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One of the most important themes in Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* is the theme of love and madness. In essence, a discussion between Phaedrus and Socrates transpires wherein the two compare and contrast the two ideas, those being love and madness, initially likening the two, offering the idea that sensibility is the most important aspect for a young man to consider when entering a relationship, especially if that relationship be with an older man, as it is easier to build a more solid foundation on emotionally intelligent friendship than it is mad, passionate love. They argue that love is dangerous, unwieldy, and inefficient in establishing true rapport with an individual. However, eventually, Plato uses Socrates as a sort of mouthpiece to argue the opposite - that love and, therefore, madness, though in need of a counterbalance of rationale, is ultimately the superior option, as it leads those that get trapped in its bind to a far more philosophical end, one of beauty, philosophy, and thought beyond the Earthly desires that the purely rational brain can only comprehend.

At the beginning of the dialogue, Phaedrus reads a speech created by Lysius that makes the key and overarching point that a young man getting into a relationship with an older man purely for the older man's passion and love is ineffective and unstable. He argues that the madness of love is less reliable and far less fulfilling than a relationship based on stimulating intellectualism and friendship. He does so by likening being in love to a true physical malady, an illness - as he states, "A lover will admit that he's more sick than sound in the head. He's well aware that he is not thinking straight; but he'll say he can't get himself under control. So when he does start thinking straight, why would he stand by decisions he had made when he was sick?" (Phaedrus, 231c). He implies that passion is often a fleeting feeling, not a lasting one, whereas friendship and intellectual compatibility is often a far sturdier basis for a relationship. In arguing this, he argues against relationships based purely on love and passion, and argues for relationships based on mutual interests and intellect. As he states,

“...lovers generally start to desire your body before they know your character or have any experience of your other traits, with the result that even they can’t tell whether they’ll still want to be friends with you after their desire has passed. Non-lovers, on the other hand, are friends with you even before they achieve their goal, and you’ve no reason to expect that benefits received will ever detract from their friendship for you. No, those things will stand as reminders of more to come.” (Phaedrus, 232e-233a).

Here, he argues that, in a relationship based only on attraction leaves the pair with nothing once the passion fades, as there is no establishment of an emotional connection or even an intellectual one. On the other hand, a connection based on intellect and sensibility can offer the two a lasting friendship, even if the passion fades away.

Initially, Socrates agrees with this viewpoint. He gives a speech of his own agreeing with Phaedrus, adding in and emphasising the idea that the younger man in the relationship can only stand to lose and be damaged by this type of relationship with an older man who himself is so passionately in love. He criticises the older man in the relationship, saying, “The older man clings to the younger day and night, never willing to leave him, driven by necessity and goaded on by the sting that gives him pleasure every time he sees, hears, touches, or perceives his boy in any way at all, so that he follows him around like a servant, with pleasure.” (Phaedrus, 240c-240d) In saying this, he admonishes the older man for essentially taking advantage of the boy for the sake of his own passion and love that he is allowing to drive him mad. He then sympathises with the boy, stating, “As for the boy, however, what comfort of pleasure will the lover give to him during all the time they spend together? Won’t it be disgusting in the extreme to see the face of that older man who’s lost his looks?... To be watched and guarded suspiciously all the time... To hear praise of yourself that is out of place and excessive...” (Phaedrus, 240d-240e). Essentially, Socrates argues that these relationships are inherently one-sided in their form, and that this can only bring hurt to the people involved when things so unstable as emotions, feelings, and passions are involved. He then goes on to discuss a similar point that Phaedrus mentioned, the one that argues that love and passion burns fast and fleetingly. He says,

“While he is still in love he is harmful and disgusting, but after his love fades he breaks his trust with you for the future, in spite of all the promises he has made with all those oaths and entreaties which just barely kept you in a relationship that was troublesome at the time, in hope of future benefits. So, then, by the time he should pay up, he has made a change and installed... right-minded reason in the place of the madness of love.” (Phaedrus, 240e-241a).

However, Socrates (and almost certainly Plato, using the philosopher as a mouthpiece) is not contented with the argument he’s made, finding it to ignore the fact that madness is quite inherently divine, an effective form of love that should truly have a place in the world, especially on the path to higher thinking and enlightenment, and that “...in fact the best things we have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the god.” (Phaedrus, 244a). To begin, Socrates suggests that there are four primary forms of madness. The first form is prophetic madness, the second is a madness having to do with rites and purifications, the third is poetic madness that is inspired by the Muses, and the fourth is madness to do with love. He argues that this fourth kind of madness is the most important and most applicable in terms of transcending the rational boundaries so often valued by Greek societies, and that it takes those who pursue it the furthest in terms of reconnection with a higher being and a higher realm of thinking. This point, made by Plato through Socrates, is one that initially defies the typical Athenian association of reason with virtue and instead gives credence to the potential for enlightenment via certain forms of irrationality - making it all the more interesting and important to analyze.

Socrates, following his initial point to defend some forms of madness, talks about the boundlessness of the soul, and the overall structure of it. Conceding his ability to effectively describe the soul in actuality, he likens it to a chariot being drawn by two horses - one horse being good, honorable, and virtuous, and one bad, fueled by desire, and hedonistic. The good horse in this application represents that which is rational and rooted in logic, and the bad horse represents desires and that which is rooted in love, passion, and emotionality. By pursuing love, Socrates argues, and pursuing the desires of the “bad horse,” the charioteer actually goes on an extremely enlightening journey of the soul, and experiences and

recollects all that which came before its Earthly incarnation, reminding the soul of the divine realm, and granting upon the charioteer an appreciation and love for beauty and wisdom that cannot be granted without this soul journey. The initial desire for the Earthly beauty of one's lover leads them to seeking their true beauty, and then the true beauty and truth of the world and universe itself, leading them directly to the divine, which is as close to truth, higher thinking, and enlightenment as one can get. This return and remembrance of the divine allows one to look at things from the complete outside of human concerns and, thus, enlightens one and allows them to engage in much deeper thinking, much more effective rationality and allows them to get much closer to the actual truth of the world. As he states,

“Now this takes me to the whole point of my discussion of the fourth kind of madness – that which someone shows when he sees the beauty we have down here and is reminded of true beauty; then he takes wing and flutters in his eagerness to rise up... paying no attention to what is down below – and that is what brings him on the charge that he has gone mad.” (Phaedrus, 249d-250a).

