

# Derivative and Novel Speeches in Plato's *Symposium*

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The six speeches of the *Symposium* may be divided into two sets: on the one hand, there is Phaedrus's speech and those which are derivative of his, and on the other hand, there are the novel speeches; and these are the ones which reject the previous approaches and propose unique theories of Eros.

## **Phaedrus and his derivatives**

Phaedrus's speech may be understood as the basis for a theory of Eros which is developed and augmented all the way through the speeches of Pausanias and Eryximachus.

If we put aside Phaedrus's initial mythological appeals—which I consider to be a side effect of the kind of speech he is giving, and much less a core part of his argument—the main focus of Phaedrus's speech, then, would seem to be the power of Eros to engender in humans a kind of virtue or fury which they might not have had without the god's inspiration.

When Pausanias begins, he criticizes Phaedrus for failing to include in his account the fact that Eros is double in nature:

εἰπεῖν δ' αὐτὸν ὅτι Οὐ καλῶς μοι δοκεῖ, ὦ Φαῖδρε, προβεβλησθαι ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος, τὸ ἀπλῶς οὕτως παρηγγελθαι ἐγκωμιάζειν Ἑρωτα. εἰ μὲν γὰρ εἷς ἦν ὁ Ἑρως, καλῶς ἂν εἶχε, νῦν δὲ οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν εἷς· μὴ ὄντος δὲ ἑνός ὁρδότερόν ἐστι πρότερον προρηθῆναι ὁποῖον δεῖ ἐπαινεῖν. (180c3–180d1)<sup>1</sup>

But Pausanias's analysis is necessarily a refinement of Phaedrus's, and not a refutation. In fact, Pausanias only adds and does not subtract from Phaedrus's point; for he simply specifies further both the nature and the origin of the inspiration that Phaedrus discussed, integrating it into his bipartite understanding of Eros. In Pausanias's framework, this inspiration is nothing other than the engenderment of concern for virtue in the hearts of lovers and their beloveds; and this is, to be sure, the inspiration which is derived from the Heavenly Eros, as opposed to the other:

οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τῆς οὐρανίας θεοῦ ἔρως καὶ οὐράνιος καὶ πομποῦ ἄξιος καὶ πόλει καὶ ἰδιώταις, πομπὴν ἐπιμέλειαν ἀναγκάζων ποιῆσθαι πρὸς ἀρετὴν τὸν τε ἐρώντα αὐτὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸν ἐρώμενον· οἱ δ' ἕτεροι πάντες τῆς ἐτέρας, τῆς πανδήμου. (185b5–185c2)<sup>2</sup>

In this way, Pausanias is one of the refiners of previous ideas. Likewise, Eryximachus fails to present an entirely new approach, but rather starts where he considers Pausanias to have left off on the way to the correct theory:

Εἰπεῖν δὴ τὸν Ἐρυξίμαχον, Δοκεῖ τοίνυν μοι ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι, ἐπειδὴ Πausanίας ὁρμήσας ἐπὶ τὸν λόγον καλῶς οὐχ ἱκανῶς ἀπετέλεσε, δεῖν ἐμὲ πειρᾶσθαι τέλος ἐπιθεῖναι τῷ λόγῳ. (185e6–196a2)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>And he said, "It doesn't seem right to me, O Phaedrus, for the speech to be proposed, that is, for it to be exhorted to just simply praise Eros. For if Eros were indeed singular, then it would be fine; but in fact, he is not singular; and since he is not singular, then it would more correct to say beforehand in what fashion one ought to praise him."

<sup>2</sup>This is the love from the heavenly goddess, and it's heavenly itself, and worthy of much both in the city and in private, forcing both the lover and the beloved to have much care for himself in relation to excellence; and the all the others are of the other (love), the one one of common (Aphrodite).

<sup>3</sup>So Eryximachus said, "It seems to me to be necessarily the case, since Pausanias started into the speech well but failed to finish it satisfactorily, that I must try and add an end to the speech."

In the course of his analysis, Eryximachus proceeds to generalize the existing discourse to encompass wide enough a breadth so as to admit a discussion of Medicine, Music, Athletics, Agriculture, and, in fact, every other affair.

