

way. But this sort of thing is not supposed to cause any harm, and really should work to the benefit of both sides.

Well, I think this speech is long enough. If you are still longing for more, if you think I have passed over something, just ask.”

How does the speech strike you, Socrates? Don’t you think it’s simply superb, especially in its choice of words?

*d*     SOCRATES   It’s a miracle, my friend! I’m in ecstasy. And it’s all your doing, Phaedrus: I was looking at you while you were reading and it seemed to me the speech had made you radiant with delight; and since I believe you understand these matters better than I do, I followed your lead, and following you I shared your Bacchic frenzy.

PHAEDRUS   Come, Socrates, do you think you should joke about this?

SOCRATES   Do you really think I am joking, that I am not serious?

*e*     PHAEDRUS   You are not at all serious, Socrates. But now tell me the truth, in the name of Zeus, god of friendship: Do you think that any other Greek could say anything more impressive or more complete on this same subject?

SOCRATES   What? Must we praise the speech even on the ground that its author has said what the situation demanded, and not instead simply on the ground that he has spoken in a clear and concise manner, with a precise turn of phrase? If we must, I will have to go along for your sake, since—surely because I am so ignorant—that passed me by. I paid attention only to the speech’s style. As to the other part, I wouldn’t even think that Lysias himself could be satisfied with it. For it seemed to me, Phaedrus—unless, of course, you disagree—that he said the same things two or even three times, as if he really didn’t have much to say about the subject, almost as if he just weren’t very interested in it. In fact, he seemed to me to be showing off, trying to demonstrate that he could say the same thing in two different ways, and say it just as well both times.

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Greece, either for an individual person or for a whole city, but they accomplish little or nothing when they are in control of themselves.

We will not mention the Sybil or the others who foretell many things by means of god-inspired prophetic trances and give sound guidance to many people—that would take too much time for a point that’s obvious to everyone. But here’s some evidence worth adding to our case:

The people who designed our language in the old days never thought of madness as something to be ashamed of or worthy of blame; otherwise they would not have used the word ‘*manic*’ for the finest experts of all—the ones who tell the future—thereby weaving insanity into

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prophecy. They thought it was wonderful when it came as a gift of the god, and that’s why they gave its name to prophecy; but nowadays people don’t know the fine points, so they stick in a ‘*v*’ and call it ‘*manic*.’ Similarly, the clear-headed study of the future, which uses birds and other signs, was originally called *oionoisitē*, since it uses reasoning to bring intelligence (*nous*) and learning (*historia*) into human thought; but now modern speakers call it *oionistic*, putting on airs with their long ‘*ō*’. To the extent, then, that prophecy, *mantikē*, is more perfect and more admirable than sign-based prediction, *oionistic*, in both name and achievement, madness (*mania*) from a god is finer than self-control of human origin, according to the testimony of the ancient language givers.

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Next, madness can provide relief from the greatest plagues of trouble that beset certain families because of their guilt for ancient crimes: it turns up among those who need a way out; it gives prophecies and takes refuge in prayers to the gods and in worship, discovering mystic rites and purifications that bring the man it touches through to safety for this and all time to come. So it is that the right sort of madness finds relief from present hardships for a man it has possessed.

Third comes the kind of madness that is possession by the Muses, which takes a tender virgin soul and awakens it to a Bacchic frenzy of

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former for keeping his wits about him or condemning the latter for losing his—points that are essential to make—and still have something left to say? I believe we must allow these points, and concede them to the speaker. In their case, we cannot praise their novelty but only their skillful arrangement; but we can praise both the arrangement and the novelty of the nonessential points that are harder to think up.

PHAEDRUS I agree with you; I think that's reasonable. This, then, is what I shall do. I will allow you to presuppose that the lover is less sane than the non-lover—and if you are able to add anything of value to complete what we already have in hand, you will stand in hammered gold beside the offering of the Cypselids in Olympia.<sup>11</sup>

SOCRATES Oh, Phaedrus, I was only criticizing your beloved in order to tease you—did you take me seriously? Do you think I'd really try to match the product of his wisdom with a fancier speech?