Once one goes on this journey of the self and of the soul, they are fully transformed. The beauty of the Earth, the beauty of the one they love, all of this begins to remind them of the divine beauties they had forgotten during their Earthly incarnation. They pay no attention to the Earth that calls them mad, for they now have a truer understanding of the divine beauty and truth of the world and thus can more effectively reason within its bounds.

Not fully turning his back on Plato's emphasis on balance within philosophy and rhetoric, Socrates later adds in his speech that self-control, rationality, and discipline is still ever important - that alone they can both be dangerous, but together they create a perfect harmony. Rationality alone cannot in itself lead one on a soul journey, as the charioteer is not pushed to an extreme and forced to take a divine soul journey and confront their own madness. On the other hand, madness alone is dangerous and volatile, and can easily lead one to spiral and hurt themselves or others if they are not careful on their soul journey of a rediscovery of the divine. But together, they create a perfect situation where the soul can thrive on discipline and indulgence in equal parts. As he states, “While the charioteer sees that face, his memory is

carried back to the real nature of Beauty, and he sees it again where it stands on the sacred pedestal next to Self-control.” (Phaedrus, 254b). When put in this context, one of balance and harmony rather than strict opposition, it seems as though love and madness can certainly accompany one another extremely effectively - a sentiment that stands directly opposed to Phaedrus’ initial speech, as well as Socrates’.

Socrates not only pushes for the values and virtues of the companionship of a lover, though, not just explaining how love and mad passion can push one to experiencing divine and life-altering enlightenments. He also simultaneously devalues the more philosophical, stoic, sensible relationship between a younger and older man, stating that this type of friendship only values that of human nature, and gives nothing to that outside the sphere of human comprehension, outside of human concerns, and into the divine realm. As he states,

“These are the rewards you will have from a lover’s friendship, my boy, and they are as great as divine gifts should be. A non-lover’s companionship, on the other hand, is diluted by human self-control; all it pays are cheap, human dividends, and though the slavish attitude it engenders in a friend’s soul is widely praised as virtue, it tosses the soul around for nine thousand years on the earth and leads it, mindless, beneath it.”

(Phaedrus, 256e-257a).

This emphasis on an appreciation for beauty, the divine, and the truth in love is extremely reminiscent of Plato’s emphasis on the appreciation of beauty, the divine, and truth in rhetoric and deeper thought. Plato’s ideals that balance is inherent to thought, and that rationale or logos alone is not enough to be a great thinker is reflected consistently throughout the dialogue, echoing the sentiments of the overall theme of love and madness. The rhetorician’s belief that critical thinking and stepping outside of Earthly concerns is reflected in many ways throughout the dialogue, though - not just in the obvious connections of the major theme of love and rationality’s connections with one another. In putting Socrates and Phaedrus outside of their typical urban setting of Athens, for example, Plato subtextually argues for a balance between beauty and nature, and rationale and critical thinking. The quiet, serene scene where the two men give their speeches and their thoughts seemingly starkly opposes the rational and logical manner

of the philosopher, and yet the two discuss the depths of the soul and of love with extreme efficiency and inspiration while in nature. This again argues for Plato's emphasis and encouragement for a balance between more rational ideals like self-control, discipline, and critical thinking alongside more desire-based ideas such as love, eroticism, and beauty. He essentially argues that, while the two can exist without one another, they drive a chariot more effectively when working together in harmony.

As aforementioned, these beliefs in many ways defy the inherent emphasis on rationale and reason that Greek philosophers and overall society embraced when it came to higher thinking. Higher thinking and irrationality are often juxtaposed in these lights, but Plato essentially argues for the opposite - that emotions, though unstable and unwieldy, can be used as a means to gain insight into a far higher plane of thinking, one that reconnects directly to the gods. Through the pursuit of passion and beauty, one gets far closer to their soul, and who they were before their Earthly incarnation, opening their mind to new and divine forms of thought. That is why this section of the dialogue is so interesting and important to analyze - its one that essentially argues against the commonly accepted reality of reason being paramount, and instead offers the idea that something so rejected from philosophy and serious higher thinking such as love, passion, and emotionality can not just coexist with reason, but can develop and enhance it.

In *Phaedrus*, Plato's examination of the theme of love and madness provides a nuanced view of human emotion, suggesting that love, even in its irrationality, has the potential to elevate the soul by taking one on a soul journey wherein they remember and regain an appreciation for the divine beauties and truths of the world. Through the concept of a sort of divine madness, he demonstrates that love is not only a powerful force but also a transformative one that can guide individuals toward wisdom, virtue, self-realization, and more fully actualized higher thinking and critical awareness of the world around them. Rather than viewing madness as purely negative and as diametrically and fully oppositional to rationale, reason, and critical thought, Plato redefines it as a vital aspect of the soul's journey toward truth,

stating clearly that the path to wisdom is not only a rational one but one that requires a passionate and sometimes irrational commitment to the ideals one seeks.

Works Cited

*Phaedrus*, Plato.