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**What are collections and divisions good for? A reconsideration of Plato’s *Phaedrus***

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In the second half of the *Phaedrus*, while Socrates and Phaedrus are discussing how one should speak and write nobly or beautifully, Socrates makes the following statement:

Now I am myself, Phaedrus, a lover of these divisions and collections, so that I may be able both to speak and think; and if I think anyone else has the capacity to look to one and to multiplicity as they are in nature, I pursue him ‘in his footsteps, behind him, as if he were a god.’ And furthermore, those who can do this – whether I give them the right name or not, god knows, but at any rate – up till now I call them dialectical. (266b3-c1).[[2]](#footnote-2)

This article defends three interrelated claims. First, that Socrates in this passage describes collection and division as procedures that underlie human speaking and thinking, in general, as well as philosophical inquiry, without identifying them with either. More precisely, it argues that collection and division structure ordinary thinking and speaking, and that these procedures may, but need not, acquire a specific dialectical significance: a significance they acquire when they are used to clarify a subject matter by considering it as a natural whole with natural parts. Second, that the speeches found in the first half of the *Phaedrus* demonstrate that the difference between the ordinary and the dialectical uses of collection and division is not methodological or technical; what sets the dialectical use of these procedures apart from their ordinary use are philosophical suppositions independent of the procedures of collection and division themselves, and, for that reason, collection and division cannot be identified with dialectic as such, or with a philosophical method aimed at providing explanatory accounts.[[3]](#footnote-3) Third, that the second part of the *Phaedrus*, which ostensibly revolves around the question how rhetoric, as a kind of expertise, is related to dialectic, also revolves around the broader question how noble or beautiful speaking, in general, may be said to depend on dialectic; and the discussion of this broader question demonstrates that collection and division, even when they are aimed at clarifying a subject matter by considering it as a natural whole with natural parts and are, thus, used dialectically, are still only parts of a larger inquiry, in the precise sense that they may facilitate an inquiry into the nature of the subject matter under consideration without thereby coinciding with such an inquiry *simpliciter*. In particular, collection and division help facilitate the dialectical inquiry into the whole-part structure of the soul.

These are controversial claims that challenge generally accepted views about dialectic, collection and division, and the role these procedures play in the *Phaedrus*, the defense of which requires a thorough discussion of several passages in the *Phaedrus*, both from the speeches on *eros*, and from the discussion of rhetoric and dialectic. The article falls into four parts.

The first part briefly considers a now commonly accepted way of reading the *Phaedrus*. According to this reading, the *Phaedrus* is the first dialogue to introduce a new dialectical method for answering *ti esti* questions – collection and division – that Plato only fully elaborates in supposedly later dialogues such as the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, and the *Philebus*.[[4]](#footnote-4) This picture is not supported by the *Phaedrus* itself, the article urges, and depends on questionable assumptions about Plato’s development, which are both rejected by a growing number of scholars, and at any rate do not help us to understand the argument of the *Phaedrus*. The *Phaedrus* itself, moreover, suggests that the procedures of collection and division, at least as they are intended in this dialogue, can be understood on the basis of the *Phaedrus* itself, and need not be supplemented by material taken from, for instance, the *Sophist*, the *Statesman* and the *Philebus*. This does not rule out that consulting such dialogues may be helpful for the purpose of understanding the full significance of collection and division as discussed in the *Phaedrus*.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The second part interprets the passage 266b3-c1 and its immediate context, 265d3-266b1, in detail. It is argued that when Socrates claims that collection and division enable him to speak and think, he is referring to an ordinary use of collection and division, according to which it structures thinking and speaking as such and that he in 266b3-c1 distinguishes between this ordinary and a specifically dialectical use of collection and division. [[6]](#footnote-6) This reading is supported by some brief considerations of a couple of passages from the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* that distinguish between a dialectical use of collection and division and an ordinary use, characteristic of the way people speak and think in general.

The third interprets Socrates’ two speeches on *eros* specifically with an eye to the question how collection and division inform these speeches. It is argued that collection and division are used in an identical manner in the two speeches and that the speeches are similar with regard to their procedural aspects. What distinguishes them are substantial suppositions concerning the nature of *eros* and the soul that support the argument of the second speech; these suppositions may be said to motivate and come to expression in the divisions found in the second speech, but they do not result from them. It is further argued that, since collection and division are used in the same way in the two speeches, and since it is suppositions concerning *eros* and the soul that are independent of collection and division that enables the second speech to reveal the nature of love more fully than the first speech, collection and division cannot be identical with dialectic, in so far as dialectic is aimed at uncovering the nature of the subject of a given inquiry.

The fourth part turns to the discussion of beautiful speaking and writing in the second half of the *Phaedrus* and, in particular, to two passages that, in addition to 265d3-266c1, contain explicit discussions of collection and division, 261a3-262c7 and 269d2-271c5. Socrates’ overall aim in this part of the dialogue, it is argued, is to consider how speaking well, in general, is related to philosophy and dialectic, and not simply to supply rhetoric with a scientific (or dialectical) basis, as suggested by many critics.[[7]](#footnote-7) This amounts to a deliberate broadening, on Plato’s part, of the conception of rhetoric, it is argued, from being conceived of as a specialist expertise, to being regarded as a general expertise concerned with thinking and speaking in general. The paper concludes by arguing that collection and division are particularly useful procedures in dialectical inquiry when the inquiry is concerned with complex wholes such as, especially, the soul. Such inquiry stands in need, however, of additional considerations concerning the natural powers such wholes and their parts possess, in order for the inquiry to be truly dialectical, a fact that demonstrates that collection and division, even when they are aimed at clarifying a subject matter by considering it as a natural whole with parts, are only parts of a larger dialectical inquiry that they may help facilitate, but with which they are not identical.

I: The *Phaedrus* and Plato’s supposedly later dialectic

In 20th century Plato scholarship, the *Phaedru*s generally came to be regarded as a dialogue belonging to a hypothetical late period of Plato’s writing, or as a transitory dialogue postdating the *Republic* that together with the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus* initiated this hypothetical late period.[[8]](#footnote-8)A peculiar feature of this dialogue, taken to indicate its supposed late or transitory character, is, in the words of Reginald Hackforth, that Plato here “for the first time formally expounds that philosophical method – the method of dialectic”, i.e. collection and division, “which from now onwards becomes so prominent in his thought, especially in the *Sophist*, *Statesman* and *Philebus*.” (Hackforth1952, 134; see also Cornford 1935,170 and Guthrie 1978, 33 and 130) Thus, according to this view, the *Phaedrus* announces Plato’s new method, which in the words of Richard Robinson is aimed at providing “the definition of the essence” (Robinson 1953, 52) of something. Many critics also supposed, however, that the *Phaedrus* does not present us with a full discussion of the method, or even illustrate in full how it is supposed to work; these tasks, they held, were left to the, supposedly later, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Philebus* (see Hackforth 1952, 136; Moravcsik 1973, 158, 166-167).

The view that collection and division is a specifically late Platonic method, and is identical with dialectic, derives in large part from the work of Julius Stenzel, especially his influential *Studien zur Entwicklung der Platonischen Dialektik von Sokrates zu Aristoteles*.[[9]](#footnote-9) Here Stenzel argues that the supposedly late dialogues are characterized by the new method of *diairesis* or division that is aimed at providing an account of essences (Stenzel 1917, 47, 85), and that this method differs significantly from dialectic as conceived of in Plato’s supposedly earlier dialogues (Stenzel 1917, 45-54); he further argues that this method was the result of a change in Plato’s ontological orientation (Stenzel 1917, 1-2, 54-62).[[10]](#footnote-10) According to Stenzel, Plato was interested primarily in practical-ethical matters in the dialogues up to and including the *Republic*, but developed in the supposedly later dialogues a new interest in theoretical questions pertaining to the philosophy of nature.[[11]](#footnote-11) A consequence of this change, according to Stenzel, was that Plato’s conception of dialectic changed as well; it became a method for defining Forms, understood as natural classes, by using division to map them, and to place them within in a hierarchy of Forms (Stenzel 1917, 44 and 47-54; see also Hackforth 1952, 135-136). This general understanding of Plato’ development, it is fair to say, dominated 20th century scholarship on Plato’s supposedly later conception of dialectic.

