

PHAEDRUS' COSMOLOGY IN THE *SYMPOSIUM*: A REAPPRAISAL*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Phaedrus' speech in the *Symposium* (178a–180b) has not attracted the full attention of scholars of Plato. Yet the cosmology that Plato puts in Phaedrus' mouth at the beginning of his praise of Eros suffers from inconsistencies that have been noticed by modern scholarship but recklessly explained away. Indeed, they have been credited to simple inattention on the part of the speaker, Phaedrus, or resolved by correcting the text given by the manuscripts. I shall try to recover the coherence of this passage by defending a *uaria lectio* of the manuscript tradition that has so far been neglected. The resulting reading will lead to a new interpretation of Eros' genealogy and to a reappraisal of Phaedrus' speech within the *Symposium*.

PLATO'S INCONSISTENCIES?

τὸ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς πρεσβύτατον εἶναι τὸν θεὸν τίμιον, ἧ δ' ὄς, τεκμήριον δὲ τούτου· γονῆς γὰρ Ἔρωτος οὐτ' εἰσὶν οὔτε λέγονται ὑπ' οὐδενὸς οὔτε ιδιώτου οὔτε ποιητοῦ, ἀλλ' Ἡσιόδου πρῶτον μὲν Χάος φησὶ γενέσθαι· αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα Γαῖ' εὐρύστερνος, πάντων ἔδος ἀσφαλὲς αἰεὶ, ἧ δ' Ἔρος. {φησὶ μετὰ τὸ Χάος δύο τούτω γενέσθαι Γῆν τε καὶ Ἔρωτα.} Παρμενίδης δὲ τὴν γένεσιν λέγει· πρῶτιστον μὲν Ἔρωτα θεῶν μητίσατο πάντων. Ἡσιόδῳ δὲ καὶ Ἀκουσίλειος ὁμολογεῖ. οὕτω πολλαχόθεν ὁμολογεῖται ὁ Ἔρος ἐν τοῖς πρεσβύτατος εἶναι. πρεσβύτατος δὲ ὢν μεγίστων ἀγαθῶν ἡμῖν αἰτιὸς ἔστιν.
(Pl. *Symp.* 178a–c)

For he (Eros) is among the eldest of the gods, which is an honour, he (Phaedrus) said, and there is proof for this. For there is no memorial of his parents, neither are they spoken of by anyone either layman or poet. As Hesiod says, 'First Chaos came into being, and then broad-bosomed Earth, the everlasting seat of all that is, and Eros'. {After Chaos, these two came into being, Earth and Eros.} Also Parmenides mentions his generation. 'First of all the gods, he devised Eros'. And Acusilaus agrees with Hesiod. Thus Eros is

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agreed by many witnesses to be among the eldest of the gods. Now, as Eros is the eldest of the gods, so also he confers upon us the greatest benefits.

(tr. Toye, as in n. 9, slightly adapted)

At the beginning of his encomium of Eros, Phaedrus states (*Symp.* 178a) that the primacy of the god resides in the fact that he is among the eldest of deities (τὸ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς πρεσβύτατον εἶναι τὸν θεὸν τίμιον). As evidence for this (τεκμήριον δὲ τούτου), he declares that Eros has no parents and that neither laymen nor poets have recorded them (γονῆς γὰρ Ἔρωτος οὐτ' εἰσὶν οὔτε λέγονται ὑπ' οὐδενὸς οὔτε ἰδιώτου οὔτε ποιητοῦ). This is a rash statement, as has been rightly stressed by scholars.¹ Rather, early poetic and philosophic traditions have repeatedly elaborated on speculations about the parentage of Eros.² On the one hand, the invented genealogies tentatively integrated him into the sphere of Olympian deities.³ On the other hand, there was a mythological development of Eros as a cosmogonic principle and hence a formation of his genealogy during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E.⁴ The resulting accounts were fixed by lyric poetry, the theogonies and the cosmogonies of early philosophers.

