



---

(EROS AND NOMOS (PLATO, "SYMPOSIUM" 182A-185C

Author(s): K. J. Dover

Source: *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 1964, No. 11 (1964), pp. 31-42

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43636553>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and .facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Oxford University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*

JSTOR

EROS AND NOMOS<sup>1</sup>  
(PLATO, SYMPOSIUM 182A-185C)

by K. J. Dover

Plato's Pausanias says of Athens (*Smp.* 182a7-b1): ὁ περὶ τὸν ἔρωτα νόμος ... ἐνθάδε ... ποικίλος. In amplification: "the encouragement given by everybody to the lover is extraordinary" (182d8, cf. 183b2-c4), but a boy's parents and fellows do everything to discourage him from associating with a lover (183c4-d2); in short, "our νόμος ... encourages the lover to pursue and the boy to flee" (183e6-184a3), in order to test the lover's perseverance and seriousness of purpose (183d8-e6, 184a3-b5).

Expression of homosexual emotion and of attitudes towards it is abundant in Attic literature; the speech of Pausanias is unique in that it also purports to describe the attitude of Athenian society as a whole. Is this description true? It is at least invulnerable to objection *a priori*. Since homosexuality is not necessarily a lasting orientation of the whole personality, and a homosexual act is not necessarily committed by "a" homosexual,<sup>2</sup> a society in which young men pursue their juniors for a period of some years before "settling down" in marriage is by no means unimaginable. Nor is it difficult for society to maintain and express attitudes which contradict each other. We have only to substitute "girl" for "boy" in Pausanias's speech, changing the gender of pronouns and adjectives where appropriate, and we have a recognisable description of the operation of the notorious "double standard" in a predominantly heterosexual society with a high degree of female emancipation. "Parents encourage their sons to make love, but are horrified if their daughters do. They may talk in shocked tones that a neighbour's daughter has 'fallen' - and a little later boast about their son's 'conquests'".<sup>3</sup> "The boy *is expected*" (my italics) "to ask for as much as possible, the girl to yield as little as possible".<sup>4</sup> Pausanias may therefore be describing accurately a society which, ἀγωνοθετῶν (184a3), expected young men to compete with each other for the favours of boys and at the same time expected the boys to make these favours unattainable.

Nevertheless, to say that the picture drawn by Pausanias is plausible is not to say that it is true. He may be speaking of an eccentric minority as if it were the only portion of society which mattered to his hearers; if we find reason to believe that he is, we have learned something of importance about the relation of the Socratic circle to the society of which it formed a part.

There are occasions when it is rational to answer a question about Athenian society by simply taking the word of an Athenian, but such an occasion cannot arise in the field of sexual beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. The systematic study of this field in our own time is fertile in warnings and lessons for the historian, notably:-

- (1) Public opinion, including scientific opinion, has proved capable, during the last hundred years, of the wildest errors in respect of (e.g.) the incidence of a given type of sexual behaviour in contemporary society,<sup>5</sup> the constituents of "normal" behaviour in the animal world,<sup>6</sup> the physical effects of certain types of behaviour,<sup>7</sup> and even fundamentals of the psychology and physiology of sex.<sup>8</sup> The causes of error have been the same in all cases: acceptance of traditional doctrine as a substitute for evidence, willingness to press unproved assumptions into the service of moral rules, and reluctance on the part of the individual to acknowledge that his own experience and his exceedingly fragmentary acquaintance with the experience of his intimates are a negligible basis for generalisation.
- (2) What is morally momentous to one social class may be morally indifferent to another, but there is no uniform relation, direct or inverse, between permissiveness and class. The application of the concept "natural" differs greatly from one class to another.<sup>9</sup>
- (3) The highest incidence of a given type of behaviour may occur in that class which is most vocal in condemning it and most insistent on its punishment.<sup>10</sup>
- (4) Beliefs held by one generation or race about the sexual behaviour of another are usually exaggerated and commonly false.<sup>11</sup>

Application of these lessons to the study of Plato and his time suggests that we should be content with the *location and definition of attitudes and beliefs*. The formulation of historical hypotheses to account for the location and content of these attitudes and beliefs may be irresistible (cf. p. 38 *infr.*), but the tentative character of such hypotheses must be fully acknowledged, and no kind of statistical statement, however approximate, should be attempted.<sup>12</sup>

Pausanias speaks of Athenian νόμος, which includes convention as well as codified law. Aeschines' speech against Timarchos, delivered some thirty years after *Smp.*, provides us with most of our information on Attic law in relation to homosexuality and also with a very full expression of a distinctive attitude. Aeschines emphasises a difference between two types of relationship, the commercial and the non-commercial. The commercial may be subdivided into two categories: (i) εἰσπράξεις, a long-term relationship with a single client (51), and (ii) πορνεία, a succession of short-term relations with a variety of clients (52). We may for convenience translate both words as "prostitution". The law concerned itself with one aspect of prostitution only, the status of the prostitute, and a citizen who had prostituted himself suffered civic disqualification (19, 29); the law took no cognisance of the prostitution of a metic or foreigner (195),<sup>13</sup> except, of course, to ensure collection of the πορνικὸν τέλος (119), and the physical act was not penalised as such.<sup>14</sup> Aeschines' attitude to male prostitution is uniformly hostile. The prostitute incurs the most formidable reproach that can be brought against a Greek, the reproach that he is a *woman* (111, 185). Unlike an adulterous woman, who errs "according to nature", he errs "contrary to nature" (185), and his conduct is both βδελυρός, "detestable" (31, 41 *al.*) and καταγέλαστος, "contemptible" (31, 43, 76). Aeschines' attitude to the prostitute's client depends on who the client is. He is openly hostile to a group whom he calls ἄγριοι (52, cf. *Ar. Nu.* 349 c. Σ)

