

PLATO'S *PHAEDRUS* IN PRAGUE AND IN OXFORD

III.

PLATO, ISOCRATES, AND ALCIDAMAS IN DISPUTE ON PHILOSOPHY AND RHETORIC

[In Oxford – only outside Balliol?]

On June 8, I protested at Balliol against the on-going degradation of classics and classical philosophy. In the evening, as I was standing there with my poster 'A philosopher from Prague appeals to Oxford academics LET US DISCUSS PLATO', I was surrounded by students who wanted to know what my protest was all about. I instructed them on the scholarly disagreement between Oxford academics and me concerning the dating of the *Phaedrus*, relating to them what I put on paper in the preceding two chapters. In the first chapter, against the cultural and historical background provided by Herodotus, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, I derive evidence from Plato's *Phaedrus*, *Republic* and *Laws* for my dating of the *Phaedrus* prior to the death of Polemarchus, that is five years prior to the death of Socrates. In the second chapter I discuss and refute the doctrinal 'proofs' for the late dating of the *Phaedrus*, corroborate my dating of the *Phaedrus* with the help of Cicero, and relate the discussion I had on the subject at the Philosophy Centre at 10 Merton Street in 1981. I end the chapter with the words: 'The discussion took place thirty years ago; it is time to reopen it.'

It was a very cold night on June 8, but students braved the cold and stayed with me for hours. The importance of reopening the discussion on the dating of the *Phaedrus* was the main topic of our discussion. After discussing love, rhetoric, and philosophy Socrates, in the *Phaedrus* addresses Phaedrus as follows:

'Go and tell Lysias that we two went down to the stream where is the holy place of the Nymphs, and there listened to words which charged us to deliver a message, first to Lysias and all the other composers of discourses, secondly to Homer and all others who have written poetry whether to be read or sung, and thirdly to Solon and all such as are authors of political compositions under the name of laws: to wit, that if any of them has done his work with a knowledge of truth, can defend his statements (*echôn boêthein*) when challenged (*eis elegchon elthôn*), and can demonstrate the inferiority of his writings out of his own mouth, he ought not to be designated by a name drawn from those writings, but by one that indicates his serious pursuit ... lover of wisdom (*philosophon*, 278d4).' (*Phaedrus* 278b7-d4, translation R. Hackforth)

Do I stretch this appeal too far when I take it as an appeal to Platonic scholars: 'Defend your dating of the *Phaedrus* against Tomin's challenge!?' In 1988, in the wake of the World Congress of Philosophy held at Brighton, Barry O'Brien wrote in *The Daily Telegraph* (Thursday, August 25, 1988):

'A leading scholar responded yesterday to complaints by Dr Julius Tomin, the Czech dissident philosopher, that he cannot get his controversial work on Plato published in

Britain. “He holds that the *Phaedrus* is Plato’s first dialogue, which is contrary to the beliefs of pretty well all scholars in the field in this century,” said Dr David Sedley, editor of *Classical Quarterly*, and director of studies in classics at Christ’s College Cambridge.’

Barry O’ Brien then suggested to Dr Sedley: ‘If Dr Tomin were right, it would affect a great deal of Platonic scholarship.’ Dr Sedley replied:

‘I think people just have a great difficulty in seeing how it can be right. It means he is asking people to give up nearly everything else they believe about Plato’s development, but he is not telling us enough about why we should give up all these other views.’

I have never asked Oxford and Cambridge Platonists to give up their views on Plato; I have been asking them to face in an open discussion the challenge to their views with which my dating of the *Phaedrus* presents them. In the following I derive evidence for my proposed dating of the *Phaedrus* from an ancient dispute on rhetoric.

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Socrates opens the discussion of the spoken and the written word in the *Phaedrus* with a myth about the Egyptian god Theuth, the inventor of writing. Theuth showed his invention to Thamus, the highest god, claiming it to be a *pharmakon* (‘a recipe’, R. Hackforth; ‘an elixir’, C. J. Rowe, ‘le remède’, L. Robin and L. Brisson)ⁱ for wisdom and memory. But Thamus has nothing positive to say about writing: ‘You invented a *pharmakon* not for memory, but for reminding’ (*oukoun mnêmês alla hupomnêseôs pharmakon hêures*, 275a 5-6), he tells Theuth dismissively. ‘Writing will cause forgetfulness in the souls of those who learn it. Neglecting memory, for they will trust writing, they will call things to remembrance by external marks instead of stimulating memory from within ... They will appear to know much, knowing nothing, filled with the conceit of wisdom, not with wisdom itself.’ⁱⁱ (*Phaedrus* 275a2-b2)

Socrates then says that a man who thinks that he can present science (*technên*) in writings (*en grammasi*) and likewise anyone who thinks that writings will provide him with something that has clarity, reliability, and permanence (*hôs ti saphes kai bebaion*) is foolish (275c5-7). If that, which is written, is unjustly berated, it cannot protect and defend itself (*out’ amunasthai oute boêthêsai dunatos heautôi*, 275e2-4), whereas the spoken word, ‘written with knowledge in the soul of the learner, can defend itself’ (276a5-7).

Socrates’ dismissive criticism of the written word in the *Phaedrus* fully applies to everything that was written before the *Phaedrus*, but in the *Phaedrus* Plato emulates the power of Socrates’ living spoken word and gives the written word unprecedented powers, transforming it into the main vehicle of the pursuit of philosophy. In his late *Laws*, with the *Phaedrus* in front of his eyes, Plato ascribes to the written word the prerogatives that Socrates in the *Phaedrus* attributed to the spoken word, insisting that writing provides the laws with the greatest assistance and defence (*megistê boêtheia*) by giving them permanent stability (*pantôs êremei*) so that they are ready to stand up to scrutiny for ever (*hôs dôsonta eis panta chronon*

elengchon, 890e6-891a2); they provide the learner with the greatest power to improve himself and become a better person (*pantôn gar mathêmatôn kuriôtata tou ton manthanonta beltiô gignesthai*, 957c3-5).

What interpretation of Socrates' dismissal of the written word in the *Phaedrus* and of the negation of this dismissal by Plato in the *Laws* can be offered on the basis of the currently accepted late dating of the former? To my knowledge, only Derrida fully acknowledges the contrast between the two:

'Writing provides the means of returning at leisure, as often as one wants to that ideal object, which is the law. One can thus scrutinize writing, interrogate it, consult it, make it speak without losing its identity. Using the same words (notably *boêtheia*), it is the direct opposite of Socrates' statement in the *Phaedrus*'.ⁱⁱⁱ

This observation is correct in spite of its being linked to mistaken views on the *Phaedrus*. Derrida says that 'by describing *logos* in the *Phaedrus* as *zôon* [a living being] Plato follows certain rhetoricians and sophists, who **before him** opposed the living speech to the cadaveric rigidity of writing'.^{iv} He claims that 'the association *logos-zôon* appears in Isocrates' discourse *Against the Sophists* and Alcidamas' *On Sophists*',^v and that 'the argumentation in the *Phaedrus* against writing can borrow all its resources from Isocrates or Alcidamas'.^{vi} All these claims are mistaken, but the only mistake unique to Derrida is his claim concerning Isocrates. I shall begin by exploring it, for Alcidamas' *On Sophists* can be properly understood only as a reply to Isocrates' *Against the Sophists*, and because Derrida's mistake is instructive. I shall do so by relating the passage in Isocrates' *Against the Sophists*, which misled Derrida, to the corresponding passage in the *Phaedrus*, which is as follows:

'Socrates: Writing has this strange feature, which makes it like painting (*homoion zôgraphiai*). The offspring of painting stand there as if alive (*hôs zônta*), but if you ask them something, they preserve a quite solemn silence. Similarly with written words: you might think that they spoke as if they had some thought in their heads, but if you ever ask them about any of the things they say out of the desire to learn, they point to just one thing, the same each time (*hen ti sêmainei monon t'auton aei*).'^{vii} (*Phaedrus* 275d4-9, tr. C. J. Rowe)

The passage in Isocrates' *Against the Sophists*, which misled Derrida, is in paragraph 12 of the essay:

'I marvel when I see that these men (*hotan idô toutous*) consider themselves worthy of disciples, men who cannot see that they are applying the analogy (*paradeigma pherontes*) of an art with hard and fast rules (*tetagmenên technên*) to a creative process (*poiêtikou pragmatos*). For, excepting these men, who does not know that the use of letters (*to men tôn grammatôn*) **is immobile** (*akinêtôs echei*) and remains always the same (*kai menei kata t'auton*), so that we use always the same letters for the same words, while in the matter of speeches (*to de tôn logôn*) the very opposite is true (*pan tou'nantion peponthen*).'^{viii}

It must have been Isocrates' *akinêtôs echei*, 'is immobile', which Isocrates rejects as inappropriate concerning the discourse in which he is interested and which he is going to teach, that prompted Derrida to say that 'the association *logos-zôon* appears in Isocrates' *Against the Sophists*. What Derrida failed to observe is that when Isocrates used the expression, he did not apply it to written works. Restricting its use to the use of letters, to grammar, he defended the creative process of writing against a critic who ascribed to written works as such the character of immobility.

