

songs and poetry that glorifies the achievements of the past and teaches them to future generations. If anyone comes to the gates of poetry and expects to become an adequate poet by acquiring expert knowledge of the subject without the Muses' madness, he will fail, and his self-controlled verses will be eclipsed by the poetry of men who have been driven out of their minds.

b There you have some of the fine achievements—and I could tell you even more—that are due to god-sent madness. We must not have any fear on this particular point, then, and we must not let anyone disturb us or frighten us with the claim that you should prefer a friend who is in control of himself to one who is disturbed. Besides proving that point, if he is to win his case, our opponent must show that love is not sent by the gods as a benefit to a lover and his boy. And we, for our part, must prove the opposite, that this sort of madness is given us by the gods to ensure our greatest good fortune. It will be a proof that convinces the wise if not the clever.

Now we must first understand the truth about the nature of the soul, divine or human, by examining what it does and what is done to it. Here begins the proof:

d Every soul²¹ is immortal. That is because whatever is always in motion is immortal, while what moves, and is moved by, something else stops living when it stops moving. So it is only what moves itself that never desists from motion, since it does not leave off being itself. In fact, this self-mover is also the source and spring of motion in everything else that moves; and a source has no beginning. That is because anything that has a beginning comes from some source, but there is no source for this, since a source that got its start from something else would no longer be the source. And since it cannot have a beginning, then necessarily it cannot be destroyed. That is because if a source were destroyed it could never get started again from anything else and nothing else could get started from it—that is, if everything gets started from

not care so much about our children if that were so, or about our fathers and mothers. And we wouldn't have had any trustworthy friends, since those relationships did not come from such a desire but from doing quite different things.

b Besides, if it were true that we ought to give the biggest favor to those who need it most, then we should all be helping out the very poorest people, not the best ones, because people we've saved from the worst troubles will give us the most thanks. For instance, the right people to invite to a dinner party would be beggars and people who need to sate their hunger, because they're the ones who'll be fond of us, follow us, knock on our doors,⁹ take the most pleasure with the deepest gratitude, and pray for our success. No, it's proper, I suppose, to grant your favors to those who are best able to return them, not to those in the direst need—that is, not to those who merely desire the thing, but to those who really deserve it—not to people who will take pleasure in the bloom of your youth, but to those who will share their goods with you when you are older; not to people who achieve their goal and then boast about it in public, but to those who will keep a modest silence with everyone; not to people whose devotion is short-lived, but to those who will be steady friends their whole lives; not to the people who look for an excuse to quarrel as soon as their desire has passed, but to those who will prove their worth when the bloom of your youth has faded. Now, remember what I said and keep this in mind: friends often criticize a lover for bad behavior; but no one close to a non-lover ever thinks that desire has led him into bad judgment about his interests.

c And now I suppose you'll ask me whether I'm urging you to give your favors to everyone who is not in love with you. No. As I see it, a lover would not ask you to give in to all your lovers either. You would not, in that case, earn as much gratitude from each recipient, and you would not be able to keep one affair secret from the others in the same

d brought up among the most vulgar of sailors, totally ignorant of love among the freeborn? Wouldn't he most certainly refuse to acknowledge the flaws we attributed to Love?

PHAEDRUS Most probably, Socrates.

e SOCRATES Well, that man makes me feel ashamed, and as I'm also afraid of Love himself, I want to wash out the bitterness of what we've heard with a more tasteful speech. And my advice to Lysias, too, is to write as soon as possible a speech urging one to give similar favors to a lover rather than to a non-lover.

PHAEDRUS You can be sure he will. For once you have spoken in praise of the lover, I will most definitely make Lysias write a speech on the same topic.

SOCRATES I do believe you will, so long as you are who you are.

PHAEDRUS Speak on, then, in full confidence.

SOCRATES Where, then, is the boy to whom I was speaking? Let him hear this speech, too. Otherwise he may be too quick to give his favors to the non-lover.

