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The Role of the Interlocutor in Plato's Dialogues
Theory and Practice

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ἔστι δὲ ἴσως τὸ διαλεκτικώτερον μὴ μόνον τἀληθῆ ἀποκρίνεσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ δι' ἐκείνων ὧν ἂν προσομολογῇ εἰδέναι ὁ ἐρωτώμενος.

And perhaps the more dialectical manner is to give answers which are not only true, but made in terms of what the respondent agrees he knows.

(Meno 75d 5–7)

I

When Socrates sets responsiveness to the interlocutor beside devotion to the truth as a distinctive feature of dialectic, he gives expression to the idea underlying the importance of characterization in Plato's work. It is essential to dialectic as Plato portrays it that argument should not be unvarying, indifferent to the participants, but should rather be sensitive to the individual respondent in any dispute. The respondent is repeatedly urged to say only what he believes;[1] Socrates in turn is bound to take account of these beliefs in his argument. Such sensitivity to the respondent may have the result that Socrates' success in enquiry varies according to his interlocutor, as is suggested by the comment which Glaucon adds to his encouragement as Socrates prepares to defend his assertion that philosophers should rule: καὶ ἴσως ἂν ἄλλου του ἐμμελέστερόν σοι ἀποκρινοίμην

[1] See e.g. *Cri.* 49c11–d1; *Gorg.* 495a7–9; *Rep.* 1. 350e5; and the discussion, with further instances, in G. Vlastos, 'The Socratic Elenchus', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1 (1983), 27–58.

['And perhaps my replies may be more in harmony with your questions than someone else's'] (*Rep.* 5. 474a8–b1).[2] So too, the very form which Socrates' arguments take is influenced by the character, ability, and position of the respondent.[3]

Accordingly, the choice and characterization of interlocutors for a dialogue must be important to Plato; for it is intimately related to the development of the argument, and so to the precise thought expressed. Equally, for interpreters, understanding a dialogue calls for consideration of arguments and interlocutors together, just as in a Socratic enquiry both a thesis and its supporter are tested at once.[4] The appropriateness of Plato's style of composition to his philosophy appears partly in the fact that in both, different strands are closely related and throw light on one another, without its being possible to identify one as the fundamental element from which all explanation must start.[5] Thus, of Plato's ethics and his epistemology, neither should be regarded as more basic than the other; understanding is enhanced by seeing their appropriateness to each other and to the whole philosophy of which they are equally fundamental aspects. The same is true of argument and characterization as elements in the composition of a dialogue. Neither can be treated as the key to understanding of the other and of the dialogue as a whole; but the significance of each is most fully grasped in comprehending their relation to each other and their appropriateness to Plato's concerns in the work.

II

Socrates' remark in the *Meno* concerning the importance of responsiveness to the interlocutor is made in the context of a contrast between dialectic and eristic. In the recurrent

[2] Cf. *Tht.* 185e and *Euthyd.* 282c, where Socrates acknowledges that his interlocutors' replies have made his task easier. A helpful respondent need not violate the requirement of sincerity; Parmenides believes that the youngest disputant will be the most suitable respondent on both grounds (*Parm.* 137b6–7).

[3] For an analysis of the relation between particular arguments and the figures to whom they are addressed, see C. H. Kahn, 'Drama and Dialectic in Plato's *Gorgias*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1 (1983), 75–121.

[4] See *Prt.* 331c3–d1, 333c7–9.

[5] The difficulty of deciding on a suitable starting-point for the study of Plato has long been acknowledged; see e.g. Albinus, *Introductio* 4–6.

confrontations portrayed in the dialogues between Socrates and the representatives of rival methods of discourse and argument, this contrast is embodied; and these encounters play a large part in making clear the depth of Plato's concern for the personal nature of dialectic. The practitioners of rhetoric and sophistry whom Socrates faces are portrayed as deficient with regard to both of Socrates' requirements for dialectic; and a connection is drawn between their indifference to the truth and to their individual respondents.

In the *Euthydemus*, the eristic brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are represented from the outset as indifferent to the truth: their skill lies in refuting any statement, true as well as false (272a8–b1). Their equal lack of concern for their respondents is epitomized in Euthydemus' dissociation of himself from Socrates at 296. Socrates has expressed a fear that statements made without proper qualification may lead to difficulties in the argument: *ἀλλ' ὅπως μή τι ἡμᾶς σφήλῃ τὸ "ἀεὶ" τοῦτο* ['But I am afraid this "always" may trip us up'] (296a9); to which Euthydemus retorts that any difficulty will affect Socrates alone, not the two brothers: *οὔκουν ἡμᾶς γ', ἔφη, ἀλλ' εἴπερ, σέ* ['"Not us, at any rate," he said, "but if anyone, you."'] (296b1).[6] Typical of the brothers' combative approach to argument (Socrates' initial description of them, at 271c–272b, is rich in words of conflict and competitiveness[7]), this dissociation and opposition excludes the adaptation to a particular interlocutor's needs and abilities which Socrates demands from dialectic.

Dionysodorus manifests the twofold indifference of the eristics in a particularly telling way as he and his brother begin to demonstrate their skill by questioning the young Cleinias.

[6] R. S. W. Hawtrey, *Commentary on Plato's* Euthydemus (Philadelphia, 1981), ad loc., notes that Euthydemus repeats Socrates' *ἡμᾶς* ['us'] while changing the reference to exclude Socrates himself; this emphasizes the effect of dissociation. Cf. *Meno* 75d1–3, where the opposition *ἐμοὶ μὲν εἴρηται . . . σὸν ἔργον λαμβάνειν λόγον καὶ ἐλέγχειν* ['I have made my statement . . . it's your job to exact an account and refute me'], typical of eristic, is contrasted with the co-operative *ἐγώ τε καὶ σύ* ['you and I'] of dialectic. It is, of course, characteristic of Socrates to maintain that both difficulties and advances in argument are shared by all the participants: see e.g. *Charm.* 166d4–6; *Gorg.* 505e6.

[7] At 271–2, note: *παγκρατιασταί, παγκρατιαστά* (271c7, 8); *παγκρατιαστικῇ* (272a5); *παμμάχω* (271c7); *μάχεσθαι* (271d1, 3, 272a8); *μάχην, μάχη* (272a2, 6); *ἀγωνίσασθαι* (272a2); *ἀντᾶραι* (272a7).