Isocrates' *to de tôn logôn*, 'the matter of speeches', which he defends against the imputation of immobility, does not mean the spoken word in contrast to the written word, but the model speeches with the writing of which he was preoccupied. He continues:

'For what has been said by another (*to gar hup' heterou rêthen*) is not equally useful for the one who speaks after him (*tôi legonti met' ekeionon*), but the man who appears to be most skilled speaks in a manner worthy of his subject and is able to discover in it new topics, unlike the others.'

Isocrates' phrases 'what has been said by another', 'who speaks after him', 'speaks in a manner worthy of his subject', might mislead the reader, and obviously misled Derrida to thinking that Isocrates speaks here about speeches spoken off the cuff, not about written speeches. But we say often 'Plato says in the *Republic*', he 'says in the *Timaeus*', and it is in this vein that Isocrates prefers to speak of his speeches. He nevertheless does refer to his speeches as written in *Antidosis* 14, his *Apologia pro vita sua*, in which he defends his writings against their being attacked as such, that is as written pieces:

'This man, who himself delivers in writing what he presents (*autos sunegrammena legôn*), said more against my written speeches (*peri tôn emôn sungrammatôn pleiô pepoiêtai logon*) than upon all other points; it is as if one accused another with the charge of robbing a temple while having in his own hands plunder stolen from the gods.'

That Isocrates speaks in *Against the Sophists* of his own written speeches, which are to surpass all others by their novelty and originality, becomes clear when we compare paragraph 12 of his essay with the opening paragraphs of his model speech on which he prided himself most, the *Panegyricus*. In *Panegyricus* 4 he says:

'I hope to rise so far superior to all others who have rushed upon this speech that it will seem as if no word had ever been spoken on this theme (*mêden pôpote dokein eirêsthai peri autôn*).

If we compare paragraph 13 of *Against the Sophists* with paragraphs 5-8 of the *Panegyricus*, the correspondence between the two makes it even clearer that Isocrates speaks of his written speeches, not of the spoken word in contrast to writings. In *Against the Sophists* 13 Isocrates says:

'But the greatest proof of their dissimilarity [i.e. the dissimilarity between the use of letters and 'the creative matter' of speeches] lies in the fact that speeches cannot be fine

(*tous logous ouch hoionte kalôs echein*) if they do not fit the occasion, if their style is not proper, and if they lack originality (*ên mê tôn kairôn kai tou prepontôs kai tou kainôs echein metaschôsin*), while in the case of letters (*tois de grammasin*) nothing of this kind is needed (*oudenos toutôn prosedeêse*).’

In *Panegyricus* 5 Isocrates insists that ‘the moment for action’ (*hoi kairoi*) has not yet gone by, so as to make his speech futile (*hôt’ êdê matên einai to memnêsthai peri toutôn*), and in paragraphs 7-8 he goes on to say:

‘If it were possible to present the same subject matter in one form (*dia mias ideas*) and in no other, one might have reason to think it gratuitous to weary one’s hearers (*enochlein tois akouousi*) by speaking again (*legonta*) in the same manner as his predecessors; but since oratory (*hoi logoi*) is of such a nature that it is possible to discourse on the same subject matter in many different ways ... in a new manner (*kainôs*)... it follows that one must not shun the subjects upon which others have spoken (*eirêkasi*) before, but must try to speak (*eipein*) better than they.’ (Translation G. Norlin)

In *Against the Sophists* Isocrates does not ‘oppose the living speech to the cadaveric rigidity of writing’, as Derrida puts it; he opposes his creative written speeches to what he considers to be a mistaken paradigm of letters. Derrida is therefore wrong when he says that ‘the argumentation in the *Phaedrus* against writing can borrow all its resources from Isocrates’.

On his late dating of the *Phaedrus* Derrida nevertheless could have maintained that Plato in his project of philosophic rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* borrowed significant resources from Isocrates. For Plato in the *Phaedrus* refers to a musician (*mousikos, harmonikos*) as a model for a rhetorician, emphasizing appropriate composition (*sustasin prepousan*, 268d); Isocrates in his essay maintains that an expert rhetorician composes (*suntithemen*) his speeches rhythmically and musically (*euruthmôs kai mousikôs*, 16). Plato says that a rhetorician must properly arrange his speech (*sunistasthai*, 269c); Isocrates insists that the speech must be properly ordered (*taxai kata tropon*, 16). Plato says that the expert must heed the opportunities (*kairous*) for the employment of all the forms of speeches (*eidê logôn*) he learns; Isocrates says that the student of rhetoric must acquire knowledge of the forms (*tôn eidôn*) out of which speeches are composed, and must not miss opportunities to use them (*tôn kairôn mê diamartein*, 16). Plato insists that a man can be good in rhetoric only if he has a natural talent for it (*phusei*, 269d4); Isocrates emphasizes that a student must have a natural aptitude (*phusin*) for rhetoric, if he is to excel in it (17). Plato says that if any of these requirements are missing (*hotou d’an elleipêis toutôn*), the student will be lacking in his accomplishment accordingly (*tautêi atelês esêi*, 269d5-6); Isocrates says ‘if any of these requirements were left out (*kath’ ho d’an elleiphthêi ti tôn eirêmenôn*), the student of rhetoric would be disadvantaged accordingly’ (*annagkê tautêi cheiron diakeisthai*, 18).

If we take paragraphs 16-18, in which Isocrates presents his programme of philosophic rhetoric, in isolation from the rest of his essay, and compare it as such with *Phaedrus* 268d-269d, the borrowings are obvious, but it is unclear who of the two is the borrower. Isocrates’

defence of his speeches against the imputation of being ‘motionless and remaining always the same’ (*akinêtôs echei kai menei kata t’auton*) in *Against the Sophists* 12 nevertheless clearly indicates that such criticism preceded his essay. If we compare Socrates’ criticism of the written word in the *Phaedrus* as ‘pointing to just one thing, the same each time’ (*hen ti sêmainei monon t’auton aei*, 275d9), the provenance of that criticism becomes obvious. This nevertheless does not imply that Isocrates borrowed his programme of philosophic rhetoric from Plato’s *Phaedrus*, for he was nine years older than Plato, and had devoted himself to rhetoric since his youth, that is ‘from the first’ (*ex archês*), as he says in *Apodosis* 151. To this he adds in *Apodosis* 161:

‘my father educated me with such care that I was more conspicuous then and more distinguished among the youth of my own age and among my fellow-students than I am now among my fellow-citizens.’ (tr. G. Norlin)

This chimes well with what Socrates says about the young Isocrates in the *Phaedrus*:

‘Isocrates is still young, but ... it seems to me that his natural powers give him superiority over anything that Lysias has achieved in literature, and also that in point of character he is of a nobler composition; hence it would not surprise me if with advancing years he made all his literary predecessors look like a very small fry; that is, supposing him to persist in the actual type of writing in which he engages at present; still more so, if he should become dissatisfied with such work, and a sublime impulse led him to greater things. For that mind of his, Phaedrus, contains an innate tincture of philosophy.’ (*Phdr.* 278e10-279b1, tr. R. Hackforth)^{vii}

This eulogy of Isocrates stands in the *Phaedrus* as an acknowledgement of the debt Plato owes his discussions with him on the theme of rhetoric. I speak of discussions, for Isocrates put down his thoughts on philosophic rhetoric for the first time in writing in *Against the Sophists*, at the beginning of his career as a teacher of the subject, as he himself says in *Antidosis* 193. Nevertheless, the very fact that much of what Isocrates regarded as his own appeared first in the *Phaedrus*, and because in the *Phaedrus* it was in his eyes contaminated with claims and professions totally alien to philosophic rhetoric as he conceived of it, he felt compelled to preface his outline of rhetoric in *Against the Sophists* by critically distancing himself from ‘those’ who thus in his view distorted philosophy.

Let us investigate what Isocrates says about ‘these [men]’ (*toutous*), whose criticism of writing he rejects in paragraph 12 of his essay. In paragraph 1 Isocrates criticises those who devote themselves to philosophy (*peri tên philosophian diatribontôn*), but make greater promises than what they can fulfil, for bringing philosophy into disrepute: ‘They pretend to search for truth (*tên alêtheian zêtein*), but at the very beginning of their professions (*ethus d’ en archêi tôn epaggelmatôn*) attempt to deceive us by lying (*pseudê legein epicheirousin*)’. What ‘lying’ does Isocrates point to? In paragraph 2 he explains: ‘For it is clear to everyone that foreknowledge of future events is not vouchsafed to our human nature.’ The ‘lying’ must have concerned a prediction which the subsequent events proved to be wrong, and which as such became notorious. The intimate involvement of that prediction with the philosophy of

‘those men’ is explained in paragraph 3: ‘These men try to persuade young men that if they become their disciples, they will learn what to do in life (*ha te prakteon esti eisontai*) and that through this knowledge (*dia tautês tês epistêmês*) they will attain happiness and prosperity (*eudaimones genêsontai*)’. In paragraphs 4-6 he ridicules those who sell the totality of virtue and happiness (*sumpasan têt aretên kai têt eudaimonian*, 4) for a trifling price of three or four minae, requiring that students deposit the fees they were charged to third parties (until the end of the course), thus mistrusting those whom they were to teach the virtue of justice, while trusting those whom they never taught. Isocrates says sarcastically that in doing so they are ‘well advised as to their security, but do the opposite of what they preach’ (5-6).

