Hermias

*On Plato*

*Phaedrus 257C-279C*

*with*

'*Syrianus*'

*Introduction to*

*Hermogenes on Styles*

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[. . .] Square brackets enclose words or phrases that have been added to the translation for purposes of clarity and to our expansions of Hermias' lemmata.

(. . .) Round brackets, besides being used for ordinary parentheses, contain transliterated Greek words or references to the text of the *Phaedrus* or of Hermias’ commentary itself.

<. . .> Angle brackets enclosing text contain additions to Lucarini and

Moreschini’s text. Those enclosing three stops indicate points at which they assume a lacuna in the Greek text.

In addition to their normal uses, italics are used to identify direct

quotation of the *Phaedrus*.

The page and line numbers of Lucarini and Moreschini’s edition are

printed in the margins of the translation and the page numbers

of Couvreur’s edition are printed in bolded round brackets in

the text.

**Abbreviations**

Ast = Friedrich Ast (ed.) *Platonis Phaedrus recensuit Hermiae scholiis e Cod. Monac. XI. suisque commentariis illustravit*,Leipzig: Schwickert, 1810.

Bernard = Hildegund Bernard (tr.), *Hermeias von Alexandrien, Kommentar zu Platons* Phaidros, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997.

Couvreur = P. Couvreur (ed.) *Hermiae Alexandrini in Platonis Phaedrum scholia*, Paris: Librairie E. Bouillon, 1901.

DK = H. Diels *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, *Griechisch und Deutsch*, 6th ed., ed. W. Kranz, 3 vols, Berlin: Weidmann, 1951-2.

Dillon = John Dillon (ed.), *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis dialogos commentariorum fragmenta*, Leiden: Brill, 1973.

Hackforth = R. Hackforth (tr.), *Plato's* Phaedrus, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952.

Lampe = G. W. H. Lampe (ed.), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.

*LCL* = Loeb Classical Library.

LSJ = H. G. Liddell and R. Scott (comps), *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. H. Jones, with a New Supplement, 9th ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Lucarini and Moreschini = C. M. Lucarini and C. Moreschini (eds), *Hermias Alexandrinus*: *in Platonis Phaedrum scholia*, Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, 2012.

*OCT* = *Oxford Classical Texts*

Perry = Ben Edwin Perry (comp.), *Aesopica*, New York: Arno Press, 1980.

*TLG* = *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* [CD ROM]

West = M. L. West, *Iambi et elegi Graeci ante Alexandrinum cantati*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, vol. 2.

Yunis = Harvey Yunis, *Plato*, Phaedrus, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

# Introduction

# 1. Hermias’ uneven commentary

As we noted in volume 2 of this series, Hermias’ commentary does not devote the same level of attention to all parts of Plato’s dialogue. The palinode (243E9–257B6) takes up about a quarter of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, but Hermias devotes almost half the pages in his commentary to this part of the dialogue. Moreover, even within the section of Hermias’ commentary that concerns the palinode, the depth and thoroughness of his attention to Plato’s text differs. Once he has concluded his discussion of the periods of the soul’s incarnation at 249D, the numbered sections dealing with individual lemmata become much briefer and, often, much more superficial. Thus book 2 §§10–49 deals with 246A3–249D3 – a bit over three Stephanus pages. It takes Hermias roughly 58 pages in his commentary to cover this material. But book 3 deals with 249D4–257C1 (roughly 11 Stephanus pages) in 98 sections and the sections are so much briefer that he covers this portion of Plato’s text in 32 pages. The different levels of exegetical engagement are perhaps unsurprising when we consider the role of the *Phaedrus* in the Platonic curriculum. It was regarded as a ‘theological’ dialogue (along with the *Symposium*) and the part of the text that Hermias expends the most effort over concerns Socrates’ description of *divine souls* and the manner in which they guide human souls to a vision of the intelligibles.

Hermias’ thoroughness in the treatment of the lemmata from the end of the palinode at 257C1 declines even more dramatically. This volume of our translation begins with book 3 §99 and concludes with §308. The commentary discusses just over 40% of Plato’s dialogue (257C–279C) but does so in the space of only 61 pages, so the sections tend to be correspondingly shorter. But they are not uniformly short: Hermias takes more time over some parts of the text than others. Some of the longer discussions, as one might expect, concern the digression that Socrates takes in the myth of the cicadas (258E6–259D7) and on the transition to the discussion of writing (257C ff). Platonic myths tend to call forth extensive discussion in the Neoplatonic commentary tradition. So too do questions about the structure of the text and its overall unity. Given the attention that Platonist commentators normally dedicate to myths, one might expect, then, that Socrates’ account of the genesis of writing with Theuth and Thaumas (274C1–275B2) would be treated at length by Hermias. But Hermias regards this myth as ‘clear’ (267,9 and 268,29) and his comments on it serve principally to explicate the meaning or significance of individual words and phrases. Perhaps this is because Hermias takes seriously Phaedrus’ remark that Socrates has just made the whole story up on the spot (275B3). This myth is thus unlike the myth spoken in the palinode where Hermias regards Socrates as divinely inspired, so that his words come as a kind of divine revelation. Whatever the reason, then, Hermias’ explication of the story of Theuth and Thaumas concentrates on matters of detail, like the symbolic significance of the ibis as a sacred bird (274C6–7).

In our previous volume 2, Hermias spent time showing the consistency of Socrates’ theological account with that of Orpheus, as well as showing how what the *Phaedrus* tells us agrees with other Platonic dialogues. In the present volume 3, we still see *Platonic* intertextuality. In particular, Hermias notes the agreement of the *Phaedrus* with the *Sophist*, *Symposium* and, especially, the *Gorgias*, but we no longer see Hermias working to establish the consistency of Plato’s remarks with Orphic ideas or with the 'theology' of Homer. This is, in all likelihood, simply a result of the fact that the material in *Phaedrus* 257C–279C does not offer many opportunities for discovering such parallels with non-Platonic sources of authority since its subject matter concerns beauty at the level of language rather than the divine, super-sensible principles of beauty.

Another common theme across all three volumes in this series is Hermias’ concern with the unity and structure of the *Phaedrus*. We will turn to this attempt to discover a unity in the case of the conclusion of the palinode and the discussion of rhetoric and writing in section 2 of the Introduction. We will take up Platonic intertextuality in section 4 and Hermias’ treatment of the cicada myth in section 3.

But let us first consider one hypothesis as to why Hermias’ treatment of the latter part of the *Phaedrus* seems so superficial in relation to his treatment of the palinode. Let us call this hypothesis ‘the Neoplatonic rejection of rhetoric’. On this hypothesis, Hermias’ commentary on the latter parts of the dialogue is relatively superficial because *the Neoplatonic philosophers were not particularly interested in, or positively disposed toward, rhetoric*.

Such a hostile attitude toward rhetoric could easily be regarded as true to Plato. After all, Plato’s depiction of Gorgias, Polus and Callicles in conversation with Socrates in the *Gorgias* stands out as among the most polemical of Plato’s dialogues. By the time that Callicles enters the conversation in that dialogue, philosophy and rhetoric have expanded to the role of diametrically opposed, totalising ethical visions. Callicles rejects as signs of weakness or stupidity the commitment to the virtues of justice and self-control that Socrates regards as necessary (and perhaps sufficient) conditions of human well-being. Callicles also denigrates philosophy as a childish waste of time that risks leaving the philosopher open to shameful abuse by those who have the power of persuasion. Socrates, for his part, characterises rhetoric as a non-art that yields no genuine benefit to its practitioners. If the *Phaedrus* attenuates this hostile and negative portrait of rhetoric and rhetoricians, it is only by holding out the ideal of a ‘true rhetoric’ that no actual rhetorician seems to have achieved. So one might suppose that if the Neoplatonists in the Athenian school were hostile toward, or at least dismissive of, rhetoric, they had ample Platonic authority for such an attitude.

In addition to this Platonic warrant for hostility to rhetoric, members of the school of Syrianus at Athens might well have resented the fame and wealth of the schools of rhetoric in their city. In the fourth century, Athens was famous as a destination for study, but this fame was built on the notable teachers of *rhetoric* who made the city their home and who offered instruction. While there were Platonic philosophers who taught in Athens after Longinus (d. 273), the first teacher of Porphyry, none of them enjoyed the same repute. From Longinus to Plutarch of Athens (d. 432), we know little about Platonic philosophers in Athens. By contrast, thanks to works like Philostratus’ *Lives of the Sophists*, we have a vivid picture of many of the rhetoricians at Athens in the third and fourth centuries.[[1]](#footnote-1) By the early fifth century, the reputation of Platonic philosophers at Athens was well established as evidenced by the fact that young men like Hermias and Proclus came to study with Plutarch and Syrianus. But it is also true that by the early fifth century the political influence of both the pagan teachers of rhetoric and of philosophy on civic affairs in Athens was diminished relative to their power in the fourth century.[[2]](#footnote-2) Even so, the Athenian Platonists might have had reasons of their own – apart from the authority of Plato’s depictions of rhetoric as philosophy’s debased and wicked rival – to resent the other, more numerous, providers of education in Athens.

In fact, however, both rhetoric and philosophy had changed significantly since the composition of Plato’s *Gorgias*. Rhetoric in late antiquity was much more philosophical than the activity that Plato criticised. Similarly, nearly all the Platonists philosophers in late antiquity came to philosophy by way of a prior education in rhetoric. It is certainly true that part of the hagiography of nearly every Platonic philosopher was that the subject turned his back on rhetoric at the point at which he was 'converted' to philosophy. But it is equally true that Platonist philosophers regularly defended Plato as a master stylist and that they evince a good understanding of the theoretical concepts in late antique rhetoric.[[3]](#footnote-3) In fact, in the latter third of this volume we translate the introduction to a commentary on a work of rhetorical theory that was attributed to Hermias’ teacher, Syrianus. The engagement of Platonic philosophers with rhetoric and its teaching may also reflect the fact that jobs teaching rhetoric were more numerous than those teaching philosophy. So, the relation between philosophy and rhetoric in late antiquity was complex and is perhaps best glossed with the 20th century portmanteau: ‘frenemies’. We therefore think that ‘Neoplatonic rejection of rhetoric’ is not a good explanation for the fact that Hermias’ commentary on the latter part of the *Phaedrus* is relatively brief and relatively shallow.

