

5. The Unity of the *Phaedrus*

The Problem

The *Phaedrus* is described in ancient catalogues as an “ethical dialogue on the beautiful.” The dialogue is certainly ethical; and it is about *love*, principally as the desire for what is *beautiful*. But it is even more obviously about *rhetoric* (which is necessarily an “ethical topic”). We have to find the necessary link between Rhetoric and either love or beauty. It cannot be just chance that Phaidros has a thing about *love* as well as one about *speeches*.

But then again, the last third of the dialogue is about the method of philosophy. Plato wants to offer us a new conception of *dialectic*; and it is one that is no closer to *rhetoric* than his older conception was. Also *this* part of the discussion is all entwined with the problem of the relation between *written* and *spoken* word. This hardly seems to be necessary any more than the link between rhetoric and love.¹

Even the setting and incidentals are surprisingly heterogeneous: A quite eccentric variety of agencies are invoked for inspiration, or credited with providing it (Sappho and Anakreon with the cicada, along with the *daimonion*, the “gods of the place” — there is some ambiguity about who *they* are — and the Muses). Plato’s myths are more numerous and more various than usual — and in the view of many critics one of them overbalances the dialogue as a whole. Is this seeming farrago really an organic unity?

Towards a Solution

We must begin with the relatively uncontroversial assumption that the *Phaedrus* is later than both the *Republic* and the *Symposium*. Apart from the new concept of the dialectic, the echoes of the Myth of Er in the Palinode here seem to be decisive for the priority of the *Republic*; and the role of Phaidros himself seems to be decisive for that of the *Symposium* (compare *Sym* 177c with *Phdr* 257a).

Having said this, we can set out in its barest outline, the position that will be defended here: We shall maintain that the unitary topic of the dialogue is *rhetoric as a techne*. Scientific rhetoric is the art of leading the soul toward the truth. The innate urge of the soul towards truth is what Plato means by *love*. Thus any *rhetorical* treatment of the art of rhetoric must take the *form* of discoursing about love — the loves and hates of men are the *matter* of the *techne*.

The *means* of the *techne* are words and arguments (*logoi*). But these are also the means of another higher *techne*, the *techne* for the development of truth itself when the soul arrives at it, the *techne* of *dialectic*, which is the expression of the highest kind of love, *philosophia*, the love of wisdom. Dialectic is the art to which Rhetoric must hand the soul over when it is ready. (But of course, only the truly philosophic souls can ever make this transition.)

The way rhetoric uses words and arguments is essentially different from the way in which dialectic uses them. (The *techne* of Rhetoric itself as a theoretical study belongs to the lower reaches of Dialectic, but the first steps of Dialectic, which Plato gives us — the distinction of words into two classes, the penny-plain ones and the twopenny-colored ones — illustrates the contrast.) Rhetoric aims to give *fixity* to belief (to make everything penny-plain). Dialectic on the other hand begins with the recognition that *all* of our language is twopenny-colored. Thus for Rhetoric the written word of truth is the goal, the ideal; and the highest rhetorician is the lawgiver whose speeches are graven in stone (whereas for Dialectic the vision that cannot even be spoken remains the ideal).

There are two main types of Rhetoric, because there are two main types of soul to be led to the truth. There is rhetoric for those who are not capable of dialectic, and a different rhetoric for those who are. For those who cannot go on to the higher *techne*, the goal of rhetoric as defined above, is absolute. Their belief should be fixed in the truth, as the words of the lawgiver

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are graven in the stone. Sokrates' first speech exemplifies *this* kind of rhetoric. For those who are capable of dialectic, on the other hand, the lower art must achieve a transvaluation of its own highest values. They must go beyond the *reason* of the city and its laws, into the sphere of *madness*. The *Palinode* (the etymological suggestion of *turning back on one's road* here, is not accidental) describes this transvaluation. No doubt there are other subdivisions of these types, but Plato does not bother with them here.

Plato's psychology, so far as he spells it out, provides the ground for a *different* (even more fundamental) division: the division of rhetoric into *true* and *false*, *techne* and *empeiria*; and of love into right-hand and left-hand. There is not only rhetoric for those who *cannot* love wisdom; there is also rhetoric by those who *do not* love wisdom. The speech of "Lysias" exemplifies this kind of rhetoric — and it does so at the lowest limit since it exemplifies the *absolute* degradation of the kind of emotional relationship from which (in Plato's view) the impulse towards proper philosophy springs.

Between the *rhetor* (in the ordinary sense) and the lawgiver stands the poet. The mythmaker is the rhetorician whose special concern is with the twopenny-colored aspect of language. He ought to work under the control and guidance of the lawgiver — but usually he does not. He creates false images of the divine — Gorgons and titanic figures — on the model of the distorted emotions and lawless desires of unscientific rhetoric. Specifically, in this instance, he presents us with a shameless tale of Boreas and Oreithuia right next to the place which Sokrates, the paragon of true piety, identifies as sacred to Acheloos and the Nymphs. This River-God, like the Wind, is a flux-symbol: it is the Herakleitean River, just as the Wind is the Air of Anaximenes. Pan — who arrives later when the whole picture is before us — is a symbol of the One in the natural order, a cave-copy of Apollo, and hence an appropriate image for the task of rhetoric in the narrow sense (*below* poetry).

But myth, which *fixes* the values of the unenlightened, is also the instrument for the rhetorical transvaluation of values. All the future lovers of wisdom, as they struggle towards philosophy, are servants of the Muses, especially of Urania, the "heavenly one," and Kalliope, who reigns *beyond* the Heavens. In this aspect the aspirant to philosophy and his poetic mentors are *higher* than the lawgiver — at least in their function. They are on the way out of the Cave where the Lawgiver rules — but of course the *scientific* Lawgiver has already been outside the Cave himself.