Whatever answer the boy makes to Euthydemus' first question, Dionysodorus predicts to Socrates, he will be refuted (275e5–6). Cleinias is treated here with the lack of concern for his beliefs and understanding from which Socrates also suffers later as the sophists' respondent. Euthydemus insists that Socrates should answer the questions put to him without ensuring that he understands them, or understands them in the same sense as the questioner (295b–c).[8] In the same way, any interest in the particular reply chosen by Cleinias is ruled out in advance (whereas Socrates has just urged him to make the reply which he thinks true: *ἀπόκριναι ἀνδρείως, ὁπότερά σοι φαίνεται* (275e1)). For the sophists' purposes, Cleinias' answer is simply material for the refutation which is their ultimate concern; and from this perspective, his understanding of the question, and his intention in answering, are irrelevant. At the same time, Dionysodorus' prediction clearly echoes and confirms Socrates' charge that the brothers are ready to refute any statement regardless of its truth or falsity. Dionysodorus is no more interested in the truth of the answer to be refuted than in the beliefs which prompt Cleinias to make it. Socrates' later analysis (277e–278b) of the sophists' opening questions and their ambiguities indicates how attention to the sense in which the respondent interpreted the question and intended his answer could lead to an increased understanding of the subject under discussion.[9] The brothers' failure to recognize the search for truth as a purpose in argument beyond that of victory over an opponent is of a piece with their lack of interest in the identity of their respondent and his understanding of the issues.[10] They lack the devotion to truth which will lead Socrates to his death (an outcome alluded to, in a burlesque tone suited to that of the dialogue as a whole, at 285a–c); and this deficiency is inseparably

[8] See the comments of Hawtrey ad loc.

[9] Cf. *Gorg.* 454b9–c5, where Socrates connects the progress of the argument with understanding his interlocutor's intention.

[10] Their indifference to the identity of the respondent extends to that of the questioner. If the sense in which a question is understood makes no difference to the course of the argument, then it does not matter either who asks or who answers it. Accordingly, from 277b onwards, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus put questions interchangeably. Socrates' recognition of, and resignation to, this approach to argument is reflected in his request at 282d7–8: *σφῷν δὲ ὁπότερος βούλεται . . . ἐπιδειξάτω* ['one of you demonstrate, whichever wants to'].

linked to their failure to show Socrates' concern for the respondent's well-being (275a–b, 277d2–4, 283b–c) and for mutual understanding between the disputants (295b–c).

Given the important place of sensitivity to the respondent in comparisons between dialectic and rival methods, Socrates' apologetic comments in the *Gorgias* on his unwonted long speeches (*μακρολογία*, 465e–466a, 519d–e) can be seen as more than an acknowledgement that he is speaking out of character.[11] Rather, they make an important contribution to the dialogue's contrasting representations of dialectic and of rhetoric.[12] In insisting that he is driven to make long speeches by Polus' incomprehension (465e5–6) and Callicles' refusal to co-operate (519d6–7, e2), Socrates represents even his departures from the brevity (*βραχυλογία*) of dialectic, with its constant reference to the interlocutor, as springing from that adaptation to the respondent's needs and character which is portrayed as typifying dialectic, and which rhetoric, in contrast, is seen as lacking. Rhetorical *μακρολογία* is dictated by the speaker's inclinations, not by the needs of the respondent—so Polus asks indignantly: *οὐκ ἐξέσται μοι λέγειν ὁπόσα ἂν βούλωμαι*; ['Shall I not be allowed to say *as much as I want to*?'] (461d8–9).[13] Plato makes Socrates adapt the standard rhetorical plea that one's adversary compels one to speak, so as to express a truth concerning the nature of dialectic about which he cares deeply.[14]

In the *Gorgias*, moreover, a further dimension of the relation between the *Meno*'s two requirements for dialectic can be discerned. Socrates insists explicitly on the merits in an enquiry of

[11] Contrast E. R. Dodds' *comm.* (Oxford, 1959), 17, 232.

[12] Compare the effect, at 463e1, of Socrates' comment that he is speaking obscurely—a fault with which he has previously charged Gorgias (451d9–e1). Socrates' acknowledgement that his own argument shows a characteristic whose unconscious use he criticizes in the rhetorician suggests that as in the case of *μακρολογία*, he is exploiting this feature deliberately for an end consonant with the nature of dialectic—in this case, the use of enigmatic pronouncements to stimulate the interlocutor's thought.

[13] Cf. *Prt.* 334e5–6: *μακρὰ λέγειν, ἐὰν βούλῃ . . . καὶ αὖ βραχέα* ['to speak at length, *if you so wish* . . . and concisely in turn']; and Protagoras' acknowledgement, at 335a, that adaptation of his style to his interlocutor's needs would be detrimental to his own interests.

[14] See esp. 519d5–6, *ὡς ἀληθῶς δημηγορεῖν με ἠνάγκασας* ['you have really forced me to play the orator'] (also 505e2–3: *κινδυνεύει ἀναγκαιότατον εἶναι* ['it seems to be absolutely necessary'], of Socrates' monologue); cf. Dem. 18. 256; Lys. 3. 3.

argument with a single interlocutor, taking into account that interlocutor's beliefs and objections (471d–472d, 474a, 475e). In addition, however, the insistence on dialectical responsiveness to the interlocutor is an element in Plato's representation of dialectic and rhetoric as mirroring the ways of life for which the practitioners of each argue.[15] In the dialectician's readiness to adapt his style of argument to his interlocutor is mirrored the acknowledgement that one is part of a whole, and must take into account one's relation to other parts, for which Socrates contends; while the lack of flexibility with which rhetoric is charged finds its counterpart in the self-regarding career advocated by Callicles.

Now it is part of Socrates' concern in his arguments with Gorgias to convince the rhetorician that a form of discourse cannot be morally neutral. Rhetoric and dialectic are not simply alternative methods of discussing life, but are themselves elements in particular ways of life; it is a mistake to suppose that the choice of one or the other does not commit the agent morally.[16] It is for this reason that Socrates can represent the dispute as a comparison at once of opposing ways of life and of opposing methods of argument.[17] Thus it is appropriate to this dialogue in particular that the truth concerning Socrates' central question, how best to live, should be represented as necessarily attained through a method of argument which is in accordance with this truth and is in fact an element in the fulfilment of its requirements. Socrates' failure to convince Callicles is thus enacted in the latter's refusal to participate in the co-operation of dialectic; the necessity of abandoning the principle of close interaction between disputants gains an

[15] Compare the appropriateness of Socrates' orderly approach to argument, possibly foreshadowing the method of collection and division (see Dodds, comm., 17, 226–7), to the view which he advocates of the universe as a *κόσμος* governed by *ἰσότης γεωμετρική*, an ordered whole governed by geometrical equality.

[16] Cf. *Cra.* 387b8–9, where *λέγειν* is agreed to be a *πρᾶξις*.

