

REREADING ISOCRATES: WHY DOES SOCRATES PRESCRIBE A DIVINE IMPULSE  
FOR ISOCRATES AT THE END OF *THE PHAEDRUS*?

by

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I argue that Plato's reference to Isocrates at *Phaedrus* 279a-b attempts to represent the onto-epistemological differences between Platonic philosophy and Isocratean philosophy. Existing commentary on this moment in *The Phaedrus* tends to suggest either that Plato is insulting Isocrates or being optimistic about his potential conversion. I contend that Plato is realistically identifying the difference between their philosophies and naming that difference poetically, namely: as a "divine impulse" (ὄρμη θειοτέρα). My argument recognizes the rhetorical and philosophical implications of this phrase and attempts to explain why something *divine*, according to Plato, would help Isocrates to become a philosopher. In other words, I uncover what, for Plato, appears lacking in Isocratean philosophy. But I also show why, *for Isocrates*, this divine impulse is unnecessary.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE there were two competing schools in Athens: Plato's famous Academy which taught *philosophia* or what we know today as Platonic Philosophy, and Isocrates' school for public speaking and eloquence (he never uses the word: *rhetoric*) where he also claimed to teach *philosophia*. There was a fierce rivalry between these two headmasters jockeying for the right to use the word *philosophia*. In many of his dialogues, Plato famously denounces rhetoricians and demagoguery, while Isocrates refers to the high-brow theoretical work of the Academy as gymnastics of the mind and emphasizes the ethical importance of thoughtful communication. As Werner Jaeger suggests: "[Isocrates' curriculum] completely inverts the meanings given by Plato to the two words [rhetoric and philosophy]." <sup>1</sup> But the truth is that in 4<sup>th</sup> century, *philosophia* or philosophy had not become the specific discipline that it is today. It seems common today to associate the beginning of philosophy with Plato and Socrates, but this neglects a rich tradition of other thinkers, like Isocrates who also participated in the conversation which gave birth to philosophy. Jaeger tells us:

Today, when Plato's definition of 'philosophy' has been universally accepted for centuries, Isocrates' procedure appears to have been a mere whim. But really it was not. In his time, those concepts [rhetoric and philosophy] were still developing, and had not yet finally hardened into their ultimate shapes. It was not Plato, but Isocrates, who followed the general idiom... in using philosophy to mean intellectual culture in general. <sup>2</sup>

Thus *philosophia* in the 4<sup>th</sup> century was not a specific doctrine associated with one school or the other. Rather, philosophy was a kind of cultural education for the aristocratic youth usually

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<sup>1</sup> Jaeger 1939, 49

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

intended for grooming promising statesman and political leaders. Therefore, we have to divorce ourselves from the idea that Plato's teaching and philosophy are identical. Once we have re-evaluated our perspective on philosophy we can investigate the competition between these two great teachers which laid the groundwork for the philosophical tradition studied today.

This competition between Isocrates and Plato is perhaps, nowhere more explicit than at the end of Plato's *Phaedrus* when Socrates says:

It seems to me that [Isocrates'] natural talents are too good to be judged by the standards of Lysias and his school; moreover [Isocrates] appears to possess a nobler character... and some more divine impulse may well lead him to greater heights; for by his very nature there is a certain philosophy in the man's thought.<sup>3</sup>

There has been a lot of debate surrounding Plato's reference to Isocrates here. Goggin and Long nicely summarize the controversy with the question: "Does Isocrates represent the central cancer in a malignant rhetoric, or does he symbolize the potential for a reformed rhetoric?"<sup>4</sup> The debate surrounds the question of whether Plato's reference to Isocrates is a symbol of hope or simply an example of something already irreparably evil and base. Goggin and Long argue that the line of interpretation which sees the comment as insulting and sarcastic stretches back to W.H. Thompson's critical edition of *The Phaedrus* from 1868. They write: "In his edition Thompson claims that Plato's prophecy for Isocrates is a backhanded compliment 'passed upon him [Isocrates] at the conclusion of the *Phaedrus* [sic] ... as but poor amends for the stinging sarcasm showered so profusely on his art ... in other parts of the dialogue."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Phaedrus* 279: δοκεῖ μοι ἀμείνων ἢ κατὰ τοὺς περὶ Λυσίαν εἶναι λόγους τὰ τῆς φύσεως, ἔτι τε ἤθει γεννικωτέρῳ κεκρᾶσθαι: ὥστε οὐδὲν ἂν γένοιτο θαυμαστὸν προϊούσης τῆς ἡλικίας εἰ περὶ αὐτοῦς τε τοὺς λόγους, οἷς νῦν ἐπιχειρεῖ, πλέον ἢ παιδῶν διενέγκοι τῶν πρόποτε ἀγαμένων λόγων, ἔτι τε εἰ αὐτῷ μὴ ἀποχρήσαι ταῦτα, ἐπὶ μείζω δέ τις αὐτὸν ἄγοι ὀρμὴ θειοτέρα: φύσει γάρ, ὧ φίλε, ἔνεστί τις φιλοσοφία τῇ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς διανοίᾳ

<sup>4</sup> Goggin and Long 1993, 301

<sup>5</sup> Goggin and Long 1993, 301; (Thompson 1868, 173)

Thompson sees the entire dialogue as an extended exercise in sarcastic castigation, and this reference is but the last jibe. Thompson's is the majority opinion regarding Plato's motivations for this reference to Isocrates. Howland goes as far as to say that "the whole *dialogue* must be considered primarily as a direct and comprehensive attack on the educational system of Isocrates."<sup>6</sup> Brad McAdon also sees the reference as "nothing more than mocking condescension."<sup>7</sup>

Alternatively, Hackforth and De Vries (with some reservations) think Plato is being sincere.<sup>8</sup> They see Plato as legitimately hoping that Isocrates could alter his philosophical aspirations and move over to the Academy. Hackforth even suggests that the reference is meant to reconcile anything in dialogue which might have been "taken amiss."<sup>9</sup> Jaeger is closer to these two commentators. He says: "To take this remark as irony is to misunderstand it completely. Within the obvious limits, it is absolutely just, and every careful reader of Isocrates cannot but be impressed by its truth."<sup>10</sup> Jaeger's reading reveals just how firmly within the Platonic paradigm he is. For Jaeger, *philosophia*, properly understood, is Platonic, and so Isocrates, who argues against much of Plato's teachings, is certainly not a philosopher. In other words, Socrates' statement is only "just" from Plato's perspective; from Isocrates' it is nonsensical or irrelevant.

The truth is, though, no one reading *The Phaedrus* in 4<sup>th</sup> century Athens would have been surprised by Plato's assessment in this regard. Readers contemporaneous to Plato and Isocrates

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<sup>6</sup> Howland 1937, 152 (*italics mine*)

<sup>7</sup> McAdon 2004, 25

<sup>8</sup> Hackforth 1952, 167-8; De Vries 1952, 39. De Vries originally read the comment as sarcastic but changed his mind after reading Hackforth's translation and commentary.

<sup>9</sup> Hackforth 1952, 168

<sup>10</sup> Jaeger 1939, 98

would have probably understood this reference as Plato making a simple distinction between himself and Isocrates. Elizabeth Asmis, for example, suggests that in *The Phaedrus* “the threat perceived by Plato is no longer Gorgianic demagoguery, but Isocratean ‘philosophy.’”<sup>11</sup> In this way, Asmis is more in line with Harvey Yunis who reads *The Phaedrus* as a justification of philosophical life.<sup>12</sup> Asmis and Yunis both recognize that Plato’s reference to Isocrates here represents part of an historical drama between Isocrates and Plato. They both see that Plato is not simply announcing a feeling about Isocrates. Rather his comment has philosophical as well as rhetorical motivations. If we read this reference to Isocrates as simply an *ad hominem* attack then we miss the philosophical importance of the distinction Plato is trying to make.

Quite often we also find readings which construct inter-textual dialogues between Plato and Isocrates. For example, Luc Brisson, in the introduction to his French translation, argues that *The Antidosis* by Isocrates “could be read as a response to the last page of *The Phaedrus*.”<sup>13</sup> McAdon on the other hand constructs a dramatic narrative between *The Phaedrus* and Isocrates’ *Against the Sophists*.<sup>14</sup> I will not be delving into the intertextual aspect of the debate in my thesis. It seems to me impossible to determine with any certainty the direct intent of any clear allusion let alone determine whether some allusions are actually there at all. I commend those scholars on their exhaustive studies, but the claims made therein did not influence my readings of *The Phaedrus* or Isocrates.

In this thesis I will argue that Plato’s reference to Isocrates at the end of *The Phaedrus* represents the onto-epistemological differences between Platonic philosophy and Isocratean philosophy. To put my argument in the terms of the debate: by realistically identifying the

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<sup>11</sup> Asmis 1986, 167

<sup>12</sup> Yunis 2007, 82

<sup>13</sup> Brisson 2004, 29; De Vries offers a similar reading (1969, 17).

<sup>14</sup> McAdon 2004, 21



difference between their two ways of thinking and naming that difference, albeit poetically, as a divine impulse, Plato shows that, according to his definition, Isocrates is not engaged in philosophy. My argument recognizes the rhetorical and philosophical implications of the phrase “divine impulse” and attempts to explain why something “divine” would help Isocrates to become a philosopher. In other words, I will uncover what, for Plato, appears to be lacking in Isocratean philosophy. And I will also endeavour to show why, *for Isocrates*, this divine impulse is unnecessary.

To this end, my thesis will progress according to the following structure. First I will give a reading of the *Phaedrus* in which I explain that Plato constructs parallel continua of love and rhetoric in order to show that both of these human activities are perfected in and through a philosophical attention to absolutes or ideals which transcend the world of becoming. In the second chapter I investigate the middle speech of *The Phaedrus* in order to clearly articulate Plato’s depiction of Isocratean rhetoric and philosophy. And finally, in the third chapter, I move through Isocrates’ own writing to describe his philosophy which, ultimately, understands the basis of human activity as grounded in λόγος. He argues consistently that by learning to speak well and in accordance with the present καιρός and the historically generated δόξαι, we can also learn to conduct ourselves well with others. Isocrates posits that all we need to learn in order to conduct ourselves well is how to speak which requires a certain attention to the present moment and the audience to whom we are speaking. Plato, who also appreciates that momentary demands change, thinks that ethical conduct is, nevertheless, best informed through dialectical reflection on *a priori* absolutes.

## CHAPTER II: PLATO'S *PHAEDRUS*: RHETORIC, LOVE, AND PHILOSOPHY

### *Introduction*

Plato's *Phaedrus* will provide us with the backdrop of our discussion. It is a dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus and contains three speeches about love followed by the typical Socratic elenchus about rhetoric, writing, and philosophy. In this dialogue, unlike some of the other dialogues associated with rhetoric, Plato characterizes the way that the art of speaking *should* be taught and how it relates pedagogically to his conception of *philosophia*. Harvey Yunis suggests that "like many other Platonic dialogues, the main concern of *The Phaedrus* is to vindicate Plato's conception of the philosophical against rival pursuits" such as Sophistry or competing schools or philosophy.<sup>15</sup> However, Yunis also contends that Plato never *explicitly* confirms that "philosophy is more important than rhetoric."<sup>16</sup> Ferrari is careful to suggest that Socrates does not just "inject philosophy into rhetoric."<sup>17</sup> Rather it is the replication of the philosophical argument structure and method, i.e. dialectic, which we see manifest in true rhetoric. As Jessica Moss says: "True rhetoric turns out to be or at least overlap extensively with philosophy."<sup>18</sup> Yunis, concurring with Moss, writes: "Socrates brings dialectic into alliance with the true art of rhetoric."<sup>19</sup> And Kennedy is convinced that: "Plato perhaps regards the true rhetoric as best exemplified in the dialectic with which the philosopher persuades and ennoble the soul of his beloved."<sup>20</sup> Suffice it to say that most scholars agree that there is an intimate and interdependent entangling of methodology which allows rhetoric and dialectic to succeed but only in reference to one another.

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<sup>15</sup> Yunis 2007, 82

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ferrari 1987, 77-81

<sup>18</sup> Moss 2012, 16

<sup>19</sup> Yunis 2007, 84

<sup>20</sup> Kennedy 1963, 75

In the following section, however, I will argue that for Plato rhetoric or the art of leading souls is subordinate to philosophy, and, ideally, it ought to be used only to communicate philosophical ideas—not to deceive or prevaricate to gain power. I will not simply be explaining the complementarity of dialectic to rhetoric. Rather, I read *The Phaedrus* as demonstrating that there is no true rhetoric without philosophy first. I don't mean to suggest that these earlier commentators did not notice what I outline below, I am just going to argue the case for this prioritization more specifically than others have done. It seems to me that, as De Vries insists, both knowledge and beauty are essential conditions to the persuasive use of words, and these are objects only available to a philosophical inquiry.<sup>21</sup> I want qualify my thesis by further arguing that because of his prioritization of philosophy *true* rhetoric, for Plato, functions *only* with reference to ontological and epistemological structures only accessible through philosophical investigation. Part of exposing Plato's subordination of rhetoric to philosophy is seeing how *ideal* or *true rhetoric* manifests only in the light of philosophy and is *similarly* directed toward eternal absolutes like the Good and truth.<sup>22</sup>

I will begin by explaining the three different conceptions of love which appear in the three speeches. Then I will analyze the rhetorical strategies of each speech in relation to the kind of love it expresses. This comparison of kinds of love to kinds of rhetoric makes it clear that Plato's underlying argument is always a prioritization of philosophy as dialectical analysis seeking the Good. When we look at love and rhetoric side-by-side we will see that Plato understands these two activities in terms of how they relate to (or participate in) the Good. He

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<sup>21</sup> De Vries 1969, 23

<sup>22</sup> David White holds that reference to truth is necessary for rhetorical efficacy (White 1993, 191). And Richard Weaver holds the same with regards to the Good (Weaver 1953, 23).

suggests that the ideal of both rhetoric and love turns either an audience or a beloved toward the Good and toward philosophy.

### *II.1: Three Kinds of Love*

There are three propositions about love represented in the first half of *The Phaedrus*: one which suggests that we should favor the non-lover over the lover; a second which criticizes love because it is evil; and a third which praises love for facilitating philosophical inquiry and reflection. For the sake of clarity, below is a list of the main ideas of each of the speeches:

- 1) Lysias's Speech: Lovers are fickle, and showing favor to a lover is always a potentially failed investment. We are better off forming meaningful friendships which are built on reciprocity and not on sexual desire or appetitive attraction. This speech *praises* the non-lover.
- 2) Socrates' First Speech (The Middle Speech): Lovers are jealous and prohibitive. They retard moral and individual growth by attempting to maintain possession of their beloveds. This speech *criticizes* the lover.
- 3) The Palinode: Love begins with a soul recognizing beauty in another person, and that beauty reminds the lover's soul of the beauty of true reality beyond the physical world. Love is the attraction of the lover to the beloved *on account of* physical beauty which *reminds* the lover of true beauty. This speech identifies and praises the philosophical lover.

#### *II.1.1: Love in Lysias' Speech*

We will begin our analysis with Lysias' speech read and performed by Phaedrus for Socrates. The thesis of Lysias' speech, according to Phaedrus, is that we should not show favor

to someone who loves us but to someone who is simply a non-lover.<sup>23</sup> Weaver says that this speech “stresses the fact that the non-lover follows a policy of enlightened self-interest.”<sup>24</sup>

Lysias’ non-lover is a dispassionate participant who won’t be riled up or become upset because he “never sacrifices himself.”<sup>25</sup> The speech implies that the lover could become upset simply because he is passionately involved in the relationship.

Lysias claims that “lovers regret the good deeds they have done, whenever they should stop their desire (ἐπειδὴν τῆς ἐπιθυμίας παύσωνται). On the other hand, [for the non-lover] there is no time, in which it is fitting to change his mind.”<sup>26</sup> Lysias, thus, identifies the lover’s love with the *duration* of his appetitive desire (τῆς ἐπιθυμίας). The lover is nothing more than someone attracted to someone else physically and looking to fulfill physical desires. The lover, therefore, may stop loving or desiring someone if his attraction to the beloved should fade. On the other hand, Lysias argues, the non-lover won’t ever stop loving or being attracted to the *non-beloved* because he never began to love him in the first place.

We should note here that, typically, in the Platonic corpus, ἐπιθυμία specifically refers to the basest desires for things like food and sex. It is purely physical and is not customarily synonymous with the ideas of ἔρωσ, φιλία, ἀγάπη which are the three more common words for love in classical Greek. So, Lysias’ identification of ἔρωσ with ἐπιθυμία would be remarkable to Plato’s contemporaries. It would be analogous to someone speaking in a contemporary vernacular identifying romantic love with physical attraction. This is a close analogy, but, really, our contemporary notions of romantic love do not convey completely how Plato will eventually define ἔρωσ. What is visible in this analogy, however, is that in the same way romantic love

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<sup>23</sup> *Phaedrus* 227c

<sup>24</sup> Weaver 1953, 6

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Phaedrus* 231a

differs from basic physical attraction by today's standard definitions, i.e. because it has a richer meaning and significance, ἔρωσ differs from ἐπιθυμία. That Lysias would collapse these two different concepts into one another implies that he doesn't recognize the full difference between them. If he did, he would surely be able to see that ἔρωσ can never be reduced absolutely to ἐπιθυμία.

Because Lysias does not see love as anything other than our physical desire he thinks of it as mutable and finite. His chief concern, therefore, is the potential fickleness of the lover. He suggests over and over again the different ways a lover can be offended or hurt which may lead to the end of the relationship. He holds this fickleness in comparison to an abiding and rich relationship with a non-lover. He writes:

But, perhaps, you ought not gratify those who beg excessively, but to those who are capable of repaying; not to those who ask, but to those who are worthy of the deeds; not to those who enjoy your youth, but those who will share their goods with you as you age; not to those who having succeeded in seducing you will boast to others, but those who, out of modesty, keep silent; not to those who about a small time make a big to-do, but those who will love you throughout your whole life; not to those who, when they have ceased from desire, will seek out a reason to fight, but those who when your beauty ceases, demonstrate their virtue.<sup>27</sup>

In this passage Lysias lauds a relationship with a non-lover founded in reciprocity, merit, and duration. He characterizes the lover as a needy and temperamental annoyance who brings little

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<sup>27</sup> *Phaedrus* 233e-234a: ἀλλ' ἴσως προσήκει οὐ τοῖς σφόδρα δεομένοις χαρίζεσθαι, ἀλλὰ τοῖς μάλιστα ἀποδοῦναι χάριν δυναμένοις: οὐδὲ τοῖς προσαιτοῦσι μόνον, ἀλλὰ τοῖς τοῦ πράγματος ἀξίοις: οὐδὲ ὅσοι τῆς σῆς ὥρας ἀπολαύσονται, ἀλλ' οἵτινες πρεσβυτέρῳ γενομένῳ τῶν σφετέρων ἀγαθῶν μεταδώσουσιν: οὐδὲ οἱ διαπραξάμενοι πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους φιλοτιμήσονται, ἀλλ' οἵτινες αἰσχυρόμενοι πρὸς ἅπαντας σιωπήσονται: οὐδὲ τοῖς ὀλίγον χρόνον σπουδάζουσιν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ὁμοίως διὰ παντὸς τοῦ βίου φίλοις ἐσομένοις: οὐδὲ οἵτινες παυόμενοι τῆς ἐπιθυμίας ἔχθρας πρόφασιν ζητήσουσιν, ἀλλ' οἱ παυσάμενοι τῆς ὥρας τότε τὴν αὐτῶν ἀρετὴν ἐπιδείξονται.

benefit to the relationship. Lysias conceives of an unstable and uncertain love which is not worth the emotional or temporal investment. This implies that, for Lysias, the only relationship worth investing in is one which continues to reciprocate or repay that attention. This prioritization of repayment reveals that Lysias' gripe with love and gratifying the lover is that it is like a failed or unstable investment. He thinks that favoring someone should have some sort of benefit; some sort of remuneration, either in terms of returned attention or education. The fact that a lover could potentially withhold such repayment or suddenly stop makes favoring the lover an uncertain time investment. A non-lover, on the other hand, as Weaver says, "acts from calculation, [and] he never has occasion for remorse" or reason to change his heart.<sup>28</sup> This means that favoring the non-lover has the potential for a more certain and stable return.

We need to see that Lysias conceives of love as if it were simply an appetitive urge. He cannot imagine a loving relationship which grounds itself on eternal ideas and can thereby sustain itself through aging or changing tastes. Love, for Lysias, is a function of satiety and pleasure. Therefore, it makes more sense to invest favors, attention, and time into the non-lover than to gratify a lover.

### *II.1.2: Love in the Middle Speech*

In Socrates' first speech, the middle speech, he proposes, first, that we are ruled by two principles: one which is pure innate desire (ἡ μὲν ἔμφυτος οὐσα ἐπιθυμία ἡδονῶν) and the other which is acquired opinion striving for excellence (ἐπίκτητος δόξα, ἐφιεμένη τοῦ ἀρίστου).<sup>29</sup> These two principles represent opposing sets of criteria by which we make a decision: On the one hand we may make a decision based upon our desire for pleasure, and, on the other hand, we

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<sup>28</sup> Weaver 1953, 6

<sup>29</sup> *Phaedrus* 237d

can make rational decisions based on the customs and culture present to us. At the end of this preamble Socrates explains that love is:

The desire without reason, which strives toward right conduct, that [desire] which is pulled toward the enjoyment of the beautiful, and, again, on account of desires similar to itself, gains strength from the beauty of bodies...<sup>30</sup>

Love, according to Socrates in the middle speech, is a desire or ἐπιθυμία which yearns for beauty but is not civically or ethically accountable. Love is the aesthetic or pleasure-driven desire for beautiful things in the sensual world.

It should be clear that in his *first* speech Socrates defines love just as Lysias does in his speech. It is a temporal and mutable activity. Because love's anchor is physical attraction, it depends on the presence or absence of that attraction to exist. Notice how this definition of love which lacks a transcendent founding principle opens love up to the same sort of criticism which Lysias uses in his speech: the mutable physical appearance of a person as the sole cause of love puts the possibility of love in the hands of change.

In distinction from Lysias, however, Socrates is not praising the non-lover so much as he criticizing what Weaver calls the "evil lover." In the case of the evil lover Socrates' largest concern is that the beloved is simply a body for pleasure, and the lover objectifies the beloved. The lover's false-sense of ownership precludes the beloved from opportunities for betterment because the lover wants to keep the beloved beholden to him in different ways, e.g. not allowing him to engage in philosophy.<sup>31</sup> Weaver says the evil lover "in exercising an unremitting

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<sup>30</sup> *Phaedrus* 238b-c: ἡ γὰρ ἄνευ λόγου δόξης ἐπὶ τὸ ὀρθὸν ὀρμώσεως κρατήσασα ἐπιθυμία πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἀχθεῖσα κάλλους, καὶ ὑπὸ αὐτῶν ἐαυτῆς συγγενῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν ἐπὶ σωμάτων κάλλος ἐρρωμένως...

<sup>31</sup> *Phaedrus* 239-40



compulsion over the beloved deprives him of all praiseworthy qualities” so that the beloved will never become superior or challenging to the lover.<sup>32</sup>

Socrates ends his speech by comparing love of a beloved to a need for food: “As a wolf loves his lamb, so a lover loves his lad.”<sup>33</sup> This comparison emphasizes the ephemerality of love and the “theme of exploitation.”<sup>34</sup> The lover treats the beloved like he is food, i.e. the only good to come out of their relationship is the pleasure and satiety the beloved produces in the lover. The beloved never benefits from evil love.

### *II.1.3: The Difference Between Love in the Middle Speech and Love for Lysias*

The first two speeches in *The Phaedrus* both criticize love as if it were an infatuation or appetitive urge. Love as ἐπιθυμία is about immediate sensible pleasure. But I want to distinguish Lysias’ suggestion from that of Socrates, so that we can begin to recognize movement along the continuum of love which Plato creates.