and to a certain Hegesandros, whose propensities, he says, have brought about his general moral deterioration (67), but he is more circumspect in handling Misgolas, a man of “extraordinary enthusiasm” (41) for handsome youths but otherwise in good standing; Aeschines regards it as likely (but not certain) that Misgolas will feel some shame at being exposed as a client of Timarchos (45-46). Aeschines nowhere uses the terms ἔρως, ἐρᾶν, ἐραστής, in connection with commercial relations.

The law was concerned with ὕβρις, and boys, like women, were legally protected against sexual violation by force or the threat of force. Laws relating to ὕβρις were not relevant to the prosecution of Timarchos. This does not deter Aeschines from having one of them read out (15) to lend weight to an argument which in other circumstances might offer a hint of moral insight but in Aeschines serves a transparently rhetorical purpose: the argument that prostitution is a kind of ὕβρις committed by the client against the prostitute or by the prostitute against his own body (29, 55, 87, 108, 116, 137, 185, 188).

Aeschines' essential distinction is between commercial relations on the one hand and ἔρως on the other (136, 159). He does not attach to ἔρως any of the opprobrious terms which he attaches to prostitution; in particular, he does not call it effeminate or unnatural. On the contrary, he describes himself as ἐρωτικός (135), and speaks as if ἔρως were by its very nature δίκαιος (136), ἀδελφθόρος (137) and σώφρων (156, cf. 139). A modern reader of Aeschines, if he were unacquainted with any other Greek literature, would almost certainly conclude that Aeschines means by ἔρως what we would call a “platonic” affection. It might then occur to him to wonder what Aeschines would say about homosexual relations which are physical but not commercial. It is somewhat as if a modern barrister were to pretend in his speech to the jury that prostitution at one extreme and platonic affection at the other were the only possible relations between young men and girls; or, on a less articulate level, it resembles the use of “prostitute” as a term of abuse against any girl who has pre-marital intercourse.

Further consideration suggests that Aeschines is not *leaving* a gap between the commercial and the platonic; he is *covering* the gap, extending ἔρως to all relationships which are not commercial. His reasons for this are in part tactical, in part dictated by the linguistic inhibitions which may often be seen at work in Greek oratory. He adopts a pose of ostentatious propriety (37, 52, 55, 76), claiming even that it does violence to his nature to utter such a word as πόρνος in public (70). His interpretation of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, which Aeschylus plainly represented as physical (frgs. 228, 229 Mette, cf. Pl. *Smp.* 180a3-7), is peculiarly interesting, for he admits that it was indeed ἔρως but says (142-143) that Homer did not name it outright, relying on his “educated hearers” to perceive its nature from its manifestations. He also professes to believe (132ff.) that the defence will cite in defence of Timarchos the famous case of Harmodios and Aristogeiton. He himself hesitates to call that relationship ἔρως (εἴτε ἔρωτα εἴτε τρόπον χρὴ προσεῖπεῖν, 140); why, if ἔρως to him was necessarily σώφρων? Again, in anticipating the arguments which Demosthenes will offer in defence of Timarchos,<sup>15</sup> he assumes that disproof of a commercial relationship between Misgolas and Timarchos will suffice and that disproof of a physical, non-commercial relationship will not be offered (160ff.).

It would be a mistake to imagine that when Plato's Pausanias draws a distinction between good and bad ἔρως he is distinguishing between the physical and the platonic.<sup>16</sup> The bad lover

who “is in love more with the boy’s body than with his soul” (183e1), deserts the boy “when the flower fades” (e3–5), whereas the good lover, the lover “of the boy’s good character” (e5), abides. But both good and bad aim at the physical submission of the boy which is termed ὑπουργεῖν (184d6–7) or χαρίζεσθαι (184a2, d4, e4, 185a1, a6, and notably 184b4 πᾶν πάντως γε καλὸν ἀρετῆς γ’ ἔνεκα χαρίζεσθαι) and the difference between good and bad ἔρως lies in the whole context of the ultimate physical act, not in the presence or absence of the act itself. The important differences between Aeschines and Pausanias lie in the purposes for which and the circumstances in which they are speaking, the one striving to worst an enemy and the other contributing to a discussion among friends. Nothing that either of them says is in any way incompatible with the hypothesis that in their own feeling and behaviour they were identical, and there is nothing to justify any suggestion that public opinion, either in society as a whole or in one class, had changed between the writing of the *Symposium* and the writing of *Against Timarchos*.

