

The Judgment of Paris

"Zeus is said to have invited to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis all the gods except Eris, or Discord. When she came later and was not admitted to the banquet, she threw an apple through the door, saying that the fairest should take it.

Hera, Aphrodite, and Athene claimed the beauty prize for themselves. A huge argument broke out among them. Zeus ordered Hermes to take them to Mt Ida to Paris Alexander and order him to judge. Hera promised him, if he ruled in her favour, that he would rule all the lands and dominate the rest in wealth; Athena, if she left the winner, that he would be the strongest among mortals and know every skill; Aphrodite, however, promised that he would marry Helen, daughter of Tyndareus, the most beautiful woman in the world.

Paris preferred this last gift to the previous ones and ruled Aphrodite was the fairest. Because of this, Hera and Athena were angry with the Trojans. Alexander, at the prompting of Aphrodite, took Helen from his host Menelaus from Lacedaemon to Troy, and married her."

Pseudo-Hyginus, *Fabulae* 92 (trans. Grant)

"Discord at a banquet of the gods threw a golden apple, and so a dispute about it arising among the goddesses." The three Goddesses in dispute were Athene, Hera and Aphrodite, who represent wisdom, rulership and beauty respectively: they thus appeal to the threefold nature of the soul which directs its energies towards reason (in its widest sense), anger (or the ordinative power) and desire. Now Paris, although a prince of the "towering Troy", is also a shepherd, and thus represents the rational soul in its terrestrial state – a creature whose essential station is royal but who finds itself in the fields of time obliged to care for the outward things of earth. Sallust continues, "The Goddesses were sent by Zeus to take the judgement of Paris, who, charmed with the beauty of Aphrodite, gave her the apple in preference to the rest. For in this fable the banquet denotes the super-mundane powers of the gods; and on this account they subsist in conjunction with each other: but the golden apple denotes the world, which, on account of its composition from contrary natures, is not improperly said to be thrown by Discord, or strife. But again, since different gifts are imparted to the world by different gods, they appear to contest with each other for the apple. And a soul living according to sense, (for this is Paris), not perceiving other powers in the universe, asserts that the contended apple subsists alone through the beauty of Aphrodite."

Sallust, *On the Gods and the World*, ch. 4

Proclus, in his *Scholium on the Republic*, says, "Paris also is said to have been appointed a judge of Athena, Hera and Aphrodite; and that of three lives which were proposed

to him, he chose the amatory life: and this not with prudence, but recurring to apparent beauty, and pursuing the image of that beauty which is intelligible. For he who is truly amatory, taking intellect and prudence for his guides, and with these contemplating both true and apparent beauty, is no less the votary of Athena than of Aphrodite. But he who alone pursues the amatory form of life by itself, and this accompanied with passion, deserts true beauty, but through folly and luxury leaps to the image of beauty, lies about it in a fallen condition, and does not attain to a perfection adapted to an amatory character. For he who is truly amatory and studious of Aphrodite, is led to divine beauty, and looks down upon all that is beautiful in the regions of sense."

Hermeas in his *Commentary on the Phaedrus* writes, "By Ilion (Troy) we must understand the generated and material place, which is so denominated from *mud* (ἰλον, *ilun*) *matter* (ὕλην, *hyle*) and in which there are war and sedition. But the Trojans are material forms, and all the lives which subsist about bodies. Hence also the Trojans are called *genuine* (ἰθαγενεῖς *ithageneis*). For all the lives which subsist about bodies, and irrational souls, are favourable and attentive to their proper matter. On the contrary, the Greeks are rational souls, coming from Greece, *i.e.* from the intelligible into matter. Hence the Greeks are called *foreigners*, (ἐπηλυδεις *epelydes*), and vanquish the Trojans, as being of a superior order. But they fight with each other about the image of Helen, as the poet says

Around the phantom, Greeks and Trojans fight. (Iliad V, 451)

Helen signifying intelligible beauty, being a certain *vessel* (ἑλενον τις ουσια – *helenon tis ousa*), attracting to itself intellect. An efflux therefore of this intelligible beauty is imparted to matter through Aphrodite; and about this efflux of beauty the Greeks fight with the Trojans (*i.e.* rational with irrational lives). And those indeed, that oppose and vanquish matter return to the intelligible world, which is their true country; but those who do not, as is the case with the multitude, are bound to matter. As therefore the prophet in the tenth book of the *Republic*, previously to the descent of souls, announces to them how they may return (to their pristine felicity) according to periods of a thousand and ten thousand years; thus also Calchas predicts to the Greeks their return in ten years, the number ten being a symbol of a perfect (or complete) period. And as in the lives of souls some are elevated through philosophy, others through the amatory art, and others through the royal and warlike disciplines; so with respect to the Greeks, some act with rectitude through prudence, but others through war or love, and their return is different [according to their different pursuits]."