Another somewhat disconcerting statement in Phaedrus' speech that has for the most part been disregarded by scholars also concerns the characterization of Eros as the eldest deity (πρεσβύτατος), at both the beginning and the end of the passage quoted above (cf. also *Symp.* 180b). In my view, the two poetic authorities that Phaedrus produces in order to support his point of view fail to do so conclusively: the Hesiodic passage has Eros come into being after Gaia, who is to be seen as older than Eros, or at least as old as him (*Theog.* 116–20);⁵ and the Parmenidean line quoted by Phaedrus (DK 28B13) confirms Eros' primordially but at the same time his created and conceived nature (πρώτιστον μὲν Ἔρωτα θεὸν μητίσατο πάντων). The subject of the (causative) aorist μητίσατο ('devised' or 'conceived'),

¹ Cf. A. Hug, *Platons Symposion* (Leipzig, 1884²), 35 ('eine kategorische Behauptung des Phädrus, die sehr der Berichtigung bedarf'); R.G. Bury, *The Symposium of Plato* (Cambridge, 1909), 22 ('This is a rash statement on the part of Phaedrus'); H. Schwabl, 'Weltschöpfung', *RE Suppl.* IX (Stuttgart, 1962), 1465 ('eines Irrtums'); H. Martin, 'Amatorius, 756 E–F: Plutarch's citation of Parmenides and Hesiod', *AJPh* 90 (1969), 192 n. 25 ('Phaedrus is clearly mistaken'); K. Dover, *Plato. Symposium* (Cambridge, 1980), 90 ('is untrue'); P. Vicaire, *Platon. Le Banquet* (Paris, 1989), 11 ('affirmation assez étonnante'); C.J. Rowe, *Plato. Symposium* (Warminster, 1998), 137 ('not everyone chose to be so logical'); G. Reale, *Platone. Simposio* (Milano, 2001), 171 ('è errata'); B. Breitenberger, *Aphrodite and Eros: The Development of Erotic Mythology in Early Greek Poetry and Cult* (New York and London, 2007), 165 ('seems to conflict with the plethora of parentages given by other authors to Eros').

² See e.g. *Schol. Theoc.* 13.1/2c (ed. Wendel) (= Acus. fr. 6c Fowler; cf. below). Cf. Eur. *Hipp.* 533; Paus. 9.27.3; *Schol. Ap. Rhod. Argon.* 3.26b; Serv. *Aen.* 1.664. See a complete catalogue of Eros' genealogies in M. Martínez, 'Las genealogías de Eros en la literatura grecolatina', in J.F. González Castro et al. (edd.), *Actas del XI Congreso Español de Estudios Clásicos* (Madrid, 2005), 2.393–406.

³ Cf. Breitenberger (n. 1), 164–9.

⁴ Cf. I. Kovaleva, 'Eros at the Panathenaea: personification of what?', in E. Stafford and J. Herrin (edd.), *Personification in the Greek World: From Antiquity to Byzantium* (London, 2005), 140–1.

⁵ See Martin (n. 1), 193: 'Phaedrus ... fails to comment on the fact that Eros must share whatever primacy he has with at least Gaia.' As a matter of fact, Phaedrus also omits line 119 concerning Tartarus, who precedes Eros in the cosmology. Yet the Hesiodic authenticity of this line has been very much discussed and it is not beyond dispute that Plato's text of the *Theogony* included it. On Plato's handling of poets, see J. Mitscherling, 'Plato's misquotation of the poets', *CQ* 55 (2005), 295–8.

viz. the progenitor or creator of Eros, has been identified by some scholars with the *daimon* that presides over intercourse and birth in another fragment of Parmenides (DK 28B12).⁶ Be that as it may, Phaedrus carefully avoids naming the god or goddess behind, and *before*, the devising of Eros.⁷

The most intriguing detail, however, in Phaedrus' *logos* is an ambiguous and tantalizing reference to Acusilaus of Argos ('*Ἡσιόδῳ δὲ καὶ Ἀκουσίλειος ὁμολογεῖ*). As it happens, Acusilaus' cosmological concepts, as they are reconstructed from the scanty literary evidence, do not agree with Hesiodic cosmology, except for the fact that both authors feature Chaos as a first principle (as I shall prove in the next section). And as a matter of fact the textual transmission of this passage is considered corrupt by the majority of editors of Plato.⁸ At any rate, Eros' genealogy seems to differ sharply from one author to another.⁹ How then is the inconsistency of the passage to be understood?