If it is a contrast of attitude which we are seeking, we must set Plato beside Aristophanic Comedy. The sexual element which is so prominent in the comic hero’s triumph (Ar. *Ach.* 1198ff., *Pax* 1316ff., *Av.* 1720ff.) and the comic chorus’s prayers (*Ach.* 989ff.) is consistently and robustly heterosexual, whereas the theory of ἔρως in *Smp.* and *Phdr.* is founded almost wholly on homosexual relations. The boy or youth who has lovers comes off badly in comedy. Not only the Honest Argument in *Clouds* (who has nothing good to say of the younger generation) but Aristophanic humour in general assumes that such a boy is effeminate<sup>17</sup> (a serious delinquency in a community which depends for its survival more on the physical stamina of its citizens than on their brains), and εὐρύπρωκτος is a standby of comic abuse. Like Aeschines on prostitution, and like the modern parents quoted above on promiscuity, Aristophanes does not to any comparable extent ridicule the “active partner”, the lover whose ubiquity is assumed by the Honest Argument (*Nu.* 975ff.). καταπύγων is a term of abuse in comedy, but its use as a feminine (*Anecd. Cram.* 99 p. 31) and the recently attested form καταπύγαινα<sup>18</sup> suggest that the application of καταπύγων in the fifth century may not have been quite as specific as its etymology would suggest (cf. Ar. *Lys.* 137, fr. 130, Sophron fr. 63 Kaibel; and modern English parallels are well known).

*Av.* 127ff. is a passage of particular interest. The Hoopoe asks Euelpides and Peisetairos what kind of city they would like to inhabit. Eulpides says: one in which the greatest trouble (τὰ μέγιστα πράγματα) is the importunity of a friend saying “do come to my wedding-feast . . . and if you don’t come now, you needn’t come and see me when I’m in difficulties!” The Hoopoe exclaims in reply, with what must be jocular irony (135) νῆ Δία ταλαιπώρων γε πραγμάτων ἔρῳς. Peisetairos now interposes that he wants the same kind of thing himself: “where the father of a handsome boy will meet me and complain, as if I had done him wrong, ‘You met my son coming home from the gymnasium . . . but you didn’t kiss him . . . οὐκ ὥρχιπέδισας, and you an old family friend!’” The Hoopoe replies (143) ὦ δειλακρίων σὺ τῶν κακῶν οἶων ἔρῳς, a reply which cannot be dissociated in tone from his reply to Euelpides, and he continues (leading on to a different joke) “There is a happy city (εὐδαίμων πόλις) of the kind you mean . . . The implication of this passage is that encouragement to homosexual dalliance of the grossest kind<sup>19</sup> is a phenomenon of *Schlaraffenland*. A similar implication is found in two other passages: V. 578, where Philocleon includes among the privileges and delights of a juror’s life παίδων τοίνυν δοκιμαζομένων αἰδοῖα πάρεστι θεᾶσθαι; and *Eq.* 1384ff., where Demos is rewarded and flattered:–



- Αλ. ἔχε νυν ἐπὶ τούτοις τουτονὶ τὸν ὀκλαδίαν,  
καὶ παῖδ' ἐνόρχην, ὅσπερ οἴσει τόνδε σοι·  
κᾶν που δοκῇ σοι, τοῦτον ὀκλαδίαν πόσει.
- Δη. μακάριος ἐς τάρχαῖα δὴ καθίσταμαι.

These Aristophanic jokes could be converted into heterosexual jokes of the type which is the stock-in-trade of vulgar comedy today. A similar transposition would be possible in many passages of Plato, notably Alcibiades' account of his desperate attempts to seduce Socrates (*Smp.* 217a2-219d2) and the well-known passage of *Charmides* (155b9-e2) which, if we turned Charmides into a girl and changed the gender of the pronouns, would pass in a modern context as a light-hearted description of the effect which the proximity of a very pretty girl may have on a courteous, middle-aged, rather nervous bachelor.<sup>20</sup> Aristophanes and Plato at least agree in treating homosexual temptation as something by which anyone may expect to be assailed, and to which, given a suitable opportunity, he may yield. The fundamental assumption of the *Phaedrus* (e.g. 253e5-254e10) is that the sight of a handsome boy must necessarily provoke desire (an assumption shared by Xenophon,<sup>21</sup> despite his hostility to the pursuit of the physical end desired), and in *Phdr.* 256b7-c7 Socrates envisages that a boy and his lover, united with good moral intention but with an inadequate philosophical preparation, may fall into a physical relationship in an unguarded moment.<sup>22</sup>

