

Re-inventing Love: An Introduction to Plato's *Phaedrus*

Let me begin by explaining my slightly preposterous title and my intentions in this talk. The English playwright Tom Stoppard has a dazzlingly erudite play called "The Invention of Love." It is not one of his more popular works for the stage, partly because of the arcane references to classical philology, including substantial quotations from the Roman poets in Latin and a stupefying excursion into the critical role of the comma. The play centers on the 19th-century Oxford classicist and poet A. E. Housman, dramatically reviewing his life in the Underworld among the ghosts from his past, including himself as a youth. In the course of it, Housman recollects his scholarly foray into the problem of who invented the love elegy, Propertius or Gallus – a tour de force of academic wit, since the decision in favor of Gallus is founded on one surviving line of the latter poet. Hence Stoppard's playful title "The Invention of Love." Yet the title suggests its deeper implication when, near the end of the play, the flamboyant Oscar Wilde drops into this Hades. The lesson is something like this. Housman strove throughout his career to leave behind an immortal monument of scholarly work, founded on the scattered fragments of ancient writing. But his work too will be reduced to mere fragments, as time has its way with all things human. Meanwhile he was an emotional failure, in contrast to his contemporary, the bold pederast Oscar Wilde. Through the character of Wilde, Stoppard suggests that Housman missed his own "real" life, the life offered to everyone in the experience of love. If love was anyone's invention, it is one that we cannot see behind (p. 95). And so every man must either discover love or invent it for himself.

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Now the importance accorded to love in the “real life” of poets and scholars in Stoppard’s play is certainly on the order of Plato’s concerns. But their views – I am tempted to say: the views of the two playwrights, Plato being the playwright of the life of Socrates – their views could hardly be farther apart about what the real life of eros consists in. Ironically, I think this is because Plato – who is no less playful than Stoppard – takes the invention of love by the poets more seriously. True, the poets did not singlehandedly invent love as the Greeks knew it, much less as we know it. But the poets have much to do with how people experience love and what they do with the experience, more than ordinary folk are ever aware of. That is why Plato suggests in the *Phaedrus* the radical idea that Socrates undertook to re-invent love over against the poets. Socrates re-invented love as philosophical eros – the all-consuming love of wisdom – in his view, the highest expression of human erotics in general and the meaning of Greek pederasty in particular.

So the re-invention of love turns on a question of the deepest importance in Plato’s philosophy: namely, how philosophy is erotic. Philosophy is erotic not just in the sense that wisdom might be someone’s over-mastering passion. It is erotic also in that the pursuit of wisdom draws on and absorbs the notorious excesses of sexual desire. Thus the philosopher is master of his sexual impulses. This mastery is not an end in itself. But the love of wisdom, which is the philosopher’s end in itself, puts the physical eros at the disposal of the soul, reversing the nearly universal tendency of eros to subjugate the soul to the body. From this idea derives what is popularly called “Platonic love,” the passionate, extra-marital relationship that seeks no sexual expression – one of the most spectacular (as well as one of the most misunderstood) notions in all of ancient and

modern literature. Its locus classicus, of course, is the *Phaedrus*.

Working through the whole *Phaedrus* in a short talk like this is out of the question, especially as it is one of the most intricate and ambiguous texts in the Platonic corpus. What I shall attempt instead is to look at how the dialogue prepares us as readers to appreciate philosophical eros. I shall therefore focus on the exchanges and speeches that come before Socrates' famous speech, before the great palinode, where he describes the Divine Madness and the soul as a charioteer driving mismatched steeds with broken wings. Now the parts of the dialogue that precede the palinode have two strikes against them. No. 1, they are confusing. No. 2, they are not the palinode. That is, we tend to take them as "preliminary material," not worth too much of our trouble as readers compared to Socrates' great discourse on love. In any case, doesn't Socrates himself repudiate the speeches that precede the palinode? While we may find the first parts of the dialogue hard to take very seriously, on the other hand every joke and gesture of Socrates can seem ripe with some meaning. I would like to propose that the first sections of the *Phaedrus* dramatize an essential piece of Socrates' wisdom about eros. But the only way to glean this wisdom is to never let our guard down before the crafty philosopher.

Let's start with the question I already raised about invention. "Invention" is a rhetorical category. The Greek term εὑρεσις refers to the originality of the argument or rhetorical strategy in a speech. It can also mean "discovery." Socrates uses the term when discussing his approach in his first speech, building on Lysias's thesis of the superiority of the non-lover to the lover. As usual, Socrates is ironic: in discussing "invention" he leads us to believe that he himself could say nothing very original, except perhaps on a few inessential points. (236a) Thus Socrates makes the contest in the use of

rhetorical devices a smokescreen concealing the audacity of the teaching about eros that he is about to present.

