Logos, Inspiration, and Self-Motion in Plato's *Phaedrus*

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ABSTRACT

Plato is often seen as the quintessential champion of reason, but many of his dialogues dramatize the insufficiency of certain conceptions of reason for ethical and political life. In this article, I trace out the multiple forms and purposes of reason and inspiration in Plato's *Phaedrus*, and show that each can be discerning or misleading. No method of reason or experience of inspiration can automatically provide secure moral knowledge. Instead of certainty, the *Phaedrus* recommends a kind of self-motion that requires an ongoing choice of self via an ongoing practice of *logos* with others. In this practice, reason intertwines with other forces to ask and answer the questions generated by the multiple values of the soul.

Keywords: Plato, Phaedrus, reason, inspiration

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Plato is often seen as the quintessential champion of rationality, and in two ways. The first account draws from Plato's vision of a city where philosopher-kings rule according to knowledge derived from the unchanging forms of true being. On this view, Plato is a believer in universalistic knowledge and philosophical certainty (e.g., Reeve, 2006). The second account focuses on Plato's Socrates and his role as gadfly, employing critical reason to puncture the beliefs of those who think they know. On this view, the primary purpose of Socrates' activities is to undermine certainty (e.g., Villa 2001). However, as other scholars have shown, neither of these views do justice to the way many of Plato's dialogues dramatize the insufficiency of either form of reason for ethical and political life.[1] In this article, I focus on the *Phaedrus*, where inspiration figures as a companion or counterpart of reason. I call inspiration a "companion" of reason in order to stress that inspiration is neither opposed to reason nor reducible to it, and I aim to show that Plato takes it seriously as a potential source of knowledge.

With "inspiration," I am not tracing a particular Greek term in Plato's work, but rather referring to Plato's repeated representation of the experience of being moved by an insight whose origins we cannot necessarily trace, and that we do not arrive at by explicit reasoning. I begin by sketching how Plato dramatizes different limitations of reason – limitations that call for a normative examination of ways of *being moved*. I then turn to the *Phaedrus*, which assists with this normative analysis in three ways: a) by drawing attention to multiple forms of reason and inspiration, some of which are discerning and some misleading; b) by showing that both the misleading and the discerning cases may be accompanied by the *feeling* of knowing; and c) by shifting our attention away from the opposition between reason and inspiration, toward what it means to be self-moving. However, the "self" in self-moving cannot simply be identified with reason, but rather is discerned through one's ongoing choices in an ongoing practice of *logos* with others.

THE LIMITS OF REASON IN PLATO

We can see three ways in which *logos* as reasoned argument is not a self-sufficient or a final source of security with respect to knowing. First, reason can't justify itself unless one is already persuaded of the value of reason – of knowing more rather than less, of thinking better. As David Roochnik points out in his commentary on the *Cleitophon*, "there is no argument which can, without begging the question, establish the goodness of argumentation...rational argumentation depends on a value judgment: that it is good to pursue the argument, to strive to replace opinion with knowledge" (1984, p. 141-2). Thus Socrates' usual insistence on proceeding via dialogic argument rather than through competing speeches cannot be justified simply in its own terms. If I don't already think that by reasoning and argumentation I can achieve some good, then what argument can persuade me? Or rather, why would *argument* persuade me? As a result, the project of philosophy "is initiated, not by a demonstration of its value, but by exhortation" (Roochnik 1984, p. 142).

This is perhaps why, in so many of Plato's dialogues, we see not simply a formal elenchus or logical procedure but Socrates' own exhortations, enticements, and provocations. This leads to the second kind of limitation of reason that Plato dramatizes, as we see So-

crates exhorting other people to live a just life, rather than a life aimed at amassing political power and material wealth. Plato shows us that particular reasoned arguments, for what ways of life are worth choosing, may not be enough to persuade. Socrates does of course give reasons for choosing a particular ethical view – those reasons have to do with the kind of life we would lead, the kind of person we would be – but Socrates also has to get those reasons to *matter* to his interlocutors. To matter to us – to really take hold in our soul – we have to "feel their force," yet in a way that makes them our own.[2] But Plato often portrays Socrates' interlocutors as instead *feeling forced* by Socrates. Recall Callicles, who in the *Gorgias* resists the "discipline" of the discussion and who in the end is not really convinced, or Thrasymachus' blushing, sweating reluctance in Book 1 of the *Republic* (*Grg.* 505c, 513c; *R.* 350c-d).[3] It is perhaps not incidental that both Callicles and Thrasymachus identify freedom with having power over others, and see speech as central to that power. This view of *logos*, and this equation of freedom with rule over others, is one that Socrates persistently contests. He also enacts a kind of freedom himself (he denies in both the *Gorgias* and the *Crito* that others have the power to harm him), and he works to get his interlocutors to reconsider what *kinds* of compulsion, what kinds of force, they should in fact fear and resist. Doing so requires moving them to care most about what it means to lead a just life; those are the kinds of reasons that have to come to matter, and the kind of purposes that have to guide the practice of *logos*.

Once again, this understanding of the limits of reason shows why Socrates' practice of dialogic reasoning is necessarily intertwined with exhortations, provocations, and reproaches.[4] This calls for a normative defense of *being moved*. What kind of moving and being moved is compatible with something like freedom – with not being in someone else's power but being moved by our own power?[5]

A conventional Platonic answer would refer to the mastery of reason –i.e., that we are moved "by our own power" when we are moved by reason (Stalley 1998). But there is a third difficulty that further complicates conventional portrayals of Plato's rationalism: his work indicates that reason is not the only way we come to know things. This is dramatized by Plato's depictions of Socrates himself as inspired. As a particularly notable example, Socrates often speaks about his *daimonion* -- a divine sign, a "spiritual manifestation" (*Ap.* 40a) that opposes him when he is about to do something wrong. In many of the dialogues, Plato explicitly depicts Socrates as someone who comes to know the right thing to do via being moved by a divine sign.