Such assumptions are at variance with popular modern beliefs about male psychology,<sup>23</sup> but they are reconcilable with Aeschines, who confines the term "unnatural" to prostitution (v. supr.). They are less obviously reconcilable with Plato's frequent assertion in the *Laws* that the physical gratification of homosexual desire is unnatural (*Lg.* 636c1-7, 835d3-842a10, especially 836c1, 838e4-839a3, 840c11-e2, 841c8-d5). Plato bases his condemnation on the grounds that homosexual relations do not occur among animals (836c3-6); in other contexts reference to the animal world might not seem to him to justify the suppression of specifically human activity.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately a deadly ambiguity is inherent in what Plato (and the rest of us) says about "nature". Sometimes we use "nature" as a scientific concept, and call a thing "natural" to the extent to which it is explicable and predictable by generalisations based on observation and experiment; when "nature" is so used, the most extraordinary behaviour becomes "natural" if it is explicable. At other times we use "nature" as a religious concept, to denote a set of divine rules which are still rules however often they are disobeyed; whether or not anything but a human will can disobey the rules is a question upon which religions differ. Most of us readily infer the divine rules from what we observe, but we are seldom ready to admit that we are mistaken about a rule when it becomes apparent that the observations from which it was inferred were inadequate or misleading. Conversely, having accepted a rule on authority we tend to assume that it is also a valid generalisation about the observable world, and we react emotionally against observations which indicate that it is nothing of the kind. Now, Plato obviously did not believe, when he wrote *Smp.* and *Phdr.*, that it was in either sense "unnatural" for a male to feel intense emotion at the sight of a handsome younger male, nor did he believe at any time that it was "unnatural", in the sense "observably abnormal", to assuage this emotion by a physical act. What he did believe was that the act was "unnatural" in the sense "against the rules"; it was a morally ignorant exploitation of pleasure beyond what is "granted" (κατὰ φύσιν ἀποδεδοσθαι, *Lg.* 636c4), the product of an ἀκράτεια (c6) which can be aggravated by habituation and bad example. His comparison of homosexuality with incest (837e9-838e1) is particularly revealing. "Not even

a desire" for incest "enters the heads of most people" (838b4-5); but we owe this freedom from incestuous desire not to our "nature" (Plato makes no reference to "nature" in this connection) but to the intensity, antiquity and universality of public opinion and convention. It is "the power of φήμη" (838c8-d1) which has outlawed incest; and Plato hopes to create by legislation a comparable hostility to homosexuality.

Although Plato and Aristophanes do not appear to take irreconcilable views of the potential homosexuality of the individual,<sup>25</sup> there remains the important difference that in *Smp.* and *Phdr.* homosexual relations are a focus of intense and lasting emotion, whereas in comedy they are at most a marginal luxury.

Age may have something to do with this difference. The implication of *Lys.* iii 4 (spoken by a man who has become involved in a lawsuit through his infatuation with a young Plataian and his quarrel with a rival lover), "you may think I've been rather foolish about the young man, for my age" (παρὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν τὴν ἐμαυτοῦ ἀνοητότερον), is that homosexual love-affairs are especially characteristic of youth.<sup>26</sup> Phaidros is young, and the young play a disproportionately large part in Socratic dialogues, whereas the comic hero is commonly old, or at least middle-aged. But a difference of standpoint between classes may be much more important than a difference of age. It is, indeed, commonly argued that young Athenian aristocrats cultivated homosexuality as part of cultural "laconism", and there is *prima facie* evidence both that it was regarded by the Athenians as characteristically Spartan and that the Socratic circle was affected by laconism.<sup>27</sup> Since this question is of some importance for Athenian political history, and not only for the study of Plato, it deserves scrutiny.

(1) Hesychios s.v. *Κυσολάκων* says Ἀρίσταρχός φησι τὸν Κλεινίαν οὕτω λέγεσθαι τῷ κυσῷ λακωνίζοντα, and Photios, similarly, ὁ Κλεινίας ὁ τῷ κυσῷ λακωνίζων. Ruhnken emended to *Κλεινίου* in both cases (cf. *Ar. Ach.* 716 καὶ λαλῶς ὡς Κλεινίου), but he was probably wrong. If the source (presumably a comic poet) said ὁ Κλεινίου (Kock actually supposed that it said *Κυσολάκων ὁ Κλεινίου*, and he called this "Aristophanes fr. 907"), why should not Aristarchos have explained the reference by saying "Alcibiades" plainly? The source must have referred to Alcibiades as "son of *Κυσολάκων*", a normal comic method of characterising a person (cf. Phrynichos fr. 53 *Κλεόμβροτον τε τὸν Πέρδικος υἱόν*; *Ar. Ach.* 1131),<sup>28</sup> and Aristarchos took it too literally, equating *Κυσολάκων* with the actual father of Alcibiades. Photios continues: τὸ δὲ τοῖς παιδικοῖς χρῆσθαι λακωνίζειν λέγουσιν (sim. Hsch.). He gives *λακωνίζειν* a separate entry, refers it to Aristophanes (fr. 338), and interprets it in the same way; but s.v. *Κυσολάκων* he offers an explanation: Μελαίνη γὰρ ὁησεὺς οὕτως ἐχρήσατο, ὡς Ἀριστοτέλης. The type of explanation, referring to a single heroic event and not to a national propensity, is interesting, and contrasts with Phot. and Hsch. s.v. *λεσβίσαι* or Steph. Byz. on *Κορινθιάζομαι* and Σ<sup>V</sup> *Ar. Pl.* 149 *ἐταίρας ... Κορινθίας*. No heroine Melaina is known, and none of the heroes called Melaneus (*Hom. Od.* xxiv 103, Paus. iv 2.2, *Ov. M.* xii 306) has any connection with Theseus or with Lakonia. Ruhnken's emendation Ἑλένη is therefore all but inescapable; Helen was abducted as a child by Theseus, and Photios's ὡς Ἀριστοτέλης should be taken as a reference to Aristotle's Ἐρωτικός, not emended. It thus appears that popular opinion attributed to the Spartans the practice of anal coitus in heterosexual relations; this is what *λακωνίζειν* would mean in a sexual context – it would have different meanings in different contexts – and, for obvious reasons, it could easily be used of a