Many scholars are now less inclined to accept the developmentalist notion that Plato’s works can be divided into distinct periods with sharp breaks in his views from one period to another; and, in particular, they are loath to accept that the interpretation of Plato depends on a reconstruction of his supposed development (see Cooper 1997, xi-xii; Burnyeat 2012, 238 and, especially, Howland 1991, 189-214). Despite this general shift, however, the following views remain widespread among critics: (1) the method of collection and division is a specifically late Platonic method; (2) this method expresses Plato’s later conception of dialectic as such, according to which dialectic is understood as aiming to provide definitions of forms (however they may be conceived of) through “mapping” their interrelations; and (3) the *Phaedrus* is the first dialogue to announce this new method, even if it does not exhibit fully what the method consists in (Rowe 1988, note to 266d3 ff.; Kahn 1996, 299n6; Crivelli 2012, 13-22; Yunis 2011, 25.).

For this reason, it is worth pointing out that this understanding of collection and division was not accepted by scholars in the early 20th century who were critical of developmental approaches to Plato, such as Paul Friedländer and Paul Shorey. Both objected that we find examples of collection and division in dialogues that, according to the generally accepted account of the chronology of Plato’ dialogues at that time, are earlier than the hypothetically late dialogues, such as for instance the *Gorgias* (see Friedländer 1964, 337n9, 1961, 229-30, and 1945, 253; Shorey 1933, 295; see also Dodds 1959, 226).[[12]](#footnote-12) Some Platonists writing prior to the ascendancy of developmental readings of the dialogues likewise viewed matters differently. Plotinus and Alcinous, for instance, regarded dialectic as a more or less unified method employing different procedures and understood division as one such procedure; they did not, however, suppose it to be identical with dialectic *tout court*,but rather saw it as one procedure among others aimed at discovering the nature or essence of something (*On Dialectic* or *Peri Dialektikês*, I.3.4; 2-5 and I.3.4-9; *Didaskalikos*, 5.1.). And Proclus claimed that Socrates “almost everywhere hotly pursues” the procedures of collection and division (*In Parm.*, 651, 9-10), thereby suggesting that these procedures are not primarily found in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, where Socrates’ participation is minimal.

The fact that developmental approaches to Plato have come to be recognized as questionable by a growing number of scholars, coupled with the fact that older critics viewed collection and division differently from those who have been influenced by developmental approaches, suggests that it would be fruitful to reconsider the account of collection and division in the *Phaedrus* without the assumption that this dialogue merely announces a method that is depicted more fully in supposedly later dialogues. In fact, read on its own, the *Phaedrus* does not support either the view that collection and division are introduced as a new method, or the view that we are presented with a merely formal exposition of a method not fully illustrated in the dialogue. On the contrary, if read without the assumptions guiding developmental approaches to Plato, Socrates’ statement concerning collection and division quoted at the beginning of the article suggests that collection and division are general procedures; and Socrates clearly indicates that collection and division, as he understands them, are illustrated by the speeches he has presented in the earlier parts of the *Phaedrus*.

For these reasons, the present article undertakes to reconsider what collection and division, as discussed and exemplified in the *Phaedrus*, amount to, and what role they play in philosophical inquiry. The *Phaedrus*, it argues, gives us a more subtle understanding of these procedures than much of the traditional scholarship on this dialogue would lead one to conclude; in particular, a careful study of the *Phaedrus* demonstrates that collection and division are procedures helpful for dialectical inquiries into the nature of soul, an insight that is less likely to be arrived at through the study of the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, and the *Philebus*. In what follows it is assumed that the interpretation of collection and division as it is presented in the *Phaedrus* should be based primarily on this dialogue, and does not require supplementary material from other dialogues in which these procedures are, supposedly, fleshed out.

II: The description of collection and division in *Phaedrus* 265d3-266c1

At 265d3-266c1, Socrates presents an explicit description of collection and division, and most critics have concentrated on this passage when discussing the account of these procedures in the *Phaedrus*. But Socrates also discusses collection and division in some detail at 261a3-262c7 and 269d2-271c5 and a careful consideration of these passages is called for if the procedures of collection and division, as they are understood in the *Phaedrus*, are to be interpreted adequately. Nevertheless, since 265d3-266c1 does present the most explicit description of the procedures in the dialogue, it remains the natural starting point for the interpretation to be developed in the article.

*Speaking and thinking and the ability of the dialectician*

Socrates presents his most general description of collection and division in the *Phaedrus* as follows:

S.: Now I am myself, Phaedrus, a lover of these divisions and collections, so that I may be able both to speak and think; and if I think anyone else has the capacity to look to one and to multiplicity as they are in nature, I pursue him ‘in his footsteps, behind him, as if he were a god.’ And furthermore, those who can do this – whether I give them the right name or not, god knows, but at any rate – up till now I call them dialectical. (266b3-c1)

The first thing we should take note of concerning this passage is that Socrates does not state that collection and division are identical with dialectic (διαλεκτική), or that the ability to collect and divide is all that characterizes those whom he here calls dialectical. What he claims is that he has called ‘dialectical’ those he considers to be able to look to natural unity and multiplicity.[[13]](#footnote-13) This leaves open the possibility that dialecticians, according to Socrates, will also be able to perform other tasks in virtue of the fact that they are dialectical.

A second point directly related to this is that Socrates claims to be a lover of collections and divisions with a specific purpose in mind: to be able to speak and think. This suggests that Plato intends a direct connection between Socrates’ ability to speak and think and the ability to collect and divide. What that connection is, however, is open to question.

It might seem that a natural reading of the entire passage is this: Socrates claims he is a lover of collection and division, which he also describes as a capacity to look to unity and multiplicity as they are in nature; he calls those able to collect and divide or look to natural unity and multiplicity dialectical; and he finally claims that these dialectical procedures enable him – as a dialectician – to speak and think. If one assumes that collection and division are identical with dialectic *simpliciter*, as most commentators do, it is likely that one will read Socrates’ statement in this way.

But Socrates might also be suggesting that collections and divisions enable him, just as they enable any other human being, to speak and think, while at the same time indicating that only those who are able to perform such divisions and collections in a specific manner – described here as a capacity to look to one and to multiplicity as they are in nature – deserve to be called dialectical. In other words, it is possible to read the passage as introducing a distinction between collection and division, in general, and a privileged, or more adequate, performance of these procedures, which we may call dialectical. Showing that the latter alternative is in fact the preferable reading is the main point in the overall argument of this article.

The first step in this task is to point out that Socrates describes his own attachment to collection and division in a manner somewhat different from the manner in which he describes the ability of a dialectician; he uses the plain and practically colloquial doublet “to speak and think” (λέγειν τε καὶ φρονεῖν) when explaining what collection and division enable him to do, but he describes the ability characteristic of those he calls dialectical in a more careful manner, as a capacity “to look to one and to multiplicity as they are in nature” (εἰς ἕν καὶ ἐπὶ πολλά πεφυκόθ᾽ ὁρᾶν).

The doublet “to speak and think” is also found several times in Isocrates (see *Panegyricus* 50 and *Antidosis* 207, 244, 277, 308), where it designates intellectual activity in general; those who master these abilities well, such as Isocrates himself according to his own evaluation, and the Athenians in general, therefore outshine other men. At *Gorgias* 449e6 Socrates suggests that rhetoric, since it enables people to speak (λέγειν) about something, also enables them to think (φρονεῖν) about that something, while he at 450a2 suggests that medical skill enables the doctor to speak and think about those who are ill. The two verbs when used in conjunction thus seem to form what Elroy L. Bundy calls a “universalizing doublet”, [[14]](#footnote-14) that is, a literary convention employed to express a whole vividly by breaking it up into two complementary parts. Examples include such duos as “land and sea", “beginning and end”, “friend and foe” (see Bundy 1986, 24). The expression ‘to speak and think’ would thus designate the process of reasoning quite generally, depicted as carried out either in thought or in speech; and according to Plato thinking is, after all – at least according to both the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* – internal speech (see *Soph.* 263e3-9and *Tht.* 189e4-190a7). We may assume that Socrates uses the expression “to speak and think” in this way in the *Phaedrus* too.

The ability that, according to Socrates, entitles one to be called dialectical, in contrast, is described as the twofold capacity of being able to look to one(εἰς ἕν), and to multiplicity(ἐπὶ πολλά)as they are in nature. While the expressions ‘unity’ and ‘multiplicity’ clearly seem to link the ability of the dialectician with collection and division, the qualification that the unities and multiplicities the dialectician looks toward are natural seems to indicate that the dialectician does not simply collect and divide; he or she divides in accordance with nature.

An objection to the suggestion that Socrates is drawing a distinction between a general and a privileged or dialectical use of collection and division must be met, however. At 265d3-266b2 Socrates describes division, in general, as a capacity to divide according to natural joints, a fact that seems to rule out the line of reading suggested here from the beginning. However, Socrates also states that this ability may fail in achieving its aim. This suggests that, while it may be said that also the general use of division is teleogically aimed at dividing something according to its natural joints, an instance of division need not achieve this aim in order to count as division.

