to right, and, since Phaedrus is occupying the first place on the left and is also the originator of the subject, he should begin’. ‘No one will vote against you, Eryximachus’, said Socrates. ‘I would hardly say no, since the only subject I can claim to know about is love,’ and the same is true I rather think of Agathon and Pausanias, and certainly true of Aristophanes, whose whole time is taken up with Dionysus and Aphrodite. In fact it is true of everyone I see here. However, I should say that the arrangement is hardly fair on those of us who will be speaking last; but if those before us don’t disappoint, and speak well, we shan’t complain. Let Phaedrus go first and speak in praise of Love, and good luck to him’.

All the rest echoed his sentiments and repeated Socrates’ instruction to begin. Now, Aristodemus did not entirely remember all that each speaker said, nor do I remember everything that Aristodemus told me, but I will tell you what seemed to me particularly worth recording from the most memorable speeches.

Aristodemus told me, as I have said, that Phaedrus was the first to speak, and he began with the point that Love is a great god and particularly revered by men and gods by reason of his birth. ‘It is because he is the oldest of the gods that he is honoured’, he said, ‘and there is good evidence for this. Love has no parents, and none have ever been ascribed to him by anyone, prose-writer or poet. The poet Hesiod says that first of all Chaos came into being, “then there was broad-bosomed Earth, the eternally firm foundation of all things, and Love”.

fluctuates between the god and the emotion of love, and in some places the word ‘love’ even seems to stand for the lover. This would have caused the Greeks fewer problems than it may cause readers of this translation, because the former did not distinguish in writing between upper- and lower-case letters. Most current texts and translations attempt to distinguish between Love and love, but the reader should be aware that in any translation the choice of upper- or lower-case initials is inevitably somewhat arbitrary.

25 ‘The subject of love’ translates [ta] erotica; see glossary.
26 Well known to be lovers; see 193b.
27 In the view attributed here to Socrates, Aristophanes’ comedies are all concerned with drink and sex, the respective provinces of those gods. Dionysus is also the patron-god of the theatre; see Glossary of names.
28 Apollodorus, the narrator of the dialogue. 29 genesis.
30 Theogony, 116–17 and 120. It was the early Greek poets, especially Hesiod, who preserved the stories about the mythical past.
‘Acusilaus too agrees with Hesiod and says that after Chaos there came into being these two, Earth and Love. And Parmenides also says of the origin\(^{31}\) of Love,

“First of all gods was fashioned Love”.

‘So it is widely agreed that Love is the oldest of the gods, and he is also the source of our greatest blessings.\(^{32}\) For I certainly cannot say what greater blessing there can be for any man to have right from youth than a virtuous\(^{33}\) lover,\(^{34}\) or what can be better for a lover than a beloved boy\(^{35}\) who is himself virtuous. For those feelings which ought to be the lifelong guide of men whose aim is to live a good\(^{36}\) life cannot be implanted either by advantageous connexions or public honours or wealth or anything else so well as they are by love. And what are those feelings? Shame\(^{37}\) at dishonourable\(^{38}\) and pride\(^{39}\) in honourable behaviour. Without these feelings it is not possible either for a state or for an individual to do any noble or great work. Therefore I declare that if any man who is in love were to be revealed doing something dishonourable or submitting dishonourably to someone without defending himself, because of cowardice, he would not find it as painful to be seen by his father or his friends or anyone like that as he would to be seen by his beloved. Clearly the same is true in the case of the beloved, that he feels particularly ashamed if ever he is seen by his lovers to be involved in something dishonourable. If only some means might be found for a state or an army to consist of pairs of lovers, there would be no better people to run their country, for they would avoid any act that brought disgrace and would compete with each other in winning honour. Moreover they would be victorious over virtually every other army, even if they were only few in number, as long as they fought side by side. Certainly a man in love who deserted his post or threw away his arms would mind less being seen by the whole world than by his beloved; sooner than this he would choose to die a thousand deaths. And as for abandoning his beloved or failing to go to his aid in danger – no one is so cowardly that he cannot be inspired to courage\(^{40}\) by Love himself, to be the equal of the man who is very courageous\(^{41}\) by nature. It is exactly as Homer describes a god.
‘breathing might’ into some of the heroes: in just the same way Love provides from his own being this inspiration for those in love.

