Love, Madness, and Plato. Phaedrus: The Worthy Other in Plato’s Dialogues

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The paper argues against Charles Griswold’s opinion that in the *Phaedrus* the latter is not worthy of Socrates’s time because he is mediocre. First, we refer to Socrates’s affectionate attitude towards Phaedrus and his desire to turn the latter’s soul towards philosophy. Second, we highlighted Socrates’s incompleteness as the reason he engages in a meaningful conversation with Phaedrus. A third approach dealt with the philosopher’s ascent and the idea that physical beauty does not define a young boy completely; when the philosopher acknowledges the relevance of his soul’s beauty he actually acknowledges his worth. We concluded that Griswold misunderstood the crucial importance of the role of the other in Plato’s dialogues, “other” who is in fact an engaged partner whose worth consists in taking part in a constant effort for reaching the truth.

**Keywords:** Plato’s dialogues, *Phaedrus*, the other, partner of dialogue, worthiness, physical beauty, beauty of the soul, philosopher’s ascent.

**Introduction**

My analysis will focus on two of Plato’s dialogues, namely the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. I will start from some remarks made by Charles L. Griswold in his book *Self-knowledge in Plato’s Phaedrus*. Griswold seems to be surprised that Plato chose Phaedrus as a character and named the dialogue after him. He refers to Phaedrus as being inferior to Socrates. He also finds their interaction as being mainly comical precisely because of this asymmetry in their relationship. My
interest is not to engage in a detailed critique of Griswold’s hypotheses. I will nevertheless present briefly some of the points Griswold makes in his study of the *Phaedrus*. This helps me introduce my own thesis regarding Phaedrus’ significance for both the dialogue and Socrates.

For Griswold, the main difference between Socrates and Phaedrus would be that Socrates is already aware of his own ignorance, while Phaedrus cannot even realize the fact that he is ignorant. Griswold’s suggestion is then that Phaedrus is intentionally chosen by Plato as the ideal character to illustrate the necessity of self-knowledge. Phaedrus would be then *useful* to both Socrates and Plato. Moreover, Griswold seems to imply that Phaedrus appears in the dialogue due to his *unworthiness* as an interlocutor, referring to him as mediocre. It is true that Griswold is ready to acknowledge that Phaedrus is turned to philosophy by Socrates by the end of the dialogue. However, he can only acknowledge Phaedrus’s utility. He will not talk about Phaedrus as being intrinsically worthy. It is important to mention that this happens because Griswold fails to notice the true nature of the relationship between Socrates and Phaedrus. For him, despite Socrates’s obvious interest in engaging in a conversation with Phaedrus (Griswold 1996, 26-32), they are not even friends. I firmly consider that Socrates does not engage in a dialogue with someone who is unworthy. This happens not only because Socrates does not treat Phaedrus as being unworthy, which Griswold does not deny. My argument is that Socrates’s attitude towards Phaedrus is also Plato’s attitude. Phaedrus’s worth, as it can be

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2 “It is precisely Phaedrus’ passive and formalistic love of speeches that makes him congenial to Socrates.” (Griswold 1996, 22). The use of the term *congenial* [my emphasis] is only one of the many examples of how Griswold inscribes the relationship between Socrates and Phaedrus in the language of mere utility. This is the position I wish to argue against. Another example is the use of the term *suitable*: “Phaedrus does serve as a suitable [my emphasis] interlocutor for a conversation in which the self-knowledge theme is developed.” (25) Last but not least, Griswold uses the term *useful* to describe Phaedrus: “Phaedrus is useful [my emphasis] to Socrates as a conveyer to the city of a partial, politically useful defense of philosophy.” (27)

3 “Mediocre Phaedrus” (Griswold 1996, 18).

4 “Best is the relationship of friendship (*philia*) between lovers of wisdom. (…) Phaedrus and Socrates do not attain friendship in that sense.” (Griswold 1996, 31).
seen throughout the whole dialogue, is that he manages to eventually rise up to Socrates’s challenge, his soul turning to philosophy. This is intimately related to Phaedrus’s love for Socrates: there is already something inside the former that makes him worthy of Socrates’s time and it is Plato’s intention to express that. I shall note here that I understand worth in the sense of something or someone having value, personal importance or merit. Usefulness, on the other hand, refers to something or someone that is serving someone else’s purpose, brings an advantage to them.

I intend to argue that there is worth to Phaedrus, not mere practicality, which will be by the end connected to the character of Alcibiades and the Symposium. Phaedrus’s love for Socrates is crucial for understanding the former’s worth. Also, Socrates’s love for both Phaedrus and Alcibiades will help justify my position. No less important will be exploring ideas such as incompleteness and lack in both the Phaedrus and the Symposium. To anticipate, an important distinction must be made. We have on the one hand Socrates’s incompleteness (he knows that he does not know) and Phaedrus’s initial incompleteness (he does not know that he does not know). My conclusion will be that Griswold’s reading of the Phaedrus is problematic because it fails to recognize the crucial importance of the role of the other in Plato’s dialogues. This is why he talks about usefulness in his account of the Phaedrus. My reading of the Phaedrus acknowledges precisely the value of the other for the philosophical enterprise, by affirming Phaedrus’s worth.

