

Plato, *Phaedrus*. Translated by Harold North Fowler. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Plato (428-348 B.C.) studied under Socrates, and instructed Aristotle. His philosophical system based on ideal forms supported a potent ethical structure. Plato's system proved seminal to all subsequent Western philosophy. Plato founded the Academy in Athens, where he taught until his death.

Phaedrus induces Socrates to go on a walk outside Athens, which Socrates seldom does, by the promise of a long talk on Lysias's proposition that the non-lover must be preferred over the lover. Socrates notes that he does not like to leave the city because he knows so little about himself that he cannot afford to investigate matters other than himself. The city, not the countryside, teaches Socrates of Socrates. Socrates cajoles Phaedrus into recounting what he has heard Lysias say concerning love.

Lysias's Argument Concerning Eros. Erotic lovers act from passion; friends (non-lovers) act from reason according to their perceptions of their self-interest. The erotic lover acts insanely; the friend restrains their emotions so they can choose what is best under the circumstances. Friendship itself faces formidable obstacles, and may perish. But bonds to an erotic lover are certain to be short-lived. Erotic lovers seek to prevent their beloved from associating with others more wealthy, intelligent, educated than themselves, from jealousy. They leave their beloved bereft of friends. The erotic lover leaps into relationship even before he has discovered if he likes his beloved. The beloved should be pitied. A friend weighs the future of his friend, controls his angers, is slow to take offense, forgives easily, and avoids all intentional harms. Real love should benefit the both lovers, not harm them.

Socrates ridicules Lysias's argument as both facile and inelegant. Its rhetoric is deficient.

Phaedrus urges Socrates to improve on Lysias. Socrates objects that his skills are deficient, since his is merely a pitcher into which the thoughts of many others have been poured. Socrates cannot even remember from whom he has taken his own thoughts. Phaedrus persists, and Socrates relents his intention to return to Athens from the countryside. He will speak, but will keep his head wrapped while speaking so he won't be embarrassed.

Socrates' First Argument. Eros is desire for beauty that overwhelms rational pursuit of the right and good. The erotic lover seeks a beloved inferior to himself. The erotic lover seeks to isolate his beloved, from jealousy. He seeks to keep the beloved ignorant. The erotic lover seeks an effeminate companion, one who is cowardly. The erotic lover fastidiously prevents his beloved from acquiring wisdom, which is the most important possession. In short, the erotic lover impoverishes his beloved. When the erotic lover's passion ebbs, he abandons all his promises to the beloved. The beloved has been loved as wolves love lambs.

Socrates says that his inner voice tells him he has spoken wrongly. Both Lysias's and his own arguments are erroneous, because Love is a god, not to be disparaged. Socrates recants his argument, even before the god punishes him.

Socrates' Recantation of the First Argument. Lysias and Socrates have misportrayed erotic lovers. Any person who has had a gentle and considerate erotic lover will disagree with their characterization. That person will assert that an erotic lover is much to be preferred over a reasonable friend. Socrates and Lysias erred when they portrayed love as a kind of madness. Madness can be saving, as when the Delphic oracle speaks from her frenzy, or when religious devotion releases old guilts, or when the Muses inspire a poet. One must prove that such madness as erotic love is the greatest gift of the gods. In this recantation, Socrates does not seem entirely genuine.

Socrates' Second Argument. A certain "madness" is the preferred state. Every soul is immortal because the soul moves the body and itself. Self-motion is the very meaning of what a soul is. In its form, the soul is like a charioteer driving a pair of winged horses, one pure and noble, but the other of the opposite character. Mortal beings are souls joined to bodies, as living creatures. Immortal souls rule the heavens, and lack bodies, but have wings. Soul wings carry the unembodied soul up toward beauty, wisdom, and goodness, which are divinity. The mind guides the soul, and in gods, the mind sees absolute verities, not our so-called realities. Of those souls that cannot dwell with the gods, and so are embodied, the soul that knows best absolute beauty,

justice, and wisdom becomes a philosopher, and less insightful souls become lesser humans. When normal people see philosophers, they think them mad, because philosophers, in the thrall of beauty recollected, behave oddly. Philosophers remember the heavenly forms, stirred by the earthly pale images of divine realities, being less burdened by their bodies (their oyster shells) than are their human companions. Earthly beauty afflicts the philosopher with dim remembrance of absolute Beauty. Often the earthly beauty that afflicts the philosopher is that of his young male lover.

