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ARTIGO | ARTICLE

“My dear Phaedrus, where is it you are going, and where have you come from?”: An Interpretation of the Opening Line of the Phaedrus

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DOTTO, P. M. G. (2023) “My dear Phaedrus, where is it you are going, and where have you come from?” An Interpretation of the Opening Line of the Phaedrus. 33 *Archai*, e-3319

Abstract: I argue that the opening line of the *Phaedrus* proleptically encapsulates the major themes of the dialogue and that paying attention to the opening line enables us to strengthen the

identification of psychagogy as the key unifying thread of the whole dialogue. In particular, I argue that the opening line foreshadows the quarrel between Lysias and Socrates over the practical guidance of Phaedrus' soul; the prominence of friendship in the philosophical form of life; the pertinence of Socrates' one-on-one, custom-built speeches, vis-à-vis the later conceptualization of rhetoric; the definition of the soul as a source of never-ending movement; as well as the origin (ἀρχή) and destiny (τέλος) of human souls, following the lines of the Palinode.

Keywords: Plato; *Phaedrus*, Unity of the *Phaedrus*, Psychagogy, Persuasion

Introduction

An ancient testimony conserved by Diogenes Laertius records that the beginning of the *Republic* was revised and rearranged in many ways.¹ Even if this evidence might not be taken at face value, it does serve to attest to the degree of care and consideration it was believed that Plato put into the opening of his dialogues. Plato was exceptionally conscientious about the significance of opening lines, and he spared no effort to design truly memorable ones for his dialogues. In fact, inspired by an intriguing remark by Proclus on the import of Platonic preludes,² Myles Burnyeat (1998) undertook a swift but inspiring examination of the opening lines of different Platonic dialogues

¹ D. L. III.37. On Plato's meticulousness as a writer, see also Hackforth (1952, p.165-6, n. 2).

² in *Prm.* 658.34-9.23 This passage is reproduced in Burnyeat's piece (1998, p. 19-20). Proclus makes a similar observation about the preludes of Platonic dialogues in his commentary to *Alcibiades I* (in *Alc.*, 18-19). See also O'Neill (1971, p. 11-12).

such as the *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Laws*, *Phaedo*, *Gorgias*, among others. The *Phaedrus*, however, was left out of his analysis.³

In this article, I embark on an interpretation of the inaugural line of Plato's *Phaedrus*: "My dear Phaedrus, where is it you are going and where have you come from?" (ὦ φίλε Φαῖδρε, ποῦ δὴ καὶ πόθεν, 227a1).⁴ As I shall demonstrate, this slight and unassuming line condenses many problems and propositions that surface later in the dialogue. If that line had appeared in a different section of the dialogue, just as a similar one encountered in *Lysis* 203a6-b1, it would not have the *special status* that it calls for. However, as the first line of the dialogue, this sentence allows for and even invites careful and deeper considerations. Many commentators have already suggested that the first line of the *Phaedrus* is connected in some way or another with the rest of the dialogue.⁵ However, none of them has given it extensive and detailed attention.

³ Anne Lebeck, however, in a noteworthy paper, explored the dialogue from the point of view of *la forme et le fond*; picking up, for instance, the prologue as a dramatic enactment of the myth (Lebeck, 1972, esp. p. 280–83). In a more recent study on Platonic prologues, Capuccino examines the *status quaestionis* and defends a circular or organic reading of the prologue in relation to the entire dialogue that bears much affinity with my own treatment of the issue. See particularly her introduction: Capuccino (2014, p. 1–24).

⁴ Unless otherwise specified, I make use of Rowe's (1986) translation of the *Phaedrus*. The Stephanus pagination is always from the *Phaedrus*, unless otherwise noted.

⁵ For example: "If we allow ourselves a metaphorical reading of the first line of the dialogue, it is clear that Phaedrus cannot answer Socrates' question, as is also shown by Phaedrus' comic infatuation with Lysias' speech. He has come from listening to the speech and he is going to recite it to himself. Phaedrus does not ask himself whether these comings and goings are good or not. He does not naturally reflect on the significance of his own infatuation, that is, on himself." (Griswold, 1996, p. 24); "The presence of motion and an aura of impending strangeness animate this question, elements which will characterize the subsequent conversation until, when it concludes, Socrates will say to his companion 'let us be going' (279a). Socrates will then return with Phaedrus to a place of mutual concern and relative safety, both men having won greater understanding both of themselves as individuals and as friends, as well as the structure of reality underlying this understanding" (White, 1993, p. 11); "The question, ostensibly a formulaic greeting, suggests the dialogue's central concern - in which direction should the

In this paper, I fill this gap in the scholarship by analyzing the philosophical significance of the first line for the interpretation of the following themes and passages of the *Phaedrus*: i) the dispute between Lysias and Socrates over the practical guidance of Phaedrus' soul, latent in the general sense of the question; ii) the elevated status of friendship (φιλία) in the life of philosophy that the adjective φίλε gestures at; iii) the personalized discursive engagement with Phaedrus, in conformity with the definition of the genuine art of rhetoric (261a7-e4; 271c10-272b6) and in contrast to the technique of writing, encapsulated in the vocative Φαῖδρε; iv) the logical deduction of the soul's essence as a source of never-ending self-motion (245c5-246a2), implied by Socrates' interrogation (ποῖ δὴ καὶ πόθεν;); v) the poetical display of soul's true origin (ἀρχή) and ultimate destination (τέλος) as recounted in the Great Myth (246a3-257a1), couched in the interrogative adverbs whence (πόθεν) and whither (ποῖ).