**Socrates’ Attitude towards Phaedrus**

The first manner in which one can understand Phaedrus’s worth for Socrates is by looking at the latter’s attitude towards Phaedrus. Take

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It is interesting to see that Griswold also connects Phaedrus and Alcibiades. He misinterprets the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades as well and ends up stating the following: “The last section of the Symposium documents Socrates’s inability to get Alcibiades to understand and control his Eros. For all his mediocrity, Phaedrus is in a way closer to philosophy than is Alcibiades.” (Griswold, 1996, 22-23).
for example the first two lines of the dialogue. Socrates’s question proves to be the most meaningful question one can ask. This has to do with the idea of education as being a turning of the soul. Socrates’s question could be rephrased in the following manner: can we say that Phaedrus’s soul is turned into the right direction? From the first lines we understand that the two first questions are at stake for the whole dialogue. This is only the first clue that Socrates will be trying to seduce Phaedrus.

Socrates and Phaedrus embody the relationship between the erastes (adult, active lover and citizen) and eromenos (a young boy, the beloved who is yet to become an active citizen). In Ancient Greece, an educational relationship like this was a learning opportunity for the young boy. It was considered that homoerotic relationships strengthened civic bonds. This is why these relationships consisted in standardized practices of homoeroticism. The proper practice would imply that the relationship was not reciprocal. The boy would not sexually desire the lover. He was supposed to enter the relation out of admiration for the lover and for improving himself. The boy was supposed to play coy, seriously evaluate if the erastes deserved his favors. A positive erotic relationship needed to be transformed into philia when the passion was gone and the boy became an adult.

The dialogue starts by Socrates convincing Phaedrus to read him one of the speeches of Lysias, the famous rhetorician. Although Phaedrus is more than eager to do so, he pretends he is not comfortable

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6 “SOCRATES: Phaedrus, my friend! Where have you been? And where are you going?” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 227a).
7 As Richard Bernstein had pointed out.
8 One must also have in mind Phaedrus’s speech in the Symposium where he talks about “an army of lovers and beloveds, a productive, happy polity composed entirely of erastai and eromenoi.” (Wohl 1999, 356).
9 Victoria Wohl offers a detailed and complex analysis of this relationship and its relevance for Athenian democracy in “The Eros of Alcibiades”. She talks about a “democratic Eros” that “defined the Athenian citizen as socially autonomous and sexually dominant.” (51). I will come back to Wohl’s text in a following section of this paper.
doing it. He is playing the coquette. Phaedrus’s age is never mentioned in the dialogue. He is nevertheless known to have been around thirty or forty years old. Despite that, there are many instances in which he acts as a boy. This resistance, an inherent part of any game of seduction, is an important proof of the erotic nature of the relationship between the two characters of the dialogue.

Lysias’s speech deals with seduction through persuasion, aiming “at seducing a beautiful boy, but the speaker is not in love with him.” As we will find out later in the dialogue, for Plato, the soul is immortal because it is a self-moving mover. We might say that Phaedrus’s incompleteness consists precisely in his soul not showing self-movement. One can clearly observe that Phaedrus lacks autonomy at this point. He is more than ready to succumb to the “clever and elegant” speech of Lysias, enchanted by its form and not concerning himself with matters of content or truth. There is an already obvious difference between Socrates and Phaedrus when it comes to discourse. In the Symposium Phaedrus is named the father of speeches and he is the one starting the conversation about Eros. One would be tempted to say that their supposed shared passion for speeches is not quite the same. Despite that, what is of interest here for my purposes is the explicit erotic language defining Socrates’s and Phaedrus’s conversation.

They refer to each other also as friends, but they flirt and tease each other various times. Socrates speaks of him and Phaedrus using the image of two dance partners. His general attitude is affectionate and

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10 “Do you think that a mere dilettante like me could recite from memory in a manner worthy of him a speech that Lysias, the best of our writers, took such time and trouble to compose?” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 228a).

11 Plato, “Phaedrus”, 227c.

12 “Every soul is immortal. That is because whatever is always in motion is immortal. (…) So it is only what moves itself that never desists from motion, since it does not leave off being itself.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 245c).

