A paper on Plato for the XIII Symposium Platonicum Pragense

My paper on the dating of the *Phaedrus* has two parts. In the first, I shall discuss the late dating, focussing on the role of Cicero. In the second, I shall propose my dating of the dialogue.

I.

According to the ancient tradition, recorded by Diogenes Laertius, the *Phaedrus* was Plato's first dialogue. Modern Platonic studies began with the rejection of this dating by Tennemann, inspired by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. For Kant believed that he discovered the truth, and that the only thing remaining for professional philosophers was to discover the history of Pure Reason, that is the history of thought that led to his discovery. Tennemann undertook this task, which he began to pursue with his *System der platonischen Philosophie*, published in 1792. With the theory of Forms in the *Phaedrus* Plato comes the nearest to Kant's *a priori* concepts, for Socrates says in the Palinode that 'human speech requires understanding according to Forms (δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ᾽ εἶδος λεγόμενον), bringing the influx of perceptions into unity by reasoning (ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὸν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῶι συναιρούμενον, 249b4-c1)'. Plato must have progressed towards the *Phaedrus* through a chain of dialogues, just as the subsequent history of philosophy progressed towards Kant' *Critique of Pure Reason*.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Schleiermacher dismissed Tennemann's dating of the *Phaedrus*: 'Surely everybody who understands the matter and who has the corresponding personal experience will agree that true philosophy does not start with separate special points but with anticipation at least of the whole … The beginnings of almost all Plato's philosophy are undeniably found in the *Phaedrus*, but its undeveloped state can be seen there as well.'

This insight is valuable; the problem lies in Schleiermacher's 'philosophic system' of Plato. He divided Plato's work into three periods. The first contained the *Phaedrus*, *Protagoras*, and *Parmenides*, which laid down the first principles of Plato's philosophy. In the second period these principles were applied to ethics and physics. Here belonged the *Theaetetus, Sophist, Politicus, Phaedo*, and *Philebus*. The last, so called constructive period, was dominated by the *Republic*, and contained *Timaeus* and *Critias*. (Let me note: stylometric investigations proved that the *Sophist*, *Politicus*, and *Philebus* were written after the *Republic*.) Schleiermacher maintained: 'The necessity of giving the last place to the constructive dialogues is so great from all points of view that if dependable historical testimonies were found which would prove that the *Republic* was written earlier than any of the preparatory works, we would stand in the most vexing conflict with our judgment about Plato and we would be thrown into the greatest perplexity of how to make such a want of reason compatible with his great intellect.'

But that's precisely what happened. In 1822 was published Cicero's *De re publica*, discovered in the Vatican Library by its prefect, Cardinal Angelo Mai, in 1820. Cicero says in in its first book that Socrates discarded the study of nature, and so did Plato as long as Socrates lived. After Socrates' death Plato devoted himself to it under the influence of the

Pythagoreans, whom he joined on his journey to Italy and Sicily. In his dialogues he then attributed to Socrates his own thoughts on the subject, ‘as he loved Socrates with singular affection and wished to give him credit for everything’ (*cum Socratem unice dilexisset eique omnia tribuere voluisset*, I. 16). *De re publica* ends with ‘Scipio’s dream’, in which Plato presents cosmological speculations from the *Timaeus*. The ‘Dream’ ends with Cicero’s translation of the proofs of the immortality of soul from the *Phaedrus* and the *Phaedo*. Cicero does not mention Plato in connection with any of it. In his view it all went back to the Pythagoreans, and thus to Italy and Sicily.

In the *Orator*, written a few years after *De re publica*, Cicero says that Plato wrote the *Phaedrus* when Isocrates was *senior* and Plato his *aequalis* (42). As Stallbaum pointed out, the Romans called *seniores* men between forty-five and sixty years of age. But after the *Orator* Cicero changed his mind concerning the dating of the *Phaedrus*. In the *Tusculan Disputations* he reproduces his translation of the proofs of immortality from *De re publica* i.53,54), retrospectively acknowledges Plato’s authorship, and insists that those views were Plato’s own (i.39,49); Plato derived them from the Delphic ‘Know thyself’ (*Nosce te*), understood as ‘Know thy soul’ (*Nosce animum tuum*) (i.52,53). He says that ‘influenced by these and similar reasons Socrates sought out no advocate when on trial for his life, and did not humbly entreat his judges’ (*His et talibus rationibus adductus Socrates nec patronum quaesivit ad iudicium capitis nec iudicibus supplex fuit*, i.71). This suggests that Cicero received information that Plato conceived his proofs of the immortality of soul during Socrates’ lifetime; his *Letters to Atticus* provide a clue concerning its source.