To frame the problem more broadly, comparison with a similar text may provide suggestions for further inquiry. An Aristotelian passage affords a close parallel to the Platonic text. At the beginning of *Metaphysics* A 4, Aristotle attempts a critical overview of ancient authors who first introduced the efficient cause, citing Hesiod and Parmenides:

ὑποπτεύσειε δ' ἂν τις Ἡσιόδον πρῶτον ζητῆσαι τὸ τοιοῦτον, κἂν εἴ τις ἄλλος ἔρωτα ἢ ἐπιθυμίαν ἐν τοῖς οὐσιν ἔθηκεν ὡς ἀρχήν, οἷον καὶ Παρμενίδης· καὶ γὰρ οὗτος κατασκευάζων τὴν τοῦ παντὸς γένεσιν πρῶτιστον μὲν φησιν ἔρωτα θεῶν μητίσατο πάντων, Ἡσιόδος δὲ πάντων μὲν πρῶτιστα χάος γένετ', αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα γὰρ εὐρύστερον ... ἢ δ' ἔρος, ὃς πάντεσσι μεταπρέπει ἀθανάτοισιν, ὡς δέον ἐν τοῖς οὐσιν ὑπάρχειν τιν' αἰτίαν ἣτις κινήσει καὶ συνάξει τὰ πράγματα. τούτους μὲν οὖν πῶς χρὴ διανεῖμαι περὶ τοῦ τίς πρῶτος, ἐξέστω κρίνειν ὕστερον. (Arist. *Metaph.* 984b)

It might be inferred that the first person to consider this question was Hesiod, or indeed anyone else who assumed Eros or Desire as a first principle in things; e.g. Parmenides. For he says, where he is describing the creation of the universe, 'Eros she'¹⁰ created first of all gods'. And Hesiod says, 'First of all things was Chaos made, and then | Broad-bosomed Earth ... | And Eros, the foremost of immortal beings', thus implying that there must be in the world some cause to move things and combine them. The question of arranging these thinkers in order of priority may be decided later.

(tr. Tredennick, slightly adapted)

⁶ See J.S. Morrison, 'Four notes on Plato's *Symposium*', *CQ* 14 (1964), 51; D. Gallop, *Parmenides of Elea. Fragments* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1984), 83; G. Reale and L. Ruggiu, *Parmenide. Poema sulla natura. I frammenti e le testimonianze indirette* (Milano, 2003), 349–50.

⁷ Cf. Martin (n. 1), 193: '[Phaedrus] carefully skirted the problem of the subject of *μητίσατο*'; see, from another perspective, C. Salman, 'Phaedrus' cosmology in the *Symposium*', *Interpretation* 20 (1992–3), 112.

⁸ The whole sentence concerning the agreement between Hesiod and Acusilaus is removed and transferred by some scholars after the quotation of Hesiod above. See an overview of the conjectures of the editors of the *Symposium* in C.J. Classen, 'Bemerkungen zu zwei griechischen Philosophiehistorikern', *Philologus* 109 (1965), 176 n. 1.

⁹ See D.L. Toye, 'Akousilaos of Argos (2)', in I. Worthington (ed.), *Brill's New Jacoby* (Leiden, 2009): 'The testimony of the speaker in this dialogue (Phaidros) contradicts the later account of Eudemos (F 6b) who reported that in Akousilaos' theogony Eros did have parents – Erebus and Night' (commentary on fr. 6a).

¹⁰ Tredennick's translation is correct if the subject of 'created' is identified with the goddess mentioned by Parm. DK 28B12 (see above, n. 6).

As Aristotle quotes the very same Hesiodic and Parmenidean lines in a 'doxographical' context comparable to that of Plato in Phaedrus' speech, it is possible that both philosophers are drawing upon a common source.¹¹ As Kienle and Classen, among others, have argued, Plato and Aristotle might be using a learned anthology that has been identified by some scholars with the *Collection*, or *Synagoge*, of the sophist Hippias of Elis.¹² As a matter of fact, in the *Protagoras* (315c) Plato places Phaedrus among those listening to Hippias.¹³ Be that as it may, scholars who have compared both texts have failed to explain the main point of divergence between them, that is to say, that Aristotle omits any mention of Acusilaus of Argos.

RECONSTRUCTING ACUSILAUS' COSMOLOGY

Acusilaus is one of the few Greek fragmentary authors included both in the *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* of Diels and Kranz and the *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* of Felix Jacoby. A genealogist of the sixth or fifth century B.C.E., no one calls into question his status as a mythographer. But his contribution to cosmogonic thought has scarcely attracted attention among students of ancient philosophy.¹⁴ In my opinion, the lack of interest in Acusilaus' cosmology is caused by textual uncertainties, which have prompted misunderstandings and confused readings.