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If all of these theses are true, then the unity of topic will be made out — I think — even though some things (e.g. the *daimonion* and the *cicadas*) still require to be woven into the fabric and there are a mass of things that remain to be said about *hubris* and *mania* and their subtypes.

One puzzle remains: the *arrangement* of the dialogue. What I have tried to give so far, is the synoptic view of the dialogue (as seen by the dialectician who has “collected” the topics, and put them into proper logical perspective). Can we now *divide* the dialogue properly? This is not difficult, for the order is that of the *techne* in action.ⁱⁱ But we must now deal with the rhetoric of it, step by step.

The Prologue

Phaidros has been listening to a discourse of the speech-writer Lysias. he has borrowed the text and studied it. Now he is about to go for his daily walk outside the City. As we know from the *Symposium*, he is a very serious person. He does not hold with drinking too much, and he follows the best medical advice about his bodily health. But as far as the health of his soul is concerned, he seems to think that everything *entertaining* is equally good. He is a great admirer of Lysias, whom he regards as “the ablest writer of our day” (228a); and he is delighted to have in his possession a speech that is not meant for a jury, but for the entertainment of a thoughtful audience, through the defense of a seeming paradox. A young man is to be persuaded that it is much better to gratify sexual desire without the complications produced by emotional commitment. It is *better not to be in love*.

Sokrates guesses at once that Phaidros has been *learning* the speech. Phaidros admits this, but he does not know it yet, so he can only give an outline in his own words. But Sokrates detects the manuscript under his cloak, and refuses to be put off with any substitute “when Lysias himself is present” (228e). Thus, at the very beginning, the written word is set up as the very self of the writer — and it is Sokrates, who will emerge as a bitter critic of written words, who adopts this view. Sokrates, who will hardly leave the City as a rule, and who claims that “trees and open country won’t teach me anything” (230d), is willing to walk to Megara with Phaidros, in order to hear the speech.

We should attend to the symbolism here. The conversation takes place *outside* the City, but not outside the Cave. The natural world has no *self* to be known. Sokrates is determined to

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“know himself” in obedience to the Oracle of Apollo. This means that he must know his own humanity (his “soul”) in its total range and extent — not just his particular, accidental “self.” But there is *no* self, until there is a linguistic expression of it. What is there in the human body, before we speak and write, is not the humanity that it is our task to know. A written *speech*, on the other hand, is at least part of the self that we need to know.

The Speech of Lysias

So they settle themselves in the first comfortable spot (apparently they do not walk far) — and Phaidros reads the speech. Probably Plato *wrote* it in imitation of Lysias. He lets Sokrates criticize it severely; but we must look for the virtues that will justify Phaidros’ admiration. Looked at as a *forensic* speech, it is not without merit. It begins with a clear statement of what the “non-lover” wants, and of the main reason for thinking that his petition is reasonable. “Love” is not *defined*; but the fact that “being in love” is a kind of madness is appealed to at once. “Being in love” is a *temporary madness*; and once it is over the lover is apt to regret everything that it has led him to do (except satisfy his desire — which is what he ought to regret).

Our speaker is highly “rational” — and rationality means to him, the calm calculation of one’s own best interest. He assumes that any “lover” will be like this, whenever he is in his “right mind.” But also, whenever he falls in love again, his old love will become a natural target of ill will. Anyone who reflects rationally will decide to gratify another rational person, and will choose the best that can be found. “Lovers” are *jealous*; whereas rational partners are quite willing to allow other friendships — indeed they will encourage other admirers (as witnesses to their own good taste).

The basis of rational, friendly, association is knowledge of character; so a non-loving admirer will always work to improve character. The rational friend is “the master of himself rather than the victim of love” (233bc). One must not be moved by the “destitution” of those who are in love; for it is not the poorest beggars whom one invites to dinner. It is those who can become lifelong friends and benefactors that one must seek. These are the people that a young man must associate with; and associations of this kind will be more discreet altogether. One should make a definite choice, and not be promiscuous, because discretion is essential.

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There are some flourishes in the speech that I have silently ignored as probable lies; and the promise of improvement and lifelong good will may be a mere pretense. For outright hypocrites certainly fall within the range of those who could commission and employ this speech. But then too, the sort of “lover” who is envisaged in the argument could equally be guilty of hypocrisy (though perhaps less consciously). So we ought to set that complaint aside. The clear implication that one ought to choose on the basis of lasting experience puts it out of court.

This speech, however, is rhetoric for those who are prisoners in the Cave; and it is not controlled morally by the *techne*. So we must expect to find an appeal to appearances in it; and we do. If you associate with someone who is just a friend, says the speaker, no one will think that you are doing anything morally dubious (232ab). Also Hackforth is right in seeing deliberate irony in the opposite claim that a friend will “do what is best rather than shine in the eyes of their neighbors” (232a). Finally, the claim that if “there can be no firm friendship save with a lover” then “we should not set store by sons, or fathers, or mothers” (232cd) is an evident sophism. The basic assumption of the speech — that there is nothing special and distinctive in the relation of lover and beloved — is clearly exposed here. As we shall see, the ignoring or concealing of necessary distinctions is the most important characteristic of rhetoric as a repertory of tricks.

