

On the Sophistry of Plato's Pausanias

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Plato's Pausanias (*Symposium* 180c, 1–185c, 3) has been condemned as a sophist who makes a perverted use of morality to achieve his real goal, a legitimation of pederasty.¹ Those opposing this interpretation find in him an almost Socratic determination to purify this vice.² At first glance the latter view seems well taken, for if Pausanias was primarily interested in making pederasty respectable, why did he not prefer the sexual mores of Elis and Boeotia to those of Athens (182A, 7–D, 5)? Instead of applauding these two peoples for their unbridled license, he censures the dullness which renders them incapable of more civilized procedures. Boys, he maintains, are encouraged by law to surrender themselves only in “the most primitive, least intellectually developed regions of Greece.”³ Does not his disdain for these regions indicate an end nobler than mere physical gratification? The present paper attempts to show that no loftier aspiration is to be ascribed to Pausanias. Even his preference for Athenian customs arises from a desire to use culture and civilization as a cloak for his vice.

In Plato's *Protagoras* (315D, 6–E, 3) and Xenophon's *Symposium* (8.32) Pausanias is presented as the lover of his young friend,

¹ R. G. Bury, *The Symposium of Plato*² (Cambridge 1932) xxvi: “. . . he is fundamentally a sensualist, however refined or specious may be the form in which he gives expression to his sensualism.” Cf. G. Krüger, *Einsicht und Leidenschaft*² (Frankfurt am Main 1948) 99 ff. These two works are hereafter cited by the author's name only.

² G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (Boston 1958) 98: “. . . in connecting the higher love with philosophy . . . Pausanias prepares the way for Socrates, even though he uses the word philosophy in a sense which Socrates would not ultimately accept.” Cf. B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato* 3^a (New York 1914) 286; A. E. Taylor, *Plato*⁶ (New York 1960) 214 f.; P. Friedländer, *Platon* 3² (Berlin 1960) 12 f.; W. Jaeger, *Paideia* 2, translated by G. Highet (New York 1943) 180 f.

³ Jaeger (above, note 2) 181. When Pausanias refers to law (*nomos*), he of course includes both law proper and public sentiment or custom as Bury (34) notes.

Agathon.⁴ The *Protagoras* takes place around 433 B.C., approximately sixteen years before the *Symposium*.⁵ In the former dialogue Agathon is very young, possibly between thirteen and sixteen. Pausanias' age has never been definitely ascertained, although he is obviously somewhat older than his favorite. Since Agathon is in his early thirties at the time of the *Symposium*, Pausanias would probably be somewhere between forty and sixty at that time. Agathon is not only younger than Pausanias; he is also better looking. His remarkable beauty is recognized by all, while no one characterizes Pausanias as handsome. Of course Agathon's superiority in this respect would be of little concern to Pausanias, if the latter were, as he claims to be, more attached to philosophy or virtue than to pederasty. Does he not condemn the wanton eros whose preference for corporeal over spiritual attractions leads it to desire the young and irrational (181B, 2-D, 1)?

For Pausanias, the moral worth of spiritual love rests upon the lover's intention rather than on the quality of the beloved. In itself no activity—including love—is noble or base; if morally executed, it is moral; if immorally, immoral. What then, is Pausanias' noble love or, rather, his noble way to love? Noble lovers voluntarily impose a law on themselves, limiting their erotic activity, while the immoral accept no self-imposed restraint (181E, 3-182A, 6). The latter love women and boys indiscriminately and are interested solely in success. They are justly censured, while the other lovers are moved by a pure, heavenly eros (180D, 6-8; 181C, 2-D, 1).

The law, voluntarily accepted by the noble and sanctifying their love, limits eros to more intelligent and, therefore, older boys. Refusing to take advantage of the ignorance of youth, a well-bred lover, forbids himself to love boys before the first hairs appear on their chins, presumably when they are between fourteen and sixteen (181D, 1-3). The subordination of nature (*physis*) to conventional law or custom (*nomos*) implied in this notion of self-imposed law has been rightly observed.⁶ For if it were natural to forego the love of boys under fifteen, why would it

⁴ Cf. Plato, *Symposium* (193B, 7-C, 2). In the Xenophon passage, Pausanias is said to justify his excesses by the military virtue nurtured by them. A similar sentiment is expressed by Plato's Pausanias (185B, 5-C, 1).