In support of the suggestion that Socrates is distinguishing between a general and a, specifically, dialectical version of collection and division, we may also observe that Socrates introduces the entire discussion of noble or beautiful speeches – in which the passage under consideration is central – by suggesting that unless Phaedrus “engages in philosophy sufficiently (ἱκανῶς) well he will never (οὐδὲ*…* ποτε) be a sufficiently (ἱκανός) good speaker about anything (οὐδενός)” (261a4-5). We may take this suggestion as invoking a clear distinction between a general ability to speak – concerned with anything that may be spoken of – and philosophizing, and as suggesting that that latter is required for this general ability to be exercised adequately.

Finally, two passages from the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* that are concerned with the science of dialectic and the ability and inability to divide according to forms may be adduced as evidence for the suggested distinction between a specifically dialectical and an ordinary use of collection and division.

The inquiry that begins in the *Sophist* and is continued in the *Statesman* is aimed at distinguishing the philosopher from the sophist and statesman, and at deciding the question whether or not the names ‘philosopher’, ‘sophist’, and ‘statesman’ correspond to three kinds (γένη; see *Soph.* 216c2-217b4). In order to achieve these tasks, the Eleatic visitor, the main interlocutor of the two dialogues, introduces the procedures of collection and division at the beginning of the *Sophist* (219a1-2) for the purpose of distinguishing and delimiting various kinds of expertise, in particular the three types of expertise sophist, statesman, and philosopher supposedly possess. At a later point in the dialogue the visitor offers a description of the expertise or science (ἐπιστήμη) characteristic of the philosopher, dialectic (see 253c7-d3). While it is controversial how this description should be interpreted, and how it is meant to be related to the collections and divisions of expertise found in the first part of the dialogue,[[15]](#footnote-15) the first part of the description the visitor presents of this science strongly suggests that the description is meant to have a bearing on the divisions of types of expertise also, even if such divisions are not the only things dialectic is preoccupied with. Here is what the visitor says: “Are we not going to claim that dividing according to kind, and not thinking either that the same form is different or, when it is different, that it is the same, belongs to expertise in dialectic?” (253d1-3; translation Christopher Rowe) The fact that the visitor uses the word ‘kind’ (γένη), which is also used at the beginning of the dialogue when the question whether or not the names ‘sophist’, ‘statesman’, and ‘philosopher’ correspond to three kinds is raised (217a7-9), strongly suggests that the passage is meant to point out that dialectic is required if the three kinds are to be distinguished adequately from each other. We may also note that the passage indicates that the ability to collect and divide correctly belongs to dialectic (τῆς διαλεκτικῆς … ἐπιστήμης εἶναι) without being identical to dialectic.

The passage also suggests that people without this expertise commonly make mistakes, both by supposing that one and the same thing or form is many – an example could be sophistry, that to the untrained eye may seem to be many different things (see *Soph.* 232a1-6) – and by regarding kinds that are different as identical – an example could be conflating philosophers and sophists (see *Soph.* 216c4-d3). Such mistakes suggest that people who are not dialecticians also collect and divide, but fail to do so correctly; for to suppose that things or forms that are truly different are identical is, arguably, to collect them, and to suppose that one and the same thing or form is many is, arguably, to divide it. A similar point is made in the middle of the *Statesman* where the visitor discusses the inability to collect and divide correctly that characterizes people without dialectical training. Here he states that “since people are not accustomed to look into things and dividing them according to forms, they right away throw these things that are so different together in the same group, deeming them similar” – the things he has in mind here are two types of measure, but the point is general –, “and then they do the opposite of this with other things, failing to divide them according to parts” (285a4-8; translation E. Brann, P. Kalkavage and E. Salem, modified).

The visitor thus suggests that people who are unaccustomed to dividing things they see in accordance with forms throw things together just because they look alike – the example of the wolf and the dog discussed in the *Sophist* may spring to mind (see *Soph*. 231a6-8) – and divide other things without considering whether the divisions correspond to real parts of what is divided – for example by dividing human beings into Greeks and Barbarians (see *Pol.* 262c10-d6). Again, the visitor seems to suggest that people in general do collect and divide, but that these collections and divisions are commonly misguided due to a lack in dialectical training, because they lump together things that are different and divide other things into parts that do not corresponds to forms or real parts. And the ability characterizing the one who possesses dialectical expertise, namely to collect and divide in accordance with kinds, corresponds, it may be argued, to the ability to look to natural unity and multiplicity, the ability that Socrates, in the *Phaedrus*, claims characterizes those people he calls dialectical.

The passages from the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* not only support the suggestion that Plato distinguishes between a general and a privileged or dialectical use of collection and division, they also help us see how collection and division may be said to help one think and speak in general. As the passage from the *Statesman* suggests, people in general collect and divide things, even though they commonly fail to do so correctly; and it is in fact hard to see how one could think or speak of anything without somehow differentiating that thing from other things, while, at the same time, comparing it to other things. Further, as Socrates suggests in the *Philebus*, the same ‘thing’ may appear both as one and as many as a result of the fact that we speak (see 15d4-6). This ability that language provides, to address a thing both as one and as many, is, moreover, a general source of confusion, according to Socrates, that can be overcome only through dialectical training, and if it is not so overcome, it is a ground for eristic or disputation (15d4-17a5).[[16]](#footnote-16) To see more clearly how this ability to collect and divide, which is connected to speech and thought in general, is related to the dialectical use of collection and division, we now return to the *Phaedrus*.

*Socrates’ description of collection and division*

What Socrates in the *Phaedrus* understands by collection and division is set out in greater detail as follows:

S.: First, there is perceiving together and bringing into one form (εἰσ μίαν ἰδέαν) items that are scattered in many places, in order that one can, by circumscribing each thing, make clear whatever it is that one wishes to instruct one’s audience about on any occasion. Just so with the things said just now about love, about what it is when circumscribed: whether it was right or wrong, the speech was able to say what was at any rate clear and self-consistent because of that.

P.: And what is the second kind of procedure you refer to, Socrates?

S.: Being able to cut it up again, into forms, according to its natural joints, and not try to break any part into pieces, like an inexpert butcher; as just now the two speeches took the unreasoning aspect of the mind (τὸ μὲν ἄφρον τῆς διανοίας) as one form together, and just as a single body naturally has its parts in pairs, with both members of each pair having the same name, and labeled respectively left and right, so too the two speeches regarded derangement as naturally a single form in us, and the one cut off the part on the left-hand side, then cutting it again, and not giving up until it had found among the parts a love which is, as we say, ‘left-handed’, and abused it with full justice, while the other speech led us to the parts of madness on the right-handed side, and discovering and exhibiting a love which shares the same name as the other, but is divine, it praised it as cause of our greatest good. (265d3-266b1)

Before looking more closely at this passage, we should note that Socrates prefaces it by stating (at 265c9-d1) that two procedures[[17]](#footnote-17) (δυοῖν εἰδοῖν) were exhibited by chance (ἐκ τύχης) in the speeches he delivered previously in the dialogue – namely the procedures he goes on to identify as collection and division in 265d3-266b1 – and that it would be gratifying if one could grasp their power (δύναμιν) in a skillful way (τέχνῃ). He thereby identifies collection and division as procedures having certain powers that may be grasped skillfully, a point that again seems to confirm that collection and division may be carried out with or without expertise; at the same time Socrates implies that the procedures were not necessarily employed in his own speeches on the basis of such an expertise, since they exhibited these procedures only by chance. If we assume that grasping the power of collection and division skillfully is characteristic of the dialectician, the implication is then that Socrates’ two speeches do not necessarily exemplify a full dialectical use of collection and division.

Let us now examine Socrates’ description of collection and division at 265d3-266b1 more closely. It is clear that Socrates regards each procedure as performing a distinct task. Collection helps ὁρίζειν, i.e., to circumscribe or define, something and, by doing so, helps to clarify a subject of instruction. The ability to divide, on the other hand, is an ability to cut something up – presumably that which is gathered into a unity by collection, if we are to follow the example Socrates provides at 265e3-266b1 – and to do so by cutting this something into forms (εἴδη) at the natural joints (ἄρθρα πέφυκεν) without attempting to break any part into pieces “in the manner of an inexpert butcher”.