Socrates' radical views are – as is only to be expected in Plato – set in contrast to the teaching of the poets who have long shaped people's experience of love. Indeed the English term “invention” (as a translation of εὔρεσις) may apply more to the poets, while the term “discovery” may better suit the philosopher who inquires into the nature of things. The poets (according to the Greek term ποιήσις) are makers and creators. They are not necessarily interested in the truth about human things, nor about the Whole in which Socrates, by contrast, would ground the subject of love. Now Socrates, in placing eros in the context of the entire Cosmos – speculating about nature on the grand scale, like his philosophical predecessors – will point out that the poets have not sung, and will never sing, adequately concerning the place beyond the heavens of the gods, the place of That Which Truly Is. (247c) The poets may be the mediators between the gods and men; but the philosopher gets nearer to Being itself. The poets could therefore only give us love as an artifice – they invented it. The philosopher tries to reveal love as it is by nature, as it might be discovered in truth by the reflective mind.

Now the way this difference comes up near the beginning of the dialogue is striking. Before beginning his speech in the match with Lysias, Socrates makes a point of saying how shallow Lysias is on the topic of love. (235b) Socrates prefers the original writers, like the poets Sappho and Anacreon, who at least knew what needed to be said on the topic. Now he does not mean that the poets spoke or knew the truth. He brings them into this conversation because of their decisive influence on our typical erotic sentiments. He says he could not have invented (οὐδὲν αὐτῶν ἐννεόηκα, 235c) the original

talk about love. The poets poured it into his ears like a foreign stream – “foreign” (ἄλλοτριῶν) implying that this current was not native, not natural to him nor perhaps to anybody else. Lysias may be the occasion of this impromptu contest of speeches concerning eros, but for Socrates the serious competitors are the poets.

Now notice Phaedrus’s reaction. “Don’t tell me, Socrates, even if I beg you, how or from whom you heard such talk.” (235d) I doubt that it is just Phaedrus’s individual character that Plato has portrayed here; I rather think that Plato is underscoring the antipathy between a shallow type of aesthetic experience and philosophy. Phaedrus is expressing resistance to having knowledge about the sources of his pleasure. Pleasure is immediacy, and knowledge would mediate that immediacy. Knowledge interferes with passive enjoyment, supplanting it with the beginnings of critique and self-consciousness about one’s response. A certain self-deception is the condition of erotic attachment to surface beauty. But the question of origins has another, more disturbing feature from which Phaedrus may be protecting himself. The question of origins would force upon his attention the arbitrariness of certain cultural forms and practices – the power poets have even beyond our immediate experience of their poetry. Subjection to love and subjection to rhetoric start to resemble each other, when seen as expressions of the power of language over time. Thoughtful distancing from eros may well be in our interest.

Even in our interpersonal experience, love and rhetoric are intertwined. The passions that engage us intimately also find us putting on masks and playing rhetorical games with people in order to protect those passions or carry out their designs. At the beginning of the dialogue both Socrates and Phaedrus profess to be lovers of speeches – susceptible to the beauties of language. But they don’t mean quite the same thing by this,

and so they engage in a good deal of horsing around before they settle on their shared business. Each conceals his desire in a different way. Phaedrus hides his need to recite Lysias's speech, to impersonate him before another, as if he could make Lysias's powers his own (228a). (He is even concealing the fact that he has Lysias's discourse with him.) This deception Socrates will quickly expose. By contrast, Socrates pretends weakness. He pretends to be sick with the love of hearing discourses, when (as we shall see) he is looking for the right chance to expound his own views. So the difference is that Phaedrus is not honest with himself when he hides his desire, whereas Socrates hides his with full awareness by pretending to be susceptible to a different one. He pretends to be dependent on Phaedrus to hear any speeches, such that Phaedrus might lead him all around Attica. Phaedrus senses that Socrates is teasing him on this score, though he does not appreciate how the quest for wisdom motivates this playfulness. Thus Plato introduces us immediately to the difference that self-knowledge makes in the need that desire has, to conceal and preserve itself. Ordinary desire conceals itself out of self-interest. Philosophical desire conceals itself by imitating ordinary desire and does so out of interest in philosophy. (Cf. 227c-d2) This is part of Socratic irony.

Therefore it is the philosopher who is ready to call attention to the role-playing. Initially Socrates hopes that they might drop the game of masks and Phaedrus just recite Lysias's speech, or read the copy he has with him. Socrates reinterprets his meeting with Phaedrus, describing their encounter as third persons, so as to shatter the fiction.

O Phaedrus! If I don't know Phaedrus, I have forgotten myself. But since neither of these things is true, I know very well that when listening to Lysias he did not hear once only, but often urged him to repeat; and he gladly obeyed. Yet even that was not enough for Phaedrus, but at last he borrowed the book and read what he especially wished. Then . . . he went for a walk with the speech, as I believe, . . . learned by heart. . . And he was going outside the wall to practice it. And meeting the man who is sick with the love of discourse, he was glad when he saw him, because he would have someone to share his revel, and told him to lead on. But when the lover of

discourse asked him to speak, he feigned coyness, as if he did not yearn to speak; at last, however, even if no one would listen willingly, he was bound to speak whether or no. So, Phaedrus, ask him to do now what he will presently do anyway. 228a-c

