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Pastoral Places and the City: Environmental Rhetoric in Plato's *Phaedrus*

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Abstract: Historically, the notion of nature or the place outside the city in *Phaedrus* has been read as a proto-pastoral dialogue. If we accept this reading of Plato's dialogue, Phaedrus hierarchizes the landscape where the city is perceived as superior to the noncity. However, I argue that Plato offers an alternative in Phaedrus that opposes the country–city hierarchized binary. Rather than seeing the natural world as a starting place for intellectual knowledge, Plato refuses the pastoral impulse that projects a construction of nature in Phaedrus. Instead, he values the noncity as any other place where individuals can come together in a dialectical fashion to ascertain truth. Indeed, Socrates' orientation toward the setting in Phaedrus suggests that he is practicing a rhetoric of immersion in the ambient nonhuman place around him before attempting to project meaning onto it.

Keywords: Phaedrus; Plato; Socrates; environmentalism; rhetoric; pastoralism

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According to ancient commentaries and Neoplatonist readings, the notion of nature or the place outside the city in *Phaedrus* has been read as a proto-pastoral dialogue. If we accept this reading of Plato's dialogue, *Phaedrus* hierarchizes the landscape, where the city is perceived as superior to the noncity. Socrates claims it is the city—not the rural countryside—where human knowledge is shared and transmitted among mostly Greek citizens (Greek men). As feminist critics note, this binary plays into patriarchal conceptions of space that privilege the city as masculine centers of knowledge and industry, where the "wilderness" becomes maternal or virginal spaces to conquer.[1] However, I argue that Plato offers an alternative in *Phaedrus* that opposes the country–city hierarchized binary. Rather than seeing the natural world as a starting place for intellectual knowledge, Plato refuses the pastoral impulse that projects a construction of nature in *Phaedrus*. Instead, he values the noncity as any other place where individuals can come together in a dialectical fashion to ascertain truth. Indeed, Socrates' orientation toward the setting in *Phaedrus* suggests that he is practicing a rhetoric of immersion in the ambient nonhuman place around him before attempting to project meaning onto it.

For centuries, scholars have read the setting of *Phaedrus*, as well as other Platonic dialogues like *Republic*, as an allegory for the soul. Neoplatonists, for instance, utilized Plato's many works for this very purpose. Hermias, the Alexandrian philosopher who studied under Syrianus at Plato's academy around 400 A.D., provides modern scholars with an interpretation of *Phaedrus* that indicates the significance of allegory in their practices of exegesis.[2] In the commentary, the setting of the dialogue is a symbolic representation of the various Platonic realms. By positioning Socrates and Phaedrus in the lowest of realms (the natural), Plato instructs his readers how to traverse to the highest, heavenly realm by modeling it in the discussion between the two characters. Hermias proposes that the dialogue's objective "is beauty of every kind—first that in the sensible and in nature",

before moving upward to the higher planes of intellect and the gods (Hermias 2018, p. 59). In his discussion on Hermias' reading, Dirk Baltzly claims the ancient Neoplatonists viewed the dialogue as an image "of the human soul's fall and re-ascent by dramatic means that highlight the movement from one place to another" (Baltzly 2019, p. 7). Socrates becomes Phaedrus' guide, helping him leave the lower realms to ascend higher upon the scale of beauty.

Recent scholarship also views *Phaedrus* as an allegory for the different levels of love. Athanasia Giasoumi suggests that the dialogue is separated into sections based on the categories of love Plato addresses. Socrates and Phaedrus scale the levels of love throughout the text, beginning with the sensual and ending with the divine (Giasoumi 2022, p. 24). Consequently, the sensual level of love correlates with the natural landscape surrounding the characters. Allegorizing Plato's texts, whether it be about love or wisdom, has often led to subsequent hierarchizations of the city and the noncity. This establishes a damaging rhetoric of place. The landscape becomes a simplistic space that, while beautiful, is less valuable than the city from a purely humanistic perspective. The noncity becomes a point of departure for Phaedrus and Socrates. For the Neoplatonists, Socrates' suggestion that "landscapes and trees have nothing to teach" should be taken quite literally (Reeve 2012, 230d). Essentially, the city is an emblem of what one should try to achieve within one's soul, whereas the natural landscape is representative of the lowest level of intellect, where human senses reign over philosophic wisdom.