13 Plato, “Phaedrus”, 227c.

14 Even Griswold notes how the words philē or philōtes appear constantly in the dialogue (Griswold 1996, 26).

15 “And running into a man [Socrates] who is sick with the passion for hearing speeches, seeing him, just seeing him – he was filled with delight: he had found a partner for his frenzied dance, and he urged him to lead the way.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 228b).
caring, although he is ironic in many instances. He knows very well who he is talking to and takes deep interest in Phaedrus. He even openly says to the latter: “I love you dearly.” One can only be surprised how someone, as Griswold does, could still sustain that Socrates is not considering Phaedrus to be worthy of his time. I consider the hypothesis of Socrates being completely ironical and deceitful every time he is affectionate to Phaedrus hard to be argued for. One can clearly see the game of seduction Socrates and Phaedrus constantly play. Also, the roles are reversed at some points, when Phaedrus is chasing Socrates, and not the other way around. One could then say that Socrates is not actually himself in this dialogue. A discussion of Socrates’s strange description of the countryside, where he and Phaedrus actually have their conversation exceeds my intentions. However, I want to stress the fact that Socrates is out of place only in his description of the scenery. His love for Phaedrus is rather a part of Socrates being his usual self.

For now, the most important aspect of the beginning of the Phaedrus is that Socrates knows very well that Phaedrus is extremely interested in hearing speeches. The former then proceeds to talk to the latter about his love for words, engaging in a meaningful and soul-turning dialogue. Socrates is trying here to take Phaedrus away from Lysias. Socrates’s intention is to seduce Phaedrus into an understanding of what love truly is. We can even talk about a contest between Lysias and Socrates for the soul (psyche) of Phaedrus. Why then would Socrates fight for a soul that is unworthy and try to prevent it from being seduced by anything but philosophy?

**The Final Step in Seducing Phaedrus into Philosophy**

Socrates’s affectionate attitude towards Phaedrus, his attempt at seducing him and turning his soul towards philosophy is an important

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16 “SOCRATES: Oh, Phaedrus, if I don’t know my Phaedrus I must be forgetting who I am myself.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 228a.)

17 Plato, “Phaedrus”, 228d.

18 “PHAEDRUS: And you, my remarkable friend, appear to be totally out of place.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 230d.)
and necessary step in proving Phaedrus’s worth. However, this is not sufficient. It is not enough to prove that Socrates is interested in Phaedrus. This is due to the fact that one can still maintain, as Griswold does, that Phaedrus is merely useful in Socrates’s pursuit of knowledge. Even if we recognize an erotic relation between the two, we could be faced with yet another objection. The erotic relationship, followed by philia could still be just a gateway and first step towards reaching true beauty, which would be the philosopher’s purpose. Phaedrus could still be merely useful to Socrates and disposable after accessing the form of Beauty itself. This is why it is necessary to further explore the way in which Socrates himself is incomplete. Also, it will prove helpful to look into the definition of Eros as not being a god in another dialogue, namely the Symposium. Before exploring all this, a last argument from the Phaedrus must be detailed.

There is a part in this dialogue (276a-277a) where we can already see why we must talk about Phaedrus as being worthy and not useful. Towards the end of the dialogue, Socrates emphasizes the importance of the right kind of speech. Socrates considers that the proper kind of discourse and the proper kind of writing is the one that aims at the soul of the listener. He is actually describing here what happens between him and Phaedrus. It can also be seen as a reference to the silence of Lysias’s speech, which is read by Phaedrus in Lysias’s absence. It is another way for Socrates to tell Phaedrus that it is the right decision to choose philosophy over (bad) rhetoric. Socrates is the “sensible farmer” he himself refers to. His use of the imagery of the seeds that are planted in the soul proves his belief in an inner worth of Phaedrus. Socrates talks about planting “the seeds he care[s] for” and the importance of when and where these seeds are planted. The mere decision of engaging in a

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19 “The nature of the speech is in fact to direct the soul.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 271d).
20 “It is a discourse that is written down, with knowledge in the soul of the listener; it can defend itself, and it knows for whom it should speak and for whom it should remain silent.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 276a).
21 Lysias himself cannot answer Socrates’s many questions and objections because he is present only through his written speech – which irremediably remains silent and undefended.
22 Plato, “Phaedrus”, 276b.
seduction of Phaedrus through dialogue shows that Phaedrus’s soul was worthy enough for Socrates to choose it among other souls. Plato is making Socrates express the idea that there is always an informed choice of the philosopher when he starts a dialogue with someone. Again, this is exactly the case with Phaedrus. Socrates, willingly and carefully selects Phaedrus’s soul to turn towards philosophy precisely because he recognizes it as being the right kind of soul to be turned to philosophy.

