

PART I

GREECE

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Figure 1 *Zeus and Ganymede*. Attic red figure kylix, c.455 BCE. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Ferrara, 9351 Zeus, indicated by the thunderbolt at left, abducts the beautiful youth, Ganymede. As a lover's gift, the cock at right signifies an amorous context. Zeus later made Ganymede immortal and appointed him cup-bearer of the gods.

# I CLASSICAL GREEK ATTITUDES TO SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

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*K. J. Dover*

## I. Words and Assumptions

The Greeks regarded sexual enjoyment as the area of life in which the goddess Aphrodite was interested, as Ares was interested in war and other deities in other activities. Sexual intercourse was *aphrodisia*, 'the things of Aphrodite.' Sexual desire could be denoted by general words for 'desire,' but the obsessive desire for a particular person was *eros*, 'love' in the sense which it has in our expressions 'be in love with . . .' (*eran*) and 'fall in love with . . .' (*erasthenai*). Eros, like all powerful emotional forces, but more consistently than most, was personified and deified; treated by some early poets as a cosmic force older than Aphrodite, occasionally (though not often) alleged to be her son, he was most commonly thought of as her minister or agent, to the extent that she could, when she wished (as in Euripides' *Hippolytus*), cause X to fall in love with Y.

At some time in the latter part of the fifth century Prodicus defined eros as 'desire doubled'; eros doubled, he said, was madness.<sup>1</sup> Both philosophical and unphilosophical Greeks treated sexual desire as a response to the stimulus of visual beauty, which is reasonable enough; rather more surprisingly, they also treated eros as a strong response to great visual beauty, a response which may be intensified by admirable or lovable qualities in the desired person but is not in the first instance evoked by those qualities. Plato finds it philosophically necessary in *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* to treat eros as a response to beauty; but even

Plato shows his awareness elsewhere (*Rep.* 474bE) that superior visual stimuli from Z do not necessarily make X fall out of love with Y.<sup>2</sup>

Eros generates *philia*, 'love'; the same word can denote milder degrees of affection, just as 'my *philoî*' can mean my friends or my inner-most family circle, according to context. For the important question 'Do you love me?' the verb used is *philein*, whether the question is put by a youth to a girl as their kissing becomes more passionate<sup>3</sup> or by a father to his son as an anxious preliminary to a test of filial obedience.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Inhibition

Our own culture has its myths about the remote past, and one myth that dies hard is that the 'invention' of sexual guilt, shame and fear by the Christians destroyed a golden age of free, fearless, pagan sexuality. That most pagans were in many ways less inhibited than most Christians is undeniable. Not only had they a goddess specially concerned with sexual pleasure; their other deities were portrayed in legend as enjoying fornication, adultery and sodomy. A pillar surmounted by the head of Hermes and adorned with an erect penis stood at every Athenian front-door; great models of the erect penis were borne in procession at festivals of Dionysus, and it too was personified as the tirelessly lascivious Phales.<sup>5</sup> The vase-painters often depicted sexual intercourse, sometimes masturbation (male or female) and fellatio, and in respect of any kind of sexual behaviour Aristophanic comedy appears to have had total license of word and act. A century ago there was a tendency to explain Aristophanic obscenity by positing a kind of dispensation for festive occasions which were once fertility-rituals, but this has no relevance to the vase-painters, nor, indeed, to the iambic poets of the archaic period, Archilochus and Hipponax, in whom no vestige of inhibition is apparent.

There is, however, another side of the coin. Sexual intercourse was not permitted in the temples or sanctuaries of deities (not even of deities whose sexual enthusiasm was conspicuous in mythology), and regulations prescribing chastity or formal purification after intercourse played a part in many Greek cults. Homeric epic, for all its unquestioning acceptance of fornication as one of the good things of life, is circumspect in vocabulary, and more than once denotes the male genitals by *aidos*, 'shame,' 'disgrace.' Serious poetry in the early classical poetry was often direct in what it said, but preserved a certain level of dignity in the ways of saying it; even when Pindar states the parentage of Castor in terms of Tyndareus' ejaculation into Leda, his style has the highest poetic credentials.<sup>6</sup> Poets (notably

Homer) sometimes describe interesting and agreeable activities – cooking, mixing wine, stabbing an enemy through a chink in his armour – in meticulous detail, but nowhere is there a comparable description of the mechanisms of sexual activity. Prose literature, even on medical subjects, is euphemistic (‘be with . . .’ is a common way of saying ‘have sexual intercourse with . . .’), and can degenerate into coyness, as when ‘we all know what’ is substituted for ‘the genitals’ in a list of the bodily organs which convey pleasurable sensations.<sup>7</sup> The fourth-century orators show some skill in insinuating allegations of sexual misconduct and simultaneously suggesting that both the speaker’s sense of propriety and the jury’s would be outraged by a plain statement of the facts; when a coarse word is unavoidable, they make a show of reluctance to utter it.<sup>8</sup> By the late fourth century, the obscene words which had been so lavishly used by Aristophanes and his contemporaries had been almost entirely excluded from comedy; Aristotle, commenting on this, calls the old style *aiskhrologia*, ‘speaking what is shameful (disgraceful, ugly).’<sup>9</sup>

