

Soul-Leading: The Unity of the *Phaedrus*, Again

Jessica Moss – penultimate draft. Final version in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 43, 2012

The *Phaedrus* famously claims that all good *logoi* (speeches or discourses) must be “put together like a living creature,” with parts that suit one another and the whole (264c); the dialogue itself just as famously seems to be a misshapen jumble. It begins as a series of elegant rhetorical speeches about love, and ends as a dry philosophical discussion of rhetoric. Along the way we get an elaborate parody of a pastoral courtship, and mythological versions of the *Republic*’s metaphysics and psychology. What, if anything, makes all this hang together?

The question has been posed since antiquity;¹ it continues to vex interpreters, as evidenced by the sheer number of articles titled “The Unity of the *Phaedrus*.”² A recent article in

This paper began life as a presentation in a seminar taught by Sarah Broadie in Princeton long ago; I am very grateful to her and to the participants in that seminar, and also to Danielle Allen, Jimmy Doyle, Brad Inwood, Alexander Nehamas, Giles Pearson, and Gabriel Richardson Lear for comments on later versions.

¹ Hermias – whose commentary from the 5th century CE is the earliest we have on the dialogue – tells us that some think the main topic is love, others rhetoric, some the good, and others like himself beauty (8.15-12.25).

² See e.g. M. Heath, “The Unity of Plato’s *Phaedrus*” [“Unity”], *OSAP* 7 (1989), 151-73, and in the same volume C.J. Rowe, “The Unity of the *Phaedrus*: A Reply to Heath”, *ibid.*, 175-88; G.E. Mueller, “Unity of the *Phaedrus*”, *Classical Bulletin* 33 (1975), 50-3; 63-5; P. Plass, “The Unity of the *Phaedrus*”, *Symbolae Osloenses*, 43 (1968), 7-38; R.P. Winnington-Ingram, “The Unity of the *Phaedrus*”, inaugural lecture at King’s College, University of London, 1953, *Dialogos*

this journal by Werner gives a detailed statement of the puzzle and survey of proposed solutions, and I will not attempt to repeat that feat here.³ The basic problem can be stated succinctly: clearly the dialogue is about love, and clearly it is also about rhetoric, but it is not at all clear why Plato treats both topics together, nor why he does so in a dialogue that includes all the other diverse elements the *Phaedrus* does.

Given the difficulty in finding a theme that unifies the whole dialogue, the most recent commentary on the *Phaedrus* argues that what unifies it is its drama. For the *Phaedrus* has a

(*Hellenic Studies Review*) 1 (1994), 6-20), and in the same volume G.R.F. Ferrari, “‘The Unity of the *Phaedrus*’: A Response” [“Unity”], *ibid.*, 21-5. The topic is also of course taken up by many works which do not mention it in the title, including all the major commentaries on the dialogue.

³ D. Werner, “Plato’s *Phaedrus* and the Problem of Unity” [“Problem of Unity”], *OSAP* 32 (2007), 91-137. For a few of very many examples: De Vries joins the majority in backing rhetoric, Griswold proposes self-knowledge, and Burger writing (G.J. De Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato* (Amsterdam, 1969); C.L. Griswold, Jr., *Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Phaedrus* (Pennsylvania, 1996); R. Burger, *Plato’s Phaedrus: A Defense of a Philosophic Art of Writing* (Alabama, 1980). Ferrari concludes his book with: “Let us not struggle too hard, then, to unify the *Phaedrus*; for the real struggle is elsewhere” (G.R.F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas* (Cambridge, 1987), 232); cf. his “Unity”. Heath and Hackforth argue that the dialogue has no thematic unity but instead functional unity, or unity of purpose: the elements belong together only insofar as they serve to bring the reader toward philosophy and virtue (Heath, “Unity”), or to “vindicate the pursuit of philosophy” and announce new methods for practicing it (R. Hackforth, *Plato: Phaedrus* (Cambridge, 1952), 9). Werner himself advocates “thematic pluralism” – love, rhetoric, and philosophy are all unifying themes – and argues that the dialogue is also unified by various structural and literary features.

drama, more obviously than many of Plato's dialogues: as is widely recognized, it shows Socrates attempting, with apparent success, to convert his interlocutor away from devotion to contemporary rhetoric and toward devotion to philosophy. Yunis argues that once we come to see that the various elements of the dialogue serve its dramatic purpose – that Socrates says what he says in order best to influence Phaedrus – we should be left with no further questions about what makes those elements cohere.⁴

Certainly the conversion plot is so prominent a feature of the *Phaedrus* that if the dialogue is unified at all its plot must fit with the other elements, and thus Yunis's strategy is a promising one. I want to show, however, that we can do better: we need not accept that the plot provides the dialogue its only unity. Rather, the plot should be recognized as one aspect – the dramatization – of a theme that unifies all the apparently disparate aspects of the dialogue.

Properly understood, I will argue, the *Phaedrus* is a treatise on the serious kind of persuasion that Plato calls soul-leading (*psuchagôgia*).⁵ The two parts consider two methods of

⁴ “All of S.’s utterances in their unpredictable variety of form and content belong to the artfully contrived sequence that moves Ph. forward step by step towards the goal. The design of the dialogue as a whole consists in the coherence of the sequence such that the effect – the change that S. produces in Ph. – is convincing;” moreover, the apparent disunity of the dialogue also serves this purpose: “Discourse should be as complex as it needs to be to persuade the soul being addressed. In Ph. S. faces a complex, ‘variegated soul’ [referencing 277c2-3]....The ‘variegated, all-inclusive discourses’ that S. addresses to Ph. are no more or less complex than is needed for the task at hand” (H. Yunis, *Plato: Phaedrus* (Cambridge, 2011), 6-7).

⁵ In making this argument I am partly reviving the interpretation of Elizabeth Asmis, in her “*Psychagogia in Plato's Phaedrus*”, *Illinois Classical Studies* 11 (1986), 153-172). On Asmis's

soul-leading, love and rhetoric, and the dialogue as a whole asks how either or both can be successful in directing the soul toward truth and the good life. The events of the dialogue – Socrates’s attempts to seduce Phaedrus away from his infatuation with Lysianic rhetoric and toward devotion to philosophy – dramatize the endeavor, and unify the two proposed methods: we see Socrates engaged in an attempt at soul-leading, using as his tool Phaedrus’s love, not of another person, but of rhetoric.