I find it highly unconvincing if someone would interpret this passage as referring to Phaedrus’s utility for Socrates. I consider the passage an important proof for the worthiness of Phaedrus, whose already fertile soul allows Socrates to plant a “discourse (...) which is not barren, but produces a seed from which more discourse grows.” Plato’s message seems to lead to the crucial importance of reciprocity, even though the relationship between the two characters of the dialogue remains asymmetric. It is not as if Socrates is merely using Phaedrus for his philosophical ascent towards a world of pure contemplation. Their dialogue takes place outside the city walls, but in the end they return to the city. The city is the place were Socrates feels to be himself, in contrast to how he feels in the countryside, where he is out of place (atopostatos).

Their friendship survives their return to the city. The whole dialogue

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23 “The dialectician chooses a proper soul and plants sows within it.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 276e).
24 This point is also made by L. Robin, quoted in Hadot’s book, What is ancient philosophy?: “The fruitful soul can fecundate and fructify only by its commerce with another soul, in which the necessary qualities [my emphasis] had been recognized. This commerce can be instituted only by living words and the daily interchange required by a life in common (...) for an indefinite future.” (Hadot 2002, 56).
26 After Socrates’ great speech, the one delivered to purify himself from the untruthfulness of his first speech, Phaedrus’s attitude has already changed. He says: “I join you in your prayer [for converting Phaedrus to philosophy]. (...) As to your speech, I admired it from the moment you began. (...) I’m afraid that Lysias’s effort to match it is bound to fall flat.”, Plato, “Phaedrus”, 257c.
27 As Cinzia Aruzzo pointed out, the Greek word is a superlative and can also mean absurdity.
28 In the last lines of the dialogue Phaedrus asks his beloved friend Socrates to pray for him as well: “Make a prayer for me as well. Friends have everything in common.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 279c).
shows how Socrates cares and takes care of Phaedrus’s soul. It is impossible to consider Socrates would love someone whose worth is uncertain. I consider this to be Plato’s intention and message. Philosophy turns out to be an existential\(^{29}\) practice that aims at gaining knowledge of the truth. In order for this to happen, one must transform oneself and Phaedrus rises to the challenge. Socrates already knows that. As this transformation occurs, the soul is changed and this leads to further transformation: knowing the truth restructures Phaedrus. The question then arises: how can someone’s soul be restructured unless they already had the possibility of this reshaping within them? This is one of the reasons why we should be speaking of worth and not instrumentality in the case of Phaedrus.

**Socrates’ Incompleteness**

As I have mentioned earlier, it is necessary to explore Socrates’s specific incompleteness. In order to do that, both the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* will prove to be relevant. We can already see in the *Phaedrus* how Socrates directly expresses his own lack. This has to do with him being aware that he cannot yet truly understand and know himself. It constitutes his main concern\(^{30}\). It is in this light that we should see Socrates’s desire to talk to people in general and to talk to Phaedrus in particular. Moreover, this is the reason why Socrates usually does not travel outside Athens: he has much more to learn from conversing with people than from anything else\(^{31}\). It is true that the *Phaedrus* takes place outside the city walls, but Socrates seems to be charmed mostly by

\(^{29}\) “This existential option (...) implies a certain vision of the world, and the task of philosophical discourse will therefore be to reveal and rationally justify this existential option, as well as this representation of the world.” (Hadot 2002, 3).

\(^{30}\) “But I have no time for such things; and the reason, my friend, is this. I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself; and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 230a).

\(^{31}\) “I am devoted to learning; landscapes and trees have nothing to teach – only the people in the city can do that.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 230d).
Phaedrus and by the possibility of a meaningful conversation with him. Again, one could say that Socrates is being ironic when he stresses the importance of learning from other people. They could then say that for him Phaedrus and everybody else is not even useful. I wish to reject this interpretation. Also, I find it hard to see how someone could still talk about Phaedrus as being useful from Socrates. This is due to the fact that the latter openly acknowledges the merit and worth of other people. Admitting to gain knowledge from others means already admitting their potential worth.

For both Socrates and Plato, the most valuable interaction with others is the erotic one. Socrates talks about Eros as being the most important form of divine madness (mania) in the Phaedrus\textsuperscript{32}. He is, of course, talking about the lover/beloved relationship\textsuperscript{33}. Socrates tells Phaedrus: “when someone who loves beautiful boys is touched by this madness, he is called a lover.”\textsuperscript{34} I consider that Socrates – and Plato for that matter – attributes value to the erotic interaction between an adult man and a young boy. Given that Phaedrus mostly plays the role of the beloved in the dialogue, we can say that his beauty reminds Socrates of true beauty\textsuperscript{35}. Phaedrus is the beautiful boy both Socrates and Lysias talk about in their respective speeches. It is true that his soul is not yet beautiful as Socrates’s soul might be, but Phaedrus’s value could consist in making Socrates recollect the vision of the form of Beauty. He cannot be just a replaceable element in Socrates journey towards the forms. In order to truly confirm my point, however, I must go beyond the Phaedrus. Although Plato offers us the image of the soul regaining the lost wings through love, one could still see mere utility in the love for a young boy. Again, Socrates’s love for Phaedrus and Phaedrus’s love for Socrates are necessary, but not sufficient proof.