⁵ Taylor (above, note 2) 236; Bury (above, note 1) xxxiv.

⁶ Bury (above note 1) xxxvii; Krüger (above, note 1) 100 ff.

be necessary to impose such a law on oneself? Why are laws required here at all? Pausanias, in this way, implies that pederasty is natural and can be curbed only by a convention contrary to nature. Whether the lover legislates for himself or receives his law from society is not decisive in this regard. The sophistic character of this legalism becomes apparent, if one contrasts it with Socratic idealism, which condemns as unnatural any love whose ultimate aim is physical gratification. "Pausanias vertritt die sophistische These, die Nomoi seien 'durch Satzung' nicht 'von Natur' da . . ." ⁷ For him, then, the desire to seduce boys under fifteen is natural. Still, one might claim that his self-imposed legislation forces him to transcend the vice regarded as natural by him. His opting for Athenian sexual mores would seem to support the view that he is not merely posing, when he champions law against nature. However, a closer look at his concept of love will make his pose evident.

Pausanias is in love primarily with the beauty of youth, although he admits that young boys, even those over fifteen, are deficient intellectually (181D, 5-7; cf. 184E, 4-185B, 5). If he were really a lover of rationality and soul, as he claims to be, he would of course cherish a wise, mature man, regardless of his looks, more than an attractive fifteen-year-old boy. Since such a preference is not shared even by his moral love, it is correct to regard his espousal of convention over nature as a sophistic pose, designed to hide his actual intention. ⁸ And yet, as we have noted, he rejects the lax morality of those cities which allow boys unlimited freedom to gratify their lovers. He believes that their permissiveness arises from a lack of the rhetorical skills necessary to persuade the young (182B, 1-6; 182D, 2-4). But why should inarticulateness be a mark against a people in the eyes of Pausanias? Would he not have an easier success among them? Not if it is natural to love attractive boys under fifteen. For Pausanias is older and less attractive than those regarded as erotically ideal by him. On his own terms, he would be at a distinct disadvantage under a system of free and open competition. In this sense, he perhaps resembles the barbarian tyrants who suppress the free competition characteristic of the less civilized Greeks (182B, 7-D, 2). He has no desire to live where his lack of

⁷ Krüger (above, note 1) 102.

⁸ Bury (above, note 1) xxxvii.

natural gifts would make itself felt. On the other hand, he has no prospect of achieving the tyrannical power which would leave him free openly to indulge his vice.⁹ This is the real reason for his rejection of the two non-Athenian possibilities. Under the circumstances, Athenian morals are most congenial to him, since they allow him to compensate for his lack of what he regards as natural gifts. One should not forget that he is a pupil of the sophists¹⁰ and very much in need of the rhetorical skills taught by them.

Through his sophistry Pausanias attempts to persuade his favorites that youth and beauty, which he actually views as most attractive, are far less desirable than the spiritual qualities praised by public opinion. He would have them convinced that an upright character, honor, intelligence and trustworthiness are the ultimate desiderata; mere youth and beauty attract only the baser and less mature (183D, 8-E, 5). After persuading them of this, he must create the illusion that he is the embodiment of these desirable traits and is equipped to teach them. Success in his enterprise will mean that boys allow themselves to be seduced in return for instruction in sound morals and philosophy. Alcibiades' willingness to accommodate Socrates on these terms (218D, 1-5) shows that there were potential victims of Pausanias' sophistry even, and perhaps especially, among the most gifted young Athenians. Of course, Socrates rejected the suggestion of his young friend, since he had no intention of making philosophy the handmaiden of perversion.

