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Chapter 1

THE INSPIRER OF NOBLE DEEDS: *PHAEDRUS*

Phaedrus has proposed the topic of praising love, more specifically the god Eros, to his fellow symposiasts. An idealistic young man, he starts off the first set of five speeches by arguing that Eros is the oldest of the gods and praiseworthy on that account. The Greeks honored old age, and the longevity of Eros implies that the god's blessings will be more numerous than those of younger gods. Phaedrus goes on to argue that love inspires lovers to aim for noble heights of action; he draws on a military image of heroism to commend those who risk their lives for the ones they love.

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Citizens like Phaedrus were expected to fight in Athens' frequent battles against enemies such as Thebes and Sparta. Once enrolled as hoplites (heavy-armed infantrymen, who were required to supply their own suit of armor, shield, and weapons), they could be called up to go on campaign by land or sea. Many saw service on the battlefield as a chance to win glory as well as to fulfill their patriotic duty. Socrates himself, as we learn in the later part of the dialogue, was a courageous and effective hoplite soldier who participated in many battles on Athens' behalf.

What a lover wants, Phaedrus argues, is to win the respect and admiration of his beloved, and vice versa. An army composed of lovers would fight valiantly to preserve their honor in the eyes of those they love. Such a force would be unbeatable, because

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Love would inspire them to avoid any taint of disgrace or cowardice. Phaedrus will have known about such a force that had recently been formed in Thebes, the “Sacred Band”; and since he extends the idea of a partnership of lovers to a whole state, he is also likely to have in mind the way Sparta’s militaristic society was organized.

Phaedrus admits that such love can inspire women as well as men. Alcestis, for example, the mythical heroine portrayed in Euripides’ drama *Alcestis*, was willing to lay down her life on behalf of her husband when no one else would, and as a result of her heroic conduct the gods allowed her to resume life among the living. Eros is praised by Phaedrus as the god who inspires such people to behave with nobility and makes them worthy of the greatest rewards.

PHAEDRUS

Albeit in rather narrow terms, then, Phaedrus presents the idea of love as a force for good in human life, particularly when two individuals are strongly connected by a loving bond. This is a behavioral rather than psychological understanding of love; while honor and shame are involved, nothing is said about feelings such as intense affection or romantic passion. Many questions remain unanswered. How does love arise between two people in the first place? Since love sometimes leads to negative as well as positive behaviors, can it be presented unequivocally as a force for good? If love is thought of solely as inspiring success in battle and a willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice, where does this leave love's positive, creative, and life-enhancing dimensions? These and similar objections will be recognized in

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some form and accounted for by subsequent speakers in the dialogue.

Α. πρῶτον μὲν γάρ, ὥσπερ λέγω, ἔφη
Φαῖδρον ἀρξάμενον ἐνθένδε ποθὲν λέγειν,
ὅτι μέγας θεὸς εἴη ὁ Ἔρως καὶ θαυμαστὸς
ἐν ἀνθρώποις τε καὶ θεοῖς, πολλαχῇ μὲν
καὶ ἄλλῃ, οὐχ ἥκιστα δὲ κατὰ τὴν γένεσιν.
τὸ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς πρεσβύτατον εἶναι τὸν θεὸν
τίμιον, ἧ δ' ὅς, τεκμήριον δὲ τούτου· γονῆς
γὰρ Ἑρωτος οὔτ' εἰσὶν οὔτε λέγονται ὑπ'
οὐδενὸς οὔτε ιδιώτου οὔτε ποιητοῦ, ἀλλ'
Ἡσίοδος πρῶτον μὲν Χάος φησὶ γενέσθαι

αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα
Γαῖ' εὐρύστερνος, πάντων ἕδος ἀσφαλὲς
αἰεὶ,
ἦδ' Ἑρως

[*Theogony* 116]

Phaedrus: Translation and Text

A. Phaedrus began by saying something like this:

First of all, I say that Eros is revered among gods and men for lots of reasons, but not least because of his origins. He's the oldest of all the gods, as shown by the fact that he has no parents — no prose author or poet assigns any to him. Hesiod says that the first element to arise was Space,

*And after that
wide-breasted Earth, the world's secure,
eternal, base;
then Love.*

PHAEDRUS

Ἡσιόδω δὲ καὶ Ἀκουσίλεως σύμφησιν
μετὰ τὸ Χάος δύο τούτω γενέσθαι, Γῆν τε καὶ
Ἔρωτα. Παρμενίδης δὲ τὴν γένεσιν λέγει—

πρώτιστον μὲν Ἔρωτα θεῶν μητίσατο
πάντων.