man to imply his addiction to homosexual practices. Whether or not popular opinion was right, we do not know. We can only say that the development of anal coitus would not be surprising in a community which combined an abnormal degree of female emancipation with patrilineal inheritance and ignorance of effective contraception. True or not,<sup>29</sup> the belief itself is attested by Hagnon of Tarsos ap. Ath. 602d, referring to a Spartan custom ταῖς παρθένοις ὥσπερ παιδικοῖς χρῆσθαι, and it affords a complete explanation of the joke in Ar. *Lys.* 1173f., where the entire context is strongly heterosexual:<sup>30</sup>

Αθ. ἤδη γεωργεῖν γυμνὸς ἀποδὺς βούλομαι.

Αα. ἐγὼ δὲ κοπραγωγῆν γὰρ τῷ πρώτῳ καὶ τῷ σιῷ.

Hesychios and Photios therefore provide no evidence for a Greek belief that homosexual practices were more in evidence at Sparta than elsewhere.

(2) Plato in *Lg.* 636b5-d4 treats the gymnasias of the Cretans and Spartans as the source from which homosexuality has spread over the Greek world, and this passage was of exceptional importance for the theory of *Dorische Knabenliebe* systematically expounded by E. Bethe (*Rh.M.* N.F. lxii [1907] 438ff.) and widely accepted at the present time. But:-

(a) Since in *R.* 452c8-9 Plato expresses the belief that gymnasias were invented by the Cretans and taken up thereafter by the Spartans, it seems that in *Lg.* he is theorising historically rather than condemning a contemporary movement of fashion. The theory may have been his own (in Euripides [Ael. *N.A.* vi 16] the Theban Laios is the relevant εὐρέτης), and it may have been wholly unjustified. Since, moreover, Solon (frgs. 12-13 Diehl<sup>3</sup>) expressed plain homosexual sentiments, and the murder of Hipparchos, according to the Thucydidean version, was a consequence of rivalry between Hipparchos and Aristogeiton (μέσος πολίτης, *Th.* vi 54.2) for the favours of Harmodios, it might be thought that by Plato's time homosexuality had been fashionable at Athens long enough to render contemporary practice in Dorian states irrelevant.<sup>31</sup>

(b) Although the belief that the Cretans were exceptionally homosexual was held by others besides Plato (cf. Ath. 601e-f, 602f) – it may have been based on the curious ritual rape practised in Crete (Ephoros F 149.21) – no one before Plutarch (*Amat.* 761d) says this of Sparta. In Athenaios (loc. cit.) the state associated with Crete is Ionian Chalcis. In *Smp.* 182a8-b1 Pausanias associates Sparta with Athens as a state in which the usage is “hard to understand”, by contrast with Elis and Boeotia. The text has been questioned and the words καὶ ἐν Λακεδαιμόνι transposed (Robin) or deleted (Winckelmann), since Pausanias says no more about Sparta, and the reason given for the Elean and Boeotian attitude, the inarticulateness of those peoples, is a traditional charge against Sparta. But deletion or transposition would break up a set of three pairs, “Elis and Boeotia”, “Athens and Sparta”, “Ionia and elsewhere”.<sup>32</sup> If the text is sound, Pausanias is drawing the same distinction as Xenophon in *Resp. Lac.* 2.12-13 and *Smp.* 8.35. Bethe argues throughout as if the Eleans and Boeotians were Dorians – they were not – and his interpretation (448) of the story of Archias and Actaeon (Plu. *Amat. Narr.* 772e-773a), as reflecting a custom at Dorian Corinth of the same nature as the Cretan ritual rape, is extremely forced.

(3) There existed at Athens, as elsewhere (Pl. *Prt.* 342b7-8), laconisers, who cultivated boxing, hard physical exercise, and indifference to discomfort, dirt and privation. Naturally these people tended to hold anti-democratic views, many of which coincided with those of Socrates and members of his circle; hence Callicles in *Grg.* 515e8-9 replies to Socrates’ “I hear that Pericles made



the Athenians idle . . .” by saying “It’s from the men with the cauliflower ears that you hear that”, which Socrates neither confirms nor denies. A passage of *Birds* (1281ff.) appears to associate Socrates with laconism:-

ἐλακωνομάνουν ἅπαντες<sup>33</sup> ἄνθρωποι τότε,  
ἐκόμων ἐπείνων ἐρρύπων ἐσωκράτουν  
σκυτάλι' ἐφόρουν, νυνὶ δ' ὑποστρέφαντες αὖ  
ὀρνιθομανοῦσι.