Lysias’ speech talks about love as if it is a bad investment. Remember, for Lysias, the lover regrets his favors when the desire stops. For Socrates, in his first speech, the greater problem is not a beloved’s failed investment, but the objectification of another person and the way this stops the beloved from betterment. Lysias’ claim is individualized and economical, while Socrates’ focus is much more ethical and, to some degree, political or, at least, civic. The progression between these two speeches occurs in the fact that even though Socrates’ speech is meant to argue for the same sentiment as Lysias’ speech his criticism of love places less emphasis on the possible repayment of the beloved and more emphasis on the lacking beneficence of the lover. He sees a problem in understanding love as economically or as

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<sup>32</sup> Weaver 1953, 10

<sup>33</sup> *Phaedrus* 241c

<sup>34</sup> Weaver 1953, 11

calculatedly as Lysias does. And although he still takes issue with love, his grounds for criticism are not from a selfish perspective, but from a more ethical and community-oriented perspective.

As we move forward into Socrates' second speech we should notice that aesthetic desire retains its powerful pull, but the object of love moves from the sensible into the intelligible. In Socrates' second speech, the *Palinode*, love is no longer a pursuit for beauty and pleasure in the physical world for the body, but love is a desire for the *Beautiful* for the sake of nourishing the soul.

#### *II.1.4: Love in the Palinode*

Socrates begins his *Palinode* with an investigation of the agents and agencies involved in love before investigating love itself. First Socrates claims that love is a kind of madness, but it is the best kind of madness because it is a gift from the gods and affords humans the greatest happiness.<sup>35</sup> This analysis of madness as noble or true love is meant to be a correction of the two earlier speeches. In this way Socrates is altering his earlier opinion that love is a bad thing and recognizing that because it is divine, love must be good. Weaver points out that the noble love, unlike evil love, “is a generous state which confers blessings to the ignoring of self...”<sup>36</sup> He continues: “Such is the conversion by which love turns from the exploitative to the creative.”<sup>37</sup>

It is this creative and beneficent love which Socrates praises in the *Palinode*. But interestingly he does not praise this true love by introducing scenarios which demonstrate its relative superiority over non-love or evil love. Rather Socrates praises true love by simply explaining completely its relationship to the divine, and the ontological structures at work in the

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<sup>35</sup> *Phaedrus* 244-5

<sup>36</sup> Weaver 1953, 13

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 13-14

activity of love. This is important rhetorically because it implies that true love is positive in a way which can be demonstrated absolutely and does not need to be reflected in particularity.

Socrates begins his explanation of love with a description of the soul's life prior to embodiment. He first announces that the soul is immortal and self-moving and then transitions from an analytical tone of voice to a more mythological or poetic one. He says:

About the immortality of the soul enough is enough; about the form or idea of the soul we must speak this way. What it really is would be for an altogether divine and massive inquiry; of what it *seems*, men could speak; in this way we must speak. Let the soul seem like the combined powers of a pair of winged horses and their charioteer.<sup>38</sup>

Here, Socrates posits that in order to explain what the soul really is, its essence, would be a task only fit for a god, so, as humans, we must settle to explain the soul analogically or metaphorically. He suggests that the soul is a composite of three parts, *like* a charioteer and two winged-horses. In divine souls, the horses are both good, but in humans, one of the horses is bad and the other good. These horses represent the human condition that is constantly torn between, on the one side customary appropriate behavior, and, on the other side, irrational appetite. We can see this in later moment when Socrates explains the horses' character a bit more:

And of the horses we said one is good and one is not. Be we did not define the virtue of the goodness or the deviancy of the bad one, and now, about this, it is necessary to speak. For the one stationed in the nobler position is ideally shaped and articulated, it holds its head high, with an aquiline nose, brilliant color and black eyes, it lusts after honor with prudence and decency, and is a companion of true opinion (*ἀληθινῆς δόξης*), without a

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<sup>38</sup> *Phaedrus* 246a: *περὶ μὲν οὖν ἀθανασίας αὐτῆς ἱκανῶς: περὶ δὲ τῆς ιδέας αὐτῆς ὧδε λεκτέον. οἷον μὲν ἐστὶ, πάντη πάντως θείας εἶναι καὶ μακρᾶς διηγήσεως, ᾧ δὲ ἔοικεν, ἀνθρωπίνης τε καὶ ἐλάττονος: ταύτη οὖν λέγωμεν. εὐοικέτω δὴ συμφύτῳ δυνάμει ὑποπτέρου ζεύγους τε καὶ ἡνιόχου*

whip, it heeds orders, led by word (λόγῳ) alone. The other horse, is large (πολύς) and bent, as if it was simply piled together, with strong, short neck and a snub-nose, with grey eyes, suffused with blood; it is the companion of hubris and quackery; it is shaggy-haired around its deaf ears and hardly yields to the whip or spurs.<sup>39</sup>

Note here the similarity between this definition of the good horse and the definition of prudence in the middle speech which is: opinion led by reason (λόγος) toward the best (ἄριστον).<sup>40</sup> Also, when Socrates criticizes Lysias' speech later on he does so by insisting that all speeches must have an orderly arrangement like the body of an animal. The bad horse's shape or lack thereof, therefore, corresponds to how Socrates later characterizes Lysias' speech.<sup>41</sup>

I would argue the two horses can be interpreted as analogues for the two speeches which came before. The good horse is governed by λόγος and δόξα which is the ethical ideal described in Socrates' first speech, though, interestingly, not the definition of love. The bad horse, on the other hand, is driven by its ἐπιθυμία which is the same as Lysias' fickle lover. By positioning representations of the two earlier speeches in this specific metaphor, Plato further implies that the concept of love expounded on in each speech conveys a psychology lacking the charioteer who rules the two horses and maintains order between them.<sup>42</sup> This implication anticipates the over-arching distinction Plato makes between the first two conceptions of love and the

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<sup>39</sup> *Phaedrus* 253d-e: τῶν δὲ δὴ ἵππων ὁ μὲν, φαμέν, ἀγαθός, ὁ δ' οὐ: ἀρετὴ δὲ τίς τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἢ κακοῦ κακία, οὐ διείπομεν, νῦν δὲ λεκτέον. ὁ μὲν τοίνυν αὐτοῖν ἐν τῇ καλλίονι στάσει ὧν τό τε εἶδος ὀρθός καὶ διηρθρωμένος, ὑψαύχην, ἐπίγρυπος, λευκὸς ἰδεῖν, μελανόμματος, τιμῆς ἐραστῆς μετὰ σωφροσύνης τε καὶ αἰδοῦς, καὶ ἀληθινῆς δόξης ἐταῖρος, ἄπληκτος, κελεύσματι μόνον καὶ λόγῳ ἠνιοχεῖται: ὁ δ' αὖ σκολιός, πολὺς, εἰκῆ συμπεφορημένος, κρατεραύχην, βραχυτράχηλος, σιμοπρόσωπος, μελάγχρως, γλαυκόμματος, ὕφαιμος, ὕβρεως καὶ ἀλαζονείας ἐταῖρος, περὶ ὧτα λάσιος, κωφός, μάλιστα μετὰ κέντρων μόγις ὑπεϊκῶν

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 237e: δόξης μὲν οὖν ἐπὶ τὸ ἄριστον λόγῳ ἀγοῦσης καὶ κρατούσης τῷ κράτει σωφροσύνη ὄνομα

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 264

<sup>42</sup> *Phaedrus* 246

Palinode's, i.e. the first two definitions of love are incorrect because they do not make reference to those transcendent causes and principles only available to the mind.

We get our first glimpse of the transcendent principles when Socrates explains that unburdened by a bad horse, the gods can go right up to the οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα or “being being beingly” which lies even beyond heaven.<sup>43</sup> This is the realm only visible to the mind which nurtures the divine soul. Humans, weighed down by the bad horse, can only look at the οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα imperfectly, but we continue to strive to see it because that is where the wings of our souls are refreshed.

The wings of the soul serve a dual-purpose in Socrates' metaphor. On the one hand they symbolize this tendency of humanity to seek truth and proximity to the divine. On the other hand, Socrates explains that in the upheaval to see true reality the wings of a particular soul may be broken off, and it tumbles down to earth. The roots of the wings, however, always remain in the soul. In this way, the roots of the wings become integral to Socrates' definition of love. He says:

Whenever [a lover] sees something beautiful, he is reminded of the truth, and his wings begin to grow as he flaps them eagerly trying to fly, but he cannot, and since he looks upward like a bird, and neglects those things below this causes him to be considered mad.<sup>44</sup>

The wings, in this image, are the impetus of love. They regrow as a soul is reminded of the beauty of the true reality where the gods are. Because the wing metonymically relates to flying and, therefore, to the sky and heaven, the image of the wing emphasizes the transcendence of

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 247c

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 249e: ὅταν τὸ τῆδὲ τις ὄρων κάλλος, τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἀναμνησκόμενος, πτερῶται τε καὶ ἀναπτερούμενος προθυμούμενος ἀναπτέσθαι, ἀδυνατῶν δέ, ὄρνιθος δίκην βλέπων ἄνω, τῶν κάτω δὲ ἀμελῶν, αἰτίαν ἔχει ὡς μανικῶς διακείμενος.

true reality from the physical beauty which inspires a memory but is only an approximation or derivative of the beauty in true reality. Love is activated when a soul recognizes beauty in the world as an analogue and reminder for the true reality (οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα) it experienced prior to its embodiment. To put this differently: love moves us when an individual's soul recognizes the participation of another individual's soul in the transcendent, eternal, and absolute *idea* of beauty, and then desires to be near that individual in the same way that the soul was once near true reality. The re-grown wings poetically represent the initial attraction (the re-growth) and the subsequent impulse toward the sky, heaven, and the true reality beyond.

This grounding of love in the noetic or intellectually accessible realm of the universe represents the largest difference between the first two speeches and the *Palinode*: love is, now, an activity in the world of sensation grounded in the intellectual. Though physical beauty might initiate the activity of love, it does so only in so far as the lover is reminded of the truth (ἀληθοῦς). The beloved becomes a sort of conduit back to the realm above heaven for the lover. Of course, an embodied soul cannot return to those pastures, so it contents itself with “gazing-upwards” or philosophical reflection. Socrates, though, is not suggesting that love ends with the lover philosophizing *alone*. Rather, according to Socrates, the lover will attempt to model himself and his lover on whichever god the soul of the lover was following around heaven prior to its embodiment.<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Asmis helpfully characterizes this conception of love as “humans aim[ing] to recover a divine condition of knowledge through love of another.”<sup>46</sup> It is crucial that love, in this philosophical sense, is both directed toward others *and* philosophically targeting the Good.

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<sup>45</sup> *Phaedrus* 252e-253a

<sup>46</sup> Asmis 1986, 164

## *Conclusion*

Taken together, the three speeches of *The Phaedrus* form the following continuum:

- 1) Lysias' Speech: Love is based on ephemeral exchange and has no room for the possibility of a relationship which makes reference to metaphysical or transcendent value. Thus, love is bad because it does not bring continuous, constant, or reliable pleasure.
- 2) Socrates' First Speech: Love is bad because it gets in the way of ethical development of the beloved.
- 3) The Palinode: Love is a byproduct of *remembering* transcendental and eternal truths and recognizing an instance of those in another. This kind of love also inspires a lover to point his beloved toward those ideals, i.e. to morally educate him.

It should be becoming clear that the speeches progress in terms of how much their respective definitions of love refer to the eternal and transcendent. Lysias' speech makes no reference to any sort of eternal or transcendent ideals; he is firmly focused on what is best for himself.

Socrates' first speech does not appeal to anything transcendent either, but his speech does move away from the egocentrism showcased in Lysias' speech. Additionally, in the middle speech, Socrates does demonstrate the importance of finding definitions, and he even implies that "divine philosophy" has value. Though neither of the first two speeches are, by Plato's definition, philosophical, the middle speech shows marked progress toward philosophical methodology and values from Lysias' speech. And, of course, in the Palinode we find a definition of love which relies on the existence of and study of transcendent ontological structures.

## *II.2: Three Kinds of Rhetoric*

Let's turn now to examine the three speeches from a methodological perspective, so that we may recognize the kinds of rhetoric each represents. I will argue in the following section that in the same way Plato creates a continuum of love with the speeches, he simultaneously creates a continuum of rhetoric. Further, the continua are not independent of one another, but, rather importantly, the logic of the content informs the rhetorical strategies employed. By "logic" I mean, in the case of love, the intellectual constructs and dynamics which the speaker pulls together in his conception of love, and, in the case of rhetoric, I mean the methodology and motivations implicit in the structure of the speech. My contention is that Plato constructs the speeches so that the form represents the substance.

We should also keep in mind that, fundamentally, rhetoric, for Plato, is "the technique of soul-leading through logoi (τέχνη ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων)." This includes a wide variety of forms of discourse. Socrates tells Phaedrus that we use rhetoric "not merely in the law courts and all other public meeting places, but in private gatherings also."<sup>47</sup> As we look at the methodology Plato showcases in each of the speeches, we ought to notice that each speech is rhetorical, but it is the *kind* and quality of rhetoric which Plato graphs onto a spectrum. To him, as with love, there is an ideal rhetoric or true rhetoric. This true rhetoric has a specific form and content which varies a great deal from the customary characterization of rhetoric in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. For Plato ideal rhetoric is organized dialectically and uses philosophical inquiry and truth to inform its content. This kind of rhetoric is most accurately represented in the *Palinode*. But if we keep this

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<sup>47</sup> *Phaedrus* 261



definition of rhetoric in mind it will make distinguishing the kinds of rhetoric used in the other two speeches easier.

### *II.2.1: Lysias' Rhetoric*

A careful reader of Plato will know that the lackluster nature of Lysias' speech is a symptom of its philosophical poverty. That is, the speech does not ground its conclusion on any logical deductions or make any analytical inferences through dialectic. And, because it is written down, the speech lacks the rhetorical sensitivity of a rhetor to his audience. Jessica Moss says that Lysias' speech represents that kind of rhetoric which "produces pleasing *logoi* for ulterior motives, with no regard for the truth."<sup>48</sup> That is to say, Lysias prioritizes the pleasure of his audience over their knowledge. His speech appeals to Phaedrus because it *seems* witty, controversial, almost paradoxical (loving the non-lover), but in reality his speech is an illusion of intellect which plies on the unwitting who confuse aesthetic pleasure with goodness. It is, as Goggin and Long say, "designed to appeal to the multitude's sense of probability" rather than inform or expand philosophical understanding.<sup>49</sup>

Plato helpfully critiques Lysias' speech for us so that we know exactly why it is not a good example of rhetoric. Firstly the speech does not proceed dialectically, i.e. it does not begin with a definition of love and then proceed to prove it. Instead of carefully leading his audience through a systematic argument, Lysias jumps from one example to another comparing the lover to the non-lover. In these paragraphs Plato uses the Greek conjunction-pair  $\mu\grave{\epsilon}\nu\text{-}\delta\grave{\epsilon}$  which is usually translated as "On the one hand... and on the other hand." By using  $\mu\grave{\epsilon}\nu\text{-}\delta\grave{\epsilon}$  in these paragraphs Plato emphasizes that these scenes revolve around the simple juxtaposition of the

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<sup>48</sup> Moss 2012, 10

<sup>49</sup> Goggin and Long 1993, 305

lover to the non-lover. Presenting simple comparative dualities, like Lysias does, lacks any underlying or universal criteria; it just emphasizes relative difference. What is more, this faulty structure actually gives rise to Socrates' other major criticism of Lysias' speech which is that it does not have an organic structure which leads from the beginning to the end.<sup>50</sup>

In the later portions of the dialogue, Socrates explains that written work cannot relate to its audience the same way that an interlocutor can. He criticizes the fact that written information can only contain reminders of knowledge, but cannot fully communicate the truth of something.<sup>51</sup> There is no way we can read these passages without applying them to Lysias' *written* speech. It is that this speech is written down which, for Plato, takes it the furthest from true philosophy and philosophical investigation. We can neither ask questions nor demand clarification from a written speech; it pretends to contain the entirety of some knowledge but cannot engage with its readers to help them understand. Moreover, for Plato, a written text, like Lysias', can be amended and altered by its multitude of readers. And this is exactly what Phaedrus tries to do by suggesting he rehearse Lysias' speech without having fully memorized it.<sup>52</sup> There is a danger in the written word that its truth can fluctuate or remain unrevealed. This is all to say that because Lysias' speech appears in the dialogue written down and it makes no reference to any philosophical absolutes it is methodologically further from the philosophical rhetoric Socrates describes in the end of the dialogue.

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<sup>50</sup> *Phaedrus* 264

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 275-6

<sup>52</sup> Cf Ferrari 1987, 210

### *II.2.2: The Rhetoric of the Middle Speech*

The rhetorical method contained in the middle speech will be the subject of the second chapter of this thesis, so the points I go over here will be rehearsed and expanded in due course. Most importantly, I want to lay the groundwork for the suggestion in the second chapter that we should read the middle speech as if Plato intends for us to associate it with Isocrates and Isocratean rhetoric.<sup>53</sup> There are several indications for this argument which I will discuss in detail in the next chapter. For now I simply want to highlight their existence here without an extensive comparison to Isocrates. Firstly, the middle speech is dominated by appeals to δόξα or opinion. Secondly, the speech proceeds methodologically anticipating the dialectical patterns which Socrates will discuss later on. However, crucially, the middle speech moves through this methodological defining process *within* the realm of δόξα, which is to say it makes no recourse to absolutes or primary causes. This brings us to the fact that according to Socrates the love described in the middle speech is not divine.<sup>54</sup> He suggests that though both speeches proceed dialectically the middle speech does not attend to the divine aspect of love. This is important because the lack of attention to divinity associates the middle speech with Isocrates who, according to Socrates, is in need of some sort of divine impulse.

In the middle speech Socrates is effectively arguing for the same thing as Lysias in his speech. Instead of arguing from the perspective of the one to be benefitted, Socrates derives the speech from conventional opinion, i.e. δόξα. He begins by calling on the Muses to help him tell the “myth” about a clever rhetor who wants to convince a boy he loves that, firstly, the rhetor does not love the boy, and, secondly, the boy ought to favor non-lovers over lovers.<sup>55</sup> By

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<sup>53</sup> I am indebted to Malcom Brown and James Coulter (1971) for this idea.

<sup>54</sup> *Phaedrus* 266

<sup>55</sup> *Phaedrus* 237a Cf. White 1993, 36

defining the speech as a myth Socrates forces us to recall his reaction to myths in the beginning of the dialogue. He says there that for the most part he is simply convinced by the conventional understanding of myths and cares very little about demythologizing them.<sup>56</sup> We are to recognize that this speech comes out of a deference to what is conventional and traditional and is not an attempt to move outside what is established opinion. Socrates' suggestion that he could use the ancient poetic tradition to argue Lysias' point more effectively further supports the idea the speech is meant to be grounded in the tradition and not novel investigation.<sup>57</sup> We have even further confirmation in the fact that the opening claim of the speech is based on something everybody knows. Socrates says: “ἐπιθυμία τις ὁ ἔρωσ, ἅπαντι δῆλον” or “It is clear to *everyone* that love is a sort of appetite or desire.”<sup>58</sup> David White says that because the speech begins here with δόξα it will never move outside that kind of knowledge.<sup>59</sup> For Plato, the fact the middle speech remains locked within the realm of δόξα means that it does not use or reflect on absolute truth or ideals. In his discussion of love in the middle speech Socrates does not consider the ontological structures which participate in the occurrence of love. He never even admits that ἔρωσ is a god.

In terms of the methodology of the middle speech Socrates says: “About all things, boy, there is one way for those to deliberate beautifully, for it is necessary to see what the topic of deliberation is, or the whole investigation will miss the mark.”<sup>60</sup> This programmatic directive signals that this speech unlike Lysias' is going to participate in an established structure, i.e. it will follow a specific form. This form, as Socrates explains later in the dialogue, is dialectical

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<sup>56</sup> *Phaedrus* 230a

<sup>57</sup> *Phaedrus* 235c-d Cf. White 1993, 29

<sup>58</sup> *Phaedrus* 237d

<sup>59</sup> White 1993, 39

<sup>60</sup> *Phaedrus* 237b: *περὶ παντός, ὃ παῖ, μία ἀρχὴ τοῖς μέλλουσι καλῶς βουλευέσθαι: εἰδέναι δεῖ περὶ οὗ ἂν ἦ ἡ βουλή, ἣ παντὸς ἀμαρτάνειν ἀνάγκη.*

analysis. Socrates, then, moves through an explanation for love which he describes as when our appetite overcomes our rational opinion for right conduct and pursues carnal beauty alone. Using this definition Socrates argues that because the lover is simply always looking for pleasure, he will endeavor to secure a beloved who is inferior to him and keep him that way. Socrates further suggests that for this same goal the lover will bar the beloved from learning “divine philosophy.”<sup>61</sup> I am repeating these points again only to demonstrate that Socrates uses the definition of love from the beginning as a kernel from which he can unfold the logic of his speech. Though he will later conclude this kernel is fallacious (in the *Palinode*), the method of Socrates’ first speech is what moves us along the continuum of rhetorical methodology from relative comparison in Lysias’ speech to something more philosophical in intent. Furthermore, this is the first indication that the rhetoric of the middle speech contains a philosophical structure which anticipates that of the *Palinode*.

### *II.2.3: The True Rhetoric of the Palinode*

To understand the full effect and subtle imbrication with which Plato crafts the *Palinode* we need to read it with a few things in mind. Firstly, the speech contains all the elements of philosophical or true rhetoric. Secondly, this speech is as much about love as it is about rhetoric. That is, the true brilliance of the *Palinode* is that it is a speech written for a speech-lover (*Phaedrus*) to convince him that his love for speeches is actually a love for philosophical truth. Plato implies that we can use the same system of references and ontological metonyms to explain the activity of love as well as the structures which make rhetorical communication and persuasion possible. It will be hard to talk about all of these layers at the same time, so I will begin by briefly pointing out how the *Palinode* exemplifies ideal rhetoric and then move on to

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 239

show how the theory of love it posits is also an explanation for rhetoric. But we should note that, for Plato, this speech as it relates to the narrative of the dialogue and the conversion of Phaedrus manifests as its own explanation.

As we noted above Plato's broad definition of rhetoric, is "the technique of soul-leading through *logoi*" (τέχνη ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων).<sup>62</sup> But this definition includes all forms of discourse which can move an audience. The ideal rhetorician or the philosophical rhetorician uses a specific system of organization called dialectic in order to reflect on the ideas she wants to communicate and then to communicate them clearly, i.e. "to think and to speak."<sup>63</sup> Plato defines dialectic as two abilities: on the one hand, "the power to organize into a single comprehensive system the unarranged characteristics of a subject," and on the other hand, "the ability to divide into species according to natural articulations, avoiding the attempt to shatter the unity of a natural part."<sup>64</sup> Put simply: dialectic is the process of collection and division. This system of organization gives the rhetorician a process by which she can *lead* an audience from one idea to the next through comparisons based on similarities and natural associations. We should compare this to the comparisons Lysias' speech uses which serve to emphasize difference and not to investigate primary truths.

Hans-Georg Gadamer claims:

It is no accident that the theory of dialectic, in its original motive of coming to an understanding, should be present specifically in the context of the critique of rhetoric. In the situation of giving a speech, the original mode by which people can come to an understanding—namely, by questioning and answering—is impossible... [So a

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<sup>62</sup> *Phaedrus* 261a

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 266

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 265

rhetorician must proceed] by an apparently cogent process, starting from something in regard to the subject in question on which the speaker knows in advance that his listeners are in agreement with him, he must characterize the subject in its being in such a way that what he wants to demonstrate about it follows necessarily from this characterization. In the same way, the goal of dialectic is to comprehend the facts of the matter, in their being, on the basis of premises that are accepted as such by everyone. Thus, although it strives for persuasion rather than for true shared understanding, the art of rhetoric, as a semblance of such understanding, reflects [dialectic's] structures.<sup>65</sup>

Gadamer's analysis points out the similarities between rhetoric and dialectic in so far as they both deal in coming to understanding. But he suggests that the chief difference between them is the intent of persuasion instead of *true* shared understanding. He implies that, for Plato, rhetorical persuasion produces the illusion that the rhetor has provided the audience with the means to grasp his point as clearly and completely as he does, i.e. that the audience is in agreement not because they are persuaded but because they all equally understand. I think Gadamer's point here articulates the suspicion Plato feels toward Lysianic and, to some degree, Isocratean rhetoric. He considers it dissembling and manipulative, rather than conversational and revelatory.

