

# Hermias on the Unity of the *Phaedrus*

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Two broad types of error might be attributed to Hermias' view on the unity of Plato's *Phaedrus*. First, you might object that Hermias misunderstands Socrates' principle of speech-composition (*Phdr.* 264a–e) and defends a single unitary theme at the expense of appreciating the thematic variety of the dialogue. The dialogue simply has no *skopos* in the Neoplatonic sense of the word. Second, you might grant that the *Phaedrus* has a single unifying theme but object that Hermias' identification of that theme is mistaken. The real unifying theme of Plato's dialogue is not, as Hermias supposes, 'beauty on every level'. It is something else.

Recent scholarship on the *Phaedrus* reveals that both these criticisms would find supporters. An influential argument by Malcolm Heath backs the first (and undermines the second): the kind of compositional unity discussed at *Phdr.* 264c (and presumably applicable to Plato's own text)<sup>1</sup> is a less-demanding classical concept of formal or dramatic unity which lacks the distinctly Neoplatonic requirement of a single theme that governs all elements of a work. Therefore, the search for a unifying *skopos* of the dialogue is, both then and now, anachronistic. A broader feature of the scholarship on the unity of the *Phaedrus* might validate Hermias' second error: while many commentators suggest a unifying theme of the dialogue, hardly any argue that it is 'beauty' (let alone 'beauty on every level'). For both these reasons contemporary literature on the *Phaedrus* tends to ignore Hermias. This essay attempts to make better sense of Hermias' position on the unity of the *Phaedrus*. In section 1 we argue that Heath has failed to show that the Neoplatonists over-interpret Socrates' insistence on the unity of discourses at *Phdr.* 264c. In section 2 we discuss and defend the views of

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1 Since the applicability of Plato's critique of writing to his own works is much debated, we might expect a similar controversy over the use of Socrates' principle of speech composition in interpretative judgements about the *Phaedrus*. Burger (1980) 90, for example, argues Plato's critique of writing applies to rhetoric and treatises but not to the dialogue form, which, unlike other genres of writing, knows 'when to speak and when to remain silent'. Griswold (1986), 219–226 agrees with Burger: the Platonic dialogue solved the problem that plagues *other* forms of writing, but Plato does not assume his criticism applies to his own works. Thompson (1868), Derrida (1981), and Rowe (1986) all disagree, each holding that Plato's critique of writing does apply universally, and thus to the *Phaedrus* itself. We assume here that the critique is applicable to the *Phaedrus*, and so too are the guidelines for well-formed speeches.

two modern commentators who agree with Hermias in accepting (at least) that there is a unifying theme for the *Phaedrus* and that it involves beauty. In section 3 we consider Hermias' defence of his more demanding notion of a *skopos* for the dialogue and the identification of that *skopos* with 'beauty at every level'. There may be many details of Hermias' interpretation of Plato's dialogue that we who are not Neoplatonists cannot find even vaguely plausible. But when it comes to general features of the *Phaedrus*, like its unifying theme, we think that Hermias deserves to be taken seriously.

### 1 What Is a *Skopos* and Why Think the *Phaedrus* Has One?

The question of the unity of the *Phaedrus* is a textbook example of a scholarly controversy. It is controversial whether we should expect the *Phaedrus* to have a single unifying theme and, among those who agree that it should, it is controversial what that theme is. A survey of the secondary literature brings up in excess of fifty interpretations with little sign of an emerging consensus over the last hundred years.<sup>2</sup> The first controversy arises from the fact that Socrates explicitly mentions in the *Phaedrus* that organic unity is a *sine qua non* of a well-formed composition (264c), yet the *Phaedrus* itself—with its three unique speeches on love, lengthy dialogue on rhetoric, and eclectic range of myths and arguments on various topics such as writing, the soul, and the theory of Forms—seems to openly violate this principle. Thus, one question that has particularly puzzled scholars is whether or not there is a single, specifiable theme around which the content of the dialogue can be unified. And if there is such a theme, what is it? Or if there is no such theme, how is the *Phaedrus* unified, if at all? It seems nearly all commentators consider the *Phaedrus* unified in at least some sense: we can talk about this dialogue called the *Phaedrus*, written by Plato, depicting two characters walking down the Ilissus, and so on. What is more controversial is the assumption that Socrates' conception of unity requires a unifying theme, instead of some other unifying apparatus such as dramatic plot, structure, or poetic imagery.<sup>3</sup>

The Neoplatonic commentary tradition was in no doubt about the existence of a strong unifying theme for each dialogue. It is characteristic of the Neopla-

2 The best summary of this literature is Werner (2009) 91–137. Further opinions on the unity of the *Phaedrus* include Batchelder (2009) 1–2, note 1; Bury (1886) 83; Cooper (1948) 3; Dorter (2006) 260; Hoerber (1958) 33; Jaeger (1945) 184; Kastley (2002) 138; Levinson (1964) 196; Moss (2013) 3; Rowe (2005) xxiii; Trivigno (2009) 177–178; and Yunis (2011) 4.