Unfortunately, Socrates will soon discover that it is not so easy in this case to dispense with the disguises. When Phaedrus proves excessively enamored of Lysias's speech, Socrates dons a mask beyond any little game shared by acquaintances. He will cover himself with his cloak, separating himself from Phaedrus more than the latter realizes. (237a) Socrates is supposed to speak against love and in behalf of non-love, in the manner of Lysias's speech of seduction. He lets Phaedrus assume that he has to cover himself out of embarrassment before him, as if he were giving a speech he was loathe to give but gives anyway to win Phaedrus's admiration. This is misleading, as is the later talk about Socrates being ashamed to offend the god Eros (as we shall see). In fact –this is what is not obvious – Socrates is speaking for himself as a philosopher, but concealing it while he plays the imitator and rival of Lysias. His concern for Phaedrus's regard is really a concern that wisdom be freely recognized. (237b) His speech inquires into the nature of things; and so it aims first to define the nature of love. It makes much of the prudent counsel it gives to the youth it addresses (237c, 238d) and it recommends "divine philosophy" to make him wise. (239b) Socrates is not representing a seductive Lysian non-lover, as he pretends according to the rhetoric contest. He is performing his own peculiar species of dispassion called philosophy, the "Non-Love" (as most people would see it) practiced by the lover of wisdom who is interested in his listener's welfare. In speaking before Phaedrus, Socrates' words represent himself. The irrational lovers described in his speech, who are supposed to resemble the lovers that Lysias condemns, include Lysias himself and all his kind. (We'll see proof of this later.) The irony then is this. While Socrates prevented Phaedrus from speaking as Lysias, with Lysias, as he put

it (228e2), concealed there under his cloak, Socrates contrives to speak as if he were the new Lysias while, under his cloak, he has just concealed himself. We have, in the image of the two speakers as protrusions under cloaks, the ironic symbolism of the Talking Phallus. Not Socrates' shame but a satyr play has emerged here in the dialogue. Covertly, Socrates both mocks Phaedrus's illusion of empowerment by Lysias and prepares to speak on the serious matter of the devolution of eros into power and lust.

Let's look at how Socrates' first speech comes to define eros as force. He sets out a sequence of exorbitant desires. First he mentions the overmastering passion for food, which is called gluttony. Then the tyrannizing passion for wine: "we know what that is called," he says. We seek a name for a desire akin to these. He continues,

It's relatively clear already, I suppose, why all this has been said, but things are altogether clearer if the reason is spelled out rather than left unstated: when passion without reason [overcomes] straight-minded (sic) opinion and is itself driven toward the pleasure of beauty, and further, when this passion is violently moved by kindred desires toward the beauty of the body and is victorious, it takes its name from that very force (δύμη) and is called love (ἔρως). (238b-c)

Socrates' definition of eros here is a picture of transgression and excess. Passion overcomes opinion concerning what is correct, ἐπὶ τὸ ὀρθὸν, or (as this translation has it) passion overcomes "straight-minded" opinion. This is a joke about Greek pederasty that apparently works in the original language as it does in English. It also underscores the determination of desire to break conventional boundaries. Then there is the irony of Socrates' making eros conclude a list of nutritional excesses. Gluttony, drunkenness, and . . . love! The implication is that what most people call "love" comes down to sexual appetite, excessive and insatiable insofar as they reduce eros to a selfish need to feed upon someone, rather than remain open to a transpersonal energy. (Socrates would probably see the modern literature of vampires as expressing our ambivalence about a sexuality widely enacted on the nutritional model.) His lecture about clarity here only

adds to the comedy of his not saying clearly what he is saying. The real problem of eros concerns not its normal and natural powers but its tendency to violence and predation.

Readers frequently assume that Socrates' concern is a general one: to raise eros above the physical [Pippin, 18]; but this ignores the specific context that elicits his ironic inquiries. In the *Phaedrus*, as in the *Symposium*, Socrates is addressing the peculiar practice of Greek pederasty, the sexual courtship of the youth by adult citizens, a practice that was by no means a settled institution of the polis. (Historian James Davidson, for example, describes it as full of "knottiness and contradictions." xxvi) If we take pederasty as a Greek norm, when it is its borderline normalcy, its transgressive tendency, that is at issue for Socrates, then we miss the connection between eros and philosophy. The eros that points to philosophy is the eros that tends to defy conventionality. (A fair analogy might be the passion of adultery and its quest for sublimation, as found in the operas of Wagner and Debussy.) It is the excesses of eros, its power to break any norm, that Socrates would bring to its climax – as if there was a hidden purpose in the havoc that eros wreaks, as if all the excess was not finally about sex. This is the reason for the intensity – far from repression – in the non-sexual "Platonic" relationship: suspending sex, it heightens the soul's conscious urge toward Being. How the philosopher refines his immoderate eros into a relationship to Being itself is what the *Phaedrus* is all about.

