

## Soul's Recollecting of Reality Love and Rhetoric in Plato's *Phaedrus*

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### Abstract

This paper is initiated by the strangeness of structure of Plato's *Phaedrus*, and the controversial character of love discussed within, as well as what love got to do with rhetoric on earth. I examine the difference of human inner structure underlies those three speeches, which makes them intrinsically apart from each other. Then explore what happen to soul throughout love and rhetoric. Lastly, conclude that love and rhetoric both are chances for soul to recollect Reality as they call for people to transcend one self and impact others. More than that, as long as, and only when the "charioteer" of soul takes the key role, that love and rhetoric could awake the driving forces approaching Reality.

### Keywords

Plato, *Phaedrus*, Love, Rhetoric, Soul

The *Phaedrus* is a controversial work among Plato's masterpieces. People are likely to be confused on what indeed Plato attempted to emphasize between two irrelevant themes—love and rhetoric, which come in sequence under one title. Besides, to fulfill the purpose of showing the truth of love and how rhetoric should be, why necessary is it for Socrates gave two speeches on one topic, as both are nicely organized but dissent each other? Why Socrates (or maybe Plato) deliver the first one and disparages it himself? Along with these bewilderment, people tend to suspect and ignore the value of ideas on love in the *Phaedrus*, more likely to reckon *Symposium* a better classic on love, while limit the *Phaedrus* as a paradigm on rhetoric.

Confusion and controversy happens unavoidably, but not intrinsically. If we fail to grasp the innate soul, we can hardly get hold of the idea of the text, and even be off the track to figure out how and why the whole issue composed in that way. Above all, love is an intriguing theme for generations, influencing everybody's life. We will benefit from every step forward in decoding it.

In this paper, I will first give full discussion about the relationship of all the three speeches in *Phaedrus*, their meanings and functions, thus to clarify the conflict on "love." Then, examine their different theory basis concerning human's inner structure, which are implicit or explicit in

Socrates' first and second speeches. Afterwards, with *soul* as a core of our perspective, I will explore what meaning Socrates suggested about *love* and *rhetoric*. Lastly, I try to explain the problem which allures us into our discussion, to see what concealed behind the weird composition.

## I Interrelationship of the Three Speeches:

Although the *Phaedrus* is generally considered as two parts, and the three speeches belongs to the first, for they all surround the theme "love," our discussion on them is surely not confined within the first, as the discourse of the second part is actually about them. Now, we would better first delve into Lysias' speech to scrutinize its problems. Then we can clarify Socrates' speeches' merits.

### i Lysias' Speech: What's the Problem?

Lysias' initiation of the speech is to show the evils of lovers and why relationship with non-lovers is more favorable than lovers. He congeats a bunch of points to verify that. To display it more succinctly, here I condense them as below:

- (1) Love is no more than an exchange, a business. Lovers bestow as much as they can get back, otherwise will regret;
- (2) New/old: love is unreliable, always prefer the new, and even do evil to the old;
- (3) Sober/Madness: lovers are incapable of good judgment, and lose control themselves;
- (4) Limitation in wideness;
- (5) Ostentation/Truth: lovers tend to be ostentatious, away from the fact;
- (6) Love creates gossips;
- (7) Improvement/Hindrance: love is possession, lovers make hindrance to the beloved;
- (8) Body/Character: love is a desire for body, and ignorant the beloved's character;
- (9) Present/Long-run: love is towards present pleasure, which is moody and cause extravagant praise, not future benefits;
- (10) Good/Needy: Lovers are the neediest, not the best, for the beloved.

Wrap up them all, it describes love in its normal sense, vividly and extensively, concerning its detrimental effects to both the lover and the beloved, both in short and long run. But we can hardly see the inner connection of all the ten points. It seems they have been picked up randomly, or a little messily. That's the popular criticism towards it—on its form and structure. And moreover, according to Socrates, a speech should first figure out the nature of the object before further discussion.

