

The Method of Division and the Division of the *Phaedrus*

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The paradoxical character of the *Phaedrus* is well known. It is not only the most deeply bifurcated of all Plato's dialogues, with its first half devoted to speeches about eros and the second to rhetoric, it is also the dialogue in which Plato insists most strongly on the importance of unity in writing (264c). Not surprisingly, rival attempts to identify the unifying principle of the dialogue have been proposed since ancient times. Hermias, who takes the subject of dialogue to be beauty, reports competing theories that the subject is love, or rhetoric, or the soul, or the good (Heath 1989, 164), while nearly 1500 years later Hackforth 1952, 9 remarked that 'modern scholars...necessarily agree with and differ from each other in an infinite variety of combinations'. The proposed answers tend to be variations on two general approaches. One is the view that there is a single subject of investigation that unifies the two halves, the most common recent candidates being philosophy and rhetoric. Those who claim it is philosophy tend to emphasize the first half of the dialogue in which philosophy appears as the highest species of eros, and regard the second half as concerned with the rhetorical principles with which philosophy must necessarily concern itself;¹ while those who claim it is rhetoric tend to emphasize the second half by taking the speeches at the beginning to be examples for the subsequent examination of rhetoric,² although this correlation is only the preponderance—Hackforth's 'infinite variety of combinations' remains the rule. The other general approach is that the quest for a single unifying theme is fundamentally misguided because the kind of unity that the *Phaedrus* advocates and embodies is narrative unity rather than thematic unity.³

What is attractive about the view that the unity of the dialogue is only of a narrative kind is that its proponents do not have to explain away what appears to be

¹ Thus for Hackforth 1952, 9-10, 'the dominant purpose...[that] gives the dialogue its unity' is 'To vindicate the pursuit of philosophy...by contrast with the false claims of contemporary rhetoric... For to Plato philosophy is love' (cf. Friedländer 1969, 219; Burger 1980, 5-7; Ferrari 1987, 23-34; White 1993, 177-178; Zwicky 1997, 21; Gill 2003, 308; Brown 2003, 320).

² Cf. Taylor 1956, 300; De Vries 1969, 23; Asmis 1986, 159; Rowe 1986, 7-11; Rowe 1989; Nehamas and Woodruff 1994, xxxviii-xl. Additional candidates for a unifying theme include the question 'what is man?' (Mueller 1957); self-knowledge (Griswold 1986); the social, political, and legal context of Athens (Buccioni 2002, 8-9); the relationship between the public and the private (Al-Maini 2004).

³ Heath 1989, 161-163, e.g., argues that the *Phaedrus* has narrative unity of the kind displayed by Greek drama and described by Aristotle (cf. Guthrie 1975, iv 396 and Nicholson 1999, 11, 108, 124).

a fundamental difference in the material treated in the two halves of the dialogue, nor do they have to subordinate one theme to the other when opinion is so evenly divided about which is more important. Nevertheless, I believe that the dialogue does exhibit thematic unity as well as narrative unity, but that the thematic unity is to be found not by minimizing the difference between the two halves, but by insisting on it. In his first speech, anticipating the method of division that he introduces between the two halves of the dialogue, Socrates divides the genus, 'what rules and leads us', into two species, the innate and the acquired (237d). I shall argue that the two halves of the dialogue explore these two species, respectively, and that the thematic unity of the *Phaedrus* corresponds to the way the method of division unifies species within a genus.⁴

Plato sometimes illustrates a procedure before announcing it,⁵ and he does so here with the method of division. Just before Socrates introduces the method he illustrates division by distinguishing madness into the two species of human illness and divine inspiration, and the latter into four subspecies.⁶ He then alludes to the step of collection when he points out that his earlier two speeches took the various kinds of mental derangement into a common species.⁷ In addition to informally surveying the types of divine madness before unifying them within a common genus, and then formally dividing the genus into species, the dialogue began by providing us with a number of dichotomies of the same type as the dichotomy that divides the dialogue as a whole, and Socrates subsequently identifies the genus to which they all belong. By surveying those dichotomies and noticing their common principle, we will be able to recognize the way that the two halves of the dialogue represent contrasting species of a unifying principle—in other words that the structure of the dialogue is itself an illustration of the method that is being introduced.

In a dialogue which announces that philosophy can best be communicated not by straightforward writing but by planting oral seeds 'from which other words grow in the character of other people' (276e-277a, translations are my own unless otherwise indicated), and that this is true although to a lesser extent even in the case of writing (276d), it is not surprising that Plato does not offer a

⁴ Hoerber 1958, 33, too, looks to the method of division for the unity of the dialogue, but in relation to a very different thesis: 'Plato is depicting dramatically that the ultimate type of Love (philosophic) is inseparable from the best method of discourse (Dialectic), while the inferior discourse (Rhetoric) is suitable to the common Love (erotic)'.