Socrates' *daimonion* has been interpreted as simply the inner voice of conscience, or alternatively as an authoritative religious command. What is unsatisfying about both of these options is that they too easily tame the strangeness of Socrates the philosopher being guided away from certain actions by a divine sign. Indeed, Plato has Socrates say in the *Republic* that such a thing is rare (496c). But why then does Plato craft his dialogues to include these repeated mentions of Socrates' divine sign? In what way is this to engage readers/listeners who don't have these kinds of spiritual manifestations? I suggest that when Plato portrays Socrates as inspired by the divine, it is illuminating to read this as a portrayal of a compelling experience that is more widely shared -- the experience of ethical/intellectual intuition or insight. Portraying this type of inspiration captures the phenomenon of "knowing" things ("feeling

the force" of things) whose origins are not in a chain of conscious reasoning.[6]

A different version of the "feeling of knowing" appears in Plato's dialogues too, when we see interlocutors whose unexamined opinions have been formed by the stories they were told as children or the cultural common sense that they repeat and accept. *That* feeling of knowing is a crucial sort of mistake that Socratic dialogue is meant to unravel. Socrates' own inspiration is clearly a different sort of phenomenon. By the "feeling of knowing," then, I mean to refer to an *experience*, where we experience ourselves as knowing something. But the "feeling of knowing" is not an *epistemic* condition; we may or may not actually have knowledge that stands up to further investigation.

Socrates' own inspiration can surely be reconciled with reason, as many ingenious interpretive attempts have shown.[7] This isn't wrong, exactly; as Plato portrays him, Socrates reflects on, and offers reasons to explain, why his *daimonion* forbids certain actions (e.g., *Ap.* 40a-b, *Phdr.* 242c-d). But this way of making sense of Socratic inspiration simply reasserts reason as a higher authority or final arbiter, *without acknowledging that only certain kinds of reasons and certain chains of reasoning are going to make sense to Socrates*. From a contemporary point of view, that would make Socrates' response to his *daimonion* an example of motivated reasoning – he is interpreting evidence to suit already held beliefs, a practice far from exemplary. But perhaps Plato's work can help de-familiarize these contemporary assumptions. To be sure, moral reasoning requires that we be able to question our beliefs, even those deeply interwoven into the fabric of our identities. Indeed, Plato's Socrates regards this questioning as the ongoing task of human living. But Plato's dialogues also show that reasons are always internal to lives; as Socrates often reminds his interlocutors, what is at stake in their discussions is what way of life is worth pursuing (e.g., *R.* 344d-e, *Grg.* 500c-d). Thus I argue that Plato's work *also* suggests a kind of moral thinking in which reason is neither wholly detached from our identities nor reduced to mere rationalization of those identities. What kind of moral thinking is neither radically autonomous nor passively enculturated?

To probe this further, I turn to a dialogue in which reason and inspiration play vivid dramatic roles: the *Phaedrus*. The dialogue shows that inspiration takes multiple forms, and can turn out to be either true or false, right or wrong, illuminating or misleading. But it also shows that reason has the same multiplicity, and the same ability to illuminate or mislead. This returns us to the need for a closer normative examination of what kind of moving and being moved is compatible with freedom, rather than involving manipulation, passivity, or self-deception. If different forms of reason cannot automatically trump inspiration/intuition as the standard that justifies the soul's self-motion, what are we to do with "the feeling of knowing"? I argue that the drama of the dialogue suggests the need to recursively ask, answer, and investigate the relation between two questions at the heart of moral thinking: not only "is it true?" but also "does it truly move me?"

PHAEDRUS I: FORMS OF REASON AND INSPIRATION

The dialogue takes place outside the city walls, as Socrates and Phaedrus meet while walking in the countryside.[8] Phaedrus is bubbling over with enthusiasm about a speech

written by Lysias, and Socrates teasingly likens this enthusiasm to the "frenzied dance" of the Corybantes.[9] Yet Socrates portrays himself as a partner in this enthusiasm, as someone "sick with passion for hearing speeches (*logoi*)" and willing to follow Phaedrus anywhere to listen to one (227d-228b). One obviously odd aspect of this entertaining beginning is that Plato's Socrates is generally not a lover of speeches but rather the opposite – a persistent critic of rhetoric and of conventional practices of speechmaking, often reorienting the form of the conversation away from competing speeches and toward the question-and-answer that he claims is more fruitful. But here in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates himself is the one offering competing speeches. First he enters into the mindset of competitive oratory, challenging the absent Lysias by offering a supposedly better speech on the same topic. And then he is moved to give a second speech recanting his first. The dialogue thus shows Socrates playing with and performing the various meanings of *logos* in multiple ways. But to what end?

Lysias's speech is from the point of view of a "non-lover," a speaker who claims not to be in love with the boy who is the addressee. The speech aims to persuade the boy that it is better to favor the speaker, who doesn't love him, rather than someone who is carried away by the madness of love. The non-lover depicts himself as rationally calculating and clear-eyed, and argues that such a state of mind enables him to act well, in a way that is honest, self-controlled, and reliable. By contrast, a lover swept up in passion is "well aware that he is not thinking straight" but simply can't control himself. He is likely to be jealous, angry, and inconstant (230e-234c).

