

# interpretation

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*Volume 15 Number 1*

- 3 Harry V. Jaffa Equality, Liberty, Wisdom, Morality and Consent in the Idea of Political Freedom
- 29 John C. Koritansky Socratic Rhetoric and Socratic Wisdom in Plato's *Phaedrus*
- 55 James C. Leake Tacitus' Teaching and the Decline of Liberty at Rome (Preface, Introduction, and Chapters 1 and 2)
- Discussion*
- 97 Pamela K. Jensen The Moral Foundations of the American Republic
- 129 Will Morrisey Delimiting Philosophy
- 143 *Book Reviews*

# interpretation

Volume 15 number 1

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# Socratic Rhetoric and Socratic Wisdom in Plato's *Phaedrus*

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In his much discussed "Introduction" to his edition of Leo Strauss' *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, Thomas Pangle raises the following question: "To what extent was the *core* of Socratic philosophizing affected by the Socratic turn?"<sup>1</sup> The question refers to Socrates' orientation towards human and especially political matters. Is Socrates' concern with human themes and human beings a concession dictated by the necessity of preserving conventional life and philosophy from the danger they pose to each other, and so is it essentially a casting of philosophy into a new rhetorical posture; or alternatively, does Socrates' political philosophizing indicate his discovery that human being is the center or the key to the structure of the whole? It is certainly understandable that Pangle should confess that he cannot supply an answer to this difficult question, nor can he show there to be a succinct and final answer in Strauss' Platonic writings. What Pangle offers as "some heuristic reflections and tentative beginnings of answers . . ."<sup>2</sup> is plausible as far as it goes, but he is surely not being facetious in underscoring its provisional character and, therefore, that there is more to be said that may require recasting the whole issue. Pangle ventures Socrates came to understand (in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*) that however tentative or hypothetical philosophy might argue or wish itself to be, it could not escape a sort of dogmatism in its very rejection of the authority of transrational revelation. Philosophy must, at least, presume that the life independent of any particular revelation is not only seriously possible but best. Must this presumption not degenerate into a thin and querulous sort of faith? Pangle suggests that: "The choice to live as a philosopher ceases to be simply an act of faith or will if and only if it is a choice to live as a philosopher preoccupied with the serious examination of the phenomena and the arguments of faith: if and only if, that is, the philosopher never completely ceases engaging in conversational scrutiny of those who articulate most authoritatively and compellingly the claims of the faithful, and if and only if through that perscrutation he repeatedly shows to his own satisfaction and to that of others that he has, not a definitive, but a fuller account of the moral experiences to which the pious point as their most significant experiences."<sup>3</sup> The problem with this statement, though, is that, at least in Plato, we never see Socrates engaging in a serious examination of the arguments of faith, if serious means free

1. Strauss, Leo, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, "Introduction" by Thomas Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 17.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

of rhetorical ploy. The *Euthyphro* is the dialogue in which Socrates confronts a self-professed piety more directly than in any other dialogue, and yet in this example it is hardly the case that Euthyphro presents a serious challenge to the supremacy of philosophical life such that Socrates has to deal with it forthrightly. Here, as elsewhere, Socrates performs ironically, hiding his wisdom from someone not given to understanding it for himself. Where Socrates is being ironic, though, how does the fools' gold with which his interlocutor may be satisfied save Socrates from the accusation that his own wisdom may be a smug conceit?

Nor is it the case that Socrates is ironic or rhetorical in a pejorative sense only when he talks with disagreeable characters or when his dialogues are involuntary, to cite a distinction among the dialogues that Strauss considered a great importance. The *Phaedrus* is an outstanding example of a dialogue that is highly ironic and rhetorical although perfectly voluntary. Socrates talks down to Phaedrus and hides himself from him even though there is surely a genuine affection that passes between them. Whether with friends or opponents, Socrates is always ironical. What gives Plato's writing its permanently enigmatic, wonderful character is just that Socrates never drops his veil entirely; he never abandons the rhetorical posture that mediates the disjunction between himself and the nonphilosophers with whom he speaks. And in view of this fact we may restate the question about Socrates that Pangle raises as the question of the relationship between Socratic rhetoric and Socratic wisdom.

Anything we come to understand about Socratic rhetoric will have to be understood against the backdrop of Socrates' scathing critique of rhetoric as taught by the sophists which he develops in the *Gorgias*. There rhetoric is said by Socrates to be "no art"<sup>4</sup> because it is merely a set of techniques of manipulation unaccompanied by an understanding of why these techniques are effective on an auditor of a particular nature, or, relatedly, whether they are or are not good for that nature. Rhetoric is, then, a slavish tool; it suits Thrasymachus, whose view of statesmanship is revealed in the *Republic* to be a knack for soothing and stroking the great beast to which he is bound. For such bogus art to be desired and honored, it must fail to be understood in its own true character. Instead, the cleverness that goes with it is valued for itself; in the extreme case this cleverness can be confused with a wisdom that sets one free and its possession thought the greatest of all goods. Socrates knows that this confusion of wisdom and sophisticated cleverness presumes an omniscience of speech, and so, especially in the dialogues where Socrates is on the attack (or counterattack) like *Gorgias* or *Protagoras*, he proceeds to disabuse his opponent of that presumption by bringing home the relevance of brute fact.

If, however, the *Gorgias* gives the impression that a wise man will never engage in rhetoric, the *Phaedrus* may be said to present a qualified rehabilitation of it. Phaedrus is brought not to condemn rhetoric but to appreciate it in a new way.

4. *Gorgias*, 462b.

a way that involves a nod towards philosophy as a sort of culmination of the rhetorical art. On close inspection, though, it is highly problematical whether the rhetoric Socrates defends and engages in self-consciously in the *Phaedrus* contains any lessons or even intimations for teachers and practitioners other than Socrates himself. On the contrary, it appears that Socrates' rhetoric is like what he says of his prophecy—that it is just good enough for his own purposes. From the *Phaedrus* we probably do not learn anything of use to our own practice of rhetoric, nothing that compares with Aristotle's great text for instance, but we may learn what it is about Socrates that causes him to speak rhetorically.

A distinctive feature of the rhetoric of the *Phaedrus* that indicates its *essentially* Socratic character is that it prides itself for being oral and, so, superior to anything written. Socrates will deprecate written speeches by comparing them to the spoken word as “living and breathing,” inscribed on the soul of an actual hearer in a particular context. Can there be an independent art of rhetoric that could survive Socrates' deprecation of writing, though? It is hard to imagine rhetoric coming into its own except in connection with speeches being written down, to stand as monuments to the speech writer's craft. To be sure, Socrates' deprecation of writing is not intended by him to be thoroughly destructive of it. He says that writing speeches can be permitted if such writing is informed that it merely imitates the spoken word and remains inferior to it. We have to wonder, though, whether this somewhat niggardly concession to writing is adequate to the development of a genuine art of rhetoric.

An even more fundamental question, moreover, is whether what Socrates says about writing versus speaking is sound. Can it explain why Socrates' rhetoric is oral? Indeed, does Socrates really understand this whole issue after all? In the background of the writing theme, of course, is the baffling but tempting question of the relationship between Socrates and Plato himself; and I will try to bring the thoughts in this paper to their conclusion by offering a statement on just this issue.