⁵ In the *Phaedo*, e.g., the method of hypothesis that Socrates introduces at 100a has already been employed by Simmias at 85c-d.

⁶ The prophetic madness ascribed to Apollo, mystical madness ascribed to Dionysus, poetic madness ascribed to the Muses, and erotic madness ascribed to Aphrodite and Eros (265a-b). Not every formal division needs to be into dual species (cf. *Statesman* 287c).

⁷ He had mentioned the prophetic madness of Delphi (Apollo) at 244b, dithyrambic (Dionysus) possession in the presence of the divine at 238c-d, and poetic inspiration of the Muses (237a, not yet described as madness); the madness of Eros is first referred to when Lysias speaks of how lovers are compelled by their passion to do what they would not have done willingly (231a, Socrates echoes this point at 238a).

straightforward explanation of how the *Phaedrus*' insistence on organic unity is consistent with its own practice, but makes us search for the answer ourselves.

I. The Preliminary Narrative

The dialogue opens with a dichotomy between city and nature. In reply to a question from Socrates, Phaedrus says he is coming from the city and going to have a walk outside the city walls. When Phaedrus mentions that he spent the morning with the speech writer Lysias, Socrates replies, paraphrasing Pindar, that hearing what Phaedrus and Lysias did together would be more important to him than the most urgent business. The allusion is to the opening of Pindar's first Isthmian ode, where he addresses his native city Thebes, saying he will set her above his present business.⁸ Phaedrus tells Socrates that the speech of Lysias, which Phaedrus had spent the morning discussing with the author, was clever because it argues that we should award sexual favors to someone who is not in love with us rather than someone who is. Socrates replies that if the speech had argued that gratification should also be awarded to those who are poor instead of rich, and old instead of young, like Socrates and most others, then it would really be sophisticated (227b-d). The word for 'sophisticated' is *asteioi*, 'cited', which returns later when the speeches that favor the non-lover are called 'completely *asteia* in their foolishness' (242e). These opening lines, with their multiple references to the city, set up a conception of the city as the home of what is artificial: enclosed in walls (city walls are mentioned again at 227d and 228b), a place where lifeless rhetorical artifacts compete with living dialogue (274c-275b), and where arguments are produced that urge us to go against the promptings of nature.

As Phaedrus leaves the city walls he meets Socrates who is 'sick with a passion for hearing speeches, and seeing him, seeing him, he was filled with pleasure because he would have his fellow-Korybant' (228b).⁹ They proceed to walk towards a plane tree, which, like the Korybants, was associated with Dionysus (see Farnell 1896-1909, v 118; cf. *OCD* 1949, 'trees'), and to discuss the precise location, somewhere in the present vicinity, of the myth in which Boreas, god of the North wind, carried off Orithuia. Now that they are outside the city, instead of the controlled environment of walls and writing, we encounter out-of-control phenomena like sickness, Korybantic frenzy, and being overpowered by the forces of nature.

When Phaedrus asks Socrates whether he believes the myth to be true, Socrates replies that although such myths can be read as allegories of natural events, for

⁸ 'Pindar was in the middle of writing a poem to the Delian Apollo when he was called upon by Thebes, the town of his origin, to compose a poem in praise of Herodotus, who had won the chariot race in the games' (Griswold 1986, 250n11).

⁹ Plato's emphasis of repetition on 'seeing him' anticipates Socrates' observation at the end of his palinode, that the act of seeing someone can awaken in us our dormant apprehension of the highest reality, if the person we look at has a beauty that reminds us of our patron god (528d-e). In the present context, as fellow-Korybants, they share an allegiance to Dionysus.

example that Orithuia was blown off the rocks by the North wind, to go through all such stories of monsters would be overwhelming unless one had a great deal of leisure. Socrates, however, is kept busy by the injunction of the Delphic oracle to know oneself, and he wonders whether he is 'a wild beast more complex and savagely appetitive (ἐπιτεθυμένον) than Typhon, or a tamer and simpler creature who partakes by nature in a divine and quiet lot' (230a). We can recognize in this an adumbration of the two horses of the palinode's chariot metaphor of the soul: the black horse is an image of the lowest part of the tripartite soul, also called 'appetite' (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν) which is subsequently described in terms of complexity (238a-b; cf. *Rep.* 580d-e), while the white horse is gentle and simple, and partakes in the divine reason of the charioteer.