[17] With 472c4–6—*παραβαλόντες οὖν παρ' ἀλλήλους σκεψώμεθα εἴ τι διοίσουσιν ἀλλήλων* ['let us compare them with each other and consider whether they differ at all'] (referring to Socrates' and Polus' rival *ἔλεγχοι*, but immediately followed by an emphatic statement of the importance of the question how one should live)—compare 500d2–4: *εἰ ἔστιν τούτω διττὼ τὼ βίω, σκέψασθαι τί τε διαφέρετον ἀλλήλοιν καὶ ὁπότερον βιωτέον αὐτοῖν* ['if these are two distinct ways of life, consider how they differ from each other and in which of the two we should live'].

added bitterness from that principle's intimate relation to the position which Socrates maintains.[18]

The close connection between style of argument and philosophical position which emerges so clearly from the *Gorgias* means that even Socrates' more incidental remarks concerning the conduct of an enquiry should be treated as not merely casual, but related to the concerns of the work in which they occur.[19] Thus Socrates' insistence in the *Meno* that the dialectician should speak the truth in terms comprehensible to the respondent gains added point in the context of the dialogue's exploration of the nature of ἐπιστήμη ['understanding']. Plato represents ἐπιστήμη as a form of cognition which, contrary to the implications of Meno's initial question, ἔχεις μοι εἰπεῖν; ['Can you tell me?'] (70a1), or of his reliance on Gorgias (71c–d), cannot be attained simply by memorizing what one is told. The learner must be less passive than Meno suggests, making an effort which extends beyond memorizing to understanding what is learned.[20] As such understanding involves grasping the significance of an item of knowledge not just in isolation, but in its relation to other items, it is easy to see that, from the point of view of the respondent, a successful enquiry calls for expression of the truth in familiar and intelligible terms.[21]

[18] T. H. Irwin, 'Coercion and Objectivity in Plato's Dialectic', *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 156–7 (1986), 49–74, maintains that Socrates' success is not diminished by Callicles' obduracy: 'since Socrates' aim was to argue for the truth of his position through Callicles' agreement, not to persuade Callicles, failure to persuade Callicles is no objection to the argument. For Socrates has secured what he wanted, Callicles' agreement to the crucial claims that define the outlook of a rational agent' (70). While I agree that Callicles' refusal to co-operate does not constitute an objection to Socrates' argument as such, I still hold that Socrates' success in establishing his conclusion must be to some extent undermined when he is forced to abandon the style of argument which has been so closely connected with his beliefs throughout the dialogue.

[19] Note, for instance, that in *Rep.* 10 Socrates' initial dismissal of his reluctance to criticize Homer (ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ πρό γε τῆς ἀληθείας τιμητέος ἀνήρ ['But we must not show more respect to a man than to the truth'] (595c2–3)) encapsulates the philosopher's recognition that no human affair is ἄξιον . . . μεγάλης σπουδῆς ['worthy of serious attention'] (604b12–c1), which is central to the criticism of poetry.

[20] On ἐπιστήμη in Plato as understanding, see J. M. E. Moravcsik, 'Understanding and Knowledge in Plato's Philosophy', *Neue Hefte für Philosophie*, 15–16 (1979), 53–69; S. Scolnicov, 'Three Aspects of Plato's Philosophy of Learning and Instruction', *Paideia*, 5 (1976) [Special Plato Issue]; and on the *Meno* in particular, see e.g. K. V. Wilkes, 'Conclusions in the *Meno*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 61 (1979), 143–53.

[21] Cf. R. Demos, 'On Persuasion', *Journal of Philosophy*, 29 (1932), 225–32, on the importance of integrating new ideas with the background of one's existing knowledge and beliefs.

The treatment in the dialogues of the theme of Socrates' consistency casts light on the manner in which, for the questioner as well, adaptation of his argument to suit his interlocutor is necessarily involved in his attempt to express and extend his understanding of a constant truth. One expression of the fundamental opposition between Socrates and Callicles appears in their different attitudes to the charge of always saying the same things: it is a reproach in Callicles' eyes, but for Socrates the reverse is true (*Gorg.* 491b5–8). Socrates is proud to admit that he says ταὐτὰ . . . περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ['the same things . . . about the same things'] (490e9–11); in this he reaffirms his earlier emphasis on the importance of consistency (481d–482c). Callicles interprets this claim in the sense of literal verbal consistency and the use of the same examples: (ἀεὶ σκυτέας τε καὶ κναφέας καὶ μαγείρους λέγων καὶ ἰατροὺς οὐδέν παύῃ ['you never stop talking about cobblers and fullers and cooks and doctors'] (491a1–2); Alcibiades gives a similar account of his assertion that Socrates ἀεὶ διὰ τῶν αὐτῶν τὰ αὐτὰ φαίνεται λέγειν (*Smp.* 221e5–6). Alcibiades' encomium, however, follows a speech in which Socrates leaves behind his accustomed examples; despite the attribution of the speech to Diotima, the contrast is such as to suggest that the consistency which matters to Socrates is other than verbal.

Verbal repetition can in fact be represented as a fault; and as a fault which detracts from Socratic consistency. Socrates' complaint in the *Phaedrus*, that a written text ἕν τι σημαίνει μόνον ταὐτὸν ἀεί ['always says just one and the same thing'] (275d9), looks initially very like his own claim always to say ταὐτὰ περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν; from his confrontations elsewhere with sophists and rhetoricians, it can be seen how they differ. The manner of 'saying the same things' which is a fault shared by rhetoricians with written texts is exemplified when Polus, in reply to Chaerephon's question as to the nature of rhetoric, delivers what has every appearance of being a prepared encomium (*Gorg.* 448c), kept ready—like Hippias' discourse on Simonides (*Prt.* 347a6–b2)—for production at any opportunity.[22] Such repetition,

[22] Another variety of rhetorical repetition, the use of stock themes and commonplaces regardless of whether they are applicable on a particular occasion, receives its most extreme illustration in the *Menexenus*. On repetition as a feature of rhetoric reaching its height in funeral speeches, see N. Loraux, 'Socrate contrepoison de l'oraison funèbre', *L'Antiquité classique*, 43 (1974), 172–211.

paying no attention to the particular question asked, is of no assistance to a bewildered listener, as Socrates points out at *Protagoras* 329a. Nor, however, does it assist the speaker himself in his grasp and expression of the truth. The rhetorician who repeats a prepared speech, in failing to answer a particular question, fails to engage at all in conversation with the questioner. Socratic consistency, however, calls for the ability to maintain a constant position in successive arguments, rather than avoiding argument by repeating a verbally constant *non sequitur*. Moreover, if understanding involves the comprehension of a truth's relation to other ideas, it is both exercised and extended in discerning the form of expression best adapted to meet a particular question springing from a particular set of beliefs and interests. The verbal repetition which Socrates criticizes masks a deficiency in the type of understanding which Socratic consistency reflects. The nature of understanding is such that the flexibility of dialectic is necessary to Socrates' consistency; and thus responsiveness to the interlocutor is no additional feature of dialectic's truthfulness, but an essential part of it.