Marsilio Ficino, an Italian priest from the 13th century, provides more insight into the dominant historical interpretation of the rhetoric of place in *Phaedrus.* In his commentary, Ficino emphasizes that Socrates employs poetic language in the first part of the dialogue as a response to the natural landscape surrounding the characters. For instance, when the two arrive at their resting spot, Socrates exclaims, "Feel the freshness of the air; how pretty and pleasant it is; how it echoes with the summery, sweet song of the cicadas' chorus!" (Reeve 2012, 230c). Ficino claims that Socrates' poetic rapture with the environment is a display of the lower forms of love and beauty, which he attributes to the senses of sight and sound (Ficino 2008, p. 39). For the remainder of the text, however, Socrates reveals to his young friend the way to ascend to higher forms of love and beauty, which he associates with intelligence. Ficino, like other Neoplatonists, allegorizes the setting of *Phaedrus*, reinforcing the country–city hierarchy. Alexander J.B. Hampton notes that Christian Platonism has often enforced anthropocentric thinking that "minimize[s] the inherent meaning and value in nature, whilst at the same time disembedding humans from nature by placing them outside and above it" (Hampton 2021, p. 385). Inherent to Hampton's argument is that set out in Lynn White's famous 1967 thesis, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis."[3] Yet, along with the ecological damage of allegory adopted by Christian Platonists, Ficino regards the landscape as a place that affects Socrates into poetic elation. Such an idea is derivative of the pastoral—both a literary genre or theme as well as a specific method for framing the natural or nonhuman world. For centuries, then, many interpreters of *Phaedrus* have read Plato's dialogue as a pastoral text, whether they realize it in such terms or not.

Interpretations of the pastoralism that is seemingly evident in *Phaedrus* extend into the 20th century. For example, in 1940, Clyde Murley suggested that Plato's dialogue was a direct influence on Theocritus, the Greek poet associated with the invention of the pastoral genre (Murley 1940, p. 282). In other words, Plato's text is not merely a philosophic dialogue but a proto-pastoral work that has influenced the creation of a wide-ranging literary genre. In many ways, Murley is correct in this assertion, and he is not alone. In fact, two centuries before Murley, rhetorician John Lawson credited Plato's poetic style in his own poem, "The Judgment of Plato". According to Lawson, Plato's oratory is a rare combination of both philosophical brilliance and poetic beauty (Lawson 1759 & Kennedy 1980, p. 279). In

Phaedrus, the dramatic setting, where two city-dwellers traverse the countryside to admire its gardenlike beauty and to discuss the concept of love, recurs throughout the pastoral poetry (Murley 1940, p. 286). The beauty of nature enables the two to relax and reach a transcendental comprehension of life and love before returning to their homes within the city walls. Additionally, Nymphs are mentioned in the dialogue—one of the main mythological creatures associated with pastoral poetry. Yet, as Murley notes, Socrates completely alters his tone halfway through the dialogue (Murley 1940, p. 291). Shortly after delivering his second speech, Socrates gestures to the environment surrounding them once again with his myth of the cicadas. At the end of this story, he says to Phaedrus, "There are many reasons, then, why we should talk and not waste our afternoon in sleep" (Reeve 2012, 259d). Socrates discards sleep and leisure in nature—both of which are fundamental aspects of the pastoral—as something that is "slavish" (Reeve 2012, 259a). Instead, Socrates maintains that the two of them should remain awake, despite the heat of the midday sun and the lulling hum of the cicada chorus, to converse about rhetoric. Jonathan Lavilla de Lera astutely suggests that the tempting setting that nearly lulls Phaedrus to sleep points back to a key point of Plato's: "[b]ecoming a philosopher means engaging in an active process that cannot be attained as a gift from outside; it is a virtue earned with effort" (Lavilla de Lera 2018, p. 93). Contrary to ancient and even more recent interpretations of the setting in *Phaedrus*, Plato's text resists the pastoral and its hierarchization of place. Socrates' refusal to doze off under the noonday sun is one of many examples that confirm Plato's outlook on the landscape is vastly distinct from how it has been interpreted for centuries.

In my alternate interpretation of *Phaedrus*, Plato proposes an environmental rhetoric of place vastly different from that of the pastoral genre. I hope to show that Plato and Socrates' concern for "knowing thyself" is not just an inward turn. "Knowing thyself" also applies to one's posture and attitude toward the exterior world.

