History is a morass of false ideas reverently held and defended tooth and nail. These notions propagate largely unchallenged, gaining authority with every new repetition. One amusing example is the claim that Aristotle thought flies had only four legs. In what has become a paragon of mindless obedience, the old philosopher was thought to never have bothered to count them properly, leading his readers to parrot the same nonsense for twenty five hundred years.

But wait a moment! Aristotle was speaking specifically of the mayfly, which he called the “day fly” or ephemeron. Many mayflies do indeed use only the hind and middle legs for walking. The front pair has evolved into grasping limbs for holding on to their mate. The worst we can say about our knee-jerk defamation of Aristotle is that it has fooled us into feeling superior to the ancients without good cause, and thus dismissing too readily their worth.

A far more harmful canard about the ancient Greeks is one that is as ancient as they are. It holds that Greek men routinely copulated anally with their boyfriends. From that we get the familiar ethnic slur, current in many languages, that refers to men serving themselves of the aft end of their partner’s digestive system, be that partner man or a woman, as having sex “the Greek way.” But a close reading of Greek texts and a close look at Greek art will show that educated Greeks, while praising ethical male love, in the same breath denounced that particular form of carnal pleasure in the harshest terms and viewed it as gross abuse and base indignity, the domain of vulgarians. Strangely however, their condemnation of anal sex has consistently been misinterpreted as condemnation of “homosexuality,” when the opposite was intended.
How can so many have been wrong for so long? Clearly the accusation has served a purpose, or many purposes. Christianity’s battle with Hellenism clearly played a role, as the Church fathers grasped at any and all means to denigrate and destroy the old religion. So did nationalistic fervor among the Greeks themselves. Athenians routinely mocked other Greek states for brutishly indulging in an outrage that their more sophisticated Athens forbade. In times closer to our own the unexamined need for personal self-justification by historians given to such acquired tastes may also be a factor. Finally, we should blame the actual, if egregious, occurrence of such behavior in antiquity, illustrated by notorious examples that have survived to this day, as well as by the blame that is directed by many ancient authors towards such men. However, an analysis of purposes must remain the topic of another article, the first order of business here is to show that the claim is false.

To put matters in context, let me first invite you to a thought experiment. Imagine yourself in a society where certain standards are held in high esteem. Actions in accord with those norms are praised and admired, while those that contravene them are strongly condemned. Now imagine that there is one activity above all that is totally at odds with those standards, indeed is diametrically opposite. This activity is so detested, and viewed with such disgust and contempt that it is effectively unmentionable among decent people. This activity, thought to inflict not only indignity but pain and physical harm upon those subjected to it, is not only considered degrading to the person to whom it is done, whether he accepts it voluntarily or is imposed on him by force, but it is so abhorrent that it brings dishonor upon the perpetrator as well.

What then would you expect educated and respectable citizens in this society to desire for their own children, with respect to those engaged in this activity? Will they aspire that their offspring will make friends with such dishonorable people and practice their detested ways, and will they
stand by with folded arms should they see such a person courting their children? And will they, with a wink and a nod, take upon themselves the role of despised abusers with the cherished children of their friends and neighbors in plain sight of those very men?

How can we then be so naive as to believe, as most of our historians would have it when discussing sodomy in antiquity, that the same Greeks who put such store by honor and self-control and moderation would, when it came to the very persons they held most dear and were pivotal in the preservation of the family line—their own sons, would somehow turn a blind eye to that activity they deemed most depraved? Are we really to believe that they would be complicit in allowing their sons to suffer such indignity as did cause some boys to kill themselves rather than submit, as young Damocles who, when cornered in the Athenian baths by king Demetrius Poliorcetes, leaped into the cauldron of boiling water, preferring an agonizing death to dishonor? Or that caused other boys to murder their abusers upon reaching maturity? And are we further to believe that these Greeks not only abandoned their own sons to that which they called *hubris*, by which they meant sexual violation, but then these educated and cultured men betrayed their own core values and themselves inflicted that same outrage upon the sons of their fellow citizens?!

Perhaps some will object that such an argument is prima facie ethnocentric. After all, how can we impute our values to the ancient Greeks, when we are separated from them by almost three millennia of social and intellectual evolution? We are far more different from the ancient Greeks that we can imagine. For example, we no longer throw malformed babies off cliffs, nor do we expose them in the wilderness.