The contrast in this respect between rhetoric and dialectic has a still further dimension. Rhetoric is portrayed as deficient in sensitivity to an individual respondent's needs; yet it is at the same time a form of discourse in which the speaker is crucially concerned with the impression made on his audience.[23] With an irony typical of Plato's treatment of rhetoric, the rhetorician is seen, in substituting the persuasion of an audience for the pursuit of truth and the responsiveness to the interlocutor which is bound up with it, to submit after all to dependence on another. Accommodation of others' needs is not avoided by abandoning the pursuit of truth; it reappears in a debased, parodic form, becoming a matter of dependence rather than voluntary interaction.[24]

[23] On the different positions of audience and interlocutor in rhetoric and dialectic, as well as on the equal importance ascribed in dialectic to the interlocutor and the discourse itself, see R. Burke, 'Rhetoric, Dialectic and Force', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 7 (1974), 154–65.

[24] Cf. the representation in *Rep.* 10 of the poet as dependent on the whim of his audience by reason of his lack of knowledge (602b1–4). In contrast, the *ἐπιεικής* ['good, reasonable man'] whose concern is to secure the rule of reason in his soul, is simply strengthened in this resolve by the presence of an audience (603e–604a).

The different positions of audience and interlocutor, and the different forms of attention paid to each, thus become part of Plato's ironic treatment of the autonomy claimed by poetry and rhetoric. These art-forms are seen as attempting to exist as autonomous *τέχναι*, with aims and standards of their own, distinct from those of philosophy; but Plato represents the attempt as resulting, not in autonomy, but in increased dependence. Rhetoric and poetry become, not arts to be judged on their own terms, by distinct standards, but heteronomous pursuits, dependent for their existence, and for the form which they take, on genuine *τέχναι*.[25] Plato represents the attempt to engage in a pursuit independent of the goals and standards of philosophy as self-defeating—not merely the wrong choice, but not even the choice of a valid alternative. He expresses this idea of the heteronomy of such pursuits partly through his treatment of their goals; a pursuit inspired by aims other than those of philosophy is portrayed as finding these aims impossible to fulfil.[26] Failing to fulfil the ideals of philosophy, the rhetorician also fails, both in his art and in the life which corresponds to it, to attain the goals which he attempted to substitute for them; he is left, ironically, with a debased version of the ideals which he rejected. In the *Gorgias* in particular, Socrates' interlocutors are so treated as to emphasize their failure in their own terms as well as their inadequacy in comparison with Socrates.[27] In part, this emerges in respect of the relation to others which the interlocutors envisage. In the life corresponding to the practice of rhetoric, Callicles advocates the pursuit of self-advantage, unhampered by the philosopher's concern for the well-being of

[25] Rhetoric is *πολιτικῆς μορίου εἴδωλον* ['the image of a part of statesmanship'] (*Gorg.* 463d2), cleverly mimicking *δικαιοσύνη* ['justice']. In *Rep.* 10 Socrates applies to the activity of *μίμησις* ['representation'] language similar to that which he uses to describe the intermediate, dependent status of particulars: *τινὶ μὲν τρόπῳ γενέσθαι ἂν τούτων ἁπάντων ποιητής, τινὶ δὲ οὐκ ἄν* ['to prove to be a creator of all these things in one sense, but not in another'] (596d3–4). See also A. Nehamas, 'Plato on Imitation and Poetry in *Republic* 10', in J. M. E. Moravcsik and P. Temko (edd.), *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom and the Arts* (New Jersey, 1982), 47–78.

[26] Cf. the suggestive remark of J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's* Republic (Oxford, 1981), 297: the timocratic man fails to live up to his ideals 'because they are inadequate'—not because he is attempting to meet the impossibly high standards of philosophy.

[27] See the discussion of this theme by A. Spitzer, 'The Self-Reference of the *Gorgias*', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 8 (1975), 1–22 repr. in K. V. Erickson (ed.), *Plato: True and Sophistic Rhetoric* (Amsterdam, 1979), 129–51.

others. Socrates points out to him, however, that he cannot be as independent as he supposes; he is and will remain reliant on the caprice of the *dēmos* (481d–e, 513a–b).[28] So the voluntary consideration of others which is a part of Socrates' position reappears as a caricature in the dependence which Callicles tries unsuccessfully to avoid. A similar dependence afflicts the rhetoric which reflects and is a part of this way of life. A means of attaining power over others (452d–e, 456a–c), exercised without regard for the needs of individuals in argument, rhetoric none the less subjects its practitioner, in his concern for appearance, to the whim of his audience. Consideration of others, both in life and in discourse, is, Plato suggests, unavoidable; but it may take the form of a fruitful, voluntary interaction or of a reluctant dependence according to whether it is chosen as part of the life of philosophy or results ironically from a vain attempt to live independently of philosophy's demands.

III

Plato's interest in the interlocutor's role in dialectic, seen as one among the closely related elements of his philosophy, is matched by the practical importance of characterization in his writing. The characterization of interlocutors has a significant contribution to make to the presentation of his concerns in a dialogue. Some of Socrates' interlocutors, in their character and their influence on the course of his arguments, may be less congenial to his purposes than others.[29] For Plato, however, even these apparently less satisfactory figures are chosen as suited to some design. In any dialogue, it is necessary to consider the relation of the interlocutors' characters to the questions at issue and Plato's manner of treating them. Thus in the

[28] Callicles' failure to avoid dependence on common opinion is foreshadowed when he quotes such opinion in the opening words of the dialogue (447a1–2), just as the sentiment there expressed is suggestive of the form of hedonism to which he will be represented as committed, despite his distaste for some of its consequences.

[29] See the comment of Glaucon's quoted in the first para. of this chapter. While rhetoric is represented as inherently self-defeating, in an imperfect world dialectic too may become so, in that confrontation with an obdurate interlocutor may necessitate a compromising of its principles. This is suggested by the wry tone of Socrates' comments on his concessions to Polus and Callicles (*Gorg.* 465e, 519d–e) and to Meno (*Meno* 76d–e).

Phaedrus, for instance, both the general portrayal of Phaedrus' character and his influence on the course of the conversation can be seen to have a particular appropriateness to the dialogue's concerns.