The Speech of Sokrates

Phaidros claims that this speech of Lysias has everything. One could not make a *greater* speech on this topic (234e). Sokrates is therefore driven to say that he could make one with more and better arguments — though, of course, he would have to include some points made by Lysias. He has heard better arguments “from the fair Sappho maybe, or the wise Anacreon” (235c). These are rather odd authorities for this paradoxical theme; and the reference prepares us for the fact that Sokrates will only *pretend* not to be in love, when he makes his argument.

As a rule Sokrates refuses to make long speeches. But here his customary claim that he cannot do it, is revealed as a false pretense; Phaidros forces him to perform by threatening never to share any speeches in future if he does not. This is a prospect that he cannot face. (We should remember that he reads every *book* he can lay hands on.)

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His speech is not actually very much “greater” (bigger, longer) than that of “Lysias.” But that is important only to Phaidros. The new speech begins by discussing its own necessary order. If we are to decide between one who is in love and one who is not, says this deceitful lover, we must first know what love is. It is certainly a kind of desire, so we must distinguish between the instinctive desire for pleasure, and the learned desire for what is good. To desire what is good is temperance; simply desiring pleasure is *hubris*. There are many kinds of *hubris*; but the irrational desire that overpowers right conduct in pursuit of bodily beauty, is called *love*.

We shall eventually recognize the method called “Collection and Division” in the discussion of rhetoric near the end of the dialogue. But in this methodical approach we have to recognize first the procedure of a liberated philosopher operating in the Cave. The definition is deliberately biased, because only an *antirational* kind of desire is allowed to count. For a proper definition of love the dividing concepts of “temperance” and “*hubris*” must be moved down, because there is both rational, temperate, love and irrational, hybristic, love. It is perfectly in order for an *educator* to make the division in the way that Sokrates does, because a pupil needs to be taught to avoid *hubris*. But the division in this form is not ethically *scientific*. A.E. Taylor’s functional hypothesis that responsibility for this speech can first be shifted to Phaidros, and then set aside as “mad” (19==, 303) is correct; but the “simpler” explanation offered by Hackforth (1952, 40) — that this speaker really cares about the welfare of the “beloved” — is more insightful. However, it is not justified by the text, for the claim is actually made by Lysias. The division is made in terms of *doxa* because we are still in the Cave. But it is as accurate and truthful as the Cave “reality” allows, because we are no longer the prisoners of our sense impressions.

The speaker takes over from Lysias the assumption that the lover’s “madness” is a sickness; and he even exaggerates the claim that a lover makes his beloved *worse*. It becomes crucially important now that the lover does not want the beloved to be concerned with philosophy — there is an implicit *division* here, because this “wily” lover *is* a philosopher (and that is his great advantage over his rivals). Lysias had already used this educational argument, less specifically. But now philosophy is identified as the crown of the education of the mind (*dianoia*).

From the mind, we pass methodically to the body, and to “possessions.” About physical well-being, Sokrates is more biased than Lysias was. He ought to be told “Your prophecy is not necessarily true.” Lysias was more attentive to “likelihood.” The Sokratic philosopher is

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concerned only with what it is *good to believe*. The boy's kinfolk are treated as his "dearest possessions"; and the possessive lover is seen as wanting to isolate the beloved, and prevent him from growing up to assume his own family responsibilities. (Here again, we can recognize an implicit *division* between philosophical and non-philosophical love.)

What is at issue is a relation between an older man and a younger one (a "boy" under eighteen). Our speaker now lays it down that the man should not be *too* old. This raises the question of just how old Sokrates and Phaidros are; and when we study that, we discover that there is simply no satisfactory "dramatic date" at which the conversation could be occurring. The role ascribed to Phaidros in the *Protagoras* suggests that he was born about 450 BCE. The presence of Lysias in Athens, however, was impossible before 412 BCE (before that he was in the new colony at Thurii). Yet Sokrates calls Phaidros a "young chap" at 257c and a "boy" at 267.ⁱⁱⁱ This would lead us to a date just before the War began; and the age relation of Sokrates and Phaidros would fit in with the requirements of the speech (but Lysias could not, at that moment, be in Athens). We have to admit that Plato simply does not care about historical facts in this dialogue. In fact, he never cares about historical truth — he uses it when it suits him (e.g. *Symposium*, *Apology*), and ignores it when it does not (*Parmenides*).

The most important point (which makes the climax) is that "being in love" is a temporary condition; and when it passes, the lover will begin to avoid the beloved. The advent of "wisdom and temperance" instead of "love and madness" will produce this result (241a). Again, there is an implicit "division" here. For the "wily lover" possesses temperance, and is in pursuit of wisdom all the time; and it is only in the *philosophically organized* Cave that the transition from mad passion to "wisdom and temperance" can be reliably expected — or simply assumed.

There is not really much in this speech, that was not in that of Lysias; but for someone who is interested in *rational* persuasion, the argument is much better marshaled. The speech *would* be longer than that of Lysias if Sokrates could bring himself to praise the non-lover, and not just criticize the lover. But since his speaker is only pretending not to be in love, this would be hypocritical. There is a limit to the pretending that is legitimate for a philosophical educator. If Sokrates went any further, the "nymphs" (241e — of blind passion?) would take possession of him; and when he makes a move to go, his *daimonion* will not let him leave until he *atones* for his attack upon Love. Love is truly one of the Gods. Hence (as was laid down in the *Republic*) one must not ascribe evil to him, or speak evil of him.

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This view of Love seems to contradict the claim of Diotima, in the *Symposium*, that Love is not a god, but a *daimon*. She is only half-wrong, however, for the full truth is that Love is *both* a *daimon* and a God. The division between the left- and the right-hand Love will make this conclusion necessary, since the left-hand Love *cannot* be a God. So it *must* be a *daimon*; and even the right-hand love must surely be a *daimon* in the coming Myth.