We should start by considering what Socrates means by claiming that collection helps ὁρίζειν something. The verb ὁρίζεινis often taken to mean ‘to define’ in the sense of defining the essence of something. If we take Socrates to be saying that collection is the procedure for arriving at essential definitions of something, this looks like a serious objection to the suggestion that collection in general is not something that only the dialectician is able to perform, at least if we think that only a dialectician is able to provide essential definitions. But we may rule this objection out simply by observing that Socrates indicates, at 265b6-7, that his speech (he seems here to be thinking of both his speeches as one) may have failed to grasp the whole truth about *eros*, a point he repeats when he describes how the power to collect is illustrated by what he did when he defined love: “Just so with the things said just now about love, about what it is when circumscribed (ὃ ἔστιν ὁρισθέν): whether it was right or wrong, the speech was able to say what was at any rate clear and self-consistent because of that.” (265d3-7).

The important thing to note here is that Socrates allows that a proposed circumscription may be right or wrong, while at the same time characterizing such a proposed circumscription as exemplifying collection (265d3-7). It follows that he does not think that for a process to exemplify collection, it must circumscribe something in the sense of providing a full explanatory account or definition. To avoid confusion, I therefore translate ὁρίζειν simply as ‘to circumscribe’, not as ‘to define’.

We may now consider more carefully the procedure of division. This procedure, it seems, is more complex than collection; as Socrates makes clear, it consists in (1) being able to cut, into forms (κατ᾽ εἴδη), according to natural joints (κατ᾽ ἄρθρα ᾗ πέφυκεν); and in (2) not trying (μὴ ἐπιχειρεῖν) to break any parts of what one is cutting.

Clearly the procedure is more than a simple act of dividing something; it is teleological in nature since the aim of the ability to divide is to divide according to the natural joints of what one divides. But it remains a question whether divisions, in order to be divisions that exemplify this ability, must achieve this aim. If they must, then the suggestion that Socrates distinguishes between a general ability to divide and a dialectical version of it at 266b3-7 will appear untenable. But we do not have to draw this conclusion.

First, we may well think that divisions that do not achieve their aim, because they fail to cut something according to its natural joints, are still examples of the same ability. Socrates does not state that division is simply an ability to cut in accordance with natural joints; on the contrary, he characterizes the ability in terms of the intention not to break any part (cf. μὴ ἐπιχειρεῖν, ‘not to attempt to …’). But it is possible for one to intend not to do something but still do it, or fail to avoid doing it; for instance, if one does not have a proper understanding of what one is doing.

Second, and in direct continuation of the previous point, it remains a question whether Socrates’ speeches on *eros* divide *eros* at its natural joints. If they do, as the summary at 265e3-266b1 at first sight suggests, this speaks against the suggestion that the procedure of division as employed in them does not exemplify a fully skillful or dialectical use of division. But if it can be established that they do not, or at any rate that only one of them does, and can only be said to do so in a qualified manner, then this is confirmation of the thesis that divisions may be examples of the ability to divide according to natural joints, even if they do not divide correctly, since Socrates explicitly states that *both* his speeches exemplify division. To see if this can be established, however, we need to look more closely at the divisions performed by Socrates in his speeches.

III: Collection and division in Socrates’ two speeches

Before looking more closely at collection and division in the two speeches, an observation concerning their inter-relation is called for. Looking at the speeches from the perspective Socrates provides on them in his summary at 265e3-266b1, one may get the impression that they constitute two halves of one speech that together investigate the whole phenomenon of *e*. This impression is not mistaken, but taken in isolation the summary tends to blur the fact that the speeches were, as Socrates points out at 265a1, opposed to each other.[[18]](#footnote-18) More precisely, the two speeches together exemplify, as Socrates makes explicit at 262c5-7 (see also 265a2-3), a specific manner of speaking that he terms ‘to dispute’ (ἀντιλέγειν, 261c5, see also 261d10). By this he means to dispute in a broad sense, i.e. the activity of being engaged in an argument in general, but he includes under this also the more specific activity where the same person is advancing contrary arguments concerning the same thing, that is, discussing or disputing with himself or herself (cf. 261c10-4e).[[19]](#footnote-19) The two speeches regarded as one may be understood as such a procedure, where Socrates first advances one argument concerning *eros*, and then advances an opposed argument.

The two speeches are, then, eventually (but not from the start) presented as parts of one argument or “speech”, the aim of which is to make the same phenomenon – *eros* – first appear to be one thing, namely bad, and then appear to be the opposite, namely good. This means that the two speeches must, at a general level, circumscribe their subject – *eros* – in more or less the same way. Otherwise it might be objected that the first speech made one thing appear bad, while the second speech made something else appear good, and therefore that the second speech did not really contradict the first.

*Collection and division in Socrates’ first speech*

Socrates’ first speech, presented as a speech given a by a non-lover or, rather, a lover who conceals himself as a non-lover, begins with the following claim:

“In everything, my boy, there is one starting-point for anyone who is going to deliberate successfully: he must know what it is that he is deliberating about, or he will inevitably miss everything. Most people are unaware that they do not know what each thing really is. So they fail to reach agreement about it at the beginning of their enquiry, assuming that they know what it is, and having proceeded on this basis they pay the penalty one would expect: they agree neither with themselves nor with each other. So let us, you and I, avoid having happen to us what we find fault with in others: since the question before you and me is whether one should rather enter into friendship with lover or non-lover, let us establish an agreed definition (ὅρος) of love, about what sort of thing it is and what power it possesses, and look to this as our point of reference while we make our enquiry whether it brings advantage or harm.” (237b7-d3)

The starting point of this speech – as well as the next, we may add (see 244a3-4) – is the question whether one should enter into friendship with a lover or a non-lover. This question gives rise to the question what love is, and what power it possesses, i.e., how we are to define or circumscribe love. Apparently, collection and division are meant to help establish this definition.

Let us start with the question how collection informs the definition. According to Socrates’ exposition at 265d3-5, collection helps to circumscribe something by bringing “into one form items that are scattered in many places” by perceiving them together. The most likely candidate for such a collection contained in the first speech is the claim that *eros* is one kind of desire, specifically desire that is directed at pleasure, whose rule in the soul is ὕβρις or excess (237d3-238a2). Here Socrates brings erotic desires together with other types of such desires under one heading or form, excess, that he contrasts with the rule of acquired opinions conducted through arguments (see 237e2-238a2).

Turning next to the question how division informs the speech, things become more complicated. The most obvious use of division in the speech is to be found in the part where Socrates proceeds to divide excess; excess has, he claims, “many limbs and many forms” (238a2-3), such as gluttony, alcoholism, and *eros* (238a6-c4). The mention of limbs and parts strongly suggests that this is an instance of division, and we may regard the listing of types of excess as a division of excess. This division itself is based on a prior identification of various objects to which excess may be directed – food (238a6), drink (238b2), and bodily beauty (238c2). Excess is, then, characterized by an ‘object-directedness’ that explains why excess divides into sub-kinds. This way of dividing a complex phenomenon in accordance with the various objects to which it may be directed is found in many Platonic dialogues, where phenomena such as knowledge, virtue, and various kinds of speech are divided (see e.g. *Gorg.* 449e1-452e8, 463a8-c3, 464b3-465c7; *Chrm.* 165c4-166b6, *Rep*. 438a7-439a7). In itself, the division of excess, thus, seems sound enough, and one could argue that it is in accordance with natural joints.

At the same time, this division is rather trivial, and almost routine in nature; it merely spells out more clearly what Socrates must already have presupposed when performing the collection at 237d3-238a2, namely that *eros* is one of *several* types of irrational desires that differ due to their varying objects. It therefore makes sense when Socrates openly admits at the beginning of his speech that he is merely spelling out “what is clear to everyone” (237d4) concerning *eros*. Here Collection and division, it seems, merely perform the function of what we might call conceptual analysis, and what is analyzed is merely a generally accepted view concerning *eros*, that it is a kind of natural desire standing in opposition to our acquired opinions.