Ancient authors transmitting Acusilaus' cosmology build up a tangled combination of sources, ostensibly contradictory models that do not allow, at least at first

¹¹ Hes. *Theog.* 116–17; 120. Parm. DK 28B13. Plato quotes all the words of *Theogony* 117 and only the first words of 120; Aristotle quotes the first words of 117 but the whole of 120, which suggests, though it does not prove (as Aristotle could have supplied the rest of the line himself), that he does not simply transcribe Plato (cf. J. Mansfeld, 'Aristotle, Plato, and the Preplatonic doxography and chronography', in G. Cambiano [ed.], *Storiografia e dossografia nella filosofia antica* [Turin, 1986], 24).

¹² W. von Kienle, *Die Berichte über die Sukzessionen der Philosophen in der hellenistischen und spätantiken Literatur* (Berlin, 1961) (*non uidi*); Classen (n. 8), 175–8. See also Mansfeld (n. 11), 13–14; 24; cf. J. Mansfeld, 'Bad world and Demiurge: a 'Gnostic' motif from Parmenides and Empedocles to Lucretius and Philo', in R. Van den Broek and M.J. Vermaseren (edd.), *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Leiden, 1981), 267 n. 16: 'It is a definite possibility that Plato and Aristotle, in the doxographical passages at issue, used the sophist Hippias' compendium of "important and related ideas".' Snell, too, has tentatively pointed to the existence of another fragment of Hippias quoted by Plato (*Cra.* 402b) and Aristotle (*Metaph.* 983b); see B. Snell, 'Die Nachrichten über die Lehren des Thales und die Anfänge der griechischen Philosophie- und Literaturgeschichte', in C.J. Classen (ed.), *Sophistik* (Darmstadt, 1976), 478–490 [= *Philologus* 96 (1944), 170–82]. A doxographical tradition behind Plato and Aristotle is also admitted by F. Wehrli, *Sotion* (Basel and Stuttgart, 1978), 11–12. For the arrangement, method and scope of Hippias' *Collection*, see M. Węcowski, 'Hippias of Elis (6)', in Worthington (n. 9) (commentary on fr. 4).

¹³ See S. Rosen, *Plato's Symposium* (New Haven and London, 1987?), 39–45 (on Phaedrus 'the student of Hippias').

¹⁴ See e.g. the severe verdict of Kirk and Raven: 'Acusilaus ... was a genealogist who might well have given a summary, and of course unoriginal, account of the first ancestors ... he is almost entirely irrelevant to the history of Presocratic thought, and scarcely deserves the space accorded him in DK' (G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* [Cambridge, 1983?], 20). Note a slightly different formulation in the earlier editions of this book: 'He is almost entirely irrelevant to the history of early Greek philosophy, and scarcely deserves ...' (G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* [Cambridge, 1964], 23 [italics mine]).

sight, a clear picture of his cosmogonic concepts. These texts are grouped under number 6 in collections of Acusilaus' fragments (cf. Acus. fr. 6 Jacoby/Fowler/Toye). The first testimony is the fragment of Plato discussed above (Pl. *Symp.* 178 a–c = Acus. fr. 6a Fowler). Here are the two other testimonia:

Ἄκουσίλαος δὲ Χάος μὲν ὑποτίθεσθαι μοι δοκεῖ τὴν πρώτην ἀρχήν, ὡς πάντα ἄγνωστον, τὰς δὲ δύο μετὰ τὴν μίαν Ἐρεβος μὲν τὴν ἄρρενα, τὴν δὲ θήλειαν Νύκτα ... ἐκ δὲ τούτων φησὶ μυχθέντων Αἰθέρα γενέσθαι καὶ Ἔρωτα καὶ Μῆτιν ... παράγει δὲ ἐπὶ τούτοις ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν καὶ ἄλλων θεῶν πολὺν ἀριθμὸν κατὰ τὴν Εὐδῆμου ἱστορίαν.
(Acus. fr. 6b Fowler = Dam. *Pr.* 124)