The Palinode

The *hypothesis* of Sokrates' first speech will now be explicitly *removed*. "False is the tale" (244e) he says, borrowing the opening words of Stesichoros' Palinode (from which he gets his own model) — and he removes even his own authorship, calling the speech "the discourse of Phaidros son of Pythokles" (244a). Love is, indeed, a kind of *madness*. But there are several kinds of madness, and some of them are great blessings, not curses. First, Sokrates appeals to the madness of oracular prophecy. This leads directly to some typically implausible etymological byplay. Plato definitely wants to *divide* "prophecy" into a good (divine) kind — of which Diotima is a model — and a bad (human) kind — condemned in the *Republic* (cf. 364b). But he casts a cloud over the whole concept. The implication is that if there are any true prophets, it takes one to know one.^{iv}

Next, Sokrates mentions a medical form of divine madness. This is just another kind of prophetic divination, and the "division" is almost certainly determined by the distinction between soul and body. If, as Hackforth says (1952, 60), this kind of "purification" was "specially associated with Orphism," then the reference to it is only a bit of Pythagorean piety on Plato's part, and we need not take it literally.

The third kind of madness is poetical inspiration. This is quite seriously meant. The very commonsensical Demokritos believed that the poet is divinely *mad*; and we are about to experience one of Plato's own best examples of inspired poetic madness. Some poets may be unhappy about being categorized here, but it provides Plato with an explanation for the truth that they seem to know and utter without having anything that he would call a satisfactory *knowledge* of it. In his view it is the channel by which the higher world of intellectual being, can be present in the Cave. But it needs the philosopher as its critical and educational interpreter.

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The final (and only democratic) form of divine madness is the experience of being in love *philosophically*. Our present “poet” does not make this qualification explicitly. But it is implicit, clearly enough, in the *removal* of the earlier speeches; and the later criticism of the speeches will make it explicit. The problem of “discerning the nature of soul divine and human” (245c) contains the assumption of “philosophical love.”

We proceed to the proof that there is a “divine” madness. For this we must show that “all soul is immortal” (and hence kin to the divine). This is evident, because there is motion that is perpetual; and “soul” is the necessary principle of motion. This proof of immortality (which I shall not further examine) seems to me to be the best one that Plato ever found. It was first proposed (probably) by Alkmaion. Laplace thought that he could postulate perpetual motion without the hypothesis of “soul”; and our modern physics avoids the postulate of *immortality* altogether. But the rationalist tradition has always relied on this passage of the *Phaedrus*. We should note that even if we read “All soul is” as equivalent to “All souls are” — as Plato probably did — the argument does not establish the *personal* immortality of traditional Christian orthodoxy. The “immortal” soul does not remember Heaven properly; and there is no reason to suppose that the soul in Heaven (or its next life) has any memory of its present earthly existence.

What the *human* principle of self-motion *is*, Sokrates cannot tell us. But he can say what it is *like*; and from that a Myth will follow. The human soul is like a charioteer driving a pair of horses. The chariot itself is not mentioned; but it fits into the story readily enough as the *body*. Of the horses, one is noble, and the other is black and ill-natured. So the image is easily understood in terms of the “tripartite theory of the soul” stated in Book IV of the *Republic*. Reason is the charioteer who must drive the horses of “Spirit” and “Desire.” When he is able to do this properly, he and his team grow wings and can fly; and eleven of the Twelve Olympian Gods (produced by our imagination as immortal ideals) are each of them the leader of a troop of mortally embodied souls, who are flying as well as they can.^v (In the case of the philosophers who follow Zeus, “flying” means “leaving the Cave”; but if those following other Gods — e.g. poets following Apollo — are not philosophers, their flying presumably does not get them properly out of the Cave. So we must be cautious when we put the Myths together.)

The souls that are successful in following their Gods reach the edge of this world of motion and becoming. They can then “stand upon the back of the world” (247b) and view the “region beyond the heaven” as the heaven itself carries them round. What they see there is “Being.” This Being is apparently the Ideas; and other souls besides the philosophers must share

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in this vision, because Sokrates classifies all philosophers (including himself and Phaidros) as followers of Zeus (i.e. a true philosopher is a philosopher-king). This is not really surprising, because properly inspired poets — for example — must have the vision, even if they do not understand it.

Plato himself is the poet who can sing of the “place beyond the Heaven” with proper understanding. But the understanding consists mainly of relating our mortal lives to the eternal region. The mortal world is a competitive scramble in the darkness in which the men and horses are trampled, and the wings broken. Between this world and the place beyond the Heaven, lies the heaven itself. The Heaven is the sphere of perpetual circular motion. Whoever can fly up into it can participate in the vision. The most important elements of the vision (as far as the *Phaedrus* is concerned) are the moral ideals of human life — the Forms of the virtues, especially Wisdom and Temperance (*Sophrosyne*).

The natural order, being perpetual, requires the Form of Living Creature with all of its subordinate Forms; and this will be taken up in the *Timaeus*. But our souls have our bodies, and the human world, to care for. So it is the ethical Forms with which we have to be mainly concerned here.

There are some souls that never fall into the darkness. These may, as Hermeias (and Hackforth — 1952, 79, n. 2) think, be the good *daimones*. But, since they are in the struggle, I think we ought to take them as philosophically minded humans.^{vi} But, by “some mischance” (*syntychia*), human souls — for the most part — do not rise out of the darkness; and then they must pass into embodied lives.