Gadamer, however, is not just distinguishing the two disciplines. He is explaining that, for Plato, dialectic is integral to rhetoric because it gives the rhetorician a method of argumentation which proceeds along a series of opinions beginning with agreement and ending in agreement. It should begin to be clear at this point that it is *dialectical rhetoric*, for Plato, which takes advantage of the dynamic of love. By using the soul's desire for beauty in the world

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<sup>65</sup> Gadamer 2004, 84

for the sake of the beauty of the truth, a rhetorician can move a soul to desire one beautiful thing instead of another by appealing to the source of their original desire.

For Plato, the dialectical rhetorician begins with a definition, i.e. a collection or species arranged under a single heading with a broad definition, such as: love, or madness. Socrates explains that it is the dialectical definitions in speeches which allow them “to be clear and self-consistent (ὁμολογούμενον).”<sup>66</sup> Definitions in this case do not need to be *correct*; they simply define the scale and target of the investigation. After making her definitions, the speaker moves through a series of distinctions within the given kind, looking for the instance of that kind of most appropriate to the speech at hand. As an example of proper dialectical division Socrates refers us to the discussions of madness in each of his speeches.<sup>67</sup> In the case of the Palinode, Socrates begins with the good kinds of madness eventually coming to madness as love which is “like its left-handed counterpart in name, yet divine in nature.”<sup>68</sup> These distinctions are not based on names but on essence, i.e. what something is in its nature. Dialectic moves through distinctions of essences in order to root out the most fundamental aspects of a kind. It is primarily this dialectical method of the Palinode which makes it superior to the other speeches.

However, because Plato conceives of rhetoric as, ideally, a communicative mouthpiece for philosophy he considers speeches which make use of philosophical material far superior to those with little to no philosophical merit. Socrates says:

Each great one of the technical arts comes with leisurely discussion or, stargazing, *about the nature of things*: this loftiness of mind and general effectiveness seem to come from this source. And it was to this Pericles added to his natural ability: for I think his being

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<sup>66</sup> *Phaedrus* 265

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 265-6

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 266; For an example of this dialectic in action see 244-245.



with Anaxagoras, being such a man, filled him with stargazing-thoughts about the nature of mind and arrived at opinion, about which Anaxagoras spoke often, and from here he [Pericles] drew what is useful to the art of speaking.<sup>69</sup>

Socrates praises Pericles' rhetorical ability based on how much it relies on his "stargazing" or philosophical reflection.

In the Palinode we can see that Socrates' reflections on love are not about the effects of love on the physical or social life of the lover and beloved but about the primary ontological and epistemological structures which underlie and facilitate love, e.g. the soul, the gods, the Good, and beauty. Thus, Socrates' Palinode praises love by way of explaining its relationship to the divine and to the Good. By making his speech an investigation into the nature of something Socrates extricates his speech from the epideictic genre and moves into that of science and philosophy.

Moreover, Socrates' use of a metaphorical description of the pasture of true being and the soul implies that any description of these two things would resist de-mythologized language. Elizabeth Asmis notes that "the use of myth is intended to lift Phaedrus' awareness from the narrow focus on human selfishness... to a new cosmic vision, in which humans aim to recover a divine condition of knowledge..."<sup>70</sup> In other words, because we are *wingless*, so to speak, we don't have direct access to the pasture of true being, so Socrates has to mediate that experience

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 270: πᾶσαι ὅσαι μεγάλα τῶν τεχνῶν προσδέονται ἀδολεσχίας καὶ μετεωρολογίας φύσεως περὶ: τὸ γὰρ ὑψηλόνουν τοῦτο καὶ πάντη τελεσιουργὸν ἔοικεν ἐντεῦθεν ποθεν εἰσιέναι. ὃ καὶ Περικλῆς πρὸς τῷ εὐφυῆς εἶναι ἐκτίσατο: προσπεσὼν γὰρ οἶμαι τοιοῦτω ὄντι Ἀναξαγόρα, μετεωρολογίας ἐμπλησθεὶς καὶ ἐπὶ φύσιν νοῦ τε καὶ διανοίας ἀφικόμενος, ὃν δὴ περὶ τὸν πολὺν λόγον ἐποιεῖτο Ἀναξαγόρας, ἐντεῦθεν εἴλκυσεν ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν λόγων τέχνην τὸ πρόσφορον αὐτῇ.

<sup>70</sup> Asmis 1986, 164

through a myth and through the metaphor of sensation. This metaphor serves to emphasize the way in which we have moved past the realm of direct sensible perception which typified the first two speeches and into the realm of poetic mediation-- a sort of divine mania or madness in and of itself. In this final speech we move away from an argument based in ephemerality and toward an argument which makes reference to the eternal, transcendent, and universal.

True or ideal rhetoric, therefore, is rhetoric which adheres to truth and moves its audience toward truth and goodness. Weaver notes: "It is impossible to talk about rhetoric as effective expression without having as a term giving intelligibility to the whole discourse, the Good."<sup>71</sup> Importantly, for Plato, understanding and awareness of the Good only comes out of dialectical analysis without which, as Weaver concludes, no true rhetoric can exist.<sup>72</sup>

We should see now that Socrates' Palinode makes use of all these characteristics of true rhetoric. And if we step back and examine the speech from within the narrative of the dialogue we can see that Socrates is using the speech as a way to move Phaedrus toward philosophy and away from Lysian rhetoric. Socrates notices that instead of being seduced by Lysias' speech, Phaedrus leaves with the speech trying desperately to memorize the words. But, as we already noted, Phaedrus doesn't love people, he loves speeches, so Socrates, understanding the ontological structures in love, realizes that if the object of Phaedrus' love is speeches and not people then arguing about loving people would be irrelevant. If he can show Phaedrus that what makes a speech effective and beautiful is fundamentally how philosophical the speech is, then Socrates can convince Phaedrus that philosophy is more important than rhetoric. Socrates lays the groundwork for their agreement by calling both himself and Phaedrus lovers of discourse.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Weaver 1953, 23

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 17

<sup>73</sup> *Phaedrus* 228

Then he shows Phaedrus that if he loves good rhetoric he must also love dialectic because it makes rhetoric better. And if he loves dialectic he must love philosophy because it informs good dialectic. Thus, in the end Socrates moves Phaedrus from a love of speeches which don't love him back to the love of wisdom which nourishes his soul.

### *II.3: Love and Rhetoric as Psychagogia*

Now that we have seen how the different rhetorical methods are exemplified in each speech we should turn now to see how Plato implicitly connects love to rhetoric. However, I hope it is becoming clear that true rhetoric, for Plato, *takes advantage* of the dynamics of love: By using the soul's desire for beauty in the world for the sake of the beauty of the truth, a rhetorician can move a soul to desire one beautiful thing instead of another by appealing to the source of their original desire.

In order to understand the relationship between love and rhetoric we have to see first that both rhetoric and love are functions of the soul. In the *Palinode*, before he can explain love, Socrates must first resort to a poetic-philosophical exegesis of the soul. And we see a similar order of operations explicitly suggested when Socrates talks about rhetoric. Socrates stipulates that anyone “who seriously offers a science of rhetoric (τέχνην ῥητορικὴν) must first with all possible accuracy describe the soul and make us perceive whether its nature is single or uniform or, like the body, complex.”<sup>74</sup> He goes on to suggest that this scientific description of rhetoric would also include the different types of souls and how each type of soul is affected by its own unique type of rhetoric.

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<sup>74</sup> *Phaedrus* 271a: Literally, “τέχνην ῥητορικὴν” means “craft of rhetoric,” but the English word science does a better job of encapsulating the meaning because it evokes notions of rigidity and deduced concepts. For

Asmis further contends that “the underlying theme *that binds the whole dialogue* is... Plato’s new definition of rhetoric as ‘psychagogia’.”<sup>75</sup> She means that soul-leading is the aspect of rhetoric which ties it thematically to love. Thus, true love, like true rhetoric, is a kind of soul-leading, and part of the lover’s activity is to lead his beloved toward goodness. And, as Moss explains: “In the best circumstances, love leads, both lover and beloved to a life of philosophy; they spend their lives in philosophic conversation.”<sup>76</sup> The point both Moss and Asmis seem to be making is illustrated in the *Palinode* in which Socrates shows how a lover will be attracted to a beloved and how he will then conduct himself around that beloved. Socrates suggests that the lover will be attracted to those people who represent qualities reminiscent of the god whom the lover followed around heaven. The beloved becomes an emblem of that god for the lover while the lover attempts to be that god for his beloved.<sup>77</sup> This leading is, crucially, also a leading back to the Good and back to the truth. The beauty of the beloved encourages the lover to return intellectually to the memory of true reality.<sup>78</sup> And then that goodness and truth is the criteria for how the lover conducts his deeds and actions.

For example, Socrates says that someone who follows Zeus around heaven will be attracted to someone else who has a propensity for wisdom and truth-seeking and, in turn, that lover will become more interested in wisdom to create reciprocated attraction from his beloved. The lover, thus, mimics the characteristics of that god who is his paradigm; the lover strives to become what he wants.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 154

<sup>76</sup> Moss 2012, 13

<sup>77</sup> *Phaedrus* 255

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 254

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 255-6

For Plato, we do not *love* what appeals to us on the level of appetite. Rather, we love the *ideal* of that person, i.e. the god to whom they are most similar. This is strikingly and, I think, fundamentally similar to one of Socrates' final conclusions about rhetoric. He tells Phaedrus:

If a man is in possession of his reason, he must make this toilsome effort not for the sake of his speech and his conduct in relation to men: 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—and this to the utmost of his powers.<sup>80</sup>

Ultimately, for Plato, our desire and our speech is not for ourselves or even for something in this physical universe. If we are to practice and understand true love and true rhetoric then we must know that the end of these activities is always already the divine Good.

#### *II.4: Conclusion*

That rhetoric and love are directed toward the Good subordinates them to philosophy and philosophical inquiry. For Plato, love is only to be understood in the light of philosophy, and rhetoric is only good if its content is philosophical. But philosophy in this case is a very specific discipline. Philosophy for Plato is the dialectical investigation of universal and fundamental truth and goodness. It is moving away from physical, ephemeral, sensual, and symbolic thought into thinking about *a priori* absolutes, e.g. the Good. It is important to see that Plato is not suggesting without philosophy there is no love or rhetoric. Rather he is suggesting that the ideal or best

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<sup>80</sup> *Phaedrus* 273: εἰ δὲ μή, οἷς νυνδὴ διήλομεν πεισόμεθα, ὡς ἐὰν μή τις τῶν τε ἀκουσομένων τὰς φύσεις διαριθμήσῃται, καὶ κατ' εἶδη τε διαιρεῖσθαι τὰ ὄντα καὶ μιᾷ ἰδέᾳ δυνατὸς ἢ καθ' ἕνα ἕκαστον περιλαμβάνειν, οὐ ποτ' ἔσται τεχνικὸς λόγων περὶ καθ' ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀνθρώπῳ. τὰυτὰ δὲ οὐ μὴ ποτε κτήσῃται ἄνευ πολλῆς πραγματείας: ἦν οὐκ ἔνεκα τοῦ λέγειν καὶ πράττειν πρὸς ἀνθρώπους δεῖ διαπονεῖσθαι τὸν σῶφρονα, ἀλλὰ τοῦ θεοῖς κεχαρισμένα μὲν λέγειν δύνασθαι, κεχαρισμένως δὲ πράττειν τὸ πᾶν εἰς δύναμιν.

manifestations of rhetoric and love are those which make reference to or participate in philosophical truth-seeking *via* dialectic. This is where most commentators misunderstand *The Phaedrus*. Plato is not suggesting there is only one love or one rhetoric. These, like all things in the world of sensation, are derivatives of ideals. *The Phaedrus* lays out for us the ideals for each of these activities and explains that the way to understand and practice ideal love and ideal rhetoric is through a philosophical understanding of those activities. And this philosophical understanding recognizes and prioritizes the seeking of a transcendent, eternal, and universal truth.

Because Plato prioritizes an eternal truth, he must emphasize ascertaining and seeking this truth prior to any other activity. And this why, for Plato, Isocrates needs something “more divine” in order to make him a philosopher.

At the outset of this section I quoted a line from the end of *The Phaedrus* when Socrates says: “[Isocrates’] natural talents are too good to be judged by the standards of Lysias and his school; moreover [Isocrates] appears to possess a nobler character... and some more divine impulse may well lead him to greater heights; for by his very nature there is a certain philosophy in the man’s thought.”<sup>81</sup> This statement seems to position Isocrates somewhere between Lysian rhetoric and philosophical rhetoric. For Weaver, this would land Isocrates in the realm of the evil rhetorician. However, Asmis who thinks, along with Brown and Coulter, that the middle speech is representative of Isocratean rhetoric, suggests that the fallaciousness of the middle speech is naïve and not maliciously intended.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Phaedrus* 279

<sup>82</sup> The fallaciousness of the middle speech is the fact that Socrates never associates love with divinity and fails to recognize the philosophical importance of love. For Asmis, Brown and Coulter we can read this failure as naïve misunderstanding rather than intentional deception.

The next chapter turns to look at these questions raised about the middle speech and Isocrates. Specifically, I turn to Brown and Coulter's essay to decide if there is any reason to assume Plato is using the middle speech to represent Isocratean rhetoric and, if he is, what can we learn about Plato from his representation of Isocrates.

### CHAPTER III: THE MIDDLE SPEECH

#### *Introduction*

In the last chapter we focused primarily on understanding the relationship between the rhetoric of the speeches and their content in the *Phaedrus*. I argued that Plato's underlying argument was that both "What is love?" and "What is rhetoric?" are questions fundamentally answered within the discipline of philosophy which investigates the nature of things. That is, both love and rhetoric are grounded on theoretical absolutes, e.g. the truth and the Good.

Because this thesis aims at explaining the reference to Isocrates at the end of *The Phaedrus*, our next task is to flesh-out Plato's understanding of Isocrates' thought. Once we have a more complete picture of how Plato represents Isocrates and Isocratean thought we will be able to clarify this ambiguous reference. To that end, this chapter will contain primarily a close-reading of Socrates' first speech or the middle speech. My inspiration to devote so much space and time to this speech comes from the work done by Malcom Brown and James Coulter in their paper, "The Middle Speech of Plato's *Phaedrus*."<sup>83</sup> Their essay argues that the middle speech contains an entirely "unPlatonic" philodoxy as opposed to the Platonic philosophy.<sup>84</sup> They further stipulate that Plato uses either Isocrates himself or Isocratean rhetoric as the model for the middle speech.

I must make a caveat here. I do not agree with all of Brown and Coulter's reasons for associating Isocrates with the middle speech, but I do think, if Plato were to associate the middle speech with anybody, it would be Isocrates. Brown and Coulter have begun a nobly intentioned

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<sup>83</sup> Brown & Coulter 1971. Brown and Coulter are not the only scholars to recognize a relationship between Isocrates and the middle speech, but they give the most significant space to the inquiry.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 405



and valid project, but I want to re-orient some of their arguments to reveal more authentic correspondences between Isocrates and the middle speech. That said, I will not be devoting much time to understanding or interpreting Isocrates in this chapter; I want to save that work for the next chapter which will be almost entirely devoted to understanding Isocrates on his own terms. The point of this chapter, to re-iterate, is to investigate what is probably *Plato's representation* of Isocrates in the middle speech. That said, I will point out the places in which the middle speech and Isocrates' philosophy seem to correspond.

According to Brown and Coulter the rhetor in the middle speech is an educator who uses rhetoric to teach a philodoxy instead of philosophy with distorted virtues and whose focus on utility and pleasure makes him blind to ideal beauty.<sup>85</sup> This, seems to me, to be a good summary of the character Plato describes both implicitly and explicitly, and this may be how Plato thinks of Isocrates as well. This presents us with two questions: 1) Is this a valid characterization of Isocrates? And 2) regardless of the validity of Plato's characterization what does it tell us about the difference between Plato and Isocrates and the reference to Isocrates at the end of *The Phaedrus*?

I will focus more on the second question because the first question will be answered after we investigate Isocrates in the next chapter. In the following discussion I will argue that the logic and construction of the middle speech are meant to represent a mode of thinking which curiously prioritizes both *δόξα* (opinion) and "divine" philosophy in such a way that the speech represents the transition between Lysias and the Palinode. It is that the middle speech recognizes the importance of philosophy and proceeds in a philosophical manner that leads us toward the

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<sup>85</sup> Brown and Coulter 1971, 406

Palinode, while it is the content of the speech which refers back to Lysias. In other words, the methodology of the middle speech points forward, while most of the content is meant to mirror the things Lysias says. It is in the middle speech's transitional position and its prioritization of δόξα that we can associate it with Isocrates, but I will show that this particular representation of Isocrates is misguided.

### *III.1: Philodoxy*

Brown and Coulter characterize the middle speech as philodoxical, thereby implying that the content in the middle speech is derived from δόξα or opinion as opposed to a philosophical speech which would derive from *sophia* or wisdom.<sup>86</sup> This is an important distinction for us because δόξα is *not* the kind of epistemological foundation which Plato prioritizes in *The Phaedrus*, but it is what Isocrates thinks of as the perfect rhetorical source for knowledge and arguments. The most common translation of δόξα is opinion, but this is not some subjective or arbitrary feeling. Rather, δόξα is the way the world appears to a subject. Etymologically δόξα comes from the Greek verb δοκεῖν which means “to seem.” It is often juxtaposed with the verb εἶναι which means “to be.” For Plato, we should always look to *what-is* rather than how things *seem*. The assumption built into the notion of δόξα is that it is has no demand for truth or validity even though it may be correct. This means that *what-is* is often held as the true reality behind how things appear (δόξα). To appeal to δόξα for knowledge or information is to appeal to an unstable and mutable reference. On the other hand, searching for *what-is* generates a much more permanent and fundamental kind of knowledge. For our discussion regarding the middle speech, a reliance on δόξα over and against true reality necessarily separates the speech from the Palinode and philosophical inquiry in general. Brown and Coulter correctly identify the speech

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<sup>86</sup> Brown and Coulter 1971, 405

as philodoxical although I don't agree with the determination "unPlatonic." Furthermore, the historical association of Isocrates with δόξα is inescapable. It is, therefore, strange that, in the final paragraphs of their paper in which Brown and Coulter attempt to prove Isocrates' presence in the middle speech, there are no claims about the philodoxical nature of the middle speech.

David A. White's interpretation of the middle speech gives further determination to Brown and Coulter's assessment by deducing a possible source of the philodoxy. He says: "The fact that [the major premise of the middle speech] is an *opinion* immediately suggests that whatever will be inferred from this claim can never reach beyond opinion."<sup>87</sup> White is referring here to Socrates's sentiment: "*It is clear to everyone*, that love is a certain desire."<sup>88</sup> According to White, because the founding premise of Socrates' argument is common knowledge, the rest of the speech is built on top of an opinion, and an argument which uses an opinion as its grounding principle has to stay within the boundaries of opinion.<sup>89</sup> White is helpful here because his reading of the middle speech recognizes the logical priority the middle speech places in opinion. However, we should not overlook the possibility of an induction which begins from an opinion and discovers some absolute truth. Importantly, in the middle speech Socrates makes no pretensions of discovering absolute truths, so that his grounding premise is an opinion seems to imply that the speech is not meant to reveal anything more fundamental than a popular understanding on which both he and his audience can agree and which allows him to continue speaking.

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<sup>87</sup> White 1993, 39

<sup>88</sup> *Phaedrus* 237d: ὅτι μὲν οὖν δὴ ἐπιθυμία τις ὁ ἔρωσ, ἅπαντι δῆλον (emphasis mine)

<sup>89</sup> That the middle speech relies so much on *doxa* is important for comparing it to Isocrates because he places a great emphasis on *doxa* as the criteria for ethical and virtuous actions. I will work out Isocrates' own definition of *doxa* in the next chapter, but it will be fruitful to keep this in mind while we look the "*philodoxy*" of the middle speech.

Herman Sinaiko helpfully explains that this definition of love is not a true definition but a practical or useful one. He says: “[this] definition which merely expresses an initial agreement between the parties of an inquiry and thus *enables* them to continue their deliberations is very different from a definition which states the truth about the subject to be considered.”<sup>90</sup> Sinaiko notices here that the definition which begins the middle speech has a purely expedient end, i.e. to *enable* the discussion to continue. He further suggests that this definition for the sake of expediency differs from a definition which distinguishes one nature from another. The distinction which Sinaiko draws here echoes the difference between the middle speech and the Palinode, i.e. the middle speech does not use absolutes to prove a point. Rather, the middle speech proceeds through working definitions toward a conclusion. The Palinode, of course, uses dialectic to derive a conclusion based on absolute truths.

That the middle speech derives its content from δόξα is one thing, but in the first half of the speech δόξα also plays an important role in Socrates’ definition of left-handed love in which δόξα appears three times. First Socrates explains:

ἡμῶν ἐν ἐκάστῳ δύο τινέ ἐστων ἰδέα ἄρχοντε καὶ ἄγοντε, οἷν ἐπόμεθα ἢ ἂν ἄγητον, ἢ μὲν ἔμφυτος οὐσα ἐπιθυμία ἡδονῶν, ἄλλη δὲ ἐπίκτητος δόξα, ἐφιεμένη τοῦ ἀρίστου.<sup>91</sup>

In each of us there are two governing and directing principles, which we follow whichever is leading, on the one hand there is appetite for pleasure, and on the other hand there is an acquired opinion toward the best.

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<sup>90</sup> Sinaiko 1965, 33

<sup>91</sup> *Phaedrus* 237d; I am following Meunier’s French translation of ἄρχοντε and ἄγοντε. He renders the passage: “*Il faut aussi savoir qu’il est en nous deux principes qui nous gouvernent, qui nous dirigent et que nous suivons là où ils nous conduisent. L’un est le désir instinctif du plaisir; l’autre, sentiment acquis, est la propension vers le mieux*” (Meunier 1926, 32-33). Brisson also has a similarly helpful translation.

Then he describes the highest ethical principle, prudence, as grounded in δόξα led by λόγος:

When opinion is led by reason (λόγῳ) toward what is best and is more powerful, this power is called prudence (σωφροσύνη) by name.<sup>92</sup>

And finally Socrates defines love as:

When appetite toward pleasure of beauty is more powerful than rational opinion... that is called love.<sup>93</sup>

We should see that, of the two sides of human nature Socrates describes in the middle speech, δόξα is surely the aspect which tends toward the good and appropriate while appetite tends to stray from what is appropriate or *good*. Love in the middle speech is a negative activity, and so anything associated with it takes on that characteristic. However, anything which is held as opposed to love is good and helpful. δόξα takes on the very important responsibility of keeping us on the straight path away from love and the distractions of appetite. Socrates clearly considers δόξα led by λόγος *the* ethical criteria *par excellence* in so far as it opposes love. Thus, in the same way that the speech itself is contained *within* δόξα, it also prescribes an ethics grounded in following δόξα led by λόγος. And now we have come full circle in that the speech which derives its content from δόξα and is therefore a philodoxy also prioritizes δόξα as the guiding criteria of ethical conduct.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *Phaedrus* 237c: δόξης μὲν οὖν ἐπὶ τὸ ἄριστον λόγῳ ἀγούσης καὶ κρατούσης τῷ κράτει σωφροσύνη ὄνομα.

<sup>93</sup> *Phaedrus* 238b-c: ἡ γὰρ ἄνευ λόγου δόξης ἐπὶ τὸ ὀρθὸν ὀρμώσης κρατήσασα ἐπιθυμία πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἀχθεῖσα κάλλους... ἔρωσ ἐκλήθη.

