



## 解读柏拉图的《会饮篇》：英文论文

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EROS AND LAW IN THE SYMPOSIUM

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Paul Ludwig

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St. John's College, Annapolis

The Symposium speech of Aristophanes raises significant questions about the interrelatedness of human eros, law and civil religion. On first view, the myth of the circle-people, who ascended into the sky to attack the gods and were cut in half, offers a taxonomy of desire based on our former biologies, in which all orientations arise naturally (Symposium 191d 6-192c 2). Men seek men, women and men seek one another, and women seek women, in accordance with the other halves which have been predetermined for them by their original, unitary nature. This expansive, polymorphous vision of sexuality comes to sight as a celebration of nature over convention. [1] In the recent scholarship on this topic in the Symposium, several readings have reinforced the impression that eros is natural in the speech. [2] Other scholars, however, have enlisted Aristophanes' myth in support of the social construction of eros. [3] These interpretations of the speech are in conflict over the relative weight of nature and convention in the formation of human eros, both for Plato and for Aristophanes. The present article offers a synthesis of the above positions, attempting to establish the degree to which eros is caused by nature and the degree to which eros is shaped by nomos, i.e. by law and civil religion, in the speech. The methodology is to trace allusions in the Symposium myth to the political comedies of the real Aristophanes, particularly the Birds, [4] and to compare the nomos-physis distinction as it is treated in both the speech and the comedies with the nomos-physis distinction found in a number of sophistic sources. [5] On the basis of substantial agreements between them, the article argues that

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Plato interpreted Aristophanes' political thought to be essentially the same as that of certain sophists.

While Aristophanes' Symposium speech initially examines the effect of law and civil religion on eros, particularly on male homosexuality (192a 7-b 3), the sophistic sources reveal a comprehensive meditation on the reciprocal relationship between eros and nomos, in which law constrains eros but eros also has a strong effect on both law and civil religion, and the three interact, wielding mutual influence over one another. The political ramifications of pederasty give the initial impetus for the discussion: the law which forces marriage and child-production onto the male homosexuals cannot change their underlying desire to live unmarried with a member of the same sex, and this desire is said to be "by nature" (b 2). Furthermore, only males attracted to other males become "real men" (andres) and enter politics (a 6-7). The recent scholarship on the dialogue has not adequately explained the connection established by Aristophanes and other speakers between male homosexuality and statesmanship (178d 4-179a 2, 182b 6-d 2, 192a 5-7, 208e 5-209e 4). Despite the positive valuation of both homosexuality and political ambition elsewhere in the dialogue, Aristophanes satirizes the elite pederasts for engaging in a cult of masculinity: they celebrate manly excellence and courage, the pedagogy of passing on such virtues to boys, and masculine beauty or looks (179a 3-b 3; 184b 5-e 4; 191e 6-192a 5) while glossing over the unmanly submission required of boys to earn their education and eventual political preferment. [6] Plato's Aristophanes relates the political ambition of the pederasts and their partners to the original ascent of the circle-people, and he locates the emergence of nomos in an attempt both to tame and to fulfill eros. From the perspective of modern debates over social-constructionism and essentialism, the contribution of the Symposium speech is to move the discussion beyond the influence of social forces such as law on eros and to begin inquiring into the origins of law itself.

#### MYTH AND "NATURE"

Aristophanes' myth shows a number of affinities with the myth which Plato writes for the sophist Protagoras (Protagoras 320c 3-323c 2), particularly in its portrayal of the gods. In the Symposium myth, after the divine surgery, the halves begin dying of hunger because they refuse to do anything but cling to one another in an attempt to grow back together. Their deaths were not part of the original plan, and Zeus is forced to think hard before he can come up with a second scheme: he rearranges their genitals to enable copulation with one another, inventing sexuality where previously they reproduced asexually (Symposium 190c 1-191c 2). The desperate embracing which formerly was harmful now ensures the survival of the race by producing children. Likewise in the Protagoras myth, the creation of humankind and

the operations performed on humans by the gods prove to be inadequate, and humans again begin dying off, as they did in the Symposium. The other animals have been given tough hides and the means to defend themselves, but the humans are left naked and defenseless. Prometheus therefore steals fire and "technical wisdom" to give to humankind. Protagoras says that this gift provides the wisdom necessary for their livelihood but that humans lack political wisdom. Because the stronger animals are killing them off, the humans attempt to band together by forming cities. But without the political art, they commit injustice against one another and are unable to live together. After dispersing, they begin perishing as before.

Zeus, fearing for the survival of the race, finally gives humans the political virtues of shame and justice to enable them to bond together successfully. Both Aristophanes and Protagoras, in Plato's intellectual portraits of them, depict gods who initially botch their operations on man only to redress the situation later.

The use of nature or naturalism in the two myths reveals a yet closer conformity between the way Plato interpreted the thought of the comedian and the way he interpreted the thought of the sophist. Prior to speaking, Protagoras wonders aloud whether, since he has been asked to make a display of his talents, he should tell a story (mythos) or else canvass his subject thoroughly with an "account" (logos). Taking note of his company, the great sophist decides that a story would be more elegant (320c 3-7). Ostensibly, then, Protagoras does not demonstrate that virtue is teachable, as he had agreed to do (b 8-c 4), but rather tells "how virtue came to be." This genre of aetiological narrative is found in many folk tales ("how the leopard got his spots"). [7] Clearly Protagoras was capable of employing either vehicle--mythos or logos--to carry his point. No listener would dream of interpreting the myth literally or pointing out unlikelihoods such as naïve belief in Titans like Prometheus. That would be to mistake metaphor for substance (cf. 316d 4-8). [8] Likewise, the naturalism (hide, hair, formation of creatures under the earth) does not provide a literal history or taxonomy of the animal kingdom. The fact that narrative was only optional implies that the thesis is synchronic or static, not truly diachronic or historical. Which of the two preceded the other in human prehistory, political virtue or "technical wisdom," is not really disclosed by the myth. But by showing mankind in possession of technical wisdom and yet dying off still, Protagoras brings home forcefully the philosophical, if not historical, priority of virtue.

As in the Protagoras, so in the Symposium, the aetiological narrative in question is preceded by deliberation over whether a strict account (logos) would be more appropriate. Despite Eryximachus' insistence that he render an account (189 b 1-

9; cf. 193d 6-e3), Aristophanes' speech, replete with giants and gods, is scarcely rigorous enough to qualify as a logos in the doctor's view. Yet Aristophanes' poetic myth, with its heroic folly of ascending into the sky, the divine retribution and the restless searching afterwards, better expresses eros as we experience it than does the scientific account of the doctor, who manages to reduce the human pageantry of love to bodily repletion and evacuation (186c 5-7). At issue between comedian and scientist is the proper use of myth. An aetiological narrative can use a notional history of olden times in order to bring to light the current, not past, being of a thing. At the level of folk tale, aetiology teaches the child that the leopard is the spotted cat, and the charm of a (false) evolution imprints on the child's memory the salient aspect which distinguishes the leopard from the striped cat. From the point of view of both Plato's comedian and his sophist, it is better to admit the fictionality of one's account by indulging in a fabulousness which cannot be mistaken for natural history. When Aristophanes' myth is finished we are no wiser about how eros came to be, but his specious aetiology has reminded us of each salient feature of eros as it is experienced by humans of the present day. His speech constitutes a phenomenology of eros rather than a genealogy. What place nature has in Aristophanes' thought remains to be seen, but it is clear that the reader must beware of being too literal about finding nature in myth.