3 Helmbold & Holther (1952) is exemplary of the view that the unifier of the text need not be thematic.

tonic commentary to first orient the reader to the work under discussion by identifying its *skopos*. This is the key preliminary to unlocking the teaching of Plato in each dialogue. So what is a Neoplatonic *skopos*?

The *skopos* is that which unifies a dialogue and is the key to understanding it. A dialogue's *skopos* is, roughly, what the dialogue is about. It was uncontroversial in the broader commentary tradition, prior to the work of Iamblichus, that Platonic dialogues possessed a *skopos* or a *prothesis*. But the Neoplatonic tradition after Iamblichus tightened this specification considerably by claiming that each dialogue in the canon was meant to correspond to increasingly more abstract gradations of virtue. The relations of the different *skopoi* and their correlation with different gradations of virtue created an ordered curriculum for the ascent of the soul. Here is what Proclus has to say about the *Alcibiades I*—the first dialogue in the Neoplatonic curriculum:

Even if one were to say that the *telos* for the dialogue is the *care* of the self and the understanding of this—though this is rightly said—let such a person understand that this [care of the self] applies to us as an end (*telos*) or as the good that results from what is demonstrated [in the dialogue]. But what is sought is a subject for research (*problēma*) and that for the sake of which the syllogisms in the dialogue exist—the *knowledge* of the self, for it is one thing to know the *skopos* of the dialogue but another to know the good that results from its having such a theme.

*in Alc.* 9.16–10.3, our translation

Not only was each dialogue assumed to have a single *skopos*, not shared with any other dialogue, but it was the *skopos* that explained the structure or division (*diairesis*) of the dialogue. This role as the explanatory principle of structure is clear from Olympiodorus' *Commentary on the Gorgias*. Just as Hermias will do in the case of the *Phaedrus*, Olympiodorus dismisses some candidates for the *skopos* of the dialogue because they are merely drawn from one part of it (proem § 4.1–4). The true *skopos* covers the *whole* dialogue (cf. *Anonymous Prolegomena* 21.18ff.) and explains why the dialogue has the structure it has. So the *skopos* of the *Gorgias* is not rhetoric or justice and injustice, or even the Demiurge—though Socrates talks about each of these things in his conversation. Rather, the *skopos* of the *Gorgias* is *eudaimonia politikê*. It is this that binds all three of the conversations together since Olympiodorus tells us that Socrates exposes the causes of constitutional well-being in his conversations. The efficient cause is the philosophical life (which is the topic of conversation with Gorgias); the formal cause is justice and temperance (the topic of the

conversation with Polus); the paradigmatic cause is the well-ordered cosmos “since the statesman arranges everything with his eye on the universe which is brimming with order”.<sup>4</sup> This last is the principal topic of conversation with Callicles, though Olympiodorus concedes that the interpenetration of causes by one another assures that these causes make some appearance in the other conversations as well.

From this example we may take it that the *skopos* of a dialogue is a single theme, the illumination of which explains the structure of the dialogue and whose understanding is necessary for the reading of the dialogue to confer its aretaic benefit. Why suppose that every Platonic dialogue has such a *skopos*? The answer for the Neoplatonists is given in the *Phaedrus* itself:

Every speech (*logos*) must be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own; it must be neither without head nor without legs; and it must have a middle and extremities that are fitting both to one another and to the whole work.

*Phdr.* 264c2–5, NEHAMAS and WOODRUFF

Justifications as they are offered for the existence of a *skopos* inevitably allude to this passage (*Anon. Proleg.* 21.19–25).<sup>5</sup> Are the Neoplatonists right to locate in this passage the proof of their principle?

Heath claims that the Neoplatonists misunderstand the import of the passage. He discusses the strong notion of the unity of a written work that flows from the Neoplatonists’ understanding of *Phdr.* 264c.2–5 and rejects the idea that this reading is necessitated by Plato’s text. He first notes that Plato’s criticisms of Lysias’ speech do not invoke any term like ‘unity’ or any close cognate. Rather, Socrates in the *Phaedrus* criticizes Lysias’ speech on two grounds: completeness (requiring a text to have all and only the parts which it ought to have) and coherence or appropriate order (those parts should be properly arranged).<sup>6</sup> But completeness and order falls short of a strong requirement of organic unity. He illustrates this gap by reference to Biellemeier’s discussion of Hermias:

Through an argument *e contrario* we reach the conclusion that Plato’s comparison of the speech with a ζῷον means that its sequence of thought

4 Olympiodorus, *In Gorg.* translated by Jackson, Lycos, and Tarrant (1998).

5 Cf. Proclus, *in Remp.* 1 6.24–7.2 and *in Parm.* 659.12–18 where *Phdr.* 264c is also invoked to justify the Iamblichean procedure of relating all aspects of the dialogue back to its *skopos*.