So why *is* the final section of Hermias’ commentary on the *Phaedrus* relatively superficial compared to the earlier parts? There may be no good answer to this question apart from the observation that it was not unusual for Neoplatonist commentaries on Plato’s works to become less detailed as they went along. Some of our most extensive Plato commentaries – those of Proclus on *Alcibiades I*, *Parmenides* and *Timaeus* are incomplete. Each of these breaks off and, at least in the case of *Alcibiades* *I* and *Parmenides*, we know that this was because, at some point, a copyist didn’t finish the monumental task before him. In the case of the *Timaeus*, Tarrant has suggested that Proclus’ missing original abandoned the method of detailed, line-by-line commentary and addressed various topics in a manner not unlike Proclus’ *Republic Commentary*.[[4]](#footnote-4) But where we *do* have complete commentaries on Plato’s dialogues, as in the case of Olympiodorus on *Alcibiades I* and on *Gorgias*, the commentary gets briefer and more superficial toward the end. (This is rather surprising in the case of the *Alcibiades I*, since it is at the end that things get really interesting.) Now, both the Olympiodorus commentaries just mentioned are *apo phonês* – accounts of lectures by Olympiodorus recorded by some student. (Though it is, of course, possible that Olympiodorus reviewed the content of the work, suggesting additions or corrections. We simply don’t know.) We noted in volume 1 that remarks in Hermias’ commentary on the *Phaedrus* like ‘then my companion Proclus asked …’ show that his commentary owes *something* to lectures by Syrianus. We urged agnosticism about how much is owed to Syrianus and how much might represent a re-working of notes from those lectures by Hermias. But *somewhere* in the genesis of Hermias’ work, there were lectures by Syrianus and notes on them. Now we cannot know whether there were regular schedules of teaching in the Platonic schools – much less given time-frames like semesters. But it is not uncommon for contemporary academics to begin a post-graduate seminar with ambitions to study carefully, say, three books in thirteen weeks. But then the class becomes absorbed in the detail of the first and one doesn’t quite get to the second and third books as one had hoped. It is not hard to imagine that in the schools of Athens or Alexandria a series of lectures on a Platonic work might similarly run short of time, or perhaps that the lecturer and the class might run short of the energy needed to engage with the text at the same level of detail throughout.

Whatever the reason, we can say that the trajectory of engagement with Plato’s text that we observe in Hermias’ *Phaedrus Commentary* is not uncommon among the few remaining full commentaries on Plato’s works that we possess from the Platonists of late antiquity. Thus we think it calls for no special explanation. Any such explanation would have to be speculative. The idea of a fundamental opposition between philosophy and rhetoric is not only speculative, but a speculation that does not comport well with the extent to which Platonist philosophers engaged with the business of rhetorical theory – an engagement we will discuss in more detail in our Introduction to the second translation in this volume.

# 2. The unity of the dialogue: Hermias on the transition at 257C

Given Socrates’ remarks at 264C2–5 about the unity of good writing resembling the unity of a living animal, it is important to Hermias to show that the *Phaedrus* itself obeys this rule and has the unity of a living creature.[[5]](#footnote-5) But the transition from the palinode to the discussion of speech-writing looks a bit artificial. It *seems* like a change of subject and while such changes in subject are not unusual for conversations among friends – even philosophical conversations – the Neoplatonists’ commitment to the claim that every dialogue possesses a unifying *skopos* that determines its decomposition into parts seems threatened by this. After all, Platonic dialogues are not mere reports of philosophical conversations.

Hermias claimed at the beginning that the unifying theme of the *Phaedrus* was ‘beauty at every level’. As he sees it, the dialogue moves from (i) visible beauty (in the physical form of Phaedrus, a beauty loved by Lysias) to (ii) beauty in *logoi* (since Lysias’ speech is the object of Phaedrus’ love) to (iii) beauty of souls (since this is supposedly the subject of Socrates’ first speech since it deals with virtue and the distinction between licentious and rational love.) From the beauty in souls, the dialogue moves to (iv) beauty of the encosmic gods in the first part of the Socratic palinode, and the finally to (v) the very source of beauty in Socrates’ description of the super-celestial place – ‘the very source of beauty and the god Love and the beautiful itself’ (13,2–3). Hermias claims that the dialogue then descends back through each of these levels of beauty ‘by means of [the method of] division to the beauty of souls and the beauty of the virtues and the sciences, then back once more to the beautiful in speeches, joining the end to the beginning’ (13,3–5).

If we attempt to pursue this ring structure through Hermias’ commentary, then it is perhaps noteworthy that at 197,6 (on *Phaedrus* 252C3–4) and at 201,17 (on 253C6–D2) he speaks first of the *telos* of ‘the erotic enterprise’ and then of ‘the *telos* of the erotic art’. The two Platonic passages seem to mark a return to the level of (iv) the encosmic gods and then to (iii) the level of the beauty of souls. The first part describes the kinds of lovers who would ideally correspond to those who followed upon Zeus, Ares, etc. But at 201,17 we return to the image of the soul as a winged chariot and driver. This seems, then, to correspond to the virtues and sciences in the soul, since 253D2–3 concerns the virtues of the good horse and the vices of the bad one. So the next stage should be to consider (ii) beauty in *logoi*.

Now, it must be said that Plato’s dialogue does not make this transition as seamless as would be convenient for Hermias’ view of its unity and structure. The hinge point seems to be Phaedrus’ observation about Lysias’ speech-writing at 257C1–7. Here Phaedrus suggests that the speech of Lysias looks poor in comparison to the palinode just delivered by Socrates and, moreover, that Lysias might be reluctant to write in competition with it. Almost as an aside (*kai gar*, 257C4), Phaedrus observes that a certain politician recently abused Lysias for writing speeches. In light of this event, Phaedrus suggests that Lysias might well give up writing out of concern for how he will *look* in the public eye. If we take Hermias’ ring structure of the dialogue seriously, this is not quite a sudden descent to physical beauty in the ordinary sense – that is to say, back to the level from which the dialogue began – but it is certainly concern for what we might call ‘apparent’ or ‘phenomenal beauty/nobility’. But Socrates seems to think better of Lysias and rebukes Phaedrus for supposing that the speech-writer will be concerned with such superficial matters as what people say of him (257C8–D2).

Hermias engineers for Plato a more subtle transition from (iii) the level of beauty in souls to (ii) beauty in *logoi* by appeal to the idea that *the soul is itself a logos* (222,16–19). This is a consequence of the fact that the rational soul has its substantial being and its activity after the manner (*kata*) of the intellectual element *in* it and it is by virtue of this fact that the soul wishes to produce *speeches*. Hermias pulls this transitional rabbit out of the hat of Phaedrus’ enthusiasm for asking the question ‘What is the way of writing appropriately?’ In Plato’s dialogue, Phaedrus has responded to Socrates’ proposal to pose this question with the remark, ‘What else should one *live for* than pleasures of this sort?’ (258E1–2). Hermias takes this remark to point toward the soul’s life or activity and to indicate that this involves the production of *logoi*, since the soul is itself a *logos*. Thus, in Hermias’ eyes at least, the transition between the virtues of the soul in love at the end of the palinode and the discussion of speech-writing has the organic connection of one part of a living creature to another part. The life of the soul as a kind of *logos* oils what would otherwise seem to be a creaky hinge as the dialogue turns from the virtuous lover’s *soul* to the question of *speeches*. This, of course, complicates how the translator must handle ‘logos’ in this context, since Hermias is relying on its multiple meanings in his account of the connections among the dialogue’s parts. This is also true of his integration of the next apparent digression – the story of the cicadas.

# 3. The allegorising of Plato’s myths: listening to the cicadas

One commonly finds that the Neoplatonists expend significant exegetical effort over Plato’s myths and the digression on the cicadas (258E6-259E1) and the proper use of mid-day leisure is no exception. Hermias’ allegorical treatment of this passage is not too wild, though some features of it need to be understood in relation to associations between Muses and Sirens in the work of his classmate, Proclus.

Unlike the transition between the palinode and the discussion of writing, the connection between the myth of the cicadas and what comes before and after in Plato’s text feels less adventitious. After all, it is writing and speaking that is the subject matter and the Muses are individually associated with various genres of writing or, more generally, with activities like dance that have strong historical connections with poetic performance. Hermias’ contribution to enhancing the audience’s appreciation of this unity is relatively modest. In his treatment of the passage, the Muses are not merely associated with writing, but are described as the overseeing gods and causes of *logos* (223,13­-14). The generality of their oversight regarding all aspects of *mousikê* is mirrored in Hermias’ frequent reminders that, although the individual speeches of Lysias and Socrates are to be contrasted, these are but examples. The subject under discussion is good writing and speaking *in general* and such an insistence on generality is not perhaps unreasonable in view of *Phaedrus* 259E1-2.

Much of Hermias’ exegetical energy in his discussion of the myth of the cicadas is invested in pre-empting misleading appearances of temporality. Socrates’ story concerns humans who seemingly *pre-dated* the existence of the Muses and *subsequently* became entranced by the song of the Muses. As with the temporal language in the *Timaeus* (which might be taken to suggest that the sensible cosmos came into existence at some point in time), the seemingly temporal narrative structure *Phaedrus*’ account of the Muses and humans needs to be understood differently. Apparent temporal priority is translated into causal priority. Hermias credits Iamblichus for the general strategy here (225,21-226,4).[[6]](#footnote-6) Thus the human souls who became absorbed by the arts of the Muses ‘after’ the Muses came into being point toward human souls in the company of the hypercosmic gods – presumably those hypercosmic gods who lead the procession of souls up to the intelligible in the palinode. The Muses, in turn, are identified with the spheres of the heavens and the sensible cosmos. When the human souls become infatuated with the songs of the Muses, then, this indicates their descent into Becoming generally. Yet because these souls are newly initiated (*neotelês*, cf. *Phaedrus* 250E1), they remember the intelligible realm and thus do not seek nourishment from Becoming and so are said to ‘starve’. That is to say, they pursue the recollection of the intelligible world and do not ‘participate in perceptual opinion’. For their devotion to the higher life, these starved souls have become intermediaries between gods and humans. They report to the gods how human souls down here conduct themselves in relation to the temptations of matter as symbolised by the cicadas’ own sounds which lull people to sleep at midday. When Socrates alludes again to the cicadas later in the dialogue (262D2–4), Hermias takes this to refer to the orders of local gods and daemons that sometimes mediate the gods’ providence to human souls (238,27–238,3).

Hermias connects this episode explicitly or implicitly to other dialogues. Explicitly, the idea that the cicadas play a role as intermediaries between gods and humans is compared with the role of daemons in the *Symposium* (226,23). In this context, it is worth remembering that the *Symposium* was grouped with the *Phaedrus* in the Iamblichean curriculum as a ‘theological’ dialogue. Hermias also implicitly connects the Muses with the music of the celestial spheres with which they are identified and this doubtless reflects the role played by the Muses in the Myth of Er at the end of the *Republic*. In that myth, Muses sit on the edge of each of the whorls and each sings a single note, their collective singing forming a harmony. Hermias observes that Pythagoras heard these celestial voices and that musical notes are named after them.

# 4. Intertextuality: *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias* on rhetoric

The proper definition of rhetoric was a concern for both philosophers and rhetoricians in late antiquity. We know this from the various introductions to the canonical works of rhetorical theory for the period.[[7]](#footnote-7) In one of these introductions, credited (probably falsely) to Marcellinus, the author examines definitions of rhetoric drawn from both the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*.[[8]](#footnote-8) He takes these definitions to be inconsistent if they concern one and the same rhetoric. After all, it is clear from the *Phaedrus* that there is a true rhetoric that is theoretically possible and it – if anyone could possess it – would be an art or *tekhnê*. But the *Gorgias* famously insists that what Gorgias and Polus practices is not a *tekhnê* but a mere knack or *empeiria*. So [Marcellinus] claims that if Plato did indeed posit two or more kinds of rhetoric, it is not the false and sycophantic kind of rhetoric that *we* – i. e. respectable rhetoricians like himself – teach. Nor is such a false rhetoric that with which Hermogenes’ canonical works deal. So even if the *Gorgias* is consistent with the *Phaedrus* because Plato’s real view is that ‘rhetoric is many’, this in no way impugns what is taught and practiced by contemporary rhetoricians ([Marcellinus] *Introduction*, 281,17–18).