There are eleven Gods we can follow; but Plato lists just nine lives into which we can fall. The first four are easy to understand. Philosophers are classed at the top with lovers of beauty, muse-followers, and lovers. (We should notice the *mousikoi* here, because they will include the inspired poets.) Then come law-abiding monarchs, warriors and rulers. Third are statesmen (*politikoi* of the democratic type?), heads of households, and businessmen; and fourth, athletes, trainers, and physical healers. (Concern with the body follows next after concern with the soul.)

After this comes a second rank, so to speak. The fifth place goes to prophets and mystery-priests. Like the mimetic *poietikoi* who follow, these would seem to be of the kind who

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are not divinely inspired. Those who are inspired will surely be with the philosophers and *mousikoi* in the first category. In the seventh place we find the artisans and farmers of the *Republic*; and after them the “mischance” becomes ruinous. The eighth category are “sophists and demagogues”; and the ninth are tyrants. As in the *Republic*, we must think of these as psychological types — there are so many “sophists” and “tyrants” in private life.

The lot of the fallen soul is to return to Heaven after ten thousand years (ten incarnations). This part of the Myth certainly supports the interpretation of the unfallen souls as *human* — at the very least some human souls have to be included in this category. “Unfallen” must be the status of those souls who escape from the wheel of birth after only three incarnations by choosing the philosophic life consistently. But for the souls who keep on falling there is a Last Judgment after every incarnation; and for the bad cases there is punishment in places under the earth. After its second phase, the soul to be can *choose* to be incarnated in a subhuman animal. This feature of the Myth enables Plato to account for the existence of the subhuman animal order. But I think that his main concern here is with the Cave-prisoner aspect of our human life. The prisoners are confined in the darkness, living by animal instinct, and never rising into the sphere of heavenly light. Just how a soul embodied in an animal can return later to human form is something of a mystery. But it does happen. (Certainly my “Prisoner” interpretation makes it easier to credit. We need only to consider that human *children* are not rational initially; they *grow into* their *immortal* status.) Only the philosophical soul (in *eleven* forms, not just the followers of Zeus) can regain its wings, and so rise into the realm of light. Plato’s theory is, apparently, that once the soul has had the vision, even an animal soul can recover its human status by remembering the place beyond the Heaven (that is why there must always be a human incarnation first). The hypothesis of Recollection (*anamnesis*) is a way of expressing how the knowledge that really is virtue can be present in us. Alcibiades in the *Symposium*, has suffered the “mischance” that caused him to lose it. He has great intellectual capacities, but he cannot now *recollect* Wisdom and Temperance properly.

We can come back now to Love, and to the reason why the Lover is classified with the Philosopher. It is the Recollection of the Form of Beauty that distinguishes the Lover. Everyone who has the vision, must behold the Form of Beauty; so all philosophers and Muse-followers are Lovers; actually falling in love (philosophically) is being carried away by the recollective knowledge of Beauty. Most of the Ideas are quite hard to recollect; but the recollection of Beauty is spontaneous and relatively easy. Thus, there are far more Lovers, than there are philosophers or poets properly so called. Beauty is the visible Idea; Wisdom remains invisible;

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and the other ethical ideals have, I suppose, some *measure* of ordinary visibility. It is through the Form of Beauty that our wings begin to grow. This is the one moment of the vision that evil associations (250a) cannot obscure.

Plato gives us a memorable description of what being philosophically in love is like — and from the little poem “To Aster” that survives in the *Palatine Anthology*, we know that he is speaking from experience. Then he tells us something about the followers of other Gods besides Zeus. It is Plato who belongs to Zeus (and he takes Phaidros with him). He is the Philosopher-King type. Sokrates himself was a follower of Apollo — who is not characterized, perhaps for that very reason. It is the poets who belong logically to Apollo. Plato chooses to deal first with Ares, whose followers are naturally prone to emotional violence; and then with Hera, who seems to be the Goddess of the law-abiding monarch type. He leaves us to work out the right view of Apollo and the others.

The account of how the beloved is captured provides an opportunity to explain about the two horses. The “spirited” horse is white, and loves glory; it “keeps company with true opinion” (253d). This puts it firmly among the *liberated* virtuous Cave-dwellers. Whereas the horse of desire is black and ill-shaped; hot-blooded and inclined to *hubris*. It is hard to control, and it seeks carnal gratification; so both the charioteer and the white horse must pull against it. It *can* get its way (turning Love to the left, so to speak). But Beauty is next to Temperance in the vision; and the recollection of this can keep the black horse under control. But these horses can talk, so the black one can speak his mind. Eventually, however, he is tamed, and becomes obedient.

The beloved now has the full benefit of a loving education. There is a God dwelling in his Lover (255b — this guides us towards Plato’s interpretation of what “following in the procession” really means, and what the “Gods” are), so the beloved himself is filled with love, and the relationship becomes properly reciprocal — and the wings of the beloved grow. But the steady resistance to physical desire must be maintained. Even if they cannot maintain it, however, the lovers can still have a (slightly spoiled) “Platonic” relationship; and when they die, they can return to Heaven.

As against all this, a non-lover can offer only worldly temperance and conventional virtue. Nine thousand years of earthly wandering go with this sort of relation. (Apart from this mystical prophecy, the negative part of the speech is brief. It corresponds nicely with the speech

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for which it apologizes. The poetry was to please Phaidros — who is a Cave-Dweller really, not a philosopher at all. Sokrates prays to the God of Love that he may keep his “lover’s talent”; and finally he prays for the philosophical conversion of Phaidros like his brother Polemarchos, converted in the *Republic*. (*Lysias* is now made responsible for *both* of the earlier speeches — 257b).

