

■ Socrates' Metaphysical Olympiad in Plato's *Phaedrus*

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Abstract

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates leaves Athens for the *locus amoenus* beneath a plane tree. As if possessed, the philosopher then articulates the renowned chariot allegory in a frenzy. However, to understand the myth as a medium of philosophical instruction dumbs down the Greeks' exuberant imagination revolving around sport whether in mythology or in actuality. Namely, competitive events in numerous Hellenic games feature a diversity of instrumental sociocultural views more than what a philosophical allegory can contain. For instance, sport serves as the fundamental apparatus of distinguishing Greeks from non-Greeks and furthermore, of fashioning an epitomical Greek identity underlined by gender and class differences. Therefore, this paper aims to employ the sociocultural connotations of Greek sport to re-interpret the *Phaedrus* and the chariot myth therein. It turns out that Socrates' journey out of town transforms the idyllic nature of the space outside Athens into a space informed by athleticism. More remarkably, with the multiple correlation points between the chariot races in Hellenic games and those in the allegory, Socrates finally mounts a *de facto* Olympiad—a metaphysical Olympiad that extols in like manner power and aristocracy.

Keywords: *Phaedrus*, chariot allegory, sport, agon, charioteering, Olympiad

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Socrates on an Out-of-Town Excursion¹

Even though Plato's dialogues are—tautologically—philosophical, they also engage readers in literary representations that charm them into the universe of make-believe. In particular, the *Phaedrus* has gained curious prominence in terms of its status in Plato's corpus in special ways. The “developmental hypothesis” premise says that this dialogue is a sophisticated one, a later piece than the *Republic* and the *Symposium* in his middle period around 355 (Yunis 23).² Indeed, the *Phaedrus* appears so complex in structural design and complete in point of Plato's agenda that it cannot be immature. Therein lies the rub. The premise has been substantiated only by common consent and through conjecturing (Zaborowski 167; Nehamas and Woodruff xiii). For example, Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff could only propose the “speculation”—“with some confidence”—that the dialogue in question can be dated “between 375 and 365 B.C.” (xiii).

Mature as it appears, the dialogue has invited antithetical views ironically derived from its maturity, too. For one thing, the *Phaedrus* seems to contain a welter of disparate doctrines, contravening Socrates' own ideal discourse in the *Phaedrus* where elements and parts should be placed “in fitting relation to each other and to the whole” (264c). Plato has him free-handedly touch upon the “Forms” explored elsewhere in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*; learning through anamnesis, in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*; and the psychic structure, in the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* (Waterfield x). Such comprehensiveness, or “congestion,” does not bode well for certain scholars to pinpoint the topic of the *Phaedrus* (Helmbold and Rabinowitz vii). The unity of the dialogue is thus a “perennial” mystery in Platonic scholarship (Waterfield x; Nehamas and Woodruff xii).

The other thing is that the wealth (or extravaganza) of topics leads a number of scholars in the early 1800s, paradoxically, to consider the *Phaedrus* to be the “first” philosophical dialogue by Plato, which serves “as a kind of programme for the rest” (Waterfield x).³ The trailblazer in modern hermeneutics Friedrich Schliermacher typifies this view. He regards the dialogue as a

¹ The original version of this paper was presented at the 28th Annual Conference of the English and American Literature Association.

² Graeme Nicholson propounds that the *Phaedrus* is “Plato's most mature exposition of the philosophy of his ‘middle’ period”, including ideas such as the immortality of the soul, how it can be elevated, its comprehension of the Forms, and the original model of reality (2).

³ According to Robin Waterfield, John Stuart Mill, the reformer of society and philosopher in the nineteenth century, points out “politely” the *Phaedrus* is the most varied regarding the topics it deals with when compared with Plato's other lengthier dialogues (x).

synoptic collection introducing the Platonic ideas to come (Griswold 1; Yunis 29; Nicholson 2). Moreover, he cites a number of reasons to prove its “youthfulness” in his *Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato* (qtd. in Griswold 243).⁴ Even back in ancient times, Diogenes Laertius, who writes biographies for Greek philosophers, mentions a somewhat established view supporting such a “young” appearance (Hamilton 7). However, be the views modern or ancient, the *Phaedrus* as Plato's first dialogue is now more likely “an absurdity” from the developmental perspective (7).⁵ For instance, in the *Symposium*, Phaedrus claims that no one has had the nerve to praise *eros*, but this claim disables the *Phaedrus* as an earlier work since the chariot myth in it sings precisely of the glorious love (Hamilton 7).

One thing is certain—and distinguishes the *Phaedrus* in Plato's corpus—though: in this dialogue only, Socrates departs from the city of Athens to have a philosophical discussion (Nehamas and Woodruff ix-x; Griswold 33; Werner 21). Mindful readers might quickly grasp the interpretive potential of this fact, especially when they also realize that “nowhere else,” the philosopher becomes palpably “sensitive to the influence of the powers of external nature” (Hamilton 11). That is, “spatiality” should, among other things, be one of the major concerns when it comes to how one can approach the “movement” and “journeys” in the *Phaedrus* (Werner 20). Generally, as Daniel S. Werner puts it, Socrates' quitting of city and excursion into nature signify “a *crossing of boundaries*,” allowing his temporary self-indulgence in mythical and rhetorical explorations (20; emphases original). Consequent on such crossing and noetic liberty, an innovative version of rhetoric—the synthesis of “dialectic” and “psychology”—arises to counter sophistry (Yunis 12).⁶

The oneiric quality of the suburban setting in the *Phaedrus* therefore enables Socrates to ease his aggressive stance against rhetoric and accommodate it when compared with the *Gorgias*, Plato's other main dialogue on this subject. Clearly, Plato bifurcates the space in the dialogue. One part of it is Athens, where the philosopher practices dialectic to procure knowledge, which in turn results in a correspondent ethics. The other part of it is the outside of Athens, where the philosopher himself even declaims on love and, instead of cornering

⁴ Schliermacher has translated a number of Plato's dialogues into German and placed the *Phaedrus* prior to the others as “a kind of overture to the whole,” postulating that this particular work is chronologically the first one in its composition (Nicholson 2).