οὕτω πολλαχόθεν ὁμολογεῖται ὁ Ἔρωτος ἐν
τοῖς πρεσβύτατος εἶναι. πρεσβύτατος δὲ ὢν
μεγίστων ἀγαθῶν ἡμῖν αἰτίος ἐστίν.

Β. οὐ γὰρ ἔγωγ' ἔχω εἰπεῖν ὅτι μεῖζόν
ἐστίν ἀγαθὸν εὐθύς νέω ὄντι ἢ ἐραστῆς
χρηστὸς καὶ ἐραστῇ παιδικά. ὁ γὰρ χρὴ
ἀνθρώποις ἡγεῖσθαι παντὸς τοῦ βίου τοῖς
μέλλουσι καλῶς βιώσεσθαι, τοῦτο οὔτε
συγγένεια οἷα τε ἐμποιεῖν οὕτω καλῶς οὔτε
τιμαὶ οὔτε πλοῦτος οὔτ' ἄλλο οὐδὲν ὥς ἔρωτος.
λέγω δὲ δὴ τί τοῦτο; τὴν ἐπὶ μὲν τοῖς αἰσχροῖς
αἰσχύνην, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς καλοῖς φιλοτιμίαν· οὐ

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Like Hesiod, Akousilaos says that after Space these two elements, Earth and Love, came into being. Parmenides also speaks of Love's birth, saying

*The first of all the gods conceived was
Love.*

Many sources attest, then, that Love is the most ancient of gods. On account of his longevity, he deserves thanks for providing the longest series of blessings to humankind.

B. Personally I can't think of a greater blessing than to have a praiseworthy lover in one's youth, or for a lover to have an admirable beloved. If we want to live fulfilling lives, what we need to guide us can't be attained from family connections, success, or wealth, or from anything more than love. Let me explain. People who do bad things bring shame on themselves, and those who

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γὰρ ἔστιν ἄνευ τούτων οὔτε πόλιν οὔτε
ιδιώτην μεγάλα καὶ καλὰ ἔργα ἐξεργάζεσθαι.

φημὶ τοίνυν ἐγὼ ἄνδρα ὅστις ἐρᾷ, εἴ τι
αἰσχροὺς ποιῶν κατάδηλος γίγνοιτο ἢ
πάσχων ὑπὸ τοῦ δι' ἀνανδρίαν μὴ ἀμυνό-
μενος, οὔτ' ἂν ὑπὸ πατρὸς ὀφθέντα οὔτως
ἀλγῆσαι οὔτε ὑπὸ ἐταίρων οὔτε ὑπ' ἄλλου
οὐδενὸς ὥς ὑπὸ παιδικῶν. ταῦτόν δὲ τοῦτο
καὶ τὸν ἐρώμενον ὀρώμεν, ὅτι διαφερό-
ντως τοὺς ἐραστὰς αἰσχύνεται, ὅταν ὀφθῇ
ἐν αἰσχροῦ τινι ὦν. εἰ οὖν μηχανή τις γέ-
νοιτο ὥστε πόλιν γενέσθαι ἢ στρατόπεδον
ἐραστῶν τε καὶ παιδικῶν, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅπως
ἂν ἄμεινον οἰκήσειαν τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἢ
ἀπεχόμενοι πάντων τῶν αἰσχροῶν καὶ
φιλοτιμούμενοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους, καὶ μαχό-
μενοί γ' ἂν μετ' ἀλλήλων οἱ τοιοῦτοι νικῶεν
ἂν ὀλίγοι ὄντες ὥς ἔπος εἰπεῖν πάντας
ἀνθρώπους.

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act nobly gain renown. No city or individual who fails to respect these guidelines can accomplish anything honorable or good.

The fact is that lovers found doing something unworthy, or failing to stand up for themselves when abused, would be more bothered to be caught out by their beloveds than by their own fathers, friends, or anyone else. Similarly, if a beloved were observed doing something unworthy, he'd feel the same way vis-à-vis his lover. So if we could create cities or armies consisting of lovers and their beloveds, they'd be supremely successful, because they'd compete with each other to do good and would strain every sinew to avoid disgrace. Lovers paired off in this way and fighting shoulder to shoulder, even if they were few in number, could effectively conquer the world.