In paragraphs 7-8 Isocrates sums up his criticism:

‘When, therefore, the layman puts all these things together and observes that the teachers of wisdom and dispensers of happiness (*têt sophian didaskontas kai têt eudaimonian paradidontas*) are themselves in great want but exact only a small fee from their students, that they are on the watch for contradictions in words but are blind to inconsistencies in deeds, and that, furthermore, they pretend to have knowledge of the future but are incapable either of saying anything pertinent or of giving any counsel regarding the present, and when he observes that those who follow their opinions (*tous tais doxais chrômenous*) are more consistent and more successful than those who profess to have exact knowledge (*ê tous têt epistêmên echein epaggellomenous*), then he has, I think, good reason to condemn such studies and regard them as stuff and nonsense, and not as a true discipline of the soul.’^{viii}

It is important to note that philosophers Isocrates criticizes in his essay are all those he viewed as contemporary philosophers, for in paragraph 19 he says that the only remaining men to expose to criticism are ‘those who lived before our time (*loipoi d’ hêmîn eisi hoi pro hêmôn gegonotes*)’. The view that philosophy leads to virtue and that the virtuous life leads to happiness thus appears to have been shared by all disciples of Socrates. This may seem surprising, for Isocrates’ essay was written in the 390s, less than ten years after the death of Socrates. How could it happen that his companions departed so sharply and so soon from the not-knowing Socrates of the Defence speech in the *Apology*? Procuring happiness through a life in philosophy was the main theme of the *Phaedrus*, and it became the main theme of Socrates’ philosophic discourse on his last day. Phaedo opens his account of it by saying that Socrates on that day appeared to him to be filled with happiness (*eudaimôn*, 58e3). Satisfied with his final proof of the immortality of soul, Socrates concludes his discourse:

‘If you analyse the initial hypotheses adequately, you will, I believe, follow the argument to the furthest point to which man can follow it up; and if you get that clear, you’ll seek nothing further.’ (*Phaedo* 107b6-9, tr. D. Gallop)

Socrates identified knowledge with virtue, and on his last day he believed he had obtained it. This was his true legacy. Socrates’ new line of thought began at the trial, when after he had been found guilty he declared himself worthy of free meals in Prytaneum on the ground that he was procuring his fellow citizens true happiness (*eudaimonas einai*, 36d9). His pronouncement ‘I give you true happiness’ cannot be derived from the elenctic activities

founded in his self-proclaimed not-knowing, which in his Defence he associated with annoying people, making lots of enemies, and causing a lot of ill will towards himself (19b-23b). From what could he derive his assertion ‘I give you true happiness’? Let us consider Socrates’ brief outline of his philosophic activities, which in his Defence he pledged himself to pursue if the jury rejected the charges against him:

‘I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting any one of you whom I meet and saying to him after my manner: “You, my friend, – a citizen of the great and mighty and wise city of Athens, – are you not ashamed of heaping up the largest amount of money and honour and reputation, and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard nor heed at all?” And if the person with whom I am arguing, says: “Yes, but I do care”; then I shall not leave him nor let him go at once, but proceed to interrogate (*erêsomai auton*) and examine (*exetasô*) and cross-examine him (*elengxô*), and if I think that he has no virtue in him but only says that he has, I shall reproach him with undervaluing the most precious, and overvaluing the less.’ (29c4-30a2, tr. B. Jowett)

Socrates’ conviction that ‘wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul’ are our most precious assets (*ta pleistou axia*) is not derived from his elenctic activities and is not subjected to them. His elenctic activities are set in motion when someone claims that he possesses these assets: ‘then I proceed to interrogate and examine and cross-examine him’. The Greeks viewed those men as blessed with happiness (*eudaimonas einai*) that had the most precious assets in their possession and knew how to use and enjoy them (see e. Pl. *Euthydemus* 278e-282a). Socrates was presenting his fellow citizens with such assets. On this he reflected when he proclaimed in the *Apology* ‘I give you true happiness’.

This new line of Socrates’ thinking found its fruition on his last day, and Isocrates’ *Against the Sophists* compels us to take seriously its historicity. It is important to note that Isocrates speaks of the contemporary philosophers as ‘recently sprung up’ (*hoi arti tôn sophistôn anaphuomenoi*), ‘and having recently stumbled upon these pretensions’ (*kai neôsti prospeptôkotes tais alazoneiais*, 19).

Socrates’ declaration in the *Phaedrus* that those who follow an orderly life prescribed by philosophy shall live in happiness and harmony here on earth (256a-b) exposed Plato and his followers to the charge that they pretended to have knowledge of the future, and his following presentation of Polemarchus as an exemplary follower of philosophy, closely associated with that declaration (257b), to the charge of bringing philosophy into disrepute ‘at the very beginning of their professions’ (*euthus d’ en archêi tôn epaggelmatôn*, 1’).

xxx

Isocrates had a special reason for recalling the *Phaedrus* to the minds of his readers in *Against the Sophists*, with which he opened his own school of rhetoric, and in which he identified the study of political discourse (*tên tôn logôn tôn politikôn epimeleian*, 21) with philosophy (*hoi philosophountes*, 18; *hupo tês philosophias tautês*, 21), for Socrates in the *Phaedrus* praised ‘a certain philosophical instinct (*enesti tis^{ix} philosophia*) innate (*phusei*) in

his mind' (*têi tou andros dianoiâi*)' (*Phaedrus* 279a, tr. C. J. Rowe). In paragraph 11 of *Against the Sophists* Isocrates says:

‘For myself, I should have preferred above great riches that philosophy had as much power as these men claim; for, possibly, I should not have been the very last in the profession.’ (tr. G. Norlin)

After this allusion to his philosophic credentials Isocrates announced his own project of education, which has a lot in common with the project of philosophic rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*, as has been seen. There is nevertheless a major difference between the two conceptions of philosophic rhetoric. Plato insists on **knowledge** concerning the subject of which a rhetorician is to talk (*Phaedrus* 260e, 265d-266b); polemically, Isocrates lays emphasis on expedient **opinions** and judgements schooled by practical experience: ‘those who follow their **opinions** (*tous tais doxais chrômenous*) are more consistent and more successful than those who profess to have exact **knowledge**’ (*ê tous tèn epistêmên echein epaggellomenous*, *Against the Sophists*, 8, cf. 14). That Isocrates has in mind Plato in the first place when he speaks of ‘those who profess to have exact knowledge’ becomes clear from his *Antidosis*, in which he reacts to Plato’s attack on him in the *Republic*, defending his philosophy and attacking his ‘opponents’ along the same lines as he did in *Against the Sophists*. I put the ‘opponents’ in quotation marks, for Isocrates was eighty two years old when he wrote the *Antidosis*, as he himself tells us (*Antidosis* 9), i. e. in the year 354-353 B. C., Plato was approaching his mid seventies. This on its own makes it clear whom Isocrates means when he refers to his by then life-long ‘opponents’.

In *Republic* V Plato sharply differentiates between knowledge (*epistêmê*) and opinion (*doxa*, 477b), reserving the title of a philosopher only to those who pursue knowledge (*philosophous*), and separating them from those who are enamoured of opinions (*philodoxous*, 480a). In *Republic* VI Plato then directs his attack against those who ‘pursue subtlety and controversy that lead to nothing but opinion and strife’ (*ta de kompsa te kai eristika kai mêdamose allose teinonta ê pros doxan kai erin*, 499a6-8) and illegitimately call themselves philosophers:

‘And do you not also think, as I do’, says Socrates, ‘that the harsh feeling which the many entertain towards philosophy originates in the pretenders, who rush in uninvited, and are always railing at one another and are quarrelsome (*philapechthêmonôs echontas* 500b4) and always indulge in making personal remarks, thus doing that which is most unbecoming those who are engaged in philosophy?’

Isocrates replied to it in *Antidosis* 260:

‘I may show you clearly that we who are occupied with political discourse and whom they call quarrelsome (*hous ekeinoi phasin einai philapechthêmonas*) are more considerate than they.’

In *Antidosis* 270-271 he then says:

‘I hold that what some people call philosophy is not entitled for that name ... For since it is not in the nature of man (*ouk enestin en têi phusei tôn anthrôpôn*) to attain a science (*epistêmên labein*) by the possession of which we can know positively (*hên echontes an eideimen*) what we should do or what we should say (*ho ti prakteon ê lekteon estin*), in the next resort I hold that man to be wise who is able by his opinions (*tais doxais*) to arrive generally (*epitugchanein hôs epi to polu*) at the best course (*tou beltistou*), and I hold that man to be a philosopher who occupies himself with the studies from which he will most quickly gain that kind of insight.’^x

Completely missing in Isocrates’ outline of philosophic rhetoric in *Against the Sophists* is Plato’s insistence on the prerequisite knowledge of the souls of those who are to be persuaded by the rhetorician (270b-274a). By the time Isocrates wrote his essay Plato himself must have realized that such knowledge was unattainable, for his Phaedran outline of philosophic rhetoric could not survive his disappointment with Polemarchus; furthermore, Plato’s postulate of unfailing persuasiveness (*Phaedrus* 260e-262c) could not survive Socrates’ defeat at his trial.