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1 “Sodomy” is here understood to mean “anal sex” though oral sex was also seen (at least in Athens) as an assault on the honor of the person on the receiving end.

2 Plutarch, *Life of Demetrius*
That may be true, yet the works of the Greeks speak to us in the same clear tones they once spoke. As they did, we laugh at their comedies, as they were, we are gripped by their tragedies. Their sculptures are still imbued with soul and vitality for us, their majestic ruins awe us. When shipwrecked Odysseus covers his nakedness upon meeting young Nausicaa by the shore we identify with him. When Euripides doubts the gods he voices concerns any man of faith today would find familiar. In the same fashion, we too are outraged when a man today makes use of an adolescent boy as a surrogate vagina, and punish that evildoer more severely than if he had murdered that youth. And as for exposing babies, now we terminate the lives of unwanted babies three months after conception instead of nine, even the able-bodied ones. So any difference between us and the Greeks is a quantitative rather than a qualitative one, is it not? Most importantly, in what regards the Greeks’ homoerotic practices, not only does current academic dogma and popular belief fly in the face of common sense, it blatantly contradicts what the important Greek intellectuals themselves wrote.

When we listen to these contemporary accounts we hear a very different story. The words of the Greeks, versified below, reveal a constant current of erotic ethics running from the early days of Aesop to the beginning of the first millennium of our era. This was a nuanced morality of male loving that condoned certain forms of erotic expression in the context of a relationship based on affection and generosity, even as it condemned others sexual activities. This morality stopped short of carnal coupling, though it permitted other forms of lovemaking which were not considered intrusive and demeaning, such as fondling or thigh sex. Even as they praised male eros, Greek authors directed a barrage of ridicule and contempt at those males who mounted others, or who let themselves be mounted. At their kindest they described it as a neurosis, in the same category as nail-biting, hair-pulling or eating earth, a classification made by Aristotle. This pattern of condemnation is only offset by some late poetic works by inconsequential figures, such as Strato of Sardis, who
wrote works that can best be described as soft porn. But pornography usually depicts scenarios very unlike everyday life, that’s why it sells.

Thus it is as far fetched to assume sodomy was practiced by such paragons of Greek male love as Harmodius and Aristogiton, or Solon and Pisistratus, or Epaminondas and his beloveds as it would be to take it for granted, absent any evidence to that effect, that modern figures such as Mozart, Freud, Churchill, Babe Ruth, Walter Cronkite or Barack Obama beat their wives. It is nothing but a self-serving accusation, like that of the British in Shakespeare’s time calling syphilis the “French disease.” Not that the ancients were beneath splattering each other with this mud. One term that the Athenians used for the act was to “Lakonize” best rendered in English as “to Spartanize.” Is this not a clear indication that the act was found so repulsive by the average speaker and listener so as to serve as insult, here used by Athenians to demean their arch enemies, the Spartans? That does not say anything about the Spartans, any more than today the slur that someone has “Jewed” another says anything about the Jews, though it similarly conveys a disapproval of greed and dishonesty.

Likewise, just as most men today do not beat their wives, we can deduce from these texts that the Athenian or Spartan man in the street wanted nothing to do with this kind of activity and viewed with contempt the doer as well as the one done. That of course is not to say that such acts never did, or do, take place, simply that even in antiquity they ran counter to what was, until not so long ago, expected of moral, law-abiding individuals. We might then ask why, despite such explicit condemnation of sodomy on the part of many of the most important of the ancient Greeks, modern students of the culture still assume that penetration was the common coin of male love? By what stretch of the imagination have the moderns swum counter to this ethical current and concluded the opposite about the ancients from what they repeatedly and consistently claimed about themselves?
One possibility is that we, living in a culture founded on Christian lore, have internalized the assumed Biblical association between male love and sodomy. Whether such an association is based on an actual identification of the two in Biblical times, whether such an identification was intended by the writers of the Biblical texts or was a later projection, is beside the point. The fact remains that the damage is done, and we live in a culture in which to say male love is to imply sodomy. We have essentialized this activity as the main characteristic of male/male sex even though fifty percent or more of homosexual men do not engage in it, even though there is absolutely nothing masculine about the anus, even though it is widely practiced by heterosexual couples. And if we have essentialized it for homosexual couples then how could we possibly let off the hook that most homosexual of all cultures, the Greeks?