Toward the opening portion of the text, Phaedrus remarks that Socrates is "totally out of place" beside the Ilisus because he rarely "set[s] foot beyond the city walls" (Reeve 2012, 230d). In response, Socrates claims, "I am devoted to learning; landscapes and trees have nothing to teach me—only the people in the city can do that" (Reeve 2012, 230d). According to Hermias' interpretation, Socrates identifies with the city because of the intellectual potential it can hold. Baltzly remarks on this idea: "Socrates enters [the noncity], but thanks to the manner in which he engages with it, he does not descend into the Becoming and matter that it symbolises" (Baltzly 2019, p. 13). He avoids descending to the rustic setting through a variety of bodily actions that emblematize his intellectual wisdom. These actions include elevating his head while reclining under the plane tree (Reeve 2012, 230c), only dipping his feet into the Ilisus (Reeve 2012, 229a) and covering his head before delivering his first speech (Reeve 2012, 237a). For ancient interpreters, these physical actions reveal that Socrates is not wholly overcome by the sensory world of the landscape. City, then, becomes an equivalent of Socratic wisdom and dialectic; the rural exterior becomes a representation of Phaedrus' mind. According to G. R. F. Ferrari, Phaedrus symbolizes one who is entirely preoccupied with sensory impression (Ferrari 1987, p. 5). This is the reason he esteems Lysias' speech on nonlovers. The oratory performance portrays love or lust as something utterly sensuous and without reason (Giasoumi 2022, p. 26). Yet, for Phaedrus, the linguistic cadence of the speech is a delightful experience regardless of its questionable meaning. After reciting the speech, he remarks, "How does the speech strike you, Socrates? Don't you think it's simply superb, especially in its choice of words?" (Reeve 2012, 234c). Lysias, like many rhetoricians who were influenced by sophistry, was more interested in persuasion than in the "truth" of things (Merlan 1954, p. 71). Jenny Bryan also sees Lysias as "the personification of rhetoric in general" (Bryan 2021, p. 3). According to

these interpretations, Lysias' rhetorical success derives from his ability to manipulate the sensory—words, rhythm, and cadence—so that they sound appealing to those who listen to him speak. Phaedrus internalizes Lysias' frame of mind, which explains his placement beyond the city walls. His position in the rural landscape signifies that his intellectual faculties remain at the sensory stage. He admires what is visually or audibly pleasing but does not explore anything beyond.

The city becomes the birthplace of wisdom in its many forms, according to this reading; whereas the noncity is merely a place of sensory impressions that, while stimulating, only serves as the starting point for intellectual *epistêmê*. Ryan Brown notes that the natural world outside Athens serves as a conduit "wherein divine inspiration can be *led-down* to those present" (Brown 2023, p. 406). Thus, the Greek landscape takes on a more prevalent role as the catalyst that leads to truth rather than as something irrelevant to human wisdom. Erica Harris likewise explores the problems with this "classical dichotomy" in her own research (Harris 2023, p. 192). By viewing the city and noncity as emblems of reason and emotion, the two are historically understood as separate. This division, according to Harris, has often led to the historical dismissal and marginalization of women, who were "believed to let their emotions get the better of their ability to think rationally" (Harris 2023, p. 193). In a traditional gender binary, women embody the emotional while men take on the logical or rational. The sensory, emotional world of the noncity becomes a pastoral space where individuals can retreat and recuperate before returning to the generative cityscape of reason and intellect. Annette Kolodny, among other feminist scholars, even notes that this pastoral space, traditionally perceived as outside human civilization, is often characterized with feminine attributes (Kolodny 1975, p. 4). It is represented as the maternal and the virginal, especially in colonial literature. In *Phaedrus*, the urban space of Athens, on the other hand, embodies the Augustinian "city on a hill". Reading *Phaedrus* pastorally leads to a dichotomy between reason and the sensory aspect of human experience; individuals who rely more on feelings, like Phaedrus, are considered inferior to those who are rational. Hence, a pastoral reading of *Phaedrus* is inherently patriarchal because it positions "nature" or "the wilderness" as a maternal–virginal space of simplicity.

The desire to "get away" or retreat outside of what is considered the normal humdrum of city life is a common trait of the pastoral. Phaedrus has a similar impulse. When Socrates asks why he is outside Athens proper, Phaedrus says, "You see, I'm keeping in mind the advice of our mutual friend Acumenus, who says it's more refreshing to walk along country roads than city streets" (Reeve 2012, 227a). Like many pastoral plotlines, Phaedrus believes that nature has a recuperative effect on the individual because it is outside human-centered activity. In this interpretation of *Phaedrus*, there is an inherent assumption that the landscape is wholly outside human civilization. It is enterable, but always as the city's complete other. As such, humans can enter the natural space, but as "outsiders". Andrew McMurry explains that there is a "widespread perception that environment is somehow external to human affairs in general" (McMurry 2017, p. 736). In the present day, this rhetorical construction is the reason for the blatant disregard for climate change and other ecological disasters. For Phaedrus, the place outside Athens serves a similar purpose. Acumenus, a well-known doctor within the city, apparently advises his patients of the importance of nature walks—a common practice of the time (Worman 2015, p. 299).