Let us turn to a theme closely related to this one of eros as unregulated force: the theme of master and slave. We saw earlier how the passions Socrates and Phaedrus have merely for speeches makes them vulnerable to each other's manipulations; it is so much more the case with the desire to possess other people, especially outside the roles defined by custom. Here is where force emerges, not just within the disordered soul, but between

the lovers who, left to their own devices, naturally vie for power. How does one get what one wants from another person who is himself a center of desire and choice? The asymmetries of this struggle, which Hegel's analysis of Spirit made famous as the master-slave dialectics, are not at all foreign to Plato. In fact, I would propose that the struggle to be the master is all that makes the speech of Lysias of interest. What draws Phaedrus to this speech of Lysias, whereby a man recommends himself as a non-lover in order to seduce a beloved? Readers of the dialogue often take the speaker of Lysias's speech (whom I shall call Lysias for short) for a clever scoundrel – a seducer whose only distinction is a weird strategy of seduction that recommends his own lack of passion. This cannot be the whole story. If Lysias has devised such an unlikely proposition to get some regular recreational sex, then Phaedrus is merely a fool, and Plato is providing Socrates with a slight pretext indeed as the occasion to expound his thinking about eros. The problem is to understand what makes Lysias's position significant both for Phaedrus as a candidate of his solicitations and, in a different way, for Socrates.

First of all, one should note how Lysias has attempted to create legitimacy and public respectability for a relationship where these were lacking. He has made Greek pederasty into something that seems sensible in itself and that will pass without criticism under public gaze. Thanks to his lack of passion, his lack of the mad unpredictability that attends passion, the older friend will provide the youth with reliable and sustained social benefits, and meanwhile not be tempted to make any careless disclosures. The problem with Lysias's solution for this doubtfully licit love, however, is not simply his personal deceitfulness or even his sexual designs. The problem is that, while he has removed one of the obstacles to this love, its open offense to social opinion, he has simultaneously

removed one of its hidden motivations. He can't remove the defiance of respectability from wild eros without reducing some of its allure. Reducing the relationship to cool calculations for sex, Lysias has turned a high-stakes safari into a secret outing to grab a snack between meals. Is that still erotic?

Well, yes. But only because the conventional Lysias injects the liaison with a new power, the very unconventional idea of the attraction of non-Love, a theme he belabors, as Socrates points out. (235a). What Lysias's novel seduction brings to the fore is the power of indifference and impassivity. The obstacle and danger that he removed in a social sense from Greek love he must recreate in a psychological sense. Anyone who has ever played hard-to-get – well, I suppose this is not something that we would do, but something other bad people might do to us – anyone who has seen someone play hard-to-get knows that this paradoxical posture touches on something paradoxical in desire itself. In Lysias's case, it is easy to see how the older person might capitalize on the youth's attraction to him. As a Non-Lover, he effectively makes the youth into the lover and makes himself the prize. He is no slave of love; he need not surrender any of his ego-pride. He simply denies love, denies his capacity to be captivated in that way. We are speaking, after all, about the rhetorician whose interest is his ability to move other people – someone whose dialectics, like his erotics, is a one-way street. Meanwhile, Lysias's listener, the younger person like Phaedrus, will have instead an Idol to worship. Now there can be little doubt about Phaedrus's need for a hero. Why else would he insist three times on the definitiveness of Lysias's speech? (236b) And why offer, even in jest, to erect a statue of the winner of the speech competition? (236b) It is Lysias's turning of the tables on the beloved that supplies the required element of fascination. For Phaedrus

Lysias functions as the erotic unmoved Mover.

Socrates cannot fail to be struck by Lysias's perverse image of the philosopher, the sublime aloofness of one who keeps his head in love. Even his criticism of Lysias for harping on his theme might indicate that he is intrigued by Lysias's negation of love. And notice: when Phaedrus asks Socrates to give his own speech, a better and "quite different" one (μη ἐλάττω ἕτερα, 235d), Socrates craftily avoids doing so. Let me make this clear: Socrates could easily give now, after Phaedrus's recitation and at Phaedrus's request, what we take to be the "true" speech about eros as Divine Madness, the renowned palinode. But at this point he resists the invitation. We needn't go *there*, he tells Phaedrus. (I am paraphrasing.) Lysias has not failed in every respect. Plus, you mustn't imagine that feeble-minded Socrates could compose a discourse with brand new arguments! (235e) So Socrates pretends that he is required to adopt Lysias's topic of non-love; he distracts our attention with a question-begging maneuver. "Take the subject of Lysias' speech," he says, "what person arguing that the non-lover ought to be more favored than the lover, could omit praise of the non-lover's calm sense and blame of the lover's unreason? These are necessary points." (235e-236a) Thus, while quietly indicating what might be attractive about non-love, and using its necessary entailment by Lysias's thesis as his alibi, Socrates submits to a non-existent rule of adopting Lysias's thesis for his first speech. Socrates is intent on recognizing the Non-Lover, albeit according to his own version of that idea. He merely pretends to need to borrow the topic from Lysias and to have Phaedrus's permission to do so. (236b)

Of course, Socrates does have to unpack what's going on in Lysias's head, since despite the novelty of Lysias' rhetorical game it is informed by no real superiority.