My claim, in sum, is that the opening line of the *Phaedrus* proleptically anticipates guiding topics that will be expounded in the dialogue. Thus, in each of the following sections of the paper, I focus on a segment of the opening line with a view to extracting its implications from the vantage point of the development and conclusion of the dialogue. Against those who construe the *Phaedrus* as a mishmash of themes or those who seek to undermine the legitimacy and pertinence of the “unity problem” (e.g. Ferrari, 1987; Heath, 1989; Kastely, 2002), I show through this examination that the *Phaedrus* is a thoroughly unified

soul go and what moves it there? - and lures Ph. into the conversation that follows” (Yunis, 2011, p. 85–86); “The line that opens the dialogue – Socrates’ question to Phaedrus, ‘Where have you been? And where are you going?’ (ποῖ δὴ καὶ πόθεν;) – establishes straightaway the thematic importance of movement and journeys...The *Phaedrus* as a whole is indeed concerned with ‘finding one’s way,’ and with navigating among the various influences and modes of discourse that vie for one’s attention” (Werner, 2012, p. 20).

dialogue.⁶ Furthermore, as a result of my reading, the theme of psychagogy (soul-leading) will stand out as the most suitable candidate to integrate the dialogue in its entirety, as foreshadowed already by the inaugural line of the dialogue.⁷ Psychagogy, in my proposal, is not confined simply to the treatment of rhetoric and, therefore, to the second half of the dialogue (cf. 261a7-9; 271c10). Rather, I posit that psychagogy is actually a complex topic that necessarily involves an understanding of the nature of the soul, the motivating force of love, the persuasive power of language, and the goals of philosophy.⁸ According to this optics, psychagogy integrates the dialogue not only across the multiplicity of issues discussed by Socrates and Phaedrus (love, soul, language, rhetoric, dialectics, philosophy, writing, etc.) but also from the standpoint of the dramatic movement of the characters, and the undergirding function of the dialogue, that is, to lead the soul of the reader into the path of philosophy.

In sum, the problem I address is once again the unity of the *Phaedrus*. I propose that the first line of Platonic dialogues acquires a special status that licenses and even solicits such a penetrating and profound reading as I am undertaking. Consequently, I argue that an in-depth reading of the first line of the *Phaedrus* can contribute to the

⁶ Werner (2007) offers a helpful literature review to the problem of the unity of the *Phaedrus*.

⁷ For different approaches to psychagogy as the unifying theme of the *Phaedrus*, see Asmis (1986); Kélessidou (1992); Peixoto (2011) and particularly Moss (2012). None of these readings, however, has taken pains to interpret the first line of the *Phaedrus* as a crucial locus for the comprehension of the unity of the *Phaedrus*. This is an exegetical move that has been mostly overlooked by the literature that argues for psychagogy as the unifying theme of the dialogue.

⁸ Thus, in my interpretation of psychagogy as the unifying theme of the *Phaedrus*, I would prevent it from falling under the banner of “thematic monism” in Werner’s classification, i.e., an approach that fails to do justice to the thematic diversity and dramatic complexity of the *Phaedrus*. See Werner (2007, p. 94–109). Even if Moss relies on Werner’s account of the *status quaestionis*, she does not clearly state whether her approach takes side with “thematic monism” (as Werner classifies Asmis’ original paper on psychagogy that Moss revisits), or not. See Moss (2012, p. 2–3).

acknowledgment that psychagogy offers the best hypothesis to organically integrate the dialogue across thematic, dramatic, and structural levels.

I

The dialogue begins with an interpellation: “My dear Phaedrus, where is it you're going, and where have you come from?” (227a1). Socrates not only acknowledges and warmly addresses his friend, but his greeting can also be heard as an interjection that, unannounced and all of a sudden, interrupts Phaedrus' course of affairs. Phaedrus is both invited and urged to give an account, as well as be accountable for, his place of departure and destination. As much as this appears to be a standard form of salutation in Plato (e.g., *Ly.* 203a6-b1; cf. Ryan, 2012, p. 79), it acquires a novel and suggestive meaning if read within the framework of the dialogue as a whole, especially when one bears in mind the motif of psychagogy and the special status that first lines assume in Plato's dialogues. The placement of this greeting as the opening line of the *Phaedrus*, hence, makes it stick out and project or reflect its significance for the entire work;⁹ its singular position transposes it from an ordinary denotation to an extraordinary connotation.