In the dialogue, the prime focus is movement—both physically and allegorically (Ferrari 1987). Angela Longo suggests that most of Plato's work, but particularly *Phaedrus*, is concerned with the concept of self-movement (Longo 2019, p. 115). The text begins with Socrates' question to Phaedrus, "Where have you been? And where are you going?" (Reeve 2012, 227a). Similarly, at the end, after Socrates offers a prayer to Pan and the other gods in the landscape, he says, "Let's be off" (Reeve 2012, 279c). The noncity is not a place to

remain for the two Athenian men. Engaging with it correctly is only the starting point for living an intellectual life or returning to the generative cityscape.

Hence, commentary on *Phaedrus* that frames the bucolic setting as a place of simplicity favors a humanist perspective of the environment. Human knowledge or the symbolic city becomes elevated above the nonhuman environment. In an era of extreme environmental crisis largely due to humanistic and colonial rhetorics of place, further evaluations of Plato's *Phaedrus* are a necessity. Recent scholarship has explored Plato's perception of the environment that differs from Neoplatonist readings.[4] While it may seem that the ancient text does indeed contribute to damaging notions of traditional pastoralism, Plato provides an alternate outlook on the environment. He attempts to perceive the nonhuman world as it is rather than as it is desired it to be.

A key element of *Phaedrus* is the change that Socrates experiences about halfway through the text. Miming Phaedrus, Socrates pretends to be elated by the bucolic landscape throughout the opening portions of the dialogue. Yet, he quickly corrects this viewpoint, signaling to the readers that a pastoral outlook is somehow problematic. Nancy Worman most notably addresses this in her "Stylistic Landscapes" chapter in *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics*. She claims that Plato actually mocks the pastoral tradition as an elitist form and pastime that originated in Sicily. She sees this mocking as a direct criticism of the sophists since Gorgias, the preeminent leader of the many disparate schools, was from Sicily (Worman 2015, p. 294). She argues, "From Socrates' lowbrow, modern, 'outsider's' perspective, poetic exclamation and rhetorical encomia are jejune activities, pleasant enough but essentially old-fashioned, indulgent of aristocratic proclivities, and even a little silly" (Worman 2015, p. 294). Integral to this reading is the idea that the "poetic exclamation" of landscape and "rhetorical encomia" are combined. While Worman correctly contends that Socrates perceives pastoralism as trivial, the Athenian philosopher does not recognize it as harmless. On the contrary, Socrates realizes Lysias' speech and the one he delivers with a covered head are "impious" because they both speak "offence against Love" (Reeve 2012, 242e). Rhetorical encomia, Socrates discovers, is capable of compounding "dangerous falsehoods and preening themselves over perhaps deceiving a few silly people" (Reeve 2012, 243a). Plato is wary of rhetorical speeches delivered by sophists like Lysias and admired by men like Phaedrus because they favor ideas that do not align with sensory impressions. Lysias claims that it is better for men to pursue boys who they do not love. Yet, as Socrates will later explore, love is a good thing, and sensory perceptions confirm this to be true. The same applies to the pastoral construction of the environment. Phaedrus produces his own perception of the landscape, assigning value to it based on his own cognizance rather than as it exists spatiotemporally. Contrary to traditional interpretations, Plato is not critiquing human sensory perception. Instead, he is doubting the value of comprehension that is not based on felt experience. Often, assigning symbols to the nonhuman world "allows humans to cultivate an instrumentalist, exploitative, utilitarian relationship to a nature that has no intrinsic meaning itself" (Hampton 2021). In other words, with both rhetoric and the environment, meaning that is assigned without or even contradictory to sensory perceptions is a restrictive way to view the world.

Socrates' oft-quoted line in section 230d takes on a completely new meaning. He asserts to Phaedrus, "I am devoted to learning; landscapes and trees have nothing to teach me—only the people in the city can do that" (Reeve 2012, 230d). About this section of the dialogue, Charles L. Griswold Jr. points out that Socrates observes the trees and the river non-discursively (Griswold 1986, p. 35). Sarah Nooter similarly writes, "A slightly more literal translation would emphasize the agency and will (or lack thereof) that Socrates lends to the 'land and trees': they *wish to teach me nothing*" (Nooter 2020, pp. 141–42). He refuses to assign a pastoral meaning to the River Ilisus outside the city walls and even