Despite (or because of) Phaedrus's enthusiasm for the speech, Socrates claims to know an even better speech from the same perspective, and is moved to give it, even as he clearly marks out this speech in favor of the non-lover as not his own:

> "My breast is full and I feel I can make a different speech, even better than Lysias'. Now I am well aware that none of these ideas cannot come from me – I know my own ignorance. The only other possibility, I think, is that I was filled, like an empty jar, by the words of other people streaming into my ears" (235c-235d).

We can compare this description of being filled with others' ideas with the later account of the dangers of writing -- readers will put their faith in something "which is external and depends on signs that belong to others" and "will imagine that they have come to know much while for the most part they will know nothing" (275a-b). The difference here is that Socrates is, as always, aware of his own ignorance. He further distances himself from the speech by embedding it in a story about a beautiful boy, calling on the Muses to assist him, and covering his head while he's speaking (235c-d, 237a-b). The head covering is allegedly out of embarrassment at competing with Lysias' "wisdom," but it is the content of the speech that the drama reveals as shameful in Socrates' eyes.[10]

Socrates's first speech proceeds by definition and distinction – not only defining what love is, but also identifying the difference between being in love and not being in love. That difference is whether reason – *logos* – is in command or not. The speech goes on to offer an account of the kinds of harm that would come to the boy from someone possessed by the "unreasoning desire" of *erōs* (238c). And in the middle of the speech, Socrates pauses to comment on how inspired he is: "don't you think, as I do, that I'm in the grip of something

divine?" Under the influence of the nymphs to whom their riverside resting place has been dedicated, Socrates waxes poetic (238c-d).

Note, then, what a strange mixture the speech is. Is the practice of definition and distinction supposed to portend the later reference to collection and division as a necessary practice for "dialecticians" and lovers of wisdom? If so, the speech employs a method of philosophy – but wrongly, given how Socrates remakes the divisions in his next speech. At the same time, this methodical approach is conveyed in eloquent poetic language that Socrates stresses does not come from him. Whose speech *is* this strange hybrid of orderly method and poetic inspiration (the Muses? The Nymphs? The named wise people or unnamed prose writers of 235c?)?[11]

The strangeness is deepened when, after explaining the various harms that come from the lover being more concerned with his own pleasure than with the boy's good, Socrates suddenly ends his speech, saying that he is unwilling to become more completely possessed (241e). Yet as he prepares to leave, another divine inspiration – his *daimonion* – prevents him, and he interprets this as a prompt to recant the speech he has just given, which he now characterizes as "horrible…foolish...close to being impious" (242d). If we regard the first speech as inspired, the subsequent need for recantation shows the moral dangers of yielding to the experience of inspiration. But this is complicated by the fact that the first speech also had the *appearance* of reason, and that the recantation was itself prompted by an experience of inspiration.

This dramatic portrayal of different experiences of inspiration and reason is then explicitly thematized in the next speech, which distinguishes bad kinds of "madness" from divine kinds. The non-lover had claimed to be a better partner for the boy precisely because he was calm and reasonable, rather than mad with desire. But Socrates's second speech rethinks the simplistic opposition between reason and madness: whether reason is better than madness depends upon what *kind* of madness we are talking about (and, it turns out, what kind of reason). As noted, Socrates later names himself a lover of precisely these kinds of "divisions and collections" whereby one discerns the parts that make up a kind, and the connections and distinctions between them; this is central to being able "to think and to speak" (266b). Here he first considers the divine inspiration seen in the "madness" of prophecy. The priestesses are "out of their minds" in their "god-inspired prophetic trances" yet they "give sound guidance" (244b-c). And poets are possessed by the Muses, and "without the Muses' madness" their poetry would be inadequate -- technically correct about the subject, but without the power to move (244a-245a).[12] Socrates then argues that love too is a god-given madness, and to possess it – or be possessed by it – is "our greatest good fortune" (245c).[13]

To understand the beneficial madness of love, Socrates says, we need to know the nature of that which loves: the soul. Socrates' account of the soul works to further complicate the opposition between someone who is sane, controlled, and in their right mind, and someone who is out of their mind and possessed by another force. I argue that the crucial question turns out not to be whether we should be moved by cool reason or mad *eros*, but something quite different: what it means to be self-moving.

PHAEDRUS II: THE ANIMATE SOUL AND ITS VALUES

At the heart of Socrates' description of the soul is its *self-moving* character. "Whatever

moves itself is essentially soul;" being a source of motion is "the very essence and principle of a soul" (245e).[14] But to say that the soul is self-moving is not to say that it is radically autonomous, or unaffected by its surroundings; Socrates says that understanding the soul requires "examining what it does *and* what is done to it" (245c, my italics). The soul both acts (it moves itself) and is acted upon (affected by what it experiences). How is it that we can think of this as *self*-moving, as opposed to being moved by something outside us? In what way might our responses to something external be no less ours? This is crucial to parse, for to say otherwise – that we can't help ourselves in the face of external temptation, for example -- is to assert a fundamental unfreedom, whereby we are at the mercy of whatever comes to us, whatever we experience, however our culture has shaped us. This requires thinking about self-motion as not radically detached from other forces, and thinking about "being moved" as not always passive. Charles Griswold's (1986, p. 87) formulation is helpful: "If the soul desires what appears to it to be good and beautiful, the appearance may be said to move the soul, but only because the soul values the appearance. In this very broad sense, then, the soul may be said to move itself." To value something is to have a kind of active response to the external, an interaction. We might say that the soul moves itself in response to what is outside itself, what it experiences through perception. The soul's active engagement with the external is precisely "what allows the soul to be talked into desiring different things" (Griswold 1986, p. 87).[15]