Socrates recurs to his image of the soul as two horses led by a charioteer. The right hand horse heeds command and reason. The left, however, barely responds to beating. The unruly horse, when it sees the beloved, urges sex, so violently that the charioteer must haul in both horses with great difficulty. Brought to his haunches, the bad horse nevertheless perseveres, and the charioteer must again and again rein it in, making its bit bloody, before it learns, for fear, to heed the charioteer and fear sight of the beloved. The lover eschews passion with the beloved, until a moment of weakness overcomes them both. Having succumbed, the soul of lover and beloved alike are injured. Nevertheless, in this manner, a lover surpasses the benefit derived from the mere friend's affection, hobbled as it is by careful foresight and societal compliances.

Socrates ends his argument on behalf of Love, and offers a prayer to Love, in which Phaedrus concurs.

Rhetoric. Phaedrus notes that Lysias may not want to rewrite his argument against lovers, because the opinions of many is that writers are sophists. Socrates notes that all great statesmen write. What shame exists in writing lies in doing so poorly. One writes well when one persuades others of truth. Phaedrus notes that many say persuasion concerns what people believe, not what is true. It deals in appearances and perception, not facts. Socrates asserts that real persuasion convinces others of truth. To persuade requires knowing the similarities and dissimilarities of things. And that entails knowing the truth of a matter. The less the audience knows, the more easily a speaker deceives it.

The two philosophers analyze Lysias's argument on erotic lovers and friends. Socrates chides that it lacks a beginning, middle, and end. Phaedrus turns to Socrates' argument, which Socrates notes had a pallor of jest hanging over it. Considering both arguments, which reach opposite conclusions, one finds two principles of the dialectician (one who has the art of speech): bring together disparate items under one heading, and divide one thing into its constituent parts.

Phaedrus asks Socrates about the many concepts in extant books on rhetoric. Socrates summarizes many points the rhetoricians deem significant. Socrates asserts that these matters are preliminaries of rhetoric, not the art of rhetoric proper. Acquiring the art of speaking depends on conditions: natural ability, loftiness of thought, practice and study. Pericles is the most skilled artist of speech alive.

Medicine and rhetoric have methodological similarities. Medicine addresses the nature of the body; rhetoric addresses that of the soul. As the physician attempts to produce health in the body, the speaker seeks to generate conviction in the soul. So, the rhetorician must know the soul. But the writers of books on rhetoric obscure the nature of the soul. The true rhetorician must catalogue the types of men, observe what sorts of speech moves each sort of man, and practice those speeches. Such skill is a long and difficult art to acquire.

Socrates turns to playing the devil's advocate. He asks, What about the theory that rhetoric concerns not truth, but persuasion alone, regardless of the truth of the matter? People are persuaded by what seems probable, not by truth. Artistic speakers focus on probability. Tisias, a rhetorician of this stripe, proposed criminal defenses likely to prevail but patently false.

Writing reminds. Writing is not understanding, which lies only in an intelligent mind. He who writes should do so only to remind, seeking by his words to raise up other intelligent minds.

Knowing good and bad is praiseworthy, whether or not the crowd sneers.

Socrates offers a prayer to Pan before he and Phaedrus leave the glen. Make my soul beautiful, my possessions conform to my soul. Let me believe wise men are rich, and give me only such wealth as a man of moderation can bear. Phaedrus shares this prayer, because friends share everything.