They stop to rest by the plane tree sacred to Dionysus, and a chaste-tree (agnus) sacred to Hera (Farnell 1896-1909, i 38 note c), as Socrates admires its beauty with an oath by that goddess. Hera will later be associated with kingship (253b) and thus with cities, so once again we have a contrast between orderly cities and wild nature, personified here by Hera and Dionysus respectively. Socrates proceeds to examine the place with his bodily senses: he smells the fragrance of the chaste-tree, sees sacred statues, feels the coolness of the water, and hears the shrillness of the cicadas (230b-c). He does not put anything into his mouth, but he remarks that his taste for speeches led him here (230d, food is a prominent metaphor throughout the dialogue). The reason he had to be led outside the city by someone else is that 'I am a lover of learning, and country places and trees don't want to teach me anything, but people in cities do' (230d). When Socrates says that they do not want (ἐθέλει) to teach him rather than that they cannot, he has evidently chosen his words carefully. He acknowledges later that under the right conditions they can indeed teach us, when he says that according to the priests of Zeus at Dodona the first prophesies were spoken by an oak tree, and that they found it rewarding to listen to what an oak or even a stone had to say, as long as it told the truth (275b-c). But the priestesses at Dodona and Delphi were successful only when they were in a state of madness and not when they were in control of themselves (244b). In that case it is not surprising that in his present state, governed by an oath to Hera who is associated here with chastity (the agnus), and soberly observing the scene with his bodily senses, Socrates feels that the place and the trees have nothing to teach him. But when Phaedrus recites Lysias' speech, the radiance on his face makes Socrates ecstatic (ἐπλογήναι), turning him into Phaedrus' Bacchic partner (συμβάκχευσα), and when Phaedrus swears an oath by the plane tree, symbol of Dionysus, to compel Socrates to make a rival speech about eros, Socrates feels as though he has been enraptured by the local Nymphs (νυμφόληπτος), begins to speak in the dithyrambic meter of Dionysus (238d), and at the end of his speech hears 'a voice from this very spot' (αὐτόθεν, 242c). Taken together this imagery once again opposes city to nature, this time in terms of the provinces of Hera and Dionysus, and suggests that each realm speaks to us most clearly under opposite conditions—the self-controlled dialogue with other people within the walls (230d) and the

ecstatic openness to nature outside the walls (244b).

Socrates begins his own speech by identifying eros as a kind of appetite (237d), and proceeds to define precisely what kind of appetite it is. He does this by an informal employment of the method of division that he will formally introduce at 265d. Within the species of 'what rules and leads us', he distinguishes two principles which we follow wherever they lead: an innate appetite for pleasure and an acquired opinion that aims at what is best. When opinion is in control and leads us by reasoning toward what is best its strength is called self-control, while when appetite is in control and drags us without reasoning toward pleasure it is called hubris. Hubris, we are told, has many names because it has many species: hubris about food is gluttony, hubris about drink has a different unspecified name, and hubris for the pleasure of beauty and for the related pleasures of beautiful bodies is called eros (237d-238b).

All the previous dichotomies function as an informal collection for the above division of 'what rules and leads us' into the primary dichotomy of innate appetite and acquired opinion. Amalgamating all the examples we have noted gives us six analogous pairs which anticipate a seventh:

1. On one side the natural world full of menacing monsters, on the other the humanly constructed city with walls to keep out danger (227a, 229b-e).
2. On one side a savage beast, on the other a tame one (230a).
3. On one side Dionysian divine madness, on the other sobriety under the auspices of Hera, patron of rulers over cities (230b-d, 241e-242c).
4. On one side the natural tendency to respond to love with sexual passion, on the other the 'citized' behavior that calculatingly trades sex as a commodity (230e-241c).
5. On one side our natural appetites, on the other our acquired opinions (237a).
6. On one side a natural tendency to hubris, on the other an effort to acquire self-control (237e-238a).
7. The second half will present a parallel contrast between natural living conversation and artificial products of the acquisition of writing that are devoid of life (274c-275b).

All of these dichotomies are between primal nature and acquired order, and the source from which they all result is identified in the present passage as our ruling principle divided into its dual species of natural appetite and acquired opinion. This dual species is also the principle that gives rise to the two halves of the dialogue. The first half illustrates how our natural appetite can lead us to rational truth by means of eros, while the second half describes how our acquired opinions can lead us to that same goal by means of a constructed *techné* of discourse.