6 Heath (1989) 18–19.

must be constructed with the same inner necessity as the limbs of a ζῶον, which, despite their diverse functions, are held together by a unitary *Lebensprinzip*.

BIELMEIR 22–23, cited in HEATH 19

Heath responds that the attempt to import a unitary *Lebensprinzip* into *Phdr* 264c.2–5 is gratuitous: only the external bodily form of the organism is in question in this passage and there is no mention of its soul.<sup>7</sup> By eliding the discussion from one of bodily integrity to an alleged psychic source for this integrity—a unitary *Lebensprinzip*—Heath alleges the Neoplatonists have illegitimately read their own metaphysics into Plato's text.

Applied to the *Phaedrus*, Heath's more modest reading of 264c's requirements comes merely to this: the first part of the dialogue discusses love, while the second part discusses rhetoric. These two themes are brought together for the sake of the character Phaedrus (Heath 14). The selection and arrangement of textual elements in a work of philosophy is, by Plato's lights, determined by the function of that discourse.<sup>8</sup> The *Phaedrus*, according to Heath, aims to 'sow seeds' in a 'suitable soul' (276e.4–a.4) or to 'write' on a soul about justice, beauty and virtue (2798a.2–4). Nothing in these philosophical purposes demands that the *Phaedrus* have a single philosophical theme in the sense in which the Neoplatonists suppose.<sup>9</sup>

Hermias and other Neoplatonists would deny critical premises in Heath's argument. These denials are not *ad hoc*, nor are they specific to merely the issues at hand. Rather, they flow from their broad orientation to metaphysics and to the function of Plato's dialogues.

Let us first address the move from the completeness and order of a ζῶον to its soul or, as Bielmeir aptly put it, the *Lebensprinzip*. The completeness and order in a seen thing, such as a living being or a written *logos*, is always the product of a more unified and invisible principle that is the cause or explanation of that completeness and order. This is simply a fundamental axiom of their metaphysics of causation. The visible *kosmos* is the product of an invisible *kosmos* and it is the job of the Platonic philosopher to move from the visible to the invisible causes. So the belief that there is a unified and unifying *Lebensprinzip* that explains the apparent completeness and order of a Platonic dialogue is not an

7 In fact, Heath points out, when Plato speaks of an *empsychon logos* it is *logos* in the soul—not a written text at all (*Phdr.* 276a9).

8 Heath takes different dialogues to be doing different things: the *Gorgias* aims to instill virtues, while the *Statesman* aims to improve dialectical ability.

9 Heath 26.

assumption that is specific to their hermeneutic theory. It is simply an application within the sphere of hermeneutics of a broader, universal causal principle. Moreover, such a causal principle is plausibly recommended by Plato's own works. It is, for instance, the World Soul that moves, unifies and enlivens the visible cosmos in Plato's *Timaeus*. Similarly in the *Republic* the unity of the ideal city is a result of the complementary psychic orders in the souls of its citizens. While the Neoplatonists may have been much more explicit in their insistence that each unified thing is the product of an ontologically prior and more unitary cause, the antecedents of such a principle are clearly visible in Plato's dialogues. The Neoplatonists' hermeneutical principle of unity may be mistaken because their general causal principle is, but the hermeneutical principle is not arbitrary or *ad hoc*. Just as the soul of a living being is the unitary thing that unifies the animal, so too in the realm of written compositions, the *skopos* is the unitary thing that unifies what is well written. (And of course, they have no doubts that Plato's dialogues are well written!)

Second, while Heath supposes that some Platonic dialogues are ethical and others logical, the Neoplatonists who follow Iamblichus' curriculum would disagree. Each dialogue contributes in its own distinctive way toward the *telos* of likeness to god by promoting increasingly higher gradations of the cardinal virtues. Both the independent plausibility and the Platonic antecedents of this assumption are much more problematic. Plato's dialogues tell us nothing much about whether Plato had any philosophy to communicate or about what his intentions were in writing dialogues. The role of Plato as mystagogue (Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* 1.1) is not one that is obviously recommended by the dialogues themselves. But it is not one that is contradicted by the dialogues either. Here we are in the realm of grand hermeneutical questions about Plato's dialogues. The Neoplatonists go their way and Heath goes his.