Linguistic inhibition, then, was observably strengthened in the course of the classical period; and at least in some art-forms, inhibition extended also to content. These are data which do not fit the popular concept of a guilt-free or shame-free sexual morality, and require explanation. Why so many human cultures use derogatory words as synonyms of ‘sexual’ and reproach sexual prowess while praising prowess in (e.g.) swimming and riding, is a question which would take us to a remote level of speculation. Why the Greeks did so is a question which can at least be related intelligibly to the structure of Greek society and to Greek moral schemata which have no special bearing on sex.

### 3. Segregation and Adultery

As far as was practicable (cf. § 7), Greek girls were segregated from boys and brought up at home in ignorance of the world outside the home; one speaker in court seeks to impress the jury with the respectability of his family by saying that his sister and nieces are ‘so well brought up that they are embarrassed in the presence even of a man who is a member of the family.’<sup>10</sup> Married young, perhaps at fourteen<sup>11</sup> (and perhaps to a man twenty years or more her senior), a girl exchanged confinement in her father’s house for confinement in her husband’s. When he was invited out, his children might be invited with him, but not his wife;<sup>12</sup> and when he had friends in, she did not join the company. Shopping seems to have been a man’s job, to judge from references in comedy,<sup>13</sup> and slaves could

be sent on other errands outside the house. Upholders of the proprieties pronounced the front door to be the boundaries of a good woman's territory.<sup>14</sup>

Consider now the situation of an adolescent boy growing up in such a society. Every obstacle is put in the way of his speaking to the girl next door; it may not be easy for him even to get a glimpse of her. Festivals, sacrifices and funerals, for which women and girls did come out in public, provided the occasion for seeing and being seen. They could hardly afford more than that, for there were too many people about, but from such an occasion (both in real life and in fiction) an intrigue could be set on foot, with a female slave of respectable age as the indispensable go-between.<sup>15</sup>

In a society which practices segregation of the sexes, it is likely that boys and girls should devote a good deal of time and ingenuity to defeating society, and many slaves may have co-operated with enthusiasm. But Greek laws were not lenient towards adultery, and *moikheia*, for which we have no suitable translation except 'adultery,' denoted not only the seduction of another man's wife, but also the seduction of his widowed mother, unmarried daughter, sister, niece, or any other woman whose legal guardian he was.<sup>16</sup> The adulterer could be prosecuted by the offended father, husband or guardian; alternatively, if caught in the act, he could be killed, maltreated, or imprisoned by force until he purchased his freedom by paying heavy compensation. A certain tendency to regard women as irresponsible and ever ready to yield to sexual temptation (see § 5) relieved a cuckolded husband of a sense of shame or inadequacy and made him willing to seek the co-operation of his friends in apprehending an adulterer,<sup>17</sup> just as he would seek their co-operation to defend himself against fraud, encroachment, breach of contract, or any other threat to his property. The adulterer was open to reproach in the same way, and to the same extent, as any other violator of the laws protecting the individual citizen against arbitrary treatment by other citizens. To seduce a woman of citizen status was more culpable than to rape her, not only because rape was presumed to be unpremeditated but because seduction involved the capture of her affection and loyalty;<sup>18</sup> it was the degree of offense against the man to whom she belonged, not her own feelings, which mattered.

It naturally follows from the state of the law and from the attitudes and values implied by segregation that an adolescent boy who showed an exceptional enthusiasm for the opposite sex could be regarded as a potential adulterer and his propensity discouraged just as one would discourage theft, lies and trickery, while an adolescent boy who blushed at the mere idea of proximity to a woman was praised as *sophron*, 'right-minded,'

i.e. unlikely to do anything without reflecting first whether it might incur punishment, disapproval, dishonour or other undesirable consequences.

#### 4. Commercial Sex

Greek society was a slave-owning society, and a female slave was not in a position to refuse the sexual demands of her owner or of anyone else to whom he granted the temporary use of her. Large cities, notably Athens, also had a big population of resident aliens, and these included women who made a living as prostitutes, on short-term relations with a succession of clients, or as *hetairai*, who endeavoured to establish long-term relations with wealthy and agreeable men. Both aliens and citizens could own brothels and stock them with slave-prostitutes. Slave-girls and alien girls who took part in men's parties as dancers or musicians could also be mauled and importuned in a manner which might cost a man his life if he attempted it with a woman of citizen status. In an instructive scene at the close of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* (1160–1231) Euripides, disguised as an old woman, distracts the attention of a policeman with the help of a pretty dancing-girl; for a drachma, the policeman is allowed to have intercourse with the girl, but it is the 'old woman,' not the girl, who strikes the bargain, exactly as if it were a matter of paying rent for use of an inanimate object.