II. The Palinode

The dichotomy between natural appetite and acquired opinion in Socrates' first speech is recapitulated in the palinode in terms of the two horses. The white horse is 'a lover of honor with self-control and modesty, a companion of authen-

tic opinion (ἀληθινῆς δόξης), while the black horse is 'a companion of hubris and vanity' (253d-e). In the description of the white horse the term translated here as 'opinion', *doxa*, is usually translated in this passage as 'glory' even though elsewhere else in Plato *doxa* is almost always translated as 'opinion' or a synonym. The reason for the usual translation of 'glory' in the present context is that the two horses together with the charioteer correspond to the tripartite soul of the *Republic*,¹⁰ with the white horse representing spiritedness or 'love of honor', and the translation of *doxa* as 'glory' emphasizes its connection with honor. On this view the words, 'companion of *doxa*', are essentially a restatement of the previous words, 'lover of honor', rather than the introduction of an additional characteristic. There are three reasons why I have not followed this practice.

(1) The interpretation of *doxa* here as opinion is not only compatible with the *Republic*'s tripartite soul, it actually strengthens the correspondence to the *Republic*. In *Republic* iv, when the tripartite soul is first introduced, we hear that the proper virtue (courage) of the spirited element is to preserve the dictates of rationality about what is to be feared and what is not (442c), in other words, to preserve an opinion acquired from the faculty of reason. This is explicit in the discussion of 'spiritedness writ large', the class of auxiliaries in the rational city, whose distinguishing virtue of courage is defined as the ability to preserve the opinion (δόξαν) received from the rational rulers (429c). Throughout the *Republic* the spirited element, whether conceived in its psychological version as a component of the soul or in its political equivalent as the class of auxiliaries, fulfills its function only when it enforces against appetite opinions that it takes over from rationality.¹¹ What I am suggesting is that the two formulations, 'lover of honor' and 'companion of *doxa*', describe two different characteristics rather giving two descriptions of a single characteristic. We are being told that the white horse is a lover of honor and therefore (like the lovers of honor in the *Republic*) a companion of authentic opinion, opinion held on good authority, i.e., from reason.

(2) The antithesis here between hubris and *doxa* precisely echoes the antithesis between our innate tendency toward hubris and our acquired *doxa* in Socrates' first speech (237d-238a), and there *doxa* is always translated as 'opinion' or one of its cognates, rather than as 'glory'. The correlation in the palinode of *doxa* with love of honor is essentially a reformulation of the correlation in the earlier

¹⁰ I once had reservations about this correspondence (see Dorter 1971), but the connection between spiritedness and opinion that is mentioned below dispelled my misgivings. More recently Buccioni 2002, 337-339 expresses misgivings about the identification because the clear boundaries that the *Republic* draws between the three are not present in the *Phaedrus*' chariot metaphor. It is true that the *Republic* draws rigid boundaries when the three parts of the soul are formally distinguished in book 4, but later books admit overlapping of the kind that is present in the *Phaedrus*. Thus all three parts of the soul have appetites (580d), are capable of spiritedly 'biting and fighting against each other' (589a), and are capable of rational beliefs (442c).

¹¹ Thus when Socrates said in the introductory conversation of the *Phaedrus* that the 'tamer than Typhon' alternative partakes by nature in the divine (230a), it paralleled the white horse that is obedient to divine rationality. And when he said in his first speech that the acquired *opinion* in us, that is opposed to hubris, aims at the highest good (237d) the same parallel is present.

passage of *doxa* with 'pursuit of what is best'. Even here in the palinode Socrates recently remarked that those souls which in their circuit of heaven fail to see reality are forced to take their nourishment from opinion, *doxa* (248b); it would be surprising for Plato to expect us to take *doxa* to mean 'glory' so soon after this.

(3) *Doxa* is here connected with self-control, which was classified as a species of 'acquired *doxa*' in Socrates' first speech, where *doxa* is generally agreed to mean opinion (237a).

The chariot metaphor goes beyond Socrates' first speech in introducing a third principle within us, reason (νοῦς), in the person of the charioteer who governs and mediates between the other two principles (247c7-8). The discussion in Socrates' first speech of our dual ruling principle—innate appetite and acquired opinion—did not specify reason as an additional principle, although it alluded to it several times. For example, the division of our ruling principle into its two species is done because knowing (εἰδέναι) the subject is the first principle (ἀρχή) for making a decision (237c). This principle is not reducible either to opinion or appetite. Further into the speech Socrates says that when the lover's erotic madness subsides it is replaced by reason (νοῦς) and self-control (241a3, b1, c1). Socrates' motivation for explicitly distinguishing only two leading principles in his first speech, even though the additional principle of reason is referred to, seems to be that reason is not conceived here as a leading principle in the same sense as appetite and opinion. This is illustrated in the palinode by the fact that only the horses (appetite and honor-loving opinion) have the power to pull the chariot, while reason, the charioteer, can only try to influence the direction that the horses take, and has no independent pulling power of its own. The basis of the omission in both of Socrates' speeches of a role for reason as one of the leading principles of our soul, comparable to the one it has in the *Republic*, is that the project of the *Phaedrus* is to describe how reason can make use of the other two principles for its own purposes. That is where the unity of the dialogue lies. Reason stays in the background, like the charioteer behind his horses, and the focus is on the pair in front of it.