Acusilaus appears to me to suppose that Chaos, the first principle, is altogether unknowable. There are two principles after the one. Erebus is male and Night, female. He says that from the union of these two, Aither came into being, and Eros and Metis ... and he introduces besides those coming from them also a large number of other gods according to the research of Eudemus. (tr. Toye)

ἀμφιβάλλει τίνος υἱὸν εἶπη τὸν Ἔρωτα. Ἡσιόδος μὲν γὰρ Χάους καὶ Γῆς Σιμωνίδης Ἄρεος καὶ Ἀφροδίτης· Ἄκουσίλαος Νυκτὸς καὶ Αἰθέρος· Ἀλκαῖος Ἴριδος καὶ Ζεφύρου· Σαπφῶ Ἀφροδίτης καὶ Οὐρανοῦ· καὶ ἄλλοι ἄλλων.
(Acus. frag. 6c Fowler = *Schol. Theoc.* 13.1/2c)

(Theocritus) is uncertain of whom he should name Eros to be the child. For Hesiod (says he is the child of) Chaos and Earth, and Simonides of Ares and Aphrodite, and Acusilaus, of Night and Aither, and Alcaeus, of Iris and Zephyr, and Sappho, of Aphrodite and Heaven, and others mention other parents. (tr. Toye, slightly adapted)

As a result, we are provided with three texts transmitting Acusilaus' cosmology which, however, diverge from and contradict one another. According to Plato, Acusilaus agrees with Hesiod's cosmology (and so makes Chaos a first principle, followed by Gaia and Eros); according to the Neoplatonist Damascius, Acusilaus' Chaos is followed by Erebus and Night, progenitors of Aither, Eros and Metis, who give birth to a large number of other gods; finally, according to the scholiast to Theocritus (conventionally identified with Theon of Alexandria),¹⁵ Acusilaus' Eros is son of Night and Aither. In other words, we have three testimonies for Acusilaus providing three different genealogies of Eros.

In order to reconstruct a coherent picture of Acusilaus' cosmogonic thought, the point of departure of my *Quellenforschung* will be the last of the aforementioned texts (Acus. fr. 6c Fowler = *Schol. Theoc.* 13.1/2c). The fact that the scholiast to Theocritus, or his source the grammarian Theon of Alexandria, has Hesiod's Eros born of Chaos and Gaia proves that this text is a far from reliable source. Indeed, according to the *Theogony*, Eros was not born from Chaos and Gaia but came into being after them (cf. Hes. *Theog.* 116–20: γένηται ... ἡδ' Ἔρος). Rejecting the error of the scholiast, however, is not enough. Besides identifying the mistake, we shall try to ferret out why such a mistake occurred. Such a procedure may eventually enable us to understand why the scholiast committed the mistake as well, when referring to Acusilaus' theogonic doctrine. The fact that Eros is said to be *the son of Chaos and Gaia* instead of emerging *after* Chaos and Gaia suggests that the

¹⁵ Cf. F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Erster Teil. Genealogie und Mythographie. Kommentar. Nachträge (Leiden, 1957), 377; Toye (n. 9), commentary on fr. 6c.

scholiast, or rather his source, is making use of a catalogue, or a catalogue-like source, where the gods' names were probably listed one after the other (a sort of *Zitatennest*). This has led the scholiast to think that Hesiod's Eros is a descendant of Chaos and Gaia, the names of these two gods being mentioned in this order in the *Theogony*. As for Acusilaus, Eros appeared in such a list or catalogue *after* Night and Aither, prompting the scholiast to take Eros as the *son* of these two divinities.¹⁶

Accordingly, thanks to the mistake committed by the scholiast (or by Theon of Alexandria himself?), Damascius' testimony of Acusilaus' genealogy (= Acus. fr. 6b) gains trustworthiness: Eros, along with Aither and Metis, is the son of Erebus and Night. Notwithstanding its late character (fifth and sixth centuries C.E.), and its Neoplatonist additions, Damascius' *De principiis* should prevail in a reconstruction of Acusilaus' cosmology. Damascius' main source, the survey of early theogonic doctrines of the Peripatetic philosopher Eudemos of Rhodes, is reliable, as scholarship on this disciple of Aristotle has widely acknowledged.¹⁷ On the other hand, Eros' descent as son of Night and Erebus is documented outside the archaic tradition and is well known to Hellenistic literature (cf. Antag. p. 120 Powell = Diog.Laert. 4.26).¹⁸