To Eryximachus, then, the two kinds of love that humans may experience in their relationships are only special cases of something much more abstract; that is, Eros is simply the thing which drives opposites to combine. And so when things at variance combine by means of the Heavenly Eros (whether they be extremes of humor, flavor, pitch or temperature, or some other continuum), the result is harmonious and orderly; whereas, when the differing things combine by means of the Common Eros, the result is of disorderliness, harm, and pestilence.

By this means, Eryximachus continues with Pausanias's program of analyzing which kinds of inspiration are engendered by which kind of Eros, generalizing them to the point where we must understand the Inspiration introduced by Phaedrus as a special case itself of what results from, more abstractly, the joining of things together—in this case, namely, the joining of humans together.

## The Novel Speeches

Aristophanes begins by noting how he intends to pursue a different tack than that those who preceded him:

*Καὶ μὲν, ὦ Ἐρυξίμαχε, εἰπεῖν τὸν Ἀριστοφάνη, ἄλλη γέ πη ἐν νῶ ἔχω λέγειν ἢ ἢ σύ  
τε καὶ Πανσανίας εἰπέτην. (189c2–189c3)<sup>4</sup>*

The approach of Aristophanes is to develop his theory by providing a mythological backdrop, and then using it to explain the attractions which occur between humans. At

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<sup>4</sup>“And yet, O Eryximachus,” said Aristophanes, “I have it in mind to speak in a different way, at least, from how you and Pausanias have spoken.”

the surface, his argument would almost appear in the class of explanations which say that different kinds of love yield different kinds of inspiration, as Pausanias argued. And yet, I think it can be shown to be not so much that, but rather something a bit different.

In enumerating the different kinds of love-pursuit that may occur (that is, men pursuing women, women pursuing men, women pursuing women, and men pursuing men), Aristophanes distinguishes between different kinds of love: when men and women pursue each other, this is the spirit of adultery; when women pursue women, this is the spirit of lesbianism; but when men pursue men, this is manliness:

*ὅσοι δὲ ἄρρενος τμήμα εἰσι, τὰ ἄρρενα διώκουσι, καὶ τέως μὲν ἂν παῖδες ᾧσιν, ἅτε  
τεμάχια ὄντα τοῦ ἄρρενος, φιλοῦσι τοὺς ἄνδρας καὶ χαίρουσι συγκατακείμενοι καὶ  
συμπεπλεγμένοι τοῖς ἀνδράσι, καὶ εἰσιν οὗτοι βέλτιστοι τῶν παίδων καὶ μεираκίων,  
ἅτε ἀνδρείοτατοι ὄντες φύσει. (191e1–192a2)<sup>5</sup>*

And so, if we wished to characterize Aristophanes's analysis within the framework of the dual Eros, it would be the male homosexual relationships which are derived from the Heavenly Eros, and all the others from the Common one. And yet, such a characterization proves quite difficult to argue, if we consider the lines of causality between nature, love and inspiration.

Whereas we might well imagine that Pausanias would consent to the idea it is a person's nature which determines which kind of Eros will join him to his beloved (or vice versa), and that it is this in turn which determines whether or not his inspiration is virtuous, we cannot say the same of Aristophanes.

For to Aristophanes, the nature of a human (which is to say, whether he or she derived from a man-man, a woman-woman, or a man-woman) determines which Love they will

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<sup>5</sup>And all those which are cuttings from the male pursue men, and so long as they are children, inasmuch as they are slices of a man, love men and delight in lying with them and embracing them, and these are the best of children and youths, inasmuch as they are the most manly by nature.

experience; this much provokes no disagreement with the previous discourse, and merely augments it with a comical just-so story. But it is not *which* Love they experience that inspires them with civic and virtuous concerns, but rather their nature itself:

καὶ γὰρ τελεωθέντες μόνοι ἀποβαίνουσιν εἰς τὰ πολιτικὰ ἄνδρες οἱ τοιοῦτοι. ἐπειδὴν δὲ  
ἀνδρωῶσι, παιδεραστοῦσι καὶ πρὸς γάμους καὶ παιδοποιίας οὐ προσέχουσι τὸν νοῦν  
φύσει, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου ἀναγκάζονται· ἀλλ' ἐξαρκεῖ αὐτοῖς μετ' ἀκλήλων καταλῆν  
ἀγάμοις. (192a6–192b3)<sup>6</sup>

It is on account of being derived from a man-man that one is daring and virile, and it is on account of being that way both that one is inclined toward homosexual love, and that one is inspired to participate in the matters of the city. So, the inspiration in Aristophanes's framework does not derive from the Love, but rather issues directly from the primitive nature of the man himself, by which the kind of Love to be experienced is also determined.