‘There is another point. Only those in love are prepared to die for one another, women as well as men. Every Greek will find sufficient evidence for this claim in the example of Alcestis, the daughter of Pelias. She was the only person willing to die for her husband even though he had a father and a mother still living. She so much surpassed them in devotion because of her love that she made them look like strangers to their own son, related to him only in name. When she had actually given up her life for him, so noble did it seem not only to men but also to the gods, that they sent back her soul from the Underworld. Out of the many that have done great deeds, she is one of very few who have been granted this privilege; yet the gods sent back her soul because of their great admiration for what she did. So they too pay particular honour to the zeal and courage that come from love. In the case of Orpheus, however, the son of Oeagrus, they sent him back from the Underworld without achieving his object: they showed him only a phantom of the wife he had come to recover, and did not give her back to him in the flesh, because they thought he lacked spirit; he was only a lyre-player and did not dare actually to die, as Alcestis did, for the sake of love. Instead he contrived to enter the Underworld while he was still alive. So, because of this they punished him, and brought about his death at the hands of women.

‘Achilles, the son of Thetis, however, they honoured and sent to the Isles of the Blest. For when he found out from his mother that if he killed Hector he too would die, but if he did not kill him he would return home and live to old age, he nevertheless dared to make the choice of standing up for his lover Patroclus and avenging him; thus he also died, and died for his sake. (Aeschylus actually talks nonsense when he asserts that it was Achilles who was the lover of Patroclus: Achilles was not only more beautiful than Patroclus but also more

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42 As Apollo into Aeneas at Iliad 20.110. 43 ‘those in love’, in Greek hoi erontes; see eran.
44 philia; see philein. 45 eros. 46 psuche. 47 arete.
48 In Greek myth, islands in the legendary far west of the Greek world where after death specially favoured mortals, notably some of the heroes, pass a blissful afterlife, rather than having a phantom existence in the Underworld like everyone else.
49 Homer in the Iliad did not make Achilles and Patroclus lovers, but Aeschylus represents them as such in Myrmidons, a lost tragedy from which a few quotations survive.
beautiful than all the rest of the heroes, and still beardless; and according to Homer he was much younger.\(^50\) As a consequence the gods, out of extreme admiration, honoured Achilles to an exceptional degree for having such a high regard for his lover. Although the gods show particular honour to the kind of excellence that comes from passionate love, it is those cases where the beloved shows his devotion\(^51\) to his lover rather than the other way round that they appreciate and admire more and reward more generously, because a lover has a god within him and he is thus more akin to the divine than the beloved. This is why the gods paid more honour to Achilles than to Alcestis and sent him to the Isles of the Blest.

‘These are my reasons, then, for saying that Love is the oldest of gods and most worthy of honour, and most powerful in helping men achieve excellence and happiness\(^52\) both during life and after death’.

This was, roughly speaking, the speech Phaedrus made, according to Aristodemus, and after him there were some other speeches which Aristodemus did not altogether remember. Passing over these he related next the speech of Pausanias.

‘It seems to me, Phaedrus, that our subject has not been set out in the right way’, said Pausanias. ‘I mean that we have simply been told to deliver an encomium on Love, just like that. If there were only one Love it would be all very well, but in fact that is not the case: Love is not single, and that being so it is better to state first of all which sort of Love should be praised. I shall therefore try to put this right by first explaining which Love is the one to be praised, and then by praising the god in the way he deserves.

‘We all know that Aphrodite is always accompanied by Love. If there were only a single Aphrodite there would only be a single Love. But since there are two Aphrodites there must be two Loves also. And it cannot be denied that there are two goddesses. One, older obviously, is the daughter of Uranus and had no mother, and we call her “Heavenly”\(^53\).
Aphrodite”; the younger is the child of Zeus and Dione and we call her “Common Aphrodite”. It follows then that the Love who works with the latter Aphrodite should correctly be called “Common Love” and the other “Heavenly Love”.