PHAEDRUS Well, as far as that goes, my friend, you've fallen into your own trap. You have no choice but to give your speech as best you can: otherwise you will force us into trading vulgar jibes the way they do in comedy. Don't make me say what you said: "Socrates, if I don't know my Socrates, I must be forgetting who I am myself," or "He wanted to speak, but he was being coy." Get it into your head that we shall not leave here until you recite what you claimed to have "in your breast." We are alone, in a deserted place, and I am younger and stronger. From all this, "take my meaning"<sup>12</sup> and don't make me force you to speak when you can do so willingly.

SOCRATES But, my dear Phaedrus, I'll be ridiculous—a mere dilettante, improvising on the same topics as a seasoned professional!

PHAEDRUS Do you understand the situation? Stop playing hard to get! I know what I can say to make you give your speech.

SOCRATES Then please don't say it!

PHAEDRUS Oh, yes, I will. And what I say will be an oath. I swear to you—by which god, I wonder? How about this very plane tree?—I

speech, which you charmed me through your potion into delivering myself. But if Love is a god or something divine—which he is—he can't be bad in any way; and yet our speeches just now spoke of him as if he were. That is their offense against Love. And they've compounded it with their utter foolishness in parading their dangerous falsehoods and preening themselves over perhaps deceiving a few silly people and coming to be admired by them.

And so, my friend, I must purify myself. Now for those whose offense lies in telling false stories about matters divine, there is an ancient rite of purification—Homer did not know it, but Stesichorus did. When he lost his sight for speaking ill of Helen, he did not, like Homer, remain in the dark about the reason why. On the contrary, true followers of the Muses that he was, he understood it and immediately composed these lines:

*There's no truth to that story:  
You never sailed that lonely ship,  
You never reached the tower of Troy.*

And as soon as he completed the poem we call the Palinode, he immediately regained his sight. Now I will prove to be wiser than Homer and Stesichorus to this small extent: I will try to offer my Palinode to Love before I am punished for speaking ill of him—with my head bare, no longer covered in shame.

PHAEDRUS No words could be sweeter to my ears, Socrates.

SOCRATES You see, my dear Phaedrus, you understand how shameless the speeches were, my own as well as the one in your book. Suppose a noble and gentle man, who was (or had once been) in love with a boy of similar character, were to hear us say that lovers start serious quarrels for trivial reasons and that, jealous of their beloved, they do him harm—don't you think that man would think we had been

an agreement at the start of the inquiry, they wind up as you would expect—in conflict with themselves and each other. Now you and I had better not let this happen to us, since we criticize it in others. Because you and I are about to discuss whether a boy should make friends with a man who loves him rather than with one who does not, we should agree on defining what love is and what effects it has. Then we can look back and refer to that as we try to find out whether to expect benefit or harm from love. Now, as everyone plainly knows, love is some kind of desire; but we also know that even men who are not in love have a desire for what is beautiful. So how shall we distinguish between a man who is in love and one who is not? We must realize that each of us is ruled by two principles which we follow wherever they lead: one is our inborn desire for pleasures, the other is our acquired judgment that pursues what is best. Sometimes these two are in agreement; but there are times when they quarrel inside us, and then sometimes one of them gains control, sometimes the other. Now when judgment is in control and leads us by reasoning toward what is best, that sort of self-control is called ‘being in your right mind’; but when desire takes command in us and drags us without reasoning toward pleasure, then its command is known as ‘outrageousness’.<sup>14</sup> Now outrageousness has as many names as the forms it can take, and these are quite diverse.<sup>15</sup> Whichever form stands out in a particular case gives its name to the person who has it—and that is not a pretty name to be called, not worth earning at all. If it is desire for food that overpowers a person’s reasoning about what is best and suppresses his other desires, it is called gluttony and it gives him the name of a glutton, while if it is desire for drink that plays the tyrant and leads the man in that direction, we all know what name we’ll call him then! And now it should be clear how to describe someone appropriately in the other cases: call the man by that name—sister to these others—that derives from the sister of these desires that controls him at the time. As for the desire that has led us

who therefore had by necessity lost his mind. He should much rather have done it for a man who was not in love and had his wits about him. Otherwise it follows necessarily that he’d be giving himself to a man who is deceitful, irritable, jealous, disgusting, harmful to his property, harmful to his physical fitness, and absolutely devastating to the cultivation of his soul, which truly is, and will always be, the most valuable thing to gods and men.

“These are the points you should bear in mind, my boy. You should know that the friendship of a lover arises without any good will at all. No, like food, its purpose is to sate hunger. ‘Do wolves love lambs? That’s how lovers befriend a boy!’”