Again, why has this association occurred? Can projection have had something to do with it? After all, in a relationship between a man and a woman there is one and only one act of consummation. What can be more natural for a man who loves women than to assume that a male who loves males would want the same satisfaction for himself. Whatever might be said of some modern homosexuals, that was certainly not the case with the average Greek. Indeed male love and anal sex were diametrically opposed in the minds and lives of those Greeks with whom we associate the great achievements of their society, and the distaste they showed for such behavior survived in our culture until just yesterday, so to speak.

How is it then that we have, in recent years, made space in our laws and in public discourse for this kind of sexuality, until so recently seen as so disagreeable? Kindness probably, compassion, a desire to right an old injustice and ease the suffering of men who love other men and who have for so long been persecuted for it. Perhaps we did so out of a belief that modern technology can make safe something that never has been safe. Or an unconscious computation that weighs the discomfort of accepting that
some males will behave in this way with each other as less onerous than perpetuating an authoritarian interference in other’s people’s most private moments. The belief that one of the greatest cultural achievements of humankind co-existed and was compatible with the systematic practice of this form of sexual fulfilment has played an important part in our new tolerance. It can be argued that many of these notions are to some degree misdirected or mistaken, but none more so than the last one.

It is high time to right centuries of wrongs and liberate men who desire and fall in love with others of their own sex, to free caged love at last. It is a mark of civilization that we have collectively begun to shake free the burden of this insane prejudice. But a liberation that compels males who love other males to ape the heterosexual act with each other as an essential mark of their identity is worse than no liberation at all. In effect all we have done is exchange one form of imprisonment for another.

In the first place, by privileging this most destructive and dangerous of sexual acts we increase its frequency in the community of males who have sex with other males, to their detriment in terms of greater incidence of disease, disability and death. In the second place, obligating all males who love other males to march under the banner of anal sex closes off for most men who do not have an appetite for such acts a love that in many times and lands was enjoyed by all males. The real liberation that needs to be discussed is the liberation of all males from the presumption that they have to engage in dangerous and aesthetically repugnant activities in order to love other males. Male love is not an issue of “diversity,” as if we were making room for the handicapped, but a universal cause that speaks to the emotional and erotic fulfillment of all males.

While it could be argued that if some men chose to break this taboo it is no one else’s business, this is also an issue that affects the younger generation. They are the ones most deeply violated, for being
brainwashed to believe that in order to satisfy one of the most basic natural instincts, to love whom you love, they must breach an instinct just as strong, to not befoul themselves. These youth have been effectively turned into child soldiers, and have been sent to fight a war that is not theirs. Encouraging the young to “come out” when that coming out enlists them into defending acts that the overwhelming majority of young people finds instinctively repugnant is to condemn them to a life of disdain and rejection by their age-mates.

For a youngster this is an unbearable life that all too often ends in suicide. And the fault for those needless deaths does not originate with the bullies who mock and ostracize these young people. Those bullies are themselves immature and unable to see the pain they cause by scapegoating an innocent youth. They are simply acting out their natural, sane and healthy revulsion against acts that flagrantly flout instinctive and natural human taboos as well as the most elementary hygiene.

Though their actions are not excusable, their feelings are very justifiable indeed, and totally beyond blame. The real fault lies with the adults who have put both the young person who is “coming out” and the bullies who react to that youth in an impossible position. By not teaching them that it is not only possible but crucial for two males who love each other to do so without soiling and debasing themselves, they have obligated gay youths to loudly proclaim the unspeakable, and their schoolmates to swallow the unpalatable. This is a crazy-making environment in which the weak psychically self-destruct. We would do better to heed Plato’s advice, that we should inculcate from the earliest age shame against acts that defile, all the while praising the beautiful and non-polluting forms of male love. Only when male love is associated with actions and activities that are uplifted and ennobling will the instinctive disdain and disgust that feed homophobia come to an end. The countless "Gay-straight alliance" clubs in the school ought to give all those boys permission to engage in a creative, satisfying sensuality that carries no risk of harm and
indignity or requires having to overcome natural revulsion.