In the *Cratylus* Plato gives philosophic reasons for his abandoning of the programme. The Phaedran programme requires that words are properly classified and defined (*Phaedrus* 263a-e), and that knowledge of truth is achieved by the method of analysis and synthesis (*Phaedrus* 265d-266b, 273d-274a, 277b-c). In the *Cratylus* Plato explains what it involves, taking recourse to the paradigm of painting as in the *Phaedrus*. We must analyse speech into words, words into syllables, and syllables into letters. We must then similarly analyse things into their constitutive forms, and then one must see which letters are similar to which components of things, and how the letters are to be composed into words so as to be similar to things in their compositions, just as a painter uses single colours or their compositions to create images of living beings: ‘We shall compose (*sustêsomen*) here the speech (*ton logon*) by the art of naming or rhetoric (*têi onomastikêi ê rêtorikêi*), just as there [that is in the art of painting] a living being is composed by painting (*hôsper ekei to zôion têi graphikêi*, 425a3-4)’. When Hermogenes, Socrates’ interlocutor, agrees with all this, Socrates retorts: ‘What? Do you trust yourself to analyse all these things in this manner? For I do not trust myself to do so.’ Hermogenes replies: ‘Much less do I trust myself to be able to.’ (*Cratylus* 424c5-425b7) Further on in the dialogue Socrates demonstrates that the elementary forms into which human speech can be analysed do not correspond to the elementary forms that constitute reality (*Crat.* 430a-437d). The project of philosophic rhetoric is found to be faulty.

Plato’s recourse to the paradigm of letters in his refutation of the project of philosophic rhetoric in the *Cratylus* provided Isocrates with an opportunity to ridicule it as alien to the art of rhetoric in paragraph 12 of his essay, and it gave him confidence to close his own outline of philosophic rhetoric with an assertion that philosophers would abandon their untenable pretensions and embrace rhetoric identified with philosophy as he envisaged it: ‘they will all, I am sure, come round to this position’ (*eu oid’ hoti pantes epi tautên katenechthêsontai tèn hupothesin*, 19).^{xi}

Isocrates in his essay jumbled up all philosophers in one group; some of the traits he attributed to them did apply to all, other traits only to some of them. We may presume that all disciples of Socrates professed to teach virtue, understood it as knowledge (*epistēmē*) of what one should do in life, and professed that it would bring their disciples happiness (*eudaimonia*); this remained the central tenet of Plato's philosophy, and as such he had to defend it. Isocrates dismissed it in his early *Against the Sophists* (3-4) as he did in his late *Antidosis* (271).

There was presumably little danger that anyone would think of Plato in terms of Isocrates' taunt 'although they set themselves up as teachers of so great goods, they are not ashamed of asking three or four minae ... setting such a trifling price on virtue and happiness' (*Against the Sophists* 3);^{xii} notably, this taunt is missing in Isocrates' criticism of philosophers in the *Antidosis*. But it was very different with Isocrates' branding all philosophers as eristics, as 'men who spend their time in controversies and disputations' (*tôn peri tas eridas diatribontôn*, *Against the Sophists* 1), as 'men wallowing in controversies and disputations' (*tôn peri tas eridas kalindoumenôn*, *Against the Sophists* 20). Plato's sharp criticism of Lysias and other rhetoricians in the *Phaedrus* was open to this sort of invective. – It is noteworthy that Hermeias, an ancient commentator on the *Phaedrus*, defends the dialogue against critics who maintained that Plato disputed in it against Lysias' speech as a 'contentious youngster' (*philoneikou neou*).^{xiii} – Plato had to defend philosophy against its association with eristic, to draw a sharp dividing line between a sophist and a philosopher, and to vindicate the claim that philosophy provided the key to happiness. Rebutting Isocrates, Plato undertook this dual task in the *Euthydemus*. The manner in which he did so is very peculiar, dictated by his effort to disassociate himself from the other Socratics with whom, until then, he had been associated.

In the *Euthydemus* Socrates repeats to Crito a lengthy discussion he had with two sophists (*sophistai*, 271c1), Euthydemus and Dionysodorus (272b2-3), expressing his wish to learn from them their wisdom, the eristic (*tautês tês sophias egôge epithumô, tês eristikês*, 272b9-10). Even the most obtuse reader must begin to suspect that Socrates is ironical as soon as he bestows praise on their qualifications: they formerly taught martial arts and rhetoric, and only recently, well advanced in age (*geronte onte*, 272b9), learnt the art of teaching virtue, which they profess to teach better and quicker than any man (273c-d); their only real aim is to confuse and refute their interlocutors at any cost (275e-277c, 283b-288a, 293a-303a). But Crito, the good and honest life-long friend of Socrates, has no antennae for irony, which provides the dialogue with exquisite humour. But his obtuseness has a much more serious purpose. Only towards the end of the dialogue we learn that the whole discussion was listened to by a rhetorician who missed the irony, denigrated Socrates for his association with the two sophists, identified philosophy with eristic, and dismissed it as worthless.

While Euthydemus and Dionysodorus indulge in sophistries, Socrates is searching for the only thing worthy of serious concern, knowledge that procures happiness; all men want to do well in life (*eu prattein*, 278e3), and a man who is to be happy (*ton mellonta eudaimona esesthai*, 280d5-6) can become so only if he obtains knowledge (*epistēmên*) that will provide him with happiness and make him a good man (*hên dei labonta eudaimonein te kai agathon*

andra einai, 282e). Within the framework of this search Socrates asks: ‘By gods, if we learnt the art of composing speeches (*ei tēn logopoiikēn technēn mathoimen*), is this the art the possession of which is bound to provide happiness for us (*hēn edei kektēmenous hēmas eudaimonas einai*, 289c6-8)?’ Cleinias, Socrates’ young interlocutor, emphatically answers ‘no’, for some rhetoricians produce speeches, which they are unable to use (289d); it had been agreed that only such knowledge can ascertain happiness that provides both the good on which happiness can be founded, and the ability to use it (280d-281a, 288d-289b). This is the first unmistakable pointer that Isocrates is the butt of Socrates’ irony, for he wrote speeches for others to declaim; as he himself concedes, he could not be an orator, because his voice was not up to it and he lacked confidence.^{xiv}

If Isocrates’ attack on philosophers in *Against the Sophists* was uncommonly severe, so was Plato’s response to it in the *Euthydemus*. Socrates muses:

‘Pity – I did think that we were getting close to uncovering the branch of knowledge we’ve been after all this time: my contacts with speech-writers themselves have always confirmed them in my eyes as incredibly clever, and their art as superhuman and sublime. And that’s only what you’d expect: after all it’s an aspect of enchantment and a close second best to it. Enchantment is the bewitching of wild animals and pests like snakes, poisonous spiders or scorpions; speech-writing is in fact the bewitching and calming down of assemblies – legal, political, and so on.’ (*Euthydemus* 289d10-290a4, translation R. Waterfield)

In the *Phaedrus* Plato characterized rhetoric as a charmer’s art (*psuchagôgia tis*, 261a8) without any negative connotations, using this denomination as a basis for his own positive outline of philosophic rhetoric. In contrast, in the *Euthydemus* he confirms his rejection of rhetoric theoretically substantiated in the *Cratylus*.

At the close of the discussion with the two sophists Socrates proclaims himself completely enslaved by their wisdom (*pantapasi katadoulôtheis hupo tēs sophias autoin*): ‘O blessed are you two for having such a wonderful nature (*Ô makarioi sphô tēs thaumastês phuseôs*, 303c4) that you learnt such a great thing in such a short time.’ Reminded of Isocrates by Socrates’ preceding ironic admiration of speechwriters who write speeches for others to use, the reader is now invited retrospectively to read the Phaedran praise of Isocrates’ natural talent (*phusei*) for philosophy (*enesti tis philosophia tēi tou Andros dianoiai*, *Phaedrus* 279a9-b1) in the light of the ironic praise of the ‘remarkable nature’ of the two sophists.

In order to make sure that nobody can mistake the irony for genuine praise, Socrates goes on to tell the two sophists that very few men, those similar to them, would admire their eristic skills, while most men would be ashamed to refute others as they do; their art is so easy to learn that anybody can imitate them in no time; it would be best if they confined their discussions to themselves, but if they must have an audience, they should talk only to those who would pay them for it (303d-304a).