Socrates' question prepares the ground for his quarrel (ἀγών) with Lysias over the guidance of Phaedrus' soul. In this light, Socrates' query foreshadows a question that is of key importance for the dialogue, to wit: in what direction is the soul moving? But also: what are the past experiences that have

⁹ But as Burnyeat alerts, drawing an analogy with the aperture of operas: “So far from the opening scene telling you how to read the philosophy that follows, it is the philosophy that tells you how to read the opening scene. The opera explains the overture, not vice versa. Only when you know the opera, can you 'read' and really savour the overture. But the philosophical content of a Platonic dialogue, unlike its prologue, is not something you can take in at a glance, or even by one or two careful readings. It may require years of philosophical training, experience, and study—as Proclus would most emphatically agree” (Burnyeat, 1998, p. 4).

shaped its journey, and how can the soul's movement be redirected? This is the issue of soul-leading, soul-shaping, or soul-directing, adumbrated by the term ψυχαγωγία.

As with most of Plato's dialogues, the reader is introduced to a scene that is already underway. Borrowing an expression from Horace's *Ars Poetica*, one might say that the *Phaedrus* places the reader *in media res*. In this case, the background of the dialogue is Lysias' sojourn in Athens—"the cleverest of present writers" (228a2-3) to Phaedrus' eyes—along with Phaedrus' attendance at Epicrates' house that morning to listen to the renowned orator's discourse. Phaedrus was at Epicrates' "Morychian house" before the haphazard encounter with Socrates, to be sure, but in his response to Socrates' greeting, it is to Lysias that he refers (227a2), which indicates that what mattered was not merely *where* he was, but mostly *with whom* he was keeping company.¹⁰

This is evocative, I believe, for as I aim to show in the following section, the *where-from* and *where-to* interrogations are just as essential as the *with-whom*.¹¹ By addressing the question of the proper addressee of a boy's favors (whether it is the lover or the non-lover), both Lysias' and Socrates' speeches on love examine the question of friendship: what the true value and virtue of friendship are, and, consequently, what kind of person one should befriend. This aspect of the dialogue is nicely foregrounded by Socrates' adjective,

¹⁰ The dialogue makes apparent that Lysias was staying in Athens at the house of Epicrates (227b4), a democratic politician from the late fifth and early fourth century. The title of the place as the "Morychian house" (227b5) is most likely a reference to its former owner, Morychus, a man famed by his gluttony and overindulgence (*Ar. Ach.* 887, *Pax* 1008-9, *V.* 506). For more details on the characters mentioned, see Yunis (2011, p. 85-8) and Ryan (2012, p. 79-82).

¹¹ This claim should be understood in the context of Socrates' reformulation of traditional παιδεία as συνουσία, as evidenced in Aeschines, Plato, and Xenophon. See Stavru (2017, esp. p. 43-44), and, more to the point, Pentassuglio (2020). On the historical background of συνουσία in Greek oral societies as a form of education, and communal initiation, see Havelock (1986, p. 4-5), and Robb (2011, p. 197-207).

φίλε.¹² If rhetoric is the leading of the soul by means of speeches (261a7-9), then one who sets out to be a philosopher-rhetorician must be familiar with the orientation of the soul of his interlocutor as well as with whom it must keep company.

II

In what manner does the theme of friendship, evoked by the “ὦ φίλε,” surface in the dialogue?¹³ Overall, within the framework of Ancient Greek pederasty, Lysias’ discourse frames the task facing the young boy as that of finding a man “worthy of your friendship” (τὸν ἄξιον τῆς σῆς φιλίας, 231e1-2). At the outset of his speech, he challenges the commonly held assumption that lovers tend to exhibit “the greatest degree of affection to those they are in love with” (μάλιστα φασιν φιλεῖν ὧν ἂν ἐρῶσιν, 231c1-2). Against this, he argues that lovers tend to give priority to whomever they are affectionately attached to in the present moment while dismissing and perhaps even damaging a former beloved—in any case, if that be the wish of their newly found sweetheart. The transience of his affection would seem to betray the genuine intentions of the lover, which would be far removed from forming lasting bonds of friendship.

Further, besides arguing that the friendship of lovers is unstable and short-lived, Lysias claims that the lover will eventually abandon the beloved and leave him in a desert of friends (232d2). On the contrary, the non-lovers, who were already friends of the beloved before the erotic involvement, will

¹² For the purport of “friendship terms” in Plato’s dialogues, see Dickey (1996, p. 107–27), and Ryan (2012, p. 92). For a full list of vocative addresses in the *Phaedrus*, see Scully (2003, p. 133–34).

¹³ I am not going to offer an interpretation of the particle ὦ, for – as Eleanor Dickey notes – there was no clear rule for the use of ὦ in classical Greek. See Dickey (1996, p. 205).

have their friendship secured and even strengthened through the sexual encounter (233a1-3; 233c-d).