PHAEDRUS

С. ἐρῶν γὰρ ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ παιδικῶν ὀφθῆναι ἢ λιπῶν τάξιν ἢ ὄπλα ἀποβαλὼν ἤττον ἀν δῆπου δέξαιτο ἢ ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν ἄλλων, καὶ πρὸ τούτου τεθνάναι ἀν πολλάκις ἔλοιτο. καὶ μὴν ἐγκαταλιπεῖν γε τὰ παιδικὰ ἢ μὴ βοηθῆσαι κινδυνεύοντι—οὐδεὶς οὕτω κακὸς ὄντινα οὐκ ἀν αὐτὸς ὁ Ἔρως ἔνθεον ποιήσειε πρὸς ἀρετὴν, ὥστε ὅμοιον εἶναι τῷ ἀρίστῳ φύσει· καὶ ἀτεχνῶς, ὃ ἔφη Ὀμηρος, “μένος ἐμπνεῦσαι” [*Iliad* 10.482, 15.262] ἐνίοις τῶν ἡρώων τὸν θεόν, τοῦτο ὁ Ἔρως τοῖς ἐρῶσι παρέχει γιγνόμενον παρ’ αὐτοῦ. καὶ μὴν ὑπεραποθνήσκειν γε μόνοι ἐθέλουσιν οἱ ἐρῶντες, οὐ μόνον ὅτι ἄνδρες, ἀλλὰ καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες.

τούτου δὲ καὶ ἡ Πελίου θυγάτηρ Ἀλκηστὶς ἱκανὴν μαρτυρίαν παρέχεται ὑπὲρ τοῦδε τοῦ λόγου εἰς τοὺς Ἕλληνας, ἐθελήσασα μόνη ὑπὲρ τοῦ αὐτῆς ἀνδρὸς ἀποθανεῖν, ὄντων αὐτῷ πατρός τε καὶ μητρός, οὓς ἐκείνη το-

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C. If a lover abandoned his post or armor in battle, he'd clearly want the whole world to witness it rather than his beloved. He'd prefer to die a thousand deaths rather than let that happen. Who would desert or abandon someone he loves in their moment of danger? At that juncture the most arrant coward becomes the bravest of heroes, because Love itself inspires his courage. Homer says simply that the god "breathes spirit" into the souls of certain heroes; and that's what Love arouses and breathes into lovers. Love and love alone is what makes people lay down their lives for those they love, and that goes for women as well as men.

A shining example of this for the Greeks is Alcestis, daughter of Pelias, because she agreed, when no one else would, to give up her life for her husband. His father and mother might have taken the choice to do

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σοῦτον ὑπερεβάλετο τῇ φιλίᾳ διὰ τὸν ἔρωτα,
ὥστε ἀποδείξαι αὐτοὺς ἀλλοτρίους ὄντας τῷ
υἱ καὶ ὀνόματι μόνον προσήκοντας, καὶ
τοῦτ' ἐργασαμένη τὸ ἔργον οὕτω καλὸν
ἔδοξεν ἐργάσασθαι οὐ μόνον ἀνθρώποις
ἀλλὰ καὶ θεοῖς, ὥστε πολλῶν πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ
ἐργασαμένων εὐαριθμήτοις δὴ τισιν ἔδοσαν
τοῦτο γέρας οἱ θεοί, ἐξ Ἄιδου ἀνεῖναι πάλιν
τὴν ψυχὴν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐκείνης ἀνεῖσαν ἀγα-
σθέντες τῷ ἔργῳ· οὕτω καὶ θεοὶ τὴν περὶ τὸν
ἔρωτα σπουδὴν τε καὶ ἀρετὴν μάλιστα
τιμῶσιν.

D. Ὅρφέα δὲ τὸν Οἰάγρου ἀτελῇ ἀπέπεμ-
ψαν ἐξ Ἄιδου, φάσμα δείξαντες τῆς γυναικὸς
ἐφ' ἣν ἦκεν, αὐτὴν δὲ οὐ δόντες, ὅτι μαλθα-
κίζεσθαι ἐδόκει, ἅτε ὦν κιθαρωδός, καὶ οὐ
τολμᾷν ἔνεκα τοῦ ἔρωτος ἀποθνήσκειν
ὥσπερ Ἀλκηστis, ἀλλὰ διαμηχανᾶσθαι ζῶν
εἰσιέναι εἰς Ἄιδου.

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so, but Alcestis' devotion, borne of love, was so much stronger than theirs that his parents might as well have been related to him in name only, not by blood. Her action was viewed as so heroic by gods no less than men that she, out of the many mortals famed for their deeds, is almost alone in having been allowed by the gods to come back alive from death. Such is the supreme honor the gods pay to loyalty and heroism when these qualities are inspired by love.