Immediately after this sharp criticism, Socrates ends his recounting of the discussion with the two sophists by appealing to them ‘please enrol me and Cleinias as your disciples’ (304b4-5),

and then he addresses Crito with the words: ‘Do you think you can manage to join me as their pupil?’ (*Euthydemus* 304b6) What was the point of all this? Plato had to disassociate himself from the other Socratics, notably from Antisthenes, whose views he on several occasions put into the mouth of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.^{xv} What better way to do so than by using all the power of Socratic irony, expressing an arduous desire to become their disciple? Diogenes Laertius in his ‘Life of Plato’ tells a story that Antisthenes invited Plato to his lecture on the impossibility of contradiction (*peri tou mê einai antilegein*), to which Plato replied by asking him ‘How can you then write about it?’, thus showing to him that his thesis was self-refuting (*kai didaskontos hoti peritrepetai*, iii. 35). The primary target of the irony is nevertheless Isocrates with his confident claim that ‘the sophists who have lately sprung up’ would all come round to his position (*Against the Sophists* 19); to him Socrates now turns all his attention.

Missing Socrates’ irony, in response to his appeal Crito professes himself to be one of those who would rather suffer being refuted than refute others after the manner of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. Reluctant to criticise Socrates directly, he reports to him critical remarks of a man who listened to the whole interchange between Socrates and the sophists, ‘a man who thinks he is very wise, one of those terrific experts on forensic speeches’ (304d5-6):

“‘It was worth listening to,’ he said. – ‘Why?’ I asked. – ‘To have heard philosophical discussion from contemporary masters of the art.’ – ‘How did it strike you?’ I asked. – ‘As the sort of nonsense one can always hear from such people, of course, when they devote themselves pointlessly to pointless matters,’ he replied – these were almost his exact words. ‘But philosophy is a decent sort of pursuit,’ I said. – ‘Decent, my friend!’ he said. ‘A waste of time. If you’d been there, I think you’d have been most embarrassed by your friend’s highly eccentric inclination to put himself into the hands of men who couldn’t care less what they say, and who seize on every word. These are the men, as I was just saying, who are among the leading lights nowadays! No, Crito,’ he said. ‘The fact of the matter is that this pursuit and those who spend their time on it are worthless and ridiculous.’”

Socrates wants to know more about this censurer of philosophy (*memphomenos tēn philosophian*):

“‘Is he an orator, someone good at fighting cases, or is he one of their backroom boys, a writer of the speeches with which the orators do the fighting?’ Crito: ‘He’s certainly no orator at all; in fact, I don’t think he’s ever entered a lawcourt. But, as God is my witness, he is reputed to understand the pursuit, as well as to be clever and to compose clever speeches.’” (*Euthydemus* 304d9-305c4, tr. R. Waterfield)

On hearing these words, Socrates immediately knows whom Crito means: ‘Now I understand’ (*Êdê manthanô*, 305c5) – Isocrates prided himself in not taking part in law-court proceedings or any related activities. In *Antidosis* 38 he proclaims: ‘no one has ever seen me either at the council board, or at the preliminaries, or in the courts, or before the arbitrators; I

have kept aloof from all these more than any of my fellow-citizens.’ (Tr. G. Norlin) – Socrates goes on:

‘They think that if they create a reputation of worthlessness for those who devote themselves to philosophy, nobody will dispute their claim to the prize of victory for wisdom. ... They think they are very wise, and likely so, for they participate both in philosophy and in politics in due measure (*metriôs men gar philosophias echein, metriôs de politikôn,*) ... standing back from risks and contests, they reap the benefits of their wisdom’ (305d6-e2).

Socrates’ remark ‘they participate both in philosophy and in politics in due measure’ cannot be derived from Crito’s account, in which there is no mentioning of the man’s participation in philosophy or in politics. Here Socrates points his finger directly at *Against the Sophists*, which Isocrates opens with harsh criticism of contemporary philosophy, but ends by identifying the study of political discourse (*tên tôn logon tôn politikôn epimeleian*) with philosophy, which he intends to teach (*tês philosophias tautês*, 21). Socrates in the *Euthydemus* turns this self-positioning of Isocrates against him. He argues that if both philosophy and politics are good disciplines related to different spheres (*ei men oun hê philosophia agathon estin kai hê politikê praxis, pros allo de hekatera*, 306b2-3), then those who think that they partake of both fairly well but in fact stand in between the two are deficient in respect of both and their criticism of philosophy is invalid (*ouden legousin*, 306b4).

In Isocrates’ eyes the *Euthydemus* was a product of eristic *par excellence*, and so in the *Antidosis* he reinforced his invective:

‘Among those who indulge in eristic disputations there are some (*tôn peri tas eridas spoudazontôn enioi tines*) who talk no less abusively of speeches on general and useful themes (*peri tôn logôn tôn koinôn kai chrêsimôn*) than do the most benighted of men, not that they are ignorant of their power or of the advantage which they quickly give to those who avail themselves of them, but because they think that by decrying them they will enhance the standing of their own.’ (*Antidosis* 258)

As can be seen, Isocrates’ polemical attacks against contemporary philosophers in *Against the Sophists*, which he wrote in his forties, are iterated and accentuated in the *Antidosis*, written in his eighties. His attacks in the *Antidosis* can be directly related to Plato’s attacks against him in the *Republic*. This in itself suggests that his target in *Against the Sophists* is primarily Plato. Isocrates’ defence in paragraph 12 of *Against the Sophists* against the attribution of immobility to written speeches points to the *Phaedrus*, in which the written word is criticised by Socrates in these terms. Isocrates’ accusation that those who devote themselves to philosophy ‘at the very beginning of their profession attempt to deceive us by lying, pretending to search for truth’ (*Against the Sophists* 1) chimes with the ancient dating of the *Phaedrus* as Plato’s first dialogue. For Isocrates specifies the ‘lying’ as pretending to have foreknowledge of future events, which is not vouchsafed to our human nature (*Against the Sophists* 2), accusing ‘these men’ of identifying philosophy with ‘knowledge through

which men attain happiness and prosperity' (*Against the Sophists* 3). All these accusations can be related to the Phaedran palinode, in which Socrates asserts that men devoted to philosophy will live a blessed life here on earth (*Phaedrus* 256a-b).

XXX

Derrida is right when he says that "the association *logos-zôon* appears in Alcidamas' *On Sophists*". He can hardly be blamed for claiming that Alcidamas made this association before Plato, for in this he merely follows a scholarly tradition established in the twentieth century, ever since the *Phaedrus* was placed among Plato's late dialogues. In the note on *Phaedrus* 274b-278b Hackforth writes :

'In his work *On Sophists*, which is thought to have appeared not later than 380 B.C.,^{xvi} Alcidamas adopts the same general attitude towards the written discourse that Plato here puts into the mouth of Socrates; and indeed the similarities of language are such that, in view of the improbability of the common source, borrowing can hardly be denied. Chronology makes it likely that Plato is the borrower'.^{xvii}

Friedländer, to whom Hackforth refers, reports Plato's alleged borrowings:

'According to Alcidamas, only the word arising spontaneously out of thought is possessed of soul and life (*empsychos esti kai dzêi*, 28). A written speech is not a genuine "speech" at all, but only a copy, form, or imitation (*eidôla kai schêmata kai mimêmata logôn, eikôn logou*). It cannot be likened to a real body, but only to a plastic or painted figure (*chalkôn andriantôn kai lithinôn agalmatôn kai gegrammenôn dzôiôn*), and it is unmoving (*akinêtos*) and useless like the latter. Socrates in the *Phaedrus* also calls the spoken word "living and possessed of soul" (*logon dzônta kai empsychon*, 276a), and the written word a mere copy (*eidôlon*). He, too, places written language side by side with painting (*homoion dzôigraphiai*, 275d). Its offspring stand as if alive (*hestêken hôs dzônta*), but they are unmoving, and they only say the same things over again.'^{xviii}

Friedländer says that Alcidamas 'looks upon himself as a rhetorician who gives his extemporaneous speeches *without much preparation* (*eikêi*, 29)', which is wrong. In paragraph 29, to which Friedländer refers, Alcidamas distances himself from an irrational (*alogon*) praise of 'speaking *eikêi*' by someone who 'spends his time in philosophy' (*peri philosophian diatribonta*, 29). *Eikêi* means 'without plan or purpose', and Alcidamas explicitly denies that that he commends speaking *eikêi* (*oud' eikêi legein parakeleuometha*, 33).

Friedländer is equally wrong when he explains Alcidamas' criticism of the written word as a defence of 'the purely oral art' of Gorgias.^{xix} Gorgias in the *Defence of Palamedes* lauds Palamedes for inventing 'written laws, the guardians of justice' (*nomous te graptous phulakas tou dikaiou*) and 'letters, the instrument of memory' (*grammata te mnêmês organon*, B 11 a, 30).^{xx} Highlighting the persuasive powers of *logos* in the *Encomium of Helen*, Gorgias divides the domain of the persuasive *logos* as follows: 1. Discourses on nature

(*tous tôn meteôrologôn logous*), which compel the soul to exchange one opinion for another (*doxan anti doxês*), and thus to view that which is unclear and untrustworthy through the eyes of the opinion (*tois tês doxês ommasin*). 2. The necessary oratorical contests (*tous anagkaious dia logôn agônas*), in which a single speech (*heis logos*) **written with art** (*technêi grapheis*) can entertain and persuade a great assembly of people. 3. Philosophic disputations (*philosophôn logôn hamillas*), in which the speed of thought (*gnômês tachos*) makes opinions changeable (B 11, 13). Gorgias with his rhythmically polished speeches, written with art, falls into the second category.