Socrates' first speech makes clear that friendship is the real issue behind the alternatives that confront the young boy, viz. to grant favors to either the lover or the non-lover (237c6–8). Since Socrates had agreed to adopt Lysias' premise that the lover is sicker than the non-lover, the following conclusion falls into place:

So these, my boy, are the things you must bear in mind and you must understand that the friendship of a lover (τὴν ἐραστοῦ φιλίαν) does not come with goodwill; it's like an appetite for food, for the purpose of filling up –as wolves love lambs, so is lovers' friendship (φιλοῦσιν) to a boy (241c6-d1).¹⁴

With the Palinode and the recognition that *eros*, as a form of madness, is a gift of the gods, the discourse is turned on its head. Socrates insists that the argument for the young boy to choose the non-lover as a friend (δεῖ προαιρεῖσθαι φίλον) should be turned upside down (245b1-c4). As stated in the Great Myth, the lover should discover, persuade and shape his beloved in conformity with the god that they have both worshiped and pursued in the mythical procession. In other words, the true lover has to make use of a sort of psychagogy through speeches to convince his beloved of the dignity of their shared vocation (253b3-c6). This takes place in the true and upright experience of love, by virtue of “the friend who is maddened through love to the object of his friendship” (δι' ἔρωτα μανέντος φίλου τῷ φιληθέντι, 253c5).¹⁵

This is the reason why a beloved should keep company with the divinely possessed lover rather than the clever and cunning non-lover. It follows from this reasoning that the prizes of the relationship

¹⁴ I have replaced Rowe's “affection” with “friendship” to highlight the topic of this section, as the verb φιλοῦσιν lies closer to the φιλία under examination.

¹⁵ Similar modification and same reasoning as in the preceding note.

with the true lover eclipse the petty advantages a beloved might gain from consorting with a non-lover. Moreover, from the godly nature of love, it also follows that not even the sum of the beloved's family members and friends measures up to the worth of the relationship with "the friend who is divinely possessed" (πρὸς τὸν ἔνθεον φίλον), i.e., the true lover (255a1-b7). Furthermore, the "counter-love" (in Hackforth's felicitous translation of ἀντέρωπα) or "backlove" (in Werner's clever rendition) that the beloved feels is called by him not as love, but friendship (255d-e).

Socrates concludes the Palinode reaffirming that these great and godly gifts are what awaits the beloved with the friendship of the lover, while the "acquaintance (οἰκειότης) with the one not in love"—not friendship, but association, acquaintanceship—affords mean and merely mortal goods to the beloved (256e3-257a2).

At the closing of the Palinode, Socrates offers a prayer to Eros, whom he addresses as a friend (ὦ φίλε Ἔρωσ), and asks for Phaedrus to be turned into a philosopher, as his brother Polemarchus already has. At the conclusion of the dialogue, Socrates dedicates a prayer to the god Pan, whom he calls a friend (ὦ φίλε Πάν)—paralleling the initial salutation to Phaedrus and that to Eros at the end of the Palinode.¹⁶ Socrates asks for inner beauty as well as external goods in "friendly accord with what is inside" (279b8-c5). Phaedrus asks for Socrates to extend this prayer to himself too, for as the Greek proverb holds: "the goods of friends are held in common (κοινὰ... τὰ τῶν φίλων, 279c6-7)."¹⁷

¹⁶ See Clay (1979) for an account of these three instances of friendly salutation as structural hinges of the *Phaedrus*.

¹⁷ My translation.

The theme of friendship, thus, plays a prominent role in the dialogue.¹⁸ Consequently, it is not by chance that the term φίλε stands out at the beginning of the dialogue. Moreover, psychagogic rhetoric is a crucial device for the experience of true friendship to come to its utmost fruition, as described specifically in 253b3-c6. In the divine experience of love, the lover carries the soul of his beloved (ψυχῆ-ἄγειν) with the aid of speeches (διὰ λόγων) to an appreciation of wisdom as the highest value and to a commitment to the philosophical way as the only suitable means of reaching out to wisdom. Thus, not only the intensity of love but also the reciprocity of friendship is necessary for the guidance of the beloved's soul to philosophy, and the motif of friendship is already hinted at already in the dialogue's opening line.

III

The vocative address “ὦ φίλε” is attached to a proper name: “Φαῖδρε.” And this is not an insignificant detail. As the definition of rhetoric that is formulated in the second part of the dialogue spells out, knowledge of the soul is a critical component in the business of persuasion or, more precisely, in the art of soul-leading (271c10-272b4). As such, my hypothesis here is that the vocative “Φαῖδρε” is a subtle way to indicate that attention should be given to the character of the interlocutor in the domain of technical rhetoric. In one word: psychagogy, as the leading of the soul, requires knowledge of the soul one intends to lead.¹⁹

¹⁸ For an account of the eminence of friendship in the *Phaedrus*, linking it up to Aristotle's teachings on φιλία, see Sheffield (2011). Additionally, see Cobb (1993, p. 170).

¹⁹ I do not concern myself, however, with what *type* of knowledge is exactly the knowledge of soul that is required of the expert rhetorician (if it is knowledge of the soul-parts, of soul-kinds, etc.) as this would set my paper in a different track. For a recent treatment of the debate, in relation to the Hippocratic literature, see Jelinek and Pappas (2020).