It was therefore easy enough to purchase sexual satisfaction, and the richer a man was the better provision he could make for himself. But money spent on sex was money not spent on other things, and there seems to have been substantial agreement on what were proper or improper items of expenditure. Throughout the work of the Attic orators, who offer us by far the best evidence on the moral standards which it was prudent to uphold in addressing large juries composed of ordinary citizens, it is regarded as virtuous to impoverish oneself by gifts and loans to friends in misfortune (for their daughters' dowries, their fathers' funerals, and the like), by ransoming Athenian citizens taken prisoner in war, and by paying out more than the required minimum in the performance of public duties (the upkeep of a warship, for example, or the dressing and training of a chorus at a festival). This kind of expenditure was boasted about and treated as a claim on the gratitude of the community.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, to 'devour an inheritance' by expenditure on one's own consumption was treated as disgraceful.<sup>20</sup> Hence gluttony, drunkenness and purchased sexual relations were classified together as 'shameful pleasures'; Demosthenes<sup>21</sup> castigates one of his

fellow-ambassadors for 'going round buying prostitutes and fish' with the money he had corruptly received. When a young man fell in love, he might well fall in love with a hetaira or a slave, since his chances of falling in love with a girl of citizen status were so restricted, and to secure the object of his love he would need to purchase or ransom her. A close association between eros and extravagance therefore tends to be assumed, especially in comedy; a character in Menander<sup>22</sup> says, 'No one is so parsimonious as not to make some sacrifice of his property to Eros.' More than three centuries earlier, Archilochus<sup>23</sup> put the matter in characteristically violent form when he spoke of wealth accumulated by long labour 'pouring down into a whore's guts.' A fourth-century litigant<sup>24</sup> venomously asserts that his adversary, whose tastes were predominantly homosexual, has 'buggered away all his estate.'

We have here another reason for the discouragement and disapproval of sexual enthusiasm in the adolescent; it was seen as presenting a threat that the family's wealth would be dissipated in ways other than those which earned honour and respect from the community. The idea that one has a right to spend one's own money as one wishes (or a right to do anything which detracts from one's health and physical fitness) is not Greek, and would have seemed absurd to a Greek. He had only the rights which the law of his city explicitly gave him; no right was inalienable, and no claim superior to the city's.

## 5. Resistance

Living in a fragmented and predatory world, the inhabitants of a Greek city-state, who could never afford to take the survival of their community completely for granted, attached great importance to the qualities required of a soldier: not only to strength and speed, in which men are normally superior to women, but also to the endurance of hunger, thirst, pain, fatigue, discomfort and disagreeably hot or cold weather. The ability to resist and master the body's demands for nourishment and rest was normally regarded as belonging to the same moral category as the ability to resist sexual desire. Xenophon describes the chastity of King Agesilaus together with his physical toughness,<sup>25</sup> and elsewhere<sup>26</sup> summarises 'lack of self-control' as the inability to hold out against 'hunger, thirst, sexual desire and long hours without sleep.' The reasons for this association are manifold: the treatment of sex – a treatment virtually inevitable in a slave-owning society – as a commodity, and therefore as something which the toughest and most frugal men will be able to cut

down to a minimum; the need for a soldier to resist the blandishments of comfort (for if he does not resist, the enemy who does will win), to sacrifice himself as an individual entirely, to accept pain and death as the price to be paid for the attainment of a goal which is not easily quantified, the honour of victory; and the inveterate Greek tendency to conceive of strong desires and emotional states as forces which assail the soul from the outside. To resist is manly and 'free'; to be distracted by immediate pleasure from the pursuit of honour through toil and suffering is to be a 'slave' to the forces which 'defeat' and 'wrest' one's own personality.

Here is a third reason for praise of chastity in the young, the encouragement of the capacity to resist, to go without, to become the sort of man on whom the community depends for its defence. If the segregation and legal and administrative subordination of women received their original impetus from the fragmentation of the early Greek world into small, continuously warring states, they also gave an impetus to the formation of certain beliefs about women which served as a rationalization of segregation and no doubt affected behaviour to the extent that people tend to behave in the ways expected of them. Just as it was thought masculine to resist and endure, it was thought feminine to yield to fear, desire and impulse. 'Now you must be a *man*;' says Demas to himself as he tries to make up his mind to get rid of his concubine,<sup>27</sup> 'Forget your desire, fall out of love.' Women in comedy are notoriously unable to keep off the bottle, and in tragedy women are regarded as naturally more prone than men to panic, uncontrollable grief, jealousy and spite. It seems to have been believed not only that women enjoyed sexual intercourse more intensely than men,<sup>28</sup> but also that experience of intercourse put the woman more under the man's power than it put him under hers,<sup>29</sup> and that if not segregated and guarded women would be insatiably promiscuous.

