-eidos* distinguishes his Guardians from animals or primitives; they are only *thumoeideis*, or “thumoslike.” Similarly, Aristotle was at pains to distinguish true courage from mere *thumos*: “they [mistakenly] class *thumos* with courage. For those who, just like beasts, are carried by their *thumos* against the ones who wounded them, *seem* courageous because the courageous *are thumoeideis*.”¹⁰⁵ *Thumos* is an ingredient of courage, but not the whole of courage; to *thumos* must be added reason and choice. A fundamental disrespect for unadulterated *thumos* has now emerged from all of the main political theorists: Thucydides, Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle. This is the more striking in that *thumos* is the passion most directly related to the fight against injustice, both against one’s own wrongdoings and the wrongdoings of others. Socrates explains *thumos* in the *Republic* by means of an anecdote of a man named Leontius who, passing near corpses left by the public executioner, gets angry at himself for wanting to look at the

¹⁰⁴ Benardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.8.10 (1116b 25–1117a 10); emphasis added. Compare *Politics* 8.4.1–3, 1338b 10–22.

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sordid spectacle. His fight against his baser desires is carried out by means of a totally different “desire”: the desire to be superior to vulgar behavior, to be noble (*Republic*, Book 4, 439e 1–440c 7). In the case of a man who “believes he is being done an injustice,” thumos “makes an alliance with apparent justice” and does not desist, despite hunger and cold, but hangs on like a dog (440c 7–440d 5). The Guardian class must be high-strung in this faculty of soul that keenly feels justice and injustice because the Guardians will be both external defenders and internal police. However, certain caveats in the preceding quotation, such as “thinks” and “apparent,” are worth considering. Nothing guarantees the reality of the injustice that thumos perceives and does battle against. Its doglike character is related to the mindlessness of thumos in all of the fifth- and fourth-century theorists. In addition, the fight against injustice is essentially punitive: “for there is no other way to avoid injustices . . . except to fight, defend oneself, and conquer, in no way easing up on punishment . . .” (*Laws* Book 5, 731b 3–8). This punitiveness, as well as proneness to mistakes, makes thumos liable to abuse.

No better character study of the thumic personality and its punitive abuses can be found than Aristophanes’ 422 B.C. satire on the law courts and the mass jury system, *Wasps*.¹⁰⁶ The voice of reason in the play, Bdelycleon, says that an ancient malady has been hatched in the city (*Wasps* 651). The institution of payment for jury duty has ensured that the poor and unemployed pack the trials, with hundreds and sometimes thousands sitting in judgement in a single case. Demagogues can then make careers for themselves by prosecuting wealthy men on trumped-up charges in front of the mass juries, manipulating the natural envy felt by the poor toward the rich. The fines exacted from the rich fill public coffers, whence they are eventually redistributed as jury pay, adding extra incentive to convict and completing the loop of a self-perpetuating cycle.¹⁰⁷ The satirist, to render believable the splenetic vindictiveness that he attributes to the jurymen, as well as to render their destitution absolute, casts them as irascible, decrepit old men. “No living thing is more sharp-spirited [*oxuthumon*, a cognate of

¹⁰⁶ Among recent interpretations, see especially D. Allen, *The World of Prometheus*, pp. 128–33.

¹⁰⁷ Compare Aristotle, *Politics* 6.5.3–4 (1320a 4–17), 2.12.3–5 (1273b 41–1274a 15). Aristophanes’ jurymen say of the general Laches, the defendant whom they are about to judge, “everyone says he has a hive of money” (240–1; cf. 288, 659, and 1113: “we sting every man and provide ourselves with a livelihood”). Compare also *Knights* 1359–60.

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*thumos*¹⁰⁸] or dyspeptic,” they proudly say of themselves (1104–5). For a scheduled trial, they say, “Cleon our keeper has enjoined us to arrive early with three days worth of wicked anger in store for [the defendant] so we can punish him for his injustice” (242–3). Words for spirit, anger, rage, and bile fill the descriptions of the jurymen (383, 403, 405, 424, 430, 560, 567, 574). The fiercest of them, Philocleon, says simply that he desires to “do some harm” (322, 340). He prides himself on never yet having voted to acquit; the defendants twist and wriggle, but he always gets them in the end (278–89). Tears and lamentations of the accused are his chief joys in life (389–90).

These feelings of indignation, however, also engender a political emotion: solidarity. The indignity of being poor¹⁰⁹ and their judicial response to it have evolved into a class consciousness. The poor men’s activism is an example of recognition politics. A personal motive, each member’s offended self-worth, is at the root of their solidarity, but in practice the only way to secure respect from the upper classes has been to strike fear into them through group action. By this late stage, the group identity that they have achieved raises them far above self-interest; their leader says repeatedly and in a variety of ways that he simply is unwilling to enjoy himself (341, 510–11). Rather, the jurymen uphold a Principle, justice, however mistaken their conception of it may be. They lay claim to a dignity that goes back to the service they did for the city in their glory days, when they allegedly defeated the barbarians at Marathon (1978–80). They won that battle by drinking a sharp draft of *thumos* that resulted in *orge* (1081–2). This anger at the invader was crucial to their being able to “stand man beside man,” that is, to maintain solidarity. They acted together in swarms, literally stinging the enemy like wasps, in order to defeat the despotism that threatened the city from outside long ago. Today they act in concert again, but now they battle internal enemies, oligarchic and monarchical conspirators who allegedly abound within the city (482–502). Packed into their benches like grubs in cells of a hive (1109–11), they prepare to sting again, this time at the Odeon, the archon’s office, and the prison (1108–9). These actions of theirs, both past and present, are inspired by patriotism above all. So Attic

¹⁰⁸ It should be noted that the word *thumos* in Aristophanes does not have the precision with which Plato later endowed it; the term is not strictly opposed to desire on the one hand and reason on the other. See the subsequent discussion.

¹⁰⁹ The old men are mostly displaced farmers (260–5; cf. Section 7.6). They cannot afford to buy figs, and their own sons wonder where their next meal is coming from, if the court should not be in session that day; they ask why their mothers ever bore them (291–315).

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are they, that Home Defense is reflected in their very nature (*phusis*, 1071): they possess a wasp's stinger. Like wasps (and like the circle-people) they are asexual, springing from the ground autochthonous (1071–6). Guardians past and present, the old jurymen, at least in their own minds, *are* the polis. Thumos is the spirit of the polis because it enables action in concert.

How animosity enables them to close ranks is worth investigating because the selflessness and community spirit of the wasps cannot be overemphasized. They are self-effacing; they are all alike and fully regimented. As defenders of the law, they are impeccably lawful themselves (cf. 1252–5). They come down hard on people who stand out, or grow too large for the political order, lest the ancien régime should be lost. Theirs is the ostracizing spirit, the spirit of sacrifice. Whom they sacrifice, themselves or others, is not a matter they waste thought on because the common good throws all personal matters into the shade. Their rectitude is sustained by the pride that comes of membership in the ancient fraternal order; being cast out of the order, ceasing to be one of the wasps, is unthinkable; all self-esteem comes from membership. It would be worth attempting to reconstruct the symptoms of their pride from our own experience. Such pride is experienced as a certain tautness or tension in the chest that comes unstrung if one gives in to pleasures, as happened to Zeus. The high-strung feeling is nettlesome, sensitive, ready to spring at the least provocation. Always prompt to issue in anger, this pride could even be constituted of bottled anger. Certainly pride is in its element when dealing with a scapegoat, for the full fury of the group directed against the one reaffirms and edifies the fundamental opposition, between membership and nonmembership. The wasps especially persecute shirkers (they call them stingless drones) who evade military service, that is, those do not act in defense of the group (1114–21).

Each wasp also turns the weapon of anger against himself: pride does not allow the self to be exempt. Self-directed anger is what enables each wasp to observe the code in all its strictness. Getting mad at oneself for not maintaining standards – “I could kick myself” – is a thought and feeling familiar to everyone. At a less developed stage, this self-anger may have been the group's fury turned against a member, enforcing the code. But that code has long since been internalized, and a part of the self now rounds in blame against another part. When Leontius in the anecdote could no longer refrain from looking at the corpses, he cursed his own eyes for their recalcitrant vulgarity and then forced them open, to saturate them with the sight, the way we rub a dog's nose in it, both as punishment and as a future

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deterrent (*Republic*, Book 4, 440a 1–5). Leontius sends a clear message to his eyes: do not do that again. Yet this would entail that Leontius' eyes are no longer part of Leontius; he alienates his own eyes in order to scapegoat them. Although his pride has come unstrung momentarily (while he indulged his eyes), it snaps back rigid with equal fury, demanding a sacrifice. Shame is the precursor to self-chastisement; shame takes over in the interval before pride reasserts itself. For a brief moment, shame believes that the accusation is true: "Maybe I am not good enough to be a member of the better class." The wasps, for example, feel the most terrible shame and guilt at their own softness or moral compromise, for example, when some weakness comes over them and they fail to convict (994–1002). The drama of ostracism from the group then replays itself within the individual psyche. Sacrificing the offending part, such as Leontius' eyes, singling out and cutting away the cancer, is the first step on the road to self-improvement and readmittance to the group. The wasps are nothing if not strongly bonded: since Aristotle believed the thumos to be the source of philia, it is worthwhile considering whether all philia relationships resemble the exceptional bonding of the wasps, albeit to lesser degrees and retaining only the potential for violent anger. The stronger the bond of affection, the more jealous against outsiders it must be and the stronger the grievance should the bond ever be broken. The need for the violence in the extreme cases we examined in Section 4.1 would then come into sharper focus: both the violence directed against outsiders and the violence against initiates struggling to become insiders (not to mention that against fully fledged insiders who break the code) would be functions of the group's separating itself off in order to bond together. By analogy, an individual, such as Leontius, as a collectivity of different passions and motives, must turn the aggression inward on parts of himself when those parts threaten to dissolve the bond or "holding" of soul that he takes to be the most important part of himself.

This dividing of the self, the most problematic aspect of thumos, is related to militarism. People steel themselves to march off to death by pitting thumos against bodily desires such as the desire to avoid pain and to experience pleasure. Willingness to risk life and limb in battle implies an overcoming of the body, a forgetfulness of the basic fact that one needs a body to experience even the self-esteem that comes from heroism and membership. The Homeric hero fights for a fame the benefits of which he will not live to experience. His idea of himself is more important to him than his body. Only if the shade existence is real enough to permit one

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to experience honor does this become a rational choice. Even the ghost of Achilles admits it was a fallacy: better to be alive without honor than king of the dead.¹¹⁰

This mental process of abstracting from the material can be characteristic of angry people. Pressure emanating from the region of the chest conjures up not only Leontius' self-idea but also a chimerical image of ocular organs who have a will of their own. His thumoeidetic faculty personifies or apostrophizes them.¹¹¹ A clearer example of such personification occurs in the judicial theory of Plato's *Laws*, Book 9: the Athenian stranger initially suggests that no one commits wrongdoing voluntarily (860d 1–861a 2). He quickly yields that high ground, however, and instead maintains that there are voluntary and involuntary injuries, of which the involuntary, at least, cannot be considered wrongdoing at all (861e 1–862a 8). A little later, the stranger concedes that, in practice, even beasts of burden will receive the death penalty if they accidentally kill someone (873d 10–874a 4). Inanimate objects that chance to fall on people and kill them will be declared polluted and cast out, as if an inanimate object could care what punishment it received (*ibid.*). The injured and the bereaved want to believe that a malevolent will lies behind every harm suffered; millstones and packasses must stand trial as though they were persons in order to satisfy the thirst for vengeance. Any real city will contain anger of this sort, and hence the stranger accommodates it; but that does not mean that anger's effect on rationality is anything but perverse. Righteous indignation wishes to forget mitigating circumstances, relativity, even the possibility of mistaken identity, in order to contemplate the crime (and its punishment) in their ideal forms. In the preceding examples, thumos influences the eidetic or idea-making faculty to create a false purity of thought, or puritanism. The idealism of the wasps effectively blanks out any interest they might have in establishing the facts behind a given accusation. Likewise pride and shame, the other faces of thumos, both conceal some facts and idealize others, each in its own way: pride concocting a self-idea that omits discordant features, while shame, in its self-castigation, refuses to hear mitigation in the self's own defense, wishing to wallow in disgrace a little longer.

Envy, a final mode in which thumos appears, is a clue to the relation between thumos and eros. The austerity drive of the wasps (504–5, 1166–7),

¹¹⁰ *Odyssey* 11.489–91.

¹¹¹ Benardete, *Socrates' Second Sailing*, pp. 99–100.

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their feeding on honor and principle alone (508–11), and their occupying the high, ascetic ground are not without ostentation. The wasps are too poor to afford many pleasures (300–16), unable to purchase even the small luxury of figs. Their renunciations are a way of making a virtue of necessity. The wasps really want to live a wealthy lifestyle (1450–61, 575–6), but because they cannot, they persecute those who do. Their money crunch “stings” the wasps (253); that is, the wasps sting others only because they have been stung themselves. Moreover, their advanced age places youth and its especial enjoyments on the invidious list: the old men envy the new generation of wealthy young knights, with their long curls, foppish fashions, and indulgence in homosexuality (1069–70). Loss of their sexual potency is the primary lament of the wasps (1060–4), an unforgivable offense of youth against age. Yet, because no possibility of regaining these enjoyments is on the horizon, the wasps pretend to themselves and to others that they would not want them anyway. Thwarted eros issues in envy and vindictiveness against people who are not thus thwarted.

Only Bdelycleon, who is wealthy, can afford to offer his father an alternative to jury duty: the old man has the wherewithal, at home, to relax and enjoy himself. As *thumos* is the passion driving public activism, so eros is one of the passions to be indulged in the alternative private life that the son offers: drinking and song, and a prostitute to rub him (739–40). These are real, undeniable pleasures that Bdelycleon insists on, and as such they must be enjoyed privately, in intimate groups or pairs, within the confines of a private home, hidden from the view of the public. By contrast, the pleasures of the spirit, which Philocleon insists on, all require an onlooker, some third party to give the nod of approbation. Politicking creates an artificial value system, a self-referential loop of group honor giving, a mutual admiration society. These spiritual goods are ersatz, and they vanish like smoke as soon as one leaves the group.

Precisely *city* honor is worthless from a rational standpoint. Bdelycleon is disgusted that his father’s life has become other-directed. The old man no longer cares for his own, his house and family and servants (764–6), but channels all his energies into an abstract entity, the state. Politics gets people to act in concert by causing them to forget their own interest; in place of real goods, politics substitutes a host of loyalties, honors, and perquisites (578–87) that are valueless because the people offering them do not really love you. Philocleon is dancing to someone else’s tune. Bdelycleon wants him to lead a noble (*gennaïos*) life (506), by which he means self-sufficiency and

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self-direction, not enslavement to a demagogue and certainly not associating with vulgar people all the time, participating in the lowest orders of the democracy, itself a none-too-respectable regime. The private and the erotic are real and solid, in this view, whereas thumos is public and artificial, the passion of envious people who lack the private means to fulfill their eros.

All of the manifestations of thumos as envy point to the conclusion that Aristophanes (or at least Bdelycleon) entertains a notion of repression similar to Freud's.¹¹² Thumos represses eros. Condemning other people's enjoyments is strictly related to denying oneself the same enjoyments. The invidious glance, the constant looking back over the shoulder, wondering what others think, the special fury that the group reserves for the naysayer because he dares to voice what all secretly believe although scarcely admit to themselves, and the moral indignation against the free spirit because he does what everyone else secretly wishes to do: in all these cases, people ratchet themselves up to accept the public truth of the emperor's new clothes, and the energy denied its outlet in the enjoyment of real goods appears to be channeled into frustration at the one who refuses to see the prescribed ones. The dissenter actually aids the rest in their own acceptance of the public artifice because whatever internal discord they feel between real and prescribed can be drowned out by shouting him down.

That public animus reduces to thwarted private interest is a theme found elsewhere in the comedies, particularly in the *Acharnians*. Dicaeopolis knows that peace, food, drink, and sex are superior to politicking and war; he tries public activism (37–9) to achieve his private aim of getting back to his deme, where the preceding commodities are produced naturally, but when politics fails, he secedes from the polis. Hot on the trail of the deserter are old men from Acharnae, Marathon fighters who, like the wasps, are driven by the connected passions of warlikeness, patriotism (they are rabidly anti-Spartan), and the judicial activism of a lynch mob (370–6). Like that of the wasps, their spiritedness carries them roughshod over the facts in

¹¹² "I named this process *repression*. . . . It was obviously a primary mechanism of defence . . . and was only the forerunner of the later-developed normal condemning judgement" (Freud, "An Autobiographical Study," p. 30; emphasis in original). Compare "Analysis replaces the process of repression, which is an automatic and excessive one, by a temperate and purposeful control on the part of the highest agencies of the mind. In a word, *analysis replaces repression by condemnation*" ("Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy," p. 145; emphasis in original). For Bdelycleon's attempts at a "medical" cure for his father's compulsive persecution of defendants, cf. lines 114–24.

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the case: as they advance on him with stones uplifted, Dicaeopolis begs them repeatedly to *listen* to why he seceded.¹¹³ Instead, they all scream at the “polluted one” (182, 282, 285) and call him a betrayer of the fatherland (289–90). Their own support of the war effort is not motivated wholly by concern for the common good, however. They cannot help mentioning that their own vines have been cut down by the Spartans, and their land ravaged (183, 228, 231–3). Mention is made of charcoal and the wood that they make into charcoal (180–1, 213). This local produce ordinarily yields revenues that they are no longer receiving because of the Spartan occupation of Acharnae.¹¹⁴ As the patriotic chorus fan their rage hot enough to justify stoning him, Dicaeopolis exclaims, “How that black, half-burnt charcoal of yours blazed up again!” (*thumalops*, 321, with a pun on *thumos*). Dicaeopolis knows that their wrath against both Spartans and alleged Spartan sympathizers is only misdirected economic need. To secure his own safety, he produces a hostage, a loved one of theirs (324) – not a human but a scuttle of charcoal that he threatens with a knife. The Acharnians immediately give their cause up as lost because the charcoal is their fellow demesman (329, 333), that is, their export (348–9). The Acharnians now promise to listen to whatever Dicaeopolis wishes to say, even if he wants to describe how he became a Spartan sympathizer. “This little scuttle I will never betray,” they say in a strophe that, metrically, is the mirror image of the strophe in which they accused him of betraying the fatherland (338–41 with 287–92). So total is their reversal and so total the reduction of the public animus in these self-appointed hangmen to private interest that Dicaeopolis now switches from charcoal to their other product, the one they enjoy among themselves, wine from the devastated vines: “It’s terrible that wine from unripe grapes enatures the *thumos* of men such that they want to throw stones and shout and not listen” (352–4). The unripe grapes are all that they were able to harvest before the Spartan invasion. War has forced the Acharnians to drink a bitter cup. However, their animus ought therefore to be directed at the war, not at Sparta. After they witness Dicaeopolis preparing his tantalizing feast (976–89), they undergo a total change of heart about war; their newfound appreciation of the goods of peace is capped by a dream of Eros and a private rendezvous (990–9), although

¹¹³ *Akono* in various forms is repeated over and over, in his pleas and their refusals to listen (294, 295, 296, 303, 306, 322, 323, 335, 337; cf. *Wasps* 415, 471–2).

¹¹⁴ Compare Thucydides 2.19.2–2.20.5.

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Dicaeopolis trumps their feeble passions with his appearance in the final scene wearing the stiff variety of the comic phallus held by two girls (1216–17). Both Dicaeopolis and Bdelycleon know where the real pleasures in life are; they must teach the thumic Acharnians and wasps how to enjoy themselves.

However, a more complex picture of the interaction between thumos and eros emerges from *Wasps* than simple impedance versus enjoyment. In the initial description of Philocleon's malady, the need to persecute is not characterized as angry or thumic at all. Rather, as Philocleon's name suggests and as the servants confirm, the old man is characterized by a love, and his sickness is a love. The audience guesses that the old man is a cubophile (75), passionately addicted to gambling with dice.¹¹⁵ The “-phile” part is right, according to one servant; philism is the root of the evil.¹¹⁶ The audience then guess he must be a bibophile (79), addicted to drink. No again, the other servant replies: the audience is making a class-based mistake (80), since a man wealthy enough to have servants ordinarily falls prey to drinking (and gaming). The audience thereupon assumes that the man in question must be a poor man who lives beyond his means, as a xenophile, one who entertains guests or strangers too often (82). This, too, is wrong. The old man is actually a juridiphile (88): he has fallen in love with sitting in judgement (*erai . . . tou dikazein*, 89). So erotic is he for the courtroom that he dreams about the waterclock at night and writes graffiti about the beautiful orifice of the urn that receives his ballot (91–9). Like a lover, he issues a groan if he cannot sit on the front bench (89–90). When his son Bdelycleon keeps him cooped up inside the house to prevent him from consummating his desire, he cries “Let me out or I'll burst!” (162). His resourcefulness in devising ways to escape from the house (176, 181–9, 192, 208, 379–80; cf. 364–5: *ekporize mechanen*) resembles the activity of a male dog trying to gain access to a female dog in estrus.

All this desire is in service, however, of judging and convicting, that is, indulging his vindictiveness. His spleen or thumos, beyond merely repressing

¹¹⁵ Compare the Hippocratic treatise *Humors* 9.2: “erotes for dice.”

¹¹⁶ Line 77. The prefix *phil-* ordinarily means “fond of” and thus could be contrasted with *eros* in the same way that *philia* sometimes was contrasted with *eros*. In *Wasps*, however, it connotes the morbid or compulsive cravings characteristic of a medical pathology, analogous to our scientific usages (e.g., necrophilia, pedophilia) and hence may connote desires that are erotic in their intensity. As we shall see, however, a fundamental confusion of *eros* and *philia* takes place in *Wasps*.

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his eros, seems to be an expression of it: a rechanneling of eros away from ordinary objects of infatuation and toward public affairs. As Bdelycleon says, the old man has become “habituated to take pleasure in troubles” (*hedesthai . . . pragmata*, 512). Philocleon admits that he “desires to experience nothing good” (1125). He explains that the good is “not advantageous” to him.¹¹⁷ His value system has been stood on its head by the displacement of his desire from a natural object to an unnatural. The language of love returns to Philocleon’s lips after his son has won both the battle and the agon, and the old man believes that he will never see his beloved courtroom again: *keinon eramai*.¹¹⁸ When the two of them later set about constructing Philocleon’s judge-at-home virtual courtroom, Bdelycleon again remarks on his father’s terrible locophilia (*philokhoria* 834), or longing-for-the-place where judging occurs, an expression with connotations of patriotism or love-of-country.

There is a further indication that Philocleon’s judicial activism might be a repression or sublimation of lower desires: the sudden rechanneling back down of Philocleon’s eros after his disease is cured. No longer lusting over courtroom paraphernalia (1335–41), he loses all of the moral uprightness and social formation that he received from the wasps and immediately attempts a bungled ravishment or elopement with a nude flute girl, the undeniable object of a genuine, as opposed to denatured, eros. Bdelycleon initially tries to frighten his father with the possibility that, at his advanced age, newly regained passion could precipitate a heart attack: “You seem to miss lusting after [*eran*] a blooming young coffin!” (1365). In reality, however, the young man thinks Philocleon is impotent, and he tries to take the girl away from him on the grounds that the elderly man is “worn-out [*sapros*] and not able to do anything [*sc.* with her]” (1380–1). But the audience knows that Philocleon retains his sexual function: before his son’s entrance he was pulling the prostitute up the stairs to bed by means of the comic phallus, saying “take this rope in your hand. Cling to it, but be careful, since the rope is worn [*sapros*]. It’ll certainly support a rubbing, though!” (1341–4). A not-fully-recoverable joke about this generic costume prop of Old Comedy and its relation to the stinger, that costume prop specific to this individual play, was actually ongoing throughout the stage production of *Wasps*. Both organs protrude from the hip or loins (*osphus*, 225), a location

¹¹⁷ 1126. The flip side of Philocleon’s not desiring the good for himself is his desiring to “do some harm” to others (322, 340).

¹¹⁸ 751. Paratragedy of Euripides, *Alcestis* 866.

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that seems basically in front at 739–40, although the stingers are a feature of the buttocks at 1075. The stinger has to be turned or redirected to ready it for use (422–3), perhaps in the way that a real wasp is imagined to bring the tail down and slightly forward to strike, that is, the tip's distance from the wasp's underbelly lessens. However, by coming forward, this part of the costume would interfere with the comic phallus, unless the two props were identical.¹¹⁹ The members of the chorus do indicate their phalloi at one point,¹²⁰ or at least they indicate the place where their phalloi once were, precisely in the context of admitting that they are past it, in this most masculine of regards (1063–5). The only way in which they can regain manliness (1077, 1083, 1090) is through use of the stinger, which becomes “stretched out” when striking (407). At 727, stingers are associated with the sticks (*skipones*) that old men carry to defend themselves and to lean on while walking. Jurymen all possess canes (*bakteriai*) at verse 33, and a stock joke of Old Comedy was to bring an old man out on stage and have him peevisly strike someone with his cane.¹²¹ There seems little question that this weapon is meant to appear prosthetic, an artificial substitute of the old and decrepit for the natural tool of the young and strong. The only way the wasps can get it up is through anger: extending or lowering (423, 727) their staves or stingers corresponds to losing or keeping their temper (425, 727). This interchangeability between phallus and stinger may imply that the same costume prop served for both. Philocleon's costume probably differed as he is not a member of the chorus; certainly his costume included the phallus. But his sexual rejuvenation seems to prove that his thumos was only thwarted eros all along. The stinger–phallus is reversible; the same energy apparently issues in either of two modes, aggressive or erotic.¹²² However, the polis with its artificial honor system channels energy into aggression, whereas erotic energy is natural.

The width of the pendulum swing that Philocleon undergoes, from archjuryman to scofflaw (1335–40), raises the question of how his eros ever underwent such a fragile “sublimation” in the first place. The crucial part of his reconversion is Bdelycleon's proof that he has no honor in the city.

¹¹⁹ Arrowsmith, “Aristophanes' *Birds*,” p. 137.

¹²⁰ 1062. Compare both D. M. MacDowell, ed., *Aristophanes. Wasps*, and Sommerstein, ed., *Wasps*, ad loc.

¹²¹ *Clouds* 541–2.

¹²² See also K. Reckford, “Catharsis and Dream Interpretation in Aristophanes' *Wasps*,” pp. 305–308; Allen, *The World of Prometheus*, pp. 160–1.

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When Bdelycleon asserts that he is a slave without noticing it, Philocleon retorts “I rule everyone” (517–18). When Bdelycleon asks him to explain what honor, or *time*, he gets, the agon commences (519–21). Philocleon claims that he, as a juryman, exercises kingly rule; there is no one more blessed: tall men supplicate him and great men black his boots, and in sum he rules a realm in no way inferior to Zeus’ (546–620). Here the *mega phronein* that characterizes the thumos comes to the fore in Philocleon. Just as Leontius wanted to imagine himself one of the better people, above vulgar indulgence, so Philocleon wants to see himself as a king or god. The three obols of jury pay become, for the purposes of the agon, the tangible symbol of the *time* that Philocleon’s spirit requires. On the domestic front, too, the major evidence of the old man’s spirit is his desire to remain economically independent of his son, to whom he has handed over the financial reins of the household (612–14). His wife’s and daughter’s continuing respect for him is contingent on the pittance he earns, or at least they must feign respect in order to wheedle the small change out of him.¹²³ It does not take Bdelycleon long to prove, however, that the three obols, even multiplied by the entire number of jurymen, make up an insignificant amount of the imperial tribute that comes into the public coffers. Philocleon is not a negotiating partner in the polis any more than he is a negotiating partner at home. According to the terms of debate that the wasps themselves have set up, Bdelycleon proves that the old, the whole lot of them, are not useful (*kbresimos*) anymore (540–1). This revelation breaks Philocleon’s spirit. His loss of face is of heroic proportions, like Ajax’s dishonor when his thumos was denied a fair portion by the Achaeans, who voted to bestow the honor of Achilles’ armor on Odysseus instead of him. Like Ajax, Philocleon resolves on the only honorable course: to fall on his sword (522–3, 756–7). In other words, Philocleon snaps. But he botches the suicide, and, after a period of shame, he accepts the lowly position of judge of his own household. The tension in his chest relaxes, and later (with the help of wine) a corresponding tension floods his loins.

Clearly the honor he received from the wasps was responsible for Philocleon’s sublimation and love sickness. His later debauch is merely the

¹²³ 605–12. This link between money making and honor, Philocleon’s “spiritual” need for jury pay goes some way toward extenuating the otherwise crass materialism of the imperial desire of the Athenian demos in Thucydides’ account (cf. Section 7.6). Monetary compensation, in the minds of Philocleon and the demotic wasps, is proof that they receive honor in the city. Their desire for money is thus halfway between a desire for mere material gain and a higher desire for honor, or *philotimia*.

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flip side of his previous self-respect. The honor-loving man becomes dissolute when there is no longer any honor to maintain. His own self-policing upheld the *nomos* that denatured his *eros* so long as he was receiving group recognition from the wasps and (as he thought) from the city. His corruption resembles the degeneration of men and regimes in *Republic* Books 8 and 9, a process that admittedly takes place across generations. The timocratic man is the incarnation of *thumos* (547d 9–548c 6), whereas the tyrannical man is the incarnation of *eros* (573b 7–575a 7). The timocratic man, who forces himself to be good in order to gain honor, is hypocritical when no one is looking (548a 5–c 2) and brittle in the face of temptations. In the myth of Er, a decent man chooses tyranny for his next life (Book 10, 619b 7–d 1) because he had always had to restrain himself from such desires in his previous life, i.e., he secretly valued the tyrant's way of life all along. Honor and dishonor are socially useful tools, but fragile in the face of more basic pleasures.

The assumption of Bdelycleon's (and Dicaeopolis') reconversion program was that public activism and the splenetic vindictiveness that motivates it were artificial substitutes for, and therefore reducible to, desire for private enjoyments. Given the wherewithal, people would naturally choose the more direct access to pleasures. They would be cured of their anger and would stop persecuting others. Yet if Philocleon's thumic aggressions consisted entirely of thwarted *eros*, then his newfound erotic enjoyment ought to be pacific. He should make love, not war. In the event, he makes both. Liberated from his puritan inhibitions, he takes to assaulting people in the streets (1322–3). The contrast with his former, judicial persecutions is strictly drawn: he who wanted to convict everyone in a court of law now collects a whole crowd of wronged individuals summoning him to court (1332–40, 1406–8, 1417–20). *Hubris* is the word used over and over to describe his new, drunk and disorderly conduct (1304, 1319, 1418, 1419, 1441). The peak of violence comes when Philocleon strikes his son and knocks him down (1384–6), as Bdelycleon no doubt richly deserves for trying to change his father (or for botching the cure). Philocleon's rejuvenation has taken him back to adolescence (1354–63); he who used to persecute the wealthy and notable has become the very type of the arrogant, wealthy young man, like the *Ithyphalloi*.¹²⁴ Yet greater than the contrast between Philocleon's

¹²⁴ For his youth, the wealth he stands to inherit, and the way “my little son keeps close watch over me,” see 1354–57. Philocleon also pretends to have reversed roles with Bdelycleon; hence in striking his son he imitates a father beater, the ectype of the hubristic youth.

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old life and his new life is the similarity between them: in both cases he wanted to hurt people (322, 340). Whether he does harm as a public servant or as a private citizen, the distinction pales in comparison with the basic fact about Philocleon, the substratum that cannot be taken away, his irrepressible mischief.¹²⁵ Political persecutions are apparently the price that society pays for keeping types like Philocleon in line. The most dangerous types can be fitted into society only by allowing them to be policemen and hangmen. If Philocleon does not get the privilege of making other people behave, he cannot behave himself. Because he must do violence, better to let him do it in an official capacity. At least then some of the violence is channeled back into himself, in self-policing.

Hence Bdelycleon's reconversion project was misconceived. Eros cannot always be purified or isolated from thumos. On the contrary, the two appear inseparable. Philocleon turns out to be no less thumic in his love affairs than he was in his pseudo-civic-mindedness. The angry/lustful passion animating Philocleon may have modulated from an initial stress on the angry to an eventual stress on the lustful, but both are still present. He is no longer pent up; he is able to do harm with the greatest of ease and good humor. Telling jokes all the while (1381–6, 1401–5, 1427–32, 1437–40, 1446–8), he joyfully assaults people, making his presence felt in ways much more direct and satisfying than anything he was capable of doing in the courtroom. The gauntlet of resistance that Philocleon thinks he must run (cf. 1322 with 1341) in his elopement is purely a figment of his imagination: he seeks out enemies and people who would oppose his abduction of the flute girl purely because violating such people makes the overall experience that much more pleasurable. Apparently, anger (as in his judicial stage) will always come with a desirous aspect. Eros will always come with aggressiveness.

If Aristophanes makes no strict dichotomy between lust and angry passion, he merely accepts the prevalent opinion of his day. Athenian society in general made no such distinction. As Allen's recent study has argued, the strict distinction between anger and lust almost certainly began with Plato. After separating a rational part of the soul from a passionate part, Socrates in the *Republic* asks whether anger is a third thing or a twin with one of the other two. Glaucon "gives Socrates the standard Athenian answer when he says that anger might be identified as twin to the element in the soul that gives rise to lust. . . . Glaucon simply does not think of the soul as

¹²⁵ Compare Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, p. 134.

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being tripartite or of anger as being separate from desire."¹²⁶ In Glaucon's view, anger, the desire to vindicate or to do harm, is also a desire. The group of cognates of *orge* show this most clearly: swell with lust but also swell with anger; the same word serves for both. Aristophanes thus predates the dichotomy between anger and desire. As we saw earlier, the Homeric tendency was to make thumos the whole soul. There are several places in the comedies in which Aristophanes appears to use the word *thumos* to mean the whole soul,¹²⁷ whereas Plato normally reserves the word for the irascible part of the soul. This collapse of lust with vindictiveness in the Athenian mind sheds still more light on the demos' suspicions about elite pederasty. If Plato is to vindicate any form of pederasty, he must drive a wedge between aggression and desire.

Plato gives the thumos a specific job and thus separates it from desire (*epithumia*).¹²⁸ This intentional narrowing of the concept is important because it has implications for the question of whether the aim of eros is violation or whether violation is only a by-product of eros. It is worth noting that the leftover anger or aggression in Philocleon's amorous desire is related to his possessiveness, the same ability to form strong attachments that we have seen in him all along. Bdelycleon had wanted his father to enjoy real, solid pleasures such as a drinking party complete with courtesans, as opposed to ersatz political pleasures. But after his conversion, Philocleon's preferences become far more real and solid than anything Bdelycleon envisioned. The gentlemen at the symposium had intended to indulge in a limited form of erotic relating; the impersonal services of the flute girl, that is, recreational sex.¹²⁹ No one was supposed to become desirous enough to want to *possess* the girl, to make her his own permanent acquisition (1353). Similarly, the insults with which Philocleon disturbs or breaks up the party seem intended to mock the feebleness of their enjoyments in contrast to his own strength of passion (1299–1321). Philocleon's desire to make another person his own, like his former judicial desire to make himself part of a larger whole, sheds light on the possessive polis-forming eros of Plato's Aristophanes. The distinction drawn by Plato between eros and

¹²⁶ D. Allen, *The World of Prometheus*, p. 253 (on *Republic* 439e); see generally, pp. 245–257; 50–59; 118–21. Compare Benardete, *Socrates' Second Sailing*, p. 208.

¹²⁷ For example, *Acharnians* 480.

¹²⁸ Eros falls under the desirous or *epithumetikon* part of the soul at *Republic* 439d 3–7. However, see Chapter 5, note 8.

¹²⁹ Compare *lesbiain tous xumpotas* (1345–50) with Bdelycleon's original plan for his father (739–40).

the thumoeidetic has important ramifications for the interpretation of the *Symposium*.

4.3. The *Symposium* Again: Eros and Philia

Comparing *Wasps* with these other Platonic dialogues, particularly the *Republic* and the *Laws*, puts us in a position to examine Plato's disagreement with Aristophanes in the *Symposium* over the connectedness of eros to angry passion. Their disagreement is indicated in the *Symposium* in a surprising way: as we shall see, the disagreement points to an even more important underlying agreement. In the preceding section we began to suspect that *Wasps* might be conflating eros with a different kind of love, a love with two sides: possessive or jealous affection on the one hand, and violent anger on the other. In short, a popular or unphilosophical form of *philia*, the love based on thumos for Aristotle. If, as is likely, *Wasps* was one of the sources on which Plato drew to ascertain Aristophanes' view of eros when writing the *Symposium* speech, the conflation of eros with *philia* in *Wasps* might give us clues for interpreting the *Symposium* speech (and Plato's view of it) as well.

*Philia*¹³⁰ is a very likely candidate for explaining the "eros" of Plato's Aristophanes; as was pointed out, one of the speech's principal formulations is that eros seeks "one's own" (*oikeion*), and Diotima picks out the *oikeion* as the heart of Aristophanes' speech (Chapter 1, notes 22 and 23). Of etymological

¹³⁰ The word appears at 192b 5–c 1: on finding our other half, according to Aristophanes, we are wonderfully struck by "*philia*, belongingness, and *eros*." It is significant that *philia* comes first. Is *eros* added to the list as an afterthought or as a synonym? For another cognate of *philia* used in the speech, see 191e 6–8: slices of the all-male circle-man, when they are boys, *philousi* grown men. To all appearances, Plato's Aristophanes here picks the conventional word of choice to describe underage boys' feelings toward their older lovers. Conventionally, boys were not supposed to feel eros for men; eros would place them under the cloud of unchastity and unmanliness. To have said that the boys *erosi* grown men would have bordered on the scandalous. This explanation seems sufficient, and so critics have not remarked on the word choice. Yet the entire logic of the myth is riding on the claim that certain boys feel the desire to reunite with men from an early age. This desire to reunite is Aristophanes' definition of eros. No desire differential can obtain between the adult-male half and the boy half or else the myth loses its explanatory power. Someone might object that sexual desire does not begin before puberty, so Aristophanes has no choice in the language he must use. It may indeed have been a common belief, if there is anything to what Aristotle says (*Generation of Animals* 1.20, 728a 10–25), that boys before the production of semen experience no genital arousal. Such an opinion, however unobservant, might have imposed limitations on the satire, which has to maintain some link to "reality." However, the argument ignores the fact that sexual desire and

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importance is the fact that in earlier Greek the adjective form, *philos*, also denoted “one’s own.”¹³¹ If Aristophanes were conflating *eros* and *philia*, it would explain why he identifies *eros* with synoecism and political bonding. Elsewhere in Greek political theory, *philia*, not *eros*, is the civic bond that holds communities together. Civic friendship (*philia*)¹³² or affection is the principle cause of union, whereas *eros* may be conducive to maintaining (or producing more) *philia*. This is true of Phaedrus’ speech with its admiration for military arrangements like the Sacred Band.¹³³

Perhaps Plato’s Aristophanes merely relates, rather than equates, *eros* and *philia*. However, when we turn to the other Platonic dialogues, the conclusion that Plato wishes to make him equate them becomes inescapable. Chief among these is the *Lysis*, the topic of which is precisely *philia*.¹³⁴ Toward the end of the *Lysis*, Socrates avers that people who are *philo*i (friends or dear) are also related or “belong” (*oikeioi*) to one another. The same also holds true, he claims, for *eros* and desire¹³⁵ (*epithumia*). The similarity

eros are unconnected in Aristophanes’ speech (cf. note 73 of Chapter 2). Perhaps the following provides a solution: the desire felt by the older lovers, a desire that can be dissipated in sexual intercourse, is *eros*. And the sexless *philia* that the boys feel is *eros* too. Both attractions are forms of the same desire. But then Aristophanes is certainly conflating *eros* and *philia*. In an important respect, Aristophanes seems correct about the “manliness” of certain boys predisposing them toward companionship with men. Preadolescent boys often do not like girls or want to play with them. Boys stick to their own kind (*to homoion*): they wish to be included in the company of men. If they did prefer girls at that age, they really would seem girlish or unmanly. This love of same is indeed primary, as required by the myth of primordial origins, but it is also crucially different from *eros*. Boys’ desire to form an exclusive club, like their desire to be accepted by “big” men, seems like a younger analogue of adult males’ desire to unite into the unnatural whole of the polis.

¹³¹ As in the phrase, “holding on with his own two hands” (10. 25 West), where “his own” translates the adjective *philos* and “two” translates the dual case of hands. See also LSJ, s. v. (I.2.c.).

¹³² See especially Aristotle’s *Politics*, Book 2, with the subsequent discussion in this section.

¹³³ In Phaedrus’ retelling of the tale of Alcestis, who alone was willing to die in her husband’s stead (his old parents refused), Phaedrus claims that Alcestis “on account of her *eros* so surpassed them in respect to *philia* [*sc.* for Admetus] that she showed them up as being alien to their own son” (179b 5–c 3). Both parents and wife feel *philia*, but the *eros* the wife feels comports to a far greater *philia*. The same assumption governs Phaedrus’ description of the psychological mechanism by which the erotic city, or armed camp, works: the man in love (*erai*) who is caught in a shameful act “never feels quite so aggrieved if seen by his father or his comrades [*i.e.*, *philia* relations] or anyone else than when seen by his *eromenos*” (178d 4–e 1).

¹³⁴ Here I follow A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, pp. 1–14. For the conformity between Aristophanes’ *Symposium* speech and the treatment of *philia* in the *Lysis*, see pp. 12–14. Price does not push the idea far enough to see the underlying agreement between Plato and his Aristophanes, however.

¹³⁵ *Lysis* 221e 5–222a 3. See Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, p. 8.

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with the *Symposium* is not merely that Plato's Aristophanes defines *eros* in terms of the *oikeion*, while the Socrates of the *Lysis* does the same for *philia* (and, in doing so, likens *philia* to *eros*). Rather, as Price points out, Socrates' dialogue with young Lysis occurs before an audience: an interested party named Hippothales, Lysis' scorned suitor. Socrates' explicit project is to show Hippothales how to chat up boys. Socrates in the passage quoted has gotten young Lysis to agree to a formula that practically forces the boy to admit that he was meant for and "belongs" (*oikeios*) to Hippothales. Otherwise how could Hippothales be in love with him? In other words, we find in the *Lysis* the same essential assumptions that motivated the comic fantasy of circle-people: there is one person out there for me; I am the right person for him too; we belong to each other even though we have never met; I will know when I meet the right person because he will love me and I him. To call into question the soundness of these assumptions is not to deny that true *eros* feels this way. On the contrary, these assumptions adequately capture very common, if not universal, erotic experience. If Lysis has a shred of romance in him, he may very well feel obliged to love Hippothales back.¹³⁶ As Price points out, Aristophanes' *Symposium* speech is a fantasy offering a fictional answer to the question of *philia* as posed in the *Lysis*.¹³⁷

When we turn to the political myth of civic *philia* in the *Republic*, the parallels between Aristophanes' *eros* and Socrates' *philia* become even more suggestive.¹³⁸ Socrates is attempting to transfer the *philia* usually felt between parents and children, brothers and sisters, to all relations among the citizens. If a citizen believes the "noble lie," then whomever he meets he will believe to be his blood kinsman (*Republic* Book 5, 463c 4–7). Thus, for example, a young man can in theory be prevented from violent acts against all older men if he is made to believe that all older men are his father (465a 6–b 4). The lie, of course, is that the citizens were fashioned under the earth¹³⁹ and are therefore autochthonous, like the circle-people arising out of the earth mother (Book 3, 414e 3). All are thereby brothers and kinsmen (*xungeneis*, 415a 3 and 8). The same word for kin described what the halves welcomed in the *Symposium* (*sungenes*, 192b 5), who were likewise autochthonous and who likewise all came from the same earth mother. Plato in the *Symposium* may

¹³⁶ Compare, e.g., Francesca's explanation of how she came to love Paolo in Dante's *Inferno* 5.103.

¹³⁷ Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, p. 12.

¹³⁸ On Plato and *philia*, see G. Vlastos, "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato," pp. 11–19.

¹³⁹ The political myth of the *Protagoras* contains not only similar concepts but similar language; see the treatments in Sections 1.1 and 2.2.

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well be making Aristophanes deliver a political myth of civic *philia* similar to Socrates' in the *Republic*. Under the leadership and military generalship of the god Eros, Plato's Aristophanes says, we are to make our peace with the gods and we are all to "become friends" (*philoï*). Only by thus becoming "dear" to one another will we be able find out, and meet up with, our other halves¹⁴⁰ (*Symposium* 193b 1–5).

If we venture outside the Platonic corpus, we find corroboration of the thesis that Aristophanes' speech is actually about *philia* in an early reader of no less stature than Aristotle. The *Politics* brings up Aristophanes' *Symposium* speech precisely in the context of a discussion of civic *philia* within the Guardian class of Plato's *Republic*.¹⁴¹ Aristotle writes¹⁴²

Socrates praises the unity of the city most . . . which he says is the work of *philia*, just as in the erotic discourses (*erotikoi logoi*) we know Aristophanes tells how lovers (*erontes*) on account of excessive *philia* (*to sphodra philein*) desire (*epithumountes*) to grow together and from two to become both one.

On which he drily comments, "Here it is necessary that both parties be destroyed, or one of them" (1262b 14–15). In other words, if I really could make another person a part of myself (or become part of the other person), then either I would destroy him or her *qua* person, or else would myself be destroyed. Here the violent aspect of *philia* peeks out again. Analogously (as shall be argued in Chapter 6) for the Guardians each to become utterly interchangeable parts of the whole implies doing some violence to their nature.

We have established that Aristophanes talks about *philia* in his eros speech. It remains to make precise wherein Plato thinks his mistake lies. What is the difference between eros and *philia*? In the dialectic of the *Symposium*, Aristophanes' speech fails to mention the role that beauty plays in arousing eros, concentrating instead on belonging and possession. By contrast, the

¹⁴⁰ If this last passage sounds like a formula for learning to love (erotically) what is already near and dear to us ("philically"), it would be in keeping with the speech's overall moral: let us be content with what we have, lest we be punished again (e.g., 193a 3–5).

¹⁴¹ Expressing typical Greek sentiment, Aristotle agrees with the *Republic's* apparent aim of inculcating *philia* among the Guardians. "For we suppose *philia* to be the greatest of good things for cities, for in this way they would least of all engage in factional conflict" (*Politics* 2.4.6, 1262b 8–10). Aristotle disagrees with the *Republic's* method of inculcating *philia*, which, he says, would lead to dilution of *philia* rather than an increase of it (1262b 15). He adds that *philia* is caused by "one's own" (*oikeion*, 1262b 21–22).

¹⁴² *Politics* 2.4.6, 1262b 9–13.

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tragedian Agathon concentrates mainly on beauty.¹⁴³ Although Agathon mentions belonging (*oikeiotes*, 197d 1) among his elegant sophisms, one has to wonder whether the fluid god Eros that he proposes could ever desire anything or anyone strongly enough to wish to take possession. Unlike Diotima's needy daemon, Agathon's god already has all of the beautiful attributes he could possibly want (199e 6–201b 12). Agathon himself, as a perpetual beloved, seems to want nothing except to be wanted. Aristophanes is all grabbing and holding. Agathon is all flower sniffing (196a 7–b 2), aloof and unmoved by his own manipulative poetry. Broadly speaking, then, the comedian is the spokesman for the love of one's own in the dialogue, whereas the tragedian is the spokesman for the love of beauty. Diotima is then left with the task of resolving the tension between love of beauty and love of one's own by somehow combining the two or otherwise overcoming the dichotomy.

She does so by elevating the good over both of them, preserving a subordinate role for beauty (as medium or catalyst) while explicitly and categorically denying any role to the love of one's own. Diotima's critique of Aristophanes' speech is presented straightforwardly: "my account denies that eros [is desire of] either a half or a whole, unless [that half or whole] happens to be good" (205d 10–206a 1). She argues that people even consent to amputation of their own feet and hands when those body parts seem harmful to them – clearly a reference to the divine surgery and loss of half of each human's original members in Aristophanes' speech. She continues: only if we confuse "the good" (*agathon*) with "one's own" (*oikeion*) can we deceive ourselves that eros desires anything other than the good.

In one way, Diotima's criticism is well founded. The object that arouses eros is rarely a current possession, a person or thing that is already "one's own." More often, the erotic subject finds an unexpected object desirable and wishes to *make* it his or her own. Aristophanes has to pretend (as Socrates did for Hippothales) that when we meet somebody and fall in love, that person already belonged to us (though neither party realized it until meeting). It is far likelier that human beings desire someone first, on a different basis (e.g., beauty or goodness), only afterwards concocting the justification for proprietary rights and belonging that "we were meant

¹⁴³ For example 195a 7–196b 4; during the second half of the speech, on Eros' virtues, Agathon bases the god's goodness on his beauty, which is mentioned explicitly again at 197b 5.

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for one another.” If, then, eros ordinarily attempts to embrace a (real or apparent) good, in order to make it one’s own, then Aristophanes has clearly seized on one piece of erotic experience (*ownness* or belonging) and has presented that piece in place of the entire erotic experience. Aristophanes’ presentation ignores eros for the beautiful (and good) and overestimates the love of one’s own. Likewise Agathon makes the equal but opposite error, giving short shrift to possessiveness and the love of one’s own in his enthusiasm for the beautiful.

Yet Diotima’s speech comes close to repeating Agathon’s error in a different way. In her emphasis on the good and beautiful, Diotima (initially) slights the fact that we ordinarily want to possess the good *for our very own*. Detached appreciation of the good for its own sake, without any relation to ourselves, does not describe much of the range of erotic phenomena, which typically includes jealousy, envy, possessiveness, and such sentiments as “if I cannot have him, I shall die.” Not only does she slight the desire to *take* possession, Diotima neglects the joy humans have in possessions that are *already* their own.¹⁴⁴ Her amputation argument actually pits one beloved possession (a bodily member) against another beloved possession (one’s life). The argument thus proves only that humans love some possessions more than they love other possessions. The argument does not prove that humans do not love their possessions (but love only the good in them).¹⁴⁵ “The good” turns out to be intimately bound up with question of “the good for *me*.” Diotima’s criticism underestimates the love of one’s own.

The love of one’s own actually makes a comeback in Diotima’s speech in a new guise. Young Socrates witlessly answers in the affirmative the question “are we to say thus absolutely that humans love the good?” Diotima corrects him: “What then? Must it not be added . . . that they love the good to be *theirs*?” (206a 3–7; emphasis added). Then, because people in love say (as Aristophanes had pointed out) that they want to be together forever, Diotima adds a second qualification: eros is the desire for the good to be

¹⁴⁴ Hence she slights their “desire” to keep them. “Possession”: the word is polemical, especially when used of persons, but the use to which eros wishes to put its possessions (Dover, ed., *Plato Symposium*, p. 144, remarks the negative sense of “being at disposal”) is a separate issue from the existence of possessiveness in most people’s experience of erotic love, a fact that strikes me as undeniable. See also Aristotle’s objection, note 142 and accompanying text. For a view similar to Aristophanes’, that spouses are like each other’s body parts, see Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, p. 1235: “do I love my finger? I don’t love it [now], but just try to cut it off!”