Given these ten points, I venture an expression of the nature implied in Lysias' speech: Love is the selfish desire (transient passion) for another body. The keywords here are "selfish," "transient," "passion," and "body." We can recap the above ten in category under these four: roughly, (1) (7) (10) go to "selfish," (2) (9) go to "transient," (3) (5) go to "passion" and (4) (6) (8) go to "body". Thus we see the speech is obviously poorly organized and as Socrates remarks, "it seems that the author was

saying the same thing two or three times.”<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it doesn’t mean that the premise, i.e., Lysias’ notion of “love,” is indubitable or should be taken for sure. But the polar opposite, there lies the vital problem, of paramount importance.

## ii Their Interpretation and Transition

So, if we were Socrates, how should we rectify it thoroughly and precisely, and correct people’s misunderstanding on this important theme? Is it the best way to disclose its innate notion and fully let it unfold in a fully-developed form on the first step? That’s where the first speech of Socrates comes. And it did in an obvious way as it has been put into the mouth of a “certain cunning fellow,” kept a maximum distance from Socrates’ own believing, and even being veiled in appearance. While in contrast, the last one is given sincerely by Socrates.

Here I think it’s necessary to make a sketchy overview of the Socrates’ two speeches.

In his first, to make sure the true nature of the object first, he asserts that there are two principles for each individual: one is an innate desire for pleasure, the other is an acquired opinion which strives for the best. The former leads to wantonness while the latter to self-control. Lovers and non-lovers are depend on which force prevail the other. Then lovers, which evoked by the innate desire for pleasure, will do harm to the beloved in several ways: (1) spiritually, the beloved is restrained and deteriorated; (2) physically, he develops as a weakling, effeminate living; (3) as to possession, the lover begrudge the beloved and his possession and rejoice when they are lost; (4) adhesive enslavement to the beloved; (5) when love ceases, lovers become defaulter. With the proverb, it ends—“As wolf loves lamb, so lovers love their lads.”

Whereas in Socrates’ second speech, it means to depict the generous and decent love, by illustrating two major questions: what is love and lover? And how a love relationship begins and develops? First and foremost, correspondingly, the premise is the nature of soul: two winged horses and their charioteer. Upon that, Socrates elaborate that love, being one kind of madness, is the gift from gods, for people’s soul to approach Reality; lover is the man who partakes the madness of eager to approach the Reality and Beauty when they see Beauty’s resemblance. Therefore, love’s effect to the beloved is to better and please him, make him more like the beloved god. As to how a love relationship begins and develops, from the lover’s part, the whole soul is inspired by beauty and forced by “the bad horse” to approach the beloved, the sincere intimacy excite the beloved’s soul, and his soul is impulsed by his “bad horse” either. Henceforward, it has two outcomes, if the better part of them wins, they will have fully-grown wings and live philosophically and harmoniously; otherwise, they surrender to flesh but still benefit as their journey to heaven have once begun. That’s why Socrates values love much higher than friendship of non-lovers.

Now we halt from going more detailed into those profound analogies, since we will have full discussion later, and retrieve our thread to overview all the three speeches. Lysias’ speech start the topic and present the problem, the last speech provide the full answer to the entire issue. Without the second speech, it would be a leap of faith from the first to the third, the first and the third would only be different opinions, and what Socrates means would be no more than a supplement to Lysias for he omits the advantage of love and lover. It plays the cornerstone, it helps Lysias’ idea

1 Phaedrus (235–236)

exalt to the stage comparable with Socrates' true meaning. As for rhetoric, it's a redress to make it more effective; as for the thought, it helps us to get hold of the essence which vaguely and messily expressed in Lysias'.

Presently, the contradiction is highlighted in the last two speeches. They behold the opposite for many parts, primarily from the root. That's where our second part gets start.

## II Nature of Soul: Two or three parts?

### i Two Principles in Socrates' First

As we interpreted above, Socrates' two speeches follow the same method: clarify the nature of object before discussion. In his first speech, Socrates described the inner part of a person (he did not use "soul") has two ruling and guiding principles: innate desire for pleasure; and acquired opinion which strive for the best. These two principles are shifted between harmony and variance, and one masters the other from time to time. Self-control means "opinion leads through reason to what is best and dominant the other"; while the mastery of desire towards pleasure calls wantonness.