## 6. Homosexuality

It was taken for granted in the Classical period that a man was sexually attracted by a good-looking younger male,<sup>30</sup> and no Greek who said that he was 'in love' would have taken it amiss if his hearers assumed without further enquiry that he was in love with a boy and that he desired more than anything to ejaculate in or on the boy's body. I put the matter in these coarse and clinical terms to preclude any misapprehension arising from modern application of the expression 'Platonic love' or from Greek euphemism (see below). Xenophon<sup>31</sup> portrays the Syracusan tyrant Hiero

as declaring that he wants from the youth Dailochus, with whom he is in love, 'what, perhaps, the nature of man compels us to want from the beautiful.' Aphrodite, despite her femininity, is not hostile to homosexual desire, and homosexual intercourse is denoted by the same term, *aphrodisia*, as heterosexual intercourse.<sup>32</sup> Vase-painting was noticeably affected by the homosexual ethos; painters sometimes depicted a naked woman with a male waist and hips, as if a woman's body was nothing but a young man's body plus breasts and minus external genitals,<sup>33</sup> and in many of their pictures of heterosexual intercourse from the rear position the penis appears (whatever the painter's intention) to be penetrating the anus, not the vagina.<sup>34</sup>

Why homosexuality – or, to speak more precisely, 'pseudo-homosexuality',<sup>35</sup> since the Greeks saw nothing surprising in the co-existence of desire for boys and desire for girls in the same person-obtained so firm and widespread a hold on Greek society, is a difficult and speculative question.<sup>36</sup> Segregation alone cannot be the answer, for comparable segregation has failed to engender a comparable degree of homosexuality in other cultures. Why the Greeks of the Classical period accepted homosexual desire as natural and normal is a much easier question: they did so because previous generations had accepted it, and segregation of the sexes in adolescence fortified and sustained the acceptance and the practice.

Money may have enabled the adolescent boy to have plenty of sexual intercourse with girls of alien or servile status, but it could not give him the satisfaction which can be pursued by his counterpart in a society which does not own slaves: the satisfaction of being welcomed *for his own sake* by a sexual partner of equal status. This is what the Greek boy was offered by homosexual relations. He was probably accustomed (as often happens with boys who do not have the company of girls) to a good deal of homosexual play at the time of puberty, and he never heard from his elders the suggestion that one was destined to become *either* 'a homosexual' *or* 'a heterosexual.'<sup>37</sup> As he grew older, he could seek among his juniors a partner of citizen status, who could certainly not be forced and who might be totally resistant to even the most disguised kind of purchase. If he was to succeed in seducing this boy (or if later, as a mature man, he was to seduce a youth), he could do so only by *earning* hero-worship.<sup>38</sup>

This is why, when Greek writers 'idealize' eros and treat the physical act as the 'lowest' ingredient in a rich and complex relationship which comprises mutual devotion, reciprocal sacrifice, emulation, and the awakening of sensibility, imagination and intellect, they look not to what most of us understand by sexual love but to the desire of an older for a younger male and the admiration felt by the younger for the older. It is noticeable also

that in art and literature inhibitions operate in much the same way as in the romantic treatment of heterosexual love in our own tradition. When physical gratification is directly referred to, the younger partner is said to 'grant favours' or 'render services'; but a great deal is written about homosexual eros from which the innocent reader would not easily gather that any physical contact at all was involved. Aeschines, who follows Aeschylus and Classical sentiment generally in treating the relation between Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad* as homoerotic, commends Homer for leaving it to 'the educated among his hearers' to perceive the nature of the relation from the extravagant grief expressed by Achilles at the death of Patroclus.<sup>39</sup> The vase-painters very frequently depict the giving of presents by men to boys and the 'courting' of boys (a mild term for an approach which includes putting a hand on the boy's genitals), but their pursuit of the subject to the stage of erection, let alone penetration, in a variety of positions, is commonplace.<sup>40</sup>

We also observe in the field of homosexual relations the operation of the 'dual standard of morality' which so often characterizes societies in which segregation of the sexes is minimal.<sup>41</sup> If a Greek admitted that he was in love with a boy, he could expect sympathy and encouragement from his friends, and if it was known that he had attained his goal, envy and admiration. The boy, on the other hand, was praised if he retained his chastity, and he could expect strong disapproval if he was thought in any way to have taken the initiative in attracting a lover. The probable implication is that neither partner would actually say anything about the physical aspect of their relationship to anyone else,<sup>42</sup> nor would they expect any question about it to be put to them or any allusion to it made in their presence.