That’s it, Phaedrus. You won’t hear another word from me, and you’ll have to accept this as the end of the speech.

PHAEDRUS But I thought you were right in the middle—I thought you were about to speak at the same length about the non-lover, to list his good points and argue that it’s better to give one’s favors to him. So why are you stopping now, Socrates?

SOCRATES Didn’t you notice, my friend, that even though I am criticizing the lover, I have passed beyond lyric into epic poetry?<sup>17</sup> What do you suppose will happen to me if I begin to praise his opposite? Don’t you realize that the Nymphs to whom you so cleverly exposed me will take complete possession of me? So I say instead, in a word, that every shortcoming for which we blamed the lover has its contrary advantage, and the non-lover possesses it. Why make a long speech of it? That’s enough about them both. This way my story will meet the end it deserves, and I will cross the river and leave before you make me do something even worse.

PHAEDRUS Not yet, Socrates, not until this heat is over. Don’t you see that it is almost exactly noon, “straight-up” as they say? Let’s wait and discuss the speeches, and go as soon as it turns cooler.

SOCRATES You’re really superhuman when it comes to speeches,

trained orator, the slow-witted to the quick. By necessity, a lover will be delighted to find all these mental defects and more, whether acquired or innate in his boy; and if he does not, he will have to supply them or else lose the pleasure of the moment. The necessary consequence is that he will be jealous and keep the boy away from the good company of anyone who would make a better man of him; and that will cause him a great deal of harm, especially if he keeps him away from what would most improve his mind—and that is, in fact, divine philosophy, from which it is necessary for a lover to keep his boy a great distance away, out of fear the boy will eventually come to look down on him. He will have to invent other ways, too, of keeping the boy in total ignorance and so in total dependence on himself. That way the boy will give his lover the most pleasure, though the harm to himself will be severe. So it will not be of any use to your intellectual development to have as your mentor and companion a man who is in love.

“Now let’s turn to your physical development. If a man is bound by necessity to chase pleasure at the expense of the good, what sort of shape will he want you to be in? How will he train you, if he is in charge? You will see that what he wants is someone who is soft, not muscular, and not trained in full sunlight but in dappled shade—someone who has never worked out like a man, never touched hard, sweaty exercise. Instead, he goes for a boy who has known only a soft unmanly style of life, who makes himself pretty with cosmetics because he has no natural color at all. There is no point in going on with this description: it is perfectly obvious what other sorts of behavior follow from this. We can take up our next topic after drawing all this to a head: the sort of body a lover wants in his boy is one that will give confidence to the enemy in a war or other great crisis while causing alarm to friends and even to his lovers. Enough of that; the point is obvious.

“Our next topic is the benefit or harm to your possessions that will

come from a lover’s care and company. Everyone knows the answer, especially a lover: His first wish will be for a boy who has lost his dearest, kindest and godliest possessions—his mother and father and other close relatives. He would be happy to see the boy deprived of them, since he would expect them either to block him from the sweet pleasure of the boy’s company or to criticize him severely for taking it. What is more, a lover would think any money or other wealth the boy owns would only make him harder to snare and, once snared, harder to handle. It follows by absolute necessity that wealth in a boyfriend will cause his lover to envy him, while his poverty will be a delight. Furthermore, he will wish for the boy to stay wifeless, childless, and homeless for as long as possible, since that’s how long he desires to go on plucking his sweet fruit.

“There are other troubles in life, of course, but some divinity has mixed most of them with a dash of immediate pleasure. A flatterer, for example, may be an awful beast and a dreadful nuisance, but nature makes flattery rather pleasant by mixing in a little culture with its words. So it is with a mistress—for all the harm we accuse her of causing—and with many other creatures of that character, and their callings: at least they are delightful company for a day. But besides being harmful to his boyfriend, a lover is simply disgusting to spend the day with, ‘Youth delights youth,’ as the old proverb runs—because, I suppose, friendship grows from similarity, as boys of the same age go after the same pleasures. But you can even have too much of people your own age. Besides, as they say, it is miserable for anyone to be forced into anything by necessity—and this (to say nothing of the age difference) is most true for a boy with his lover. The older man clings to the younger day and night, never willing to leave him, driven by necessity and goaded on by the sting that gives him pleasure every time he sees, hears, touches, or perceives his boy in any way at all, so that he follows him around like a servant, with pleasure.