views the landscape as an agential place that cannot be fully known. He continues by saying to Phaedrus, "But you, I think have found a potion to charm me into leaving" (Reeve 2012, 230d). The older man is still allured, at least for a moment, by the delights of speech and pastoralism.[5] From this, Plato models how humans can often be drawn into false constructions or conceptions, including ideas of "nature" that hierarchize the city and the noncity. Though Plato depicts his old mentor as originally enticed by the constructed beauty of speechmaking and landscape, Socrates eventually realizes the folly and even danger of remaining in this mental space. Enjoying the beauty of a space or thing is not inherently wrong; on the contrary, it is a wonderful human experience. Indeed, Plato depicts the Ilisus riverbank as a vibrant, living place full of all kinds of organisms. The problem, according to Plato, is when individuals see beauty in things based upon rhetorical constructions alone. This is the error that Phaedrus commits in the dialogue. He is convinced that the natural space serves as some "other" place for physical healing based mostly upon secondhand opinions. He does not take in the environment for himself to develop his own thoughts of the noncity. Additionally, later in the dialogue, Phaedrus seeks to know the exact location where the myth of Boreas and Oreithuia occurred. He does not enjoy the Ilisus for what it is but seeks to assign value to it based upon its significance to Greek myth and narrative. In this way, pastoralism and sophistic rhetoric function in the same manner. Both prioritize rhetorical construction—the way a speech sounds or the way an environment is represented—rather than the intrinsic value embedded within them. In *Phaedrus,* then, Plato emphasizes the need to move beyond form, aesthetics, and rhetorical constructions to comprehend the "truth" of a representation, whether it is a speech or a place.

Though a nondiscursive environment may seem like another hierarchization of city and noncity, it really emphasizes the intrinsic value of a place. Rather than haphazardly projecting signs and symbols onto the environment, acknowledging a place as nondiscursive implies that there might be meanings beyond that of human sense and comprehension. For the most part, Socrates treats the environment as any other place. It provides shady plane trees where people can speak to each other in his favored dialectical fashion. In fact, his dialectical discussion with Phaedrus is significantly more productive than those he has in other dialogues, like *Gorgias* or even certain sections of *Republic.* The philosopher's attitude toward place coincides with Raymond Williams' country–city thesis.[6] At times, however, the background advances into the foreground to become the centralized subject of the dialogue (Ferrari 1987, p. 31). In these moments, it seems as though the environment is no longer nondiscursive, especially when Socrates applies Greek myth to the surrounding landscape. However, the myths throughout *Phaedrus* can be divided into two sections: myths of the external and myths of the internal. External myths apply meaning to the landscape without any just cause. On the other hand, internal myths look at elements of the nonhuman space for introspection alone.

The one external myth in *Phaedrus* is the story of Boreas and Oreithuia. Phaedrus asks, "Tell me, Socrates, isn't it from somewhere near this stretch of the Ilisus that people say Boreas carried Oreithuia away?" (Reeve 2012, 229b). Phaedrus believes this must be the spot because it seems the pure waters of the Ilisus are appropriate for play (Reeve 2012, 229b). In this moment, Phaedrus exhibits a tendency to impose myth upon the environment. His basis for imposition is not upon any concrete fact but rhetorically constructed similarities between the beauty of external reality and a story with similar descriptions. Whereas Phaedrus is convinced they stand at the very spot of the Boreas story, Socrates corrects his friend, confirming that it is "two or three hundred yards farther downstream," where an altar has been built to the wind god (Reeve 2012, 229c). By adding in this piece of dialogue, Plato critiques the way humans often attach ideological structures of knowledge or belief

to their sensory impressions of the nonhuman world. Rather than simply remaining within his own felt experience, the younger man immediately relates it to Greek legend. While this is not inherently wrong, the topographic certitude to which he subscribes in the Boreas myth obscures his observation of the environment.

After being corrected, Phaedrus inquires, "But tell me, Socrates, in the name of Zeus, do you really believe that that legend is true?" (Reeve 2012, 229c). The philosopher responds, "Actually, it would not be out of place for me to reject it, as our intellectuals do" (Reeve 2012, 229c). He elaborates on this idea by pointing to the uselessness of providing a rational account of the myth. At no point does Socrates answer whether he believes in the legend or not. Ferrari sees this response as a backing down "from any commitment to topographic certainty" (Ferrari 1987, p. 10). At the same time, "he is also cautious about adopting holus-bolus a sceptical attitude toward this and other myths" (Ferrari 1987, p. 10). Griswold explains that Socrates' answer is a result of his refusal to reduce belief in mythic constructions to a simple yes or no answer. Instead, "he pities the poor fellow whose job it is to produce" myth or rational accounts that explain them (Griswold 1986, p. 37). This instance in the text further reveals Socrates' attempt to treat the environment non-discursively. First, he is not interested in imposing myth on the environment at any topographic locations like Phaedrus—even the places that are said to be correct.[7] Second, he is unwilling to speak to a myth's truth or falsehood because this also engages with and constructs a certain image of the natural world. Instead, Socrates asserts, "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" (Reeve 2012, 229e). Myths like that of Boreas and Oreithuia map externally onto the environment in a way that frames our understanding of it. Plato and his Socrates resist these kinds of rhetorical structures in favor of first ascertaining a level of self-knowledge sufficient to eventually make an exterior turn.