#### EROTIC GODS AND HEROIC HUMANISM

The portrayal of the gods in the Symposium myth contains a number of allusions to the comedies of the real Aristophanes. Both the Symposium and the comedies highlight a problem with the gods as they were depicted by poets: their susceptibility to "human" needs. The Greek poets portrayed the gods in constant enjoyment of the goods which humans seek. "Blessed" is a common epithet used of the gods, and their blessedness is understood in material terms: an eternal festival in the Olympian halls, replete with eating and drinking. Zeus and other gods also indulge in sexual adventures, especially during sallies to their earthly holdings, where they play the role of the ultimate aristocrats preying upon mortal women and boys who cannot resist their sovereign power. The Olympian gods are supposed to be guardians of justice: they impose limits on human desires by laying down the law. Yet the gods keep humankind from unjust and selfish acts by occupying the territory themselves or by establishing a monopoly on pleonexia and selfishness, and they ruthlessly guard their privilege against human encroachments. Greek gods do not lead by example. When the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob says "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy," [9] i.e. you shall refrain from unlawful things, it is inconceivable that He Himself would wish to indulge in those very things. By contrast, Zeus has human longings and the power to fulfill them. Non bovi sed Jovi means that Zeus has prerogatives which mortals may not share; they must refrain from

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the things which Zeus has the right to enjoy fully. If the erotic crimes such a  
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adultery, rape and elopement are properly Zeus' prerogative, then the implicatio  
n is  
that the guardian of justice, Zeus, is not just himself. Zeus emerges as a tyrant  
rather than a benevolent king or father, and he civilizes humankind not for its o  
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good but only with a view to his own self-interest, in order to keep mortals lo  
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The selfishness and tyranny of the gods is evident in the Symposium in  
the punishment of the circle-people who rebelled. Their punishment is strictly  
designed with the welfare of the gods, not humanity, in mind. Zeus and the othe  
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gods would have preferred to make the race disappear, as they did previous rebel  
races (190c 3-4; cf. 7-8), except that then their own honors and sacrifices from  
humans would disappear (4-5). From the gods' point of view, the attraction of Ze  
us'  
plan is that humans become "more useful" (chrêsimoteroi) to gods on account of  
doubling their number (d 2-3). Twice as many humans means twice as many  
sacrifices.

This greediness of the gods for sacrifices is an Aristophanic topos whi  
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Plato lifts from the comedies, where the gods' greed is cast in material terms a  
s  
desire for meat and the Homeric smoke or aroma of meat being cooked or burnt as  
a  
sacrifice. [10] In the play Peace, the gods leave Hermes behind as guardian or  
watchdog of the heavenly abode which they vacate (196-202); when Hermes savagely  
attacks the mortal Trygaeus for trespassing on the heavenly property, Trygaeus  
produces some meat and buys off the god the way an ordinary trespasser or  
housebreaker brings a piece of meat in case he needs to deflect the savagery of  
a  
guard dog (182-94). The joke about meat is later tied neatly onto the ordinary  
practices of Greek religion, where it says much about the thin line between  
sacrifice and bribery. When Trygaeus pleads with Hermes not to annihilate him an  
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his panhellenic chorus for resurrecting Peace in contravention of the gods' expre  
ss  
orders, he swears by the gods (pros tôn theôn), but when that avails him nothin  
g, he  
changes his oath to pros tôn kreôn ("By the meats!" 378-81). The implication of  
the  
rhyme, i.e. that the gods cannot control their own bellies, or that they are no m  
ore  
than the meat that is sacrificed, is confirmed when the chorus thereupon say a  
prayer reminding Hermes of the piglets he ate when they sacrificed to him in prio  
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days (385-8). Eventually Trygaeus promises that Hermes will hereafter receive al  
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the sacrifices which at present belong to other gods, and Hermes ends up directin  
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their impious action (458). The gods are so susceptible to bribes that they fai  
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even to protect their own precincts and pronouncements.

The gods' immoderate greed reveals their actual neediness and weaknes  
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Their dependence on humankind for sustenance means that their fate is inevitably  
bound up with that of the human race. For the gods of the Symposium, ridding  
themselves of a pesky humankind is not an option, and only Zeus' brainstorm (190  
c 6-  
7) gets the gods out of a real predicament. This abjectness of the gods becomes

so acute in the Birds that they un-god themselves. Peisetaerus instructs the birds to intercept the sacrifices, thus making the gods so hungry (1516-20) that they are forced to come to the negotiating table, where food becomes the lever by which they are persuaded to step down. Strategically, Peisetaerus receives the divine ambassadors while cooking. His side, he says, is willing to make a treaty, so long as the gods are willing to do what is just, and what is just is for Zeus to hand over his sceptre to the birds (1579-1601).

Peisetaerus. And if we reconcile on these terms, I shall call the ambassadors to lunch.

Heracles. That's enough for me, and I vote in favor. (1602-3) [11]

Peisetaerus has correctly diagnosed the inverse relationship of the gods' justice to their enforcement of man's justice: the less just they are themselves, the more justice they force upon humans in order to keep humans away from their holdings. The gods' desires, on the other hand, are in direct relationship to said enforcement: the more they grasp for themselves, the less are humans allowed to have. Peisetaerus turns these proportionalities against them and lets the system work to the advantage of humans for once. The less humans give up to the gods, the less "justice" humans are forced to practice themselves. Withholding sacrifices frees humans to do what they want.

These Aristophanic sources for the circle-people's rebellion are evidence that Plato intended his Aristophanes to sympathize with the revolt of his original humans, if only it had been feasible. Greek religious thought contained a humanistic strain in which rebellion against the Olympian system took place not out of impiety but out of a profound sense of the system's injustice. Euripides, the most sophisticatedly-influenced of the three great tragedians, made use of this topic in many of his tragic protagonists, who expound a "heroic humanism" in which the injustice of the Olympians and their inadequacy, specifically the way eros drives them to commit follies and crimes, lead to disbelief in the whole religious system created by poets: "I do not believe the gods desire unlawful beds or bind each other's hands in chains. . . . Nor that one god becomes tyrant over another. If god is truly god, he has no needs. These are the worthless lies of singers." [12]

This loss of plausibility and esteem suffered by the gods is related to the withholding of sacrifices which caused them such anxiety both in Birds and in the Symposium. Sacrifice is only the material expression of esteem (timê 190c 4), and the latter can likewise be withheld from the gods. Sacrifices are sustenance for the gods in the larger sense that human esteem sustains them. Part of the jo



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in Birds is that the Olympians are supposed to be immortal yet Aristophanes proceeds  
on the assumption that they are in danger of starving to death. Peisetaerus calls  
it the "Melian famine" (limos Mēlios, 186), a reference to the siege which cut off  
food supplies from the island city of Melos, starvation being among the levers  
intended to force her to surrender to the Athenian empire.[13] In a religious  
context, however, "Melian" connotes atheism, after Diagoras of Melos, whose  
notoriety for atheism during this period earned him mention later in the play.[14]  
An atheist deprives the gods of sustenance by withholding his belief. If everyone  
did likewise, the gods would "die." Plato's Aristophanes, like the real  
Aristophanes, implies that the gods exist only by convention: that is why,  
metaphorically, they are dependent on the human race for their existence. Zeus in  
the Symposium cannot annihilate humankind because doing so would entail his own  
demise.

#### THE RETURN TO ORIGINAL NATURE

The influence of convention, however, can be great despite fundamental  
inconsistencies or injustice. The radicalness of the change which belief makes in  
man is signaled in the Symposium myth by the wholly different physical shapes which  
man is given depending on whether he is influenced by the Olympians or by the cosmic  
gods: sun, moon and earth. The cosmic gods appear briefly in order to explain the  
circle-people's spheroid shape:

They were like this, and were three in kind, on account of the following: because  
the male was originally the Sun's offspring, and the female was the Earth's, but  
the type sharing in both

[sexes] was the Moon's, because the moon also shares in both. Revolving they were,  
both in themselves and in their gait, on account of their likeness to their  
parents.

(190a 8-b 5)

The original people get their roundness from the heavenly spheres. They change to  
an upright, bipedal shape only after the Olympians eclipse the cosmic gods in the  
lines sequel to these; significantly, the Olympians are also upright and bipedal.  
Circular gods for circular people; man-shaped gods for man-shaped people. This  
notion that every people resembles its gods (or that their gods resemble them) is  
also found in the plays. In Birds the Greek gods are Greek: they speak Greek, dress  
as Greeks (1565-72). The gods of the barbarians, on the other hand, are "barbaric"  
(1572-3). Poseidon has to help the Triballian god dress properly. The poor god  
also speaks unintelligibly (1615-6, 1628-9, 1678-81). This is the crux of  
anthropomorphism: each nation makes up gods in its own image, endowing them with

its own conventions and language; man's eidos or "look" always gives rise to the eidos of his gods.