PHAEDRUS He is here, always right by your side, whenever you want him.

d 244 SOCRATES You'll have to understand, beautiful boy, that the previous speech was by Phaedrus, Pythocles' son, from Myrrhinus, while the one I am about to deliver is by Stesichorus, Euphemus' son, from Himera.²⁰ And here is how the speech should go:

"There's no truth to that story—that when a lover is available you should give your favors to a man who doesn't love you instead, because he is in control of himself while the lover has lost his head. That would have been fine to say if madness were bad, pure and simple; but in fact the best things we have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the god.

b The prophetess of Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona are out of their minds when they perform that fine work of theirs for all of

PHAEDRUS You are absolutely wrong, Socrates. That is in fact the best thing about the speech: He has omitted nothing worth mentioning about the subject, so that no one will ever be able to add anything of value to complete what he has already said himself.

SOCRATES You go too far: I can't agree with you about that. If, as a favor to you, I accept your view, I will stand refuted by all the wise men and women of old who have spoken or written about this subject.

PHAEDRUS Who are these people? And where have you heard anything better than this?

SOCRATES I can't tell you offhand, but I'm sure I've heard better somewhere; perhaps it was the lovely Sappho or the wise Anacreon or even some writer of prose. So, what's my evidence? The fact, my dear friend, that my breast is full and I feel I can make a different speech, even better than Lysias'. Now I am well aware that none of these ideas can have come from me—I know my own ignorance. The only other possibility, I think, is that I was filled, like an empty jar, by the words of other people streaming in through my ears, though I'm so stupid that I've even forgotten where and from whom I heard them.

PHAEDRUS But, my dear friend, you couldn't have said a better thing! Don't bother telling me when and from whom you've heard this, even if I ask you—instead, do exactly what you said: You've just promised to make another speech making more points, and better ones, without repeating a word from my book. And I promise you that, like the Nine Archons, I shall set up in return a life-sized golden statue at Delphi, not only of myself but also of you.¹⁰

SOCRATES You're a real friend, Phaedrus, good as gold, to think I'm claiming that Lysias failed in absolutely every respect and that I can make a speech that is different on every point from his. I am sure that that couldn't happen even to the worst possible author. In our own case, for example, do you think that anyone could argue that one should favor the non-lover rather than the lover without praising the

b Phaedrus: you're truly amazing. I'm sure you've brought into being more of the speeches that have been given during your lifetime than anyone else, whether you composed them yourself or in one way or another forced others to make them; with the single exception of Simias the Theban, you are far ahead of the rest.¹⁸ Even as we speak, I think, you're managing to cause me to produce yet another one.

PHAEDRUS Oh, how wonderful! But what do you mean? What speech?

c SOCRATES My friend, just as I was about to cross the river, the familiar divine sign came to me which, whenever it occurs, holds me back from something I am about to do. I thought I heard a voice coming from this very spot, forbidding me to leave until I made atonement for some offense against the gods. In effect, you see, I am a seer, and though I am not particularly good at it, still—like people who are just barely able to read and write—I am good enough for my own purposes. I recognize my offense clearly now. In fact, the soul too, my friend, is itself a sort of seer; that's why, almost from the beginning of my speech, I was disturbed by a very uneasy feeling, as Ibycus puts it, that "for offending the gods I am honored by men."¹⁹ But now I understand exactly what my offense has been.

PHAEDRUS Tell me, what is it?

SOCRATES Phaedrus, that speech you carried with you here—it was horrible, as horrible as the speech you made me give.

PHAEDRUS How could that be?

SOCRATES It was foolish, and close to being impious. What could be more horrible than that?

PHAEDRUS Nothing—if, of course, what you say is right.

SOCRATES Well, then? Don't you believe that Love is the son of Aphrodite? Isn't he one of the gods?

PHAEDRUS This is certainly what people say.

SOCRATES Well, Lysias certainly doesn't and neither does your

swear in all truth that, if you don't make your speech right next to this tree here, I shall never, never again recite another speech for you—I shall never utter another word about speeches to you!

SOCRATES My oh my, what a horrible man you are! You've really found the way to force a lover of speeches to do just as you say!

PHAEDRUS So why are you still twisting and turning like that?

SOCRATES I'll stop—now that you've taken this oath. How could I possibly give up such treats?

PHAEDRUS Speak, then.

SOCRATES Do you know what I'll do?

PHAEDRUS What?

SOCRATES I'll cover my head while I'm speaking. In that way, as I'm going through the speech as fast as I can, I won't get embarrassed by having to look at you and lose the thread of my argument.

PHAEDRUS Just give your speech! You can do anything else you like.