Finally, among the associates of Socrates, Alcibiades had ancestral connections with Sparta, which he was ready to exploit when it was politically desirable to do so (Th. v 43.2: cf. vi 89), and Critias expressed both in his writings (frgs. 6-8 Diels-Kranz) and in his crucial political decisions his own alignment with Sparta. It is moreover against a homosexual love-affair of Critias's that Socrates in *X. Mem.* i 2.30 makes a cruel joke.<sup>34</sup> Yet we must observe that in *Prt.* 342b6-d2 Socrates, addressing a company of well-to-do people whom we encounter in other dialogues, including Alcibiades, Critias, Eryximachos, Phaidros and Charmides, speaks of laconisers not as people who have anything to do with the company but as amusing eccentrics (who, incidentally, actually live at Sparta [342c5-7] if they have the opportunity to do so). One does not easily imagine Alcibiades and Critias going dirty and hungry for fashion's sake. As for *Av.* 1281ff., we must remember that in *Clouds* Aristophanes attaches to Socrates characteristics of the sophists, notably instruction in rhetoric for a fee, simply because Socrates and the sophists shared one feature, intellectual curiosity, which differentiated them from the ordinary man. Similarly in *Birds* Socrates is associated with laconisers because he and they shared another such feature, contempt for physical comfort (cf. *Av.* 1554f.). We do not, on the strength of *Clouds*, assert that Socrates taught rhetoric for money; why should we, on the strength of *Birds*, assert that he and his friends were laconisers? Again, “wearing the hair long”, here joined with “going dirty”, is in other circumstances (*Eq.* 580, *V.* 1317, *Nu.* 545) associated with elegance; Pheidippides wore his hair long (*Nu.* 14), but would not have liked the laconisers' dirtiness (cf. *Nu.* 837f.).

I submit that the available evidence does not justify any of the following hypotheses: that homosexual practices at Athens were the product of any conscious imitation of Sparta; that they were believed by the Athenians to be more prevalent at Sparta than elsewhere; that they originated in Dorian states; and that they were more prevalent in Dorian than in non-Dorian states generally.

What is left of the theory of Dorian influence is the hypothesis that the difference between Aristophanes and Plato, between homosexual acts as a peripheral luxury and homosexual ἔρωρ as central and emotionally absorbing, is a difference between the way of life of middle-aged peasants and the way of life of rich young men. Let us suppose that at an early date (possibly before the sixth century B.C.), for a reason which we cannot hope to recover,<sup>35</sup> it became fashionable in the Athenian upper class for young men to compete for the favours of boys. Those who hunt as recreation and not for a living have a poor opinion of a quarry which waits to be caught, and it was precisely the difficulty of seducing boys that fed the Greek appetite for emulation and enhanced the glamour of success. That it was more difficult than the pursuit of girls in a heterosexual society is highly probable. The boy, if he made himself inaccessible, had public opinion behind him (cf. p. 31 and *Phdr.* 255a5); since he was destined to grow into a man, he did not have to worry, as a girl in comparable circumstances<sup>36</sup> may worry, that he might be left on the

shelf; and, unlike a girl, he could not expect to win from the physical act pleasure on the same scale as that of his partner (cf. *Phdr.* 240b5-e7, *X. Smp.* 8.21). In such circumstances competition between lovers must necessarily be harder and more prolonged than in a heterosexual society. The lover must bribe, at least indirectly (cf. *Smp.* 184a7-b5; 184d2-185b5), and he must be admirable and enviable, if not in himself, then at least in his family connections.

Naturally a fashion set at the top would be imitated, but with such modifications as are imposed by an insufficiency of leisure and the impracticability of emotional commitment to an essentially artificial competition. The middle-aged peasant who is the common type of comic hero and whose values are implicit throughout comedy is a sensual opportunist who is prepared to take any pleasure for its own sake (except the pleasure of intellectual enquiry). He may well relish occasional homosexual contacts, like the herdsmen of *Theocr.* 5.39ff., 87, 116f.; he may sometimes be a client of a male prostitute (plainly, someone must have been);<sup>37</sup> but we cannot easily envisage this shrewd and wary peasant, even in his youth, committing himself to the extravagant manifestations of emotion summarised in *Smp.* 182d5-183b5.

Lest we exaggerate the difference between classes in real life, let us remember that our problem is essentially literary, not sociological: to explain the difference not between real peasants and real aristocrats, but between *homo Aristophaneus* and *homo Platonius*. *Aristophaneus* is consistent, intelligible and familiar. The interesting question which remains is why Plato exploited exclusively homosexual emotion for his philosophical theory of ἔρως. The answer might be that he had no real alternative, that when men in his own milieu spoke of ἔρως and ἐρᾶν their reference was almost always homosexual, and that he accepted the fact that men pursued boys when leisure and wealth made them free to choose their pursuits. It must, however, be observed that even if he did have alternatives homosexual ἔρως still provided the most useful starting-point for his own theory.

Homosexual relationships are necessarily transient to a greater degree than heterosexual relationships. Between the ages of 15 and 25 a male (especially in a society which does not shave the face) becomes a different sort of being in his εἶδος; a female does not. He changes roles, from ἐρώμενος to ἐραστής; a female does not. Hence a homosexual relationship cannot mature without changing in character and adjusting itself to circumstances much more drastically than a heterosexual relationship need change.<sup>38</sup> In this respect, the vividness of the contrast between "false" and "true" ἔρως may have contributed something to Plato's striking contempt for the material (cf. *Smp.* 210d1-3, 211e2-3, *Ep.* 7.335b2-5) and given a sharper edge to the protreptic element in his teaching and writing (cf. *Phdr.* 240a6-8).