‘All the gods deserve our praise, but however that may be, what I have to do now is describe the sphere of activity that is the concern of each of the two Loves. To begin with, it is true of every activity that it is in itself neither right nor wrong. Take what we are doing now, drinking or singing or talking. None of these activities is right in itself; the manner of its doing decides how it will turn out. Only if it is done in the right and proper way is it right; if not, it is wrong. Now, the same is true of loving and of Love: not every Love is right and deserves our praise, only the Love who directs us to love in the right way.

‘The Love who belongs to Common Aphrodite is truly common and engages in his activity as opportunity offers. This is the Love that inferior people experience. In the first place men of this sort love women quite as much as boys, and secondly, their bodies more than their souls, and thirdly, the stupidest people possible, since they have regard only for the act itself and do not care whether it is rightly done or not. Hence their activity is governed by chance, and as likely to be bad as good. The reason is that the Common Aphrodite, with whom this Love is associated, is far younger than the other Aphrodite, and because of her parentage she has characteristics both of the male and of the female.

‘However, the Love who accompanies the heavenly goddess (and who does not descend from the female but only from the male) is the love of boys, and that goddess is older and entirely free from wantonness. Hence those who are inspired by this love incline to the male,

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54 In Greek, Pandemos, ‘belonging to all the people’; hence, ‘popular’, ‘common’ and so ‘ordinary’, ‘vulgar’.
55 kalos and aischros. Throughout Pausanias’ speech, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ translate respectively the Greek kalos and aischros (in their various forms; see glossary). Those who argue that these concepts are not found among the Greeks have a strong case. Nevertheless, I have chosen to use ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ here because the tone of this particular speech suggested to me that these are the nearest equivalent in English to the speaker’s meaning. Those who do not agree might prefer to substitute ‘noble’ and ‘disgraceful’ as appropriate.
56 It looks as if the statement at 180e, that ‘all gods deserve our praise’, was merely a conventional phrase to ward off possible retribution from the gods.
57 paides, plural of pais. 58 hubris.
preferring what has by nature more vigour and intelligence. Moreover, even among men who love younger members of their own sex it is possible to recognise those who are motivated purely by this heavenly love, in that they do not love boys before the stage when their intelligence begins to develop, which is near the time when they begin to grow a beard. I believe that those who wait until then to embark on a love affair are prepared to spend their whole life with this individual and to live in partnership with him. They will not take him at a time when he is young and inexperienced, and then deceive him, contemptuously leaving him and running off to someone else.

‘There ought really to be a law against starting a love affair with mere boys, to prevent a great deal of effort being spent on something of uncertain outcome, because with young boys it is uncertain how well or badly in body or soul they will turn out. Good men of course lay down this rule for themselves of their own accord, but some similar restriction should be imposed on those lovers of the common sort, just as we prevent them as far as we can from having love affairs with free-born women.

It is men like these who have given rise to disapproval and caused some people to go so far as to state that gratifying lovers is wrong, but their disapproval is based on the ill-judged and improper behaviour of this latter kind of lovers, since certainly no activity that is carried on in a decent and lawful manner can justly be called blameworthy.

‘Now, in many states their conventional attitude to love has been defined in straightforward terms and is consequently easy to understand, but the attitude here in Athens, and also in Sparta, is complex. In Elis and Boeotia and wherever men are not skilled in argument, they simply have a rule that it is fine to gratify lovers, and no one young or old would say that it was wrong. The reason is, I suppose, that, not being good speakers, they want to spare themselves the trouble of trying

59 *psuche*.

60 In Athens, as in ancient Greece in general, women who were not slaves were under the guardianship of their father, husband or nearest male relation, who exercised tight legal control of their sexual activity.

61 In Plato’s Greek a youth is euphemistically said to ‘gratify’ (*charizesthai*) his lover when he grants him sexual favours.