In myth, however, the direction of influence is the other way around, from god to man, and Plato's Aristophanes appears to accept that myth may contain important grains of truth. The sun, moon and earth at least lent us their round shape naturally, through birth. The Olympians employ artificial means, surgery and sewing:

[Zeus] cut the humans in two, the way they cut sorb-apples with the intention of pickling them, or the way they cut eggs by means of hairs. . . . [Apollo,] drawing together the skin from all sides . . . made one mouth and tied it off in the middle of the belly. (190d 7-e 9)

It would be difficult to draw a starker contrast between nature and artifice, and the artificiality of the gods seems to stand for convention. Aristophanes repeats several times that our round shape was nature (physis 189d 5, 6, 191a 5, d 1, 3, 192e 9, 193c 5, d 4). The implication is that the Olympian gods denatured us. Nature tries to thwart the artifice of the gods by drawing the halves toward one another in order that they may renature or regrow together (symphynai 191a 8). But so powerful is the sway of convention, that the new eros is now ennatured in us (emphytos 191d 1); nature has literally been changed.

The unnaturalness of the Olympians' operations on us throws into relief the naturalness of the nature gods. Earlier humans, in their freedom from need, resembled their stately, self-sufficient parents, just as later humans came to resemble the needy, contemptible Olympians. Sun, moon and earth's apparent changelessness, the way they keep their courses across the sky, never deviating, implies that they are self-moved, instead of being forced by need or desire to go out of their way, as the Olympians constantly do. [15] Like deities, like worshippers: the circle-people possessed the lost wholeness which the human halves now busily seek. The sphere, the most perfect geometrical shape because it is symmetrical in respect to itself at all points, symbolizes the perfection both of the primitive humans and of their gods. In addition, the heavenly bodies have the advantage of being evident to the senses of all: they at least exist. No one has ever seen the Olympians; they are known to exist only by report. Furthermore, it is the Olympians who are responsible for humanity's unnatural condition and incomplete shape.

This malleability or plasticity of the physical self in the Symposium (e.g. ektetyptomanoi 193a6) contains a comic literalism which is also a feature of Aristophanic comedy. In Acharnians, the poet pretends to take literally a pompous title from the Persian court: "King's eye." The ambassador from Persia, when announced, comes on stage in the form of a giant with one Big Eye in the middle of his forehead (91-7). According to official protocol, the political bond between courtier and king was supposed to metamorphose into an organic relationship, as



though the king, a mere man, could become so omnipresent as to use others for his organs. Aristophanes merely takes the protocol at its word: the king's courtier is one big organ, who has no independent existence but lives only to serve. The barbarism of such servility makes Pseudartabas not even human: he is a cyclops, the symbol of violence, inhumanity and lack of civilization, cyclopes never having gotten beyond the household level.[16] The Persian tyrant's speech-act has denatured Pseudartabas, reduced him to his inhuman eidos. Nomos, a state of mind, abstract and therefore hard to grasp, is made palpable by reducing it to physis, concrete and therefore evident to the senses.

Aristophanes' penchant for talking about convention in physical metaphors sheds light on the question concerning the place of nature in the poet's thought, at least in Plato's interpretation. The omnipotence of nomos, bending physis to fit any form, could be taken to imply that human nature is infinitely malleable. Zeus threatens, and Aristophanes pretends to believe, that humans may someday be sawn in half once more, this time between the nostrils, making them monopods (190d 4-6) in bas-relief (193a 4-7). If physical form is taken to imply a psychic condition, however, then the facts of material nature could remain hard and unyielding while man's perception and interpretation of those facts, and of himself, changed enormously. From a phenomenological perspective, psychic change is more important than physical continuity. Neither Plato nor Aristophanes wishes to imply that man was ever spherical, or cut in two, but rather that the difference which nomos makes to man and to man's view of himself is so great that he might as well have been both.

The round, "whole" eidos (b 3-5) of the circle-people represents the psychic condition of natural man, before the imposition of nomos on him, a Rousseauian vision of lost wholeness. The original people were literally twice the men of later generations. Their terrific strength (190b 5) signifies the greater freedom of primitive man unfettered by the constraints of law. By becoming civilized, humans have curbed their powers, cut their robustness by half, literally maimed themselves. The circle-people's completeness signifies self-sufficiency. They are literally well-rounded. They do not seek mates because each is already whole in him or herself. They have the advantage of being autochthonous, for though they originally descended from three different celestial bodies, in later generations all three sexes come out of the earth mother (b 7-c 2).

Eros in the Symposium speech is defined as that which pushes humans to regain this original nature (191c 8-d 3). The theme of the return to nature, of liberating the natural self from the stifling norms of convention, also occurs many times in Aristophanes' plays. Birds in particular merits an extended comparison with the Symposium myth. Two companions in Birds set out to find the birds, fleeing legalism and litigation at Athens (34-41). They desire a simpler, more natural life. Their desire to get back to nature is called eros. Peisetaerus is introduced

to the birds as an erastês of their community (324). Eros (411) guided him to the birds: eros for their existence and their way of life, and eros to dwell with them and to consort with them in every way (412-14). This bird existence is characterized by Euelpides as the life of the newly-wedded (161), i.e. the brief time in each person's life when nature is allowed to take its course. It is only law and custom which artificially limit nature, as when in the parabasis the birds-actors say: "Whatever is shameful here, dominated by nomos, is all beautiful with birds" (755-6).

The artificiality of civilization is represented in Birds by the Athenian empire. Athens does not rest content with imposing her nomoi on her own citizens but travels the globe imposing them on all peoples. Almost nowhere is safe: even the red sea is not far enough away since the S.S. Salaminia can find you anywhere and summon you back to trial (144-7). The artificiality of the gods is tied directly onto the artificiality of Athens. When the goddess Iris invades Cloudcuckootown's air space, the provenance of the gods is made clear:

Iris. I am from the gods, the Olympians.  
Peisetaerus. And what is your name? The Paralus? Or Salaminia?

(120

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The state ships and the city's gods are equally tools of control in the empire of Nomos. Leaving the city means leaving the city's gods, since the gods are products of the city. Peisetaerus drives Iris away the same as he drives away the other imperialists, tools sent by Athens to ensure that the new city accepts Athenian weights, Athenian measures, Athenian statutes (1040-2), as well as the Athenian jury-system (1022-3, 1032) which the companions particularly sought to escape. Peisetaerus says "Today I'll show you some bitter nomoi!" (1045), meaning the blows he is raining down on them as he drives them out. Natural justice is swift and clean compared to legalism.

But nomos, as if by an iron necessity, gradually reasserts itself. Imperceptibly at first, e.g. in slips of speech such as newcomers make when they naturally fall into the plural when using the name Cloudcuckootown (just as the word Athens is plural 819, 917, 1023), then gathering steam in the debate over who the patron deity of the new city should be (Peisetaerus suggests Athena 826-8), the natural city transforms itself into the conventional city once more. The jig is up when Peisetaerus contemplates the list of items he will control once the gods are out of the way: shipyards and jury-pay inter alia (1537-41). The betrayal of the revolution, man's struggle against nomos, is best revealed, as usual, in the case of the nomos par excellence, the gods. The stunning success of Peisetaerus' liberation from the gods is immediately followed by the shocking ascension of a new god: Peisetaerus. The mere man assumes the role of Zeus, and becomes keeper of the

thunderbolt (1745-54). The tyrannicide without a decent interval begins styling himself the new tyrant (1708, 1764-5). This substitution of one nomos for another nomos, rather than substituting nature for nomos, was actually long prepared for. Even while one man was seeking to liberate himself from the gods, the mass of humans back on earth were merely switching allegiances and beginning to worship the birds (561-9, 716-36, 1235-7, 1277-1307). This result should have been predictable, but human hopes are such that everyone needs to learn it for himself. If Everyman could travel to heaven and see with his own eyes that it was empty, would he return to earth to spread the news among his fellow man, or would he take up residence in heaven himself? In the latter case what would then keep him, and others, from believing in his divinity? Aristophanes presents a *reductio ad absurdum* of human desires, first getting his audience to identify their own desires with Peisetaerus' and then showing the folly to which such hopes really lead. [17] The humanist revolution in Aristophanes falls short of liberation, but that failure results from man's own desire. The desire for liberation does not differ from the *libido dominandi* except in degree. This admonition was latent all along in the humanist critique of the gods, viz. that we create them in our own image. If such images are tyrants, then it follows that we humans are tyrants too, potential ones, just waiting for our chance to get free and lord it over others.