\textsuperscript{32} “This is the best and noblest of all the forms that possession by god can take for anyone.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 249e).
\textsuperscript{33} Described in an earlier section of this paper.
\textsuperscript{34} Plato, “Phaedrus”, 249e.
\textsuperscript{35} “He sees the beauty we have down here and [the lover/philosopher] is reminded of true beauty; then he takes wing and flutters in his eagerness to rise up. (...) beauty was radiant to see at that time when the souls (...) saw that blessed and spectacular vision.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 249e-250b).
Two more mentions must be made before exploring the *Symposium*. First, true beauty can, in a certain sense, be grasped through our sight. It is the only form that appears in a sensorial way. This means that Eros is an access point to the contemplation of forms\(^{36}\). Beauty and Eros then constitute for Plato a bridge between humans and the forms. The interaction between the man and the particular beautiful boy is part of the philosophers’ ascent. For Plato, though, even after the passion is consumed, there is also a strong emotional attachment to be preserved. Even here utility seems to be terribly out of place. Second, the boy also feels erotic desire towards his older lover, but does not know what he loves\(^{37}\). Seeing himself in the lover’s eyes is like seeing himself in a mirror. The boy sees his own beauty, but not as a narcissistic enterprise. His physical beauty is acknowledged as a transition to the contemplation of the forms. This is a love that makes one aware of one’s beauty. Why would Socrates make Phaedrus aware of something like his beauty if he considered him unworthy? More than that, how could Socrates talk about true beauty in the case of Phaedrus if he envisioned their relation as being instrumental?

**Aristophanes’s Speech**

It is true that the androgynous myth offered by Aristophanes might appear as a strange way to talk about love in the *Symposium*. However, there is an important aspect of his speech that must be considered. The idea Plato expresses through him is precisely that human beings are characterized by a lack that is always seeking fulfillment\(^{38}\). Human beings desire and need each other\(^{39}\). Even from

\(^{36}\) We cannot deny the physical, sexual element in erotic relationships precisely because of the specificity of beauty, as Cinzia Aruzzo pointed out.

\(^{37}\) “Still, his desire is nearly the same as the lover’s is (…) though he never speaks nor thinks of it as love, but as friendship.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 255e).

\(^{38}\) As emphasized several times by Cinzia Aruzzo, also in the discussion about the *Phaedrus*. 
Aristophanes’ speech we can already see the crucial role of the other in Plato. It is not as if the other person is a mere means to and end or someone who can offer us only carnal pleasure. Physicality is definitely not denied by its importance, as desire for someone’s body has its origin in the soul. Added to it, an erotic relationship would also engage the other parts of the soul. It has to do also with a desire for unity, according to Aristophanes. Unfortunately, for the latter, love is considered to be a god. Socrates’ speech will correct that.

Diotima’s Speech: Love Is Not a God

Before even starting his speech, Socrates promises to offer a truthful account of love through his speech. It is important to note that he then attributes the words he is about to utter to a woman, Diotima – the priestess of Mantinea. All of the people present at the banquet and who gave speeches described Eros as a god. Socrates then starts by saying that Diotima contradicted him on this issue when he himself expressed a similar view. He had already proved Agathon that Love needs beauty and the good. Diotima is the first to convince Socrates that Eros is defined by need and desire for beauty and good, without being beautiful or a god. Eros is presented as an intermediary being. This follows the same logic as the one in which correct opinion.

39 “Each one longed for its own other half, and so they would throw their arms about each other, weaving themselves together, wanting to grow together. (...) Love is born into every human being.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 191bd).
40 “It’s obvious that the soul of every lover longs for something else; his soul cannot say what it is, but (...) it has a sense of what it wants.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 192d).
41 “You will hear the truth about love, and the words and phrasing will take care of themselves.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 199b).
42 One must not forget that Agathon was Socrates’s beautiful beloved and the poet celebrated at the feast described in the Symposium.
43 “Then if Love needs beautiful things, and if all good things are beautiful, he will need good things too.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 201c).
44 “What about Love? You agreed he needs good and beautiful things, and that’s why he desires them – because he does he needs them.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 202d).
45 “It’s judging things correctly without being able to give a reason. (...) it is in between understanding and ignorance.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 202a).
(ortodoxa) is situated between wisdom (sophia) and ignorance. Eros proves to be a daimon, “a great spirit”\[^{46}\] who is neither mortal nor immortal. His intermediary state makes him also a mediator between humans and the gods. This is one of the reasons why Pierre Hadot rightfully sees Socrates in Diotima’s description of Eros\[^{47}\]. Moreover, by defining Eros as a “lover of wisdom”\[^{48}\], Diotima identifies him with the philosopher in general\[^{49}\]. Love arises from need and lack of self-sufficiency and this is also the destiny of Socrates as a philosopher.