However, scholars discussing Eudemos' survey and translators of Damascius' *De principiis* have widely misunderstood, and mistranslated, a brief (yet remarkably significant) passage in the last part of the paragraph devoted to Acusilaus' theological doctrines.¹⁹ A close reading shows that the words *παράγει δὲ ἐπὶ τούτοις ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν καὶ ἄλλων θεῶν πολλὴν ἀριθμὸν* cannot be translated as 'and he introduces besides those coming from them (that is, from Aither, Eros and Metis) also a large number of other gods', thus meaning that Aither, Eros and Metis gave birth to a large number of gods.²⁰ The correct rendering should be something like 'besides these gods (that is Aither, Eros and Metis), he (Acusilaus) introduces a large number of other gods being born from the same divinities (that is, from

¹⁶ Cf. Toye (n. 9), commentary on fr. 6c: 'Perhaps in Akousilaos' theogony the birth of Eros was related immediately after the emergence of Aither, leading Theon to conclude that one was the offspring of the other, just as he had done in the case of Hesiod's account'; Schwabl (n. 1), 1464: 'Es bestätigt wohl, daß bei Akusilaos Nyx, Aither, Eros in dieser Reihenfolge genannt waren'. If we take into account Acus. fr. 6d Fowler (where *ἐκ Χάους* could mean either 'after' or 'from', i.e. son of), we can also understand how confusion could easily arise.

¹⁷ Cf. F. Wehrli, *Eudemos von Rhodos* (Basel and Stuttgart, 1969²), 122; G. Casadio, 'Eudemo di Rodi: un pioniere della storia delle religioni tra oriente e occidente', *WS* 112 (1999), 44. The most complete research on Damascius' use of Eudemos is G. Betegh, 'On Eudemos fr. 150 (Wehrli)', in I. Bodnár and W.W. Fortenbaugh (edd.), *Eudemos of Rhodes* (New Brunswick, 2002), 337–57. O. Gigon is too rigorous against Damascius, 'Akusilaos, Cicero und Varro', *WS* 79 (1966), 214: 'Damaskios ... ein leises Mißtrauen erregen muß, da dieser allem Anscheine nach nur diejenigen Informationen exzerpiert, die ihm zur Bestätigung seiner eigenen ontologischen Theoreme dienlich sind'. As for Damascius' respectful way of using his sources, see Betegh, 347–9.

¹⁸ Cf. P. Von der Mühl, 'Zu den Gedichten des Antagoras von Rhodos', *MH* 19 (1962), 31–2.

¹⁹ The sole exception (as far as I know) is Schwabl (n. 1), 1464 (following A.E.J. Holwerda, 'De Theogonia Orphica', *Mnemosyne* 22 [1894], 299).

²⁰ Tr. Toye (n. 9). Cf. the Budé translation (L.G. Westerink and J. Combès, *Damascius. Traité des premiers principes. Tome III. De la procession de l'unifié* [Paris 2002²]): 'A la suite de ceux-là, et à partir des mêmes, il [*sc.* Acusilaus] fait engendrer un grand nombre aussi d'autres dieux.' Cf. Betegh (n. 17), 345 n. 19: 'After these, from the same ones, he [*sc.* Acusilaus] introduces a great number of other gods.'

Erebus and Night)²¹. The critical phrase is ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν which refers to the same divinities mentioned above (Erebus and Night) with the words ἐκ δὲ τούτων φησὶ μιχθέντων and contrasts with ἐπὶ τούτοις which refers to Aither, Eros and Metis.

In other words, the cosmology we can attribute to Acusilaus with certainty by way of Damascius does not include a divine offspring engendered by Eros and his siblings, Aither and Metis. The great number of other gods (ἄλλων θεῶν πολὺν ἀριθμὸν) mentioned subsequently are descendants of Erebus and Night, like Aither, Eros and Metis, yet begotten after them. Hence, the originality of Acusilaus, which sets him apart from Hesiod but also from other ‘forerunners of philosophical cosmogony’,²² resides in tracing the successive divine generations from Erebus and Night. Thus, Acusilaus’ cosmogonic thought does not envisage a world where Eros leaves his seed; instead, he conceives a frightening cosmos where all of the gods derive from nocturnal and abyssal chasms.