## 7. Class and Status

Once we have accepted the universality of homosexual relations in Greek society as a fact, it surprises us to learn that if a man had at any time in his life prostituted himself to another man for money he was debarred from exercising his political rights.<sup>43</sup> If he was an alien, he had no political rights to exercise, and was in no way penalized for living as a male prostitute, so long as he paid the prostitution tax levied upon males and females alike.<sup>44</sup> It was therefore not the physical act *per se* which incurred penalty, but the incorporation of the act in a certain deliberately chosen role which could only be fully defined with reference to the nationality and status of the participants.

This datum illustrates an attitude which was fundamental to Greek society. They tended to believe that one's moral character is formed in the main by the circumstances in which one lives: the wealthy man is tempted to arrogance and oppression, the poor man to robbery and fraud, the slave to cowardice and petty greed. A citizen compelled by great and sudden economic misfortune to do work of a kind normally done by slaves was shamed because his assumption of a role which so closely resembled a slave's role altered his relationship to his fellow-citizens.<sup>45</sup> Since prostitutes were usually slaves or aliens, to play the role of a prostitute was, as it were, to remove oneself from the citizen-body, and the formal exclusion of a male prostitute from the rights of a citizen was a penalty for disloyalty to the community in his choice of role.

Prostitution is not easily defined – submission in gratitude for gifts, services or help is not so different in kind from submission in return for an agreed fee<sup>46</sup> – nor was it easily proved in a Greek city, unless people were willing (as they were not)<sup>47</sup> to come forward and testify that they had helped to cause a citizen's son to incur the penalty of disenfranchisement. A boy involved in a homosexual relationship absolutely untainted by mercenary considerations could still be called a prostitute by his family's enemies, just as the term can be recklessly applied today by unfriendly neighbours or indignant parents to a girl who sleeps with a lover. He could also be called effeminate; not always rightly, since athletic success seems to have been a powerful stimulus to his potential lovers, but it is possible (and the visual arts do not help us much here) that positively feminine characteristics in the appearance, movements and manner of boys and youths played a larger part in the ordinary run of homosexual activity than the idealization and romanticisation of the subject in literature indicates. There were certainly circumstances in which homosexuality could be treated as a substitute for heterosexuality; a comic poet<sup>48</sup> says of the Greeks who besieged Troy for ten years, 'they never saw a hetaira . . . and ended up with arseholes wider than the gates of Troy.' The homosexual courting scene which becomes so common in vase-paintings of the sixth century B.C. – the man touching the face and genitals of the boy, the boy indignantly grasping the man's wrists to push them away – first appears in the seventh century as a youth courting a woman.<sup>49</sup> A sixth-century vase in which all of a group of men except one are penetrating women shows the odd man out grasping his erect penis and approaching, with a gesture of entreaty, a youth – who starts to run away.<sup>50</sup> In so far as the 'passive partner' in a homosexual act takes on himself the role of a woman, he was open to the suspicion, like the male prostitute, that he abjured his prescribed role as a future soldier and defender of the community.

The comic poets, like the orators, ridicule individuals for effeminacy, for participation in homosexual activity, or for both together; at the same time, the sturdy, wilful, roguish characters whom we meet in Aristophanes are not averse to handling and penetrating good-looking boys when the opportunity presents itself,<sup>51</sup> as a supplement to their busy and enjoyable heterosexual programmes. They represent a social class which, though in the main solidly prosperous, is below the level of most of the people we meet in reading Plato, and there is one obvious factor which we should expect to determine different sexual attitudes in different classes. The thoroughgoing segregation of women of citizen status was possible only in households which owned enough slaves and could afford to confine its womenfolk to a leisure enlivened only by the exercise of domestic crafts such as weaving and spinning. This degree of segregation was simply not possible in poorer families; the women who sold bread and vegetables in the market – Athenian women,<sup>52</sup> not resident aliens – were not segregated, and there must have been plenty of women in the demes of the Attic countryside who took a hand in work on the land and drove animals to market. No doubt convention required that they should protect each other's virtue by staying in pairs or groups as much as they could, but clearly the generalizations which I formulated in § 3 on the subject of segregation and the obstacles to love-affairs between citizens' sons and citizens' daughters lose their validity as one goes down the social scale. Where there are love-affairs, both boys and girls can have decided views – not enforceable *de jure*, but very important *de facto* – on whom they wish to marry. The girl in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* who waits impatiently for her young man's arrival while her mother is out may be much nearer the norm of Athenian life than those cloistered ladies who were 'embarrassed by the presence even of a male relative.' It would not be discordant with modern experience to believe that speakers in an Athenian law-court professed, and were careful to attribute to the jury, standards of propriety higher than the average member of the jury actually set himself.