Socrates’ division of excess, however, itself relies on another division that is contained in the passage where the collection is performed, and this division is neither trivial nor obviously in accordance with natural joints. When beginning his collection at 237d3-4 by stating that *eros* is a kind of desire, Socrates further claims that “we know that men desire the beautiful (ἐπιθυμοῦσι τῶν καλῶν) even if they are not in love.” (237d4-5). This raises the question how one should distinguish these two types of desire for the beautiful, the erotic and the non-erotic, and Socrates suggests the following solution:

“We must next observe that in each of us there are two kinds of things (δύο τινέ ἰδέα) which rule and lead us, which we follow wherever they may lead, the one an inborn desire for pleasures, another an acquired opinion which aims at the best.” (237d6-9)

By the expression “two kinds of things” that are “in each of us”, Socrates must mean two parts or principles of the soul, and the fact that he uses the term ἰδέα suggest that what we have here is a division in the sense discussed at 265d3-266b1, namely a division of the soul.[[20]](#footnote-20) This suggestion is further confirmed by the fact that Socrates, when he later explains how his two speeches used the procedure of division, says that both speeches began by taking hold of the unreasoning aspect of the mind (τὸ μὲν ἄφρον τῆς διανοίας ἕν τι κοινῇ εἶδος ἐλαβέτην; 265e3-4), which implies that they started by dividing this part off from the rest of the soul. It is also important to notice that it is through the division of the soul made at the start of his speech that Socrates introduces the notion that the soul is led by two ‘principles’ – either inborn desires for pleasure or acquired opinions –, and that only the latter aims at what is best. This notion explains why he can, then, without further argument, conclude that every kind of excess leads to harm rather than advantage. For excess is, he suggests, a manifestation of the desire for pleasure where this desire rules the soul to the exclusion of acquired opinion of what is best, and since only acquired opinion is directed at the best, excess should be avoided at all cost. The division of the soul is, thus, intended to support the ensuing division of excess by demarcating the desires that are merely inborn or ‘natural’, including erotic desires, from other desires that result from acquired opinions, and by identifying the former as altogether bad when unchecked by acquired opinions.

It is, therefore, remarkable that Socrates offers no justification for this division of the soul; his suggestion that they simply have to recognize these two parts (δεῖ νοῆσαι; 237d6) is an appeal to commonly held beliefs about it,[[21]](#footnote-21) and it is far from clear that this division in accordance with common *doxai* is also a division in accordance with nature. In fact, the second speech explicitly questions that it is such a natural division when it introduces an altogether different understanding of the soul.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Summing up, then, we may say that Socrates’ first speech uses collection and division to circumscribe or define *eros* as follows: it begins by collecting various types of desires under the general form ‘excess’ and then divides these types of excess in accordance with the various objects to which they may be directed. In order to identify the types of desires collected *as* types of excess and in order to suggest that, as such types, they must be condemned, however, it introduces a division of the soul into two parts, according to which inborn desires are always directed at pleasure, and only acquired desires are directed at what is best. And while the speech thereby presents us with a definition of *eros* in the sense that it circumscribes *eros* sufficiently well for the rest of the speech to be able to proceed in an orderly manner, it should be clear that this is not in any sense an explanatory account of *eros* or a real attempt to answer the *tι esti* question: what is *eros*? The definition or circumscription is not the terminal point of an inquiry into a difficult matter, but simply a stipulative definition based on commonly accepted opinions about *eros* and the soul that enables a superficial inquiry into the effects of *eros* to proceed in a rhetorically effective manner (see Gadamer 1985, 62).

Since Plato elsewhere identifies dialectic as a kind of knowledge aimed at answering *tι esti* questions concerning controversial matters by deciding what the nature or essence of the matter in question is (see e.g. *Rep.* 525b9-d3, 533a10-c6 and 534b3-4; see also *Phaed*. 78d1-3 with 99e4-102a1), we may conclude that collection and division are not used as parts of a dialectical inquiry in the first speech. The fact that the speech nevertheless exemplifies, and is explicitly said to exemplify, these procedures demonstrates that collection and division, on their own, may serve other purposes than dialectical inquiry, for instance the purpose of enabling one to speak in a clear and self-consistent manner (see 265d6-7).[[23]](#footnote-23)

*Collection and* *division in Socrates’ second speech*

Like his first speech, Socrates’ second speech may be said to set out from a collection, not of types of excess, which are now identified as types of ordinary madness (μανία), but rather of the types of madness that may be regarded as divine gifts (244a5-245c2); this collection is intertwined with a division of the types of divine madness, among which Socrates wishes to find out whether *eros*, or at least a part of *eros*, belongs. The speech thus offers a simultaneous collection and division of divinely inspired madness that complements the collection and division of excess of the first speech; and like this collection and division, the collection and division of divine madness is not particularly informative. Socrates suggests that inspired prophecy (244a8-244d5), rites of purification (244d5-245a1), and divinely inspired poetry (245a1-8) are examples of divine madness, and this amounts to little more than spelling out a commonly accepted opinion.

Divine madness, however, is not all that is collected and divided in the second speech. We should start by noting that Socrates, before he collects and divides divine madness, begins by suggesting that madness can be divided into good and bad madness (see 244a5-6). This may be regarded as a collection of various types of madness into one whole and a subsequent division of this whole into two; and, importantly, it is only on the basis of this collection and division that Socrates later is able to regard the divisions performed in the first speech as part of a larger discussion of the whole phenomenon of *eros*. Socrates’ initial division of madness into good and bad, in effect, suggests that what the first speech regarded as the trunk of a tree to be divided into its various branches, namely excess, is, when viewed from a more general level, only a branch on a larger trunk, namely madness. Thus, the second speech implicitly takes the first speech to task for having begun its discussion of *eros* too early, so to say, collecting something into a whole that does not reflect a natural unity but only a part of such a unity.

What motivates Socrates to divide madness into good and bad madness is, apparently, a supposition concerning *eros* that Socrates describes as a kind of prophetic knowledge (242b8-d2); and whatever we are to make of this claim, it seems clear that Socrates, in dividing madness into two sub-kinds, and dividing divine madness into further sub-kinds, is led by a substantial view of the nature of *eros* that is not arrived at through the procedures of collection and division, but is rather explicated through them.

A further point to note is that, while the first speech merely stipulates that *eros* is a kind of excess, and is, therefore, bad, on the basis of the allegedly known fact about the two principles directing the soul, the second speech, in contrast, seeks to demonstrate (ἀποδείκνύναι) that *eros* is, in fact, a type of divine madness (245b7-c2). The starting point of this demonstration, moreover, is the question what the nature of soul, both divine and human, is (245c3-5). And while Socrates openly admits that the question what kind of thing the form (ἰδέα) of the soul is may lie beyond the abilities of human beings to decide (246a3-6), he nevertheless suggests that it is humanly possible to explain what this form resembles. This in turn leads him to divide the soul into three parts, which he explicitly refers to as forms (εἴδη) at 253c7-d1.

The fact that Socrates refers to a form or ἰδέα of the soul, which may be explicated, if not defined, through the introduction of three further forms or εἴδη that are parts of the soul, strongly suggests that we here again have a collection and division. First, in the general description of collection and division, Socrates uses the word ‘ἰδέα’ to describe what the one who collects a manifold into one is said to look toward while collecting (265d3), and the term ‘εἴδη’ to describe the parts into which the one who divides according to natural joints divides a thing (265e1). Second, later in the dialogue Socrates explicitly identifies knowledge of the soul, especially concerning the question whether it is naturally one and uniform (ἓν καὶ ὅμοιν πέφυκεν) or rather complex (πολυειδές) as central to the dialectical knowledge that supposedly will help turn ordinary rhetoric into a real expertise (see 271a4-8).

Summing up our discussion of the second speech, we can conclude that Socrates uses collection and division in it as follows. To begin with, he collects various types of madness into a unity that he then subdivides into good and bad madness. He then divides good, or divine, madness and suggests that one kind of *eros* could be regarded as a sub-kind of divine madness. He does not simply take this for granted, however; his suggestion rather leads him to consider the nature of the soul and, in particular, to perform a collection and division of the soul, and the greater part of the rest of the speech is then preoccupied with discussing the parts of the soul, and their interrelation. Formally speaking, collection and division are used identically in both speeches; they collect and divide excess or madness as well as the soul. But in the first speech collection and division merely explicate commonly held beliefs and help structure the speech, whereas, in the second speech, they are used as tools helpful for an inquiry into the nature of *eros* and the soul, an inquiry that takes its cue from substantial suppositions concerning the nature of *eros* and, presumably, the soul that is not arrived at through collection and division.

IV: Speaking and thinking, rhetoric and dialectic

We now turn to the discussion of beautiful speaking and writing in the second half of the *Phaedrus* and, in particular, to the passages 261a3-262c7 and 269d2-271c5. Before taking up these passages, however, a short consideration of the dramatic background against which our first passage should be read is called for, since this will help us appreciate the significance of the discussion of rhetoric in this passage.