Asking if the *Phaedrus* is a unified work is not merely asking whether Plato practices what Socrates preaches; it is also asking what the dialogue is really about. In arguing that the *Phaedrus* is unified by the theme of soul-leading, I will be arguing for a new understanding of what philosophical questions and notions it is meant to convey, and how it develops the concerns of other dialogues: an account of why Plato is interested in love, and why he is interested in rhetoric, and how he thinks both are tied to the topic that is at the heart of all the dialogues, philosophy.

account, however, the dialogue’s unifying theme is “the definition of rhetoric as *psychagogia*” (154), and so she counts her view among those which make rhetoric the central theme; she considers love as a soul-leader only briefly (at 164). The details of her account in this way and others differ significantly from mine; nonetheless, the central idea is similar, and I have learned enormously from her paper. Werner briefly notes some of the ideas I will defend below when he includes soul-leading on a list of what he takes to be seven main themes of the dialogue: “The second half contains a discussion *about* ‘the leading of the soul’, but the dialogue also contains several *examples* of it: within each of the speeches, a lover leads a beloved; within the drama of the dialogue, Socrates attempts to lead Phaedrus; and through a self-reflexive myth about writing, Plato attempts to lead us (his readers) beyond his own dialogues” (Werner, “Problem of Unity,” 124)

1. Soul-leading

Psuchagōgia, literally “leading of souls” (from ψυχή, soul, and ἄγειν, to lead, direct, or guide) is a word used to mean persuasion, with some implication of deception or enchantment.⁶ Outside of the *Phaedrus* Plato never uses the noun, and he uses its verbal form only twice.⁷ But in two important passages from other dialogues he writes of leading people or souls, without using the compound word; I want to show that these passages give the context for the *Phaedrus*’s notion of rhetoric as *psuchagōgia*, and its interest in the problem of how to lead souls.

In many of the Socratic dialogues Plato both dramatizes and comments on Socrates’ attempts to persuade others to pursue the life of philosophy and virtue. In the *Apology* he represents Socrates’ aim as a kind of conversion. Socrates tries to turn people’s care and attention away from the things they think worthwhile, and toward something new, the pursuit of virtue and wisdom:

...for as long as I live and am able, I won’t stop philosophizing...[saying] to any one of you I ever happen to meet...aren’t you ashamed that you care for money,

⁶ Asmis gives citations and a helpful brief history of the word: “The earliest attested meaning of the compound *psychagog-* is that of ‘conjuring’ or ‘evoking’ souls of the dead. From this use, there evolved the notion of influencing the souls of living people, with the connotation of ‘alluring’ or ‘beguiling’ them” (“*Psychagogia* in Plato’s *Phaedrus*,” 155-6).

⁷ At *Tim.* 71a5-7 the appetitive part of the soul ψυχαγωγῆσονται – is persuaded or influenced – by images and phantoms; *Laws* 909b2-3 uses the verb first with respect to the living (deceive) and then with respect to the dead (conjure souls).

that you may have as much as possible, and care for your reputation and honor, but neither care for nor think of wisdom, truth, or your soul, that it may be as good as possible? (Ap. 29d4-e3)

The *Republic* allegorizes such attempts at conversion in its story of the philosopher who goes back down into the cave and tries to “lead up” (ἀνάγειν, 517a5) the other prisoners into the light. Socrates then declares that the aim of education is the literal analogue of such leading-up, namely “leading around”:

The power to learn is present in everyone’s soul, as is the instrument with which each person learns [intellect]. And just as if an eye could not be turned toward the light from darkness except by turning the whole body, so this instrument must be led around (περιακτέον) along with the whole soul from that which is coming into being...Then [education] is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this leading-around (περιαγωγῆς). (*Rep.* 518c4-d4)

To educate someone is to lead around her soul, away from the visible world and its pleasures and honors and toward the Forms. It is to turn her attention and concern and desire from unworthy things towards those most worthy – just what Socrates reports as his own life-long mission in the *Apology*.

But as often as he emphasizes the importance of such conversion, Plato emphasizes its difficulty. When the philosopher tries to persuade others to leave the cave they laugh at him, and then try to kill him (*Rep.* 517a; cf. the fate of the public-minded philosopher in the ordinary city at *Rep.* 496d-e); Socrates’s attempts at persuading his interlocutors to pursue the life of justice and philosophy often end in failure (see especially his conversation with Callicles in the *Gorgias*); and although the dialogues show us a few Athenians following Socrates’s call, in the

end the majority vote to put him to death. Wanting to lead others toward what is worth caring about is one thing; being able to is quite another.

In the *Symposium* Plato puts an explanation of the difficulty into Diotima's mouth:

No one who is ignorant will love wisdom (φιλοσοφοῦσιν) or want to become wise. For what's especially difficult about being ignorant is that you are content with yourself, even though you're neither fine and good nor intelligent. If you don't think you need anything, of course you won't want what you don't think you need. (*Symp.* 204a1-7)

As Diotima diagnoses it, the trouble is that those who are most in need of the things philosophy offers do not recognize their need. In order to lead others toward the true and the good, the philosopher needs some effective means of leading their souls.

The *Symposium* not only identifies this problem but also proposes a solution to it: love (*erôs*). Love is "in love with what is beautiful [or fine – καλόν]" (204b3): that is, we are naturally inclined to fall in love with things that are beautiful. Moreover, "wisdom is extremely beautiful" (*ibid.*): this entails that the erotic impulse can lead a person not only to love beautiful bodies and souls but also to love wisdom – to be a philosopher. Diotima's ladder (210a-211c) is, of course, a methodical plan for this erotic ascent. Thus love is one tool by which souls can be brought toward the Forms, and Plato again uses words for leading to make his point:

The one who has been thus far instructed [literally 'led as a child,' παιδαγωγηθῆ] in matters of Love, who has beheld beautiful things in the right order and

correctly, is coming now to the goal....This is what it is to go or to be led (ἄγεσθαι) by another correctly into the mystery of Love. (*Symp.* 210e2-211c1)⁸

The *Republic* asks what could lead souls toward the Forms; the *Symposium* proposes a method sweeter than the laborious education described in the *Republic*, and not dependent on the political structure of the state. A wise leader can use her disciple's erotic desire for beauty as a tool by which to lead him to philosophy.