We'd better take notice here, that within one person we have TWO principles which have very disparate natures. They can never be mingled or agree with each other, but only one take the throne at one time. There is no other supreme authority as the charioteer in the analogy of chariot. The mechanism of their function is counteraction and overmastering. It also implies that the pleasure contradicts with the striving for the best, and the former is bad, the latter is good. Anything beyond reason is dangerous because that is out of self-control and inevitably falls to the territorial of desire.

What's more important is that the desire for pleasure is INNATE, while the opinion strive for the best is ACQUIRED. We should not ignore the word "opinion" here. As we know from the famous Divided Line, "opinion" is the lower degree of knowledge, about the visible world, and comes from visible and tangible things as well as images (sense experience of appearance, or illusion).<sup>2</sup> By "opinion," we can boldly presume Plato implies that the person is still on the lower stage of enlightenment and be bound to the visible world, far away from the Good. So the meaning and significance of "self-control" here makes less sense. And the "best" it strives for are merely things or matters of the visible world, and are short of truth. It can bring a well-balanced life, but fails to cause exaltation of soul. The ability to control is not innate, but acquired from outside. For Plato, learning is actually recollection, not acquiring. What can be acquired is skill, not knowledge, not truth.

On the other hand, as it preaches, people's desire for pleasure is innate. So virtually, the inner part of a person consists only of the unfavorable and irrational desires. What can be expected from a person is only how well they got restrained. There is little space for the soul to develop, and there is no direction for that. Pessimistically, from their definition, the innate desire can not be overcome by an acquired opinion eternally. There lacks a solid innate support for it. Moreover, the "self-control" can never be a leading force, since it exists only to control the desire for pleasure, to

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<sup>2</sup> Socrates To Sartre, Samuel Enoch Stumpf, 1993, Page55

inhibit the desire from undue behaviors. In this picture, not only love, but human beings are hopeless. On one hand, it believes in reason,<sup>3</sup> want to rationalize everything; on the other, it requires an outer salvation, which exactly like the contemporary rationalism together with a secularized Christianity. And by that, sophists get their delimitation.

## ii Three Parts of Soul: The Charioteer and Two Horses

In the second speech of Socrates, the soul is depicted adequately by analogy. But beforehand, Socrates states the immortality of soul. He declares that “self-motion is the essence, the very definition of the soul.” So the charioteer and two horses move as a whole. Soul moves itself and never ceases to move. Its motion does not derive from any source outside itself. Inasmuch as its immortality, it transcends the bodily existence. Then, our inner essence is not merely carnal desires from the body, but the soul. What happens inwardly is not only the gas and brake of desires, but the development of soul.

The analogy shows the soul as a team of winged horses and their charioteer. In the case of human soul, it’s a pair of horses that the charioteer dominates, one good and one bad, and for most people, their horses lost wings. (If horses have wings, the chariot can move upwards into the heaven; if not, it can only land on solid earth and move along with the terrain.)

Here I emphasize the number THREE, which can formulate a triangle. It is not hard to recognize their role and relationship: The charioteer drives the chariot and motivates the horses. The horses provide power for the chariot to move. The charioteer beholds the destination and conceives the route, and also control the speed as well as direction; the two horses, under his dominance, pull forward. Between the two horses, the good one constantly follows the charioteer’s commands and can even self-control with decorum; while the other is crooked, always move on its own like, not follow instructions. Accordingly, within human soul, there are three parts or forces: the dominant one behold or can retrieve the form of real Beauty and Reality, set the mission for the soul; the second one is “a follower of true renown,”<sup>4</sup> it loves honor with temperance and decency; and the third is the volition of insolence and knavery.

## iii Are the Two Principles (in Socrates’ first) the Two Horses (in Socrates’ second)?

We can see a great similarity in both of them, wondering whether Socrates’ analogy of two horses exactly the two principles which lay the foundation for his first one. As our imagination extends, the good horse is similar to opinion of the best, and the bad horse like the desire for pleasure. However, after careful scrutiny, I insist that they are not. And above all, the difference between them is a real mine, from which we will excavate diamond incisive to settle other doubts.