It is fair to ask whether we could move away from a paradigm of penetration to one of dignity and responsibility. Interestingly, our construction of male love is already evolving in that direction. After the chaotic Big Bang of the early post-Stonewall days, the gay universe is cooling down and coalescing into orderly galaxies of long-term relationships, gay marriage and child rearing. Certain parallels with the Greek world are thus beginning to appear. The relationships are not exactly equal, since the male husband / male wife roles approximate the erastes / eromenos structuring of the Greeks. Likewise, the inclusion of children in the relationship restores to a certain extent the pedagogic energy of male love, though at a remove. Is it too much to ask that we learn something from the sexual ethics of the Greeks as well? If there is one lesson to be learned from the study of gay history is that while the love between males is universal and irrepressible, the form that love has taken is completely determined by culture.

In closing we should ask, how might love between males evolve if there were as clear a distinction between love and copulation as there has often been in the past? Would being freed from the obligation of having to adopt this most acquired of tastes liberate more males to experience and express affection and desire towards other males? Would males rediscover that male love is a universal pleasure, not one restricted to those males unable to enjoy the sexuality of women, as it has been in so many other cultures over the centuries? Would we then make the same discovery that the Greeks made, that if one wants children one should love a woman, and if one wants a friend one should love a male? Perhaps only then we would finally transcend the artificial duality of gay and straight and go beyond a hierarchy of desire and identity to a discrimination between superior and inferior paths to pleasure and fulfilment, one grounded in experience and pragmatism.
In a world in which male desire was directed at both males and females, could we then not hope to see lower rates of population growth, with all the ecological benefits that would spring from that? And might not the beauty and satisfaction of such relationships, filling an emotional void that plagues all men in all homophobic cultures, diminish the modern insatiable greed for material goods?

The following rhymed polemic on love between males claims to speak for the ancient Greeks. Why another attempt, where so many have tried and so few succeeded? Precisely because after so much effort and earnest good will we still get it wrong, we still project our reality and expectations, instead of perceiving without preconceptions. This time the ones doing the speaking are the Greeks themselves, or at least those among them who could be said to have fostered the cultural ideals of their day.
What is the cause the bookish philologue
Holds that the Greeks were by their bent abusive?
And wherefore the hoary pedagogue
Strains to persuade us that they were intrusive?³

Does search for truth inspire these academics?
Does love of learning lead them the Greeks betray?
For some it’s pure bigotry systemic,
While others in plain sight argue pro se.⁴

The straights of dominance accuse the Greeks
While the gays search desperately for a foil.
Antiquity, they preen, of abuse reeks,
Unlike us modern wags, so don’t recoil.

Thus wed in marriage of convenience,
The lettered prigs of the academy
And the fey profs they scorn for deviance
Drag down the good Greek name in infamy.

Oh, could those Greeks awake, and raise ajar
The heavy lid of time, and with a smile
Across the gulf of years, from afar,
Give lie to all these accusations vile.

Men who rough plough and sword first cast aside
And to the peaks of knowledge strove to stride,

³ The dominant theme in classical studies has been to assume that Greek pederasty automatically implied penetrative sex. Thus with Dover, Foucault, and other luminaries of 20th century philology. Against that predominant misconception a few have raised objections (See David Cohen, “Sexuality, Violence, and the Athenian Law of ‘Hubris’”; Harvey Yunis Tr, Plato, Phaedrus pp151-152).

⁴ Dover was reputed to be homophobic, and to have countenanced Greek eros not as a sensibility to adolescent male beauty but by explaining Greek desire for males as a polymorphously perverse drive to penetrate weaker persons so as to subjugate them.
Stripped off their robes and showed themselves undressed
And naked exercised and learned and taught,
Not by some primitive impulse possessed,
But so that by their eyes truth naked might be caught.

Thus out of vision grasped by men farsighted
The flames of art and science first ignited.
From their hands mute stone first sprang to life;
From their stages theater laughed and cried;
Their minds, seeking to end brute toil and strife,
To tame men’s savage ways, a subtle path descried.

‘Twas love they found, yet not love reproductive,
But a new love, of thoughtful men productive,
And friendships strong, that made fell tyrants quake.5
Thence modern man was born, from this found truth:
Man callow lives and dies, lest through man’s love awake.
Thus was Greek glory won, through man’s love for a youth.