BACK TO PLATO: EROS’ NON-GENERATING NATURE

In order to recover the coherence of Phaedrus’ speech on Eros’ genealogy, a textual variant will be produced and supported. It is a *uaria lectio* that has been neglected by the main Platonic manuscript tradition but is well documented by an indirect source, viz. the extracts from the Platonic *Symposium* in the *Eclogae* of Stobaeus. Aside from some minor variants (at least one of which has found its place in a modern edition of Plato),²³ Stobaeus (and some Platonic manuscripts) read the beginning of the passage as follows: γοναὶ γὰρ Ἐρωτος ‘offspring of Eros’ instead of γονῆς γὰρ Ἐρωτος ‘progenitors of Eros’.²⁴ The variant γοναὶ for γονῆς has been accepted by none of the modern editors of Plato. Yet it is defended by the most accredited editor of early mythographers and thus of Acusilaus of Argos, Robert Fowler, who embraced an old suggestion of Wilamowitz.²⁵ Indeed, the reading γοναὶ attested by Stobaeus, being the *lectio difficilior*, ought to prevail against γονῆς, transmitted by most of the Platonic manuscripts.²⁶ This new

²¹ As Betegh aptly points out, when Damascius reaches the level of the third component of the second triad, the intelligible intellect, he stops his own exposition of the theogony, but adds that further generations followed in his source; cf. Betegh (n. 17), 345.

²² I am borrowing this phrase from the title of the first section of the book by Kirk and Raven on the Presocratics (cf. Kirk–Raven–Schofield, n. 14).

²³ See e.g. Dover (n. 1), 91.

²⁴ See Stob. 1.9.12; cf. I/115, ed. Wachsmuth and Hense. Although the recent editions of the *Symposium* do not account for this *lectio* in their critical apparatuses, according to some Platonic editions of the nineteenth century some MSS record the variant γοναὶ, too; cf. F. Ast, *Platonis Symposium et Alcibiades Primus* (Landshut, 1819), 211: ‘Cod. Paris. et Stob. γοναὶ’; I. Bekker, *Platonis Scripta Graece Omnia* (London, 1826), 5.18–19; O. Jahn, *Platonis Symposium* (Bonn, 1875), 49; Bury (n. 1), 22: ‘γοναὶ Stob., vulg.’.

²⁵ R.L. Fowler, *Early Greek Mythography. I. Texts* (Oxford and New York, 2000), 5. Cf. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Platon. Beilagen und Textkritik* (Dublin and Zurich, 1969 [orig. 1919]), 169 n. 2. However, Wilamowitz takes γοναὶ as ‘Entstehungs-Geburtsgeschichte’, that is to say, his interpretation does not differ from the current one. But see the main meanings of γονή in LSJ: ‘offspring, οἱ οὖν τι παίδων γ. γένετο κρειόντων II. 24.539 ... children ... fruits of the earth ... race, stock, family, A.Ag.1565 (lyr.); ὃ γονῆ γενναίε S. OT 1469’.

²⁶ The form γοναὶ is *difficilior*, γονῆς being a trivialization, inasmuch as the context is talking about Eros being *πρεσβύτατος*, which is most commonly taken as ‘the most ancient’. The meaning here, however, is ‘most prominent, important’. See next footnote.

interpretation of Phaedrus' words enables us to discern the link that unites Hesiod and Acusilaus, as observed by Plato ('*Ἡσιόδῳ δὲ καὶ Ἀκουσίλειος ὁμολογεῖ*), namely the fact that both authors agree that Eros lacks offspring (for Acusilaus, see previous section). Moreover, it helps us to understand why Aristotle did not include any reference to Acusilaus in the *Metaphysics* passage discussed above. In the survey of the 'Presocratic' philosophers, he mentions Hesiod and Parmenides as the first authors to posit Eros as the first principle (*ἐν τοῖς οὖσι ... ἀρχήν*) and thus the cause (*ἐν τοῖς οὖσι ... αἰτίαν*) of moving and combining things. Understandably enough, Acusilaus' cosmological concepts, including the genealogy of Eros, did not suit the convenience of the arguments outlined here by Aristotle.