Chora/graphy, as defined by April O'Brien, also resists narratives or meaning-making practices that are restrictive. O'Brien defines chora/graphy as spatial method-methodology that builds on Gregory Ulmer's theory of the same name.[8] The main difference between the two is that chora/graphy "reorients place and public memory as a measure to resist any controlling space/place narratives and meaning-making practices that ignore other cultural histories and considerations" (O'Brien 2020, para. 2). Socrates partially employs O'Brien's spatial method-methodology when he refuses to prove or disprove the Boreas and Oreithuia myth. His mocking tone of myth and meaning-making in section 229d suggests that he doubts the value of dominant narratives that diminish alternative views of the environment. Yet, he does not necessarily provide a reorientation toward the landscape in this portion of the dialogue. On the other hand, Phaedrus' understanding of the legend maps onto the landscape in a way that restricts its meaning. Essential to O'Brien's method-methodology is the philosophical understanding of *chora*, coined by Plato himself in *Timaeus* (Jowett 2000). Using a variety of definitions of *chora* developed by other scholars, O'Brien summarizes it with a sequence of questions.[9] *Chora* prompts individuals to ask, "How does this place make me *feel?* How does my body react to this space?" (O'Brien 2020, para. 7). Whereas Socrates later responds to the environment based on senses associated with chora/graphy, Phaedrus views the stream as something "lovely, pure, and clear: just right for girls to be playing nearby" (Reeve 2012, 229b). His sensory perceptions are mostly valid. Yet, he takes them and immediately projects a mythic narrative onto the water in his very next line. Early in the dialogue, then, Plato is invested in an ecological orientation radically different from a hierarchized landscape.

Later in *Phaedrus*, however, Socrates alludes to three different myths: the cicadas, the chariot allegory, and the story of the Egyptian god Theuth. Each is a myth of the internal.

Unlike Phaedrus' curiosity for the Boreas myth, Socrates utilizes his legends as metaphors or even fables. The literal truth of the story or its location in space–time are irrelevant. Athanasia Giasoumi points out that Socrates' myths are a part of his own rhetorical art. It is a tool to be used based on the foundational theory that rhetoric of all kinds is meant "to provide a plausible image of the truth" (Giasoumi 2022, p. 29). The cicada myth is a metaphor used for instruction—a device both Plato and Aristotle valued.[10] Socrates tells the myths to Phaedrus as a method of instruction, with the end being only self-knowledge. They function as images of what is probably true but not the definite thing itself. The cicada myth, for instance, is not meant to assign meaning or understanding to the existence of the insects in the Greek countryside. Rather, it is a metaphor meant to teach Phaedrus about rhetorical and environmental orientation. Such introspective mythic stories are distinct from the Boreas and Oreithuia legend.

The myth of the cicadas directly engages with the ancient Greek countryside in ways that the chariot and Egyptian legends do not. In the myth, Socrates says,

> The story goes that the cicadas used to be human beings who lived before the birth of the Muses. When the Muses were born and song was created for the first time, some of the people of that time were so overwhelmed with the pleasure of singing that they forgot to eat or drink; so they died without even realizing it. It is from them that the race of the cicadas came into being (Reeve 2012, 259c)

Accordingly, the cicadas act as judges, reporting on who properly honors the various Muses after the insects die. Though it does anthropomorphize organisms in the natural world, Socrates is at once stating that humans should treat the environment honorably because it is a reactive thing outside the bounds of human comprehension. Nooter asserts a similar point. She argues that "when we humans hear the sounds of nature, elevating these sounds from the status of white noise, we are also acknowledging the ability of other lifeforms to perceive us, and even judge us" (Nooter 2020, p. 144). With this story, Socrates essentially affirms that sensory perception is valuable not as the basis for intellectual wisdom but as a thing itself. The issue with sensory impression, as Plato reveals with *Phaedrus*, is attaching ideological constructions to one's cognizance of the nonhuman world. Though mythic, Socrates' cicadas possess a certain exterior power over humankind; they report those who honor the Muses upon their death (Reeve 2012, 259d). Whether the cicadas are actual humans who died from extensive singing is beside the point. Plato argues that each person must realize that there are lifeforms well outside their own comprehension to take the first step toward intellectual wisdom.