In mistaking the character of man's desire to be liberated, the humanist critique of the gods arrives at an overly benign view of eros. Giantism is the truth about natural man's desire. The circle-people are identified with the Homeric giants Otus and Ephialtes (*Symposium* 190b 7-8), just as Peisetaerus is identified with the Pindaric giant Porphyryon at the moment he conceives his city plan (*Birds* 553; cf. 1249-52). When his city is complete, Peisetaerus himself identifies it with the battleground where giants battled gods (821-5). When specifically threatening to attack the gods he compares his armies of birds to Porphyryon (1249-52). Giants in Homer and Hesiod are in-between creatures, stronger than man yet less than gods. Given their half-way status, giants are in an impossible position: they cannot accept the lower status of mere men, yet they are also incapable of replacing the gods. Hesiod's account of how the gods came to be gods is a series of battles in which each successive generation attempts to differentiate itself from a pack of competitors; the pantheon comes to a rest only once the children of Cronus have put distance between themselves and everyone else. In like manner, the Gigantomachy must occur because giants are too close to divinity simply to submit to the new tyrants without a fight.

This drama of giantism is played out in the *Symposium* by the circle-people when they think "high thoughts" and make an anabasis into the sky to attack the gods. [18] Natural man was a giant who had to be put into his place the hard way. As Arrowsmith pointed out, Aristophanes' use of the giants myth in *Birds* recalls archaic Greek aristocratic poetry, typified by one of Pindar's later ode

s,  
the eighth Pythian. Myths about flying too high, as in the cases of Icarus and Bellerophon, and about the folly of competing with a god, which Arachne and Niobe do, demonstrate the dangers of overweening, of arrogating to oneself powers which one cannot control or does not truly possess. Their moral is the moral of the story of the magician's apprentice. The message is that great fortune and power can cause a great man to lose his wits and briefly consider himself a god. Know thyself, the Delphic Apollo's admonition, means "know you are not a god."

Peisetaerus' actions evoke this response from Iris, who says in the language of tragedy: "fool, fool" (1238) and "Truly my father will stop you from hybris" (1259). Hybris in this context may connote a luxuriant growth, something which sprang up naturally but then grew oversized. [19] Giants in Homer are "tallest the earth nourished" (Odyssey 11.309). Their greatness is not purely a figment of their own imagination but real. It is the overestimation of admitted greatness which sets the tragedy in motion; there would be no drama if the relative standing of all parties were clear at the outset. Hence the drama unfolds in the crucial area of uncertainty, in which looking up from below, the higher does not seem out of reach, while looking down from on high, the lower looks big enough to pose a threat. Miscalculation or "overweening" in the literal sense is crucial to the sin of the circle-people, hence their high thoughts.

The naturalness of hybris, the innate tendency in each of us to grow rankly until pruned back, calls for a reconsideration of the necessity of nomos, however disfiguring. The differences between Peisetaerus and the circle-people are many: they represent early man, he late; Peisetaerus lives at the peak of civilization, or a little past the peak, while the circle-people antedate civilization and all its makings; they specifically antedate the Olympians, while he post-dates them, or gives them the coup de grâce. In addition, his is a humanist revolt, an attempt to regain the lost human nature out from under the disfigurement caused by the gods, while the circle-people have not yet lost pristine nature nor been disfigured. Yet for all that, the separate stories of Peisetaerus and the circle-people both reveal what the pristine nature really is: a desire for self-deification. If the circle-people are natural, then their attempt to storm heaven is natural, too. Peisetaerus gets back to nature; i.e. he regains real manhood, and, to use the language of the Symposium, essentially becomes whole and circular once more. But the original nature turns out to be a monstrous growth, and the nomoi which disfigure men also keep them from giantism. To read the Symposium back onto the Birds: Peisetaerus becomes a circle-man, but then he only stands in need of surgery again.

#### CIVIL RELIGION AND NATURE RECONSIDERED

By relegating the gods to the realm of nomos, both the Symposium speech and the comedies use the nomos-physis dichotomy in a way substantially similar to

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the way the dichotomy was used by various sophists. Some critics have explained away Aristophanes' impious treatment of the gods in his comedies as a carnival convention or as otherwise a requirement of his genre. [20] It can even be argued that the obscenity to which Aristophanes indiscriminately subjects every victim, both human and divine, bolsters a low, traditional piety because bodily eruptions puncture the pretensions of those who in their hybris would forget the rooted, earthy side of man. [21] However, Aristophanes' ability to orchestrate the drama of the reductio ad absurdum of human desires implies a critical distance from his subject matter which is not simply identical to the peasant's rueful jesting about his human and divine masters. The satirist knew the humanistic arguments well enough to construct pointed jokes out of them. It is doubtful that he was immune to their influence. Yet he rejected them, at least in tongue-in-cheek fashion, ostensibly in favor of the tradition. The pious sermonizing which Plato writes for him is difficult to reconcile with the intentional coarseness of his characterization of the gods both in the plays and in the Symposium itself. For example, the same speech which begins with sacrifices and altars (189c 5-8), and ends with eusebeia and singing hymns (193d 4-5, a 8, c 8-d 1), in the middle deconstructs those sacrifices (190c 4-5), and shows the Olympians to be, at best, worthy of fear (193a 3-4).

Only among certain of the sophists are positions found which shed light on this alliance between the cynical and the pious. Aristophanes' satire against sophists is not monolithic; for example he turns Socrates into a sophist in Clouds and makes him a scapegoat with specific reference to the religious question (Clouds 1506-9). Yet Socrates' new nature gods, the clouds, who by all rights should be as specious as the way of life which discovered them, eventually turn against the sophist who introduced them into the city, styling themselves as protectresses of the traditional pantheon; and they take up the playwright's own cause with the judges (1452-64, 1115-30). Aristophanes reserves the right to select from the sophistic menu what items seem good to him. Similarly, the birds declare war on the gods, yet they also single out for blame published atheists such as Prodicus and Diagoras (Birds 688-92, 1073-4). These paradoxes disappear if Aristophanes' stance is understood to be dual: both that man is in dire need of gods, and that gods, at least as described by the poets, do not exist. Such a position is not self-contradictory; traditional piety may be ignorant of the true origin of its gods in the psyche alone, while simultaneously, the self-proclaimed atheists are oblivious to the enormous need which causes the psyche to create gods. The latter group serve no good purpose by undermining the civil religion. Vanity would compel the playwright to include sophistic arguments in his dramas in sufficient abundance to ensure that none of the wise mistook him for a pious simpleton. [22]

This stance was not unexampled among fifth and fourth-century intellectuals although it could lead to cynicism, notably in the case of Critias.

[23] A fragment of his satyr play Sisyphus states that nature was originally brutish and violent, and that law was therefore invented by men, but all law was and is by convention only. Law, the passage continues, only prevented people from doing violence in public view; in secret they could still do as they liked. Therefore someone of clever intellect invented fear of the gods to keep potential wrongdoers in line even when no witnesses were present. The use of the gods, then, is to plug a specific gap in criminal psychology which the law is otherwise unable to reach. The gods are invisible presences, witnesses at every human event. [24] Antiphon the sophist also pointed out the implications of this gap: "A man would then behave in accordance with justice, if he should observe the major laws when with witnesses, but when he is apart from witnesses, observe the things of nature." Antiphon defines this hypocrisy as justice because in his understanding, as we saw also in Critias' statement, law is completely conventional in character: "justice is: not transgressing the customs of whatever city one happens to be a citizen in." [25]

This conventionalism naturally gives rise to hypocrisy, and it is hypocrisy that the gods function crucially to combat. The gods in this sense are the most effective nomos of all: they are the nomos to save all nomoi. That gods are vital for this function adds no credence to their ultimate existence. On the contrary, since this necessity alone is a sufficient explanation of why they were invented, it lends weight to the opposite conclusion. No less an authority than Aristotle would later arrive at the same conclusion about this strict tie between the gods and the law. In the following passage he adds an important distinction between cosmic and anthropomorphic gods:

It is handed down from the very early ancients in the form of myth that these [planets] are gods and that the divine embraces the whole of nature. But the rest was added mythically with a view to the persuasion of the many, and with a view to utility for the laws and for expediency; for they say that [gods] are anthropomorphic [anthropoeideis] and like some of the animals . . . . If one separated these, taking only the first, viz. that they thought primary substances to be gods, he would deem that they spoke divinely . . . . [26]

Primary substances here mean the planets. Considered strictly from this legal and utilitarian point of view, anthropomorphic gods are more effective in combating hypocrisy and upholding the law than are sun, moon and earth. The heavenly bodies are too remote to care very much about human doings. Perfect in themselves, needing nothing, never leaving their courses, they do not come down to interfere in man's affairs. With the exception of the earth, they are detached. The same self-sufficiency which made them seem divine proves to be a drawback. Man



needs more active, participant gods to enforce the law. In our experience only human beings care what other human beings do; therefore, gods who care must be humanoid. The way to ensure that they care enough is to make them passionate, erotic, susceptible to the same beauties that people are moved by, and in competition for the same goods people seek. Only then will a god feel slighted when

a mortal surreptitiously breaks one of "his" commandments. Only then will mortals refrain from breaking the

commandments even when they could get away with it. Hence from the standpoint of crass utility, the erotic weakness of the Olympians is also their strength. A further drawback of the cosmic deities, who do not exact justice but who do inspire the circle-people to attempt to emulate or rival them, is that their absolute spherical perfection points up the relative deficiencies in natural matter, no matter how round and whole he may be. In the discussion of the circle-people's gait or motus, Aristophanes indicates that they had two separate means of locomotion: upright, like at the present day (190a 4-5), and rolling or revolving, like acrobats turning cartwheels, with their eight limbs as spokes (6-7). Only this revolving motus is said to resemble their parents, the spheres, in the same way that their roundness does (b 3-5). The upright motus, on the other hand, suggests instead a kinship with the latter-day, maimed humanity (190d 4-6). Nor are the circle-people, though approximately circular, quite symmetrical at every point as spheres are: their heads are upright, and their feet point down to earth. Their eight appendages are growths which mar their spherical perfection. Like the giants, they are at an intermediate stage between the all-too human with feet on the ground, and divinity. Their project of ascent into the sky is a way of overcoming their human deficiency in an attempt to become like their parents. They must become all one thing or all the other, totally divine or totally human.

The cosmic gods alone would have been insufficient to stop the gigantic enterprise had the Olympians not come to their aid. The reader may infer that worship of the stars does not give the worshippers an adequate formation. Their *eidos* is left too close to and too far from perfection. The formation which natural gods give is a perfection in strength, robustness (190b 5), not morals. To become perfect in strength, omnipotent in their spheres like sun and moon, is impossible for earthbound creatures. Boundedness or weakness implies the need for a different kind of formation: a perfection in morals, which only the watchful, concerned Olympians can provide.

In the lines following the failed anabasis, details emerge about the circle-people's relation to the earth which shed a less flattering light on the original nature. No love or sexuality existed back then. All people were born out of the earth mother in whom, like insects (191c 1-2) they also generated and fathered offspring (b 7-c 1). Aristophanes pretends that genitalia originally had no directedness toward one another, but had to be turned round to the front in order

that sexuality might begin (b 5-c 8). Since the men sow in their own mother, the re is enough here to support the interpretation that, underneath his skein of biological unlikelihoods, Aristophanes is suggesting that natural man propagated himself by means of incest. The reading is worth exploring because it parallels the picture of man's loveless origins and incest painted in Rousseau's conjectural prehistory of mankind:

Before that time did men spring from the earth? Did generations succeed each other without any union of the sexes . . . ? No: there were families, but there were no nations. . . . There were marriages but there was no love at all. Each family was self-sufficient and perpetuated itself exclusively by inbreeding. Children of the same parents grew up together . . . the sexes became obvious with age; natural inclination sufficed to unite them. Instinct held the place of passion; habit held the place of preference. They became husband and wife without ceasing to be brother and sister. [27]

Aristophanes' autochthony seems to mean the same thing: not that people actually sprang from the earth, but that they might as well have, for all that their reproductive life meant to them spiritually. Eros did not exist, if by eros is meant love, or the passionate longing to live together with another person, as Aristophanes conceives it (192e 1-2). Aristophanes' account of the unerotic origins is more radical or subhuman than Rousseau's, however, if the earth-mother in whom the circle-men sow is a cipher for the human mother of the clan. On this reading, the siblings would be more attracted to their mother than to one another. Instinctual self-love and love-of-one's-own would direct each toward his or her own origins, the nourishing source from which all life sprang--all life, that is, in their narrow experience, limited to one brood. [28]

Because the circle-people already have contact with the earth mother, it is principally the sun, father of the males, who is under attack. The androgynes are also said to have risen up against their parent, the moon, but Aristophanes' preoccupation with maleness and manliness implies that the former attack is the one that matters to him. The males' urges are Oedipal, since they sow in their mother, and they intend to vanquish their father, or to take their father's place. Their violent desire, like their incest, is in keeping with Aristophanes' fundamental principle of eros: like desires like (homoion 192a 5; or "that which is akin" suggenes b 5). Like wishes to join with its like, hoping to become part of it again (as they hope to do with their mother) or to become it (as they hope to do with their father). Like the boys who are friendly to politicians later in the speech (191e 6-192a 7), the circle-men wish to rival their elders, to become equals, or even become superior. Their desire is directed half towards their objects of admiration, and

half towards themselves, or towards a mental image of themselves as they hope to be.

Is this violent admiration--loving a more grandiose version of oneself-- an example of eros? Later in the dialogue, Socrates or Diotima will indeed advocate political ambition (philotimia) as a form of eros (e.g. 208c 1-e 1). The circle-men's abortive struggle to achieve greatness is more in keeping with a dark side to such ambition than it is with the major thrust of Aristophanes' speech: the homely search for one's other half. But both the author who brought us Peisetaerus and the character in Plato's dialogue who dreamed up the circle-people seem to recognize the existence, if not the goodness, of a violent, status-seeking desire. Aristophanes' resistance to this kind of desire may explain why the word eros is not mentioned in his myth prior to the artifice of splitting. Nomos invents one kind of eros in man, but there is a raw material on which nomos operates: a more primitive desire which resembles eros. This Ur-eros cannot be invented by nomos if the advent of the Olympians represents the first nomos. It could be argued that primitive admiration is not entirely free from nomos because belief that the stars are gods is itself a nomos. The passivity of the nature gods, however, argues that whatever formation they gave merely enhanced, but did not change radically, the primitive feelings of natural man. The nature gods are only objects of desire, while the Olympians are both objects and agents. On this reading, then, there is a place for nature in Aristophanes' thought. Nature would not be, however, of such a kind as most of us erotically assume: not the life of newlyweds, as Euelpides hoped. The natural life would contain no weddings nor any affection of the kind that would make weddings, but only a bestiality which wished to skip humanity on its way to divinity.

The ugliness of the circle-people, as well as the insectile analogy, makes Aristophanes' second round of assurances that the spheroid nature was human nature (191d 1, 3, 192e 9, 193c 5, d 4) increasingly suspect. Human nature is inhuman in Aristophanes' account. Only nomos confers on man the human eidos. Civilization is a disfigurement, but the original nature it effaces is not pretty either, unless it were an austere beauty, as we admire a shark for its symmetry or purity of function. The hopelessness and sheer wrongheadedness of going back to nature was implicit in the opening lines of *Birds*, in the idiom used by the companions to describe their plan of finding the birds: "going to the buzzards" (28), a piece of graveyard humor since the English equivalent is "going to hell."