SOCRATES Come to me, O you clear-voiced Muses, whether you are called so because of the quality of your song or from the musical people of Liguria,²⁰ "come, take up my burden" in telling the tale that this fine fellow forces upon me so that his companion may now seem to him even more clever than he did before:

There once was a boy, a youth rather, and he was very beautiful, and had very many lovers. One of them was wily and had persuaded him that he was not in love, though he loved the lad no less than the others. And once in pressing his suit to him, he tried to persuade him that he ought to give his favors to a man who did not love him rather than to one who did. And this is what he said:

"If you wish to reach a good decision on any topic, my boy, there is only one way to begin: You must know what the decision is about, or else you are bound to miss your target altogether. Ordinary people cannot see that they do not know the true nature of a particular subject, so they proceed as if they did; and because they do not work out

“As for the boy, however, what comfort or pleasure will the lover
 give to him during all the time they spend together? Won’t it be dis-
 gusting in the extreme to see the face of that older man who’s lost his
 looks? And everything that goes with that face—why, it is a misery
 even to hear them mentioned, let alone actually handle them, as you
 would constantly be forced to do! To be watched and guarded suspi-
 ciously all the time, with everyone! To hear praise of yourself that is
 out of place and excessive! And then to be falsely accused—which is
 unbearable when the man is sober and not only unbearable but posi-
 tively shameful when he is drunk and lays into you with a pack of wild
 barefaced insults!

241 “While he is still in love he is harmful and disgusting, but after his
 love fades he breaks his trust with you for the future, in spite of all the
 promises he has made with all those oaths and entreaties which just
 barely kept you in a relationship that was troublesome at the time, in
 hope of future benefits. So, then, by the time he should pay up, he has
 made a change and installed a new ruling government in himself: right-
 minded reason in place of the madness of love. The boy does not even
 realize that his lover is a different man. He insists on his reward for past
 favors and reminds him of what they had done and said before—as if he
 were still talking to the same man! The lover, however, is so ashamed
 that he does not dare tell the boy how much he has changed or that
 there is no way, now that he is in his right mind and under control
 again, that he can stand by the promises he had sworn to uphold when
 b he was under that old mindless regime. He is afraid that if he acted as
 he had before he would turn out the same and revert to his old self. So
 now he is a refugee, fleeing from those old promises on which he must
 default by necessity; he, the former lover, has to switch roles and flee,
 since the coin has fallen the other way, while the boy must chase after
 him, angry and cursing. All along he has been completely unaware that
 c he should never have given his favors to a man who was in love—and

to say all this, it should be obvious already, but I suppose things said
 are always better understood than things unsaid: The unreasoning de-
 sire that overpowers a person’s considered impulse to do right and is
 driven to take pleasure in beauty, its force reinforced by its kindred
 desires for beauty in human bodies—this desire, all-conquering in its
 forceful drive, takes its name from the word for force (*phōmē*) and is
 called *erōs*.”

There, Phaedrus my friend, don’t you think, as I do, that I’m in the
 grip of something divine?

PHAEDRUS This is certainly an unusual flow of words for you,
 Socrates.

d SOCRATES Then be quiet and listen. There’s something really di-
 vine about this place, so don’t be surprised if I’m quite taken by the
 Nymphs’ madness as I go on with the speech. I’m on the edge of speak-
 ing in dihyrambs⁶ as it is.

PHAEDRUS Very true!

SOCRATES Yes, and you’re the cause of it. But hear me out; the
 attack may yet be prevented. That, however, is up to the god; what we
 must do is face the boy again in the speech:

“All right then, my brave friend, now we have a definition for the
 subject of our decision; now we have said what it really is, so let us keep
 that in view as we complete our discussion. What benefit or harm is
 likely to come from the lover or the non-lover to the boy who gives
 him favors? It is surely necessary that a man who is ruled by desire and
 is a slave to pleasure will turn his boy into whatever is most pleasing to
 himself. Now a sick man takes pleasure in anything that does not re-
 sist him, but sees anyone who is equal or superior to him as an enemy.
 That is why a lover will not willingly put up with a boyfriend who is
 his equal or superior, but is always working to make the boy he loves
 weaker and inferior to himself. Now, the ignorant man is inferior to
 the wise one, the coward to the brave, the ineffective speaker to the