Socrates depicts the complexity of the self-moving soul -- and the way it can be talked into desiring different things -- in the context of an elaborate myth in which human souls, before they come to earth, catch varying glimpses of true being (Justice, Beauty, and so on). In the image that Socrates uses, the soul is figured as a charioteer with two horses, one noble and one bad. The noble horse is "a lover of honor with modesty and self-control… and is guided by verbal commands alone." The bad horse is ugly and wild and "just barely" controlled by physical force (253d-e). If we have in mind the tripartite soul of the *Republic*, it is easy to assume that the third figure, the charioteer, represents a straightforward conception of reason, but this is undercut by the way the character of erotic madness is portrayed.[16]

The occasion for the portrayal is the struggle in the soul that happens upon seeing a beautiful boy (253e-254e). The "entire soul" feels the appeal, the desire for beauty. But it is the bad horse who leaps forward and who, when the other two resist, persistently badgers them to go forward and proposition the boy. The charioteer and the good horse are plunged into a stew of conflicting emotions and beliefs: they "tingle" with desire, they're angry at being pressured to do something they believe is shameful, they are exasperated and finally worn down by the wild horse's persistence, "reluctantly agreeing to do as they have been told." Then:

> They are close to him now, and they are struck by the boy's face as if by a bolt of lightning. When the charioteer sees that face, his memory is carried back to the real nature of Beauty, and he sees it again where it stands on the sacred pedestal next to Self-Control. At the sight he is frightened, falls over backwards awestruck, and at the same time has to pull the reins back so fiercely that both horses are set on their haunches" (253e-254c).

The noble horse cooperates with this sudden reversal, suffused with "shame and awe," but the other horse, indignant at being restrained, promptly resumes its importuning (254c). This scene replays itself, "time after time," as the bad horse continues to press its purposes on the other two, and the charioteer and the good horse delay, dissemble, and give in – only for the charioteer to be "struck with the same feelings as before, only worse" (254e). He is overwhelmed each time by the memories that rise up at the sight of the boy. These are memories of seeing true being, of perceiving the "real nature" of things -- of *knowing*. These memories move the charioteer to act to forcefully restrain the bad horse. This restraint becomes progressively more violent, painful, and bloody, until finally out of fear the bad horse becomes "humble enough to follow the charioteer's warnings" which allows the soul to "[follow] its boy in reverence and awe" (254e).

The charioteer clearly represents a complex power. He uses the tools of violence and pretense, and both he and the noble horse are capable of anger and of inconsistency, as they get worn down by the bad horse's persistence.[17] And the bad horse engages in persuasion, remembers earlier agreements, and calculates when to apply what kind of force. So we can't identify each "part" of the soul simply with one capacity (desire, self-restraint, reason). All three aspects of the soul feel desire; all three parts of the soul engage in reason. But each has a primary value, a characteristic focus, something that matters most. The bad horse's aim is to fulfill bodily appetite, and it is to this goal that it directs its attempts at compelling its companions, whether through physical force or verbal persuasion. The noble horse is committed to honor and self-restraint; this mostly involves following the charioteer's lead, but also involves some kind of applied judgment about whether the behavior is more and less honorable. The charioteer? The violence with which he chastises the bad horse, and the result that the horse eventually "dies of fright" when it sees the boy (254e), might seem to indicate that the charioteer's aim is to eradicate lustful desire. But this isn't right, and Plato's text supplies two kinds of reasons why not. First and perhaps less interestingly, the bad horse is simply irrepressible. It becomes animate again once the lover is used to spending time around the boy; in a particularly tempting situation, the bad horse "has a word to say to the charioteer – that after all its suffering it is entitled to a little fun" (256a). Although tamed, the bad horse has not been wholly silenced. Bodily appetites, lustful desires, instrumental reasoning toward narrowly defined goals – perhaps these are recalcitrant elements of selfhood that can never be fully eradicated. But, secondly, this is not necessarily something that should be regarded with regret. For the bad horse is indispensable; it is the source of the movement that brings the charioteer close enough to the boy for the charioteer to actually be struck by insight -- to be moved by memory – and to act upon it.[18]

Scholars are divided on what might this mean in non-mythical, non-metaphorical terms. Nussbaum (1986, p. 214-216 and ch. 7 *passim*) argues that the *Phaedrus* represents a change in Plato's own valuations, and that he is here giving non-intellectual passions and desires an important motivational and "guiding" role, as "intrinsically valuable components of the best human life." In contrast, Sheffield (2012, p. 230-232) contends that the black horse is simply an inevitable characteristic of the charioteer's "mortal nature" and represents "the backdrop against which philosophical *eros* must struggle." Rowe (1990, p. 238-241)

concurs with Sheffield that the desires of the black horse require struggle and control, rather than "enjoyment."

I agree with the latter two scholars that, if we take Plato's depictions seriously, the black horse's desires are not intrinsically valuable in and of themselves. Yet neither are they simply a matter of regret or disdain. Although the charioteer notices the boy's beauty before the black horse leaps forward, he is not close enough to be struck by insight until the black horse's movement, contra Sheffield (253e-254c). To translate this into non-mythical, non-metaphorical terms: it is precisely the multiple values of the soul that press upon us the question of what -- of who -- we want to be. The self-restraint of the noble horse might be that part of us responsive to the valuations of others and of society (this is why shame and honor are so important for it). Simply giving into it would be as unfree as giving into the selfish erotic desire of the other horse, unfree because compelled either by societal opinion or erotic necessity. This idea of compulsion is compatible with the self-moving character of the soul, because as noted before, the soul moves itself according to how it values what it perceives. But as the chariot metaphor depicts so vividly, the soul has multiple desires and sources of value.