⁵ More mildly, Robin Waterfield deems this perspective “eccentric” (x).

⁶ In David J. Schenker's words, one is therefore presented with “a new science of rhetoric, summarized at 271c10-72b4, and offered in direct opposition to what Lysias and his sort have been teaching (227c3)” (83).

rhetoric, takes the initiative to reformat it. As such, the traversing of boundaries points to a rare and unique moment when Socrates elasticizes philosophy to sanction the synthesis aforementioned. In a sense, the new rhetoric is a hybrid as well; hence, the dialogue presents a spatial configuration suggestive of subversion through the juxtaposition of the inside of and the outside of Athens.

However, as no research has illuminated so far, this study would like to indicate that—regarding space—what truly makes the *Phaedrus* stand out is the *athletic* nature of Athens' outside as envisioned by Socrates through his landmark chariot allegory. In the story, the philosopher advances the renowned comparison between soul and winged chariot. What underlies this myth is actually a compound of ancient Greeks' sociocultural beliefs and practices that total what one might call sport today. In the main, chariot racing forms part of the sport events held in ancient Greece, and yet, there are certain reasons strong enough for one not to dismiss the comparison as simply a handy simile but to consider it to be a sport symbol.

First of all, sport is not the Greeks' prerogative, but it is definitely their signature culture, as seen in the numerous athletic events they hold, with the "Crown Games" being the prestigious ones.⁷ They even suspend their wars, for instance, for the Olympic games (Ong 9). Second, an athlete can be a hero, and vice versa. Recalling how Odysseus manages to maintain his anonymity but risks the exposure of his identity by showing himself to be an authentic athlete in Book 8 of the *Odyssey*, one can notice the correlation between heroism and athletic brilliance in ancient Greece.⁸ Thirdly, it is perhaps Plato himself who necessitates a reading of the myth in the context of sport. Toward the end of the allegory, Socrates explicates to Phaedrus that if an embodied human soul exercises self-control, it will regain the wings that it has lost previously because of the ascendancy of desire. Such recovery of wings, as the philosopher claims, means the soul has triumphed in the "Olympic" games (256b)—a mention that has strangely caught little critical attention. With these points of departure taken into consideration, this study will then pinpoint the athletic nature of Athens' outside and explore how ancient Greek sport can inform the chariot

⁷ Also, ancient Greeks exhibit a prominent concern for sport in art and literature. As Zinon Papakonstantinou explains, they "were not the first to practise sport but they were distinguished among other ancient civilisations for devoting significant portions of their literary and artistic production to the subject" (1657). As to "Crown Games," they refer to the four major competitive celebrations in ancient Greece, including the Olympic games, the Pythian games, the Isthmian games, and the Nemean games (Crowther 14; Golden 10).

⁸ The rise and flourishing of epinician poetry (odes dedicated to honoring winners in Greek games) further testifies to this correlation. This paper will address the genre in relation to the *Phaedrus* in the concluding section.

myth and how chariot as a sport symbol can reformulate Socrates' philosophical journey in the *Phaedrus*.

The Chariot Myth and Athletic Agonism

The myth provides a teleological account of how souls are naturally inclined to behave under the influence of love—to live a philosophical life after recollecting the Forms they have seen but let slip from their memory. Through this account, Socrates aims to discredit the idea that non-love benefits lovers since love would only engender insanity. Quite on the contrary, love is truly divine; the madness it stirs up is amazingly a decent and wholesome course of therapy that can steer humans into the Forms-regulated life patterns. Central to the mythical account is the comparison between souls and winged chariots. Socrates likens each soul (both divine and human) to a chariot composed of a charioteer and two horses with pinions. A human's soul is pitifully imperfect, with one of its horses being unsightly and disorderly. Even though the soul manages and struggles to join the divine journey beyond heaven to remark the knowledge that is sound and true—it succeeds sometimes—the defective horse craves the desiderative and causes a downward fall that eventually deprives the soul of its wings. However, love reminds the soul of the truth of beauty in a state of seeming lunacy, and then it regains control over the disobedient animal, leading to the regrowth of its wings and the re-search for the knowledge in an upward pilgrimage. Such is the power of love in transforming humans into philosophical beings that the chariot myth has been regarded as a “hymn” on the role of love in fashioning an ideal *modus vivendi* (Yunis 15; Nehamas and Woodruff xx).

As a eulogistic oration on love, the chariot myth then pictures love as having an extensive and pedagogically striking impact on human life. An indispensable procedure by which love can achieve this impact, as the account above shows, is recollection: recalling what one has seen but failed to remember—the Forms. Mere anamnesis does not suffice to make possible the success of love in what Socrates recounts in the allegory, though. This paper finds that competition is significantly the other procedure that works with recollection to grace the overarching love. The former procedure occurs in various spheres in the *Phaedrus*, particularly over the course of three speeches on love and in the imagery of the soul's charioteering aimed at viewing the Forms beyond heaven. Competition is everywhere, so to speak. It is this observation, among others, that enables one to approach the chariot myth symbolically informed by ancient Greek sport, but

before exploring further, one must take a look first at the loaded idea of competition for Greeks.