Love, however, is not a foolproof method. In most cases love of beautiful bodies leads nowhere near philosophy; Diotima's point is only that under the supervision of a qualified leader it could. If Plato is on a quest to find a widely applicable method of soul-leading, he is not yet done.

When we come to the *Phaedrus* we find a very different candidate: rhetoric – here characterized as an art through which one person can lead another to the truth through carefully constructed, knowledge-based *logoi* – is called *psuchagôgia* (261a, 271c, quoted and discussed below). In what follows I argue that the *Phaedrus* has not abandoned the *Symposium*'s proposed candidate for soul-leading, but instead proposes to make use of it in a new way. True rhetoric will focus people's love for the fine and beautiful onto fine and beautiful *logoi*, which have been designed to lead the hearers' souls toward the love of wisdom.⁹

⁸ See also the beginning of the description of the journey up the ladder, which uses another word for leading or guiding: “First, if the guide guides correctly (ἐὰν ὀρθῶς ἡγήται ὁ ἡγούμενος)...” (210a).

⁹ As to the *Republic*'s candidate for the craft of soul-leading, namely the state-supervised education that begins with arithmetic, we will see that the *Phaedrus* is a rhetoric is a substitute for its necessary preliminaries – the soul-shaping musical education of Books II-III – and includes its

I will divide the dialogue into four sections – the opening scene, the palinode (Socrates’s great speech), the cicada interlude, and the discussion of rhetoric – and show how each in turn contributes to the examination and demonstration of *psuchagōgia*.

2. Opening scene: Love of *logoi*

The first part of the *Phaedrus*, in which Phaedrus and Socrates make love-speeches to each other, drips with hints of courtship and seduction. Phaedrus has been won over by the orator Lysias, as boys are won over by lovers. When Socrates pressures Phaedrus to recite Lysias’s speech Phaedrus is coy (ἐθρόπτετο, 228c2), but finally yields, as if seduced. When he gives the speech, we find it is itself a seduction-speech. Then the tables are turned and Phaedrus pressures Socrates to deliver up a speech of his own, threatening him almost as if with rape (236c-d). Socrates in turn is coy (ἐθρόπτετο, 236c6; καλλωπιζόμενος, 236d6); when he finally yields, with a profusion of shame, he delivers another seduction speech, and then another. So here we have two men, out in the countryside near the scene of a famous seduction (229b-c), using the language of seduction to pressure one another into delivering love-speeches.

But Socrates and Phaedrus are not literally in love, and neither are they literally seducing one another.¹⁰ What is the reason for all this love-play, then? Why are they shown as mock-

final stage, dialectic. The *Republic*’s education may in Plato’s view be the ideal means of soul-turning, but it is dependent on the existence of the ideal city; rhetoric turns out to be a means for the same end, and one available in actual, imperfect states like Athens.

¹⁰ Pace Nussbaum (*The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1986), chapter 7; see especially 229). I want to show that we get a

lovers, and why do they spend the afternoon making love-speeches to each other? In this section I will argue that Plato uses both their mock-courtship and the fictional courtship between the imagined speakers and audience of the love-speeches to represent the real drama of the dialogue. The mock- and fictional seductions show us how to understand what is happening at the literal level: Socrates's attempt to win Phaedrus away from his devotion to contemporary rhetoric and toward the philosophical life. Properly understood, the opening scene puts forth a proposal: erotic desire for beautiful *logoi* can be used as a tool for leading souls in various directions, and therefore has potential as a tool for leading souls in the right direction – toward philosophy.

Most generally, the mock-courtship establishes that love of *logoi* is a species of erotic love. Plato portrays Phaedrus and Socrates as possessed by *erôs*; he makes clear, however, that they are sick with passion for speeches rather than sex. More specifically, these two characters, along with Lysias, exemplify different forms of love of *logoi*, which parallel the different forms of sexual love at issue in the speeches they deliver. Plato thus uses the mock-courtship between Socrates and Phaedrus to distinguish a bad kind of love of *logoi* from a good, along the lines Socrates will draw later on when he distinguishes different forms of interpersonal love (see 266a); he also uses it to raise the possibility that in the right hands the bad kind can be used as a tool for inculcating the good.

To see how this works we need to distinguish between two cleverly intertwined levels in the opening scene. First there is the literal level of the dialogue: the relations between Phaedrus, Socrates, and Lysias. Second, and mirroring this, is the fictional level of the rhetorical speeches: the relations between the fictional speakers and audience (the non-lover, the lover, and the

reading of the dialogue that is philosophically compelling, as well as textually more plausible, by taking the love-play as mere metaphor.

beloved boy). The love-speeches are about ordinary *erôs*, love of people, but Plato uses the various love-relations discussed and displayed in the speeches as metaphors for love of *logoi*, and thereby shows us how *logoi* can be used to influence and lead those who love them.

The drama at the fictional level is a love-triangle: we hear rival speeches from two characters both aiming to seduce a boy. The speaker in Lysias's speech is a "non-lover," someone not in love with the boy. The speaker in Socrates's two speeches is a lover. Thus Lysias's and Socrates's fictional personae are rival suitors, and it is clear who plays the part of the boy: Phaedrus, who is the audience for all three speeches (he delivers Lysias's speech in the dialogue, but has just come from listening to Lysias deliver it to him). Plato makes Phaedrus's role explicit with a brief interchange that comes between Socrates's two speeches:

Soc: Where is that boy I was talking to? He must listen to this too, and not rush off to give his favors to his non-lover before he hears what I have to say.