Lysias wants the beloved's sexual favors as much as any of the standard lovers; he only manifests in an exceptional way the lover's wish to keep perfect control. Thus, one of the things that Socrates' first speech will do is to make explicit how the older lover (who might be Lysias) feels compelled to master the beloved, a compulsion of the soul rather than the body. On Socrates' account, the bad lover seeks a boy who bears witness to his presumed superiority, a beloved who can be kept dependent on him and never surpass him. This Master refuses to appreciate the beloved's needs as he remains preoccupied with his own. His denial of the beloved's specific charm and humanity – remember, Lysias's speech comes in one size that fits all – ensures that the beloved will pay all the psychological costs. Thus Socrates, speaking as the true and wise Non-Lover, would protect his youthful addressee from such abuse. In fact, with all the general wisdom reflected in Socrates' first speech, it is quite specific for the occasion and aimed at the real-life Phaedrus. There is a moment when Socrates interrupts his speech, "seeming" (so he says) to have lost control of his mind to the nymphs or Muses; he will even wish that "this attack might be averted." (238d) But the immediate context gives Socrates' wish another sense. For he inserts that Phaedrus is responsible for his enthusiasm, and that Phaedrus should attend to what follows. The only attack that Socrates means to avert is that of an operator like Lysias.

Thus Socrates continues his speech, emphasizing his counter-attack not only on the bad lover, the "slave to pleasure" (238e) who attacks youth, but also on any professed non-lover (like Lysias) with sexual designs. He says, surprisingly, that he will describe "what advantage or harm will come from the lover or the non-lover to the youth who grants him his favors." (238e) Phaedrus misses the innuendo. So, when Socrates has

finished his speech retailing the repulsive features of such seducers, Phaedrus expects to hear the other half of Socrates' declamation, namely the praise of the non-lover. Socrates pretends such an elaboration is superfluous; one could simply reverse the situation and attribute to the non-lover the advantages that parallel the disadvantages of the lover. But at the same time he suggests that such a positive speech might indeed be grand. He is already speaking in hexameter! "If I begin to praise the non-lover, what kind of hymn do you suppose I shall raise?" (241e) If (as we shall see) Socrates has his second speech up his sleeve, we are invited to wonder whether that second speech in praise of divine madness will not be in praise of the non-lover in the best sense, the true and wise Non-Lover Socrates already represents. So it seems significant, though it is rarely noticed, that, in introducing his second speech, Socrates continues to speak as the Non-Lover. He continues his stance as the true and wise advisor of the unwary youth. He asks, "Where's the boy with whom I was just speaking? He must hear this speech, too, and not be in a rush to grant favors to the non-lover before he has heard me out." (243e) In other words, Phaedrus must hear the second speech in order to learn not to grant favors even to a non-lover, the supplementary lesson he failed to get from Socrates' first speech. In the palinode, Socrates will indeed celebrate the soul of the true and wise Non-lover, again taking "non-lover" in a different sense from the hypocritical Lysias. Now Socrates can deliver this second speech, without concealment. Out from under Lysias's shadow, he can re-define Love as the soul's higher inspiration and describe his own art of love. He will re-define Love in a way compatible with his former recommendation of Non-Love, for both ideas converge upon an idea of Love superior to lust and power.

What I am proposing – now that we have it in focus – is that the two speeches of

Socrates are connected. They have numerous internal consistencies. For Socrates is always Socrates. He always says what he thinks is true, but according to meanings that his irony both hides and hints at. It is up to the reader to ask what he means at each step, and to keep track of the ambiguities. Such interpretive demands make the *Phaedrus* a confusing experience for the novice, who naturally runs for shelter in the palinode. But the idea that the palinode represents Socrates' essential teaching – an error made even by experienced readers – is not compatible with the evidence that he means for both his speeches to be heard. Socrates himself suggests the idea that the two speeches form a larger whole in the section of dialogue that follows them. (265a-266a) He proposes, for instance, that they might be like right and left in an object with mirror-symmetry. Indeed we just saw how Socrates makes love and non-love consistent between the two speeches, such that they might represent two sides of one thing. It would not be hard to show that the ideas of madness (265a), the accounts of the desire for beauty (238c) and of the rule of mind (237e-238a) all follow suit and have been balanced across the speeches as well. It is as if Socrates' speeches describe a single, expansive, humanly indifferent force – called Eros – only from opposite points of view. An important question we shall return to is how a merely rhetorical shift ruptures that unity to create an internal opposition.

First we must see how their implicit unity affects the plot. If Socrates' two speeches are intended as a whole, then we have to entertain the notion that he planned his oratorical performance from some point early on in the dialogue – I would say, at the latest, when he hears how vehemently Phaedrus defends Lysias. This hypothesis actually resolves many textual difficulties. Once we entertain the idea that Socrates is a master of rhetoric, the guide of Phaedrus's soul nearly from the start, much of what seems so

confusing in the early dialogue clears itself up. Here I can only offer a couple further illustrations of how Socrates conducts the conversation.