The multiplicity of the soul opens up the question, in Ferrari's astute formulation, of "how best the life of the whole person should go" (1987, p. 201). This is a question about freedom not because it involves reason ruling non-reason, but because the answer is a choice of self – a choice involving what desires we want to be moved by, and what reasons we want to matter to us.[19] Thus, to characterize Platonic freedom as being governed by reason, as Stalley 1998 does, is too simple. Yet neither is the mere fact of choice sufficient to ensure that we are governed by our own power. Nightingale (1995) captures the issue at hand with her distinction between "alien" and "authentic" discourses. Alien discourses are those that come from others, including stories that have been passed down to us or *logoi* accepted on the authority of another (136-38). But "alien" also includes the multiple conflicting discourses of the soul; as Nightingale notes, each part of the soul is associated not only with certain desires, but with the "discourse of these desires" (143). And this shows the need to "examine and evaluate not only external discourse but also the voices within" (145), for it is through this process that we reject some alien discourses and transform others into authentic ones, ones that are "our own" (165-169). Not only are some *logoi* better than others, then, but also a better soul-condition means being in a specific kind of relation to the *logoi* that move us.

This indicates a deeper, more normative understanding of what it means to be self-moving. Strictly speaking, the soul is self-moving in the myth when the bad horse lunges toward the beautiful boy. But it is clear that the charioteer's movements involve the right valuing of that which the soul perceives, and thus are the kind of self-motion we should desire. I will call this "true" self-motion, indicating both moral truth and an active orientation of the self to that truth. This active orientation reflects a recognizable kind of freedom, of being under our own power rather than subject to another.[20]

Nightingale's articulation of the need to "examine and evaluate" might seem to re-center reason as the measure of a soul's self-motion. True self-moving does require reason, to be sure, but not merely the instrumental reasoning of the bad horse, or the applied but unquestioning judgment of the noble horse.

(We can imagine a situation in which it is the noble horse the charioteer has to train, to persuade it to a different understanding of what is shameful and what is honorable.) The charioteer feels the desires of the other two, and understands their reasoning, but his role, his aim, is to evaluate and direct action from the perspective of the good of the whole. In Ferrari's words again (1987, p. 201):

> "The essential point of contrast between the charioteer and rebellious horse is not that between the faculty of reason (without desire) and a faculty of appetite or desire (without reason) but, as we have seen, between that in us which aims at how best the life of the whole person should go and that which looks only to as immediate a satisfaction as possible."

And this means "integrating" the multiple aspects of the soul -- choosing a self. The training of the bad horse is a necessary element of this integration; leaving its desire in its untamed wild state would mean the battle must be fought without end, never less violently, the soul charging first in one way, then another. In the integrated soul, the bad horse does not become passive or silent, but how it acts on its desires changes; it pipes up with "a word to say to the charioteer" (256a), but it no longer lunges forward or attempts to use physical force.[21]

The untamed horse, and the non-lover in Lysias' speech, and Socrates' own first speech, all show that instrumental reason can be shortsighted in the way that emotion and desires can. But even the more holistic judgment of the charioteer can go wrong, as he performs his difficult work; he gives in to the bad horse, pretends to forget their agreement, allows the values of undisciplined appetite to have too much power (254b-254e). But he is able to rethink, to right himself, and this involves being moved by an experience of knowing that comes not through conscious reasoning, but through inspiration.

Recall that prophetic and poetic inspiration involve the person being inspired in the sense of being "occupied by" the divine, possessed by a god who is speaking or acting through them. In other words, the inspired person is a passive vehicle for an external force. Erotic/philosophic inspiration is something different. It is not passively being taken over by an external force, as in Socrates' first speech (recall the passage at 235c-235d cited above). Rather, it involves experiencing something that seems to come from without and yet at the same time is one's own, and sparks action within us. As Irani argues (2017, p. 139), this is "the sort of experience one suffers in seeing the beauty of a good argument… those who are compelled in philosophical argument are an important sense compelled *by themselves*."[22] This is one helpful *example* of the experience, but philosophical/erotic inspiration as depicted in Socrates's second speech can't simply be reduced to philosophical argument. In the myth, after all, it is the sight of beauty that strikes the charioteer so forcefully. As Kathryn Morgan argues (2010, p. 54-55), "rather than being invaded by an outside force [i.e., possessed by a god], the mind of the philosopher leaves the mortal world...Being inspired is a question of being next to the divine...by means of your memory."