Phaed: Here he is, quite close beside you, whenever you want him. (243e3-8)

As Socrates makes very clear, this rivalry is mirrored at the literal level of the dialogue. He casts himself as Lysias's rival in speechmaking, first criticizing Lysias's speech (235a), and then worrying that his own incompetence as a speechmaker will raise Lysias even higher in Phaedrus's eyes (237a). As the dialogue progresses he makes the implication of this last point increasingly explicit: the object of the rivalry is Phaedrus. Unlike their fictional personae, however, Lysias and Socrates are not vying for sexual favors; they want something quite different:

Soc: Dear Love...Stop Lysias from writing his kind of *logoi*, and turn him toward philosophy...in order that his lover here [Phaedrus] too may no longer

play both sides as he does now, but simply direct his life toward love with philosophical *logoi*. (257a3-b6)

At the dialogue's start Phaedrus is a devotee of Lysianic rhetoric; like the lover who wants to win his beloved boy away from the non-lover at 243e, Socrates wants to wrest Phaedrus away from his attachment to contemporary rhetoric and lead him toward philosophy instead.

In broad strokes, that is the drama of the opening scene; now let us look more closely at the characters, and at the mechanism of Socrates's proposed seduction.

We can begin with Lysias. His fictional role of non-lover symbolizes his own attitude toward *logoi*. The non-lover is not in love with the boy – not driven to mania by the boy's beauty – but instead values him coolly for the gratifications their relationship can bring; orators like Lysias are not in love with the beauty of *logoi* (let alone with the truths *logoi* can help one find), but instead value them purely for the wealth, political power, status, and legal success they can confer. Lysias is calm and self-controlled in his attitude toward *logoi*, just as the non-lover is calm and self-controlled in his attitude toward the boy. In other words, Plato casts Lysias, and by proxy contemporary rhetoric, as an exploitative non-lover of *logoi* who aims to recruit the impressionable intellectuals of Athens to his camp. The non-lover's seduction of the boy is a metaphor for Lysias's attempts to win Phaedrus's allegiance to contemporary rhetoric.¹¹

Socrates's role is more complex. At the fictional level, in his first speech he plays a lover who pretends to be a non-lover in order better to seduce the beloved; in his second speech, he plays an unabashed lover. When we look closely, we see that this precisely mirrors his role at the

¹¹ There is a complication in that Lysias is also called Phaedrus's beloved (236b5, 257b4); I comment on this below.

literal level of the dialogue: as with Lysias, Socrates's fictional role symbolizes his attitude toward *logoi*.

First, Socrates explicitly declares himself a lover of *logoi* (ἐραστοῦ, 228c2-3). He at first presents himself as a frenzied lover who desires *logoi* for the pleasures they bring – an exemplar of what he will later call “left-handed” love (266a5): he is “sick” with passion, Phaedrus's fellow Chorbyant and partner in Bacchic frenzy (228b6-7, 234d5). The irony is heavy-handed: clearly this is mere pretense, and in the end Socrates declares his apparent delight in Lysias's speech a mere reflection of Phaedrus's (234d). But his later defense of the divine kind of madness and inspiration (what he details in the palinode, and calls “right-handed” love (266a6-7)) show that his playful pretense is connected to something serious: the frenzy and inspiration which Phaedrus feels and Socrates claims to share are inferior versions of the divine madness and inspiration which will prove to be consummately philosophical. By first pretending to be a left-handed lover of base *logoi*, and then in the remainder of the dialogue showing himself to have a very different kind of passion for *logoi* – he is a lover (ἐραστής) of dialectical collections and divisions (266b3), i.e. of the truth and wisdom *logoi* can bring – Socrates demonstrates the contrast between two kinds of love which he formally draws at 266a. He shows himself to be a right-handed lover of *logoi*: his passion is not for their sensual pleasures but for their grasp on the Forms. In other words, Plato is showing us that the true lover of *logoi* is the philosopher.

Second, just like the lover of Socrates's first speech who pretends to be a non-lover in order to win the boy, Socrates himself is a lover of *logoi* who pretends in that first speech to be a non-lover of *logoi* – a practitioner of Lysianic rhetoric: someone who produces pleasing *logoi* for ulterior motives, with no regard for the truth – in order better to win Phaedrus to his side. The opening scene thus shows a philosopher trying to win a convert by exploiting some of the tricks of contemporary rhetoric; we will return to this point below.

Now let us consider Phaedrus. We saw that his fictional counterpart is the sought-after boy (most explicit at 243e), and that at the literal level Socrates and Lysias compete for his allegiance to their rival professions. But Phaedrus is such a natural target for such rivalry because he has another trait, this one not mirrored by his fictional counterpart: he is a lover. Socrates several times refers to him as Lysias’s lover (236b5, 257b4), but the opening scene makes clear what this means: he loves Lysias’s kind of *logoi*. Moreover, his love is shown as a mad longing for pleasures. He is a Chorybant (228b7), in a Bacchic madness (234d5-6); he lacks all self-control, even threatening Socrates with violence in his lust to hear his speech (236c-d); what he values in *logoi* is the pleasures they afford (see especially 258e). In short, his attitude toward the rhetorical display-speeches he thinks beautiful perfectly fits the definition of love Socrates gives in his first speech, and which he later refers to as the bad “left-handed” kind of love (266a5): an “irrational appetite that, having overpowered the belief that urges one to do right, is led toward pleasure in beauty” (238b7-c1).¹² The only salient difference between Phaedrus and the ordinary left-handed lover is that his love is for *logoi* rather than people.

It is because Phaedrus is a frenzied lover of *logoi* that he becomes an object of seduction by *logoi*: both Lysias and Socrates exploit his love of *logoi* in their attempts to win his allegiance to their brand of *logoi*. Thus the drama of the opening scene shows that even the left-handed kind of love – at least when directed toward beautiful *logoi* – can be used as a tool for leading people in various directions. Socrates makes this point through a bit of self-mockery:

¹² Ἡ γὰρ ἄνευ λόγου δόξης ἐπὶ τὸ ὀρθὸν ὀρμώσης κρατήσασα ἐπιθυμία πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἀχθεῖσα κάλλους.