If you reread the text you may notice that Socrates' resistance to the idea of entering into competition with Lysias is completely unconvincing. Not simply because Socrates wants to speak, but because he wants to make Phaedrus make him speak. (Cf. 237a10) Socrates has baited Phaedrus with the idea that he, Socrates, could give a better speech than Lysias, but then turns around and acts surprised that Phaedrus has taken his jest in earnest and is now forcing him to make a speech. How could anyone compete with the ingenious Lysias?! (236b-c) Phaedrus rises to the bait. He imagines that he now has a "fair hold" on Socrates and can also get him back for exposing Phaedrus's need to play Lysias. Phaedrus will use the tactic Socrates used on him, and say to the eager Socrates, "if I don't know Socrates I have forgotten myself" and "he yearned to speak, but feigned coyness" etc. (236b) Phaedrus is enjoying his game of one-upmanship over Socrates. The real joke is that Socrates plotted Phaedrus's entreaty, so that he can credibly blame Phaedrus for making him deliver his first speech criticizing lovers and love. (The motives for this we'll examine in a moment).

Socrates' second speech is set up in an even more elaborate way. Phaedrus has bought Socrates' explanation that there is no need for him to praise the non-lover. Socrates says he will go away before Phaedrus exerts any more of his irresistible power over him. Phaedrus, however, wants Socrates to stay, specifically to talk over what's already been said. In other words, once again, Phaedrus would have been glad to skip the next part of the actual text, the palinode in this case, and engage in the dialogue that follows the speeches. It is Phaedrus, not Socrates, who uses the verb διαλέγω here!

(242a) What? Dialogue? Socrates? No way! To prevent his oratorical plan from going off course, Socrates pretends to misunderstand Phaedrus's request: "Phaedrus, you are something divine when it comes to discourses. Who has been the source of more discourses than you, either speaking them yourself or compelling others to do so? There you go again, twisting my arm! Now another speech is coming upon me, all because of you!" (242a-b paraphrased) Notice that Phaedrus is surprised at this unasked-for event. He uses the famous Greek idiom, "that is good news." (οὐ πόλεμόν γε ἀγγέλλεις)

But that's just the beginning of the intrigue. For Socrates' announcement of the new discourse that Phaedrus is allegedly extorting from him precedes what he will profess to be the motivating account of that speech. Socrates now declares, further, that his *daimonion* prevented him from going away apparently to make up for his sin against the god by discrediting love. A sin against Eros. . . ? Socrates has now given Phaedrus one too many justifications for the famous palinode. We know the one is false, why should the other be true? Perhaps they are both mere justifications, and neither is true. Phaedrus's interest in more talk might have been enough of a "sign" for Socrates to know that he now has Phaedrus's attention for the rest of his discourse. [Zuckert, p.311, n.65] Of course, that does not explain Socrates' confession of sin and claim to need atonement. How are we to take Socrates' guilt over a sin that we observed him commit, so to speak, with malice aforethought – the critique of love and praise of non-love? We observed his cunning in preserving that topic for his first speech. No *daimon* troubled him then! Now, interestingly, Socrates gives an external reason for his sin as well. At the same time that he beats his breast with guilt, he plays up how it was all Phaedrus's fault! We just saw how Socrates manipulated Phaedrus in preparation for this move. Now, after the fact, he

moans: that was a dreadful speech you made me give, Phaedrus! That first speech was your speech. It was spoken by you, through my mouth, as you bewitched me! (242e)

Now this sounds a bit over the top. This crisis of conscience Socrates is having has to be more “Socrates Theatre.” Indeed the confession of the sin combined with the blaming of Phaedrus for his enchantment fulfills two purposes at once. It both makes Socrates’ game more transparent to the suspicious reader and expresses something significant about the psychology of sin: sin is allowing oneself to fall under the other’s magic spell.

Incidentally, I count six references to sin by Socrates when he describes the crime of his first speech. These, however, fall into two distinct classes, a rhetorical error on the one hand, and an offense to the god Eros on the other. He will correct his rhetorical error by recanting the speech, as he admits to having “sinned with respect to mythology” (243a), i.e. speech about the god. But though he dwells on the offense to Eros himself (242c, d, e), Socrates never admits to such a sin. So the question can be simply stated: why the theological melodrama? Why does Socrates put on a redemption play starring himself, a play within the play – let us call it “Appeasing the God Eros” – to discredit the first speech and distract our attention from his contrivance to have both speeches in place, as they form an implicit whole? Why the elaborate deception? Or: perhaps Socrates’ drama of rejecting the first speech is relevant to the way the two speeches are connected. Perhaps while they present a coherent picture of eros, it is some human action, a violent turn like Socrates’, that makes eros into something different in the palinode. I believe that this question, of how Socrates’ performance speaks to the true relation between his speeches, is one of the central riddles of the *Phaedrus*. (Cf. 265c) In the last part of this talk I shall sketch as simply as I can what I believe to be the solution to this riddle.