Why, then, did it suit Plato to make this docile but unexceptional figure Socrates' respondent? To begin, the choice of interlocutor is clearly in keeping with the tone of the dialogue; its pervasive irony could not be maintained if Socrates were confronted with the passionate opposition of a Callicles. Nor is this so superficial a consideration as it might appear; for the tone is bound up with Plato's concerns in the *Phaedrus*. It is partly through its irony that the dialogue, while not avoiding the deficiencies of written texts to which Socrates draws attention, at least escapes the charge of failing to acknowledge its own inadequacy. Constantly qualifying itself through ironic presentation, the *Phaedrus* avoids to some extent the misleading fixity and appearance of adequacy in a written work which suggests that it is the one true account of its subject and that reading it is sufficient for complete understanding. The earnestness underlying the dialogue's irony is suggested by Plato's treatment of his chief symbol of philosophic seriousness, Socrates' death. Apparently absent from the *Phaedrus*, this theme is in fact, as in the *Euthydemus*, adapted to the dialogue's tone. Philosophic asceticism and readiness to face death appear mythologized in the fable of the cicadas, forgetting to eat and drink in their wonder at the Muses (259b–d). This lighthearted treatment of a theme whose contrasting presentation in the allusions of the *Gorgias* contributes to that dialogue's passion reflects the way in which Plato's irony springs from the depth of his concern. It is because Plato is so much in earnest about the ideas in the *Phaedrus* that he cannot allow his presentation of them to appear definitive; and so, because of the depth of his convictions, the dialogue must have its peculiar lightness of tone.

The appropriateness of Phaedrus' character to the dialogue's tone is thus no trivial matter; but there are further, more specific reasons why his character, and its relation to that of Socrates, make him a suitable interlocutor. Phaedrus and Socrates have been seen as prefiguring and enacting the relationship between philosophic lovers portrayed in Socrates' second

speech.[30] In particular, the emphasis on reciprocity and sharing between the lovers, and on the kinship between their souls, may be thought to be illustrated by the representation of Socrates and Phaedrus in the dialogue's opening pages. Here, the suggestions of a similarity in character between the two (especially 228a–b) are reinforced by their repeated interchange of roles. Phaedrus and Socrates take it in turns to play the part of guide (227c1, 229a7, 230c5); at 236b9–c6, Phaedrus comments on the recurrence of the situation of 228a–c, with the parts played by himself and Socrates reversed. Now it is true that the theme of sharing and reciprocity is a significant one in the dialogue; and true also that it is associated with the relationship between Socrates and Phaedrus. Phaedrus' last words in the dialogue apply the idea of sharing between friends to his own friendship with Socrates: *κοινὰ γὰρ τὰ τῶν φίλων* ['friends' possessions are shared'] (279c6–7); his first remark, too, introduces the theme in his claim that he and Socrates share an acquaintance in Acumenus (227a4–5).[31] However, further consideration of Socrates and Phaedrus suggests that their sharing, and the resemblance between their characters, is far from complete. Plato has indeed associated their relationship with the love described in the palinode; but he presents it as at best a very imperfect example, and the result is far richer than a simple effect of illustration.

The portrayal of the relationship between Socrates and Phaedrus, as similar to the ideal of the palinode but far from adequate in comparison with it, is connected, like the dialogue's tone, with the closing discussion of speech and writing. Plato is disturbed by the tendency of immutable written texts to appear definitive, and so to conceal their lack of true *βεβαιότης* ['stability'] and *σαφήνεια* ['clarity'] (277d8–9)—the inability of any single formulation to capture the entire truth, and its worthlessness if it fails to stimulate the reader's thought and

[30] See e.g. A. Lebeck, 'The Central Myth of Plato's *Phaedrus*', *GRBS* 13 (1972), 267–90.

[31] This example is typical of Plato's practice of introducing in an apparently casual and trivial remark themes which acquire depth as the dialogue progresses. Phaedrus' claim has an additional significance of its own: it suggests in advance that whatever Socrates' relationship with Phaedrus may be, he is not the kind of lover who, as the first two speeches tell us (232c–d, 239b1–3, e5–6), tries to keep his beloved from forming other friendships.

understanding. In contrast with the authors of such works, Plato is aware that the desired *βεβαιότης* and *σαφήνεια* may not necessarily be found even in the oral discussion which is given preference over writing. To suppose otherwise would be to pay undue attention to formal considerations, and thus to fall into an error similar to that of the unreflective readers of texts. Orally delivered speeches, as Socrates acknowledges at 277e, can share the deficiency of written texts typified by their failure to instruct by allowing questions and explanation; and even in the argument which is contrasted with such speeches, the form of words used must be recognized as being of value not in itself, but only in so far as it assists the attainment of understanding. This, I believe, is one reason for the final description of the concluding argument as itself play (*πεπαίσθω*, 278b7). On one level a reminder to the readers that the dialogue is a written text, sharing with other such texts their largely playful character (277e6), the expression can be read also as a warning to Phaedrus not to ascribe undue authority to the particular form which the argument has taken, but to recognize the essentially subordinate character of any formulation in the search for understanding.[32]

Plato's concern prompts him to produce a text which, unusually, wears its lack of *βεβαιότης* on its surface. The dialogue's irony is an important factor in creating this effect, keeping the reader from taking entirely seriously ideas which it is equally impossible wholly to dismiss.[33] This is most noticeable in Socrates' second speech (though, for an example taken from elsewhere in the dialogue, note the irony of 275b–c, where Socrates ascribes to the respectable authority of the ancients the interest in a statement's truth rather than its source which he recommends to Phaedrus). The effect of the palinode's mythical character is enhanced by the inclusion within it of jarring or humorous elements. While far from outweighing entirely the

[32] Cf. K. von Fritz, 'The Philosophical Passage in the Seventh Platonic Letter and the Problem of Plato's "Esoteric" Philosophy', in J. P. Anton and G. L. Kustas (edd.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (New York, 1971), 408–47. Von Fritz argues (411–12) that the treatment in *Letter* 7 of the deficiencies even of spoken language 'merely draws the ultimate consequence of what is said in the *Phaedrus*'.