Hermias in his *Phaedrus Commentary* and Olympiodorus in his *Gorgias Commentary* agree: the condemnation of rhetoric as a mere knack in the *Gorgias* is consistent with the vision of the true rhetoric articulated in the *Phaedrus*. Olympiodorus initially makes a division between only two kinds of rhetoric:

Note that rhetoric is of two kinds, one kind true and scientific (*technikê*), the other false and [based on] experience (*empeiria*). That which is subordinate to the statesman is scientific, that which aims at pleasure is false. (*in Gorg*. 1.13,4–7, trans. Jackson, Lycos, & Tarrant 1998)

But Olympiodorus goes on to make further divisions among the kinds of rhetoric – or perhaps the kinds of orators – whose relation to this initial dichotomy is not entirely clear. So, *between* those who practise the true and false rhetorics, we find orators who are said to be of the *intermediate* kind: Pericles, Themistocles, Miltiades, and Cimon. Unlike practitioners of the false rhetoric, Olympiodorus says, these men were not flatterers. But they are still distinct from the true rhetoric which is ‘the servant of statesmanship’. These intermediate orators did not aim at the truth and merely saved the *bodies* of their fellow citizens by preserving public safety, without doing what was truly beneficial – saving their *souls* (*in Gorg.* 32.3,8–20). But Olympiodorus also explains, albeit too briefly, another division into five kinds of rhetoric, each corresponding to the different kinds of civic and psychic constitutions discussed in the *Republic*: aristocracy, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny.

Note that each of these kinds has its own rhetoric, and so there are *five rhetorics*. The true rhetoric is that of aristocracy, over which the statesman presides. For in that case the rhetor serves the statesman by way of recommending whatever he commands, for example, ‘Persuade them that there should be a doctor in the city’, ‘Persuade them that there should not be comedy’. And just as the doctor looks to a single end, healing all who suffer, making use of a variety and not the same kind of remedies, so too the rhetor should persuade by every means, using different arguments, one kind for the doctor, another for the military, and another for the labourer. Such is the true rhetoric, the others being falsely so-called. (*in Gorg*. 1.13,22–33, trans. Jackson, Lycos and Tarrant)

Olympiodorus is clear that the kind of rhetoric practised by orators in the service of tyrants is the worst: a base form of flattery that is analogous to a doctor who prescribes a deliciously rich diet for his patient out of a desire to share his table. Python, a student of Isocrates who served Philip of Macedon, is Olympiodorus’ example here. He contrasts Python with Themistocles who is likened to a doctor who prescribes a strict diet for a patient who won’t stick to it. Such doctors ‘do not abandon them when they break it, nor even turn a blind eye, but take a stand against each deviation from their prescription’ (*in Gorg*. 1.13,63-65). Olympiodorus claims that although the four democratic rhetoricians were not flatterers, they did nothing useful, as one can see from the fact that they did not create an aristocracy from a democracy (32.3,20–1). One does not know exactly how much weight to hang on Olympiodorus’ advice to his audience that immediately follows (32.4): if *we* lack the power to put those who are ruled in good order, we should retreat and not remain with them. Doing so would be as foolish as trying to pet wild animals! *If* – and this is speculative – Olympiodorus addresses his audience as ‘we who aspire to practice the true rhetoric’, then this would imply that the true rhetoric cannot be practiced anywhere except in the ideal city where the education of all the citizens makes them amenable to being put in order (*ruthmizein*) by the servant of the statesman – the true orator. If that is correct, then it would seem that the true rhetoric is inseparable from philosophy in this sense: it cannot be successfully practised in any city that is not ruled by philosophers.

Hermias similarly distinguishes between true and false rhetoric and thus treats the *Gorgias* as fully consistent with the *Phaedrus*. Like Olympiodorus, he also places Pericles, Themistocles and Demosthenes in an intermediate category between the true and false rhetoric. But he is much more explicit than Olympiodorus in *identifying* the true rhetoric with philosophy.[[9]](#footnote-9) Thus he says at 1,11 ‘he is now elevating Phaedrus, who is passionate about rhetoric, [to an appreciation of] the *true* rhetoric, i. e. philosophy.’[[10]](#footnote-10) Just a bit later he provides an overview of the difference between the false or popular rhetoric and the true one.

Anyone, then, who is going to write well must know the truth of things. And this is how the true and the popular rhetoric are distinguished: the former is acquainted with truth, is a knowledge of what is just and what not just, is an attendant (*opados*) of philosophy, *belongs to the philosopher alone*, and creates and delivers content that is *pleasing to gods* (273E7) and men; the popular kind, on the other hand, produces a kind of allurement or charming of the soul and is a sort of *knack that lacks all art* (260E5) and is without any science. (*in Phaedr*. 7,2–9)

The idea that the philosopher alone has the genuine *tekhnê* of the true rhetoric is one that emerges naturally enough from Socrates’ insistence that a genuinely artful or scientific rhetoric must know the truth of things through *dialectic* (266B8-D2). This knowledge of the subject matter, achieved by the mastery of dialectic, conjoined with both an understanding of the nature of the souls of the audience (270C1–271A2) and an understanding of the kinds of speeches and their effects upon such souls (271B1–5), is the content of the true rhetoric. What those who practice the false or popular rhetoric teach and the techniques they pride themselves on are merely the preliminaries for rhetoric (269B7–8).

Following Plato, Hermias insists that rhetoric is not really these preliminaries, but the capacity to use them *well* (249,16–19). Moreover, one cannot use them well unless one knows, not only the nature of the souls being addressed and the effects of the various kinds of speeches upon them, but the truth of the matter under discussion (252,22–28). At 255,1–2, however, Hermias makes the further claim: that it is *not possible* to speak persuasively without *speaking the truth*. This is not a thesis that Socrates commits himself to in Plato’s dialogue. He says at 259E4–6 that the person who is going to speak well and nobly (*kalôs*) must *have in mind the truth* concerning the subject he is addressing. That is a different matter, of course, from speaking that truth. Moreover, Hermias’ claim seems empirically doubtful, to put it politely. After all, about a third of US voters believe that Joe Biden did not really win the 2020 Presidential election. They have seemingly been persuaded by the speech of Mr Trump or of the hosts on Fox News, but they were not speaking the truth – not even the truth as they saw it. As the e-mail and texts that were made public prior to the settlement with Dominion show, many of the Fox News hosts knew they were not speaking the truth. Yet their speech, though untrue, seems to have been persuasive.

Perhaps it is better to see Hermias’ off-hand remark in the context of his insistence that rhetoric is the capacity to lead souls *successfully* – that is to say, to make them noble/beautiful (*kalon*) and good (264,20–22). Thus we might treat the claim that ‘it is not possible to speak persuasively without speaking the truth’ as tantamount to the claim that ‘one cannot lead souls to a condition that is noble and good without speaking the truth.’ So, ‘speaking persuasively’ would be what philosophers sometimes call a ‘success term’: just as you can’t *recognise* the man at the bar unless he’s someone you’ve actually seen before, so too the orator can’t *speak persuasively* – at least as Hermias understands the phrase – without morally improving his audience.

Nonetheless, we are still left to wonder whether the moral improvement of some audiences might best be accomplished by telling them lies – albeit noble ones, as Socrates suggests in one of the more notorious passages in the *Republic* (414B8). One might try to defend the ‘success term’ reading of speaking persuasively and the insistence that truth is a necessary condition for this by distinguishing speech that makes an audience *better* than they were before from speech that makes them *fully and truly* noble-and-good. But this seems like a pretty desperate strategy. Has Hermias created a problem for himself by his insistence not merely that the true orator must have *knowledge* of his subject matter, but that he must *speak* the truth about it?

# 5. Deus ex machina – Hermias on the success of the true rhetoric

Let us take stock. We think that one ought to grant that Olympiodorus and Hermias are right to oppose critics who take the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus* to be inconsistent on the subject of rhetoric. What is condemned in the *Gorgias* as mere knack is similar to what the *Phaedrus* treats as the rhetoric taught and practiced by non-ideal rhetoricians. So the criticisms of the non-ideal that are offered in the *Gorgias* are consistent with the existence of a true art envisioned in the *Phaedrus*. But one might still object that the status of a genuine *tekhnê* that is attributed to the true rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* comes at too high a price. Arguably it removes the true rhetoric so far from the actual practice of public persuasion as to make implausible that the one is the ideal form of the other rather than something wholly different and completely irrelevant to the goals of ‘popular rhetoric’.

To be fair, Plato’s characters in the *Phaedrus* are aware that the true rhetoric that they are discussing is far removed from the practice of actual orators and actual teachers of rhetoric. Socrates and Phaedrus note repeatedly that the kind of rhetoric that combines *dialectic* with psychology is hard to achieve and very different from what Thrasymachus, Gorgias, et al. practice and teach. They consider two reasons why actual rhetoricians should regard knowledge of the subject matter, and thus the art of dialectic through which such knowledge is allegedly gained, to be necessary conditions for the true art of rhetoric.[[11]](#footnote-11) The first of these begins from the assumption that a rhetoric worthy of the status of *tekhnê* is a *benefit* to its possessor. The example of the ignorant orator and his ignorant audience who do not know a donkey from a horse (260B1–D2) is offered to illustrate this point. When the speaker doesn’t know what he is talking about, it is not likely that the persuasion he effects upon his equally ignorant audience will be a benefit to either of them. A second argument for knowledge of the truth as a necessary condition for success in public speaking is offered at 261E–262C3 and it concerns the *means* through which the audience’s conviction is to be achieved. Deception (*apatê*) is best achieved through disguised progress through a range of similar things – this motion carrying the audience from what they believe at the start of the speech, through considerations similar to other things they believe, and ending in a conclusion different from where they started. But the person who is best able to produce or bring to light similarities through which his audience may be led along this pathway is the person who knows what he is talking about. Such a person can also bring to light the subtle sleights of hand through which the competing speaker seeks to carry the audience smoothly from A to B.

Both the horse and donkey example and the considerations about deception seem to gesture toward familiar settings for the deployment of rhetoric. Though Socrates does not say so explicitly, the potential military value of the horse that is mentioned at 260B8 invites the thought of debate in the Assembly about going to war and what is needed for success in such a war. The deception argument explicitly mentions the opposing views in the law courts about what is just and unjust as well as opposing views in public debate about what is good or beneficial (261C4–D4; cf. *Gorgias* 452E1–4 and 454B5–7). But it is precisely in this context, that Socrates and Phaedrus agree that the practice of speaking on opposite sides (*antilogikê*) occurs not only in the law courts and in the Assembly, but more generally in any context where there is contention on opposite sides (261D10–E4). This significantly expands the scope of rhetoric, as Socrates urges us to understand it, so that it includes far more than speaking publically in the traditional contexts of juridical, deliberative, and even epideictic rhetoric. This step occurs in the midst of Socrates’ argument that knowledge of the truth of what one is talking about is a pre-requisite for successful deception.