Throughout the *Phaedrus*, Socrates and Phaedrus are portrayed as lovers of λόγοι (see 227b9-11, 227d5-228a4, 228b5-c1, 236e1-5 and 242a7-b3).[[24]](#footnote-24) At the same time, Phaedrus is depicted as interested in speeches primarily as a means of persuasion, i.e., in rhetoric (see 260a3-4 and 269c9), while Socrates is portrayed as interested in λόγοι understood both quite generally as speeches (261a4-5) and as philosophical arguments (257b6). This difference in their interest structures the dramatic exchange between the two interlocutors in the second half of the dialogue. When Socrates raises the question how one should write and speak in order to do so beautifully or nobly (258d7, 259e1-2) – the question that initiates the discussion of rhetoric – Phaedrus’ interest in the question is a result of his admiration of the skill that enables a good speechwriter to write clever and persuasive speeches. Socrates, on the other hand, has a very different view of what it means to write and speak beautifully or nobly, and seeks to convince Phaedrus that this view is superior, thereby seeking to redirect Phaedrus’ interest from rhetoric toward philosophy (see 257b1-6).[[25]](#footnote-25)

*Rhetoric, antilogikê, and collection and division (261a3-262c7)*

It is against this dramatic background that we must read the opening lines of our first passage, where Socrates “summons” some arguments intended to persuade Phaedrus that “unless he engages in philosophy sufficiently well (μὴ ἱκανῶς φιλοσοφήσῃ), neither will he ever be adequate at speaking about anything (οὐδὲ ἱκανός ποτε λέγειν ἔσται περὶ οὐδενός).” (261a4-5)

We should observe that Socrates is not simply suggesting that the arguments are intended to convince Phaedrus that rhetoric or political and public speeches require philosophy; rather, they are intended to convince him that, unless he engages in the activity of philosophy sufficiently, he will never become adequate at speaking *at any time about* *anything* (ποτε *…* περὶ οὐδενός). The arguments clearly concern speaking in general, and are intended to make plausible a teleological view of speaking and its dependence on philosophy if it is to fulfill its end.

To understand this teleological view properly, we will have to consider what Socrates means by being “adequate at speaking” and to “engage in philosophy sufficiently”. We also need to see more clearly how this general claim about speaking is connected to Phaedrus’ interest in rhetoric. Socrates proceeds to state the following:

Well then, will not the science of rhetoric as a whole be a kind of leading of the soul by means of things said, not only in the law-courts and all other kinds of public gatherings, but in private ones too – the same science, whether it is concerned with small matters or large ones, and something which possesses no more value, if properly understood, when it comes into play with things of importance than when it does with things of no importance? (261a7-b2)

We should again take note of the generality of Socrates’ statement – what he terms rhetoric may concern anything and can be performed everywhere. As Phaedrus points out (261b3-5), this account does not capture what is traditionally understood by ‘rhetoric’:[[26]](#footnote-26) according to the traditional understanding, rhetoric is concerned mostly with lawsuits and questions concerning what is just (see 261c8), and with public speeches and questions concerning what is good (see 261d3-4). In consequence of Phaedrus’ objection, Socrates proceeds to argue for his controversial view.

It should be observed that had Socrates wanted to argue simply that rhetoric should be grounded in philosophy, as is often assumed (e.g. Hackforth 1952, 122;Heitsch 1997, 126-135), arguing for this controversial account of rhetoric would be superfluous. He could simply have argued that, in order to be adequate at speaking at all, one has to philosophize sufficiently; it would then follow that, since rhetoric, as understood by Phaedrus, is a kind of speaking, it too, requires philosophy. Or, even more simply, he could have argued directly that rhetoric, as understood by Phaedrus, stands in need of philosophy, and forget about the general activity of speaking. The fact that he instead proceeds to argue that rhetoric is not limited in scope, as Phaedrus believes it is, but may concern anything, demonstrates that Socrates’ real interest lies in speaking in general.

Socrates’ argument for broadening the scope of rhetoric to include speaking in general sets out from the two kinds of speeches Phaedrus acknowledges as rhetorical, forensic speeches concerning the just, and deliberative speeches concerning the good. Both, Socrates argues, are essentially concerned with the act of disputing (ἀντιλέγειν), and he adds that the one who disputes with skill (τέχνῃ) is able to make the same thing appear to his audience sometimes one thing, sometimes the opposite (261c4-d4). Socrates then suggests that Zeno or the “Eleatic Palamedes” is basically engaged in the same activity, only he is not concerned with the just and the good, but with “like and unlike, one and many, at rest and in motion” (2616-8). Phaedrus accepts all this and Socrates accordingly concludes that

… the science of disputation is not only concerned with law-courts and public addresses, but, so it seems, there will be this one skill – if indeed it is one – in relation to everything that is said, by which a man will be able to make everything which is capable of being made to resemble something else resemble everything which it is capable of being made to resemble, and to bring it to light when someone else makes one thing resemble another and disguises it. (261d10-e4)

Socrates, thereby, reaches the conclusion that rhetoric may concern anything. However, by changing the name from ῥητορική to ἀντιλογική or ‘the skill of disputation’, he again reveals that his own interest lies elsewhere than Phaedrus’. For what Socrates is, in effect, arguing is that the activity Phaedrus identifies as rhetoric – an understanding identical with the one advanced by the Platonic Gorgias (see *Gorgias* 452e1-4) – is a subpart of a much broader phenomenon, disputation.

Having established that rhetoric may concern anything and may be performed anywhere and is a kind of disputation, Socrates proceeds to demonstrate that skillful disputation depends on knowledge of the truth. It is not entirely clear whether Socrates by this means to suggest that the activity of disputing is identical with the activity of speaking in general, about anything, or whether he only regards it as a particularly important example of it. But it seems fair to assume that his demonstration is intended to make plausible the overall claim that, in order to speak adequately about anything, one needs to engage sufficiently in philosophy.

To show that disputation presupposes knowledge of the truth in order to be performed adequately or skillfully, Socrates focuses on the phenomenon of deception*,* apparently because deception, when it is the result of a dispute, is apt to illustrate what Socrates means by the complex claim that disputation performed with skill will enable one “to make everything which is capable of being made to resemble something else resemble everything which it is capable of being made to resemble”.

The first part of the argument runs as follows. Deception is most likely to come about concerning things that differ only a little from each other (261e6-7). Moreover, if you seek to deceive someone by making a thing appear as something else, it is easier to do this if you do it by small steps (262a2-3). But this means that deception requires precise knowledge of the resemblance and the dissimilarity between things (262a5-7).

If we try to illustrate what Socrates is arguing through the previous speeches – they are, after all, said to illustrate the activity of disputation (see 262c5-7) – we may say that, in order to make *eros* appear as something (e.g. either as good or as bad) you need to know what other good or bad things *eros* resembles. If you possess that knowledge, you may convince someone that it is bad by establishing that *eros* is similar to something bad, such as drunkenness, or convince him that it is good, by likening it to something good, such as inspired poetry. In order to do so, you start by circumscribing it as either a kind of excess or a kind of divine madness through a collection, and then divide excess or divine madness in order to make plausible the claim that *eros* belongs in the general class of ‘excess’ or of ‘divine madness’.

The real crux of Socrates’ argument, however, lies in the following claim: one cannot discern (διαγιγνώσκειν) the resemblances other things may have to a particular thing, if one is ignorant of what each thing truly or really is (ἀλήθειαν ἀγνοῶν ἑκάστου; 262a9-11). And this means that one cannot deceive another in a skillful manner, unless one has recognized what each of the things is (ὃ ἔστιν ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων; 262b5-8). By this, Socrates must mean that one needs to know what something is *essentially* (the expression ὃ ἔστιν at 262b8 taken together with ἀλήθειαν ἑκάστου at 262a9 indicates this) if one is to deceive someone through the use of skillful disputation. If we turn to Socrates’ own speeches, the claim implies that, in order to deceive another concerning *eros* in a skillful manner, one must know what *eros*, as well as various types of excess and divine madness, essentially are.

We should note that Socrates is not making the implausible suggestion that you cannot deceive another about something unless you understand the essence of that something; for this, you would probably need to know only how that thing appears to someone else. What Socrates is claiming is, rather, that you cannot do so *skillfully*, or *with expertise*, without knowing the essence of the thing you are trying to ‘dress up’ as something else and the essence of the thing you are trying to ‘dress it up’ as. The reasoning behind this claim must be something like the following: in order to deceive other people in a skillful manner you must know the essence of things, because these essences explain why certain things appear to resemble certain other things; the reason why *eros* may resemble drunkenness, for instance, is not simply our common opinions about *eros*, but rather something in the natures of *eros* and drunkenness themselves.