Mac Dowell in his edition of Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* remarks: 'it is interesting that Gorgias regards quick thinking as characteristic of philosophers (rather than scientists or law-court speakers), and associates them with debating rather than lecturing. But there is no ground for thinking that he is referring to Socrates.'^{xxi} This remark shows how successful the modern Platonic scholarship had been in divorcing the historical Socrates from Socrates in Plato's dialogues. For anybody who can see the historical Socrates in the Socrates who discusses rhetoric with Gorgias, Polus, and Callikles in the *Gorgias*, virtue with Protagoras in the *Protagoras* and with Meno in the *Meno*, beauty with Hippias in the *Hippias Major*, virtue, right and wrong with Hippias in the *Hippias Minor*, piety with Euthyphro in the *Euthyphro*, or friendship with Lysis and Menexenus in the *Lysis*, can immediately see to whom Gorgias in his *Encomium* is primarily referring when he speaks of philosophic disputations in which the speed of thought makes opinions changeable.

There must have been someone of great authority to elevate the spoken word in the eyes of Gorgias' disciple Alcidas above Gorgias' speeches written with art. Socrates insists on quick thinking in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (*eutheôs* 490, *tacheôs* 775) at the time when Plato was a boy of four. In the *Birds*, staged when Plato was thirteen, Aristophanes says that 'all imitated Socrates' (*hapantes esôkratoun*, 1281-2). Prior to Socrates, philosophy was the domain of those who theorised about nature and enclosed their widely differing views in their treatises. Socrates exposed their theories and their writings to ridicule and limited philosophy to discussions on ethics and politics, as we know from Plato (see esp. the *Apology* and *Theaetetus*), from Xenophon (esp. *Mem.* IV. vii. 2-8), and from Aristotle (*Met.* A, 987b1-4, M, 1078b17-19). Gorgias' separation of 'discourses on nature' from 'philosophic disputations' in his *Encomium of Helen* reflects the profound change that Socrates brought about in the philosophy of those days. This profound change is most emphatically corroborated by Isocrates who in *Against the Sophists* identifies philosophy, as it constituted itself after the death of Socrates, with moral philosophy.

xxx

The relationship between Plato's *Phaedrus* and Alcidas' *On Sophists* can be properly explored only within the framework of the latter to Isocrates' *Against the Sophists*, to which it is a reply. Isocrates' criticism of 'the teachers of political oratory' (*tois tous politikous logous hupischnoumenois*) was harsh:

‘They are themselves so stupid and conceive others to be so dull that, although the speeches which they compose are worse (*cheiron graphontes tous logous*) than those which some laymen improvise (*ê tôn idiôtôn tines autoschediazousi*), nevertheless they promise to make their students such clever orators that they will not overlook any of the possibilities which a subject affords’ (*Against the Sophists* 9, tr. G. Norlin).

Alcidamas replied in style:

‘Since there are some so-called sophists who have neglected sciences and education and are so lacking in the power of speaking (*tou dunasthai legein*) as inexperienced laymen (*homoiôs tois idiôtais apeirôs echousi*), who affect a grave and solemn air and hold themselves in high esteem on account of devoting their care to the writing of speeches, thus displaying their wisdom through means of no reliability and permanence (*di’ abebaiôn*) and claiming to be in possession of the whole discipline of rhetoric while they have mastered only a tiny part of it; for this reason (*dia tauten tèn aitian*) I shall put my hand to making an accusation (*epicheirêsô katêgorian poiêsthai*) against written speeches (*tôn graptôn logôn.*’ (*On Sophists* 1)^{xxii}

In his attack against ‘the teachers of political oratory’ Isocrates put the composition of speeches into the very centre of rhetoric. His unfavourable comparison of Alcidamas’ written speeches to ‘speeches given by extemporizing laymen’ powerfully recalled the *Phaedrus* in which Socrates presented his speeches on love as ‘an improvising layman’ (*idiôtês autoschediazôn*, 236d5), confident that his readers would be reminded of Socrates’ praise of him in the *Phaedrus*.

Isocrates’ covert references to the *Phaedrus* were a godsend to Alcidamas, who turned against him all the power of the criticism of the written word in the *Phaedrus*, which Socrates opened with the words:

‘The man who thinks that he has left behind him a science (*technên*) in writing, and in turn the man who receives it from him in the belief that anything clear or certain (*bebaion*) will result from what is written down, would be full of simplicity.’ (*Phaedrus* 275c5-7, tr. C. J. Rowe)

Alcidamas presses on, using Plato’s armoury both from the *Euthydemus* and from the *Phaedrus*:

‘I believe that one should treat writing as a mere accessory, and that those who devote their lives to it fall short both of rhetoric and of philosophy (*apoleleiphthai polu kai rêtorikês kai philosophias*), and should be rightly called poets (*poiêtas*) rather than sophists.’ (2)

In the *Euthydemus* Socrates says that those who write speeches for others fall short both of rhetoric and of philosophy, and in the *Phaedrus* he calls a man who has nothing better to show of himself than his writings ‘a poet’ (*poiêtên*, 275e1) in contrast to a philosopher who knows the truth and cultivates the spoken word as its vehicle (278d-e).

Isocrates' attempt to reclaim Socrates' praise of his natural talent for philosophy in the *Phaedrus* triggered another attack by Alcidas, armed as he was with the weapons from the Phaedran armoury:

'It is awful that a man who makes a claim to philosophy (*ton antipoioumenon philosophias*) and promises to educate others can show off his wisdom if he has a tablet or a strip of paper to write on, but without it stands there no better than an uneducated man. When he is given time he can produce a speech, but if he is to speak off the cuff on a given subject, he is less able to do so than a layman (*aphônoteron einai tôn idiôtôn*, 15).'

Isocrates in *Against the Sophists* criticized philosophers for 'pretending to have knowledge of the future' (7), 'when it is manifest to all that foreknowledge of future events is not vouchsafed to our human nature' (*ta mellonta progignôskein ou tês hêmeteras phuseôs estin*, 2). Alcidas in *On Sophists* snatched this argument from him and turned it against him:

'Those who elaborated their speeches long before the contests sometimes miss what is right and proper when the occasions arrive ... For it is difficult, or rather impossible to obtain access to future by human forethought (*adunaton estin anthrôpinên pronoian ephikesthai tou mellontos*).' (22-23)

After this feat of snatching Isocrates' argument, used by Isocrates against the *Phaedrus*, from him and using it against him, Alcidas in paragraphs 24-26 extols the ability of expert extempore orators to snatch arguments from their opponents and integrate them into their own speeches. He thus introduces paragraphs 27-28, in which his attack against Isocrates as the writer of speeches culminates with an extensive use of the Phaedran arguments against writing. Socrates in the *Phaedrus* emphasizes the static character of writing, comparing it to painting of living beings (*graphê ... homoion zôgraphiai*, 275d4-5). Alcidas compares written speeches (*logous ... tous gegrammenous*) to paintings of living beings (*gegrammenôn zôiôn*, 27). Socrates considers the written word a mere phantom (*eidôlon*, 276a9) of the spoken word. Alcidas views written speeches as mere phantoms of actual speeches (*hôsper eidôla logôn*, 27). Socrates maintains that the offsprings of painting stand there as if alive (*hestêke men hês zônta*, 275d6), but if you ask them something, they maintain a solemn silence, and that with writing it is the same (275d4-7). Alcidas observes that the written speech can cause some wonder when it is read from a book, but when the time for intervention comes (*epi de tôn kairôn*) it is of no use, for it is immobile (*akinêtos ôn*, 28). Socrates says that the spoken word is written in the soul of the learner (*graphetai en têi tou manthanontos psuchêi*, 276a5-6), has soul and is living (*logon ... zônta kai empsuchon*, 276a8-9). Alcidas writes that the speech spoken directly from the mind at the given moment has soul and is living (*empsuchos esti kai zêi*, 28).

After thus using the Phaedran arguments to disparage Isocrates' speech-making, Alcidas distances himself from a writer of philosophic discourses who could be justifiably ridiculed for his arguments against writing:

‘Someone might say perhaps that it is absurd to disparage the power of writing when a man appears to be showing himself to his best by the means of it, and to excite prejudices against the activity through which he is preparing himself to become famous among the Greeks, and when he devotes his time to philosophy (*peri philosophian diatribonta*) to commend extemporaneous speeches (*autoschediastikous logous epainein*), to consider chance (*tuchên*) more propitious than foresight and those who speak without plan (*tous eikêi legontas*) to be wiser than those who write on the basis of due preparation (*tôn meta paraskeuês graphontôn*, 29).

The words ‘it is absurd to disparage the power of writing when a man appears to be showing himself to his best by the means of it, and to excite prejudices (*prodiaballein*) against the activity (*prodiaballein tèn pragmateian*) through which he is preparing himself to become famous (*di’ hês eudokimein paraskeuazetai*) among the Greeks (*para tois Hellêsin*)’ make sense only in connection with the ancient tradition according to which the *Phaedrus* was Plato’s first dialogue. The swipe against ‘commending extemporaneous speeches when one devotes his time to philosophy’ should be read against the background of and in contrast to Gorgias’ association of philosophy with the spoken word, which during Gorgias’ life-time reflected the profound change caused by Socrates’ way of doing philosophy. Alcidas testifies to it that by the time he wrote his essay Plato brought about another colossal change: thanks to the powerful influence of his dialogues philosophy became firmly associated with writing.