Let us take a step back. I stated earlier that Socrates hints, in the conversation following the oratory, that we might inquire into how he has linked his two speeches. (265c) But this hint comes purposely too late. From the point of view of Phaedrus and that of most readers [even Scully, 95], the two speeches must seem incompatible in an obvious way that will stand. One speech argued that eros is harmful to both the lover and the beloved, and the other showed that eros is the greatest of good things. This is how Phaedrus describes their contradiction in retrospect, implicitly likening Socrates to a sophist who has demonstrated contradictory theses. (263c) From a philosophical point of view, however, the contradiction represented by the two speeches lies deeper. It is the contradiction that lies at the heart of human existence – a conflict within the experience of eros itself. The lover has to come to see this internal conflict for what it is and act on it, for in the lawless land of erotics he is under no other constraint or authority.

We observed that part of the fascination with Lysias's speech was its internal paradox: the obstacle of the Non-lover who awakens an excess of love in the beloved. It is as if in every lover the non-lover had always been lurking, and in desire a desire for the non-desiring. When Socrates thus gives his "Lysian" (first) speech, he plays up the internal negation. He plays up the repulsiveness of the sexual lover, in order to elicit from the youth, not his preference for the non-lover (that was Lysias's strategy), but his repulsion from such sexual advances altogether, whether from someone calling himself a lover or a non-lover. He presses further. He plays up the lover's alienation from his love as well. The inevitable decline in the lover's passion was merely incidental in Lysias's speech, an eventual disappointment to the boy. Socrates makes a long excursus on the lover's discomfort, describing his own psychological turn away from the beloved when,

sooner or later, he finds himself a completely “different person.” (241b) Beyond warning the youth against all sexually motivated lovers, Socrates is reminding lovers of their own internal division. His first speech, limited to the desire that is predominantly a pursuit of bodies, thus already initiated the turn against itself. The reversal is inherent in the experience of so-called “free” sex. Ordinarily, lovers will ascribe their eventual turn against their love to the inadequacy of a particular partner; Socrates is showing that the inadequacy is inherent in the surplus of eros invested in what only temporarily extinguishes it. This unsatisfying eros thus conditions the realization that eros is reaching beyond sexual pleasure – reaching for something physically ungraspable in the experience of beauty.

Hence, when Socrates renounces his first speech – when he says that that speech said “nothing sound or true.” (μηδὲν ὕγιές λέγοντε μηδὲ ἀληθές, 242e9) – he is “acting” in a couple senses of the term. He is performing for Phaedrus, but also performing for himself the “no” that preserves its negativity in memory and lends force to the eros that is positively healthy and true. Our instinctual experience of sexuality is a condition of un-health and un-truth, when combined with the excessive impulse of mind. “Nothing sound or true!” The double expression here, error of the mind and ailment of one’s whole being, is significant. It is similar to the double opposition we find between the speeches, insofar as we can see there either a superficial logical contradiction in the estimate of eros, or a conflict in eros itself that must be consciously realized for the health of the whole soul. On its own, the first speech does not express an eros satisfying to a being with a human mind. This is why Socrates adds that it is fit only to impress “manikins” – undeveloped people – ἀνθρώπισκοι is his term. (243a) Thus, while for

Socrates the two speeches express a deep tension in eros, and he can live that tension in full awareness, he knows that most people never attain the decisive, indeed the defining, experience of love, where care for the genuinely beautiful reigns in the soul. He knows that most people's mental perceptions remain poorly differentiated from their experience of bodies.

Socrates lives in awareness of the tension. He does not pretend to be a saint or an avatar. He told Phaedrus about the dividedness of his own soul earlier in the dialogue.

He wondered whether he is “. . . a monster more complicated and more furious than Typhon, or a gentler and simpler creature, to whom a divine lot is given by nature.”

(230a) More Socratic irony! As with his references to his famous *daimonion*, when Socrates speaks about his own soul and his aim to know himself, he speaks potentially for all human beings. In this case, it is worth noticing that Socrates does not refer to two lots or two fates, between which a soul might choose. He calls only the gentle and simple condition of soul a destiny, μοίρα. It is ours potentially, as “our share in nature.”

(φύσει μετέχον) Ultimately it is not a matter of simply exercising free will and choosing between good and evil in the soul, as if these were self-evident. Nor is it a matter of assuming the intelligibility of things, exercising dialectic to unfold the truth, and then acting on it. It is rather a matter of realizing our true nature, in the knowledge of what the excess of eros is: an expression of unruly mind in an animal that seeks a free relation with the beautiful and (beyond reason) demands to be satisfied. Only an education that addresses the desire of this ambiguous being, that enables it to separate its impulse toward beauty from its instinct for sexual pleasure, has a chance of satisfying it. This possibility was already sketched in Socrates' initial definition of love. “When

passion without reason . . . is driven toward the pleasure of beauty, and further, when it is violently moved by kindred desires toward the beauty of the body. . . this is called love.” There is a latent division in the human response to beauty. Only philosophy can develop a “healthy and true” distinction between ideas generally conflated in our experience.