What sort of attraction can *Phaedrus* hold for Socrates? The impression we get of him from the dialogue that bears his name is consistent with the one we get from the *Symposium*, where he also appears in a role just short of a major character's. There he is the one who recommends and initiates the contest among speeches on love. His own contribution, though, is somewhat weak and, moreover, fails his purpose since he ends up by praising the self-sacrifice of Achilles, which was commanded by his sense of honor, as greater than the self-sacrifice of Patroclus, which was animated by his love for Achilles. We learn that *Phaedrus* cannot finally acknowledge the supreme value or power of love. He is too sober for that. This, of course, does not make him brutish or insensitive to beautiful things. On the contrary, his tastes are elevated and urbane; he is especially enamored of brilliant speech. *Phaedrus* is a person of cheerful, dispassionate urbanity. His very name suggests a sort of brightness that goes along with the kindredness between him and the intellectuals and helps explain their fondness for him. He is

a fellow traveler among the sophists but not a highly combative one and he is well disposed towards Socrates.<sup>5</sup>

In his own dialogue, Phaedrus brings a written speech which, after some playful coaxing, he reads to Socrates. There is an obvious consonance between the character of Phaedrus and this speech and the more we reflect on this feature of the dialogue the more significant and amazing it appears. We may note that if Socrates had wished to cross-examine the actual author of the speech, Lysias, he could have done so. Lysias is still in Athens while the conversation is going on. In a way, though, Phaedrus reflects the charm of that speech even more than does its author and for Phaedrus to read it rather than Lysias himself is consistent with its peculiar, brilliantly paradoxical thesis. That thesis, which we learn well before the speech itself is read, is that a youth is well advised to yield his favors to a nonlover rather than to a lover! Phaedrus presents this as a delightful bafflement; and so it is. Obviously, there is much that can be said in support of such a thesis about the good sense and discretion of a nonlover and so on, but the bafflement is in trying to understand the posture of one who advances the position. What is his aim? If he does not love, what does he care for its favors; if he loves, how can he hope to win by the unfavorable comparison? Must we necessarily attribute to one who makes such a speech a lack of candor then, as Socrates appears to do subsequently when he advances the same thesis? There is something close to a paradox on this score too, though. Can one hope to win love's favors on the basis of an indefinitely successful masquerade as a nonlover? Clearly, even to say this much is already to have been caught in a foolish attempt to explain a punch line. Phaedrus understands, and we do too, that the bafflement produced by the speech is itself its virtue and charm. The only aim of the author of this speech is to celebrate his own cleverness.<sup>6</sup>

We can see too that the clever paradox of Lysias' thesis is a sort of parody of the speech writer's craft. When one writes a speech that is to be delivered by another, he necessarily performs an effacement of himself. The speech abstracts from whatever motivates its author: fame, money, or whatever. In some sense this holds true for all forms of writing where, to address an impersonal audience, the author assumes an impersonality on his own part. Lysias' speech is in a playful way self-referential in that it makes reference, indirectly, to the self-effacement characteristic of speech writers. As for Phaedrus, his involvement in the paradox is shown by his coy pretense that he will recite the speech only because

5. Cf. R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 13. Stanley Rosen's paper, "The Non-lover in Plato's 'Phaedrus,'" is a kind of redemption of Phaedrus and a persuasive account of what attractions he might have for Socrates; *Man and World*, Vol. 2, No. 3, August 1969, esp. pp. 426 and 429.

6. Ronna Burger observes that Lysias' speech is unintelligible as a personal statement whereby the speaker is trying to persuade someone to accept the explicit thesis. The purpose of the speech can only be to exhibit the brilliance of the speaker's wit. Reasonably, she connects this with the question of the self-monumentalization of speech through the impersonal medium of writing. But does Burger think that Phaedrus is at all aware of Lysias' irony? cf. Ronna Burger, *Plato's "Phaedrus," a Defense of a Philosophical Art of Writing* (University of Alabama Press, 1980), esp. pp. 145-7, note 1.

Socrates tells him to and from imperfect memory. In fact, Socrates reveals that Phaedrus *wants* to recite the speech very much and he has no need to trust his memory since he has a copy of the speech hidden in his cloak. The reason for this is that, like anyone who performs a speech written for him, Phaedrus would like the speech to appear as his own and not simply parrot the author. In this particular case, however, it is not the thesis of the speech Phaedrus would own but rather the speech itself—its clever, baffling brilliance. In order to own the speech in this sense, Phaedrus tries to make it appear that he relies on his own “knowledge” to make up for whatever might have been the imperfection of his memory.

Socrates, of course, sees through all this and makes Phaedrus pay the price for trying to be coy. Nevertheless, Socrates remains intrigued and charmed; the prospect of hearing Phaedrus perform Lysias' speech is enough to draw Socrates out of his usual haunts in the city, out into the countryside where he and his friend can relax undisturbed. As the companions are walking about, looking for a place to sit and examine Lysias' speech, Socrates says something that goes a long way towards explaining why the whole environment is strange to him and why he finds it so hospitable at this moment. In response to Phaedrus' question whether he puts much stock in the old myths about gods and woodland nymphs and that sort of thing, Socrates says that he has not time for the business of explaining away such stories. Instead he must follow the inscription at Delphi and pursue the more urgent business of seeking to know himself.<sup>7</sup> Then, by way of illustration, he refers to a myth himself. Must Socrates understand himself as a monster, complex and furious like the fabled Typho; or is he of a gentler, simpler sort, to whom the gods grant a quieter life? “. εἴτε τι θηρίον τυγχάνω τυφῶνος πολυπλοκώτερον καὶ μᾶλλον ἐπιτεθύμμενον, εἴτε ἡμερώτερόν τε καὶ ἀπλούστερον ζῶον, θείας τινὸς καὶ ἀτύφου μοίρας φύτει μετέχον” (230a).<sup>8</sup> Amidst their placid, idyllic surroundings, Socrates' reference to the monster Typho is especially startling. It causes us to reflect: does not Socrates' self-examination—to discover whether he is like Typho or just what he is like—not *presume* some degree of detachment from the passions warring within him? Granted even this presumption may be questioned; still for the practical purpose of self-examination it seems necessary. Now Phaedrus represents just that detachment, that claim to some freedom from *ἔρως*, which Socrates cannot help but presume even for his own purpose of examining it. Although Socrates is at home in the city, where champions of this opinion or that engage in their continual contest to persuade him, he can be drawn out of the city by being drawn to

7. Socrates does not envy those who spend their energies explaining such myths away, but he is very much interested in what truth may be reflected mythically and in the phenomenon of mythical reflection itself. I accept Jacob Klein's explanation at this general point, which he gives in connection with a reference to this very passage of the *Phaedrus*. Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), pp. 170–1.

8. Where I have quoted the text of the dialogue directly, whether in Greek or in translation, I have relied on the Loeb edition. *Phaedrus* is in Vol. 1, transl. Harold North Fowler, ed. W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, London: Heinemann, 1960).

a sort of refuge from the passions that vie to rule and shape his very soul. In his innocent way, Phaedrus holds the charm for drawing Socrates out of himself, so to speak.

The atmosphere of the whole conversation between Socrates and Phaedrus is charged with a supernatural, magical quality. There is much reference to mythical figures and powers. Any complete account of the dialogue would certainly have to be extended to treat all of the references to the various sources of inspiration that seem to inhabit this enchanted place; of all of these, though, surely the most outstanding one is the shade tree where Socrates and Phaedrus settle to talk. The word for "shade tree" in Greek is *πλάτανος*, practically a homonym for Plato! This fact has invited many speculations as to its meaning and I mean to submit one of my own. With what is almost a mention of his own name as a power that graces and shades this conversation, Plato invites his readers' consideration as to how it relates to himself and his own art. Plato too is a "speech writer" in a certain sense. Moreover, by way of Plato's art, Socrates' speeches will be withdrawn from their original context, as Phaedrus and Socrates withdraw the speech of Lysias. Plato will provide for Socrates' speeches too to be examined in a place of cool leisure. So Plato *almost* breaks the spell of the dialogue; but not quite. Instead the scene of it takes on its strange, fairy tale quality. Plato has the characters sense that the setting is not quite real. It may be put that what Socrates senses without quite realizing it is the process of being transformed into Plato's *dramatis persona*.

With regard to its content, the speech of Lysias that Phaedrus reads to Socrates is straightforward and quite sensible. One should yield one's favors to a nonlover rather than to a lover because love takes one out of one's head. A lover is not able either to recognize or to pursue his own advantage or his beloved's sensibly and discretely. I submit that we ought not be so scandalized by the almost raw frankness of this thesis that we not consider whether it might not ultimately be the recommendation of wisdom. I believe that when Socrates' elaborate response to the thesis is considered in toto, we see that there is a sense in which he agrees with it. Viewed without blinking, Lysias' position is undoubtedly prosaic but not necessarily vulgar or swinish. Surely its appeal to Phaedrus is cerebral rather than visceral. Lysias preserved a human detachment from the animal desires he admits by means of his ironic and sophisticated wit. He recommends to everyone that we give play to our desires without yielding to the illusions that accompany them. To yield to desire on these terms is not really yielding; it is rather a kind of self-mastery, expressed in irony. So, Lysias' advice to the youth to yield to the one who does not love him is a sort of invitation that the youth join the free community of those who can master their hearts and enjoy more purely intellectual charms, while conceding to desire only its due.<sup>9</sup>

9. Most commentators share Hackforth's reaction of contempt and outrage at Lysias' speech. This reaction appears to fuel the debate about whether Plato is reiterating an actual speech of Lysias; or whether he is making it up. Thus Taylor argues that, "It would be self-stultifying to publish a severe criticism of a well-known author based on an imitation of him which the critic had composed for

Naturally, though, there is a problem and it can be identified without recourse to moralizing. Does Lysias know what he is talking about? His speech *almost* reduces love to desire—all that is real in love is desire. On the other hand, Lysias cannot simply equate love with desire since he wants to argue that the youth should submit to one who desires but does not love. If love is an illusion, still its effects are real, and evil. Lysias' speech cuts through the illusion of love but it leaves the fact of that illusion and its specific nature unaccounted for. The speech fails, then, precisely because it does not set forth what love *is*, either at the outset or anywhere. Subsequently, Socrates is careful to give a very explicit definition of love at the starting point of his speech and he identifies this as the cause of the superiority of his own efforts.