Just as people lead hungry beasts by shaking a branch or some fruit in front of them, you appear to lead me around (περιάξειν) all Attica and wherever else you might wish by holding out *logoi* in books this way. (230d6-e1)

Clearly the same is true of Phaedrus.¹³

Now we have the details of the opening scene's rivalries, literal and fictional, in view; we can summarize them as follows:

	Fictional Level	Literal Level
Lysias	Non-lover of boy	Non-lover of <i>logoi</i>
Socrates	Lover of boy, pretending to be a non-lover in order to win him	Right-handed lover of <i>logoi</i> , pretending to be a non-lover in order to win Phaedrus
Phaedrus	Beloved boy, object of seduction by non-lover and lover	Object of rivalry between contemporary rhetoric and philosophy, <i>and</i> left-handed lover of <i>logoi</i>

¹³ Note that both Socrates and Phaedrus speak of the other as their leader, telling other to “lead on” (πρόαγε) (227c1, 229a7; cf. 230c5-7).

We can also sum up what these details show about the use of *logoi*, and of love, for soul-leading. Socrates wants to lead Phaedrus away from devotion to contemporary rhetoric and toward philosophy. Love of *logoi* can be used as a tool for leading people. Thus Socrates attempts the conversion by exploiting Phaedrus's love of *logoi* (that is, by reciting pleasing speeches to him).

Moreover, Phaedrus's delight at the palinode, and his subsequent willingness to stay on and participate in some dry dialectical discussion, suggest that Socrates has some success.

Thus the opening scene raises an important promise: although frenzied love of sensual beauty tends to lead toward the empty pursuit of pleasure, it can perhaps be exploited to lead people toward the love of truth. That is, it can perhaps be used as a tool of serious soul-leading. I will argue in section 5 that Socrates's proposed art of rhetoric picks up on just this promise.

3. The Palinode: Love as soul-leader

The first pleasing *logos* Socrates offers Phaedrus is a pastiche of Lysianic rhetoric; the second is something much more Platonic, the palinode.¹⁴ In section 6 we will see that Socrates presents the palinode itself as a tool for seducing Phaedrus to philosophy (257a-b) – that is, as a form of *psuchagôgia*; in this section, I examine the palinode's content, and show that in it Socrates presents love as a form of *psuchagôgia*.

In the *Republic* one ascends from worldly things to Forms, from images to their originals, by means of a complex, slow, laborious education. In the *Symposium*, love of the beautiful

¹⁴ A palinode is a speech in which one takes back an earlier charge: here Socrates acquits Love of his first speech's slanders.

carries one upwards, but again the process is slow, with many stages, and involves rigorous intellectual education: it is only through the practice of sciences and philosophy that one finally reaches the Form (*Symp.* 210d-e). The palinode's myth describes instead a swift and immediate ascent. Beauty, unlike other Forms, is "radiant," and "shines out through its images" in the visible world (250b). When a lover sees an image of this Form in a boy, his mind is carried up to a glimpse of the Form in a quick, passionate version of the cave allegory's slow, painful ascent. Just as in the *Symposium*, but much more quickly and directly, love of the beautiful transports one from obsession with worldly images to a vision of the Forms.¹⁵

Moreover, love can lead the soul not only of the lover but also of the beloved: a lover who has been led in this way to a vision of the Forms will turn his beloved to philosophy (252eff.) (The beloved is moved by love too – 'backlove' (255e), a reflection of the lover's desire.) The lover admires a certain god – a way of life, or set of virtues – and he causes the boy to admire and emulate that god as well (253b): this is a passionate substitute for the *Republic's* methodical "musical" education, which uses art to make the citizens emulate the right kind of life. In the best circumstances, love leads both lover and beloved to a life of philosophy: they spend their lives together in philosophic conversation, and they are blessed both in earthly life and afterwards (256a-b).

Love, then, is a wonderfully effective tool of *psuchagogia* that can lead both the lover and the beloved toward philosophy. Nonetheless, the dialogue makes clear, it has two severe limitations.

¹⁵ The lover's soul is carried upwards toward the divine by its wings (247d). Evidently the wings symbolize, or at least are closely associated with, love: the lover's soul begins to grow them precisely when he sees the boy, and they are nourished by beauty (251a-c, 255d).

First, it can only work as a soul-leader on those who already possess the right sort of soul. Only if one has recently seen the Forms between worldly incarnations – that is, if one’s intellect is in some superior condition – will the sight of the beloved spark a recollection of the Beautiful itself (250e). And only if one is possessed of adequate temperance and self-control can love lead one to philosophy; otherwise the appetites will get the upper hand and drag one down to more worldly pursuits (256a). In other words, love can only lead to philosophy someone whose soul is already suited to it. (In this way it is similar to *Republic VII*’s soul-leading education: this only works if one’s intellect is naturally strong, and if one’s appetites and other non-rational elements have been suitably molded by the correct childhood education.)

Second, love is highly contingent: it is a soul-leader available only to those lucky enough to fall in love with, or to be loved by, a philosophical type.

Both limitations render interpersonal love an inadequate tool for soul-leading in many cases – including, notably, the case at hand in the dialogue: Socrates’s attempt to seduce Phaedrus away from rhetoric and toward philosophy. First, Phaedrus is a passionate sensualist, one who values *logoi* for their variety and pleasures rather than for their grasp on truth: his is not by nature a philosophical soul. Second, the courtship parody of the opening scene makes clear that Socrates and Phaedrus are not in love. As we saw, the courtship drama was just a play; Phaedrus is not literally a beloved boy, nor Socrates literally his lover, and at the end of the dialogue they will not really go off to live together as lovers.

If Socrates is to convert Phaedrus to philosophy, then, he needs some other means. But love is not just a red herring, nor even just a metaphor for some other method of soul direction. For as we saw above, the opening scene reveals that Phaedrus is a lover, although not of Socrates.

He is a lover of *logoi* – of rhetorical speeches, in particular. His love is the bad kind: irrational desire for sensual pleasure in the beauty of the speeches. But if Socrates is to turn his soul, perhaps he can exploit this inferior kind of love and convert it into the higher kind: perhaps he can use Phaedrus's erotic impulse to direct his soul upward, via the object of Phaedrus's erotic love, *logoi*.

This, we will see, is the project of the rest of the dialogue: to discover and develop a craft of turning the soul by means of beautiful *logoi*. What is needed is something applicable in every circumstance – or at least widely applicable. What is needed is a systematic art (*technê*). The art that Socrates suggests, and sets out to explore, is a heavily revised version of Lysias's trade: rhetoric.