In athletics, a competition in the ancient Greek culture is hardly a game but a contest named *agon* not quite equivalent (and even potentially antithetical) to sport (Crowther 56). A competitor either wins or fails: victory means getting the first place, and the second and third places are simply dismissed as inconsequential (53). Further, sportsmanship is an alien concept to the ancient world, which conceives of competition antipodally (55). In a sense, the Greeks understand their contests to be zero-sum games: as might be expected, their competitions are always intense; presumably, they cannot accommodate to the chagrin of losing. It is either honor or shame—as the Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus reports: “In the Olympic Games you cannot just be beaten and then depart, but first of all, you will be disgraced not only before the people of Athens . . . but before the whole world” (qtd. in Kyle 127). Winners are granted all possible prizes: contestants are therefore subject to mammoth pressure and very likely resort to violence.⁹ Odysseus serves as a perfect example of a Greek competitor. He employs no violence (though is verbally acrimonious) but by all means proves himself to be a genuine athlete even if this might imperil his life once the Phaeacians know he is one of the city-sackers.¹⁰

In fact, the agonistic mindset applies to the Greeks’ life in general, not limited to athletics, covering as well drama, beauty, music, beauty, fine arts, etc. (Crowther 57). Moreover, be it athletic or not, any type of contest is taken by the Greeks in rather “serious” earnest (Golden xi). There is nothing playful as long as the Greeks find any slightest possibility of excelling at something even in the form of leisure. In light of this, not only *bie* but also *metis* can be seen as an embodiment of the agonistic spirit whenever it comes to verbal and psychological competitions, which amount to almost everything in the Greek world. Thus, for Debra Hawhee, the Greeks’ obsession with competition “cannot be overemphasized: it was the place where wars were won or lost . . . the reason gods and goddesses came into being . . . and even, according to Hesiod, the reason crops grew . . .” (15). In other words, the Greeks’ signature culture of sport testifies prominently to their predisposition to compete, which underlines

⁹ The stress experienced by the athletes in having to win is fierce: in the year of 492, after deprived of his triumph in boxing for purposely slaying Ikkos of Epidauros, Kleomedes of Astyplaiia, back in his hometown, caused the death of quite a number of children by pulling down the roof of their school on them (Kyle 127-28).

¹⁰ One young Phaeacian called Euryalus insults Odysseus as non-athletic, and then the still anonymous hero, enraged, moves on to throw the possibly largest discus on site, resulting in a stupefying feat (*Odyssey* 8.164-234).

as a matter of fact a diversity of decisions made and actions taken by the Greeks. Or, one could even extend this idea to argue that any competition can be aptly and metaphorically described as broadly athletic, as evidenced in Plato's use of "an athlete in contests of words" in defining a "sophist."¹¹ In any case, due to the pervasive extra- and intra-textual influence of (athletic) agonism, this paper here foregrounds the procedure of competition as an equal highlight of the *Phaedrus* to that of recollection.

As a Platonic dialogue, the *Phaedrus* readily bodies forth the Greeks' agonistic spirit via the dialectical conversation between Socrates and Phaedrus.¹² An examination of the dialogue's whole athletic confabulation is inviting, but this paper will focus only on matters directly related to the chariot allegory. To begin with—let no one be led to suppose that the target dialogue, unlike Plato's other major dialogues on rhetoric, the *Gorgias*, treats teachers of this subject with sincere complying magnanimity. The antagonism between Socrates and Gorgias remains likewise and persists between the philosopher and Lysias—the latter *in absentia*, represented by his obsessive admirer Phaedrus—under the guise of friendship. Specifically, the dialogue stages an event approximate to a speech contest which Socrates contrives against Lysias without Phaedrus knowing such. Determined, the philosopher undertakes to trump rhetoric and its proponents on all occasions.

The speech contest features three successive declamations on love. Socrates seems to be tempted by Phaedrus to leave Athens and hear him recite the first one, author of which is Lysias. It argues for the boon of non-love: it is wiser to accept a non-lover because then craziness would not sour the relationship between the persons concerned. The loved one will even benefit from the sane connection. The unusual oxymoron of love in non-love intrigues Phaedrus, who wonders whether "any other of the Greeks could speak better or more copiously than this on the same subject" (234e). In response, Socrates draws his attention to the superfluities in the speech: judging from "rhetorical" requirements themselves, Lysias falls short of formal neatness, saying "the same thing two or three times, as if he did not find it easy to say many things about one subject" (235a). Namely, the declamation lacks organizational integrity. To apply the philosopher's own vision of an ideal declamation, this speech disappointingly ceases to be "a living being" with "a body of its own," becoming "headless" and "footless," not "in fitting relation to each other and to the whole"

¹¹ Please refer to Plato's *Sophist* 231d-e.

¹² Walter J. Ong speaks of the "agonistic mentality" in the West and its "roots" as "identifiable in antiquity in the dialectical procedures of the Socratic dialogues as reconstructed by Plato" (3).

(264c).

Socrates' criticism does not sizzle, but one thing is clear: he does not share Phaedrus' enthusiasm. Then one questions what he means by his conviction in the beginning of the dialogue that "his [Lysias'] discourse would be witty and of general utility" (227d). One possible explanation goes that the philosopher's pretension of interest at the outset is, in truth, a lure. He deliberately receives Phaedrus' invitation to enjoy Lysias' discourse: "you are just the man to hear it" (227c). Exploiting his friend's self-limiting ignorance, Socrates can therefore hoax Phaedrus into a verbal war that in nature resembles that between him and Gorgias. Furthermore, the war is not merely verbal but also physical, considering Socrates' likening discourse to body mentioned above. So, it makes sense to reconceptualize the speech contest as a contest between bodies disfigured and fully developed. One has, somehow, a quasi-athletic competition.

What happens next in the competition is Socrates' appeal to Phaedrus' undifferentiated passion for discourses by mentioning a speech he has known and heard that could outperform Lysias'. Indeed, the second declamation he recites in the contest possesses an anthropomorphic structure, not "headless" or "footless" any longer: as of necessity, to examine "whether the lover or the non-lover is to be preferred," he urges, "let us *first* agree on a definition of love, its nature and its power" (237c; my emphasis). Accordingly, Socrates tells a lover apart from a non-lover before he enumerates the distinguishing characteristics of each: while the former pursues the desiderative, the latter, the beneficial. It is interesting to note that after he exhausts the demerits of a lover, he discontinues his discussion of his counterpart, which prompts Phaedrus' curiosity. The philosopher dismisses it by stating that a non-lover obviously goes against a lover in all aspects, and he asks "Why make a long speech?" when non-love reverses love's bane in mirror image (237d).