[33] C. J. Rowe, 'The Argument and Structure of Plato's *Phaedrus*', *PCPS*, NS 32 (1986), 106–25, comments on the ironic elements in the myth: 'It is as if [Plato] were simultaneously challenging us to believe and to disbelieve' (125 n. 62).

power and beauty of the speech so as to suggest that it should not be taken seriously at all, such elements do discourage whole-hearted acceptance of it as a completely serious and exact account. With a characteristic audacity, Plato applies this technique even to his handling of the central image of the charioteer and horses. From its introduction, the image is so treated as to reinforce the explicit statement that this is a likeness, not to be taken literally (246a4–6), nor necessarily even to be seen as the only likeness possible. The soul, Socrates has argued immediately beforehand, must be *ἀγένητον* ['ungenerated'] (245d–246a); but in introducing the image, he dwells three times on the horses' ancestry (246a7, b2–3)—a repetition which suggests deliberate emphasis on the discrepancy between the soul and the image used of it.[34] The effect is heightened by the bizarre character of the image itself—verging on the ludicrous, if the horses and charioteer can be taken to be not merely winged, but covered with feathers.[35] It is a mark of the power of Plato's writing in the speech that such treatment even of its central image qualifies but does not destroy the reader's acceptance.

This effect of qualifying, avoiding a single settled judgement, can be seen also in the treatment of Socrates' first speech; and here the reasons why it is important to Plato emerge more clearly. It is crucial that two opposing judgements should both be seen to be true of this speech. It is both a *δεινὸς λόγος* ['terrible speech'] (242d4–5), false and pretentious (242e5–243a1), and a legitimate part of an enquiry into the nature of love, justified in both its method and its content (265e–266a). These descriptions should both be regarded as applying truly to the speech—but not in the sense that each expresses certain of its qualities, and that these faults and merits should be weighed

[34] R. Hackforth, *Plato's* Phaedrus (Cambridge, 1952), 68 n. 2, suggests that the expression *ἀγαθοὶ καὶ ἐξ ἀγαθῶν* ['good and of good ancestry'] may have become stereotyped, meaning no more than 'wholly good'. It is the repetition of such expressions within so short a space, and in this particular context, that suggests to me that Plato was in fact alive to their full meaning and exploited the apparent inappropriateness.

[35] See G. R. F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas* (Cambridge, 1987), 265 n. 20. Elsewhere, however, Ferrari reverts to the more usual translation, 'winged'; this may result from the difficulty of deciding whether in fact the team are intended as winged, feathered, or both. This vagueness on Plato's part may be deliberate, further discouraging the reader from acquiescing entirely in the use of the image by making it hard even to determine precisely how it is to be envisaged.

against one another in forming a single consistent judgement. Rather, part of the point of Plato's treatment of the speech is that no one judgement, combining both the views of it which Socrates expresses, should be possible. The dialogue contains two opposing assessments of the speech, each of which, when uttered, and from the perspective from which it is made, is not true on balance, but simply true. Such a presentation of a single speech is clearly a matter of structural economy; but it also makes a major contribution to the peculiarly unsettling character of the *Phaedrus*, its discouragement of any statement which is too definite and unqualified.

In style and thought, Socrates' first speech shows close similarities to the work of Isocrates.[36] This similarity suggests that Plato's treatment of the speech may have further relevance for his opinion of Isocrates, as the rhetorician appears at the end of the dialogue (278e–279b). The presentation of Isocrates here reflects Plato's sense of the danger in an appearance of adequacy, in mistaking a promise for its fulfilment.[37] Just as the apparent completeness and finality of a written text can inspire belief in its adequacy, discouraging the questioning thought which could lead to true understanding, so it was all too easy for the superiority which Isocrates showed over other rhetoricians (279a3–7) to be seen as sufficient in itself, rather than as an indication that he was capable of rising still higher (279a7–9). Isocrates illustrates the possibility of a misleading similarity between a philosophical and a rhetorical character. Socrates' concluding judgement, *ἔνεστί τις φιλοσοφία τῇ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς διανοίᾳ* ['the man's mind shows a certain philosophical ability'] (279a9–b1), encapsulates this idea. While Socrates sees in the rhetorician *φιλοσοφία τις*, in the sense of signs that the young man may be capable of advancing to true philosophy, Isocrates regarded his present thought as *φιλοσοφία*, philosophy, and as such remained satisfied with it. In this context, the connection of Isocrates with Socrates' first speech becomes pointed. The

[36] See e.g. M. Brown and J. Coulter, 'The Middle Speech of Plato's *Phaedrus*', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 6 (1968), 217–31, repr. in Erickson (ed.), *Plato*, 239–64; E. Asmis, 'Psychagogia in Plato's *Phaedrus*', *Illinois Classical Studies*, 11 (1986), 153–72.

[37] Cf. Asmis, 'Psychagogia', 172: in comparison to Lysias, 'Isocratean rhetoric holds out a promise of better things. But the promise unfulfilled is a far greater danger than Lysianic rhetoric ever was.'

speech, in its twofold character, is a reminder of the fluidity and hesitancy of judgement which would be needed to keep an Isocrates from satisfaction with the apparent sufficiency of his attainments.

It is in this light, I believe, that Phaedrus' character and his relationship with Socrates should be regarded. In his portrayal of Phaedrus, Plato offers a more extended illustration of those characteristics represented by Isocrates. Comparison with Socrates repeatedly reveals an apparent likeness accompanied by, and drawing attention to, an inadequacy on Phaedrus' part.

In comparison with other young men with whom Socrates converses, Phaedrus is portrayed not just as promising in general terms, but as showing specific similarities to Socrates. On the other hand, he is far from the affinity with Socrates of Theaetetus which is reflected in their close physical likeness (*Tht.* 143e7–9). Nor, again, is he like Callicles in holding beliefs comparable to those of Socrates and Plato but given an opposite interpretation.[38] Phaedrus' similarities to Socrates do not cover a radical opposition, but rather constitute a pale reflection. Where the same description is applicable to both, it is in a shallower sense that it applies to Phaedrus. Incomplete comprehension, inadequate realization of a concept or a quality's potential, is the distinguishing feature of Phaedrus, rather than development in a direction totally opposed to that of Socrates.[39] As with Thaeatetus, the relation is reflected in physical details. As Phaedrus shares occasionally in Socrates' constant habit of going barefoot (229a3–4), so he exhibits, to a lesser degree and in a shallower version, intellectual characteristics of Socrates.

Central to this representation is, obviously, the love of λόγοι ['discourses'] which the two are portrayed as sharing. The sharing is modified by the very different forms of discourse which they have in mind. When Socrates reveals that the λόγοι of which he is an ἐραστής ['lover'] are those of collection and division (266b3–4, echoing and modifying 228c1–2), and that

[38] See Dodds's comm. on *Gorgias*, 267, 269, for comparisons of Callicles' ῥῆσις with passages from the *Laws* and *Politicus*.

[39] The closest parallel is with figures such as Nicias in the *Laches*, who repeat Socratic views without fully understanding them. The presentation of the characteristic in Phaedrus is, however, more extended.

it is in the footsteps of the dialecticians that he follows (266b5–7), rather than in those of Phaedrus carrying Lysias' speech (230d5–e1), Plato is, in his accustomed manner, treating a theme with increasing depth; but he is also drawing attention to the difference between the philosopher and the admirer of rhetoric which coexists with their similarity as lovers of discourse.