All the other points in which Alcidas in paragraph 29 of his essay distances himself from the contemplated radical critic of the art of writing can be traced to Plato’s dialogues. Plato could be censured for ‘commending extemporaneous speeches’ (*tous autoschediastikous logous epainein*), for he presented Socrates in the *Phaedrus* as ‘an improvising layman’ (*idiôtês autoschdiazôn*, 236d5), and could be criticised for ‘considering chance (*tuchên*) to be more propitious than foresight’, for he presented Socrates’ two speeches on love in the *Phaedrus* as products of chance (*kata tuchên tina ... errêthêtên tô logô*, 262c10-d1). The charge of considering those ‘who speak without plan (*eikêi*) to be wiser than those who write on the basis of due preparation’ finds its justification in the *Apology*, where Socrates introduced his Defence speech by proclaiming that he would speak ‘without plan or preparation, as the words come to me’ (*eikêi legomena tois epituchousin onomasin*, 17c).

In paragraph 29 Alcidas speaks of ‘a man who devotes his time to philosophy’ (*peri philosophian diatribonta*, 29), whereas in paragraph 15 he derides ‘a man who lays claim to philosophy’ (*ton prospoioumenon philosophias*, 15). In paragraph 29 he refers to Plato, in paragraph 15 to Isocrates. The verb *diatribein*, with which he refers to Plato, was used by the Athenians when they talked about the activities of Socrates and his friends (cf. *Euthyphro* 2a2, *Apology* 29c8), by Socrates when he talked about time devoted to philosophy (cf. *Phaedo* 59d5, *Republic* 540b2); Isocrates in his essay uses the noun *diatribê* when he proclaims to be one of those who devote themselves to philosophy, he is ‘in the same profession’ (*peri tèn autên diatribên*, 11). In contrast, the verb *prospoierein*, with which Alcidas in paragraph 15 characterizes Isocrates’ relation to philosophy, has connotations

of ‘pretending to do or to be’, ‘affecting’. Plato’s use of the word in the *Charmides* is apposite. Socrates tells Critias:

‘Supposing self-control (*sôphrosunê*) were as we now define it, and did govern us completely ... No one ... who pretended to know something he didn’t know (*prospoioumenos ti eidenai ho mê oiden*), would escape our notice.’ (*Chrm.* 173a8-b4, tr. D. Watt)

In paragraph 30 Alcidas says that he does not completely condemn the ability to write, he merely holds it to be inferior to speaking extempore (30). Next he says that he writes in order to show his oratorical prowess to those who do not frequent his extempore speeches, for being used to listening to the declamation of written speeches, they might fail to properly estimate his speeches given off the cuff (31). Paragraph 32 is worth rendering in full:

‘Apart from all this, marks of the progress (*sêmeia tês epidoseôs*) that is likely to take place in one’s mind (*hên eikos en têi dianoiai gignesthai*) are most clearly to be seen (*enargestata katidein estin*) in written speeches (*para tôn graptôn logôn*). It is difficult to judge whether we produce better extempore speeches now than we did before, for it is difficult to preserve the memory of previously held speeches, but if we look at the written speeches (*eis de ta gegrammena katidontes*), it is easy to observe in them the progress of the soul (*theôresai tas tês psuchês epidoseis*) as in a mirror (*hôsper en katoptrôi*). Furthermore, we take recourse to writing because we are eager to leave memory of ourselves for posterity and thus satisfy our ambition.’ (32)

These insights into the value of writing, which stand in stark contrast to its disparagement in paragraphs 1-28, make it clear that the arguments against the written word that Alcidas opportunely borrowed from the *Phaedrus* were in fact alien to his own appreciation of it. This comes to the fore most conspicuously if we contrast paragraph 32 with the first paragraph, in which Alcidas accuses written speeches of unreliability and impermanence (*di’ abebaiôn*).^{xxiii} When Socrates in the *Phaedrus* ridicules those who believe that through writing their words will acquire permanence (*hôs ti bebaion* 275c6; *bebaiotêta* 277d8), he contrasts the unreliability of the written word, liable to misunderstandings and most wildly differing interpretations, with the reliability and permanence of the spoken word that comprehends truth, which lives in the soul and is rendered immortal (*athanaton* 277a2) by its propagation from one soul to another, from generation to generation. All this was alien to Alcidas. Socrates had no experience with writing philosophy, but plenty of experience with the effects of his spoken word on his interlocutors, which he could always check, scrutinize, ascertain by his questioning, and which he could compare to the effects that writings of poets, rhetoricians, sophists, and pre-Socratic philosophers had on their minds. Alcidas had plenty of experience both with giving his speeches off the cuff and with writing them, and was thus well aware that the impression his off the cuff speeches left in the minds of the audience quickly faded away, whereas his written speeches could be looked at again and again, and could even preserve his memory for posterity.

In the closing peroration Alcidas reemphasizes the salient points of his criticism of the makers of speeches, and once again powerfully recalls the *Phaedrus*. Socrates in the dialogue maintained that a wise man would never view writing as a serious pursuit, but regard it at best as merely a play (*paidias charin* 276d2, *paizôn d8*, *paidian e1*). Alcidas maintains that ‘whoever desires to become a powerful rhetorician but not a maker of speeches (*alla mê poiêtês logon*) ... would be judged a wise man by those who are wise (*eu phronein kriteiê para tois eu phronousin*), if he cultivated (*epimelomenos*) writing (*tou graphein*) in play (*en paidiai*)’ (34).

xxx

The currently dominant late dating of the *Phaedrus* stands and falls with the dating of the *Phaedrus* after Isocrates’ *Against the Sophists* and Alcidas’ *On Sophists*. Isocrates’ and Alcidas’ essays can be dated prior to the *Phaedrus* only at the expense of their distortion, and of the corresponding distortion of the *Phaedrus*, the originality of which is thus compromised. When these distortion are removed, the dating of the *Phaedrus* prior to Isocrates’ *Against the Sophists* and Alcidas’ *On Sophists* becomes imperative.

ⁱ R. Hackforth, *Plato’s Phaedrus*, Cambridge, The University Press, 1952, repr. 1972, p. 157; C. J. Rowe, *Plato: Phaedrus*, Aris & Phillips Classical Texts, Oxbow books, Oxford 1988; Platon *Phèdre* followed by Jacques Derrida, *La Pharmacie de Platon*, Flammarion, Paris, 1989, p. 178 and 295.

ⁱⁱ Unless indicated otherwise, the translation of each quoted passage is mine.

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘L’écriture nous assure le moyen de revenir à loisir, autant de fois qu’il faudra, à cet objet idéal qu’est la loi. On pourra ainsi la scruter, l’interroger, la consulter, la faire parler sans altérer son identité. C’est exactement, avec les memes mots (*boetheia* notamment), l’envers ... du discours de Socrate dans le *Phèdre*.’ J. Derrida, *op. cit.* p. 317.

^{iv} ‘En décrivant le *logos* comme un *zôon*, Platon suit certains rhéteurs et sophistes qui, à la rigidité cadaverique de l’écriture, opposèrent avant lui la parole vive.’ Derrida, *op.cit.* p. 276.

^v L’association *logos-zôon* apparaît dans les discours d’Isocrate *Contre les sophistes* et d’Alcidas *Sur les sophistes*.’ Derrida, *op.cit.* p. 388, n. 9.

^{vi} ‘L’argumentation du *Phèdre* contre l’écriture peut emprunter toutes ses ressources à Isocrate ou à Alcidas.’ Derrida, *op. cit.* p. 316.

^{vii} Hackforth notes: ‘I agree with Wilamowitz that there is no trace of Irony in what is said of Isocrates here; and the fact that he is favourably contrasted with Lysias in itself rules out the idea that he, personally and individually, has been the target of all the foregoing criticism of rhetoric.’ (Hackforth, *op. cit.* pp. 167-8) Wilamowitz says tersely: ‘Wahrlich ein hohes Lob: keine Spur von Ironie.’ [‘Truly great praise: no trace of Irony.’] (U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorf, *Platon* II, p.122, Berlin 1920.)

^{viii} Translation G. Norlin with a minor change; Norlin translates *doxais* as ‘judgements’, I translate it as ‘opinions’.

^{ix} Rowe argues that we should read this praise as irony, arguing that Isocrates ‘defends a conception of *philosophia* which is as far removed from the Socratic-Platonic conception as it could possibly be

(*Against the Sophists* 16 ff. ; *Antidosis* 270 ff.). Against this background, he maintains, we should read Socrates' suggestion at 279a9-b1 that 'there is a certain philosophical instinct (*philosophia tis*)' in Isocrates' mind. (C. J. Rowe, *Plato Phaedrus*, Oxbow Books, Oxford 1986, p. 216). De Vries in the 'Introduction' to his edition of the dialogue says that when it was published 'Isocrates was at least more than sixty years old, probably nearing seventy or even older ... The last taunt especially is a taunt: what kind of philosophy (*tis!*) can it be that was *phusei* present in his mind?' (G. J. de Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato*, Adolf M. Hakkert, Amsterdam 1969, p. 17).