This second speech invokes a corporeal image worthy of attention. If an ideal discourse is a body with well-developed and well-arranged organs, Socrates' refusal to elaborate on the lover implies that his elaboration would disfigure his speech in a way that this body will have unnatural growth on it, say, a tumor or an extra limb. A body with more organs is as dehumanizing as a body without proper organs. Such images reinforce the physical aspect of the speech competition. There is more to this. Before the second speech, Socrates' deliberative passivity built on his friend's indiscriminate interest in discourses only entices his game to ask for the piece on love all the more. The asking is literally physical: Phaedrus threatens the philosopher (jokingly?) that he will use force if the latter still declines to declaim—since they are "in a solitary spot" and "I am stronger and younger than you" (236d). At this point, one can candidly admit:

the speech competition is a ticklish situation that needs careful analysis. After all, the verbal part of it cannot be detached from the physical and has been provoked by bodily compulsion since Phaedrus forces it to happen. Thus, even if Socrates and his friend do not have a strictly defined athletic contest, they have something virtually close or corresponding to it. In addition, the philosopher's friendly pose must not belie his agonistic spirit in ambushing rhetoric and its propagators.

Refined as the second speech is, it remains flawed, and as if winning the first round is not enough, Socrates moves on to declaim once more in the competition to deliver a love speech *par excellence*. This declamation deals with why and how true love (not the kind of love in relation to the good non-love) is veritably beneficial through the telling of the chariot allegory. It is similarly athletic—though in a different strain. Something physical compels it to happen as well, but this time, a daemonic power inspires it. Socrates has just finished a better speech, but he wishes to quit the outside of Athens, thinking he has been “possessed” and speaking in “hexameters” (241e). Yet, he cannot “cross this stream [Ilissus]” and “go away before you [Phaedrus] put some further compulsion upon me” (242a). A “voice,” he says, “forbade my going away” (242c). As he claims, the two speeches have profaned love because “Love” is a deity and “can be nothing evil” (242e). The voice thus conditions his body to offer up a “recantation” (the well-known palinode) to redeem himself and honor Love (243b).

Thinking back, one can notice that immediately from the outset, Socrates' bodily movement has begun to contextualize the speech contest and transform it into a sort of physical *agon*. His body leaves Athens for the first speech, and his body cannot return to the city before the third one; in between is the second one because his body must stay where he is, being forced by Phaedrus. This observation matters, considering that the antagonism between Socrates and Gorgias in the *Gorgias* looks more verbal and much less physical. The spatial quality in the *Phaedrus* is thus arguably athletic, as represented in the two friends' “movement” and “journeys.” One can also notice that Socrates' agonistic spirit culminates in his prayer to Love after the third speech. He hopes, of course, Love could forgive him, but the prayer emphasizes his role as a victor in the foregoing contest. To Love, he pronounces that it is all Lysias' fault in desecrating love and prays that Love inspires both Lysias and Phaedrus to embrace love and philosophy instead of making blasphemous speeches (257b). Profoundly, Phaedrus sides with the philosopher: “I join in your prayer, Socrates . . .” (257b). A *peripeteia* occurs: the philosopher wins, in the contest he has contrived against Lysias, his friend's mind (and heart?).

Perhaps, one can also feel the palinode to be a formidable conquest of rhetoric so much so that it has come to represent the whole *Phaedrus*. Mathematically, this speech takes up merely around one fourth of the dialogue (244a–257b), but its rhetorical effect makes it the “centerpiece” of the dialogue (Nehamas and Woodruff xx). Further, it is intriguing to note how certain scholars evaluate the agonistic drive of this centerpiece. Nehamas and Woodruff see that the recantation is “a panegyric on love and quite *overwhelms* the rest of the work” (xx; my emphasis). Harvey Yunis proposes something similar: the speech Socrates dedicates to Love is “so imaginative and large that it *threatens to dominate* the dialogue as a whole” (1; my emphases). An affective “disproportion,” that is (Hamilton 11). Hence, Plato might have created a rigorous textual discrepancy to zoom in on the allegory so as to underline the ever-victorious status of Socrates’ second speech aimed at redemption.

Sociocultural Aspects of Charioteering

If the foregoing speech contest contextualizes the chariot myth in athletic agonism implicitly, it is the philosopher who himself conceives of the soul’s struggle with the desiderative explicitly as an athletic event. Toward the end of the palinode, as Socrates explains, if the lovers “live a life of happiness and harmony here on earth, self[-]controlled and orderly,” “when this life is ended they are light and winged” because they have won in an “Olympic” game (256b). Moreover, what he continues to say about the surpassing prize only testifies to the keenness of such an agon: “*Neither* human wisdom *nor* divine inspiration can confer upon man *any greater blessing* than this” (256b; my emphases). On the contrary, those who cannot tame the black horses in them forfeit their new pinions and remain “a wanderer upon the earth for *nine thousand years* and a fool below the earth at last” (257a; my emphases). Here, the amount of time unphilosophical lovers are confined to earth also implies the intensity scale of the agon.

Thus far, one may wonder whether Socrates’ reference to the Olympic contests is at best metaphorical. It is possible, but this view ignores a plain but heuristic fact: chariot racing forms one of the athletic events in ancient Greek sport. To be precise, these events fall into two kinds: one is athletic, including those such as wrestling and discus throwing, and the other is hippic, including those such as chariot racing and jockeying (Crowther 59-73).¹³ One question

¹³ Other kinds of competitive events are also possible. For example, at Olympia, trumpeters and

immediately arises: Is Socrates' appropriation of chariot racing in the allegory of the soul's charioteering a convenient comparison or a deliberate choice? To answer this question, this paper holds that the more urgent task is to ponder how the comparison between soul and chariot could affect readers with the culturally rich and significant associations of chariot racing as a sport event. That is, if the moderns could feel the either overwhelming or threatening agonistic drive of the myth, the ancients might have felt a stronger drive since they have been conditioned in the culture where they live and experience to the full.