The dialogue to this point can be simplified into four partially overlapping stages, exclusive of the introduction:

1. Comparisons in the first two speeches between the non-lover and the lover, in which the non-lover is preferred largely on the grounds that lovers cannot be trusted because they are out of control (the term 'madness' is only later applied to this condition, 230e-241d).¹²
2. Socrates' division of our ruling and leading principle into the two species of natural appetite for pleasures, and acquired opinion that pursues the good (237d).
3. The palinode's account of how our capacity for knowing the eternal forms depends on the ability of reason to control appetite and spiritedness (248a;

¹² In Lysias' speech this reason is the only one that is repeated (231a and d); in Socrates' first speech it occurs at 238b-c.

cf. *Phaedo* 65d-66a).

4. The palinode's subsequent account of how the erotic appetite of the black horse enables us to recollect intelligible reality (253e-254b).¹³

As the first half of the dialogue culminates in an account of how one half of our leading principle, our appetite for pleasure, can bring us to an apprehension of truth, the second half will furnish an account of how this can also be achieved by the other half, opinion that pursues the good. The palinode tells us that those whose rational faculty never achieves a clear knowledge of reality because of the erratic behavior of the horses—either unrestrained appetite or spiritedness misled by unwise opinions—must nourish themselves instead with opinion (248b). In order to raise such people as far as possible to true knowledge we must find a way not only to ensure that the opinions they are nourished by are true ones, but a way to use their faculty of opinion to raise them beyond opinion altogether, and this will be the true art of rhetoric.

III. Theoretical Rhetoric

In view of the emphasis in the first two speeches on the unpredictable behavior of lovers, it is not hard to understand why eros would be described as a kind of madness, but why would Plato want to classify philosophy as a subspecies of that madness (249c-250d)? There is an echo of the allegory of the cave in Socrates' description of the philosopher who looks upon beauty here and is reminded of beauty itself: 'looking upward like a bird, he becomes unconcerned about the things below, which causes him to be considered mad' (249d). In the cave allegory he had asked: if a cave dweller looked up at the light and was blinded, 'What do you think he would say if someone said to him that what he saw before was insignificant, but now because he's somewhat closer to what is, and is more turned toward what is, he sees more correctly?' (*Rep.* 515c-d). The expected answer, had Socrates waited for one, would have been along the lines of, 'He would say the person was mad'. The metaphor of madness in the *Phaedrus* corresponds to the metaphor of blindness in the *Republic*, both of which are meant to illustrate the otherness of the intelligible realm from the visible realm. We cannot make the transition by a smooth extension of our empirical knowledge because the difference between the empirical and the intelligible is qualitative rather than quantitative. The disruption that is required to cross that divide is characterized in the *Republic* as conversion (518c, 521c) and in the *Phaedrus* as recollection, the sudden leap from a sense perception to its intelligible counterpart. Where that leap appeared as a kind of madness in the appetitive context of the first half of the dialogue, in the second half it will appear as the metaphor of a seed (opinion) that takes root in our soul and becomes no longer a mere acquisition but something

¹³ This account of how eros can arouse our inherent capacity to apprehend intelligible reality, as an inadvertent consequence of the pursuit of its hedonistic goals, is analogous to the way that in the *Republic* appetite, pursuing its own goals, pushes us onto the path that leads beyond the appetitive city of pigs (372d), eventually to the apprehension of intelligible reality.

internalized and intrinsic to us.

Both the *Phaedrus* and *Republic* (515c-e) distinguish our ability to make this transition 'by nature' from our ability to be guided to it by others. The question then becomes how those who have succeeded by nature in perceiving the intelligible basis of the world can bring along others who are capable of doing so with external assistance. In the *Republic* it is to be accomplished by an educational system that emphasizes mathematics, since mathematics, as a *techne* (533d), combines practical applications in the visible realm with principles that belong to the intelligible realm, and thus can use the former to make us aware of the latter (521d-525b). For the same reason education, too, must be a *techne* (518d). The *Republic's* educational system, however, is a political institution, formally prescribed and maintained by the rulers, whereas the *Phaedrus*, situated outside the city walls, abstracts from political institutions and focuses instead on the interpersonal dimension. The ascent to truth in the first half is not a liberation from shadows projected within a context of political enchainment, but simply a falling in love with someone beautiful. Similarly, the *techne* for helping others that is explored in the second half is not the communal *techne* of state education but the interpersonal *techne* of rhetoric.