Also, Eros is the capacity of some human beings to transform their acknowledged condition of lack into access to reality, to the forms. When I say some human beings I have in mind Plato’s idea of people who are “ignorant” and who do not recognize their own ignorance\[^{50}\]. At first Phaedrus is one of them, but he is quickly urged by Socrates to move towards another type of incompleteness that belongs to the philosopher. The same happens to the supposedly untamable and controversial Alcibiades. Alcibiades’s more complicated case will be analyzed in the following section.

Returning to Diotima’s speech, one can find here a similar image to one found in the Phaedrus. Love is not only a desire for what is wise and beautiful, but also a desire for fecundity, Hadot observes. It is a desire “to immortalize oneself by producing” (Hadot 2002, 55). Diotima carefully makes the distinction between the fruitfulness of the body (giving birth to children) and the soul’s fruitfulness (giving birth to ideas)\[^{51}\]. In the Phaedrus we have this in the image of “impregnating minds”\[^{52}\] and the metaphor of the seeds, already discussed. This is the

\[^{46}\] Plato, “Symposium”, 202e.

\[^{47}\] “He is always poor, and he’s far from being delicate and beautiful. (…) he is tough and shriveled and shoeless and homeless.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 203d).

\[^{48}\] Plato, “Symposium”, 204b.

\[^{49}\] “Eros and Socrates personify (…) the figure of the philosopher.” (Hadot 2002, 41).

\[^{50}\] “For what’s especially difficult about being ignorant is that you are content with yourself, even though you’re neither beautiful and good nor intelligent.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 204a).

\[^{51}\] “All of us are pregnant, (…) both in body and in soul, and, as soon as we come to a certain age, we naturally desire to give birth.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 206c).

\[^{52}\] “Such discourse makes the seed forever immortal and renders the man who has it as happy as any human being can be.” (Plato, “Phaedrus”, 277a).
reason why Socrates is also represented as a midwife, helping his interlocutors give birth to their own truth (Hadot 2002, 27). Now we can better understand why Socratic dialogue is crucial for philosophy. This means that philosophy does not presuppose a lonely, detached enterprise. It is envisioned by Plato as a “community of life and dialogue between masters and disciples.” (56). If we agree with this interpretation of Plato’s intentions when writing his dialogues, then it is again very difficult to maintain a position even remotely similar to that of Griswold’s. It seems that seeing the relationship between Socrates and Phaedrus (and any other of his partners in dialogue) in terms of usefulness is a serious misunderstanding of what philosophy stands for. It is unconceivable to talk about utility in the interaction between master and disciple, although their relation is defined as asymmetrical. They are not using each other in the vulgar sense Griswold proposes. The dialogue itself is worth both their time53. This happens because of the acknowledged worth of both interlocutors. It is true though that this is more explicit in the Symposium than in the Phaedrus.

The idea of the soul being impregnated with the truth is correlated by Diotima with beauty. This can be seen in her description of lovers as “giving birth in beauty, whether in body or soul.”54 Beauty is a component of reproduction because of the divine nature of the latter. However, there is more value in the product of what we might call an intellectual reproduction. Again, the lover/beloved educational relationship55 is described here. It is through the other that we are reminded of beauty, of something that we have “been carrying inside (…) for ages”56. This is how true friendship is reached. I consider this to be an accurate description of what happens between Phaedrus and Socrates in the Phaedrus.

53 “Caring for ourselves and questioning ourselves occur only when our individuality is transcended and we rise to the level of universality, which is represented by what the two interlocutors have in common.” (Hadot 2002, 32).
55 “Such people therefore, have much more to share than do the parents of human children and have a firmer bond of friendship.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 209cd). The children that are given birth to in the homoerotic relationship are ideas, which are both truly beautiful and immortal, according to Plato.
Initiation into the Ritual of Love

The true challenge of Eros consists, according to Diotima, into mastering a certain path that must be followed, “through loving boys correctly.”57 This passage (210b-212c) is complex and problematic precisely for the question of value or worth I have been raising. Diotima describes the philosopher’s ascent from particular, bodily beauty to Beauty itself58. Before talking about the actual steps of this ascent, I must notice the verb to use59 in the translation of Plato’s text. Someone like Griswold would take this as a definitive proof of the beloved being instrumental and disposable after true Beauty is finally reached. I understand why someone would be tempted to interpret it like this, but I intend to explain this statement in relation with the entire passage about the destination of the philosopher’s journey. Also, in the Symposium the ascent seems to be presented as not being interrupted by any interior conflict. One might want to contrast this with what happens in the Phaedrus in the dramatic myth of the charioteer and the idea of the tri-partition of the soul.60

