HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Frederic Will, Ph.D.

Aeschines (389 B.C.-314 B.C.)

Aeschines, whose life span overlaps that of Plato and Aristotle, belongs fully to the fourth century, and to a cultural environment which is no longer the fresh first blossom of *polis* society, such as we experience it in the great age of drama and the Parthenon, but of a new age of internal politics, growing multiculturalism, and naked ambition with great talent to back it up. Aeschines entered this eristic cultural milieu modestly, as the son of a school teacher who provided him the model of industry and commitment, then served with honor on the military front, eventually finding himself drawn into politics, where the challenges and rewards of the society were lodged, and in later life—the story is a long one--founded a school of rhetoric and oratory on the island of Rhodes. The chief geopolitical issue facing the Athenians of the time, as well as the Spartans and other Greek city states, was how to control the rising power of Philip of Macedon, the Father of Alexander the Great, and himself a candidate for hegemony over the whole of Hellas. Among the rival political candidates for attention in the Athenian polity were Aeschines and his more famous opponent, the orator Demosthenes. As it turned out, the efforts of Aeschines, to attack one of Demosthenes' allies and friends, Timarchus, turned into one of the most famous speeches left to us from Aeschines, and, incidentally, a fascinating glimpse into one view of pederasty, a practice Plato had defended with a special subtlety, but which Aeschines abhorred. The following passage gives the flavor of an Aeschinean attack:

See now, fellow citizens, how unlike to Timarchus were Solon and those men of old whom I mentioned a moment ago. They were too modest to speak with the arm outside the cloak, but this man not long ago, yes, only the other day, in an assembly of the people threw off his cloak and leaped about like a gymnast, half naked, his body so reduced and befouled through drunkenness and lewdness that right-minded men, at least, covered their eyes, being ashamed for the city, that we should let such men as he be our advisers.

Aeschines's assault on Timarchus turned the tide, and drove the man into exile.