<sup>94</sup> It is worth mentioning here that when we turn to Isocrates we will see that his theory of ethics also focuses on δόξα and our ability to interpret the δόξα of others. Brown and Coulter, as I said above, do not reflect on this fact which seems to me an ample reason to consider this speech aimed at the Isocrates. Even Yunis points out in his commentary that the definition of δόξα in the middle speech is most often associated with Isocrates (Yunis 2011, 113).

To Brown and Coulter the philodoxy in the middle speech generates alternate definitions of words typically associated with Platonic philosophy in a way which is meant to be unPlatonic. That is to say, according to Brown and Coulter, Plato includes these *misusages* of his own technical vocabulary to create the image of a speaker who misunderstands Platonic philosophy. However, by characterizing something as unPlatonic we run the risk of holding the Platonic definition of a given word or ideas as *the* criteria for validity or comprehensibility. The term “unPlatonic” places the middle speech at odds with Plato and Platonism in the Palinode rather than on a continuum toward him and it, respectively. Hackforth, along with Sinaiko and Ferrari, understands these alternative definitions as “popular” or “common” instead of unPlatonic.<sup>95</sup> That is to say these words are not necessarily intentionally denying what Plato says. Rather they are the conventional ideas on which Plato builds his own philosophy.

There are two specific words which Brown and Coulter discuss as misused Platonic vocabulary, namely: οὐσία and philosophy.

*Ousia* (οὐσία)<sup>96</sup> often appears as a metaphysical or ontological term in Platonic writing. Brown and Coulter notice that in the middle speech οὐσία means “material possessions,” which is well within the range of meanings for the word, but it does not carry the same metaphysical force of Plato’s typical usage of the word.<sup>97</sup> In the Palinode, for example, Plato uses οὐσία to refer directly to that central piece of reality around which the gods revel and revolve.<sup>98</sup> In the Palinode οὐσία has a decidedly ontological and metaphysical meaning. Comparing the definition

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<sup>95</sup> Hackforth 1952, 41; Sinaiko 1965, 33; Ferrari 1987, 101.

<sup>96</sup> οὐσία comes from the Greek word εἶναι which means “to be.” οὐσία is etymologically related to the participial form of the verb to be which means it describes things that are *being*. In Aristotle this word often means the substance of something referring to that thing’s essence or most fundamental existing element, so to speak.

<sup>97</sup> Brown and Coulter 1971, 410; Brown and Coulter note that there is another use of *ousia* in the middle speech in which it is used more Platonically to mean “the substance or content” of a discourse (*Phaedrus* 237).

<sup>98</sup> *Phaedrus* 240a, 241c

of οὐσία in the Palinode to the definition in the middle speech, reveals that the difference between them comes from an emphasis on the material and practical in the middle speech, and an emphasis on the theoretical in the Palinode. This difference between usages further demonstrates that Plato is trying to generate a consistent picture of a specifically practice-centric way of thinking in the middle speech, as opposed to the more theoretical and intellectual logic in the Palinode. Furthermore, this difference in uses of οὐσία mimics the difference between *philodoxy* and *philosophy* which, as we have already discussed, is a varying of degrees of attention to the divine/ideal/philosophical plane of existence.

Brown and Coulter also point out that in Lysias' speech there is a different misappropriation of οὐσία. There it refers to money and the ability to buy love.<sup>99</sup> To think about these three speeches as stages of progressive development reveals that Lysias, in the first speech, thinks of οὐσία as money, which is an derivative abstraction of materiality; Socrates, in the second speech defines οὐσία as material possessions proper; and in the third speech or the Palinode he uses the word “οὐσία” much more philosophically as a state or level of existence (οὐσία ὄντως οὐσία).<sup>100</sup> The movement along this spectrum from the first speech to the Palinode is a function of, once again, the relationship of the speech to the philosophical, i.e. to that way of thinking which pays the most attention to the intellectual and theoretical nature of things.

Isocrates, for his part, also uses the word οὐσία, but of the 84 instances in his extant writings *all* refer to material wealth or property in general which would have been the more common or conventional definition of the word.<sup>101</sup> It is really Plato who popularizes the more

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<sup>99</sup> Brown and Coulter 1971, 410; *Phaedrus* 232c

<sup>100</sup> *Phaedrus* 247c

<sup>101</sup> The number 84 comes from a search using the word frequency statistics function in the Perseus Project. [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/searchresults?q=ou\)si/a&target=greek&doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0143&expand=lemma&sort=docorder](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/searchresults?q=ou)si/a&target=greek&doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0143&expand=lemma&sort=docorder)

metaphysical use of the word. Brown and Coulter do not make any observation regarding Isocrates' use of the word οὐσία, and I have not seen any other commentators argue about its implications. Isocrates is using οὐσία the same way as the middle speech uses it, but this simple fact does not necessarily associate him to the speech any more than it does with Lysias' speech. Fundamentally both the middle speech and Lysias are using οὐσία to refer to money just in varying degrees of liquidity and with different purposes. Isocrates' use of the word doesn't reveal much to us, beyond the fact that he was not using the word in a way which aligned with how Plato had re-defined it. And, really, that is to be expected.

Brown and Coulter argue that:

In Plato *philosophia* is unthinkable without accurate knowledge of the really real. The *Republic* defines the philosopher in terms of the reality of his objects of knowledge (479f) and longing (490a-b) In the hedonistic, utilitarian, “philodoxical” world of the middle speech, such philosophical visions and longings and such “real realities” obviously have no place.<sup>102</sup>

Brown and Coulter here suggest that the middle speech cannot appreciate philosophy in the way Plato most often articulates it. While this is certainly true, the reference to philosophy in the middle speech should not be tossed away. It has important ramifications in relation to the movement from the middle speech to the Palinode.

Socrates says:

And this happens to be *divine* (θεία) *philosophy*, from which the lover must necessarily bar [his beloved], out of fear that he be looked down on... with regards to the intellect

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<sup>102</sup> Brown and Coulter 1971, 411



(διάνοιαν), then a man in love is in no way a guardian (ἐπίτροπός) or a profitable or advantageous partner (κοινωνός λυσιτελής).<sup>103</sup>

The reference to philosophy here is more nuanced than Brown and Coulter suggest. In the middle speech Plato does not need to create a perfect *philodoxical* system which excludes philosophy. Rather, he creates an image of a fallacious doxological rhetorician *trying to be philosophical* or *on his way to being philosophical*.

Most commentators think of Socrates as acting the role of the common man or the layman. De Vries, for example, contends that “θεία in this rhetorical context is a *conventional* laudatory adjective.”<sup>104</sup> The word in this context is *not* meant to refer to a divine philosophy like the one Socrates describes in the *Palinode*. De Vries seems right in the sense that the hypothetical speaker of the middle speech would not be using θεία to refer to Platonic philosophy. But, how can we avoid comparisons between θεία here and where it appears in the reference to Isocrates at the end of the dialogue: “ὄρμηθι θειοτέρα” (a more divine impulse)?<sup>105</sup> I would argue that θεία must be understood here with something of Plato’s general call to philosophy in mind. It is not that the hypothetical speaker in the middle speech is accidentally stumbling into Platonism, but, rather, that Socrates cannot stop himself from praising his own brand of philosophy.

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<sup>103</sup> *Phaedrus* 239b-c (emphasis mine): τοῦτο δὲ ἡ θεία φιλοσοφία τυγχάνει ὄν, ἧς ἐραστὴν παιδικὰ ἀνάγκη πόρρωθεν εἶργειν, περίφοβον ὄντα τοῦ καταφρονηθῆναι... τὰ μὲν οὖν κατὰ διάνοιαν ἐπίτροπός τε καὶ κοινωνός οὐδαμῆ λυσιτελής ἀνὴρ ἔχων ἔρωτα

<sup>104</sup> De Vries 1969, 91

<sup>105</sup> *Phaedrus* 279b

Yunis submits that “the epithet ‘divine’ also suggests Socrates’ underlying adherence to his *own* values and *Plato’s* sense of philosophy as the pursuit of knowledge of true reality.”<sup>106</sup> And Ferrari similarly argues that Socrates’ references to philosophy and education “put him on a rather more exalted level than *average*, although still lacking in philosophical sophistication.”<sup>107</sup> With Yunis and Ferrari, I see this reference to *philosophia* as a narratologically necessary character break in which Socrates, thinking philodoxically, must laud not just any normal philosophy but the divine kind. And so Brown and Coulter and De Vries seem to neglect the narrative and rhetorical importance of this reference when they suggest that this is the common definition. De Vries, however, helpfully adds that “[even] though Socrates speaks ‘in character,’ the reader is supposed to catch the Platonic overtones which are not entirely absent.”<sup>108</sup> That is to say, we must read *philosophia* with *all of its Platonic import* while simultaneously recognizing that it is masquerading as a lay-usage.

Ferrari’s and Yunis’ analyses fall more in line with my reading that Plato is using these speeches to draw out continua. By reading Socrates in the middle speech as a layman making use of material which might be slightly over his head intellectually we get a better idea of what Plato is doing with this reference to *philosophia*, i.e. he is anticipating the next step in the development of the dialogue. De Vries’ insistence that this reference ought to be read with all of its Platonic “overtones” is important here because without the Platonic nuances there can be no implicit comparison between *philosophia* in the middle speech and *philosophia* in the Palinode. That is to say, if we read the speeches in a vacuum and do not hold them in relation to one another we miss

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<sup>106</sup> Yunis 2011, 116 (italics mine)

<sup>107</sup> Ferrari 1987, 101 (italics mine)

<sup>108</sup> De Vries 1969, 91 (italics mine)

the importance of this reference to philosophy in that it distances the middle speech from Lysias' and anticipates, to some degree, the *point* of the Palinode.

David White reads this reference to philosophy as it relates to the narrative of the whole dialogue and in the light of the speech's caveat against favoring the lover. He argues:

The treatment of divine philosophy not only exposes the fundamental falsity of the nonlover but also indirectly demonstrates to the beloved that love, truly understood, is better than its opposite.<sup>109</sup>

White's reading suggests that the reference to divine philosophy in the middle speech actually undermines the speech's fundamental warning against love. Socrates refers to divine philosophy as an activity or knowledge from which a beloved would be barred if he were to favor a lover. Correspondingly, according to White, this suggests that a non-lover would, at the very least, allow, if not encourage, his non-beloved to pursue philosophy. Problematically, as a non-beloved learned philosophy he would realize the truth about love (as we do in the Palinode). This realization would undermine the non-beloved's choice to avoid a lover and he would, in the end, turn toward philosophy and love. We should note that White's reading depends on *philosophia* in the middle speech referring to Platonic *philosophia* in which the non-beloved would learn the *truth* about love. In the common or doxological conception of philosophy prevalent at the time, the conception of love would not necessarily undermine the non-lovers argument in the way White suggests.

White's interpretation, however, is helpful because it carefully moves through the complicated paradox Plato constructs by having Socrates give the middle speech as if he were

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<sup>109</sup> White 1993, 46

telling a story and then give the Palinode as himself. He demonstrates that in order to maintain the overarching goal of the dialogue (i.e. the prioritization of philosophy) Plato puts Socrates into a paradoxical situation. For our purposes, White re-emphasizes that Plato's rhetorical goal to persuade his readers of philosophy's importance fundamentally seeps into every aspect of the dialogue.

The introduction of Platonic nuance into the middle speech through allusions is what causes the speech to have so many layers of meaning. On the one hand Plato wants to describe a philodoxical rhetorician whose thinking never extends outside of *dogma* and *common δόξα*; on the other hand, Plato needs to use the middle speech as a transition from the abject self-interest of Lysias' speech to the philosophical lover in the Palinode. But we need to see that this speech is *philodoxical* in a way which recommends, or, makes way for, *philosophy*. And so, Brown and Coulter are correct that Platonic philosophy in the strictest sense cannot function within the middle speech's implicit *philodoxy*, but that does not mean that the speaker is "abus[ing]" the word *philosophy*.<sup>110</sup> Rather the juxtaposition between the speaker's clear reliance on *δόξα* and his sudden emphasis on divine philosophy is a manifestation of Plato blurring the lines between this speech and the next. The middle speech may be conceptually embroiled in *δόξα*, but at least it values the importance of intellectual pursuits which could give way to philosophy.<sup>111</sup>

Once again, Brown and Coulter provide us with an analysis of this word as it appears in the middle speech, but they do not relate it to Isocrates' use. The way Isocrates uses the word "philosophy" will be investigated much more completely in the next chapter, but Jaeger tells us

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<sup>110</sup> Brown and Coulter 1971, 411

<sup>111</sup> We cannot overlook that these intellectual pursuits could just as easily be masqueraded as philosophy even though, for Plato, they are not. This ambiguity is a large part of Plato's problem with knowledge developed from within the sphere of *δόξα*.

that Isocrates' definition is the common or conventional definition of philosophy. Plato's definition was, actually, the rebellious and novel version of the idea.<sup>112</sup> I would further argue that the specific appearance of philosophy in the middle speech is not necessarily a place of correspondence between Isocrates and the middle speech, but more an anticipation of the *Palinode* and the rest of the dialogue. That said, because I am arguing the middle speech is meant to prepare us for the *Palinode* and I think that Plato sees Isocrates as *on the way* to being a philosopher we could say that, *for Plato*, the uninitiated lay-usage reference to philosophy in the middle speech represents the sort of philosophy he thinks Isocrates is doing.

### *III.2: The Bipartite Soul*

One of the most famous characteristics of Platonic psychology is the tripartite soul divided into appetite, spirit, and mind, and it is still a debate today whether this division appears poetically in the *Palinode*. In the middle speech, on the other hand, the soul is bipartite with activity divided between *δόξα* and *ἐπιθυμία*. In the following section I will argue that the middle speech's psychology requires a corrected and more complete psychology be elaborated in the *Palinode*, and, therefore, Socrates describes a soul in the *Palinode* which is more representative of the typical Platonic psychology with three distinct parts.

To begin with we should understand the two sides of this debate in current scholarship. The argument, for the most part, revolves around whether we ought to map the charioteer metaphor onto the soul Plato describes in *Republic IV*. White says "there are more differences than similarities, and some differences are so striking and crucial that one must question whether what is obvious to [some] is really so obvious."<sup>113</sup> Robinson insists that Plato does *not* leave the

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<sup>112</sup> Jaeger 1939, 49

<sup>113</sup> White 1993, 89

bipartite soul behind in the middle speech when he moves to the Palinode. For Robinson, the charioteer does not have a clear enough authority or a distinct enough goal to qualify it as something separate from the good horse.<sup>114</sup> Hackforth argues it is “of course obvious that the charioteer with his two horses symbolizes the tripartite soul familiar to us from *Rep. IV*.”<sup>115</sup> Ferrari, for his part, reconciles the possible correspondence between the psychology in *The Republic* with *The Phaedrus* by claiming that the labels in *The Republic* have “limited application to the conduct exhibited by the charioteer and horses.”<sup>116</sup> I am most inclined to side with Ferrari here because I think his interpretation recognizes that the literary and rhetorical devices in the speech might render some doctrinal images imperfectly but that does not suggest an inconsistency on Plato’s part. But this is only half of my argument. We also need to see how the psychology of the middle speech actually necessitates the correction given in the expanded psychology of the Palinode.

Recall in the first chapter when I argued that the good horse and the bad horse each represent the two earlier speeches of the dialogue. The good horse is led only by words and is a friend of true opinion which is central to the middle speech, while the bad horse is deaf and is a companion of deceit which is the effect and point of Lysias’ speech.<sup>117</sup> That these two horses alone do not provide the complete picture of the charioteer implies that a soul without a charioteer is incomplete. Plato uses this image to demonstrate that a psychology which contains only an appetite or only appetite and opinion fails to grasp the full nature of what a soul is. For Plato we require this third aspect which rules both horses and directs their wills. And it is simply

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<sup>114</sup> Robinson 1970, 117

<sup>115</sup> Hackforth 1952, 75; and Hackforth 1965, 72 (cited by White)

<sup>116</sup> Ferrari 1987, 200

<sup>117</sup> *Phaedrus* 253d-e

more consistent with Plato's style to represent a progression from Lysias' speech to the Palinode which revolves around increasingly complete psychologies.<sup>118</sup> And, in the Palinode, we find a full expression of the Platonic tripartite psychology as a capstone to the progression which includes and supersedes the previous two conceptions of soul. This is all to say that I think Robinson's assertion that the Palinode, like the middle speech, contains a bipartite soul fundamentally misunderstands the progression from the purely appetitive to the philodoxical and, finally, to the philosophical.

Moreover, consider that the Palinode is the first speech in which we get the explicit statement that true reality is only visible to the mind.<sup>119</sup> It would make little sense, therefore, for the speech to insist that understanding love and achieving the best kind of love required a kind of knowledge only accessible to the mind but not explain what the mind is. It is more consistent for the addition to the psychology in the charioteer to correspond to the addition to the epistemological structure in mind. That is to say, because Plato adds the charioteer to the psychologies of the previous speeches he correspondingly adds the notion of mind to the epistemology. He explains that the truth toward which the charioteer is flying is only accessible through mind. I think, therefore, the charioteer is meant to represent mind and complete the tripartite psychology for which Plato is so famous. In this way, Plato completes the progression of psychologies which begins with Lysias' purely appetitive psychology; moves to the middle speech's psychology which considers social δόξα the ruler of appetite; and ends with the Palinode which demonstrates that there must be a ruling structure devoted entirely to the true reality, i.e. the mind/charioteer.

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<sup>118</sup> Considering the continuum of rhetoric and the continuum of love laid out in *The Phaedrus* it does not seem unreasonable to find a continuum of psychologies as well.

<sup>119</sup> *Phaedrus* 247c

On this point I agree with Ferrari who demonstrates the incompleteness of the middle speech's psychology. He understands the bipartition of the soul, in the middle speech, as analogically mirroring the relationship of the lover to his beloved. In the lover's soul, Ferrari says, "judgment [δόξα] becomes the outright slave of desire."<sup>120</sup> And, similarly, the "beloved is indentured to the lover and beholden to him in all things."<sup>121</sup> Ferrari is referring here to the definition of love which Socrates gives at the end of this speech:

For when an appetite for pleasure conquers logical *opinions* (δόξα) on their way toward upright conduct, and is lead away by beauty, and by appetites akin to it loving carnal beauty, when this appetite is victorious, it takes its name from that very force, it is called love (ἔρωσ).<sup>122</sup>

In this definition of love Socrates holds that love is the moment when desire for beauty overcomes our cultural inclinations toward propriety. Ferrari's interpretation above demonstrates the inversion which makes the love in the middle speech left-handed. That is, this love actively defeats any inclinations we might have toward good conduct; left-handed love is not *just* a desire for pleasure, but a desire for pleasure at the explicit loss of reflective conduct or behavior. Ferrari explains that Socrates "makes a point of explicitly opposing pleasure as whole to his notion of the *good*, and assigning them as two potentially conflicting goals to two different principles in the soul."<sup>123</sup> In other words, we find here a definition of the soul divided by principles with

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<sup>120</sup> Ferrari 1987, 107

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> *Phaedrus* 238b-c: ἡ γὰρ ἄνευ λόγου δόξης ἐπὶ τὸ ὀρθὸν ὀρμώσης κρατήσασα ἐπιθυμία πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἀχθεῖσα κάλλους, καὶ ὑπὸ αὐτῶν ἐαυτῆς συγγενῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν ἐπὶ σωματίων κάλλος ἐρρωμένως ῥωσθεῖσα νικήσασα ἀγωγῆ, ἀπ' αὐτῆς τῆς ῥώμης ἐπωνυμίαν λαβοῦσα, ἔρωσ ἐκλήθη.

<sup>123</sup> Ferrari 1987, 96 (italics mine)



mutually exclusive goals; there is no way for the soul to be complete since the goal of each half conflicts with the other.

Ferrari concludes that this is the fundamental problem in the middle speech. He says: “What is missing from all this is the pursuit of a conjoint interest, common to both partners—as opposed to the mutual compromise of individual interest... [I]n his mythic hymn Socrates will transcend the manipulative strategy that has marked both” of the earlier speeches.<sup>124</sup> Ferrari refers here to the way that the lover-beloved relationship works, but we can compare this, as he does, to the dynamics present in the soul. So, for Ferrari, the missing aspect of the bipartite soul is some level of agreement between the driving principles. Socrates does say in the middle speech that sometimes the principles of the soul are in accord.<sup>125</sup> This means that Ferrari is looking for a different kind of agreement which “transcends” the sort of accord which Socrates deems possible.

The transcendence, which Ferrari thinks is missing represents the separation between the middle speech and the Palinode. That Socrates must “transcend” the goal of simply manipulation and persuasion in order to move from one speech to the next suggests that it requires a paradigmatic shift to move from one conception of love to the other. This shift is only possible if we engage those ideas which facilitate seeking goodness not for the sake of ourselves, but for the sake of the Good itself. That is to say, in order for Ferrari’s “conjoint interest” to occur we need to find goods which are not intersubjectively formulated, e.g. traditionally appropriate behavior, or subjectively experienced, e.g. pleasure. We need to find a good which transcends this world. Of course, in order to recognize or access this transcendent or ideal Good Socrates will need to

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 109

<sup>125</sup> *Phaedrus* 237d

make recourse to mind or νοῦς which is the missing piece in the middle speech's definition of the soul.

And so, the bipartite soul is a symptom of the dearth of attention to the divine in the middle speech. That is, it is reflective of the major difference which separates the middle speech from the Palinode. This difference between the middle speech and the Palinode is also reminiscent of the prescription Socrates gives for Isocrates, i.e. a divine impulse. And so, it is possible that the bipartite soul in the middle speech is Plato's proposition that Isocrates does not recognize the importance of mind as that which facilitates philosophical reflection. Isocrates, for his part, does describe a bipartite soul, but it is not between δόξα and appetite but between soul and body. For Isocrates we have only a thinking faculty and a physical faculty there is no division of the thinking faculty which has more onto-epistemological access.<sup>126</sup>

### *III.3: Virtuosity*

In this final section of the chapter I want to bring out the way in which the middle speech relies on practical and conventional definitions and standards for determining what is virtuous *instead* of theoretical deductions. Brown and Coulter also analyze the expression of virtuosity in the middle speech, but I will show that, though their argument reaches a similar conclusion to mine, it does not fully grasp the implications of the ethics described therein.

In this discussion it is important to remember that δόξα, in the middle speech, is not the kind of thinking which explores absolute truths like the Good. Rather, δόξα refers to how things *seem* to be. In the middle speech Socrates specifically refers to “acquired δόξα” which means it is taught (actively) or learned (as in: *picked up*, so to speak) and not innate or *a priori*.<sup>127</sup> By

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<sup>126</sup> *Antidosis* 180

<sup>127</sup> *Phaedrus* 237d; See also my discussion above regarding the philodoxy of the middle speech in general.

basing ethical conduct on learned δόξα, the middle speech makes it impossible to reflect on the universal causes of ethical distinctions or qualifications. The ethics of the speech are relegated to what is conventional, typical, or acquired through tradition. This manifests in the way it develops and distinguishes valuable characteristics to have, i.e. virtues.

Brown and Coulter consider the virtues in the middle speech pragmatically oriented, however their argument comes out of a perceived comparison between several other Platonic dialogues. It is also hard, I think, to find textual support for some of their claims in the speech itself. Brown and Coulter write:

The Middle Speaker's doctrine of the virtues, then, fits in with his other doctrines squarely opposed to Plato's own. A soul whose highest function is *doxa* in a world which excludes real being can aspire to nothing nobler than power to persuade and shrewdness.<sup>128</sup>

The highest function of the soul in the middle speech is *not* δόξα but prudence or σωφροσύνη which is a state that occurs because of δόξα. It is also clear from the passage above that Brown and Coulter assume that the middle speech is incomplete since they imply that there is something *nobler* than persuasion and shrewdness. They also fail to see that not only are these two characteristics *not* set apart from any of the other virtues described in the middle speech, they are certainly not designated as the highest aspirations of anybody.