Let one thus pause awhile to think about their sport culture. Socrates' recourse to the Olympic Games might be for the sake of convenience, which is in fact a very imposing instance of convenience. Between the legion of sport events held by the ancient Greeks, the Olympiad tops its counterparts, with "its preeminence" "recognized throughout antiquity" (Golden 34).¹⁴ It even epitomizes what the Greeks have held to be a standard sport event with *agones* (Golden 12; Kyle 110). So, the popularity and reputation of the Olympiad makes the philosopher's recourse a matter of immediacy the readers of the *Phaedrus* could relate to forthright. Namely, Plato places them in the niche of better comprehending the comparison between chariot and soul.

What is more, the matter of immediacy has not been based merely on the Greeks' enthused involvement (including both watching and competing) in sport activities. That is, the ancient Olympiads differ from the modern ones in that the former do not showcase "a cosmopolitan, multicultural sporting spectacle," with a serious agenda to be negotiated (Kyle 8). Fundamentally, the Greeks exclude the participation of non-Greeks in their Olympic Games to boost and glorify their own "pride" and "identity"; in other words, they view the games as "a marker of ethnic superiority" (Kyle 8-9). There is more to this. The eligibility for competing in the Olympiad is further limited to Greeks who are "free" and "male" (Kyle 118).¹⁵ Taken together, the qualifications for entering the games conjure up "the Greek male ethos of competition" whereby, for

heralds vie with one another to see who is the loudest and clearest (Crowther 73). The Hellenic games include music and drama contests, too. Interestingly, the Olympic program does not witness the non-athletic competitions, but winners in the "double pipes" in the Pythian Games have the privilege to show their musical virtuosity for the next Olympic pentathlon (73).

¹⁴ Please refer to Footnote 7 for the major sport events (Crown Games) held in ancient Greece. They are alternatively called "stephanitic" (which means exactly "crown") games (Miller 31).

¹⁵ Nigel B. Crowther has made a similar observation concerning the "stringent regulations regarding eligibility" for the Olympiad (46). However, he notes that there are "notable exceptions" in the later festivals when Greeks and non-Greeks do not contrast each other definitely; in addition, also in the later games, officials send invitations to Romans expecting to enhance the prestige of the Olympiad and/or gain benefits politically or economically (46).

example, Odysseus puts his anonymity in jeopardy and undertakes to prove his athletic identity when insulted by the non-Greek Phaeacian Euryalus as non-athletic (Kyle 7). For example, too, the exclusively male world of the *Phaedrus* may not have resulted from a deliberate dramatic design by Plato, but this gendered world threaded through by agonism does indicate a noticeable correlation between the dialogue and the athletic context where it is inscribed.¹⁶ The immediacy is hence also the “discourse of difference” asserted in Greek sport culture, in which, with the culture “enveloped in a series of hierarchies,” “events, festivals, genders, nations and other groups were ranged and ranked no less than individuals” (Golden 4-6). So, the speeches in the *Phaedrus* are apparently one of the items to be “ranged” and “ranked” not only on the part of Socrates and Phaedrus but also implicitly on the part of the Greek readers of the dialogue to demonstrate superiority of one kind over another and produce differences essential to the integrity of the exclusive Greek identity.

The underlying ambition of fashioning an ideal Greek through ethnic and gender exclusion through games explains only the overall picture of the soul-chariot comparison, though. If one considers the social symbolism of the chariot racing event in relation to other sport contests, it is surprising to find that Socrates’ recantation—if seen as a “discourse of difference”—maneuvers to fashion an even more ideal Greek identity. Let one try to understand such symbolism by heeding the two words used by Kyle to describe charioteering in ancient Greece: “impractical” and “extravagant” (7). To begin with, keeping horses is not exactly a practical choice, let alone training them for contests. The rugged Greek mainland, along with underdeveloped horse-riding supplies, has made horses awkward to the Greeks for both “travel” and “transport” (Golden 8).¹⁷ Only the elite can afford the cost of breeding and training horses, thus showing their superiority by transcending environmental confinement (8). This results in the profligacy of horse-keeping since the cost must be “extraordinary” (5). What is being excluded is the socially inferior; even though the poor could theoretically compete in equestrian events, their financial situation has deadened their eligibility (5).¹⁸ Regarding charioteering in an agon then, one must be also

¹⁶ The Olympiad is so virile that women are proscribed “from even watching the Olympics” (Kyle 7).

¹⁷ As Stephen G. Miller indicates, “the rise of city-states” in ancient Greece lies mainly in its geography defined by “the ruggedness of the mountains of the mainland” with islands and continual coastline, leading to isolated living activities (7). Breeding horses is thus not an amenable idea to practice. For example, the Balkan peninsula’s southern end is “very mountainous, containing only a few well-defined valleys suitable for large-scale cultivation and horse-breeding” (7).

¹⁸ Note the absence of Odysseus in the chariot race in the *Iliad*. Miller interprets his non-participation as follows: “Indeed, it is telling that Odysseus who is clearly one of the poorer kings at Troy and must rely more upon his wits than his wealth, does not participate in the chariot race but does compete

opulent, in addition to being a free male Greek.