## 8. Philosophers and Others

Much Classical Greek philosophy is characterized by contempt for sexual intercourse, which the author of the Seventh Letter of Plato,<sup>53</sup> offended at the traditional association of sex with a deity, calls 'the slavish and ugly pleasure wrongly called *aphrodisios*.' Xenophon's Socrates, although disposed to think it a gift of beneficent providence that humans, unlike other mammals, can enjoy sex all the year round,<sup>54</sup> is wary of troubling

the soul over what he regards as the minimum needs of the body.<sup>55</sup> Virtue reproached Vice, in Prodicus' allegory of the choice of Herakles,<sup>56</sup> for 'forcing sexual activity before [a man] has a need of it.' Antisthenes boasted<sup>57</sup> of having intercourse only with the most readily available woman (and the least desired by other men) 'when my body needs it.' One logical outcome of this attitude to sex is exemplified by Diogenes the Cynic, who was alleged to have masturbated in public when his penis erected itself,<sup>58</sup> as if he were scratching a mosquito-bite.<sup>59</sup> Another outcome was the doctrine (influential in Christianity, but not of Christian origin)<sup>60</sup> that a wise and virtuous man will not have intercourse except for the purpose of procreating legitimate offspring, a doctrine which necessarily proscribes much heterosexual and all homosexual activity.

Although philosophical preoccupation with the contrast between 'body' and 'soul' had much to do with these developments, we can discern, as the ground from which these philosophical plants sprouted, Greek admiration for invulnerability, hostility towards the diversion of resources to the pursuit of pleasure, and disbelief in the possibility that dissimilar ways of feeling and behaving can be synthesised in the same person without detracting from his attainment of the virtues expected of a selfless defender of his city. It is also clear that the refusal of Greek law and society to treat a woman as a responsible person, while on the one hand it encouraged a complacent acceptance of prostitution and concubinage, on the other hand led to the classification of sexual activity as a male indulgence which could be reduced to a minimum by those who were not self-indulgent.<sup>61</sup>

Comedy presents a different picture. The speech put into the mouth of Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* differs from the speeches of the other characters in that work by treating eros as the individual's passionate search for the 'other half' of himself (or of herself). This view of eros is firmly rejected by Plato,<sup>62</sup> who presumably chose Aristophanes as its proponent because it seemed to him the view which one would expect of a comic poet; and it may have seemed so to him because comedy looked at sexual behaviour through the eyes of the lower middle class (cf. § 7). Certainly in comedy of the late fourth century we find much which accords with Plato's Aristophanes, notably the remorse of a sensitive young man who realizes that he has adopted a 'dual standard' in condemning his wife and excusing himself.<sup>63</sup> But we have to consider also Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, produced in 411. There is much fantasy and inconsequentiality in the play, more, indeed, than is commonly observed – and the fact that citizens denied intercourse by their wives are apparently unable to turn their attention to slaves, prostitutes or boys, or even to masturbation,<sup>64</sup> may be no more than inconsequentiality; Aristophanic

comedy easily ignores all those aspects of reality which would be inconvenient for the development of the comic plot. Yet when every allowance is made for that important comic convention, the central idea of the play, that a sex-strike by citizens' wives against their husbands can be imagined as having so devastating an effect, implies that the marital relationship was much more important in people's actual lives than we would have inferred simply from our knowledge of the law and our acquaintance with litigation about property and inheritance; more important, too, than could ever be inferred from a comprehensive survey of the varieties of sexual experience and attitude which were possible for the Greeks.

### NOTES

- 1 Prodicus fr. B7 (Diels-Kranz).
- 2 See for more detailed discussion my article, "Aristophanes' Speech in Plato's *Symposium*," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* lvi (1966), 41 ff., especially 48 f.
- 3 Xenophon, *Symposium* 9.6.
- 4 Aristophanes, *Clouds* 82.
- 5 Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 259–279.
- 6 Pindar, *Nemean Odes* 10.80–82.
- 7 Xenophon, *Hiero* 1.4.
- 8 E.g. Aeschines i 52.
- 9 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1128<sup>a</sup> 22–25.
- 10 Lysias iii 6.
- 11 E.g. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 7.5.
- 12 Isaeus iii 14 (general statement); Aristophanes, *Birds* 130–132 bears it out.
- 13 E.g. Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* 818–822, *Wasps* 788–790.
- 14 E.g. Menander fr. 592, Euripides fr. 521.
- 15 E.g. Lysias i 8 (an adulterer's designs on a married woman), Theocritus 2.70–103.
- 16 The law is cited and discussed by Demosthenes xxiii 53–55. Cf. A. R. W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens*, i (Oxford, 1968), 32–38.
- 17 The speaker of Lysias i regards his wife and children as "shamed" by the adulterer but himself as "wronged." However, an alternative view seems to be expressed in Callias fr. 1, "Profit is better than shame; off with the adulterer to the inner room!"
- 18 Lysias i 32 f.
- 19 E.g. Lysias xix 9 f., "My father, throughout his life, spent more on the city than on himself and his family. . . ."
- 20 E.g. Aeschines i 42, on Timarchus' "devouring of his considerable estate . . . because he is a slave to the most shameful pleasures."