First and foremost, in “two principles,” the desire of love belongs to the “innate desire for pleasure,” opposing to the good force of opinion craving for the best. A person is either dominated by the desire, showing wantonness, or by the opinion of the best, showing self-control. Even the inner part of the lover is influenced by two different and disagreeable forces, one is love (desire), and

<sup>3</sup> In contemporary sense, not of Plato’s, which is in accord with the Reality, but more of an exertion of earthly wit.

<sup>4</sup> Phaedrus (253–254)

the other is not. That means that the other principle is unblemished by love. Nevertheless, on the other hand, love is shared by all the three parts of soul in Socrates' second. It is written that, "...the charioteer beholds the love-inspiring sight and his whole soul is warmed by the vision and becomes filled with tickling and pricking of desire..."<sup>5</sup> although the good horse control itself and does not leap upon the beloved, with no doubt, it is inspired and ignited by the love desire either, but tend to express as reverence and awe. And through love, the wings of both horses begin to sprout out and grow. "A nourishment streams upon it the stump of the wing begins to swell and grow from the root upward as a support for the entire structure of the soul, fully developing the wing which every soul possessed in the past."<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the force of control is also shared among all the three parts. The rein of the charioteer is the symptom. And the good horse is good at self-discipline while the bad one need to be drawn back violently. Therefore, the distinguishing between "two principles" is radically different from that of the two horses.

Secondly, the goodness of one horse and the badness of the other are judged by their character, but they are both under the supervision of charioteer. If the charioteer has not been corrupted, and can behold the remembrance of Reality, no matter how obstinate the bad one which even once win the victory and lead less noble life, the lover "who have once begun the journey to heaven shall never pass down into the dark path beneath the earth." Otherwise, the lovers are likely to surrender to carnal pleasure. So to a larger part, the development of the soul and the nobleness of the lover's behavior highly depend on the charioteer (maybe we can use Freud's term Superego, but I am apt to be cautionary), on whether he could train his horses well and manage the chariot well, on whether he cherish truth and beauty. As to the horse, it is not so dreadful. However, in "two principles," the situation is lean on which one master. When a person is caught in love, it means he has yielded to desire, and the effect is definitely harmful.

Thirdly, the "two principles" are one innate and one acquired, but the two horses, together with their charioteer, are all intrinsic; "two principles" are different in nature and supported by different things, but the two horses take the same food, truth, as their nourishment.

Given them all, among soul's three parts, the bad part is not evil in nature, but cranky and hard to control. Evil is not a positive thing intrinsic in the soul, but the forgetfulness of truth. Practically, what we should do is not to take care and control our desire, but take care to keep our reason following the truth and real beauty, never cease from the journey to Reality.

To sum up, in Socrates' two speeches on love, the inner structure of human is crucial. Through analysis respectively and comparison, I'm convinced that two assertions on love are actually rooted different. The first is on "desire" while the second on "soul." Obscuring the soul, we could not see the connection between human beings and the heaven, lost our entire mission that to get back to Reality, then we sense our desires only, and without the upward force, what we can do is only constrain it. What's important is not whether you hold your desire in control or not. What really counts is whether your soul follows the truth and beauty.

The tension between Socrates' two speeches is not merely the contradiction on speech, not merely under different hypotheses; it is how we lead our life. For some people, not a minority, their

5 Phaedrus (253–254)

6 Phaedrus (251–252)

inner structure is desire/control. For some others, they are conscious of their soul, though maybe not so clear as Plato depicted. Love means different things to different souls, as they are of different aim. Besides, love is not a substance, but one of the soul states. Love is not for love's own sake, itself cannot be the ends. For lover and beloved, the recollection of Beauty and their journey to Reality is the true end, which makes love meaningful and desirable. By love, we realize the soul, both in the *Phaedrus* and in our daily life; with soul, we integrate both our life and our comprehension to the *Phaedrus*.