I will now come back to the steps towards “the sight of (...) knowledge”61 Diotima speaks of. Eros leads correctly from a particular beautiful body to every body that is beautiful, then to the realization that not physical beauty, but the beauty of the soul is truly relevant. The last step is to reach the Beauty of true knowledge or the true knowledge of Beauty.62 This is also a place of true virtue. One crucial point must be made explicit here. The particular boy with whom the ascent starts is not identical merely to his beautiful body. If it were the case, then we could indeed consider that he is eventually discarded and merely used. What the next step in the ascent presupposes is precisely the realization of a more

57 Plato, “Symposium”, 211c
58 “By itself, with itself; it is only one in form, and all the other beautiful things share in that” (Plato, “Symposium”, 211b).
59 “One goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using [my emphasis] them like rising stairs.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 211c).
60 This important difference between the Phaedrus and the Symposium had been mentioned by Cinzia Aruzzo. Added to this, Alcibiades’s entrance in the Symposium, might be seen as a sign of interior conflict. He could be a representative of the infamous black horse’s passion in the Phaedrus.
62 “In the end he comes to know what it is to be beautiful, (...) beholding this Beauty.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 211d).
important part of any particular boy, namely his soul. His physical beauty, although helpful, becomes irrelevant. The boy is still not irrelevant here. More than this, Phaedrus is not irrelevant to Socrates at any point. The value of the boy is truly recognized when the philosopher understands that he should go beyond his passion for a beautiful body. The beauty of the body reminds him of the beauty of the soul. The moment when the boy is truly valued is when his soul begins to be cared for and taken care of. So, when we are talking about the soul (psyche), instrumentality seems inappropriate. In order to understand why Phaedrus is valuable and needed even after contemplating the forms, I shall return to the idea of dialectics present in the Phaedrus and in Plato in general.

Socrates’ Incompleteness Reconsidered

We must correlate the image of the ladder used in the Symposium with the importance of a certain type of dialogue in Plato’s work. This is present explicitly in the Phaedrus. The dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus, the constant interaction between the lover and the beloved can be envisioned as a perpetual traversing of all the steps required by true Love. Socrates’s incompleteness can be better understood in this light. He acknowledges both his and Phaedrus’s troubles within the soul, although they may be different at first. He is indeed leading Phaedrus through his transformation, but this itself is part of his own effort towards reaching knowledge. Hadot points to the difficulty of holding onto wisdom once it has been reached as part of the philosopher’s destiny. This is why philosophy has to do with the constant desire for wisdom par excellence. Hadot stresses the fact that Socrates indeed tests his partners in conversation, but also himself. It is true that Phaedrus in this instance is a step towards a destination that should be final: the realm of the forms.

63 “He will think that the beauty of bodies is a thing of no importance.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 210c).
64 “Our lover must be content to love and care for him and to seek to give birth to such ideas as will make young men better.” (Plato, “Symposium”, 210c).
65 “Such wisdom is never acquired once and for all. It is not only others that Socrates never stops testing, but also himself. (...) Self-transformation is never definitive, but demands perpetual reconquest.” (Hadot 2002, 36).
However, this destination must be perpetually won, or at least this seems to be Plato’s message. This is why Socrates’s need for Phaedrus should be defined in terms of worth. Moreover, this is why philosophy involves a life choice and not an isolated, singular event. One must be reminded here again that in the Phaedrus, Socrates and Phaedrus eventually return to the city, where Socrates willfully decided to spend all of his life. The philosopher is indeed an intermediate between this world and the world of the forms, but his life must be spent in the company of other people whose value he inevitably recognizes. It seems now that we have escaped the possibility in which a particular beloved is disposable and lacks true worth. To conclude this section, we must admit, along with Hadot, that Socrates was always the first to emphasize the necessity of “living contact between human beings” (Hadot 2002, 60) and that Plato agreed with him on this topic. I would add that the basis of this view lays in a firm belief in the worth and possibility of transformation (askesis) of other people’s souls.

Alcibiades’s Untamed Eros

I will now focus shortly on Alcibiades in the Symposium. I do this not only because Griswold talks about it. The other reason is that I consider it to reinforce the idea of Phaedrus’s value, which has been my main concern here. As I have mentioned before, Alcibiades is considered to be even less worthy of Socrates’s time than Phaedrus. Socrates has completely failed in turning the controversial Alcibiades to philosophy,

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66 This is what Hadot means when he says that “the philosopher will never attain wisdom, but he can make progress in its direction. According to the Symposium, then, philosophy is not wisdom, but a way of life and discourse determined by the idea of wisdom.” (Hadot 2002, 46).