Brown and Coulter cull their list of virtues from the passage in which Socrates explains how a lover will inhibit the growth and moral betterment of his beloved. He says:

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<sup>128</sup> Brown and Coulter, 1971, 414

And so, the lover will not willingly supplicate to a beloved who is mightier or even equal to him; he will always make [the beloved] less; for the ignorant is less than the wise, the cowardly less than the brave; the inarticulate less than the *rhetorical* (ῥητορικοῦ), and the slow-witted less than the *shrewd* (ἀγχίνου).<sup>129</sup>

Brown and Coulter assume that by warning Phaedrus to avoid lovers because they inhibit attaining these qualities Socrates implies that these qualities are desirable. Therefore it would be *virtuous* to be wise, brave, rhetorical, and shrewd. We should notice that these “virtues” are only virtuous in so far as they inhibit a lover from being attracted to someone. That is to say, for example, being shrewd would make someone unattractively competent. Brown and Coulter correctly interpret the prioritization of these qualities, but I do not agree that simply because a mad lover would deny his beloved such attributes we can assume they are *virtues*. Socrates does imply that it is negative *not* to have these traits, but he never ranks them or says any one is more important than the others as Brown and Coulter suggest.

It is important to notice that the madness of a lover is so self-centering that it can convince him to actually hurt the development of his beloved. The madness of a lover forces him to turn away from socially laudable activities and to engage in deceitful sabotage for his own sake. This extreme selfishness would have been striking to Plato’s readers who considered this sort of anti-social behavior deplorable. In fact, the Greek word for someone who behaved this way, *ιδιώτης*, remains with us today in its cognate “idiot.” In this vein we should note that Isocrates considers the cultivation of the soul of paramount importance. It is possible, therefore,

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<sup>129</sup> *Phaedrus* 239a: οὔτε δὴ κρείττω οὔτε ἰσούμενον ἐκὼν ἐραστής παιδικὰ ἀνέξεται, ἥττω δὲ καὶ ὑποδεέστερον ἀεὶ ἀπεργάζεται: ἥττων δὲ ἀμαθὴς σοφοῦ, δειλὸς ἀνδρείου, ἀδύνατος εἰπεῖν ῥητορικοῦ, βραδὺς ἀγχίνου.

that if the middle speech were describing what a lover is actually like, Isocrates would similarly argue against love in order to avoid such developmental inhibitions.

Moving forward: Brown and Coulter argue that Plato replaces σωφροσύνη with ἀγχίνοια (shrewdness) in order to remain consistent with the philodoxical values of the speech. They imply that shrewdness somehow carries a more pragmatic and less idealistic quality of character. However, the middle speech does explain and reflect on the virtuosity of σωφροσύνη, so Brown and Coulter's claim is not so cut and dry. Socrates, it is true, uses ἀγχίνοια in a place where σωφροσύνη might have worked, but it is impossible to decide if Plato consciously exchanged these two words with such a severe rhetorical goal in mind.<sup>130</sup>

According to Socrates σωφροσύνη is “when opinion leads by reason (λόγω) toward the best...”<sup>131</sup> Considering, further, that σωφροσύνη is the positive ethical pole opposite love in the middle speech, it is safe to assume that for all intents and purposes σωφροσύνη and opinion led by reason represent the *practical principle* or *ideal* for ethical conduct in the middle speech. This definition identifies σωφροσύνη with, at the very least, the capacity for and tendency toward right and good conduct. Additionally, it is clear that in the middle speech σωφροσύνη is ethically superior to love which is its opposite, i.e. appetite taking full control of our behavior. Socrates tells us that when a lover is no longer in love the *mania* of love is replaced with σωφροσύνη and mind (νοῦς).<sup>132</sup> This reflection on σωφροσύνη implies that virtuosity in the middle speech is defined against love and not absolutely or in terms of absolutes. There is no moment in which we

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<sup>130</sup> *Phaedrus* 239a

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* 237e: δόξης μὲν οὖν ἐπὶ τὸ ἄριστον λόγῳ ἀγούσης. There is not enough space here to complete a full analysis of both Plato's concept of σωφροσύνη and Isocrates's. But it is worth noting that they both use the word, however Isocrates' conception is much more in line with self-control and has less to do with δόξα. But this partly because Isocrates' understanding of δόξα does not function in his ethical system the same way as it does in the middle speech. I will go into further detail on this in the following chapter.

<sup>132</sup> *Phaedrus* 241a

deduce that it is *better* to have σωφροσύνη than to not have it *because of some universal principle*. Rather Socrates simply asserts that because being prudent is not being in love it is better to be prudent.

We should take note that the definition of σωφροσύνη in the middle speech is not representative of the way Plato refers to σωφροσύνη in his other dialogues. As Hackforth says:

That Plato should thus momentarily adopt the ethical position of the ordinary man will surprise us the less when we remember that the whole standpoint of the present speech is in a sense unreal. The ἔρωξ that Socrates is condemning is not what Plato conceives to be true ἔρωξ, the μανία of which he speaks in this very sentence (241a) is not the μανία in which true ἔρωξ consists: it is the popular, ‘Lysian’ ἔρωξ, the popular ‘Lysian’ μανία: hence the σωφροσύνη commended over against it may well be the popular, not Platonic virtue.<sup>133</sup>

Hackforth is referring here to the second time Socrates uses the word σωφροσύνη when he tells us that a man who is no longer in love will possess σωφροσύνη and mind (νοῦξ).<sup>134</sup> Socrates implies here that being prudent is the opposite of the madness inspired by love. This madness of love is the denial of δόξα and socially acceptable behavior generated therein, in favor of personal aesthetic desires.<sup>135</sup> It is a denial of the social and the public for the sake of the self. A lover’s madness even goes so far as to inhibit the development of the soul in anyone to whom he is attracted in order to maintain that lover’s happiness and comfort. And so, we see that

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<sup>133</sup> Hackforth 1952, 48. De Vries, interestingly, says that Hackforth’s own translation of these two words, νοῦξ and σωφροσύνη, as “wisdom and temperance” might carry too much of the Platonic overtones. De Vries agrees, however, that the words should be taken as “popular” usages (De Vries 1969, 99).

<sup>134</sup> *Phaedrus* 241a

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 237c

σωφροσύνη which is the complete adherence to δόξα, implicitly moves us outside of this self-obsessed madness toward the public sphere.

Ferrari says that the lover “deprives [the beloved] of every opportunity of attaining to what his culture agrees is fine and worthy in a person.”<sup>136</sup> Ferrari’s statement here re-iterates the *philodoxy* of the middle speech and confirms my suggestion. The lover is inhibiting gaining qualities which are *culturally agreed upon* to be good which is to say these qualities are consistent with the prevailing δόξα. These are not necessarily beneficial in and of themselves, and even if they are, in the middle speech, the logic does not allow for a good which is an end in itself. That is all to say that in comparison with Lysias’ speech σωφροσύνη and δόξα in the middle speech provide us with a way of determining good conduct and assessing the benefits and harm of something such as love, without basing that assessment purely on the subject’s desires. While love is still defined in terms of a single person’s desires and attractions, our criteria for determining the importance of love is now part of the greater "socio-cultural mechanism" implied in acquired δόξα. This conceptual move from the absolutely appetitive to the doxological between Lysias’ speech and the middle speech lays the foundation for the next move from the middle speech (the doxological) to the Palinode (the philosophical).

I want to make one more point about the pragmatism expressed in the middle speech. This is another aspect of the middle speech about which no other commentator I have encountered has remarked. When Socrates discusses δόξα in the middle speech it almost always comes with the epithetical description: *reaching toward the best* (ἀρίστος) in one form or another. At first glance it may seem as if this is a typical Platonic suggestion to aim at the

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<sup>136</sup> Ferrari 1987, 107

theoretical ideal Good, but I would argue that this appositional qualifier of δόξα fundamentally shifts the context away from the theoretical and into the pragmatic. That we are driven toward *the best* (ἀρίστος) rather than toward The Good (ἀγαθός) implies a certain level of practicality over ideality. ἀρίστος is the superlative form of ἀγαθός which means it is grammatically and theoretically the highest limit of what ἀγαθός expresses. *The best*, though practically unattainable, delimits and defines a spectrum of attainable qualities. Correspondingly, The Good which grounds and facilitates the existence of the spectrum on which *the best* appears, is not a descriptor of possible conduct but the idea in which those qualitative distinctions participate. The Good is simply the idea of goodness; it is only accessible theoretically outside the realm of practice, yet manifests derivatively in practical pursuits. We can qualify practical pursuits in two categories of goodness: ethical goodness or quality of perfection. Within these two categories there are two infinite spectra beginning at the worst and ending the best. But these spectra only exist because of the idea of The Good. The Good makes possible the practical idea of *the best*. But the best is a practical qualification and not a theoretical or ethically generative transcendent principle.

It may seem as though my argument has simply replaced the Good with some vague idealization of *Practicality*, but it is crucial to realize that the middle speech is not recommending idealism. Its logic necessarily admits of qualitative continua to the exclusion of ideals. It may help to think of the encouraging and clichéd sentiment: “Shoot for the moon, so even if you miss you’ll land among the stars.” The message is to aim at the practically unattainable with the hopes of landing somewhere near-by. The point being: if the middle speech were constructing an idealism, that ideal would function as the ground and aim of the guiding principle, not just the vague goal.



Socrates expresses a similar idea in the latter portions of the dialogue when he concludes that in the quest to familiarize himself with the various types of souls and their corresponding rhetorical requirements, a rhetor will inevitably aim his speeches toward the gods or the ideal.<sup>137</sup> Socrates in the middle speech is different from the Socrates describing ideal rhetoric. Firstly, the best (ἀρίστος) in the middle speech is the goal of δόξα, our learned opinion, and it becomes the ethical end of conduct for a prudent person. This is not the same as the kind of rhetorical triangulation on which Socrates reflects in the later portions of the dialogue. Socrates is talking about how a rhetor might lead someone from their current ethical status toward an ideal, like the Good, (metaphorically manifested as a god in the Palinode), while the middle speech explains that we are prudent when our opinions aim at the best -- not the idea of the Good -- but the practically best defined *in terms* of the Good. It is helpful to think of the distinction Plato makes in *The Meno* between true opinion and knowledge. Opinion can be true, but it is neither permanent knowledge nor certain to be true. For Plato, though true opinion and knowledge are functionally equivalent it is *better* to have the permanent knowledge.<sup>138</sup> For our purposes here, both ethical prescriptions, that of the middle speech and that of the Palinode, *could* result in a similarly acting person, but it is also true that the middle speech is, fundamentally, referring to an onto-epistemological category different from the one to which Socrates refers in the Palinode and describes in relation to ideal rhetoric.

#### *III.4: Conclusion*

Brown and Coulter think the middle speech is unPlatonic. They argue that the epistemological, ontological, and psychological claims contained within the middle speech are

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<sup>137</sup> *Phaedrus* 274b

<sup>138</sup> *Meno* 97b-98a (I will bring this distinction up again in the last chapter.)

fundamentally opposed to those expressed in Platonic doctrine. Hackforth, however, assures us that “in the substance of [the middle speech] there is nothing un-Socratic or un-Platonic.”<sup>139</sup> From Hackforth’s perspective that δόξα is inhibitive of pure desire anticipates the typically Platonic denial of sensuality. To resolve this seeming contradiction we have to see in what ways the speech truly occupies the middle. As Brown and Coulter point out:

The speech as a whole occupies a middle position between those of Lysias and Plato [i.e. the Palinode] conceptually as well as in the structure of the dialogue. There is a semblance of Plato’s concern for virtue and education, and also a semblance of Plato’s method of definition. It is a middle conceptually, then, because it is like Lysias’ speech in its conception of love, but unlike it in method, whereas it is like Plato’s in method, but unlike it in the conception of love.<sup>140</sup>

Thus, from Plato’s perspective, the speech is the middle term which moves us from Lysianic rhetoric toward something more philosophical. For that reason, it is neither aggressively anti-Platonic nor perfectly in line with Plato’s ideas. It contains elements which echo what came before (its definition of love) and anticipate what will come after it (its dialectical method). The transition represented by the middle speech is one from the entirely individualistic and deceptive mode of thinking which typifies Lysias’ speech to the entirely philosophical way of thinking in the Palinode. In between these two modes of thought we find a logic which prioritizes δόξα in so far as it produces socially acceptable conduct.

The persona Socrates takes on in the middle speech is a rhetorician who functions within the realm of δόξα not, as Brown and Coulter contend, in a way which denies Platonism, but in a

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<sup>139</sup> Hackforth 1952, 42

<sup>140</sup> Brown & Coulter 1971, 406.

way which could potentially turn to Platonism. As David White points out, the middle speech's argument actually pushes its audience toward philosophy in a way which could actually nullify the speech's warning by revealing the truth about love. That is, as the non-lover encourages the non-beloved toward divine philosophy, the non-beloved will realize that love is actually a good thing and that the non-lover was trying to trick him all along.

We need to recognize, as Brown and Coulter rightly do, that the logic of the middle speech is philosophical in method, yet, *from Plato's perspective*, it is flawed in its fundamental definitions and grounding principles, i.e. the middle speech pays entirely too little attention to what *truly is* outside of the fluctuations and mutability of δόξα. We should recognize at this point that the middle speech when compared to the ideal manifested in the Palinode, does not recognize the importance of the divine in its analysis of love which is symptomatic of its ignorance of the more ideal and philosophical aspects of existence in general. Thus from Plato's perspective, the middle speech like Isocrates suffers from a lack of attention to divine philosophy. The ethics and the rhetoric of the middle speech are in need of the same divine impulse as that which Socrates prescribes for Isocrates.

## CHAPTER IV: ISOCRATES

### *Introduction*

In the previous chapter we examined the middle speech in *The Phaedrus* to flesh out what is probably Plato's representation of Isocratean thought. Now we turn to Isocrates' own words and examine his thought without Plato's looming influence. However, we cannot forget that the middle speech is only an implicit engagement with Isocrates, and Plato's only explicit reference to Isocrates comes at the end of *The Phaedrus* when Socrates suggests that Isocrates requires some sort of divine impulse in order to become a philosopher. Part of this chapter will attempt to reveal what about Isocrates' actual writing might have garnered such a response from Plato. But first I want to do some work analyzing Isocrates' thought on its own.

The first step in removing Plato's influence from our reading of Isocrates is recognizing that Plato's identification of Isocrates's teaching with the craft of rhetoric (ῥητορική) misrepresents Isocrates. Edward Schiappa has argued that Plato, in fact, coined the word ῥητορική in an attempt to distinguish himself from his competitors—like Isocrates.<sup>141</sup> Isocrates himself neither uses the word ῥητορική to describe what he teaches nor does he refer to himself as a *rhetor*.<sup>142</sup> Instead of calling himself a rhetor, Isocrates refers to his teaching as *philosophia*, an act which Michael Cahn calls “an implicit denial of rhetoric.”<sup>143</sup> Labeling Isocrates and his teaching presents us with a problem because he straddles these two disciplines of rhetoric and philosophy. David Timmerman's essay on the philosophy of Isocrates offers what must be an

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<sup>141</sup> Schiappa 1992, 2

<sup>142</sup> In two speeches Isocrates uses the word ῥητορικός (*rhetorikos*) to describe a hypothetical student who is capable of speaking well (*Nicoles* 8 and *Antidosis* 256). This word does not refer to the technical art form or discipline, so it should not be seen as an exception to the fact that the name of the discipline of rhetoric is virtually absent from Isocrates' extant writing. At *To Philip* 81, Isocrates denies being a rhetor.

<sup>143</sup> Cahn 1989, 134

exhaustive survey of the different trends surrounding this question in Isocratean scholarship.<sup>144</sup> He, along with almost all others, cites Jaeger's famous title for Isocrates: "the father of humanistic culture."<sup>145</sup> Jaeger's epithet for Isocrates may sound positive, but in context it comes across more as a consolation prize than anything else. For the most part Isocrates is not taken seriously as a philosopher or theorist because Plato's definition of philosophy dominates the history of western thought. Often from a heavily biased perspective commentators actively denigrate Isocrates. Kennedy says "[Isocrates] was tiresome, long-winded, and above all, superficial."<sup>146</sup> And Norlin reduces him to a "political pamphleteer."<sup>147</sup> These scholars fail to read Isocrates from outside of Plato's idea of philosophical discourse, so they, along with Plato, cannot appreciate the value and depth which Isocrates' writing contains.

There has been a revival in Isocratean study lately which recognize his theoretical ability and claim to the title of philosopher. Cahn (1989), Too (1995), Timmerman (1998), Poulakos (2001), Muir (2008), Haskins (2009), Wareh (2012), and Crosswhite (2013) have all written about the *philosophical* work of Isocrates. These commentators often have different readings of Isocrates, but one characteristic remains constant: Isocrates was an educator who believed that an instruction in how to speak (λόγος) would benefit the student's ethical interactions in general and not just his speaking ability. Isocrates makes this explicit in his discourse, *Against the Sophists*:

Those wishing to obey the prescriptions of my *philosophy* will be helped more quickly to reasonableness and politeness (ἐπιείκειαν) than toward facility in rhetoric (ῥητορείαν).

And let no one think that I am saying just-living (δικαιοσύνην) is teachable. For, in short,

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<sup>144</sup> Timmerman 1998, 145-146

<sup>145</sup> Jaeger 1943, 46.

<sup>146</sup> Kennedy 1963, 203

<sup>147</sup> Norlin 1928, 1

there is no art by which to implant justice (δικαιοσύνην) or prudence (σωφροσύνην) into those who are deviant (κακῶς) with respect to virtue (ἀρετήν). But, nevertheless, I do think that the study of political discourse (τῶν λόγων τῶν πολιτικῶν) would be the most preparatory and helpful toward this end.<sup>148</sup>

Here Isocrates identifies his *philosophia* with ὁ λόγος τῶν πολιτικῶν or political discourse, and he suggests that studying political discourse will encourage a person to conduct herself in a way representative of the qualities of justice and prudence. We can think of political discourse here as the most formal mode of public speaking, i.e. what would occur in the assembly. That is not to say, however, that all of what Isocrates' teaches is contained within this *genre*. Rather, by suggesting that the most specific mode of speaking can be used as the paradigm for our general ethical conduct Isocrates is, effectively, *advertising* the functional breadth and variety of what his *philosophia* teaches; it applies to all activities and interactions from the formal to the spontaneous and day-to-day.

The existence of this ethical aspect in his teaching ousts Isocrates from the reductive and Platonically-influenced categorization of Sophist.<sup>149</sup> In fact, Kennedy says that what distinguishes Isocrates from the Sophists is “[his] insistence upon moral consciousness as

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<sup>148</sup> *Against the Sophists* 21: καίτοι τοὺς βουλομένους πειθαρχεῖν τοῖς ὑπὸ τῆς φιλοσοφίας ταύτης προσταττομένοις πολὺ ἂν θᾶπτον πρὸς ἐπιείκειαν ἢ πρὸς ῥητορείαν ὠφελήσειεν. καὶ μηδεὶς οἰέσθω με λέγειν ὡς ἔστι δικαιοσύνη διδασκόν: ὅλωσ μὲν γὰρ οὐδεμίαν ἠγοῦμαι τοιαύτην εἶναι τέχνην, ἥτις τοῖς κακῶς πεφυκόσι πρὸς ἀρετὴν σωφροσύνην ἂν καὶ δικαιοσύνην ἐμποιήσειεν: οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ συμπαρακελεύεσασθαί γε καὶ συνασκήσαι μάλιστα ἅ οἶμαι τὴν τῶν λόγων τῶν πολιτικῶν ἐπιμέλειαν. καὶ μηδεὶς οἰέσθω με λέγειν ὡς ἔστι δικαιοσύνη διδασκόν: ὅλωσ μὲν γὰρ οὐδεμίαν ἠγοῦμαι τοιαύτην εἶναι τέχνην, ἥτις τοῖς κακῶς πεφυκόσι πρὸς ἀρετὴν σωφροσύνην ἂν καὶ δικαιοσύνην ἐμποιήσειεν: οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ συμπαρακελεύεσασθαί γε καὶ συνασκήσαι μάλιστα ἅ οἶμαι τὴν τῶν λόγων τῶν πολιτικῶν ἐπιμέλειαν.

<sup>149</sup> Sophists roamed from city to city teaching young men about speaking and debating. It is possible that Plato was the one to begin denouncing sophistry, but for the most part they were not as reviled as he would have us think. Part of the problem with Sophists was that they were so involved in the political affairs of a city without actually being citizens.

actually growing out of the process of rhetorical composition.”<sup>150</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus also notices that “the best possible lessons of virtue are to be found in the words of Isocrates.”<sup>151</sup> Interestingly, several Neo-Platonic authors turned to Isocrates for guidance through Platonic ethics—particularly in relation to understanding Socrates.<sup>152</sup> It is, therefore, necessary to understand the relationship of Isocrates’ ethical teachings in relation to his writing about teaching λόγος.

In all of this scholarship, however, there has not been an extended investigation into explaining Isocrates’ conceptual leap from the pedagogy of speaking to the pedagogy of conduct. Many scholars comment on the association of the two aspects of Isocrates’ teaching, but I have not encountered a source which endeavours to explain how Isocrates relates one to the other. In the following examination I will explain how and why Isocrates thinks his *philosophia* is capable of teaching how to speak well *and* how to conduct yourself well. I will begin with an analysis of what good speaking looks like for Isocrates. Then I will examine how good speaking is actually a pedagogical paradigm through which we can learn how to interact with others. Finally, in my conclusion, I will compare Isocrates’ philosophy with Plato’s representation of it in the middle speech. This comparison will help us come to terms with Socrates’ prescription of a divine impulse for Isocrates at the end of *The Phaedrus*.

#### *IV.1: Good Speaking*

Much of what Isocrates tells us about his curriculum for good speaking is in his speech called *Against the Sophists*. In this polemic, Isocrates castigates Sophists who falsely claim to

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<sup>150</sup> Kennedy 1963, 178

<sup>151</sup> *Dionysius of Halicarnassus: The Critical Essays. Isoc. 4.* Trans. Stephen Usher. Loeb 1. 1974

<sup>152</sup> Menechelli, M. “Un Commentario Neoplatonico come Introduzione alla Lettura di Isocrate nella Scuola Neoplatonica.” *Nέα Πώμη: Rivista di ricerche bizantinistiche*. Università degli Studi di Roma. 2007: 4.

teach virtue and happiness and those who suggest that their teaching will garner a student abilities which approximate those of the gods.<sup>153</sup> In order to further demonstrate the depth of the sophistic misunderstanding of good speaking and pedagogy Isocrates draws on the distinction between speaking and writing:

I am amazed whenever I see these men [the sophists] deeming themselves worthy of students; who fail to notice that they are using the paradigm of an ordered and structured art (τεταγμένην τέχνην) to describe a creative process (ποιητικοῦ πράγματος). For who, besides those teachers, does not know that letters are without change and remain fixed, so that we always continue to use the same ones in the same ways, but discourse [i.e. the use of words] (τῶν λόγων) is altogether the opposite of this? For what is said by one person is not equally useful (χρήσιμόν) for another speaker; on the contrary for he seems of the utmost skill who speaks worthily of the situation (πραγμάτων), and yet is able to discover [things to say] which are different from those things said by others. And the greatest sign of this difference is that speeches cannot be beautiful (καλῶς) unless they participate in the specific circumstances (τῶν καιρῶν), propriety (τοῦ πρεπόντως), and originality (τοῦ καινῶς) of a given situation, and none of these characteristics extend to letters.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> *Against the Sophists* 1-5

<sup>154</sup> *Against the Sophists* 12-13: θαυμάζω δ' ὅταν ἴδω τούτους μαθητῶν ἀξιουμένους, οἱ ποιητικοῦ πράγματος τεταγμένην τέχνην παράδειγμα φέροντες λελήθασιν σφᾶς αὐτούς. τίς γάρ οὐκ οἶδε πλὴν τούτων ὅτι τὸ μὲν τῶν γραμμάτων ἀκινήτως ἔχει καὶ μένει κατὰ ταυτόν, ὥστε τοῖς αὐτοῖς αἰεὶ περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν χρώμενοι διατελοῦμεν, τὸ δὲ τῶν λόγων πᾶν τὸναντίον πέπονθεν: τὸ γὰρ ὑφ' ἑτέρου ῥηθὲν τῷ λέγοντι μετ' ἐκείνον οὐχ ὁμοίως χρήσιμόν ἐστιν, ἀλλ' οὗτος εἶναι δοκεῖ τεχνικώτατος, ὅς τις ἂν ἀξίως μὲν λέγη τῶν πραγμάτων, μηδὲν δὲ τῶν αὐτῶν τοῖς ἄλλοις εὐρίσκειν δύνηται. μέγιστον δὲ σημεῖον τῆς ἀνομοιότητος αὐτῶν: τοὺς μὲν γὰρ λόγους οὐχ οἷόν τε καλῶς ἔχειν, ἢ μὴ τῶν καιρῶν καὶ τοῦ πρεπόντως καὶ τοῦ καινῶς ἔχειν μετὰσχωσιν, τοῖς δὲ γράμμασιν οὐδενὸς τούτων προσεδέησεν.