¹⁴⁵ Contrast Price, pp. 12–13. On Diotima’s selectiveness, cf. Ferrari, “Platonic Love,” p. 261.

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one's own *always* (206a 9). This seemingly innocuous addition comes back to haunt the conversation in the ensuing section.¹⁴⁶ If, she says, eros actually is the desire of the good for oneself always, then it must be agreed that one must desire immortality along with the good (206e 8–207a 4). Wanting to be together with something for eternity entails wanting oneself to be around for eternity too, viz., in order to be together with it. This apparently other-regarding desire for immortality later becomes the desire for immortal fame (208c 1–209e 4).

Diotima's initial denial that eros is love of one's own thus proves profoundly misleading. She in essence concedes that the majority of us desire personal immortality; that is, we desire that our own selves should continue for eternity. But surely our self is a thing very much our own, that we love and cling to even when we are not good. The desire for immortality is thus a glorified version of the love of one's own. How, Aristophanes might wish to ask, is this desire for personal immortality any different from the circle-people's desire to rise into the heavens and become gods? Perhaps this was the objection Aristophanes was going to make, when he began saying something after Socrates' speech only to be interrupted by Alcibiades' knocking on the door. Precisely the desire that Alcibiades says keeps him from practicing philosophy (216b 3–5), that same love of immortal fame that drives Alcibiades' imperial policy and his quasi-tyrannical manipulation of the democracy, Diotima has here made an integral part of her account of eros. Even at the top of the ladder of love, which persons are to ascend philosophically rather than politically, the hope is held out that they might become personally immortal (212a 5–7). In approximately a year's time, Alcibiades will evoke an erotic response in the Athenians (according to Thucydides) that will lead to military and political disaster. Somehow Diotima has failed to take into account the danger that Alcibiades represents. Such political effects of eros, however far removed from the highest metaphysical and speculative issues about eros, must also constitute a part of the wisdom about eros.

Thus the dialectic between Diotima's and Aristophanes' speeches is best viewed as a dialectic between idealistic and pragmatic accounts. Viewed purely from the limited perspective of politics, Aristophanes' speech is prudently calculated to tell the necessary truths while doing no harm.

¹⁴⁶ The sequel treats the *function* of (specific) eros (206b 1–4).

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Diotima's speech, by contrast, imprudently evokes an idealistic and quasi-mystical image and desire for the erotic life, while recking nothing of potential harm. One could go further: Diotima's speech glamorizes the upward eros.¹⁴⁷ To do so is in keeping with the ostensible rhetorical project of her speech: to attract the young Socrates into a new way of life, the philosophical life, by presenting the aspects of that life as attractively as possible. Aristophanes' speech thus exhibits political prudence, whereas Diotima's does not. Although Plato's Aristophanes may neglect the eros of the philosophic life, he accurately diagnoses the political potential of eros and warns of its dangers. He does not tell the whole truth about eros, but he does tell the main political truth about eros.¹⁴⁸

Aristophanes' account better explains the observed facts that in rape, in the shaming actions of antinomian groups both ancient and modern, and in the ritual humiliations of oligarchic societies, the pleasure specific to sexual intercourse seeks out and combines with the pleasure specific to hubris. Because the *Ur-eros* in Aristophanes' speech is a natural selfish aggression, it makes sense that in his latter-day, post-surgical *eros* (which we are arguing is identical to what Plato would call unphilosophic *philia*), the selfishness has been cut down to manageable, more humane proportions: jealous, possessive love. From the perspective of Plato's Aristophanes, the rejoining of sexual pleasure with hubris might even be a rediscovery of a natural connection severed by *nomos*. The more fundamental eros is for a wholeness that inseparably implicates a violation; sexual desire leads us back to our original nature.

¹⁴⁷ If we are to read Diotima's speech circumspectly, the three activities by which eros achieves immortality show a drastic asymmetry: in reproduction one's image lives on, in *philotimia* one's name lives on, but in contemplation one gets in touch with ideas that live on. No guarantee is given that one's self lives on to enjoy the ideas eternally. Perhaps we are expected to doubt the promise of personal immortality that she holds out, focusing instead on the phrase that precedes it, "becoming dear to the gods" (*theophiles* 212a 6), which implies a moral perfection unknown to the political climber, much less to the circle-people. By way of comparison, it must be admitted at once that a play such as *Birds* in some respects also presents the attraction or allure of the upward eros. But the rhetorical project, the strategies of encouragement and discouragement, differ from play to play, and this play's strategy differs from that of the *Symposium* speech Plato writes for Aristophanes. See the discussion of Euelpides in Section 7.5 for a critical perspective on Peisetaerus' upward eros within the confines of the *Birds*.

¹⁴⁸ Probably it is no accident that the most political of the Platonic dialogues, the *Laws*, conflates eros with *philia*, just as the most political speech in the *Symposium*, Aristophanes', conflates eros with *philia* (*Laws* Book 8, 836e 7–d 9).

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For Plato, the aim of eros is not to violate god or man; the will to violate seems to stem rather from the thumos in its vengeful or vindicating activity. As argued previously, the thumos is also the source of philia; there would be nothing to avenge unless some things were first considered “one’s own.” Plato’s Diotima attempts to purify eros from the love of one’s own in order to save eros for the philosophical life. However, because Plato’s own political dialogues (*Republic* and *Laws*) take stands on the love of one’s own similar in their essentials to that of Plato’s Aristophanes in the *Symposium*, we should entertain the possibility that the distinction between desire and angry passion, between eros and thumos, only becomes a necessary and applicable distinction in a suprapolitical realm, that is, in philosophizing. For reasons we must ascertain (Chapter 5), eros and thumos almost always go together in the ordinary experience of sexual love, not to mention in political ambition. Eros together with thumos seems to be the rule in the political realm.

If we accept Plato’s position that eros is in principle separable from thumos, then the question becomes how to liberate eros from thumos entirely. If in practice it is difficult or impossible so to liberate it, then Aristophanes’ embrace of the horizontal eros as the least bad of two bad alternatives becomes the only tenable political position. If, on the other hand, it is possible to extricate eros from thumos (perhaps only in private, nonpolitical contexts¹⁴⁹) it remains to be seen whether such a liberated eros would be the bare sex instinct or whether “higher” aims of eros, such as curiosity, would still exist. From one perspective, akin to the Freudian, it would be thumos, that is, repressive, angry, prideful and violent tendencies, that would force eros to be sublimated at all. Only legal and psychological barriers would cause eros to be rechanneled away from sexual desire. Accordingly, in Chapter 5 we examine ancient and modern conceptions of sublimation.

¹⁴⁹ In Chapter 7 we will examine the status of honorable political ambition in Plato’s thought.

FIVE

The Problem of Sublimation

Although the modern word sublimation implies a value judgement about the relative goodness of higher and lower eros (“making eros sublime”), it should be clear from the violent and politically destructive erotic sickness of Philocleon that the allegedly higher activities into which eros is channeled by conventional morality may also be conceived of as unnatural and undesirable. Aggression and sublimation may not be as opposed as they at first seem. Various thinkers in antiquity also recognized this difficulty with sublimated eros and recommended sexual release before the higher emotions could have a chance to take hold. Each of these thinkers implicitly or explicitly accepted the principle that the sexual desires of the body are connected to political and other desires of the heart and mind. Furthermore, two literary characters, portrayed by Plato and by Aristophanes, respectively, can be seen to represent diverse stages of sublimation and to make different trade-offs between sexual desire and love. The latter concept, love, has received short shrift in the recent scholarly literature on Greek eros, which has focused primarily on sexual intercourse and the societal conventions governing it. In this chapter it is argued that lengthy courtship, sublimation, and love could be expected to be more, not less, prevalent in a society, or stratum of society, that accepted and encouraged homoerotic orientation while attaching a stigma to its sexual consummation. Historical parallels and the modern theories of Freud are adduced to show the political and the cultural implications of sublimation. In the chapter we also examine the modern argument that the sublimation of eros produces culture and that, in particular, the flowering of Greek civilization owed a debt to the prolonged adolescence of Greek youth. In doing so we set the

stage for a key contention of Part Three, namely that the classical theorists saw the polis as a “school” for the eros of its citizens.

5.1. Sublimation and Love: Hippothales in the *Lysis*

The theory of eros found in Plato’s *Republic* envisions lovers no longer interested in sexual intercourse because their desires have been directed elsewhere. “In proportion as the desires incline vehemently toward some one thing, we know that they are weaker toward the rest, like a stream that has been channeled away in that direction.”¹ Accordingly, when a person’s desires “have flowed toward learning,” he or she will “abandon those pleasures that come via the body.” Whereas the modern concept of sublimation takes its bearings from the sex drive as the fundamental datum about eros² (following Freud, who sought to provide partial explanations of creativity in art and philosophy by conceiving them as higher developments of that basic desire), Plato reverses this expectation. Art and philosophy are not higher ways of satisfying the sex drive; on the contrary, sexual intercourse is a lower way of satisfying the desire to know. The idealism of the Platonic theory of eros has been well captured by D. M. Halperin³:

Sexual desire, insofar as it is aroused by that measure of the transcendent beauty instantiated in a beautiful body, is a low-order form of philosophical activity; every sexual impulse to possess another person physically – ultimately an impossible and therefore a limitless longing – represents (to the extent that it is stimulated by beauty) an inchoate expression of our metaphysical desire. . . .

Plato’s bodily metaphors, such as “coupling with Being itself” and “begetting upon it” (*Republic* 490b 6), not only help the imagination to picture the intellectual life by giving the reader solid, tangible activities to relate it to, but also have the effect of showing the larger world of human potentialities into which literal coupling and begetting are fitted. The reader is charmed by the sudden realization that the true coupling might be intellectual apprehension, whereas the activity we previously mistook for coupling was merely its image. Individuals who still choose to dissipate their eros in the

¹ *Republic* 485d 3–6. For a discussion, see Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, e.g., pp. 79–84; see especially pp. 215–22 for parallels with Freud’s theory of sublimation.

² For the provenance of the term sublimation, see the Introduction, note 16.

³ “Plato and Erotic Reciprocity,” p. 73 (emphasis added).

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lower form of coupling, mere reproduction, do so at the price of abdicating their specifically human privilege of producing something better than themselves. In this view, rather than speaking of philosophers who “sublimate” their sex instinct, it would be truer to say that the rest of us tend to “profane” our natural, philosophic eros.⁴

For lack of a better word, in this study we retain the term “sublimation,” bearing in mind that although the Freudian and Platonic conceptions of the higher manifestations of eros are in many respects similar, they disagree over its naturalness. Whereas for Plato the greater satisfaction clearly lies in the intellectual eros, in Freud, the lower, purely sexual eros is less useful to society but more immediately gratifying.⁵ By contrast, both “correct pederasty” (*to orthos paederastein*) in the *Symposium* and “correct eros” (*ho orthos eros*) in the *Republic* presuppose that the individual either voluntarily abstains from or loses interest in sexual intercourse, an act that the *Phaedrus* disdains as “performed by quadrupeds” and “considered blessed by the many.”⁶ Plato’s intellectual eros is not identical to Freud’s sublimated eros since the sexual instinct is not necessarily the ultimate source of the higher loves for Plato.⁷ There is evidence in the dialogues that Plato thought of each faculty of the soul as having its own desires.⁸ Nevertheless, the political and moral

⁴ Even the *Republic*’s “flow toward learning” seems to imply that eros starts out low, and a channel must be created to draw it off toward higher pursuits. However, starting positions are not necessarily the most natural, or fully natured, positions for Plato. It should also be pointed out immediately that this passage of Plato that most resembles Freudian sublimation occurs in one of the most political of Platonic dialogues (cf. also *Laws* Book 8, 841a 5–b 2). It remains possible that political considerations necessitate that citizens channel their eros, whereas in the absence of such political necessity, eros would not need to be rechanneled in order to find its most natural fulfillment. For an alternative explanation, see Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, pp. 83–4; “Plato and Freud,” p. 254, distinguishes between origination and reinforcement.

⁵ Freud, “The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life,” p. 59.

⁶ 211b 5–6; 403a 5; 250e 1–251a 1; 256c, respectively. Compare *Republic* 403a 9–b 2, in which Socrates says that sexual desire must not come into an “erotic” relationship.

⁷ See G. Santas, *Plato and Freud*, pp. 169–72, for a comparison and contrast between Freudian sublimation and the Platonic ladder of love. For more a philosophical treatment, see J. Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature*, especially pp. 177–213; see also Lear, “Eros and Unknowing.”

⁸ The *Republic* initially relegates eros to the lowest division of the tripartite soul (439d 3–7). This lowest division of the soul is named “desirous” (*epithumetikon*), implying that the higher two divisions, the *thumoeides* and the *logistikon*, have no desires of their own (and, if eros is a desire, they *ipso facto* have no eros). This tripartite scheme is subverted in Book 9, when it is finally admitted that not only the “desirous” (*epithumetikon*) part, but also the other two parts, have “desires” (*epithumiai*). The thumos is *philonikon* and *philotimon*, whereas the rational part is *philomathes* and *philosophon* (581a 8–b 8). Eros would seem now to be distributed over all three parts of the soul (cf. Book 5, 475a 7–b 8). The *Phaedrus* confirms the impression that all three parts of

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ramifications of the two theories of eros are similar. Strong desire for the higher objects weakens attachment to lower objects. Refraining from sexual intercourse makes sublimation possible in Freud, whereas engaging in sexual intercourse is a distraction from political ambition and philosophy in Plato.⁹ In neither theory will refraining from sexual intercourse make an individual into an artist, statesman, or philosopher, but in both theories indulgence in sexual intercourse may prevent the individual from actively pursuing those same vocations.

The verdict of antiquity was by no means unanimous, however, in recommending the higher eros over the lower. Dissenting thinkers could agree with Plato that eros channeled into its lower outlet would not, for that very reason, issue in grand endeavors, while they at the same time doubted whether said grand enterprises were natural or beneficial to human life. Diogenes the Cynic recommended masturbation on the grounds that, performed in time, it could have prevented the Trojan War.¹⁰ The jocular barb evokes images of Paris, Menelaus, and other heroes of the *Iliad* studiously following Diogenes' advice and emerging as changed men, rubbing their eyes and wondering what had previously come over them. However humorously intended, Diogenes' prescription was based on a philosophy that sought rigorously to unveil the mystery involved in human sexuality and to dispel it, exposing the human being for the naked animal he was. Diogenes and later Cynics notoriously masturbated and copulated in public to show their contempt for any convention that would attempt to cover up, or to beautify (e.g., through publicly celebrated rites of marriage), the mere act

the soul have their desires. The image of the chariot corresponds to the tripartite soul of the *Republic*: the charioteer is rational, the white horse corresponds to the thumos, and the dark horse corresponds to the bodily desires (253c 7–e 5). A beloved is first spotted by the charioteer. He, the reason, is filled with yearning (*pothos*, 253e 5–254a 1). The white horse forces himself by shame to keep from jumping on the beloved. But the dark horse is borne forward violently with a leap and nearly forces the other two to make a sexual proposition (*aphrodisia*, 254a 1–7). The charioteer suddenly perceives the beauty of the Forms in the beauty of the beloved's face and reins in his horses (254a 7–b 7). T. Gould, *Platonic Love*, pp. 115–16, points out that this reining or braking is not self-restraint but a higher passion over-ruling a lower passion. Although the white horse or thumos seems to play no role other than abstaining or restraining, Socrates in his descriptions of the three parts gives only the white horse an erotic appellation. The white horse (thumos) is a *times erastes*, or a lover of honor (253d 6), a much stronger formula than the *philotimon* of the *Republic*.

⁹ Compare *Symposium* 208e 1–209e 4. For the politically ambitious, see *Phaedrus* 256b 7–e2.

¹⁰ Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 6.19–20. Compare Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 140. For the idea of “reverse sublimation,” in which aggressive impulses organize around and give vent to themselves by placing themselves in the service of a sexual object or beauty, like Helen, see H. Higuera, *Eros and Empire*, p. 23, note 38, and pp. 126–38.

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in itself.¹¹ Trappings of nobility, such as male honor and the heroic code that drove the Greeks to besiege Troy, were to be punctured as so much pretension and vanity. “Don’t sublimate!” may be taken as the equivalent in today’s language of Diogenes’ response to Plato’s erotic theory.

Other theories in antiquity also took their bearings from the low and solid rather than the high and rare. Epicureans, insofar as their philosophy is preserved in Lucretius, understood love to be reducible to sexual desire, and they recommended satisfying only the minimal requirements of sex, precisely so as not to encourage love. In accordance with the Epicurean ideal of *ataraxia*, “without disturbances,” a little sex might be necessary to make the body leave you alone. Love, on the other hand, was a profound disturbance: hence the Epicureans recommended that people partake of a limited amount of sex to prevent their desire from being sublimated into love. In Lucretius, sexual desire is considered real and genuine, whereas love is illusory. Venus, the goddess who represents the power of sexual desire, is the font of love (*amor*). She merely mocks lovers (*amantes*) with mental images (*simulacra*). Try as they might, lovers cannot satisfy themselves by gazing nor by rubbing against one another because the madness of love will always return; hence Lucretius’ prescription to flee the mental images, that is, to ward off what feeds love, turning the mind elsewhere. Above all, a man should ejaculate his bodily humor into anything and not retain his seed.¹² By satisfying Venus in this way, a man will free himself from the perturbations of love. Apparently the pressure from below caused by the retention of semen helps to feed the mental images that torment a man with thoughts of love. Love therefore seems to be conceived of as an amalgam with both bodily and mental components, and Lucretius wishes to break the link between body and mind, not only in order to leave the mind untroubled by the body, but also to leave the body untroubled by the mind, as the mental imagery calls forth semen just as the semen evokes more mental imagery, a vicious cycle causing more and more of the same. Lucretius snips this thread linking the low to the high. The moral or practical recommendation of the Epicurean theory of eros is to take action to forestall the onset of love: any receptacle will do.

¹¹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 6.46, 69. Compare Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, pp. 54–5.

¹² *De rerum natura*, Book 4, especially 1058–72, 1101–20. See R. D. Brown, *Lucretius on Love and Sex*, pp. 69–87; on Epicurus, pp. 108–10; D. Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, e.g. 150–2. See especially W. R. Johnson, *Lucretius and the Modern World*, pp. 39–46.

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These competing views of the goodness of sublimating sexual desire into love (and war) all presuppose the immense power of love to direct and distort human life as well as presupposing some connection between the higher (or more pretentious) aspirations and the bodily motions of sexual arousal or desire. This latter presupposition, the basis of any theory of sublimation, is not easy to verify. If anywhere, it can perhaps be corroborated in the anthropology of arts and letters. For example, a feature of historical record in various highly developed civilizations is the phenomenon of the sophisticated courtesan. Although diverse historical evidence could be adduced, one of the most striking examples is the way houses of prostitution in Mughal India functioned as musical, literary, and artistic centers. Army officers in Lahore sent their sons to school in the red-light district to be taught, at the hands of courtesans, the liberal arts and the good breeding requisite for moving in the social circles which the young men were expected to enter.¹³ The courtesans' profession was not otherwise respectable; the sexual side of their duties was held in disrepute. But so high, and so highly sought after, were their cultural attainments that those attainments outweighed their ill fame in the estimation of the important families. This spillover between the sexual and the artistic is in part explained by a courtesan's acquisition of pleasing arts in order to expand her repertoire. However, such a reasoning only begs the question of why the courtesan's sexual arts alone were insufficient to entertain her clientele. Intellectual and artistic interests tend to cluster around liaisons initially intended to be erotic in the narrower sense. In Athens, Pericles' mistress Aspasia was widely known to provide an intellectual stimulation that was difficult for men to find in conventional marriage; hence such anecdotes as her alleged authorship of Pericles' speeches and her ability to teach rhetoric.¹⁴ Seen in this context, Plato's contention that intellectual fertilization is as closely related to the experience of beauty as bodily fertilization is takes on more weight and meaning. The energy built up in anticipation, in the provocation of desire, in wooing and winning, is greater than that expended in the sex act. Determining the ultimate provenance of those energies and pleasures is perhaps less important than the fact

¹³ See S. Quraeshi, *Lahore: The City Within*, p. 205; cf. I. Haque, *Glimpses of Mughal Society and Culture*, p. 132; P. N. Ojha, *Glimpses of Social Life in Mughal India*, p. 69. For Hindu analogues in various periods, see M. Chandra, *The World of Courtesans*.

¹⁴ Ancient sources include Plutarch's *Pericles*, and Plato's *Menexenus*. Compare M. Henry, *Prisoner of History. Aspasia of Miletus and Her Biographical Tradition*.

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that the sex instinct organizes higher aesthetic desires and utilizes them to provide greater satisfactions for itself. A house of ill fame without sweetmeats served, without wine, without music sung and played, and poetry recited, without a pleasurable long process of choosing and bargaining, the coquetry of dalliance and a civilized simulacrum of consent and refusal, however artificial, would be an establishment that was not utilizing the full resources at its disposal. Customers do not wish to be satisfied too soon, and the pleasure of eros is as much in the desiring as in the fulfilling.

These observations tend toward the conclusion that eros has ends beyond the copulation of bodies. Eros, even in the semicriminal case of prostitution, often arrives on the scene already sublimated. Isolating the sex drive in itself, detaching it from mental and emotional aspects of eros, might require undertaking a project no less deliberate and artificial than Diotima's project to leave the body behind in the ladder of love. The masturbational programs of the Cynics and the Epicureans would appear to illustrate this point. "Higher" eros is natural, and positive action is required to prevent it from occurring.

No better example of this quotidian variety of sublimation can be found than in the comical figure of Hippothales in the *Lysis*. The "ridiculous Hippothales," as Socrates calls him (205d 6–7), is so lovestruck by the boy Lysis that he is blinded to his own erotic interest. Singing his beloved's praises, as Socrates points out, has the opposite of the desired effect: it fills the beloved with pride and arrogance, making him a harder quarry to catch (205e 8–206a 8). The proper method is to humble beloveds by cutting them down in conversation (210e 3–6). Hippothales has forgotten the game of honor in which he and Lysis are contestants, whether they wish to compete or not: Socrates reminds him that if Lysis escapes, then all his public praise for Lysis today will come back to haunt him tomorrow, measure for measure, in the form of ridicule for letting such a prize slip through his fingers (205e 1–8). Socrates charitably pretends that Hippothales has not forgotten about honor but has rather been busily building up Lysis in the minds of his peers as an astute means of magnifying his own eventual triumph; he therefore chides Hippothales only for being overconfident of victory (205d 6–8). But the truth is that Hippothales has been boring his friends night and day with compositions both in poetry and in prose, extolling the virtues of Lysis, without a thought as to whether he will eventually prevail. Nor can it be said that the poetry and the prose are merely a means to an end for Hippothales, that is, that he practices on his friends solely in order

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that his delivery will be more effective when reciting them in Lysis' hearing. On the contrary, Hippothales keeps telling his friends how wonderful Lysis is because he really believes it. Hippothales is head over heels in love. The conventionality of his love poetry, praising the deeds of the boy's relatives (since presumably Lysis himself has not accomplished much in life yet) and mythologizing his remoter ancestors (205b 7–d 5) only serves to throw into relief how pathetic his case is.

It is worth pondering what “winning” or “catching” Lysis (Socrates' words at 205d 7, 206a 7–8) would consist of in this context. To this point in their relationship, Lysis has apparently never acknowledged Hippothales' existence, or at least not without irritation. When Socrates agrees to chat up Lysis for him, Hippothales hides behind the group gathered round the conversation to prevent Lysis from catching sight of him, for fear that he will become angry (*sc.* that Hippothales is hanging around again, 207b 5–9, 210e 7–8). Hippothales is not, at this point, looking to have sexual intercourse with Lysis. If, unexpectedly, Lysis were to suggest to Hippothales that they retire to a secluded spot, Hippothales would probably be terrified and search for an excuse. The gratification Hippothales longs for at the moment is a sign, a smile. It is true that if Lysis were to touch Hippothales' hand, Hippothales would suddenly be overcome by an overwhelming desire for greater and greater physical contact, which could lead to sexual consummation. Likewise, the intimacy of speech and companionship that Hippothales dreams about would also, whether he recognizes it at the moment or not, put him in a better position to avail himself of physical gratification. At present, however, such a desire is “unconscious” at best. Lysis is high up on a pedestal, and Hippothales has no desire to remove him from it. Rather, it is Socrates who introduces the terminology of winning and capturing, which could include sexual intercourse, apparently making the rational assumption that Hippothales will some day get over his love enough to want something else.

Hippothales' eros is so sublime, and he is so far from having predatory designs on Lysis, that even watching the progress of his Cyrano is an agony of confusion for Hippothales (210e 6–7). When, much later, Socrates gets Lysis barely to agree that a boy should befriend his *erastes*, Hippothales turns “all sorts of colors” (222b 1–3). His characteristic act is, in fact, blushing (204b 5, 204c 3, 4, 204d 8–9). It is clear that Lysis will remain in complete control of their relationship and will have nothing to fear from Hippothales, who will be putty in his hands no matter how besotted with

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passion he becomes, or rather, precisely because he is besotted.¹⁵ Whether his sexual desire has been sublimated into the exaltation he feels in regard to Lysis, or whether his eros started out exalted, Hippothales is contented, at least for the present, with his chaste love.

5.2. Reading Athenian Conventions

The *Lysis* is important because it offers a counterexample to the tendency in much recent scholarship to lay the stress on sexual intercourse to the exclusion of love. Although it is possible that Plato is gently distorting the facts of Athenian society in order to nudge Greek homosexuality toward a higher ideal, it seems at least equally likely that the minor character of Hippothales was intended to add realistic detail. (Hippothales does not emerge from the dialogue as a character worthy of emulation.) Similarly, in Xenophon's *Symposium* 1.2, Callias is aboveboard enough to notify Autolyclus' father of his love; Dover cites the passage in a context that could be construed to mean that the father condoned sexual intercourse between them.¹⁶ The far greater likelihood is that the pair were deceiving him, or else that their love was as unconsummated as friendly relations between lover and father would ordinarily imply. The very real fear of hubris, as we saw in Chapter 4, supplied reasons for ordinary Athenians to wish to defer gratification. It would be foolish to argue that the actual practice of Greek homoeroticism was always or even normally to abstain from sexual intercourse, but as we have seen in the example of the sophisticated courtesan, permanent abstinence is not a necessary condition of sublimation; rather, temporarily deferred gratification is.

The conventional barriers to gratification in Athens have been extensively studied by Cohen and others. The boys belonged to interested parties, their fathers, who protected their own. Pausanias mentions that fathers set *paidagogoi* to oversee their sons, if the boys became beloveds, and the *paidagogoi* were under orders that the sons not speak with suitors (183c 4–7). Laws such as that cited by Aeschines, which protected boys from panders and their clients (1.14), as well as protecting schoolboys from their teachers and restricting the opening times of schools, gymnasia, and palaestras to the

¹⁵ By contrast, it is the *nonlover* in the *Phaedrus* whose self-control (and therefore rhetorical control) makes him a formidable force to be reckoned with.

¹⁶ *GH*, pp. 53–4.

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daylight hours (1.9–10), show a high hedge built around the boys by the fathers.¹⁷ One problem with Cohen's reliance on law is that laws may at times be neither obeyed nor enforced. Under the letter of the law in many American states today, an eighteen-year-old boy can be prosecuted for statutory rape for sleeping with a sixteen-year-old girl. Future ages would be wrong to infer from that datum that such liaisons are infrequent. On the other hand, such state laws are remnants of a time when the majority of women could not sleep with suitors before marriage; public opinion fitted all cases of premarital sex that came to light into the dichotomy of either loose morals or rape, and families had an interest in claiming the latter in order to save the shame of the former, regardless of whether any real difference existed between the informed consent of women of sixteen and women of eighteen. Athenian society could likewise not believe that any boy simply submitted without there being something wrong with him, and a similar dichotomy governed public opinion: either it was rape or the eromenos was unmanly. A heavy stigma attached itself to the junior partner if he became known to have submitted.

The difficulty of interpreting Athenian convention can be partly traced to the modern preoccupation with orientation as opposed to the ancient concentration on sexual acts. Despite the warnings of Foucault on the distorting effect of this historical lens,¹⁸ the fundamental object of greatest modern interest in Greek eros remains the societal acceptance of homoerotic orientation. This acceptability of homoeroticism, so remarkable for modern readers, slides in the course of many scholarly arguments into a supposed acceptance, in Athens, of homosexual acts.¹⁹ It may be difficult to imagine a society, or stratum of society, in which the nomos permitted, and in some ways encouraged, men to fall in love with boys, chat them up, follow them

¹⁷ A separate law protected boys from their own fathers and competent relatives who might hire them out (1.13). For the fathers to enforce the laws protecting their sons against erastai may have been difficult, however. Cohen (*Law, Sexuality, and Society*, p. 180) points out that a father who prosecuted his son's erastes under existing hubris laws risked admitting that his son should be disfranchised. On the infrequency of hubris prosecutions cf. p. 83, and Cohen, *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens*, p. 155, note 30. For an appraisal, see Dover, "Review of Cohen."

¹⁸ *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 44–5, 188–93. Foucault sets the ancient preoccupation at two removes from the modern, a worry not about orientation, nor about acts, but only a concern about the intensity of pleasure or desire. My own interpretation would require going back to the first remove, anxiety about acts, not orientation. (The focus on intensity platonizes Athenian conventions.)

¹⁹ Dover was far more nuanced on this issue than most of his readers. The private side of any discreetly conducted relationship can only be guessed at (*GH*, pp. 53–54). Contrast, e.g., E. Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, pp. 22–7.

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around at a distance,²⁰ sometimes in the company of an entire group of rival suitors all interested in the same “belle,” like clients on a patron’s porch, whether or not the boy wanted the company of any of them, all while simultaneously decrying the act that would have broken the erotic tension. How can the desire be good if the act is wrong? Yet precisely this morality has governed premarital and even extramarital relations between the sexes in many times and places, most obviously in the case of medieval courtly love,²¹ which was often greatly encouraged but always adulterous, and for that reason very difficult to consummate. Such conventions as those of courtly love and Greek pederasty cannot, of course, achieve a stable equilibrium: a chasm yawns between what is always said and what is sometimes done. Malory’s Guinevere and Lancelot eventually give in to temptation; perhaps it was unrealistic to expect them to do otherwise for very long. Yet the society that listened to their tale in *The Morte Darthur* did expect them to do otherwise, and that expectation made a difference in the society’s experience of eros. What is said, crucially, colors what is done: conventions form a part of the reality of the society even when the conventions are broken.

Cohen, following many anthropologists, has warned against mistaking conventional morality, ideology, and platitudes for actual practice.²² As he points out, in societies in which women are supposed to be secluded, a woman who visits the well or the marketplace every day will tell the anthropologist who interviews her that she never leaves her home. She will say that she stays home because that is the ideal; she may not be deliberately lying: her divagations from the ideal may seem to her to be necessary evils, to be quickly forgotten. In other words, there is more female freedom in sequestered societies than would meet the eye if all that were left of the society were the written record of conventional moralisms. Yet with this distinction kept firmly in place, it is equally important to admit that the conventional ideal informs and gives structure to the reality, crucially determining how that reality is perceived by the participants (as in the preceding case). Imagine the difference if modern society, *per impossibile*, changed its ideal to seclusion for women, while in practice permitting free egress and access. An individual would be made to feel ashamed of

²⁰ For example, Aeschines 1.139.

²¹ See the discussion in Section 5.3.

²² See Cohen’s criticism of A. Carson in his “Review Article: Sex, Gender and Sexuality in Ancient Greece,” p. 158. Winkler, *Constraints of Desire*, pp. 45–70, is content to leave the matter here.

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going out: her male relatives would grimace at her sallying forth, and her female friends would sympathize condescendingly by implying that, if she is absolutely forced by economic necessity to go out, why then of course she must go out. This is just one way in which conventions color the realm of actual practice. Even if a convention is subverted, the subversion, if carried through with enough hypocrisy, perpetuates the convention, helps it to continue in existence. Societal ideals are thus part of the social reality.

What seems important about this courtly love model for Greek pederasty is the in-between moment, when the lover is encouraged to love the boy and yet is discouraged from sexual intercourse. He may yearn, at times violently, but he refrains out of moral and prudential considerations. His eros is particularly open to sublimation at such moments. The alternative of intercrural contact, which scholars speculate provided a safety valve or a socially acceptable means of consummating desire, does not handle well the difference between discreet and indiscreet submission. Secretive couples can go to whatever lengths they wish, whereas indiscreet couples will be suspected of doing even what they have not done. As Cohen, citing Vlastos, has argued, when a secret liaison becomes known, no one can tell for sure what actually went on between the couple, and no special pleading on behalf of a middle range between chastity and unchastity will be accepted.²³ Because members of a boy's peer group can say he submitted, they must and joyfully will say it.²⁴ Likewise, worthless erastai would trumpet the full conquest of a citizen boy even when they had achieved only a partial one.

Vase iconography is the strongest evidence that intercrural contact was a widespread means of breaking the tension brought on by courtship. Many vase depictions seem to contradict the conventions governing pederasty found in Plato, Xenophon, and the written record of the orators. The extreme view arising out of vase interpretation would make intercrural itself a part of the conventions. Cantarella has argued that rectal intercourse was the norm in practice, whereas vase depictions for the most part leave out rectal intercourse in order to highlight the affective or romantic side of pederasty, intercrural contact being a romantic fiction. Her evidence is that the former acts are seldom portrayed, and when they are, it is never man–boy

²³ Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society*, p. 198.

²⁴ A boy's agemates reproach him if they see him so much as speak to a suitor (*Symposium* 183c 4–d 3). Cf. *Phaedrus* 255a–b; 231e–232a also appears to establish (because it assumes) the conventional situation.

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but always two adult males engaged in them.²⁵ These last vases are intended, in Cantarella's view, to represent a lower level of eros, merely physical gratification. Yet the same vase evidence supports a similar scale of valuation with each category transposed one level lower. Cantarella does not mention the courtship scenes without overt sexuality. Nor does she mention satyr vases, which portray oral and other acts known to have been repugnant to the Greeks. These oversights are in one way typical of much recent scholarship on Greek sexuality, in which both the highs and the lows are missing from the accounts of eros. The vases portraying courtship, including gift giving, wrestling, and symposiast scenes without overt sexuality, were almost certainly intended to idealize the romance of pederasty.²⁶ The intercrural vases, as well as the depictions Beazley called "up and down,"²⁷ represent the eros of physical gratification. The vases portraying same-age males engaged in rectal intercourse are far more likely to represent low humor: we know that for any male to submit in this way was a grave disgrace; an adult in such a position can be only a *kinaidos*, the individual whose vulgarity represented the limits of speech even for the tough-talking Callicles.²⁸ Cantarella must be right that conventional erastai did not wish to think of their beloveds in such terms. Similarly the hypersexuality of the satyrs represented a world of subhuman (or superhuman) hubris, crimes that Greek thought and religion respected too much to ignore but were sometimes able to palliate and incorporate through humor and comedy. Because the vases cannot speak, however, with the exception of the vases that have brief captions, their painters' intentions will never be known; visual art is not "logocentric" enough to communicate fine distinctions. Three references in the written record to intercrural contact (all in Aristophanes) are all deprecatory to the passive partner, that is, unromantic.²⁹ The preponderance of evidence makes it seem unlikely that Athenian lovers and beloveds conventionally could or did engage in intercrural contact whenever the older partner needed

²⁵ *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, pp. 24–5. See also R. F. Sutton, "Pornography and Persuasion on Attic Pottery" and H. A. Shapiro, "Eros in Love: Pederasty and Pornography in Greece."

²⁶ Including Beazley's beta group. See W. A. Percy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy*, p. 119.

²⁷ Beazley's alpha and gamma groups; see also "Some Attic Vases in the Cyprus Museum;" *GH*, p. 94.

²⁸ *Gorgias* 494e. Compare Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 191.

²⁹ *Diemerizin*, the Greek word posited to mean intercrural contact, occurs three times in *Birds* in unromantic contexts: at 706, in the parody of the birds' genesis out of Eros, boys who swore not to lose their virginity do so (*sc.* because their erastai gifted them with birds), and at 1254, Peisetaerus uses the word appropos of his intention to rape the goddess Iris; cf. 669 for another instance of this second usage.

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sexual release. Rather, a long courtship would have been necessary if the older partner was to achieve anything at all.

The satires of Aristophanes are the other evidence adduced in favor of the hypothesis that Athenian pederasty was consummated early and often. In the comedies, the topic of pederasty is the occasion for scatological humor³⁰: all boys with suitors submit all of the time, and the ones who submit earliest, most often, and most cravenly end up as tomorrow's politicians. As we have seen, however, Aristophanes opposed homoeroticism because of its political connection, especially the connections with political dynamism, hubris, and tyranny. He was committed to debunking pederasty in all its forms, by fair means and foul, and the best way of debunking was to concentrate on the single aspect of pederasty that was most ridiculed by everyone. No serious historian would take Aristophanes' other reductive depictions as literally true: for example, his portraits of Socrates and Euripides. Rather, one looks into the trick mirror to see if the exaggerations reveal aspects we would not have otherwise noticed. Those aspects then become food for thought, not historical data. It should be a given that a satirist in so free swinging a genre had no scruples about slander, innuendo, and outright falsification.³¹ Aristophanes, by castigating breakers of the convention, was upholding the convention. His pretense that convention breakers were everywhere³² (like a red-baiting conservative who warns of Communists hiding under every bed) can be seen as part of the same strategy. Old Comedy may be taken as evidence that the Athenian conventions for homoeroticism were against sexual gratification. For the further question of whether those conventions were observed more in the breach, the comedies are unreliable.

Athenian conventions thus both encouraged male–male desire and discouraged its consummation. The Xenophontic morality of chaste courtship, with proper notification of the father,³³ having nothing to hide, and therefore never leaving public places,³⁴ was one way out of the dilemma created by these mixed signals: it was the way that represented the societal ideal.

³⁰ For example, *Peace* 9–12. Compare Chapter 1, note 2, and Section 1.2. For an Aristophanic look at the “higher” pederasty, see the discussion in Section 5.4.

³¹ Contrast *GH*, Postscript 204; Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society*, p. 199.

³² For example, *Clouds* 1087–1104.

³³ *Symposium* 1.2; 8.11.

³⁴ See *Agesilaus* 5.6–7 for the ostentation of rectitude in the statesman's behavior. Likewise Aeschines says that of course no one saw Timarchus in the act; what people did observe is that he left his father's house and passed the nights in other people's houses (1.75).

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The drawback of the ideal is clear: sexual desire must be sublimated, a solution that can issue in hypocrisy and vice; the prevalence of male prostitution in Athens may have been related to the simultaneous encouragement and discouragement of homoeroticism.³⁵

5.3. Barriers to Fulfillment: Their Use in Courtship

Freud, like Plato, thought that homoeroticism was especially open to sublimation.³⁶ For Plato, as Price has well said, “the very physical sterility of a homosexual attachment must motivate it toward sublimation precisely in order to achieve the goal of love, which is procreation in beauty; until then pederasty evinces a desire in want of a proper end.”³⁷ The capacity for sublimation in ordinary lovers such as Hippothales in the *Lysis* and the educational possibilities of homoerotic relationships were also observable phenomena. For Plato, the advantage that homoeroticism enjoyed over heterosexuality was precisely that its purpose was higher than physical reproduction.

For Freud, on the other hand, any eros that, like the homosexual eros, had become inhibited and therefore less capable of yielding full satisfaction on account of having acquiesced, wholly or partially, in cultural prohibitions or limitations, became capable of sublimation into achievements of immense benefit to the same culture that had proscribed it, precisely as a result of having been denied an outlet in its more natural or instinctual form.³⁸ Any eros that civilization restrained was likely to build more civilization, although also at the risk of greater and greater neuroses. For this reason, unconventional loves, like homoeroticism, were more likely to be susceptible to sublimation in the same degree to which they were subject to conventional proscription and limitation. As we also saw in the case of the sophisticated courtesan, the arts can tend to cluster around illicit desires, that is, desires less easy to fulfill because they do not enjoy the full sanction of convention.

³⁵ Aeschines exhorts hunters of such young men as are easily caught to take their preference among the metics so that they do not injure the citizenry (1.195). On male prostitution, cf. Percy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy*, p. 178; E. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus*, pp. 296–9. On hypocrisy, contrast *GH*, pp. 190–1.

³⁶ For citations in Freud, see Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, p. 229, note 10. Also cf. Freud, “‘Civilized’ Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness,” p. 18.

³⁷ Price, *ibid.*, p. 229.

³⁸ Freud, “The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life,” pp. 59–60.

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Because transactions with prostitutes are eventually consummated sexually (even in the most sophisticated houses of ill fame), it is clear that total sexual abstinence is not a requirement for the sublimation of eros. In the sublimation evident in prostitution, willing customers conspire with enlightened proprietors to erect barriers of social nicety sufficient to satisfy certain higher spiritual needs. It may be the case that a far greater degree of sublimation can be expected in the case of homosexuality, in which all of the barriers are real and enforced by the society at large. It remains to be seen whether these restrictions ostensibly imposed by society are not, like the collusion of proprietor and client, in some ways and at some times self-imposed.

From the Platonic perspective, it is the natural barrier, the sterility of the love, that is the crucial feature. The difficulty creates a pearl around itself. Why the arts can cluster around a sterile love or, in the case of prostitution, around desires that both customer and client hope to keep sterile, is made clear in the *Symposium*, both in Aristophanes' myth and in Diotima's account. The fulfillment of the promise of love, in the heterosexual case, is the child. In the homosexual case, the works are the fulfillment: projects, plans brought to fruition. By tying themselves down with children, the heterosexuals make a lasting commitment to one form of reproduction: the bodily. From the point of view of convention, which asks the citizens to produce legitimate children to replenish the city,³⁹ heterosexual marriage represents the acceptable outlet for eros. It is paradoxically the illicit, sterile eros that opens up a window on the higher mental life and shows that man has an end beyond reproducing himself.

Freud, on the other hand, asserted that *self-imposed* restrictions to the sexual aim occurred more often in male homoeroticism than in heterosexual relations. Self-imposed limitations on sexual fulfillment and the restriction of love to expressions of high emotion characterized such contacts.⁴⁰ This datum may tally, remotely, with the stigma against sexual submission in Athens. The fear of hubris, both in the wish of decent lovers to avoid committing hubris and in the wish of junior partners to prevent hubris from being committed against themselves, that is, to avoid dishonor, constituted a formidable barrier to sexual freedom. It might be objected that the stricture is imposed by society rather than self-imposed, but such societal strictures may be internalized by the erotic subject to varying degrees. By

³⁹ See, e.g., Pericles' Funeral Oration, Thucydides 2.44.3.

⁴⁰ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, pp. 11–12.

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contrast, heterosexual partners, both ancient and modern, once they have submitted to the societal demand that they marry, had and have almost no incentive to sublimate their eros. Historically, the great age of self-conscious heterosexual sublimation coincided with troubadour poetry and the ideal of courtly love.⁴¹ Because courtly love was adulterous, the stigma against adultery operated as a barrier against sexual fulfillment analogous to the fear of hubris in Athenian convention. In medieval Europe, as in Athens, the game created by restricted love was thought to yield such beneficial results that it was celebrated and encouraged. Courtly love was a source of poetic inspiration and was thought to give psychic birth to deeds of chivalry and, in stories at least, of knight errantry. As an adulterous passion, courtly love was an illicit, unconventional desire that became conventional; it represented the normalization and reintegration of passions that otherwise had no place. The putative value of the passions was thus preserved while their danger to the community was simultaneously lessened. Similarly, in the case of Greek homosexuality, the conventions against gratification were durable and continued to color the experience of pederasty no matter how often the conventions were broken. Foucault noted that, with the decline of pederasty, in the literature of late antiquity, the original irritation around which the pearl of its philosophic glory was created came back to haunt pederasty. The love of boys could not provide sexual gratification, at least not legitimately and respectably, but rather only provided intellectual stimulation; by contrast, marriage could provide both, or so thinkers were persuaded.⁴²

It is important to recognize that erecting barriers against sexual gratification may also be a strategy for maximizing erotic fulfillment. Freud wrote⁴³:

Some obstacle is necessary to swell the tide of the libido to its height; and at all periods of history, wherever natural barriers in the way of satisfaction have not sufficed, mankind has erected conventional ones in

⁴¹ For example, Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*. See also F. Goldin, *The Mirror of Narcissus in the Courtly Love Lyric*; C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, pp. 1–43. See, however, the caveats of C. S. Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness*, pp. 113–14; on the paucity of nonfictional sources: p. 268. J. Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, pp. 360–413, concludes that while courtly love remained more a literary phenomenon in Germany, it played a significant role in court entertainments in France. D. de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, e.g. pp. 8, 32–3, 248–9, judges that courtly love was a highly influential (and baneful) ideal; he points out that in most versions of the Tristan and Iseult romance, the lovers continue to create their own obstacles to satisfaction, even after the law forbidding adultery has been breached (pp. 42–6, 121–2).

⁴² *The Care of the Self*, pp. 192, 205, 213, 226–7, discussing Plutarch's *Eroticus* and Pseudo-Lucian (*Amores*).

⁴³ Freud, "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life," p. 57.

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order to be able to enjoy love. This is true both of individuals and of nations. In times during which no obstacles to sexual satisfaction existed, such as, may be, during the decline of the civilizations of antiquity, love became worthless, life became empty, and strong reaction-formations were necessary before the indispensable emotional value of love could be recovered.

It is difficult to determine the degree to which any barrier to sexual gratification is self-imposed or voluntarily accepted by the minority whose behavior it restricts. Certainly in the case of courtly love, the strictures were partly self-imposed, both because defending a beloved's chastity (from oneself above all) was harnessed to the masculine sense of honor and because abstinence was supposed to be ennobling in its own right, neither of which beliefs were known to have been operative (outside of Socratic circles) in Greek pederasty. For Freud, however, eros finds a way to block itself. Precisely in the interest of greater fulfillment, that is, as a part of the desire's ownmost aim, it seeks an obstacle. He continues: "However strange it may sound, I think the possibility must be considered that something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself is unfavourable to the achievement of absolute gratification."⁴⁴ This statement is as close as Freud and Plato come to agreeing that eros naturally seeks a nonsexual fulfillment.

Cultural achievement is one possible candidate for the nonsexual aims of eros. Courtship between suitor and beloved plays an important role in the sublimation of eros into culture since courtship is the often lengthy period during which sexual intercourse is deferred while sexual desire, as well as eros in the form of love or romantic passion, is deliberately aroused, building up tensions that issue in melancholia, poetry, and attempts to impress the beloved. Given the stigma against sexual submission in Athens, as well as the nonreciprocity of the eros, homoerotic courtship may sometimes have been long and difficult indeed. As Dover has said, many conversations about politics and athletics and war would be needed in order to make oneself admirable and interesting in the eyes of a boy.⁴⁵ It is at least conceivable that these long, drawn-out periods of courtship, and the conversations and achievements that they elicited, contributed to Athenian intellectual life: Plato's Pausanias makes the perhaps facile connection that, in Greek

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58. The explanation that Freud goes on to adduce is of course developmental rather than teleological.

⁴⁵ *GH*.

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cities where no barrier to sexual gratification exists, no one learns the arts of persuasion.⁴⁶ It might be objected that courtship alone would not have been enough to cause sublimation.⁴⁷ Most courtship will always remain liable to being interpreted as a succession of ploys to gain intercourse; certainly few Greeks, outside Socratic circles, ever thought of their own courtship as a deliberate attempt to redirect eros. Not deliberate sublimation but what eros seeks unbeknownst to the erotic subject is the point here.

Devereux has made the only serious attempt to link the psychology of homoeroticism with a sociology of "the Greek miracle," that is, the political and cultural flowering of the polis.⁴⁸ In addition to such by-products of the chase as poetry and persuasion, Devereux noted that courtship seems to fulfill a human need in its own right, a need different from sexual desire. Behavior analogous to courtship can be found in cultural contexts and situations unconnected to sex. The need that courtship fulfills seems at least in part to be related to the need for recognition. Paying court, in the sense of soliciting favor, means recommending oneself to the person who gives or withholds the favor, either on the basis of one's evident merits or else on the basis of some deed performed on behalf of that person; the suitor hopes that his deeds or the pleasure of his company will elicit approval proportionate to their worth. The suitor hopes that the beloved will then bestow a sign or token of favor on him: it is often what lies behind the token, that is, the knowledge of approval or acceptance, evidence of the beloved's psychological state or attitude toward the suitor signified by the token, rather than the token itself as a concrete object or act of gratification, that the suitor especially desires and cherishes. The physical act of gratification may be sexual, but in the courtship behavior that Devereux describes, the sexual pleasure is subordinate to its function as a proof of acceptance or validation. In paying court, a suitor thus submits himself to an examination that he hopes to pass and be self-affirmed. The suitor's high estimation of the beloved, placing him in the position of examiner, comes as the result of the suitor's falling in love. The suitor wants proof that he himself is worthy of such a beloved, that is, a worthy match for all the qualities that

⁴⁶ *Symposium* 182b 1–6.

⁴⁷ Many species practice courtship without, so far as we know, sublimating. However, human courtship differs from animal courtship in many ways, and the human potential to sublimate may well be implicated among the differences.

⁴⁸ Devereux, "Greek Pseudo-Homosexuality and the 'Greek Miracle.'"

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eros causes him to see in his beloved. Ironically then, he wishes to know that he is worthy of the power of his own eros. The incentive to excel in the eyes of the beloved, whether in athletics or politics or war, is thus not merely instrumental to sexual gratification but also touches the lover at the much deeper level of his self-esteem.⁴⁹ The sexual gratification may in fact be instrumental to the motive of self-validation. "Winning" the beloved thus has a wide range of meaning. This incentive seems to have been the ultimate source of the lover's concern with educating the beloved as a way of demonstrating what he had to offer.