Socrates is either reluctant or he pretends to be reluctant to make any rejoinder to Lysias' speech. He appears to bait Phaedrus into compelling him to speak. Phaedrus does so by threatening never again to read a speech to Socrates unless he makes a speech of his own and he enforces his threat with an oath, “by *πλάτανος*.” It is only we readers, of course, who really understand this oath as identifying the divinity by whose power we have Socrates' speeches to read. Having no choice now but to comply with Phaedrus' demand, Socrates will make the attempt. Still, the task is not only difficult but somehow shameful. If he is to speak at all, it has to be from behind a veil, as if direct eye-contact between himself and Phaedrus would reduce Socrates to silence. There is doubtless something of flirtation about Socrates veiling his face for the first part of his speech, given the lighthearted, playful atmosphere of the whole scene. At the same time, though, it is a little eerie. While the veil is in place, we are not quite so sure just who is speaking or where the voice is coming from. Might it not really be some god or muse whose voice Phaedrus hears?

Not only does Socrates deliver his speech from behind a veil, and blame anyone but himself for its content, but he also invents a *dramatis persona* to speak it for him. Thus, we have a drama within a drama, with Socrates as both *persona* and author. The *persona* that Socrates invents is a lover of a beautiful youth who, in order to prosecute his love, had persuaded the youth that he did not love him and then cites the advantages of a nonlover. He begins from an explicit definition. Love is an irrational desire that overcomes the acquired opinion which prompts us to act rightly. Specifically, a lover will always try to make his beloved weaker than himself. He will deprive his beloved of every virtue and advantage, most especially of philosophy. Moreover, besides these very real harms, the beloved must also suffer distasteful embarrassments, such as the

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his own purposes      “Hackforth, on the other hand cannot believe that Plato could have subordinated his own powers of imitation to a slavish borrowing from someone else's pen. Hackforth's point is reasonable, and Taylor's argument is less compelling if we reject the judgment of the speech as a stupid and venal straw man. Rosen says it well that the prosaic sobriety of the speech prefigures the peak of sobriety that marks philosophy according to Plato. *Plato's "Phaedrus"* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 18; A. E. Taylor, *Plato: the Man and His Work* (New York: Meridian, 1960), p. 301; Rosen, *op. cit.*, p. 426.

wildly exaggerated praises together with reproaches from his lover, bad enough when the lover is sober but still worse when he is drunk. Then, when he has been ruined, the beloved eventually finds that love has cooled, and his former lover is disloyal and resentful of the promises he made before. It always has the same end because what love really wants is to devour its object. The speech then concludes with an epigram so sharp and clear that its ring echoes throughout the remainder of the whole dialogue.

“As the wolf loves the lamb, so the lover loves his love.”

ὡς λύκοι ἄρν ἀγαπῶς, ὡς παῖδα φιλοῦσιν ἐραστά (241d).

Might that not be the truth?

At the conclusion of his first speech, Socrates is anxious to make a hasty getaway. Phaedrus, of course, entreats Socrates to stay, if not to complete his speech then at least to talk over what has been said. Socrates yields to Phaedrus' request because his daimonion, which always holds him back from doing something that he ought not do, in this case prevents him from retreating. As he was speaking he had been somehow aware that what he was saying was wrong but he had kept on going as if carried through by momentum. Now, though, he can see just what it was that had threatened to unnerve him. Does Phaedrus not see that if Love is a god, as he certainly is,<sup>10</sup> then Socrates is guilty of blasphemy for what he said? No wonder Socrates' divine sign spoke; it wished to warn him against the sin of blasphemy. Now Socrates feels compelled to recant every iota of what he said. If he were not to do this, Socrates fears Love would punish him with blindness as Homer and Stesichorus were punished before. We learn in the sequel, in Socrates' recantation, why the loss of sight is the appropriate punishment for the blasphemy of love.<sup>11</sup>

When Socrates resumes his formal speech, he retains the device of speaking through a *persona*. He drops the veil, though, so that his *persona* is now his own bald face. If we recall here the sense in which Socrates is imitating Plato, we can draw a rather refined comparison. The difference between Socrates' veiled speech and the unveiled one is very much like the difference between Plato's narrated and his performed dialogues. That is, in all his dialogues Plato adopts a *persona*, almost always Socrates, however in only some of them, the performed ones, does he let it seem that he identifies with his own *persona*, as Socrates does in his second speech. Moreover, we can attribute the same reason for this differ-

10. That love is said to be a god in the *Phaedrus* marks an important difference between the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, where Socrates is so bold as to say the opposite. Can this difference be explained with reference to the context and apparent purpose of the two dialogues? Briefly and tentatively, in the *Symposium* Socrates poeticizes philosophy by making it appear to be an exquisite because infinite longing for an object set beyond even the reach of imagination. So the subordinate status of eros is stressed. In *Phaedrus*, philosophy is more relaxed—arduous and elevated but not tragic. It finds satisfaction. Here emerges a philosophic eros as a divinity who graces life. We have, though, no reason to think that either of these two different representations is Plato's more final view.

11. Cf. p. 40 below.

ence to Plato and Socrates. In the *Republic* Socrates says that poets ought to assume a directly imitative style only when what is being represented are the actions or speeches of a good man acting freely. When it is a bad man who acts, or when a good one acts under some evil compulsion (e.g., love), his actions should only be narrated so as not to tempt the hearer or reader to imitate them.<sup>12</sup> Does Socrates not say that the sentiments of the first part of his speech are not proper ones? Is that first *persona*, who masks his true feelings of love, not acting from an evil compulsion in a way that prevents him from being worthy of imitation? Clearly the thought that controls this question moves in a direction of seriousness beyond the playful self-effacement of Lysias' speech.

Strictly speaking, Socrates' second speech proceeds from the same beginning definition as his first one so that it may be said to be a second part or even a continuation of a single speech. Love is a sort of madness, but this would amount to a sufficient condemnation only if all madness were evil. In truth, though, there are forms of madness that come as a gift of the gods and through which good things come. Prophecy is an example, as is suggested by the etymological connection that Socrates alleges between the very words *μαντική* (prophecy) and *μανία* (madness). As for love, Socrates' second speech will show that it, too, is one of the good forms of madness, good for both lover and beloved.

The first step in the demonstration that love is a good sort of madness is a proof of the soul's immortality. That proof practically consists in the definition of the soul as the principle of self-motion from which all derived motions are derived. The argument that there must be such a first principle of motion to explain motion is not itself made explicit, perhaps for the reason that any denial of it would be quibbling. What is made explicit is that, as a *first* principle the soul's motion cannot be brought into motion by anything still prior; nor could its motion cease lest all that derives motion from it also cease and the universe grind to a halt. Whatever we may think of the validity of this argument, what is perhaps especially noteworthy is that it operates wholly on the level of abstract principle. We understand it without any recourse to imagination. By contrast, in what immediately follows and throughout the remainder of the speech, imagination will be relied on very heavily and self-consciously.<sup>13</sup>

In the next place, Socrates would like to describe the form (*ιδέα*) of the soul

12. *Republic* III, 396c,e.