We conclude that Heath has not made a decisive case against Hermias' belief that the *Phaedrus* has a single *skopos*. Heath's arguments involve key assumptions that the Neoplatonists are free to reject in view of their wider philosophical commitments. This is not yet to say that there *is* a unitary theme to the dialogue—much less such a strongly unitary theme as a Neoplatonic *skopos* is alleged to be. It is simply to say that Heath's arguments that the *skopos* assumption is a bizarre Neoplatonic accretion, utterly foreign to Plato, has not yet been proven. To really adjudicate their competing claims, we should look to the fruitfulness of each author's reading of the dialogue.

## 2 Love and Beauty as the Dialogue's Unifying Theme

Thus far we have argued that Heath's arguments do not show that Hermias is wrong to think that the *Phaedrus* might have some single *skopos* that unifies it. In this section we will concentrate on two among the small number of modern commentators who have defended the thesis that the attitude/object pair 'love-beauty' is the unifying theme of the dialogue. This is an unpopular position in the literature due to a widely accepted argument that love or beauty cannot be the main theme. Since Hermias' position on the *skopos* of the *Phaedrus* resembles this modern interpretation at least partially, the argument against love-beauty as the main theme is a threat to his account of the dialogue's unity as well. Let us first, however, note the limits of the similarity between Hermias' position and this modern reading and then go on to evaluate the case against love-beauty as the theme of the dialogue. In the next section we will see if Hermias' version of this idea fares any better than the modern version.

John Beare and Lane Cooper both argue that the theme of love-beauty plays a pivotal role in unifying the *Phaedrus*. However, it would be wrong to simply categorise Hermias' interpretation alongside theirs as a form of what Werner calls 'thematic monism'. According to Werner, proponents of thematic monism argue for *one or more* of the following claims: (1) there is a single, primary theme of the *Phaedrus*; (2) strong or subtle thematic links exist between the 'two halves' of the dialogue; (3) the disunity of the dialogue is only superficial.<sup>10</sup> While Beare and Cooper would readily fit the bill, Hermias' position goes much further. Not only does it endorse all these claims but it also includes a much stronger one: that *all* elements of the dialogue are subordinate to, and intended to illuminate, a single *skopos* whose understanding is sufficient for comprehending the division of the text. On this reading, no material in the text is extraneous to the organising *skopos*. Proponents of thematic monism generally do not go so far. It is perhaps fairer to say that, for them, the unity of the *Phaedrus* consists in a single theme around which the content of the dialogue can be philosophically unified and its structure made intelligible. The key implication is that there are perhaps other specifiable themes of the dialogue capable of performing similar unifying functions. Each commentator's chosen 'theme' is, however, the theme he or she considers best able to successfully unify the content of the text and make good sense of its form. In contrast, Hermias' view is that there is an organic unity to the dialogue so strong that it, and it alone, can illuminate both the division of the text and also individual

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<sup>10</sup> Werner (2007) 93.

matters of detail. Since Hermias' position is committed to far more than that of modern thematic monists, any threat to their position is a threat to his as well.

Among the modern commentators we might classify as 'thematic monists', rhetoric is perhaps the most popular choice for the dialogue's main theme.<sup>11</sup> According to Werner, its popularity is reducible in many cases to a simple disjunctive syllogism that rules out the centrality of love or beauty as a thematic unifier:

- (1) Either rhetoric or love is the main theme of the dialogue (these are, perhaps, the two themes that are most apparent on first acquaintance with the dialogue);
- (2) Love cannot be the main theme;  
Therefore, the main theme is rhetoric.

If the dialogue is not about love, then neither is it about its object, beauty; if it is not about beauty, then neither is it about the desire for beauty, love.

What justifies the second premise, that love-beauty cannot be the main theme of the *Phaedrus*? Schleiermacher formulates the standard argument (Schleiermacher 49 ff.).<sup>12</sup> Love-beauty is forgotten or does not feature so prominently in the dialectical section of the dialogue in the same way that it does in the first three speeches.<sup>13</sup> So if we assume love-beauty to be the main theme, we must treat the second half of the dialogue as some kind of hasty, extraneous add-on. But this contradicts Socrates' principle of speech-composition. Therefore, love-beauty is not the main theme. The positive thesis that often accompanies this argument is that the dialectical section is primarily about rhetoric and the first three speeches function just as *examples* of rhetoric. Therefore, both halves of the dialogue concern rhetoric and so the unifying theme of the *Phaedrus* is rhetoric.<sup>14</sup>

How do the proponents of love-beauty as the unifying theme respond? Since both parties to this debate agree that there is some unifying theme, one strategy is to show that rhetoric as a theme fares no better. Beare makes such a case by arguing against Thompson's explanations of two key features of the *Phaedrus*, both of which purport to justify the claim that rhetoric is the main theme.