The Art of Rhetoric

Lysias may give up speech-writing, says Phaidros, because it gives him a bad reputation. That is ridiculous, says Sokrates, for written speeches are much admired. But Sokrates will end up by condemning *writing* altogether. It belongs to the Cave-Prison, he will argue. *Now* he points out that laws and decrees are *written speeches* (and we may note that the prisoners certainly cannot manage without those). What had to be decided is what constitutes *good* writing.

All the same, Sokrates does not like the written word of the Law. This comes out in his little myth of the cicadas. The cicadas are “men before there were any Muses” (259b — ancient time is logical eternity, as usual in Plato’s Myths). In other words, the cicadas are the lawgivers and lawmakers who know nothing of poetry.^{vii} But now they report to the Muses, telling Kalliope and Urania about the philosophers, Terpsichore about the dancers, and Erato about lovers. This passage invites us to relate the nine lives to the Muses (and Robin is surely right in thinking that their music is that of the Spheres — *pace* Hackforth, 1952, 118, n. 1). The first two lives fit Kalliope and Urania;^{viii} Erato may perhaps go with the third (which contains the principal forms of career-choice); and Terpsichore with the fourth (concern with the body).

After this prelude, we face up to our defined task. In the view of the existing textbooks, Rhetoric is concerned not with what is *true*, but with what is *credible* (or readily persuasive); but good rhetoric must be based on the real situation. Otherwise it will be like persuading someone to accept a donkey as his warhorse. Actually, the first essential is to aim at what is good, not at an evil result. But to know the truth does not give one rhetorical force. So is there an *art* of “persuasion”?

The art, if there is one, is a “kind of soul-leading by the use of words” (quite generally). This definition emerges directly from the protest that “Truth is not enough.” Sokrates supports

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the *generality* of the art, by ascribing textbooks to Homeric heroes. But Phaidros immediately recognizes Nestor as Gorgias (who lived more than a hundred years) and Odysseus as Thrasymachos or Theodoros; and Sokrates promptly identifies Palamedes as Zeno of Elea. Zeno wrote a book to convince us that our hypothesis that there are *many* things that *move* is an illusion. Sokrates compares this attack on the sensory consciousness of the Cave with the regular practice of the law-courts; and his point is that forensic rhetoric is *ethically* contradictory. We shan't give up plurality and motion; but we ought to give up arguing if we cannot say what is just and what is good.^{ix}

The rhetoric of *plausibility* depends on getting us to think that two things that are similar, are really the same. So the scientific orator ought to *know* precisely how things are alike. But using this knowledge to lead people into *error* is not an art. The two misguided speeches (based on the same hypothesis) will provide our examples.^x Thus “Lysias” began by assuming that we are quite clear and in agreement about the meaning of “Love.” Whereas, even in his first speech Sokrates began by defining it. Lysias, on the other hand, began by stating the conclusion he wanted to arrive at. A speech ought to be an organic whole, like a living creature; but we can take the arguments of Lysias in any order at all. Sokrates said originally (238cd) that there was “a divine presence in this spot.” Now he identifies it as “the Nymphs of Acheloos and Pan, son of Hermes” (263d).

So much for “Lysias”; Sokrates proceeds to compare his own two speeches — which he does not treat as a *pair* now (and certainly never thought of together as *one* speech). His two speeches took *opposite* sides; but the opening definitions make the reconciliation easy. The common hypothesis is that the lover is *mad*. But “madness” must be *divided* into human and divine. The first speech took Love as *human* madness (which it *can* be); the Palinode took it as *divine* (which it *ought* to be). The four forms of divine madness are inspired by Apollo, Dionysos,^{xi} the Muses, and Aphrodite and Eros respectively — the last being the highest.

The basic hypothesis of both speeches was that the lover is *mad* (indeed, this is inherited from “Lysias”). So “madness” was the *collected* plurality of different forms, confused in the speech of “Lysias,” and correctly *divided* by Sokrates. He distinguished *human* from *divine* madness “at the joint.” The first speech was concerned only with Love as a *human* madness; but the Palinode distinguished at least some of the other forms of human madness from their divine relatives. Sokrates claims too much for his first speech when he says that it “continued to make divisions” (266a), because it made no explicit divisions at all. But Phaidros will understand that

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the fourfold classification of madness was already in Sokrates' mind. This human insanity is the "left hand" of the Pythagorean division; and its *divine* forms are the "right hand" side. Those who can do the appropriate "collections" and "divisions" are the philosophical dialecticians who can eliminate the fallacies of Cave-Rhetoric. The new method should be thought of as a development and clarification of Dialectic as conceived in the *Republic*. (The *equality* of the two central sections of the Divided Line makes its use in the organization of the Cave a simple matter — though never, of course, quite perfect.)

The existing rhetoric is not scientific because it does not have this method. Sokrates runs through some of the techniques in the current textbooks (going right back to Protagoras). But they only show how to produce effects, without teaching us what effects are desirable (and when). They do not provide the knowledge of *diagnosis* that we can see to be basic to bodily medicine. They are *preparatory* studies only. The true Art of rhetoric can be supplied only by philosophical dialectic.