Phaedrus' and Socrates' shared love of discourse, together with the difference in the forms of discourse which each values, underlies the detailed comparisons between them in the dialogue's opening pages. Verbal echoes invite the reader to make comparisons from which emerges Socrates' suspicion of the particular forms of discourse which inspire Phaedrus' enthusiasm. Thus if Phaedrus claims as an ἰδιώτης ['amateur'] to be unable to memorize the speech which took Lysias so long to write (227d6–228a3), Socrates too is an ἰδιώτης—when it comes to improvising speeches (236d5). Phaedrus is right to remark that when he compels Socrates to speak, he is following Socrates' own example (236c, 228a–c); but his words also reveal a significant difference. When Phaedrus urges Socrates not to speak πρὸς βίαν ... μᾶλλον ἢ ἑκών ['under compulsion rather than willingly'] (236d2–3), the echo of Socrates' earlier comment that Phaedrus ἔμελλε καὶ εἰ μή τις ἑκὼν ἀκούοι βίᾳ ἐρεῖν ['would speak by force even if no one was willing to listen'] (228c3) underlines the fact that Socrates must really be compelled to speak, while Phaedrus, though feigning reluctance, was in fact prepared to constrain an audience.[40] The contrast underlying the parallels emerges, of course, most obviously when Socrates responds to Phaedrus' concealment of Lysias' speech (228d–e) by veiling his head before speaking himself (237a4–5, 243b6–7).

The resemblance between Socrates and Phaedrus is, then, less close than it might initially appear; and so too the apparent reciprocity in their relationship is qualified. They may exchange the role of guide in the literal sense (though even here Socrates is in some respects more knowledgeable than Phaedrus: 229c1–4); but in the sense of exerting influence, they are far

[40] Contrast *La.* 187e–188a: in a philosophical discussion, it is Socrates who exercises the constraint.

from interchangeable. Socrates claims that Phaedrus does influence him—but in the direction of his enthusiasm for rhetoric. (The repetition εἰπόμην . . . ἑπόμενος ['I followed . . . following'] at 234d5, where Socrates describes how the sight of Phaedrus' reaction to Lysias' speech affected his own, recalls the alternate leading and following earlier in the dialogue.) The alternating guides are thus not of equal worth; Phaedrus' guidance is a further instance of his shallow reflection of Socrates.

Repeatedly, comparison shows Phaedrus to possess a shallower version of a characteristic exhibited by Socrates, a version which can, however, be confused with the deeper manifestation on account of a superficial resemblance.[41] The same danger thus appears as in the case of Isocrates—that of taking the reflection for the reality, remaining satisfied with a position which only resembles what could be attained. (It is perhaps significant that it is Phaedrus who claims that his relationship with Socrates exemplifies the sharing typical of friendship, while the exaggeration in Socrates' remarks on their similarity—as at 228b7—suggests irony. Phaedrus is in danger of satisfaction with his position, less keenly aware than Socrates of the difference which still remains between them.) Socrates' description of Phaedrus as vacillating (ἐπαμφοτερίζῃ, 257b5) is as much a warning as a statement of fact.[42] It is too easy for Phaedrus, as for Isocrates, to regard his development as complete; Socrates must remind him that he is in fact at a moment of decision, with a possibility of choosing to advance. Like Isocrates, Phaedrus is both a figure to whom Plato's concern with the avoidance of fixity should be addressed, and himself an expression of this concern.

Phaedrus has, moreover, besides this general appropriateness to the dialogue, an influence on its structure. Plato makes the conversation develop in a manner suited to his interests partly by giving Phaedrus his particular character. This is most obvious at the turning-point of 257, in the rich significance

[41] A further example: at 228d4–5, Phaedrus introduces the notion of following a proper order which becomes so important later in the dialogue. In this case, however, observing the proper order means following the sequence of thought in Lysias' speech—which Socrates criticizes precisely for its lack of the ἀνάγκη λογογραφική that he requires (264b).

[42] Cf. C. J. Rowe, *Plato:* Phaedrus (Warminster, 1986), ad loc.

both of the transition in the conversation and of the way in which it effected.

Socrates calls attention here to the idea of Phaedrus' influence by remarking on his effect on the palinode: it has its particular poetic style διὰ Φαῖδρον ['on account of Phaedrus'] (257a5–6). Socrates' comments on his own performances, and especially his disclaimers of responsibility, should of course be read cautiously; but there is truth in his assertion of Phaedrus' influence here, as is suggested by the repetition of the phrase τά τε ἄλλα καὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασιν ['especially in its language'] from Phaedrus' praise of Lysias' speech (257a4–5, 234c7). The speech has taken into account Phaedrus' taste for fine expression; Socrates is rewarded for this by Phaedrus' judgement that it was more beautiful than the preceding one (257c2). Phaedrus' influence extends further, however; for the turn now taken by the conversation results from his reaction to the palinode, passing quickly as he does from the comment on its beauty to consider again Lysias and his writing. In this respect, the ensuing discussion as well as the palinode is διὰ Φαῖδρον.

Phaedrus' response is, from Socrates' point of view, unsatisfactory. Failing to ask a single question about the speech, he illustrates exactly the situation described by Socrates at 277e8–9 in the reference to speeches which are ῥαψῳδούμενοι ἄνευ ἀνακρίσεως καὶ διδαχῆς ['recited without questioning and instruction']. His failure to learn is in this case underlined by his continuing to wish, though with little hope, for another speech from Lysias.[43] In keeping with this, he continues to regard speeches as produced in a competitive spirit (ἀντιπαρατεῖναι, 257c4), assessing their quality in comparison with one another, whereas Socrates was seen in his concluding prayer considering the adequacy of his speech in relation to its subject. This deficiency in the standards by which Phaedrus judges is reflected in the reasons which he ascribes to Lysias (257c) and others (257d5–8) for hesitating to write—reasons which lack the depth of those which Socrates will offer. The considerations which Phaedrus sees as influencing the decision

[43] Phaedrus thus confirms Socrates' response at 243e2 to his claim that Lysias will be forced to write a reply to the palinode: this will be true, so long as Phaedrus remains what he is. (Note also the play here on the contrast between speaking and writing: it is a *written* speech that an unreformed Phaedrus will exact from Lysias.)

whether or not to write operate on the level of the non-lover's *σωφροσύνη θνητή* ['mortal self-possession'] (256e5).