Although courtship and the stimulus it provides toward striving for excellence apply more to lovers than to beloveds, Devereux laid the stress on the effects that he posited Greek homoeroticism as having had on youths. Noting that sexual desire and sexual activity remained polymorphous until much later in the life of a Greek male than in the lives of males in modern Western societies, Devereux posited a prolonged adolescence of Greek youths during which the experimentation and freedom associated with intellectual and artistic development were continued for periods long enough to bring the latter to fruition. This prolonged adolescence, during which the eros of young men created no permanent ties and remained unsubordinated to the urgent practical concerns of marriage and the household until past the age of thirty, may have been responsible for the widening of political, artistic, and philosophical interests associated with the flowering of the polis. Devereux speculated that adult male Greeks could continue to participate in this adolescent world, that is, revisit their own adolescence or continue to prolong it, by becoming the erastes or teacher of an adolescent youth. Because adolescence is a creative stage, the traits of adolescent psychology in both younger and older men could then be put to social and cultural use.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Note that an evolutionary explanation of love such as Posner's does not account for homoerotic courtship: "A phenomenon that can also be traced ultimately to the vulnerability of the human infant is sexual love, which differs from sexual desire in that it finds a particular person uniquely attractive, desirable. Love thus provides a stronger cement for a durable, though not necessarily permanent, relationship in which the male will protect the female and their offspring than the sexual impulse alone would do" (*Sex and Reason*, p. 98). To explain homoerotic love and courtship, it seems that Posner would have to posit a copycat theory in which homoerotic courtship mimicked the courtship evident in heterosexual relations, an imitation that clearly was not the case in Athens.

⁵⁰ Devereux, "Greek Pseudo-Homosexuality and the 'Greek Miracle,'" pp. 77, 91. Devereux draws an analogy with the modern term "youth culture," in which a society idealizes youth and beauty to such a degree that adults continue to behave with the irresponsibility (but also the openness) of adolescents well into their mature years.

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Devereux found nothing intrinsic to homoeroticism in this system.⁵¹ However, the orientation of the young men toward other males and toward male excellence may have been the most important outcome of their freedom to experiment. In the *Phaedrus*, the closest the beloved can come to loving his lover in return is to become attracted to his own beauty mirrored in the lover's eyes. So great is that beauty's effect on the lover that it flows back to its original source.⁵² The beloved thinks he feels reciprocal love (*anteros*), but in fact he experiences a form of self-love. This aspect of pederasty seems crucially different from heterosexual love or any love in which mutual attraction takes place. The boy or youth experiences the vanity and self-love proper to being the beloved without feeling the self-forgetting eros for another. To keep receiving the attentions of lovers, he must cultivate his beauty as well as his attainments in those areas by which the lovers set store, such as athletics or music. If he is also motivated by admiration for his older lover, then emulating the lover in those same areas becomes a part of his self-cultivation. These forces brought to bear on the youth's eros from a very young age, orienting it toward self-consciousness and self-improvement, might also have had important cultural ramifications, a prolonged education as the result of the prolonged adolescence. Self-cultivation would become a psychological imperative during the youth's formative years.

It should be noted that many societies in which pederasty was far more permissible than in Athens, sometimes to the extent of being institutionalized and ritualized, such as among Herdt's Melanesians or Aristotle's Celts,⁵³ did not undergo any analogous cultural "miracle." One explanation is that the unease about hubris in Athenian literature shows that Athenians were far more keenly attuned to the exploitative aspects of pederasty. Instead of boys being virtually forced by their families and by the existing system into the service of older males, as in New Guinea and in the recorded ritual abductions on Crete,⁵⁴ Athenian boys and youths were strongly

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 69–70, 90–1.

⁵² To preserve the role of beauty as catalyzing the eromenos' desire, despite the erastes' physical unattractiveness to him, the *Phaedrus* conjectures that it is the eromenos' own beauty, reflected in the eyes of the erastes, that excites him (255c–e). Compare Halperin, "Plato and Erotic Reciprocity." This aspect of Plato's theory certainly makes sense in at least one limited respect: joy is contagious.

⁵³ G. Herdt, *Guardians of the Flutes; Politics* 2.9.7 (1269b 23–27).

⁵⁴ Strabo, *Geography* 10.4.21. Compare Sergent, *Homosexualité et initiation chez les peuples indo-européens*, pp. 8–9.

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discouraged from submitting. Anthropologists as well as classical scholars rightly refuse to be shocked by societies that practice ritual sexual initiation, whether Melanesian, “Indo-European,” or Greek, but little attempt is made to correlate such societies with high levels of political freedom and societal self-criticism. Only feminist scholars have pointed out the exploitation inherent in such systems. Keuls, for example, says drily that the boys submitted to “enculturation.”⁵⁵ In Athens, by contrast, the obstacles around which lengthy courtship and an ostensibly educational relationship were built up would have been a necessary condition for the channeling of eros into the higher mental life of the city. Whether the moral strictures accidentally contributed to the sublimation of eros or whether the obstacles to satisfaction were originally sought out by eros itself, as Freud thought, seems less important than the connection between the sublimation of eros and the advancement of civilization.

The contribution of Greek homoeroticism to Greek civilization depends in large measure on whether the connection between education and homoeroticism was real or imagined. In modern discussions over the relative beardlessness or beardedness of the beloved, the emphasis of Greek texts on a *nascent* masculinity in the beloved has sometimes been overlooked. For example, Pausanias in the *Symposium* contends that the best eros is not interested in boys until the secondary sex characteristic, down on the chin, begins to appear.⁵⁶ Prepubescent boys have little or no masculinity to speak of, but adolescents possess a masculinity in the process of developing. This interest in development, watching manhood unfold and encouraging it to develop properly, features in many of the sources for Greek pederasty. It typically takes the form of promising to educate the boy. The physical sex characteristic, for Pausanias, is only a rule of thumb for determining the phase when boys really become educable: the educable phase is when they are most attractive (181d 1–3). This privileging of education in Pausanias’ speech is noteworthy inasmuch as education is one of the few points that Socrates rescues from the wreckage of Pausanias’ speech made by Aristophanes’ satire of it. On heterosexual analogies, in eras when older men used to marry young girls, part of the appeal was also

⁵⁵ E. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus*, pp. 276–7.

⁵⁶ Or the commencement of growth is near: *plēsiazēi toi geneiaskein* (181c 7–d 3). Obviously, several other aspects of Pausanias’ speech contradict his idealism.

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in the process of watching and schooling the formation of character and intellect.⁵⁷

Although modern scholars have sometimes agreed with Aristophanes in treating the promise of education as a pretext masking the erastes' baser motive⁵⁸ (at best an erastes would deceive himself that his motive was primarily philanthropic), a motive can be supplied for attraction to the educable that need not be idealistically other-regarding or altruistic. Freud emphasized mental qualities that he considered feminine in his speculation about what excited a Greek man's love for a boy, qualities such as the boy's "need for instruction and assistance."⁵⁹ Although other considerations cast doubt on Freud's ultimate characterization of Greek pederasty as a love of the feminine, it must be admitted that the need for assistance has typified femininity as it has been constructed in many eras. Men are attracted to women whom they can help, the extreme case of attractiveness coinciding with helplessness being that of damsels in distress. Conversely, a common complaint among women is that men are typically uninterested in women who are competent and self-possessed. Men want to be needed; they wish to perform a great service (and to be rewarded handsomely). Characteristic of this type of eros is that a lover looks to enter situations to which he can make a contribution. The self-regarding aspect of this "chivalry" was also recognized in antiquity. Socrates' speech gives the fullest explication of this selfish motive for eros. Educating others is a way of propagating oneself, or propagating that part of oneself that is held most dear, one's beliefs and ideas. What humans ultimately desire is to make a piece of them live on after death.⁶⁰ With a view to such self-perpetuation, man–boy attachments retained an advantage not shared by man–girl attachments: the

⁵⁷ In Jane Austen's *Emma*, for example, Mr. Knightly is bidding his time, waiting for Emma to grow to marriageable age while at the same time educating her into someone he himself could love. At various points in the novel it is clear that she is not ready yet or is not yet the person he hopes she will become.

⁵⁸ See D. M. Halperin's article in the *OCD*³, s. v. "homosexuality."

⁵⁹ "It is clear that in Greece, where the most masculine men were numbered among the inverts, what excited a man's love was not the *masculine* character of a boy, but his physical resemblance to a woman as well as his feminine mental qualities – his shyness, his modesty and his need for instruction and assistance" (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, p. 10; emphasis in original). Compare Athenaeus 605d 7–9 = Clearchus, fragment 36 in Müller: "Nam etiam pueri tum tantum pulchri sunt . . . quo usque mulieribus similes sunt . . ." (quoted in Crawford, *Eros Under a New Sky*, p. 43, note 15).

⁶⁰ See the discussions in Sections 1.1 and 7.2.

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man loved a smaller version of himself. Erastai could see, in their boys, what they once were themselves. A lover had the opportunity, by affecting the course of the boy's development, not only to form the boy into the type of man whom the boy ought to become, but also to form the boy into the man whom the educator thought he himself ought to have become, and perhaps would have become, if only the right educator had caught him in time. The educative aspect of pederasty, like ordinary parenting, would thus have given the older lover the chance to live life over again, to get it right the second time. This particular aspect of the desire to perpetuate oneself would have implicated the role modeling and rivalry discussed in Chapter 1. Like the Little League parent, the erastes' love would not be unconditional. He would wish for the eromenos to fulfill the promise of achievement he had seen first in himself, not in the eromenos, or had seen only secondarily in the eromenos. He might love the boy in his own right, but he would especially love his own contribution to the boy. As with (one aspect of) raising a child, the lover's "culture" lives on or is perpetuated in another person. This model is both cooperative and agonistic. The agonism inherent in encouraging or compelling the boy to live up to a high standard, which in the case of the Little League parent can verge on abuse, is ultimately in service of cooperation, at least to the extent that the boy accepts the standard as proper to himself and not an alien construct fitted on him by the older party. In this view, the educational relationships into which pederasty developed at Athens were not merely evidence of high mindedness or good intentions, nor an instrument of policy on the part of lovers to procure sex, but intimately bound up with eros in the full sense of the word.

For the eromenos, too, the attractiveness of education can take on erotic overtones. The Greek assumption that the eromenos does not reciprocate eros for the erastes is a difficulty that has, once again, the potential to be turned into a virtue. Here, as before, Pausanias' speech gives a clue that will later be developed by Socrates. The custom holds sway at Athens that any abasement, not excluding even willing enslavement, is excusable if performed in service of excellence and self-improvement (184b 6–c 7). Although we may doubt the tendentious conclusion he is angling for (*viz.*, that this argument is enough of a basis on which to promote legal reform in Athens), nevertheless the example of sleeping rough on a beloved's porch rings true. Both erastes and eromenos would be enslaved, the one by eros and the other by the desire to improve himself. Pausanias does not take the next step of considering whether the immense desire pushing Athenians toward

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self-improvement is itself a form of eros. In Socrates' speech, this desire to have the good and to make it one's own is incorporated into the definition of eros, whereas beauty technically becomes only the catalyst that triggers this desire for the good.⁶¹ In this way, lover and beloved both feel eros. Each is in love, although not necessarily with the other, and their relationship *qua* erotic is preserved. The eromenos, in particular, is not motivated by sexual eros for the erastes, but is motivated by the admiration that he feels for the erastes, an admiration for qualities that he hopes someday to possess in himself. The eromenos is thus his own beloved, in this second way, too, in addition to being in love with the excitement he sees in the lover's eyes. He may, crucially, despise his current self insofar as he still lacks those qualities he envisions the erastes (and his future self) as possessing.⁶² But he will love a vision of what he could become with the help of his erastes, once the erastes has conferred his own sterling qualities onto the eromenos. Thus the eromenos even less than the erastes loves a person unconditionally or for that person's own sake but rather loves aspects of the person that are in theory separable from him.⁶³ This highly qualified reciprocity, like the eros for an educable masculinity, once again fits into an agonistic model of rivalry. The erastes' desire for self-perpetuation and the eromenos' hero worship fit together, reciprocally, in the virtuous circle of role modeling and emulation; at its best, this relationship generates a constant desire to set and achieve a higher mark. The desire of the principals to make an impression on each other is inextricably bound up with having an impact, and leaving their impression, on the world around them.⁶⁴ Doing good or great deeds for a beloved in hopes of receiving favor as a reward is the "chivalry" model of eros.

5.4. The Fragility of Greekness: The "Better Argument" in *Clouds*

Although in Greek thought it is mainly the Platonic theory that celebrates the contributions to civilization made by the higher eros, qualified appreciation of the civilizing tendency of sublimated eros can be found cheek

⁶¹ Compare 205d 1–3 with 206e 2–5 (citing selectively).

⁶² See Santas, *Plato and Freud*, pp. 26–32, on the deficiency and egoistic models of desire.

⁶³ See especially Price's criticism of Vlastos in *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, p. 10.

⁶⁴ As in Phaedrus' speech: compare their consciousness of one another (178c 3–e 3, 179a 3–b 3) with their impact on the world (178e 3–179a 2). Socrates shows the larger potential of the two aspects.

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by jowl with derision even in the normally debunking and reductivist genre of Aristophanic comedy. The caricatured “Better Argument” in *Clouds*, like Hippothales in the *Lysis*, exhibits signs of erotic sublimation. Unlike Hippothales, who was content with his chaste love, the ill temper and moralism of the Better Argument show signs of sexual repression, as does his eventual collapse into what he considers the worst depravity.⁶⁵ Where Plato portrays the effortless sublimation of being in love, Aristophanes presents a portrait of a man who appears to be struggling to rein in or to contain his desires. The Better Argument’s struggle is of particular interest because of the prominent place given to beauty in his speeches. Just as Hippothales’ unrequited eros gave birth to (bad) poetry and prose, so the Better Argument briefly gives voice to a few fleeting though resonant lines depicting an idea of Greekness and a high civilizational ideal that he intends for his boys (1005–8). These lines, sandwiched between his dogmatic, musclebound prescriptions, introduce a tincture of sentimentality or nostalgia that bears on the interpretation of his speech. The difficult, uneasy redirection of the Better Argument’s eros can be seen as Aristophanes’ qualified appreciation of conventional morality as well as his satire on it.

The Better Argument’s ostensible complaint about the new education is that it produces young men who are physically and morally debilitated. Taking into account the erotic reveries into which his disquisitions repeatedly dissolve, one might say that his real complaint is that the boys are not beautiful anymore, in both the physical and the moral senses intended by the Greek word *kalos*.⁶⁶ The moral sense of *kalos* is evident in the Better Argument’s peroration, in which he charges that the traditional *kalon/aischron* distinction is being overthrown: “You will be persuaded to believe that all ugliness is beautiful, and the beautiful is ugly” (1020–1). What prevented young men from committing ugly acts, in the older education, was shame: “And [you would know] to be ashamed of ugliness and, if someone jokes about you, to blaze up red” (991–2). Doing what is ugly defiles the statue of Shame, or reverence personified (995). Aristophanes observes a strictness in his contrast between the two Arguments: the Worse Argument’s predominant characteristic is shamelessness. The Better Argument ushers

⁶⁵ Compare the discussion of *Clouds* 1102–4 below. The collapse of his morality bears comparison with Philocleon’s similar fall from judicial fervor into debauchery (Section 4.2).

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, pp. 69–73. In what follows I acknowledge a major debt to the thoughts of Jarrell Robinson of the University of Chicago, Committee on Social Thought.

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him on stage with the observation that he is bold (*thrasus*). He calls the Worse Argument shameless (*anaischuntos*, 909–10), intending it as an insult, but the Worse Argument accepts it as a compliment. In fact, the Worse Argument accepts as compliments the imputation of all acts and deeds of which he ought to be ashamed. His lack of decorum means that he has no aesthetic sense of the beauty in right and wrong; true to the Better Argument's prediction, the Worse Argument eventually encourages the young man to "consider nothing ugly" (*aischron* 1078).

Intruding on the Better Argument's encomia of moral beauty, however, are his wistful memories of the times he noticed the boys' bodily beauty as well. Part of his preoccupation with the physique is conscious and intentional: the new education implants spurious intellectualism into flabby, out-of-shape bodies – pale skin, narrow shoulders, thin chest, small haunches (1016–19), whereas his own physical training promises sleek muscles and constitutional hardihood, *mens sana in corpore sano* (e.g., 1002, 1011–14). Beyond his deliberate program of physical culture, however, he is tormented by visions he glimpsed in the line of duty, that is, while enforcing morality. At the schoolmaster's house, the boys were made to sit with one thigh thrown forward, so as not to reveal to persons outside anything "cruel" (973–4 with Dover's note ad loc.). Likewise, when they stood back up again, they had to sweep together the sand, taking care not to leave behind, for lovers, an *eidolon* of their puberty (975–6). This word, "image," is important for the interpretation of these comic passages: the Better Argument's reveries put him at two removes from touching the boys. He rejoices merely to see (and simultaneously deprecates seeing) an image of them in the sand. Likewise, at the schoolmaster's house, the Better Argument is essentially an outsider (*tois exothen*) looking in, hoping to see and hoping to resist seeing something provoking. Looking at the boys is a privilege, and a temptation, almost past bearing: in the old days, boys did not call attention to the nether regions by anointing below the waist, but spectacular sights were nevertheless noted and remembered in minute detail.⁶⁷ Part of the Better Argument's complaint against the new education of boys is that the Worse Argument teaches them "all wrapped up in himations" (*sc.* "so that one cannot see them naked anymore"; 987).

⁶⁷ 977–8. For an interpretation different from my "visual" reading, cf. the speculation of Dover, ed., *Aristophanes. Clouds*, ad loc.

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The Better Argument's forbidden enjoyments are all visual. He never mentions touching, that is, actually treading upon the hallowed ground, although he might have mentioned doing so (if he had actually had sexual affairs with his charges) as his confessions of weakness are unrehearsed: we the audience are not supposed to be privy to these reveries, which come over him unbidden. From his position of moral authority, the Better Argument, like Philocleon at the *dokimasia* (*Wasps* 578), counts the erotically restrained pastime of merely viewing boys as one of his chief pleasures in life.⁶⁸

The disappointing thing about modern boys, however, when they do finally take their clothes off, is that they are no longer attractive. The Better Argument's disappointment can be partially, but not wholly, explained by their scrawny physiques. Beyond lack of musculature, they are deficient in their carriage and bearing. Character shines through physical attitude and demeanor.⁶⁹ Boys nowadays snicker and stand at ease (983) whereas in the old days they were regimented and quiet (963–5). The Better Argument prefers silence and shame in his love objects.⁷⁰ Worst of all, boys today aggressively pander themselves, using their voice and eyes to perform come-hither gestures (979–80), welcoming the attentions of men as though they actually desired and enjoyed sexual intercourse. Chastity or temperance (*sophrosune*) was the hallmark of the old education (961). By contrast, *sophronein* is precisely what the new education dismisses (1060–1 twice, 1067, 1071); the Worse Argument asks young men to peruse the list of pleasures they will be depriving themselves of by subscribing to that one word (1071–2). One of the few body parts on the boys that has not atrophied under the new regime but undergone a meaningful augmentation recalls vase depictions of the anatomical differences among Greeks, barbarians, and especially satyrs, with the vase painters' implicit canon of the beauty (and hence the erotic attractiveness and desirability as well) to be found in temperance.⁷¹ Boys who are unchaste are simply not as attractive to the Better Argument.

The litmus test of moral ugliness is *katapugosune*: the Better Argument rests his case on this word at 1023, and he also plays the card early as his first major

⁶⁸ Dover, *ibid.*, p. xxvi.

⁶⁹ For analogous erotic preferences expressed in a heterosexual context, see Ischomachus' advice to his wife on how to remain beautiful in the *Oeconomicus* 10.9–13; cf. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 161–3.

⁷⁰ Compare K. Riezler, "The Social Psychology of Shame," p. 461.

⁷¹ Dover *ad loc.* See the discussion in Section 6.3.

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insult against the Worse Argument: *katapygon* in the same breath as shameless (909). The weakness and slavishness of any male who would assume this position render him immediately unattractive. Yet how the Worse Argument can be associated with sexual passivity is not immediately clear: although boys as well as women are items on the menu of pleasures (*hedonon*, 1072–3) which he caters, the Worse Argument primarily encourages young men to take a very active role in heterosexual adultery, to be a *hubristes* between the sheets (1068–70). The Better Argument’s logical leap from adultery to sexual passivity on the part of the Weaker Argument and his students seems based on the flimsy resemblance between true passivity and the misfortune visited on a man caught in adultery under the peculiar judicial convention that permitted the cuckolded husband to subject him to the radish treatment (1083–4). In fact, however, the text makes a closer connection between the weakness implicit in sexual passivity and the weakness or lack of control implicit in the libertine’s enjoyment of adultery. Demonstrating how an adulterer should defend himself in court, the Worse Argument points out how even that most famous of adulterers, Zeus, was weaker than his own eros for women: literally, “worse (*betton*) than eros and women” with a pun on the Worse Argument’s own name (*betton logos*, 1081 with 893). This argument that pleasures can get the “better” of one and become one’s master anticipates the arguments we have already seen in Chapter 4 in the prosecution of Timarchus as well as in Plato’s *Gorgias*. The sexually passive man is weak because he is dominated by other men, but the adulterer is also weak because he is dominated by, or fails to master, the passions within him. Just as the hedonism of Callicles in the *Gorgias* stands or falls with the case of the kinaidos, who after all enjoys himself to the utmost, so the Worse Argument’s hedonism (1072) and his injunction to think nothing ugly ultimately come down to *euruproktia*:

WORSE ARG. What if [the young man] is a *euruproktos*, what harm will he suffer?

BETTER ARG. What then could he suffer, ever, worse than this?

(1085–6)

The radish treatment is only the concrete expression of an internal state of weakness that automatically disqualifies the youth from moral beauty.

The Better Argument, however, is treading on thin ice because his own desires, scarcely admitted to himself, would naturally lead to just such *euruproktia* on the part of the boys whom he desires. Moreover, like the

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modern ethos of some males, in which women are ladies until they give in, whereupon they become whores, the Better Argument's exaltation of chastity leaves no middle ground on which his own eros could find consummation. Boys in the new dispensation are no better than prostitutes. But boys in the old dispensation were desirable just insofar as their character would not permit them to give in to his desire. The Better Argument's desire is predicated on its being unfulfillable, or remaining forever in tension. His brittle morality of either chastity or prostitution, all or nothing, permits no slips on the part of either his boys or himself; yet slips are just what we have seen throughout his disquisition, as his "lower" desires keep comically breaking out. The restraints holding back his eros are already at the breaking point; but if he falls, his own code will never let him back up again.

In the event, we witness the total destruction of the Better Argument's moralism, and hence of himself as a "better" argument. He first agrees that if the Worse Argument can persuade him that there is no harm in *euruproktia* he will "be silent," that is, cease to be an argument. In keeping with the conventions of elenchus, however, the victor must ideally deliver to the audience a loser who is not only at a loss for words but is now saying the opposite of what he started out saying.⁷² It is significant, then, that when the Better Argument loses, he embraces the opposite program. He is not merely silenced but confesses himself to be "worsted" (*bettemetha*, 1101), that is, he essentially becomes the worse (*betton*) argument. He now shamelessly joins the ranks of the same *kinoumenoi* whom he had previously held up as anathema, the one way of life young men should avoid. As we saw in Chapter 4 in the case of Philocleon, whose character snapped and whose juridiphilia was converted to sexual debauchery after he learned he had no honor in the city, what gets the better of the Better Argument is the realization that all of the men most honored by the city, the prosecutors, tragedians, and politicians, are *euruproktoi*, and that in fact everyone in the audience is too, whereupon his repressed eros bursts out, and he strips off his clothes and runs into the audience to join the crowd (1089–1104). Like everyone else from Zeus on down, he becomes worse than his own eros, or permits it to get the "better" of him.

Two possible interpretations of the Better Argument's sudden revelation both point up the inadequacy of conventional morality. The Better Argument may simply be unable to tolerate being the last chaste man in

⁷² 1043, 1062.

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Athens, in which case the mere conventionality of his morals would be highlighted: being moral is no good in itself but only if others are moral too. Or we may be intended to understand that Convention incarnate suddenly realizes that the very traditional, old-fashioned desire of men for boys, taken to its natural and logical outcome, must be at least remotely responsible for the *euruproktia* in all those males acculturated in both the old and the new systems of education, a truth that never dawned on him before. Even the big men assuming active roles in socially prominent positions must have taken the passive role as boys. Is it possible that the Better Argument did so as well? It is noteworthy that his finally admitting to himself what he really wanted all along (to take the active role with his charges) is what forces the Better Argument to join the *euruproktoi*, that is, to assume the passive role as well. His former morality is too idealistic not to recognize that one person's activity implies another's passivity.

Before his fall, the Better Argument at least pretended to himself that, in the old days, boys never used to consent to sex. His retrospective resembles modern U.S. nostalgia for the 1950s, remembered as a time when there was a lot of playing with fire in the backseats of cars but less consumption; Americans look back wistfully at those days when sex was more interesting precisely because it was supposed to be off limits. Aristophanes was not above appealing to nostalgia, both erotic and political: after the Better Argument's rancorous disquisition and before his elenchus, the poet temporarily elevates his register to pay tribute to the lost ideal which the old warrior envisions for the young man who partakes of his traditional education (1005–14):

Going down to Academe park, you'll run away under the sacred olive
trees,
Crowned with a white reed, along with a chaste companion your own
age,
Smelling of morning-glory and minding-your-business and the white
leaf-casting poplar,
In springtime, rejoicing whenever the plane-tree whispers to the elm.
If you do these things I'm showing you
And pay attention to them,
You'll always have
A glossy chest, shiny skin,
Broad shoulders, small tongue,
Big buttocks

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The register has dropped ridiculously, and the Better Argument is once more a laughingstock, but not before the image of young friends making chaplets of reed for themselves in the serenity of the public grounds has put a poignant climax on his educational program. The lines imbue the earlier ill-humored dogmatism with a sentimentality that makes it more difficult to dismiss. Everything suddenly comes together in an ode to Greekness that seems to capture the essence of the civilization: song and poetry (966–8), wrestling and the cult of the physique, friendship, and above all leisure – *apragmosune* or quietude untroubled by political affairs – a surprise in place of another flower name and the lone word that breaks the elevated register before the register drops back down to stay. The cultural portrait celebrates the traditional goods of the polis without the politics. Significantly the hierarchical, political relationship of pederasty gives way in this image to the equal, mutual, and private affection between same-age schoolmates, each perhaps too innocent to know that their mutual attraction is more than friendship. Here once again, the Better Argument earnestly envisions them as chaste (*sophron*, 1006). What the Better Argument loved about boys was their chastity and purity, without regard to whether or not he himself was the one privileged to relieve them of it. Just as he used to look into the schoolmaster's house from outside and peruse the sand where boys sat, so in the case of this last vision of boys with which he leaves us, the Better Argument is implicitly keeping his distance, watching the two friends sport under the trees, himself unseen, looking on sympathetically but also somewhat ambivalently.

Nothing comparable with this passage is found in the Worse Argument, nor does anything beautiful emerge from his speech,⁷³ although he does succeed in showing, in no uncertain terms, that the Better Argument's vision of the beautiful is an uneasy construct. In contrast to the Better Argument's repressed, smoldering eros, breaking out at odd moments, the Weaker Argument's eroticism is overt and self-professed. Chastity never gained anyone anything (1060–6). Reversing the Better Argument's celebration of Greek convention and culture, the Worse Argument enjoins the young man to “use nature” (1078) and to submit, as it were, to the “compulsions of

⁷³ M. C. Nussbaum, in “Aristophanes and Socrates on Learning Practical Wisdom,” points out that the Worse Argument offers almost no positive content of his own, but merely tears down whatever his opponent offers (cf., e.g., *Clouds* 1038–42 with 942–4).

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nature" (1075). Although such submission leads directly to sexual intercourse ("You go astray, fall in love, commit a little adultery," 1076), the sexuality envisioned by the Worse Argument seems curiously unerotic beside the reveries, longings, and imagery of the Better Argument. A commonplace of sublimation theory is that lovers see the world through different eyes, and that eros, when it is not dissipated in sexual intercourse, imbues the world with colors and sensations that would otherwise go unseen, the stuff of poetry. By contrast, the Worse Argument tells us of no yearnings he has experienced in his own right, but only acts as pander for the desires he assumes exist in the young man listening to him. Where the Better Argument is high-strung, the Worse Argument is nonchalant and flaccid; he resembles in this regard the pale, lifeless students of the Think-tank such as Chaerophon, as well Pheidippides, the young man hearing the debate between the arguments and deciding his life's course on the basis of it, after he emerges from his new education. The crass sex counseled by the Worse Argument seems to have relaxed a tension or snipped a bowstring whose tautness was, for the Old School, part of the essence of Greekness.

Perhaps it may be doubted whether Aristophanes could have thought any such thought as would remotely correspond to the modern concept of sublimation. Such a thought should remain reserved for Plato in the history of Greek philosophy. Yet it has been demonstrated that *Clouds* was written in a culture that used *eros* cognates in a very wide extension and that Aristophanes himself practiced an erotic rhetoric that explicitly reduced (or elevated?) all important desires to eros, often drawing analogies with sexual desire narrowly conceived. Did Aristophanes not see what we see in the play? It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Better Argument's eros was a necessary condition of his vision of the good life. His high civilizational ideal would never have been possible without erotic longing and yearning, without falling in love with his students. Like the poets' dreams of beautiful Olympians and like the mundane poetry and prose of Hippothales, the crowning reverie of the Better Argument is an example of the culture-producing propensity of eros. Yet here, as with Philocleon, Aristophanes seems to harbor doubts about the long-term feasibility of the project of channeling eros. By showing the Better Argument so easily worsted in a losing struggle with his own eros, Aristophanes seems to point out the instability at the base of the tradition. The channeling of eros into

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culture is beautiful to achieve but difficult to sustain. The fragile character of the Better Argument makes his eventual defeat seem almost inevitable and makes the easygoing degeneracy of the Worse Argument seem inexorable. In a similar way, Philocleon's high principles also crumbled when pressure was brought to bear on them, and his eros swung from the extreme of moralism to the extreme of debauchery. "Sublimation" is a house of cards that cannot stand for long.

As we have seen, however, the necessary condition of sublimation is not permanent abstinence on the part of all members of a society but rather temporary, prolonged abstinences. The existence of conventions as barriers to gratification affecting most people some of the time and some people all of the time is more important than the unfailing observance of those conventions at all times. In this view, sublimation is a house of cards only in individuals, not in societies. Most individual members of society will stumble and fall short of the societal ideal at some time; but their sublimations before and after that fall (if any) will still be of use to the society. Society can unstring the tension of sublimation only by lifting the barrier completely, that is, by abandoning the ideal that illicit eros must not be gratified; society does not unstring the tension by silently countenancing individual gratifications. That the ideal sets an impossibly high standard is less important than that said ideal informs citizens' experience of eros temporarily. Yet the untruth of the ideal when interpreted literally can cause a society-wide doubt about its validity; and the disappearance of the ideal would then take with it the benefits and by-products of sublimation. Only then would individuals cease to struggle with their eros, even for short periods. Thus the erotic precondition of Greekness could be fragile only if a society like Athens came to believe that abstinence was impossible, that is, if the conventional "argument" crumbled.

5.5. Aristophanic Politics?

Since the above interpretation implicates Aristophanes' political motivations and intentions, it might be proper at this juncture to revisit the questions posed in Sections 1.4–6 about whether any identifiable Aristophanic politics exists. It might be argued that humor and the creation of laughter exhaust Aristophanes' intentions for the Better Argument. What would be the *political* point of presenting onstage a poignant appreciation, as well as

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a critique, of the traditional morality? What is achieved “theoretically” by elevating, and also undercutting, the conventional argument? We have seen this double vision before, for example in *Knights*, when the sausage-seller returned Demos to the country and back to the best days of the Athenian polis, fleeing the political pederasty of Cleon’s Athens, only to find the best days of the Athenian polis were haunted by the same erotic problem. In *Knights* the utopian fantasy wished the problem away (in the dramatic action) but thereby highlighted the problem (in the drama of ideas); in *Clouds* the darker vision prevails in the dramatic action as well as in the drama of ideas. Did Aristophanes expect us to take this drama of ideas seriously or humorously? Here perhaps we must beware of making “humor” and “serious ideas” mutually exclusive. Nothing is to be taken seriously in Aristophanic comedy, if taking it seriously means failing to see the humor in it. Likewise an inability or unwillingness to engage with the seriousness and importance of the ideas entails a failure to appreciate the humor in its full sophistication, not to mention the loss of Aristophanes’ insights. It would be in keeping with our results so far if a clear insight into important ideas such as traditional morality, love, and the polis turned out to be so paradoxical as to raise a laugh.⁷⁴

What would Aristophanes hope to accomplish, for his fragile polis, by simultaneously invoking and undercutting the alleged goodness of the past? Aristophanes may have recognized that some of the same tendencies and passions that had elevated Athens above other Greek cities could also, if left unchecked, contribute to her decline. The chief example would be the tendency toward ever greater radicalization of the democracy. Clearly it was to democracy that Athens owed both her greatness and her humanity; just as clearly, however, the democracy under the popular leaders who succeeded Pericles had become increasingly moved by its passions. The outcome could not be foreseen, but two probabilities, both of which eventually occurred, were a demotic appetite for greater empire and the wars necessary to maintain it, and a right-wing revulsion (such as the oligarchic coup depicted in *Knights*). We have argued that the political vision of the plays is theoretical above all: a delight in seeing (and laughing at what one sees) must ultimately trump any practical political aims that might operate in the

⁷⁴ It is an intriguing coincidence that the English “Ha” signifies the wonder, surprise, and delight of discovery as well as imitating the sound of laughter.

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plays. Clarity about the political situation would begin with acknowledging comedy's own limited power to affect public opinion.

In the ambience of increasing radicalization, however, in addition to communicating his delight in seeing Aristophanes may have wished to communicate bright-line, memorable messages that could have some small impact on the majority of vote-casting citizens in his audience, e.g., "Make peace!" and "Oust Cleon!"⁷⁵ For a progressive city, the proper corrective is reverence for antiquity. Since the momentum of the city is progressive anyway, a constant harking back or retrospective politics is the right medicine, or a corrective⁷⁶ applied in the right direction, to keep Athens on a moderate course. As a sophisticate himself, Aristophanes will have had no desire to reverse Athens' course, and he may well have been realistic enough to know that nothing presented in a drama could hope to do more than temporarily slow her career, if even that. His apparent embrace of agrarianism, quietism, and the private life as opposed to political dynamism and ambition can be explained in this same manner. Aristophanes himself being urban and urbane, he upholds the rural life not because living it was possible or desirable for men like himself but because the Attic countryside was the root which made the flower of urban life possible.⁷⁷ Athens' sophisticates were in danger of forgetting this fact: to take one example, Pericles' explicit war policy was to cede the land of Attica to the Spartans, bringing all of the farmers within the walls of the city. Cutting the sacred tie to the soil in order to preserve overseas empire was not a strategy designed with the longevity of Athens uppermost in mind.⁷⁸ Aristophanes' apparent preference for a narrow, parochial patriotism over a cosmopolitan empire can be

⁷⁵ See the sensible comments of P. A. Cartledge, *Aristophanes and His Theatre of the Absurd*, pp. 43–6 on the power and limitations of Old Comedy in politics. (I disagree, however, with the degree of antidemocratic sentiment he attributes to the plays.) Contrast S. Halliwell, *Aristophanes*, pp. xxxix–xlvi.

⁷⁶ Compare *Politics* 5.9.6–8, 1309b 18–35.

⁷⁷ Plato's portrait of Aristophanes lends some credence to this reading: in the sophisticated company at Agathon's house, Plato's Aristophanes does not even try to make the case for rusticity. What he does do is to celebrate eros as that which "leads us to the private," to one's "own." This formula is only a more abstract version of the agrarian ideal of the plays, with a broadened applicability intended for the men at the party. They, too, from the perspective we are attributing to Aristophanes, could better moderate their eros if they would each find one person with whom to settle down.

⁷⁸ For the localized, decentralized religious and civic life of Attica prior to the Archidamian phase of the Peloponnesian War, and for Thucydides' critique of and qualified admiration for Pericles' policy of ceding Attica, see the discussions in Sections 7.4 and 7.6.

The Problem of Sublimation

understood in this light.⁷⁹ Even if Aristophanes subscribed to cosmopolitanism himself (a big if), greater expansion and greater cosmopolitanism would be the wrong messages to send, if the goal were longevity of the empire.

In this chapter we argued in favor of several ancient and modern accounts in which Greek civilization is understood to have erotic preconditions. Those preconditions involve moderating sexual eros in order to take advantage of what is today called sublimation. The study to this point has focused on ways in which eros might be political or politicizable, whether as a widely recognized project undertaken by a society or not. In Part Three we will examine how the Greek political theorists saw their societies as self-consciously and unself-consciously harnessing eros and attempting to put it in the service of communal goods such as patriotism. Therefore in Chapter 6 we focus on one practical mechanism by means of which the theorists thought eros could be “schooled”: the practice of civic nudity.

⁷⁹ It might be objected that the two political intentions we are attributing to Aristophanic comedy (the primary intention theoretical and the secondary intention practical) would undercut one another or even cancel one another out. The propagandistic motive, elevating Athens' past, would seem to obstruct a clear view of the weaknesses of that past. Likewise, the extremely harsh, critical insights into the weaknesses of, for example, traditional morality would seem to undermine the intention to elevate traditional morality in the Athenian mind. Here we must not forget that it has been possible, even for intelligent critics, to interpret Aristophanes' own opinions as differing in no significant way from the opinions of his Better Argument. An adequate appreciation of how these two apparently disparate aims of Aristophanic comedy might be combined would have to take into account the *fact* of such simplistic interpretations among diverse audiences, as well as the possibility that an astute playwright would be aware of and could make use of that fact.

PART THREE

THE POLIS AS A SCHOOL FOR EROS

SIX

Civic Nudity

[Lacedaemonians] were the first to strip naked and, having undressed in public, to anoint themselves with oil when training naked. In former times, even in the Olympic competition, the athletes competed wearing loinclothes¹ over the genitals, and it is not many years since they have stopped wearing them; and there are still some among the barbarians today, especially the Asians, who set up prizes for boxing and wrestling, and they do this wearing loinclothes. And in many other ways one could demonstrate the conformity between the modes of life of the Hellenic past and the barbarian present. (Thucydides 1.6.5)

In an introduction dominated by the aggregation of wealth and power as the key principles of historical change, Thucydides' brief excursus into the sartorial stands out in high relief. Greekness² did not fully distinguish itself from barbarism until the clothes came off. The Greeks' peculiar openness or lack of shame about the body seems to entail a coming-to-terms with

I am indebted to L. Bonfante ("Nudity as a Costume in Classical Art," p. 543) for the term "civic" nudity as opposed to the "ritual" nudity connected with, for example, initiation rites. For a view of the historical progression from ritual nudity to athletic nudity, see pp. 549–55. For the further distinction of civic nudity, see pp. 556–9, 569.

¹ Literally "girded" or wearing a kind of girdle.

² "Greekness": at 1.3.1–3, Thucydides understands himself to be looking back at a time when the words *Hellas* and *Hellene* did not exist, nor the word *barbarian*, for the reason that the distinction between Greekness and barbarism did not yet exist. See also C. Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, pp. 31–2. See, however, the *Iliad* 2.867. On the linguistic origin of the distinction between Greek and barbarian and on the hellenizing of some barbarians, see Thucydides 2.68.5.

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sexual eros, although it is unclear whether nudity meant a sexual freedom hitherto unknown to barbarian peoples, and which most of them would have considered vice,³ or whether, as seems implied in self-congratulatory Greek art and literature, naked athletics was an arena in which Greeks demonstrated their self-control and the mastery of mind over body. Nor is it clear what nudity contributed to the full flourishing of the polis, that it should make an appearance not only in Thucydides' terse and elliptical reconstruction of the growth and progress of the Greek poleis,⁴ but also in Plato's theoretical account of the perfect polis, the *Republic*, in which complete justice requires that women as well as men strip naked and that the sexes exercise together.

6.1. Rationalism and Meritocracy

In Thucydides' account, Greek nudity makes its appearance at the peak or culmination of a process beginning with ostensibly more important and nonsartorial concerns such as security, trust, and egalitarianism. The universality of piracy that precedes, and prevents, the rise of "greatness" (1.1.2–1.2.1, cf. 1.7–1.8) is ended in the Cyclades by Minos, whose difference in degree from the other pirates makes for a difference in kind: by sweeping the seas of competition, he brings about stability and relative security in the region.⁵ These earliest beginnings of security provide the framework into which Thucydides fits his sartorial treatment of the stages of civilization,

³ So "Hans Licht" (Paul Brandt), quoted in full in Section 6.2. Ennius gives an indication of what some Romans thought of Greek nudity: "the baring of bodies among citizens is the beginning of infamy" (*flagitii principium est nudare inter civis corpora*; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.70).

⁴ It should be noted that the polis is not teleologically distinctive for Thucydides as it is for Aristotle; in the *Politics* the polis is a natural development out of smaller units: household and village (1.1–1.2, 1252a 1–1253a 39). Thucydides instead introduces the term polis immediately in the history (1.1.2), of earliest times, to denote communities that "never grew strong," i.e., unwallled, presynoecism villages existing in what must have been loose federation (*poles atichistoi kai kata komas oikoumenai*, 1.5.1; see A. W. Gomme, A. Andrewes, and K. J. Dover, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, ad loc.). G. Crane may overstate his case that for Thucydides the polis is the "basic" or "primeval unit of Greek society" (*Thucydides and the Ancient Simplicity*, pp. 138–41). In any case these *Ur*-poleis are distinctive for Thucydides in a nonteleological sense: they are the entities that suscite patriotism and the sense of communal belonging. For example, at 2.15.1–2.16.2: behind the apparently unified city of Athens, there still lurks, in the hearts of the inhabitants of rural Attica, several presynoecism poleis. See the discussions in Sections 7.4 and 7.6.

⁵ 1.4.1–1.5.2, cf. 1.13.5 for a repetition of the same or a similar mechanism in other regions.

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a digression into social history that has been termed “an Archaeology in miniature”⁶:

All Hellas used to wear weapons because their dwellings were unfenced and access to each other was not secure, and they considered the armed mode of life customary, just like the barbarians. The fact that these parts of Hellas are still arranged this way is a sign that comparable modes of life once existed everywhere. Athenians were first among those who laid down their arms, and, in this emancipated mode of life, they changed to greater luxury. And on account of their delicate living, it is not a long time since the older ones among their prosperous men stopped wearing linen tunics and tying up the hair on the head in a knot with a gold-cicada fastener; whence the older men among the Ionians, due to their kinship, also practiced this fashion for a long time. By contrast, modest clothing in the current style was first introduced by the Lacedaemonians: in other ways, too, their men with greater possessions established, in the highest degree, an equal mode of life with the multitude.

From egalitarian dress, the Lacedaemonians progress to complete nudity. The narrative thus peels away armor, fine clothes, and finally the loincloth without editorial comment about the implications of each advance. In this schematic account, Thucydides assumes rather than explains how states of dress and undress relate to the political achievements of his Greeks. He relies on his readership to supply the analogies among the separate stages, whether in terms of increasing security, equality, or fair competition, as those analogies become apparent through the apparel worn. Whatever the analogies were, they must have been salient enough in the minds of Thucydides’ readership that he could leave them implicit. In this chapter it is argued that an evolving civic trust can be seen to animate the progression, with the Greeks making themselves progressively more vulnerable to one another: the Athenians expose their wealth to would-be brigands among them; wealthy Spartans expose their social standing to poorer competitors by giving up the artificial advantage of fine clothing; and finally, the Spartans expose themselves *tout court*. The civic trust implicit in laying down weapons in the first stage finds its analogue in the confidence that citizens have nothing to fear from laying aside their loincloths in the last stage. To anticipate: Greek athletes training nude, particularly when infibulated, made

⁶ M. McDonnell, “The Introduction of Athletic Nudity,” p. 189.

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a display of their sexual moderation or control. Barbarians, by contrast, were considered incapable of stripping naked without experiencing shame and loss of control.

At first glance, the social history of dress seems out of place in the austere Archaeology. Thucydides appears to force arms-bearing into a procrustean analogy with clothing, as though the urgent survival value of wearing weapons were governed by derivative mores and fashions. At least one analogy between clothing and weaponry, however, was salient enough in Greek thought that Thucydides could rely on his readers to see it. The word for naked or nude, *gumnos*, can mean not merely stark naked but also unarmed or not covered by armor.⁷ A warrior without his armor might as well be naked. This existing resource of the language appears to be one important link that led Thucydides to group the wearing of weapons with the wearing of clothes. His word iron-bearing, *siderophorein*, with its frequentative of *pherein*, to bear, can also mean iron-wearing. The frequentative implies an action repeated so often that it has become habitual, and articles of clothing constitute the majority of objects of *pherein*.⁸ In these earliest times, Thucydides' proto-Greeks strapped on weaponry as thoughtlessly as putting on clothes in the morning, so routine was the armed way of life in the face of permanent insecurity. Ever in a state of readiness to draw out his weapon, the proto-Greek was not only in constant danger but also presented a danger to others. He had forgotten, or never knew, that there could be any other way.

The barbarism of wearing weapons and its contrast with nudity receive a much later gloss in Lucian's *Anacharsis*, a fictional dialogue between the Athenian lawgiver Solon and the legendary barbarian prince from Scythia who visited Greek poleis to learn about their customs. The conversation takes place in a gymnasium, where the Scythian is shocked and amused to see Greeks wrestling naked. The crucial difference between Greek and barbarian appears early on, when Solon predicts that Anacharsis will give wrestling a try himself: the barbarian answers warmly that if one of the Greeks should handle him in such a manner, he would find out that Scythians do not

⁷ Thucydides 5.10.4; see also the *Iliad* 22.124 with 111–13; LSJ s. v. *gumnos* (I.2).

⁸ Items that are borne constantly need to be worn in order to free up the hands. In LSJ s. v. *phoreo* (I.2), objects of the verb range from a himation and a pair of shoes, to a bronze breastplate, and finally to an offensive weapon such as a sword. The modern English terms "sidearm" and "shoulder holster" convey an impression of the relevant blend of wearing and bearing.

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wear a short sword on their belt or “girth”⁹ for nothing (6–7). After much disputation, Anacharsis opines that wrestling is merely a game, which ought to be replaced with serious training in arms: bow, spear, breastplate, and helmet, among others. He envisions how easy it would be for him to draw the little sword at his belt and put the whole gymnasium to rout. The Athenians, the Scythian concludes, have been too long at peace (32–3).

Solon corrects the misimpression that Athenians never wear armor nor carry weapons, even when on military campaigns (34). He proceeds to attribute the Scythians’ armed way of life to the instability of their foreign and domestic relations, in neither of which do the Scythians enjoy peace. Solon makes the following comments (34):

But to wear arms constantly and to be girded with a short sword is, we think, superfluous in peace; and there is a penalty for anyone who wears weapons unnecessarily in town or brings out arms into the public space. You people may be forgiven for living always in arms; for unfenced dwellings make treachery easy, and your wars are very many, and it is unclear when someone may come upon a sleeping man, drag him down from his wagon, and kill him. Also your distrust of one another – since you are not fellow-citizens in law but only by individual choice – makes iron always necessary, so as to be near at hand for defence if someone should resort to violence.

Good fences make good neighbors; Lucian seems to be working with the same set of assumptions about barbarism as Thucydides.¹⁰ The Scythians could trust one another more if they lived behind walls instead of in wagons. The germ of the trust that can eventuate in citizenship, law, removal of armor, and perhaps even removal of clothing is first rendered possible by walls and fences.

The moral consequence of insecurity and mistrust is that no opprobrium attaches to the practice of piracy (Thucydides 1.5.1–2). To establish this

⁹ Literally girdle. “To be girded” with a sword at one’s side is *parezosthai* (34), and the barbarian athletes in Thucydides “are girded” *tout court*: *diezomenoi* (1.6.5). Anacharsis is “girt” with a *zone* as compared with Thucydides’ *diazoma*, the former perhaps going only round the waist, whereas the latter perhaps went between the legs.

¹⁰ Compare Thucydides’ *hai apharktoi oikeseis* (1.6.1) with Lucian’s to *en aphraktoi oikein* (34). Repeated references to walls in the Archaeology: 1.2.2, 1.5.1, 1.7, 1.9.3. Compare also the similarity of language: Thucydides (1.2.2) *adelon hon hopote tis epelthon kai ateichiston hama onton allos apbaresetai* with Lucian (34) *adelon hopote tis epistas, . . . etc.*

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point, Thucydides does not need recourse to the practices of barbarians; he can cite the written record of the Greeks themselves. In the older poets such as Homer, people landing their ships are always asked if they are pirates, as if they would not think to disown the profession, and as if those anxious to know would not reproach them for it.¹¹ This harsh introspection that “we” Greeks used to be barbarians is immediately trumped by the suggestion that some of “us” still are. As contemporary evidence, Thucydides can cite regions of the Greek mainland where, according to him, the days of piracy have scarcely come to an end (1.5.2–3). Like a Bostonian or New Yorker in the 1880s observing the Wild West, Thucydides displays uncivilized regions of Greece, places that have yet to progress because they are locked in a self-perpetuating cycle with arms.

In that cycle, the weapons fulfill their own prophecy that weapons will be needed. Armed defense may deter aggression, but it also perpetuates the perception of a potential offensive threat. For example, mere defense was perceived as threatening in the post-Persian Wars period of Athenian–Spartan relations when Themistocles built the Long Walls. For a potential enemy to make himself invulnerable constitutes an aggressive act because the vulnerability to mutual destruction that previously constrained the two parties from war is no longer mutually assured. The other party runs a huge risk if he does *not* make a preemptive strike.

Yet for one party to stop the cycle by laying down his arms is almost impossible, since to go unarmed among armed men is suicidal. Neighbors will stare in disbelief at anyone who could even contemplate so foolish and seemingly final a mistake as the laying down of his arms. They would stare in much the same way if someone laid aside his clothes. Only if everyone at once could be induced to lay aside arms or clothes would the innovations stand a chance of working. Under these conditions, far from the armed mode of life being simply irrational, a case can be made for the rationality of piracy. The possessions of people out to kill or dispossess oneself cease to look so sacrosanct. The genealogy of morals implicit in Thucydides’ account can be seen in his basic assumption that only security has rendered possible any moral repugnance against piracy. Thucydides’

¹¹ Nestor asks if Telemachus and his companion do as pirates do, after having received them as his guests and both feasted and prayed with them (*Odyssey* 3.71–4). For the identical lines asked by the Cyclops, see 9.252–55. Shades met in Hades, too, are asked, to all appearances amorally, whether they lost their lives in the act of stealing cattle or in fighting over a city and its women (11.401–3; 24.111–13). Contrast 14.83–88.