### III Soul and Reality: Implications in the *Phaedrus*

#### i Love is to Deprive or to Create?

So far as Socrates' first speech concerns, lover tries to get pleasure as much as possible from the beloved, feels unbearable if he would be inferior to the beloved, but that is ordinarily the fact, because we know that the beloved chiefly resembles the god the lover once follows, and lover lacks some attributes that he could find on the beloved. But in order to keep a constant relationship, the lover can not stand the richness of the beloved in any aspects, namely, mind, body, possession, social relationship, etc., subsequently he will deprive the beloved, to keep the "god" close to him. It implies the lover's shortage in those facets, and disability to improve himself to emulate his beloved and approach the good and beauty. He treats love as consumption, not a creation—consume his own efforts, consume the goodness of the beloved.

Conversely, as Socrates says in his recantation, lovers treat the beloved as their god—with reverence and awe, and would like to make them happy; more important, "they (lovers) exhibit no jealousy or pettiness toward the loved one; rather, every act is aimed at bringing the beloved to be as much as possible like themselves, that is, like the god they honor."<sup>7</sup> And being engulfed in love, ideally, the lover recall his memory of Beauty and his wings of soul grow. So by love, the lover creates both for the beloved and himself.

In the first situation, the lover's passage from the earth to heaven is broken or blocked. When he behold the god-like countenance or the physical imitation of beauty, he fails to connect him with god or beauty in heaven, but consider him as an individual, and consider himself as an individual either. From our analysis in part II, that's not the fault of love, but the lover's soul forgets and is deprived from the great source, Reality. As an insulated individual, he is blind to the attribution of any goodness, ignorant to the retributions.

The conclusion here cannot be plainer. Depart from the Reality/Good; the soul is not in its full form. "Charioteer and his two horses" remains as a potential, the original state; but in reality, the world is as much as the viewer views. Although the first speech is not accepted, but for more or less, lovers' relationship cannot keep from reciprocal deprivation, and only in very scarce cases, the ideal love can be intact. So I reiterate that it's not just the conflict of opinion to a fixed reality. Actually, the soul structure of one is exactly what one can comprehend and reflect inwardly. Socrates described Lysias' inner structure (which is quite prevailing) and showed us his soul structure

<sup>7</sup> *Phaedrus* (253–254)



(which is the potential for we to realize) through his speech, shedding light on the truth for us audience and readers.

## ii Rhetoric: What's Wrong with the Written One?

After the three speeches, the second part of the *Phaedrus* is mainly about rhetoric. It seems that since then Socrates deserts the topic on the truth of love and converts to rhetoric of speech. Plato lets this theme unfold inch by inch along with the process of discourse, and of quite a lot of aspects. Through criticize sorts of digression and falsity, he erects the truth of speech.

Rhetoric, as the author declares more than once, is the art of influencing the soul through words. When a person take rhetoric, as an art, he should (a) make methodical distinction between classes of generally accepted ones and the debatable ones; then (b) notice to which class the particular terms belong; afterwards, (c) give the definition of the nature of the object; (d) have the abilities of analysis and synthesis; and as to the structure, (e) his speech should have a preamble at the beginning, a conclusion at the end, and a body of reasonable length. We see in Lysias' speech, these are absolutely what it lacks, with only the enumeration of some phenomena. To rectify this, Socrates delivers his first speech. With all of these, however, Socrates claims that these devices are barely preliminaries of rhetoric, not the art of it. That's what Socrates exemplifies in delivering his second speech, and resolves in the second part.

In summing-up, the art of rhetoric includes two sides:

- (1) Distinguished from deception and those about resemblance or probability, rhetoric should implant truth into the audience's soul. "A man must first know the truth about every single subject on which he speaks or writes, he must be able to define each in terms of a universal class that stands by itself."<sup>8</sup> Above all, "it is gods he must think of, he must strive to gain the capacity to speak what they favor, to conduct himself in a manner favored by them..."<sup>9</sup> It's not to please people, but be responsible to the lofty being, in the end, Reality.
- (2) As an art influencing people's soul, the speaker must know how many types of souls there are, and then can be correspond to the specific one at the specific occasion. There is a causation links sorts of souls and sorts of speeches. Moreover, this knowledge should not be stick to theory, it's lively and actual. "Here, now, present to him in actuality—to which he must apply *this* kind of speech in *this* sort of manner in order to abstain persuasion for *this* kind of activity...in addition, grasped the concept of propriety of time—when to speak,"<sup>10</sup> how to speak, and in what manners. Otherwise, the persuasion will fail.