- 21 Demosthenes xix 229.
- 22 Menander fr. 198.
- 23 Archilochus fr. 118 (Tarditi) = 142 (Bergk).
- 24 Isaeus x 25.
- 25 Xenophon, *Agesilaus* 5.
- 26 Xenophon, *Memorabilia* iv 5.9.
- 27 Menander, *Samia* (Austin) 349 f.
- 28 Hesiod fr. 275 (Merkelbach and West).
- 29 Cf. Euripides, *Troades* 665 f., *Medea* 569–575, fr. 323.
- 30 I have discussed the evidence more fully in “Eros and Nomos,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* x (1964), 31–42.
- 31 Xenophon, *Hiero* 1.33.
- 32 E.g. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 12.14, *Symposium* 8.21.
- 33 E.g. J. D. Beazley, *Greek Vases in Poland* (Oxford, 1928), pl. 19.1, *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, Italy VIII, III Ic 1.38.
- 34 E.g. B. Graef and E. Langlotz, *Die antiken Vasen von der Akropolis zu Athen* i (Berlin, 1925), pl. 85 (no. 1639), 90 (no. 1913).
- 35 Cf. G. Devereux, “Greek Pseudo-Homosexuality and the ‘Greek Miracle,’” *Symbolae Osloenses* xlii (1967), 69–92.
- 36 The Greeks never suggested that it originated among “decadent Asiatics”; Herodotus i 135 regards the Persians as having learned pederasty from the Greeks.
- 37 That is not to say that no one was exclusively or predominantly homosexual; Pausanias and Agathon maintained a relationship that sounds rather like a homosexual “marriage” (Plato, *Symposium* 193B).
- 38 E.g. [Xenophon], *Cynegeticus* 12.20 on the efforts of the lover to excel when the eyes of his boy are on him.
- 39 Aeschines i 142.
- 40 *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, Italy III, III He 50.13 (two youths), Italy XL, III I 3.2 (group of youths); H. Licht, *Sittengeschichte Griechenlands*, iii (Dresden and Zürich, 1928), figg. 192, 199 (boys).
- 41 See, especially Plato, *Symposium* 182A–183D.
- 42 No doubt an ungentlemanly lover would boast of success, as suggested by Plato, *Phaedrus* 232A.
- 43 Aeschines i *passim*.
- 44 Aeschines i 119 f.
- 45 Cf. the embarrassment of the speaker of Demosthenes lvii 44 f. on the “servile and humble” function to which his mother had been compelled by poverty (she was a wet-nurse).
- 46 Cf. Aristophanes, *Wealth* (= “*Plutus*”) 153–159.
- 47 Cf. Aeschines i 45 f., on the difficulty of getting Timarchus’ lover (or client) Misgolas to give evidence.
- 48 Eubulus fr. 120.

- 49 K. Schefold, *Myth and Legend in Early Greek Art* (English tr. London, 1966), pl. 27b.
- 50 *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, Germany XXXI, III Hd 143 f.
- 51 Aristophanes, *Birds* 136–143, *Knights* 1384–1387, *Wasps* 578.
- 52 The bread-woman of Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1388–1414 is plainly of citizen status.
- 53 335B; whether the author is Plato or not, does not matter in the present context.
- 54 Xenophon, *Memorabilia* i 4.12.
- 55 *Ibid.*, i 3.14.
- 56 *Ibid.*, ii 1.30.
- 57 Xenophon, *Symposium* 4.38.
- 58 Plutarch, *De Stoicorum Repugnantiis* 1044B.
- 59 Socrates was said to have compared Critias' eros for Euthydemus to the desire of a pig to rub its itching back against a rock (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* i 2.30). Democritus fr. B 127 (Diels-Kranz) is evidence for high valuation of scratching rather than low valuation of sex.
- 60 Musonius Rufus (p. 63.17 ff., Hense) can hardly be supposed to exhibit Christian influence.
- 61 Modern Christian critics of the “permissive society” sometimes speak as if they really believed (and maybe they do) that an extra-marital sexual relationship with a person of the opposite sex is the same sort of experience as sinking one's teeth into a tender steak.
- 62 Plato, *Symposium* 205DE, 212C, *Laws* 731D–732B.
- 63 Charisius in Menander, *Epitrepontes* 588–612 (Körte).
- 64 However inadequate a substitute for sexual intercourse masturbation may be, it is Aristophanes himself, by representing the Athenians and Spartans as creeping around in an unremitting state of erection, who forces us to ask, “Why don't they masturbate?” Cf. also Eubulus fr. 120 on the Greeks at Troy: “they masturbated for ten years . . .”