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insight is not tantamount to judging the pirate morality of equal worth to the morality of postpiracy places and times, for a clear arrow of progress marks the stages of development in Thucydides' account. Yet he does not disguise the fact that under insecure conditions there is less *opportunity* for virtue.¹²

The Athenians receive honorable mention for laying down their arms and liberating themselves from the old mode of life at an earlier juncture than other Greeks (1.6.3). Once emancipated, they turn to luxury and delicacy. Disarmament *permits* wearing beautiful and expensive things, such as the golden cicada pins used to adorn the hair of wealthy males. During the stage of piracy, such wealth could not be worn on one's person, not while everyone carried swords and were willing to use them to take whatever they could get. The increasing civic trust can be seen by means of an analogy between wealth and the later stage of nudity: each man can vulnerably flaunt his to the others only if the others as vulnerably flaunt theirs to him. Vulnerability works only if everyone participates. Confidence in one another's intentions is implicit in the Athenians' apparel, although their confidence seems to stem rather from weakness than from strength. Thucydides' mention of the Asiatic Ionians in conjunction with the pejorative (in context) word *habros* implies an "Oriental" softness and sheer unwarlikeness, a commonplace of Greek social thought after the Persian Wars.¹³ Although the suggestion is that Thucydides does not respect their softness, the Athenians' freedom from fear nevertheless represents a quantum leap over the armed mode of life, and their luxury is the basis on which Spartan innovations will reintroduce forms of austerity.

One hard edge of competition left over from the piratical days that still prevails, suitably transfigured, among the soft Athenians is the tendency of the powerful to assert their superiority over the weak. Wealth replaces arms in the struggle for superiority, and the wealthy use their fine clothing to flaunt their superior status over the multitude (1.6.3–4). The analogy between weaponry and clothing here takes another turn. Previously arms were a form of clothing. Now clothing becomes a weapon. Thucydides' terse contrast between Spartan egalitarianism and Athenian class consciousness implies that fine clothes can be wielded as a weapon in the psychological warfare of the rich against the poor. The Athenians' pomp and splendor

¹² The phrase is M. Doyle's, from "Thucydides: A Realist?"

¹³ Compare Aeschylus, *Persians* 40–3; Herodotus 1.71, 4.104.

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have the function of confirming, in ways obvious to all, the control of a few aristocratic families. The spectacle of power is an important aspect of the exercise of power. The function of clothing is not first and foremost to protect against heat and cold: because body paint precedes clothing in many societies, it follows that clothing first emerges as a form of ornamentation. Its wearers, or bearers, distinguish themselves from the other members of the society.¹⁴

Just as, when schoolgirls attempt to outdress one another, the remedy is school uniforms, so the “modest apparel” of the Spartans is the uniform that unites rich and poor because everyone can afford it. Because many barbarian peoples had achieved disarmament (the Persians as opposed to the Scythians, for example), it follows that the leap of progress here is far greater for Thucydides than was the laying down of arms.¹⁵ The modest dress of the Spartans is the concrete manifestation of a deep egalitarianism in Thucydides’ account, for behind the clothes stands the achievement of early *eunomia* and a polis that was always tyrant free (1.18.1). Sparta’s domestic achievements were the cause both of her rise to power and of her contributions to Greece; she imposed on the other poleis the penultimate stage of Greekness: equality and political government as opposed to tyranny.¹⁶ Most of the tyrants of Greece were deposed by the Spartans (1.18). In particular, it was the Spartans, and not an indigenous movement, that freed Athens from the Peisistratid tyrants¹⁷ (6.53.3). Whatever heights Athens may later attain, the Spartan achievement will remain their necessary condition, just

¹⁴ Even inhabitants of relatively cold climates, such as Tierra del Fuego, have been recorded as going naked, except for body paint, while carrying screens to shield themselves from the cold wind. Compare the woad smeared by ancient Britons on their bodies. See J. C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, p. 17; popularly: L. Langner, *The Importance of Wearing Clothes*, pp. 5–7.

¹⁵ Contrast Gomme et al., *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, ad loc. 1.6.1.

¹⁶ Political equality is only “penultimate” because, as we shall see, civic nudity is the ultimate stage of Greekness.

¹⁷ The very early date of the Spartans’ move toward participatory government may be explicable in terms of pressure from the leftover business of their original migration into the Peloponnese and their annexation of neighboring Messenia. The ever-present danger of rebellion from their serf class, the Laconian and Messenian Helots, who probably outnumbered the citizens, may have forced the Spartans to level class differences among themselves in order to close ranks. Thucydides later writes that the aim of the majority of Spartan institutions was always to guard against the Helots (4.80.3). The relative equality (by no means absolute: cf. M. I. Finley, *The Use and Abuse of History*, pp. 164–7) within the citizen class existed because every last Spartan was needed to maintain control. Each citizen was already a member of an elite because he enjoyed vastly superior rights compared with those of the noncitizen indigenous population.

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as, at the earlier stage, disarmament was the necessary condition for the emergence of political rule.¹⁸

Here again the competitive motives do not wither away. Equality and disarmament do not remain the only, or even the highest, achievements of Greekness. Many societies enjoy nonviolence and equality but lack, Thucydides would argue, the dynamism that is the precondition of “greatness” or “deeds worthy of recording” (1.1.1, 1.17). The Athenians’ competition to outdress one another seemed soft and childish after the piratical competition, and a thoroughgoing egalitarianism could have become the enemy of achievement, completing the decline. Thucydides therefore specifies athletic competition as the final stage and logical synthesis of the previous stages. Wrestling and boxing (1.6.5) represent the reemergence of the struggle that was formerly armed, now in a context of restraint. The competitors trust one another not to kill, maim, or seek unfair advantage in their quest to establish superiority. The modern word “meritocracy” captures the spirit of this blend of equality and competitiveness. The athletes compete first in loincloths and later naked (1.6.5). Whereas the fine robes worn by the Asiatic, as well as the Greek, tyrants and nobles amounted to a disguise propagating a show of excellence, the Greeks now strip away not merely this disguise but even the modest, egalitarian dress that likewise hid the material facts on which real excellence is based. Wrestling requires the nobles to come down from their pedestal and to contest the issue man to man in order to establish real superiority of mind and muscle. Proven superiority in a fair and equal competition, in front of the eyes of all, contains no discrepancy between performance and claim, between what is true by nature and what is deemed true by *nomos*. By removing causes of discord, such athletics can become an adjunct to politics. A cameraderie may take over that engenders good humor about one’s own inferiority and acquiescence in another’s superiority because neither inferiority nor superiority can be hidden or feigned. Envy and suspicion about the emperor’s new clothes never arise because there is no emperor and there are no clothes.

¹⁸ Thucydides accomplishes the construction of these stages by the elision of many years and events and by blending Athenian and Spartan histories to make one theoretical polis that progresses by rational stages. It should be pointed out that even in this conflation, he does not make the historical claim that Sparta once had a period of finery, or that all of the poleis developed similarly. Rather, he seems to take from each particular history a building block that he can use in the construction of an ideal or essential Greek identity.

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From the perspective of the community, each stage in Thucydides' scheme is more rational than its predecessor, because each permits a greater human flourishing. Yet from the individual's perspective, it is difficult to see wherein lies the rationality: what could a Spartan aristocrat hope to gain by surrendering his conventional superiority? On this anthropological (and ahistorical) reading, the nobles, by giving up their fine clothes, hazard their social status. To do so seems as foolish as the pirate's laying down his weapons. Presumably fear of the Helots was, historically, the principal motive behind the Spartan quest for solidarity, or for the pretense thereof. Thucydides himself admits it (4.80.3). But Thucydides clearly had in mind some larger political good: just as the profit motive of Minos and the other strongmen did not exhaust the political benefits made possible by their putting an end to piracy, so meritocratic competition for Thucydides is an extra-Spartan good that prevails in Athens and elsewhere despite its Spartan genesis.

Although the aggregation of wealth has been the crucial factor in the rise of the Greek poleis to this point, nevertheless near the peak of the rise the Spartans discover a greatness beyond wealth, a greatness not evident to the passerby who sees only their unimpressive town (1.10.2). Here again, Lucian's barbarian prince, visiting Athens, cannot see the point of fighting over prizes such as a wreath of wild olive at the Olympic competitions, or wreaths of pine and celery at the Isthmian and Nemean contests, or apples at the Pythian. A pirate at heart, his conception of what is worth fighting over is limited to booty. Solon patiently explains that the prizes themselves are only symbols of the fame and reputation that go with winning (*Anacharsis* 9–10, 36). One can sympathize with the Scythian: he sees men wearing nothing, wielding nothing, who bloody themselves in a competition to gain prizes worth nothing. So immaterial has the struggle that began as the aggregation of wealth now become.

Scholars have sometimes viewed the total nudity in this final stage of Thucydides' schema as contributing (like the stage of modest apparel did) to equality and meritocracy. In one sense, the skin is the ultimate egalitarian uniform because everyone has one. Beyond its leveling effect, nakedness reveals important natural differences in strength and beauty, heretofore covered up. For Thucydides, the natural equality of bodies underneath the different classes of clothing is not a resting place but an invitation to compete.

Yet Thucydides specifies uncovering the genitals (1.6.5). What is the political or social relevance of genital nudity? It remains unclear what the

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Greeks thought they achieved by this last, most daring move that could not just as easily have been accomplished by states of undress in athletics that stopped short of uncovering the genitals. Nudity *qua* uniformity, and *qua* inviting comparisons about natural rank, may be thought to complete the egalitarianism and meritocracy of Thucydides' earlier stages; but the same uniformity and invitation to compare are achieved in U.S. elementary and high schools by the relative uncoverage of "dressing out for gym" or by playing basketball as "shirts and skins," as well as in the adult racquet-club or locker-room atmosphere in which the genitals are not paraded and do not stay uncovered for long. Physical defects and musculature cannot be hidden in such situations, nor was it hidden when Odysseus and Ajax (who for Thucydides were barbarians or only proto-Greeks) "girded themselves" before wrestling,¹⁹ that is, stripped to the waist and bound round their hips anything dangling that might trip them up or offer a hold to their opponent. It has rightly been argued that this last, most radical stage of genital nudity has nothing to do with ridding the Greeks of the artificial differences in rank that clothing helps to stratify. Even designer loincloths would have been too small to display the colors or textures necessary to distinguish their wearers.²⁰ The final stage in Thucydides' scheme is not simply a recapitulation of the prior stage of laying aside finery.

A historical consideration adds weight to the argument that, for Thucydides, the final stage of total nudity was of a significance separate from, and beyond, the stage of egalitarian clothing. Thucydides drastically down-dated the advent of full nudity in athletics in order to make it the peak of his schematic progress of Greekness. The ahistoricity of Thucydides' scheme is most evident in his extraordinary assertion that the advent of full nudity, even at the Olympics, occurred "not many years" before his time. A great number of vase paintings showing athletic nudity from the mid-sixth century onward would have to be explained away in order to rescue his chronology.²¹ Less reliable written ancient testimonia point to a date of 720

¹⁹ *Iliad* 23.710, cf. 683–5.

²⁰ J. A. Arieti, "Nudity in Greek Athletics," p. 433.

²¹ M. McDonnell, in "The Introduction of Athletic Nudity," after reviewing much vase evidence and weighing several theories that would rescue Thucydides' chronology, concludes that Thucydides down-dated the advent of nudity in order to fit the logic of his general theory of progress (pp. 189–90). Various possible explanations had previously been advanced: E. N. Gardiner, in *Greek Athletic Sports and Festivals*, pp. 86–8, wonders whether Thucydides might have meant that nudity was not yet *de rigner* for all the events at Olympia until a few years before his time, that is, that the last loincloth dropped recently, although nudity was common in the palaestras.

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or 724 B.C., at the fourteenth or fifteenth Olympics, in which a runner or runners competed naked for the first time.²² It seems difficult to reconcile Thucydides' assertion with the tradition unless one is willing to consider a period of some one to three centuries to be "not many years." A great compression of time is evident in 1.6 at all points, but even if compression is taken into account, the chronological order of the stages may well have been changed or tidied up. There is no evidence, for example, that egalitarian dress preceded athletic nudity or that nudity inside the gymnasium was incompatible with fine clothes worn outside it; it is quite possible that gymnasia, like symposia, first existed among an aristocratic elite who stripped with one another but maintained an attitude of inequality toward the lower classes.²³

The explanation seems to be that here Thucydides is rationalizing his history. Nudity is made to crown a process of emerging civic consciousness. Because athletic nudity seems to imply all of the competitiveness, trust, and egalitarianism of the earlier stages as necessary conditions for its own emergence, it follows that nudity *ought* to have been chronologically later than the others, whether or not it really was. This suggestion gains credence when we turn to Plato, who commits a similar anachronism: "It is not a long time ago that seeing men naked used to seem ugly and laughable to the Greeks, just as it now does to many barbarians."²⁴ Like Thucydides' "not many years," Plato's "not a long time ago" sits uncomfortably with the vase evidence and the tradition. Nudity *qua* the hallmark of Greekness

W. E. Sweet, in *Sport and Recreation in Ancient Greece*, p. 124, briefly entertains the position that the vase evidence for the universality of complete nudity in palaestras could be explained away as artistic convention: although athletes may have worn loincloths, painters wished to paint the entire body. The small group of so-called perizoma vases do indeed portray figures wearing athletic supporters, and Gardiner speculates that a movement may have been afoot at the end of the sixth century to cover up again (*Athletics of the Ancient World*, p. 191); in both of Gardiner's scenarios, Thucydides would have been writing about the delayed final triumph of nudity. Sweet counters with evidence that the perizoma vases were originally nudes that were specially bowdlerized (124). McDonnell rules out the perizoma vases entirely as produced especially for an Etruscan clientele who had not yet accepted athletic nudity at home (185–9).

²² There was dispute whether a Spartan or a Megarian first adopted the innovation. For a skeptical review of the evidence see Sweet, *Sport and Recreation*, pp. 124–9. Enough of the sources mention dropping loincloths to support the assumption that *gymnos* in these contexts meant totally naked and not "lightly clad."

²³ The word *gymnazesthai* (which could but probably does not mean lightly clad here) is present in the Theognidea (1335–6 West), as are symposia, homoeroticism, and an aristocratic attitude. Some lines in the Theognidea may date, however, from as late as the fifth century B.C.

²⁴ *Republic* 452c 6–8.

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seemed so important to these authors that their tendency was to make it into a recent and hard-won gain. It seems that both Plato (or his Socrates) and Thucydides were allowing theory to overshadow history. They both wanted nudity to be the end result of a long chain. This mistake only serves to throw into relief their theories about nudity, which gain intrinsic interest as the powerful ideas that led the writers into (a less interesting) historical error. If the artistic record were not enough to prove it, what is above all clear is that nudity meant a great deal to the Greeks.

What then was politically or socially significant about genital nudity to Thucydides and his readership? In the earlier stages, too, Thucydides left his readers to fill in the analogies between laying aside armor and laying aside finery. To reconstruct the further analogy between these and the laying aside of loincloths would entail extrapolating the themes of equality, competition, and trust into the realm of sexual eros. In the earliest stage, by laying aside his weapon, the proto-Greek made himself vulnerable to attack by his fellows. His assumption was that he could trust them not to take advantage. Similarly in the last stage, by laying aside his loincloth, a young Greek made himself vulnerable, *qua* erotic object, to older males. His assumption was that they were in control of themselves and that he could trust them not to take advantage. At the same time, a mature man's action of stripping was liable to the interpretation that sexually he was preparing to go on the offensive. Overcoming this mistrust was the social good inherent in nudity. In the armed stage, little or no opprobrium could attach to piracy when everyone maintained a posture of aggressive defense, the constant readiness to draw. In the sexual analogue, little or no opprobrium could attach itself to sexual predation so long as each person was defending himself with the implicit assumption that everyone wanted the same thing and would use any means to obtain it. The lack of trust implicit in wearing clothing is analogous to the lack of trust implicit in wearing armor. In both cases, the defensiveness contributes to the aggression, because the predators are only living up (or living down) to normal expectations.²⁵

Evidence from outside of Thucydides' text suggests that, under the dispensation of civic nudity, the competitive motives did not disappear. Rather,

²⁵ "Normal": see for example Dover's note on the word *hubristes* and the potential for jocular admiration of "roguish virility," ad loc. *Clouds* 1068. Nothing in this "rationalizing" account should be taken for historical *realia*: the sexual conquests or assaults registered in the Thera graffiti took place in the precinct of a gymnasium.

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the competition for beloveds became more refined, just as, in Thucydides' scheme, the struggle that started out armed was carried on by other means (e.g., by the ostentation of wealth and, later, by wrestling) once the arms were laid down. Rivalry between lovers, long and difficult courtships, gestures such as sleeping on a beloved's doorstep only become possible in a secure environment in which lovers are permitted relatively free access to boys because the boys' safety is guaranteed. Courtship of beloveds would have become more difficult, serious, and important than it could ever have been in a predatory environment, with its concomitant sheltered defensiveness and lack of freedom.²⁶ The erastes would now invest his ego in a meritocratic competition in which he would be accepted or rejected purely on the basis of his virtues. In this civic-trust model of Greek nudity, the institution of nudity would be one of the means by which that competition, best described by Dover as "the pursuit of those of lower status, by those of higher status"²⁷ became modulated into a competition in which the lover, like Hippothales in the *Lysis*, is essentially at the mercy of the beloved. The "chivalric" psychology of service discussed in Chapters 1 and 5, in which the lover wishes to win favor in the eyes of his beloved by accomplishing great or noble deeds, depends crucially on this turning of the tables. Instead of feeling superior to beloveds and hitting on them, the lover must feel inferior or feel that he needs to merit their respect and win their affection. This chivalric turn is concomitant with the modulation of eros from sexual desire into love. At least in theory, then, the moderation involved in Greek nudity could have made an important contribution to the politicization of eros, helping to make eros political not in the tyrannical sense of aggressive domination discussed in Chapter 4, but political in the republican sense of chivalric service to a beloved, a desire to serve which might then be harnessed and put to use in the service of the city (Chapters 1 and 5).

In the sections that follow, a review of the artistic evidence will show that nudity *qua* sign of moderation and self-control was indeed a widely held cultural ideal of the Greeks. In particular, Greek images of the barbarian as lacking sexual self-control situate nudity in the same discourse of the

²⁶ "Predatory": see the discussion in Section 4.1. A modern example of a predatory sexual environment that made national headlines in the early 1990s was the "scoring" competition at a Texas high school, among athletes who called themselves the "Spur Posse." Clearly the boys did not achieve love or any ennobling feeling through their conquests.

²⁷ *GH*, p. 84.

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construction of Greekness out of barbarism as Thucydides places it in. An important part of the discourse will be the connection between the demystification of power and the dispelling of sexual shame. Unpacking the wealth of theoretical implications in Thucydides 1.6 should not, however, be confused with doing history. Rather, we are pursuing what some Greeks thought about their own history. The sartorial passage is suspect even as a source for Greek social, let alone political, history. It has often been pointed out that Thucydides in the *Archaeology* has little access to the events of the remote past but rather reconstructs what “must” have happened on the basis of a theory he has formulated from observing the present.²⁸ Our purpose is to elucidate that theory in its implications for eros rather than to trace the social history of Greek nudity.

6.2. Shame and the Case for Barbarism

In this section we explore one of the analogies animating Thucydides 1.6, viz., the analogy between the demystification of power implicit in the laying aside of finery and the demystification of sexual shame implicit in the laying aside of loincloths. Tyranny and shame go together in the barbarism against which Thucydides defines Greekness, whereas his Greeks possess both political freedom and an openness or shamelessness about sexual eros. Greek nudity has sometimes been taken as evidence that the Greeks experienced a form of sexual freedom that continues to elude modern man. “Hans Licht” (Paul Brandt) stated the case strongly²⁹:

[The Greeks] recognized that such covering [of the sexual parts] only had meaning if one had ascribed a moral and inferior value to their functions. But just the opposite was the case, so that far from being ashamed of these organs, the Greeks rather regarded them with pious awe and treated them with an almost religious reverence. . . .

It is worth noting how many civilizations line up in disagreement with Greece over whether shame ought to necessitate covering these and other parts of the body, all of which civilizations thereby unwittingly confess to barbarism: Rome, Judaism, Islam, and modern Europe, to name a few. Like

²⁸ J. de Romilly, *Histoire et raison chez Thucydide*, pp. 242–3; E. Täubler, *Die Archaeologie des Thukydides*, pp. 6–7; M. I. Finley, *The Use and Abuse of History*, pp. 18–19; V. Hunter, *Past and Process*, 49.

²⁹ Brandt, *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece*, pp. 88–9.

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much else in the Greek legacy, this claim to be the best is based on an achievement so unusual that probability argues rather that the Greeks were merely eccentric.

Licht seems right insofar as he pinpoints sexual shame as the crucial area of Greek innovation. But how was the dispelling of sexual shame specifically a *political* good, as Thucydides seems to imply? One way in which the Greek concept of shame spoke directly to politics was through an equivocation on the term *aidos*: “shame” but also “awe” or “respect,” a term descriptive of the citizen’s stance toward authority, including political authority.

The classical locus in which a Greek tells other Greeks about the political relevance of sexual shame among the barbarians, and how shame brought about the downfall of a 500-year-old dynasty, is the story of Gyges in Herodotus. Candaules, king of the Lydians, felt “eros for his own wife,” a misfortune from the point of view of at least one strand of respectable Greek opinion.³⁰ Fate saw to it that the besotted king wished to share his joy with his bodyguard, Gyges. Worried that Gyges might not believe him when he praised his queen’s figure, the king resolved that Gyges must view her naked.³¹ The bodyguard protested that “by slipping off her clothes, a woman slips off her respect [*aidos* or ‘shame’] along with them.” Furthermore, a time-honored *nomos* says to keep one’s eyes on one’s own things (1.8.4 with 1.11.3). The king would not be put off, however, and he devised how Gyges might see without being seen: stationed inside the bedchamber, behind the open door, Gyges was to have a long leisurely look as the queen slipped off each of her garments one by one. The king dwelt lovingly on this detail. Gyges could then exit through the door without being seen when the queen turned her back to get into bed with the king. Gyges duly beheld his queen and slipped out. In the event, however, the queen spotted him. She felt shame (*aiskhuntheisa*), but kept her counsel. Herodotus, in anticipation of the severity of her revenge, supplies what the Greek reader needs to know about barbarians: “with most barbarians, even for a *man* to be seen naked leads to great

³⁰ *Erasthe tes heotou gunaikos, erastheis de . . .* (1.8.1; see also 1.8.2). Candaules’ obsession with bringing his private happiness into the public sphere is of course atypical both of Greeks and most of the barbarian peoples in Herodotus, although it does characterize tyrants.

³¹ The word for “view,” *theomai*, often connotes gazing in wonder (LSJ, s. v., I.1). The English word “behold” in its connotation of “taking hold of with the eyes” accidentally captures something of the moral of Herodotus’ story. The alternative sense of “being a spectator” to her nakedness, as though attending the theater or an athletic contest, agrees with a second moral problematic of the story: the immorality of the desire to see without being seen.

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shame”³² (*aiskhune*). The next day, the queen summoned Gyges into the presence of her loyal retainers and offered Gyges two alternatives: either kill the king and seize both her and the kingdom (both *basileia* and *basileie* 1.11.1–2), or else be killed himself for seeing what he ought not and for not acting in accordance with the *nomos*. Gyges, after protesting, chose to go on living, and listened to the queen’s plan: “your attack will come from the same place where he received me naked” (*sc.* the conjugal bedroom, 1.11.5). That night the queen hid Gyges behind the same door, and he slipped out and killed the sleeping king. So he seized both the woman and the kingdom (1.12.1–2).

The barbaric disproportion between punishment and crime³³ (a life for a view) brings Herodotus’ reader closer to an appreciation of the immense power of sexual shame. Different words, however, denote two different sides of the emotion: *aidos* and *aiskhune*. Neither term has any necessary connotation of weakness or undesirability in Greek; both can be virtues.³⁴ People with a sense of shame avoid bad behavior. Greeks hate shamelessness as much as barbarians do: they disagree over whether nakedness falls into the important category of the shameful (they certainly disagree that nakedness is worth killing over). The difference in meaning between the two words is partly clarified by the order in which they occur in the story: at the loss of *aidos*, the queen feels *aiskhune*. Kurt Riezler regularized the Greek terms in a way that makes psychological sense and that sheds light on Herodotus’ story. *Aidos* springs from the sense of awe.³⁵ For a person to be *aidoios* means that he has a claim to respect or reverence: a god, a ruler, a parent, a spouse, a maiden, a suppliant, a guest.³⁶ Riezler calls the sources of awe *veneranda*,

³² For Greek males, who were unashamed of their nakedness (but whose women remained covered and sometimes even unseen), this sentence has the force of an *a fortiori* argument: if barbarian *men* were ashamed to be seen naked, barbarian women must have felt all the more shame, in proportion as Greek women felt more shame than Greek men.

³³ For the motif of the vengeful queen, see S. Flory, *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus*, pp. 23–48.

³⁴ For example, Thucydides 2.43.1; *Clouds* 991–5. To see how this can be so, even though *feeling* ashamed is an undesirable state, it is enough to note that both words can also be translated as “a sense of shame” (cf. the English question, “Have you no shame?”). The virtue of shame can be heroic and therefore tragic: cf. *Iliad* 6.441–3 with 22.104–7 and context.

³⁵ K. Riezler, “The Social Psychology of Shame,” p. 463. In Greek, the objective retribution connected with disrespect was called *nemesis*. For some pairings of *aidos* with *nemesis*, see *Iliad* 6.351, 11.649, 13.120, cf. 14.80 and 14.336; also Hesiod, *Works and Days* 200.

³⁶ Respectively: *Iliad* 18.394, cf. 24.90–1; *ibid.* 4.402, cf. 10.233–40; Herodotus 1.5.2, cf. *Iliad* 22.82–3; *ibid.* 21.460; *ibid.* 2.514; *Iliad* 21.74–5, cf. *Odyssey* 7.165; *ibid.* 19.316. It does not smooth over differences too much to say that violating the prerogatives of any of this class would mean taking on an “awesome” responsibility; it would be an “awful” deed.

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the idealized images of exemplars that we esteem or revere. *Aiskbune*, on the other hand, springs from a sense of dishonor. Sources of dishonor are the *pudenda*, negative images that we abhor, that is, the opposites of *veneranda*.³⁷ Each *pudendum* implies a *venerandum* in the following way: "If a boy is ashamed of wearing childish pants, he looks up to another kind of pants he or his group holds in higher esteem."³⁸ Esteem or *aidos* is thus what the boy feels for adult trousers; the boy's anxiety that his parents will keep him in childish trousers forever is the *pudendum* for the boy, the thing conducive to *aiskbune*. In the *Odyssey*, when Hephaestus traps his wife Aphrodite in an adulterous embrace with Ares, the gods come to view the lovers, but the goddesses stay home out of *aidos*, not *aiskbune*.³⁹ Had they violated their sense of *aidos*, that is, the ideal of right conduct that they strive to achieve, in order to go view the sight, they would have felt *aiskbune* at themselves.⁴⁰

Herodotus' queen is *aidoia*, a mighty person or one-who-must-be-revered: she has a lot of *aidos* to lose. Gyges anticipates that the queen will lose his respect along with her clothes, and the queen, too, seems to assume that she must take drastic action to regain the respect that a subject properly owes to his queen. A rent in the fabric of her mystery has opened and must be sewn up. She is un-queened in the eyes of any man who has seen her illegitimately. The *nomos* is that everyone looks at nothing but his own (1.8.4). In wanting to be seized by Gyges, however, the queen seems to accept a far stricter corollary, which does not necessarily follow from the stated *nomos*, viz., "whatever someone looks at becomes his own." By seeing her, Gyges has made her his own. He now must take up the responsibilities incumbent on possessing her. Her assumption seems to be that seeing is possessing,⁴¹ a proposition with important implications because no tourist, like Herodotus, could ever view and move on. The stakes increase enormously inside a royal household, since he who possesses the queen possesses the throne unless she is to be queen no longer. To re-queen herself, she can leave only one man alive who has seen her, and that man must be king; whether he was king before or becomes king on seeing her

³⁷ Riezler, *Man: Mutable and Immutable*, p. 229.

³⁸ Riezler, "The Social Psychology of Shame," p. 464.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 463 (*Odyssey* 8.324).

⁴⁰ Likewise the invasiveness of others, and not merely one's own falling short of ideal behavior, can violate one's *aidos*. When the aura of *aidos* surrounding Herodotus' queen was transgressed, she felt *aiskbune*, although not, presumably, at her own behavior.

⁴¹ K. Kretler, "Bridges Inside: A Reading of Xerxes' Dream," p. 10.

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is irrelevant from the queenly perspective.⁴² The justice meted out is thus not unbalanced relative to the *nomos* of shame that governs the Lydians, because the respect, *aidos*, that belongs to the queen is her life *qua* queen. The king took her queenship away, and she will recoup hers only by taking away his kingship. Measure for measure, the instrument (Gyges) and the venue (the bedroom door) is the same for both deeds.

Enough parallels in modern cultures exist to bear out at least one assumption of the queen: her authority in society would be compromised by the tendency of males to treat her naked body as a sexual object. By closing off the sexual possibility, clothing make respect possible. *Hijab*, the female practice of head covering and sometimes veiling in the Middle East and South Asia is commonly misunderstood in the West as solely an instrument of oppression. In the opinion of many women who cover themselves, however, the intention of *hijab* is to enable (or force) men to interact with women on a businesslike level. When an Iranian university student gives voice to this opinion from beneath her covering, it becomes more difficult to refute; these women have, in some cases, reinterpreted *hijab* as an indigenous, non-Western feminism.⁴³ Theirs may be a false consciousness, but a better procedure is to take seriously what the locals say, at least initially. On a vastly different level, office apparel for Western women is also typically high necked or otherwise more severe than leisure wear, and for the same purpose of commanding respect.

Politically, however, the respect won through covering up is a paradox, because such respect is contingent on “shame.” Only by being ashamed of herself can a woman keep the respect of men. Licht might ask what is so wrong with the body that people have to be ashamed of it. Sexual shame appears inevitably to assign a negative valuation to the body and the sex organs. They require concealment because they are bad. Traditionally, it has been

⁴² How and Wells ad loc. dutifully consider the ancient Hebrews to be barbarians, citing 2 Samuels 16:21–2, in which the same perspective as the queen’s governs the actions of King David’s son Absalom, the usurper, when he takes possession of the kingdom by publicly sleeping with his father’s wives.

⁴³ See, for example, the sentiments recorded by F. Adelhah, *La révolution sous le voile*, pp. 202–4; contrast A. H. Betteridge, “To Veil or Not to Veil,” who argues that Iranian women embraced the veil not so much out of concern for themselves *qua* women (pp. 114–15) as to make a political statement *qua* Iranians (p. 109). Hopes that the veil would facilitate equal treatment in the professions have not been fulfilled: H. Omid, *Islam and the Post-Revolutionary State in Iran*, pp. 191–4; H. Moghissi, “Public Life and Women’s Resistance,” p. 253; cf. Betteridge, “To Veil or Not to Veil,” pp. 119, 123–4.

the female body that bore the brunt of this negative valuation. In Riezler's account, however, every *pudendum* implies a *venerandum*. Shame is only the flip side of a high valuation. Going back to the Greek term for genitals, *ta aidōia*, Riezler reasons that if an *aidōios* is a mighty personage, or a person deserving respect, then it must follow (as Licht also said) that the genitals, too, in some sense or in some period, were regarded with awe and reverence.⁴⁴ Tacking against the Latin, Riezler's implicit premise is that *ta aidōia* is a better term for the genitals than *pudenda*. In modernity, he argues, the sexual is a *pudendum* that once had, but has now lost, its *venerandum*.⁴⁵ We remain ashamed of revealing our bodies, but we have forgotten that said shame is based on a high valuation of what remains covered. On this reading, the positive emotion evoked by mystery and awe, not the negative emotion of embarrassment, is primary. Only the violation of that mystery incurs shame *qua* embarrassment.

Yet this mystique, regardless of how highly valued, along with the *potential* for embarrassment connected with it, remains unequally distributed among men, women, and other objects of (male) erotic attention. And the modest behavior required for preserving the mystery can interfere with the erotic object's freedom of movement. Herodotus' phraseology of the Lydian *nomos*, "when a woman slips off her clothes, she slips off her esteem," would not be news to the Indian subcontinent, where a woman's veil (*dupatta*) is often called simply her "honor" (*izzat*).⁴⁶ In the limit case, female honor is contingent on being unseen, covered up.⁴⁷ *Mutatis mutandis*,

⁴⁴ Riezler, "The Social Psychology of Shame," p. 463. Contrast Chantraine, s. v. *aidōiai*; *aidōis*: *aidōios* "respectable" with the sudden move to "*parties honteuses*." Compare Frisk's both "instilling bashfulness" and "bashful." An alternative to the (uncertain) etymology of "respect" for *aidōis* would be alpha-privative + *idein*, so that genitals, like gods, would be simply the "unseen," or possibly an "unbearable sight." This would raise the question why they must remain unseen, to which the answer might once again be the respect that they command, but in any case the etymology is not fully supported by Chantraine or Frisk; see s. v. *Hades* = *Haidēs*, *aidōiai*; contrast *aidēlos*.

⁴⁵ Riezler, *Man: Mutable and Immutable*, p. 231.

⁴⁶ In Punjabi cinema, a mother who has been disgraced will often plead with her son to recoup her honor by removing her veil, *dupatta* (also called a *chadar*), and laying it at his feet, with the understanding that the covering can no longer perform its function of protecting her honor, and she will leave it off until she once again has some honor to protect. Less frequently, fathers will so use their (much smaller) hat. See also *Ferozsons' Urdu-English Dictionary*, s. v. *chadar utarna*: "to tear off a woman's veil," but also "to insult or disgrace a woman."

⁴⁷ Compare Pericles' Funeral Oration (Thucydides 2.45.2), in which women's fame means to be spoken of among men as little as possible, whether for good or ill. Fame for women means, in other words, oblivion. For the range of alternative interpretations, see S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, ad loc.

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the same point is also relevant to boys and youths as objects of erotic attention in ancient Greece: their reputations were likewise contingent on their modesty. A boy did not go around with perpetual red cheeks, but he did possess an acute sensibility to shame, the readiness to “blaze up red” at the mere thought of a compromising situation.⁴⁸ The avoidance of eye contact and of loud talk, as well as maintaining a self-effacing or shy demeanor, were the requirements for Greek boys just as they are for some South Asian women who might wish to preserve their traditional allotment of respect.⁴⁹ Greek boys at least grew *into* greater freedom, but sexual modesty seems to strike directly at women’s equality in Hindu and Muslim villages as young brides newly arrived in the joint family households of their husbands will often assume the veil and a retiring demeanor toward all senior males in the family and perhaps even toward their mothers-in-law and the wives of their husbands’ brothers. Covering is, in part, a way of subjecting oneself to their authority. After putting in her time in this subordinate position (and sometimes after producing a child), the young wife will emerge to some extent.⁵⁰ The respect that she earns is thus paradoxical since it is dependent on respecting others; women win honor by honoring men and honoring their elders. Respect is available to women who fit into the family system. Thus the most polemical reading of traditional modesty would say that men respect modest women only because modest women already respect *men* more.

A further meaning of the word *aidos* qualifies this polemical reading: *aidos* can mean self-respect or self-esteem. When Odysseus returns to Ithaca disguised as a beggar, he is urged several times not to have too much *aidos*. A beggar who is too proud to become a pest to others, and who therefore stands aloof, will go hungry.⁵¹ This meaning of *aidos* brings together the respect paid to others and the respect others pay back. Self-esteem can entail using one’s own excruciatingly correct behavior to command respect from others. Correct behavior will in general mean respect *for* others, but the motive of paying one’s respects is here not strictly altruistic. People too

⁴⁸ *Clouds* 992. See the discussion in Section 5.4.

⁴⁹ D. G. Mandelbaum, *Women’s Seclusion and Men’s Honor*, pp. 4–5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵¹ *Odyssey* 17.345–7, 575–8, the latter an important example of Chantraine’s relatively rare meaning, “timid”: one can stand “abashed” at the thought of stooping so low, i.e., be abashed before one’s own self-image as easily as one can be abashed before a superior. Odysseus does not hang back out of timidity toward the suitors, but out of *self-respect*.

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proud to beg want recognition more than money; their personal dignity is a part of their modesty. This sense of *aidos* as self-esteem bears on the economies of puerile honor in Greece and feminine honor in South Asia. *Aidos* in these cases is still traceable to sexuality, though at one or two removes. A healthy respect for their own potential to provoke sexual attention is at the heart of the honor economy. Young wives veil themselves not because they are afraid of incest with senior males in the family, but rather because the power of their charms can damage the family honor if their sexuality leaves the household, whether by means of adultery or the reputation for adultery. Veiling before senior men, whose job it is to police the family honor, is a young wife's way of demonstrating that she recognizes and can properly manage this power of hers. In the limit case, even within her own marriage, the young wife's charms are thought to threaten to beguile her husband so much that she could detach him from the extended family unit, the breaking up of the brothers in a joint family system being seen as a calamity.⁵² The paradox that, traditionally, women's respect is earned by paying respect to males is thus true but not exhaustive. The South Asian woman's respect is earned not so much by respecting males as by respecting male sexual response and her own ability to set off a storm of desire around her. This respect may coexist with a healthy disrespect for male character, including but not limited to the male's ability to control his urges.⁵³ Analogous care was taken by the Better Argument's schoolboys of old, who, like Catholic schoolgirls, sat modestly rather than in a revealing posture, and who had the foresight to sweep the sand when they stood up so as not to leave behind an imprint for potential lovers to see (*Clouds* 973–6).

The traditional Greek boy is bashful and retiring, then, and the traditional South Asian woman covers herself, not because they feel worthless but because they recognize their erotic worth. This self-esteem has important ramifications for the attention that they do eventually attract. The South Asian suitor hopes that his bride covers up not merely for form's sake but in order to reserve her love especially for him. The hope of voluntarism then informs even arranged marriages: the ideal bride is able to discriminate among suitors and come to an agreement with her parents about which offer is most suitable; she then confers herself as a gift on the most worthy.

⁵² Mandelbaum, *Women's Seclusion and Men's Honor*, pp. 11–17, 80–2.

⁵³ Personal communication to the author.

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The groom's need for recognition is thus gratified.⁵⁴ Analogously, the Better Argument finds modern boys unattractive because they flaunt what they have to offer, as though it were of little worth. If the boys do not think highly of themselves, how can he be expected to think highly of them? The traditionalist case for "shame," then, asserts that shameless people have no self-respect, that is, they do not hold themselves dear. Their easy manners then induce others to treat them cheaply as well.

Respect for the power of sexuality emerges as the central feature of traditional modesty. But who stands more in awe of *ta aidolia*, barbarians or Greeks, if the barbarians cover them up, but the Greeks lay them bare? The case for barbarism is perhaps best laid out in that nonclassical locus in which one species of barbarian tells itself about the origin of sexual shame: the beginning of the Hebrew Bible. Originally, the man and the woman are both naked and are not ashamed.⁵⁵ The serpent tells the woman that by eating the forbidden fruit, her eyes will be opened, and she will be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:5). In the event, the narrator confirms that the humans' eyes were indeed opened when they ate the fruit: what they had not known before, and what they do know now, is that they are naked (3:7). This nakedness seems to include, but to go beyond, genital nakedness. In verse 7, they sew fig leaves into loincloths to cover themselves. In verses 8–10, however, at the sound of the Lord walking in the garden, they hide themselves from the Lord's presence, alleging that they are naked, despite the fact that they are now wearing loincloths. There seem to be no clothes that can cover the kind of nakedness they feel before God. The serpent was correct, however, in his assertion that they would become like God, knowing good and evil; God Himself confirms it (3:22). It seems that they are like God in one regard only (knowing good and evil), whereas the nakedness they feel before God proves that they are radically unequal to God in every other regard.⁵⁶

The text supports many interpretations, but it seems clear that the humans' disobedience is motivated, at least in part, by the wish to become

⁵⁴ See also J. Redfield, "Homo Domesticus," p. 158. For the cinematic portrayal of a South Asian male who wishes to liberate his wife in order (in part) to feel that he merits her love, see Satyajit Ray's *The Home and the World*, a film version of the novel by Rabindranath Tagore.

⁵⁵ Genesis 2:25.

⁵⁶ Immortality is one aspect of godlikeness that God prevents them from acquiring. He expels them from the garden in order to keep them from eating from the Tree of Life and thereby living forever (Genesis 3:22).

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godlike (e.g., Genesis 3:5). The lone regard in which the humans achieve godlikeness – their newfound knowledge (3:22) – then reveals to them how far they are from full godhead. What prevents them from fully becoming like God is apparently those parts that they immediately attempt to hide by means of loincloths, once their eyes are opened to the fact. The attempt then proves futile when they come into God's presence. Why genitals disqualify humans from godhead is important to determine. One possibility is that the man and the woman realize that God is neither male nor female, hence the genitals, which type the man and woman as one or the other, also effectively type them each as nondivine.⁵⁷ Another possibility is that the difficulty of controlling the genitals, the way genitals seem to have a will of their own, changing and signaling desire whether we wish them to or not, means that humans are far from omnipotent or do not wield godlike powers, because humans cannot even control their own bodies.⁵⁸ When the scales fall from their eyes, the man and the woman realize this brute fact about themselves. A real god would always be in control.⁵⁹

The traditionalist reading of shame as self-esteem, in which Greek boys and South Asian women practiced modesty because they knew their own worth, would have to be further qualified by this new, barbarian account of the overwhelming power of sex. The Genesis account seems to bear out Riezler's etymological interpretation of *ta aidōia* as mighty potentates acting on their own cognizance, before whom we stand humbly by. In the face of these forces, human volition and control pale. Women must be kept inside and boys must watch their step because they will inevitably give in to the importunities of suitors in spite of themselves. No one is capable of controlling the forces that sexuality may unleash.⁶⁰ Sexual modesty becomes, then, a prudent admission of weakness.

We find ourselves back at Hans Licht's original assertion that the Greeks, at a certain point in history, became unashamed of the sex organs. The question is, did the Greeks nevertheless retain their awe of and respect for *ta aidōia*? The barbarians by covering up at least seem to confess their own weakness in the face of the *aidōia*. In other religious contexts, hiddenness and

⁵⁷ S. Benardete, *On Plato's Symposium*, p. 55.

⁵⁸ Compare St. Augustine, *City of God* 14.19.

⁵⁹ This was the contradiction in Greek religion that motivated the "heroic humanism" discussed in Section 2.3.

⁶⁰ For the sentiment in South Asia that sex is outside of human control, see Mandelbaum, *Women's Seclusion and Men's Honor*, p. 10.

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mystery imply more respect than openness does. From Riezler's perspective, *prudendum* and *venerandum* always go hand in hand: if the Greeks recognized nothing *prudendum* about nudity, then it would be impossible for them to consider the parts uncovered to be *veneranda*. It seems as though at some point the Greeks decided that the genitals were not so awesome after all. The case for barbarism is best made by considering that the Greeks entertained a fundamental disrespect for this powerful part of (human) nature.

Herodotus' story implies, however, that *aidos* can be highly conventional. Gyges and the queen are motivated by assumptions of *nomos*;⁶¹ Herodotus must explain this motivation to his Greek audience, who operate under different assumptions. If mystery and awe are connected to monarchy and murder, then the Lydian *nomos* may be a *nomos* that the Greeks can congratulate themselves on being without. It is precisely this self-congratulation that, in part, animates Thucydides 1.6. The wealthy Ionians and Athenians achieve a mystification of their power over the poor through pomp and the aloofness of splendor, a procedure that sows the seeds of its own political destabilization because of the envy and skepticism that it naturally breeds. The piracy stage was superior, if only in its honesty or lack of disguise. The emperor is suspected of being naked underneath his clothes.

From the Greek perspective, barbarians inflate the power of sexuality out of all proportion. Birds do it, bees do it: a more natural standard might reveal nothing problematic about the sex organs. Greeks say that barbarians have no distinct concept of nature. Gyges himself may conflate *nomos* with nature when he says that the king's suggestion is unhealthy, but also says, almost in the same breath, that it is lawless.⁶² It could be both, of course, but one suspects that Law may be governing what Gyges thinks is healthy or natural.⁶³ Take away the barbarian *nomos* that overvalues sexuality, and the dishonor that causes the murder and political foolishness departs along with it.

On the other hand, the overvaluation of *eros* and *eros*' overvaluation of the erotic object are crucial to the chivalric model of political *eros*. Immodesty in boys will subvert the lover's respect for them. No lover

⁶¹ 1.8.4, 1.11.3.

⁶² *Ouk hygeia* and *anomon* (1.8.3–4); cf. the queen's *ou nomizomena* (1.11.3).

⁶³ In the book of Leviticus, uncovering someone's nakedness is so wicked that it stands in as a synecdoche for incest and other illicit intercourse, as if to say, once you have looked, there is no further evil you can do (cf. Leviticus 18:6–20 with Genesis 9:20–7). The assumption is very similar to that of Gyges' queen: seeing is possessing, sexually speaking.

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will perform great deeds for someone he disrespects. To what extent is this “higher” eros based on covering up? The extreme view would be that clothing and modesty render love (as opposed to sexual desire) possible, that they are its necessary conditions. It may seem paradoxical that covering the source of attraction enhances the passion for it. However, in the Freudian theory discussed in Section 5.3, erecting barriers to eros has, in its own right, an erotic motivation: civilizations regulate eros in order to produce love. A heterosexual example of the capacity of moderation to generate sympathy and love might be the *Odyssey* episode of Nausicaa, the daughter who draws a screen of maidenly modesty (the word is *aideto*) over her anticipation of marriage when she asks her father Alcinous if she can go wash clothes, alleging that her brothers need clothes to wear for dancing. Her father sees through her concealment and grants permission, knowing the washing is preparation for her hoped-for wedding day (*Odyssey* 6.57–70). Nausicaa is, unbeknownst to her, on her way to meet a potential husband, Odysseus, washed up naked on the shore, who covers his genitals with a branch because he feels ashamed to be naked in front of girls (6.127–9, 221–2: *aideomai*). The modesty of the two principals goes far beyond this: having provided Odysseus with clothing, Nausicaa contrives that she and he enter the city at different times, wary of the gossip and scandal that could ensue, admitting, “I would condemn another girl who did that sort of thing” (286), that is, a girl who allowed herself merely to be seen in the company of a male stranger. Hans Licht might ask why man and girl cannot simply deal with the embarrassing situation without acting as though they are about to be overwhelmed by sex. Let the people talk: it is their own fault if they have nothing better to gossip about. Worst of all: why cannot father and daughter be frank with one another? Can the mere thought of married life not be broached? Perhaps it could be argued that only the reserve of both parties prevents rape when Nausicaa’s female attendants take fright and abandon her at the sight of Odysseus, or else more cogently that the reserve of the two principals prevents the misfortune of yet another liaison to delay Odysseus’ homecoming, this time permanently. Caution is one reason for modesty. Yet the principal reason for modesty seems to be erotic. Her modesty is what makes Nausicaa a sympathetic and desirable character. There would be no trial for Odysseus, no difficulty leaving Nausicaa behind, if she were not desirable. Modesty gives her the dignity to talk back to Odysseus, to admonish him (e.g., 187–9), and to take charge of the situation. Sure of her own rectitude and control, she can help a stranger, if need be, with

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his. Such modesty is not a weakness but rather like a garment that wraps Nausicaa in beauty. Her need is apparent to anyone with eyes; she admits it to her maidservants (244–5), and inadvertently confesses to Odysseus, when impersonating the townspeople at their gossip, that she prays for a husband (280–1). But by exercising restraint, holding that need in tension, she shows that it is not her master and that she is ready when the right moment comes.⁶⁴ To appropriate a phrase of Leon Kass from a different context, Nausicaa does a dance upon necessity⁶⁵: her modesty is like a stately waltz that she performs on top of sexual need. She does not try to fight with the inevitable; but how one meets the inevitable, whether with dignity or cravenly, with control or abandon, makes a difference. The marriage bed is not dirty for Nausicaa; rather, it is too important to talk about. She does not wish her father to know just how important it is to her, how it occupies her.

Just as Nausicaa's modesty is important for making marriages, so the Greek boy's modesty is important for making the chivalric partnerships on which one view of political eros was based. Barbarians such as Nausicaa (and Odysseus, as Thucydides includes Homeric Greeks among the barbarians or proto-Greeks: 1.5.2) may fail adequately to distinguish nature from *nomos*, and their shame probably does not spring up naturally like the parts that it covers but requires instead the careful cultivation of *nomos*. Nevertheless, the case for barbarism is strengthened by the reflection that *nomos* may aid human nature the way cultivation beautifies nature and, for example, makes possible a garden. Modesty might permit, through its influence, a fuller flourishing of capacities generally admitted to be natural in human beings, such as the capacity to love. In banishing sexual shame and dispelling the mystery that underlies it, the Greeks run the risk of banishing love. To do so would remove the lynchpin of the chivalric model of political eros. How did the Greeks think their eros was capable of achieving this higher meaning, in the absence of this modesty?

6.3. The Greek Ideal

The Greeks clearly believed that the finer feelings were not prevented but rather were facilitated by their nudity. The Greeks cultivated an image of the human being who, once his clothes came off, was immediately overcome

⁶⁴ Compare 8.457–62.

⁶⁵ L. Kass, *The Hungry Soul*, pp. 158–9.

by lust, and was therefore incapable of finer feelings and noble deeds. That image was the barbarian. The progression of Greekness out of barbarism in Thucydides 1.6 culminates in this contrast of images: the naked Greek versus the barbarian who cannot remove his clothing. Lack of control, specifically sexual immoderation, was a feature of barbarians in Greek art and myth. For example, centaurs, the half-equine, half-human hybrids, were sometimes used to represent barbarians.⁶⁶ In the myth of the Lapith wedding, centaurs are invited to the feast but, unable to hold their liquor and to restrain their passions, they attack the bride and attempt to carry her and the other women away. The contrast between their behavior and the behavior expected of Greeks is often strictly drawn in the retellings of the tale. The clearest examples are the metopes on the south side of the Parthenon, where the “civilized calm of the Lapiths” does battle with the “violently anguished Centaurs.”⁶⁷ The Parthenon was constructed, in part, to commemorate the Persian Wars and the victory of Greeks over barbarians.⁶⁸ The centaurs’ sexual lack of control and predisposition toward rape were characteristics they shared with the hubristic satyrs,⁶⁹ the difference being that centaurs had the physical strength and courage to get their way. These other half-animal, half-human beings, the satyrs, shared a related feature with foreigners portrayed in Greek vase painting: both non-Greeks and satyrs were differently equipped from Greeks. Satyrs, especially, were in a perpetual state of priapism, whereas barbarians and foreign slaves, sometimes portrayed side by side with Greek males to point up the contrast, have larger, more obtrusive and shaggier genitals.⁷⁰ The latter were considered by the Greeks to be immodest and, ultimately, unattractive.⁷¹

⁶⁶ See P. duBois, *Centaurs and Amazons*, pp. 54–5.