Sokrates now claims that Perikles became a great orator because of what he learned from Anaxagoras about Nature. It is hard for us to take this seriously, both because we cannot see how what we know of Anaxagoras' thought could have provided what Plato regards as ethically desirable; and because Perikles does not seem to have had the necessary knowledge anyway. Perikles and Anaxagoras provide only a *shadowy* Cave-example of what is needed. Anaxagoras had no proper concept of what the world-guidance of *Nous* ought to mean; and the leader who took Athens into the Great War was not a real statesman. Thus Perikles is the perfect paradigm of the existing rhetoric — and we must not suppose that Plato has changed his mind since writing the *Gorgias*. (By offering us a "popular" but scientifically unsatisfactory example, he tests our understanding of the doctrine that he is putting before us. Most of us react like Cave-Dwellers.)

Scientific Rhetoric is strictly parallel with Medicine. It should do for the soul, what Medicine does for the body. Both begin from the grasp of the whole. Hence the Rhetoric textbook ought to lay out, first, the theory of the soul (as the Palinode did in a Myth). Then it must classify the types of discourse, and the types of soul; and show what type of Rhetoric is appropriate to what soul. Only then can all of the preparatory studies be incorporated scientifically.

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After this account of true rhetoric, we return to the examination of how the existing rhetorical theory proceeds. The theory of “plausibility” presupposes that we can recognize what is *like* the truth. For this, says Sokrates again, one must know what is actually true. But now we have seen that the *rhetor* must also know what the soul-type of his audience is. It seems, by implication, that there *cannot* be a scientific rhetoric for addressing a crowd. The whole conception of Cave-rhetoric for the prisoners (here called “slaves” — 274a) must be given up. As Phaidros says, scientific rhetoric would be an excellent project, if one could only carry it out. The Sokratic ideal has reduced it to absurdity.

Having reduced rhetoric to absurdity in one way, Sokrates proceeds to do it again in another way. It is of the essence of rhetorical speech that it can be written down. But a written record is no longer a living communication; the *soul* has gone out of it altogether. Sokrates makes this point first in his final myth — the *Egyptian* story of the god Theuth, and the great king Thamos. Theuth invented all of the mathematical sciences through which we can get out of the Cave, as well as some pastimes. But first of all, he had to invent writing. Yet when he brought his inventions to King Thamos, the king said that writing was not a blessing for humanity, but a curse. By making a mechanical kind of memory and preservation possible, it was impeding proper self-knowledge, and preventing the genuine recollection of the divine vision. For the written reminder to be valuable, the reader must have an activated vision of truth already. Writing, like painting, creates only dead images.

Anyone who reflects that (s)he is reading a written record of this supposed Sokratic conversation, is bound to recognize how ironic this conclusion is. Plato aims to explain why Sokrates did not write anything; and his very success (whether his explanation is right or not) justifies his own compulsion to write, and explains why he chose to write as he did. What Sokrates says, is confirmed by Plato’s fate: “the composition drifts all over the place . . . it doesn’t know how to address the right people” (275e).^{xiii} But Alcibiades showed us, in the *Symposium*, that the Sokratic ideal of finding how to speak to one person is tragically at the mercy of the Gods. This same tragedy is implicit in Sokrates’ hope that Phaidros will be converted. (Hackforth’s belief in a “happy ending” here is touching but hardly convincing. If we suppose that Phaidros really is a “boy”; and that the *Symposium* is assumed to happen *later*, then we can be *sure* that Hackforth is mistaken; but we are not meant to be *sure* of anything here.)

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Writing, says Sokrates, is only an image of the living discourse in the soul. Words are written in black and white, as playthings (276d). Here Sokrates gives us *Plato's* view, in return for the explanation of *his* view that Plato has given. Life itself, reaching its *acme* in the *living* conversation of dialectic, has to be conceived as “playing for the Gods” (*Laws* 716c). To make speeches (and tell myths) is better than to have a drinking-party (276d — a probable reference to the *Symposium*). Sokrates speaks as if one can certainly “select a soul of the right type” (276e) for dialectical play. But only the completed life can show that one is right. It is hardly likely that Phaidros is a good choice.

“Collection” becomes “definition” in the final restatement of our results; and the type of soul we are dealing with has to be recognized intuitively — though long experience may lie behind our intuition. Even *laws*, because they are written works, cannot be regarded as important, in comparison with the living knowledge that is virtue. (We must assume that Plato is quite serious in letting Sokrates restate his position thus. But our present dialogue has an ambiguous status. For some of us it will attain a higher truth than the written Law. And the final agreement of Phaidros is even more ambiguous. Surely it is an example of *doxosophia* — cf. 275ab — rather than of living dialectical conviction?)

So now “we have played properly about *logos*” (278b). This is an only half-concealed comment of Plato himself on the whole dialogue as a written composition; but in the mouth of Sokrates it is an admission that even the most serious human activity is no more than playing. (*He*, at least, is not sanguine about the conversion of Phaidros.) Phaidros is to go to Lysias (but also to the poets and lawgivers) and tell him (and them) that by the river and “muse-temple” of the Nymphs, we have made these important discoveries about written discourses. All of them must become dialectical philosophers, if they want to perform their offices properly. But then Sokrates, says Phaidros, must himself take this same message to Isokrates. (Isokrates did not heed it. Like his teacher Gorgias, he left the customs of the community to provide ethical insight, and moral education.) Sokrates prays to Pan and the Gods of the place for the maintenance of the truly philosophical attitude in himself; and with that he says, “Let us go.” The dialogue ends, as it began, with motion.

It is from the Herakleitean consciousness of human life as a river in motion that we must begin our final “division” of the dialogue. The River Acheloos is the symbol of human life; and the Nymphs are the *daimones* of life as a natural force. Our minds can no more stop moving,

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than our hearts can stop beating (and when they do stop, it is our written words that can make the conversation immortal).