This expansion of the scope of rhetoric, however, makes the argument about the nexus between truth and the true rhetoric more doubtful because in the wider sense of rhetoric now at issue, it is doubtful whether deception is essential to all of these contexts. So consider the example that Gorgias uses at 454B1–5 of accompanying his brother, the physician Herodicus, to see patients who were unwilling to submit to the treatment his brother deemed best. Knowing nothing of medicine, but being in command of the art of rhetoric, Gorgias persuaded his brother’s patients even when Herodicus himself could not. Gorgias’ use of his persuasive power in this context escapes the problem of the donkey and the horse: Gorgias himself does not need to know medicine in order to know that the procedure is in the patient's best interest. He can substitute the judgement of his physician brother and so has no need to know the truth of the matter about the things he is speaking about. Nor is it clear that Gorgias needs to engage in any *deception* in this context. It seems likely that all Gorgias needs to do is to appeal in rhetorically compelling ways to things that the patient already values – the nobility of courage, the hope of more time with his family – in order to help him to see that treatment serves his genuine long-term interest. If this is so, then the argument that knowledge of the truth concerning the subject matter is essential to successful deception does not apply.

Now, the true rhetoric as it is described in the *Phaedrus* does have an additional requirement that certainly *does* seem relevant to the example of Gorgias and his brother’s patient. The true rhetoric includes knowledge of human psychology and the ways in which various minds are affected by various kinds of speeches (270B1–271B4). It will be knowing how to represent the value of treatment to a patient of this psychological type that permits Gorgias to succeed where Herodicus has failed. But this example seems to show that Socrates’ insistence that the practitioner of the true rhetoric must know the *subject matter* about which he is speaking is mistaken. Moreover, the fact that knowledge of the content is seemingly not a necessary condition is rendered *even more* evident by the expansion of the scope of the genuinely scientific rhetoric beyond the judicial and deliberative contexts characteristic of rhetoric as traditionally understood. Socrates seems to have scored an own goal.

This is not a problem that Hermias confronts directly but we believe that there is an answer implicit in his various remarks on this portion of the *Phaedrus*. Recall that Hermias seems to go a step beyond Socrates’ already bold claim that knowledge of the truth is a necessary condition for possession of the true art of rhetoric. Hermias, as we noted above, interprets the isolated phrase ‘speaking persuasively’ at *Phaedrus* 269C2–3 to mean that it is not possible to speak persuasively without *speaking the truth* and this, of course, means *knowing* the truth – a claim that Socrates *does* seem committed to. Why does Hermias suppose that the truth has such persuasive power? We take the answer to this question to lie in his account of the nature of ‘the probable’ (*to eikos*). At 273D–E Socrates addresses himself as if to Tisias and summarises his case for the necessity of mastery of dialectic to the true art of rhetoric. Tisias was right to insist that ‘the probable’ is important to the true rhetoric, but wrong in his understanding of what ‘the probable’ actually consists in. It is *not* to be identified with ‘what appears [to be the case] to the many’ (273B1). Hermias takes the real probable to consist simply in ‘resemblance to the truth’ and it is in virtue of being like the truth that ‘the probable’ has its persuasive power:

So since all the writers on the art of rhetoric say that probabilities (*ta eikota*) and plausibilities (*ta pithana*) are the subject matter of rhetoric and that a juror is persuaded by means of these but do not give the reason why these persuade [him], the philosopher has also given the reason for these [being persuasive], stating that it is *because of their resemblance to the truth that probabilities are persuasive*. Hence truth is the first principle (*arkhê*) of all things and the speaker persuades by knowing what is true. (237,23–28)

A bit further on, Hermias makes the point again:

And he briefly summarizes the rest of what he said about the true rhetoric, [namely,] that this probability (*eikos*), by being like (*eoikenai*) the truth, convinces souls and the many thanks to its resemblance to the truth, so that someone who knows the truth knows the probability. (264,7–11)

This idea that the true art of rhetoric concerns itself with a notion of probability that consists simply in likeness to the truth is puzzling. After all, isn’t ‘the probable’ always what seems likely *to some audience*? And isn’t resemblance always a matter of what seems like what *to someone* – even if the identity of the someone in question is somewhat vague? Fool’s gold resembles gold *to* most people who aren’t experienced gold prospectors. *For whom* does the probable, properly understood, resemble the truth?

We think it likely that ‘the probable’ which is the proper concern of the true rhetorician is what seems like the truth *to the gods*. They matter in this context for it is gods, not humans, who are the real audience to whom the true rhetorician addresses himself. In the continuation of his hypothetical address to Tisias, Socrates grants the difficulty of mastering dialectic – a method through which the genuine rhetorician comes to know the truth. This task, Socrates continues, is not something that a wise person ought to undertake merely for the sake of speaking or acting well before *men*, but rather in order that he might speak and do everything, as far as possible, in a manner that is *pleasing to the gods*. This is a key passage for Hermias. At 264,20–26 he comments that Socrates appropriately includes ‘acting well’ alongside ‘speaking well’ and that in this passage he gives us the goal or *telos* of the true art of rhetoric: to speak and to write things that are pleasing to the gods (273E7) and he gives as examples hymns, dances and the like. But the only subject matter worthy of the attention of the gods is itself divine. Mere words, however, cannot express the full truth of the gods. Their full nature is beyond discursive thought or speech, but with proper attention to likenesses of the truth (i. e. ‘the probable’ properly understood), the genuine rhetorician can speak and act in ways that are pleasing to them – that is to say, in ways that discursively approximate their ultimately ineffable nature.

But what then of the normal uses of rhetoric in deliberation or in juridical settings before a human audience? Hermias seems to think that success in the mundane human realm will almost inevitably accompany the kinds of pious speech and action that please the gods. At 264,28–265,1 he continues that someone who is doing things that are pleasing to human beings need not be doing things that are pleasing to the gods, but contrariwise ‘the person who does things that are pleasing to the gods is also doing them for human beings, for that which is worse follows the one who hymns the divine.’ When the gods enjoy what we say and do, Hermias claims, ‘all goes smoothly with us’ (265,20). Even if we do not enjoy success in relation to a human audience, to act or speak in ways that are pleasing to the gods is a beautiful thing – something *kalon*. Hermias assures us that ‘the attempt, then, at fine actions is to be praised, even if the person is doomed to fail or to suffer something, whatever it may be, on account of that very [attempt]’ (265,24–25).

In Plato’s dialogue, Socrates insistence on knowledge of the truth as a necessary condition for the true art of rhetoric seems open to certain objections. These objections are made more obvious by the fact that Socrates extends the scope of the true rhetoric beyond public speaking in the law courts or deliberative contexts like the Assembly. Hermias has answers of a sort to these objections, but they involve a further and more radical re-imagining of the nature and purpose of the genuinely artful kind of rhetoric. It becomes the employment of speech or writing *with the goal of pleasing the gods*. Given that goal, it is unsurprising and uncontroversial that an *understanding* of the truth is a necessary condition for possessing the true art of rhetoric. It is perhaps also unsurprising that *speaking* the truth is a necessary condition for persuasion. But this is not persuasive success as ordinary rhetoricians understand it. It is, instead, the manifestation of a uniquely *discursive form of piety*. This is perhaps unsurprising from Hermias. After all, his commentary take every opportunity to note the pious manner in which Socrates speaks: the fact that he delivers his speech with his head covered (51,15–22); in connecting his awareness of his sin against the divine at 242C3 with the passage in *Philebus* 12C2 where Socrates expresses his awe over the proper names of the gods (74,24); as well as all his comments on Socrates’ various prayers. Given what has come before, it should come as no surprise that Hermias’ conception of the genuine art of rhetoric should turn out to be distinctively discursive expression of piety. It turns out that the *Phaedrus* is a ‘theological’ dialogue in Hermias’ view, not merely because of the divine things described in Socrates’ palinode, but because of the way in which the point and purpose of writing and speaking is re-configured in the true rhetoric that is described following the palinode.

# 6. Writing and piety

The discussion of writing at the end of the *Phaedrus* has figured prominently in one of the deepest scholarly divisions over the proper approach to Plato’s dialogues in the 20th century: the question of ‘Plato’s esotericism’.[[12]](#footnote-12) In the context of these disputes, ‘esotericism’ came to have two distinct, but easily conflated, meanings. On the one hand, it came to connote a deliberate tendency on Plato’s part to conceal, within his writings, some of his thoughts from those deemed unfit to receive them. This is the kind of esotericism one associates with Leo Strauss and the Straussian tradition. On the other hand, the tradition of the so-called Tübingen school involves a different kind of esotericism. According to them, Plato did not seek to conceal some of his philosophical views *within* his dialogues, but instead declined to commit these views to writing *at all*. Both approaches to understanding Plato’s philosophy utilise Plato’s critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* to motivate their preferred approach. For Strauss, the *Phaedrus* pointed to Plato’s awareness of the ‘essential defect of writing’: writings are equally accessible to all readers and say the same things to everyone.[[13]](#footnote-13) This essential defect Strauss took to be overcome by Plato’s dialogic form:

We may conclude that the Platonic dialogue says different things to different people – not accidentally, as every writing does, but that it is so contrived as to say different things to different people, or that it is radically ironical. The Platonic dialogue, if properly read, reveals itself to possess the flexibility or adaptability of oral communication. (Strauss 1964, 52–3)

By contrast, the Tübingen approach takes the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*, along with the disputed *Seventh Letter*, as evidence that one must supplement one’s understanding of Plato’s thought by seeking the clues left in our accounts of his oral teachings. Krämer, for instance, claimed that these two sources showed that Plato purposefully and deliberately avoiding fixing certain aspects of his philosophy in written form. Thus the unwritten doctrines were not merely doctrines he failed to get around to writing about in his dialogues. They were deliberately not communicated in the dialogues or in any other written form because of the alleged limitations of writing. Moreover, Krämer argued that these unwritten doctrines were, in fact, more important than what one finds in Plato’s written works on the basis of Socrates’ remark at 278D8 about the writer as one who has nothing more valuable (*timiôteros*) to spend his time on.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Esotericists of either stripe have had little to say about Hermias and the reasons for this are pretty obvious. Proponents of Plato’s unwritten doctrines have noted the similarity between Neoplatonic metaphysics and the system that derives all things from the One and the Indefinite Dyad (or the ‘great and the small’). So, one might expect them to share other common ground with esotericism as well. But, as Rogério De Campos puts it, ‘Hermias shows a Plato who does not refuse the written word and reconciles in a harmonious manner the superiority of the oral tradition in his philosophy with his activity as a writer.’[[15]](#footnote-15)

Now, it is not as if the Platonists of antiquity were unaware of the need to say something about the fact that Plato both criticises the activity of writing and does so in writing. The *Anonymous Prolegemenon to Platonic Philosophy* (13.6–14) reports that critics had accused Plato of slandering the authors of written works, or *sungrammata*, on the grounds that these were lifeless and incapable of giving an answer. Why then, a critic might ask, did he not simply leave behind pupils as ‘living writings’, as Socrates and Pythagoras were alleged to have done? Hermias, however, insists that a philosopher, qua philosopher, *can* write *if* he or she enters into the activity with the right aims and a suitable attitude (277,28–278,1). Hermias lists a number of limitations on the proper approach to writing at 271,10–18. The one who writes in a manner that will please the gods must (a) know the truth about the subject he writes about; (b) write for the purpose of reminding himself as proof against the forgetfulness of old age or for the benefit of pupils; and (c) not take it seriously, but as a bit of fun. The benefit to learners, however, Hermias seems to regard as contingent upon supplementation with opportunities for question and answer (270,11–12). But such an insistence upon the necessity for written philosophy to be supplemented with discussion is a very far cry from an insistence that some doctrines are not appropriately communicated in writing at all. So Hermias’ view seems very far indeed from the manner in which the Tübingen school regards the limitations on writing in the last part of the *Phaedrus*.