13. The real question is not whether the argument presented here is intended to establish the immortality of the individual soul against the most searching inquiry. Nearly all commentators share the opinion that it cannot succeed at that. The question is why should different proofs appear in different dialogues, e.g., *Laws*, *Republic*, *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus*? I suggest that the form of the argument given in the *Phaedrus* underscores the necessity of the recourse to imagination when we move from the knowably true, cosmic principle of motion to any speculation about how that principle is participated in by an individual soul. Thomas Gould notes, with disappointment, that this proof, which asserts the self-sufficiency and primacy of the principle of motion, tends to obviate the need to refer to any *ἔργον* for the good as the cause of motion, à la the *Symposium*. So it does. Thomas Gould, *Platonic Love* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), p. 120.

but that would require a very long and divine speech. We can, however, cast an image of the soul by saying that it is like a team of winged horses and a chariot-*eer*. This image may hold for both gods and men but whereas the souls of the gods operate in smooth harmony, in men's souls one of the horses is unruly and his management takes much effort. If the image Socrates conjures is tempting, what probably makes it so more than anything else is our own familiarity with our own constantly necessary efforts of self-control.

What, though, of the embodiment of the soul and in what sense are besouled beings immortal or mortal? In the general sense of the term, soul has charge of everything that is soulless. When it enters body, that besouled body is, then, mortal—a living mortal being. Now Socrates becomes very insistent: it cannot be reasonably supposed that any besouled body is immortal, for the combination of body with soul *is* mortal being. If we think otherwise, it is because when we try to imagine soul, by itself and immortal, we cannot help but attribute a sort of body to it. In our notion of an immortal god, for example, we attribute body to that which, as immortal, must be disembodied. It is scarcely necessary to remind ourselves at this point that the image of the soul as a pair of winged horses and a charioteer is an instance of the error we commit when we try to imagine soul. Phaedrus, surely, is aware of this. Still, does he understand fully just what are the consequent defects of this error in the speech that follows?

As we hear Socrates' description of how the soul comes to mix with body we soar with him on an imaginary journey of incredible splendor that traces the orb of heaven. Zeus and the other gods lead the flight around heaven; we follow as well as we can, struggling all the while to manage our evil-natured horse. At the very summit of the orbit we stop for a while. The gods actually take a step beyond heaven, into a region that no poet has ever described and wherein reside the eternally real ideas. When those divine charioteers have beheld the ideas, they give their horses nourishment of nectar and ambrosia, so that in effect the wings of the soul itself are nourished by means of the intellectual vision of the ideas. Naturally, those of us weaker souls, whose teams are harder to manage, catch less of the wing-nourishing sight of the ideas and moreover as we press together in confusion and competition our wings are damaged. We then fall to earth, to assume a station in life that corresponds to the measure of reality that we beheld when still aloft.

The vision that Socrates has drawn is breathtaking. We expect that Phaedrus is swept up in it as we are ourselves. The language is so richly detailed and graphic that one wishes for the talent of a painter and we can hardly help but to depict the scene for ourselves on the canvas before our mind's eye. When we actually try to perform that picturing carefully though, there is a difficulty in how to render the ideas. On reflection, we see that that difficulty is insuperable. How could we picture "absolute justice and temperance and knowledge?" Socrates, moreover, has insisted that these ideas have no shape or color, that they are intangible and "visible" only to the mind. Just as when we imagine the soul, we

imagine the ideas only at the cost of a distortion of their true manner of being. Perhaps nowhere in Plato's writing is the invisibility and unimaginability of the ideas made so forcefully and so frustratingly clear as a limitation upon our ability to understand the structure of the whole.

When a mortal dies, if its soul has not grown new wings, it may go beneath the earth to a place of punishment or to some part of the heavens to live "in a manner worthy of the life they led in human form" (249b). Every thousand years these souls are reincarnated; they may move up or down the rank of types depending on how well they lived their former lives. Some may even descend into forms of beasts but only after the first incarnation. No less than ten thousand years, or ten incarnations, must elapse before the soul can grow new wings and rejoin the divine throng. The only exceptions are the genuine philosophers and those who are lovers of youth along with philosophy. "τοῦ φιλοσοφήσαυτος ἀδόλως ἢ παιδεραστήσαυτος μετὰ φιλοσοφίας" (249a). These may grow their wings in three thousand years.<sup>14</sup>

The philosophers and the philosophical lovers are, then, the most human of human beings.

For a human being must understand a general conception formed by collecting into a unity by means of reason the many perceptions of the senses; and this is a recollection of those things which our soul once beheld, when it journeyed with God and, lifting its vision above the things which we now say exist, rose up into real being. And therefore it is just that the mind of the philosopher only has wings, for he is always, so far as he is able, in communion through memory with those things the communion with which causes God to be divine. Now a man who employs such memories rightly is always being initiated into perfect mysteries and he alone becomes truly perfect; but since he separates himself from human interests and turns his attention toward the divine, he is rebuked by the vulgar, who consider him and do not know that he is inspired (249c,d)

Nearly every contemporary reader of Plato will recognize in this quotation the *ἀνάμνησις* thesis, which is also present in the dialogues *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and

14. DeVries says that the word "ἢ" in the phrase quoted here means "in other words," i.e., that the lover of youth along with philosophy are other words for the philosopher. But is that so? In the preceding paragraph the "ἢ" clearly means something like "or, alternatively," as in "lawful king *or* warlike ruler," or "politician *or* man of business," and so in the first case, "philosopher *or* lover of beauty *or* someone musical and loving." Immediately following this, when Socrates reflects on the fate of those who belong to the first rank of human types, he uses the formulation "philosopher *or* lover of youth along with philosophy" in what seems the same vein, i.e., admitting that these are not identical things but willing to treat them as equivocal for present purposes. The question is whether we ought to take literally the teaching of the myth that love for beautiful youth, ennobled by moderation and graced by the philosophical muse, *is* philosophy. Herman Sinaiko argues the affirmative, for he says that the *Phaedrus* both asserts and exemplifies how the highest sort of love and the highest sort of discourse, i.e., dialectics, are identical with one another as philosophy. To me it seems that this conclusion involves just the idolatrous overestimation of beauty indulged by Socrates' myth. DeVries, *Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969), pp. 144–5. Herman Sinaiko, *Love, Knowledge, and Discourse in Plato* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), ch. 2.

*Philebus*. What is especially noteworthy though, is that only here in the *Phaedrus* are we told not only that learning is a repossession of what we knew before but also that our knowledge *is* a memory of what we beheld in our minds beyond heaven. The philosopher is said to remain the realm of the ideas *through memory*. This is, as Jacob Klein says, to elevate memory to a mythical status and significance which Socrates does “somewhat apologetically.”<sup>15</sup> Do we understand why memory is paid this special tribute at this point? The general problem is this. Memory appears to involve an imagining of what is remembered, but how can there be a memory image of the ideas when they are colorless and shapeless and visible in no way but by *vouç*? The potential for this difficulty lies in the very idea of an idea as an “invisible look”; and it is unavoidable so long as we take sight to be the image of intellection, which image is itself very hard to avoid.

The *Phaedrus* will cast no further light on this problem. Instead, our attention is drawn to the one very special idea: beauty, which, although an invisible, still does have an amazing ability to do the impossible and present to vision an image of itself!

But beauty, as I said before, shone in brilliance among these visions; and since we came to earth we have found it shining most clearly through the clearest of our senses, though wisdom is not seen by it. (250d)

This earthly representation of beauty is not like a particular instance of, say, justice whereby we are put in mind of an invisible idea. When we see something beautiful, it is as if the invisible makes itself visible. Somehow, we *do* see it; we catch its image. When we recognize beauty, it naturally seems that it has performed its amazing power to image itself upon us before, i.e., it has left its mark on our memory. So the mythical enhancement of memory may be interpreted as the natural consequence of an idolatry of beauty. Socrates makes the enthusiasm of love for the beautiful intelligible as a sort of approximation or version of the philosopher’s recollection of the ideas. In this way the lover may be called “philosophical” and even share the happy fate of the genuine philosopher.

Love of the sort that is inspired by the sight of beauty is, of course pure and chaste. It wishes only to behold in the beloved object “a good image of beauty” (251a). By its capacity for such love the soul proves that its transworldly experience of true beauty and the other ideas was recent and that it has since remained relatively uncorrupted. Returning to the image of the soul as a charioteer and two horses, one noble and tame and the other unruly, we understand now that the darker, uglier horse represents the lust that is in all of us which sees in beauty only an opportunity for the perverse pleasure associated with body. This horse must be made to submit through brutal and violent force. The bit must be jerked from his teeth till his jaws are bloodied; he must be whipped till exhaustion and

15. Cf. Jacob Klein, *op. cit.*, p. 151, and line 250d of the *Phaedrus*.

fear of pain will prevent him from running away with the soul when he sees the beautiful beloved. The struggle to control this beast calls for the most heroic virtues, but it is worth it, for the price of the victory is the truest sort of possession of the beloved that it is possible to imagine. Once the lover has become moderate, he exhibits nothing but good will towards the beloved. In time that goodness will outweigh embarrassment or any other resistance in the beloved, for it is a law of all powerful fate "that evil can never be a friend to evil and that good must always be friend to good" (255b). The beloved cannot help but be astonished at the goodness of his lover's love. It is a form of purity that rivets his attention. By purifying the lover, love makes him beautiful and so the inspiring power of beauty can now work in the opposite direction. The beloved now loves. Just what he loves would be hard for him to say, for it is originally himself, his own beauty, that beautifies the other. The beloved is fixated on his lover *as if* he were another self.