In this passage Isocrates, on one level, criticizes teaching someone to speak *as if* speaking to an audience is the same as writing or spelling words. The reason this analogy between writing and speaking fails pedagogically is that writing relies on a static system of signs, i.e. letters and their corresponding phonemes, but speaking cannot take for granted that every audience understands the same system of references, e.g. cultural allusions or historical paradigms. Therefore, instructing someone to speak in the same way that they might spell a word fails to consider the possibility that this student might encounter an audience which does not understand the same system of references and arguments which the student has been prepared to use. It also precludes the student from ever learning to improvise because if we treat speaking like spelling or writing then we presuppose that there is a correct *spelling* and *grammar* for every speech like there is for words and sentences, respectively.

Correspondingly, Isocrates is also suggesting, in this critique, that teaching good speaking and learning to speak *from a written document* is ineffective because the implicit claim of a manual or a treatise for speaking is that it is, or attempts to be, universally applicable. This implication problematically suggests that there is some way to codify the proper way to speak in all cases. Michael Cahn offers an insightful analysis of Isocrates' denial of handbook-style teaching. He suggests that part of Isocrates' project is to emphasize the teacher-student relationship over the reader-handbook relationship. In order to do this, however, Isocrates, according to Cahn, must argue that what he is teaching is not the same discipline as that which the Sophists are teaching.<sup>155</sup> Cahn thinks Isocrates undermines the institutional teachability of rhetoric as a discipline in order to affirm his own school which focuses on the student's natural ability as primary to whatever the teacher contributes. Cahn says: "By revolutionizing its

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<sup>155</sup> Cahn 1989, 128-130, 134

teaching procedures and its institutional framework, [Isocrates] was able to shatter the confidence in rhetoric as an art and to reconstitute it as a rarified confidence in his own school.”<sup>156</sup>

Cahn also reflects on the apocryphal suggestion that Isocrates wrote a technical handbook which is lost to us now. Cahn holds that there was no such handbook and that the very lack of an Isocratean handbook is meant to encourage us to become his students rather than pick one of the many handbooks. Cahn notes that *Against the Sophists* ends abruptly in a way which would imply more information should follow and that following information would be some sort of rhetorical manual. However, for Cahn and Eucken, *Against the Sophists* is an “intentional fragment” meant to emphasize the necessity of Isocrates as a teacher over any of his written discourses.<sup>157</sup>

Yun Lee Too comments extensively on Isocrates’ relationship to writing. She argues persuasively:

Writing provides Isocrates with an important aspect of his civic identity and also that the written word legitimises this civic identity beyond the limits of his own city. He has replaced the earlier politics of the voice by a politics of the written word. In the hands of Isocrates writing now contradicts the view that it is a form of discourse weakened by its relative newness, by its association with dicanic [forensic] logography and, above all, by the absence of an author or speaker. Writing is now a political activity which, so he claims, endows its practitioner – in this case, Isocrates—with the status of ‘leader of

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid. 140

<sup>157</sup> Cahn 1989, 137; Eucken 1983, 5

words' in all Greece. Thus Isocrates shows an Athenian identity can be used as an expression of authority and superiority over Greek and non-Greek alike.<sup>158</sup>

Too's argument attempts to explain how Isocrates can consistently use writing when the contemporary cultural institution demands speaking. Too does not disagree with the notion that Isocrates denies technical handbooks for the instruction in the art of speaking, so her reading that Isocrates actually uses writing to his advantage does not suggest any inconsistency in his pedagogical assertions in *Against the Sophists*. That it so to say that Isocrates' use of writing to garner political power does not suggest that he valued the instructional capacity of technical handbooks.

For Too, Isocrates sees the durability and mobility of written discourses as the possibility for an enduring and widespread identity built on a call to create a Panhellenic people pitted against the barbarians. She claims that Isocrates' *Epistle I* divests the authority, which an author's presence is supposed to supply, from that presence by implying that those who may be present to the king addressed in the letter, (e.g. court flatters) are no more convincing than his letter.<sup>159</sup> Too also gives a reading of *The Panathenaicus* in which she sees Isocrates arguing that interpreting a piece of writing for others is inappropriate; instead, "each member of the audience is to be given the opportunity to work out a reading for himself."<sup>160</sup> For Isocrates, the onus is put on the interpreter and not the text itself.

Too's reading of Isocrates uncovers a high degree of consistency between his political sentiments, his proposed discipline, and the medium in which he expresses himself. She also

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<sup>158</sup> Too 1994, 150

<sup>159</sup> Too 1994, 122-4; Isoc. *Epistle I*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.* 127

helps us to unpack the fact that even though Isocrates rarely spoke publically he managed to maintain the persona of a politically active individual. His activity manifests, however, in what Too calls, “the politics of a small voice” whereby he influences major political figures with written letters and discourses which establish Greece as the superior nation and the Greek language as the symbol of education and intellectual authority. Even with Too’s reading in mind, Isocrates’ critique of writing as an analogy for speaking in *Against the Sophists* still rings true. In *Against the Sophists* Isocrates attacks the tendency of Sophists to teach speaking as if it were like the task of writing, that is, as if explaining an idea to an audience were the same as writing that idea down with no audience in mind. For Isocrates there is no way around the fact that writing cannot effectively approximate the sensitivity to the given moment which a speaker has. He even says so in his letter *To Philip*: “And yet it does not escape me the difference in the persuasiveness of words when they are spoken and when they are read.”<sup>161</sup> And although Too wants to show that Isocrates rescues the written word from this weakness, I do not think she successfully does so. It is true that Isocrates gives writing a lot of authority and power—more so than Plato at any rate, but, as Too shows, Isocrates gives writing a specific kind of political power only in so far as it removes him from direct political activity but, at the same time, makes of him the ideal political agent who will stop at nothing to establish concord among the Greeks. He does not, in other words, afford the written word any authority or potential power outside of these documents intended to politicize and generate community. Writing, though politically effective and necessary, is neither analogous to speaking nor does it contain the same opportunities to be sensitive to the moment.

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<sup>161</sup> *To Philip* 25: καίτοι μὲν οὐδέ λήθηθεν ὅσον διαφέρουσι τῶν λόγων εἰς τὸ πείθειν οἱ λεγόμενοι τῶν ἀναγινωσκομένων

It is important, at this point, to distinguish Plato's views on writing from Isocrates'. This distinction helps to reveal some differences between their philosophies. Plato critiques the efficacy of writing in *The Phaedrus*, *The Seventh Letter*, and *The Statesman*. In *The Phaedrus*, Socrates explains that the problem with writing is that it *seems* to contain true knowledge but is really only a semblance of what someone truly conversant in such knowledge would know. For such a person, the writing would serve as a reminder. Part of Plato's critique of writing stems from a piece of writing not being able to react to its audience.<sup>162</sup> Socrates also makes an argument against rhetorical handbooks in *The Phaedrus* which corresponds to Isocrates' argument in *Against the Sophists*. Plato concludes that like medicine, poetry, and music, rhetoric or the art of speaking is more than just the sum of its parts. There is something which enables the synthesis of all the forms and techniques into the successful application of those techniques. Socrates explains to Phaedrus that what made Pericles such a great speaker was his investigation into the nature of things with Anaxagoras. For Plato, this third-term is philosophy or dialectic.<sup>163</sup>

In *The Seventh Letter* Plato denies ever having written his doctrine down and suggests that even if he were to have written it down his true insight is only accessible psychically in a moment of sudden epiphany and must be self-sustaining, i.e. without reference to documents.<sup>164</sup> It is hard to say which aspect of the nature of this kind of knowledge denies its translation into written language more. On the one hand the fact that this knowledge must occur in the individual soul suggests that there can be no reference to a text or manual. And, on the other hand, the fact that the knowledge must be self-sustaining similarly implies that there can be no reference to a text which, in and of itself, is entirely ephemeral.

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<sup>162</sup> *Phaedrus* 275 d-e

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* 267-270

<sup>164</sup> *Seventh Letter*, 341c-d

And, finally, in *The Statesman* Plato explains that codified laws cannot be constructed so as to be relevant to all people at once. He argues that the best government is a single ruler who continually institutes new policies and alters old laws in order to benefit the entire city. According to Plato, the overarching legal principle is that the law truly benefit the community. This critique of codified laws can be expanded to include a critique of writing in general. In the same way that codified laws fail to apply to all cases at all times, a piece of written communication cannot always be translated in a particular situation. The problem is that a written law particularizes a universal principle which, by definition, undermines the universality of the principle. Writing attempts to preserve an approximation of a kind of knowledge which can only be thought.<sup>165</sup> Gadamer is very helpful in understanding the relationship between the written law and application of it. With Aristotle, he explains that “the law is always deficient, not because it is imperfect in itself but because human reality is necessarily imperfect in comparison to the ordered world of law, and hence allows of no simple application of the law.”<sup>166</sup>

We should note that Plato’s critique of writing extends to every example of written communication, while Isocrates’ critique *targets* the supposed analogy between speaking and writing. That said, the fundamental difference between Plato’s and Isocrates’ views on writing is that Plato distrusts writing as a communicator of absolute knowledge, while Isocrates denies that the task of writing, which relies on a static system of signs, can be compared to the process of speaking which must be spontaneous and relative to a specific audience. Put differently: Plato seems to think that there is no way for an absolute truth only accessible to the mind to be

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<sup>165</sup> *The Statesman* 294a-296e

<sup>166</sup> Gadamer 2004, 316

translated into writing while Isocrates, who is *unconcerned* with absolute truths, thinks that the writing is altogether too static to react to the demands of a moment.

I should note that Plato *does* recognize the demands of the moment in his reflections. I would not argue that Plato's prioritization of the absolute denies him the ability to attend to the particular. On the contrary, Plato is constantly trying to attend to the particular *but only with the reference to the universal*. For Isocrates, on the other hand, there is no universal principle or absolute truth to which we must refer while speaking or acting. Rather, all ethically determinative criteria and standards exist within the very moment itself. And so, even though their criticisms overlap in some regards, because Plato and Isocrates disagree about the existence of these fundamental absolute principles, they do not share the same critique of writing. To make this distinction clearer we need to investigate the differences between the Isocratean understanding of the particular moment or *καίρος* and Plato's.

Isocrates says: "Speeches cannot be beautiful (*καλῶς*) unless they participate in the specific circumstances (*τῶν καιρῶν*), propriety (*τοῦ πρεπόντως*), and originality (*τοῦ καινῶς*) of a given situation, and none of these characteristics extend to letters."<sup>167</sup> The three qualities Isocrates requires for beautiful speaking all serve to emphasize the specificity of each and every attempt at successful eloquence. According to him, the speech must relate to that moment or *καίρος*; it must be appropriate or proper to that *καίρος*; and it cannot be a replication of some prior speech meant for some other *καίρος*. Though each of these qualities is distinct, the truth is that participation in the *καίρος* is chief among them. The other two qualities (propriety and originality) are defined in terms of the *καίρος*. There is no way to recognize what is proper for a

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<sup>167</sup> *Against the Sophists* 13

speech or to know what is an original way of expressing an argument without first understanding what the moment is in which the speaking occurs.

Siaporra tells us that, for Isocrates, “an understanding of the importance of *καίρος* as a *dynamic* principle rather than a static, codified rhetorical technique is integral to rhetorical success.”<sup>168</sup> We are not, therefore, to consider the *καίρος* as a technique which is part of our rhetorical tool-box. The *καίρος* is a principle with which we must contend while formulating a speech and the arguments therein. As Siaporra puts it: “The opportune moment must be chosen for a particular treatment of a theme, the appropriate arguments for each of the historical events must be marshalled, and the actual arrangement of the words must be skillful.”<sup>169</sup> Because the *καίρος* is dynamic it is constantly changing in relation to the interpreter and the evolution of other events around it. And each *καίρος* brings with it a new set of implicit demands which neutralize or invalidate a piece of writing written for a different *καίρος* and, simultaneously, make necessary a mode of communication which relates to the *καίρος* in and through a relation to the audience.

It is helpful to distinguish *kairic* time from *chronological* time. Though *καίρος* refers to a moment of sorts, it is not a chronological moment but a moment distinguished by qualities which give rise to varying interpretations. One *καίρος* is different from the next because of interpretable qualitative characteristics, not simply the sequence in which they occur or their quantitative extent (though these two characteristics are important). John Smith helpfully distinguishes the *καίρος* from the *chronos* (or: chronological) in his study comparing qualitative and quantitative time. He writes:

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<sup>168</sup> Siaporra 1990, 125

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.



I shall suggest that *καίρος* presupposes *chronos*, which is thus a necessary condition underlying qualitative times, but that, by itself, the *chronos* aspect does not suffice for understanding either specifically historical interpretations or the processes of nature and human experience where the *chronos* aspect reaches certain *critical points* at which a qualitative character begins to emerge, and when there are junctures of opportunity calling for human ingenuity in apprehending when the time is “right.”<sup>170</sup>

Smith rightly notices that chronological time underlies *kairic* time, but it is *kairic* time which can be critical or have significance. Chronological time can pin-point a specific moment along an infinitely continuing series of events, but it does not reveal that this moment has any *qualities* which make it different from the moment before or after it. *Kairic* time denotes a moment as a specific convergence of events; a convergence which gives rise to a specific situation with its own situational demands. Smith further explains that because “[the *καίρος*] belongs to the ontological structure of the order of happening” human behavior is part of the *καίρος*, but, crucially, we cannot influence what makes an event critical or opportune.<sup>171</sup> Smith emphasizes that the nature of the *καίρος* is such that humans can act within them, but there is no human generation of the opportunity. Humans can only notice and interpret *καίροι* as they occur.

Plato also notices the importance of the *καίρος* as it relates to rhetoric, but he does not conceive of the demands of the moment in the same way as Isocrates. We see this manifest partly in Socrates’ and Phaedrus’ references to the specificity of their location and how it is the locale itself which is, in part, dictating their conversation.<sup>172</sup> For example, just before continuing the

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<sup>170</sup> Smith 2002, 48

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> For *καίρος* in the *Phaedrus* see 229a and 272a; For references to the specific location see e.g. 230b-c, 238c, 242a.

middle speech Socrates tells Phaedrus: “Be quiet and listen to me. For this place seems to be divine to me, so much so that you should not be amazed if, going forward, I seem possessed by nymphs while speaking; for even now my words are all dithyrambs.”<sup>173</sup> Socrates, here, is telling Phaedrus that the glade in which they have decided to speak has partly determined what he is saying, as if there is a divine aspect of the location which can affect his words, their order and patterning. That Socrates compares himself to someone possessed by nymphs and to a Bacchic reveler is meant to imply that the location’s divinity completely controls his words and that he is simply a vessel or mouthpiece for that divinity. It is remarkable that Plato chooses to discuss the demands of *καίρος* geographically instead of talking about it as a temporal unit. It is possible that he does this to emphasize the discreteness of the *καίρος* which can be hard to understand when it is expressed in terms of time. That said, suggesting that there are geographical aspects to the *καίρος* is not always a metaphor. It is reasonable to think of a physical location as partly determinative of what a rhetor might say in a speech.

Plato’s most important reference to the *καίρος* appears at the climax of the discussion of rhetoric as Socrates explains that a rhetor must have a dialectical understanding of the kinds of souls and the kind of rhetoric which corresponds to each soul.<sup>174</sup> This moment represents Plato’s most explicit engagement with rhetoric’s place in the realm of the particular. Before this moment rhetoric is mostly considered as a theoretical art, but now Socrates moves on to make the claim that only when a rhetor can identify the *actual* representative of a kind of soul and know which kind of rhetoric he will need to persuade that *particular* person will the rhetor be a master of the

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<sup>173</sup> *Phaedrus* 238c: σιγῇ τοίνυν μου ἄκουε. τῷ ὄντι γὰρ θεῖος ἔοικεν ὁ τόπος εἶναι ὥστε ἐὰν ἄρα πολλάκις νυμφόληπτος προϊόντος τοῦ λόγου γένωμαι, μὴ θαυμάσης: τὰ νῦν γὰρ οὐκέτι πόρρω διθυράμβων φθέγγομαι.

<sup>174</sup> *Phaedrus* 271-2

art. It is the emphasis Socrates puts on the actuality of this application that indicates a move from theory into practice.<sup>175</sup>

Along with this knowledge of the souls and corresponding kinds of rhetoric the rhetorician will also know what the corresponding time (καίρος) is for speaking or not speaking.<sup>176</sup> This appeal to the notion of καίρος demonstrates, at some level, an affinity to Isocrates' definition of the concept, but what we have to notice is that for Plato καίρος does *not* contain the determinative elements of what we ought to say. For him, we look at people as if they are representative of a kind and to that kind we will apply the corresponding kind rhetoric *and* if the moment calls for it we will give speech. For Isocrates, it is the καίρος which determine the arguments and the words we will use for speaking. To be clear: Isocrates and Plato both recognize the necessity of the moment implicit in any successful attempt at persuasion, however Plato's theory that we can theoretically prepare for any type of soul with a dialectical analysis of types of rhetoric is *not* the same as Isocrates' insistence on being practically aware of the δόξαι of the audience. Yunis tells us that when confronted with the problem of choosing what to do in a given καίρος Plato makes reference to the process of leading souls which is to say he refers to something outside of the καίρος itself.<sup>177</sup>

The difference between these two ideas of καίρος will become clearer after a discussion of Isocrates' notion of δόξα. Therefore, the following will attempt explain why Plato's dialectical analysis of kinds of souls and kinds of rhetoric does not recommend the same kind of imminent criteria for speaking as Isocrates' insistence on the attention to δόξα. Isocrates writes:

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<sup>175</sup> Cf. Yunis 2011, 216

<sup>176</sup> *Phaedrus* 272a

<sup>177</sup> Yunis 2011, 217

Those [teaching] philosophy pass on to their students all of the kinds (ιδέας) which discourse (λόγος) happens to use. And once they have made them experienced and conversant in those techniques, they exercise them again, and make them accustomed to work, and then [the teachers] compel [their students] to synthesize those things they have learned so that they have a firm grasp on it and so that they are nearer to the opportune moments by means of the judgements [of those moments]. For, on the one hand, it is not possible to embrace all of these situations [with one technique] since in every scenario they elude exact science (ἐπιστήμας), but, on the other hand, those who most heartily put their minds to this task and are able to see the consequences, they most often hit up on the opportune moment.<sup>178</sup>

In this passage we see that, according to Isocrates, good speaking combines rote memorization of different forms of speeches and rhetorical techniques with the ability to apply those forms and techniques to unique situations. That ability is perfected, however, by gaining some *proximity* between ourselves and the *καίρος* through the judgments or opinions (δόξαις) in those moments.<sup>179</sup> Notice how, unlike Plato, the different kinds of speeches and techniques are not applied to souls but selected *because of* the *καίρος* and the *δόξα* therein.

I have translated the phrase, “so that they [those studying rhetoric] are nearer to the opportune moments by means of the judgements (δόξαις) [of those moments],” differently from

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<sup>178</sup> *Antidosis* 183-4: οἱ δὲ περὶ τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ὄντες τὰς ἰδέας ἀπάσας, αἷς ὁ λόγος τυγχάνει χρώμενος, διεξέρχονται τοῖς μαθηταῖς. ἐμπείρους δὲ τούτων ποιήσαντες καὶ διακριβώσαντες ἐν τούτοις πάλιν γυμνάζουσιν αὐτούς, καὶ πονεῖν ἐθίζουσι, καὶ συνείρειν καθ’ ἕνα ἕκαστον ὧν ἔμαθον ἀναγκάζουσιν, ἵνα ταῦτα βεβαιότερον κατάσχωσι καὶ τῶν καιρῶν ἐγγυτέρω ταῖς δόξαις γένωνται. τῷ μὲν γὰρ εἰδέναι περιλαβεῖν αὐτούς οὐχ οἷόν τ’ ἐστίν· ἐπὶ γὰρ ἀπάντων τῶν πραγμάτων διαφεύγουσι τὰς ἐπιστήμας, οἱ δὲ μάλιστα προσέχοντες τὸν νοῦν καὶ δυνάμενοι θεωρεῖν τὸ συμβαῖνον ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ πλειστάκις αὐτῶν τυγχάνουσι.

<sup>179</sup> It is better to think of *δόξα* as a judgment rather than an opinion, in this case, because Isocrates is suggesting that our ability to *read the room* or *judge* which arguments and words should be used is determinative of how effective our speaking will be.

other translators. Norlin, in his Loeb edition, makes δόξα the object of the sentence: “bring their theories into closer touch with the occasions for applying them.”<sup>180</sup> Mirhady and Too, in their more recent translation, also choose to make δόξα an object: “[so that] their views may be better adapted to the right moments.”<sup>181</sup> These translations, however, neglect δόξα’s status as a means. Isocrates wants us to *use* the δόξαι present in the moment to determine our propositions. Given the intransitive verb (γίνονται) and the dative noun (ταῖς δόξαις), in this phrase, there is more grammatical evidence to suggest a change of state in the subject of the sentence (the students) rather than δόξαι of those students. Isocrates sees the δόξαι in a καίρος as the avenue through which we can interpret the appropriate arguments and words to use for the speech. It is not that the speaker must change his judgments, but that he must alter his speech to fit the judgements of others. The speaker’s own opinions may or may not change—that is wholly irrelevant to the effectiveness of speaking.<sup>182</sup>

Isocrates, furthermore, makes a point of distinguishing δόξα from ἐπιστήμη as a possible means for understanding the necessity of the moment. I’ll repeat the line here for convenience: “Since in every scenario they [the moments] elude exact science (ἐπιστήμας).” Isocrates makes this distinction in order to emphasize that there is no way to deduce or scientifically analyze a moment or καίρος outside of that very καίρος. The καίρος eludes ἐπιστήμη, for Isocrates, because there is no way to anticipate the uniqueness of a καίρος before it has happened. Any attempt to prepare for a καίρος assumes certain knowledge about its καίρος which would actually inhibit the speaker’s ability to react should those assumptions prove false. Isocrates insists that

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<sup>180</sup> *Antidosis* 184 trans. George Norlin

<sup>181</sup> *Antidosis* 184 trans. Mirhady and Too

<sup>182</sup> Granted if we consider the arguments a speaker uses to be his δόξαι then, in a certain way, he is altering his own judgements. However, there is no evidence in Isocrates’ work to suggest this reading of δόξα nor does any commentator ever suggest it.

rather than attempt to scientifically prepare for a *καίρος* we react and adapt to the demands of that moment as it arises. In *The Phaedrus* when Socrates tells us that we must know the kinds of souls and their corresponding kinds of rhetoric this suggests that we are to construct a science or *ἐπιστήμη* around these kinds of souls and kinds of rhetoric. This, I contend, is exactly what Isocrates is arguing against here in this passage. He would rather us attend to the judgments and opinions present in the moment than attempt to inject something into the moment from outside.

In many ways, the difference between Plato and Isocrates comes down to how the rhetor identifies his audience. In his essay, “Isocrates’ use of *doxa*,” Takis Poulakos argues that Isocrates uses *δόξα* in a way which prioritizes the identity of the audience over the goal of persuasion. Poulakos posits: “If the orator can succeed in guiding auditors to see the new situation as confirming their traditions and as validating their familiar notions of self, then there is hardly any need for persuasion.”<sup>183</sup> Poulakos goes on to demonstrate that, for Isocrates, successful speaking occurs when an orator smoothly integrates a novel situation into the prevailing opinions of the audience. In this way the audience is not persuaded to change its mind, but its identity is affirmed in the new propositions of the speaker. Poulakos’ argument enriches our understanding of *δόξα* because it suggests the *δόξαι* of a given *καίρος* arrive with the audience; they are the contentions and the propositions of which the audience is familiar. In this way the audience dictates what is most appropriate in the given situation.