What is the significance of memory or recollection, in the myth and in non-mythical life? In the *Meno*, Socrates calls recollection "finding knowledge within oneself" (*Men.* 85d).[23] This phrase is evocative precisely of the experience of having a sudden insight, an experience of knowing that comes not through

conscious reasoning. In such instances, I may not be able to trace the source of my insight, as Socrates can with his *daimonion*. But I still experience it as *my* knowing. The problem, of course, is that mere opinion, short-sighted desire, or non-philosophic enthusiasm can move us in the same way, as Phaedrus is captivated by Lysias's speech.[24] So there is a contrast between what Socrates the myth-maker shows us, which is that the charioteer's experience of inspiration reflects the truth, and what Socrates as an interlocutor shows us, which is that he can never be finally or completely sure. The *experience* of insight, no matter how powerful, is no guarantee of our epistemic condition, no guarantee that we have in fact glimpsed or grasped something true. It *feels* like knowing and it feels like mine. But that feeling of inspiration or insight can turn out to be right or wrong, true or false.[25]

It is this double possibility that Plato has Socrates perform in the *Phaedrus* via his two different speeches on love, speeches that are both explicitly linked to divine inspiration. I argue that the palinode is not only a rejection of what came before, but that each speech represents an ever-present possibility of the experience of inspiration, and that both possibilities must be held in mind. This doubleness is also reflected in Plato's use of the Muses. Recall that in Hesiod's *Theogony,* the Muses give Hesiod the talent for poetry along with a warning: "we know to tell many lies that sound like truth, but we know to sing reality, when we will" (lines 25-30). And recall that Socrates invokes the Muses in his first speech, the one he then recants; in his second speech he associates the Muses with poetic madness, and Eros with philosophic madness (242d ff., 245a-b). But as the dialogue continues, this erotic philosophical madness turns out to have as patrons two of the Muses, Urania and Calliope, who Socrates appropriates for "the special kind of music" that is philosophy (259d). Noting that Muses preside here too should remind us that even the felt experience of inspiration -- finding the knowledge inside us -- has the doubleness that the Muses warn of: it can sing reality, but can also merely sound like truth.[26]

It is tempting to think we can resolve this difficulty by subjecting to the test of reason any "knowing" that comes to us through non-reason. But various forms of reason – whether reasoned argument, the procedure of collection and division, or surface-level *technē* – are shown to have the same kind of double quality, i.e., they can lead us rightly or wrongly. We have already seen this in the speeches from the non-lover, who voices an instrumentally rational argument that both misrepresents love and conceals his own lustfulness (at least in Socrates' version). But we also see this double quality of reason stressed in the part of the dialogue that comes *after* Socrates recants the non-lover's speeches.

In this section, Socrates returns to a critique of Lysias's speech, pointing out its disorderly and superficial character – it doesn't begin with a definition of love, the points appear to be in random order rather than building an argument (263d-264d). But this is itself a notably superficial criticism compared to Socrates's earlier characterization of it as "horrible" and "close to being impious" (242d) -- and indeed part of what Socrates goes on to do is to make a distinction between superficial and deeper knowing. He underscores the point with his mockery of treatises on the rhetorical art, with their subdivisions of the parts of a speech, and their ordered lists of the technical means of persuasion and refutation.[27] But this is more than a witty interlude, for it shows again that the *appearance* of "collection and

division" does not necessarily lead to meaningful knowledge. For Socrates, these accounts of rhetoric are meaningless, for rhetoric can't be a "systematic art" (*technē*) without a deeper and normative understanding of what it acts on: the soul (270b-e). The true rhetorical *technē* is "directing the soul by means of speech (*logos*)" (261a), and so requires a *logos*, in the sense of an account, of the soul. The conclusion is that rhetoricians should engage in something more like philosophy first, although the precision of the account that Socrates requires for rhetoric to be a serious art is so demanding that surely he can't expect any would-be philosophical rhetoricians to achieve it (270c-271a, 273e).[28] Socrates argues here that we must know the essential nature of the soul and the nature of the world *before* we engage with others: "first, you must know the truth concerning everything you are speaking or writing about" (277b). But the drama of the dialogue cuts directly against that claim, for the very thing that Socrates now says about thinking "systematically" -- that we need to know whether our object of investigation is simple or complex (270d) – is precisely what he says earlier he does not know about his own soul (230a). Yet this doesn't stop him from going on to offer a picture of the soul -- one that "perhaps it had a measure of truth in it, though it may also have led us astray" (265b).

And this is the difficulty that I argue Plato would have his readers wrestle with in the *Phaedrus*. We don't have a *technē*, a systematic art, and we can't simply rely on what looks like division and collection, or what feels like inspiration, to justify what we value and hence our true self-moving. Both reason and inspiration have multiple forms and multiple purposes (only some of which are oriented towards "how best the life of the whole person should go"). And they can be discerning or distracting; they can lead us to a deeper understanding, toward the self we realize we want to be, or they can lead us away.

But of course Plato is no skeptic. There may be no secure or guaranteed method to establish our knowing beyond question, to justify our feeling of knowing once and for all, but there is an ongoing interactive practice that Socrates recommends and that is "the art of dialectic":

> The dialectician chooses a proper soul and plants and sows within it discourse (*logos*) accompanied by knowledge – discourse capable of helping itself as well as the man who planted it, which is not barren but produces a seed from which more discourse grows in the character of others. Such discourse makes the seed forever immortal and renders the man who has it as happy as any human being can be (276e-277a).

The e*pisteme* that accompanies *logos* here cannot be some sort of sure final knowing, for this has just been the critique of written discourse, that it says one thing and then is silent; it can't "defend itself" when questioned. This *logos* is active, and indeed interactive, as it produces the seed – the generative capacity -- of *logos* in others, which ends up helping "the man who planted it." The value of this practice, then, is not in its ability to produce an irrefutable truth, but in its "ability to keep the pursuit of truth in motion."[29] It is this interactive and ongoing pursuit that constitutes the kind of self-motion that Socrates recommends.