⁶⁷ Arieti, “Nudity in Greek Athletics,” pp. 435–6. Contrast, for example, the calm face of the Greek youth, caught in a headlock in the first metope, with the wide-open mouth of the centaur caught in a comparable grip in the second metope (plates 11 and 13 in F. Brommer, *The Sculptures of the Parthenon*); a close-up of the centaur may be seen in plate 132 of J. Boardman and D. Finn, *The Parthenon and Its Sculptures*.

⁶⁸ The theme of Greeks battling barbarians is found in the metopes on other sides of the Parthenon as well, e.g., Greeks vs. Orientals (either Amazons or Persians), gods vs. giants, and probably Greeks vs. Trojans.

⁶⁹ P. duBois, *Centaurs and Amazons*, pp. 27–32, with citations. Compare *GH*, pp. 37–8. Both cite *Clouds* 346–50. On satyrs, see *GH*, p. 97.

⁷⁰ *GH*, pp. 127–9; Bonfante, “Nudity as a Costume in Classical Art,” pp. 555–6, especially note 79.

⁷¹ *GH*, pp. 126–8. For literary evidence that supplements the vase evidence, note the *posthe mikra* admired by the Better Argument, exemplar of Greek civilization, as opposed to that *makron*

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These images of non-Greeks and their equipment were literally the *pudenda* (in Riezler's sense of the negative images to be avoided) in the moral and civic purposes of Greek art. The barbarian could not afford to go nude but had to hide himself for fear of tempting himself. He or his fellow barbarians would take advantage of the situation, whereas a Greek, so thought the Greeks, could go nude without licentiousness. In such separations of the *veneranda* from the *pudenda*, the nude Greek heroes and their gods, often battling the centaurs and barbarians, provide the *veneranda*, the images to revere. The sexual moderation implicit in such idealized images is the sexual analogue of the tranquility found on the faces of wrestlers and other agonists depicted in the moment of greatest exertion.⁷² Calm in agony was the Greek ideal: proving by one's carriage and composure that the struggle, no matter how violent, was unable to disturb the stillness of the soul. In another rendition of the Lapith wedding, on the west pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia, Kenneth Clark found the nude Apollo who surveys the struggle to be so detached and calm as to be "pitiless."⁷³ No pathos, not even the pathos of distance, touches the *venerandus* as he rises above the strife. The eros and the fury it inspires are all on the side of the drunken centaurs attacking the bride.

These contrasts between Greek and barbarian were salient enough in Greek thought for Thucydides to rely on his readership to supply them. Just as the barbarians' relations with one another were violent (both cause and effect of their armed mode of life), so their relations were sexually unrestrained, necessitating that they cover themselves. In contrast, the Greeks possessed the inner restraint necessary to enable them to uncover themselves. Theirs was a more exacting "stately dance" upon sexual necessity than barbarian modesty could perform, since barbarians needed the artificial adjunct of clothing. An unjustly neglected suggestion about one of the purposes behind Greek athletic nudity has been made by James Arieti, who argues that because sexual arousal would have been evident to all spectators, the athlete who competed nude was, among other things, conspicuously

psephisma (a surprise for *posthe* or synonym) attributed to the educational product of the degenerate Weaker Argument; *Clouds*, 1014–19.

⁷² Arieti, "Nudity in Greek Athletics," p. 435.

⁷³ "Not a shade of doubt or compunction could soften the arc of cheek or brow; the *Phaedo* is still far away, and the Beatitudes would be totally incomprehensible." (K. Clark, *The Nude*, p. 42). An unobstructed view of the face may be seen in plate 38 of W. Dörpfeld, *Alt-Olympia*.

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demonstrating his total control over his body.⁷⁴ Such a “rationalizing” interpretation of Greek nudity is, I would argue, precisely what we would expect to find in theorists such as Thucydides. Sansone has countered the conspicuous-control interpretation, asking “How much sexual arousal is a man subject to, after all, while throwing the discus?”⁷⁵ But we can assume that then, as now, time spent in the discus event and other events consisted mainly of sitting or squatting, standing around while other athletes made their throw, and watching them perform. Arieti and Sansone both emphasize the Panhellenic competitions, in which the roles of spectator and competitor were strictly differentiated and the seriousness of the competition may have kept the athlete’s mind focused on his business; but the local, more intimate milieu of the gymnasium or palaestra, which was the daily fare of Greek athletics, would have been much more conducive to eros. Sexual arousal was a real possibility in the homoerotic ambience in which athletes were lovingly rendered nude as statues and on vases. The Platonic dialogues set in gymnasia are evidence enough.

Further evidence that Greek athletics were an arena for the ostentation of sexual moderation can be found in the practice of “infibulation,” in which one end of a thong was used to bind up the top of the foreskin and the other end was tied around the waist. Arousal in such a device would have been excruciating. Sansone’s suggestion seems correct that infibulation was a conspicuous way for an athlete to proclaim his sexual abstinence to potential lovers or beloveds while in training.⁷⁶ Only his self-control prevented painful emergencies in which the thong had to be quickly untied. This practice with its implicit ostentation of moderation must be compared

⁷⁴ Arieti, “Nudity in Greek Athletics,” pp. 435–6. Bonfante, “Nudity as a Costume in Classical Art,” p. 86, rightly points out that Arieti’s is a rationalizing interpretation of Greek nudity. As such, one finds hints of it in the artistic representations and discourse of Greek nudity, not in the mere practice of nudity itself. See the discussion of Plato’s theory and his simultaneous ambivalence about the evidence in Section 6.5.

⁷⁵ D. Sansone, *Greek Athletics and the Genesis of Sport*, p. 110. Sansone’s own theory (that athletic nudity was a holdover from primitive hunting practices, p. 112), if true, does not take into account the fact that the Greeks had “forgotten” that reason and had made up new theories about their nudity, theories that were more important to them (and therefore to us). Sansone considers the move from loincloth to total nudity to be an “epiphenomenal” change (p. 115), a judgement that Thucydides and Plato did not agree with.

⁷⁶ Sansone, *Greek Athletics and the Genesis of Sport*, p. 119–22. Athletes have long believed that abstinence enhances athletic performance. Sansone, however, stresses the purely ritual, symbolic value of infibulation over its function of preventing intercourse.

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with the exaggerated coverage of the foreskin generally in the conventions of Greek vase painting,⁷⁷ and it must be contrasted with the evident circumcision of barbarians and the exposure caused by the retracting foreskin of satyrs. Dover quotes Herodotus as disapproving the lack of decency or comeliness of the exposed look in the circumcised Egyptians.⁷⁸ Barbarians had surgically removed their natural covering and were, besides, too quick on the trigger, ever ready and therefore unable to strip. The Greeks, by contrast, could uncover what remained “clothed” by nature and by their mental self-control.⁷⁹

What becomes of eros, when the ideals are mastery over the sexual function and a pitiless attitude toward those without control? One possibility is that in athletics, as in courtship, sexual desire was not simply stymied but was partly rechanneled. That eros in some form was present in Greek athletics seems clear from the mutual influence of athletics and art. When in Plato’s *Charmides* the beautiful young man enters the gymnasium, everyone stares at him “as if he were a statue.”⁸⁰ Beautiful athletes provided

⁷⁷ Sweet, *Sport and Recreation*, pp. 132–3, reports having consulted physicians on the question of whether repeated infibulation would not eventually cause the foreskin to lengthen, so that the bottle shapes in the paintings may not be as exaggerated as they seem (cf. *GH*, p. 127).

⁷⁸ 2.36.3, 2.37.2; *GH*, p. 129, with citations in which such uncovered *pudenda* are ridiculed in comedy. On the importance of preventing the glans from emerging see Sweet, *Sport and Recreation*, pp. 132–3, and Dover, pp. 127–9. Protection of the genitals may be viewed either as an alternative motive or a complement to the motive of displaying abstinence. Sweet, however, proved to his own satisfaction that neither was any protective purpose served by infibulation nor was any need felt for an athletic supporter in naked athletics (*Sport and Recreation*, pp. 130–1).

⁷⁹ Barbarism also had an aspect opposite to wild abandon in the Greek mind: living in subjection (e.g., to tyrants) and fear of nudity were characteristics of womanliness. Agesilaus displayed Persian prisoners naked to his army in order to boost the troops’ morale: seeing the barbarians to be pale on account of never having stripped out of doors and fat from never having done any work on account of always riding in carriages, his men thought the war would be no different from having to fight women (Xenophon, *Agesilaus* 1.28.). Herodotus believed that Athenian women’s fashions had moved in the direction opposite from Thucydides’ report of Greek men’s fashions: not from “Ionic” luxury to “Doric” austerity, but from Doric to Ionic (5.87–88). The historicity of the assertion to one side, it would fit with the perspective we have been reconstructing if the women were seen to have sunk (or been forced) back into barbarism, while the men went forth into Greekness. The *pudenda*, or things to avoid, represented by this second side of barbarism have been well captured by Clark’s distinction between the naked and the nude: “Roots and bulbs, pulled up into the light, give us for a moment a feeling of shame. They are pale, defenseless, unself-supporting. They have the formless character of life that has been both protected and oppressed” (Clark, *The Nude*, p. 308, emphasis added). The same clothes that protect women and barbarians simultaneously pamper them and keep their bodies white and weak.

⁸⁰ 154d 1.

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models for artists to imitate.⁸¹ Whether nudity could have contributed to the sublimation of eros in Greek art and athletics is a very difficult question. Socrates sees inside Charmides' garment, and his reaction does not seem particularly sublimated.⁸² Freud thought that, far from uncovering, it was covering up that served artistic sublimation because, by means of clothing, "interest is turned from the genitals to the form of the body," especially to the face. Lingering at the stage of looking at the body's form, as opposed to moving straight to sexual congress, makes it possible to redirect a portion of the libido into art. The concealment provided by clothing helps us stop at the intermediate stage of excitement. Clothing thus helps to lift us out of the natural, animal reproductive function in order to appreciate, for example, facial beauty.⁸³ With the advent of clothing, the evolution of a concept of formal beauty becomes possible. Clark notes that paleolithic images of women such as the steatopygous "Venus" of Willendorf exaggerate the breasts, belly, and hips until the images are "little more than symbols of fertility."⁸⁴ By contrast, the Cnidian Aphrodite modestly covers herself with her hand, even though in the Syrian cults whence she came, the same goddess is represented as pointing directly toward the sexual source of her power.⁸⁵ Thus, according to Clark, in our aesthetic response to the Cnidian Aphrodite, the sexual instincts are held "in solution," instead of being "dragged into the foreground, where they risk upsetting the unity of responses from which a work of art derives its independent life." The Cnidian effects this sublimation by covering up.⁸⁶

The exposure of the genitals in Greek athletics should by Freudian logic, then, refocus attention back onto them and thus away from the ideal of formal beauty. In Greek art, however, the opposite occurs: the primary male sex characteristic is distorted, if anything, towards modest size, in the

⁸¹ The influence may also have worked the other way. Gardiner thought that Greek art was responsible for the "most distinctive feature" of Greek athletics: its requirement that motions be performed with grace, style, and rhythm (i.e., beauty). Even effectiveness could be sacrificed to beauty, in the ideal if not in practice: physiques exaggerated to specialize in one event, such as the hugely fat wrestler or rail-thin distance runner were not admired, perhaps not even when victorious (Gardiner, *Greek Athletic Sports and Festivals*, pp. 101–2; *Athletics of the Ancient World*, pp. 66–8, 181).

⁸² 155d 4–9.

⁸³ Langner, *The Importance of Wearing Clothes*, p. 42.

⁸⁴ Clark, *The Nude*, p. 71.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8; cf. pp. 348, 370.

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direction opposite from the aggrandizement of the female sex characteristics on the paleolithic figurines. Yet the face does cease to be the primary focus. What happens when civilized Greeks strip is illustrated in the *Charmides*. When everyone is staring at Charmides clothed, Chaerophon says, "Do you think he has a beautiful face? If he goes on to strip, you will think he has no face, such is the perfection of his figure."⁸⁷ The redistribution of interest away from the face, which Freud and Clark spoke of, does indeed occur, but that attention is not fixated on the genitals alone but seems rather to take in the form of the body in its totality.⁸⁸

Why Greek sublimation does not quite fit the Freudian model can only be speculated about. There is, to begin with, a huge difference between Greek civilization and the conjectural prehistory that Freud postulates at the beginning of a long climb out of animality into humanity. The Greeks "returned" to nudity after having achieved all of the clothed stages that Freud believed necessary for the evolution of beauty. Theirs was not a regression to primitivism, but something new: they worked through the slow climb and came out at the other end of the tunnel. Nudity in this context means something far different from primitive nudity, although it may share some attributes.

In any case, the resulting eros is quite different from the vice predicted by the barbarians. Clark attempted the analogy with chivalry to characterize this idealistic eros in Greek athletics to which the Greeks gave their full moral sanction⁸⁹:

Greek athletes competed in somewhat the same poetical and chivalrous spirit as knights, before the eyes of their loves, jostled in the lists: but all that pride and devotion which medieval contestants expressed

⁸⁷ 154d 1–6.

⁸⁸ Some evidence that the Greeks succeeded in sublimating a portion of sexual desire into an appreciation of formal beauty, or at least that their response to nudity was not always narrowly sexual, is apparent from the multifarious, quotidian contexts in which nudity occurs on vases. Beautiful views of nudes reading, playing the lyre, and enjoying recreation all seem to view the human person holistically. In modern analogies, one can imagine a *Playboy* centerfold who coyly uses just such background props to call attention to her nakedness; the discrepancy between her abnormal condition and the everyday contexts in which she would not usually be found nude is emphasized, rather than emphasizing the continuity between nudity and the quotidian. This argument that the Greeks appreciated the whole person of the nude would give the lie, at least partially, to those barbarians who thought that there was no controlling eros once the cat was let out of the bag.

⁸⁹ Clark, *The Nude*, p. 34.

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through the flashing symbolism of heraldry was, in the games of antiquity, concentrated in one object, the naked body. No wonder that it has never again been looked at with such a keen sense of its qualities, its proportion, symmetry, elasticity, and aplomb. . . .

Here Clark is clearly describing an ideal. The sources for it are suspect for their moralizing and idealizing, for example, the *Charmides* and Greek statuary and vase art. It must be stated that we do not know how often the ideal was achieved: there is also evidence in Greek culture for an embrace of sexuality that differs from the Greek ideal of moderation.

Phallic processions, for example, as well as ithyphallic statuary like the herms, represented immoderation in a way completely opposed to the vase paintings contrasting Greek and barbarian. If civic nudity meant moderation to the Greeks, then we would have to explain why moderation was not always upheld. It should be noted that some ithyphallic statues, such as the herms, were apotropaic. That is, their function was to frighten off (literally turn away) trespassers and other evildoers or evil spirits. The statues did not represent normal behavior, but rather a threatening, aggressive posture. Apotropaic statues would have lost their power to instill fear if it were normal behavior to be ithyphallic.

Phallic processions were associated with times of carnival. During prescribed periods, societal norms were temporarily overturned, and the citizens allowed themselves to blow off steam. As with much else in Greek culture, the processions were seen as a renewal of man's relation to nature. Moderation was the norm against which the sexual triumphalism could, during prescribed periods, temporarily get the upper hand. The fact that carnivals such as the Dionysiac festivals derived power and meaning from overturning the norms assumes that the norms had force in everyday life. Otherwise, there would have been no contrast to exploit, nothing to overturn. The small, covered (sometimes infibulated) phallus was the norm, and its normal civic costume was complete nudity. This costume was not an exultant assertion of masculine potency. It was in place of this costume that the phallic processions and some apotropaic statues exuberantly displayed the power of male potency and the inexorability of sexual desire. Civic nudity, by contrast, was an assertion of self-control and, if anything, an assertion of the masculineness of restraint (only males could be so restrained, so the story went). Far from the inexorability of sexual compulsion, it showed that this most powerful force in man had also bowed

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its head to the yoke of man's mind. It remains possible that attempts to live up to this idealistic belief in moderation led directly to the need for outlets such as phallic processions and made men's behavior in the private realm domineering and phallocratic. But it seems important to preserve the distinction between these two uses of sexuality and not to let civic nudity blend into the sexual triumphalism found in other aspects of Greek culture, in the way that Hans Licht allows them to blend and fails to distinguish some of the important purposes of civic nudity.

Other sources, too, argue against a univocal Greek ideal in which civic nudity displays sexual moderation. These sources either celebrate or censure naked athletics for not moderating but, if anything, for stimulating sexual desire. The poet of the Theognidea says "Blessed is the one who, in love (*eron*), trains naked (*gumnazetai*) and, going home,/sleeps (*heudei*) with a beautiful boy the whole day."⁹⁰ The laws discussed in *Against Timarchus* 9–11 imply that gymnasia were sometimes the occasion for sexual eros. The law stipulates that gymnasiarchs must not allow any one of age to wrestle with the young boys in the festival of Hermes; the gymnasiarch who permits it will himself be liable to prosecution under the law against corrupting free boys. Likewise, the parabasis of *Wasps* claims that Aristophanes when flush with pride did not gad about the palaestras making attempts (*sc.* on boys' virtue; 1025), leading to the surmise that such behavior was not uncommon in palaestras.

Historically, too, nudity as a civic institution appears to have come on the scene at the same time as the other institutions related to pederasty: athletics, gymnasia, symposia, and pederasty all accompanied the development of the polis as the distinctive form of social and political life in Greece. It is not clear that moderating eros was the original intention, or even an early intention, behind civic nudity as an institution. The moralizing interpretation of civic nudity found in Thucydides and (as we shall see) in Plato, does not exhaust the features of the institution. At the very least, the moderation theory would have to be supplemented.

Perhaps the most obvious disparity occurs not between the Greek ideal of moderation and the Greek reality of actual practice but within the confines of the Greek ideal alone: the pitiless moderation of the Apollo

⁹⁰ 1335–6 West. Although the verb to sleep need not connote sexual intercourse, it strains credulity to think that eros is not intended in a sexual sense here. It should be noted, however, that many sexual references in the Theognidea, if they are sexual, are muted or disguised.

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on the pediment at Olympia sits uneasily with the stories of the gods' all-too-human lack of control. How could the Greeks learn moderation from such immoderate deities? It is worth noting that crimes (including erotic crimes) such as gods and heroes commit in Homer and Hesiod, were increasingly dissociated from the gods in the classical period and were reinscribed to barbarians, as the gods were gradually made to conform to a different ideal.⁹¹ Gods, too, began to practice moderation.

By making the genitals no longer *pudenda*, the Greeks asserted a mastery over nature that seems too complete to be true. The severe emotional discipline required by public nudity would have meant that even a boy in the midst of the unpredictable sexual responses of adolescence had no loincloth to conceal him.⁹² He would have had to repress his urges, including his mental or fantasy life, for long periods of time while under scrutiny by others. The ridicule from peers or older men that he would face if he let his feelings show would teach him to rein them in at a young age. Mature men would also have to curb the progress of their feelings, for fear of the disruption that could ensue, such as jealousy from rival suitors and the anger of fathers and guardians. In the limit, a mature man would have been required to remain almost unfeeling or insensate toward the other bodies around him. How could the Greeks have been so sure of their control? Is it possible that the Greeks could have made this part of nature so tame? As we shall argue in the next section, the structure of eros itself may have come to the aid of the Greek project.

6.4. A Constraint on Desire

The sexual-moderation interpretation of Greek nudity is partially corroborated by modern theory and practice of nudism. A commonplace among modern nudists is that, contrary to expectations, general nudity has a dampening effect on sexual desire.⁹³ Although this assertion may seem suspect at first glance, a predictable defensive rejoinder against charges of immorality leveled at nudism, the evidence adduced in their literature is compelling. Because public nudity entails not only seeing but also being seen, the Greek

⁹¹ Compare *OCD*³ s. v. "barbarian."

⁹² Compare F. Merrill, *Nudism Comes to America*, p. 262.

⁹³ See Merrill, *Nudity Comes to America*, *passim*. On the same issue, see Langner, *The Importance of Wearing Clothes*, pp. 83–4; Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, p. 109.

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project to tame the *aidoia* may have found aid in the structure of eros itself. The damping effect stems from the fact that a crowd of people is looking at the looker. No matter how beautiful the bodies around one may be, one's leisure to look is disrupted by the fact that one is equally nude and is held equally responsible for the defects of one's physique as well as for patently betraying the evidence of arousal.⁹⁴ The damping effect is particularly strong if the would-be observer is himself unattractive. It is difficult to feel eros when the beautiful people around one are all laughing at one's own unsightly physique.

Additionally, general nudity subverts the usual hierarchy of subject–object. This hierarchy in its extreme form can be seen in modern strip clubs, in which the (predominantly male) audience remains clothed, as well as outside of the spotlight, while women dance and perform striptease. A strict line of demarcation separates observer from observed, and the darkness from which the observer views the brightly lit stage provides him with cover. No one watches his reactions to the show. If the tables were turned and the audience were forced to come forth into light and strip themselves, their feelings toward the proceedings would take on a very different character. A more natural example of this observer–observed hierarchy is the college boy daydreaming in the library: he can stare for half an hour at a girl studying at the next table, but if she happens to look up and meet his gaze, he will look away and pretend to study. Even if his intentions are honorable, he will nevertheless feel shy about revealing his eros. Eros makes him vulnerable to her; she acquires the power to crush his hopes, perhaps with ridicule. If she were to get up and walk over, chances are that fear would overpower his eros, at least initially. In both library and strip club, the observer–observed hierarchy works in favor of eros, whereas subverting or leveling the hierarchy militates against eros. Seeing without being seen is erotic, at least within certain parameters.

It should be noted that the clothed–unclothed, observer–observed hierarchies did obtain at Panhellenic competitions, where nude athletes competed in front of clothed spectators. In other venues, too, there is evidence

⁹⁴ A second aspect of this austere discipline would have been that Greek boys who were very skinny or fat, adolescents who temporarily developed feminine-looking breasts, and those of all ages with permanent physical defects must have suffered acutely from the forced revelation, inevitable comparisons, and resulting ridicule (cf. Merrill, *Nudity Comes to America*, p. 268). A thick skin would have been necessary to repel the arrows, and no one could harbor unfounded hopes of becoming an erotic object. Everyone lived in the harsh light of day.

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of older men remaining clothed to watch younger men and boys exercise naked. The Spartans, however, were known for not allowing anyone the privileged position of mere observer. At *Theaetetus* 169a 7–b 2, the older man Theodorus has been a mere onlooker while young Theaetetus is put through his paces by Socrates. When Socrates attempts to compel the older man to enter the dispute and lay his opinions bare, Theodorus draws analogy between Socrates and the Lacedaemonians, who command everyone to go away or else take off their clothes. Socrates asks rhetorically whether Theodorus would think it fair to go to the palaestras of Lacedaemon and watch others naked, some of them sorry specimens, while he himself did not strip alongside them and reveal his figure in return (162b 1–3). This appeal to equity masks a gentle taunt against Theodorus' manhood: even the men with sorry physiques are brave enough to strip. By analogy, Theodorus is afraid to lay bare his intellectual defects or weaknesses by entering the discussion.⁹⁵

In these ways, shame is pitted against desire. Shame not only at one's unattractive physique but also shame at appearing aroused would operate to damp sexual desire. The more the viewer has to be ashamed of (both in regard to his physique and his fantasy), the quicker discovery will kill the pleasure of viewing. In particular, what militates against desire is acute self-consciousness: "I know that he knows my weakness. And he knows I know." Such embarrassment can be fatal to eros.

A further check on eros (and a theme sounded over and over by both modern nudists and their detractors) is the fact that the majority of bodies are simply not attractive enough to be erotically appealing.⁹⁶ In the cold light of day, the defects stand out too clearly. Imagine being in a group of ugly bodies, some too fat, others thin, many old and wrinkled. Although occasionally nudist colonies receive sexual adventurers looking for kicks, such interlopers are allegedly disappointed by the sights and opportunities presented to them.⁹⁷ No amount of physical training can bring the general run of humanity up to standard.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ By contrast, so intense is that "terrible eros for *gymnasia*" that has clothed itself in the physically unattractive Socrates (169c 1) that said eros breaks through all barriers of shame and willingly reveals itself in all its neediness and vulnerability.

⁹⁶ Merrill *passim*, e.g., pp. 138–9.

⁹⁷ Langner, p. 83.

⁹⁸ In the 1980s, Harvard University instituted coed bathrooms in the dormitories, a move reported in the national press. Home on vacation from various colleges, my friends and I eagerly quizzed

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These unexpected checks on eros have implications for theories of erotic attraction. Clothed bodies are on average more attractive than nude ones. Eros only thinks it wants the naked truth. Seeing what is actually under the clothes spoils the ideal that the lover believed was there. Imagination supplies a better erotic stimulus than seeing the reality does.⁹⁹ It follows that one function of clothing is to beautify the body, not only in the sense of ornamentation, but also by simply covering body parts in order that they may be imagined as more attractive than they are. One can appear more sexually appealing by covering up. The imagination of the lover supplies the beloved with hidden charms that he does not in fact have. Clothing causes curiosity about what is underneath, whereas nudity solves the mystery. One method in Ovid's advice on how to get free of a mistress is to see her at her dressing table in the morning, before she is covered and has her makeup on.¹⁰⁰ The reality is inevitably more disappointing than the image.

The insight that clothes eroticize the body provides another recognition of the huge role that *nomos* plays in eros. Clothing is conventional, a cultural artifact. Clothing puts an artificial barrier in the way of nature. Ostensibly, such barriers are aids to modesty, ways to prevent erotic interest from intensifying. But constricting a volatile gas has the effect of increasing its pressure. Clothes help to sexualize the bodies that they guard and protect. They sexualize body parts precisely by making them off limits. The spice of transgression thus aids the eventual peeling off of the clothes and the eventual crossing of the line drawn by convention. In this view, clothes are wonderful because you can take them off. In one anecdote, an art teacher had his male students paint studies of a female model completely nude. As this produced no perturbation in the students, he assayed an experiment at the next session, dressing the same model in nothing but stockings. The effect on his class was immediate and disruptive.¹⁰¹ Apparently the suggestion

one of our peers from Harvard about what a pleasure it must be every morning, even granting that separate shower stalls placed a maddening obstacle in the way of what you could see. We then noticed his ennuï. "Cover it up!" was, he said, his usual response. He remarked that he frequently felt like offering to help pull other people's shower curtains shut.

⁹⁹ Merrill, pp. 212–13: "It is a well known fact, of course, that only the partly clothed figure of the opposite sex is sexually attractive. When the fact of form stares you in the face much of the glamour wrought by the imagination is removed." Here as in the citations that follow, I quote anonymous respondents to Merrill's surveys rather than Merrill's own words.

¹⁰⁰ *Remedia Amoris* 341–56.

¹⁰¹ Recounted by Langner, p. 41.

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of clothing reminded the students of the *nomos* that was being violated. Not the naked body, but the discrepancy between clothed and unclothed aroused their desire. In this reverse psychology, restricting access increases the scarcity value, and hence the desirability, of the object. Those who scoff at the nudist theory, opining that they would be attracted by nudity no matter what, are probably thinking not of nudity *per se*, but rather of nudity in a clothed context. They are right to the extent that nudists calmly view sights that, in a clothed setting such as an office or boardroom, would drive the viewer frantic with desire. In the context of general nudity, however, such sights lose much of their salaciousness.¹⁰²

This damping effect reveals another side of Greek civic nudity. Dispelling the mystery changes eros. The change is arguably an improvement: Gaugin thought that the Tahitians' "continual state of nakedness ha[d] kept their minds free from the dangerous pre-occupation with the 'mystery'" of sex, a mental freedom that gave "their manners a natural innocence, a perfect purity."¹⁰³ In this view, modesty and prurience are mutually self-supporting, and the one departs in company with the other. The categories of eroticism that nudity does away with are especially those of prurient curiosity: burlesque and pornography.¹⁰⁴ The forbidden fruit of sex, so long as it is forbidden, takes on undue proportions.¹⁰⁵ Modesty, because it makes a mystery of the body, ultimately succeeds in provoking, not squelching,

¹⁰² Merrill, p. 248: "Pruriency and obscenity depend, like modesty, upon the breach of taboos and not upon natural sexual values. It is in the violation of the taboo that they find satisfaction. Where no taboo exists, lubricity is devoid of scope and has no existence. . . . No feminine attire that has been devised is sexually less stimulating than complete unaffected nakedness, *provided no contrast is suggested with the clothed figure*" (emphasis added).

¹⁰³ P. Gaugin, *Noa Noa*, pp. 46–52. Conversely, Langner (p. 41) writes without citation that a commissioner of the South Sea islands reported that the novel custom of wearing clothes had contributed to (rather than removed) the moral decadence of the natives, since it had injected a nasty curiosity.

¹⁰⁴ Langner, p. 88; Merrill, p. 200.

¹⁰⁵ "[E]ven when . . . adults have been trained in conventional modesty and exposed to conventional pornography for years, [t]he nudist believes that through the practice of nudity the normal adult . . . will, in a surprisingly short time, be purged of his accumulated obscenity and develop a healthy sexual attitude. The body will no longer be vile and shameful, and the idea of nakedness will cease to be an erotic stimulant" (Merrill, pp. 6–7). Likewise Gibson, *The English Vice*, p. 24, locates the desire of the sadomasochist almost entirely "in the enforced revelation of what is forbidden, in the exposure of the *parties honteuses* [shameful parts]. . . . The fact that the beater is fully clothed also serves to emphasize the nakedness of the victim." Likewise the presence of spectators, also clothed, emphasizes the nakedness and the abjectness of the victim (pp. 266–70).

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desire. Prudery is thus barbaric in the same way that the mystification of power is barbaric. It makes more out of the power of the hidden than is truly warranted. Modesty pretends to reign in these awesome forces for the common good, but in fact it serves the secret interests, and pleasure, of the prude. Instead of taking sex in his or her stride, the prude swings pendulumwise from one extreme to the other, falling and being redeemed without ever finding the middle ground.¹⁰⁶

It is thus conceivable that the Greek project of civic nudity may have removed artificial stimuli from eros, schooling it to respond only to natural beauty. Although to the clothed barbarians, disrobing can only evoke emotions of shock and desire, Greeks, like modern nudists, may have found that human psychology adapts quickly to nudity and that the unclothed body comes to seem commonplace.¹⁰⁷ To excite a Greek, more would have been required than the mere glimpse of nakedness. Only the best, most beautiful body could have stood out sufficiently from the mass of humanity. This, again, is rational, whereas wishing to preserve the mystery is irrational. Many modern couples choose to disrobe only in a half-lit room, and they make use of varying stages of undress, for example, provocative lingerie, to allow the imagination full play. Shining a bright light on their proceedings would spoil the fun. Yet they implicitly admit that, by so doing, they prefer their illusions over the reality. Greek nudity, in effect, may have forced eros to rationalize itself.¹⁰⁸ In theory, then, public nudity is a way of calling off the

¹⁰⁶ "Prudery, it seems, provides mankind with endless aphrodisiacs; hence, no doubt the reluctance to abandon it" (Langer, p. 73). For the prude *qua* secret hypocrite, vacillating from the extreme of intolerance to the extreme of license, cf. Angelo in *Measure for Measure*.

¹⁰⁷ Compare Langner, p. 83; Merrill, p. 195.

¹⁰⁸ The damping effect of general nudity sheds light on how to interpret an otherwise odd fact about the *agon* in *Clouds*: that the immoralist Weaker Argument teaches the boys to cover themselves, whereas nudity is considered moral. Chastity would have seemed to go together with covering up, but the Greek morality, represented by the Better Argument, reverses this canon: the ancient *paideia* kept the boys *gymnos* even if the snow was thick as meal (965), whereas the Better Argument chides the Weaker for making the boys cover up (987–9):

Today, straightaway you teach them to go bundled up in himations, with the result that I could have choked when they had to dance at the Panathenaea and one of them slighted Tritogeneia [Athena] by holding his shield in front of his haunch.

One boy among those who danced naked, executing maneuvers with shields, enraged the Better Argument, but what did he do wrong? Dover's comment that feebleness led the boy to rest the heavy shield against his body, accidentally depriving the Argument of his favorite view, may be correct. On Dover's reading, luxurious comforts (such as clothing in cold weather) cause general debilitation, which in turn causes the boy to wish to rest the shield against his body (cf. 1045–6), or else the boy possibly even uses the shield for warmth. The boy's weakness

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game: the whole pretense by which ornamentation and outdressing one another pass under color of covering up and propriety, as well as the coquetry and false modesty that the nomos of coverage makes possible. The coyness of clothing awakens curiosity and erotic interest more than lack of clothes would do. In one sense, public nudity lets the genie out of the bottle: it dares the citizens to “go to it.” But by taking away the obstacle and the mystery that the obstacle creates, public nudity robs sexual eros of much of its force.

The contrast between covered societies and civic nudity highlights some of the pathologies from which the Greeks may have freed themselves. Constant exposure desensitizes, and a process of familiarization takes over. The standard of what is required for arousing desire goes up. To be provoking, an object must be defamiliarized. For example, the relative uncoverage of a 1950s bathing suit may not prove sufficient to catch the eye on today’s beach, where it must compete with the thong. It would be equally possible to reduce the interest in the thong by placing it in the context of a nude beach. From nudity, however, there is no place left to go, no further layer to take off. Sexual interest is left with the plain article, or nothing, because there is no defamiliarizing move possible, save covering back up. Conversely, in covered societies, excessive coverage can effectively defamiliarize so many body parts that a heightened reaction results from the slightest provocation. The mere glimpse of an ankle was provoking in the tightly laced days of 1790s New York State. The “provokingly short petticoat” of Katrina

would then be a disgrace to the goddess’ manly strength. An alternative reading would be that the boy coyly covers himself while dancing by. This is the type of boy whom the Better Argument particularly dislikes, the ones who pander themselves with come-hither eyes and voices (979–80). Holding a screen in front of his genitals means that he has something to hide; he is self-conscious of nudity. As with those other methods of self-pandering, a peekaboo device aids the boy in attracting lovers. In the context of general public nudity, his covering up differentiates him from the other boys. This reading makes better sense of the fact that the Weaker Argument *teaches* the boys to cover up. The Argument must have a certain sophistication about what arouses eros: he thereby helps to further the boys down the road to *katapugosune*. This particular boy has something to be ashamed of, and knows it, as he sidles by. The boy would then be slighting the goddess’ virgin chastity. Again, the Better Argument likes his boys chaste and innocent. A boy who coyly covers lacks forthrightness. The Better Argument’s eros wants nothing to do with the “subtle allurements of the draped.” The phrase is Churchill’s, whose classicism can be seen in the following passage (*The River War*, Vol. I, pp. 19–20, emphasis added):

For, as in the Roman State, when there are no more worlds to conquer and no rivals to destroy, nations exchange the desire for power for the love of art, and so by a gradual, yet continual, enervation and decline *turn from the vigorous beauties of the nude to the more subtle allurements of the draped*, and then sink to actual eroticism and ultimate decay.

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Van Tassel in Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* displayed "the prettiest foot and ankle in the country round."¹⁰⁹ Imagine being provoked by an ankle today. A traditional, upper-caste South Asian woman may feel prevented from performing jobs in public that entail exposing, to overly sensitized males, body parts such as hands, feet, and face, which in the absence of strict norms requiring coverage would not be provoking. In the limit, her covered presence alone elicits comment and unwanted attention in the workplace because even the presence of a female is so unusual. A level of sexual sensitization can be achieved that is not strictly necessary. Puritanism in this regard works against itself, as desire seeks the same level of intensity no matter how little it has to work with. Totally to disarm sexuality by means of coverage would entail covering more and more, until ultimately it required sequestration of all potential sexual objects. Women in strict *pardab* may be observed in Asian airports wearing black gloves on their hands so that literally no skin is exposed. Nor would that be sufficient, as the awareness of the sex object's existence would still haunt the imagination. Accordingly, many Afghans under the Taliban painted their windows black if womenfolk were living within, and the women kept their voices down lest their presence be known to passersby. A bolder, more effective approach to the same problem is to go the route of desexualization through undressing: bolder because the society must face down the initial wave of shame, more effective because it stands a greater chance of success, but only if the society can go all the way until it comes out the other end. Halfway measures, such as loincloths or fig leaves, remain more titillating than complete nudity.

The analogy between South Asia and Greece, once again, is impaired by the fact that Greek women did not partake of civic nudity; rather, it was boys and youths, the other object of male eros, who reaped the benefits of civic nudity in terms of greater security and trust. Important parallels can nevertheless be found in the ways that oversensitized eros places restraints on freedom. The threat of male predatory sexuality restricts the possibilities of courtship, and perhaps interferes thereby with the sublimation of eros into love. This is true in South Asia insofar as the perceived danger of the overwhelming power of sex is one of the motives behind arranged marriages. In a broader context, the threat of male predatory sexuality has been wielded to keep women, and to a lesser extent children, out of the

¹⁰⁹ W. Irving, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, pp. 24–5.

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public sphere in many different times and places. The thought that “it is so dangerous out there” has functioned to keep women inside and to keep the sexes from meeting. What is especially noteworthy is that the threat of male predation, in such societies, does not stay at the level of a mere myth to keep women indoors. Rather, a symbiotic relationship springs up in which myth and reality mutually confirm one another: if women normally stay indoors, they look out of place and vulnerable when they do venture outdoors. The sight of them becomes more provoking in proportion as it is unusual. Young males, in a perverse confluence, join sexual desire with moralism in order to enforce the nomos: in Indian English, the term “Eve-teasing” means the directing of sexual gestures and propositions at any woman spotted in a public place. The young wolves’ understand that a woman is fair game because, if she did not want such attention, she obviously would have stayed indoors. One purpose behind the treatment accorded her is to see to it that she stays indoors next time (although that would defeat their other, more directly sexual, purpose). The release of sexual energy thus performs the function of teaching her a lesson.¹¹⁰ Analogous behavior occurs in many or most societies, in predominantly male groups, from construction sites to sailors’ conventions. This confluence of the sexual and the “judicial,” in which the latter aspiration ought to be regulating, if anything, the males’ own eros, is startling. From such data, MacKinnon has concluded that barriers erected to contain eros, such as “allowed/not allowed,” are merely frauds designed to “eroticize the target.”¹¹¹ In the worst case scenario the same males who supply the threat of predation by accosting women from other families use the threat of predation by other males to justify making their own sisters, mother, or wife stay indoors.¹¹² But plenty of undesirable combinations can exist short of this direct cycle.¹¹³

In this self-perpetuating cycle, the nomos itself creates the need for the nomos. As in the analogy with disarmament in Thucydides, the implication

¹¹⁰ Mandelbaum, *Women's Seclusion and Men's Honor*, pp. 82–3.

¹¹¹ MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, pp. 132–3.

¹¹² Mandelbaum, p. 9.

¹¹³ For example, at universities in Pakistan, the conservative student wings of religio-political parties which in principle stand four-square against female emancipation are sometimes appreciated by female students because they “respect” women and create an environment that douses the Eve-teasing. By contrast, some of the liberals in favor of women’s rights are also liberal sexually (they do not hold themselves to standards to which they do not hold others). Thus the order enforced by the conservative parties helps women in the short run but hurts their prospects in the long run. See M. Malik, “The Old and the New.”

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is that clothing and caution generate a heightened sexualization that in turn necessitates clothes-wearing and caution, in a cycle that could be broken, like the arms cycle, only if everyone laid down their clothes at once. The image of the barbarian, as previously noted,¹¹⁴ veered between the muffled, oppressed slave and the out-of-control, priapic scavenger. What the barbarian could not find was the middle ground of moderation. Hence he must cover up: if he got a taste of freedom, he could not deal with it. The repressive regime under which the barbarian lived went hand in hand with his personal lack of control: those who cannot govern themselves need a tyrant to tell them what to do. That tyranny, in turn, prevents them from ever acquiring the ability to govern themselves. Even those nations that had broken the self-perpetuating cycle of arms bearing were still stuck in the self-perpetuating erotic cycle of modesty – sensitization – predation – modesty.

6.5. The Schooling of Eros

If, for the theorists, one function of public nudity was the damping of sexual desire, then the full potential of civic nudity can never be sounded without considering, as Plato did in the *Republic*, a hypothetical civic nudity that includes women and men together. To this point, our cross-cultural comparisons have ignored the vast differences between a civic nudity inclusive of boys and one inclusive of women. Greek civic nudity was predicated on the absence of women from the public spaces where nudity was practiced, including not only palaestras but also the Panhellenic competitions, where women were banned as spectators of male events.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ See footnote 79 of this chapter and accompanying text.

¹¹⁵ The obstacles to coed nudity in Greece were high. Pausanias, in the *Description of Greece*, alleges that there was a law in Elis whereby women caught at or near the Olympic competition on the days they were prohibited were to be thrown off a high mountain cliff (5.6.7). The exception who proved the rule was a certain female coach, daughter of a boxer by one account, who snuck into the competition disguised as a man in order to coach her son. Discovered, she was not put to death (out of respect for her boxer father), but nudity supposedly became the rule for trainers as well as athletes in Olympia thereafter, in order to make sure no such disguise could ever be perpetrated again (5.6.7). Pausanias later reports that a priestess of Demeter did look on at the Olympic games. In this context he alleges that maidens, as opposed to married women, were not barred from spectating, which entailed viewing the naked athletes (6.20.8–9). Additionally, female competitions were held in honor of Hera in which maidens ran races (5.16.2–3). Pausanias also describes a certain deshabelle in the costume of maiden athletes: a tunic ending above the knee, hence baring some thigh, and a bare right shoulder, as far as the breast.

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Only in theory was the final step taken: Plato's *Republic* appropriated the concept of civic nudity and brought the historical given to its never-actualized but logical conclusion. The utopian character of that work raises the inevitable question of whether there are limits to how far a society can go in civic nudity. Is it possible to have male and female nudity together? Perhaps the attraction between the sexes is so naturally powerful that no cultural contrivance can counter it. Yet modern nudist colonies do routinely bring the sexes together, apparently without problems.

In the *Republic*, Plato's Socrates seems to wish to complete this unfinished project (including women in full civic nudity) in order to reveal the essence of the polis by showing it in its fullest, perfected form.¹¹⁶ In the *Republic*, bringing the women out of their private, household occupation of bearing and rearing entails that they receive the same gymnastic education as the men, including stripping and exercising nude together with men (Book 5). In context, civic nudity for women and men together is part of Socrates' larger project, the explicit destruction of the private sphere. No woman is

¹¹⁶ Socrates was not entirely without models for female participation: Sparta, in so many other ways the quintessential polis, had taken further steps in regard to the female question than had Athens or most other poleis. It is illuminating to think about Sparta together with Plato's *Republic*, the one as the actual attempt, the other as the ideal limiting case toward which the first was unconsciously striving. Spartan girls received physical education, and the relative, although probably not full, nudity that obtained in connection with training was one of the scandals that caused the bad reputation of Spartan women in Athenian discourse. Compare Euripides' *Andromache*, in which a character alleges that Spartan women actually leave their houses, take off articles of clothing in the company of young men, and, showing naked thighs, race and wrestle with the young men, and possibly engage in even worse things. From this passage it appears that full nudity did not occur, since the slanderer would have been happy to include full nudity if it could credibly have been included (*Andromache*, 590–601). The Athenian allegation of immorality may have been an unenlightened response to what was actually the greater participation of Spartan women. It is interesting to speculate that the greater freedom of Spartan women was due to Sparta's ability to weaken family ties and privacy, thereby lessening the male possessiveness that tended to exclude women from the public sphere. There is some suggestion in the sources that Spartan men's barracks lifestyle and corresponding neglect of their home life may have freed up the women, in the absence of their men, either to lead dissolute lives (as in the unfriendly accounts of Athenian detractors) or else to imitate the civic dedication of the men on a lesser level (as in the accounts of pro-Spartan defenders). However, theory and history are in fact hopelessly entangled in the case of Sparta since many of our sources on Sparta come through Socratics, whose admiration for certain kinds of politics may have colored their account of actual Spartan institutions. Plato, in the *Laws*, makes compromises between public female nudity and the preservation of some modicum of a private sphere, perhaps similar to the halfway positions at Sparta. The Athenian stranger does indeed institute full nudity for some females, but only for prepubescent girls. From puberty until marriage, i.e., from the time they become erotically desirable, females must wear clothing in the very considerable athletic training they receive. The stranger thus seems implicitly to doubt the full efficacy of nudity's damping effect. (*Laws* Book 7, 804d 8–805b 1; Book 8, 833c 8–d 5).

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to form a household with any man privately (*idiai sunoikein*, 457d 1–2). Just as no private property is to belong to anyone, so no two persons are to “belong” to one another. The sexual communism parallels the economic communism. What Socrates explicitly wishes to remove is the citizen’s ability to say “my own” or “another’s” (*to allotrion*, 462c 5), whereby “one man drag[s] to his own house whatever he can acquire apart from others; another to his own house which is different [drags] a woman and children who are different and who produce private pleasures and pains out of private things” (464c 8–d 6). In place of this, all are to share “one belief about their own” (*to oikeion*; *ibid.*). This belief is the noble lie that all citizens share a common, autochthonous birth out of the earth mother, that is, all are siblings. It will be noticed that an innovation is to take place in the definition of “one’s own,” the term by which, in the *Symposium*, Plato’s Aristophanes defined eros: eros was that which “leads to one’s own” (*eis to oikeion*). The definition of one’s own will change from meaning one’s own private household (as there will be no households) to meaning one’s own polis. As we shall see, the polis is then intended to reap the benefits of the love and devotion that each citizen would ordinarily feel for his or her family. Instead of eros leading each to his or her own private establishment, eros will lead all into the larger community. Rather than the love of one’s own producing individual possessiveness, it will produce a kind of communal possessiveness, a desire to guard the city, that is, a type of patriotism.

What is the role civic nudity plays in Socrates’ innovative patriotism? My own interpretation is that the damping effect of nudity goes together with the project to make the city into one big family, a (relatively) undifferentiated herd.¹¹⁷ Nudity among members of one’s immediate family

¹¹⁷ An inkling of the way nudity functions to weaken or tame the desires that draw women and men toward their own private establishment (and away from the public) can be had from an anecdote about a Soviet nude beach on the Black Sea in 1936. The hapless narrator found himself in a huge crowd of naked men, at close quarters with an even larger crowd of naked women. Female attendants carried on vigorous conversations with naked men lying exposed in front of them, as though no one had any sense of sex differentiation. Nor did the naked women seem to notice the narrator watching them. He relates that

all awareness of sex began to leave me too. We were all a crowd of neuter animals enjoying the sun, the shingle and the sea. It was relaxed, easing, peaceful . . . and yet I found it in some curious way disturbing. It was as if sex had been abolished. . . . I felt that to have a complete sense of personal, individual existence we need to be aware of the opposite sex. . . . This was too impersonal for me; it seemed a negation of one’s individuality.

The narrator felt that he was no longer himself once women were no longer themselves. His identity was partly bound up with sexual differentiation. The anecdote is recounted in Langner, pp. 90–92.

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is unerotic, in part because the sight of family members naked occurs so frequently as to make it *de rigueur*. The same frequency of sights, that is, the same lack of privacy that ordinarily obtains within the confines of a home, will now obtain within the confines of the city. As with the citizens' acceptance of the myth of common birth (literally "homogeneity"), so with their lack of privacy, citizens will be like siblings. Their brief couplings, then, would be like incest between brother and sister. Not only would the lottery or eugenics program sometimes match up two citizens who actually were consanguine, hence leading to incest biologically defined, but the far more politically relevant incest would occur when matches were made between citizens who felt toward one another (because they had grown up together feeling) as brother and sister feel, albeit even if they were adoptive siblings. Their incest would be sociologically defined.

In one way, it is odd that such adoptive siblings should be called on to mate sexually at all: if *philia* is the aim, brothers and sisters already have it. Why assimilate the citizens-as-siblings model to the eros-conducive-to-*philia* model? The answer seems to be that (as Socrates avers), instead of sexual desire being utterly eradicated, an inborn compulsion will lead the men and women to commingle, not despite the fact but because of the fact that they are all mixed together in gymnasias and elsewhere. Glaucon interprets this compulsion as erotic (*Republic* 458d 1–7). Sexual desire, it seems, is only moderated by general nudity, not eradicated. Some outlet must be found for desire. But Socrates makes this leftover desire into a means of conducing to greater *philia*, along the lines of how actual poleis used homosexuality.

Socrates seems to seize on the homosexuality that was a principle of the polis (and that male–male nudity moderated) in order to go it one better: incest (which male–female nudity moderates) achieves the goal that the homosexuality of actual poleis was aiming at. As was argued in Chapter 4, homosexuality helped to aid the bonding of citizen males into the men's club or garrison state that constituted the voting body or polis proper. The city of males, as an armed camp, leaves out the women and children from whom alone the stock of citizen males could be replenished. Private families, albeit weakened ones, remain in all actual poleis. The city thus falls short of unifying itself into one great household. The true way of getting rid of the private household (clearing the way for the greater household)

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is through incest: anyone can in principle be matched with anyone. No family structure remains to differentiate citizens at all. An individual can ordinarily have only one father. Family relations are exclusive.¹¹⁸ But when homosexual relations are substituted for family relations, every older man can in principle be the erastes of every younger man, just as every younger man can in principle be the eromenos of every older man. Individual tastes and preference, in the actual poleis, made this distinction a difference of degree rather than kind, but erastes–eromenos relations were far more interchangeable than family relations. Thus, just as homosexuality partially pruned men away from the family, giving them new roles more useful for the city, so incest finishes the job, prying men, women, and children away from the family and giving each one a single role: that of citizen.

The most striking aspect of the *Republic's* project is the impression of animal or bovine complacency that arises from Book 5. The Guardians are repeatedly referred to as dogs and wolves, and they are compared to horses and birds in herds and flocks (e.g., 459a 3, b 4–6, 451c 9, d 3–9). Mothers will be prevented from recognizing their daughters and sons when they come to nurse them in the “pen” (460 c 1–d 2). Despite an amount of cultural dress-up (festivals, sacrifices, hymns, and “marriages”), the sexual commingling of the Guardians will remain brief, impermanent couplings, in which they move serially through many partners, allowed to lay down roots with no one partner. The affairs are engineered to mean nothing spiritually to the principals; no lasting love will be possible, for that would begin recreating the private sphere all over again.

As in the masturbational programs of the Cynics and Epicureans,¹¹⁹ Socrates must forestall the onset of true erotic love between persons,

¹¹⁸ And imply many roles: “the same man is addressed as son by one, as brother by another, and as cousin by a third” (*Politics*, 2.3.7, 1262a 9–10).