The correlation between aristocracy and charioteering could have been rather clear to the readers of the *Phaedrus*, but the text in fact has made an implicit point in this regard. In his palinode, Socrates annotates the fate of soul-charioteers who have their wings hurt and wounded in the pursuit of the Forms: they lose their flying devices and regress into human forms. Depending on their degrees of knowledge (i.e. how much they have fed on the Forms by viewing them when charioteering as a soul), each is given a particular human form. The most knowledgeable will become a philosopher or a lover; as to the rest:

the second soul ["shall enter"] into that [that is, "the birth"] of a lawful king or a warlike ruler, and the third into that of a politician or a man of business or a financier, the fourth into that of a hardworking gymnast or one who will be concerned with the cure of the body, and the fifth will lead the life of a prophet or some one who conducts mystic rites; to the sixth, a poet or some other imitative artist will be united, to the seventh, a craftsman or a husbandman, to the eighth, a sophist or a demagogue, to the ninth, a tyrant. (248d-e)

One should not fail to note that this metaphysical hierarchy results from the competition between psychic charioteers—an echo of the class distinction achieved via the discourse of difference in the Greek sport culture. Moreover, the supreme status of the philosopher, better than that of a country ruler in the hierarchy, resonates with the *Republic*, which proposes the idea of a model king: one who possesses "political power" and "philosophic intelligence" at the same time (473d). This cannot be more revealing, since by now the social dominance implied by elite charioteers manifestly parallels and merges with the philosophical dominance of the best soul-charioteers.

In fact, Socrates also appropriates a charioteering image to mark his desire and resolve to dominate the metaphysical hierarchy and subsequently its social counterpart. In the upward pilgrimage to taste the Forms, the soul-charioteers not only have to resist the pull of the black horse but must compete with each other as well. Each and every soul pines for "the upper region" but, "unable to reach it," they are "carried round beneath, trampling upon and colliding with one another, each striving to pass its neighbor" (248a-b). In such a process characterized by "confusion" and "rivalry," many souls are "lamed," with their pinions "broken through the incompetence of the drivers," and after a great deal of slog, they leave "without gaining a view of reality" (248b). This image of keen and exhausting competition, of course, evidences the prowess of the

in (and win) the footrace and the wrestling" (28).

philosophical soul as a charioteer in how well he can follow a god or a goddess very closely and then enjoy a longer view of the Forms. However, this is also an image true to the actual chariot racing scenes: underlined by the agonistic spirit to crush all others, the lack of a block between the turning devices for the chariot races would in all likelihood cause unsightly violence and “numerous crashes” between chariots (Crowther 73).

Most strikingly, Socrates pushes the boundaries of possible collision and brutality in the philosophical chariot races by exposing how much savagery can occur in the soul-chariot itself. One might assume that the horse obsessed with desire must pursue the beloved by all means. Making neighs and straining to approach him, the steed “pulls shamelessly,” bluntly regardless of the charioteer’s urge to maintain decent distancing (254d-e). G. R. F. Ferrari indicates that the reckless horse fleshes out the idea of “violence” entirely at this very moment (188). He also points out that right here Socrates uses “the first properly equine predicate” (“*khremetizōn*”) to describe the horse’s neighing (188). The horse becomes, so to speak, purely animalistic. However, the charioteer’s attempt to thwart the bad horse’s action is potentially a far cry from the role he presumably plays in charioteering: the one who employs sense and mind to empower the upward movement of the whole chariot.¹⁹ Namely, in “competing” with the steed to be the arch-master, the charioteer becomes animalistic, too. Upon nearing the beloved because of the wild horse’s forceful dragging, he “falls back” and “pulls the bit backward even more violently” (254e). Note that the word “violently” here might not denote exactly what the original ancient Greek says.²⁰ Still, the charioteer’s becoming an animal cannot be mistaken for the reason that his falling back (“*anapesen hyptia*” and “*anapesōn*”), as Ferrari explicates, is a “horse-like behaviour” in Socrates’ expression (189). What follows the pitiless pulling of the bit intensifies his animalistic aspect: he “covers his scurrilous tongue and jaws with blood, and forces his legs and haunches to the ground, causing him much pain” (254e). This brutality in subjugating the headstrong horse shows there are two literal desperate brutes vying ruthlessly for the victory each of them desires, with the charioteer being a formidable tyrant.

Hence, not only soul-chariots but also the souls and their unruly horses

¹⁹ It is “commonly agreed,” as inferred from the *Republic*, that the charioteer, the obedient horse, and its unruly counterpart correspond *gross modo* to “the reasoning, spirited and appetitive parts of the soul” in terms of structure (Ferrari 185).

²⁰ The ancient Greek word in the original Greek *Phaedrus* for “violently” here is *bia* (βία), which revolves around ideas such as “bodily strength” or “force” (Liddell and Scott). The word used in 254e to describe the disobedient horse *ubristou* (ὕβριστοῦ) perhaps comes closer to the idea of “violence” with meanings such as “wanton,” “insolent,” “outrageous” (Liddell and Scott).

crash into one another, exemplifying the very agonism the ancient Greeks adhere to adamantly. Moreover, the crashes, extrinsic or intrinsic to each soul-chariot—as “spectacles”—rather excite and thrill the spectators than keep them away (Crowther 73; Miller 75).²¹ In this regard, Socrates' appropriation of the stirring charioteering spectacle seems to be a conscious attempt to create a virtual reality for his readers to correlate the real and the textual and visualize the soul's calling, thus fathoming out the significance of approaching “the upper region.”

So far, one can see that charioteering to the Greek mind is at once exciting, exclusive, and evocative of domination and dominion. The comparison between the soul's journey and the chariot race thus contains more than a convenient simile, creating also a related bunch of images that cut across culture, politics, athletics, philosophy, and so on and so forth. If one returns to one of the major “spatial” events in the *Phaedrus*—Socrates' only seminar outside of Athens—those images could perhaps cohere with one another further by dint of the possibility that Socrates' quitting Athens approximates to a military crusade.²²

The Alpha and the Omega of Socrates' *Metaphysical Olympiad*

Now let one zoom out on Socrates' account of the philosophical chariot races: there might be certain surprisingly meaningful parallels between the physical aspects of a typical presentation of an ancient Greek Olympiad and those of the philosopher's preparation for and staging of his metaphysical equestrian agon. The very first step to undertake is, indubitably, to start out and head for the venue of athletic contests. For the Olympiad, the ancient Greeks flock to Olympia. As to Socrates, he leaves the Athenian city proper to enjoy the speech *Phaedrus* has to offer, but when it comes to charioteering, one can note that the chariot races during the Panathenaic Games in Athens are arranged in a way that they take place “outside the walls” and on “a suitable field towards the coast” (Connolly and Dodge 83). So, Socrates' question “whither away” (227a) for *Phaedrus* at the outset of the dialogue complicates because it foreshadows the athletic nature of the speech contest between the philosopher and *Lysias*.

