

# Love and desire in phaedrus



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## Essay One Phaedrus

What is love and desire? These two words, as simple as they may seem are very complicated. They are two ideas or concepts that to each person have a different meaning and effect on people. Although complicated to understand, Socrates gives a very good example of what love and desire is. In Phaedrus, Socrates uses many notions such as; madness, the soul, and beauty to help explain love and desire.

Socrates mentions many different types of madness in Phaedrus. The first being madness that is given to the people by a god. Socrates uses the prophetesses of Delphi and the priestesses of Dodona as an example. “ The prophetess of Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona are out of their minds when they perform that fine work of theirs for all of Greece, either for an individual person or for a whole city, but they accomplish little or nothing when they are in control of themselves” (244B). Madness is not to be ashamed of or to blame, if it were the word ‘ manic’ wouldn’t be given to the prophecies. Over time, people stopped using ‘ manic’ and started using ‘ mantic’ or prophecy. This means that madness from a god is much finer than self-control. The second form of madness used in Phaedrus is relief. This form of madness is used by people when they come across some form of suffering and pain. This is a way for one to connect with their spiritual and religious side. There is refuge in the prophecies. The third kind of madness comes from the Muses. This form of madness uses a Bacchic frenzy of poems and music to teach the past to future generations. This kind of madness is very important for learning and growing knowledge. The last kind of madness is love, this is sent from the gods for one’s greatest good fortune. In

order to understand this kind of madness one must understand the soul, human or divine, by looking at what it does and what is done to it.

“ Every soul is immortal” (245C). A self- mover is a source of motion, which is incapable of being created or destroyed, and because we know that a self- mover is immortal, we know that it is the essence of a soul. Thus, meaning that a soul is incapable of being created nor destroyed. In terms of the structure of a soul, it can be compared to a charioteer and two winged horses. The driver has two horses one is good essentially and the other is bad. In every person there is a good and bad side to the soul. For the gods the horses are both good, obeying the charioteer, while for humans there is the mix of good and bad. This makes driving the chariot painful and very difficult. In life, humans come across painful choices, sometimes this means being torn between ‘ good’ and ‘ bad’. The soul is the charioteer and the choices are the horses. The soul does a good job at keeping the balance between the two sides but sometimes it can be very difficult causing pain. The soul also helps some with memory, this way when they see something that they remember from the heavens they call it beautiful.

When a soul comes down to Earth they lose their memory of all things beautiful. Once in a while they see something that reminds them of the beautiful world above. When man sees someone, who sees a godlike figure or face he shudders, and fear falls over him. Then he begins to sweat as a beauty washing over him like a stream, going in through his eyes warming his soul and watering his wings. This is almost like the man was yearning for hydration and finally, after seeing such beauty, he became hydrated. The man then feels nourished and all his pain is washed away with joy. This is

what Socrates defines as ‘ desire’(251C-251D). When the man no longer sees such beauty, he becomes pained once again and desire returns. Man is willing to forget everyone, and lose everything, even lose his wealth. Beauty can change people, beauty is painful and causes madness. Going back to the two horses and the charioteer, as said before one is good and one is bad. The good horse is “ a lover of honor with modesty and self- control” (253D-253E), while the bad horse doesn’t listen and is hard to keep control of. When the charioteer is faced with love he is filled with a tingling sensation and becomes full of warmth and desire. As for the horses, the good horse has control and doesn’t jump at the sight of love, whereas, the bad horse leaps violently trying to get the charioteer to approach the boy and suggest pleasure. When they approach the boy, they are struck by beauty. The charioteer tries to control the horses, until eventually the ‘ bad’ horse dies from pain. Once there is no ‘ bad’ horse to annoy the charioteer, the man and the boy become close. They are always near each other, when apart they yearn for one another. Once they finally lay in bed together, all is resolved. The problem that once caused such ache is now enslaved, covered up by their mutual love.

Coming back to the question, what is love and desire, one can get a good understanding of it by reading *Phaedrus*. Love is not simple, and it is also not entirely a beautiful idea. Love can damage a person, it can cause pure madness. Love and desire can also be a wonderful thing, it all depends on how one looks at things. One must be careful with desire, it can ruin something amazing. Love on the other hand can fix problems and make way for a life full of happiness.

A song that goes with all of the ideas I talked about is “ Say You Won’t Let Go” by James Arthur. In the song he sings about how he knew he was in love the first night they were together because of her beauty and how she made him feel noticed. Her love makes him think about forever, even when they are dead. She makes him forget about everything else, all he wants is her. The way he sings about them growing old and being together forever is really sweet and shows love.

## **Works Cited**

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