Let us revisit the argument advocating for knowledge of the soul as a prerequisite of the refurbished rhetoric of the *Phaedrus*. In a significant analogy with medicine (270b1),²⁰ Socrates requires that the rhetorician ought to have knowledge of its object to exercise rhetoric with art. Just as the science of medicine must determine the nature of the body, the science of rhetoric must determine the nature of the soul. While medicine, with the resources of “drugs” and “diet,” produces “health” and “physical strength,” rhetoric, with the aid of “discourses” and “practices in conformance to law and custom,” produces “conviction” of whatever one wishes along with “excellence” (270b4-9).

Without these considerations, the method (μέθοδος) would be no different from, in Socrates’ words, a blind wandering (270d9-270e1). Hence, Socrates maintains that “if anyone teaches anyone speech-making in a scientific way (τέχνη λόγους), he will reveal precisely the essential nature of that thing to which his pupil will apply his speeches and that, I think, will be soul” (270e2-5).

The sensitivity and responsiveness that Socrates displays with Phaedrus throughout the dialogue give ample evidence of his understanding of Phaedrus’ soul, which is a fundamental condition for the practice of technical rhetoric. Moreover, Socrates refers quite explicitly and teasingly to his knowledge of Phaedrus: “Oh, Phaedrus, if I don’t know my Phaedrus I must be forgetting who I am myself—and neither is the case” (228a5).²¹ This attentiveness to the interlocutor’s character, as well as this formidable adaptability to his interests, concerns, and demands,

²⁰ It is significant because in the *Gorgias* (464b2-466a3) Socrates argues that rhetoric is to the soul what pastry-baking is to the body, while justice is to the soul what medicine is to the body. By associating rhetoric and medicine, *the Phaedrus* elevates the status and function of rhetoric, and brings it closer to philosophy.

²¹ In the translation of Nehamas and Woodruff (1995).

is not an exclusive characteristic of the *Phaedrus*, for Socrates seems to be remarkably attuned to the personality of his conversational partners in various dialogue.²² Still, I maintain that this aspect is anticipated by the vocative “Φαῖδρε” in the opening line of the dialogue—taking into consideration the special status acquired by Platonic first lines—and it is key to the comprehension of *Phaedrus*’ discussion of technical, philosophical rhetoric as psychagogy.

One can elaborate on the centrality of this insight from the criticism of writing as a form of communication (274b6-277a5).²³ The stiffness of a written text, as Socrates points out, prevents it from being supple and sensitive to the specificities of each situation, as well as adjustable to the singularity of the interlocutor’s soul; its silence prevents it from addressing the queries of the reader and thus ensuring meaningful instruction.²⁴ In other words, the mute rigidity of the written work runs counter to the liveliness and plasticity that the redesigned rhetoric of the *Phaedrus*, conceptualized as psychagogy, postulates. These are the main reasons for the oral, one-on-one, mode of communication championed by Socrates.

If the power of speeches is the leading of souls or psychagogy, the person who envisions becoming an authentic rhetorician must know the disposition of the soul that he is approaching as well as the most fitting speeches to address it (271c10-272b2). The personal address “Φαῖδρε” foreshadows this key tenet already in the first line, anticipating the knowledge of individual souls as a requirement for the artful exercise of rhetoric *qua* psychagogy.

²² On the role of the interlocutor in Platonic dialogues as well as Socrates’ handling of them, with an extensive treatment of the *Phaedrus*, see the excellent study by Coventry (1990).

²³ A good account of the criticism of writing, in a frank and well-articulated polemic against the Tübingen-Milano school, is provided by Franco Trabattoni (2005, p. 86-102).

²⁴ In Charles Kahn’s phraseology, the former shortcoming of writing texts is the “the failure of adaptability” and the latter is the “the failure of clarification.” See Kahn (1996, p. 377).

IV

The *Phaedrus* is a dialogue in motion, a philosophical discussion and dispute *en route*. A wildflower in Plato's botanical garden of texts,²⁵ the conversation takes place outside the city walls and advances with a variety of references to movement (casual stroll, displacement of familiar locations, divine procession, fall and flight of souls, and the like).²⁶ In a different register, purposefully anachronistic, it could be thought of as a road movie in Plato's philosophical cinematography, perhaps only comparable to the *Laws*, in which the three gentlemen hike from the Cretan city of Cnossos to the sanctuary of Zeus, most likely on Mount Ida.²⁷

Thus, given the treatment that the theme of movement receives in this dialogue, with reference also to the definition of rhetoric as psychagogy, it is not a coincidence that it is flagrantly anticipated in the initial sentence by way of Socrates' question "Where to and where from?"²⁸ In this section, I explore the theme of movement, while in the next section I delve into the Great Myth and the significance of the origin and destination that it furnishes, which are also subtly implied in the inaugural question.