4. Interlude: the cicadas

Just before he launches into a discussion of rhetoric, Socrates makes an odd digression. He draws attention to the singing of the cicadas, and says that he and Phaedrus must have a discussion so that the cicadas will report favorably on them to the Muses:

The story goes that the cicadas used to be human beings who lived before the birth of the Muses. When the Muses were born and song created for the first time, some of the people of that time were so overwhelmed with the pleasure of singing that they forgot to eat or drink; so they died without even realizing it. It is from them that the race of the cicadas came into being; and, as a gift from the Muses, they have no need of nourishment once they are born. Instead, they immediately burst into song, without food or drink, until it is time for them to die. After they die, they go to the Muses and tell each one of them which mortals have honored her... (259b6-c6, trans. Nehamas and Woodruff)

Given the positioning of this story between the two main sections of the dialogue, it is natural to look to it for signs of a bridge between the topics of love and rhetoric. The emphasis on the cicadas' pleasure in beauty suggests the following lesson to the fable: if you take sensual pleasure in beauty rather than in ordinary appetitive pleasures like food, drink, and sex – that is, if you are driven by *erôs* rather than ordinary appetites (see Socrates's distinction in his first speech, at 238a-c) – this can lead you to something higher. Ordinary animals wallow in subhuman pleasures; the cicadas transcend these, and are companions of the divine Muses. In the palinode we heard that a soul which has seen the Forms will be planted in its next incarnation in “a philosopher, a beauty-lover, or someone musical and erotic (φιλοσόφου ἢ φιλοκάλου ἢ μουσικοῦ τινος καὶ ἐρωτικοῦ)” (248d3-4). The philosopher leads the best human life, but these others are on the way. Therefore, someone like Phaedrus, in love with the beauty of *logoi*, has a chance. Socrates can try to use Phaedrus's love of beautiful *logoi* to lead him to something divine – to convert him to philosophy.¹⁶

5. Soul-leading through rhetoric: discussion

In the second part of the *Phaedrus* Socrates outlines an art (*technê*) of rhetoric, very different from what contemporary orators like Lysias practice. As Socrates tells us near the opening of the discussion, this will be an art of *psuchagôgia*:

Isn't the whole rhetorical art a kind of *psuchagôgia* through *logoi*, not only in the courts and any other civic gatherings, but also in private? (261a7-9)

¹⁶ For a much more pessimistic reading of the cicada interlude see Ferrari (*Listening to the Cicadas*, 27).

One might think that *psuchagôgia* here simply means persuasion, persuasion of the sort that Lysias and other contemporary orators perform perfectly well.¹⁷ But there are already signs that Socrates is not using words in their standard ways: Phaedrus is surprised at the inclusion of “in private,” for he thinks of rhetoric as at work only in public speaking, the persuasion of crowds. Indeed, the *Gorgias* cites this as a hallmark of rhetoric: it persuades in public, not in private (*Gorg.* 452e, 455a). As we read along, it becomes increasingly clear that Socrates thinks the true art of rhetoric a very different animal from contemporary rhetoric – indeed, something which includes dialectic, and which thus overlaps with what the *Republic* calls philosophy. To practice it, one must discover the truth about the subjects on which one speaks, and about human souls, through the practice of dialectic (collection and division) (265d-e, cf. 277b-c). Moreover, exercising this art means living the happy and blessed life (278b). Both epistemologically and ethically, then, real rhetoric turns out to be or at least overlap extensively with philosophy. Thus when Socrates says that “the whole rhetorical art is a kind of *psuchagôgia* through *logoi*,” he does not merely mean that orators are good at persuasion.

What does he mean? I will argue in this section that although the answer turns out to be quite broad, in keeping with the breadth of the art of rhetoric, the soul-leading Plato has in mind includes among other things the kind of leading-around he discusses in the *Symposium* and the *Republic*: conversion to the philosophical life.

Socrates says that there is one single art of *logoi* (261a, cf. 261e): any use of *logoi* that is based on knowledge will thus be governed by the same art, the art of rhetoric. In the *Gorgias* Socrates laid out the criteria something has to meet to count as an art (*technê*) rather than merely

¹⁷ Hackforth, for instance, calls this a “neutral” use of the term, by contrast with the negative use (deception, alluring) we find for example in Isocrates’s *ad Nic.* II.49 (commentary *ad loc.*).

a knack (*empeiria*) (*Gorg.* 464a-465d) – a distinction to which the *Phaedrus* alludes at 270b. An art must be based on knowledge, and its aim must be to benefit that which it is set over (*Gorg.* 464b-465a). The *Gorgias* condemns contemporary rhetoric as a mere knack but briefly mentions a possible art of rhetoric, “true rhetoric” (517a-b); this section of the *Phaedrus* is devoted to developing that vision. Rhetoric’s object – that which it is set over – is the soul (*Phaed.* 270e); if it is truly an art, then in keeping with Plato’s notion of *technê* it must benefit its object.¹⁸ In calling the art of rhetoric *psuchagogia*, then, Plato implies that *psuchagogia* is some way of benefiting the soul – of leading it toward something good. But that leaves open several possibilities.

We saw above this art can be practiced in large gatherings (261a, quoted above); given Plato’s arguments that in large groups and a short time no knowledge can be conveyed (*Gorg.* 455a; cf. *Phaed.* 276b-277a), it follows that sometimes the art’s aim must simply be to persuade people to have the right beliefs – to make good judicial or political decisions, rather than heeding ignorant orators who would persuade them to do something analogous to riding a donkey into battle (260b). Knowing the truth, the orator can lead people to a likeness of it, but in these cases presumably no more: the audience will have true beliefs about what is good, and act on them, without actually acquiring knowledge. Such persuasion is no mean achievement: contemporary orators will often fail at it due to their ignorance, leading people toward the bad instead of the good; well-intentioned philosophers, as Plato shows us in dialogues like the *Gorgias*, will often fail because even if they have some grip on the truth they are unable to persuade others to believe it.

¹⁸ Compare *Gorg.* 504d5-e3: “Then surely this orator, the one who has an art (*τεχνικός*) and is good...will always give his attention to this: how justice may come to be in the souls of his fellow citizens...and how the rest of excellence may arise there and vice depart.”