11 See Thompson (1868) xiv-xv; Bury (1886) 83; Taylor (1927) 300; de Vries (1969) 23; Fowler (1914) 407-408; Jaeger (1945) 184; Curran (1986) 71; Winnington-Ingram (1994) 12; Nehamas (1999) 341.

12 Jaeger (1986) 186 reinforces the same view. Werner (2007) n. 11 lists a number of scholars who have more recently signed up to it.

13 For expressions of this premise, see the literature summarized by Werner (2007) n. 11.

14 Thompson is a clear example of this argument. Werner note 9 lists those scholars who maintain that the palinode is an expression of the principles of true rhetoric that are expounded in the second half of the dialogue.



The first is Plato's motive for choosing *eros* as the subject matter of the three speeches. Thompson suggests, as we mentioned is standard in the literature, that the speeches simply serve as examples of rhetoric, the nature of which is analysed in the dialectical section of the dialogue.<sup>15</sup> But if Thompson is right, Beare argues that it is unclear why love rather than, say, justice or some other topic is selected as the primary material for discussion. If they function simply as examples of rhetorical style, the content is arbitrary. Beare does not doubt that the speeches exemplify various models of rhetoric, but he is convinced that they are thematically purposeful too.

Another strategy is to argue for the necessity of love-beauty as the subject of the speeches. Beare's argument is as follows:<sup>16</sup> the *Phaedrus* presents recollection in conjunction with dialectic as two modes of philosophy's organon of the knowledge of truth. Regarding recollection, an important principle is introduced in the *Phaedrus*: Beauty is the only Form whose image appeals directly and vividly to human sense, since we apprehend all other ideas δι' ἀμυδρῶν ὀργάνων (*Phdr.* 250b). This image of τὸ καλόν produces ἔρωϛ in us, 'a feeling compounded of joy and pain', which, although subject to the possibility of impious degradation, has the power to terrify 'all baser instincts into submission to the nobler promptings of reminiscence'.<sup>17</sup> It is this emotional response in the soul that distinguishes the earthly manifestation of τὸ καλόν from those of the other Forms.<sup>18</sup>

Beare also finds Thompson's explanation for a second feature of the *Phaedrus*—namely, the connection between its two parts—equally unconvincing. Again, Thompson relies on the common example-precept theory. The speeches are dramatisations of the types of rhetoric which are then investigated and subject to scrutiny in the later half of the dialogue. Beare's main concern here is that Thompson does not demonstrate that the order of the parts is irreversible. Beare wants to maintain that the second section grows organically out of the first. Thompson's position denies a necessity in the arrangement of the *Phae-*

15 See, eg, Asmis (1986) or Gill (2012).

16 Beare (1913) 320.

17 Ibid. 321.

18 Werner (2007) note 17 maintains that Beare's argument fails since "images of the other Forms are visible to the eye as well", such as the resemblance of two equal sticks to the Form of the Equal in the *Phaedo*. Beare's rejoinder should be that two equal sticks do not induce the sensory response—a trembling in our hearts, as if we stood before a god in awe—that is requisite for ascension of the soul towards the world of ideas. If Beauty is the only Form whose images have the requisite erotic impact on us, then Beauty is uniquely suited to task of awakening souls sunk deep into the body to recollection of the Forms. If equal sticks and stone induce in people like Cebes and Simmias the recollection of Equality Itself, this is because they—unlike Phaedrus—are already philosophers.

*drus* and allows that the dialectical part might have preceded the speeches. Beare argues for a logical coherence in the organisation of the dialogue that Thompson either fails to recognise or refuses to regard as significant.

Beare claims that the order of the parts is necessary because he is convinced that the principles and practice of true rhetoric—the subject of the second half of the dialogue—are unintelligible without prior understanding of the doctrines outlined in the speeches. Socrates must first describe the nature of truth and how we become familiar with it before he explains its application and role in the art of true rhetoric. In converting Phaedrus to philosophy, the palinode sketches the kind of knowledge that underpins true rhetoric and the heavenly realm towards which it is aimed. It would be impossible for Phaedrus to understand the way in which vulgar rhetoric is deficient without first being presented with the merits and prizes of the alternative. The speeches, then, give the necessary prolegomena for appreciation of Socrates' advocacy of true rhetoric in the dialectical section.

For Beare, then, the theme of rhetoric does not explain the fact that the dialogue has three speeches on love as opposed to three speeches on any topic. Second, it does not explain why the dialogue opens with three speeches on love and finishes with a dialogue about rhetoric. So rhetoric is not the unifying theme.