These two points, from their natures, are consistent, and even shed light on each other: truth is

<sup>8</sup> Phaedrus (277–278)

<sup>9</sup> Phaedrus (273–274)

<sup>10</sup> Phaedrus (272–273)

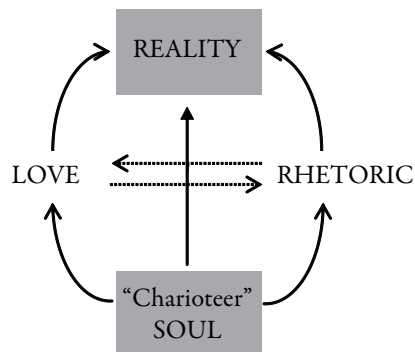


not fixed or stark, not a single independent thing that can be adopted regardless the varied circumstances. Truth is what the right thing comprehended by the soul in accordance with the Reality. It lives in soul. Just like liquid takes the shape of container, truth may appear different in different sorts of souls. And souls can only be influenced by the corresponding types at the right time. Secondly, truth is not what can be given. It is formulated and takes into shape in the process of the encounter and interaction between two souls. Without further polished by questions and explanations, it can hardly be called truth.

The written rhetoric fails to accomplish the essence. Depart from soul, written speech is only a dead display. It can only be a reminder of truth, but never the truth itself. Those who take the written works for granted that. That is why Socrates harshly criticizes the written one as a bastard of the soul of speaker. Socrates claims that, the dialectician is who “finds a congenial soul and then proceeds with true knowledge to plant and sow in it words which are able to help themselves and help him who planted them.”<sup>11</sup> For dialectician, he keeps fully reflection to his soul at every “here”; but for those who are not, they take thoughts as “once gain, stable forever,” block the passage for soul to respond to the real truth. So, what’s wrong with the writing? Opposite to dialectic that is of fresh words engendered in the open relationship of soul and soul, soul and Reality; when writing is taken into concern, the intimate relationship between soul and Reality has unfortunately been shut off.

#### IV Love and Rhetoric: Irrelevant?

From our analysis above, hopefully we have gained a lucid view about love and rhetoric respectively, their correlation with soul and Reality. Let us illustrate them all below:



Both love and rhetoric are ways for soul to recollect and even approach the Reality. They act on human’s soul and lead to the Reality. Love happens as the lover catches the sight of the beloved as the resemblance to a god or the Beauty. Rhetoric takes place as the speaker follow what the gods favors. Rhetoric is the teaching of truth, on which soul get feed and then be able to move. Love offers the

<sup>11</sup> Phaedrus (276–277)

chance for the soul to grow wings, with which soul can fly.

Love and Rhetoric shed light on “others,” persons beyond oneself. In love, the lover would like to impress the beloved; while in rhetoric, the speaker tries to influence the listener. Love can be misused as a desire and hinder soul’s improvement when it try to draw others into one’s narrow self, but not open one self to a bigger expansion. As well, rhetoric can also be misguided to serve selfish motives, or blinded by prejudice but not dispatch one self to follow the truth. Actually, the modes of love and rhetoric are displays of soul. Its move to Reality is not a present trend for every one, but a potential direction for any soul, as long as one can realize that his soul is driven by a “charioteer,” not merely two struggling forces.

Passion itself is not dreadful, for it is not inevitably leading to corruption. One need not to be nervous facing his passion, but quite the reverse, awaken his soul and take passion as one of the driving forces (horse), likewise, love or rhetoric is not necessarily good or bad, it all depends on whether the soul set Reality as its destination, and take love and rhetoric as a opportunity to recollect Reality.

Through the *Phaedrus*, I am very likely to conclude that, Plato contrast not only good speech with bad, but two ways the soul prone to develop in: whether you have a faith of Reality and the will to get close to it. Thanks to the combination of two seemingly irrelevant topics, that we could not omit their essence for both; and thanks to their joint-hand, it reveal a much larger and more profound view about how can our soul recollect the Reality.

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