62 The phrase ‘in Sparta’ is in all the manuscripts but several editors prefer to delete it as being inappropriate, or to put it after ‘Elis’, where they think it more appropriate (one reason being that Spartans were notoriously ‘not skilled in argument’).

63 Independent states in Greece.
to win over young men with persuasive speech. However, in much of Ionia and elsewhere, and in the Persian empire generally, the conventional view is that gratifying lovers is wrong. The Persians condemn it, as they also condemn philosophy and going to gymnasia, because their form of government is tyranny. I imagine it does not suit the rulers that high aspirations or ties of friendship and loyalty should arise among their subjects, and these are the emotions which are likely to be produced by love more than by anything else. This is the painful lesson which our tyrants here in Athens learned, since it was the love of Aristogiton for Harmodius and the latter’s unwavering devotion in return that put an end to their rule. Thus in places where it has been established as wrong to gratify lovers, this attitude exists because of the moral failings of those who established it: ruthless self-interest in the rulers, and cowardice in the ruled. But where the practice is simply thought to be fine, this attitude exists because of the laziness of mind of those who established it.

‘Compared with this our laws and customs here in Athens have been laid down to much better effect, but as I was saying they are not easy to understand. Think about it. It is said to be finer to conduct a love affair openly rather than secretly, and especially with the noblest and best individuals, even if they are less good-looking than some. Again, it is said that the degree of encouragement given by everyone to the lover is astonishing, which does not suggest he is about to do something disgraceful. If he succeeds in his aim people think it is to his credit; only if he fails is it a disgrace. When the lover in his attempt to win his beloved performs extraordinary acts our custom deems his actions praiseworthy, though if anyone else were to dare to behave in this way in the pursuit of any other aim and with anything other than this in view, he would incur the strongest disapproval.

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64 Plato is writing here of his own time (in the decade after 385; see footnote 109), when the Greeks living in Ionia on the west coast of Asia Minor came under Persian rule after 386 BC.
65 Gymnasia, being places of education as well as of nude physical exercise, offered pederastic and homosexual opportunities.
66 The name given to the rule of an absolute monarch, and usually of one who had seized power illegally. The Persians at this period were ruled by a dynastic monarchy. After the rise of democracy in Athens during the fifth century BC the idea of tyranny became repugnant to the Athenians.
67 Harmodius and Aristogiton killed Hipparchus, brother of the Athenian tyrant Hippias, in 514 BC.
68 psyche.
'If a man wanted to get money from someone, for example, or gain a political office or some other position of power, just imagine him being willing to do the kind of things that lovers do to woo their beloved: begging him with supplications and entreaties, swearing oaths, sleeping in his doorway, willingly enduring the kind of slavery even a slave would not put up with. Friends and enemies alike would prevent him from acting in this way, his enemies jeering at his obsequiousness and servility, his friends remonstrating with him and feeling embarrassed by his actions. But when it is a lover doing all these things people find his behaviour quite charming, and our custom allows him to act as he does without reproach, the assumption being that he is engaged in some splendid enterprise. The strangest thing of all is that when a lover swears an oath and breaks it – at least this is what people say – he and he alone is forgiven by the gods, for an oath sworn in passion, they say, has no validity.

'So, as the convention here in Athens has it, a lover is granted complete licence by both gods and men. Accordingly one might suppose that, in this city, being in love or showing affection towards a lover are regarded as splendid for both parties.

'On the other hand, consider how fathers put tutors in charge of their sons when the latter have attracted lovers, and instruct them not to let the sons speak to their lovers. Consider also how the boys’ peers and friends jeer at them if they see anything of the sort going on, and their elders do nothing to prevent or rebuke the jeering as they would if what was being said was out of order. Anyone seeing all this would surely conclude that, contrary to what he thought before, behaviour of this kind is regarded here as very wrong indeed. But the truth is, I think, as I said at the start, that it is not a simple matter. The practice is neither right in itself nor wrong in itself, but it is right if it is done in the right way and wrong if it is done in the wrong way. It is wrongly done to gratify a bad man, or gratify in a bad way, and it is rightly done to gratify a good man, or gratify in the right way.