While the common allegorical reading of *Phaedrus* relegates human senses to a low-level mode of knowing, the cicada myth in the latter half of the dialogue proves this interpretation incorrect. It is true that Socrates imposes his own theory to explain the existence of cicadas. However, the message of the myth remains nondiscursive. It implies that sensory impression can serve as a very valuable aspect of human experience. The senses can allow humans to understand that there is an external world upon which one cannot (or should not) impose ideologies or wisdom. Nooter argues that sensory impression in *Phaedrus* opens a level of life in which distinct lifeforms "share their mode of existence and expression" (Nooter 2020, p. 133). Sound, like the humming of insects, becomes comparable to a Russellian public neutral object for all beings who hear it. Bertrand Russell defines public neutral objects as those things in a public sphere that are collectively observed by multiple individuals, like a table. Despite collective observation, everyone perceives the thing from a different vantage point. As such, "What is immediately present to the sight of one is not immediately present to the sight of another: they all see things from slightly different points of view" (Russell 1998, p. 21). Though each person sees a different image, they all perceive the same thing and are thus united through this collective experience.

The differences between Russell's conception and the cicadas' humming are twofold. First, public neutral objects are only shared sensory experiences among human beings.[11] Socrates and Phaedrus enter a shared plane of experience with insects through sound. Second, the song of the cicadas is not neutral. It emanates from them alone. Though the two men can hear their song, they cannot participate in it with the small insects. This fact proves once again that the insects have a certain power or agency that is outside the confines of human control.

Plato's engagement with the noncity and the cicadas correlates to Thomas Rickert's theory of ambient rhetoric. In the introduction to his book on the subject, Rickert speaks to the timeliness of this theory. He writes,

> Rhetoric can no longer remain centered on its theoretical commonplaces, such as rhetor/subject, audience, language, image, technique, situation, and the appeals accomplishing persuasive work, at least as they are predominantly understood and deployed. Rather, it must diffuse outward to include the material environment, things (including the technological), our own embodiment, and a complex understanding of ecological relationality as participating in rhetorical practices and their theorization (Rickert 2013, p. 3)

Despite the claim that rhetoric has historically neglected ambience and attunement, Rickert later notes, "Humans have always attended to the ambient, even if we are only now gaining self-reflexive access to that insight" (Rickert 2013, p. 4). *Phaedrus* proves this point. Plato's concern for proper rhetorical theory extends to an ecological understanding of place and landscape. "Knowing thyself" is the first step before extending it to the ambience of a location (Reeve 2012, 229e–230a). Only then can an individual attune to the ambience of their surroundings. Attunement is not a traditional intellectual pursuit, but one reliant on mood, feeling, and the sensory. It values sensory impressions—like listening to the cicadas' rhythmic hum—as a mode of experience that stands alone rather than one that sits on the lowest rung of human faculties. Ultimately, it helps human understanding diverge from an anthropocentric view of the world. Additionally, as Rickert notes, "Ambience is inseparable from the person in the environment that gives rise to ambience. There is no person who can then be tacked onto the environment" (Rickert 2013, p. 8). Thus, approaching any space ambiently corresponds with an anti-hierarchized view of the city–country dichotomy. Places are not fixed but change, much like the riverbank setting that moves from background to foreground and back again in *Phaedrus*. The natural world is not somehow outside human civilization as the hierarchy implies. *Phaedrus,* perhaps more than any other Platonic work, emphasizes the necessity for humans to attune themselves to the surrounding environment. After all, it is the only dialogue set on the outskirts of the city. By placing Socrates and Phaedrus outside the city gates, their interior thoughts and ideological viewpoints become intensified. In this unique environment, Plato explores how rhetorical construction, discourse, myth, and narrative can interfere with place-based attunement through Socrates' dialectic with young Phaedrus.

Rather than reading the noncity as a symbol for the lower realms of knowledge, Plato models how humans should interact with their surrounding world. It is a shared space, but there is a great difference between trees, insects, and humans. For this reason, Socrates concludes his cicada myth by saying, "There are many reasons, then, why we should talk and not waste our afternoon in sleep" (Reeve 2012, 259d). It is a move that perceives the external world as things and beings that "continually harbor a hidden surplus that never become present" (Rickert 2013, p. 23). As Socrates has already said, knowing oneself is the most important thing a human can accomplish (Reeve 2012, 229e). A human must first understand where they end before searching for where the external world begins.