However, this unsatisfactory response also effects a transition necessary to the dialogue. On one level, Phaedrus' failure to ask any questions about the speech indicates his inadequacy. A detailed discussion of the palinode, however, would be inappropriate; for it would risk ascribing to the speech too great an authority. By representing Socrates and Phaedrus as engaged in analysis of Socrates' second speech, Plato could easily suggest that such analysis was of greater importance in itself than he would in fact allow. It could appear that the speech was the one correct account of its subject, such that the understanding of it reached by detailed interpretation constituted also complete understanding on that question. The questioning which should lead the listener beyond satisfaction with the account given could degenerate into discussion of that account for its own sake. Thus it might seem that the only remaining task was to analyse the definitive exposition which had been provided, giving precise interpretations of its details, without envisaging the possibility of a new account with an entirely different structure.[44]

Such ascription of excessive authority to any one account is decried in the case of written texts. It is represented, moreover, as a rhetorician's attitude to speeches. Discussion of a speech is particularly likely to degenerate in this way when one of the participants is an admirer of rhetoric such as Phaedrus. Plato suggests this when he depicts Phaedrus as eager to discuss Socrates' first speech (242a5–6); Socrates has already imagined Phaedrus studying Lysias' speech with its author (228a7–b1). As a result of the new direction given to the conversation by Phaedrus at 257c, the palinode, in contrast, receives no such treatment; lost from sight at the beginning of the discussion which ensues, it reappears not as an authoritative treatment of love whose content is to be analysed, but as an example of

[44] Cf. Socrates' opinion of allegorical interpretations of myths (229–230a). Socrates dismisses the attempt to translate myths into rationalizing narratives which correspond to them in every detail. The search for such correspondence ignores the fact that one is dealing with accounts different in nature and approach, not with two versions of an explanation which has the same structure in both. Cf. also the remarks of A. de Marignac, *Imagination et dialectique* (Paris, 1951), on Plato's avoidance of the suggestion that any one image corresponds precisely to the reality which it is meant to convey.

method (262–6). Even as such, it is altered in description. Socrates' summary at 265b2–5, for example, does not correspond exactly to the opening of the speech as given. It is more systematic, and includes new material in the explicit ascription of each form of madness (*μανία*) to a god. Not only is the speech considered from the perspective of method rather than that of content, therefore; such of its content as must be included in the discussion appears in a new form, undermining further any impression that its account is definitive.

This is not to say that the speech is wholly devalued, or that its only role is as an example for use in the discussion of rhetoric, which could then be seen as the main section of the dialogue. Rather, it is essential that this speech, like that preceding it, should be seen in two lights. It is a valid and valuable portrayal of the nature of the soul, its activities and experiences (245c2–4); but it is also a portrayal which is of no greater value or authority than another, different in conception, from the perspective of which it is no more than an example of method, more or less satisfactory. Its position can be understood not by attempting to subordinate one of these views to the other, but by admitting their equal truth. This dual status is reflected in Socrates' description of the speech both as *εἰς ἡμετέραν δύναμιν ὅτι καλλίστη καὶ ἀρίστη* ['the most beautiful and the best that my powers allow'] and as being made in a particular style, *διὰ Φαίδρου* (257a3–6). It is a good and beautiful speech, an expression of the truth, as Socrates claims (245c4); yet it is also conditional, an account given in particular circumstances to a particular listener. Different circumstances and listeners would call for different accounts; but their being different need not in itself keep each from being truthfully described as *καλλίστη καὶ ἀρίστη*.

As a character who can both call forth a speech in the style of the palinode and dismiss it with a brief comment, Phaedrus thus influences the course of the conversation in a manner ideally suited to the fluidity required by Plato's concerns in the dialogue. It is typical of Plato's ability to achieve several effects at once that this influence should be potrayed as being of such a kind that Phaedrus' inadequacy can be perceived. From this example of an unsatisfactory response, the reader can learn something of what would, in contrast, be required from an

ideal interlocutor. At the same time, the conditional quality which coexists with the value of both parts of the conversation is the more keenly felt by reason of the deficiency in the figure who influences them.

Phaedrus, then, is far from embodying the dialectician's ideal partner, just as his relationship with Socrates reflects only very imperfectly the reciprocity of philosophic love as described in the palinode. This imperfection, however, renders him better suited to a dialogue in which Plato is passionately concerned to convey the idea that the worth of any discourse lies in its power to assist in the understanding of a reality for which no one account is sufficient, and that such value as a discourse may possess must therefore be lost if it is seen as unqualified. The *Phaedrus* is a disturbing dialogue, resistant to any single, settled interpretation. Phaedrus' contribution, through his character and Socrates' response to it, to this disturbing quality, is typical of the way in which characterization takes its place in Plato's art, combining with other elements to reflect and express his deepest convictions.

9

Ēthos in Oratory and Rhetoric

D. A. RUSSELL

> To be sure, goodness is a blessed thing for any occasion, wonderful equipment for life. I've been talking to this gentleman only for a small part of the day, and now I'm devoted to him. Someone's going to say: 'Words are the persuasive thing, especially the words of clever people.' Well, why then do I detest other people who speak well? It's the speaker's personality that carries conviction, not his words.
>
> (Menander, *Hymnis*, fr. 407 K)[1]

> The effect produced by any narrative of events is essentially dependent not on the events themselves but on the human interest which is directly connected with them.
>
> (Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, Preface)

I

Orators and their teachers the rhetoricians knew all this very well and spared no pains to make the spoken word accord with and convey the personality. Their practice and theory are central to any attempt at understanding the Greek approach to character and characterization.[2] They do however present the literary critic with some special problems. On the one hand, oratory was such an important part of Greek life that the need to provide instruction in it became the main motive force of classical, and later of humanistic, education. The conceptual

[1] *νὴ τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν, μακάριόν τι χρηστότης | πρὸς πάντα καὶ θαυμαστὸν ἐφόδιον βίῳ. | τούτῳ λαλήσας ἡμέρας μικρὸν μέρος | εὔνους ἐγὼ νῦν εἰμι. "πειστικὸν λόγος", | πρὸς τοῦτ' ἄν εἴποι τις, "μάλιστα τῶν σοφῶν." | τί οὖν ἑτέρους λαλοῦντας εὖ βδελύττομαι; | τρόπος ἔσθ' ὁ πείθων τοῦ λέγοντος, οὐ λόγος. |*

[2] Apart from the standard histories and manuals of rhetoric the classic work is W. Süss, *Ethos: Studien zur älteren griechischen Rhetorik* (Leipzig, 1910). Despite some unsatisfactory terminology and classification, it is full of useful insights, esp. on the earlier orators and rhetors.

Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature

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CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD
1990