²⁵ Needless to say, I take the botanical-agricultural metaphor from Plato himself, *vide* "the gardens of letters." (τοὺς μὲν ἐν γράμμασι κήπους, 276d1).

²⁶ As Lebeck writes: "Important for this dialogue and for Plato's philosophy as a whole is the image of motion and a way by which to go" (Lebeck, 1972, p. 284). She also offers an interesting reflection of how the dialogue, by virtue of its form alone, is already infused with movement and the quest of searching for a way, the right way. On distinct instances of movement in the *Phaedrus*, see Peixoto (2011, p. 175). Also, on the theme of travel in conjunction with friendship as being introduced by Socrates' opening statement, see Cobb (1993, p. 141), and Werner (2012, p. 20).

²⁷ See Morrow (1993, p. 27–28).

²⁸ Hermias notes that the question, as it is stated, seems to stand backwards. In defense for this peculiar word-ordering, Hermias provides three alternative, independent, and very fanciful approaches, namely a logical, an ethical, and a scientific one (*In Phaedr.* 16.16-18.25).

In Socrates' second discourse, in the apodeictic section (245c5-2462a) that broaches the high-sounding mythopoeia of the soul's cosmic journey, a succinct argument is submitted to prove the immortality of the soul. The argument hinges on an indissociable link between life, movement, and soul. The premise, assumed without controversy, is that the ever-moving is everlasting or immortal. It is then established that the soul is that which moves itself—i.e., it is its own source of motion—and as a self-mover the soul is ever-moving. As a result, the immortality of the soul is logically safeguarded.²⁹

The prelude's question, "Where to and where from?", anticipates that movement (κίνησις) belongs to the nature (φύσις) of the soul, as argued in the logical proof of the immortality of the soul (245c-246a2). Shrewdly, it also introduces a further issue that is going to be vital for the dialogue, namely that of the *direction of the movement* or, more precisely, the *steering of the soul's motion* through artful, psychagogic rhetoric.

There is, properly speaking, a deep affinity between language and love, *logos* and *eros*, into which *Phaedrus* is tapping into.³⁰ Both *eros* and *logos*—the first half and the second half of the dialogue, in its conventional construal—are elaborated in terms of their persuasive capacity for leading or misleading the soul, and also as essential ingredients of the philosophical life, as long as they (sc. love

²⁹ On the subtleties and difficulties of this formal proof, betrayed by the simplicity by which I have exhibited it, see Bett (1986). For my argument, I just want to maintain the nexus between soul, self-movement as *perpetuum mobile*, and immortality. As Bett and some scholars have noted, also in the *Laws* (Lg. X.894b-896c), accepted as Plato's last dialogue, the soul is defined as a source of unceasing self-motion; in stark opposition to, say, the conceptualization of soul's immortality offered in the *Republic* or in the *Phaedo*. This bears some weight to the question about the dating of the *Phaedrus*. On a revision of Bett's as well as Miller's and Ackril's reconstruction of the argument, alongside a vindication of its ultimate soundness, see Zingano (2011, p. 378–84). On the other hand, for a construal that takes the proof as a "a deliberately fallacious argument" for the sake of philosophical instruction, see Moore (2014).

³⁰ On an interpretation of this connection, see Nicholson (1999, p. 124).

and language) are aimed at the right objects.³¹ Persuasion and psychagogy, in a narrow sense, as a special form of persuasion, help to make sense of the two thematic halves of the dialogue.³²

According to Jessica Moss, *logoi* and love are presented by Plato as different and independent “soul-leading” potentials, with the upper hand going for rhetoric as it is presumed to be, contrary to love, “independent of luck” and “egalitarian.” (Moss, 2012, p. 25–26). *Pace* Moss, I submit that love and rhetoric can only be effective in the task of soul-leading if they work in conjunction with one another. In Plato’s Greece, the divinity Persuasion (Πειθώ), was represented as a goddess of love as much as of rhetoric: in the erotic-private end of the spectrum, Πειθώ consorts with Aphrodite, Pothos, and/or Himeros, while in the political-public end, she allies with Eunomia, Eukleia, and/or Harmonia.³³ In the dialogue, Lysias’ base rhetoric can lead Phaedrus to hold an inadequate image of love as a spring of insanity (of the lover) and injury (for the beloved), while Socrates’ revamped rhetoric can redirect him to a philosophical conception of love as the driving force for both lover and beloved to attain a higher form of life.

For this reason, *eros* and *logos*, love and language, are mobilized by Socrates to reorient Phaedrus’ soul, i.e., to push him away from Lysias and what Lysias represents as well as to pull him towards philosophy qua the pursuit of knowledge. While true lovers in the Great Myth are expected to “lead”³⁴

³¹ See Plass (1968).

³² Lebeck, for instance, has noted the affinity between language and love when she writes that “The dialogue is in the form of a diptych, one side depicting the nature of real love, the other of true rhetoric. These two forces, Eros and Logos, are complements of one another: both lead the soul to ultimate harm or good” (Lebeck, 1972, p. 268). Nevertheless, she falls short of considering the role of psychagogy in unifying these two aspects of the *Phaedrus*.

