

The Meeting of Minds: An Examination of the Relationship of Socrates and Phaedrus in Plato's *Phaedrus*

Plato's *Phaedrus* features an in-depth discussion between Socrates and his companion Phaedrus on the subject of *eros*. The attention given in the dialogue to the roles of lover, non-lover, beloved, and friend naturally leads to questions regarding the nature of Socrates and Phaedrus' relationship. One common view is that while Socrates and Phaedrus are united by a search for philosophical truth, their relationship never progresses beyond the realm of friendship (Belfiore 2012, Tomin 2000). This view assumes that the lack of overt physical love between the two men indicates only a slight connection between their relationship and the sexual relationship variously discussed by Plato in the dialogue. On the opposite end of the spectrum, O'Conner argues that, throughout the dialogue, Socrates subtly beckons Phaedrus to enter into an explicit, physical relationship with him (O' Conner 2015). Nichols, however, offers a third interpretation, asserting that Plato believes a pure relationship between a lover and a beloved is meant to develop both men toward the good; thus, such a relationship must be about more than sex (Nichols 2009). I will argue that this ideal serves as the basis for understanding Socrates' interaction with Phaedrus.

According to my reading, Plato has redefined *eros* in a way that allows for a lover-beloved relationship without the physical component. Such a view of the *Phaedrus* assumes that knowledge of the good leads to the control of physical passions (Linsk 2003). Thus, I argue that while Plato allows for physical love to occur at the outset of the relationship or in moments of weakness instigated by the inferior portion of the soul, his ideal erotic relationship is devoid of such physical pleasure and relies solely on the mutual contemplation of the supreme beauty rather than the particular beauty of the beloved. Such particular beauty is not necessarily harmful

but is certainly not the fulfillment of the intellectual life so valued by Plato. In fact, according to Socrates, the physical acts of an erotic relationship are concessions to the inferior part of the soul; the basis of the relationship is found in the search for wisdom (*Phaedrus* 256a1-7). The relationship between Socrates and Phaedrus reflect this ideal erotic relationship, as it consists in two men participating in a search for wisdom.

Socrates interacts with Phaedrus in a way that leads him to wisdom, rather than physically gratifying him. This becomes clear as Phaedrus develops throughout the dialogue. He begins as a hapless follower of Lysias, but ends with a better understanding of truth, particularly in respect to speech writing (Schenker 2006, Tomin 2000). Although some scholarship claims that Socrates fails in teaching Phaedrus about the truth, there are indications in the text that Phaedrus has undergone some change, especially in his views on Lysias (Scott). At the outset of the dialogue, Phaedrus is only concerned with the pleasing form of Lysias' speech. When Socrates critiques Lysias' speech on *eros*, Phaedrus demands that Socrates create a better and longer speech, but not necessarily one that contains more truth (*Phaedrus* 235d5-11). However, as the dialogue continues on, Phaedrus indicates a desire to search for actual truth with Socrates. For example, after Socrates' second speech, Phaedrus joins in Socrates' prayer to Love, asserting that he shares Socrates' desire to speak truly concerning love (*Phaedrus* 257b9-c1). Furthermore, he agrees with Socrates to share the knowledge of speechwriting which they have attained with Lysias, thereby showing that Phaedrus has progressed in wisdom to a point at which he can impart wisdom to others (*Phaedrus* 278b8-e5). This change in Phaedrus is brought about by his relationship with Socrates, one that runs deeper than friendship; it reflects an intellectual interaction of a beloved and lover free from the desires and prodding of the *thymoeidic and epithymetic* parts of the soul.

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