D. By contrast, the gods sent back Orpheus, Oeagrus's son, empty-handed from the Underworld. Instead of rewarding him by granting him the wife he'd descended to Hades to rescue, they gave him only the opportunity to see her ghost. In their eyes he was pusillanimous because, being a lyre-player, he, unlike Alcestis, hadn't risked

τοιγάρτοι διὰ ταῦτα δίκην αὐτῷ ἐπέθεσαν,
καὶ ἐποίησαν τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ὑπὸ γυναι-
κῶν γενέσθαι, οὐχ ὥσπερ Ἀχιλλέα τὸν τῆς
Θέτιδος ὕδν ἐτίμησαν καὶ εἰς μακάρων
νήσους ἀπέπεμψαν, ὅτι πεπυσμένος παρὰ
τῆς μητρὸς ὡς ἀποθανοῖτο ἀποκτείνας
Ἑκτορα, μὴ ποιήσας δὲ τοῦτο οἴκαδε ἐλθὼν
γηραιὸς τελευτήσοι, ἐτόλμησεν ἐλέσθαι
βοηθήσας τῷ ἐραστῇ Πατρόκλῳ καὶ τιμω-
ρήσας οὐ μόνον ὑπεραποθανεῖν ἀλλὰ καὶ
ἐπαποθανεῖν τετελευτηκότι· ὅθεν δὴ καὶ
ὑπεραγασθέντες οἱ θεοὶ διαφερόντως αὐτὸν
ἐτίμησαν, ὅτι τὸν ἐραστὴν οὕτω περὶ πολλοῦ
ἐποιεῖτο.

Αἰσχύλος δὲ φλυαρεῖ φάσκων Ἀχιλλέα
Πατρόκλου ἐρᾶν, ὃς ἦν καλλίων οὐ μόνον
Πατρόκλου ἀλλ' ἅμα καὶ τῶν ἡρώων ἀπά-
ντων, καὶ ἔτι ἀγένειος, ἔπειτα νεώτερος
πολύ, ὥς φησιν Ὅμηρος.

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dying for love, but had contrived to enter the Underworld alive.

So the gods penalized Orpheus by making him die at the hands of women, and denying him the honor granted to Thetis's son Achilles, who was sent to the Isles of the Blest because he'd made the heroic choice. His mother had told him that if he killed Hector he would die, and that, if he didn't, he would return home and live to happy old age. So when Achilles entered the fray to avenge his lover Patroclus, he made the choice not only to risk dying, but actually to die, by fighting on his behalf. The gods were particularly touched, and honored Achilles especially highly because he accorded such regard to his older lover.

Apropos of which, Aeschylus is talking nonsense when he makes Achilles Patroclus's lover rather than vice versa. Achilles

Ε. ἀλλὰ γὰρ τῷ ὄντι μάλιστα μὲν ταύτην τὴν ἀρετὴν οἱ θεοὶ τιμῶσιν τὴν περὶ τὸν ἔρωτα, μᾶλλον μέντοι θαυμάζουσιν καὶ ἄγανται καὶ εὖ ποιοῦσιν ὅταν ὁ ἐρώμενος τὸν ἐραστὴν ἀγαπᾷ, ἢ ὅταν ὁ ἐραστὴς τὰ παιδικά. θειότερον γὰρ ἐραστὴς παιδικῶν· ἔνθεος γάρ ἐστι. διὰ ταῦτα καὶ τὸν Ἀχιλλέα τῆς Ἀλκήστιδος μᾶλλον ἐτίμησαν, εἰς μακάρων νήσους ἀποπέμψαντες.

οὕτω δὲ ἔγωγέ φημι ἼΕρωτα θεῶν καὶ πρεσβύτατον καὶ τιμιώτατον καὶ κυριώτατον εἶναι εἰς ἀρετῆς καὶ εὐδαιμονίας κτῆσιν ἀνθρώποις καὶ ζῶσι καὶ τελευτήσασιν.

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was more handsome than all the heroes, including Patroclus, and the fact that he's portrayed as beardless in Homer means he's much younger than Patroclus.

E. Anyway, it's clear that the gods have the highest regard for the heroism that arises from love, and are even more admiring and generous when it's the younger beloved who cherishes the older lover rather than vice versa. The lover, you see, is closer to the gods than the younger man is, because Love has already entered into him. So for all these reasons the gods rewarded Achilles even more highly than they did Alcestis, and sent him to the Isles of the Blest.

To sum up, my claim is that Eros is the most ancient and respected of the gods, and that Love is the supreme force that helps human beings to attain the highest and most desirable goals, both in life and in death.