Hermias does not seem to be concerned with the universal accessibility of writing to any reader as a serious problem, in the manner in which Strauss did. He certainly distinguishes between the surface meaning of, say, Socrates first speech and ‘the secret doctrine that it enigmatically imparts’ (69,3–4). But Hermias also takes seriously the idea that in uttering this speech Socrates is in the early stages of being possessed by the Nymphs. All communications from the divine – even if they be via theological poets like Orpheus or Homer – demand a distinction between the surface meaning and the underlying allegorical meaning. Plato is not, in this case, utilising the dialogic form as a means to evade the problem that writing speaks to any reader. Rather, by Hermias’ lights, Plato’s dialogue channels a divine communication which, by its very nature, demands different levels of interpretation. Hermias’ friend, Proclus, is more forthcoming about the many modes through which Plato communicates in his written works.[[16]](#footnote-16) But Plato’s various modes of communication are not necessitated by the ever-present threat of persecution, given philosophy’s intimate connection to politics.

In short, there is little in Hermias’ discussion of writing to give aid and comfort to esotericists of either the unwritten doctrines sort or of the Straussian sort. This is not to say that Hermias’ interpretation of the *Phaedrus* on writing is not pregnant with a broader theory about philosophy and writing. It just isn’t a theory that will strike most modern readers as plausible.

As in the case of the true art of speaking, Hermias’ eye is fixed on the divine in the case of writing. Socrates’ question to Phaedrus at 274B9 about whether he knows how to please god in the matter of discourse (*logos*) affords Hermias the opportunity to observe that:

Writing (*graphein*) in a seemly manner is this: saying things that are pleasing to the gods; for since they have gifted us with *logos* itself, one should raise propriety of *logos* to [the level of] the gods and use this instrument for the contemplation (*theôria*) of them. (266,11–14)

Thus it would seem that the principal audience for any act of writing is the gods. Writing may have secondary mundane effects: it can assist the person who already knows to remember what he knew before. Or it may assist – in some manner whose details are left unexplored by Hermias – students in coming to grasp important truths (provided that this impetus is properly supplemented with discussion of the appropriate sort). But these mundane purposes are subordinate to the primary goal of writing: to please the very gods from whom all *logos* comes and to use it as an instrument for contemplating them. Unsurprisingly, writing – like rhetoric – turns out to be a discursive form of piety according to Hermias. With that thought, we bring this Introduction to a close. Amen.

# Departures from Lucarini and Moreschini's Text

219,6 Changing the first *ei* to *hoti*.

224,27 Filling the lacuna with *ton Odussea*, as suggested by Couvreur.

226,14 Omitting *dêlon* but translating the other obelised words.

231,4 Emending *to de* to *tou* and removing the full stop.

236,4 Adding *tôn de brakheôn ou* after *akêkoas*, as suggested by a reader.

236,11 Emending *tês rhetorikês* to *têi rhetorikêi*, and

emending *touto* to *toutôi*, as suggested by a reader.

237,6 Adding *epi* before *epitêdeumatôn*, as suggested by Lucarini in the apparatus.

245,6-7 Translating *êgoun dia touto apeikazontes ho isôs eipen*, the reading of manuscript A, rather than *êgoun dia touto to apeikazontes to isôs eipen*, as printed by Lucarini and Moreschini.

249,30 Following Bernard in rejecting a lacuna.

251,20 Adding *katomosanta* after *homoia*, as suggested by Lucarini in the apparatus.

254,20 Like Bernard, rejecting a lacuna.

259,10 Rejecting Lucarini and Moreschini's obelising of *houtôs tekhnên*, accepting Couvreur's emendation of *endeiknumenên* (or *endeiknumenê*) to *endeiknumenon*, and retaining *tekhnê*, the reading of most of the manuscripts, in preference to *tekhnên*.

268,23 Preferring *paideia*, the reading of some manuscripts, to *paidia*, as printed by Lucarini and Moreschini.

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# Introduction

# 1. The *Preface* to Hermogenes’ *On Types of Style* (*peri Ideôn*) attributed to Syrianus

When it became clear that Hermias’ *Phaedrus Commentary* could not be divided into two books in this series, we realised that the third and final volume would be short. We wished to complement Hermias’ exegesis of Plato’s discussion of rhetoric and composition with the first English translation of some of Syrianus’ commentary activity in relation to the standard canon of rhetorical theory in late antiquity: the works of Hermogenes of Tarsus. After all, Syrianus was the teacher of both Proclus and Hermias. Moreover, his commentary *On Hermogenes On Types of Style* (*peri Ideôn*) is more thematically connected to the *Phaedrus’* alleged theme (*skopos*) of ‘beauty at every level’ than Syrianus’ other Hermogenes commentary – the work dealing with *On Issues* (*peri Staseôn*). The latter deals with ‘stasis theory’ which, as we explain below, concerns strategies of argument that a rhetorician can pursue in the juridical or deliberative contexts. The question of styles, by contrast, was said to concern how one might produce *logoi* that were beautiful. Finally, Syrianus’ work on Hermogenes’ *On Types of Style* has had no modern language translation, while his commentary *On Hermogenes On Issues* has recently appeared in a French translation.[[17]](#footnote-17)

This plan for locating a related and relevant companion to the concluding section of Hermias’ *On Plato’s Phaedrus*, however, faces two unfortunate obstacles. First, Syrianus’ commentary *On Hermogenes On Types of Style* is very long. The work, in two books, occupies 95 pages in Rabe’s Teubner edition of 1892.[[18]](#footnote-18) So a translation of the entire thing was not feasible within the word count allowed for volumes in this series. Nor is it easy to identify extracts that seem to be especially philosophically salient. While most Plato and Aristotle commentaries are prefaced by an extensive discussion of the theme, style, setting, etc, Syrianus’ commentary on Hermogenes *On Types of Style* is very brief. After a mere 26 lines, Syrianus begins to interpret Hermogenes’ text lemma by lemma. The task of selecting parts of the commentary that would complement the themes of Hermias’ *Phaedrus Commentary* was too daunting.

Now, it might *appear* that there is an easy solution at hand. Rabe’s 1892 edition of Syrianus *On Hermogenes On Types of Style* also contains a second introduction which he calls the *Preface* (or *Praefatio*) to *Hermogenes On Types of Style*. At 17 pages, the *Preface* was roughly the right size for our purposes. Moreover, the content of the work is of a more general and philosophical nature since it concerns itself with answering sceptical objections to the very possibility of a theory of the types of styles and with the utility of such a theory even were it possible. But this happy solution is only apparent: the *Preface* – or at least most of it – is certainly *not* the work of Syrianus, the teacher of Hermias.

Left with a choice between rounding out this volume with a short essay on rhetorical theory that is relevant to the concerns of Hermias’ *Phaedrus Commentary* and extracts from a too-long commentary on the types of style that is more plausibly assigned to the teacher of Hermias we have opted for thematic unity over personal connection. The *Preface* records doubts of a philosophical nature about the possibility of a genuine *tekhnê* for one of the key concepts of rhetorical theory in late antiquity – types of style – but it is not by Hermias’ teacher.

Let us review the content of the *Preface* before turning to more detail about its likely authorship. In sections 2 and 3 we will provide a broader context and discussion of rhetorical theory and the concept of types of style, as well as the features of rhetorical theory that prompted philosophers to write commentaries on Hermogenes.

## A. Overview of the content of the *Preface*.

The author of the *Preface* records a number of sceptical objections to the project of describing types of style and of the utility of this project for the emulation of ancient writers. These sceptical considerations include the impossibility of knowing particular things and, by extension, the specific characteristics of particulars. Curiously, however, the sceptical arguments rehearsed in the *Preface*, do not name Hermogenes as a target, but rather earlier theorists of types of style: Dionysius of Halicarnassus, an otherwise unknown Hipparchus, and Demetrius (99,18–100,2).

Even if the theory of styles were possible, the sceptical arguments continue, they would not facilitate the imitation of the ancient paradigms of good style, since every writer will ‘shape (*methodeuein*) the language (*logos*) in the direction of his own nature’ (99,14–15). Moreover, any such imitation would have to come about either by nature, by chance, or through art. The sceptical arguments attempt to eliminate the first two possibilities and then revert to the claim that imitation through art would always involves an element of individuality which must be dominant (102,8–9). So even if a theory of styles were possible, its utility would be questionable.

The author of the *Preface* begins his replies to this barrage of sceptical arguments at the start of page 103. The case for the knowability of styles occupies him from there to 104,11, where he turns to his arguments for the possibility and usefulness of emulation, which run to 105,21. At this point he asserts that the sceptics' arguments have now been fully answered - although it must be said that many of his arguments have been poor, sometimes consisting of mere dismissal or counter-assertion - but he will continue the argument, making use of an analogy between a living creature and a style. What follows reveals some awareness on the part of the author of the *Preface* that the sceptic has something of a point. The grasp of the elements that make up a style does not straightforwardly give one an understanding of the style itself; any more than an understanding of the parts of a living creature give one an understanding of that living creature as a whole. It is as if the master painter were to explain to the apprentice about the colours, the brushwork, but could not explain the *logos* or *morphê* that governs the whole work (107,5–9). So, one might say that the author of the *Preface* registers that each type of style is an ‘organic unity’ that does not emerge from its components in accordance with any formula that can be easily specified.

Confronted with this problem of the organic unity of styles, the author of the *Preface* reports that some people resort to a kind of account that he calls ‘symbolic’. He insists, however, that such symbolic accounts cannot illuminate the component parts or their concomitants. So the person who has a *tekhnê* concerning styles will not settle for merely symbolic names for the styles, but will instead aim to call styles by names that are expressively vivid (*emphantikos*, 107,17). But our author concedes that the standard of expressive vividness is problematic ‘for the reason mentioned earlier’ (107,18–19) – a remark whose *specific* reference is far from clear. As a result, he falls back on names metaphorically (rather than symbolically) derived from paradigms of the various types of style, ‘as though the discourses themselves were subjected to visual perception like the forms of the individual [components]’ (107,23–4).

