

"You must first understand human nature and what has happened to it. In ancient times our nature was not the same as it is now, but different. At first there were three kinds of human beings, not only two as now, male and female, but also a third that was composed of the other two. Its name still survives, [189e] but that type of being no longer exists. At one time, then, there actually existed a kind of human being that was androgynous in form and name, being a combination of both male and female, ⁴⁷ but they no longer exist, although the name is still used as a calumny. Now, the form of all three types of people was completely spherical, with their backs and sides making a complete circle. They had four hands and a similar number of legs, and two faces that were exactly alike on top of a circular neck. The two faces were turned in [190a] opposite directions on a single head that had four ears. There were also two sets of genitals, and all the other characteristics one could infer from these examples. They walked upright in the present manner, in whatever direction they wanted to, and whenever they set themselves to run quickly, they would revolve in a circle, like acrobats doing cartwheels, with their arms and legs sticking straight out. At that time, of course, they had eight limbs to support themselves on while they rapidly revolved.

"The reason there were these three types of humans is this: The male was originally a progeny of the sun, the female of the earth, and the one that had a [190b] share in both was a progeny of the moon, since the moon also has a share in both. They themselves were spherical like their parents, and their method of travelling was also like that of their parents.

"They had terrible strength and power, as well as grand ambitions, and they attacked the gods. Homer's story about Ephialtes and Otus⁴⁸ is about them and their attempt to ascend the heavens in order to attack the gods. Zeus [190c] and the other gods deliberated about what they should do about them, but they were at a loss. They did not see how they could kill them and destroy the race with a lightning bolt, as they had in the case of the giants, since the honors and sacrifices they received from human beings would also be destroyed. Neither did they see how they could tolerate their outrageous behavior. Finally, after a lot of thought, Zeus declared, 'I think I have a good idea about how human beings can continue to exist and yet, by their becoming weaker, cease their indecent behavior. I will cut each of them in two,' he said. 'They will be weaker and at the same time more useful to us by becoming more numerous. [190d] And they will still be able to walk upright since they will have two legs. However, if they continue to behave outrageously and refuse to live quietly,' he continued, 'I will cut them in two again, and they'll have to travel around on one leg like people playing hopscotch.'⁴⁹ Having said this, he cut the human beings in two, as people slice apples when they are going to preserve them or [190e] cut eggs with hairs. As he sliced each one, he ordered Apollo to shift its face and its half-neck around toward the cut, so that when it looked at its own scar the person might be more orderly. He also instructed Apollo to heal the rest of

the incision. So Apollo turned their faces around and drew the skin together on all sides to what is now called the stomach, just as purses are pulled together with a drawstring. He tied off the single opening he had made in the middle of the stomach, making what people call the navel, and he smoothed [191a] out the many other wrinkles and constructed the chest, using the sort of tool cobblers use when they smooth out wrinkles in leather on a last. However, he left a few wrinkles around the stomach and the navel as a reminder of their past experience.

"Now, since the natural form of human beings had been cut in two, each half longed for the other. So, out of their desire to grow together, they would throw their arms around each other when they met and become entwined. Hence, they began to die from hunger and other sorts of neglect, since they did not want to do anything in separation from each other. Whenever one half [191b] of a pair died and the other remained behind, the one that was left, whether it happened to be a half of a whole woman (what we now call a woman) or of a man, searched about and became entwined with someone else, and as a result they were dying out.

"However, Zeus took pity on them and came up with another good idea. He moved their genitals around to the front, for until then they had them on the back side, and they fathered and conceived, not in each other, but in the ground like cicadas. So, Zeus put their genitals around on the front side and [191c] thus made it possible for them to reproduce with each other with the male's genitals inside the female's. For this reason, whenever a male happened to encounter a female in their entwining, she would conceive and produce an offspring, and if a male encountered a male, at least they would get some satisfaction from their union and they would take a break, then return to their work and attend to the rest of life.

"It is from this situation, then, that love for one another developed in [191d] human beings. Love collects the halves of our original nature, and tries to make a single thing out of the two parts so as to restore our natural condition. Thus, each of us is the matching half of a human being, since we have been severed like a flatfish, two coming from one, and each part is always seeking its other half. Those men who are split from the mixed nature, which was then called 'androgynous,' are fond of women. Most adulterers come from this type, and [191e] those women who are fond of men and are adulteresses also come from this type. Those women who are split from a woman, however, have no interest at all in men, but rather are oriented toward women. This is the type lesbians come from. Those who are split from the male pursue males. While they are boys, since they are a slice off a male, they are fond of men and enjoy lying with men and becoming entwined with them. These are the best of the boys and young [192a] men, and at the same time are the most manly in nature. Anyone who says they are shameless is mistaken, for they do this, not from shamelessness, but from courage, manliness, and masculinity, welcoming what is like themselves. There

is a definite proof of this: Only men of this sort are completely successful in the affairs of the city. When they become men, they are lovers of boys and by [192b] nature are not interested in marriage and having children, though they are forced into it by custom. They would be satisfied to live all the time with one another without marrying. This is certainly the sort of man who becomes a lover of boys, and as a boy is fond of such lovers, always welcoming a kinsman.

"Thus, whenever a lover of boys, or anyone else, happens to encounter the person who is their other half, they are overcome with amazement at their friendship, intimacy, and love, and do not want to be severed, so to speak, [192c] from each other even for a moment. These are the people who spend their entire lives with each other, though they don't know how to say what they want from each other. No one would think this is a mere union of sexual passion, as though that were the reason each enjoys and is so enthusiastic about being with the other. On the contrary, it is clear that there is something else—what, it cannot say—that the soul of each wants, though it does have a prophetic sense of what it wants and can speak of it in riddles. If Hephaestus [50](#) [192d] were holding his tools and standing over the pair lying there together, he might say: 'What do you people want from each other?' If they had no answer, he might continue: 'Is this what you desire, to be together as much as possible, so that you would not leave each other day and night? If you desire that, I am willing to weld and forge you into one and the same being, so that from being two you will have become one and can henceforth live as one [192e] being, both of you sharing a single life in common. When you die, you will share a death in common, there in Hades, as one being instead of two. Consider whether you would like this and would be satisfied should this happen.' We know that when they heard this, not a one would refuse, nor would they appear to want anything other than that. On the contrary, they would think they had discovered what they had really desired all along, namely, to be made one out of two by being joined and welded together with their beloved.

"The explanation of this is that our original nature was as described above and we were once whole beings. So, the name 'love' is given to the desire for wholeness. Before the current situation, as I explained, we were one [193a] whole, but now, because of our misdeed, we have been made by the god to live in a separated state, as the Arcadians were by the Spartans. [51](#) We are afraid that if we do not maintain good order in our relations with the gods we may be sliced in two again, so that we would have to go around like those figures that have been inscribed in bas-relief on stelae, sawn in two along the nose like halved dice. For this reason, every man must advocate continuous reverence for the gods in all things, so that we will avoid that fate and encounter good fortune, with Love as our guide and commander. No one [193b] should oppose him in any way, because whoever opposes the gods incurs their wrath. If we are friends with the god and on good terms, we will find and establish relationships with those darlings meant for us, which few do now.