In wise men’s hands this love was no rank scourge
For it was wrought in the same genius forge
Whence came the best that Hellas yet does teach.
A middle way it took, selfless and kind,
That limned the decent boundaries not to breach,
Keeping body unfouled, while ennobling the mind.

Though now the mouths of Greeks are stopped with dust
There stands their envoy, whose word men still trust.

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5 A common trope in antiquity held that the friendships born from pederastic love were so strong that they were not bowed even by the force of tyrants, thus endangering their rule. A number of famous couples were held to have defeated the rule of tyrants, most famously Harmodius and Aristogiton, but also Chariton and Melanippus, and Antileon and Hipparinos. These may well have inspired the Revolt of the Pages, where the Macedonian personal guard of Alexander the Great, a troop composed of pairs of teenage male lovers, plotted his assassination. The plot was exposed and its leaders put to death.
Their written word, that centuries endures  
Reveals to the discriminating eye  
How well they told love pure from impure  
And that to claim Greeks boys defiled is but a lie.

Aesop man’s greed and foolishness did skewer.  
Here fabled Zeus helped him to ford a sewer:  
“Fair lady Shame defied the Olympic king  
And warned that she would fly from men, unchained,  
Should Eros from behind try entering.”  
Shameless such men by Aesop were ordained.  

Hear now Plato, whom Ganymede inflamed  
And verses penned his boyfriend, not some dame.  
His ageless laughter rolls from the tomb’s night  
Mocking those men who restraint lack in bed  
And his sharp words chide them in black and white  
“You’re depraved louts crawling to mate like quadrupeds.”

“You men fancy yourselves of noble stock?  
You’re nought but piglets scratching ‘gainst a rock.”  
Thus Socrates, whom male charms entranced.  
Thus, since our world was new, the blame in fact  
Was not sweet love that man for youth advanced  
But the crude urge to creep up his digestive tract.

Plato, when forging man’s ideal laws  
Hymned love of boys unsoiled by carnal flaws.  
The Spartan foes and myth-weaving Cretans

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6 Aesop, Fables, “Zeus and Shame” (Perry 109; Chambry 118)  
7 Plato, Greek Anthology 7.669 and 670.  
8 Plato, Phaedrus Tr. Harvey Yunis, 2011, p.151  
9 Socrates was said to have told Critias his craving for Euthydemus was like the urge of a piglet to rub against a rock. (Xenophon, Memorabilia i 2.30)
He dryly lampooned to make example,
“They sow their seed on barren rocks, poor cretins,”
Though well he knew those tribes base joys did not sample.\textsuperscript{10}

In vain plied Rome its poison pen to scold
Boy-loving Spartans for acts overbold.\textsuperscript{11}
For Cicero’s attack did doubly miss,
First showing Spartans did condemn abuse.
His epigram pining for his slave’s kiss,\textsuperscript{12}
Then proved that his own heart did lean to Spartan use.

Speak, O captain of philosophy’s seas,
Futtering males you dubbed mental disease.
Yet, Aristotle, your loves’ names fill a book!
Yet, jibed you, only blind men crave not beauty!\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} Plato, in his \textit{Laws} (836-839) is held by most modern commentators to “condemn homosexuality,” a position that is supposed to be for him a “recanting” of the support he showed for male love in his younger days. Of course Plato does nothing of the kind. That is but a simplistic interpretation that, in order to force a literal reading of the text, contorts the philosophy of the man. Furthermore it is an interpretation based on the identification of anal sex with male/male love, this in a text in which Plato unequivocally disentangles the two phenomena and indeed holds them to be not only incompatible but diametrically opposite. In the \textit{Laws} Plato simply condemns, as all important Greek intellectuals did, and as he has all along in all his writing, including in the \textit{Phaedrus} that moderns presumably use to contrast with the \textit{Laws}, the carnal use of one male by another, and reiterates that it is the act of a shameless man devoid of restraint and possessed by hubris, a theme that runs strong and steady throughout the ancient literature on this topic. But Plato has nothing but praise for those men who love youths as long as they refrain from buggering their beloveds. And surely Plato was fully aware of the same ethical currents in Sparta and in Crete, but makes use of the two states as presumed nexi of abuse. His reasons for doing so are open to interpretation, and could range from rhetorical device, to irony and satire, to critique of practices that certainly co-existed with more ethical relations and that were exaggerated to comic effect by writers for the amusement of the average Athenian.