At 108,4 we have another abrupt transition and our author takes us on to the standard questions about a text that we find regularly in commentaries by Ammonius, the son of Hermias, and by his students: (1) its objective or *skopos*; (2) its utility; (3) what its title is; (4) whether it is genuine and the work of an ancient author; (5) in what order it should be read within the Hermogenean corpus; and (6) its division into parts. These standard questions, however, are postponed for a moment while the author of the *Preface* deals with two different questions: ‘What is a style? And why hasn’t Hermogenes defined it?’ These are questions that are familiar from the longer commentary on Hermogenes’ *On Types of Style* that is generally accepted as being by Syrianus. In that longer work Syrianus immediately moves to this question after his very brief introduction. There Syrianus writes:

A type [of style] is a quality of discourse that is in harmony with both the personalities and the subjects at hand in terms of thought (*ennoia*), diction (*lexis*), and the whole framing of the structure [of the discourse]. A species (*eidos*) differs from a type (*idea*) as a genus differs from a species and a whole from a part. For the species is inclusive of the types and the types are subordinated to the species. For it is impossible for the juridical, deliberative or panegyric species of speech to be composed without a mixture of multiple types [of style]. (Syrianus, *in Herm.* I. 2,16–3,3, our translation)

But in the *Preface*, no definition matching that of Syrianus is given and the whole discussion is muddled by the fact that our author runs together the question of *what a style is* with the replies to critics who say that the book – *On Types* [*of Style*] (or *peri Ideôn*) – is not accurately titled. We may reasonably suppose that our author takes these critics to be philosophers since his first response is that one ought not to blame a rhetorician if he fails to use the term *idea* exactly as the philosophers do (108,20). But the *Preface* concedes that they have a point that the title should perhaps have been simply *On Styles* (*peri Kharaktêrôn*) rather than *On Types* [sc. *of Styles*]. The author offers us (at 110,5–14) a differentiation between types and styles that is very opaque and contrasts poorly with the treatment of this distinction that we find in the longer commentary that is attributed to Syrianus. We also find in the *Preface* corresponding epistemic distinctions which reflect the difference between wholes whose features emerge from their parts in a discursively specifiable manner and those that do not. But the matter is by no means clear. After discussing the authenticity of Hermogenes’ work and its relation to the rest of his works, our author gets tangled up again with the distinction between styles and their types and offers nothing much clearer than his earlier remarks. The *Preface* then abruptly ends.

## B. Authorship of the Preface

The *Preface* has the same opening paragraph (96,3-97,6) as the preserved commentary on Hermogenes *On Types of Style* of Syrianus (1,4-2,11).[[19]](#footnote-19) There are, however, two fairly strong arguments against Syrianian authorship of the rest of the work. The first is the inclusion of answers to the six questions (objective, utility, title, authenticity, position among the author’s other works, and textual division) posed by our author at 108,4. These aren't known to have been posed in exactly this form prior to Ammonius, the son of Hermias, which would suggest an author later than Syrianus.[[20]](#footnote-20) In itself this is also not entirely conclusive, as it is supposed by Mansfeld and others that these preliminary questions about a text were informed by Proclus’ now-lost introductory work and, in fact, Ammonius begins the commentary on *On Interpretation* by noting his debt to Proclus’ interpretation of Aristotle’s difficult treatise.[[21]](#footnote-21) So it is not impossible that the six questions were posed in the lost Aristotelian commentaries of Proclus or even those of Syrianus. That said, if the author's description of the six questions as '[matters] that it is *customary* to investigate in the case of every book' at 108,6 is at all accurate, he was presumably writing after both Syrianus (d. 437) and Proclus (d. 485) and perhaps even after Ammonius (d. 517-526), for even if these standard questions *might have originated* in the Athenian school around Syrianus, Hermias and Proclus, their use would not accurately be described as ‘customary’ at that time.

Another argument for regarding the *Preface* as not by Syrianus is simply the ramshackle nature of the work. The other works that are generally accepted as genuine Syrianus are more carefully constructed. Malcolm Heath has observed that Syrianus was not really a natural when it comes to rhetorical analysis.[[22]](#footnote-22) (It was perhaps lucky for him that he ‘made it’ as a philosopher!) But in both his (genuine) rhetorical and philosophical works he’s at least generally coherent, if not always very subtle. The *Preface* is just not as well organised and regularly lacks smooth transitions between its parts. It feels like the work of a compositor.

It looks then as though the introductory paragraph from Syrianus’ commentary has been joined to the introductory material from someone else’s commentary on Hermogenes *On Types of Style*. Just why and how this fusion occurred is a mystery. Syrianus’ introduction is quite specific to his own commentary and his own circumstances (see in particular the mention of his son or grandson Alexander 96,7) and the other material makes a rather awkward fresh start at 97,7. Perhaps some teacher of rhetoric felt the need to insert something on the possibility or usefulness of the theory of styles and the appropriateness of Hermogenes’ title into Syrianus’ commentary. Perhaps this expanded introduction then somehow became detached from the rest of Syrianus’ commentary into which it had been inserted and took on a life of its own in the manuscript tradition.

As it happens we have another candidate for authorship of the non-Syrianian part of the *Preface*. The clue comes from John of Sicily (Ioannes Sikeliotes, mid 10th cent.)[[23]](#footnote-23) who wrote a commentary on Hermogenes *On Types of Style* in which he uses much of the material in the [Syrianus] *Preface* and twice (at 405,15 and 412,23) attributes it to a certain *Phoebammon*.[[24]](#footnote-24) Further, *Preface* 111,9-11 shows that its author also wrote a commentary on Hermogenes' *On Issues* and Christophorus, an 11th century monk, cites such a commentary half a dozen times under the name Phoebammon in his own commentary on *On Issues*. On its own this would not be evidence that the author of the *Preface* was called Phoebammon, but it does lend support to the evidence from John.[[25]](#footnote-25)

So who and when was Phoebammon? Stegemann puts the relevant Phoebammon, or Phoebammons, in the fifth or sixth centuries, Brinkmann in the latter part of the fifth at the earliest, Kennedy, on the ground of a tentative identification with a sophist who lived in Antinoöpolis, in the sixth.[[26]](#footnote-26) On the basis of the evidence reviewed above, we are inclined to put him some time after Syrianus and Proclus. How long after is less clear. Because the name Phoebammon is Egyptian and because of his consideration of the six questions that we find clearly articulated in Ammonius, as well as the philosophical nature of some of his content, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he had some connection with the Alexandrian school, which would mean that he flourished no later than the middle of the sixth century.

The identity of the sceptical opponents whose arguments Phoebammon / [Syrianus] summarises and attempts to answer must also be a matter of speculation. Brinkmann’s article on Phoebaemmon suggested that they were ‘rhetorically active Neoplatonists or Neoplatonist-influenced rhetors, such as Marinus’ and Damascius’ biographies of Proclus and Isidorus present in such large numbers’.[[27]](#footnote-27) This would perhaps make sense given Phoebammon / [Syrianus]’s defence of the title of Hermogenes work (108,11–25) – his claim that one cannot blame a rhetorician for not using the word ‘type’ (*idea*) as philosophers would. This is perhaps not *wildly* speculative, but it is speculative – as is the hypothesis about the motives of the compositor who conjoined material from Phoebammon with the first few lines of Syrianus’ *peri Ideôn* commentary. This seems to be as far as the evidence can take us.

# 2. The context for the *Preface*: Hermogenes and rhetorical theory in late antiquity

In the following sections, we provide some wider context for the [Syrianus] *Preface*. Some readers will find this superfluous, but we suspect that many readers of the Commentators series will not. The history of late antique philosophy is a subfield within the disciplines of Philosophy and Classics and there are a growing number of specialists. There is also a growing community of specialists in the history of rhetoric and rhetorical theory in late antiquity. Our limited exposure to the literature in this field suggests that the practitioners of these specialisations belong to largely non-overlapping sets. This is a shame, because rhetoricians and philosophers in late antiquity were more intertwined with one another than are the specialists in these areas today. We suspect that the study of late antique Platonism in particular would benefit from a wider appreciation of the background in rhetorical studies that most philosophers of the period shared.

In volume 1 of this series we noted the role of training in rhetoric in the advanced education shared by the elites of the late Roman Empire.[[28]](#footnote-28) This advanced education or *paideia* constituted a common point of reference for the wealthy, as well as officials and politicians, from the various Roman provinces. It was part of the glue that held together the educated elite, since exhibiting oneself as one of the ‘friends of the Muses’ – as the educated called themselves – was sometimes sufficient to enter into systems of patronage and the exchange of mutual favours.[[29]](#footnote-29) As well as being a form of social capital, *paideia* also constituted a kind of insurance policy, since there were social norms that, to some extent, limited the ways in which an educated person could be treated.

The studies that were regarded as essential to being an educated person or *pepaidoumenos* centred on rhetoric. By the time of Syrianus, Proclus and Hermias, the course of education revolved around an initial, practically-oriented set of preliminary exercises in composition (the *progumnasmata*). These were followed by more theoretical treatments of specific aspects of the rhetoric. We will discuss just two of these: the *stasis* theory or the theory of ‘issues’ (in a technical sense that we will clarify in a moment) and the theory of the types of style. At the centre of this curriculum were works by – or at least attributed to – Hermogenes of Tarsus.

Hermogenes of Tarsus was discussed briefly by Philostratus in his *Lives of the Sophists* (2.7). He was a child prodigy in declamation and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius travelled to see him perform. Philostratus informs us that the Emperor took pleasure in the fifteen year-old’s *dialexis*, but was amazed at his ability to improvise. Now, one meaning of *dialexis* in rhetorical texts is that of a philosophical discourse, though it can also mean the informal introduction to the main declamation or *meletê*.[[30]](#footnote-30) So it is possible that Hermogenes developed a theoretician’s talent early in life. But his gifts in declamation, Philostratus tells us, deserted him ‘through no obvious illness’. Apart from cruel jests at the expense of a young man who lost his gift, Philostratus tells us no more about him. But it seems that when he ceased to be an oratorical performer, he took to writing treatises on rhetorical theory.[[31]](#footnote-31) Or at least this appears to be the case. Four works – all attributed to him, but only two of which are likely to be genuine – formed the core texts on rhetorical theory in late antiquity. These were:

1. Hermogenes, *On Issues* (*peri Staseôn*)[[32]](#footnote-32)

2. ps.-Hermogenes, *On Invention*[[33]](#footnote-33)

3. Hermogenes, *On Types of Style* (*peri Ideôn*)[[34]](#footnote-34)

4. ps.-Hermogenes, *On the Method of Forceful Speaking*[[35]](#footnote-35)

The fact that the genuine works of Hermogenes were the subject of commentaries attributed to Syrianus, the teacher of both Hermias and Proclus, is not as surprising as it might seem given the general antagonism between rhetoric and philosophy that is depicted in Plato’s *Gorgias*. Nearly every Platonic philosopher of late antiquity was a beneficiary of education in rhetoric. While it became a conventional part of philosophical biographies that the subject of the biography turned his back on rhetoric to pursue philosophy,[[36]](#footnote-36) in fact philosophers engaged regularly with works of rhetorical theory. For their part, rhetoricians came to adopt more philosophically sophisticated approaches to their craft than one might have expected from the *Phaedrus*’ depiction of the haphazard techniques that Phaedrus and Socrates describe as mere preliminary matters to the business of genuine rhetoric. It is therefore worthwhile to consider the mutual influence of rhetoric and philosophy upon one another in late antiquity.