From this point, the responsibility for success or failure is entirely the lover's. He is the only one who has self-awareness. He knows what has happened to him, having struggled heroically in the depth of his own soul against his darker, self-destructive animus. The beloved is innocent of that struggle. Whatever his lover requests or commands he interprets as an expression of the purity and goodness of his soul. He will yield to anything, scarcely knowing which of his two horses is which. Since the lover is good, he exercises his supreme responsibility properly and the two souls grow happy and strong. They may exist this way all their lives and at the end they will know that no divine madness nor any human discipline contributes to them any greater good than that of a tame and moderate love.

Finally, even if the lovers disappoint themselves a little and allow their wanton horses to indulge in what they consider bliss, still the lovers may reap a benefit for a love whose origin was chaste. Once such wanton acts are committed they will continue, but rarely and only on the basis of a reluctant concession to what the lovers will know to be their darker urges. "And at last, when they depart from the body, they are not winged, to be sure, but their wings have begun to grow, so that the madness of love brings them no small reward; for it is the law that those who have once begun their upward progress shall never again pass into darkness and journey under the earth, but shall live a happy life in the light as they journey together, and because of their love shall be alike in their plumage when they receive their wings" (256d). And so, Socrates makes a reluctant and moderate concession to the beast who wishes carnal pleasure. We understand why. Our dark horse needs no more than that, and we ought not give him more lest he run away with us. Such pleasures may be thought of as a gratuity that we may enjoy while looking the other way.

Socrates' magnificent performance has been a hymn to moderation. More exactly, it is a song of love as beautified by a heroic moderation which makes it more intense. The effect of the great speech is to nurture and also to tame the mad passion of love and at the same time to interpret it in such a way that the enthusi-

asms it releases may propel us to a realm of sublimity. For this reason, even if it were lifted from its context in the dialogue, it would be a good speech. As we encounter it in the context of the dialogue, however, we read it with more circumspection. Socrates paints a love in which the lovers would imitate and even approximate philosophy. Their communion would be through talk rather than touch or at least mostly so. What this requires is a form of idolatry; the lover must see his beloved as an image of the divinity and therefore not to be violated. Otherwise he would be confused, unable to tell which of *his* horses is which and, so, pathetically likely to give in to his darker one. However, if the lover does see his beloved as but an image of a distant perfection, will he still love? The answer is surely yes; such love is possible even if not entirely innocent. The love the *Phaedrus* celebrates is something over which we do have control even while we operate, partly, under its spell.

Socrates' speech not only describes and recommends the chaste, philosophical sort of love but it imitates it as well if from a certain distance. His own image of the soul as the winged horses and charioteer, which he confesses to be idolatrous, carries him and Phaedrus aloft as if on the wings of love; and we are along for the ride. In this sense, Socrates' great speech celebrates itself, its own charm. Do we not recognize this as a return to something like the clever conceit of Lysias' speech? Lysias had recommended to the youth that he yield to the non-lover, which is to make a sort of play out of love. Socrates says the youth should yield to the lover who masters his dark horse, so as to preserve the most beautiful of pretenses. No wonder that Phaedrus likes this speech, for like the first one he is able to read his own native disposition in it!

Finally, Socrates steps out of his *persona* and addresses himself directly to the god Eros. He prays that Eros will accept his recantation and not blind him; we are now able to understand the poetic sort of justice that Socrates at least claims to be fearing. For if one blasphemes love, does it not seem that he no longer deserves the faculty whereby he receives the true image his beloved casts on his soul? Socrates also asks that Eros excuse the poetical figures of his speech; those were put there for Phaedrus' sake and so they are not his fault! As for what Socrates, or Phaedrus, may have said earlier and has now been recanted, Lysias should be blamed. May Eros cause Lysias to turn to philosophy so his lover, Phaedrus, may become one of those who are lovers along with philosophy.

One of the outstanding features of the *Phaedrus* as a whole, at least superficially, is the way that it moves from the breathtaking sweep of the love speeches to the rather prosaic, pedestrian analysis of those speeches and of rhetoric in the latter part. If we find this odd, though, it makes it more striking that for Phaedrus nothing could be more appropriate or natural. The reason for this is the limitation in Phaedrus' character, which is also the limitation within which the whole dialogue operates. He finds it all too easy to assent to the proposition that the very reason for living for a free man consists in just the sort of talk in which he and Socrates are about to engage. This is what Socrates relied on and confirmed to

some extent by painting his picture of a sublime and supremely happy love as an almost purely intellectual affair. Although Phaedrus is oblivious, we should recognize that the love Socrates describes and seems to share with him is not only spiritualized and moderated but also denatured. If this were love it might be childless—a fact which seems either to escape Phaedrus' notice or not to bother him. Phaedrus' quasi-satisfaction with what I called the "idolatry" of Socrates' speech provides some ground for this denaturing of love. Is it not just by way of the conjuring of an imaginary "body" for the soul, which Socrates *warned* us not to take literally, that we can abstract from the requirements of the soul's natural embodiment?<sup>16</sup>

In the brief section that forms the transition between the love speeches and the analysis of rhetoric, Socrates encourages Phaedrus to continue the conversation in a way that, for us, underscores the abstract and limited character of the whole dialogue. One effect of Socrates' great speech is that Lysias and his whole craft of "speech-writing" has come to look so pale, so unserious, that Phaedrus cannot imagine his continuing it for long. Socrates, however, simply repudiates the suggestion that there is anything unserious about speech-writing itself; the whole question is whether it is to be done well or ill, and Socrates and Phaedrus should proceed to examine just that. Does Phaedrus not see that there is no difference between writing speeches and writing *laws*, which is of course a most serious business? Phaedrus assents. Our assent, however, must be withheld so long as we do not forget that, unlike a written speech, the law does not seek only to persuade. It issues commands and attaches sanctions that include, ultimately, life or death. In reality, our lives are governed by a mixture of persuasion and force. The structure and dramatic quality of the *Phaedrus* suggest, however, that for rhetoric to come into its own as an art built upon its own independent principles and not to be simply an aspect of, say, statesmanship, an abstraction from force and from body and from the brutal side of life is necessary. Socrates represents this idea almost comically very near the center of the dialogue, by his reference to the myth about the crickets, who have been chirping in the background of the whole conversation. To these beings the muses have granted the privilege of

16 Hackforth cannot believe that Plato condemns carnal, heterosexual relationships equally with such homosexual relationships. Perhaps not; the *Phaedrus*, however, makes *the* distinction that between carnal vs. spiritual love and treats the former as contemptible whether it be homosexual or heterosexual. All carnal sexual relations are condemned as unnatural! This should be seen as the price that is paid for the idolatry of beauty characteristic of spiritual love. It is a price that may be easier, normally, where the love is homosexual, and so it is more or less assumed that such love will be homosexual. The condescending concession to the darker horse later on can also be taken to illustrate the spirit in which one who loves nobly will engage in sexual activity with whichever sex. It is true that in the *Laws* (VII, 837c, 841d,e) the Athenian stranger reproves homosexual relations much more strictly than does Socrates here. Does this mean, as W. H. Thompson hopes, that Plato's great mind has finally "run itself clear of taint?" A more cautious explanation of the divergence is that Socrates does not have the freedom to lay down the law to Phaedrus that the Athenian stranger is able to assume. Cf. Hackforth, *op. cit.*, pp. 98 and 109; W. H. Thompson, *The "Phaedrus" of Plato* (New York: Arno, 1973), p. 163.

singing all day without ever needing food or drink. If Socrates and Phaedrus continue their leisured conversation, they may hope that the crickets will give a good account of them to the muses, probably Calliope or Urania, and they may even hope ultimately to enjoy a life as blessed as that of the chirping crickets themselves!<sup>17</sup>

Socrates initiates the next stage of the conversation by bringing up what appears to be a rather standard, even well-worn question among intellectuals. For someone to make a good speech, is it necessary for him to know the truth about the topic of the speech? Moreover, if rhetoricians do grant that one must know his subject, is there in fact anything else that one could conceivably need to know? Socrates then takes the position that a genuine knowledge of the truth about which we speak is both the necessary and sufficient condition for knowing how to speak well about it, provided we understand that such knowledge entails knowing how the subject is related to other things. For instance, genuine knowledge would include a knowledge of what things were similar but not identical. Now as rhetoric can be broadly but correctly defined as an art of leading the soul from one position to another by means of words, it follows that a rhetorician is one who knows what path to take, leading from one point to another nearly similar one. Rhetoric *is*, then, knowledge of the truth, as knowing what things are truly similar. Phaedrus answers all this with a cautious “maybe.” He appears to wonder whether he himself may have been led along a chain of similitudes to something opposite the truth.