\textsuperscript{11} Cicero reveals that the Spartans permitted sex play but drew the line at copulation. “But the Spartans, while they permit every kind of license to their young men, save that of [stuprum], come exceedingly close to the very exception they insist on . . .” Cicero, \textit{On the Commonwealth}, iv.4

\textsuperscript{12} Pliny justifies his own poems of boy love on the premise that they but follow the example set by the great orators. He recounts finding, in a work by Asinius Gallus, an epigram by Cicero in reproaching his young slave Tiro for begrudging him the kisses he had promised after dinner. Highly educated and eventually manumitted, Tiro became Cicero’s secretary, and his posthumous editor. Pliny, \textit{Epistles}, 7.4.6

\textsuperscript{13} Aristotle, when asked why men spend much time with the beautiful (and this being Greece it is not likely the questioner meant just women) responded that it was a question only a blind man would ask. (Diogenes
How then for lover Hermias you took,  
And your acolytes embraced as sacred duty?14

“Only those men are ill who their beloveds hurt.  
A boy to top? That’s tantamount to eating dirt.15
Yet moderate men have leave to taste love’s pleasure.  
My son, Nicomachus, exampled my views:  
After my death, his life my own did measure,  
When my friend Theophrastus for lover he did choose.”16

Speak, old Aeschines, you fiery orator,  
Athenian lads you courted and adored.  
But you knew chaste from beastly love of boys.  
Before all Athens, one you named a whore:  
Timarchus, his honor squandered as men’s toy,  
You berated for flinging open his back door.17

And say you more, in this Areopagus?18  
The ancient lore of love would you teach us?  
Then pray, make known to all, what kind of man  
A woman makes of his beloved male?  
“Two stains mark out for us that noisome clan,  

Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book V.Ch1.20*)

14 According to Diogenes Laertius (V.Ch1.3) Aristotle had been the eromenos of Hermias, who later gave him his daughter for wife. Aristotle had eromenoi of his own from among his students, such as Palephatus of Abydos (Suda, pi,71) and Theodectes of Phaselis (William Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* p.1035, but disputed by some recent scholars), and Aeschrion of Mytilene (Suda, ai,354).

15 In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle groups copulation between males with other neuroses such as eating earth, pulling out one’s hair and chewing one’s fingernails. (1148b15 - 1149a20)

16 Theophrastus, the friend and executor and successor of Aristotle as head of the Lyceum was also the erastes of Nicomachus, Aristotle’s son. “οὐ καὶ τοῦ υἱός Νικομάχου φησίν ἐρωτικῶς διαστῆναι,” (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, “Life of Theophrastus,” V.2 39)

17 In his speech *Against Timarchus* Aeschines indicts Timarchus not only for selling his sexual favors, but also for having permitted *hubris* against himself, i.e. for having submitted to being mounted by men, hubris being a euphemism for the sexual penetration of one male by another. (*passim*)

18 The Areopagus, in classical times, was an Athenian tribunal and high court of appeal.
Brutal are they, uncultured too, beyond the pale.”

And Plato drains his cup of wine to add:
“Lovers divine can be, as well as bad.
When looking for a loving friend, chase not
Some stripling, seek one who’s old enough to think.”

And Xenophon the crucial point has wrought:
“You must have leave from the boy’s sire, in ink.”

Thus through the mists of man’s antiquity
We glimpse male love free of iniquity.
And even as the old millenium pales
That cultured Delphic priest hymned the same song.
Plutarch himself, who favored love of males,
Held mounting was not love, but a great wrong.

And he did so not through his own frank speech,
But freed the boys their rapists to impeach.
Such riders rode a most reluctant horse
As the used youths for no man bore more hate
Than for the cad who by sly trick or force
Bent them to satisfy his urgent urge to mate.

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19 Men who pay boys and then mount them are labeled by Aeschines “hubristou kai apaideutou” or “abusive and uncultured” (ibid. 1.137) His is not a general condemnation of boy love, as he freely and proudly acknowledges being a well-known pederast himself, but an ethical one.