# 3. Philosophers and rhetorical theory

In his book on Greek rhetoric under the Christian emperors, Kennedy identifies several features that distinguish rhetorical theory in late antiquity from that in earlier periods.[[37]](#footnote-37) In addition to the centrality of stasis theory and theories of the types of styles, Kennedy identified the influence of Neoplatonic philosophers:

… few things emerge more clearly than the role of the Neoplatonic philosophers, beginning with Porphyry, in reorganizing the discipline on a philosophical basis as an introduction to dialectic. The logical process of definition and division, fundamental for all philosophical understanding, is given a preliminary presentation to the student through stasis theory. (p. 53)[[38]](#footnote-38)

Both stasis theory and the theories of the types of style posed an attraction for Platonic philosophers and this helps to explain Kennedy’s claim about the role of Neoplatonic philosophers in organising rhetoric as a suitable introduction to dialectic.

Stasis theory was initially developed as a part of judicial rhetoric and its point was to isolate the basic issues in a dispute. Hence works on the varieties of stasis titled *peri Staseôn* are often translated as ‘On Issues’.[[39]](#footnote-39) In its most basic form, it serves to help the legal advocate decide what ground he will argue on. It does this by dividing the issue into the ‘heads of argument’. These provide strategies for the advocate to pursue. So, for instance, one might wonder if it is clear or not whether the accused person in fact did what was alleged. If it is not clear, then the stasis is one of fact (*stokhasmos*). If, however, it is clear that the accused did do what was alleged, then one might argue that this action was not, in fact, something that the law actually forbids because the description of the action is incomplete (*atelês*). In this case, the stasis or head of argument is definition (*horos*). Alternatively, one might concede that the description is complete, but argue the case by appeal to specifically legal considerations (*nomikê*). There are several issues under the ‘legal’ heading: one might defend one’s client by arguing that the wording of the law does not adequately express the intent behind it (*phêton kai dianoia*) or that the law is ambiguous (*amphibolia*) or that there is a conflict among laws (*antinomia*). Alternatively, one could appeal to wider, extra-legal considerations that we might characterise as ‘natural justice’ (*logikê*). Perhaps one might decide to base one’s argument on the claim that the action was unintentional (the stasis of *antilêpsis*) or that, even though illegal, it was beneficial to the city (*antistasis*) or actually caused by one’s opponent (*antenklêma*). While stasis theory had its primary home in the practice of rhetoric in the courts – so-called judicial rhetoric – works in stasis theory sought to apply a parallel system to deliberative rhetoric. That is to say, one could structure speeches intended for a deliberative assembly along similar lines. The issues of deliberative rhetoric were categorised under *pragmatikê* and included things such as the lawful, the just, the expedient, etc.

It is not as if rhetorical theory in the Classical or Hellenistic periods was completely silent on these issues. One can find some discussion of these sorts of considerations in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, but attempts to classify them much more systematically really began in the second century BCE. By the late second century CE, however, we find that the issues (in a now technical sense) have been multiplied and a consensus reached that there are 13 of them. Two second century rhetorical theorists stand at the origins of this professional consensus around the 13 stasis theory: Minucianus and Hermogenes of Tarsus. Minucianus was an Athenian who flourished in the reign of Antoninus Pius (136–161), while Hermogenes, as we noted above, was a young man in the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–180). While both men wrote treatises on stasis theory, Hermogenes’ book eventually became the canonical one on the subject.

There are features of Hermogenes’ *On Issues* that make the book attractive to philosophers of a Platonic bent. First there is the systematicity and the way in which that systematicity seems to coincide with the practice of *dialectic* as it is described in the *Phaedrus*. At 266B5–C1, Socrates equates this with the method of collection and division. At the outset of *On Issues*, Hermogenes describes what he is about to do as a division of political questions into what he calls ‘heads’ (1,10, Rabe). Moreover, Hermogenes immediately seeks to define what it is that is being divided by saying what counts as a ‘political question’ (1,13–17). Finally, having established that a political question is ‘a rational dispute on a particular matter, based on the established laws or customs of any given people, concerned with what is *considered* just, honourable, advantageous, or all or some of these things together’, Hermogenes insists that it is not the task of rhetoric to investigate what *is truly and universally* noble, just, etc. Whatever Hermogenes might have intended by this restriction, a Platonist philosopher might admire the manner in which he both begins with a division of a defined whole (i.e. political questions) and seemingly knows the subordinate relation of rhetoric to philosophical dialectic that, as Hermias says, ‘divides the *intelligible* forms into many and collects them into one’ (*in Phaedr*. 248,6–7).

The other work in the standard rhetorical curriculum that is both widely accepted as a genuine work of Hermogenes and also the subject of a commentary by Syrianus is *peri Ideôn* or *On Types of Style*. If one were to contrast style with content, then one might say that the elements of style are things like diction, figures of speech, word order, clauses, and cadence or rhythm. But, in fact, Hermogenes offers a typology of styles that considers these elements in essential relation to different kinds of content (*ennoia*) and approach (*methodos*) (Hermogenes,  *id.* 218,18–19).[[40]](#footnote-40) So, as Hermogenes understands ‘types of style’, they apply primarily to an *author’s* style because this type is the one that is predominant in his writings. As Hermogenes says:

Thus every type of style is created out of the elements discussed above. But it is very difficult, nearly impossible in fact, to find among any of the ancients a style that is throughout composed of elements such as thought, approach, diction, etc., characteristic of only one kind of style; it is by the predominance of features belonging to one type that each acquires his particular quality. (Hermogenes,  *id.* 222,1–6, trans Wooten)[[41]](#footnote-41)

The exception is Demosthenes who, Hermogenes insists, is master of all the types of styles. Yet even he favours one style above others – the one that Hermogenes calls Abundance (*peribolê*). So his book on styles is useful for anyone who wants to *evaluate* the style of writers, ancient or contemporary, or to *produce* speeches of their own, modelled on the best of the ancients (Hermogenes,  *id.* 213,7–14).

Like the material about argumentative strategies that is codified in stasis theory, theoretical observations upon style go back to the origins of rhetoric as a would-be *tekhnê*. Hermogenes’ types of style are continuous with Aristotle’s virtues of style in *Rhetoric* 1404b1–4. In both Aristotle and Hermogenes, ‘clarity’ (*saphêneia*) holds pride of place. It is a necessary condition for speech to achieve its purpose that it be clear. But clarity is not enough: the language must exhibit propriety for its subject matter, as well as striking the mean between too much and too little ornamentation. Theophrastus seems to have added a fourth virtue (correctness of language), while Stoic philosophers added ‘brevity’ (*suntomia*). But, running alongside this proliferation of virtues for written or spoken language considered in relation to the task at hand, there was also a tradition of regarding different Homeric heroes as having different styles. Menelaus was credited with the ‘plain style’, while Odysseus’ words – ‘like snowflakes on a winter’s day’ (Homer, *Il*. 3.212–24) – embodied the ‘grand style’. This tendency to treat styles as applying principally to paradigmatic authors lies behind the system of Demetrius’ *On Style* with its classification of plain, grand, elegant, and forceful (*deinos*) styles. Hermogenes *On Types of Style* goes yet further in both adding styles and in creating relations of subordination among them. In all there are seven basic types of style, but these admit of subdivisions so that the full system involves the description of 20 types. Wooten provides a useful diagram:

A diagram of different types of style

Description automatically generated

In the tradition of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, clarity plays a special role. But the admixture of other styles prevents the clear presentation of the content from tipping over into banality or triteness.[[42]](#footnote-42) Moreover, Force (*deinotês*) seems to be something of a universal mastery of other styles to good effect.[[43]](#footnote-43) Hermogenes revisits the earlier tradition of assigning styles to Homeric speakers with an extended argument that Force is the defining feature of Odysseus’ speeches.[[44]](#footnote-44)

As with stasis theory, there is much in Hermogenes’ theory of the types of style to attract the attention of a Platonic philosopher. First, Platonic philosophers were concerned with the various ways in which Plato was thought to communicate and with the role of style in these modes of communication. Thus in volume 1 of this series we saw Hermias defending Plato’s style in the *Phaedrus* as suitable to his purposes (*in Phaedr*. 11,11–20) by adverting to the manner in which he mixes the plain style of Lysias’ speech with the more dignified or solemn (*semnotês*) style that Hermogenes discusses as a means of achieving Grandeur. (Examples could be multiplied from Proclus’ discussions of Plato’s styles in various dialogues.) Second, the method that Hermogenes employs throughout *On Types of Styles* has a strong affinity with the method of analysis, as Platonists understood it. This, of course, was the complement to division or *diairesis* and one of the essential tools of *dialectic*. The parallel with analysis emerges clearly when Hermogenes says:

Moreover, since it is not possible to understand or appreciate a mixture, in reference to style or anything else, and it is certainly not possible to create a mixture until we recognize the various elements out of which the mixture was created (to understand gray, for example, we must first understand black and white), we must ignore the style of individual writers such as Plato, Demosthenes, and Xenophon and proceed to examine separately the most basic elements of style itself. One who starts from this point can then easily go on to appreciate and describe individual authors, detecting their careful combinations, whether he wants to study and emulate one of the ancients or someone more recent. (Hermogenes, *id*. 224,12–23 trans. Wooten)

So, from a Platonist’s point of view, *On Types of Style* is an application of the method of analysis to the constituents of styles and a study of the manner in which these elements combine in various ways to yield various effects.

Porphyry was the first well-known Platonic philosopher to contribute to stasis theory. Our sources attribute to him a work ‘On the Art’ or ‘On the Art Dealing with Stasis’ (depending on how the title is reported), as well as a commentary on a now-lost treatise on stasis theory by Minucianus.[[45]](#footnote-45) Malcolm Heath has argued that Porphyry introduced an innovation that was subsequently adopted by teachers of rhetoric who did not also identify as philosophers: the detailed commentary on works in rhetorical theory.[[46]](#footnote-46) The adoption of this innovation, Heath notes, is easily explained by the common educational culture shared between rhetoric and philosophy in late antiquity:

Commentary on a standard teaching text provides specialists with an excellent vehicle for exploring (and debating) technical doctrine in depth and detail. So it is not surprising that an innovation in the form of rhetorical technography should have disseminated rapidly from philosophers to sophists. In a culture in which philosophy was part of general advanced education, many rhetoricians who were not professional philosophers would in any case have had some philosophical training, and been familiar with both the formats and the language of philosophical writing. … Conversely, one would expect philosophers to have studied rhetoric in the course of their schooling, given the place of rhetoric in ancient education.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Porphyry was not alone among Platonic philosophers who wrote commentaries on rhetorical teaching texts. Syrianus tells us that other, less known Platonist philosophers also dealt with the canonical works of the rhetorical teaching curriculum. These include Evagoras and Aquila, the latter of whom likely wrote a commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories* in the early 4th century. But the commentaries on the works of Hermogenes in the standard curriculum that were undertaken by philosophers seem to have their own agenda. Russell observed forty years ago that:

This philosophical intervention may be judged unhelpful. The commentators on Hermogenes, among whom Syrianus was particularly influential, seem much more concerned with the arrangement of their own material than with any utility the system might offer either for the potential speaker or for the reader of Demosthenes.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Syrianus *says* that philosophers are more precise in their definitions of the *staseis*. Thus at 56,16 in his commentary on Hermogenes *On Issues* Syrianus switches from a close reading of Hermogenes’ text to somewhat different divisions and definitions for stasis theory found in the philosophers Evagoras and Aquila. These philosophers come later than Hermogenes and Syrianus regards their definitions as supremely scientific (*epistêmonikôtata*). They are precise, according to Syrianus, while Hermogenes dealt with the definitions of the issues only in outline.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Apart from the primacy of theoretical tidiness and clarity over practical application, are there other differences in the manner in which a philosopher, like Syrianus, dealt with the material in Hermogenes and the manner in which rhetoricians who were not philosophers did? Surveying the differences between Syrianus and Hermogenes, as well as the differences between philosopher-rhetors and non-philosophers, Heath finds no vast differences between their techniques and methods. All of them are in love with the method of division. The doctrinal differences over questions about these divisions between philosophers writing on rhetoric and non-philosophical rhetoricians are minor. Heath does suggest one difference, though it is subtle: the scholia on acknowledged rhetorical exemplars, like Demosthenes, by pure rhetoricians evince no scruples over the use of sophisms or over the fact that Demosthenes was likely to have bribed a witness in the case under consideration. Other scholia on the same speech, which may have originated with a Platonist philosopher, are more circumspect and reserved about such underhanded rhetorical tricks.