³³ See Buxton (1982, esp. p. 29–66). On the mythical personification of Persuasion, see Stafford (2000, p. 111–46) and Breitenberger (2007, p. 117–36).

³⁴ Instead of Rowe’s “draw him into.”

(ἄγουσιν) the beloved through “persuasion” and “training”³⁵ (πείθοντες καὶ ῥυθμίζοντες) to the “way of life” and “pattern” (ἐπιτήδευμα καὶ ιδέαν) of the god they both followed in the mythical procession (253b5-253c2), rhetoric is defined in the second part of the dialogue as “a kind of leading of the soul by means of speeches” (261a7-8). In this way, the true lover has to make use of psychagogic rhetoric to convince his beloved of their shared and divine vocation, and an expert in psychagogic rhetoric must attune his interlocutor’s erotic desire towards the only objects worthy of their nature, namely the Forms.³⁶ In brief, the Zeus-like lover needs rhetoric to lead the beloved toward philosophy, and the genuine rhetorician needs to love the Forms in order to practice philosophical dialectics and to lead his conversational partners toward understanding, virtue, and truth.

The dramatic movement of Phaedrus’ soul within the dialogue is also an example of the psychagogic power of speeches that the dialogue tackles in its discussions. So, the opening line of the *Phaedrus* echoes its closing line, through Socrates’ exhortation “Let us go” (279c6). At the end of that torrid afternoon, Phaedrus seems to be ready to undertake a new journey with Socrates. Needless to say, one does not become a full-fledged dialectical philosopher in a single day.³⁷ However, if Phaedrus at least became motivated to follow the arduous trail of truth with his friend Socrates for a while, this is already a momentous accomplishment on his part. If so, Phaedrus’ soul has been rechanneled from Lysias’ base rhetoric and his faulty notion of love to Socrates’ philosophical rhetoric and his divine-abiding idea of love.

³⁵ Instead of Rowe’s “disciplining.”

³⁶ In the Socratic circle, ἔρωξ and συνουσία were key elements of the pedagogic activity ascribed to Socrates. See references at footnote 12.

³⁷ As Socrates himself warns Phaedrus at a certain point, near the end of the dialogue: “So if the way round is a long one, don’t be surprised; for the journey is to be made for the sake of important things, not for the things you have in mind” (274a2-3).

At the very least, I take it that Phaedrus has been provoked to do some soul-searching in the interest of figuring out if he is a follower of Zeus and should commit himself to philosophy, or if he should adopt a different way of life. Naturally, the motif of psychagogy is hooked on the question “Where to and where from?” since one cannot presume to guide a soul without knowing where they are heading to and from which place they are departing.³⁸

V

The soul’s self-movement is crucially displayed in the Palinode in connection with a metaphysical-cosmic narrative about its true origin and ultimate end. As the Palinode recounts, by the Law of Adrastea—the personification of the inexorable order of incarnation and reincarnation—the souls that somehow fail to rise to the supercelestial domain of true beings fall into an embodied life and become forgetful. However, erotically animated by the beauty of human appearance, souls might be empowered with the assistance of philosophy to regain their feathers and fly away from everyday reality. Via the work of recollection, apprehended as the proper cognitive process—dialogical, since it necessarily involves at least two thinkers, a lover as well as a beloved; dialectical, since the method of collection and division is what qualifies one to adequately think and speak³⁹—the desire for the human form is transfigured in a

³⁸ As Kierkegaard might have put it, certainly inspired by the Socratic example: "If one is truly to succeed in leading a person to a specific place, one must first and foremost take care to find him where he is and begin there... If you can do it, if you can very accurately find the place where the other person is and begin there, then you can perhaps have the good fortune of leading him to the place where you are" (Kierkegaard, 2000, p. 461–62).

³⁹ “Now I am myself, Phaedrus, a lover of these divisions and collections, so that I may be able both to speak and think; and If I find anyone else who I think has the natural capacity to look to one and to many, I pursue him in his footsteps, behind

desire for the true beings, i.e., the Forms (274c6-8). In light of the Palinode, the “where-from” of Phaedrus’ soul can be interpreted as the cyclic-cosmic procession in the company of the divinities.

Just as the soul’s origin (ἀρχή) precedes embodied existence and is bound up with the procession of the gods, the soul’s ultimate end (τέλος) supersedes the human horizon of aims, since it lies in the intellection of the Forms. This is a godly affair that, notwithstanding, also gives sustenance to the most divine part of human souls, namely the intellect (247c3-247e6).

Simply put, truth (or true beings, i.e., the Forms) is the definite and decisive object of every soul’s erotic striving. But what the gods accomplish effortlessly (i.e., the supercelestial contemplation of the Forms), is for human souls—both before, during, and after embodiment—a matter of the most extreme and intense struggle. These, after all, are “the true Olympic games” (256b5). The philosophically-inclined couple is the only one that accomplishes the rechanneling of *eros* toward the soul’s proper object of nourishment (viz. truth), instead of mere placeholders such as pleasure and honor.

