

PHAEDRUS: 249D-253C on Philosophy and Eros

Only the knowing power of the philosopher is appropriately winged. For philosophic reminiscence brings us near to those very regions the nearness to which makes the gods themselves divine. Thus, if you make use of remembrance, and enter into the realm of the mystery, you will be completed. Standing aside from the usual pursuits of humanity, and drawing near to the divine, such a person is often regarded as mad. For most people do not recognize when such a person is possessed by Deity, rather than by madness.

This whole discourse, therefore, is about Eros, the fourth mania, as Eros is the way to being possessed by the Divine, both for its possessor, and for any who participate therein. When one that loves beauty is touched by such a mania, that one is called a lover. And when such a person perceives earthly beauty, it evokes a reminiscence of divine Beauty, and thus the soul's wings begin to grow, and the soul longs to fly upward. This longing, however, is not yet the full power of flight, but pulls our gaze inward and away from the world for a while, on which account the world judges such a person to be mad.

As we have before observed, every human soul has, from its nature, been in contemplation of authentic being, else it would never have entered human form. But to be recollected of this vision by the world appearance is not easy... Some of us had only a brief contemplation to begin with; some lost it in the embodiment process; some through unjust acts have ignored the sacred mysteries they once beheld. Only a few remain whose reminiscence is powerful enough for such purpose. When these discern some likeness to the Intelligible they are astonished, and as it were rapt beyond themselves; but at the same time they don't know what has come over them, and are ignorant of what passion possessed them, due to their lack of clear discernment.

Indeed, few have the ability to perceive in the images of justice, temperance and whatever else is precious to the soul, the presence of the original Divine qualities. But Beauty it WAS ours to behold, when we obtained together with the happy choir this blessed vision and contemplation. Some of us indeed beheld this vision in conjunction with (through the participation in) Zeus, but others in connection with some other God, when we were initiated into that mystery, which is lawfully called the most blessed of the mysteries. And these divine experiences were celebrated by us while we were whole and perfect, being pure ourselves and being freed from our bondedness, like an oyster to a shell, to this surrounding vestment which we call body, untouched by the evils awaiting us later. Likewise whole, simple, quietly stable, resident in pure light, and blissful were the spectacular visions on which we gazed.