If we are to accept thematic monism as a methodological principle, then we might be tempted to conclude that love must now fill the unifying role since rhetoric fails in this task—absent, of course, any third contender for the claim to be the dialogue's theme. Does Beare provide us with any additional positive support for that claim? While no explicit argument is advanced to the effect that love or beauty is the main theme, Beare does maintain that love-beauty is the 'explanatory principle' of both sections of the dialogue. In the first half of the dialogue, Plato presents Phaedrus as lover of the bastardised kinds of beauty that are found in Lysias' sophistic *logoi*; in the second half, Socrates is cast as lover of the abstract beauty which is considered foundational to dialectical philosophy. So love-beauty explains the content of both halves in a way that 'rhetoric' or some other theme cannot.

Lane Cooper advances a similar argument for the importance of love-beauty in the second half of the *Phaedrus*.<sup>19</sup> Cooper maintains that the dialogue charts Phaedrus' journey of love, the transformation of the object of his love from vulgar rhetoric to Socrates' true wisdom, or philosophy. The end of the dialogue is love of truth; the means to that end is persuasion. Different types of persuasion lead to unique types of love for unique kinds of things. Good rhetoric (or good-

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19 Cooper (1948) 3–6.

persuasion) leads to love of truth, of the beautiful, of the good. Resembling Thompson's example-precept structure, Cooper claims that the three speeches, illustrating three examples of persuasion, are set out before an examination of the nature of persuasion itself in the final section of the dialogue. However, Cooper finds the clue to the unity of the *Phaedrus* in the following (rhetorical) question about the nature of rhetoric:

Isn't the rhetorical art, taken as a whole, a way of directing the soul by means of speech, not only in the lawcourts and on other public occasions but also in private?

*Phdr.* 261a, NEHAMAS and WOODRUFF

Here Plato seems to suggest that rhetoric is not just that familiar public activity but also a psychagogic art of converting the soul to philosophy and persuading it to love the good and the beautiful. What Cooper's interpretation stresses is that true rhetoric is defined in the *Phaedrus* primarily in terms of a love of beauty, which often begins, as it does in the dialogue, in a private and erotic context. Defined in such a way, we can better explain the dialogue's focus on this private aspect of the art of persuasion and why Plato so often described rhetoric in erotic language. According to Cooper, love is the 'chief emotion of the soul', and right rhetoric is a means of persuading the soul to love aright. It is not reason, but 'strong disciplined emotion' that draws us up to heaven. Cooper here provides an eloquent expression of the claim that rhetoric in its philosophical form is erotic in nature, drawing a strong connection between ἔρως and rhetoric that is noted by Beare and emphasised by numerous other scholars.<sup>20</sup> In this way Cooper, like Beare, concludes that love-beauty is one theme that successfully unifies the *Phaedrus*.

### 3 The Ancient Debate on the *Skopos*

Part of what is striking about this modern debate about the unity of the *Phaedrus* is its similarity to the ancient debate on the *skopos* as reflected in Hermias' *Commentary*. Let us first consider the case that Hermias assembles against rhetoric as the *skopos*.

<sup>20</sup> For the range of complex interactions, see Plass (1968). Griswold (1986) 159, for example, claims that "the desire to seduce requires rhetoric, whether one's purpose is to lead one's beloved into philosophy or into a sexual relationship." Helmbold & Holther (1952) argue that "philosophy is what the lover should be whispering to his beloved; and the conversation should be conducted in dialectic, so to speak" (407).

Resembling Beare's first argument against Thompson, Hermias' objection to the view that rhetoric is the main theme of the *Phaedrus* is of the same form as his objections to other erroneous opinions on the *skopos*: such assertions are based on too narrow a focus on a particular part of the dialogue. What is needed for a correct judgement is a sound understanding of the text *in its entirety* (10.0; 12.5). Rhetoric features in a significant way only at the beginning of the dialogue and in its later stages (10.25), and so the opinion that rhetoric is the main theme of the *Phaedrus* is the product of a reading that ignores its other parts. Presumably, these 'other parts' are the three speeches.

What makes Hermias so sure that the three speeches are not just examples of rhetoric and that the function of the speeches in the dialogue is primarily to facilitate a discussion about the nature of rhetoric? Proponents of rhetoric as a theme cannot ignore the conversion of Phaedrus from a love of rhetoric to a love of philosophy. So their view must be that the theme of rhetoric is taken up to exhort Phaedrus to philosophy. Given this assumption, we can subsume both the reading according to which the dialogue is about love and the reading according to which it is about rhetoric under a broader characterisation that encompasses both. Properly understood, both hypotheses assert that the dialogue is about the psychic principle:

So, to carve [it] into [its] big pieces, one might divide the *skopos* into the following two: one about love, and one about rhetoric—that is to say [taking them together] about the two motions of the soul, the one about love having to do with its internal disposition and its yearning for the things above, the one about rhetoric having to do with its external [orientation] and its gravitation<sup>21</sup> toward [the] other<sup>22</sup> and things here [below], for we provide information (*phrazein*) for the sake of others and we converse with one another. Thus one might say that [on both of these readings] the objective concerns [the] psychic (*psukhikos*) principle.