# SOURCE

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Plato (c. 429–347 BCE) uses the dramatic setting of the symposium, an all-male aristocratic drinking party, to set forth a debate about *erôs* (“love”). The participants include contemporary historical persons such as the tragic poet Agathon, the comic poet Aristophanes, and the philosopher Socrates. In this passage, Aristophanes, who had to forfeit his first attempt at speaking because of an onset of hiccups, resumes his speech with a humorous account of the mythological origins of the sexes.

## **Aristophanes’ Speech from Plato, *Symposium* 189d7–192a1**

In the beginning there were three sexes, not just the two sexes, the male and the female, as at present; there was a third kind that shared the characteristics of the other two, and whose name survives, even though the thing itself has disappeared. For at that time one was androgynous in form and shared its name with both the male and the female. Today it no longer exists except as a term of abuse. Back then the form of each human being was rounded, with back and sides forming a circle. Each had four hands and an equal number of legs, and two faces, identical in every way, upon on a circular neck. There was one head common to both faces, which were turned in opposite directions. Each creature also had four ears and two sets of genitals, and all the other corresponding parts one might imagine. Each walked upright as today, in whichever direction was desired. And whenever one launched itself into a quick run, pushing off from the ground with all eight limbs, it spun swiftly in a circle, like a tumbler who executes cartwheels and returns to an upright position.

The reason for these three sexes was that the male sprang from the sun and the female from the earth, while the androgyne evolved from the moon, because the moon shares both male and female natures. They inherited their circular shape and their manner of movement from their parents. Their strength and power made them terrible, while their arrogance led them to challenge the gods. What Homer says about the twin giants Ephialtes and Otus and their attempt to climb up to Heaven in order to attack the gods is also said about these [three sexes].

So Zeus and the other gods deliberated about what they ought to do with them, and they were puzzled. They did not want to kill them outright with lightning, as they had destroyed the race of the giants, because the honors and sacrifices from humans would then disappear. Nor did they want them to go on behaving wantonly. At last, after lengthy reflection, Zeus said,

I think I have found a way to stop human beings from their licentiousness and to make them weaker. I will cut each of them in two, thus they will be both weaker and at the same time more useful to us by becoming more numerous. They will walk upright on two legs. And if they continue to behave wantonly and if they refuse to stay quiet, I will cut them in two again so that they will hop along on one foot.

After he said this, he cut human beings in two, just as one slices apples for preserving, or [hard-boiled] eggs with a hair. And as he cut each one, he called upon the god Apollo to turn the face around and the remaining half of the neck toward the cut side, so that the human being, by looking upon his own division, might be more well-behaved. He also ordered him to heal the wounds. So Apollo turned around the faces and, gathering together the skin – like the drawstring of a purse – onto what is now called the belly, making one mouth, he fastened it tight in the middle of the belly, a spot they now call the navel. And he smoothed out the other numerous wrinkles and put the chest together with a tool of the kind used by shoemakers to smooth out wrinkled leather on the last. But he left a few wrinkles around the belly itself and the navel as a reminder of their ancient suffering.

When their original form was cut in two, each half, in longing for its other part, would come to it. And then, throwing their arms around one another and embracing, they longed to join their natures together. But they began to die of hunger and inactivity, because they refused to do anything apart. Whenever one of the halves died, the other was left behind, and the abandoned part sought and embraced another half, whether it happened to be from the female whole – and we now call that half a “woman” – or from the male. And in this way they perished. Meanwhile Zeus, taking pity upon them, devised another plan, and moved their private parts to the front. For until then they had these, too, on the outside, and they conceived and reproduced not with each other, but with the earth, like grasshoppers. So he brought these organs around to their front, and in

doing so caused them to reproduce with one another, the male in combination with the female. He did this for the following reasons: if a man should embrace and have intercourse with a woman, he would engender and create offspring; while if a male should have intercourse with a male, he would at any rate have the satisfaction of intercourse, take a rest from desire, and turn himself toward work and focus on the other parts of life. So desire for one another is innately human from as long ago as that; it unites our ancient suffering, attempting to make one thing from two and to heal our human nature.

Therefore each of us is like part of an interlocking puzzle that needs to be matched with another piece, inasmuch as we have been cut just like flatfish, into two parts from one. We each eternally seek our missing piece. All the men who have been severed from the mixed sex, that which used to be called the androgyne, are lovers of women, and many of these become adulterers. Similarly, women in this category become promiscuous lovers of men and adulteresses. All the women who have been severed from the female sex pay no attention at all to men, but rather are attracted to women; those who prefer only women belong to this category. Men severed from the male sex pursue men, and as long as they are boys – since they are slices of the male – they love men and take pleasure in embracing and reclining with men. These are the best of boys and youths, for they have the most manly nature.