Socrates suggests that what is needed is some example of what he is talking about. Phaedrus agrees enthusiastically; the preceding conversation has been too abstract to win his confidence. Lysias’ and Socrates’ speeches on love will serve. There is no doubt any longer that Lysias’ speech is inferior. What made it so, Socrates now explains, was that Lysias did not know what he was talking about. Upon rereading the opening of the speech Socrates and Phaedrus observe that Lysias did not bother to define the term “love” at the outset. It appears that Lysias did not even know that “love” is a highly problematical term and as such requires explicit clarification. Did Socrates define “love” at the beginning of his speech? God knows it; he made very much of it! Now Phaedrus understands; the grandeur and sweep of Socrates’ speech as versus Lysias’ is that he compelled himself to deal with the phenomenon comprehensively rather than settle for a review of a variety of its aspects.

We should observe the sophistry that Socrates is practicing on Phaedrus here. He has substituted “clear definition” for “knowledge” as the requisite beginning point for a persuasive speech. It is true that Lysias’ speech is inferior to Socrates’ because Lysias’ lacks a certain knowledge; what is less clear is whether Socrates’

17. Hackforth reports Frutinger’s contention that this and the myth of Theuth, encountered later in the dialogue, are the only wholly original myths in the Platonic corpus. *Op. cit.*, note 2, p. 118.

advantage is that he knows what love is, or rather, that he knows it to be in need of a clarifying definition. Phaedrus understands this only vaguely though. For him it is apparent only that Socrates has knowledge which enables him to lay down definitions on sticky points for his speech in a way that made it superior to Lysias'. Socrates' speech was, as it should be, like a living organism, each part of which was suited to the other and to the whole. Now that the importance of the organizing definition of a speech has been brought out so emphatically, however, we have to wonder whether Socrates in fact gave two speeches or only one? The way he puts it at this point it seems that he gave but one speech, but if it was one, how could it both blame and praise the same thing?<sup>18</sup> It, therefore, bears reexamination to see just how the speech passed from blame to praise. In a word, the answer to this question is that Socrates' speech was dialectical. Socrates then gives a very formal and precise statement of what that means, which has come to be recognized as one of the most authoritative accounts of the dialectical procedure in all of Plato's writing. Dialectics consists of two principles: "That of perceiving and bringing together in one idea the scattered particulars, that one may make clear by definition the particular thing which he wishes to explain" (266d), and the other is, "That of dividing things again where the natural joints are, and not trying to break any part, after the manner of a bad carver" (266e). Dialectics was the power whereby Socrates was able to conceive madness as one thing but divisible into parts; a left-hand and a right-hand side. By further subdividing each side he was able to arrive at a left-handed kind of love, which deserved censure, and also a right-handed love, worthy of praise. So, what seemed at first two speeches by Socrates are in fact the two sides of a single dialectical structure which he could expose just because of his own, godlike knowledge of dialectics.

Has Socrates in fact resolved the apparent contradiction in his speech by stipulating that he was talking about two different things—two separable parts of one larger whole? Phaedrus thinks he has, but we should see that the question remains. As Socrates himself says in carefully chosen language, everything depends upon the act of division that dialectics performs. Does it correspond to a natural division? In this case, is the distinction drawn between the two forms of love a *true* distinction? If not, then the marvelous clarity and consistency that pertained to each part of all that Socrates said would have derived from oversimplification. If we refuse to indulge this oversimplifying distinction, then the opposition between the two parts of Socrates' speech is a genuine ambiguity which must be due either to his inability to get to the truth about love, or to an ambiguity about the thing itself that speech can only reflect but not resolve.<sup>19</sup> We may,

18. Cf. p. 21 *supra.*; also Burger, *op. cit.*, pp. 78–8 and Sinaiko, *op. cit.*, pp. 24–5.

19. In *Love, Knowledge, and Discourse in Plato*, Herman Sinaiko argues that in the *Phaedrus* love is shown to be the principle of "ontological" wholeness, in a sense of that word he derives from Kurt Riesler. Love is the principle that resolves the problem of "the one and the many", albeit myste-

then, still wonder whether, when we are in the grip of love, if we are blessed, or cursed, or both. Finally, as to the dialectics, it appears to have the power Socrates claims for it only *if* it proceeds from the right starting points, but it may not provide or reveal those starting points.

Relatedly, is it the case that the rhetorical power of Socrates' speeches on love derived simply from his application of the dialectical method? That would be to ignore the charm of the very beautiful examples that he had recourse to, albeit with apology. We saw how much recourse to example is often necessary in speech, as Phaedrus was hardly able to follow Socrates' account of the connection between dialectics and rhetoric except when he could see the speeches on love as examples. Do we understand that the utility of examples is somehow a consequence of the failure of a pure dialectical reasoning to reach certain truth?<sup>20</sup>

As far as Phaedrus has understood him, Socrates appears to have shown that the true art of rhetoric consisted in dialectics. Dialectics appears so powerful that there does not seem to be room for anything else that could contribute to the persuasiveness of a speech. Nevertheless, Phaedrus cannot help but remember that there is something else. That something is hinted at in the techniques of effective speech taught by Thrasymachus and his ilk although they do not teach or understand the whole of it either. It is exemplified best in the great statesmen, like Pericles. We witness it especially in the majestically calm and authoritative manner with which we know that Pericles speaks about everything. This example is easy for Phaedrus to accept, but only with a question that probably would not have been present if the earlier argument about dialectics had not been made. Just what does Pericles know?

Socrates confesses that what sets Pericles above the teachers might not be an art at all. It might be a sort of loftiness of mind that is part of his natural disposition. If it is an art it must be of a broad and grand sort (a "liberal art" in the contemporary sense), such as is necessarily supplemented by leisurely speculation about cosmic questions. This is because rhetoric is probably very much like med-

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riously. Moreover, love is dialectical, and Sinaiko understands Socrates' treatment of love in his speech with two parts as illustrative of its essential nature. I have no quarrel with Sinaiko's attribution to Socrates of this insight into the mystery of wholeness, although it is not exclusively or originally Socratic. I am not persuaded, though, that this accounts for the specific features of the dialogue. Moreover, if it were Socrates' overall purpose to reveal the mystery of the whole, that would seem to trivialize the specific features of any dialogue or any act of concern for anything particular. Such a purpose might be better served by some form of mystical poetry. It is unlikely that any advance against this difficulty can be made unless one undertakes to grasp Socrates' purpose in the dialogue as a whole—and Sinaiko has eschewed that purpose. He tells us that he does not explain the relationship between the subjects of love and rhetoric which appear to divide the dialogue into two parts (note 28, pp. 298–9). He hints as to how he would address that issue insofar as "love" and "dialectics" are controvertible terms and that "rhetoric is clearly absorbed into dialectics in the second half of the dialogue." This last statement, though, is false. What in fact happens is that dialectics is shown to be but one ingredient of rhetoric.

20. Cf. *Statesman* (esp. 277d, 279a).

icine. It is a sort of ministering to the soul as medicine ministers to the body. The true rhetorician, therefore, would need to know the soul and not just in general, but also as it resides in a besouled individual. He would need to know how it is affected and how it produces its effects; if it is complex, he must know how its parts relate to one another. Since the besouled individuals occur in a variety of types, the rhetorician needs to know the complete catalogue of that variety together with the effects each may suffer and the causes it may produce. In other words, what must be known is precisely that great, divine discourse that Socrates was unable to provide in his speech about love and which necessitated the metaphor of the two winged horses and the charioteer! At this point, although he does not say that it is impossible, Socrates makes a very elaborate statement about the knowledge of psychology that the true rhetorician must possess that makes it seem numbingly difficult. Phaedrus responds as if with a blink; the task Socrates has outlined is “not small.”