The correspondence regarding going out of town to venues for chariot

²¹ It is perhaps due to this spectacular sight of accident and collision that the chariot race in ancient Greece has been likened to the contemporary “Formula 1 motor racing” (Crowther 71).

²² Please refer to Footnote 26.

racers could become more sophisticated as one ponders the following details. To begin with, ancient Greeks must “travel great distances to remote Olympia” (Kyle 21). Socrates’ agon does not take place in an outlying place, but the venue where the soul-chariots compete with one another is “remote” to him in a similar fashion. One reason is, as mentioned earlier in this paper, that he rarely absents himself from Athens. The other reason goes that Socrates acts like a first-timer when he and Phaedrus arrive at the plane tree beneath which the chariot myth will be narrated. In response to the philosopher’s marvel at this *locus amoenus*, the youth feels amazed, too, because “you really do seem exactly like a stranger who is being guided about, and not like a native” (230c-d). In addition, both venues involve a certain river geographically: Olympia is “on the Alpheios River” (Kyle 111); the plane tree scene happens on a stream or brook called “Ilissus” (229a). To reinforce this river image, Plato even has Phaedrus propose to Socrates that they walk barefoot in the water and enjoy a relief from hot weather. He suggests: “It is easiest then for us to go along the brook with our feet in the water, and it is not unpleasant, especially at this time of the year and the day” (229a).

Zeus serves as the second detail that underlies both the pursuit of athletic success in the Olympiad and the aspiration to the Forms in the chariot myth. In Olympia, a “religious sanctuary,” contests are in fact “a supplement to the festival to Zeus” (Kyle 111). The olive crowns athletes in the games seek are made from the tree sacred to Zeus in the holy place (Crowther 53; Kyle 114). In particular, the visit to Olympia for the festival resembles a “pilgrimage,” which can be compared with “the Hajj of today in which Moslems travel to Mecca sometimes under extreme conditions” (Crowther 49). Olympia is, assuredly, the “Mecca” in the Greek mind (49). Likewise, charioteering in the *Phaedrus* comes close to a pilgrimage, an upward journey, in which Zeus’ soul-chariot proceeds perfectly and sets an example “for the gods’ happy moment in the sky” (Slaveva-Griffin 246). Contrary to the chaotic state of humans’ soul-charioteering, the gods’ chariot rides under Zeus’ leadership are orderly and organized. That is, “arranging all things and caring for all things,” Zeus’ chariot goes first, attended by “an army of gods,” with each god fulfilling “his own duties” and with covetousness “excluded from the celestial band” (246e-247a). The immortals can therefore “behold the things outside of the heaven” as “they reach the top” (247b-c). Such scenes alert the humans’ soul-chariots whose “horse of evil nature” has not been properly schooled and thus “weighs the chariot down” (247b).

One more parallel between the Olympiad and its Socratic counterpart in the *Phaedrus* lies in the troublesome nature of the journeys to the venues

for agones. Travelers to Olympia have to “endure the stifling heat of summer” (Crowther 48).²³ Recall that they must “travel great distances to remote Olympia” and consider that they travel in such sweltering weather. As to the plane tree scene, heat does not surface as a thorny issue, but it lurks in the backdrop. For example, as quoted above, Phaedrus suggests to Socrates that they “go along the brook with our feet in the water, and it is not unpleasant, especially at this time of the year and the day.” Also, as the philosopher wishes to leave the scene before the young man could compel him to deliver another speech, the latter responds: “Not yet, Socrates, till the heat is past. Don't you see that it is already almost noon? Let us stay and talk over what has been said, and then, when it is cooler, we will go away” (242a). The philosopher acts in accordance, and then it is under the threat of the heat that he presents the chariot myth.²⁴

The journeys are troublesome also because of the risk of wars. Each Greek state agrees on a temporary “truce” proclaimed by the organizers of the Olympiad to ensure the safety of the treks (Kyle 115-16; Golden 16-17; Crowther 48). Nevertheless, the truce does not equal peace or total ceasefire (Kyle 115). Tension persists. There is still the likelihood of wars breaking out any moment.²⁵ Sparta, for example, is denied access to the Olympiad several times for violating the truce (Crowther 48). The menace of wars is true to the *Phaedrus* as well. Socrates seldom leaves Athens; if he does, he might very possibly purpose to serve the military (Nehamas and Woodruff ix).²⁶ Viewed from this possibility, the chariot myth becomes contextualized in a very different manner: the peace between Socrates and Phaedrus is perhaps an armistice in the guise of friendship. Yet, as discussed earlier on, the truth might be that the philosopher

²³ There is an agricultural background to this timing, which accords with “a lull in agricultural work after the harvest” (Kyle 114).

²⁴ It is specifically mentioned in ancient literature that slaves dread being “sent to Olympia as a punishment because of the heat of the sun at the games” (Kyle 118). Their fear makes sense, too, for the reasons addressed in what follows and in Footnote 27. Additionally, in Olympia, facilities are barely satisfactory: “Lucian, a writer of dialog, maintains that he had difficulty in obtaining transportation at the games, a problem not unknown at the modern Olympics” (Crowther 48). Can slaves expect better facilities than these already existing inadequacies?

²⁵ The Olympiad itself does pertain to war, too: “On the victory table at Olympia stood a small statue of Agon, the god of competition, next to a statue of Ares, the god of war” (Crowther 56).