But, what is more important, since a girl does not grow into a man, she does not normally take a man as a pattern to which she must make herself conform; but a boy does. This obstinate fact draws a line beyond which a pedagogic relation between a man and a girl cannot go, but it draws no such line for this relation between a man and a boy.<sup>39</sup> The pedagogic relation is central to Plato's theory of ἔρως (cf. *Smp.* 211b7-c1). The man and the boy are partners in a search for the imperishable, in which the boy becomes an increasingly competent seeker (cf. especially *Phdr.* 253b3-c6). Here it is not the contrast between false and true ἔρως but the extent of their common ground which facilitates, for Plato, the suppression of the physical constituents

of an erotic relationship and the exploitation of the intellectual.<sup>40</sup> To Plato, a desire for a perishable object must necessarily be either a step on an upward path, so long as it is recognised as a step (*Smp.* 211c1-9), or an error, if it is not recognised as a step. The emotion aroused in a male by a beautiful female appeared to Plato to be a step on a short flight which led nowhere.

*University of St. Andrews*

#### NOTES

- 1 This article is a revised version of the second of three Special University Lectures on "Aspects of Plato's *Symposium*" which I delivered in University College London, on 19 - 21 February 1964.
- 2 Cf. D.J. West, *Homosexuality* (London, 1960) 39 ff., 93, 123; A.C. Kinsey, W.B. Pomeroy and C.E. Martin, (i) *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia and London, 1948) 359, 617 ff., 639, 647 ff., (ii) (with P.H. Gebhard) *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (ibid., 1953) 451 ff., 468 ff.
- 3 *The Observer*, 5 May 1963, p. 30; cf. Anneliese Walker in *Delinquency and Discipline* (London, 1963) 20.
- 4 Margaret Mead, *Male and Female* (London, 1950) 290 f.
- 5 Kinsey i locc. citt.
- 6 id. ii 134 f., 228 ff., 449 f.
- 7 id. ii 166 ff., 352.
- 8 id. ii 358, 373 f.
- 9 id. i 327 ff., ii 312 f.
- 10 id. i 357, 384.
- 11 id. i 393 ff.
- 12 It would be perilous to draw any inference from the distribution of vase-paintings with sexual subjects. Paintings reveal part of the artist's view of his world and the ways in which his imagination worked, but they are not a blue-book. Every art has its own conventions, and every convention has some degree of autonomy, which the consumer accepts. We do not know the attitude of a vase's owner to the painting on it, or what relation between painting and life was acceptable to him.
- 13 The position is correctly and succinctly stated by J.H. Lipsius, *Das attische Recht und Rechtsverfahren* (Leipzig, 1908) 436 f. He does however misinterpret *Ar. Pl.* 153 ff. (n. 62); Aristophanes is there dwelling on the well-known fact that the moral definition of prostitution is much more elusive than the legal definition.
- 14 Taylor's generalisation (*Plato*<sup>6</sup> 212) that "at Athens [homosexual] relations were regarded as disgraceful both by law and . . . by general opinion" is misleading.
- 15 We cannot know whether Aeschines chose to forestall arguments which he thought Demosthenes

might use, or inserted in the speech, before circulating it in writing, his rebuttal of arguments which Demosthenes had actually used; but it is interesting that one of these arguments (119) is of exactly the same type as Demosthenes used twice in another speech (lvii 34, 55) delivered that same year.

- 16 Cf. A. Körte, *BSAW* lxxix(1) (1927) 34.
- 17 Aristophanes does not mean that the lover, if given *carte blanche*, would choose an effeminate boy, but that it is the effeminate boy who yields and is therefore worth pursuing; cf. the ingenious argument of Socrates in *Phdr.* 239c3-d7. The implication of Theopompos Com. fr. 29, where the personified Lykabettos says παρ' ἐμοὶ τὰ λῖαν μεῖράκια χαρίζεται τοῖς ἡλικιώταις, is obscure; if it is that exuberant virility finds expression in homosexuality, it is in agreement with a modern hypothesis discussed by Kinsey (ii 659), but more than one interpretation of λῖαν μεῖράκια is possible.
- 18 Marjorie Milne and D. von Bothmer, *Hesperia* xxii (1953) 215 ff., and Ed. Fraenkel, *Glotta* xxxiv (1955) 42 ff.
- 19 On ὀρχιπέδισα cf. D.M. Robinson and E.J. Fluck, *A Study of the Greek Love-Names* (Baltimore, 1937) 12f.
- 20 Cf. G.M.A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (London, 1935) 90 ff.
- 21 Cf. Ivo Bruns, *NJA* v (1900) 19, 26.
- 22 εἰάν . . . διαίτη φορτικωτέρᾳ τε καὶ ἀφιλοσόφῳ, φιλοσίμῳ δὲ χρήσονται - i.e. if their values are too close to those of actual society and not close enough to the philosopher's.
- 23 The assumption that homosexuality is a lasting orientation of personality, existing in some people but not in others, makes a fleeting appearance in Pausanias's speech (*Smp.* 181c4-6) and in Aristophanes' (191d6-192b5), but a contrary assumption is made in Greek literature generally. There is no contradiction here, but only a recognition that a person may be more or less homosexual, just as he may be more or less musical.
- 24 Cf. the observations of Luc. *Amor.* 36.
- 25 It is noteworthy that this belief is implied in references to sexual dreams. A man at Epidaurus suffering from an obstruction in the urethra was cured because ἐδόκει παιδὶ καλῷ συγγίγνεσθαι (*IG* iv(1)<sup>2</sup> 121.104f.), and Σ *Ar. Nu.* 16 explains the word ὀνειρώττειν by saying ὅπερ τοῖς ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ τινὸς οὗσι συμβαίνει γίνεσθαι, δοξάζουσι τοῖς παιδικοῖς συνεῖναι.
- 26 The "virile young man" of *Lg.* 839b3-6, who is imagined as protesting against restrictive legislation, is presumably protesting in defence of homosexual as well as heterosexual adventures. In a neighbouring passage the athlete Ikkos is held up for admiration because despite his physical fitness, which, it is agreed, stimulates the sexual appetite, he "didn't touch a woman or a boy while he was in training" (839e1-840a6).
- 27 Cf. J.A. Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (London, 1901) 13 ff. The view that homosexuality was a "Dorian sin" cultivated by "a tiny minority" is stated in extreme form by J.A.K. Thomson, *Greeks and Barbarians* (London, 1921) 174f.; I think that he is wrong, but he is right to give full weight to the difference between Plato and Aristophanes, a difference which generalisers about Greek morality sometimes overlook.
- 28 Cf. Dover, *Maia* N.S. xv (1963) 10f.
- 29 The self-righteous speaker of D. liv, referring disparagingly (34) to an association of young men who "by day wear serious expressions and say that they are living a Spartan life (λακωνίζεῖν φασί) . . . but when they get together, there is no shame or wickedness which they leave untried", provides a

