

James Hooker

Dr. Michael Steinmann

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Eros, Gay Longing, and the Fall of Man

One whose contribution to a symposium of philosophers which includes the sentence, "I am serious, and therefore I must beg [my listeners] not to make fun or to find any allusion in what I am saying," is bound to be quite subjective, and demands the patience of the audience (8). The reader must employ patience in understanding the true meaning of his stories, specifically on the origin of desire. According to Aristophanes, primeval man was of three sexes, representing the sun, earth, and moon: "The man was originally the child of the sun, the woman of the earth, and the man-woman of the moon" (6). Humanity as the three sexes made an attack on the gods, and were punished for their attempt to "scale heaven" (6). Zeus devised a plan to humble mankind: by cutting them in two. Thus, humanity was doomed to "throwing their arms about one another... longing to grow into one" (7).

Aristophanes' tale can be likened to the Christian concept of original sin, which details the transition of the first man and woman from a state of blissful paradise with God to a state of guilty defiance. While Aristophanes and Christianity have entirely different descriptions of how man fell out of the grace of God, both interpretations lead to the same conclusion: Man is lacking of its original nature, and because of this has an inherent desire to come back into union. This can be seen in the statement, "human nature was originally one and we were a whole, and the

desire and pursuit of the whole is called Eros" (Plato 8). Both of these examples reflect modern assumptions about desire: a primordial drive for the original nature of mankind.

For Aristophanes, this drive could be made manifest through love of any sorts, as long as it is characterized by an "intense yearning" impossible to explain (7). This yearning is well known to those in the queer community as definitive of homosexuality. The term "gay longing" is used to describe the seeming impossibility of queerness, which is culturally characterized by panic, obsession, and futility. An example of this can be seen in Richard Siken's "Litany in Which Certain Things are Crossed Out." Siken, known for his "crucial utterance" in gay poetry (Glück) writes, "We were inside the train car when I started to cry. You were crying too, smiling and crying in a way that made me even more hysterical. You said I could have anything I wanted, but I just couldn't say it out loud. Actually, you said / Love, for you, is larger than the usual romantic love. It's like a religion. It's terrifying. No one will ever want to sleep with you" (Siken).

For Aristophanes, this "ancient need" (8) is not bound by any specific sexual orientation or attraction. It hardly matters, because the desire for God is the driving force behind "the desire of one another... which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of man" (7). Thus, the intense yearning of love is essential to resolving the "fall of man", as it is known in Christianity; Through its pursuit mankind may once more enter the blissful paradise. According to Aristophanes, "if we would praise him who has given to us the benefit, we must praise the god Eros, who is our greatest benefactor, both leading us in this life back to our own nature, and giving us high hopes for the future, for he promises that if we are pious, he will restore us to our original state, and heal us and make us happy and blessed. (8-9).

Works Cited

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