Now then, Agathon begins by dismissing all the previous attempts at explaining Eros as missing the point, by failing to praise the god himself, but rather only congratulating the humans who are affected by him:

δοκοῦσι γάρ μοι πάντες οἱ πρόσθεν εἰρηκότες οὐ τὸν θεὸν ἐγκωμιάζειν ἀλλὰ τοὺς  
ἀνθρώπους εὐδαιμονίζειν τῶν ἀγαθῶν ὧν ὁ θεὸς αὐτοῖς αἴτιος· ὅποῖος δὲ τις αὐτὸς  
ὧν ταῦτα ἐδωρήσατο, οὐδεὶς εἴρηκεν. (194e4–195a1)<sup>7</sup>

The analysis provided by Agathon is, to put it briefly, that Eros alights upon those who are soft and beautiful, and that he is young and soft himself. He omits the notion of the

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<sup>6</sup>For indeed, when the grow up, only such men turn out to be politically inclined. And whenever they become men, they desire boys and do not incline themselves toward marriage and the making of children by nature, but rather are compelled by custom; rather, it suffices for them to live out their lives unmarried in each other's company.

<sup>7</sup>For it seems to me that the ones who have spoken so far were not praising the god, but rather congratulating the men for the goods of which the god is responsible for them; but being what kind of god he himself gave these gifts, nobody has said.

dual Eros, and conceives that he looks for the beautiful and the good, and engenders it in everyone he touches.

Not to be outdone by Agathon, Socrates starts off by feining to have misunderstood what an encomium was, having expected to be able to simply say the most beautiful truths that could be said about the subject so well as he could, but being instead put to attribute all the greatest and most beautiful things to the subject, whether or not they are the truth.

*ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ ὑπ' ἐβελτερίας ᾤμην δεῖν τὰ ληθῆ λέγειν περὶ ἐκάστου τοῦ ἐγκωμιαζομένου, καὶ τοῦτο μὲν ὑπάρχειν, ἐξ αὐτῶν δὲ τούτων τὰ κάλλιστα ἐκλεγομένους ὡς εὐπρεπέστατα τιθέναι· καὶ πάνυ δὴ μέγα ἐφρόνουσι ὡς εὖ ἐρῶν, ὡς εἰδὼς τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ ἐπαινεῖν ὁτιοῦν. τὸ δὲ ἄρα, ὡς ἔοικεν, οὐ τοῦτο ἦν τὸ καλῶς ἐπαινεῖν ὁτιοῦν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὡς μέγιστα ἀνατιθέναι τῷ πράγματι καὶ ὡς κάλλιστα, ἐὰν τε ᾗ οὕτως ἔχοντα ἐὰν τε μή· εἰ δὲ ψευδῆ, οὐδὲν ἄρ' ἦν πρᾶγμα. (198d3–198e2)<sup>8</sup>*

After some coaxing, Socrates agrees to deliver a praise speech in the way that he sees fit, distinct from the rest. In this way, Socrates wipes clean the slate and establishes his framework as one of the novel ones. Indeed, the theory which he claims to have gotten from Diotima is more divergent from all the previous speeches than any of them differed amongst themselves.

## 1 Conclusion

As I have shown, the last three speeches were novel, in that none of them could be combined with the ones that preceded to form a non-contradictory theory of Eros. Whilst

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<sup>8</sup>For I in my silliness thought that one ought to say the truth about each god who is being praised, and to begin this thing, and to pick out the most beautiful out of these same things and put them as nicely as possible; and forsooth, I thought very much indeed that I would speak well, on the grounds that I knew the truth about praising something. But, as it would turn out, this is not what is meant by praising something finely, but rather it is to attribute the greatest things to the subject, and the most beautiful, whether it be the case or not; and if they are false, it turns out to be of no account.

nobody should be surprised that Socrates failed to agree with anyone on something, I suggest that in addition to him, it may be no coincidence at all that it was the poets of the company, Agathon and Aristophanes, who came up with original and non-derivative speeches.

## References

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