67 I will only mention the distinction Wohl makes between the democratic Eros, socially accepted in Ancient Greece (it defines the relationship between Phaedrus and Socrates) and the tyrannical Eros, unconsciously both desired and rejected by the Greeks. The latter belongs to Alcibiades, who actually “queers (…) the very distinction between good and bad eros.” (Wohl 1999, 365-366).

68 My very short account of Alcibiades should not be seen as an incapacity to understand his importance for the whole dialogue or that I deny that much more could be said about him.
according to Griswold. Victoria Wohl offers a complex discussion of Alcibiades as a real person. I only want to point to her account of the Symposium. For her, Plato’s dialogue is a place where the strange Eros of Alcibiades can be accepted. More than that, this Eros is crucial for both Socrates and Plato. One already sees here the stubborn passion of the black horse in the Phaedrus, making love and knowledge possible. Alcibiades’s portrayal of Socrates in the Symposium shows how deeply Socrates had moved his soul. Wohl offers a key to understanding both Alcibiades’s and Phaedrus’s worth. Alcibiades’s worth consists in him being “a manifestation of Absolute Beauty”, says Wohl. The same could be said about Phaedrus as well. I consider Socrates to be able to find true beauty in both of them. His task is more difficult with Alcibiades, but he succeeds eventually.

If even Alcibiades’s worth is thus affirmed, how can Phaedrus’s still not be? Griswold’s perspective remains extremely questionable.

Conclusions

My analysis started from some comments made by Charles Griswold in connection to the relationship between Phaedrus and Socrates in the Phaedrus. He implies that Phaedrus is not worthy of Socrates’s time because he is mediocre. Their interaction would then be merely useful to Socrates in his pursuit of knowledge.

The first step in arguing against this position was to point to Socrates’s attitude towards Phaedrus. The former is affectionate and cares about his partner in conversation. Socrates sees beauty in Phaedrus and wants to turn the latter’s soul towards philosophy. This is a first sign of an inner worth of Phaedrus. However, I realized it not to be enough, although the two of them have an erotic relationship. Phaedrus

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69 Wohl sees “Alcibiades’s eros as a central element of Socratic philosophy.” His “sexuality (…) is foundational.” (Wohl 1999, 376-378).

70 Alcibiades is “merely an admirer of the supreme love that is embodied in the most valuable love-object, Socrates and his philosophy.” (Wohl 1999, 378).

71 “Thus Socrates, by the magical and demonic effect of his life and his speech, forces Alcibiades to question himself and admit that his life is not worth living if he behaves as he does.” (Hadot 2002, 47).
proves to be incomplete in the sense of lacking even the awareness of his own ignorance. This is where Socrates steps in. The metaphor of the dialectician planting seeds in a proper soul, as presented by Plato in the *Phaedrus*, strengthened my argumentation. A proper soul has worth and not mere utility.

A second step involved discussing Socrates’s incompleteness, which proved to be the philosopher’s incompleteness. It is recognition of lack. Socrates needs and desires a knowledge he is aware he does not yet possess. This was seen operating both in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. This is the reason why I proceeded in analyzing Aristophanes’s and Diotima’s speeches from the *Symposium*. According to Diotima, Love is not a god. Eros is presented as an intermediate between humanity and the gods. Diotima’s description of Eros coincides with Socrates’s figure and with the figure of the philosopher in general. It also made clearer the reason why Socrates engages in a meaningful conversation with Phaedrus after all. This also hinted to the actual worth of Phaedrus that defines Socrates’s position towards him.

A third step dealt with the philosopher’s ascent present in Diotima’s speech. Although this passage remains problematic, I tried to offer an interpretation that served my main purpose. The main idea was to stress on the fact that the physical beauty of a young boy does not define him completely. When the philosopher (Socrates) acknowledges the relevance of the beauty of the soul of his partner in dialogue, he actually acknowledges his worth. I sustained that this is the case with Phaedrus as well.

A last step was to connect Phaedrus’s character with Alcibiades’s character in the *Symposium*. Victoria Wohl’s account of the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades proved to be extremely helpful. Socrates sees true beauty in Alcibiades, which then confirms even Alcibiades’s worth. I applied this to Phaedrus as well. By the end of my enterprise I came to realize the reason why Griswold’s interpretation was so disturbing for me. Griswold had misunderstood the crucial importance of the role of the other in Plato’s dialogues. This is why he talks about usefulness in his account of the *Phaedrus*. My argumentation can be read then not only as an attempt to prove Phaedrus’s worth and crucial importance for Socrates. More than this, it can be taken as an
account of the crucial role of the other for the philosophical enterprise. It is also a way of offering a tentative solution for the problems raised by the ascent of the philosopher towards true knowledge in Diotima’s speech. My conclusion is then that the other is not merely left behind and treated as a means to an end. He is an engaged partner whose worth consists in taking part in a constant effort for understanding and reaching the truth.

REFERENCES