If Pausanias possessed the attributes felt by him to be most attractive, he would have preferred the sexual license of the backward Greeks to the stricter Athenian moral code. Lacking the allurements which would allow him to be open and forthright, he sees himself compelled to resort to indirect, sophistic expedients. Only in this way can he attain a prize to which he does not consider himself naturally entitled. Thus he tries to create the impression that the conventional qualities claimed by him are more worthwhile than the natural gifts denied him. Those persuaded by him will disdain their own physical beauty as sheer ugliness in comparison with his moral stature.

⁹ Cf. *Republic* 571A, 1-580A, 8; *Gorgias* 491D, 4-492C, 8.

¹⁰ Krüger (above, note 1) 103; Jowett (above, note 2) 286; Bury (above, note 1) xxxvii.

Pausanias intends to combine two opposing aspects of Athenian morality in a higher synthesis which could deceive some boys and their unwary parents, although it probably would not succeed in winning over public opinion. The convention sanctioning relationships destined to enlighten the young, morally and philosophically, is to be combined with the law forbidding the beloved's acquiescence (184c, 4–E, 4). Boys may and should do anything for the sake of spiritual progress. Even if deluded by an evil seducer, they act honorably as long as their motivation is the expectation of moral improvement. This means that it would be disgraceful for them to reject Pausanias' demands, if he succeeded in casting his spell over them. His higher synthesis of Athenian morality is meant to make it difficult, if not impossible, for his favorites to elude his sophistic wiles.¹¹

By deceiving those he loves, Pausanias is able to command their affection. However, in a deeper sense, he is the one being duped and even enslaved. For his notion of love means surrendering oneself to the beloved (182D, 5–183B, 2; cf. 184c, 6–7). Contrary to his explicit defense of self-determination and the intellectual virtues, he actually yearns for enslavement to corporeal attractions.¹² A slave of his desire for youthful beauty, he finds his own best qualities by nature less desirable than those for which

¹¹ Similarly his reason for self-imposed legislation reveals his selfish motive. Without this imposition, the great zeal of the lover is an uncertain investment (187D, 7–E, 1).

¹² Krüger (above, note 1) 104: "Pausanias sieht sehr wohl, dass die Hingabe an die Leidenschaft eine 'Sklaverei' darstellt (183A, B; 184c), die, gemessen am Ideal der vornehmen Selbständigkeit, 'schimpflich' ist (183B, 184c)."

Pausanias, of course, prefers enslavement to corporeal attractions to more spiritual pursuits. For him, man is primarily body and not mind or spirit. Thus he would reject the notion that those identifying themselves with pure mind (or those absolutizing the autonomy of their reason) are less naive and more radical than he is. Krüger (above, note 1) 102 f., for example, contends that the chief representatives of the modern enlightenment have avoided Pausanias' subjection to the corporeal realm by their radical insistence that man's real self is wholly independent of his body, i.e. they claim that man is pure mind: "Was ich als geistiges Wesen bin, das bin ich im wesentlichen für mich allein und in völliger Unabhängigkeit: diese Überzeugung durcherrscht das moderne Denken . . ." (*ibid.* 174; cf. 108, 168, 194 f.).

A discussion of the validity of Krüger's rather Socratic interpretation of modern thought would take me too far afield. However, one can see why a Pausanias would reject its depreciation of material things. Far from identifying himself with an autonomous, spiritual self, he regards himself as one with his body and its desires (*ibid.* 102). This "Einheit mit dem Leib" cannot, according to Krüger (174), be recognized by serious proponents of the modern enlightenment such as Nietzsche (cf. *ibid.* 102; 319, note 24; 159). Yet, it is precisely the corporeal things which are

he is willing to enslave himself. His sophistry serves to deprive him of his freedom.

According to Diotima, love is a desire to obtain the goods which one lacks and which must be available if one is to be happy (204E, 1–206A, 13). For Pausanias the most lovable thing is youthful beauty, to which he is eager to surrender himself. Regarding it as the main prerequisite for happiness, he would for its sake embrace a slavery which no slave would endure (183A, 6–7). Yearning to be younger and more attractive than he actually is, he wants, as it were, to lose himself in youth and beauty. The only way he can achieve this illusory state is to forget his real situation in the heat of his passion.¹³ When caught up in its madness he can feel himself in a kind of union with the beauty loved by him.