If it is granted that the discussion of deception is meant to illustrate more generally what is required for the one who aims to be able to dispute about anything in a skillful manner, and further that the ability to dispute is, while not necessarily identical with speaking in general, at least much broader than rhetoric in any traditional sense, it follows that Socrates has now demonstrated to Phaedrus that one needs to engage sufficiently in philosophy not just in order to become a good rhetorician but also in order to be able to speak or discuss and dispute adequately about anything. For philosophy or dialectic, the science of the philosopher, is, according to claims about dialectic elsewhere in Plato, what gives us knowledge of essences (see especially *Rep.* 525b9-d3, 533a10-c6 and 534b3-4; see also *Phaed*. 78d1-3 with 99e4-102a1). We still need to consider, however, how collection and division fit into Socrates’ general claim that one, in order speak adequately about anything, needs to philosophize adequately as well.

*Collection and division in dialectical inquiry and the power to act and suffer (269d2-271c5)*

Prior to the passage 269d2-271c5, in 268a5-269c5, Socrates criticizes conventional rhetoric for being a mere knack without any scientific or technical merit, a criticism that leads Phaedrus to ask Socrates “how and from where” one may acquire “the skill which belongs to the real expert in rhetoric and the really persuasive speaker” (269c9-d1). This skill is not the self-professed skill of sophists like Gorgias and Protagoras, but the skill that Socrates earlier termed antilogikê.

Socrates begins (269e1-270a8) his explanation how one acquires this skill with the ironic assertion that Pericles became the most consummate of all when it comes to rhetoric because he acquired from Anaxagoras what all the major crafts require according to Socrates, namely “babbling and lofty talk about nature” (269e4-270a1), and Anaxagoras also helped him arrive at “the nature of mind and the absence of mind” (270a5-6).[[27]](#footnote-27)

Behind the irony, however, is a serious point, namely that rhetoric as now conceived of by Socrates – namely, as a kind of soul-leading that depends on disputation – must be concerned with the nature of things. More precisely, Socrates proceeds to claim that rhetoric needs to determine the nature of the soul (δεῖ διελέσθαι φύσιν … ψυχῆς; 270b4-5), since rhetoric is, he now suggests, analogous to medicine; but whereas medicine treats of the body, rhetoric treats of the soul (270b1-2).[[28]](#footnote-28) This means that, if one as a rhetorician intends to install lawful pursuits and virtue in someone else, and to do so skillfully rather than on the basis of a knack and experience, one will need to know the nature if the soul, just as a doctor, in order to produce health skillfully, needs to know the nature of the body (270a4-9).

It could therefore appear that Socrates is changing the direction of his discussion of rhetoric, from the claim that antilogikê must be based on knowledge concerning essences, to the claim that it must be grounded in knowledge of the nature of the soul. We need not see this as a new, separate argument, however, but may regard it as complementary; rhetoric, conceived of as antilogikê, must, in order to become a real skill, be based on knowledge concerning both the matters it treats of and the nature of the soul, since the soul is what it aims at influencing. Moreover, even while the nature of the soul is at the center of Socrates’ final argument concerning the basis of antilogikê, the discussion concerning the way in which one acquires knowledge of its nature is presented in general terms and concerns any matter that we may wish to inquire into, as is made explicit at both 270c10-d1 (cf. περὶ ὁτουοῦν φύσεως) and 271b7-c1 (cf. οὔτε τι ἄλλο οὔτε τοῦτο). Emphasizing this point does not amount to denying that the soul has a very prominent place in the overall account of dialectic in the *Phaedrus*, concerned as it is with self-knowledge, *eros*, and the leading of souls; but it does amount to claiming that we are allowed to use Socrates’ description of the inquiry into the nature of the soul also as a basis for understanding dialectical inquiry more generally.

Socrates begins his argument concerning the requirements that must be met in order to obtain knowledge of the soul by posing the following question:

Then do you think it is possible to understand the nature of soul satisfactorily without understanding the nature of the whole? (270c1-2)

The expression “the nature of the whole” (ἡ τοῦ ὅλου φύσις) may give one the impression that Socrates is suggesting that one needs to know the totality of the things that are in order to determine the nature of the soul adequately. But this need not be the case. When Phaedrus suggests that Hippocrates is of the same opinion when it comes to understanding the body (270c3-5),[[29]](#footnote-29) Socrates suggests that they should look both at what Hippocrates *and* at what the true account say about nature (270c9-10) and proceeds to state the following:

Shouldn’t one reflect about the nature of anything like this: first, is the thing about which we will want to be experts ourselves and be capable of making other experts simple or complex? (270c10-d3).

This suggests that Socrates by the expression “the nature of the whole” means “the nature of wholeness” rather than “the nature of all there is”.[[30]](#footnote-30) For in order to decide whether something is simple or complex, one clearly has to understand what that something is as a whole, not what the whole of reality is. Socrates then proceeds to state the following:

Next, if it is simple, we should consider, shouldn’t we, what natural power it has for acting and on what, or what power it has for being acted upon, and by what; and if it has more forms than one, we should count these, and see in the case of each, as in the case where it had only one, with which of them it is its nature to do what, or with which to have what done to it by what? (270d3-7)

As can be seen from the whole passage 270c9-d8, Socrates spells out two distinct tasks that must be carried out in order to determine the nature of something. First, one needs to decide what that something is as a whole, and this requires deciding whether that something is simple or complex and, if complex, determining exactly how many parts it has. Next, one needs to decide what power to act and to be acted upon the thing possesses, either the whole thing itself or its constitutive parts. That these are indeed two consecutive tasks is emphasized when Socrates proceeds to spell out how one should determine the nature of the soul – as πρῶτον at 271a5 and δεύτερον at 271a10 make clear. These two tasks are what is required in order to indicate “precisely the essential nature (τὴν οὐσίαν … τῆς φύσεως)” of the soul (270d9-e5) or, indeed, of any other matter (271b7-c1).

The consequence of these claims for our general question concerning collection and division is this: the first task described by Socrates – deciding whether a thing is simple or complex – seems to be what collection and division are intended to help one perform, even if the procedures do not, on their own, ensure that this task is performed adequately, as the analysis of Socrates’ speeches made clear. Socrates used collection and division both in determining what *eros* is and in determining the nature of the soul, as we have seen, but the determination of *eros* and the soul found in the first speech were made questionable and rejected through the assumptions concerning madness and the nature of the soul in the second speech.[[31]](#footnote-31) It now turns out that the use of collection and division within philosophical inquiry has its limits not only in the sense that it depends on some kind of prior supposition concerning the subject to which they are applied. For it seems clear that Socrates is not suggesting that the attempt to decide what power the thing inquired into possesses can be decided through the use of collection and division. Deciding what power or δύναμις the thing inquired into possesses rather seems to be a separate task, to be undertaken after collection and division have been employed. We may suggest that the attempt to decide what power a thing or its constitutive parts possess is also a way of testing whether the collections and divisions performed on something have been carried out correctly. In the second speech, where Socrates stipulates four kinds of divine madness (244a5-245c5) in the attempt to show that *eros* has as share in the good kind of madness, he is, as we saw above, in turn led to suggest that the soul is comprised of three parts (246a6-b6). On this basis he then proceeds, in the remainder of the speech, to give a highly complex account of the way in which these three parts interact with one another and act on and react to their respective objects, and this is what finally enables him to give an account of the power of *eros*. This suggests that the account of the powers the various parts of the soul possess is meant to support the suggested division of the soul and of divine madness, rather than being the result of these divisions.

If these observations are to the point, it follows that, while collection and division may be necessary for arriving at essential definitions, they are not sufficient. We may conclude that the commonly accepted claim that collection and division are introduced as a new method for arriving at essential definitions is wrong for the simple reason that they are unable to provide essential definitions on their own. As Socrates describes collection and division in the *Phaedrus,* he makes clear that it is only in combination with other considerations and insights that they may help us to arrive at such definitions. It is this complex combination, I suggest, that Socrates calls the “ability to look to one and to multiplicity as they are in nature”.

Moreover, if it is correct that the aim of collection and division when used in dialectic is to help us understand the connection between complex wholes and their parts, these procedures are not intended to help us in “the mapping of reality”,[[32]](#footnote-32) a task that many critics see as the aim of dialectic on a conception of dialectic supposedly specific to the later Plato, – or at least this is not the only or the primary aim of collection and division. Rather, collection and division are intended to help us in addressing a problem that stands at the center of dialogues such as the *Gorgias*, the *Protagoras*, and the *Republic*, namely how something that is one – for instance the soul, knowledge, or virtue – can also be many, in the sense that it is comprised of different parts or aspects. Socrates’ claim that he has in general called those able to look to one and to multiplicity as they are in nature dialectical (266b7-c1) may therefore be understood to suggest that Plato’s Socrates in general uses the word ‘dialectical’ to designate people who are able to see a complex matter correctly, understanding both this matter as a whole and in regard to its various aspects or parts.