The transition between the two halves is marked by the legend of the cicadas. Socrates relates that cicadas were originally human beings who were so overcome with pleasure when the Muses were born and song appeared, that they became unconcerned (ἡμέλησαν) with food and drink, and died without noticing. From them the cicadas came into being, who as a gift from the Muses need no food but spend their lives in song, and when they die they tell each of the Muses which of us have honored them (259b-d). The beginning of the story recalls Socrates' description of the philosopher whose experience of earthly beauty causes him to remember heavenly beauty: looking upward he becomes unconcerned (ἀμελῶν) about the things below (249d). Here, as there, the appetite for pleasure is at work. The cicadas' subsequent rebirth as creatures who do nothing but sing, marks the dialogue's metamorphosis from a concern with appetite to a concern with voice. Socrates remarks that the cicadas report to Calliope and Urania 'those who lead a philosophical life and honor the music of these Muses who, more than the other Muses, are concerned with heaven and with both divine and human speeches, and who sing with the sweetest voice' (259d). Human speech, especially in the realm of philosophy, can have a connection with the divine, just as eros can.

Once the palinode ended, the dialogue turned its attention, in effect, from the black horse of innate appetite to the white horse of honor-loving opinion that aims at the best. Immediately after the palinode Phaedrus refers to love of honor and opinion: perhaps Lysias' love of honor (φιλοτιμίας) will keep him from writing his speech, for people are afraid to cause the opinion (δόξαν) that they are sophists (257c-d). As Socrates and Phaedrus proceed with their examination of rhetoric it is repeatedly stressed that the primary aim of rhetoric is to influence people's opinions about what is good, since the perceived good is the goal of all

our actions. Thus in order to be successful with the general public, an orator does not need to know what is really just but only the opinion (δόξαν) that the multitude has about the just, nor what is really good or noble but what will be the opinion (δόξει), for to give the multitude the opinion that a course of action is good he need only argue that it is like the things they already opine to be good. In this way he will be able to make them opine (δοκεῖν) at one time that the same thing is good and at another time the opposite (260a-261d). Concepts like 'good' and 'just' are especially vulnerable to this because, unlike concepts like 'iron' and 'silver', there is much disagreement and uncertainty as to what they refer to (263a-b).¹⁴ Thus the ultimate goals of the audience's 'acquired opinions that aim at the good', namely, the good and the just themselves, are the hardest ones to aim at accurately.

We can protect ourselves against rhetorical manipulation, Socrates says, if rhetoric can become not merely a practice, as it is now, but a *techne* (260d-e; cf. *Gorgias* 462b-c). But if rhetoric is to be a *techne*, the speaker who influences the opinions of his audience must begin by knowing the truth rather than chasing opinions (262c). The way to achieve this and to prevent people from being misled by similarities is to distinguish each kind of thing accurately from each other by the method of division. The first part of the method, 'collection', consists in 'seeing together things that are scattered everywhere and bringing them into a single idea', and the second in 'the ability to divide according to forms, at the natural joints; and not to attempt to hack off a part in the manner of a bad butcher' (265d-e).

The collection can be carried out only if we have a prior conception of the kinds of forms within which the scattered instances can be united. Socrates could not have thought to classify prophesy, mysticism, poetry, and love, all within a single form of divine madness if he had no concept of divine madness to begin with. Similarly we can proceed to divide the whole according to the forms only if we already have the ability to recognize those forms. That is why the method is preceded by the palinode's account of a latent knowledge of the intelligible forms of things, that is within us like a vague memory. We must have some knowledge of the whole before we can recognize that and how each individual is part of it. The *techne* of rhetoric—as opposed to the mere practice of rhetoric—presupposes a power of pre-empirical ontological insight. When Socrates says that if he believes someone to be capable of seeing how things by nature can be combined into one and divided into many, he would follow him as he would follow a god (266b), he is alluding to the palinode's mythic account of how we followed the gods in order to behold the forms.

Socrates applies his method not only to the source of rhetoric, the forms of its subject matter, but also to its target, the soul. The way to distinguish the nature of anything is to determine whether it is simple or complex, and then determine how it acts and is acted upon in each case, so this is what we must do with the soul if

we wish to persuade it of something. We must first describe the form of the soul with complete accuracy to see whether it is by nature one and homogeneous or multiform, second we must describe how it acts and is acted upon, and third we must distinguish the various kinds of speeches and show how certain types of speech are suitable to persuade certain types of soul (270d-271b). The method of division applies at all three levels: the level of intelligible form, so that we have accurate knowledge of the subject to which we are trying to raise our audience by our speech; the level of the audience itself (the species of soul); and the intermediate level of the kinds of speeches that can influence the audience's opinions.