²⁶ As also touched upon by Nehamas and Woodruff in the same source, personifying the Athenian laws, Socrates foregrounds his own strong fondness for Athens and unwillingness to leave the city by reposting to himself: “Socrates, we have strong evidence that we and the city pleased you; for you would never have stayed in it more than all other Athenians if you had not been better pleased with it than they; you never went out from the city to a festival, or anywhere else, except on military service, and you never made any other journey, as other people do, and you had no wish to know any other city or other laws, but you were contented with us and our city” (Plato, *Crito* 52b).

has waged an implicit war against rhetoric and its propagators through the speech contest between him and Lysias *in absentia*.²⁷

Whatever complications above might arise out of the difficult journeys to Olympia and the plane tree scene, the agonistic spirit inherent in the Greek blood bolsters both the Olympic charioteer's and his philosophical counterpart's grit to strive for the ultimate victory. In this regard, Christopher Moore's comparison between Pindar's *First Isthmian* and the *Phaedrus* aptly concludes the journeys and serves to sum up Socrates' metaphysical Olympiad discussed in this paper. The work by Pindar is an "epinician" poem praising an athletic champion, sung "as part of the celebration on the victor's triumphal return to his city" (*Britannica*).²⁸ By juxtaposing this poem and the dialogue, Moore argues that the chariot myth or the whole *Phaedrus* has been intended to be an ode like *First Isthmian* (530). One essential clue consists in Socrates' explicit allusion to this ode at 227b (Moore 525, 528). Therein, the philosopher assures Phaedrus that hearing his conversation with Lysias is far better than his present engagement, just as Pindar turns to sing of the conquering Theban charioteer Herodotus, explaining that to praise the victor is more important than "my lack of leisure" ("Isthmian 1").

Also, the similarities between the ode and the dialogue in terms of structure, concerns, and parlance are not only obvious but also centered on the two model charioteers, Herodotus and the soul-charioteer with philosophical love, honored and acclaimed for their "self-control" and "thoughtfulness" (Moore 528-29). Finally, what counts as the definitive parallel between the two works appears to be the good that personal athletic success can contribute to and inspire in the public (Moore 525). One achieves what they can for the sake of the collective and the social. Pindar both begins and ends with placing Thebes

²⁷ In the other major dialogue on rhetoric, the *Gorgias*, Socrates launches, in a sense, a hand-to-hand combat with Gorgias. Besides, the journey to Olympia could be taxing also for several other reasons: "Many visitors would walk the whole distance to Olympia. From Athens, for example, it took five or six days in each direction. Others would travel on donkeys or mules (horses being impractical on the rough terrain). The more affluent would ride in a primitive carriage, or cart, with no springs or shock absorbers of any kind. Roads were rough, or nonexistent, especially to such isolated places as Olympia. Robbers were a constant threat. The best way to travel was probably by boat, although there were no passenger ferries with regular schedules, and there was the constant danger of piracy or shipwreck" (Crowther 48). However, under all the trying circumstances, certain ancients regard the visit to Olympia as heuristic: Epictetus, for example, "uses visiting Olympia as an example of man's ability to endure hardships" (Kyle 133).

²⁸ The epinician poem is not limited to the occasion of the champion's returning home: "The homecoming procession was accompanied by a commemorative epinician ode first sung at the games, and this was repeated on arrival at the victor's home, as well as at various other stages of his career/life" (Okell 35).

over one's own gains; to benefit Athens, Socrates is identically "civically minded" because he holds that speeches should be "of the city" and "for the city" (Moore 531). Once, the philosopher even claims that he rarely leaves Athens for the reason that only the city can teach him something substantial instead of the *locus amoenus* where he and Phaedrus are now (230d). However, pertinent to the allegiance to one's own city, Moore has not elaborated on a textual detail in the *Phaedrus* that echoes the *First Isthmian* and thus makes the dialogue a *de facto* epinician. That is when near the end of the dialogue, Socrates says a prayer to Pan, wishing that "may I have such wealth as only the self-restrained man can bear or endure" (279c). Near the end of Pindar's ode, too, the singer wishes that Herodotus could continue to win and bring glory to "seven-gated Thebes" and warns: if one "hoards hidden wealth at home," he is "giving up his soul to Hades without glory" ("Isthmian 1"). Coincidence or not, along with the parallels Moore has identified, the appeal to dismantle the *idée fixe* with one's personal gains in both finales consummates the *Phaedrus* as a Pindaric encomium on winning in Hellenic games, thus putting the finishing touches to the athletic nature of Athens' outside.

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論柏拉圖對話《費德魯斯篇》中 蘇格拉底的形上奧林匹亞賽事

摘要

於柏拉圖《費德魯斯篇》裡，蘇格拉底與費德魯斯漫步至雅典城外一株梧桐樹下的優勝美地；接著，仿若著魔一般，蘇氏在迷狂嚙語中吟誦道出知名的戰車寓言。然而，將該寓言理解為哲學教導的媒介其實簡化了其於古希臘人無論是在神話或實際生活中對運動的豐富想像。亦即，在古希臘盈千累萬的運動會裡，競賽實則承載了眾多的社會文化訊息，因此，僅將戰車寓言視為哲學教導極可能去脈絡化其之於社會結構的種種意涵。例如，運動是區分希臘人和非希臘人非常重要的機制，甚者，運動也透過性別及階級差異去突顯何謂希臘人的典型。準之，本研究論文旨在運用運動之於古希臘人的社會文化意涵以重新詮釋《費德魯斯篇》及其中的戰車寓言。經推敲後發現，該對話裡雅典城外看似田園詩歌般的空間隱含著運動賽事裡競短爭長的煙硝味。而進一步探索古希臘的戰車競技與戰車寓言裡相關賽事的關聯後，可推論出蘇格拉底挪用了運動開創出其獨特的形上奧林匹亞賽事，當中也同樣交織著權力與貴族階級等等的社會結構。

關鍵字：《費德魯斯篇》、戰車寓言、運動、競賽、戰車競技、奧林匹亞賽事