To get back to nature, to find the birds, you have to become the carrion which birds pick in Homer (e.g. *Iliad* 1.4-5), i.e. you have to die. Carrion is nature. Killing and being killed are nature. Tyrannizing over others until a stronger strikes you

down in your turn is nature for Aristophanes. [29]

In applying this view of nature to sexuality, Aristophanes relates male homosexual eros to the original ambition to rise. Only males attracted to other males become "big men" (andres[30]) in politics (192a 6-7). They are daring, manly and masculine (4-5). Where heterosexual unions produce children, the male-male unions produce the more valuable assets of works (erga) and livelihood (191c 4-8; cf. 208e 1-209a 8). Yet the upward mobility of the pederasts and their partners is fraught with risk: these same big men (193a 8) must be exhorted to be pious toward the gods lest humanity incur the divine punishment of being cut in half a second time (a 3-b 1). The Symposium speech thus associates the pederastic eros with the dangerous desire for self-aggrandizement of the circle-people. The ambition for power is a smaller-scale version of the desire to become the sun. Aristophanes' resistance to the politicized pederasty of Phaedrus and Pausanias (e.g. 178d 4-179a 2, 182b 6-d 2), and his commitment to fighting it by any means, would explain the two-pronged rhetoric he employs: on the one hand, a close parody of the cult of masculinity celebrated by the prior speakers which seems to accept their assumptions; on the other hand, an attempt to undercut their pretensions by adducing, as his example of the fully masculine half of the all-male circle-man, the effeminate Agathon (193b 6-c 2). In the non-reciprocal conventions of Greek pederasty, the junior partner, who assumed the submissive posture even though he did not desire it, was often considered unmanly. [31] No such stigma attached to the older partner in his active role; on the contrary he was sometimes considered hypermasculine. If heterosexual sex meant men mastering women, then, according to this cult of manliness, mastering strong-willed and strong-bodied boys was even more masculine than mastering weak, submissive women. The pederast would be superior not only to women but to other males, since he dominated those who would dominate in turn. [32] Aristophanes vacillates between two strategies of attack: calling attention to the dangerous self-aggrandizement of the active partner and calling attention to the self-abasement of the passives. If, however, eros is not limited to sexuality but includes the desire for self-improvement, as Socrates and Diotima assert (e.g. 212a 2-7), then the junior partner, too, who submits out of admiration and a desire to be educated and initiated into the adult world in order that he may attain someday the same status as the senior partner, is seeking, at least, to become powerful and manly. Aristophanes can then exploit the paradox that the junior partners are willing to do unmanly things in order to become manly (e.g. 191e 8-192a 3).

#### THE NATURAL ORIGINS OF NOMOS

The comedies shed light not only on the origin of eros in the Symposium speech but also on the origin of nomos in the speech. In Birds, nomos returned to haunt the natural life so ineluctably that nomos itself seemed a part of nature. It would be a mistake to assume, however, that nomos first arose as a way of

restricting violence, as Critias thought. Nomos re-enters Cloudcuckootown as an instrument of tyranny, not as a guard against it. Law is an accessory to brute nature. On his path to power, Peisetaerus finds it useful to invent many nomoi in order to establish and consolidate his hegemony. For a while, his nomoi pass under color of "natural" nomoi, as when he initially uses birth or primogeniture to establish the birds' claim to the crown: leadership naturally devolves on the eldest (467-82). Yet since the arriviste Peisetaerus will eventually lord it over the ancient society of birds, it follows that naturalness is just a pretext which people use when they want to impose a nomos. Natural law, from this perspective, is nothing but the advantage of whoever is intelligent enough to pretend that his law is natural. By the same token, however, every nomos is a disguised power play which, if stripped of its stately mask, would be revealed as naked physis, a burgeoning selfish desire. [33] In this way nomos and nature are strictly intertwined. Nomos is nature pursued by other means. Nomos is a part of human nature because speech is one of man's major weapons. Persuading people that they have suffered a wrong, convincing them of what ought to be done, threatening them with punishment if they disagree: humans would be unnatural if they did not use these ploys to get their way.

Yet nomos is also an agreement. Peisetaerus could never master the birds with brute force; they are on the verge of killing him when he delivers his first speech (337-8). The intellect takes up where muscle must leave off. Though he is a reconstituted natural man, Peisetaerus retains the civilized acquisition of rhetoric. After his initial lie that the birds' former realm included "myself here, first of all" (468), the birds never again recall, until it is too late, that Man intends no good to birds (322-35, 361-74). At their peak of confidence they call themselves omniscient and omnipotent (1058-9). By the end Peisetaerus is roasting birds for a feast, allegedly because they rose up against the bird democracy (1583-5). Peisetaerus always takes what he wants justly. It is the birds' own lust for power which undoes them; the laws and the new polity intended to serve their lust unforeseeably serves Peisetaerus' too. Nomos does not thwart nature but organizes the selfish individual natures into an aggregate of collective selfishness; it acts in accordance with nature. On this reading, nomos arises out of the lust for power.

Just as the tyrant's nature leads him to impose nomos on his own community, so the imposition of nomoi on foreign nations, i.e. imperialist adventures in the best Athenian tradition, also arise naturally out of the exigency of home rule. Peisetaerus must rid the city of all who present a challenge to his power. He therefore drives out, among others, the rebellious types: the types like himself. One of the humans from Athens to arrive at the new city is a rebellious young son. Like Euelpides and Peisetaerus, the young man uses the language of lo

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to express his yearnings for the naturalness of the bird-laws: "I am desirous of your nomoi" (1345). By this point in the reductio, the mask has slipped to a large extent, and the boy's desire to get back to nature is patently tyrannical rather than pacific. The law of nature, usage of the birds, is that strangling and biting one's father is O.K. (1347-8; 757-9). The young man wishes to kill his father in order to "have it all" (1351-2) in terms of wealth and autonomy. The nakedness of his aggression, i.e. his frank confession of purpose, in contrast to Peisetaerus' discretion, means that the boy is not too bright. Peisetaerus therefore suggests that he channel his aggressions in a manner useful to the city. Instead of harming his father, the boy is to join the army (1363-8). Since he is warlike, he is to go out and make war on Thrace (1368-9). Apparently it was not through mere perversity that Athens kept sending imperialist lackeys to try to take over Cloudcuckootown. The bad old empire was driven by the same necessities which govern the new one. Aristophanes implies that the dynamic of expansion is merely an entailment of the need to consolidate power internally.

The desire of the rebellious son yields a closer look at the origins of nomos. Rebellion against the father was also the crime of the circle-men when they attempted to scale the heavens. The Symposium speech and Birds both return to the fundamental law against parricide, a combination of Honor thy father, and Thou shalt not kill. These prohibitions taken together may be said to constitute the minimum basis on which a city is founded. Birds, who do not form cities, observe only the law of the stronger, which entails father-beating. Peisetaerus conspicuously fails to uphold the bird law: he admonishes the boy not to harm his father, and sends him far away from Attica where he will have no opportunity to do so. If humans are going to be accepted into the new city, as apparently they will be accepted (1313-14), a less-than-natural nomos must prevail.

The bird law seems savage by comparison with the human law. Interestingly, however, the opposite is the case. Peisetaerus initially commends the boy's aggression: chicks who peck their father are considered manly by the birds (1349-50). But then he informs him of a corollary bird-nomos: that the young stork, having left the nest, returns and nourishes his father (1353-7), i.e. their roles reverse. Birds are unreflective, and guilt-free, about their power struggle. If the father bird is forcibly deposed by his younger, stronger son, neither bird feels guilty, or embarrassed, about the new power relation; life goes on. The facts that



a human son has difficulty bringing himself to strike his father, and that once having committed the deed, has more difficulty yet turning around and caring for his father, are revealing of human as opposed to bird nature. Birds do not feel the primitive awe and reverence for the father figure. It was that admiration or wonder which first drove the circle-men to worship the sun. Birds recognize order of rank, but they do not stand in awe of it: superiority is a fact and no more. Human self-consciousness, by contrast, brings with it desires which go beyond the need to sustain life.

That the human being is an aspiring animal also emerges from the argument, in *Clouds*, by which Strepsiades gets the better of his son during their debate over father-beating. Pheidippides had anticipated the plot of *Birds* by adducing the example of roosters and other beasts, who chastise their fathers. "How do they differ from us, except that they don't write decrees?" (1427-9). But politics is precisely the difference. Strepsiades' simple retort: "So since you imitate roosters in everything, why don't you eat dung and sleep on a perch?" (1430-1) reduces Pheidippides to a feeble appeal to Socrates' authority (1432). There can be no rebuttal because man clearly refuses to live the lowly life of birds. The human animal has aspirations; he senses his baseness and he looks up to greatness. He makes something of himself in the barest sense of "making up" decrees. Peisetaerus would never have been content with the original plan of communing with the birds. The recognition of greatness

is what caused primitive man to worship the planets as his deities in the first place. But the same desire for greatness causes him to emulate the nature gods and to rival his own father.