9.9–24, BALTZLY and SHARE

So, properly understood, both suggestions—love and rhetoric—come down to much the same thing: the dialogue is about the soul's attraction toward things, whether these be higher or lower things. So Hermias can now dispose of both these suggestions with a single argument.

Hermias also claims that those who maintain the dialogue is about love fail to recognise that for the sake of which love is discussed in the *Phaedrus*

21 Reading *rhopên* for *rhoên* at 9.23; cf. 207.19 and *rhepein* at 151.5; 206.11.

22 sc. other people and external things in general.

(12.10). According to Hermias, Plato is “clearly orientating the speeches about love towards the object of love” (ibid.). That the Form of Beauty is the object of love is discernable from Hermias’ summary of Socrates’ definition of love, presumably from *Phdr.* 249d: “a divine madness in accordance with the recollection of the Beautiful Itself” (5.25). So the speeches on love are really about Beauty itself. Contemporaries of Hermias who consider the soul or physical beauty to be the main theme of the dialogue commit the same error: they judge the objective to consist in particular aspects of the thematic content of the dialogue which in actual fact serve merely to illuminate the true *skopos*. Arguments about the immortality of the soul are introduced to demonstrate that recollection of Beauty Itself is possible (5.25). Primary (or physical) beauty functions only as a stepping-stone to arrive at its higher forms (12.10). And likewise we might say that Hermias considers rhetoric in its true form as just a tool of the philosopher for the conversation of souls to the truth (7.5; 7.20). Dialectical rhetoric is the means by which Socrates attempts to save Phaedrus from the false rhetoric and licentious love of Lysias and guide his ascension into more noble and just realms. In a way that resembles Cooper’s redefinition of persuasion as a love of beauty, Hermias argues that to claim that rhetoric is the main theme of the dialogue would be to fail to understand its broader significance and that for the sake of which it is practised in the context of the *Phaedrus*.

Hermias’ positive case for beauty as the *skopos* is more nuanced than it might first appear. Hermias reports his agreement with Iamblichus’ view on the unifying *skopos* of Plato’s *Phaedrus* (12.15). The one subject equally relevant to all sections of the dialogue, the single principle that holds the entire work together, and to which all its parts are subordinate is the beautiful *on every level* (τοῦ παντοδαποῦ καλοῦ). The hierarchical overtones of ‘level’ capture the sense in which beauty is thought to manifest itself in varying gradations of purity. For Hermias, the content of the *Phaedrus* ascends from morally and metaphysically inferior forms of beauty to eventually reach Beauty Itself in Socrates’ palinode, and then descends back through its less lofty expressions towards the end of the dialogue. This specification of the *skopos* of the dialogue does what others cannot do. Not only does it leave nothing out, but it also explains the textual division and structure of the dialogue.<sup>23</sup>

On Hermias’ reading, Plato’s text exhibits a ring structure akin to the Homeric epics. The structure is as follows. The dialogue moves from (i) visible beauty

23 By “leave nothing out”, we refer simply to the way in which Hermias’ choice for the *skopos* enables him to explain (and certainly, in many cases, over-interpret) every little detail of the text. The fuss made over the opening lines of the *Phaedrus* is exemplary (14.14–15.2; 16.16–18.25).

(in the physical form of Phaedrus, a beauty loved by Lysias) to (ii) beauty in *logoi* (Lysias' speech is the exemplar, being the *logos* with which Phaedrus is in love) to (iii) beauty of souls (Socrates' first speech deals with the science of virtue, particularly in relation to the soul since the distinction between licentious, passionate love and rational love—each belonging to different spheres in the soul—is central to Socrates' argument) 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 dialogue then descends back through each of these levels of beauty, "joining the end to the beginning" (12–13).

The traditional objection to love or beauty as the unifying theme focuses on the alleged lack of connection between the speeches on love and the discussion of speech-writing and rhetoric that begins at 257c. As might be expected, Hermias takes some time to discuss the transition from the prayer to Eros that concludes Socrates' palinode to the discussion of speech-writing that Phaedrus' gossipy remark about Lysias introduces. On his reading of the textual division of the dialogue, this is the point at which the discussion begins to loop backward to form its ring structure. Can Hermias give a better or at least equally convincing account of the connection between these two seemingly disconnected parts of the dialogue than that given by modern interpreters such as Beare or Cooper?

Unlike Beare or Cooper, Hermias focuses closely on the details of Plato's text in explaining how the theme of beauty connects the two halves.