# 4. Conclusion

Plato’s *Gorgias* famously challenged the status of rhetoric as a *tekhnê*. The *Phaedrus*, just as famously, held out the possibility of a genuine *tekhnê* of rhetoric, but one far removed from the actual theory, teaching, and practice of rhetoric. By the time of Syrianus and Hermias rhetoricians themselves had adapted philosophical methods like collection and division to produce theories that defined (inter alia) styles or enumerated the dimensions along which to arrange the content of juridical or deliberative oratory. The *Preface* of [Syrianus] shows us that there were critics who were still not sufficiently impressed with the technical pretensions of the philosophical rhetoric of late antiquity. But the Hermogenes commentaries of Syrianus treat rhetoric as a matter worthy of serious intellectual engagement.

# 5. The translation

Rabe in fact edited Phoebammon's prolegomenon twice, the first edition, as already mentioned, appearing in 1892, the second in 1931. In the second edition he took a rather different view of the manuscript tradition and, largely as a result of this, the text differs from that of the earlier edition at some points. Because this later edition represents Rabe's final thoughts on the text we have decided to base our translation on it. Unfortunately from our point of view the two editions are paginated differently. Our first thought was to give the page and line numbers of the edition we are translating in the margin of our translation, but because the TLG text gives those of the 1892 edition, we decided it would be more useful to provide them. For anyone with the 1931 edition to hand it provides the page (but not line) numbers of the 1892 edition in the margins of the text.

The following table lists the significant differences between the two editions.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line and page numbers in 1892 and 1931 editions | 1931 text | 1892 text |
| 98,9 (376,3) | *mnêsin* | *mimêsin* |
| 98,18 (376,12) | *gar* | *de* |
| 99,8 (376,26) | *ho ean* | *hos*' *an* |
| 100,3 (377,15) | *<eis>* |  |
| 100,9 (377,21) | *<eti>* |  |
| 100,10 (377,22) | *huperebê* | *huperbebêke* |
| 100,11 (377,24) | *oikeian* | *idian* |
| 100,15 (378,2) | *probasin* | *prosbasin* |
| 100,16 (378,3) | *taxin* | *mixin* |
| 100,18 (378,5) | *toutous* | *toutôi* |
| 101,19 (378,28) | <*adunatousa*> |  |
| 102,3 (379,4) | *ektelesai, rhast*' *an poioiê*; | *rhasta poiein*, *ektelesai* |
| 102,3 (379,4) | <*an*> |  |
| 102,4 (379,5) | *hoion ei* | *hoionei* |
| 102,13 (379,14) | *pros*, *menomen* | *prosmenomen* |
| 102,21 (379,22) | *kai mê* [*te*] *ton* | *mê ti ge kai ton* |
| 104,4 (380,25) | *ê tên toiande* | *ê toiande* |
| 104,6 (380,27) | *einai* | *meinai* |
| 104,20 (381,12) | *kai mê* | *mê kai* |
| 104,22 (381,15) | <*dê*> |  |
| 105,12 (381,27) | *asumphora* | *asumphoron* |
| 105,15 (382,3) | *kan* (no accent) | *kan* (grave accent) |
| 105,20 (382,8) | *kai eis* | *eis* |
| 106,12 (382,24) | *logôi* | *logos* |
| 107,7 (383,14) | *meta* | *kata* |
| 107,17 (383,24) | *poiein* | *poiei* |
| 108,7 (384,10) | <*kai*> |  |
| 108,9 (384,13) | <*tis*> |  |
| 108,10 (384,14) | <*kai tou khrêsimou*> |  |
| 110,16 (386,12) | *tên idean* | *tas ideas* |
| 111,5 (386,26) | *eirêtai* | *lekteon* |
| 111,6 (386,28) | *men gnêsion* | *men gar gnêsion* |
| 111,9 (387,2) | *peri staseôn* | *peri tôn staseôn* |

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1. Miles & Baltussen 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Watts 2006, 79–87. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. On the complex relation between the Platonist philosophers of the Athenian school and rhetoric, see Caluori 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Tarrant 2017, 1–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. cf. Gardiner & Baltzly 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This passage is fr. 7 from Iamblichus’ Phaedrus commentary in Dillon 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The introductions are collected in Rabe 1931. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Introductio in prolegomena Hermogenis artis rhetoricae fort. auctore Marcellino*, 281,17–283,10 in Rabe 1931; cf. Kennedy 1983, 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Bohle 2021,151 suggests that there is no real difference between Olympiodorus and Hermias on this point: being a (true!) rhetorician would be a skill of the philosopher-statesman. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *tên alêthê rhetorikên, toutesti philosophian*. Philosophy is similarly the true and highest form of *mousikê*; cf. Proclus’ discussion in the fifth question of Essay 5 in his *Republic* commentary with reference to *Phaedo* 61A. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. On dialectic in Hermias’ *Phaedrus* commentary, the only sustained study is Gabor 2020. We think that Hermias’ relatively few remarks on the subject are not entirely sufficient to support all of Gabor’s conclusions. In particular, we find we are unpersuaded of his claim that ‘dialectic is identical to and constitutive of the activity of philosophy’ (p. 50). Proclus’ more substantial body of work provides richer evidence for the views of the Athenian school on dialectic and the method of division. cf. Tresnie 2020 and Baltzly 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This section expands on some of the arguments put forward in Tarrant & Baltzly 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Strauss 1964, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Krämer 2012, 66, which offers a translation of Krämer 1996 along with other important essays from Tübingen school writers. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. De Campos 2022, 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. cf. *PT* 1.§4,17,18–23. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Patillon 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Rabe 1892. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The only significant difference between the two texts as edited by Rabe is the absence of *theois* after *logiois* at 2,10 in the *Preface* – in fact it only appears in one of the two MSS of the genuine Syrianus text known to Rabe and in none of the seven [Syrianus] MSS known to him. It is plausible, however, that the omissions are due to Christian writers. The two manuscript traditions even share many of the same variants. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. cf. Ammonius, *On Aristotle On Interpretation* 1,12–20, trans. Blank 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Brinkmann 1906, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Heath 1995, 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. On John see Roilos 2018 and Papaioannou 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. cf. John 405,13 ff. with [Syr] 109,4 ff. and John 412,26-413,10 with [Syr] 102,24-103,15; in the latter case in particular there is considerable verbal agreement between the two texts. Fuhr 1893 seems to have been first to draw attention to these passages. In fact John seems to have had access to the whole of our author's commentary on *On Types* and not just the introductory material preserved in the *Praefatio*, since later in his commentary (at 124,21) a comment on Hermogenes 219,6 ff. is described as coming from 'Syrianus and Phoebammon'.The fullest treatment of Phoebammon is Stegemann 1941, a Pauly article. Brinkmann 1906, where the parts of the *Praefatio* that deal with imitation are edited along with related passages from John, and Kennedy (1983) are also useful. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. On Christophorus' commentary see Rabe 1895. There are other works, extant or not, going under the name of Phoebammon, notably one on figures of speech (*peri Skhêmatôn)*, but, as Stegemann, points out, there may well have been more than one 'sophist' named Phoebammon working in the relevant period, and further questions of authorship need not concern us here. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Stegemann 1941, 326; Brinkmann 1906, 118; Kennedy 1983,121. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Brinkmann 1906, 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Baltzly & Share 2018, 31–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The classic work on the subject is Brown 1992. See also Browning 2000 and Connolly 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. cf. Miles & Baltussen 2023, 623. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Or at least this appears to be the case. Patillon 1985, 13-17 doubts that even the works accepted as genuinely by Hermogenes should be assigned to the Hermogenes of Tarsus who figures in Philostratus. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Translation and commentary in Heath 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Kennedy 2005, Patillon 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Heath 2009, Patillon 2009 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Kennedy 2005, Patillon 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. cf. Marinus, *Life of Proclus* §11 and for Damascius’ turn from rhetoric, see his *Philosophical History*, fr. 137b Athanassiadi 1999. For commentary, see Caluori 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Kennedy 1983. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Kennedy 1983 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. The disputed origins of ‘stasis’ as the name for this theory, as well as general overview of its complexities is provided in Russell 1983, 40–71. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Rabe 1913 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Wooten 1987 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. ‘It is only natural to discuss Grandeur after the discussion of Clarity, for it is necessary to interject Grandeur and a certain amount of majesty and dignity into a clear passage. This is because the very clear can seem trite and commonplace, which is the opposite of Grandeur.’ (Hermogenes,  *id.* 241,11–15, trans. Wooten) [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. 'In my opinion Force in a speech is nothing other than the proper use of all the kinds of style previously discussed and of their opposites and of whatever other elements are used to create the body of a speech. To know what technique must be used and when and how it should be used, and to be able to employ all the kinds of style and their opposites and to know what kinds of proofs and thoughts are suitable in the proemium or in the narration or in the conclusion, in other words, as I said, to be able to use all those elements that create the body of a speech as and when they should be used seems to me to be the essence of true Force.' (Hermogenes,  *id.* 368,23–369,9, trans. Wooten) [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Hermogenes,  *id.* 370,19–372,6 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. There were other rhetorical works by Porphyry, as well, including a response to rhetoricians criticising Plato. There was a work in six books entitled *Against Aristides* which was likely a reply to Aristides’ criticisms of Plato’s *Gorgias* and we can discern traces of this Porphyrian work in Olympiodorus’ commentary on that dialogue. For an overview of works on rhetoric by Porphyry, see Malcolm Heath 2003. For *Against Aristides* in particular, see Behr 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. For an overview of the genre of commentary, see Pepe 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Heath 2009, 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Russell 1983, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. cf. Syrianus, *On Hermogenes On Issues* III.1.6 (Patillon 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)