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2. Translations are from Rowe 1988; they have been modified slightly at certain points without indication. The Greek text used is that of the OCT. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For some discussion of this, see Fossheim 2012, 91-112, and Henry 2012, 229-55. See also Gill 2010, 172-199. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Hackforth 1952, 134, and Yunis 2011, 197. For the view that collection and division is a new method aimed at providing definitions, see e.g. Cornford 1935, 184-185, Notomi 1999, 74-78, and – more reservedly – Iber 2007, 223-224. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I do not mean to suggest that such comparisons are illegitimate or unimportant. All I am suggesting is that the *Phaedrus* itself provides enough material to arrive at an adequate understanding of collection and division as described in the *Phaedrus*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See in contrast Hackforth 1952, 134n1 who suggests that Plato in this passage “is careful to keep before our minds the necessity of applying dialectic to rhetoric”, thereby opting for the views that collection and division are identical with dialectic, and that they are meant to be a foundation for rhetoric, a line of reading followed by Yunis 2011, 199, note to 266b5, who maintains that Socrates cannot mean “mere speaking and thinking, for which dialectic is hardly necessary,” but must be thinking of “speaking and thinking as a matter of τέχνη, whether ῥητορική or διαλεκτική.” De Vries 1969, 219, note to 266b4-5, states, in opposition to Hackforth, that Plato is not merely thinking of the use of collection and division in rhetoric, but that his “intention is wider: the entire life of the mind depends on διαρέσεις and ξυναγωγαί.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See note 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For an overview of this discussion, see De Vries 1969, 7-11; for a critical assessment of this older approach to the dialogue, see Yunis 2011, 22-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The idea that the later dialogues present a new kind of logic corresponding to a change in Plato’s conception of science was advanced already in Lutoslawski 1897, a work influenced by Campbell 1867. Stenzel’s work took its point of departure in views of the kind found in these two works as well as works by other writers concerned with the chronology of Plato’s dialogues. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Stenzel’s views form part of the basis for F. M. Cornford’s influential interpretation of the discussion of dialectic found in the *Sophist* (see Cornford 1935, 266n1, and 268n1) and Stenzel’s main claim, that *diairesis* is a new method characterizing Plato’s supposedly later dialogues, was accepted by Richard Robinson (see Robinson 1941, 542-544 and 1952, 70). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. A recent proponent of this view is Kahn 2013, see xi-xii and 131-132 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Worth mentioning is also Lukas 1888 that traces the use of division not only in the *Phaedrus*, the *Sophist*,and the *Statesman*, but also in the *Laws*, the *Timaeus*, the *Gorgias*, the *Republic*, and the *Theaetetus*. Moravcsik 1973, 158-160, denies that what we find in the *Gorgias* is collection and division, but his argument presupposes what it seeks to prove, that this supposed method is a result of a specific ontology, only found in the later Plato, [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. It is a matter of controversy how πεφυκόθαat 266b6 should be read; Ryan 2012, note to 266b5-6, suggests to translate δυνατὸν εἰς ἓν καὶ ἐπὶ πολλὰ πεφυκόθ᾽ ὁρᾶν as “able to see unity and natural multiplicity” and offers the following comment: while some critics “wish to take πεφυκόθ᾽ with ἓν as well as πολλὰ by a kind of brachylogy … Socrates felt no need to emphasize the naturalness of the process of collection at 265d, whereas he did feel that need when describing division” since “accurate divisions along natural lines is where the difficulty is most likely to lie”. This observation seems to the point, but if one compares Socrates’ description of collection and division with descriptions found in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, it seems reasonable to suggest that people may also suppose that something is a unity that, on closer inspection, turns out not to correspond to one, natural entity. For this reason, I follow critics who take πεφυκόθα as qualifying both ἕν and πολλά. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. I thank Hayden W. Ausland for pointing this out to me. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Stenzel 1917, 62-71 argues that the passage 253d1-e2, where the fullest description of dialectic presented in the *Sophist* is found, describes the ability of the dialectician to define something through the use of division. This reading has later been questioned by Gómez-Lobo 1977, 29-47, who objects to the idea that the passage describes an ascent and a descent through what Stenzel calls a ‘pyramid of primary and subordinate concepts’ (Stenzel 1917, 69); most later critics have accepted Gómez-Lobo’s criticism. A recent discussion of the passage can be found in Miller 2016, 321-351, who argues that the full significance of the passage can only be grasped when it is read in the light of the larger complex of questions raised by the trilogy *Theaetetus*-*Sophist*-*Statesman*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See also the *Republic* 454a4-8 where Socrates states that people inadvertently end up disputing (ἐρίζειν) with each other instead of discussing (διαλέγεσθαι) because “they are unable to consider what’s said by separating it out into its forms” (translation Alan Bloom). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This is the translation suggested by Hackforth; for discussion, see Ryan 2012, note ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Some commentators emphasize that there is a discrepancy between Socrates’ harmonious summary of the speeches and the speeches themselves. Ferrari 1987, 59 suggests that Plato “by tinkering with Socrates’ memory … demonstrates that the leisurely perspective of analytic hindsight is just that: a perspective; and different from the perspective from which Socrates delivered the poetry he now misleadingly encapsulates”; Plato thereby signals that both the “poetic” perspective of the speeches and the “analytic” perspective offered in the summary are one-sided and “must supplement each other”.Griswold 1996, 175-6 sees a discrepancy between Socrates’ description of an “art of thinking” at 265d3-266b2 that merely analyzes our opinions, and the complex connection between pre-reflective knowledge and philosophical inquiry displayed in dialogue. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. That Socrates himself advances contrary arguments concerning the same subject in the *Protagoras* – the question whether or not virtue may be taught – and that this is a key element in the structure of the dialectical inquiry in that dialogue, is defended in Politis 2012, 209-239. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. In the description of collection and division in 265d3-266b1 Socrates uses the term ἰδέαto designate what the one who collects looks toward and εἶδη to designate what the thing divided is divided into; I here take for granted that the terms are used interchangeably. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Brown and Coulter 1971 argue that the view of the soul here is the view of Isocrates, see also Howland 1937, 151-159. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This is not to say that the understanding of the soul presented in the palinode does not make a division between a reasoning part and non-reasoning parts of the soul, only that the description of their interaction is very different, a description that presents us with a much more complex account of desire, reason, and their interrelation. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. It is worth pointing out that Isocrates, in *To Nicocles*, advances a similar line of reasoning as Socrates as the concealed lover does. See *To Nicocles,* 9: πρῶτον μὲν οὖν σκεπτέον τί τῶν βασιλευόντων ἔργον ἐστίν: ἂν γὰρ ἐν κεφαλαίοις τὴν δύναμιν ὅλου τοῦ πράγματος καλῶς περιλάβωμεν, ἐνταῦθ᾽ ἀποβλέποντες ἄμεινον καὶ περὶ τῶν μερῶν ἐροῦμεν. Socrates’ statement at 237b7-d3 seems literally to echo this passage. That the principle in this form is common to rhetoricians and Plato is argued in Brown and Coulter 1971, 405-23, see in particular 407-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. For a discussion of this *motif*, see Griswold 1996, 21-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. This is argued in Asmis 1986; see also McCoy 2008, 167-169 and Moss 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. We should be careful not to read into Phaedrus’ position Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric, that is, “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (*Rhet*. 1355b25-26, trans. Rhys Roberts), or modern conceptions of rhetoric derived from it. For Aristotle’s view is evidently much closer to the view of noble speaking and writing that Socrates is arguing for than it is to Phaedrus’ view. Consequently, we misunderstand the dramatic exchange between Socrates and Phaedrus if we ascribe an Aristotelian understanding of rhetoric to Phaedrus. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. I take for granted without argument that Socrates’ praise of Pericles and Anaxagoras is ironical. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This view of rhetoric probably has a basis in the pre-Platonic understanding of it. Gorgias thus likens the power of words to magic rituals in his *Encomium of Helen*, 8-10; see also *Theaetetus* 167a5-d2. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Here the expression probably means the whole of nature, but see the discussion in De Vries, 1969*,* note ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. This view is defended by Hackforth 1952, 150; see also De Vries, 1969, note ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. That collection and division are applied to the soul as well as to madness in the two speeches is clear from 237d6-9 and, especially, 246a3-4 with 253c7-d1. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The expression is taken from Rowe 1988, note to 266d3 ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)