The dialogue begins by playing with the meaning of *logos*, and it ends with this praise of a different kind of *logos*: "articulate speech" with others.[30] But why should true *self*-motion require others? In articulate speech with oth-

ers, we give voice to something we think we know in a way that others can hear and understand. Articulating our meaning for others is a practice through which we can understand ourselves, or realize that we don't.[31] We can come to see ourselves more clearly in another's reaction to our words.[32] This shared speech requires us to give an account of what we believe, and to test not only the moral truth of that account but whether we live our lives accordingly – to test what reasons *matter* to me, whether I am compelled by my own *logos*, whether the beliefs I act on are the ones I recognize as true. This ongoing engagement is necessary in part because of the incomplete character of human reason – in other words, to continually test whether the beliefs I hold actually are true. But it is also a test of the condition of my soul – as all Socrates' engagements are – a test of whether the beliefs I recognize as true are what animate me, what move me to act. Both aspects – is it true and does it move me – are crucial for reflectively becoming a self who feels the force of the reasons that should matter.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have argued that two less-noticed aspects of Plato's *Phaedrus* appear when read in light of Plato's own depictions of the limits of reason. The first aspect is that the portrayal of the self-moving soul is layered, and that "true" self-moving is not equated with reason in a narrow sense, but with choosing and forming a self to whom the right reasons *matter*. The second aspect that I've illuminated is the repeated figuring of different forms of inspiration and reason, none of which automatically provide reliable epistemic grounds for knowing, or for guiding the self-moving of the soul. This is the characteristic paradox of Socrates on knowing: to consistently challenge any notion that we have full and certain knowledge, while at the same time affirming its necessity and value. We can't know anything without certain ways of thinking, but to have engaged in those ways of thinking is no guarantee that we have done so well, that we have achieved meaningful rather than superficial knowledge, or that we can justify our self-motion.

Thus "reason's companions" can be understood in a multilayered sense in this dialogue. In the first sense, self-motion involves reason *and* feeling, argument *and* inspiration, moving *and* being moved. And secondly, the self requires companions with whom to engage in *logos* about it all, to test the appearance of reason/inspiration and to reveal my ongoing choice of self. As Moore (2016, p. 72) shows, "Socrates' exhortation to philosophy" is an exhortation to precisely such conversations, for it is these conversations that "press a person to express what he finds most valuable and true." This engagement is ongoing because human knowledge is incomplete and reason has its limits; it is also ongoing because a choice of self is not a decision made once and never revisited, but rather a continued practice. The contexts in which we act change; we may encounter a beautiful person, as in the *Phaedrus*, or we may find ourselves experiencing something more grave, as does Socrates in the *Crito*. There (*Cri.* 46c-d), he expresses both a consistent sense of self ("I am the kind of man who listens to nothing within me but the argument that on reflection seems best to me") and also some curiosity about whether he will think differently now that he is facing death: "I'm eager to examine together with you, Crito, whether this argument will appear in any way different to me in my present cir-

cumstances, or whether it remains the same, whether we are to abandon it or believe it." This ongoing choice of self means that freedom -- to not be enslaved to another power, to be truly self-moving -- is an ongoing practice of interaction and judgment, not something securely and finally accomplished.

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ENDNOTES

1 Consider, for example, scholars investigating the interplay between reason and other ways of knowing or understanding, like myth or storytelling (e.g., Murray 1999, Werner, 2012, Sevelsted, 2021). Or the arguments about the role of shame in McKim 2002 and Tarnopolsky 2010.

2 "Feel their force" comes from Ferrari 1987, 58.

3 Even a more sympathetic interlocutor, Adeimantus, points out the difference between feeling trapped by Socrates' argument and actually being convinced (R. 487b-e).

4 Recall here the powerful effect of Socrates' words as portrayed by Alcibiades (Smp. 215d-e) and Cleitophon (Clit. 407-408).

5 It may seem anachronistic to stress "freedom" in an analysis of Plato. But, as Stalley (1998, 148) puts it, Plato clearly "helps himself to the language of freedom" as he depicts Socrates engaging with his interlocutors. And as Raaflaub (2004) shows, the dominant meaning of freedom after the Persian wars was to not be enslaved, i.e., not to be subject to a master. In thematizing force and freedom, then, Plato takes up and reworks aspects of Athenian democratic culture for his own ends. By using "freedom" in this analysis, I'm not claiming that Plato was concerned with freedom in anything like the modern sense, but rather that he was concerned with characterizing the condition that is the opposite of subjection or enslavement.

6 I am not alone in suggesting that we can think of Platonic inspiration as intellectual intuition or insight. See Morgan 2010, Griswold 1996, Carter 1967.

7 Carter (1967, p. 118) argues that Plato accepts inspiration as long as it is "purified and checked by a rational method." Other scholars have argued that the rational justification for Socrates obeying his daimonion is rooted in its empirical reliability; see Brickhouse and Smith 2005 and Partridge 2008.

8 The many facets of this dialogue have led interpreters to focus on a variety of themes: love (Nussbaum 1986), self-knowledge (Griswold 1986), rhetoric (Nehamas and Woodruff 1995), soul-leading (*psychagōgia*, Moss 2012). My analysis does not aim to capture the entirety of the dialogue's concerns, but to illuminate how the dialogue addresses the concerns articulated in the previous section.

9 This is the same image that Alcibiades invokes to convey the way in which Socrates' speeches "possess" listeners (Smp. 215d-e). Unless otherwise noted, I use Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff's translation of the Phaedrus.

10 Ferrari (1987, p. 103-105) points out that Socrates' head-covering works also to stress the wrongness of treating speech as competitive entertainment rather than genuine inquiry.

11 Schenker (2006, p. 72-73) also notes the many-authored character of the speech.

12 Much scholarly attention has been paid to the differences between this account of poetic inspiration and that of the Ion; see, for example, the discussion in Gonzalez 2011.