¹¹⁹ As Diogenes the Cynic reportedly said, “Would that one could satisfy the stomach merely by rubbing it!” (Chapter 5, note 11). His sentiment indicates how reducing eros to mere sex engenders a strange form of the virtue of moderation. Diogenes is not ashamed of sex; he and his fellow Cynics copulate and masturbate in the public square, like dogs. One would think that such shamelessness would lead to licentiousness. Paradoxically, however, the demystification of sex makes Diogenes so moderate that he no longer truly desires sex. Why all the fuss? A quick masturbation and eros will not bother one for awhile. The Cynics pull eros’ teeth. This reductionism of eros to the animal urge is self-moderating. Because such eros is not very interesting, there is less obsession with desiring the experience of it. Diogenes appears to be the ultimate expression of this tendency in Socratic thought. A little bit of shamelessness leads to vice, but a lot of shamelessness undermines vice and begins to look like virtue.

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reducing eros to the bare sex instinct. What is the exact contribution of nudity to the expulsion of love? The answer seems to be that eros, even more than sexual desire narrowly conceived, requires privacy and shame. Shame manifested in the fear of being laughed at is the specter raised by Socrates, at least initially, not only for the women exercising naked, but also for Socrates and his interlocutors, who must press on where the logic of the argument tells them to go, regardless of how unseemly the conclusions (451a 1–2). The laughs have a standard of beauty and ugliness (or shamefulness, 457b 1–7) that Socrates must contradict if he is to keep them from laughing at, and shaming, his argument and his female Guardians. Accordingly, Socrates asserts that the only real standard of beauty is the good (452d 3–e 3) or the beneficial (457b 6). The eye, he says, may miss what is best; for what is best can be revealed only by speech. If female nudity turns out to be effective for the city, then it will *ipso facto* be beautiful. This move from the beautiful to the good parallels Diotima's own move from the specific to the generic eros. The quasi-utilitarian aesthetics (and morality) asks the interlocutors to examine sex roles and the conventions of clothing from the standpoint of nature (*phusis*, 456c 1–5); in this way it recalls Herodotus' implicit assertion of the unnaturalness of the barbarian *nomos* against nudity.¹²⁰ Only this time, the glaring light of nature is turned on the Greeks themselves. The old Greek *nomoi* turn out to be against nature (*para phusin*), whereas the new *nomos*, which includes women and men naked together, is according to nature (*kata phusin*, 456c 1–5). Shame at nakedness and the aesthetic and moral evaluations that support it are not natural, according to Socrates.

Freud also thought that shame is acquired through upbringing rather than being an innate drive. Shame is culture's way of inhibiting innate drives. Yet this assertion is disputable. Erwin Straus attempted a phenomenological interpretation of shame that sheds light on Socrates' innovation. In the phenomenological account, shame is basic to human, as opposed to animal, existence (cf. "the beast with red cheeks"). Straus saw the public sphere as assigning a role to each person, a role that then becomes essentially fixed, ossified. Underneath it there exists an intimate or immediate sphere, a sphere of becoming. Shame is the protective barrier between the two spheres.¹²¹ As in Riezler's account, a person feels *ashamed* only when the

¹²⁰ See the discussion in Section 6.2.

¹²¹ E. Straus, "Shame as a Historiological Phenomenon," pp. 220–1.

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barrier of shame has been breached. A simple example might be a person who fancied himself in a more glamorous line of work. If someone found out about his aspirations before the daydreamer was ready to go public with his plans, the daydreamer would feel shame because he had not yet completed the necessary preparations to make the change possible (i.e., the change was still in the sphere of “becoming”). Shame thus protects our unrealized hopes and dreams from intrusions.

An assumption of Straus’ account is that eros belongs to the sphere of becoming. Eros seeks to effect a change in being: it makes one of two and produces a third, or else it fills a lack, thereby bringing something into being that was not there before. Eros might even be said to be the force behind becoming, or at least the motive which drives certain important types of becoming¹²²:

[I]mmediate becoming, whether erotic, religious or spiritual – generally seeks protections against the profane and safeguards against the presence of the nonparticipating stranger. The stranger is of necessity an observer. He is, thus, at odds with the shared unity of the group, and his mere presence tends to introduce some objectification into every immediate relationship.

Eros is thus not merely a private feeling but a feeling that seeks to create privacy. When we fall in love, our first impulse is to hide it: no one else would understand. We must spirit the beloved away, get him or her alone, tell about our love without witnesses, and if he or she returns our love, draw a curtain around the two of us, separating us off from the rest of the world. For Straus, this is the curtain of shame. If the beloved does not return our love, then the curtain of shame, half-stitched, falls down in threads. The beloved becomes one of the public onlookers we sought to avoid, dispassionate toward us, perhaps only a little sorry for us – or worse, actively jeering, and we become ashamed. Our eros and our hopes are revealed as half-baked, as eros and hopes always must be. Straus’ “nonparticipating stranger” recalls the *Theaetetus*, the Spartan custom of always demanding that observers either strip too or go away. Their clothed presence *qua* observers intrudes on the immediacy of the group. Freud may therefore have been mistaken: if shame protects becoming, then shame does not restrain the erotic but makes “the

¹²² Ibid.

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erotic possible for the first time.”¹²³ Shame would thus not be the enemy of (at least one type of) eros, but rather its condition.

In Chapter 4, it was argued that shame was one manifestation of the thumos or thumoeidetic. With shame as the protector of eros, we seem to see a benign synergy between eros and thumos. Previously, thumos seemed responsible for erotic aggression. Sexual hubris was a form of eros that specifically desired to *shame* others. In our discussion of clothes, we saw how shame (as modesty, *aidos*) had the effect of sexually eroticizing what was covered by shame. To put these together: aggressive eros wishes to tear the veils of shame (*aidos*) in order to cause others dishonor (*aiskhune*). Romantic eros or eros as falling in love wishes to wrap lover and beloved in a covering of shame (*aidos*) lest they experience dishonor (*aiskhune*). Both forms of eros seem inextricably bound up with thumos. Apparently, the more pride (one form of thumos) an erotic subject has, the more shame (another form of thumos) he or she requires in order to provide cover and protection for his or her honor in order to experience eros at all. A person without pride would have an eros that was shameless. One could also imagine an eros so strong that it overcame pride and shamelessly admitted its neediness. But ordinary eros will probably remain dependent on shame and hence on thumos.¹²⁴

The fact that love disappears in the *Republic*, in part because of civic nudity, while the animal sex instinct remains,¹²⁵ is evidence that Erwin Straus and Socrates are chasing the same scent. The private sphere that Socrates specifically abolishes is Straus' sphere of becoming. Furthermore, it is by the removal of the barrier of shame that Socrates abolishes the private sphere. He removes the condition of the private sphere by removing

¹²³ Ibid., p. 222.

¹²⁴ The dependence of erotic love on shame would, like the need for barriers to sublimate eros discussed in Chapter 5, provide another rationale for laws regulating eros. S. Benardete, in *Plato's Laws: The Discovery of Being*, interprets the Athenian stranger to mean that in eros, “everyone is already corrupt and the uncorrupt an illusion of the pure lover” (p. 246). This seems to miss the purpose of the laws governing eros, which is not to keep everyone from vice but to keep every vice clandestine. If the conditions that permit the lover to form illusions of purity and chastity are removed, then the possibility of love will be removed as well.

¹²⁵ Cf. 458d 1–7. The overvaluation of the beloved, which Freud thought so crucial to love and sublimation, is left by nudity with no material for the imagination to work on. It must be assumed that a number of people would be satisfied with mere sexual contact with unidealized bodies when they could get it. Their eros, which ordinarily would have gone into creating households or householdlike arrangements, would thus have been channeled (“profaned”) into a lower, more animalistic direction.

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the shame felt between women and men at appearing naked in front of one another. Eros in the sense of love of one's own, or the desire to take the beloved away and make a household with him or her exclusively, seems to depart in company with the private sphere.

However, this is not the whole story. The *Republic* clearly intends for eros to transform itself into a different, higher type that seeks abstract objects. It has not often been noted that the *Republic* duplicates the major topics of Diotima's *Symposium* speech starting at 474c, offering a kind of *Symposium* in miniature. In the *Symposium*, Diotima recommends promiscuity for the young Socrates as a way of turning him off (not on to) bodily beauty. If Socrates were to fall in love with one person and wish to remain permanently with that one, his eros would never be permitted to climb beyond the household eros. Instead of seeking permanency, he is to become an eroticist, beginning while still a young man to go to beautiful bodies. First he must love the body of one person, but then he must recognize that the beauty in any one body is akin to the beauty in another. Realizing that it is very foolish not to believe that the beauty in all bodies is one and the same, he must establish himself as a lover of *all* beautiful bodies (210a 4–b 6). Diotima emphasizes that the young eroticist will relax his intense desire for the initial body, believing it a small thing, and that he will achieve a contempt for that body, a disdain that will find an analogue later in his contempt for all bodies (210c 5, 210d 1–2). Promiscuity is initially attractive but quickly becomes boring. The young Socrates will want more and will look elsewhere, precisely because bodies will no longer satisfy him. His ordinary, sexual eros will in effect be stultified. This inability to find satisfaction in bodies will push him to seek more abstract objects of eros. The process is not entirely “negative,” of course, because the higher pursuits really do contain beauties of their own. But this negative side of the ladder of love, the tedium through saturation, has not often been recognized.

As in the *Symposium*, so in the *Republic*: Socrates at first puts Glaucon in the place of the young Socrates, or young eroticist, calling him an erotic man and a boy lover (474d 2–4). Where Diotima has the young Socrates going from body to body, Socrates has Glaucon loving the body parts of many different boys. Socrates argues that a lover worthy of the name never loves only one part and not another, but desires the whole (474c 6–9). He then applies this principle to the whole *class* of boys: Glaucon as a real lover will praise a snub-nosed boy and call him “charming,” but an aquiline-nosed boy he will say is “regal” and a boy in between these extremes is

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“well proportioned”; similarly, dark-skinned boys are “masculine” and light-skinned boys are “children of the gods.” Even paleness or sallowness becomes “honey-green” as the eroticist uses every rationale in order not to exclude any boy in bloom (474d 1–475a 5). Glaucon in his response does not quite wish to own up to this description of himself, but Socrates is clearly describing behavior familiar to his interlocutors. The normal Athenian conventions of pederasty, including in particular the transience and the civic nudity, have already created in Glaucon and men like him a connoisseurship in which eros, far from being channeled into the love of one person, is diffused among many objects. The beauty that makes one person beautiful is the same as the beauty that makes another person beautiful. Glaucon, by loving all parts of all boys, is partway down the path to detaching himself from the possibility of exclusive love. This detached appreciation is a milder version of the contempt or disdain that the young Socrates eventually must come to feel for all bodily beauty in Diotima’s ladder.

The homeopathic medicine of promiscuity provides the first deflection of eros toward what, eventually, is to become a philotimic, or ultimately philosophic, eros.¹²⁶ Although there is little evidence that Plato conceived, like Freud, of a fixed quantity of libido transposed from lower to higher objects, nevertheless, as we saw in Chapter 5, the *Republic* certainly does envision higher erotes drawing off steam from lower erotes. Now it appears that stymied lower desires likewise leave more opportunity and energy for higher desires. Nudity in the *Republic* is a kind of homeopathic medicine.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ As noted in the discussion in Section 5.1, for Plato the ultimate source of eros is not necessarily the sexual instinct. The “deflection” associated with sublimation would then be a deflection of energies and attention (rather than of a quantity of libido) away from sexual congress, toward more abstract enjoyments. This distinction does not affect the political theories we have been examining because many of the ethical and political implications of the Freudian sublimation theory and the Platonic theory of eros are similar.

¹²⁷ Elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, however, the shamelessness of gymnasia are thought to be conducive to *lack* of erotic control. According to the Athenian stranger in the *Laws*, naked exercises have ruined an ancient natural law about sexual pleasures, viz., that pleasure in the congress of woman and man for generation seems given by nature, whereas the pleasure of males with males is contrary to nature (*Laws* Book 1 636b 1–c 8). The gymnasia of Crete and Sparta, he claims, have become sexual stews. The *Laws* simultaneously contradicts the *Republic* and accords better with common sense than do the *Republic*’s subtleties (“increasing to decrease” or saturation-to-tedium). Removing clothes increases sexual desire; taking the lid off sex increases licentiousness. If we wish to accept the testimony of the *Laws*, there are several ways of explaining the moderation theory of the *Republic* as a rationalization. If gymnasia were in fact responsible for increased sexuality, then a moralizing interpretation in which nudity was

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Nudity gives eros what it wants. Nudity gives eros so much of what it wants that eros becomes surfeited. Although the tendency is to think that, if a little is good, a lot will be better, in practice eros recoils from the saturation. Where eros would want a slow striptease, civic nudity gives it too much too fast. Like rubbing a dog's nose in it, homeopathic medicine deals with the disease by killing it in its own humor.

The *Republic* next adduces an analogy with the connoisseurship of wine lovers (*philoinoi*) and begins an ascent from these physical loves of bodies and wine to the intermediate stage of honor loving (*philotimia*), an ascent that culminates in *philosophia* (475a 5–b 8). This passage is, in outline, the same progression observed in Diotima's *Symposium* speech just before the ladder of love (208c 1–209e 4). "Beauty itself" also makes an appearance at *Republic* 476c 1 and 8 (cf. *Symposium* 211b 1, c 7–8, d 3, e 1). Mingling or copulating with true being and begetting intellect and truth, the only ways of terminating labor pangs, are features of the *Republic* at 490b 5–8, whereas the parallel passages in the *Symposium* are "getting together with" beauty itself and fathering true virtue (212a 2–5). Release from great labor pangs appears at *Symposium* 206e 1.

We will subsequently examine how such philotimic and philosophic eros might have an impact on the polis (Chapter 7). What, in the meantime, does this schooling of eros by the polis reveal about the nature of eros? In civic nudity, the interplay between shame and excitement, on the one hand, and between shamelessness and the damping effect, on the other hand, reveals a

considered an occasion to exercise restraint (an interpretation also evident in vase painting) may have been a way of making a virtue out of necessity. Gymnasia – stews or no – were firm fixtures of Greek culture; reinterpreting them would have been the only avenue for moralists, as abolishing them was not an option. Such idealism, moreover, could in turn have functioned to provide cover for older men to watch younger men and boys in the nude. There is evidence of older men using the convention of nudity in just this way. The Better Argument of *Clouds* certainly does it, and Philocleon in *Wasps* accounts examining naked boys in the *dokimasia* among the privileges of his office. Socrates and his circle in various dialogues frequent palaestras and gymnasia, sometimes with the explicit intention of seeing beautiful youths. It is noteworthy that, in each of these cases, the Spartan rule that everyone must strip equally is breached. The older men do not have to show their own bodies, nor their own reactions to beauty, but can sit back in the comfortable role of mere observers. This hierarchy of older vs. younger undermines the equality that the theorists saw as one of the ideals of civic nudity and subverts the intention behind civic nudity as the theorists understood it. It is as if Socrates in the *Republic* legislated that women should be nude but the men could remain covered. No moderating of eros could be achieved by this means. The two opposite approaches to civic nudity would thus coalesce around the same goal of moderating eros: "increasing to decrease" is chosen in the context of revealing the limits of political possibility in the *Republic*, while ordinary continence is chosen in the context of the more practicable regime of the *Laws*.

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structural feature of eros. Eros thinks it wants, but does not really want, the naked body. What eros really wants is to denude the clothed body, which is not the same thing at all. Civic nudity, by giving eros too much too fast, proves that eros does not want immediate nakedness. Instead, eros wants a process in which nakedness is gradually revealed (or else the chivalrous opportunity to prevent the stripping from happening). The structure of eros is found in the wrapping and unwrapping, the wish to take off layer after layer. Bodily beauty beneath clothing is not the only thing that attracts sexual eros. Rather, beauty must be covered and uncovered to be exciting.

This structure of eros can be seen most clearly by a contrast between erotic and nonerotic appreciations of beauty, for example in the contrast between sexual eros and the ordinary appreciation of art. "We do not hide a beautiful vase in a closet in order to appreciate it; the more we look at it, the more we love it."¹²⁸ Yet the wrapping of gifts and the anticipation involved in their eventual unwrapping does seem to perform an analogous (nonsexual) function for young children, to whom the joy often lies more in the anticipation than in the actual toy produced; such yearning should probably be considered erotic since it shares the same structure with sexual eros, that is, it utilizes the peekaboo strategy.

In the case of striptease, eros does not wish to short circuit the process by immediate, total nudity. Rather, eros wishes to see the next layer removed. At any given moment in the process, the current layer of clothing worn is always perceived as a boundary to be crossed, an unwanted obstacle. Yet a moment before, that same layer that now is unwanted was the short-term goal of eros. That layer was what eros wished to see revealed. The process then repeats itself, with eros being fooled, as it were, at each stage of undress. The process is one of crossing boundary after boundary, rather than of directedness to an end ascertained in advance. It might be objected that, once the last layer of clothing has been revealed, eros actually does want the naked body. Here again, however, it is not at all clear that eros desires the beauty alone of the naked body. What can eros do with that beauty (*Symposium* 204d 8–11)? What eros seems to desire is to cross another boundary, viz., to close the distance between its subject and the beautiful body, that is, to go to the next level, that of bodily congress. Consummation is itself not free of the desire to cross boundaries, bodily penetration being the obvious example. It might be objected, again, that each crossing of

¹²⁸ Merrill, pp. 213–14. Of course, artistic beauty, like bodily beauty, can grow boring.

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a boundary is merely instrumental to the end of consummation, which is thus the aim of eros. Yet, however obvious the aim of consummation may be from a biological point of view, phenomenologically eros seems only on occasion to seek intercourse as its initial, immediate aim; perhaps more often, eros progresses by stages from aim to aim. Plato might argue that, although consummation takes the edge off eros in the short run, eros will eventually grow restless with mere consummation and will desire something more. In this view, the act of consummation itself will come to be perceived as a limitation, something to be transcended. Thus eros is excited by boundaries and the crossing of boundaries. As Freud asserted, eros seeks its own barriers, creating artificial ones where there are no natural ones, in order to sublimate itself.¹²⁹ Does eros also create such barriers, in part, so that it may enjoy crossing them?

This antinomianism of sexual eros is also a feature of the higher erotes: ambition and philosophy. Ambition enjoys breaking boundaries, whereas philosophy enjoys looking behind or beyond boundaries. Aggressive ambition could be said to implicitly acknowledge the moral legitimacy of boundaries in the very act of breaking them, since there would be no spice of transgression to enjoy unless one admitted that one's action was a transgression. Philosophy on the other hand, by looking behind boundaries, implicitly doubts their moral legitimacy. Both passions are excited by the existence of boundaries. The honorably ambitious, met with a boundary, must decide whether to give it their allegiance (and hence, by becoming its defenders, to keep competitors from crossing the boundary) or else to break it themselves. Socrates obviously hopes for the former in his *Guardians*. By contrast, the philosophic become curious in the presence of boundaries.

If the nature of (one kind of) eros is to peel off veils, to cross or see behind the next boundary, then that eros seems to have a built-in upward (or progressive) gradient. This notion of eros as the desire to transcend may not be at variance with the definition of eros as a love of beauty. At each layer at which eros arrives, beauty may still be what eros is seeking. The notion of the gradient in eros might, however, say as much about the structure of beauty as it does about the structure of eros. Each time eros finds beauty, it is disappointed. Beauty would then take on the layered, disappearing aspect of a hall of mirrors, image within image to infinity, no one image offering the resting place. Beauty would always point beyond itself.

¹²⁹ Quoted in Section 5,3.

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In this chapter we have argued for three points: (1) What began as ritual or athletic nudity, some Greeks later came to interpret as a conspicuous demonstration of moderation; (2) the Greek connection between nudity and moderation happens to tally with modern theory and practice of nudism, in which nudity, besides demonstrating moderation, actually contributes to moderation; and (3) for Plato and, to a lesser extent, for Thucydides, civic nudity was a means of manipulating eros, a mechanism by which eros could be harnessed to social and political purposes.

Civic nudity, then, contributed to the schooling of eros in the view of the political theorists. Insofar as Thucydides' rationalized prehistory of the polis and Plato's ideal polis correctly identify tendencies of actual poleis and elaborate them, those actual poleis themselves manipulated eros through civic nudity in order to moderate eros and deflect it toward civic goals. So far we have examined the effects that such politicization may have had on eros. In Chapter 7 we will examine erotic patriotism and imperialism in Thucydides' history to determine what benefits and dangers such politicized eros might, in turn, have produced for the polis.

SEVEN

Patriotism and Imperialism as Eros

This chapter is intended to make three contributions to political theory: (1) to show the limits of political possibility for the “thick” view of civil society or civic republicanism by examining the most committed, idealistic, tightly-bonded (because *erotic*) conception of community and by providing a critique of the benefits, dangers, and difficulties of such a committed politics; (2) to sketch the outlines of a theory that would describe certain “peak” political moments when ordinary factors motivating nations and individuals, such as the desires for profit, security, and hegemony, are intensified and transformed in a manner best understood as erotic; and (3) to add an important, qualitatively different political motivation to the traditional list, a “globalizing” or cosmopolitan desire that seeks, among other things, to consume cultural products as commodities in order to satisfy intellectual curiosity about foreign customs, fashions and ideas.

The methodology of this chapter changes somewhat from that of the earlier chapters. I build a theory based on the ideas of Plato, Thucydides, and Aristophanes, attempting to achieve a synthesis. Plato nowhere explicitly applies his erotic theory to the political and military history of the apex and decline of Athenian imperialism. The erotic theory detected in Thucydides’ historical account of that period (Chapter 3) remains embedded and can be made explicit only by comparison with ideas outside his text. Yet the synthesis, it is argued, is fully in the spirit of both authors, at once a worthy application of the Platonic theory and a legitimate elaboration of the Thucydidean theory. Aristophanic comedy, by providing social criticism of the erotic orientations of Athenian consumers from two different economic classes, sheds light on the motives Thucydides gives for

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the Sicilian expedition: security, profit, and a desire to view foreign “sights and spectacles.” Aristophanes also provides crucial information on diverse contemporary attitudes toward imperialism.

In drawing on the theoretical categories of the *Symposium*, the chapter borrows not only from Socrates’ speech with its categories of *philotimia* (the love of honor) and *theoria* (contemplation), but also from the speech of Plato’s Aristophanes for the crucial category of the love of “one’s own” (*oikeion*). For reasons that will become apparent, I do not adopt the final definition of specific eros in the *Symposium*: that eros seeks a “bringing to birth” of human goods “in beauty.” Instead, I leave the categories of the love of one’s own (simply because it is one’s own) and the higher love of beauty (even if one can never possess it) as opposite poles of a spectrum on which all other loves, such as patriotism, imperialism, and cosmopolitanism, can be assigned a place. Uneasy syntheses of low and high erotic motives such as Pericles’ project of erotically motivated love of country are then assessed to determine how feasible they are. If, for example, all eros reduces to selfish acquisition, then not only Pericles’ project but also the attempts by Sparta and other Greek cities to harness eros for civic friendship and for *homonoia* were ill conceived. Greek hopes for the constructive politicization of eros depend on the *manner* in which eros produces generous behavior.

7.1. The Love of One’s Own: From Family to Community

In the speeches of his history, Thucydides constructs a number of set-piece rhetorical contrasts between Athens and Sparta in order to isolate the motivations that drive the citizens of each city. One such contrast occurs in the Funeral Oration of Pericles. The question of motivation is crucial in the Funeral Oration because the citizens in question gave their lives for Athens; Pericles must make the case that their sacrifice was not in vain but rather was a model for all to follow. What motive can make people give up everything for the city? In exhorting the citizens to emulate the conduct of the ones who died (2.43.4), Pericles erects a scaffolding of the material and psychological advantages of being Athenian. Such advantages will only carry the citizen beyond a utilitarian calculus if they can evoke the further inspiration of eros (2.43.1):

Look not to a mere description of benefits – which one could expound at length to you who know them as well as anyone, telling how many

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good things depend upon defense against enemies – but instead, actively contemplate the power of the city, day by day, and become her lovers [*erastai*].¹ And when you perceive her greatness, take it to heart that daring men, men who knew what was needed, and who, in their actions, had a sense of shame, acquired these things. . . .

The sophistication of Pericles' alternatives, *either* benefits (*ophelia*, literally "profit") or eros, is evident from the fact that neither alternative asks for an unmotivated sacrifice, such as, for example, an appeal to duty would have required. Pericles looks to stimulate generosity out of either exchange or love. Having already enumerated the particular benefits, he summarizes them as power (*dunamis*) and greatness. Although power may seem purely instrumental, it is rather an aesthetic appreciation of power, or grandeur, and not power's utility, that is the basis of the eros. Pericles' exhortation thus combines sophisticated prudence with a high idealism. As we argued in Chapter 3, following Monoson, Pericles' vision of political eros requires more of the citizen, and more of eros, than did the political myth of the founders Harmodius and Aristogeiton when it celebrated the happy coincidence between the private aim of ordinary love between two persons and the public good of antityranny.² By contrast, Pericles says in effect, "Fall in love with the abstract entity of the city and court her as you would a human beloved."

The lower, selfish attachments that Pericles must combat receive mention in another passage of the oration (2.40.2):

[At Athens,] the same people have a care for household affairs [*oikeia*] at the same time as politics, while others, people with permanent jobs, have no small understanding of politics. And the man who refuses to participate in politics? We alone [among the Greeks] do not consider him to be minding his own business [*apragmon*] but rather to be simply useless.

Pericles assumes a distinction between the few and the many before collapsing it. The normal assumption is that wealthy statesmen, who do not have to work for a living ("permanent jobs"), neglect their own (*ta oikeia*), that is, their homes and families, in favor of the public good, as Pericles

¹ The word translated as "her" (*autes*) could refer either to the city (*polis*) or to the power (*dunamis*), both feminine.

² S. Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, pp. 42–3; see the discussions of Harmodius and Aristogeiton in Sections 1.1 and 3.5 and of *erastes* in the Funeral Oration in 3.4.

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himself did when he summarily donated his Attic estate to the public after suspecting that the Spartan king Archidamus would spare it from the devastation to which all other farms were subjected in order to sow discord between Pericles and his people (2.13.1). Analogously, the relatively small, elite group of citizen males at Sparta were expected, at least in the Spartan ideology, to overcome their private attachments to household and family in favor of communal living. Ordinary folk, on the other hand, are assumed to be *apragmones*, too self-centered and intent on private gain to care much about, or sacrifice much for, the common weal. Pericles' characterization of Athenian democracy, in which all have a share in ruling, breaks down this distinction. The many who are not independently wealthy and for whom private gain is therefore a major concern are expected to break out of their selfishness and participate politically. Apparently Pericles' strategy for motivating ordinary citizens to participate fully, even to the point of giving their lives, is to inspire them with eros for the city. With the inspiration of eros, all Athenians will be both political *and* attached to "their own." Without eros, ordinary citizens would be merely attached to their own. Eros in Pericles' speech is thus a higher love than the attachment to one's own; he reserves the term "eros" for the attraction to great and worthy objects.

Yet attachment to one's own is the first feasible account of eros in the *Symposium*, given in Aristophanes' speech: "Eros . . . benefits us most by leading us to our own"³ (*to oikeion*, 193d 2). In Section 4.3, it was argued that Plato's Aristophanes conflates eros with *philia*, failing to distinguish anger from desire, and ending up with an overly selfish view of eros. It is time to examine in more detail Diotima's later attack on this definition of eros, since her attack is the philosophical counterpart of Pericles' political contempt for stick-at-homes⁴ (205e 1–7):

A certain account is told, how lovers are those who seek the half of themselves; but my account says that eros does not desire a half . . . unless that half happens to be good. . . . For people, I think, do not cling to what belongs to them, unless one calls the good "one's own" [*oikeion*] and the bad "the other's" [*allogrion*].

³ To rehearse: "one's own" is cognate with *oikos* and *oikia* and refers initially to the household created by love for spouse, one's other half. When a lover finds his other half he is marvelously struck by friendship, by eros, and by *oikeiotes*, attachment or belonging (195c 1), a feeling like "coming home."

⁴ Compare *Lysis* 222c 3–5.

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Diotima's thesis, that we seek nothing other than the good, may be ultimately correct, but she ignores the political consequences of the fact that we each seek the good according to our lights. Inexperience of the world can make us think that what is near at hand is best: who cares what outlandish people – or city folk – think? We have everything we need right here at home. The psychological process can actually be the opposite of Diotima's redefinition or swapping of terms. In Section 4.3, we saw that Aristophanic desire invents ownership over the beloved: we see the good and selfishly rename it "our own." But the opposite also occurs, viz., that we see only our own, and naïvely name it good. From Diotima's perspective of completed wisdom,⁵ the good is already known, but this is true only at the end, not the start, of the search. The ignorance inherent in our initial self-centeredness makes it contemptible, but who would deny that most of us behave in this way to greater or lesser degrees? Diotima (in fact Socrates) pretends wonderment that Aristophanes could ever have thought people so narrow. Analogously, Pericles offers a blame ("we alone consider him useless"); but even his blame admits that people are indeed narrow – everywhere but in Athens. The truth seems to be that the love of one's own is a natural and powerful human passion. Though the love of one's own is not the whole of eros, most manifestations of eros will nevertheless be inextricably bound up with the love of one's own since the latter will set the standard by which we find even new objects attractive. The mutually exclusive definitions of Aristophanes and Socrates actually meet in the realm of ignorance of the good. Precisely if Socrates' definition is correct, that eros is what seeks the good, then the love of one's own governs eros for all who do not yet fully understand their good: the starting place of all eros is loving our own, so long as we know no better.⁶

Another aspect of Socrates' objection to this initial, and lowest, type of love is that we are not objective about our nearest and dearest. Even in cases in which a better alternative is available to us, our preference still

⁵ See, e.g., 208c 1, "she, like the accomplished sophists" (*teleoi sophistai*). Compare 201d 2–5.

⁶ The denial that the *oikeion* can be an object of eros, then, would be a rhetorical aspect of Socrates' encomium, not a conclusion of Plato's theory. Socrates is here laying the groundwork for his wholly benign picture of eros, culminating in the detached love of beauty for its own sake. It would be in keeping with his explicit standard for composing encomia (198d 3–6) if he left out the lower, unlovely attachment: the encomiast ought to refrain from telling falsehoods, but "out of the truths" he should only "select the most beautiful ones." For evidence that Plato took very seriously the argument that the *oikeion* awakens eros, cf. *Lysis* 221e 7–222a 4.

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tends toward our own. Often we love our spouse beyond his or her actual merits. We love the products of our own eros, our offspring, more than we love the products of other people's eros, even when ours are not the brightest and most beautiful children in the neighborhood. Socrates spent his time talking to other people's children, and neglected his own, on a purely meritocratic basis, which shows in a way the monstrosity of his severing this attachment. The love of one's own is so deeply ingrained that it features in conventional morality: people who neglect their own are seen as untrustworthy. But there is no question, objectively speaking, that our love for our own often ignores sheer merit. At its worst, ownership creates an illusion of goodness; we see merit where there is none.

The lover of his own is thus overly content with what he already has. He feels no need to look beyond. His self-satisfaction is equivalent to pride. It was argued in Chapter 4 that pride is related to the thumoeidetic. Pride seems to be that manifestation of the thumoeidetic that is specific to the lover of his own. Pride refuses to care what other people think, does not want to hear what they have to say. Pride keeps us from admitting that our own things are inferior in quality to our neighbor's things. Pride can feel threatened, of course, and then it rises in anger. But it is important to note that even injured pride is essentially defensive: it seeks to end the debate or shut out the challenge to it. By refusing to make comparisons with the neighbor's belongings, unless those comparisons are favorable, pride seeks in the first instance to put such challenges out of sight and out of mind.

Pride's refusal to engage with others is limited to the realm of thought and opinion, however. Pride will defend tooth and nail its right of actual possession, when its own is in danger of being taken away. Spirited defense of property, life, and spouse is the thumic counterpart of Aristophanes' lowly household love. Love and pride might be viewed as existing in direct proportion to one another within this personality: the greater the love of one's own, the fiercer the resistance to anything that might put it in jeopardy. If the lover of his own ever became so dispirited as to allow himself to be dispossessed of his own, his loss of spirit would be proof of his loss of love; the two are inseparable. It may at first appear that his thumos is instrumental to his love: strong love causes strong jealousy and defense. But the opposite, love in service of his pride, is at least as likely to be the case.⁷

⁷ An example would perhaps be men who abandon their families after losing the ability to support them financially, i.e., when the blow to their pride also weakens their attachment

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For Plato, the thumos is identical to the sense of self, whereas eros is self-forgetting; eros is that which takes us out of ourselves. Plato's Aristophanes must thus interpret every ostensible outward-bound motive as a specious pretense masking an inward-bound motive. Why did the circle-people originally rise up if not because of their desire for something outside of themselves? Perhaps it may be argued that the outside objects of their desire were *their* own parents, or what they understood to be their own parents. In that case, it would be their projection of their inner selves onto the universe, their sense of self-worth crying for a grandiose fulfillment, that caused them to rise. In both of these cases, their love remains a type of love of one's own. Perhaps such arguments take on the character of special pleading when greater and greater ingenuity is required for explaining all love for others, all generosity, in terms of self-love. But Plato's alternative is itself more sobering and less sanguine about generosity than it might appear. In Plato's alternative, eros would be in constant competition with the thumos, constantly being reined in and at times distorted by it. It is not clear how eros could ever be disentangled from thumos, nor whether such a project would not cause more harm than good.⁸ The most ordinary eros wishes to possess something *for the self*, that is, eros is working in tandem with the thumos. It remains unclear what an eros that did not wish to possess would be like.

The love of one's own is the origin of all conservatism and the basis for the real Aristophanes' recurrent hope in the plays that the demos will remain apolitical. The farmer Dicaeopolis in *Acharnians* is the incarnation of the love of one's own,⁹ an old rustic who yearns and longs (*eron, pothon* 32–3) so badly for his fields and his former irenic existence that he becomes a traitor to the city, deserting from the army and seceding from the state, making a separate peace with the Spartans valid for only his immediate household: self, children, and spouse (130–33). A statesman such as

to family. Their love is contingent on their status, or pride of possession. Their abandonment of their families is tantamount to saying, "If I cannot fulfill the role I envisioned myself fulfilling for you, then I do not want you at all." The extreme case of pride's ascendancy over love is when a husband kills his ex-wife: if he cannot have her, no one will.

⁸ See, for example, the discussion in Section 4.2.

⁹ Such a description holds only for the first half of *Acharnians*. In the surprise reversal of the second half, the marketing Dicaeopolis achieves a more refined selfishness: the consumerism of foreign products that will loom so large in Section 7.8.

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Pericles must come down harshly on such *apragmones* precisely because of this intractable selfishness.

The love of one's own appears to be the least generous of all loves and to offer the Greeks little hope of politicization. Unless, that is, projects such as that of the *Republic* can be successfully undertaken to extend the love of one's own far enough to include one's own city. In Section 6.5, it was argued that the institution of incest among the Guardians was an attempt to complete or perfect the homosexuality that already obtained in cities such as Sparta. The familial love of one's own is broken in the *Republic* so that a civic love of one's own may emerge – to fill the vacuum created, if for no higher reason. At Sparta, for example, a crucial step away from the possessiveness of the love of one's own was the institutionalization of pederasty. It gave the men a sexual interest outside the home, providing perhaps the last amenity that could have kept them from the public realm. The impermanence of pederasty also militated against long-term possessiveness. Perhaps the most bizarre aspect of the love of boys was the way it took over the functions of parenting in the surrogate father role of the *erastes* at Sparta.¹⁰ From the point of view of the regime, surrogate fatherhood was a way of breaking parental pride and loosening the stranglehold that the love of one's own exercised over the nurture and formation of children. The biological parent is too sentimental and has too much of his or her sense of self invested in the child to know what the child really needs and deserves. Whatever its civic benefits, such an institution says much about the psychology of the fathers who let their children be taken: Sparta broke the hold of familial love so successfully that she was able to institute a political version of Socrates' philosophic neglect of his own children and interest in other people's children. Spartan acculturation was able to bring a sizable number of people halfway to Socrates' willing surrender of his own.¹¹ The Spartans, of course, remained fanatically committed to their own city; they did not give up the love of their own simply, but (in this theory) substituted a wider, more advanced love of their own for a lower, narrower one. This extended, political version of the love of one's own turns out to be the most salutary political passion both in the *Republic* and in Aristophanes' *Symposium* speech.

¹⁰ P. A. Cartledge, "The Politics of Spartan Pederasty," p. 22.

¹¹ See, however, the caveat in note 116 of Chapter 6.

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7.2. Acquisitiveness and the Love of Honor: Filial and Erotic Models

Pericles' implicit comparison on many points in his Funeral Oration is Sparta, alternately conceived of as Athens' great opposite¹² and as the lower basis from which Athenian progress took off.¹³ The Spartan civic tradition broke the parent–child bond when male children at the age of seven were taken from their homes and regimented into herds.¹⁴ Mandatory common meals and common sleeping arrangements for adult males forced them out of the house and away from the influence of their wives, who would ordinarily have seen to it that their husbands put the welfare of their own families ahead of public affairs. As a result of these institutions, male Spartans lived a great deal of their lives in public spaces and in full view of their peers. Tradition has it that even newlyweds had to meet under cover of darkness, with the young man sneaking away from the common bunk in his men's house.¹⁵ Private acquisition was particularly discouraged: equal lots of property that could be neither bought nor sold were intended to form the citizenry of Sparta into a classless society, and sumptuary laws restricted the public display of what wealth any single family did manage to amass.¹⁶ The reputation of absolute dedication of Spartan citizen–soldiers to the common weal was thus attributable not (or not only) to a higher love of country but to an intentional weakening of lower loves. With Spartan males having been (in many respects) deprived of their families, the city was all that they had left. Spartan citizens resemble in this regard the Guardians of the *Republic*.

Pericles' chief claim is that laws suppressing the private are unnecessary for Athenians, who, unlike the Spartans, can be trusted with a wide freedom in their private lives (2.37.2–3) and yet will still, when the time comes, freely and willingly risk their own for the common good (2.39.4). Athens therefore achieves the same or better civic sacrifices as Sparta does at less cost to her citizens' humanity (2.39.1). In particular, Athenians can be

¹² For example, in the speech of the Corinthians delivered to the Peloponnesian congress (1.68–1.71).

¹³ For example, in the "Archaeology," 1.2, 1.6, 1.18–9. See the discussion in Section 6.1.

¹⁴ *Laws Book 2*, 666e 1–4. Compare Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, Vol. 1, pp. 1.128–9.

¹⁵ Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 1.5. Compare Rahe, *ibid.*, pp. 140–1.

¹⁶ *Laws Book 3*, 684d 4–e 7. Compare Rahe, *ibid.*, pp. 125–6.

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trusted with acquisitiveness not only in their desire for beautiful things and in their pursuit of knowledge (*philokaloumen*, *philosophoumen* 2.40.1), but even in pursuing wealth itself (*ibid.*). Athenians know how to keep wealth in its place: money has no political significance because the franchise is not based on an assessment (2.37.1). The poor in Athens are not prevented from working their way out of poverty; indeed, they are positively shamed into doing so (2.40.1). And splendid private establishments contribute to the enjoyment of all (2.38.1). Moreover, in place of the constant surveillance from a young age and rigorous training in the endurance of pain at Sparta, the Athenians substitute the freedom to act in accordance with pleasure (2.37.2). The burden of oppression is lifted so completely from private life that Pericles feels compelled to rebut a charge of public lawlessness (2.37.3). Yet only the sacrifices of people who have something to give up, who have a “clear knowledge of the pleasures” they risk losing, is truly admirable (2.40.3). For a Spartan to embrace pain merely because he has never been allowed to experience anything better is not real courage.

Why can the Athenians be trusted with pleasures and with acquisitiveness? Because they are acquisitive of a higher pleasure. “The love of honor [*to philotimon*] alone never grows old, and the better enjoyment . . . is not material gain as some say, but receiving honor” (*to timasthai* 2.44.4). In the case of the ones who died, specifically the enjoyment of riches and the hope of enriching themselves later in life did not stand in the way of risking their lives now (2.42.4). This was not because wealth is not a good, but because honor is a greater good. The Spartan regime can pretend all it wants that wealth is not desirable, but the Spartans secretly know it is.¹⁷ Their indoctrination against wealth has had, if anything, a rebound effect; people desire the forbidden beyond its worth. Paradoxically, it is the Spartan regime that values wealth more than honor, for it fears to give its citizens a fair choice between the two; Spartans can be expected to choose honor only if the alternative is not made available.

Free people, presented with the full information, will naturally choose the superior course, or so Pericles seems to believe.¹⁸ Their choice to risk

¹⁷ *Republic* Book 8, 548a 5–c 2.

¹⁸ Pericles seems to divagate from this basic assumption only once, in his otherwise apparently brutal remark aimed at the new widows (2.45.2). His paradox that women’s acclaim is greatest when most obscure seems intended to suppress the customary keening of female relatives (2.34.4), the public expression of a *private* grief, a grief that claimed that their boys and men belonged not to the city but to themselves, that they were sons and husbands first, citizens

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their lives, however, is the opposite of altruistic. Again, Pericles does not believe in unmotivated acts. The citizens' sacrifice is not less but *more* self-seeking than if they chose the safe enjoyment of their private property. A passage in Aristotle captures an analogous version of the sophisticated idealism that Pericles is espousing: "this type of man could seem to be very much a self-lover [*philautos*]. He takes for himself the finest and the best. . . . He who gives his life chooses nobility for himself." Private interest and public service converge.¹⁹

With everyone vying for the noble [*to kalon*] and exerting themselves to perform the noblest actions, all obligations to the public would be met, and privately each would get the greatest of goods, if indeed virtue is it.

People need never stop acting in their own interest. On the contrary, they will act more than ever in their own interest by embracing beauty or nobility (in Aristotle's version), or honor, reputation, and praise (in Pericles', although honor is admittedly lower than the noble *per se*). To a very great extent, the patriotism that Pericles wishes to evoke is bound up with this sublime selfishness.

The love of honor thus represents one relatively outward-bound motive: love that has been drawn by the attraction of beauty a significant distance away from the lowest, purely selfish motivation of the love of one's own. In the love of one's own, possession was nine-tenths of the love; in the higher loves, beauty and merit begin to supplant possession and possessiveness. The love of honor occupies a middle ground between the love of one's own

only secondarily (Spartan women were also told, for the civic good, to contain their grief after Leuctra; Xenophon, *Hellenica* 6.4.16). Because Pericles is elevating the city Athens into the vehicle that a man's own family would ordinarily serve as – the vehicle of remembrance – it is rational to choose the greatness of Athens as a powerful prosthetic device toward this aim. But Pericles asserts that, although the men sacrificed their bodies in common (*koinēi*, 2.43.2), they nevertheless receive their praise individually (*idiai*). This assertion seems to reverse the actual situation: bodies are not held in common but belong to the individual privately; each body was therefore lost to an individual. Moreover, the dead receive their praise in common. Pericles' own funeral praise belies his claim that they are remembered personally by the city, because the oration mentions no individual names. Only the great, such as Pericles himself, can be remembered by name. The lesser men could be cherished in memory only by their families. To the city and to the world, they are merely Athenians. Unresolved tension between civic and familial recognition goes some way toward explaining Pericles' remark about women. To elevate the city over the family, Pericles must suppress the women since they are the mainstays of the family. In this lone regard, Pericles implicitly admits that lower attachments must be suppressed in order to achieve the higher eros.

¹⁹ *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.8.6 (1168b 28–30); 9.8.7 (1169a 8–11).

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and the love of beauty simply. Honor appears beautiful to us,²⁰ but we clearly seek our *own* honor. *Philotimia* thus partakes of both beauty and possessiveness. Socrates' Diotima defines an eros for honor by using many of the same terms, and the same trade-off (life in exchange for glory), as Pericles (208c 1–d 2):

... if you are willing to examine the *philotimia* of human beings you would marvel at their irrationality ... unless you consider well how terribly they are affected by eros to make a name for themselves and to store up deathless glory into time eternal. That is why they are prepared to run risks, . . . , to exhaust their money, . . . , and to die for its sake.

Because death is the ultimate price of honor and glory, the prize must often be conferred posthumously. Memory therefore becomes the vehicle by which the dead receive their honor. Only if memory of their deeds lives on after them will their sacrifice of life not have been in vain. Diotima speaks of achievements that earn “deathless remembrance” (*athanatos mneme*, 208d 5), “immortality and remembrance” (*athanasia kai mneme*, 208e 4) and “deathless glory and remembrance” (209d 3). Pericles speaks of the “eternal memorials” (*mnemeia aidia*, 2.41.4), “eternally remembered repute” (*doxa aieimnestos*, 2.43.2) and “unwritten memory” (*agraphos mneme*, 2.43.3) that the dead have earned for themselves. The implicit argument is that because death cannot be postponed indefinitely, it is irrational to wait hiding in a corner until it comes for you in old age. Precisely if maximizing life is the goal, memory lasts far longer than bodily existence. Just as bodily eros pushes us toward the act that engenders mere life, so psychic eros pushes us to perform acts that obtain significant life. For Diotima, eros is the principle of generation, whether the progeny be offspring of the soul or of the body.

Yet given *philotimia's* abiding tie to the love of one's own, and thence to the thumos and potential aggressiveness (Section 4.2), one has to wonder about the prudence of Pericles' innovation, viz., his recommending political eros to democratic citizens, when the tradition was univocal in applying political eros to tyrants only (Sections 3.4–5). Whatever possessiveness and selfish exclusiveness remain in *philotimia* could be seen as inappropriate passions for democratic citizens upholding the common good. How does Pericles know

²⁰ We envy the honor received by others, for example, so it cannot be the case that honor is merely seen to be beautiful when (and hence because) it is already our own.

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that no Alcibiades will take him at his word, want Athens exclusively for his own private acquisition, and attempt to ensure his everlasting fame by winning the game of courtship, thereby putting an end to the admittedly productive game? One could go further: what would keep such a lover from mistreating or using the city for his own pleasure? It is one thing if a boy finally disappoints all other suitors by giving himself to one. But the political analogue would be one politician taking over the beloved city permanently and to the exclusion of rival politicians, no longer ruling and being ruled in turn: tyranny. Such at least was the selfish worry of the demagogues who sought to depose Alcibiades.²¹ How does Pericles propose to keep the citizenship-as-courtship model under control? Pericles would be assuming an extraordinary eros indeed, one that had cut the tie that binds it to selfish possessiveness.

In an analogous way, Diotima's eventual formula for the specific eros, "bringing to birth in beauty," is misleading because the love of beauty so conceived is far from selfless. We wish to beget *our own* in beauty: our own children, our own fame, our own ideas. The productive erotes such as procreation and *philotimia* are, as previously stated, mixes of the love of one's own and the love of beauty. They do not represent, as Diotima claims, a new, higher synthesis overcoming both (in, say, a love of the good alone, like the generic eros).²²

Hence we must leave beauty and one's own unsynthesized, and we must place them at opposite poles on a spectrum. The philotimic eros will be placed in the middle of the spectrum, as partaking in both beauty and one's own. The "middling" *philotimia*, like all loves not identical to either pole on the spectrum, will be liable to misinterpretation. *Philotimia* will look almost altruistic when viewed from below, that is, when contrasted with the lowest, narrow love of one's own. However, the same philotimic eros will appear quite selfish when viewed from above, that is, when contrasted with higher loves containing greater admixtures of the love of beauty, such as the philosophic eros. To be a middling love (that is, to belong to the majority of actual human loves) means to be vulnerable to the misapprehension that said love is "really" just a version of one end of the spectrum or the other.

The possessive element in eros between persons has attracted criticisms similar to the one we have leveled against the possessive element in Pericles' erotic patriotism. For example, the chivalry of serving a fair maiden has

²¹ See the discussion in Section 3.5.

²² See the discussion in Section 4.3.

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been attacked as narcissistic. Certainly the “zealous contestations” that break out over apparel in the preparations for and setting sail of the Sicilian expedition (Section 3.5) do nothing to dispel the impression of peacock pride or thumos governing whatever eros is in play in the account. Yet do chivalric suitors never truly wish to rescue the blushing damsel but only to get the credit for doing so? The eros for the person and the eros for honor seem conjoined but separable. The more we desire someone or something, the more that entity is liable to involve questions of honor for us. The question that we must face is whether the eros for Athens and the eros for honor in Pericles’ Funeral Oration are mutually compatible.

In using eros, Pericles discovers perhaps the sole motive that could incline perfectly free individuals, habituated (as he says) to their own private interest and toward pursuing pleasures, to take the good of another as their own good. In the self-forgetting of eros, people in love, then as now, were routinely seen to neglect themselves. Examples from ordinary courtship included camping out on the beloved’s doorstep, disregarding one’s own business affairs, going without food, all in the service of eros. Eros makes people willingly enter into bonds that would otherwise look like slavery. Eros is at once perfectly free and perfectly committed. Nor does Thucydides criticize the feasibility of the citizenship-as-courtship model. Instead, he depicts with a kind of awe the Athenians wholeheartedly engaged in just such behavior (Section 3.5). On this reading, the courtship analogy for patriotic service works only as long as the courtship continues and the beloved (the city or aggregate of citizens) remains equally aloof from all suitors. As soon as one suitor is poised actually to *win* the contest, the other suitors are not likely to bow out gracefully. Even if the disgruntled suitors could perceive that a marriage or permanent relationship with the successful suitor was in the best interest of the beloved, erotic desire is often such that the lover would be willing to do harm to the beloved’s interests rather than give her up. This is exactly what Alcibiades does later in the history, after his exile, attempting to bring Athens to her knees to show her how much she needs him. Alcibiades gives his definition of patriotism while offering his services to the Spartans²³: “The true *philopolis* is not one who refuses to attack his city, though he lost her unjustly; rather, he is the one who will attempt to take her back by any means, on account of

²³ Thucydides 6.92.2–4.

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desiring (*epithumein*) her so." Alcibiades' patriotism is erotic and, at least by this point in the history, aggressive.

In this way, Pericles changes the type of love that constitutes patriotism, away from the traditional analogy with filial piety between parent and child – the “fatherland” or “motherland” – in favor of the more active, energetic passion between lovers. The child's feeling for his or her parent, like the citizen's feeling for, say, the motherland, is protective: citizens operating under the filial-love model *would be* jealous of politicians who were essentially suitors (as the popular leaders who ousted Alcibiades were jealous), and filial-model citizens would resist tyranny analogously with the way a child resists its mother's taking a new husband. But the filial-model citizen would not be desirous of becoming the new husband himself.²⁴ The traditional analogy brings different and perhaps safer forms of selfishness into play. Pericles' switch of metaphors is fraught with risks, although it also has the potential for high returns.