Phaedrus: As to your speech, I found it wondrous from the moment you began. [...] In fact, my wondrous friend, a politician I know was only recently taking Lysias to task for [writing speeches].

*Phdr.* 257c.1–6

τὸν λόγον δέ σου πάλαι θαυμάσας ἔχω, [...] καὶ γὰρ τις αὐτόν, ὃ θαυμάσιε, ἔναγχος τῶν πολιτικῶν τοῦτ' αὐτὸ λοιδορῶν ὠνειδίξε, καὶ διὰ πάσης τῆς λοιδορίας ἐκάλει λογογράφον·

Hermias utilizes the repetition of 'wonder' to connect Phaedrus to philosophy, since wonder is the origin of philosophy (cf. Plato, *Tht.* 155d.2–3; Aristotle, *Metaphys.* 982b.12) and the prayer at 257b invites Phaedrus to live for love with the aid of philosophy. According to Hermias, Socrates uses Phaedrus' present love of beautiful discourse as the motive for shifting the discussion to rhetoric. He writes:

It is by virtue of wonder that philosophy is present in everyone, but particularly so through the density, continuity and unity of *logos*. After all, it is in this vein that he writes that every *logos* is brought to completion in the way in which a living being is one. Just as that which is alive has distinct parts that are unified, it is likewise for the speech of Socrates. Thus since he wishes to introduce the discussion of rhetoric, the origin of the discussion is from this point, for Phaedrus is someone who stands in wonder at visible beauty and the construction of discourse, while the philosopher has come to the entire preceding discussion thanks to Phaedrus. So see how smoothly he introduces the discussion of rhetoric ...

*in Phdr.* 219.8–18, BALTZLY and SHARE

This, then, is the point at which what had previously been the upward journey through increasingly abstract beauties turns back downward to examine true beauty in *logoi*. Phaedrus' sojourn to the higher orders of beauty will now serve to give him a critical distance on his previously uncritical love of beautiful discourses. Now he is ready to approach this lower beauty in a more philosophical way.

It must be said that Hermias' reading gains considerable support from the way in which Socrates and Phaedrus describe the various inquiries that they undertake in the latter part of the dialogue. The preliminary discussion, prior to the tale of the cicadas, shows that speech writing in itself is not *aischron*. Rather, it is doing so in a manner that *lacks beauty*.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the question that Socrates sets before them and repeats again involves reference to the *kalon*.<sup>25</sup> An important element in the beauty of discourse is unity. Hence Hermias comments on the key passage at 264c in the following terms:

For what reason is it necessary for a discourse to be unified? Beauty and what is done well (*to eu*) is manifested by every thing as a result of the One, for if it were not restrained by the One, it would not be at all possible for a thing to be good. Thus even the Beautiful is not beautiful unless a unification of all of its parts has come about.

*in Phdr.* 242.22–26, BALTZLY and SHARE

24 *Phdr.* 258d.4–5: Ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνο οἶμαι αἰσχροὺν ἤδη, τὸ μὴ καλῶς λέγειν τε καὶ γράφειν ἀλλ' αἰσχροῦς τε καὶ κακῶς.

25 *Phdr.* 258d.7–8: Τίς οὖν ὁ τρόπος τοῦ καλῶς τε καὶ μὴ γράφειν; δεόμεθ' αὖτις, ὦ Φαίδρε. *Phdr.* 259e.1–2 Οὐκοῦν, ὅπερ νῦν προϋθέμεθα σκέψασθαι, τὸν λόγον ὅπῃ καλῶς ἔχει λέγειν τε καὶ γράφειν καὶ ὅπῃ μὴ, σκεπτέον.

Thus, at least on Hermias' reading, Plato is well aware of the need for the *Phaedrus* to be unified. Moreover, the theme that does the unifying is the very quality that such a unified discourse manifests: Beauty.

#### 4 Conclusion

This paper does not attempt to show that 'beauty at every level' can do all that the Neoplatonists required of a *skopos*. In particular, we do not endorse the claim that every detail of Plato's text is subordinated to the *skopos*. But with respect to the general feature of Plato's text, we think Hermias' reading is both novel and insightful. The ring-structure that Hermias finds in Plato's dialogue is a result of his identification of the *skopos* as beauty at every level. As a result, it does what the Neoplatonic tradition requires of a *skopos*: it yields a division of the text into parts as well as providing an explanation of how the parts so identified are unified by the theme of the dialogue. In this respect, Hermias is in at least as good a position to defend his claim about the unifying theme as his modern fellow-travelers, Beare and Cooper. Indeed, in some ways, Hermias' more narrowly circumscribed *skopos*—beauty at every level—makes better sense of the details of Plato's text than the idea that love-beauty is the unifying theme.