The forces of life emerge from the Earth, and express themselves in a particular place (and language). So the “Gods of the place” should be the first objects of our reverence. Without a proper understanding of what religious reverence is, our love will take a left turn in the darkness of the Cave. Then, talking to our fellow prisoners, we shall produce (at the best) the “rational objectivity” of the speech of “Lysias.” In the alienation of “Reason” from “the Passions,” Love has already taken its “left turn”; and in the ethical “neutrality” of Reason,” we have the situation of the Cave Prisoners.

This ethical neutrality is overcome by liberation from the world of sense-impressions, and the establishment of objective measurement. “Reason” is then, no longer *really* alienated from the passions. In the first speech of Sokrates, it is educated Love that is the guiding force. The *education* of Love is clearly seen as the aim and purpose of human social intercourse — even if the true lover must remain hidden. For nothing can be said about the real world outside the Cave. This is the level of *Pistis* (trust).

That is what is transformed in the *Palinode*. The Lover comes into the open, and tells us (as best he can inside the Cave) all that he knows. He can speak only in a Myth — but that was true already in the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, however, there was a mathematical analogy — the Divided Line. It is the necessary equality of the middle parts of the Line that makes “intellectual mythology” possible. The world of the Heaven itself, we can measure and determine; and once we are freed from the Cave-Shadows, it is our proper concern to get on with that. Then, we can speak by analogy of the “place beyond the Heaven”; and even as Cave-Dwellers we can come to know (imaginatively) how things really are.

Scientific Rhetoric can take us no further than this. When we study the Science itself, we are the Philosophers who have returned to the Cave. We can talk *about* the Dialectic that belongs to the World Outside. But to do it, we must *go* outside; and in the world of physical motion, we can never be certain that we have securely done that. Rhetorically, we can only arrive, like Sokrates, at a prayer (and a prayer to the divinities of the Cave) that that has happened to us.

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Rhetoric is the science of “life in the Cave.” It is essential to it, that it can be written down — turned into Shadows on the Cave Wall. The Shadows are subject to differing interpretations. In this respect they are helpless; they cannot tell us which reading is right. We can write down even the dialogue of dialectic in the soul. But then it is a Shadow, not the real thing. It will achieve *reality* (of some sort) in the living conflict of the interpretations. But whether the reality is within the Heaven, or beyond it, only Apollo can know. Most interpreters would be satisfied with the reality of the Cave, if we could achieve it. That is what we actually work for in the case of a dialogue like the *Phaedrus*. But the written words being shadows, must eventually defeat us. Only very partial victories are possible. If the organic unity of Plato’s dialogue is now made out, that will be enough for the present essay.

Notes

ⁱOne can say, if one chooses, that the dialogue is about *writing* (cf. R. Burger, 1980), rather than about *rhetoric* as I shall maintain. But this is only valid because the dialogue itself is necessarily a *written* product. It is about the forms of *speaking*; and I think that, although rhetoric can all be written, not all writing is properly rhetoric. Written philosophy is, but not — for example — the *Histories* of Herodotos and Thucydides.

ⁱⁱThese first pages were originally drafted in October 1969. What follows was first written down in January 2000.

ⁱⁱⁱPhaidros *accepts* the role of “boy” at 243e. But that is not very decisive.

^{iv}The way Diotima is introduced in the *Symposium* seems to me to confirm this claim. The same applies to the (surely ironic?) praise of dream-interpretation in the *Timaeus* (71a-72b).

^vHestia stays at home (her name means “the Hearth”). She corresponds, among the Gods, to Mother Earth on our side. Perhaps they are identical. But we should be cautious, because although Mother Earth is certainly a Goddess, she has offspring who are both good and evil *daimones* — or at least *daimones* whose character is ambiguous. Pan and the “Gods of the place” are treated as divine and hence good; but the Wind that carried off Oreithuia (and that carries *us* off in left-handed Love) is *not* good.

^{vi}It is a point in favor of the neoPlatonists (and Hackforth) that there are some *fallen daimones* — Left-Hand Love being one.

^{vii}Solon — mentioned at 259c — was certainly a poet, but not in his lawgiving.

^{viii}Hackforth’s suggestion that Urania is the patroness of cosmology is inappropriate. This dialogue is very strictly “ethical.”

^{ix}It seems clear that Plato thinks Zeno’s book — like forensic arguments — is full of fallacies.

^xIt is not clear to me how the speeches are inspired by “the Gods of the place” or “the Cicadas” (262d). But this reference clearly *shows* that the Palinode is not included. The bad Rhetoric comes from the Earth, and is not poetic. (Even the first speech of Sokrates has a *bad* aim.)

^{xi}Hackforth (1952, 131, n. 2) complains that Apollo and Dionysos were not mentioned at 255b-d. This is foolish. When Plato sets us a puzzle of this sort, we should ask: “How could we have known?” (or “Why ought we to have known?”). The first example of divine madness was “the prophetess at Delphi” (244b); and the second “purifying madness” is “Orphic” (according to Aristophanes — see Hackforth, 1952, 59-60). Phaidros will recognize *now* (if not earlier) the forms of madness sent by the Gods of Pythagorean devotion in the Heaven, and in our Underworld — the Cave under the Day Sky.

^{xii}One has only to compare Hackforth’s commentary with mine to recognize this helpless drifting of the text. I am certainly much closer to the disciples of Leo Strauss (e.g. C. Griswold, 1986). But, unlike them, I think Hackforth belongs to the “right people” as much as I do. In fact, I *feel* much closer to him than to them. Plato must have foreseen what would happen — so he is being ironic about “right people” too.