#### THE RECIPROCITY OF EROS AND LAW

Which, then, is prior in eros: the physis or the nomos? Two types of eros are present in the *Symposium* speech: an original eros untutored by nomos, and a civilized eros which is a mixture of physis and nomos. On this reading, nomos is secondary, arising out of the original, violent physis, the desire to ascend into the heavens. This natural eros gives birth to nomos, but then nomos changes eros. Civil religion and law prune back the original, tyrannical eros for apotheosis, shaping it into a more humane eros of the household, the desire to love and be loved. The domestication of eros is evident in the formula describing eros after the surgery: eros "leads us toward the oikeion" (*Symposium* 193d 2), i.e. eros leads us toward "our own," a cognate of the Greek words for house or household, oikos and oikia. Likewise, one of the principal emotions in the speech's phenomenology of eros is the feeling of belonging, or being-at-home (oikeiotês 192c 1), i.e. a sense of proprietary rights and a contentment with what one has, rather than an urge to risk it by seeking to add to it. [34] In the speech of Diotima, Socrates picks out privacy or love of "one's own" as the heart of Aristophanes' speech (205d 10-206a 1; again the word is oikeion; cf. 205e 6 with 193d 2). The

possessiveness of eros in Aristophanes' account is so emphatic that embracing comes to define eros itself. [35] However, full possession, i.e. subsuming the spouse into oneself, is not possible (191a 5-b 5), except with the help of Hephaestus (192c 4-e 9). [36] As if in lieu of accomplishing this desire, copulation takes on a larger meaning in the domesticated eros than it formerly had, and this is the significance of Zeus' "invention" of sexuality as an anodyne to allay the painful desire for reunification (191b 5-c 3). The higher goals which natural man cherishes, such as apotheosis, perfect satisfaction and sovereign power, are all relegated to the gods. Domestic man even attributes to the gods the new sexuality which has become so important to him, even though a real god, as opposed to a useful one, would not be sexual. The gods are thus related to human eros in two ways: as vicarious fulfillment and as the nomos which keeps humans from the original desire to rise.

The original eros, however, appears capable of partially reconstituting itself through politics. Political unity and the strength made possible by the combined might of the city permit men to think high thoughts once more. Nomos does not have full efficacy in restricting the more manly natures, particularly when they unite and partially re-form the original all-male circle-man. In the masculinist Greek discourse which Aristophanes is manipulating, resistance to tyranny, both human and divine, including the tyranny of nomos, comes from male-male couples. For example, in the speech of Pausanias, tyrants outlaw homosexuality and strong attachments between males because they fear the high thoughts (*phronêmata megala* 182c 2) which they engender. The reconstitution of eros in Aristophanes' male-male couples is clear from this comparison because the circle-men, too, thought high thoughts (*phronêmata megala* 190b 6), prior to their anabasis. The hybristic desire for political ascension and the hybristic desire to master other males sexually both stem from the same source: the original, tyrannical eros for apotheosis. In the polis, as opposed to the household, eros becomes vertical, directed upward, once more. Since in Aristophanes' myth, sexual desire, being a later addition, is extrinsic to eros, (191a 5-b 1, b 5-c 8), it follows that homosexuality does not cause the upward, political eros; rather, it is the upward eros which causes this type of homosexuality. Paradoxically, the upward eros is prior in the cycle to heterosexual love and is therefore more, not less, natural. The incest of the uncut circle-people is yet more venerable and more natural. The politicians with their hybris in Aristophanes' account partially retrace the steps through which nomos emerged to tame eros. Their political ambition approaches the original eros, the violent admiration of the circle-people. The final step, which they stand in danger of taking, would mean progressing from statesman to tyrant, whose characteristic act in Greek thought generally, like the act of the circle-people, is incest. [37]

The ostensible definition of eros as a lowly and homely search for on

e's other half is therefore intentionally undercut in Aristophanes' speech. Plato's Aristophanes knows, and shows, that eros also has an upward, transgressive side. [38] But since there is no effective terminus to the upward eros, short of self-deification, he encourages the lower eros and grants the name "eros" to it alone. When he warns that every big man (anêr) must be exhorted to be pious toward the gods, "as Eros is our leader and general" (193a 7-b 2), he refers to the lower, homely eros and conceals the upward eros, though the latter peeks out through his military language. His concealment is a moral and rhetorical stance, not a philosophical thesis. Nevertheless, Socrates will treat it as a thesis in his (or Diotima's) speech (205d 10-206a 1), ignoring its moral warning, and, in the dialectic of the Symposium, Socrates will take the opposite extreme, that all eros is vertical: even the lowly deed of child-production is a self-conscious grab for immortality (208e 1-5). Limitations of space prevent a full discussion of how Aristophanes' speech is supplemented and corrected by Socrates' speech. Socrates, however, does not get the final word. Aristophanes is about to object to his presentation (212c 4-8) when a furious knocking is heard at the door. Alcibiades, the imperialist statesman who was later to persuade the city to gamble her empire and her very existence on a scheme of western domination, bursts in uninvited and drunkenly delivers a confession that he cannot live up to the asceticism of Socrates' philosophic eros but must continue to attempt to realize his ambitions on the political plane (216a 4-8). Alcibiades represents in his person the danger to which Aristophanes was about to allude: Socrates has scarcely finished his benign picture of the upward eros when a circle-man walks in. [39] A portion of Aristophanes' speech is thus left standing at the end of the dialogue; it is not demolished by Socrates' criticism but only supplemented by it. To extent that the Symposium speeches bring us closer to the phenomena, eros is both the homely desire for one's other half and the restless upward striving which fuels Athenian political and intellectual life. The respective types of eros differ only in the degree to which each has been shaped by, or liberated from, *nomos*.

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1. This feature of Plato's intellectual portrait of Aristophanes is in keeping with the carnival celebrations at which Old Comedy was performed. In these festivals, conventions standing in the way of bodily satisfaction could be temporarily overthrown. See S. Halliwell, "Aristophanic Satire," Yearbook of

English Studies 14 (1984): 7-8; J. C. Carrière, *Le carnaval et la politique*, Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon, 2nd. series, vol. 212 (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1979), 29-32. For interpretive issues concerning the accuracy of Plato's portrait, whether it is sympathetic or ironic, and for problems concerning the relation between the speech of Plato's Aristophanes and the political comedies of the real Aristophanes, see the discussion in P. W. Ludwig, "Politics and Eros in Aristophanes' Speech: Symposium 191E-192A and the Comedies," *American Journal of Philology* 117 (1996): 537-62.

[2]. See, for example, M. C. Nussbaum, "Platonic Love and Colorado Law," *Virginia Law Review* 80 (1994): 1517-18. J. Thorp, "The Social Construction of Homosexuality," *Phoenix* 46 (1992): 57-60, bases his critique of social-constructionism almost entirely on Aristophanes' speech.

[3]. See, for example, D. M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 18-21; cf. A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 225-6.

[4]. Some of the more thoughtful interpretations of the Birds include L. Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes* (Chicago: Midway, 1966), 160-94; W. Arrowsmith, "Aristophanes' Birds: The Fantasy Politics of Eros," *Arion*, new series 1 (1973): 119-67; and J. Henderson, "Mass versus Elite and the Comic Heroism of Peisetairos," in G. W. Dobrov, ed., *The City as Comedy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997), 135-48. For the scholarly debate over whether serious views may be extracted from Greek comedy, contrast A. W. Gomme, "Aristophanes and Politics," *Classical Review* 52 (1938): 97-109, and Halliwell, "Aristophanic Satire" with G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1972), appendix 29.

[5]. On the *nomos-physis* distinction generally, its origin in presocratic thought and influence on Greek philosophy, and its relation to religious belief, see H. D. Rankin, *Sophists, Socratics and Cynics* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1983), 112-15, 129-31; W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 55-134, 226-234; G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (New York: Cambridge, 1981), 111-130.