IV. Applied Rhetoric

Techne, unlike *episteme*, is more than theory, it also requires application (see Roochnik 1996, 20-21, 26, 31, 41, 44, 50, 52, 70), and so rhetoric requires the ability to combine theory with sense perception: in addition to abstract knowledge and typological classifications the speaker 'must be able to discern these things in practical affairs and follow them clearly with his senses' (271d-e). We must not only know what type of person responds to what type of speech, but when we meet someone we must also be able to recognize perceptually the type that this person actually exemplifies (271e-272a). There is a third factor as well. We must not only know the comparative typology of speeches and souls, and be able to subsume the person in front of us under the correct type of soul, but we also must be sensitive to the circumstances of the moment. Since we cannot say exactly the same words to the same person under all circumstances and at all times with equal effectiveness, we also must be able to recognize 'when it is timely (*kairos*) to speak and when to stop, when to speak briefly, or piteously, or hyperbolically, and all the other kinds of speech he has learned—when they are timely (*eukairian*) and when they are untimely (*akairian*)' (272a). This concept of *kairos* is central to Plato's conception of *techne*. In the *Republic*, for example, Socrates points out that if someone who is working at a *techne* 'lets the right moment (*kairos*) go by, the work is ruined' (370b).¹⁵

It is not surprising then that Socrates denigrates written speeches, which are by nature unresponsive to changing circumstances, in favor of oral dialogue. In the myth of Theuth and Thamos, when Theuth shows Thamos the *techne* of writing that he invented, Thamos dismisses his claim that it will improve memory and wisdom. Instead, he says, it will produce forgetfulness since people will no longer have to rely on their memories; and only the appearance of wisdom since they will read without being instructed (274c-275b). Socrates adds that written words seem to speak as if they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to learn, they always say just the same one thing. And once it's

¹⁴ Cf. *Statesman* 277d: 'It's difficult to show without examples any of the greater things'.

¹⁵ For a fuller discussion of the relationship between *techne* and *kairos*, see Dorter 2006, 235-242.

written down, every speech rolls along everywhere, equally to those who understand it and, just the same, to those for whom it's not suitable. And it does not know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. (275d-e)

In an implicit application of the method of division, Socrates asks whether 'we can see a legitimate brother of this [illegitimate] one, ... which is written with knowledge in the soul of the learner and is able to defend itself, and knows to whom it should speak or keep silent' (276a). Someone who is knowledgeable about the just, the good, and the beautiful, when he is serious about sowing the seeds of their knowledge, would not sow them in writing:

But the gardens of letters, it seems, he will plant for the sake of amusement, and will write, when he writes, to treasure up reminders to himself for when he arrives at the forgetfulness of old age, and for all others who follow along the same track. And he will enjoy seeing them grow delicate shoots... It's much nobler... and shows seriousness, when one makes use of the art of dialectic and, taking a suitable soul, plants and sows it with words that contain knowledge; which are able to help themselves and the one who planted them; which are not fruitless but contain seed from which other words grow in the character of other people.¹⁶ (276d-277a)

The words that the student hears in such cases are at first no more than opinions acquired from the teacher, which are accepted provisionally. Thus Theaetetus says to the Eleatic visitor, 'Perhaps because I am young I often change my opinions, but now, looking at you and recognizing that you believe... I accept it as well' (*Sophist* 265d). Only when the student has been able to understand the teachings thoroughly are they transformed from opinion (unrooted seeds) to knowledge (seeds that have taken root).

The classic illustration is Socrates' instruction of Meno's slave in a problem of geometry. At the conclusion Socrates says that the correct opinions have been stirred up in the slave as if in a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked the right questions in different ways he would eventually have knowledge as exact as anyone's (*Meno* 85c-d). What makes this transition possible, on the *Meno*'s account, is the theory of recollection: we are capable of discovering truths that cannot be discerned by the senses alone, such as the nature of virtue and of mathematics, because they are within us implicitly (as if previously seen and then forgotten) and their latency can be activated by the right kind of reminders. The same metaphor of recollection governs the explanation in the first half of the *Phaedrus* of how our innate appetite can awaken us to truth (249c-251a). In the second half it is replaced by a botanical metaphor, but the point illustrated is the same: wis-

¹⁶ Cf. the Seventh Letter: 'Acquaintance with it must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship, when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it's generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining' (341c-d).

dom is latent within us and can be activated by the right kind of sensory stimulus. In the first half the latency of wisdom is compared to a forgotten memory that needs only the perception of a certain kind of beauty through our eyes; in the second half it is compared to a suitable but fallow soil that needs only the right seed to be planted through our ears.