good instance of a human tendency to believe that those who are outwardly austere (and on occasion, especially in a fight, obviously superior) must somehow indulge in immoral, disagreeable or absurd practices when no one is looking.

- 30 In Eupolis fr. 351, which begins  $\mu\iota\sigma\tilde{\omega}\lambda\alpha\kappa\omega\nu\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu$ , the meaning is obscure and is not necessarily sexual at all.
- 31 Cf. G. Daux, *REG* lv (1942) 264 f.
- 32 Cf. Rettig (ed.) ad loc. and Daux, loc. cit. 258 ff.
- 33 "Everyone was crazy about Sparta" = "among the crazes" (however few people had a craze at all) "the most conspicuous was the craze for Sparta"; an interesting form of comic statement.
- 34 The fact that Pausanias bears a name famous at Sparta is not significant. At least four other Athenians of that name can be identified in the fifth century alone, two of them on the same war memorial (*IG* i<sup>2</sup> 950.95, 117); the name occurs also in Boeotia in the fifth century (*IG* vii 584.4.12) and, of course, in Macedonia.
- 35 Bethe 457 ff. offered an ingenious explanation of the origin of homosexuality as a magical practice symbolising and effecting the transference of moral excellence from one male to another, and his explanation is treated as proven by R. Lagerborg *Die platonische Liebe* (Leipzig, 1926) 43. Actual parallels are, however, few and exceedingly remote, and there is nothing from the ancient Mediterranean except the unpleasant allegations of Epiphanius against a Gnostic sect (*Haer.* xxv 2.4 3.2 Holl). It is possible that Bethe's theory, despite his strictures (439) on "der moralische Ton, der Todfeind der Wissenschaft", shows the influence (cf. especially 449 f.) of the belief in which most modern Europeans have been brought up, that the choice between different physical contexts for the sexual act is morally important and that to prefer boys to girls, unlike a preference for (e.g.) Turkish coffee, is an enrolment in the forces of darkness. From such a belief it follows that if many Greeks preferred boys some very special explanation of this disquieting fact must be sought; but the belief itself is neither universal nor inescapable.
- 36 The Athenian girl was not in comparable circumstances; one must compare the Athenian boy with the modern girl. It is interesting that in the speech which Plato gives to Aristophanes the heterosexual counterpart of homosexual ἔρως is not marriage (which is a convention imposed upon all alike by society, *Smp.* 192b1-2) but the more difficult and dangerous pursuit of adultery (191d6-e2).
- 37 In this connection we must consider the humorous implication of *Ar. Th.* 35 (Euripides to the old man, about Agathon) καὶ μὲν βεβίνηκας σύ γ', ἀλλ' οὐκ οἶσθ' ὅμως and *Eq.* 1242 (the sausage-seller on his own way of life) ἡλλαντοπώλουν καὶ τι καὶ βινεσκόμην (inappropriately taken as middle by LSJ, although this, as an answer to "what was your τέχνη when you grew up?" would hardly differentiate the sausage-seller from anyone else). For general references to male prostitution cf. Cratin. fr. 151 (on "misbehaving in the Kimonian ruins") and Aeschin. i 82-84 (on the uncontrollable laughter aroused in the assembly by an unfortunate series of double-entendres).
- 38 Observed by Luc. *Amor.* 25-26.
- 39 Cf. J. Stenzel, *Platon der Erzieher* (Leipzig, 1928) 191 ff., 201.
- 40 Cf. Stenzel, op. cit. 195; Lagerborg, op. cit. 94 ff.