13 Socrates also mentions a kind of ritual madness that brings a kind of purification of guilt (244d-e; for further explanation, see Dodds 1951 and White 1993).

14 As the Hackforth (1952) translation puts it in the passage immediately following: "Any body that has an external source of motion is soulless, but a body deriving its motion from a source within itself is animate or besouled" (245e). Irani 2017 also stresses the importance of the self-moving character of the soul.

15 See also Ferrari 1987, p. 137-9. Davis 2011 offers an account of the soul as both a principle of motion/engagement, and a principle of awareness/perception.

16 Yunis 2011, Hackforth 1952, and to some extent Schenker 2006 read the charioteer image as emphasizing the mastery of reason.

17 Thus the charioteer cannot solely represent nous, despite nous being referred to as "the soul's steersman" at 247c-d.

18 As noted by Ferrari (1987, p. 192-194), Belfiore, (2012, p. 251), and Nichols (2009, p. 114-115).

19 My argument here is not inconsistent with Irani 2017. Although Irani identifies the charioteer with reason, it is a capacious conception of reason, not a narrow calculative one: "the job of the charioteer, the reason-seeking part of the soul, is to recognize and appreciate a system of values that the lover can come to endorse as his own, and to determine as a result of this activity which of the soul's desires are worth satisfying and which are not" (Irani 2017, p. 127; see also 142, 176). A similar treatment is in Burnyeat (2012), who refers to the charioteer as "pure reason," and describes philosophic inspiration as being inspired by one's "own power of reason" (p. 247, 242). Yet he also concludes that Plato is showing "a process of transformation involving complex interactions of thought, desire and even perception" (Burnyeat 2012, p. 258). I disagree with Burnyeat's first characterization, but share the second. To put it another way, in the present argument, I want to take seriously the intertwining of reason and inspiration in the choice of self, without reducing the distinctive experience of inspiration to reason.

20 We might, with Nightingale, call it "authentic" self-motion, but to my mind the language of authenticity runs the risk of stressing the origin rather than the active aim.

21 In addition to Ferrari 1987, my analysis chimes with Belfiore 2012, Griswold 1986, and Irani 2017. But none of us have answered to my satisfaction why the training is depicted as so violent, merciless and agonizing for the horse. Is this an indication of how difficult it is to shape certain kinds of desires to match our chosen sense of self? Or of how painful it can be to have these kinds of desires thwarted? Or how difficult it is to commit to a choice of self and to leave other possibilities behind?

22 Similarly, in her discussion of persuasion, Frank (2018, p. 127-131) argues that what distinguishes legitimate persuasion from deception or mere obedience is the listeners' active role in persuading themselves.

23 As Giasoumi (2022, p. 31) notes, the theory of recollection in the Meno "indicates that we can discover truths that our senses alone could not discern" and that such discovery may happen through "reminders" in discussion (thus not simply through reason).

24 As Griswold (1986, p. 110) puts it: "Nongodly souls… might ask themselves whether they are nourished because they know the truth or whether they think they know the truth because they feel nourished. The doubt here concerns an opposition not between reason and emotion but between one kind of complex of reason/emotion and another (true reason and genuine satisfaction versus opinion and false satisfaction)."

25 To be clear: I am not arguing that philosophic inspiration itself can be right or wrong for Plato, but that a person can be right or wrong about whether it is philosophic inspiration.

26 Thus I disagree with Murray (2002, p. 29-46), who sees Plato as appropriating exclusively the truthful aspect of Muses for philosophy and prose. I contend that it is the twofold potential of the Muses -- the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (memory) -- that is significant.

27 Socrates cites various teachers of rhetoric and their accounts of their art: "first, I believe, there is the Preamble with which a speech must begin… second comes the Statement of Facts and the Evidence of Witnesses concerning it; third, Indirect Evidence; fourth, Claims to Possibility…" and so on through "Reduplication, Speaking in Maxims, Speaking in Images… Correct Diction… Recapitulation" (266d-267b).

28 Werner (2012) and Rowe (1986) argue in different ways that only dialectic can come close to fulfilling these terms, not rhetoric (Werner) or written philosophy (Rowe).

29 The quoted phrase is from Nightingale (1995, p. 168).

30 "Articulate speech" is used to characterize *logos* in Salkever (2009, p. 4-5). See also Kahn (1979, p. 107) on Heraclitus' conception of soul: "the new concept of psyche is expressed in terms of the power of articulate speech: rationality is understood as the capacity to participate in the life of language, 'knowing how to listen and how to speak.'" Frank 2015 (reading Aristotle) illuminates the significance of holding onto a conception of *logos* as speech.

31 See Irani 2017, Griswold 1986, and Asmis 1986 for thoughtful analyses of how the presence of others is necessary for self-knowledge. Irani stresses that the *logos* that is crucial to self-moving requires a caring, not competitive, attitude toward others. For

a similar perspective in a contemporary context, see Fricker's (2007, p. 52-53) argument that "trustful conversation with others is the basic mechanism by which the mind steadies itself," and that this is "how we come to be who we are."

32 In the palinode, Socrates describes the boy responding to his own beauty as reflected through the lover's desire; he is unknowingly "seeing himself in the lover as in a mirror" (255D). This experience of "backlove" doesn't necessarily parallel the interaction between partners in dialogue, but it does suggest the possibility of seeing ourselves in another's reaction to us. It also raises the possibility that such interaction can be confusing rather than clarifying; thus the necessity for ongoing dialogic engagement.