[6]. Ludwig, "Politics and Eros" 551-55; cf. K. J. Dover, ed., *Plato. Symposium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 118; Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 142 note 10; L. Robin, ed., *Le banquet in Platon: Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1929), lxi-lxii; G. F. Rettig, *Commentatio de oratione Aristophanis in Symposio Platonis* (Bern: Hünnerwadel, 1860).

[7]. K. J. Dover, "Aristophanes' Speech in Plato's Symposium," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 86 (1966): 42-4, 46.

[8]. On Protagoras' "agnosticism" cf. Theaetetus 162d-e, and Guthrie, *The Sophists*, 234-5, as well as 64-5: Protagoras' myth is concocted

rationalistically, without regard for the received tales. Theological "machinery" could be used in this way for purposes of illustration or to recommend a certain moral course of action, as in the display speech by the sophist Prodicus known as Heracles at the Crossroads (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* II. i. 21-34). Cf. Phaedrus' mention of Prodicus' speech at Symposium 177b 1-4, when he and Eryximachus first propose that each member of the company should tell a speech. For Prodicus' sophisticated stance toward the gods of story, see Guthrie, 238-42, 274-80. Cf. Phaedrus' own literary enjoyment of myth and yet simultaneous surprise when Socrates seems to put any real credence in a myth (Phaedrus 229b 4-c 5).

[9]. Leviticus 19:2

[10]. Cf. *Birds* 190-3 with *Iliad* 1.317. For Plato's gentler treatment of the same subject, see the Athenian stranger's critique of appeasing the gods with sacrifices in *Laws* book 10 (906c 8-907b 4).

[11]. All translations are the author's own unless cited.

[12]. Heracles 1341-6; emphasis added.

[13]. Thucydides 5.115.4.

[14]. Diagoras the Melian is mentioned at line 1073 (Strauss, Socrates and Aristophanes, 318 note 49). Cf. *Clouds* 830, where Strepsiades, explaining Socrates' doctrine of Zeus' nonexistence to his son (and getting it wrong) refers to

Socrates simply as "the Melian."

[15]. E.g. *Iliad* books 14 and 15, when Zeus loses his concentration while Hera seduces him. Hera's faction first visits earth to stir the humans to fight each other; they then leave earth again when Zeus wakes up, causing the human battle to change from moment to moment.

[16]. *Odyssey* 9.106-15; cf. Euripides' *Cyclops* 116-128.

[17]. Arrowsmith, "Fantasy Politics," 155.

[18]. Cf. the Symposium's language *eis ton ouranon anabasis* (190b 5-c 1) with that of the account of Otus and Ephialtes in *Odyssey* 11.316: *hin' ouranos ambatos eiê*.

[19]. H. Liddell, R. Scott and S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th. edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) s. v. *hybris* (I.3). Cf. A. Micheli, "HYBRIS and Plants," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 82 (1978): 35-44. The attestations are, however, late: Aristotle and Theophrastus. A connection between *hybris* and nature also seems attested in the famous (and textually vexed) passage of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*: "hybris breeds [or more literally, 'natures'] the tyrant" (*hybris phyteuei tyrannon* 873).

[20]. For example, K. J. Dover, ed., *Aristophanes. Frogs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 41; Carrière, *Le carnaval et la politique*, 51-5.

[21]. S. Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, 2nd. edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 125-6.

[22]. It should be clear that nothing in the evidence considered here precludes either Aristophanes' or Plato's acceptance of a supreme being or divine intelligence on other grounds. In the case of Plato, in particular, much evidence could be adduced from the dialogues in favor of such a conclusion. What the evidence does suggest, however, is that Aristophanes rejected, on intellectual grounds, the gods of story, who were also, crucially, the civic gods.

[23]. Critias lived c. 460-403 B.C., was a student of Socrates, uncle of

Plato and one of the Thirty Tyrants in the oligarchic coup of 404-403.

[24]. Frag. 25, H. Diels and W. Kranz, eds., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th. edition (Berlin: Weidman, 1951-2); Rankin, *Sophists, Socratic and Cynics*, 73; Guthrie, *The Sophists*, 243-4. Because only a fragment of Critias' play is extant, we cannot be certain whether this view represents Critias' own view: satyr plays were sometimes "satiric," and the possibility remains open that Critias was parodying the philosophy of another thinker. Even parody presupposes the broad currency of such a view, however, since the audience would have had to be familiar enough with such arguments to recognize them in a play, regardless of whether the arguments belonged to Critias or to some other intellectual. Certainly Critias' known political violence in the oligarchic coup does nothing to dispel the impression of disrespect for convention and for the gods. For speculation and debate about why Critias presented this material in the way he did, see Guthrie, 243 note 3 with text.

[25]. Frag. 44, Diels and Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*.

[26]. *Metaphysics* XII. viii. 19-20, 1074b 1-10; cf. *Politics* I. ii. 7, 1252b 24-7; Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, 121 note 7).

[27]. J.-J. Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, in J. H. Moran and A. Gode, eds. and trans., *On the Origin of Language* (New York: Ungar, 1967), 45 (emphasis added). Cf. K. J. Dover, "Eros and Nomos (Plato, *Symposium* 182a-185c)," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 11 (1964): 35-6, for the naturalness of incest in Plato's *Laws*. Only *nomos* or *phêmê*, report or reputation, is responsible for the fact that the desire for incest never " 'enters the heads of most people' " (Book 8, 838b 4-d 1).

[28]. Cf. Rousseau, *Origin of Languages*, 44.

[29]. For the sophistic parallels, see Guthrie 99-101.

[30]. For the political sense of *anêr* see Euripides fragments 787-8 in A. Nauck, ed. *Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1889), 2nd. edition. Cf. Aristophanes' *Peace* 50-53.

[31]. D. M. Halperin, "Plato and Erotic Reciprocity," *Classical Antiquity* 5 (1986): 63-66.

[32]. See D. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 182-7, for evidence that homosexual intercourse was sometimes problematized in this way at Athens. Cf. 176-80 with Cohen, *Law, Violence and Community in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 156-61 for its relationship to *hybris*. As Cohen points out, it is likely that desire for this sort of sexual conquest may at times have constituted part of the attraction in homoerotic pursuits. Cf. A. H. Sommerstein, ed., *Frogs* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1996), 161 ad loc. line 57.

[33]. Arrowsmith, "Fantasy Politics," 159.

[34]. The word used to describe the surgery when humans were originally split in half is *diokizô* "break up house," or disperse into smaller units, which Aristophanes associates with the political diaspora imposed on the Arcadians by the



Spartans (193a 1-3).

[35]. For evidence that eros is the desire to embrace or hug, see the repeated use of *sumplekô* (“embrace” 191a 7, b 3, c 4, e 8). Sexual desire per se is not eros: Zeus invented sex as a substitute for eros because the true aim of eros, the permanent fusion of two into one, cannot be achieved by embracing (191a 5-b 1, b 5-c 8).

[36]. Cf. Aristotle’s dry comment on the desire of couples in Aristophanes’ *Symposium* speech to grow together and become one instead of two: “. . .both--or one of them--would necessarily be destroyed.” *Politics* II. iv. 6-7, 1262b 11-14. Devouring one’s partner would seem not to be excluded from this definition of eros. The selfishness inherent in Aristophanes’ account of eros seems to slight certain erotic phenomena, such as vulnerability and loss of ego on the part of the lover. It is possible that Plato wished his readers to see the dependence of Aristophanes’ account on a different passion from eros: *thymos* or the *thymoeidetic* (cf. *Republic* 377a 9-b 3, 439e 1-440c 7).

[37]. E.g. *Republic* 571c-d; *Herodotus* 6.107; *Oedipus Tyrannus* *passim*.

[38]. For other evidence that Plato himself may have considered eros transgressive, in contrast to the benign view of the “vertical” eros presented by Socrates and Diotima in the *Symposium*, see the definition of eros as *hybris* at *Phaedrus* 237d 3-238 4.

[39]. Cf. M. Lutz, *Socrates’ Education to Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 8-9. For a similar interpretation with important differences, see Rosen, *Plato’s Symposium* 283-5.

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