It is crucial to determine what, for Pericles, is lovable about Athens. Although Pericles may be referring to the visible beauty of the city with its glorious temples and public places, analogously with the corporeal beauty of an ordinary suitor's beloved, Pericles also assumes that eros can rise above the bodily and orient itself toward abstract objects such as an imagined community: imagined because by “Athens” he also means the corporate body of Athenians, visible in part, perhaps, in the assembly, but otherwise imagined. Given Pericles' own emphasis in the oration, the major candidate for loveliness is Athenian institutions. Precisely because Athens allows them their freedom and their private lives, Athenians, by making comparisons with other cities and political systems, can perceive the superiority of Athens and hence can truly love her on her merits. The private pleasures and freedoms that Pericles lists among the benefits of living in Athens, although they might at first appear as selfish pursuits with no relation to civic duty, are in another way the bastion against tyrannical encroachment. In a more modern parlance, when I exercise my freedoms, it is not only good for me and for my selfish interest, it is also good for my fellow citizens and for their interest, because exercising freedoms preserves and perpetuates them as freedoms. Can Athenians be erotically attracted to the beauty

²⁴ Filial to erotic: according to Plutarch, the night before Caesar crossed the Rubicon to attack Rome, he dreamed of committing incest with his mother (*Life of Caesar* 32.6). Rome was his patria and also, Plutarch implies, his motherland, an entity toward whom to feel eros was a crime.

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in freedom? Diodotus claims the Mytilenians were erotically attracted to a liberty they did not yet possess (Section 3.5). Could the Athenians erotically pursue Athens because of an attraction to the freedoms they exercised every day? A further problem is that, unlike with a human beloved, each citizen-as-suitor is a part of the Athens he is pursuing, each a pixel in the larger picture that makes up the corporate body of Athenians. He contemplates himself when he contemplates Athens. If the oration means that he is to contemplate Athens' power (*dunamis*), then in doing so he contemplates his own power. Likewise the "eternally remembered repute" held out as the prize the citizen-lover can earn is contingent on the power and longevity of its vehicle, Athens. An ordinary chivalric lover loves both the damsel and the honor. But the analogues, erotic patriotism and *philotimia* in Pericles' speech, seem significantly more entangled with one another.

Because *philotimia* looms so large, it is crucial to sort out what is erotic about honor and what in honor stems rather from the thumoeidetic. As was argued in Section 4.2, Plato's *Republic* initially places the maintenance of one's dignity and self-esteem wholly in the *thumoeides* or middle part of the tripartite soul. The rational part determines which desires are good, and the *thumoeides* enforces reason's dictates over the desirous part (439c 4–6, d 3–7). The thumos thus polices or maintains the dignity or status of the soul, preventing it from being undermined by base desires.²⁵ A thumos that only polices and maintains seems essentially conservative. Could the thumos by itself ever go on the offensive and become acquisitive of new and higher status (*time*)? If the thumos only maintains the status it already possesses, then some other passion must be at work in the acquisitive stage. For example, the defense of one's honor is angry (anger being one characteristic of the thumos). But the pursuit of honor does not seem particularly angry.

We earlier noted the combative, angry aspect of the love of one's own. The love of one's own appeared to suffer under the constraints of pride, which in turn stemmed from thumos. The love of honor, by contrast, appears to be a much more open, questing, outward-bound passion. A mixture of eros and thumos appears to constitute the love of honor. Thumos perhaps determines the object choice: one's own personal status is the initial concern of the thumos. Eros then pursues that object with the aim

²⁵ 440a 5–7.

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of enhancing it, that is, eros pursues a status the thumos yet lacks. Such a combination of eros and thumos would answer to familiar names in medieval and modern philosophy: vanity, *amour-propre*, *das Man*. If pride was the manifestation of thumos specific to the love of one's own, then vanity is the manifestation of thumos specific to the love of honor. In the former case, the pride and the love were barely distinguishable. In the present case, vanity seems to be a self-love, which pursues not the self that we already possess but rather a vision of the self as it could potentially come to be. The major difference between pride and vanity is the other-directedness of vanity. Pride is essentially self-satisfied. If pride is the way we see ourselves, then vanity is the way we would have others see us.²⁶ Vanity is a more refined emotion than pride in that pride refuses to care what other people think or wishes to remain ignorant, whereas vanity makes comparisons and doubts the value of its own. Vanity takes for itself a standard outside the self, a standard that others set and on which the self then becomes dependent.

Although the modern appellations of this sentiment are all pejorative, the ancient city considered it indispensable for the formation of citizens. Inculcating a consciousness that others are watching and that their opinions about you count more than your own does, was the purpose of the constant surveillance at Sparta. Possibly the single most important tool in the polis' activation of this feeling was praise poetry and blame poetry such as that by Tyrtaeus and Callinus. In the poem *tethnamenai gar kalon*, the young man's appearance while he was falling in battle is of the utmost importance. To get the young men to risk their lives in the hoplite line, the poet uses a visual aesthetic of death, preferring the beauty of one corpse over another. An older man who has fallen is ugly: the spectacle of his white head and grey chin while he gasps his life out onto the sand, skin stripped naked, "holding his bloody private parts with his own two hands," is "ugly [*aischron*] to the eyes and nemesis to see."²⁷ By contrast, the blossom of a youthful soldier arouses eros in his onlookers even after he is dead (10.29–30):

To males [he is] worth gazing at; to females, lovely [*eratos*]
while alive, and a beauty after falling in the front ranks.

²⁶ The definitions are stolen from the character Mary Bennett in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.
²⁷ 10.21–7 West. Compare *Iliad*, 22.71–6.

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Pericles' Funeral Oration may be said to borrow this trope from Tyrtaeus' or related poetry: the tradition of the beautiful death.²⁸ The ones who died perceived that it was better to go out on top, to slip away while still at the peak of their powers (*meta romes*, 2.43.6), having performed the deed that constitutes the height of their reputation (*akme tes doxes*, 2.42.4), than to outlive their prime and to be remembered as something less than they once were. It is as if a young man had the opportunity to step into eternity, into memory, at the moment of his own choosing, an act by which he could make of his life exactly what he wanted, or at least what he had been taught to want. In one stroke he makes up for all faults, as Pericles says (2.42.3), or he simply "becomes good," as Tyrtaeus says (12.10, 12.20 West). The young men are ripe for death and memory the way maidens are ripe for marriage; the season is now.²⁹

It is not so much that the young men fall in love with death as that death is the means by which they can make the community "fall in love" with them, or at least appreciate or esteem them. The young men seek to become attractive; they desire to be desirable. By risking, and receiving, death, the young citizen-soldier seeks to awaken a yearning on the part of the community, a yearning for himself. Callinus expresses it as a *laoi sumpanti pothos* (1.18 West), a longing that the whole community experiences. Because *pothos* is a regret or longing for things absent, early death is almost a necessity if one is to achieve this honor; one who dies at home of old age is simply not of equal value and cannot be missed (*demoi potheinos*, 14-16) in the same way. This desire to be desirable oneself, as opposed to desiring another person, is not eros simpliciter but a vanity or eros mixed with thumos. The most erotic description of vanity is "a desire for a desire."³⁰ We may first feel eros for another person, and then, in order to be erotically successful, a desire to be loved back. The desire to be loved back would then be purely instrumental or utilitarian. But the desire to be loved back may also have a life of its own, as the thumos itself does. We recognize the merit or beauty in others that provokes our eros, and we covet those qualities for ourselves. The aim of this desire is not physical gratification but the

²⁸ Compare J.-P. Vernant, "A 'Beautiful Death' and the Disfigured Corpse in Homeric Epic," pp. 50-74, and *Panta Kala*, pp. 84-91. Compare N. Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, pp. 98-105.

²⁹ Pericles' greater sophistication can be seen in his admission that it is nonetheless preferable to stay alive (2.43.1).

³⁰ The phrase is offered by F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, p. 165, in his Hegelian discussion of the classical concept of thumos.

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inculcation of a positive idea about ourselves in the mind of another, in short, honor.

If vanity seems even less admirable than pride, it is nevertheless indispensable for service to others. For example, Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* is initially presented as a man of superior strengths of character, including a (justified) pride in himself coupled with a total lack of vanity, almost an unwillingness to make a good impression, a disdain for public opinion, as at the initial ball. Only after he falls in love with Elizabeth Bennett does he for the first time feel the need to justify his conduct in someone else's eyes, as he does by writing the letter. Eventually, he performs a great service for Elizabeth and her family. His pride had to be converted into vanity, at least in regard to one person, before his virtues could become social, useful to someone other than himself and his own.

Because generous, other-directed political behavior is now to be motivated out of honor-loving or vanity, it would be worthwhile to determine which passion predominates in the mixture that is vanity: eros or thumos? Certainly vanity is a form of self-love. It is possible that extremely vain persons experience a kind of narcissistic eros for themselves. Self-love, however, is also associated with the thumos. In one way, vanity seems to reverse the process of eros. Ordinary eros fools us into altruism by its very acquisitiveness. Wanting something so badly necessarily makes one forget about oneself and concentrate wholly on the object. Vanity, by contrast, which appears concentrated wholly on others, doing what is lovable in their eyes, is in reality fixated on the self. Others become instruments by which the vanity is fed. The person motivated by eros, on the other hand, is surprised to find himself swept away by a flood of generosity toward a beloved whom he perhaps originally intended only to attempt to sleep with. Eros, although often intending to use the other as an instrument toward its satisfaction, fools us into giving ourselves away. The individual under the influence of vanity and the individual under the influence of ordinary eros can both end up committing generous acts for the wrong reasons: strictly speaking, their intentions are not generous, but their passions drive them to sacrifice themselves. Crucially, it appears possible to be vain and honor loving without being in love with another person, but personal love seems to comport with it a modicum of concern for honor, at least in the eyes of the beloved.

To summarize the argument: the love of one's own is present at every point on the spectrum except its opposite end point, the pure love of beauty without the desire to possess. Therefore to criticize the love of

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honor for containing elements of possessiveness is to say no more than can be said about almost any other human love. Furthermore, the love of honor cannot be entirely thumic but must partake of eros to some extent because there is no way for the unadulterated thumos to seek anything outside itself. Actively to seek out more honors implies a combination of eros and thumos. Vanity is virtually identical to the love of honor. We may speculate that the reciprocated “love” desired by the Spartan hoplite and by Pericles’ citizen-lover was not warm fellow feeling³¹ but honors bestowed on him by the city.

What conclusions, then, are we led to about the moral goodness and prudential desirability of the love of honor in politics? Particularly since honor-loving is an admixture of the love of one’s own and the love of beauty, honor-loving has the potential to be used in at least two different ways. Pericles’ erotic model uses honor-loving as a stepping stone to higher love, that is, it seeks to achieve a political version of a generous love. Pericles’ model does not, however, exhaust the political uses of the love of honor. Clearly Sparta, as well as Plato’s *Republic*, used the love of honor to expand or extend the love of one’s own to include the community as a whole. On this second model, little or no attempt is made to achieve a higher appreciation of the polity’s beauty or merit. Rather, the Spartans, like the majority of Plato’s Guardians, continue to love their own city for no better reason than that it is their own. Problems with this Spartan model will be examined in Section 7.3, and the case for the human and philosophic superiority of Pericles’ model will be made in Section 7.4. But pragmatic political benefits such as security will be seen in subsequent sections to reside in the Spartan model rather than in the Periclean model.

Since I have claimed that the *Symposium* speech of Plato’s Aristophanes contains the dialogue’s political teaching on eros, and that the political philosophy of the *Symposium* speech is comparable to that of the *Republic* (Section 4.3), it remains to establish briefly the status of the love of honor for Plato. Because Plato’s Aristophanes, unlike Diotima, never mentions eros for honors, and because the real Aristophanes shows the fragility of the honor-loving personality³² (e.g. Philocleon; see Section 4.2), one might wonder whether the love of honor is recommended by Plato at all. Likewise,

³¹ Envy and resentment will, Pericles admits, be more likely (2.35.2; cf. 2.64.4–5, 2.45.1). I am indebted to Clifford Orwin for this point.

³² Compare the fragility of the philotimic personality in the *Republic* Book 9, 547b 2–553a 7: he secretly desires the pleasures that he denies himself and unwittingly prepares the way for decline.

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Socrates in the *Republic* makes use of honors and the ambition for honors as instruments of policy while never explicitly endorsing honor and ambition as aspects of the human good. This lack of a clear recommendation of honor-loving seems to argue that honor-loving is not choiceworthy for Plato. It must be stressed that Socrates does accommodate and make use of honor-loving in the *Republic*; he seems to recognize honor-loving as an ineradicable aspect of human nature and to accommodate it as such. Likewise in Aristophanes' *Wasps*, it would be a misinterpretation to believe that, since Philocleon's honor-loving can turn so quickly into tyrannical selfishness, the play is saying (with Bdelycleon) that Philocleon should cease to pursue honor. On the contrary, only greater destructiveness results from Bdelycleon's attempt to eradicate Philocleon's honor-loving. It seems, then, that an adequate political philosophy must make a place for honor-loving, but that honor-loving needs no encouragement. Rather, honor-loving requires criticism and careful molding to prevent it from becoming destructive. Hence we see in the *Symposium* speech of Aristophanes no encouragement of (even) honorable political ambition, but rather a warning, that the political men of the city must be exhorted to remain pious (*Symposium* 193a 7-b 1). Likewise the chivalry model of political pederasty found in Diotima's speech and elsewhere in Plato is best understood as making a virtue of necessity: if considerations of honor must arise (and they must) among people in love, better to use honor constructively, as a motive for protecting the beloved (Section 5.3), rather than destructively, as a motive for the lover's vaunting himself over the beloved (Section 4.1). However, the further Periclean step whereby the love of honor becomes involved with an erotic love for the city, as opposed to the Spartan model of involving honor with an erotic love for a fellow citizen or citizens, is an innovation that Plato cannot be said to recommend. As in the Spartan model, the *Republic* envisions a "horizontal" eros among fellow citizens, in which each citizen feels eros toward one or more fellow citizens. In the Periclean model, the eros is "vertical," that is, the citizen falls in love with the greater entity of the city. Before returning to Pericles' vertical model, we will examine (in Section 7.3) the political possibilities for horizontal love among fellow citizens.

7.3. Community, Patriotism, and Civic Friendship

Greek theory took seriously the most idealistic aspirations about love of country and affection among fellow-citizens. In part because of the tiny size

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of their citizen bodies, in which each citizen could have direct knowledge of every other citizen in a sizable subset of the whole, powerful ideologies influencing actual civic organization in diverse poleis advocated tight bonding, civic friendship, and erotic ties. This idealistic communal dedication and solidarity make the poleis limit cases of communitarian politics, while the theoretical accounts provided about them make them suitable models for a critique of the benefits and difficulties of communitarianism.

Ordinary patriotism seems more thumic than erotic, a love of one's own with no need for the fully erotic appreciation of grandeur in Pericles' account. The Greek term "one's own" can also be used to designate one's own country or fatherland (*patris*) in addition to family or household. Ordinary citizens love the community because it is theirs and has done so much for them: they feel they would be nothing, or "lost," without it. The theoretical analogue of their sentiment is the idea that the community has been "constitutive" of the citizens' selves: their very being is embedded in the community.³³ Hence they would indeed be nothing, or at least radically different without it. Taking a step back to appreciate the community aesthetically the way Pericles envisions would entail stepping out of themselves; it might imply an impossibility, as though a half of one of the *Symposium's* circle-people could turn his head to look at his other half, to see what parts he is made up of. Before the surgery, there is no way the circle-person could ever authentically entertain the idea that he is a composite because he has no being outside of being what would only later, artificially, come to seem a composite made up of "individuals."

The bond of attachment between halves forming wholes in Aristophanes' speech is probably *philia* (Section 4.3). Similarly, the *Republic* attempts to extend the citizens' *philia* from their household to their city, so that they can bond with one another as tightly as families can. Such an extended patriotic love of one's own would represent clear progress beyond the narrow love of one's own household: self and family. We will later have to speculate how such a love could be extended if not through an inkling of beauty or the good. But if embeddedness in a community constitutes our evaluations of beauty and goodness, then "our own" would determine the standard we use to judge by, as Plato's Aristophanes also argued (Sections 1.4, 7.1). Communal ownness might even constitute our narrower, familial ownness (or excise it, as the *Republic* would have it).

³³ See M. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, pp. 147–54, 178–83.

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Modern communitarian thought has at times stressed friendship, affection, and other forms of love as the bonds that ought to hold communities together and that, in the absence of artificial theoretical impositions such as deontological liberalism, naturally do hold communities together.³⁴ Each modern theorist of community feels, in his or her own way, the lack of a bridge from loving persons face to face to loving the entire community, for example, loving strangers in the community simply because they are civic members.³⁵ One of the best points made in such works is very telling indeed: that the decline of community (Platonically, one's own "in the large") has trickled down to weaken our narrower loves (one's own "in the small"): marriages, kinship, and friendships seem negatively affected and, in a vicious circle, no longer provide models and habits for communal love.

Greek theory and practice represent the limit case of the communitarian program and therefore reveal important aspects of it. I examine here only the Spartan constitution and the theoretical project of the *Republic*, both of which envisioned using eros in such a way as to instill civic *philia*. We should keep in mind, however that other organizations had similar projects, most famously the Sacred Band of Thebes, an elite corp consisting of 150 pairs of lovers and beloveds. In the Macedonian victory at Chaeronea, which is often taken to mark the demise of the independent polis in Greece, the Sacred Band died together, completely annihilated, because they refused to run away. In the heat of battle, soldiers fight not for their country but for each other: they protect their friends. But what if your whole country were your friends? Because of the small size of many poleis, this was not an unthinkable thought. Traditionally in the polis, military arrangements were a family affair – with phalanxes arranged by tribe, in which three generations (grandfather, father, and son) might stand side by side. The innovations at Sparta substituted eros in place of familial love. Both the

³⁴ See, e.g. R. N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, pp. xi, xxxv, 85–112 (on individualism's attack on love and marriage *qua* one bridge to loving the community), pp. 113–16 (on communal Christian love and the civic relevance of friendship); B. Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, pp. 147–51, 196–9; cf. S. Kautz, *Liberalism and Community*, pp. 65, 107–25.

³⁵ Voluntary associations, e.g., clubs, churches, etc., have been shown to provide a bridge to more participatory citizenship. See, e.g., Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, p. 212; empirical: R. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*. However, to awaken the crucial missing link of love, these remain unfeasible. M. Sandel, for example, points out that justice would not even be required in a community in which everyone knew one another and one another's ends well enough to govern by the common good alone. Such a condition is unlikely to be perfectly realized, so justice will remain necessary, but justice will always be at odds with true knowledge and goodness (*Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 183).

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traditional and the Spartan arrangements sought to bind the ranks together through affection, but Sparta chose to utilize the more intense (and perhaps more volatile) type of love, eros.

As was argued in Section 6.5, the partial communism of the Spartans, as well as their sexual arrangements, can be seen as forerunners of Plato's *Republic*. The social utility of pederasty would be especially high if (as in Phaedrus' *Symposium* speech) lover and beloved were sometimes stationed near one another in the hoplite line.³⁶ The *Republic's* unisex military training and the notion of going to war side by side with someone you love are merely the logical extensions of the pederastic military arrangements of actual Greek states such as Sparta.

Although he suppresses the sexual component,³⁷ Aristotle in a telling passage agrees with Plato's Pausanias about the antityrannical character³⁸ of the institutions that promoted homoeroticism in Sparta (and to a far lesser degree in Athens): common meals, political clubs, paideia (which in the gymnasia at least had some connections to pederasty), and leisure.³⁹ Tyrants outlaw these activities because they give rise to two virtues, one competitive, the other cooperative. High thoughts (*phronemata*) and high-minded individuals (*phronematai*, cf. Pausanias' *phronemata megala*, 182c 2) create competition for the tyrant. There is no room in a tyranny for many proud (or vain) individuals, but the admiration of peers engenders high thoughts about one's own importance. Second, the free associations give rise to trust (*pistis*), since spending time together leads the citizens to knowledge of one another, and trust is based on knowledge (1313b 5–6). Trust then allows the many proud to cooperate with one another in banding together to depose the tyrant or to oppose an attempted takeover. Although Aristotle does not use the word *homonioia* in this passage, he is clearly describing it.⁴⁰ The

³⁶ On Thebes: Plutarch, *Pelopidas* 18.1–19.4. Regarding the Spartans, Rahe points out Xenophon, *Hellenica* 4.8.39, which admittedly may imply only an informal pairing on one occasion. Xenophon's *Symposium* 8.32–5, states that the Eleans, too, drew up in battle order in this way, but the passage denies that Spartans needed their lovers or beloveds nearby in order to fight to the death.

³⁷ Aristotle seems to regard pederasty (and alternatively uxoriousness) as side indulgences characteristic of warlike societies, not passions upon which regimes are constructed; cf. *Politics* 2.9.7 (1269b 23–31).

³⁸ See the discussions in Section 1.5. The contrast with democratic political sentiment (Section 4.1) could not be starker.

³⁹ *Politics* 5.11.5 (1313a 39–b 6).

⁴⁰ For a much fuller discussion of *homonioia* in Aristotle's thought than can be attempted here, see R. J. Klonoski, "Homonioia in Aristotle's Ethics and Politics."

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same institutions contributed to both pederasty and homonoia. Citizens are bound together through ties of mutual affection. Larger, substitute families partially replace households.

Aristotle treats the civic-*philia* model with the utmost seriousness. Accordingly, he seeks to show its limits by subjecting the *Republic*, that is, the limiting case of civic friendship toward which polities like Sparta were tending, to rigorous criticism. As was pointed out earlier, the social role of *erastes* functioned politically to shape citizens into more homogeneous, interchangeable, relatively less exclusive pieces of a whole than traditional, exclusive roles such as father did (Section 6.5). Plato's sexual communism takes this political function of pederasty to its logical conclusion, removing all exclusive familial roles and homogenizing the citizenry.⁴¹ Aristotle offers a thought experiment about what happens to the city as such homogeneity increases. His argument is a calculus-style limiting argument: assume that one of the variables that determines the type of community under discussion is the degree of homogeneity among its members. If you take the limit of the community as its homogeneity increases without bound, the polis progressively vanishes, becoming first a household and then an individual once more.⁴² This implausible image carries greater weight, and its "mathematics" takes on meaning, if we reflect that Aristotle identifies the city with its *politeuma*, or citizen body, and a citizen is defined as one who shares in ruling.⁴³ The typical Greek assumption is that noncitizens living in the city are infrastructure only, not a part of the city. If a small group such as a ruling junta or a wealthy family takes over the government of the city, then that group exclusively constitutes the new city. But that kind of homogeneity is not what the idealistic theories and ideologies desired. Instead of the city becoming one great, inclusive household, a small group (or an actual household) takes over and disfranchises the rest of the city. The collapse continues in the case of the tyrant. In a tyranny the city has only one citizen. The tyrant has swallowed the city into himself. In this way, the city progressively vanishes, becoming an individual once more. One-person rule is the ultimate in homogeneity but at a price Plato and Socrates would not wish to pay. The unspoken assumption of Aristotle's argument is that the only path to homogeneity is smaller and smaller numbers. For

⁴¹ "Homogenizing": the Guardian class, i.e., the true citizens.

⁴² *Politics* 2.2.2 (1261a 16–22).

⁴³ *Ibid.* 3.6.1 (1278b 11); 3.1.6 (1275a 22–23). Compare 1284a 3–11, 1252a 1.

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just as (in his view) the city originally had blossomed organically through stages, beginning with the smallest nuclear family, progressing to the clan, and then to the village, each level growing into the next in order to meet needs that it was unable to meet on its own, unity decreased at every stage. Increase in the *heterogeneity* of roles and occupations, the interdependency of different roles, was the rule throughout the development. Increase in homogeneity must thus reverse the progression. A city seized by a small group or a tyrant has in a real sense regressed to the household level of apolitical rule: a benighted, cyclopean family (Section 2.6).

The same difficulty that puts bounds on the civic–philia model also shows the limits of the project to make the city an erotic association. In practice, only a diluted affection could exist among significant numbers of the citizens. In the sexual communism of the *Republic*, the homogenization of roles wished to do away with separate titles such as husband, sister, or uncle by holding all children in common in order to make the city one through affection. The whole city would care for itself as one great family. But Aristotle argues that if all of the citizens have 1,000 sons each, far from loving them all like sons, “all will slight them in a similar fashion” (1262a 1). The real effect of Socrates’ project is the opposite of affection. Like philia, truly passionate erotic love is too exclusive to distribute over an entire community. Something must give: either the love is diluted or the polity changes form. The aspiration of Aristophanes’ *Symposium* speech, as Aristotle notes in this context, was to feel eros and philia strongly enough to unify two into one. But the unification entails either that one destroys or devours the other, or that both lose their form.⁴⁴ Analogously, regime form changes as the ties that bind become tighter or looser. If a tiny group of peers that felt eros or philia for one another took over the city, perhaps a group like the Sacred Band, then those few citizens would constitute the city. The best a city cemented by eros could hope for would be the most extreme oligarchy. The new unit or units into which eros bound individuals would behave toward the larger community in much the same manner as family units do. They would sacrifice for the city so long as the city served their private aim. But unless prudent political steps (e.g., in the process of conferring honors), were taken to bind the new erotic unit’s private aims closely to the city’s aims, each erotic unit would continue to place its own

⁴⁴ *Politics* 2.4.6–7, 1262b 7–14; see the discussion in Section 4.3.

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aims above the city's. In this way, the number of people who can truly feel friendship for one another, let alone eros, is too small to permit *political* government. Here, then, a polis striving to cement itself by means of eros loses its form or transcends itself.

In this ancient treatment of community, then, nature eventually places limits on the degree to which human beings can be embedded in community. The discrete individuality of bodies obstructs even the union of lovers from achieving the Aristophanic ideal. The rootedness of eros and philia in bodies arguably places analogous limits on the values-constituting power of community: my love for my daughter is dependent, in part, on the fact that I see her every day. If I am away, I imagine her every day. No ideology can make me see or imagine, and hence value, 1,000 daughters in quite the same way. Community therefore falls back either on deontological values or on utilitarian values, or else on some different form of love. In the next section we return to Pericles' project of connecting the individual's acquisitiveness of his own good to a kind of erotic appreciation of the community as a whole, not necessarily loving one's fellow citizens erotically or even philically, but rather loving the *idea* of one's community. Although sexual love and courtship between individuals provide a model and a metaphor for the citizens' patriotism in the Funeral Oration, in their own right they provide no bridge or stepping stone across which the citizen can travel to achieve the higher love of Athens. The two loves, that for persons and that for community, remain distinct. Citizens will have to love the community in the abstract, or not at all. Thus the second communitarian possibility to be examined will be affection (not eros) for one's country or community as a whole, as opposed to love or friendship between and among individual citizens. A stronger *political* case for this second communitarian possibility (particularly its greater safety and security) will emerge by contrast with the more daring Periclean erotic model (7.4), at the same time that Pericles' model emerges as the more intellectually satisfying and humane alternative (7.8). The kind of patriotism to be examined next will involve the problematic human propensity to say, and to think, that one's own community is best.⁴⁵ Accordingly, it involves the problem of distinguishing the love of an illusory beauty from the merit-based love of the good.

⁴⁵ Kautz, *Liberalism and Community*, pp. 136–42, juxtaposes this aspect of patriotism with the “essential and ineliminable” particularity of patriotism, its unconditionality and imperviousness to rational criticism stressed by Alasdair MacIntyre in *Is Patriotism a Virtue?*

7.4. Patriotism and the Love of Beauty

In basing patriotism on an erotic response to the grandeur of Athens, Pericles assumes that patriotism is not a parochial, subjective sentiment or unthinking affection for the surroundings in which one grew up. Athens must be objectively desirable if people of sophistication, such as the Athenians, are to love her. The devotion that many Athenians no doubt already gave unthinkingly, Pericles makes a rational case in favor of giving. His is a strangely detached appreciation on which to base love of country. He wants them to love Athens on her merits. It is curious that Pericles does not appeal to the sentiment of belonging in a speech exhorting citizens to die for their country. As previously mentioned, Spartan patriotism was a higher-level version of the love of one's own. Pericles himself assumes that the general run of humanity fight harder in defense of their own than they do on foreign soil as invaders (*en tei allotriai* [*sc. gei*], 2.39.2). The peculiar virtue of the Athenians is that they fight so hard on foreign soil that they have, in a way, overcome this distinction between home and abroad (*ibid.*). Most people love their country ignorantly, that is, not because she is great but because she is theirs. In fact, belief in her greatness issues from their proprietary feelings, not vice versa. They do not first inspect her for greatness and then sign on to the project. Rather, they love the people and places among whom they have been thrown by accident of birth, and they think those people and places great. By contrast, Pericles' Athenians perceive that mere parochial attachment to a given patch of ground is a low motive for patriotism when opposed to real merit and objective beauty of the city. If another city were better, they would face a difficult choice between which to love, but fortunately Athens is best of all.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Compare C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, pp. 30–1: “Finally we reach the stage where patriotism . . . unconsciously denies itself. Chesterton picked on two lines from Kipling as the perfect example. . . .

If England was what England seems
 'Ow quick we'd drop 'er. But she ain't!

Love never spoke that way. It is like loving your children only 'if they're good', your wife only while she keeps her looks, your husband only so long as he is famous and successful. 'No man,' said one of the Greeks, 'loves his city because it is great, but because it is his.' A man who really loves his country will love her in her ruin and degeneration. . . . He may think her good and great, when she is not, because he loves her; the delusion is up to a point pardonable. But Kipling's soldier reverses it; he loves her because he thinks her good and great – loves her on her merits. She is a fine going concern and it gratifies his pride to be in it. How if she ceased to be such? The answer is plainly given: "Ow quick we'd drop 'er.' When the ship begins to sink he

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The collapse of the distinction between home and abroad in the Athenian mind has far-reaching ramifications, which Thucydides makes one of his great themes. He first introduces the problem not in the Funeral Oration but in the earlier speech of the Corinthians at the Peloponnesian conference. This national trait of the Athenians fills the more conservative cities of Greece with alarm. The matchup between Sparta and Athens, say the Corinthians, is one between stick-at-homes and people who essentially live abroad (*apodemetai*). “By being away, they think they can acquire more, while you [Spartans] think that, by going on the offensive, you would weaken what you have already” (1.70.4). The Athenians have the disconcerting habit of considering other people’s property their own before they have even taken it (1.70.7; emphasis added):

When they fail to prosecute their schemes, they feel deprived of what is their own [*oikeia*]. But when they do invade and acquire something, they regard it a small deed compared with things to come. . . . For them alone, *hoping and having are the same*. . . .

The Corinthians in their wonderment do not stop at denouncing the foreign policy that arises from this collapse of the distinction between Athens’ own and the other’s. They also anticipate Pericles’ boast that a concomitant collapse of the distinction between public and private yields remarkable results domestically in each citizen’s relation to the community (1.70.6):

In their city’s behalf, they treat their bodies as if completely alienated from them [*allotriotata*]. And on deeds in her behalf they use their intellect, though it is their ownmost [*oikeiotate*].

The astonishment of the Corinthians stems from the Athenians’ reversal of all ordinary assumptions. Body is the Corinthians’ definition of an individual’s “own.” It is the only possession that cannot be given away or alienated without also destroying the individual himself. Yet Athenians behave as if bodies were held in common. Apparently Pericles’ assertion in the Funeral Oration that the dead citizens sacrificed their bodies “in common” (*koinei*) was not the first time an Athenian had expressed this thought. Something in the Athenian civic tradition had rendered this belief possible. Mind, on the other hand, can be made to conform with the common, at least within

will leave her. Thus that kind of patriotism which sets off with the greatest swagger of drums and banners actually sets off on the road that can lead to Vichy.”

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limits: minds can all register the same idea at the same time, as a common possession; hence the success of the mind control exercised at Sparta. The Corinthians are therefore astonished at the fact that Athenians regard their minds as their “ownmost.” Athenians are allowed the freedom to exercise their own mind to the fullest extent,⁴⁷ and yet somehow that mind still turns back to the public good. By allowing Athenians to have their own minds, Athens reaps the benefits of a free allegiance that, in its vehemence, can only be called devotion. In these ways, Athenians have reversed the poles of ordinary discourse about one’s own and the other’s. Not only do Athenians, in their foreign policy, treat everyone else’s belongings as their own; they also, in their internal politics, treat their own as everyone else’s.

The formidable civic engine driven by the Athenians’ ability to rise above the love of their own nevertheless has a down side that the Corinthians, despite their alarm, can only pity (1.70.8):

And all these things they labor at with troubles and dangers throughout the whole of life, and they enjoy least of all what already belongs to them, on account of always acquiring more; nor do they think that a holiday is anything other than effecting the necessary, or that a troublesome lack of leisure is any greater misfortune than the peace of minding their own business [*hesuchia apragmon*].

Here, as in the Funeral Oration, Athens alone among all the Greek cities does not value *apragmosune*. Yet a stick-at-home like Dicaeopolis at least enjoys what he has, whereas the politically hyperactive Wasps and Acharnians could find no peace. Discontent was at the root of their activism. It may not be public altruism that causes the Athenians to expend their bodies but an unwillingness to go on living in the low station that they feel they already occupy. The life they risk so pales in comparison to the higher level they hope to attain that it loses all value. The uprooting of each individual from his natural self-satisfaction, the psychic distancing inherent in the transition to the love of beauty, honor, and merit has had a psychological cost on Athens no less than on Sparta.

Yet, in a desire that afflicts Sparta only a little, Athens additionally seeks international honor. The drama of vanity among citizens repeats itself at the national level (2.64.6). Just as the vain citizen is in one way more far sighted

⁴⁷ Compare Gomme, Andrews, and Dover, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, ad loc.

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than the man who is content with his own, so Periclean Athens is more far sighted than Sparta. Pericles foresees a time when Athens will no longer exist. At the lowest point of the plague, he even hints of the city's demise in a speech to the assembly. If the communal memory must someday come to an end, the implication is that memory of Athenian glory will have to survive among peoples other than Athenians. Athens, he says, now holds (2.64.3)

the greatest power hitherto acquired . . . and if, after this, we should ever give in (for the nature of all things is to decline), the memory will remain behind that, though Greeks, we yet ruled the greatest number of Greeks.

Just as the individual is compelled to pursue honor and office by the specter of his personal demise, so the city is compelled to rule other cities in anticipation of the communal demise. The minds in whom the memory of Athens will remain, after the Athenians are gone, turn out to be the peoples whom Athenians have fought in foreign lands (2.43.3):

For illustrious men, all the earth is their tomb. Not only does the epitaph on stelae signal it in their own land [*en tei oikeiai*]; but also, in lands not belonging to them [*en tei me prosekousei*], there dwells an unwritten marker in every mind if not in fact.

The different scale of Pericles' vision from Tyrtaeus' vision here becomes apparent. The Spartan poet's horizon was bounded by the polis; all honor devolves from the community to the individual. No honor comes from other nations to Sparta because none is needed. Why should Spartans care what other nations think? Tyrtaeus does not imagine a time when there is no Sparta; it is unthinkable that the communal memory, the memory of the hero's conspicuous tomb, as he calls it in *out' an mnesaimen* (12.29 West), should ever pass into oblivion. Yet pass it will unless some larger community of nations remains behind to remember it. Spartan conservatism and the concomitant longevity of their regime result in part from their unwillingness to look beyond this horizon. Pericles, by contrast, despite the conservatism of his strategy for the present war, seems to make a conscious choice for Athens to burn brighter even if brighter means briefer. The memory of a brief excellence outlasts that of a long mediocrity. Pericles can make this choice because he sees further. Tyrtaeus' horizon is civic, Pericles' universal.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Compare Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, Vol. 1, p. 187.

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Athens' going forth to strive with other cities is a logical consequence of Pericles' choice to love her on her merits rather than because she is his own. If she is to merit this higher love, she must be greater and better than other cities in actual fact. The erotic variety of patriotism implies imperialism, for if Athens does not take her place in the forefront of the other cities, then there is nothing lovable about her. Spartans, on the other hand, never compared Sparta with other nations in order to reassure themselves that she was indeed superior. It would never have entered their minds to do so; the act of comparing implies doubt. Spartans already know that their own ways are best. That is why they are so surprised when they get out in the world and find out what they have been missing.⁴⁹ Athenians on the other hand have opened up a distance between their own and true merit that leads them to want to test the value of their own.

Merit, nobility (*to kalon*) in action, grandeur, power appreciated aesthetically: these are ways in which a city shows its beauty. It was argued earlier that honor was among the beautiful things for individuals. A citizen-soldier covered in glory is the highest civic idea of individual beauty. Now the city, too, must prove herself beautiful. The communal imperative dovetails with the individual imperative in Athens' foreign wars. A young officer, by risking everything for victory in a noble action, wins honor vis-à-vis his peers. The whole city, by risking herself in noble actions against foreign powers, proves her own foremost merit, greatness, and beauty among other cities. The city, by thus proving her loveliness, in turn merits the eros felt for her by the citizen-soldier: she, of all cities, is worth his sacrifice. However, his desire to be loved back by the city, his eros (and thumos) for honor, can be satisfied only if he finds a noble action in which he risks his life. He thus has strong motives for leading the city into wars, and a self-sustaining cycle becomes evident. His personal ambition and his vision for the city go hand in hand. Both are fraught with risk. His eros for the city is such that he expects great things for her, and he wishes to help her realize that greatness. Because he does not love either himself or her unconditionally, but wishes to test both himself and her in order to prove the true worth of each, he risks personal failure and he risks leading the city into danger. Despite the clear advantages of his conscious, merit-based love over the unthinking attachment of the Spartans, the merit-based love nevertheless contains these

⁴⁹ Thucydides 1.130.

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paradoxes. By contrast, Spartans at least value their own country enough not to gamble it on greater and greater acquisitions.

Perhaps the most patriotic reading of imperialism, whether Athenian imperialism or any other, is that the citizens love their country so much that they wish to adorn her with a jewel in her crown. This may, but need not, imply a conscious wish to improve on what is already their own. The citizens may feel deeply that their country already deserves such a foremost position among nations. The ambitious among them dream of being the one who confers the rightful honor on his country, winning the jewel for her. The winning of the jewel for her is also the act by which he covers himself in glory. Yet according to our reading of the *Symposium*, what the honor lover desires is to make his mark, stamping some material around him in a way that future generations will see and remember him for. This would entail making his mark on his homeland, stamping her in some permanent way. This personal motive is somewhat at odds with the communal motive: the personal motive requires that the honor-lover *change* his homeland, improve her; the communal motive assumes that the patriot merely confers on the homeland what she already merited, with no fundamental change having been effected. The former motive is proper to a founder, whereas only the latter motive is appropriate to a citizen. The personal motive will thus tend to drive the citizen to desire to change his country substantially, improve her, and this calls into question his love for her as she currently is.

7.5. Colonialism, Territoriality, and the Beauty in Transgression

Patriotism involves this paradox: should the citizen love his or her community simply? Or should the citizen love the community's goodness? If the community and its goodness are separable in the citizen's mind, what is to stop the citizen from leaving the community for another or, better yet, building a new one to suit his or her taste? Starting over politically means founding a colony, a common occurrence in Greek political life. But colonization involves the justice and injustice at the heart of all political foundings. As we shall see, Spartan-style patriotism *qua* love of their own enjoys a second advantage over the beauty-based, merit-based patriotism of the Pericles' Athenians. The *justice* of this lower love, the love of one's own, is less easy to impugn than the justice of any other love on the spectrum

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(short of the detached, appreciative desire for contemplating beauty without possessing it). Although the love of one's own is defined by possession and therefore may appear to be the most possessive love of all, it properly loves only what it possesses already, and it does not desire to appropriate the belongings of others. Possessiveness, or what we have called acquisitiveness, appears only in the higher loves, in which the lover doubts the value of his own and seeks to test it or improve upon it. Self-satisfaction properly understood is too closed to seek to appropriate the other's possessions. Only some interest in the other can lead to theft and conquest. Paradoxically, the limit case of selfishness is effectually less selfish than some of the higher loves that supersede it. Because almost all eros will contain an element of the desire to take possession, the practical choice may be between more and less dangerous forms of selfishness. Some balance would appear to be needed between a love of one's own so narrow that civic life is impossible, and a love of honor and merit so aggressive that civic life is put at risk.

In his speech exhorting the Athenians to live up to their empire, even if their empire is a tyranny, Pericles again denigrates *apragmosune*, which he ridicules as "playing the good man" (*andragathizesthai*), useful only for a safe servitude (2.63.2–3). This divorce of politics from quietism, a policy carried through by Pericles and expanded by some of his successors in ways he would not have approved, was viewed by the more conservative Aristophanes as a danger to the state. It is worth delving into Old Comedy to see, one last time, the strict connection between sexuality and politics, in this case the politics of empire. Here, the sexuality, like the politics, goes together with the most extreme injustice.

The clearest contrast between *apragmosune* and *polupragmosune* occurs in *Birds*, the 414 B.C. satire about colonialism written shortly after the departure of the Sicilian expedition. Both principals, Euelpides and Peisetaerus, come to sight initially as retiring; they seek a place without troubles (*topos apragmon*, 44). As dropouts, they are useless to their own city, just as Pericles said. It is noteworthy that they did not love their own enough to stick with it, but the fault clearly lies with the city, not with them: the litigiousness of Athens does not allow anyone to rest quietly in possession of his own; the danger that a prosecutor will take away one's property, and the ease with which he can do so, have yielded the result that all Athenians are already alienated from their own. When asked to describe their ideal city, a subtle difference emerges between the two

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men. One of them, almost certainly Euelpides,⁵⁰ says that he envisions a city in which the worst troubles (*pragmata*) that could befall you were for a friend to browbeat you into attending a wedding feast and bringing the kids along, too, after giving them a bath. By contrast, Peisetaerus' vision is a city in which an old friend of the family, father to a blooming boy, accosts you and charges you with injustice for meeting his boy fresh from the bath yet leaving him *ummolested* (127–43). In contrast to his friend's homely idea of a good time, Peisetaerus' restless eros peeks out here.⁵¹

Family life continues to separate the two when Peisetaerus tries to expound his political idea to the birds, and Euelpides interrupts him with an irrelevant anecdote about the time he was invited to a baby's tenth day naming party (494). The naming-day party comes back in the christening of Cloudcuckootown when Peisetaerus says that he puts the name on it on the tenth day "just like it was a child" (922–3). In keeping with Socrates' speech in the *Symposium*, the new city is progeny of Peisetaerus' eros as surely as if he had fathered it. Peisetaerus is pregnant in soul, whereas Euelpides is pregnant in body. Moreover, the homoeroticism evident in Peisetaerus' vision of the ideal city, contrasted with the heterosexual, familial existence upheld by Euelpides, dovetails with the bifurcation of eros in the *Symposium* speech of Aristophanes. The lower, household eros of the heterosexuals produces children, whereas the eros of the homosexuals (and politicians) produces the more valuable offspring of works. Here, as elsewhere in Greek thought and literature, pederasty goes together with a wider civic or political ambition, whereas heterosexuality remains stuck in a lower, homely mindset. Euelpides' sexual orientation thus shows him to be the true *apragmon*, whereas Peisetaerus' orientation reveals that he is actually a *polupragmon*, a foreshadowing later borne out in the action of the play.

Euelpides eventually opts out of the imperial project and leaves, never to return. He departs just after Peisetaerus gives him an order for the first time (837–46). Euelpides wants his own private establishment; he can no more take orders than he can give them. But just as Euelpides' lower eros disqualifies him for politics by placing him beneath civic concerns,

⁵⁰ For a bibliography on the vexed question of line attribution in *Birds*, see Sommerstein, *Birds* ad loc. line one. My attributions differ from those of the most recent editions, particularly the critical edition of N. Dunbar, *Aristophanes. Birds*.

⁵¹ S. Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, p. 129.

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so Peisetaerus' upward eros disqualifies him for politics, in the republican sense praised by Pericles, by placing him above politics. Peisetaerus does not wish to rule and be ruled in turn. He wishes to be emperor, not statesman. It turns out that the two partners hated litigation in Athens for different reasons: Euelpides because he wanted to mind his own business, Peisetaerus because he wanted to mind everyone's business, and litigation, as the preliminary route to power in a democracy, would have taken too long.

Not only his sexual preference or orientation but also the manner of his sexual response distinguishes Peisetaerus' imperious eros. At the sight of Procne, Tereus' consort, Euelpides notices her beauty and her gold, and thinks of her as a maiden, that is, a virgin. Peisetaerus announces that it would give him pleasure to spread her thighs, disrobe her, and kiss her.⁵² This scene foreshadows his later offer to rape the goddess Iris after she unwittingly violates Clouduckoo air space (1253–6). In the Iris scene, the political meaning of the rape stems from the fact that Iris presents the first challenge to Peisetaerus' new empire in the sky. Will the air remain a no-man's land, formless and void, or can it be colonized like soil?⁵³ Rape is the punishment peculiar to the crime of trespassing;⁵⁴ a trespasser implicitly disregards the *nomoi* laid down by the one who has marked off the territory as his own. The sex act becomes an act of subordination that imposes the territorial *nomoi* onto the trespasser. Peisetaerus pretends that Iris needs a seal stamped on her, a kind of permit, before she can pass through the bird territory (1213–15). Marking the interloper to signify one's authority over her and therefore her implicit recognition of the colonialist's *nomoi* is the function of the rape.

Because the appropriation of property is closely linked with colonialism, it is worth exploring this sexual punishment that seems related both to property and to empire. It would be simplistic to assume that rape is a function only of the self-glorification or vanity associated with the higher

⁵² 667–74. Compare Dunbar, *Aristophanes. Birds* ad loc. on the long tradition of attributing the relevant lines to Peisetaerus.

⁵³ Significantly, Peisetaerus calls Iris "polluted" (*miarotate*, 1209), the religio-medical condition that infects someone who has knowingly or unknowingly invaded a precinct sacred to some god – as though Peisetaerus himself were the god and Iris the mortal interloper. Compare *Peace* 183–7, in which the mortal Trygaeus trespasses on the heavenly property, leading Hermes to shout hysterically, *miare, pammiare, miarotate, and miaron miarotate*.

⁵⁴ Dover writes, "Anthropological data indicate that human societies at many times and in many regions have subjected strangers, newcomers and trespassers to [rape] as a way of reminding them of their subordinate status" (*GH*, p. 105).

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love, *philotimia*, and not also a function of the lower love of one's own. Dicaeopolis, too, when enumerating the joys of the country life mentions the opportunity to dispose with your neighbor's slave girl as you please if you catch her sneaking onto your property to steal wood.⁵⁵ The god Priapus was guardian of orchards and gardens, and his imposing physique threatened the punishment that awaited anyone caught on the premises. Other statues used as boundary markers were similarly configured.⁵⁶ Country life is superior precisely because nothing is held in common: out here one has one's own domain, however small. Every man's home is his castle. Within these narrow boundaries, one makes the laws and can do whatever one likes, which is not true of life in the city, where one must abide by someone else's laws.

However morally ambiguous property ownership,⁵⁷ in the case of Dicaeopolis and other *apragmones* the appropriation took place in the past. The act of appropriation may no longer even be remembered. The *polupragmon* by contrast is looking to take over places that do not yet belong to him. Peisetaerus is a "settler." The word *oikizein* has "home" implicit in it: he is not defending a home but rather making himself at home.⁵⁸ Pericles spoke of "forcing every sea and land to become the highway for our daring, and setting down [*xunkatoikizein*] memorials both of evils and of goods everywhere" (2.41.4). Like a true Athenian, Peisetaerus is treating all extant property as ready to hand. The companions went to seek a new home, but finding one will entail taking away someone else's. By contrast, the harmlessness of the birds consists in their nomadism, the fact that they never appropriated any place for themselves (179–86). The air used to be

⁵⁵ 263–75. Dicaeopolis is in the middle of a prayer to "Phales," a personification of the phallus.

⁵⁶ *GH*, p. 105.

⁵⁷ The connection between sex and territoriality is so prevalent in the animal kingdom that it may be thought to be hard wired in human nature. For example, a male elephant will sometimes perform a bizarre sexual motion over the dead body of another male elephant slain in combat. Typically, the ritual is not performed by the bull that actually killed him but by the younger, weaker members in the bachelor herd, males of low status who have something to prove and who steal up to the corpse afterward. Although animals rely more on instinct and therefore cannot complete the act, man can. Dover cites as human examples the Norse saga in which a chieftain's dominion, whether actually or metaphorically, is expressed by "he uses X as his wife," as well as the "Eurymedon" vase depicting a Greek offering to mount a Persian, probably in celebration of a military victory (*GH*, p. 105; see Section 4.1). The nonclassical locus would be the city of Sodom in Genesis 19, in which the citizens desire to rape the strangers who come to visit Lot. The biblical story draws together the same three otherwise unrelated factors of homosexuality, territoriality, and rape, that characterize the political desire of Peisetaerus.

⁵⁸ For repeated uses of the word *oikizein* and cognates, see lines 172, 183, 196, 293, 413, 547, 836, 965, 967, 1027, 1107, 1109–10, 1124, 1132, 1277, 1280, 1307, 1319, 1351, 1345, 1515.

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free; it belonged to everyone. Air, like the water mastered by the Athenian navy, was formerly a medium, joining places together, not a place in its own right. By making air into a place, Peisetaerus makes it his own. But the fantasy merely points up the truth about the earth as well: all land was once free, too. Every appropriation was unjust. No original appropriation has any more moral standing than today's expropriation; the Athenians are justified in taking away from anyone whatever they can manage themselves.

The rapes involved in Peisetaerus' colonialism are merely the sexual aspect of his desire to leave his stamp on the world around him. Sexuality becomes one vehicle by which the imperialist's eros to leave the world forever changed by him, to leave a lasting memorial to himself, is fulfilled. The imperialist sees all the world as matter on which to impress his form. His desire to take over stems from this perception, in which he sees opportunities missed, land unused, people unoccupied. The birds ought to make something of themselves. Like Pericles, criticizing the *apragmones*, Peisetaerus chides the birds for not being *polupragmones* enough (471). Their passivity is provoking: a blank page invites the pen; white snow asks to be sullied, to receive some form. In Chapters 4 and 5 we examined the Freudian-style explanation that sublimated sexual desire is at the base of all such urges, keeping the pot bubbling by maintaining the heat and pressure from below, and (in the case of imperialism) powering the quest to discover and conquer foreign lands. The same chapters also examined Plato's alternative explanation that the philotimic eros is primary, in which case the sexual aspect of conquest would be an outgrowth of the desire for self-aggrandizement and self-glorification. On the latter reading, sexual intercourse becomes triumphal, or celebratory of something greater than itself: the physical culmination of a spiritual achievement, bodily proof of the military and political success.