Phaedrus’s education will have to liberate his eros from a sensual aestheticism that enflames his feelings and fantasies. A poetry or a rhetoric that is not directed to philosophical insight cannot achieve this. Socrates must arouse in Phaedrus a desire for desire that he has not yet experienced. Phaedrus cannot (like Socrates) live in the tension between the tyrannical eros and a liberating eros of thinking when he has hardly tasted the power of his own mind. His imagination must first be set upon the path to his mind’s realization. This is the reason for Socrates’ introducing the question of piety – the shameful offense to the god Eros. Socrates would free Phaedrus’s erotic excess from the common sexual plane where it will never be satisfied, and try to enlist his confidence that the world is not so absurd as to deny it satisfaction. Phaedrus must learn about the god’s goodness in providing for erotic exuberance. “My first speech,” Socrates declares,

...was foolish and somewhat impious. What could be more dreadful than that? . . . Do you not believe that Love is the son of Aphrodite and is a god? . . . If Love is, as indeed he is, a god *or something divine*, he can be nothing evil. . . I will try to atone by recantation. (242d – e, 243b)

At the same time, Socrates wishes to avoid the fate of being blinded by the god Eros, who is rumored to punish those who disrespect him. (243) Phaedrus might take this threat of divine retribution at face value, but we have to recognize how Socrates plays the oracle. The god’s goodness is reasonable if his blinding of people has a non-physical sense. Socrates is speaking of a person being deprived of the capacity for higher vision (Cf. 257a) if he understands Eros as being the god of banal and frustrated longing. Then Socrates brings forward another reason for his piety, yielding a similar interpretation:

If any man of noble and gentle character, one who was himself in love with another of the same sort . . . had happened to hear us saying that lovers take up violent enmity because of small matters and are jealously disposed and harmful to the beloved, don't you think he would imagine he was listening to people brought up among low sailors, who had never *seen a generous love*? Would he not *refuse utterly to assent to our censure of the god Love*? (243c-d, my italics)

Here Socrates forges the same link between our perception of a beautiful or noble love and our belief in the god, but now in a positive sense. Revering the god is linked to experiencing a higher love first-hand. Socrates does not say which way the influence of believing and noble loving work. All he tells us is that a noble and gentle lover (notice the allusion to Socrates' description of his soul) would not approve of Socrates' first speech. The influence may go both ways, describing a feedback loop in experience: noble love re-inforces belief, and vice versa. He means something like this: that belief in the goodness of the god can enable Phaedrus to discover the power of a generous love and the soul's real beauty. Phaedrus might reverse his banal experience of eros as sexual hubris and force (the perspective of the first discourse) if he will try to see in Love a blessing from a superior sphere, a gentle god with something to teach. Prior to his encounter with Socrates, Phaedrus's situation might be compared to that of Meno, who remained trapped in his own self-undermining behavior, reinforcing both his arrogance and his ignorance. Indeed there might be a "Meno's paradox" of erotics, a sophisticated way of thinking by which human beings keep themselves in the condition of unhappy, desiring beasts. The false paradox would go like this: If there are no good gods, then there is no reason for love to be a beneficial experience; and if there are good gods, then they should provide us with this beneficial love out of their benevolence. But Socrates knows that that's not how life and love work. Life and love require a soul's effort. Mythologically speaking, a soul has to help bring the god Love to birth. Phaedrus, like Meno, needs the spark of mythology to get him to take seriously his own latent powers,

the potential of mind that alone can satisfy the erotic overdrive of which it is the cause.

The superior sphere from which the blessing of love might descend to Phaedrus, then, is really the untapped potency of the soul. The soul needs support to come erotically into its own. It needs to credit its own sublime force, enough to counter the sensual force that will otherwise sap its development, albeit without satisfaction. The soul does not acquire its birthright, its own higher faculties of perception, action, and self-mastery, without first participating imaginatively – here with the aid of mythology – in its own unfolding. (Participation, μετέχω, was the word Socrates used for realizing one's true nature, being part of the Whole.) If a soul has no sense of the holy whatever – no sense of how eros expresses its participation in the Whole – then it denies itself the openness to Being by which its desire would evolve in freedom. So, because Socrates knows well the instinctual (ἐμφυτός 237d) origins of eros, the impulses that ever threaten to usurp human consciousness without any clear sense, he must, in behalf of Phaedrus's development, repudiate such commonplace "knowledge" as a distorting picture of human potentials. To picture the human – literally, to present an image of the human soul – only as a licentious animal: that would be the "sin against mythology." As teacher, as philosopher, as true poet and rhetorician, Socrates tips the balance – dramatically! – in favor of the learner's highest possibilities, wherein his eros might find an ongoing fulfillment.

Socrates' new mythos in the palinode, a mythos preparatory for philosophy, will attempt to tap the latent powers of Phaedrus's soul. It will attempt to initiate him, first imaginatively, into a mature and liberating experience of love. Should Socrates' effort meet with any success, should Phaedrus undertake to practice this new discipline of

philosophical eros, he may feel compelled later to reinterpret that mythos about following the god. But, even if the god's benevolence comes to seem different from how he first imagined it, nonetheless, his achieved experience of love and beauty in freedom will not thereby cease to be an enduring good.

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February 9, 2011

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