Although Socrates' emphasis has been on the superiority of oral dialogue to written teaching, and writing is dismissed as suitable only for amusement, not for the serious dissemination of knowledge (276a), that cannot be the whole story from the point of view of Plato who continued to write philosophical books with undiminished energy. Thus at the very point where Socrates dismisses writing as suited only to be a reminder for our forgetful old age, he added, 'and for all others who follow along the same track. And he will enjoy seeing them grow delicate shoots' (276d). The last sentence means that written words can have the same effect as oral ones—the successful planting of seeds in the soul of our audience. Our written words can have only limited value for ourselves, their authors, since they are only crude approximations of what is already alive within us—we can amuse ourselves with them or use them as reminders when we become forgetful of what we now perceive directly. But at their best they can have the same effect on others as oral words, although less reliably so since the circumstances in which they are read, and the character of those who read them, are unpredictable. In their own way they can accomplish the two goals that Socrates emphasized: that the teachings not remain mere opinions but come alive within the soul of the recipient (276e-277a), and that they know who to speak to and when to keep silent (276a).¹⁷

The way that Socrates achieved the former objective with oral speech was by asking questions and forcing his listeners not merely to accept doctrines but to think matters through themselves in the hope that the effort would trigger an individuated insight or recollection. The *Phaedrus* has shown us how Plato sought to achieve something comparable by means of written words. Nowhere have we been presented with formal doctrines that we are expected to assent to as a definitive formulation of the truth. Instead we were offered a myth, some elements of which are more resistant to interpretation than others; we were given metaphors like recollection and seed-planting that present challenges for our interpretive thinking; and we were faced with a dialogue that emphasizes more than any other Platonic work the importance of organically unified discourse, while itself seeming to exhibit the greatest disunity of all Plato's dialogues, so that we are forced to think through the implications of all its elements in quest of a unifying principle. By such means we are continually forced to become active participants in the work of the dialogue and not merely passive recipients; to strive for knowledge-by-acquaintance of its subject rather than remaining satisfied with opinion-by-description.

¹⁷ Zwicky 1997, 28-37 gives a detailed defense of Plato's writing as not being subject to the limitations that Socrates ascribes to writing in general.

We can solve the interpretive problems only to the extent that we are able to look at the reality itself to which the words refer. To the extent that we succeed, the accounts take root in our souls and grow into something more, but if we lack the ability to find more in the words than their surface meaning, the dialogue does not speak to us, and thus it achieves the second objective as well, keeping silent before those for whom it is not suitable (276a). Those whose morality depends on religious tradition, and who lack the motivation or ability to replace religion-based morality with reason-based morality if their beliefs come under attack (as at 229c), would find in the *Phaedrus* only confirmations of what they already believe: the soul and gods of traditional religion. Plato writes in a way that minimizes the danger he speaks of in the *Republic*:

We hold from childhood certain beliefs about just and beautiful things; we're brought up in these beliefs as by parents, we obey and honor them... And then a questioner comes along and asks a man in those circumstances what's beautiful, and when he answers what he has heard from the lawgiver, the argument refutes him, and does this often and in many places. This reduces him to the belief that this thing is no more beautiful than it's ugly, and the same with what's just and good and the things he honored most... Then when he no longer believes these principles to be his own nor to be obeyed, as he did before, and does not discover true ones, ... from law abiding he becomes lawless. That is why... you must be extremely careful how you introduce [people] to dialectic. (538c-539a)

The second half of the dialogue shows us, then, how a *techne* can bring us to knowledge of the highest intelligible truth ('the just, the good, and the beautiful', 276c) through the part of us that is led by acquired opinions; as the first half showed this in terms of our innate appetite. The dialogue began by informally collecting, or at least traversing, a number of dualities (the symbolic opposition of nature and city life, followed by oppositions between passionate and calculated sex, Typhonic appetite and tame obedience, Dionysian madness and Heran sobriety, appetite and self-control) the common genus of which became visible as a dual principle of 'what rules and leads us': innate appetite for pleasure and acquired opinion that aims at the good. The first and second half of the dialogue explored each of these respectively, and the chariot metaphor, in which they appear as the black and white horses, adds the unifying concept of rationality, in the figure of the charioteer. It is that which steers our appetitive nature toward the good and not merely the pleasant, and which leads our opinions toward a transforming experience that is no longer mere opinion. The dialogue ends as it began, with an image of the dual theme of 'innate' and 'acquired'. At the beginning this was represented figuratively, as natural countryside and walled city, but now is referred directly to ourselves, as our own inner and outer sides, our nature and our acquisitions: 'Dear Pan and all other gods of this place', Socrates prays, 'grant that I may become beautiful within, and that my external possessions be in

friendly harmony with what is within me'.¹⁸

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