20 Though the Greeks have long been blamed for taking advantage of children, the honorable form of boy love restricted itself to older boys, such as would be of legal age in most modern countries, though perhaps not in the US. Plato, Symposium, 181d

21 The presence of the father, suggesting the importance of his background role in pederastic relationships, is a running theme throughout Greek pederastic mythology as well as other pederastic texts, such as Xenophon’s Symposium where the father, Axiocbus, accompanies Clinias, his son to the house of the son’s lover. While that lover in the text is presented as “Critobulus,” Diogenes Laertius, quoting Aristippus, asserts that it was Xenophon himself who was the erastes of the boy.

22 Plutarch seems generally sympathetic to male love in its ethical form, as can be seen throughout his Lives, for example in the life of Solon where he casually and without negative judgment mentions Solon’s love for his cousin, the beautiful Pisistratus, the future tyrant.

23 Plutarch, Moralia “On Love”
Greek lads often avenged ill use with death
Though that revenge might cost their last breath.
Thus fared the despot who while feasting asked
The boy he buggered, “Are you yet with child?”
The youth boiled over, to be thus unmasked
And cut that man in two, by hot shame driven wild

And yet the Greeks held pure boy love blameless
For their world was one where men not nameless,
From mythic grandsires ploughed and sowed and fought
And each other’s sons shielded from dangers
For the cherished young lads they loved and taught
Were sprung of friends or neighbors, not faceless strangers.

The Greeks’ own words prove they were not uncouth,
And that to evil call their love is an untruth.
Against the shadow that man’s primal lust still casts,
And always will, on many-figured love
Their refined ways shine a bright ray that lasts.
Where hordes through mire drag, they rise above.

If in the Greeks we see base degradation,
Gaze we a mirror of our own creation.
While moderns pursue sodomy’s phantasm
Coldly the ancients boy mounters did dismiss.
Who then degraded is, blind slaves of orgasm,
Or wisdom seekers, illumed by a lad’s kiss?

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24 Plutarch relates the tale of Periander, tyrant of Ambracia, who met his end at the hands of his vengeful eromenos. He also mentions, in this context, Crates who murdered Archelaus out of the hate and disgust he still felt for having been mounted by him in his youth, and Pytholaus who assassinated Alexander of Pherae, a noted abuser of youths. (Moralia “On Love” 23) Aristotle in his Politics (V.10) mentions Derdas who assassinated Amyntas the Little, and of course Philip II of Macedon, Alexander the Great’s father, was assassinated by his disgruntled former eromenos, Pausanias.
Such love’s volcanic power, when thoughtful turned,
Inspired youthful spirits till bright they burned.
True architects of soul the ancients were
And saw that character must many-pillared be.
A father’s word might lose its heft or fade in war
Then lovers noble would the son’s worth trustee.

But be no man or woman so naive
As frigid their skilful play believe.
What male with eyes and heart, brain in his head,
Would joy refuse when tender beauty beckons?
No. The very peak of pleasure they assayed
But strode the path of him that honor reckons.

For in that world spun with unpitied pace
In which men’s lives had but a moment’s grace
To win a lasting prize, then through death’s door,
Honor was that one boon all Greeks aspired,
In honor’s quest they swung their shields in war,
Honor the touchstone that tested their loves’ fire.

“What honor,” jeers the crowd, “have you gone mad?”
“We’re free at last, pile on, join the gay fad.”
Where’s freedom in your jail of the senses?
Selflessly nurture, heed then not base urges.
Then male love might scale those prison fences,
Succumbing not to greed when wild passion surges.

The lid of time swings shut, the Greeks are gone,
Upon our orb we’re once again alone.
From modern heights we disdain Greeks as rakes
Against whose crimes our mores pretend defense.
Yet, thinking to sidestep their mistakes,
We’ve killed what made them great, and saved what gave offense.

And therein the irony does lie
Keep the bathwater, let the baby die.
But for this murder we’ll all pay the price.
Male love denied morphs into brutish need
From glut of couplings we then multiply like mice
Till pillaged Nature break beneath the human breed.

Nor ask why leering dawns this new dark age,
This maelstrom of materialistic rage,
When in our hearts this unvoiced void does gape,
And butchered Eros stumbles on one leg.
Thus man’s reduced to matrimonial ape,
And his life’s one great goal? Filthy lucre to beg.