Clearly, however, the art of rhetoric Socrates outlines in the *Phaedrus* has a higher *telos* than this. The art is difficult, and not worth struggling to acquire merely “for the sake of speaking and acting among humans, but so as to be able to say things gratifying to the gods, and act in a way that gratifies them as much as one can” (273e5-8). The main substance of the rhetorical art is dialectic (266d, 269b), and the main point of acquiring the art is to put it to its divine use, which turns out to be nothing other than the practice of philosophy:

[Serious use of *logoi* is] when someone, using the dialectical art, takes a suitable soul and plants and sows in it *logoi* with knowledge, which will aid both themselves and the planter, and are not without fruit but contain a seed from which other *logoi* will grow in other characters, capable of rendering the seed forever immortal, and will make the one who has it as happy as it is possible for a person to be. (276e6-277a4)

This is the ultimate correct use of *logoi*. It is soul-leading in a higher sense than that applicable in large gatherings; one who uses *logoi* in this way is leading his interlocutor’s soul not merely to true beliefs about what is just or good or fine to do, but to what is ultimately beneficial: knowledge of the Forms themselves of justice and the rest.

This is not yet to show that rhetoric can be used as a soul-leader in the sense I laid out at the start of this paper – as a tool for turning people away from worldly concerns and towards love of the truth: what we see in the seed-sowing passage might instead be interpreted as a way of using *logoi* to help people along the way towards truth when they are already set on finding it. What Socrates says about rhetoric elsewhere, however, shows how rhetoric could accomplish the prior stage – the conversion stage – as well.

In his discussion of the art of rhetoric Socrates dwells on two elements which – although he does not make the point explicit – would give it the power to succeed, where his own methods in dialogues like the *Gorgias* or *Euthyphro* fail, to win over people who are not already willing and prepared to pursue the truth. First, a crucial part of the art of rhetoric – and one explicitly mentioned as a tool of *psuchagôgia* – is knowledge of the different types of human soul, and of the different types of *logoi* suited to each:

Since the power of *logos* turns out to be *psuchagôgia*, it is necessary for the one who intends to be a rhetorician to know how many species the soul has...And when he has divided these in these ways, then in turn [he must determine] how many species of *logos* there are, and what each one is like. For such-and-such sort of people are easily persuaded by such-and-such sort of *logos*, and this other sort hard to persuade by the same *logoi*. (271c10-d7)

This is the dialogue's second and last use of the word *psuchagôgia* (alongside 261a8, quoted above). The passage it makes clear that leading souls will often be a matter of tailoring *logoi* to suit particular characters, rather than simply presenting a one-size-fits-all declaration of the truth. Other dialogues emphasize Socrates's refusal to tailor his *logoi*: in the *Gorgias*, most notably, he happily accepts the accusation that he always "says the same things" (490e9-11), for "what philosophy says always stays the same" (482a7-b1); in the *Apology* he boasts of his egalitarian approach – he says the same thing to "any one of you I ever happen to meet" (29d6, quoted above; cf. "young and old" at 30a3). One can of course talk to a Cephalus or a Callicles as if he were a Glaucon, but the conversation, Plato shows us in these dialogues, is likely to end quickly or badly. The *Phaedrus* recommends a radically different tactic. The orator must

discover which kind of *logos* is appropriate to each kind of soul, prepare and arrange your *logos* accordingly, and offer multicolored [or ‘variegated’ – ποικίλους] and many-moded *logoi* to a multicolored soul and simple ones to a simple one. (277c1-3)

The vocabulary is particularly notable here: Plato elsewhere uses ‘multicolored’ to characterize people ruled by the appetitive part of the soul – that is, vicious, intemperate types – by contrast with ‘simple,’ stable, unified virtuous types (see especially *Rep.* 561e, 605a, and *Laws* 704d, vs. *Rep.* 361d), and the *Rep.* excludes varied, complicated art from the ideal city because of its corrupting influence, allowing in only the simple kind (*Rep.* 397b-c, 399c, 399e-400a, 404e, 605a). Here, by contrast, multicolored *logoi* have a beneficial use: in the right hands, they can benefit multicolored souls, and lead them toward the good.

Socrates also describes a second element of the art of rhetoric which could help it to win over those not naturally given to philosophy: the tricks it borrows from contemporary rhetoric. In the *Gorgias* techniques such as elegant style and appeal to emotions were dismissed as mere flattery; here they are “necessary preliminaries” to the proper exercise of rhetoric (266d-269c). Using the same tricks contemporary orators rely on for their own baser ends, the practitioner of the art of rhetoric can bring someone into a suitable state for hearing the truth. (This second element surely overlaps with the first: multicolored souls will best be won by speeches that appeal to emotions, or employ images, while simple souls may be more amenable to short speeches than long ones, and so on.)

These aspects of the art of rhetoric endow it with a very important potential: it can act as a soul-leader as effective as interpersonal love, but without love’s limitations. Like interpersonal love, it can exploit people’s passion for the beautiful – here the beauty of *logoi* rather than of

human bodies or souls – to lead them toward the Forms. Unlike such love, however, it is not contingent: even those not lucky enough to fall in love with or be loved by a philosophical soul can practice or be the audience for rhetoric, for like medicine it is a systematic art adaptable to all people and circumstances. Thus also, and again unlike ordinary love, it is egalitarian: even those multicolored types who lack a natural bent toward philosophy, or whose unruly souls distract them from it, can be guided by rhetoric toward the truth.

Socrates does not explicitly say that rhetoric can be used to lead souls toward philosophy in this way. But I want now to demonstrate that throughout the dialogue, Plato *shows* him doing – or at least attempting – precisely this. His attempts to convert Phaedrus demonstrate both advantages of rhetoric as a soul-leader over love: that it is independent of luck, and that – because it knows how to make use of contemporary rhetoric’s tricks, and how to adapt its speeches to the audience’s soul – it can influence even a multicolored soul.