By nature, every human soul has glimpsed, in varying degrees, the Forms. Otherwise, they would not have come to be the living being that they are in their embodied existence (249b5-251a1). Even so, the more the lover and the beloved succeed in finding out and following up their distinctive God,⁴⁰ the more they fulfill the highest—albeit *prima facie* hidden—aspiration of their soul. Thus, the education of *eros*, grounded in the interpersonal relationship of *philia*, reveals itself as an initiation (τελετή) into the way of Being.⁴¹

him, as if he were a god” (266b2-7). Love, language, and philosophy (dialectics) are tightly knitted together in this important passage.

⁴⁰ On the idea of the falling in love as a process of self-discovery, see Lebeck, (1972, p. 282) and Ferrari (1987, p. 147–48; p. 183).

⁴¹ Rowe’s translation fails to do justice to the “telestic” nuance of this passage: “The eagerness of those who are truly in love, then, and its outcome (τελετή)—if, that is, they manage to achieve what they eagerly desire in the way I have said—

In conclusion, the whence (πόθεν) and whither (ποῦ) interrogative adverbs can be construed at a physical-everyday level, following the natural flow of the dialogue, but also at a metaphysical-cosmic level, in keeping with the Palinodic narrative. For the one who has a Zeus-like soul and is struggling to become a philosopher, the “whence” and the “whither,” the origin and the end, coincide in a perfect circle.

Conclusion

In my reading, the *Phaedrus*' inaugural line must be taken as foreshadowing the thematic arch of the dialogue as a whole, while it also hints at its dramatic unfolding and psychagogic purpose. This interpretation makes the unity of the dialogue much more conspicuous. In this sense, the deeper implications that I have sought to extract from the inaugural line all connect to psychagogy as a unifying motif of the entire work.

Psychagogy, once it is understood as a complex subject matter, which includes the topics of soul, love, language, and philosophy, can provide a renewed understanding of the *Phaedrus* as a tightly integrated and well-structured dialogue. In this paper, I have sought to show how the central motif of psychagogy is superbly foreshadowed already in the dialogue's inaugural sentence. To recapitulate: the quarrel with Lysias over the orientation of Phaedrus' soul; the role of friendship in the philosophical mode of life; the custom-made (*ad hominem*), extemporaneous conversation with Phaedrus in *viva voce* in contrast to the stiffness and silence of written works; the conceptualization of soul as a source of never-ending motion; and the prenatal origin as well as the utmost aspiration of human souls.

are thus rendered beautiful and being happiness from the friend whos is maddened through love to the object of his affection” (253c2-5).

By way of comparison, for Hermias the first line of the dialogue corroborates his proposition that its *skopos* is, in line with Iamblichus, “beauty of every kind.”⁴² On my part, considering psychagogy as a multi-layered motif holding the dialogue together, I have argued that the opening line foreshadows many topics that fall under the general reach of psychagogy, such as friendship, *eros*, rhetoric, the criticism of writing, the nature of the soul, and the ends of philosophy.

One may object that my approach commits what Dirk Baltzly has termed “hermeneutic over-kill,” which is emblematic of Neoplatonic commentaries (Baltzly, 2020, p. 7), in the sense that it extracts great significance and consequence from textual trifles. Nevertheless, as I have already demonstrated, there is plenty of evidence that the first words of a Platonic dialogue are neither accidental nor trivial, but should rather be taken as a “unit of anticipation” (Burnyeat, 1998, p. 13–14) of the dialogue as a whole.⁴³ Additionally, the dialogue itself invites this care in reading the first line, as Socrates and Phaedrus go back twice to the opening lines of Lysias’ speech (262e1-4; 263e6-264a2) so as to scrutinize them from a critical stance with the analytical tools that they are developing. Analogously, I have returned to the first line of the *Phaedrus* several times so as to inspect its meaning and implications after a thorough study of the dialogue in its entirety.

Finally, the opening line of the *Phaedrus* should also be read as a question that Plato addresses to his reader in order to prompt a movement of self-examination: “Dear reader of the *Phaedrus*, where are you heading to and from which background? What is the course

⁴² In *Phaedr* 14.9-15.3. For a well-argued defense of Hermias’ take on the unity of the dialogue, see Baltzly and Gardiner (2020).

⁴³ In support of this, recall the testimony of Euphorion and Panaetius divulged by Diogenes Laertius on the application that Plato gave to edit the beginning of the *Republic*, Proclus’ exegetical approach to Platonic preludes, and Burnyeat’s striking experiment of testing Proclus’ hypothesis in a fruitful interpretation of the first words of various Platonic dialogues.

of your journey, the stakes of each step you take, and which is the destination you have set for your soul?” The *vocative* directed at Phaedrus becomes, at this metatextual dimension, a *provocation* aimed at the reader of the *Phaedrus*.⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ On Platonic provocation, see Miller (1985).

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Submitted in 23/07/2022 and accepted for publication 28/11/2022.



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