As can be seen, C. J. Rowe and G. J. de Vries on the basis of their late dating of the *Phaedrus* project the irony, which they derive from viewing the *Phaedrus* against the background of a long hostility between the two, into the indefinite pronoun *tis*, 'some', or 'certain'. But the use of *tis* in this instance is no more ironic than when Socrates says in the *Cratylus* that Zeus is likely to have 'sprung from some (*tinós*) great mind'.

As Hackforth noted, irony is excluded from the given passage by the very fact that Plato in it favourably compares Isocrates to Lysias. (See above note viii.)

^x Tr. G. Norlin, with one change. Norlin translates *tais doxais* 'by his powers of conjecture', I translate it 'by his opinions'.

^{xi} The implied dating of the *Cratylus* prior to Isocrates' essay *Against the Sophists* helps us understand its title, for in the *Cratylus* Plato identifies the 'accomplished sophist' (*teleos sophistês*) with a philosopher (403e-404a). Socrates' morally uplifting 'etymological' interpretations of the names of the gods in the *Cratylus* are inspired by the discussions about gods that he had held 'in the morning' with Euthyphro (396d, 399a, 400a, 407d, 409d, 428c). The *Cratylus* thus presents itself as an answer and explanation to the *Euthyphro*, in which Euthyphro, inspired by the accepted views on Zeus, was about to indict his father for murder: 'Zeus, the best and most righteous of the gods bound his father because of his father's crime' (5e-6a). To this Socrates replied: 'May not this be the reason why I have been indicted, that I show some resentment when someone speaks about gods in this way?'

Socrates' discussion with Euthyphro takes place in front of the Office of the King Archon, where Socrates came to face the charges raised against him by Meletus. As I have argued in 'Socrates in the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology*', Chapter 12 of *The Lost Plato* (online at www.juliustomin.org), Plato wrote the dialogue before the trial, convinced that Socrates would win. After Socrates' defeat at the trial he had to protect himself and other followers of Socrates from the imputation of impiety, which Socrates' pronouncement in the *Euthyphro* might trigger.

Compare Euthyphro's pronouncements on Zeus and on his father Cronus in the *Euthyphro* with Socrates' characterization of these two gods in the *Cratylus*, as he derives it from their names: Zeus is the cause of life (*tou zên*) of all living beings (*pasi tois zôsi*), and so for good reason he is a son of some great mind, deriving the name of Zeus' father Cronus from the purity (*katharon*) and undefiled nature (*akêraton*) of intellect (*tou nou*, *Crat.* 396a-b). Plato's Socrates in the *Cratylus* does not hide the fact that his views concerning Zeus and Cronus differ radically from the current beliefs, expressed by Euthyphro in the *Euthyphro*, but he makes an important proviso. He wants to go on with his investigations in this vein for the day, but the next day, he suggests, he and his interlocutors should undergo purification (396e). Furthermore, and even more importantly, he proclaims that he knows nothing about gods, neither about them nor about the names they themselves give to themselves; what he is investigating are men (*skepsometha peri tôn anthrôpôn*), what were their opinions (*hên pote tina doxan echontes*) when they gave gods their names (*etithento autois ta onomata*): 'for this will not incur the wrath of God' (*touto anemesêton*, 401a5). (*Cratylus* 400d6-401a5) With these provisos he retrospectively shields the *Euthyphro* against any imputation of impiety. This is the primary reason why I consider *Cratylus* as written immediately after the *Crito*, most likely when Plato was still in

self-imposed exile in Megara, where he with other disciples of Socrates fled after the death of Socrates out of fear of prosecution (Diogenes Laertius ii. 106, iii.6). (For the dating of the *Crito* see *The Lost Plato* vol. 2, Ch. 2 ‘Socrates and the Laws of Athens’, online at www.juliustomin.org.)

^{xii} With these words Isocrates echoes Socrates who in his Defence contrasted his philosophic ignorance to sophists who professed to teach virtue, such as Euenus, whom Socrates with biting irony declared blessed if he truly possessed the art of teaching virtue and taught it for a mere five minae a student (Plato, *Apology*, 19e-20c). Isocrates undoubtedly savoured turning Socrates’ irony directed against the sophists against Socrates’ followers. Isocrates’ taking recourse to Socrates’ authentic criticism chimes well with his reminding the reader of the *Phaedrus* throughout his essay, for in the *Phaedrus* Isocrates is called a companion (*hetairos*, 278e6) of Socrates by Phaedrus, and Socrates speaks of him as his beloved (*paidika*, 279b2).

^{xiii} Hermias, *In Platonis Phaedrum Scholia*, ed. P. Cuvreur, Paris, Librairie Émile Bouillon, 1901, p. 9.

^{xiv} See Isocrates, *To Philip* 81, *Panathenaicus* 10.

^{xv} The two argue that contradiction (*to antilegein*) does not exist (285d7-286b6), that there is no such thing as saying a falsehood (*pseudê legein ouk esti*, 286c6, c9); we know from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 1024b32-34 that these views were held by Antisthenes.

In the *Euthydemus* Dionysodorus challenges Socrates to refute (*elegxon*, 286e1) his thesis that there is no possibility of contradiction, falsity, and ignorance. In response, Socrates asks: ‘Is there then according to your argument such a thing as refutation, when it is impossible to tell a falsehood?’ Euthydemus steps in: ‘There is no such thing.’ Dionysodorus then denies having asked Socrates to refute him: ‘how could I ask you to do that which is not?’ (286e2-7) So Socrates allows himself to be ensnared into making a statement, which Dionysodorus brands as mistaken. ‘I made a mistake because of my stupidity,’ admits Socrates, ‘or did I make no mistake after all? ... For if I did not make a mistake’, Socrates argues, ‘then you cannot refute me, however wise you may be ... But if I did make a mistake, then even so you cannot be right, for you say that there is no such thing as making a mistake.’ (287e-288a)

Antisthenes’ negation of the possibility of contradiction stands on the claim that one can express in speech only *that which is*, one cannot speak of things that *are not*. In other words, one can ‘speak telling truth, or not speak at all’ (*ê legont’ alêthê legein ê mê legein*), as Socrates rephrases Dionysodorus’ argument, pointing out that it can be traced back to Protagoras and even further back (*Euthydemus* 286c7-8). Needless to say, Plato thus deprives Antisthenes of his originality.

^{xvi} Alcidas’ *On Sophists* cannot be dated later than 380 BC, for Isocrates responded to it in the *Panegyricus* published at about that date. Concerning the dating of Isocrates’ *Panegyricus* see e.g. G. Norlin, ‘Introduction’ to *Panegyricus, Isocrates* vol. i. The Loeb Classical Library, 1980, p. 116.

^{xvii} R. Hackforth, *Plato’s Phaedrus*, Cambridge 1952, p. 162.

^{xviii} P. Friedländer, *Plato*, London 1958, p. 111.

^{xix} Friedländer, *ibid.*

^{xx} Plato must have cast a critical eye at Gorgias’ *Defence of Palamedes* when he was composing the Phaedran myth about Theuth as an inventor of writing. Socrates appears to have thought a lot about Palamedes. In the *Apology*, talking to his friends after the verdict, Socrates muses how nice it might be if he got into Hades judged by true judges, Minos, Radamantys, Aiakos and Triptolemos, and could meet Palamedes ‘or any other man of old who was put to death through an unjust judgement’ (41a-b).

^{xxi} D. M. Mac Dowell, *Gorgias, Encomium of Helen*, 1982, p. 40.

^{xxii} Alcidamas speaks about Isocrates without naming him and in plural, just as Plato did in his criticism of Isocrates in the *Euthydemus*, and Isocrates did in his criticism both of Plato and of Alcidamas in *Against the Sophists*. This convention of politely avoiding the naming of the criticized opponent may be the result of the sharp criticism that Plato incurred because of his open attacks on Lysias in the *Phaedrus*. Hermeias, an ancient commentator on the *Phaedrus*, defends the dialogue against those who criticized it for his contending against the speech of Lysias as a contentious youngster (Hermeias, op. cit., p. 9), while Themistius turns the criticism to which Plato was subjected on that account into Plato's strength: 'and you were not afraid that someone might accuse you of juvenile behaviour when you contended against Lysias' (*Oration xxvi*, 329c). At the same time, the use of the plural reflects the fact that all these three men had their devoted followers.

^{xxiii} For the reading *di' abebaiôn* as against Reiske's conjecture *dia bibliôn* see Guido Avezù's textual note: "*di' abebaiôn* Ξam₄M: *diabebaiôn* K: *dia bebaiôn* Am₁EmuNT Ald: *dia bibliôn* post Reiske omnes. *Alcidamante Orazioni e Frammenti*, Testo, introduzione, traduzione e note a cura di Guido Avezù, Università di Padova, Bolletino dell' Istituto di Filologia Greca, Supplemento 6, Bretschneider, Roma 1982, p. 8.