The Attic orators discussed in Section 4.1 claimed that the hubris involved in rape went far beyond mere sexuality and should be punished accordingly. Hubris was, additionally, the desire to rise above one's victim politically. In *Birds*, rising above the other by means of the sex act, that is, the use of the sex act to establish or reaffirm status, pertains not only to political but to metaphysical divisions. Peisetaerus' first and most telling complaint against the gods was their coming down to earth as adulterers to prey on mortal women ("high handedly," as it were: 556–60). Mortals are easy marks for immortals. Every time an immortal targets a mortal, the relative status of each is confirmed. The democratic fear at Athens about

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attacks by upper-class citizens on lower-class citizens was the political analogue of Peisetaerus' metaphysical complaint. By making Iris his mark, Peisetaerus turns the tables. He makes a metaphysical statement. No one but a god can sleep with a goddess.⁵⁹ He crosses the bourn that separates man from god. Iris, of course, disagrees strenuously with his interpretation of their relative standing in the hierarchy (1213–14). The desire to cross this boundary inflames Peisetaerus far more than a specifically sexual need for a female – females are not his taste anyway, as he implies.⁶⁰ The imperial eros of Peisetaerus wishes to transgress all norms; he finds a beauty in transgression. The beauty he contemplates is his own, a vision of Peisetaerus transformed into an Olympian god.

Eros as transgression, the antinomianism of desire, proves that such eros is nomothetical at its very core. Only the presence of the boundary piques the desire. Likewise, the existence of sadism is proof of Socrates' contention that *philotimia* is properly erotic, not thumic only. As argued in Section 6.5, the desire to strip away both mores and clothes might seem initially a desire to get down to the natural, but the bodily beauty that one finds there, stripped of all cultural construction, is boring, and the desire to impose *nomos* on it rears up again. Once sadists have peeled the object of desire down to the skin and find there is no place left to go, the skin must be peeled off next, or else the body must be remade to reflect the desirers' will by readding *nomos* in some subtler way. If their eros were simply anomian, then the sadists would not need to bring back dominance and hierarchy in forms purely empty of content. The *nomoi* that they reimpose are weak parodies of the *philotimia* to make one's mark on the political level or, in Peisetaerus' and Athens' case, on the universal level. Bodily beauty naturally gives way to mental beauties, including especially the narcissism of contemplating one's own high status, demonstrated in the subordination of another.

Natural boundaries must be forced to give way as surely as cultural boundaries. A destructive eros that attempts to subsume more and more of the world into itself, of necessity breaking the form of each new object, reducing it to raw material in order to impose its own new form on it, is nonetheless eros. Aristotle called Empedocles' Strife merely another form

⁵⁹ Peisetaerus eventually marries a goddess, Zeus' daughter, in order to consolidate, or finalize, the transfer of power. For the sheer impiety of the deed, contrast the reaction of Anchises when he finds out, the morning after, that it was Aphrodite in disguise who came to his bed the night before: "Do not allow me to live" (*Hymn to Aphrodite* 188–9).

⁶⁰ Scholia on 1261 with Sommerstein, *Birds*, ad loc.

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of Love, as the breaking down and building up are aspects of the same cycle.⁶¹ *Sub specie aeternitatis*, the two are the same. From the limited point of view of the aggregate bodies, their own destruction is a strife; but from the point of view of the four elements, the destruction of aggregates looks like a love because the elements are released from the aggregates to find one another again. The imperialist is the tool of this latter cosmic force as well as of the former, aggregating force. As he tries to take all of the cosmos into himself, he eventually stretches himself too thin and overreaches, losing the aggregate that he had already collected. The Athenian empire, by attempting to increase without bound, effects its own dispersal. The empire unites with the cosmos not by taking the whole into itself, but by giving itself back to the whole. Likewise, the individual who was exhilarated to be part of the movement, who desired to use the power of the city to transgress the bounds of his own humanity or to overcome his mortal form, also does so, in a way he did not expect: his elements are dispersed once again.

7.6. Security, Profit, and Discontent with One's Own

The ordinary factors motivating the behavior of nations – e.g., security, profit, hegemony – all have their place in Thucydides' analysis of Athens' most imperialistic moment, the Sicilian expedition. However, Thucydides describes a new mode, eros, in which profit, for example, can be experienced. In Thucydides' conception, the ordinary motives take on an erotic cast when they become intensified and transformed. Thucydides' concept of eros can thus help to provide us with a theory to describe political behavior at "peak"⁶² moments, when a nation acts for the ordinary motives in an abnormal, atypical manner. Furthermore, to these traditional motives in their new mode, Thucydides adds an important new motive: a cosmopolitan interest in importing everything foreign and in gazing on the foreign land to be subjugated.

Three classes of citizens, specified by diversity of age, economic standing, and motivation, experience the political movement for conquering Sicily differently. Security is given as the decisive factor for one age group, the elder citizens (*presbuteroi*, Thucydides 6.24.3). The Athenian assembly as a whole had also been concerned with security (*asphaleia* 6.24.2; cf. 6.23.4, 6.18.7, 6.18.5). The safety of the expeditionary force was the paramount

⁶¹ *Metaphysics* 1.4.6 (985a 24–9).

⁶² The term is taken from A. H. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*. See pp. 59–68.

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issue since large losses of men and matériel would have implications for the security of Athens herself (6.18.5, 6.10.1–2, 6.9.3). Of the three ways in which eros is said to have affected the Athenians, security seems at first sight the only motive that could not become erotically intense in itself. Security is not acquisitive but protects its own; security thus seems a motive that must first be set aside before a nation or individual experiences political eros. Yet security extends to the defense of acquisitions in addition to the defense of homeland. Security is thus linked to (the ostensibly more erotic) expansionism if only in the retrospective manner of seeking to secure foreign possessions that have already been acquired. The greater the extent to which the empire has expanded heretofore, the greater the need for extraordinary measures to maintain what has been acquired. Where Pericles had argued that national security would be endangered by attempting to relinquish the empire, that is, to let go a tiger once Athens had taken it by the tail (6.2.60), Alcibiades in the debate over Sicily modifies the argument to say that not only ceasing to defend but also ceasing to make new acquisitions harms Athenian security. As with Hobbes' famous "power after power" argument, in which each new increase in power is sought not for its own sake but only in order to protect the last increase, so in Alcibiades' vision the Athenian empire has become more precarious the higher it has climbed, to the point that the distinction between offense and defense and between risk and security has become nullified. He argues that against an emerging first-rate power such as Syracuse, who was establishing herself as hegemon in Sicily, Athens could not afford a defensive posture of waiting to be attacked, but must resort to a preemptive strike (6.18.2). Everyone was now gunning for Athens, and with good reason. By this argument, Alcibiades was able to make risk-taking seem the safest course, whereas a defensive posture implied the gradual crumbling of future security.

It is unclear whether for the elders, and for the assembly as a whole, this argument in particular proved the most convincing.⁶³ The concern

⁶³ Alcibiades offered a second argument containing a veiled threat about the security implications of class conflict in Athens that may have proved more convincing to prudent citizens. The vulgar, the middle class, and the thinking class (*to panu akribes*) are strong only when mixed together. The city at rest would wear itself out on itself (6.18.6). Alcibiades thus reveals the implications of the internal dynamic of expansion that lay at the heart of the imperial democracy. The demos has been made hungry, in part artificially, by methods that we shall subsequently explore. Practically speaking, Athens must exploit other cities economically in order to keep her system going. The people are likely to turn on the wealthy in search of sustenance and riches if some foreign source is not found. It is in the context of this threat that Alcibiades advances the arguments that

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for the safety of the expeditionary force in the assembly as a whole was disarmed by Nicias' attempt to stagger them with the economic cost⁶⁴ (6.24.1, 6.19.2). Precisely if staking more on the wager increases chances of success, then gambling a much greater stake provides that much more security for the stake. With everyone else convinced of success on this basis, the elders, that is, the only segment of society who continued to regard failure as a possible outcome of the mission (and for whom security therefore remained decisive), reasoned that the expedition was desirable because there were only two possible outcomes: that they would subjugate those against whom they sailed or else that (implicitly), even if they failed, such a massive expeditionary force would be secure (6.24.3). In this way, the *idea* of safety is transformed and plays into the hands of desire and its intensification. Images of defensive impregnability or unsinkability, even if distinguished from offensive capabilities in the mind of the political actor, bear indirectly on the choice to undertake offensive and acquisitive action. Joined with even meager offensive capabilities, invulnerability turns accepting steep odds against success into a safe choice. Invulnerability combined with considerable offensive capabilities makes accepting unfavorable odds a rational choice.

The second and third age- and economics-based classes are given as the young men (*en tei helikiai*), probably of the societal elite as they do not want for money, and the mass of people serving as soldiers. These two classes experience erotic imperialism as, respectively, the imperial "gaze" and an exceptionally intensified desire for profit. Because the descriptions mirror the Funeral Oration in crucial respects, the two parts of the history should be treated in tandem. The dream of political eros laid out in the Funeral Oration is realized in these two classes of citizens, but not simply as the patriotic eros that Pericles had envisioned.⁶⁵ These citizens do not only or

Athenian military science (which was primarily naval, i.e., depending on the mobilization of the demos for rowers) would remain sharp for the national defense only through its continual use in struggles, and that a polis not habituated to inactivity would place herself in jeopardy by attempting to change to inactivity (*apragmosune*, 6.18.6–7, 6.18.3). A politics that departs least from its own prevailing character and conventions, even if those happen to be risky expansions, secures the greatest safety (*sc.* that is possible for such a city).

⁶⁴ See the discussion in Section 3.5.

⁶⁵ For a different but related view of how Thucydides critiques Pericles' project, see Monoson and Loriaux, "The Illusion of Power and the Disruption of Moral Norms: Thucydides' Critique of Periclean Policy."

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merely fall in love with Athens in any simple sense. As previously stated, the idea of sending an armada to Sicily, an idea with which the Athenians explicitly fall in love, could be explained patriotically only as the desire to expand Athenian hegemony, that is, to win for Athens a jewel for her crown. In place of this generous possibility, Thucydides implies a lack of generosity, on the part of the mass, and an attraction not simply to Athens on the part of the elite but an attraction to Sicily itself, that is, a nonpatriotic eros for the foreign or the other.

The distinction that Pericles drew between high and low motives for loving the city is reprised in the diverse motives in play during the Sicilian narrative. Pericles argued that the Athenians should become *erastai* of the city through gazing at (*theomenoi*) or contemplating her, and not merely for gain (*ophelia*). As if in answer to his exhortation, the young men of the elite class, true to Pericles' ideal, have the experience of eros as an ocular desire: "a longing for far-off sights and spectacles" (*opsis kai theoria*, 6.24.3). Their eros does indeed appear to have something in common with the contemplation of beauty, although not in the way Pericles intended.⁶⁶ But the mass of people act in direct contravention of Pericles' advocacy:

The great multitude and the soldier intended to earn money, in the short run, and besides that to acquire power whence they might earn wages eternally thereafter [*aidion*].

Whether or not Thucydides' language of "eternal wages" is a deliberate answer to the language of "eternal memorials" (*aidia*, 2.41.4) that he reported that Pericles used in the Funeral Oration, this passage seems to contain the outcome of Pericles' project. The liberation of acquisitiveness did not permit all Athenians to raise their sights. The mass of people never liberated themselves from the desire for material gain. This lower need, associated with the love of one's own, which Pericles contrasted with true eros, Thucydides presents as one of his three main manifestations of eros. It is noteworthy that in Thucydides' vulgar gain and elite "gaze," as in the *Symposium*, eros has the dual aspects of possession and admiration; it stretches itself between ownership and beauty. But for the two aspects to be so widely separated from one another, each the province of a separate economic and social class, eventually works to the detriment of the whole project.

⁶⁶ See the discussion in Section 7.7.

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It is noteworthy that the lower class, or poor majority, do not love their own in the strict sense of self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction. They desire to acquire more. The Corinthians' speech at the Peloponnesian conference, squarely in the oligarchic tradition of Greek political thought, registered alarm at this discontent of the Athenian masses and their implicit alienation from their own (Section 7.4). Thucydides in his own treatment of the same material agrees in part but also stresses the *political* creation of discontent in the daring policies of Themistocles and Pericles (1.18.2, 2.16.1). Athens is, according to Thucydides, not one polis at all but a number of poleis spread out all over Attica. Decentralized country life was more the case with Athens than with other cities (2.15.1). The synoecism that, by tradition, occurred under Theseus, had never taken hold in people's minds (2.16.1). Thus when Pericles' strategy called for them to cede the land of Attica to the Spartan invaders and to move inside the walls for safety, it was with great reluctance that the rural populace left behind their homes and ancestral rites, each person in effect "leaving behind nothing less than his own polis" (2.16.2). In other words, even allegiance to the centralized Athenian polis, whose traditional number was 30,000, already stretches their loyalties thin. Clearly the rural Athenians were originally lovers of their own. Before being regimented into the political weapon that the Corinthians call self-abnegating and that Pericles treats as the higher acquisitiveness, their love was oriented toward the near and dear. No higher eros for beauty would have been needed to make them fight and die to defend these lands. But instead, the naval strategy of Athens called for them to cede the land and to stand by and watch the land being ravaged (e.g., 2.21.2–3), in two separate wars during the span of a single generation.

The astonishing dedication of the demos to the common weal can be seen as an indirect result of these evacuations. The loss of their own personal substance was severe. Thucydides describes their carrying their families and their moveables into the city, some even bringing the wood from their houses. Flocks and beasts of burden they sent into Euboia and the adjacent islands (2.14.1). But when they arrived in Athens, there was not enough dwelling space, let alone enough plots of ground, for each to be self-sufficient, even after the land between the long walls was parceled out (2.17.1–3). The *pleonexia* of the majority, so fatal in the Sicilian imperialism, can therefore be explained by the fact that so many were dispossessed. Public pay from soldiering and jury duty (Section 4.2) became the main means of

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subsistence. Aristotle later described the political difference between rural subsistence farmers and an urban proletariat (*Politics* 6.4.1–3, 1318b 9–17):

The best demos is the farming kind. . . . For on account of not having much property, they lack leisure, with the result that they do not attend the assembly often, but on account of not having the necessaries they spend their time working and do not desire the things of others; working is more pleasant to them than politicking and ruling, wherever there are not great incomes from offices. For the many grasp after gain more than honor.

A marketing demos, on the other hand, “because they are always frequenting the marketplace and the town . . . easily attend the assembly” (6.4.13, 1319a 28–30). Aristotle takes it as a matter of course that political activism on the part of the demos must inevitably lead to a collective pursuit of gain by means of politics in the assembly. Dispersed, each is wholly occupied with eking out a bare subsistence. As a collectivity, however, the economic reality is such that the temptation to use the collective might for individual gain becomes overpowering. As a collectivity, Athenians were able to pursue gain at the expense of other cities.

Before the war, Pericles might truthfully have been able to say that his hearers preferred honor to gain. Aside from marketers, anyone who had leisure to attend the assembly also had enough substance to live in town. But for the majority of poor Athenians, acquisitiveness meant not Pericles’ love of beauty (*philokaloumen*, 2.40.2) but love of gain (*philokerdoumen*). They had no choice.⁶⁷ The dedication to the common, then, was as unnatural at Athens as it was at Sparta. In each case, people deprived of their own had no other alternative than the common. In one way, the savage Spartan arrangement was superior, in that each citizen had his own property allotment, even if he was not allowed to enjoy it. No one in the politeuma or voting body in Sparta was poor; hence there was at least no absolute compulsion to use public affairs for private ends.

Not the higher love of a beautiful Athens, then, but what Athens can do for them motivates the majority of Athenians. Although their collective action has the appearance of being directed toward the common good of Athens, an appearance that alarmed the Corinthians, on closer inspection

⁶⁷ For ways in which honor and money can work in tandem, see the discussion of *Wasps* in Section 4.3.

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this common good turns out to be a host of congruent private goods. The same was true of at least one of the higher loves that Pericles sought to enlist: the love of honor. The few use the city as the vehicle for their honor and remembrance, just as the many use it as the ultimate money-making instrument; in both cases, the good redounds to individuals. Thucydides' judgement on how the war was lost singles out both for equal blame: the war effort fell prey to "private ambitions and private gains" (*kata tas idias philotimias kai idia kerde*, 2.65.7), a fatal alliance between the few and the many so that each class might obtain its desire. The patriotic aspect of political eros is thus undermined in several ways. Security and profit can both become erotic, and their communal intensity gives the appearance of great dedication to the common good. But neither finally unites the city. We have now surveyed the lower and middling forms of political eros. Only the contemplative eros in Pericles' project remains to be examined, both as the third and final motive of the peak moment as well as in its own right as an undeservedly neglected political motivation, a "globalizing" or cosmopolitan desire for foreign cultural products (Sections 7.7–8). This highest love in the Periclean project is also important for the continuing light it sheds on the second communitarian possibility (7.8), the nonerotic affection felt for one's country or community as a whole (as opposed to the affection between and among its citizens).

7.7. The Contemplative Desire and the Love of Beauty in Politics

Despite the role that *philotimia* played in the motivations of the elite, the notable example being Alcibiades,⁶⁸ Thucydides does not describe the eros of the elite young men, at the crucial moment before setting sail, as a desire for honor or self-glorification. Instead, he records the peculiarly detached, useless motive of sight-seeing. When eros fell on the elite young men, they desired to see "far-off sights and spectacles." The Athenian pursuit of beauty that Pericles advertised (*philokaloumen*) seems to come into its own here. It will be argued that this third, and final, motive for imperialism in Thucydides' account is a fuller, more nuanced view of what in modern parlance would be called the imperial gaze or, in terminology specific to

⁶⁸ Alcibiades needed both money and reputation, the former to support the latter: *elpizon . . . ta idia bama eutuchesas kbremasi te kai doxei opheseisin* (6.15.2–3).

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the study of certain areas dominated by modern European imperialism, “orientalism.” Most modern accounts of this passion stress how the will to dominate infects the imperialist’s intellectual and aesthetic faculties. His or her intentions remain larcenous, and the foreigner or the “other” is used principally for self-aggrandizement, only now on more subtle levels than that of physical subjugation. A cultural subjugation, or a putting-in-its-place of another culture is the dominant theme. The ancient view supplements these modern accounts in important ways. In ancient parlance, the modern accounts focus exclusively on the thumos or thumoeidetic. By contrast, the ancient view of ocular and mental desire is almost entirely erotic, and the thumos here melts away so that the erotic loses its typical concern with possession or incorporation. This occurrence not only calls into question the utility of such a benign passion for the project of imperialism but also calls into question the completeness of the political psychology of empire under which most modern studies are conducted.

The word that Thucydides uses in his description of the young men’s passion to see is *theoria*, which properly means a “spectator event,” including theatrical performances, religious processions, and athletic contests. The Greeks loved to attend such events, and then as now watching was even more popular than taking part. In the context of international politics, *theoria* also meant the embassy of official observers sent at state expense to another city to represent Athens and to witness Panhellenic games such as the Olympic, Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian, or to attend local religious festivals and observe holy days of many kinds. If a citizen was on a *theoria*, he was on a junket, getting paid to travel to foreign lands and see places and sights that he had always wanted to see, in addition to being wined and dined by the locals. This made the position of *theoros*, or official spectator, a much-envied and highly sought-after assignment. The price of tyranny in *Republic* Book 9 is that, because of his many enemies, the tyrant, although “full of *erotes*,” cannot leave his country to view the spectacles (*theoresai*) that other free men are desirous of seeing, but must remain at home and envy whoever goes abroad and sees something good (579b 4–c 2).

The odd thing about the young Athenians’ being overcome by this desire now, on the eve of the Sicilian expedition, is that *theoria* is a mission undertaken in time of peace, between nations who are on friendly terms, or who are at least maintaining diplomatic relations. In the deadly struggle that awaits the young men, there will be no leisure to look. Their detachment from reality is a dangerous delusion about how amenable the world is to

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their own desires, at once characteristic of eros,⁶⁹ and worse than useless in practical politics. Cleon, an authentic imperialist, berates the Athenians for precisely this tendency, in the speech that Thucydides recounts, after the Athenians had a change of heart over the fate of Mytilene and wanted to hear more debate (3.36.5). The whole democracy, Cleon asserts, has been organized along the lines of an oratory contest, wherein citizens are habituated to become spectators. They judge facts and actions purely on the basis of how well spoken the proponent is (3.38.4–7):

You seek something other than the reality in which we live . . . you are simply mastered by the pleasure of hearing, less like people in council about the city than you are like spectators [*theatai*] sitting at the feet of sophists.

Cleon is correct that the elite young men of the Sicilian expedition are not the only soldiers in the course of the war to fall prey to the desire to contemplate. In an irony of Thucydides' account, this Athenian desire to watch rather than to act, to appreciate rather than to accomplish, is a passion that turns up in Cleon himself. Thucydides describes the politician's fatal reconnoiter of Amphipolis in terms suggestive of the leisured, contemplative, theater-going life. Not realizing that Brasidas is nearby watching his every move and not expecting anyone to come out of Amphipolis to attack him (5.7.1–3), Cleon announces that he is going for a view (*kata thean*, 5.7.3) of the land. Accordingly, he stations his army atop a hill while he himself takes in the view (*etheato*, 5.7.4) of the lake that the river Strymon formed there, and of the situation of the city on the Thraceward side. Brasidas alerts his men that the enemy is up on a hill in no regular order, diverted by the view (*kata thean tetrammenous*, 5.9.3), and orders them to prepare for battle. Other Athenians, perceiving that attack is imminent, hurriedly bring word to Cleon "who has gone up ahead for his view" (*kata ten thean*, 5.10.2). Even at this point Cleon believes he is at leisure (*skhole*, 5.10.4) to depart and accordingly exposes his army's unguarded side to Brasidas, who promptly attacks, leading to Cleon's ignominious end. Cleon no doubt went ahead in search of practical information. But why did he take so long, and why did he lose his sense of the practical consequences? Why does Thucydides relentlessly stress the language of viewing, four times in brief compass? If the most genocidal imperialist at Athens could thus fall prey to the

⁶⁹ See the discussion in Section 3.5.

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same attraction that overcame the young men on the eve of the Sicilian expedition, then the implication is that Cleon and the other Athenians were, in one important respect, innocents abroad. Cleon's case proves the rule that a desire for disinterested viewing was one of the motives at the heart of Athenian imperialism, and was, at the same time, fatal to the enterprise.

Eros beguiles the one who feels it and, unbeknownst to him, works the dissolution of the composite. The naïve young men, for their own safety, ought to have been feeling sterner emotions as they sailed off to Sicily, from which few ever returned. Anger at an injustice, or fear for the safety of their own homeland would have served them better. Even possessiveness, which the many felt, would have stood them in better stead for the rigors to come. A near total lack of selfishness characterizes this eros, in which beautiful sights take precedence over acquisition and replace even the desire to win glory.

The young men's ocular desire approaches the purely mental eros that Socrates recommends at the top of the ladder of love in the *Symposium*, as well as elsewhere in the Platonic corpus. People who love sights and spectacles (*philotheamones*) are discussed in the *Republic* Book 5, in which Socrates insists that lovers of sights as well as people who run to and fro attending Dionysiac festivals both in town and in the country in order to witness as many choral performances as they can are similar to philosophers. The only difference is that the unique sight that the philosophers love to see is the sight of the truth, rather than just any beautiful color or figure⁷⁰ (475c 7–476b 7). The aestheticism of this desire implies a very different kind of eros from those examined heretofore. The object of attraction might just as well reside in a museum as in the home of the admirer; he has no desire to take it. The highest tier in Socrates' theory of eros is an attempt to overcome possessiveness in order to love all beauty, no matter where it is found. This entails overcoming the last vestige of the attachment to one's own. The transition from the love of one's own to the love of honor implied a loss of satisfaction or an insecurity about the value of one's possessions. Now the transition from the love of honor to the love of beauty entails that the preoccupation with one's own nobility or "beauty" must give way to the love of beauty simply, whether one can possess it or not. The political implication would be that the love of patria must open up to include every place or land that merits appreciation.

⁷⁰ For a comprehensive analysis of Plato's use of *theoria* and cognates, see Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, pp. 206–37.

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Although the lower two erotes were strongly influenced by thumos, the highest eros seems to contain no animosity or competitiveness of any kind. The silence regarding thumos in the *Symposium* speech can be supplied if we extrapolate from its treatment of the body, viz. that which in every case is most “one’s own.” Child production required bodily contact, and even the philotimic couple were allowed to touch; but “correct” pederasty (211b 5–6) means leaving bodies behind, at first leaving other people’s bodies but eventually also leaving one’s own body. Diotima counsels promiscuity for Socrates as a young man as a way of making his taste go off bodies. This was the homeopathic medicine discussed in Section 6.5. If he were allowed to stick with one body, he might fall in love with its particular incarnation of beauty, and he would inevitably fall into the trap of the love of one’s own. But by frequenting many bodies, Socrates will achieve a frustration and will be forced into a mental eros (or at least his mental eros will have less competition from his frustrated bodily eros). In place of touching comes viewing, or beholding, first with the eye and later with the mind’s eye, as corporeal objects are left behind in favor of beauties found in abstract relations, such as those of laws and sciences. Diotima calls this “viewing by what means he must” and “seeing beauty in the way it is seeable” (212a 1–3). Just as bodily beauty can be appreciated only by bodily organs, so one’s body becomes an impediment to purity of intellection as one progresses to the intellectual beauties. The letting go of one’s own body must proceed *pari passu* with the loss of bodies as objects of desire. The true lover will have to learn to give up his body, to learn how to die, as Socrates argues in the *Phaedo*.⁷¹ This embrace of death was characteristic also of the honor-lover in his sacrifice. Yet his letting-go of life was in service of longer “life.” He desired to impress his form on the world in a way that time could not erase. The contemplative must give up that aspiration; he must allow the world to impress its form on him. This amounts to losing the will to struggle against what he sees. The loss of one’s own is now total: not only one’s own body but one’s last shred of vanity or selfishness, so that the mind may become a mirror that cannot choose but reflect exactly the things put in front of it. Otherwise, the eideticizing of thumos will substitute figments of its own construction in place of beings.⁷² Earlier we defined eros as that which takes us out of ourselves. Eros at this highest level finally succeeds in taking us completely

⁷¹ 66b 1–67b 5; 67e 2–5.

⁷² Section 4.2.

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out of ourselves. The self is annihilated in the sense that it becomes an exact copy of what it reflects. Aristotle's dictum that the soul is, in a way, nothing other than all of the beings,⁷³ becomes true only if the eros to see is intense enough to push thumos to this vanishing point.

It is worth stressing that Socrates' eros is still selfish in intention. He desires to experience beauty for himself. Moreover, his desire to possess the whole is, in one very limited sense, no less imperialist than Alcibiades' desire. He sets no terminus on the expansion of his inquiry; no region is off limits from his probing examination. His eros could thus be viewed as a transgression, a "higher" hubris. Foucauldian and other modern and postmodern accounts of philosophy do indeed assimilate philosophy to domination,⁷⁴ rather than, as the ancient account does, assimilate one rarefied aspect of imperial domination to philosophy. The difference, once again in ancient terminology, is whether we understand eros or thumos to be the decisive passion, and whether we should view the desire to possess the world as a stunted attempt to know the world, or view the desire to know the world as a stunted desire to possess it. In the ancient account, the destructiveness normally attendant on hubris is in Socrates' rare case defeated simply by the nature of the organ with which he experiences his pleasure, the organ of perception, which happens to require that the most intimate penetration of all beings be identical to allowing itself to be penetrated by those beings. The ultimate appropriation is to allow oneself to be appropriated. Eros by its apparent selfishness fools the one who feels it into giving himself away. In a similar manner, Thucydides' elite young men are betrayed both by the strength of their passion and by the transpolitical nature of that passion. The power of their ocular passion will not let them rest content with contemplating their own; yet the softness inherent in their desire renders it unfit for achieving satisfaction on the political plane. Without realizing that eros entails their death, without ever "learning how to die," the young men go forth to their tryst with destiny. Imperialism for them means falling in love with a foreign land.

⁷³ *He psuche ta onta pos estin panta* (*De anima* 3,8, 431b 21; cf. 3,5, 430a 14). However, the ways in which both Aristotle's and Diotima's accounts rely on a kind of mysticism would be worth considering in another study. One wonders if their implicit religiosity (particularly in Diotima's account) does not mean that thumos, rather than eros, is crying out for the annihilation of the self; in an inversion, the wish to eradicate thumos may stem from the thumos itself, i.e. the thumos would covertly be the driving force behind this poetic rendering of the contemplative life.

⁷⁴ For knowing as power, victory, superiority, see Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, aphorism 252.

7.8. Cosmopolitanism and Cultural Acquisitiveness

The imperialism of the elite young Athenians seems to be a blurred image of Socrates' eros: a political reflection of his philosophical strand of eros. Evidence from other sources corroborates Thucydides' political theory and suggests that the attraction to the other was not an uncommon feature of Athenian imperialism. A globalizing desire to traffic in foreign customs, fashions, and ideas is most evident in the Athenians' consumption of commodities, including cultural products, that the empire enabled them to purchase. Patriotic voices decried this attraction to otherness as dangerously unpatriotic. If imperialism *qua* material acquisition tempts the desirer to overreach and give back all that he has taken, imperialism *qua* cultural consumption, like the desire to see, entails a loss of one's own in a more fundamental sense. For example, behind Aristophanes' vocal anti-imperialism lay not the fear of Athenian collapse but rather a cultural conservatism. Aristophanes routinely castigated Athens' desire for the foreign delicacies and foreign fashions that came into her harbor at the hub of the empire. The evil of empire in his eyes was not an excess of patriotism or a hatred of the other leading to aggression, but paradoxically an attraction to the other, a desire to have his things, perhaps even to live his life, adopt his ways, to become him. A "cosmopolitan"⁷⁵ character is thereby produced in the citizen, who is no longer unswervingly loyal to his own city. This loss of cultural formation was a shocking occurrence to Greeks in instances such as that of the Spartan Pausanias, who went abroad and found that being a Persian was more enjoyable than being a Spartan. His old way of life now struck him as needlessly austere.⁷⁶ The danger of his attraction, that is, betrayal of the fatherland, was therefore clear.

For political theory in the twenty-first century, the importance of the Greek debate is that it shows that imperialism shares a motivation with economic and cultural globalization that is not based on domination in any simple or obvious sense. Because the two, globalization and imperialism, shade into one another, it will always require careful analysis to distinguish them. Just as European unification means loss of state sovereignty in certain areas, so Athenian imperialism paradoxically meant a loss of

⁷⁵ The term cosmopolitan is used in its modern sense; it is not meant to refer to the Stoics (or the Cynics) who thought of themselves as citizens of the cosmos (*politai tou kosmou*), although these Socratic lines of thought may in some sense have been the logical outcome of the expansive eros felt by the young Athenians.

⁷⁶ Thucydides 1.130.

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Athens, if Athens is understood to consist of her native customs. In the view of Aristophanes, citizens ought to desire their own native ways and native products, even if those ways and products happen to be inferior. By contrast, Pericles boasted (2.38.2):

On account of the stature of our city, all things come into her from every land; whence it happens that for us, reaping the goods produced here is no more familiar [*oikeiotera*] an enjoyment than reaping those of other people.

But the influx of foreign goods has an impact on the imperial center in unforeseen ways. In *Birds*, Aristophanes satirized what he saw as the resulting instability of the Athenian character. At an early stage in the founding of Cloudcuckootown, Athenian imperialists had tried to take it over by forcing Athenian *nomoi* onto the new state (Section 2.4). Later, after Peisetaerus' successful resistance, the reverse occurs: Cloudcuckoo fashions take over Athens. A bird herald reports on the progress down there:

Don't you know how many lovers [*erastai*] of this land you have?
Back before you founded this city,
Lacomania possessed quite all the people:
they used to grow long hair, go hungry, get dirty, Socratize,
carry knobbed sticks; but now, they've turned about again:
Ornithomania has them doing everything birds do,
for sheer pleasure mimicking them utterly.

Whether the Athenians imitate Sparta or the birds, the poet notices the loss of national character. Imperialism works both ways: the colonizer becomes colonized by the foreign land to which he is attracted. Does not such need for the other imply a disdain for, or insecurity with, what one already has? Patriots stay home. Imperialism emerges not so much as a rational selfishness as an insane altruism. The Athenians' project of pulling the rest of the world into themselves is tantamount to giving themselves totally to the world. When the mind encounters the other, by mirroring that other it loses itself and takes on aspects of the other.

Once again, important aspects of modern communitarian theory are revealed by this ancient theory. Proponents of "thicker" civil society, by asserting that citizens ought to love their own more, seem to accept evidence against the "strong" communitarian claim of constitutive community, in which the values-constituting power of community determines what citizens perceive as beautiful and good. If some citizens are overly

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attracted to otherness, and under-attached to their own, then their community cannot adequately be constituting their values.⁷⁷ Proponents of the strongest version would have to argue that other-oriented citizens actually love only aspects of their own *in* the other and that their embrace of other ways must always be inauthentic. Since distinguishing authentic from inauthentic understandings of otherness could only be accomplished by a mind outside the closed loop of community (a mind that cannot exist on this view), the inauthenticity of our embrace of the other, on which the strong version of communitarianism depends, must remain an assumption.

Weaker versions of communitarianism, however, receive a great deal of corroboration from the ancient theories we have been considering. Neither deontology nor utilitarianism alone keeps communities together.⁷⁸ Pericles' erotic community transcends both of these by far: hearts as well as minds are engaged in the project of community; Athenian patriotism includes a built-in gradient toward stricter and stricter scrutiny of itself. Yet ultimately, Pericles' erotic patriotism tries for too much. Just as the strong version of communitarianism forgets the struggle of the human mind to transcend parochial limits, so Pericles' transcendent patriotism implies a disembodied mind that forgets the local and particular requirements of community. In an attempt to be universal, Periclean Athens must give up her own – give up herself. Actual communities are founded *both* on love of one's own *and* on values that transcend one's own. Finding an appropriate balance for a given community is the crucial task of political theory. Actual communities are based preponderantly on the love of one's own. Voluntary associations, as well as civic honors, enlarge a narrow, familial love of one's own, allowing it to encompass a greater portion of the whole community. In an uneasy balance with these loves, a small modicum of love for (at least apparent) merit is required. A community in which citizens could not use their rationality either to strive to bring their actual community into accord with an ideal community or, in the worst case, to rationalize that their actual community already is the best community, would be a moribund community. Here deontology and utilitarianism creep back in, now taking their subordinate places: to satisfy the minds of citizens, the citizens

⁷⁷ Sandel, *Liberalism*, pp. 150, 179–80, argues for a *partial* constitutiveness but does not say how the faculty of reflection escapes the community's constituting power even partially.

⁷⁸ Since Pericles' project assumes both utilitarian values and deontology as scaffolding for his own, erotic version of community (Sections 7.1–2), it follows that Pericles, and probably Thucydides, saw the need for some further bond of association.

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must attempt, at the very least, to transcend the limits of the parochial. No one can consciously and seriously accept the proposition that the only reason he loves his community is because it is his own.⁷⁹ Needless to say, from the examples we have seen of communities that emphasized one of these requirements to the detriment of the others, each requirement alone without checks and balances from the others comports political temptations that no true patriot could ever wish his country to undergo. This is especially the case with the cosmopolitan imperialism into which Periclean erotic patriotism eventually resolves itself.

The problem with cosmopolitanism in real politics, in Aristophanes' view, is that it simultaneously desires empire and lacks the hardness to maintain it, the worst of both worlds from a patriot's perspective. The Aristophanic protagonist most infected by this eros, in a surprise reversal after the first half of *Wasps*, is Bdelycleon. After championing the private life and effecting a cure of his father's politicized eros, the young man introduces the old man to the pleasures of a leisured existence, including a high-class drinking party, at which he will meet a better class of people than the demotic crowd with which he was formerly involved. As they dress to go out, Philocleon balks at putting on a certain rare style of wool cloak, which looks outlandish to him. Bdelycleon informs him that it is sometimes called a "Persian": if Philocleon had ever traveled to Sardis, he would have seen them there. Such cloaks, he says, are handwoven by barbarians in Ecbatana (1135–47). Philocleon has a strange aversion to it, however. Next Bdelycleon tries to get his father to try a pair of shoes, also of foreign make, called "Laconics." Philocleon positively recoils at the idea of putting his Athenian feet into those; one of his toes is exceedingly anti-Spartan (*misolakon*, 1157–65). Bdelycleon's tastes are cosmopolitan. Philocleon's tastes are patriotic. Philocleon knows and loves only the products of his own city. One wonders how attached Bdelycleon is to Athens, except insofar as she is the center where all of these wonderful products arrive.

The son then rehearses his father about how to make charming dinner conversation. Cultured men are able to tell urbane stories; especially if something a little awkward or untoward happens during the course of the evening, a real gentleman will know how to cover it up with an anecdote. Philocleon is at a loss: what kind of anecdotes? Impressive ones, Bdelycleon

⁷⁹ However, a political theory with a proper respect for utility would be aware of the value of leaving undisturbed the rationalizations of citizens whose patriotism amounted to *little better* than the mere love of their own, that is, the value of letting sleeping dogs lie.

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instructs him, such as the time he went on a *theoria* with some famous politicians. Philocleon retorts that the only time *he* ever went on a *theoria* he earned only two obols, implying that his job was to help row the boat that carried the real *theoroi* to their destination (1186–9).

Wearing the right things, saying the right things: vanity and regard for the opinion of a peer group now appear to be as much a part of Bdelycleon's private life as they were a part of Philocleon's erstwhile political life. At least the esteem bestowed on Philocleon by the Wasps had a worthwhile aim, the preservation of the city, however mistaken their idea of what that preservation entailed. Bdelycleon shows his father how to "walk wealthily" and the fashionable way to recline on a couch: stretching the knees, one pours oneself athletically onto the sheets in a liquid motion (1168–73; 1208–13). In his enthusiasm, Bdelycleon seems to forget himself and begins imagining an entire banquet, of which the guest list is a *Who's Who* of recent politicians including, significantly, Cleon. Part of the good cheer is for one guest to sing the first verse of a song, and for the next guest to take it up without missing a beat and sing the second verse. Bdelycleon, whose name was supposed to imply that he was "disgusted-with-Cleon," demonstrates by saying, "Now suppose *I'm* Cleon. And I start singing the Harmodius: 'Never was such a man born in Athens . . .'" Bdelycleon's song refers to the historical tyrant-slayer. But his father, who has completely gone off Cleon, sings back: "Never such a scoundrel and thief" – meaning Cleon. Bdelycleon rebukes his father for such rudeness and threatens him with the great power that Cleon wields over the assembly: if the old man says anything so untoward tonight it will mean destruction, exile (1224–30). Father and son have here reversed roles. He who was Philocleon ("Cleon-lover") now hates the politician, whereas Bdelycleon, perhaps unbeknownst to himself, is attempting to become like Cleon. If Bdelycleon ever hated Cleon at all, it was out of envy of him, or rivalry with him, because he wanted to do the things that Cleon was able to do. The young man may disdain politics, but he loves the perquisites of power, particularly the lifestyle, the foreign fashions, and the opportunities for travel that imperial politics enables.

Pericles asserted that Athenians could pursue beauty and culture frugally and without softness (*aneu malakias*, 2.40.2). Yet immoderation and softness seem inherent in this eros, because it contains no animosity, nothing that could restrain it. Philocleon's preference for Athenian fashions is predicated on his animus toward Persia and Sparta. The love of beauty is free of this idiocy, yet it must be admitted that animosity won the empire: fear of the

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Persian threat and anger at the potential loss of their own, certainly not attraction to the worst enemies of Athens. Yet just such an attraction played a role in the bid to win a whole new empire, in the desire for sight-seeing (*opsis kai theoria*) in Sicily. One wonders if the elite young officer class of the Sicilian expedition was capable of maintaining the old empire, let alone acquiring a new one.⁸⁰

By placing patriotism on an erotic basis, Pericles unleashes or makes explicit a political force that is difficult to control. Especially because eros in his understanding is the love of merit, not the love of one's own, such a basis is likely to prove unstable. Every fatherland is a particularism, and only the love of one's own is quite content with the particular. The reason the Athenians were to be trusted with acquisitiveness was because they would, of their own accord, seek to acquire the higher good of honor, foregoing private gain. Yet how many people, in a given society, can be expected to convert their eros to this higher aim? Those who do not will fuel the push for empire by means of a private acquisitiveness free from any sense of ignominy in the potential failure or loss of honor consequent to damaging the patria. Of the few who do become honor-lovers, how many will be satisfied to stop at this halfway house of eros and will refrain from the higher love of beauty no matter where it is found, at home or abroad, becoming thereby useless for patriotism? If Athenians are to love Athens solely for her beauty and merit, how can they be expected to refrain from loving other lands for their beauty and merit as well? Two of the classes at Athens, by the time of the Sicilian expedition, seem to be straddling the patriotic, honor-bound personality: the many have not yet made it there; they are still acquiring the necessaries. The youthful elite are beyond it; they have fallen prey to softer ambitions; for them foreign wars are an opportunity for sight-seeing. The traditional middle ground of patriotism, achieved by the Spartans, was a love of one's own that was extended to include the city. Personal ambition or *philotimia* then fueled individual achievement. Yet the love of honor, understood as an eros for ever-greater honors (as opposed to defense of the status one already has), is already a dangerous passion on which to base patriotic action and must be kept under close supervision, as the *idia*

⁸⁰ If Aristophanes' intention in *Wasps* was for Bdelycleon to represent the younger generation at Athens, as his father represented the older generation, then the imperialism of the young consisted of a watered-down love of honor or vanity in regard to foreign travel and the perquisites of private wealth, coupled with a prephilosophic love of beauty. The *theoria* and cultural consumption of Bdelycleon, like the *theoria* of Thucydides' elite young men, occupies an intermediate position between the *philotimia* and *philosophia* of the *Symposium*.

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philotimia of Alcibiades bears out. Even this most politicizable, middle tier of eros is a privatizing passion, in that honor accrues to the individual and is enjoyed privately, even if it is dependent on the opinion of the community. The love of beauty and cultural consumerism are also enjoyed privately. It was argued in Section 6.5 that eros is not a private passion but that it seeks to create privacy. Political eros, then, would seek to make the public into the private, to privatize the public sphere. However natural or necessary the introduction of eros into politics is in certain situations, eros would always retain this volatile potential.⁸¹ By turning a privatizing passion into the animating principle of the regime, the Athenian polis chose a course that placed the common weal at risk. If eros is that which draws the individual out of himself, or herself, then political eros must tend to draw the polis out of itself as well, drawing it toward regime changes that would make it at once more than, and less than, a polis.

7.9. Eros and the Demise of the Polis

Eros enters into politics but also transcends political boundaries, expanding them or breaking them if they prove inelastic. If Alcibiades' failed expansionism presaged the successes of Philip and Alexander, it also heralded the demise of the polis as an autonomous political entity. The eros to build greater aggregates of peoples than could consist of face-to-face associations with one another led to territorial empires that paradoxically were too large to utilize eros in the same way the polis had done. It was earlier argued that the *homonoia* produced by having lovers in the ranks did not provide a bridge to the political eros for abstract objects such as the city or its empire.⁸² It is now clear that all *homonoia* eventually suffers as a result of this abstract political eros, as the latter envisions communities spread over distances too vast to be bound by ties of mutual respect or affection, let alone eros. The most patriotic reading of Athenian imperialism, viz., that eros for Sicily was ancillary to eros for Athens, a wish to adorn the homeland with a jewel in her crown, may still imply discontent and the desire to improve the homeland or to improve one's current standing in her. Making one's mark on the homeland, stamping her in a way that future generations will see and remember, may change her in unforeseen ways, detracting from the attractiveness that evoked love in the first place.

⁸¹ This slightly revises the excellent account of S. Forde, *The Ambition to Rule*, pp. 148–9.

⁸² See Section 7.3.

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Perhaps closer to the essential meaning of the polis was that strand of political discourse that envisioned the polis as an erotic association, in which eros between persons could contribute to the cement holding the community together. This was the aspiration to make the polity into one great household. Aristotle's refutation is convincing: that the city vanishes in the attempt to make it into a household, and household rule is only effected by a tyranny or a politeuma so small as to be an extremely narrow oligarchy. The city cemented by eros would cease to be a city. The number of people who can truly feel eros for one another is too small to permit *political* government. Here, too, a polis based on eros loses its form or transcends itself, not this time by increasing past its upper bound of numbers, as in the case of imperialism, but by imploding and falling below its lower bound. Eros, as a privatizing passion, eventually has a destructive or privatizing effect on the public realm. Whether eros is utilized to expand the polis universally or to bind the polis into a tighter particularism, the polis tends to be transformed into something else in the process, either by stretching the polis too thin or by collapsing the polis too tightly.

The third strand of Greek discourse about eros in politics, political pederasty, was on firmer ground. Men and women in many ages have felt that their love pointed beyond itself, that it was enlisted in a higher project, whether religious or political. Such feelings partly explain the impulse for, and the resort to, difficult or unfulfillable projects such as the ones discussed in the other two strands. Political eros in the truest sense refers to these difficult projects, viz. the idealism animating the classical polis and to some extent all political life. The irrepressible desires to bind the community into a tighter particularism, as well as to expand it to include greater and greater aggregates of people, are the relevant aspects of political eros for all times. Unbeknownst to the political agent, such political idealism actually reflects a privatizing desire, a wish to make the polity conform to feelings and sentiments proper to private life and private love. Such political eros becomes especially salient if, as in the case of Greek pederasty, it can be connected to eros in the narrower sense. If Aristotle was correct that, in practice, only a diluted affection could exist among significant numbers of the citizens, nothing prevented the eros of discrete, noninterlocking pairs from becoming one factor in the strengthening of homonoia among citizens for whom, as in the Spartan case, such eros was institutionally regulated and encouraged. Because in Greek pederasty both parties were, or would become, sharers in rule and office, the system had a political

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advantage over later chivalry and courtly love. Even the nonreciprocity of eros may have worked to political advantage, since the boy was motivated entirely by *philotimia*; that is, in Socrates' scheme, he was already halfway to an eros for abstract objects. Pederasty opened out onto politics although its contribution was not always benign and pacific. The political clubs at Athens, for example, set themselves in opposition to the regime.

This study has gone only a very little distance toward answering the question, what is eros? The question is also of practical political importance as it is bound up with the questions of erotic aggression and of the naturalness or social construction of eros. Eros seems to have two separate aspects: a need to possess and a response to beauty. If either is missing, the desire in question fails to be eros. The limiting case of the love of one's own (simply because it is one's own), which experiences no beauty or merit but is determined wholly by ownership, thus seems unerotic, off the scale of eros in the downward direction. Likewise a purely detached contemplation of beauty, which arouses no desire for possession, seems to be off the scale of eros at the upper end; it lacks the robustness of eros.⁸³ Thus the poles between which eros stretches itself may not themselves be eros. Nor have we ascended from beauty to the love of the good; this political analysis has remained at the level of the apparent good. Perhaps this limitation is in-built in politics. Merit is a form of goodness, but political eros recognizes in merit its beauty rather than its solid utility. Beauty and goodness seem connected but separable. It is unlikely that eros could be entirely mistaken about its objects: every specious appearance seems to be a divination of some good. Yet that divination is not enough ground on which to base the choices of practical politics. If for no other reason, eros tells the political agent nothing about when is the right moment to pursue. The ability to introduce such prudent political calculations would mean that the agent was no longer experiencing eros. Perhaps this is the rationale behind Diotima's suggestion of a generic eros for the good, which seems unerotic. Eros would always point beyond itself to a nonerotic desire for the good.

An analogous thing occurs when eros drops out of the ladder of love.⁸⁴ With contemplation taking over the function of eros at the top of the ladder,

⁸³ Compare Plato's playful etymology linking *eros* with *rome* (strength, might, vigor) at *Phaedrus* 238c 3.

⁸⁴ On the ladder, the climber is said to feel eros for bodies (210a 7) and for bodies together with souls (210c 1), but with the turn to contemplating institutions and laws, eros is no longer mentioned. Contemplation appears to take over its function. Eros returns in the overall

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a union with the form is implied in which the young eroticist ceases to wish to make an impression on the world and instead allows the beings to make their impression on him. He ceases to take beautiful things for himself and learns to give himself to the form of beauty. Such an unpossessive desire can perhaps be saved for eros only paradoxically, in that young Socrates could be said to be enticed with a desire to *be* possessed by the beings or the form, or to desire rapture by them. Ultimately, it is difficult to believe that such a desire would itself be philosophic, although it might be part of a rhetorical enticement toward an (ultimately more sober) philosophy. In any case, ordinary eros seems to consist in an alternation between holding close and admiring from arm's length. Neither the touching nor the seeing is satisfactory alone, but each succeeds the other. The higher erotes would still be explicable if the human being, as in-between beast and God, were always already on a continuous journey away from touching, toward seeing and knowing. The impulse to slide back would be ever present, as would the impulse to fly too high too soon. Aristophanes' account of eros in the *Symposium* must be incomplete for these reasons. No one would want to embrace another's body for eternity. Without the alternation between looking and holding, the attraction would cease, or at best, end after brief coupling. The beast with two backs must be temporary, or else generation cannot take place. Making the beloved a part of oneself destroys the beloved, as Aristotle pointed out. No sooner do we possess than we wish to confer a modicum of independence again, else what good is the possession? Even more indicative is the desire to become part of the beloved. Eros is driving us to transcend our current limitations, to become part of something better, to become something whole or great. From Plato's perspective, Aristophanes was blind to the potential of a restless, striving, upward (i.e. transgressive) eros when applied to the theoretical life.

If eros transcends politics, it also, during the time it remains in harness, makes for a transcendent politics. Without the manipulation of eros, there would have been no Athens and no Sparta. The example of Sparta and the theories she inspired reveal the limits of political community by showing its lower bound. Maximizing communal love, civic friendship, and solidarity means minimizing the number of citizens. The example of Athens and the theories she inspired reveal the limits of political possibility by intimating

description of the ladder at 211b 5–c 1, disappears in the summary rehearsal of the particular steps of the ladder, and is not mentioned again until Socrates' peroration, when he has ceased to quote Diotima (e.g., 212b 4–5).

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political community's upper bound. The idea of expansion without bounds raises the possibility of a community that is transpolitical. Despite Aristophanes' protested distaste for it, cosmopolitanism seems to have been the best thing, the only generous thing, about Athenian imperialism. Love of country becomes paradoxical when it grows great enough to desire a jewel in the crown, since the jewel may be attractive in its own right. In Athenians like Thucydides' elite young men (and Aristophanes' Bdelycleon), far-flung objects of desire weakened the attachment to homeland. A paradox of empire is this unforeseen cosmopolitanism, which is a natural outcome of eros: the beautiful and the good are not always home grown.

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