It is important to see that Isocrates’ use of *δόξα* which implies an identification of the audience is not the same as Plato’s suggestion that we must know the souls of the audience. For Plato rhetoric is the art of leading souls. He compares it, in *The Phaedrus*, to a lover encouraging

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<sup>183</sup> Poulakos 2001, 69

his beloved to behave and think like a particular god. This analogy implies that the rhetor, like the lover, knows where the beloved/audience is before the leading takes place. That is to say, before I lead an audience toward a new idea, I must first make sure of how close or far away the audience is in relation to that idea. But this system relies on a metaphysical distinction (i.e. where a soul *actually is* compared to where it *could be* in relation to where a rhetor wants to lead it) the knowledge of which the rhetor brings to bear on the *καίρος*. Therefore, Plato *does* recognize and attend to the practical and the pragmatic, but he only does so with reference to absolutes which remain outside the *καίρος*.

Isocrates, on the other hand, wants speakers to be sensitive to the audience as an other and to engage with that audience on its own terms. This requires recognizing the historical and cultural tradition of the audience and being aware in some capacity of what the audience thinks of you as the speaker. For Isocrates we use the audience itself as the target of our persuasion; persuasion is simply the re-affirmation of the identity of an audience in a novel situation. This is not to say that Isocrates wants to avoid transforming an audience's *δόξαι*. But effective use of *δόξαι* occurs when a rhetor can demonstrate how an audience's current *δόξαι* gives rise to something new. We should avoid words like "improvement" and "progress" in reference to this aspect of Isocrates' theories because those terms imply a sort of goal or ideal toward which we are moving. A rhetor's goal is to recognize those *δόξαι* and use them as a mechanism through which he can translate the present into some alternative. But there is no implication in Isocrates' writing that this alternative is an improvement other than the implication that if someone gives advice he usually believes that counsel to be better in one way or another than the current state of affairs. We could argue that for Plato we are also leading the audience toward themselves in so far as we are leading them to the ideal of what they could be. But Isocrates does not think of

speaking as this process of leading in the same way Plato does. For Isocrates, the arguments and strategies a speaker employs are dictated by the identity of the audience in the moment not a hypothetical ideal of that audience. He wants us to show the audience that the novel alternative is consistent with the current moment; he is looking for a neutral translation, and not a movement toward an ideal.

#### *IV.1.2: Conclusion*

In this section I summarized the basic criteria for good speaking according to Isocrates. He holds that good speaking must be attuned to the specific audience and the specific moment or issues in which the debate is occurring. Isocrates argues that good speaking cannot be taught from a handbook. In fact, as Michael Cahn says: “Isocrates’ text is not a theory of rhetoric, but rather a theory of the impossibility of theorizing about rhetoric.”<sup>184</sup> Instead of theorizing about rhetoric, Isocrates insists that each speaker learn the different forms of speeches, and then, with practice and creativity learn to be sensitive to the arguments and propositions of a given audience. For as we learned from Poulakos, Isocrates does not think of speaking as purely the art of persuasion. Rather, part of learning to be a good speaker, is learning to recognize the identity of your audience and then reflect that identity back to it in a novel situation.

Moving forward, the most important aspects of Isocrates’ reflections on good speaking are (1) *δόξα* is the *kairically determined* source of the criteria for a good speech, and (2) knowing and recognizing the appropriate things to say in a speech is the same as recognizing and identifying who your audience is.

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<sup>184</sup> Cahn 1989, 124



#### *IV.2: How and why speaking well teaches us to live well*

Up until this point we have been examining, essentially, a *mode* of λόγος, i.e. τῶν λόγος πολιτικῶν. This mode of λόγος refers to public speeches for which young aristocrats and royalty in 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E Athens would be trained by teachers like Isocrates. But Isocrates does not think λόγος is only at work in these formalized institutions. Rather, as we will see, λόγος for Isocrates represents the actual limits of human speaking, doing, and thinking. There is no activity which occurs outside of λόγος, so learning how to function within the realm of political discourse can teach us how to conduct ourselves with others. The logic of our ethical interactions (between the self and the other) is the same as that of the rhetor and his audience.

Isocrates' clearest description of his concept of λόγος appears in *To Nicoles* and is repeated in *The Antidosis*:

Regarding the other [powers] we have, we surpass no other form of life, but we are lacking, in terms of swiftness, strength, and many other faculties, but born into us is the capacity to persuade one another and to make clear to one another what we desire, and through this not only do we distance ourselves from the lives of beasts, but also we come together and found cities, set-down laws, and discover arts, and in nearly all of our constructions, discourse (λόγος), which helps in all of these institutions, is there. For [in and through discourse] we set down laws concerning just things and unjust things and shameful things and beautiful things, and [without those laws] we would not be able to come together and live (οἰκεῖν) with one another. And it is through [discourse] that we indict (ἐξελέγομεν) evil things and praise good things. Through this we educate the ignorant (ἀνοήτους) and approve the practically wise (φρονίμους). For it is necessary that being able to speak well (τὸ λέγειν) is the greatest sign of practical thinking, and true

and just discourse (λόγος) is the image (εἶδωλον) of a good and faithful (πιστῆς) soul.

With this ability [discourse] we both contend and seek knowledge about matters which are unknown; for we use those same arguments in private deliberation as in public debate, and we call someone eloquent (ῥητορικούς) if they can speak in front of many people, and we consider well-advised, those who debate the best with themselves about public affairs (τῶν πραγμάτων). And if it is necessary to sum up this ability [discourse], then we must say this: we shall find that none of our intellectual deeds (τῶν φρονίμως πραττομένων) are without discourse (ἀλόγως), but that in all of our deeds and thoughts we are led by [discourse], and it is most employed by those having the most wisdom (νοῦν). Therefore, those who dare to blaspheme against educators and philosophers deserve our hatred just as much as those who profane in the places of the gods.<sup>185</sup>

In this passage, often called the “The Hymn to λόγος,” there are two premises which are fundamental to Isocrates’ thought. Firstly, λόγος is the defining ability of the human species. It is comparable to the speed and strength of other animals, which is to say that it is not a semi-divine characteristic. And secondly, because λόγος is the medium by which we persuade one another

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<sup>185</sup> *Nicoles* 5-9: τοῖς μὲν γὰρ ἄλλοις οἷς ἔχομεν οὐδὲν τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων διαφέρομεν, ἀλλὰ πολλῶν καὶ τῷ τάχει καὶ τῇ ῥώμῃ καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις εὐπορίαις καταδεέστεροι τυγχάνομεν ὄντες· ἐγγενομένου δ’ ἡμῖν τοῦ πείθειν ἀλλήλους καὶ δηλοῦν πρὸς ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς περὶ ὧν ἂν βουλευθῶμεν, οὐ μόνον τοῦ θηριωδῶς ζῆν ἀπηλλάγημεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ συνελθόντες πόλεις φέκισαμεν καὶ νόμους ἐθέμεθα καὶ τέχνας εὕρομεν, καὶ σχεδὸν ἅπαντα τὰ δι’ ἡμῶν μεμηχανημένα λόγος ἡμῖν ἐστὶν ὁ συγκατασκευάσας. οὗτος γὰρ περὶ τῶν δικαίων καὶ τῶν ἀδίκων καὶ τῶν αἰσχυρῶν καὶ τῶν καλῶν ἐνομοθέτησεν· ὧν μὴ διαταχθέντων οὐκ ἂν οἰοί τ’ ἦμεν οἰκεῖν μετ’ ἀλλήλων. τούτῳ καὶ τοὺς κακοὺς ἐξελέγχομεν καὶ τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ἐγκωμιάζομεν. διὰ τούτου τοὺς τ’ ἀνοήτους παιδεύομεν καὶ τοὺς φρονίμους δοκιμάζομεν· τὸ γὰρ λέγειν ὡς δεῖ τοῦ φρονεῖν εὖ μέγιστον σημεῖον ποιούμεθα, καὶ λόγος ἀληθῆς καὶ νόμιμος καὶ δίκαιος ψυχῆς ἀγαθῆς καὶ πιστῆς εἶδωλόν ἐστιν. μετὰ τούτου καὶ περὶ τῶν ἀμφισβητησίμων ἀγωνιζόμεθα καὶ περὶ τῶν ἀγνωστούμενων σκοπούμεθα· ταῖς γὰρ πίστεσιν αἷς τοὺς ἄλλους λέγοντες πείθομεν, ταῖς αὐταῖς ταύταις βουλευόμενοι χρώμεθα, καὶ ῥητορικοὺς μὲν καλοῦμεν τοὺς ἐν τῷ πλήθει δυναμένους λέγειν, εὐβούλους δὲ νομίζομεν οἵτινες ἂν αὐτοὶ πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἄριστα περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων διαλεχθῶσιν. εἰ δὲ δεῖ συλλήβδην περὶ τῆς δυνάμεως ταύτης εἰπεῖν, οὐδὲν τῶν φρονίμως πραττομένων εὐρήσομεν ἀλόγως γιγνόμενον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἔργων καὶ τῶν διανοημάτων ἀπάντων ἡγεμόνα λόγον ὄντα, καὶ μάλιστα χρωμένους αὐτῷ τοὺς πλεῖστον νοῦν ἔχοντας· ὥστε τοὺς τολμῶντας βλασφημεῖν περὶ τῶν παιδευόντων καὶ φιλοσοφούντων ὁμοίως ἄξιον μισεῖν ὥσπερ τοὺς εἰς τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἐξαμαρτάνοντας.

and make clear our own desires to others, it allows us to do things *together*. And it is in terms of these two modes of interaction (persuasion and the clear expression of our own desires) that we participate in all human activities and endeavours.

Gorgias, Isocrates' probable teacher, also wrote a hymn to λόγος in his *Encomium to Helen*. It might be fruitful to keep Gorgias in mind as an example of a kind of thinking from which Isocrates is, in general, trying to distinguish himself. Gorgias explains that he sees the efficacy of λόγος in altering human action as magical. Referring to the power of λόγος he says: "the power of the incantation beguiles [the soul] and persuades it, and alters it by witchcraft."<sup>186</sup> This line reveals that, for Gorgias, the power of λόγος lies partly in its mysteriousness and that it is an approximation of the divine in so far as it operates like witchcraft. Michael Fournier holds that it is not λόγος which is magical but magic that is logical.<sup>187</sup> It is in the mysteriousness and indeterminacy of λόγος where Gorgias, according to Fournier, locates its power. In so far as magic manifests in λόγος, what is magical depends on λόγος. Thus, the power associated with magic and witchcraft is dependent on participation in the realm of λόγος. The differences between Gorgias' and Isocrates' hymns most likely come out of the fact that Isocrates wants us to understand λόγος as the fundamental human activity which brings us together and makes us capable of great things while Gorgias is trying to demonstrate the absolute power of λόγος by equating the force of persuasive speech with necessity, divinity, and human physical force.<sup>188</sup> They both seem to recognize that λόγος possesses a certain fundamental position, but the way Gorgias' praises λόγος comes out of a goal to describe the depth of its power, whereas Isocrates, nonetheless concerned with the power of λόγος, focuses more on the way in which it manifests

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<sup>186</sup> *Encomium to Helen* 10

<sup>187</sup> Fournier 2013, 120

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.* 6-7

as an activity in which humans participate and the way that participation gives way to subsequent inventions and institutions.

Isocrates, however, clearly indicates that *λόγος* is not *simply* a tool which we can use to affect others. Rather by distinguishing between persuasion and making oneself clear to others Isocrates implies that *λόγος* is a fundamental part of our ethical interaction. In both of these modes of *λόγος* we are required to recognize the difference between ourselves and others. Persuasion requires first and foremost a sense that I, as persuader, have a different set of thoughts and desires from my audience. The corollary to this sense of self is that there are others. And in this way persuasion demands knowledge of difference between persuader and persuaded.

Isocrates' second category, that of making one's desires clear to others, is different from persuasion because it does not carry the same tendency toward homogeneity. In making myself clear I am not trying to modify anyone else's ideas or thoughts, but I want to make it known who I am and what I want. In a way, this second dimension of *λόγος* is self-identification, a bearing witness to one's own selfhood.

It is important to note that Isocrates does not discuss any use of *λόγος* which happens in an isolated or perfectly private domain. He makes a single reference in this passage to individual use of *λόγος*, but he does so only to claim that individual *and* interactive use of *λόγος* relies on the *same* arguments. He, thereby, denies any radical difference between the way we interact through *λόγος* and the way we think or reflect privately. The fact that we use the same arguments privately as publically represents that our thinking and decision making process is inherently discursive and mediated through *λόγος* which is always already intersubjectively oriented. Thus, we should see that for Isocrates our ethical categories do not come to use from some transcendent realm of pure thought. Rather, in *λόγος* or in discourse we generate our own ethical

categories and then maintain them. Yun Lee Too argues that for Isocrates after λόγος is done persuading it simply perpetuates the community it generated in that persuasion.<sup>189</sup>

The centrality of λόγος to our social existence manifests in that it allows us to distinguish what is *just* from what is *unjust* and what is *shameful* from what is *laudable*. Isocrates moves through a conceptual archaeology of these ideas and institutions in order to show how everything in society depends on human interaction via λόγος. This means that what is just or unjust is not something derived or deduced from ideals or pure concepts and then symbolized in language. Rather, justice and injustice are deliberated on and require some sort of agreement or human interaction to take shape. Interestingly, Isocrates posits that shame and praise appear in the same logical step as justice and injustice. This archeological association of the concepts of justice and laudability implies that the realms of the social in which shame and praise occur as well as the realm of the judicial in which justice and injustice occur, are not only co-original to one another, but logically subsequent to the realm of λόγος.

The last idea which needs fleshing out from Isocrates' "Hymn to λόγος" is the way in which λόγος represents the boundaries of human knowing. Isocrates says:

And if it is necessary to sum up this ability [discourse], then we must say this: we shall find that none of our intellectual deeds (τῶν φρονίμως πραττομένων) are without discourse (ἀλόγως), but that in all of our deeds and thoughts (τῶν ἔργων καὶ τῶν διανοημάτων) discourse (λόγος) is our guide (ἡγεμόνα), and it is most employed by those having the most wisdom (νοῦν).<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Too 1995, 4

<sup>190</sup> Nicoles 9

That λόγος is the sufficient condition for human activity implies that there is no activity for humans which occurs outside of discourse or λόγος. Therefore Isocrates does not consider the possibility of any *a priori* concepts which transcend or resist language. They may very well exist, but Isocrates neither discusses them nor would their existence have any real implications for human activity which is constrained to what occurs inside λόγος. Moreover, as we saw above, categories like shame and justice, which some philosophers consider absolutes, Isocrates argues arrive to us from out of our interactions in λόγος.

Isocrates reiterates his belief in limited human-knowing by claiming that we cannot know the future. He writes: “For I think it is clear to all that foreknowledge of those things to come is not for us, by nature...”<sup>191</sup> Isocrates goes on to discuss that even Homer showed how knowing the future was impossible for humans and is a power only afforded to the gods.<sup>192</sup> Isocrates reflects on this notion of limited human knowing throughout his writing in order to distinguish himself from those who would profess to teach their students how to be happy or to know what to do *in every situation*.<sup>193</sup>

To be able to predict the future would be able to know with absolute certainty the way in which human activity and interaction would progress from the present until the moment of the prediction. It also suggests that we can have knowledge of interactions which have not happened yet. These interactions *will* occur within λόγος but have not yet, and so they effectively are not part of λόγος which means they have no functional application to present interaction. Therefore,

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<sup>191</sup> *Against the Sophists* 2: οἶμαι γὰρ ἅπασιν εἶναι φανερόν ὅτι τὰ μέλλοντα προγιγνώσκειν οὐ τῆς ἡμετέρας φύσεώς ἐστιν

<sup>192</sup> Isocrates’ religiosity has become, more and more, an interesting question for me. It may prove to be a fruitful inquiry in the future. It seems to me impossible that his theory of epistemology would allow for any fundamentalism with regards to the gods. But it is possible that he thinks of mythology from a nuanced and intensely rhetorical perspective. That is to say, his references to the gods *could be* strategic hooks on which, those audience members who do believe, are baited.

<sup>193</sup> *Against the Sophists* 3

Isocrates' limitation on human knowing falls out of the conclusion that all of human activity occurs within λόγος and is essentially interactive.

Gorgias, too, reflects on the nature of limited human knowledge. He writes:

Since, as things are now, it is not so easy for [people] to recall the past nor to consider the present nor to divine the future; so that on most subjects most men take opinion (δόξα) as counsellor (σύμβουλον) to their soul.<sup>194</sup>

And so for Gorgias, it is actually because of the inability of people to know the future, recall the past, or even consider the present that we can persuade each other at all. Because we have such limited certain knowledge we are constantly allowing what seems (δόξα) to inform our ideas of the world. What is more, because δόξα is simply how things seem to be, persuasion is just replacing one δόξα with another.<sup>195</sup> So, for Gorgias, δόξα represents the limited epistemology of humanity *and* the weakness in our epistemological process which makes possible persuasion.

Isocrates also associates δόξα with our inability to tell the future. But instead of making it our weakness, Isocrates suggests that δόξα can be the source of success. Christoph Eucken argues that in distinction from Gorgias “Isocrates posits that philosophers, who presume to have knowledge, rely on δόξαι.”<sup>196</sup> The difference, therefore, between these thinkers is that δόξαι for Gorgias represents our vulnerability to persuasion and λόγος, but for Isocrates knowing the δόξαι of the moment is what makes someone a philosopher. He writes:

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<sup>194</sup> Gorgias, *Encomium to Helen* 11

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* 13

<sup>196</sup> Eucken (1983), 34: *Stellt Isokrates die Philosophen, die ein Wissen zu haben vorgeben, denen gegenüber, die sich auf Doxai stützen.*

For since, in the nature of man it is not possible to ascertain through science (ἐπιστήμην) what we must do (πρακτέον) or what we must say (λεκτέον), out of this, I consider wise those who can recognize the judgements (δόξαι) most of the time, correspondingly, they are philosophers who spend time gathering such a practical wisdom (φρόνησιν) as quickly as possible.<sup>197</sup>

Notice first that Isocrates here intimately associates knowing what to do with knowing what to say. For him this knowledge comes from the same source, namely, δόξαι. The ability to internalize and make use of the δόξαι quickly, he calls φρόνησιν or practical wisdom. For Isocrates, we determine the appropriateness of our words when making a formal oration to an assembled audience, in the same way we determine an appropriate action in our everyday dealings, that is: we turn to the δόξαι of the moment.

We should now see that δόξαι is the hinge of Isocrates' theory on which we can collapse one's ability to speak well into her ability to conduct herself well. It is through δόξαι that a speaker may gain access to the words and arguments appropriate to their speech, and similarly it is through δόξαι that we can aim at the most appropriate way to conduct ourselves. That δόξαι represents this criteria is remarkable because it implies first and foremost that what it means to act well and speak well is ultimately relative to the context of the action and the speaking. Additionally, by basing our conduct on δόξαι and not something universally the same, it is clear that Isocrates is not concerned with acting in a way which will garner the agent universal approval. Rather the criteria for good conduct is specific to a moment and that given context.

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<sup>197</sup> *Antidosis* 271: ἐπειδὴ γὰρ οὐκ ἔνεστιν ἐν τῇ φύσει τῇ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιστήμην λαβεῖν ἢν ἔχοντες ἂν εἰδεῖμεν ὅ τι πρακτέον ἢ λεκτέον ἐστίν, ἐκ τῶν λοιπῶν σοφοὺς μὲν νομίζω τοὺς ταῖς δόξαις ἐπιτυγχάνειν ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ τοῦ βελτίστου δυναμένου, φιλοσόφους δὲ τοὺς ἐν τούτοις διατρίβοντας ἐξ ὧν τάχιστα λήψονται τὴν τοιαύτην φρόνησιν.



It may sound as if Isocrates is arguing for a sort of valueless relativism which has no stable ideals. But this misunderstands the fact that for Isocrates we must always be working toward the benefit and perpetuation of our community. For Isocrates we achieve this perpetuation in two ways: (1) always disposing ourselves toward civic agency, and (2) constantly working toward agreement or concord.

In his *Antidosis* there is a difficult passage in which Isocrates attempts to explain how wanting to speak well encourages virtuosity in the name of the city and human welfare. This passage gives Isocrates' readers a sort of practical principle in order to decipher appropriate actions. But don't confuse this with a transcendent cause or ideal. We know from Isocrates' concept of *λόγος* that the city and any politicizing activity occur within the bounds of discourse. Isocrates writes:

But, for me, people improve and become more worthy, if they dispose themselves toward speaking well in a way which deserves honor (*φιλοτίμως*), and toward being able to persuade those listening, and also those who desire advantage (*πλεονεξίας*). I don't mean the kind of advantage which the unlearned consider advantage, but what it means to truly possess this power [to persuade]. And that this is so, I intend to make quickly clear.

For firstly, someone choosing to speak and write speeches worthy of praise and honor will not make them about topics which are unjust or small or deal simply in private matters, but they will choose large and magnificent topics about human welfare and public situations... Someone experienced in contemplating and examining such topics will have that experience not only with respect to their speaking but in their actions as

well. It follows therefore that good speaking and practical thinking (φρονεῖν) will reward those who are intended toward discourse.<sup>198</sup>

Here we can see that, according to Isocrates, as we learn to speak well we begin to become conversant in those issues which are important to humanity in general. We learn to put these topics ahead of those which are private and small which means we learn to put others before ourselves. We are not simply determining the value of actions arbitrarily from situation to situation. Rather, we are always looking outwards to others and considering: what are my audience's opinions? What is my audience's history and cultural tradition? How do I appear to my audience? What topic is most critical to the perpetuation of the society in which we all live (οἰκεῖν)? These questions inform the content of our speeches as well as how we conduct ourselves day to day, but, critically, the answers to each other these questions is relative to the *καίρος* and contained, for the most part, in *δόξα*.

For Isocrates we also perpetuate our community by constantly seeking agreement. Eucken says that Isocrates' understanding of human interaction is grounded in shared and corresponding experiences and not everyone simply doing as they want. He further insists that the measure of *δόξα*'s appropriateness comes out of a public consensus.<sup>199</sup> Eucken's claims corroborate Yun Lee Too's assertion: "After *λόγος* establishes community, it stops persuading

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<sup>198</sup> *Antidosis* 275-277: οὐ μὴν ἀλλ' αὐτοῦς γ' αὐτῶν βελτίους ἂν γίγνεσθαι καὶ πλέονος ἀξίους, εἰ πρὸς τε τὸ λέγειν εὖ φιλοτίμως διατεθεῖεν, καὶ τοῦ πείθειν δύνασθαι τοὺς ἀκούοντας ἐρασθεῖεν, καὶ πρὸς τούτοις τῆς πλεονεξίας ἐπιθυμήσαιεν, μὴ τῆς ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνοήτων νομιζομένης, ἀλλὰ τῆς ὡς ἀληθῶς τὴν δύναμιν ταύτην ἐχούσης. καὶ ταῦθ' ὡς οὕτω πέφυκε, ταχέως οἶμαι δηλώσειν.

πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ὁ λέγειν ἢ γράφειν προαιρούμενος λόγους ἀξίους ἐπαίνου καὶ τιμῆς οὐκ ἔστιν ὅπως ποιήσεται τὰς ὑποθέσεις ἀδίκους ἢ μικρὰς ἢ περὶ τῶν ἰδίων συμβολαίων, ἀλλὰ μεγάλας καὶ καλὰς καὶ φιλανθρώπους καὶ περὶ τῶν κοινῶν πραγμάτων: μὴ γὰρ τοιαύτας εὐρίσκων οὐδὲν διαπράττεται τῶν δεόντων... ὁ δὲ τὰς τοιαύτας συνεθιζόμενος θεωρεῖν καὶ δοκιμάζειν οὐ μόνον περὶ τὸν ἐνεστῶτα λόγον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τὰς ἄλλας πράξεις τὴν αὐτὴν ἔξει ταύτην δύναμιν, ὥσθ' ἅμα τὸ λέγειν εὖ καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν παραγενήσεται τοῖς φιλοσόφως καὶ φιλοτίμως πρὸς τοὺς λόγους διακειμένοις

<sup>199</sup> Eucken 1983, 33

and starts perpetuating the community it generated.”<sup>200</sup> In a way we can also return to Poulakos’ theory that Isocrates’ use of δόξα prioritizes the identification of the audience and not persuasion because what we are looking for is agreement and the perpetuation of the community and not an ideological homogeneity.

Isocrates’ emphasis on agreement and consensus comes across nicely in the following passage. Here he pits the unyielding certainty of scientific knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) against the possibility of agreement in studying δόξα. Isocrates writes:

Those who consult δόξαι are more agreeable (ὁμονοοῦντας) and more successful (κατορθοῦντας) than those who claim to have scientific knowledge (ἐπιστήμην), and it seems to me likely to disregard such time-sinks and consider them immature and trivial, and not a way to care for (ἐπιμέλειαν) the soul.<sup>201</sup>

In this passage “agreeable” or ὁμονοοῦντας literally means “to be of the same mind.” That Isocrates chooses this word instead of ὁμόλογος which literally means “to be of the same language” suggests that to be cognisant of δόξα is not simply speaking the same language or using the same argument. Rather to be conversant in δόξαι and to use them in speaking and doing creates a certain kind of identity between an agent and the others with whom she interacts. From another perspective we could say that ὁμονοοῦντος implies that we are not looking for cosmic confirmation that our perceptions actually reflect reality. Rather good conduct and good speaking manifest in a meeting of minds around an issue not by applying normative doctrine to something novel. This seeking of agreement as a means to discovering ethical criteria for conduct implies that these sorts of questions can be answered in discourse and do not depend on

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<sup>200</sup> Too 1995, 4

<sup>201</sup> *Against the Sophists* 7-8: μᾶλλον ὁμονοοῦντας καὶ πλείω κατορθοῦντας τοὺς ταῖς δόξαις χρωμένους ἢ τοὺς τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἔχειν ἐπαγγελλομένους, εἰκότως οἴμαι καταφρονοῦσι, καὶ νομίζουσιν ἀδολεσχίαν καὶ μικρολογίαν ἀλλ’ οὐ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπιμέλειαν εἶναι τὰς τοιαύτας διατριβάς.

scientific derivations or analysis of the essence of things. We can use δόξα to be ethical, and this, in turn, makes us more agreeable.

In this section I have attempted to explain that because Isocrates conceives of human epistemology as contained within the boundaries of discourse and communication, he thinks that good conduct does not arise out of the scientific application of absolute ideals to particular situations. Rather, for Isocrates, good conduct is analogous to good speaking, in so far as any situation in which either speaking or doing could occur is potentially a *καίρος* complete with its own contingent criteria for appropriateness. To conduct ourselves well for Isocrates, therefore, becomes a function of reading the implicit cultural and historical circumstances which have converged into the present (δόξαι) in the same way we would assess which arguments to use when speaking in a formal assembly. Finally, I explained that Isocrates' conception of *λόγος* and *δόξα* prioritizes the perpetuation of a community by looking for agreement as a meeting of minds.

#### *IV.3: Isocratean Philosophy and Plato*

In this current chapter I have outlined some of the basic premises and arguments which make up Isocrates' philosophy. Most importantly: he considers *λόγος* the sufficient condition to human activity. Because *λόγος* initiates everything we do, Isocrates posits that teaching someone to speak is analogous to teaching them to conduct themselves in their day-to-day lives with others. Therefore, he suggests that in learning to speak well we will also learn to conduct ourselves well.

What makes Isocrates so problematic for Plato is that, as Jaeger puts it, “he makes a virtue of necessity.”<sup>202</sup> Instead of conceiving of an ethics which derives the criteria for good conduct from an absolute ideal, Isocrates thinks that each moment and its circumstances *necessitates* its own specific set of ethical criteria, i.e. the δόξαι of that καίρος.

For Plato, *that* truth must always come first makes it impossible for him to recognize Isocrates’ system as philosophical. As Persuasion personified, Socrates says:

For I do not cause those ignorant of the truth to learn to speak, but if my advice means anything, they will procure this first before acquiring me. For this greatness of myself I speak: without me the man who knows reality (τὰ ὄντα) is no closer to the art of persuasion.<sup>203</sup>

Plato reminds us here that the bare truth is not persuasive. And even someone who is fully aware of the way things really are is no more capable of communicating those facts than anybody else, unless she possess the ability to speak well. In this way, for Plato, the ability to speak and persuade is *properly* informed by the truth or facts (τὰ ὄντα). Furthermore, Persuasion-personified also suggests here that we investigate truth *prior* to learning the art of persuasion. So, if Plato had his druthers, it seems that learning the art of persuasion would come only *after* learning to do dialectic and studying philosophy.

Contrary to the Palinode, in the middle speech Plato gives us the image of a rhetor who uses rhetoric without ever investigating or learning the truth. Plato imagines an ethical system in

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<sup>202</sup> Jaeger 1939, 65

<sup>203</sup> *Phaedrus* 260d: ἐγὼ γὰρ οὐδέν’ ἀγνοοῦντα τᾶληθῆς ἀναγκάζω μαθάνειν λέγειν, ἀλλ’, εἴ τι ἐμῆ συμβουλή, κτησάμενον ἐκεῖνο οὕτως ἐμὲ λαμβάνειν: τόδε δ’ οὖν μέγα λέγω, ὡς ἄνευ ἐμοῦ τῶ τὰ ὄντα εἰδότε οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον ἔσται πείθειν τέχνη.

which the ideal, so to speak, is δόξα led by λόγος.<sup>204</sup> Though this may seem similar to what Isocrates prescribes, the difference is that for Isocrates λόγος is the condition for δόξα. It is not that there is more than one kind of δόξα or some δόξα which can be led by λόγος. There is only λόγος in which we make use of δόξα. Poulakos describes this well:

Plato's scheme demand[s] something that Isocrates was not prepared to do: distinguish δόξα into two levels, an inferior and a superior δόξα, and demonstrate under what conditions and on the basis of what standards superior δόξα could approximate wisdom, or *sophia*. Unwilling to go this route, Isocrates remain[s] committed to situating *phronesis* within the troublesome domain of political life, that is, on the same level as the ambiguous world of δόξα.<sup>205</sup>

There is no divided line of onto-epistemological realms for Isocrates. There is only λόγος and the interactions humans have within λόγος produce δόξαι and those δόξαι determine how we can continue interacting. In the ethical schema Plato creates for the middle speech λόγος has a beneficial effect on δόξα – as if λόγος can make a given δόξα better than some other δόξα. But there is no room for this kind of hierarchy for Isocrates.

Interestingly, the way Plato's rhetor in the middle speech uses δόξα reflects the way that "true opinion" functions in *The Meno*. In *that* dialogue Socrates and Meno decide that "true opinion" is just as useful as knowledge because it just as often hits on right action. However, it is important that, for Plato, "true opinion" is unlike knowledge because it is not anchored to whomever holds it. Knowing something, therefore, is more valuable because you *always* know

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<sup>204</sup> *Phaedrus* 237

<sup>205</sup> Poulakos 2001, 73

it. Holding an opinion, on the other hand, no matter how true it may be, is less valuable because it lacks permanence.<sup>206</sup>

The necessity to correct the middle speech with the Palinode represents the superiority of ἐπιστήμη over ὀρθὸς δόξα in *The Meno*. In *The Phaedrus*, the rhetor of the middle speech does not understand the true nature of love because he does not make recourse to permanent and absolute knowledge in the realm outside of δόξα and λόγος, so Socrates must correct the middle speech (his first speech) by making such recourses in his second speech, the Palinode.

I would argue, therefore, that the difference between these two epistemological strata (δόξα and ἐπιστήμη) and the difference between the middle speech and the Palinode is analogous to the way Plato evaluates himself in relation to Isocrates. In the scholarship surrounding the debate between Plato and Isocrates the difference between them is often captured in the word “transcendence.” Timmerman, for example, claims that “Plato’s conceptualization of *philosophia* is characterized by a transcendence that is absent in Isocrates.”<sup>207</sup> And Eucken also notices that the difference between these two thinkers is a definition of transcendence.<sup>208</sup> These two commentators see that Isocrates conceives of an ethical system defined by a radical immanence and mindfulness of the present. Plato on the other hand, famously divides the ontology of the universe into several levels. Because he so severely divides the world of truth and reality from δόξα, Plato cannot allow a doctrine dominated by a practical sensitivity to the moment and the δόξα therein to share the name *philosophia* with his doctrine. Moreover, for Plato there is no way that all of our knowledge is contained simply within λόγος or discourse—especially not in the way Isocrates conceives of it. This is demonstrated several times in the Platonic corpus, but there

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<sup>206</sup> *Meno* 97b-98a

<sup>207</sup> Timmerman 1998, 147

<sup>208</sup> Eucken 1983, 18

is one moment in *The Phaedrus* when this distinction of the realm of λόγος and δόξα from the realm of truth and true reality is made clear.

In the Palinode Socrates describes the οὐσία ὄντως οὖσα as “μόνον θεατὴ νοῦ” or “only visible to the mind.”<sup>209</sup> This phrase, “μόνον θεατὴ νοῦ,” suggests that what really is, the truth, is neither describable in language nor visible to the eyes. The word “θεατὴ” is etymologically related to the word from which we derive the words “theory” and “theorize,” and its root word can also be translated as “contemplate.” The etymological implications of θεατὴ emphasize that Plato is not talking about physical visibility but something more akin to intellectual accessibility. He is claiming that true reality, is not available to the senses, but only accessible in and through our minds or νοῦς. The onto-epistemological structure Plato describes here precludes the possibility of true reality being accessed from inside the realm of λόγος and δόξα, so, for Plato, whatever information we might glean from the realm of true reality would be lost if we follow Isocrates’ ethical prescriptions to stay attuned to the fluctuating δόξα of each καίρος. To Plato, in order to remedy this situation Isocrates requires some divine assistance. Socrates prescribes a divine impulse which would not be unlike the one which encourages Socrates to correct the middle speech.<sup>210</sup> Therefore, when we ask: Why does Plato have Socrates say that Isocrates needs some divine impulse to make him a philosopher? The answer is: It is in reaction to Isocrates’ own convictions which intentionally turn away from the theoretical and ideal in which the gods and the divine exist and toward everyday judgements of people seeking pragmatic solutions to situations as they arise. To suggest Isocrates needs some sort of divine impulse is

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<sup>209</sup> *Phaedrus* 247c

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.* 242-3



tantamount to insisting that he accept Plato's emphasis on the eternal and absolute over and against the *kairic* and contingent.

#### *IV.4: The Question of Normativity*

Now, we come the final question of this chapter: Is there a normative principle for Isocrates in the same way that there is for Plato? In other words: How do we judge, for Isocrates, that a given act is more appropriate than another?

For Plato we glean normative principles for ethical conduct from studying ethical absolutes, e.g. The Good and Justice. And in this way Plato argues for a double attention to *both* the universal and particular. It is, however, problematic in some ways to expect the demand of normativity implicit in Plato's idealistic ethics to be met in Isocrates' *kairic* or pragmatic ethics. If we think that ethical conduct can be explained in and through recourse to absolutes and ideals, then we implicitly require some sort of standard or criteria to which to compare our conduct and assess its value. For Isocrates there is no such absolute demand. Moreover, as I noted above, in Plato's *Meno* he discusses the *functional* equivalency of "true opinion" and knowledge. If we were act *rightly* because of opinion, i.e. through our own judgements without recourse to the ideal, then there would be no way of determining whether we deduced it from the ideal or not. Plato admits in this way that there is no *practical* demand for a normative principle in so far as "true opinion" is just as effective as knowledge. Of course, for him, philosophical knowledge of the Good would secure certainty that all your actions are universally good and just, whereas, for Isocrates, this certainty is impossible for humans to attain. Confronted with the question of studying such questions Isocrates responds: "Likely conjecture (*δοξάζειν*) about useable things (*τῶν χρησίμων*) is far more powerful (*κρεῖττόν*) than exact knowledge (*ἐπίστασθαι*) of useless

things (τῶν ἀχρήστων).”<sup>211</sup> This line summarizes the Isocratean position on the necessity of ascertaining perfect certainty in ethical conduct: deciding whether there is or is not a normative principle for ethical conduct is not a useful endeavour, in so far as, not having one (as is the case with “true opinion”) does not always result in evil deeds and can result in right action. Therefore, it is more powerful (read: applicable) to be able to estimate and hypothesize good conduct than it is to try to gather functionally irrelevant certainty.

There are, however, two aspects of Isocrates’ thought which offer us some semblance of a normative principle, namely: historical paradigms and ὁμόνοια. I would argue that if there is any sort of standardizing impulse to be found in Isocrates’ ethical considerations it is a coalescence of reflecting on political and cultural history and a *very* general movement toward concord or agreement.

### *Historical Paradigms*

In his letter to Demonicus (a young aristocrat), Isocrates writes: “While deliberating, make paradigms of the past for the future; for you will have a diagnosis of the invisible most quickly with recourse to the visible.”<sup>212</sup> This aphorism represents Isocrates’ approach to history and culture as sources of models of virtue. As C.H. Wilson says: “[he is preoccupied] “with the moral lessons that history affords.”<sup>213</sup> In fact, Isocrates is so enamoured with the past, at times, that it may seem as if he simply replaces the ethical absolutes of Plato with an idealized version of the past. But the past does not represent perfection for Isocrates. Furthermore to simply repeat

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<sup>211</sup> *Helen* 5

<sup>212</sup> *To Demonicus* 34: βουλευόμενος παραδείγματα ποιῶ τὰ παρεληλυθότα τῶν μελλόντων: τὸ γὰρ ἀφανὲς ἐκ τοῦ φανεροῦ ταχίστην ἔχει τὴν διάγνωσιν. See also *To Nicoles* 35: “If you remember those past events (τὰ παρεληλυθότα μνημονεύης), you will plan better regarding the future.” Jaeger says that this phrase “τὰ παρεληλυθότα μνημονεύης” is “the essence of all historical study.” Cf. *Panegyricus* 141; *Areopagiticus* 75; and *Archidamus* 59.

<sup>213</sup> Wilson 1966, 56

what has already been done would neither meet the demands of the present nor would it be original or unique. Rather to find the appropriate course of action for the future we ought to look to the past and re-affirm that tradition within a novel situation. It would require, in other words, the agent to adapt to the situation in light of the historicity of the moment in which he acting.

Thus, unlike Plato, Isocrates does not require that actions be justified by their relationship to metaphysical absolutes. He justifies actions and words in and through appeals to the past. Wilson holds that for Isocrates: “The law discernible in the past is applied normatively in the future.”<sup>214</sup> He refers us to an excellent quotation from Isocrates’ *Archidamus*: “All wars coming forward to today have been decided not according to might or ability, but by justice.” Wilson’s reading of this line is probably too Hegelian to correctly encapsulate Isocrates’ relationship to history, but we do get the sense that rather than seeking a metaphysical ideal outside of history and social interaction, as Plato suggests, Isocrates looks to the events and moments in history to find models and paradigms of virtue.<sup>215</sup> Jaeger helpfully summarizes the differences between Plato and Isocrates regarding their use of historical study: “Isocrates does not then, like Plato, think that rulers [or rhetors] should be trained by studying the lofty abstract conceptions of mathematics and dialectic, but by knowing historical fact.”<sup>216</sup>

### *Concord and ὁμόνοια*

De Romilly says that concord (ὁμόνοια) “is [Isocrates’] one great idea.”<sup>217</sup> He uses it in political, educational, and ethical discussions. I quoted a passage above in which a derivative of ὁμόνοια helped us piece-together Isocrates’ ethical stance:

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<sup>214</sup> Wilson 1966, 57

<sup>215</sup> Cf. W.H. Walsh 1962; and R.G. Bury 1951 for more on Plato’s use of history.

<sup>216</sup> Jaeger 1944, 101

<sup>217</sup> De Romilly 1958, 8

Those who consult δόξαι are more agreeable (ὁμονοοῦντας) and more successful (κατορθοῦντας) than those who claim to have scientific knowledge (ἐπιστήμην), and it seems to me likely to disregard such time-sinks and consider them immature and trivial, and not a way to care for (ἐπιμέλιαν) the soul.<sup>218</sup>

This passage asserts that agreeability (ὁμονοοῦντας) is a by-product of using δόξα rather than ἐπιστήμη. I argue above that for Isocrates a sensitivity to the δόξα of others directs an ethical agent to put those others before himself or, at least, even with himself in order to begin the process of communication and persuasion. That is to say, for Isocrates, persuasion and λόγος are not intended for deception and trickery but producing concord and agreement through a sensitivity to the δόξαι of others present in the moment.

Isocrates also uses the ὁμονοία to refer to peace or concord among the Greeks which is a major political theme in his writing. For example, in *The Antidosis* Isocrates says: “And, yet, regarding what topic could be more noble (or beautiful) and more of the circumstances than that which summons the Greeks to make an expedition against the barbarians and advises them to form a concord with one another?”<sup>219</sup> The association here between the nobility and pragmatism of a speech which advises concord or ὁμονοία demonstrates that, for Isocrates, the value of a speech depends in part on the practical value of what it expresses which, in this case, is the creation of a united Greek front against the Barbarians. But this is also one of many moments in which Isocrates indicates ὁμονοία is a constant goal for speaking and acting.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> *Against the Sophists* 7-8

<sup>219</sup> *Antidosis* 77: ἔτι δὲ τίς ἂν περὶ καλλίωνων καὶ μειζόνων πραγμάτων τοῦ τοῦς Ἑλληνας ἐπὶ τε τὴν τῶν βαρβάρων στρατείαν παρακαλοῦντος καὶ περὶ τῆς πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὁμονοίας συμβουλευόντος;

<sup>220</sup> For more references to Greek ὁμονοία see, for instance: *Panathenaicus* 13 and 42; *To Philip* 16; or *Panegyricus* 3

In order to answer the question of Isocratean normativity it is necessary to understand his conception of history and to see his goal of a united Greece. He thinks that history provides us examples and clues for how to act in the future, but, fundamentally, we should always be moving toward a kind of agreement and concord. I don't think, for Isocrates, this means that he desires perfect ideological homogeneity. In other words, ὁμολογία does not imply persuasion, but a coming together around an issue inside a *καίρος* by recognizing the *δόξαι* of others. This implicit recognition of others is one of the most fruitful characteristics of *kairic* ethics. In an ethical system which constantly makes references to ethical absolutes it is possible to lose sight of the other with whom you are interacting. When the moment is paramount we are confronted by the other in so far as he or she is implicated in and unique to that moment in which you are acting. I hesitated to answer and ultimately dismissed this question of normative principles in Isocrates. He offers us an ethics which does not require any special knowledge or innate philosophical ability. Rather, for Isocrates, being noble and virtuous comes out of how we appear to others and how well we internalize into our own criteria for conduct the necessity of speeches to be productive of general human welfare. This, in turn, comes out of a constant attention to those with whom we are interacting and the contingency which gave birth to our present interaction.<sup>221</sup>

#### *IV.3.1: Conclusion*

This chapter contained a reflection on the philosophy of Isocrates. I have explained how Isocrates thinks that teaching people to speak well also teaches them to conduct themselves ethically in so far as the basis of human interaction is *λόγος*. For Isocrates being well-spoken and conducting yourself well both require a fine tuned attention to the *καίρος* and the *δόξαι* of those with whom you are interacting. Furthermore, we just learned that Isocrates' criteria for

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<sup>221</sup> *Antidosis* 274-8

appropriate action in the *καίρος* comes, in part, from a reflection on history and cultural precedents as well as a movement toward *ὁμονοία* or agreement. Isocrates tells us to speak well requires “a brave and *doxastic* soul (ψυχῆς ἀνδρικῆς καὶ δοξαστικῆς).”<sup>222</sup> We must be brave in order to attempt novel and unique arguments but remain, simultaneously, attentive to what is conventional and customary so as to maintain appropriateness to the historicity of the *καίρος*.

The second goal of this chapter was to relate a more authentic summary of Isocratean thinking to Plato’s representation of him in the middle speech of *The Phaedrus*. Correspondingly, I explained why Socrates prescribes Isocrates a divine impulse at the end of *The Phaedrus*. I demonstrated that Plato’s representation of Isocratean rhetoric in the middle speech was not wholly accurate in so far as it misunderstands the place of *δόξα* as a means for understanding the moment. Plato implies that when *λόγος* leads *δόξα*, that leading somehow perfects *δόξα* and allows for good conduct, but hopefully it is clear from the discussion above that Isocrates’ conceptions of *λόγος* and *δόξα* do not work together in this way. Rather *λόγος* gives rise to the interaction which instantiate and perpetuate *δόξα*.

I explained, further, that in the *Phaedrus* Plato describes a divided metaphysical ontology grounded on ethical absolutes only accessible to the mind. When Socrates tells Phaedrus that Isocrates is in need of a divine impulse he is referring, metaphorically, to these ethical absolutes. For Plato, because Isocrates contends that an ethical agent need *only* find an appropriate adaptation to the moment (*καίρος*) in terms of its historical contingency and the others with whom he is interacting, he *fails* to appeal to any metaphysical absolutes.

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<sup>222</sup> *Against the Sophists* 17

In the concluding pages of this chapter we examined the possibility of a normative principle in Isocratean thinking, but instead we discovered that Isocrates' ethical stance does not require the same kind of absolute standard as Plato's. Rather he suggests that we examine the δόξαι of the καίρος in order to determine what would be an historically appropriate way to deal with the novel situation and hopefully produce some sort of concord or agreement.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Beginning with the question proposed by Socrates' ambiguous characterization of Isocrates at the end of *The Phaedrus*, this thesis has re-constructed the debate between Isocrates and Plato. In the first chapter I gave a reading of the *The Phaedrus* which is meant to show why rhetoric ought to be devoted to the communication of dialectically established truths—not just be a tool for lawyers and demagogues. Moreover, in *The Phaedrus*, we learn that for Plato good conduct like good rhetoric comes from an attention to the ideal or absolute in the realm of pure being only accessible *via* the mind and dialectic. In the second chapter I gave a close reading of the middle speech in *The Phaedrus* to establish Plato's conception of the Isocratean position. And, in the third and final chapter, I described Isocrates' philosophy which posits λόγος as the basis of all human interaction and understands good conduct as analogous to good speaking. I examined the nature of the καίρος as unit of interpretable time and δόξα as the medium of that interpretation. We came to see that, for Isocrates, it is an attention to the καίρος in and through the δόξαι of the other that we can come to terms with what is necessary to say or to do. For Isocrates this is not a perfect science (ἐπιστήμη) but a kind of practical wisdom (φρόνησις) which works most of the time. In the final pages of the third chapter I explained why, for Plato, Isocrates would require some sort of divine impulse in order to make him a philosopher. For Plato absolute truths remain accessible in a realm which resists λόγος only open to mind. Isocrates' explicit denial of these transcendent truths and affirmation of the καίρος and historical paradigms, bars him, according to Plato, from these truths which we can think of metaphorically as the gods. In other words, for Isocrates to become a philosopher he would need to be turned away from the mortal and mutable world of opinion and impression toward the world of the permanent and divine.



My goal in this thesis was to explain the rhetorical and philosophical motivations behind Plato's comment at the end of *The Phaedrus*. Other scholars have remarked on whether this comment is meant to be malicious, friendly, sarcastic, or parodic. I was not concerned with this sort of categorization. I demonstrated, instead, that Plato's characterization of Isocrates encapsulates the very nature of the difference between the two philosophers. And, regardless, of Plato's reading, I hope to have shown that Isocrates offers a consistent doctrine of thinking which does not require the divine assistance Socrates prescribes.

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