Phaedrus can hardly help but to understate the enormity of the task Socrates has shown to be required by the art of rhetoric. It appears beyond human power, in fact. The earlier requirement for dialectics has not been dropped but is now supplemented by an exhaustive psychology; the full implication is that rhetoric is nothing less than the comprehensive wisdom for which the philosopher searches unendingly. Phaedrus has no more than an external sense of what that means, still the argument will probably affect his expectations and his demands somehow. To whatever extent he is affected, his enthusiasm for speech-making will now involve an enthusiasm for philosophy. (We may recall Socrates' prayer at the end of his speech on love that the god Love turn Lysias towards philosophy. If that were in fact to happen, it would very likely be by Phaedrus' agency, as a result of what has transpired since Socrates lifted his prayer.)

Phaedrus has been brought to see that a prodigious effort will be necessary to acquire the art of rhetoric as Socrates has outlined it; but can we imagine him actually undertaking that effort in the future? More likely he is, as we are, nearly paralyzed with a sense of awe at the magnitude of the task and is scarcely able to know just which step comes next. In that condition, will he not be vulnerable to the criticism that everything Socrates has said up to this point is just so much high-toned nonsense? For are there not in fact effective rhetoricians and teachers of rhetoric who know next to nothing of Socratic dialectics or his psychology? According to the Sophist Tisias, of whom Phaedrus has already made a careful study, there is no need for an effective speaker to have anything to do with truth, or good conduct, or any other sublime value. All that is necessary to affect what men believe is to know what is probable—what seems likely in general. Socrates reminds Phaedrus of this criticism as if to prepare him for his own conclusion which may set and seal the effect of the elaborate argument that they have just gone through.

In part, Socrates' response to Tisias is only a capsule summary of his earlier argument. He insists that what is probable is so because of its similarity to what

is true and so he who knows the truth will be best able to discover the persuasive similarities. Moreover, as the characters of one's hearers *do* differ, it is useful to know them and how they are variously affected by probabilities. Even Tisias' purposes will be better served the more one actually *knows*. To this recapitulation Socrates then adds the following, somewhat moralizing, sentiment. The real reason that we should make the effort Socrates has outlined is not just to be more effective among human beings, but so that our speech may be pleasing to the gods. This consideration, after all, is the only one worthy of a free man and it ought to guide all our conduct, speech included. The problem with what Socrates says here is that insofar as it is a summary, it reproduces the problem it is intended to answer. Fundamentally, what has never been cleared up is how dialectics can be insufficient and just how psychology corrects for it. Nevertheless, when this summary is put together with the reference to the gods, Phaedrus somehow understands. The explanation of this requires an understanding of the genuine movement that Phaedrus has undergone in this dialogue.

Phaedrus hears Socrates' account of the ingredients of rhetoric as a confirming description of his own recent experience of listening to Socrates' great speech on love. We understand that Phaedrus has heard that speech not only as an example of Socrates' rhetorical art but also as an account of *how* the truth charms and moves the soul; he appears now to have accepted that account almost literally. If it follows Socrates' prescription, speech can cast a true image upon the soul, like the way beauty casts an image of her true self upon the lover. Thus understood, true speech finds a metaphor in love, as we imagine true love will be characterized, for the most part, by speech. In this connection it is of course the case that the speech that is true will be most persuasive. Moreover, just as Socrates' speech exemplifies the persuasive power of the truth, it also exemplifies the fact that the speaker's most important concern is not with persuasiveness *per se*. The truth has been shown to be useful, but that cannot be its supreme value. Socrates had taken care to speak truth so as to make this speech acceptable to the god, Eros. It was that concern that compelled him to give his speech the ring of truth. Phaedrus accepts this too. We see how far he has come from the easygoing agnosticism he indicated at the beginning of the dialogue (229c). Socrates has made use of Phaedrus' instinct for beautiful speeches to impart to him something of piety. This will be his amulet against the degrading charm of speeches like Lysias' and against the sophisticated interpretation of rhetoric.

With Socrates' rejoinder to the argument he ascribes to Tisias, the *Phaedrus* reaches what appears to be a conclusion. And in fact, with regard to the subject of rhetoric and whether it can become a genuine art, nothing more will be said. Nevertheless, the dialogue continues, as if Socrates is suddenly remembering something that had dropped out of the conversation without their noticing. That subject is writing, the second part of the formula "speech-writing" that was to have been the object of examination. While strictly speaking this last section is but correlative to the formal teaching about rhetoric, it is related directly to the overarching question about the nature of *Socratic* rhetoric with which we began.

Socrates proceeds to make his point about writing by way of a myth. He relates that once long ago, in Egypt, a god named Theuth presented to the god king, Thamus, several of his inventions, intending them for the benefit of the king's people. Theuth had invented numbers and various mathematical sciences, games of chance and so on, and most especially, writing. Of writing Theuth said that it would make the Egyptians wise and would improve their memories. The wise king Thamus responded, however, that writing will enable men to rely less on their memories by being a substitute. The substitute, though, is inferior because men will mistake the mere appearance of knowledge and wisdom for the real things that once resided in their memories. Socrates does acknowledge that writing might be useful in reminding men of what they do remember, but this utility is likely to be offset by the temptation to think that we do not need to remember what is written down.

Hearing this, Phaedrus responds that Socrates is just making up a story out of whole cloth. Socrates answers with a surprisingly stern rebuke: if the moral rings true, what difference does it make from what source the story comes? The priests of Zeus say that the first words of prophecy spring from oak and rock, and yet the people of that time were content with them because they contained the truth, irrespective of who spoke them. Socrates continues, if anyone thinks that written words can ever be clear or certain in themselves, or have any use except to remind someone who already knows of what he knows, he must be unaware of the prophecy of Ammon, which says the contrary. There is clearly an irony in the way Socrates puts this insofar as the authority of prophecy to which Socrates refers in his myth, and which he relies on to deprecate writing shares the disadvantages of writing itself. That is, the prophecy is an impersonal pronouncement and it maintains a solemn silence beyond just the words pronounced! In other words, Socrates might as well be relying on sacred *text*. But what does Socrates' practical admission of such a reliance imply for his assertion of the primacy of spoken over written language? Are we not reminded by Socrates' mythical reference to the original language of the first prophets that all our language makes use of words which have or claim to have a meaning of their own irrespective of the personality of their speaker or hearer? This is not to repudiate Socrates' point that written language suffers a disadvantage in that it cannot make what may be necessary concessions to the peculiarities of its audience as can be made in a living conversation. It is, though, to point towards a complementary criticism of spoken language that insofar as it *is* language it aims towards formulations that will transcend the limitations of the conversants and be intelligible to any disinterested hearer or reader.

Although Phaedrus is initially put on his guard by Socrates' recourse to the myth of Theuth, he is all but oblivious to the incompleteness of Socrates' deprecation of writing that is both involved and also obfuscated by the myth. He finds it easy to accept Socrates' proposal that the difficulty with writing is that written words are like paintings, that is, they are frozen, silent, dead. If you try to cross-examine them they just say the same thing over and over, without explanation.

With only a little coaxing, Phaedrus supplies the obvious, and fantastic, contrast. What we actually remember is “the living and breathing words of him who knows, of which the written word may be justly called the image” (276a). Perhaps Phaedrus still feels Socrates’ words stirring within him as he says this! We see, though, that what he says involves the same overestimation of the faculty of memory to hold a “true image” that we observed before. The real problem is with words themselves and their inability to recapitulate perfectly the wordless dialogue of the mind with itself.

To summarize, the specific criticism of writing at the end of the *Phaedrus* appears to be the version of the more general criticism of image-making (cf. *Republic* X) which survives the somewhat spurious and mythical assertion of the “living and breathing” images of love and speech. Phaedrus has been being prepared for this all along and we can understand why. Socrates’ limited deprecation of writing is practically a sufficient guard against the sophistical interpretation of speech as self-monumentalizing of which Socrates has been laboring all along to disabuse Phaedrus. It is part of the process of transforming Phaedrus’ being attracted by brilliant and beautiful speeches into a near instinctive obedience to philosophy.