In other words, this minor textual choice (*γοναί* for *γονῆς*) compels one to read the passage in question afresh and to attempt another interpretation of it, which may provide directions for a new interpretation of Phaedrus' speech in the *Symposium*. Indeed, irrespective of what Eros' origins might have been, Eros did not have descendants, according to Phaedrus' argument, neither were they recorded by any layman or poet (which is strictly true). Everything now falls into place. Besides elucidating Acusilaus' puzzling reference, this new reading allows us to resolve the inconsistencies in the first speech of the *Symposium* noticed above: on the one hand, Phaedrus did not mistakenly neglect the plethora of genealogies for Eros already existing in the Archaic period. On the other hand, the Hesiodic and Parmenidean cosmogonic notions referred to by Phaedrus, that insist on the elementary primordially of Eros but do not include any progeny of this god, turn out to be appropriate to the perspective of Phaedrus' Eros.

Accordingly, in Phaedrus' argument, the characterization of Eros as *πρεσβύτατος* is to be taken as 'the most respectful' or 'the most prominent', rather than as 'the eldest' among the gods. I admit that the term *πρεσβύτατος* is used somewhat ambiguously by Plato in the *Symposium*, as another passage later in the dialogue shows. When challenging Phaedrus' views about Eros, Alcibiades refers to the god as *ἀρχαιότερος* and to his deeds as *τὰ παλαιὰ πράγματα* (*Symp.* 195b–c), thus astutely interpreting *πρεσβύτατος* as 'the eldest' in order to argue for his own view of Eros as *νεώτατον θεῶν*. I contend, however, that in the context of Phaedrus' speech, as in other passages in Plato's work, the meaning is not 'the eldest' but 'the most venerable', as ancient grammarians did not fail to recognize.²⁷ If the value of this meaning is acceptable, still another embarrassing line of argument in Phaedrus' *logos* recovers its sense. Indeed, at the very end of the passage in question, Phaedrus draws the conclusion that the beneficence of Eros is in direct proportion with his *πρεσβεία* (*πρεσβύτατος δὲ ὢν μεγίστων ἀγαθῶν ἡμῖν αἰτίος ἔστιν*). This reasoning is cogent if *πρεσβύτατος* is taken as 'the most prominent'.²⁸

²⁷ See Poll. 2.12: *καὶ πρεσβεύειν τὸ προτιμᾶν παρὰ Πλάτωνι, καὶ τὸ 'οὐδὲν ἔστι πρεσβύτερον' ἀντὶ τοῦ οὐδὲν τιμώτερον*. For *πρέσβυς* as 'prominent, important', see LSJ⁹, s.v. *πρέσβυς* (I.2). Cf. also Classen (n. 8), 177. Another example in the *Symposium*: *ἐμοὶ μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲν ἔστι πρεσβύτερον τοῦ ὡς ὅτι βέλτιστον ἐμὲ γενέσθαι* (*Symp.* 218d). The same goes for *πρεσβεύω* (*Symp.* 186b: *ἄρξομαι δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἰατρικῆς λέγων, ἵνα καὶ πρεσβεύωμεν τὴν τέχνην*; 188c: *ἐὰν μὴ τις τῷ κοσμίῳ Ἐρωτι χαρίζηται μηδὲ τιμᾶ τε αὐτὸν καὶ πρεσβεύῃ ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ*). Further instances in other authors: Thuc. 4.61; Hdt. 5.63; Soph. *OT* 1365; Acus. fr. 1 Fowler.

²⁸ See C. Schmelzer, *Symposion* (Berlin, 1882), 17: 'Unreif ist dann der Übergang der Einleitung zur Ausführung: *πρεσβύτατος δὲ ὢν μεγίστων ἀγαθῶν αἰτίος ἔστιν*, weil ihm das logische Band fehlt'; Bury (n. 1), 24: 'The partic. [*sc. ὢν*] gives the impression of a causal connexion – as if beneficence must be in direct proportion to antiquity!'

To sum up, in Phaedrus' argument, Eros' glory and honour reside in the fact that he did not bring forth a child. This notion fits with Phaedrus' speech in the dialogue, as he is responsible for introducing, as the *πατήρ τοῦ λόγου*, one of the most pervasive problems in the *Symposium*: 'the significance of pederastic or nongenerating Eros'.²⁹

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²⁹ Cf. Rosen (n. 13), 44. For spiritual pregnancies in the *Symposium* (Diotima's speech), see Morrison (n. 6), 51–5; E.E. Pender, 'Spiritual pregnancy in Plato's *Symposium*', *CQ* 42 (1992), 72–86.