'The bad man is the lover of the common sort, the one who loves the body rather than the soul. He is not constant, because the thing he loves is not constant. As soon as the physical bloom that he fell in love with begins to fade, “he flits away and is gone”, revealing the worthlessness

69 chrestos. 70 A reference to Homer, Iliad 2.71.
of his protestations and promises. But the lover who loves a virtuous character remains constant for life, because he is joined with that which remains constant.

184a ‘Now, our custom here in Athens aims to put both classes of lovers well and truly to the test, the good to be gratified, the bad shunned. Accordingly the lover is encouraged to pursue but the beloved to run away, because then a competition or test is set up which will reveal to which of the two classes the lover and the beloved respectively belong. This is the reason why, in the first place, we consider it shameful for the beloved to be won over by a lover too quickly: time should elapse, for after all, time seems to be a good test of most things. Secondly, we also consider it shameful for him to be won over by money or political influence, and this is the case both if he is subjected to threats and submits without resisting, and if he is treated kindly with financial or political inducements and fails to reject these with contempt. For neither situation seems to offer lasting security, quite apart from the fact that no true friendship can develop on that basis.

‘So, according to our custom only one method is left by which the beloved can gratify his lover in the right way. I have already explained how here in Athens we accept it as customary for lovers willingly to endure any form of slavery for the sake of a beloved without being reproached for obsequiousness. There is one other form of voluntary slavery – but only one – which we also accept and which is beyond reproach. This is the slavery that is directed to excellence. We take the view that if someone is willing to devote himself to another person in the belief that through that person he will become a better man himself in some kind of wisdom or in any other part whatever of excellence, then this kind of voluntary slavery is not wrong, nor is it obsequiousness. It is necessary therefore that these two customs – the one to do with loving boys, the other with pursuing wisdom and the other parts of excellence – should exist each in the appropriate partner if it is going to turn out to be right for the beloved to gratify the lover. For then, when a lover and his beloved come together, each will have his own

71 sophia.
72 As well as wisdom (sophia, which in this context means skills or accomplishments), the other parts of a man’s virtue or personal excellence (arete) are justice, good sense or self-control (sophrosune) and bravery, together with piety.
73 ‘pursuing wisdom’ here translates philosophia.
The Symposium (‘The Drinking Party’)

principle. The lover will believe that by being of service in any way to the beloved who has gratified him he will be justified in so serving him. The beloved will believe that by helping in any way the one who is making him wise and good he too will be justified in so helping him. Thus the lover will be able to contribute to his beloved’s understanding and excellence in general, and the beloved will seek to acquire these qualities for his education and his wisdom in general. Therefore, when these two principles exist and are directed to the same end, then and only then does it come about that it is right for a beloved to gratify his lover; otherwise, not.

‘In this circumstance, even being deceived is not shameful, but in all other cases gratification brings shame on the beloved whether he is deceived or not. For if the beloved, believing his lover to be rich, gratifies him for the sake of money, but is deceived and gets no money because the lover turns out to be poor, it is still shameful because a beloved like that seems to reveal his true character. He shows that he is prepared to do any service to anyone for the sake of money, and this behaviour is not right. By the same token, if a beloved gratifies a lover on the grounds that the man is good and that he himself will become a better person through that man’s love, but is deceived and the man turns out to be bad and devoid of excellence, in this case his being deceived is a noble error. This beloved too seems to have made clear his own character, but he shows that he is keen to do anything for anybody for the sake of excellence and becoming a better person, and this is the noblest thing of all. Thus it is entirely right to gratify a lover when it is for the sake of excellence. This is the love that belongs to the heavenly goddess, and it is itself heavenly and of great value to the state and to individuals alike, since it compels the lover to take great care with regard to his own excellence and the beloved to do the same. But all other kinds of love belong to the other goddess, the common one.

‘This is my contribution, Phaedrus, the best I can deliver on the spur of the moment, on the subject of Love’.

Pausanias came to a pause (those experts in rhetoric teach me to speak in this balanced way). Aristodemus said that it was Aristophanes’