Although for these reasons it does seem that Socrates’ deprecation of writing at the conclusion of the *Phaedrus* is ironical and rhetorical, this judgment points to an obvious problem. Why, on this view, did Socrates in fact disdain the pen? Moreover, how can we understand Plato’s writing as a medium for Socrates’ wisdom? It seems unthinkable that Plato should be inferior to Socrates, that is to Plato’s Socrates, but does Plato, then, transcend a limitation from which his Socrates suffers and if so what limitation? And however those questions might be answered, why does Plato limit himself to writing Socratic dialogues almost exclusively? These issues, which are fundamental to the whole Platonic corpus, lie at the outermost reaches of the dialogue *Phaedrus*.

As for Socrates, surely it is not possible to explain Socrates’ refusal to write by way of reference to any presumed content of his theology or metaphysics. Even if there is something ineffably mysterious about the cosmos, there still might be a sort of writing that addressed itself to that mystery, if it were properly tentative and circumspect. If it were otherwise, we would have to pronounce against all philosophical writing on Socrates’ authority! Moreover, the thesis that what prevents Socrates from writing is his philosophy would always be attended by a comical difficulty. For how could someone formulate that thesis in a way that would be intelligible to a general audience without committing a version of the error it supposedly condemns? So, it appears we have to look to explain Socrates’ refusal to write to more incidental factors, i.e., things more idiosyncratic to Socrates’ personality. Now once we swallow the initial disappointment that we may well feel with this proposal, it may occur to us that the reason Socrates did not write is simply that he could not! Of course he was not illiterate, but it may be that Socrates lacked and knew that he lacked the fine craft of writ-

ing well about important and difficult things. In fact there is a hint in the *Phaedrus* that this is so. Towards the end Socrates mentions the name of Plato's actual rival, Isocrates, as someone who is very likely to develop the study of speech-writing to heights as yet unknown. I submit that for Socrates to mention anyone other than Plato himself in this connection, let alone Isocrates, does suggest that he actually was oblivious to the truly highest prospects for writing, and that therefore he had little grasp of the practice of literary art.<sup>21</sup> Regarding the whole corpus, do we not finally have to interpret Socrates' almost perfect silence and disinterest in Plato as not only a pleasant modesty on Plato's part but also a real shortcoming of Socrates?

Still, the foregoing speculation may be said to beg the question. Why did Socrates not correct for his inability to write? Must we not consider, in this connection, the possible relevance of Socrates' famous or notorious demonic voice of daimonion? To be sure, Socrates does not explain his refusal to write by way of reference to his daimonion; and that is because he presents an *argument* to the same effect which pertains to Phaedrus as well as himself. In view of the ironical and unsatisfactory character of that argument, though, we are driven back to the daimonion as the most outstanding, distinctive feature of Socrates' character. What are we to make of this dark and difficult subject? Are we to take it literally that Socrates hears something within himself that is not his own but alien and even unnatural? We are naturally inclined to suppose that Socrates' daimonion is somehow a metaphor; that he is referring to a peculiar quality or dimension of his own basic eros. The main thing that stands in the way, though, of that surmise is the description of the daimonion as issuing only negative commands, preventing Socrates from going into politics, for example. For how is it possible that a "thou shalt not" could function as an animating principle? Now on this point the example of the daimonion in the *Phaedrus*, noted earlier, is especially noteworthy. The daimonion prevented Socrates from *ceasing* to speak, at the point where he would have been guilty of blasphemy had he not continued. This makes it clear that the negative character of the daimonion is somewhat *pro forma*. And so, the daimonion does appear to be a mythical reference to something peculiar about Socrates' eros, something which is only hinted at by making it separate and negative.

If this makes sense, then I think we can be helped still further by recalling what was said about what attracts Socrates to Phaedrus. That is, Phaedrus offers Socrates the prospect of being drawn out of himself by participating in a suspension of his doubt about whether he is a victim of monstrous passions within. Socrates' need, though, is a general one, to which Phaedrus can supply only a partial answer. I am suggesting that Socrates' amazing insight into the souls of

21. This specific observation is Joseph Cropsey's, who presented it in a paper read before the American Political Science Association in 1976. Much of what follows is my attempt to follow up hints that were contained in that paper about the relationship between Socrates and Plato. This is not to accuse him, however, of being responsible.

those with whom he talks, and the enormous, erotic power that he has for other people, derives ultimately from a dependence he has upon others to help him overcome what otherwise would be a paralyzing doubt regarding the freedom and the authority of reason and mind. Socrates' universal doubt, his "knowledge of ignorance" is prevented from becoming a doubt of the wisdom of pursuing knowledge, and so reducing Socrates to torpor, only as Socrates is able to come alive with others, who do not have that doubt. In his dialogues, Socrates enters into a form of life represented by the other soul. Of course, he does not submit himself fully to the limitations of that other soul; rather he traces them out, he understands them *as* limitations. He learns each type of soul and more profoundly he learns how each actual soul and its form of life confirms the primacy of his own unanswerable need to know all there is to know. These reflections lead again to the thought that Socrates did not write because he could not. He lacked the self-containment and what is usually called self-motivation that any writer has to have. We might now square ourselves with Socrates' mythical language by saying that he might have been a writer, or a poet, or a statesman, or any of a number of things were it not for something demonic in him that would not allow his mind to wake and act except in the intimate company of another living soul. If all this is satisfactory, then it appears that a possible and likely explanation of the "Socratic turn" is the awakening of his demonic voice.

And what of Plato? If the foregoing speculations make sense then there is nothing that requires us to explain Plato's assumption of the pen Socrates disdained as a measure of a superiority of Plato's wisdom to Socrates', or an inferiority, or to any difference at all. Plato did not experience the daimonion; that remains Socrates' distinction. If that is true, though, how then was Plato able to overcome the potentially paralyzing doubt that Socrates experienced? The question naturally arises but it obviously cannot be settled in connection with the explication of a dialogue that is concerned primarily with Socrates' erotic rhetoric. The question is the still broader one of Plato's art. This much can be said: in Plato's case as in Socrates' it is not the love of wisdom itself that gives specific form to his way of life and mode of expression, nor could it be. To Plato we attribute some strength of will and an instinct for beauty, tempered and sharpened by a love he must have felt for Socrates and by the passion to avenge his unjust death with the most just punishment.<sup>22</sup>

22. Ronna Burger and Jacques Derrida have both looked to the *Phaedrus* as being important chiefly for what it has to say regarding writing and particularly Platonic writing. Burger thinks that, "The ideal meeting point defined by dialectics, as the convergence of two paths of . . . living speech and writing, is in fact represented by the Platonic dialogue itself." *Op. cit.*, p. 109. I would agree that Plato's art involves a self-conscious recognition of the incompleteness of writing and speaking but not that it represents both in a way that corrects for the incompleteness of each. Therefore, I do not find evidence for the view that Plato held his own writing to be more philosophical than, say, Aristotle's was to be.

In the ambiguity of the word *φάρμακον* (remedy, poison), which Plato uses to name writing in the opening scene of the *Phaedrus* (230c), Derrida finds a pretext to correct Socrates' subsequent sub-

Before he and Phaedrus depart the scene, Socrates lifts a prayer to the gods of the place. Earlier, while still imbued with the mania that seemed to bear him and us aloft, Socrates had prayed to Eros that he not be blinded for his blasphemy. Now he prays to Pan, by whose prosaic and earthy spirit erotic matters are *sometimes* viewed, especially when with a mind to the whole natural order within which human desires are to be explained. Socrates prays for moderation of his possessions and his desires, to be made beautiful on the inside and for there to be harmony between what is within and what is outside him. Maybe Socrates is still afraid that there might be something essentially unharmonious, Typhonic, about him, for against similar fears have we all not wished to be allowed to be just simply natural?

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ordination of writing to speaking. If I understand him, Derrida thinks that the opposition between speaking and writing in language is a matrix for the opposition between speaking and the ideas about which we would speak. The impossible dream Plato imparts to us of overcoming that opposition through a perfect and univocal speech is a version of his dream to write a perfectly faithful representation of the spoken word. However, this interpretation, if it is that, seems to give no heed to the absolute propriety of Socrates' speech such that Plato's writing might content itself to imitate it. Should Derrida not elucidate that propriety to understand what, for Plato at least, are the highest prospects as well as the limits of both speaking and writing? Jacques Derrida, *Plato's Pharmacy*, in *Dissemination*, Barbara Johnson, transl. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).