Pausanias' passion for his favorites blinds him to his own reality and, in this sense, it is pathological. His erotic ideal is self destructive, not only because he is older and less handsome, but even if he were younger and more attractive. For the beauty of youth must always be ageing, unless, like Hamlet's crab, it could go backward. Pausanias' passionate addiction to his vice is a futile rebellion against this natural process. From Diotima's standpoint, it is unnatural because it presupposes that the lover ultimately desires a kind of union with the beauty loved. She sees the goal of love not as union with beauty but as reproduction in or through it.¹⁴ In her view, men can attain immortality only by repro-

viewed as natural by Pausanias, while a purely spiritual self would be regarded as a conventional fiction by him. In other words, he would consider what Krüger calls the modern enlightenment as a championing of convention against nature. In a sense, he also, as we have noted, takes up the cudgels in defense of convention. However, this is merely a sophistic pose: "... sein ethischer 'Formalismus' dient der Apologie des veredelten Genusses" (*ibid.* 102), an apology which finds "... in der Souveränität des Denkens fast ausschliesslich die Möglichkeit, alles Begehren zu rechtfertigen." Krüger (174) regards this view as a sign of "heidnischer Naivetät," which contrasts sharply with the modern enlightenment's emphasis on "... die drückende Verantwortung, über Normen und Sinn des Daseins selbst entscheiden zu müssen, die z.B. bei Nietzsche des Eudaimonismus völlig erstickt." But would it not be necessary to disprove Pausanias' materialistic conviction about nature and convention before one could justifiably regard it as less radical or more naive than the idealism ascribed by Krüger to modern thought? I do not see that Krüger has done this.

¹³ Cf. the force of Pausanias' passion as noted by Xenophon's Socrates (*Symposium* 8.32): "... ἀπολογούμενος ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀκραίωνε συγκαλυδουμένων . . ."

¹⁴ That this holds true not only of her so-called lesser mysteries, but also of her "higher mysteries," has been shown by R. Hackforth, "Immortality in Plato's

duction, by leaving behind physical or psychical children. According to this position, Pausanias misinterprets his desire for youthful beauty, since, rightly understood, it is a need to immortalize oneself through reproduction. For it is impossible to appropriate or to be one with the absolute beauty which never grows old (210E, 6–211A, 2; 211B, 3–5; 211D, 3–8). Any attempt to lose or enslave oneself to the beloved is illusory, since all beauty is defined as a means to physical or psychical reproduction and not as an end in itself (206E, 2 f.). From Diotima's vantage point, Pausanias is deceiving himself with his sophistry. His inordinate need to be what he cannot possibly be blinds him. His craving for the fountain of youth is, I suggest, an outgrowth of an excessive fear of death, a fear which has played the sophist in his own soul, persuading him to seek an illusory happiness by surrendering himself to his vice.¹⁵ However, this may be, his passion resembles Aristophanes' yearning for union with the beloved¹⁶ rather than Diotima's reproductive eros.

Symposium," *CR* 64 (1950) 43–45. In "Diotima's Concept of Love," *AJP* 86 (1965) 33–59, I defend this position against the objections of J. V. Luce, *CR* (1952) 137–41; R. S. Bluck, *Plato's Phaedo* (New York 1955), 27 ff.; H. Cherniss, *CR* (1953) 131 and Hackforth's own misgivings in *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge 1955) 20.

¹⁵ Cf. *Phaedo* (77E, 3–78A, 2) on the need to charm the childish element in man which is responsible for this fear. In "The Problem of Piety in Plato's *Euthyphro*" (to be published in *The Modern Schoolman*), I discuss the relation of Euthyphro's religious ideals to this fear.

¹⁶ Cf. Aristophanes' remarks on Pausanias and Agathon (193B, 6–c, 1).