6. Soul-leading through rhetoric: demonstration

I argued above that the opening scene shows us that Socrates wants to lead Phaedrus away from the empty charms of contemporary rhetoric and toward the life of philosophy. The palinode describes one tool for such leading: love. But love only works for lovers, and the mock-courtship emphasizes that Socrates and Phaedrus are not in fact in love; hence Socrates cannot use interpersonal love to lead Phaedrus’s soul. The opening scene also reveals, however, that Phaedrus has erotic love for *logoi*, thus suggesting that Socrates might use this kind of love instead. In this last section I will argue that over the course of the dialogue he does just this, exploiting the two aspects of his putative art of rhetoric that equip it to lead souls when interpersonal love cannot.

The first thing to note is that Phaedrus is presented as having some potential for philosophy, in that his love is for *logoi* rather than food or sex, but as ruled by his strong passion for aesthetic pleasure. The opening scene, as we saw, casts him as a left-handed lover of *logoi*: lacking self-control, sick with passion, and seeking pleasure above all. He welcomes all *logoi*, regardless of their grip on truth, so long as they strike him as fine and beautiful. And thus he is easily seduced by contemporary rhetoric (and indeed also by sophistry: see *Protag.* 315c, where he is mentioned as a devotee of the sophist Hippias).¹⁹ In the *Republic*, Plato characterizes both pleasing *logoi* and the souls naturally influenced by them as multicolored.²⁰ Thus Phaedrus's is a multicolored soul, and if Socrates wants to persuade him of anything then he must follow the advice he gives to the practitioner of rhetoric at 271c-d (quoted above) and apply multicolored *logoi* to his soul.

Moreover, Socrates not only does just this with the flowery palinode, but at the end of that speech even calls attention to the fact that this is what he has done:

...this palinode was forced to be spoken in some poetical (ποιητικοῖς) words, on account of Phaedrus. (257a5-6)

Socrates has tailored his speech to suit Phaedrus's soul: he has used multicolored, "poetical" language of the kind that will please Phaedrus. (Contrast *Rep.* 387b2-4: the more poetical a work,

¹⁹ As Brad Inwood points out to me, Phaedrus's devotion to Hippias fits perfectly with his character, for Hippias is a master of many and various arts, precisely the sort that would attract an indiscriminate variety-lover like Phaedrus.

²⁰ See the passages quoted in the previous section; note also that tragedy, which the *Republic* describes as having an affinity with multicolored souls (604d-605a), is characterized as a form of contemporary rhetoric, pleasing but not beneficial, at *Gorg.* 502b-d.

and the more pleasing, “the less it should be heard.”) His purpose is made clear in the lines that follow (257b2-6, quoted above in section 2): to persuade Phaedrus to stop “playing both sides” and instead “simply live for Love with philosophical *logoi*” – in other words, to lead his soul toward philosophy.

Indeed we can read all of Socrates’s playfulness with words throughout the first half of the dialogue – his mock-flirtation with Phaedrus, his Lysianic first speech, and of course the palinode itself – as attempts to tailor *logoi* to suit his hearer’s soul. (Arguably we can also see him as employing some of contemporary rhetoric’s tricks: certainly he plays on Phaedrus’s emotions, and certainly his speeches are elegantly constructed.) The aim throughout, as he makes clear, is to win Phaedrus to philosophy. Thus Socrates not only describes the art of rhetoric in a way that it entails that it *could* be used to lead souls toward philosophy (see previous section), but also gives us an *epideixis*, a demonstration, of just this use.²¹

This is not to say that Socrates is actually practicing the art that he describes – for surely he would disavow the knowledge which belongs to that art, knowledge of the human soul and of the “just, fine and good” (270b, 276c) – but only that he is attempting it. In the *Gorgias* he describes himself as perhaps the only person who “attempts (ἐπιχειρεῖν) the true political art and

²¹ The general idea that the *Phaedrus* shows Socrates using rhetoric for philosophical ends is a familiar one, well expressed for example by Ferrari: Plato recognizes “that discursive argument alone cannot furnish Socrates with adequate means of persuading the adherents of rhetoric to become philosophical” (*Listening to the Cicadas*, 38-39); see also Nightingale: “Part of philosophy... must involve a critical engagement with *logoi* that do not represent the wisdom-loving part of the soul” (A.W. Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the construct of philosophy* (Cambridge, 1995), 147).

practices politics” (521d5-7); what I am arguing is that he takes the same stance toward the rhetorical art here.

Neither is this to say that Socrates is successful in his soul-leading. He certainly seems to have some success: after the pleasures of the opening speeches is Phaedrus is content to participate in a dry discussion very different from the sort of thing he sought before, and at the end of the dialogue he appears to be convinced that the philosophical life is best. On the other hand, we never see him engaging in philosophy in any other dialogue (he appears only twice, in dialogues probably earlier than the *Phaedrus*: in the *Symposium* desiring to hear speeches in praise of love, and in the *Protagoras* as a devotee of the sophists), and one might well suspect that what he gets out of the discussion is no more than what he expressly desired from it: pleasure (258e). Perhaps we are meant to think that Phaedrus will always only wallow in the pleasures of *logoi*, just as non-philosophical lovers wallow in the pleasures of sex, without being transported to anything higher. In his seed-sowing metaphor, however, Socrates tells us that the flowering of wisdom takes time, and it is at least arguable that in this dialogue we see him plant the seeds. At any rate, my claim is not that Plato shows Socrates succeed in leading Phaedrus’s soul toward philosophy; instead, it is that he shows him making the attempt.

I have argued that the most prominent features of the *Phaedrus* – its elaborate opening scene, its odd switch from drama to dialectic, its speeches about love, and its discussion of the art of rhetoric – are all unified by one theme: *psuchagôgia*. In the *Phaedrus*, as in other dialogues, Plato is concerned with the question of how a philosopher can bring others to philosophy. He proposes a new means: exploitation of a subject’s love of beauty, by means of beautiful, truth-directed *logoi*. To explain how this works, he expounds on the soul-leading potential both of love and of *logoi*. And he constructs the dialogue as a demonstration of an attempt at precisely this type of soul-leading: Socrates’s attempt to convert Phaedrus, using a nascent art of rhetoric, away

from the pleasures of contemporary rhetoric and toward the divine benefits of the philosophical life.

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