It is no coincidence that Plato immediately transitions from the cicada myth to a dialectical examination of rhetoric and speaking. In this section, Socrates says, "Suppose I were trying to convince you that you should fight your enemies on horseback, and neither one of us knew what a horse is, but I happened to know this much about you, that Phaedrus believes a horse is the tame animal with the longest ears" (Reeve 2012, 260c). Phaedrus immediately scoffs at Socrates' scenario, especially when the latter suggests he could praise the donkey as horse and neither party would know any better of it. The point of this scenario, according to the philosopher, is to illustrate how rhetoric can malfunction if a rhetorician does not have a solid grasp of what is "good" and "bad" (Reeve 2012, 260c). Socrates concludes, "The art of a speaker who doesn't know the truth and chases opinions instead is likely to be a ridiculous thing—not an art at all" (Reeve 2012, 262d). The same is true of one's posture toward the environment. Whereas Phaedrus commits to a restrictive pastoral approach early in the dialogue, Socrates instructs his friend in a new orientation that can best be summarized in his statement in 263b. He contends, "Whoever wants to acquire the art of rhetoric must first make a systematic division and grasp the particular character of each of these two kinds of thing, both the kind where most people wander in different directions and the kind where they do not" (Reeve 2012, 263b). By "two kinds of thing," Plato means the ideas that have diverging definitions and generally agreed upon definitions. An example of something with diverging definitions in *Phaedrus* is the idea of love, but this can also apply to concepts of the environment. Since there are differing perceptions of the nonhuman world, there is a need to seek out a way to comprehend it accurately. Love, as an abstract concept, can be explored dialectically; the environment cannot. Hence, the myth of the cicadas teaches Phaedrus and readers of the ancient dialogue that sensory impression based on the ambience of the surrounding world leads to a better comprehension of the environment. The other kind of thing, imposing structure or myth onto the external, leads to a constructed view of the environment.

Immersion is a vastly different educational experience from merely reading or viewing a place as a spectator. Plato clearly understands this. As a result, Phaedrus and Socrates' discussion about rhetoric, love, and landscape is a lesson in immersion. The former acts as a spectator, assigning meaning to the external without having a real experience within it; the latter corrects his behavior. This becomes exceedingly evident in the final prayer at the end of the dialogue. Socrates says, "O dear Pan and all the other gods of this place, grant that I may be beautiful inside. Let all my external possessions be in friendly harmony with what is within" (Reeve 2012, 279b). To take this idea a step further, knowing thyself harmonizes with externality—both that which one "owns" and that which one is immersed within. In this way, the natural world in Plato's dialogue serves as a sacred teacher, emphasizing that to know oneself is to also know the environment that surrounds humanity.

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Notes

[1] Kolodny (1975) explores this gendered binary in North American colonial literature.

[2] Most scholars and translators of this text suggest that Hermias' commentary is really a transcription of Syrianus' remarks on *Phaedrus*.

[3] White's main argument is that Christianity is most responsible for the damaging constructions of landscape that have led to the ecological crises of the 20th century. Christian Platonism was an influential form of religion that theologians like Origen, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas adopted in their own theology (White 1967).

[4] Other commentators who have challenged the Neoplatonic reading include (Sallis 1996; Nussbaum 2001; Brown 2022, 2023). Another significant text is (Werner 2012). This is just a small selection of writers who directly challenge the Neoplatonist tradition.

[5] He is also enticed by his love/lust for Phaedrus. This is an important aspect worth mentioning even though it falls outside the scope of my paper. For more on this aspect of *Phaedrus*, see (Cornell 2015).

[6] The main way Williams and Plato/Socrates coincide here is that both see the construction of country and city as purely constructed. There is no clear division between the two. Williams, of course, is interested in the Marxist implications that a country–city dichotomy has as a literary device from Medieval England to the 20th century. For more, see (Williams 1973).

[7] Socrates even questions the "correctness" of the location. Later, he says, "I could claim that a gust of the North Wind blew her over the rocks where she [Oreithuia] was playing with Pharamceia; and once she was killed that way people said she had been carried off by Boreas—or was it, perhaps, from the Areopagus?" (229c–d).

[8] Ulmer's choragraphy "duplicates a term that already exists in the discipline of geography, thus establishing a valuable resonance for a rhetoric of invention concerned with the history of 'place' in relation to memory" (Ulmer 1994, p. 39). It tries "to capture a more subjective dimension of spatiality in specific rather than generic terms" (Ulmer 1994, p. 39).

[9] The scholars she refers to are as follows: (Arroyo 2013; Clary-Lemon 2018; Rickert 2013).

[10] See (Aristotle 2007), Chapter 10, for more on the Platonic/Aristotelian understanding of metaphors.

[11] Though Russell explores this with only humans, it is safe to contend that public neutral objects could include inter-species experience as well. For example, I view the same table that my pet dog sees. Of course, we see it from different perspectives and for different purposes.

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