In the end of 46 B.C. Cicero wrote to Atticus, an authority on Greek and Roman antiquities, that he greatly appreciated his finding time to read the *Orator* (*Letters to Atticus* XII, 6a). From Cicero’s letter of May 28, 45 B.C. we learn that Atticus suggested to him that he ought to read Dicaearchus’ books. Cicero welcomed the suggestion and asked Atticus to send him the books. He repeated his request in his letter of May 29, and in a letter of June 3 he acknowledged accepting the books. In the *Tusculan Disputations*, written in 45 B.C., Cicero refers to Dicaearchus repeatedly, invoking Plato and Socrates against his view that ‘the soul is nothing at all’ (i.24), for ‘Dicaearchus argued most incisively against this immortality’ (*acerrime Dicaearchus contra hanc immortalitatem disseruit*, i.77).

Now we can turn to Diogenes on the dating of the *Phaedrus*: λόγος δὲ πρῶτον γράψαι αὐτὸν τὸν Φαῖδρον· καὶ γὰρ ἔχειν μειρακιῶδές τι τὸ πρόβλημα. Δικαίαρχος δὲ καὶ τὸν τρόπον τῆς γραφῆς ὅλον ἐπιμέμφεται ὡς φορτικόν. (III.38). This statement falls into three parts. Hicks translates the first two parts: ‘There is a story that the *Phaedrus* was his first dialogue. For the subject has about it something of the freshness of youth.’ The first part is based on the second part. As early as 1792 the element of ‘youthfulness’ was identified by Tennemann with the theme of love. Diogenes’ source was dismissed as a pedant who could not envisage Plato in his later years writing on love with passion.

Arguing against this view, I shall begin by focussing attention on the connective καὶ γάρ. It can occasionally have the force of the causal ‘for’, but usually introduces a clause that merely corroborates what was said before. For example, in *Apology* 34d3-5 Socrates addresses an imaginary critic: ‘My friend, I have a family, and indeed (καὶ γάρ), as Homer

says, I am not "of a tree or of a rock", I am a man.' The connective καὶ γάρ introduces the quotation from Homer to give a special touch to Socrates' 'I am a man', but Socrates' 'I am a man' does not depend on the quotation from Homer.

In order to decide which is the function of καὶ γάρ in the given case, we must enquire into the meaning of μειρακιῶδές τι in the ancient references to the dialogue. Hermias begins his commentary on the *Phaedrus* by taking on Plato's critics who maintained that Plato in the dialogue argued for and against love 'like a juvenile' (ὥσπερ μειράκιον), and that he contended against the speech of Lysias as a contentious youngster (Hermias 9). Hermias' testimony is supported by Themistius who in *Oration xxvi* addressed philosophy with the words 'and you were not afraid that someone might accuse you of juvenile behaviour (μειρακιεύεσθαι) when you contended against Lysias'. The ancients did not see the theme of love as a streak of juvenility, but the contentious manner in which Plato presented it, and in which he argued against Lysias.

Now we can turn to Dicaearchus' censure. The word that Dicaearchus used in criticising the dialogue is φορτικόν. In the *Phaedrus* this term signifies contentious ridiculing of one another 'as the comic writers do' (τὸ τῶν κωμωιδῶν φορτικόν, 236c). In Hermias the link between μειρακιῶδές τι and φορτικόν is obvious: The ancient critics alleged that like a youngster (ὥσπερ μειράκιον) Plato exposed Lysias to comic ridicule (κωμωιδούντος τὸν ῥήτορα, Hermias 9). The collocation of particles δὲ καί that links Dicaearchus' criticism to the preceding statements concerning its dating and character is not adversative ('however') but assentient and progressive: 'moreover', 'in addition', 'and what is more'. Previous critics censured merely the contentious manner, in which Plato attacked Lysias and argued for and against love; Dicaearchus extended this censure to the dialogue in its entirety. Dicaearchus' testimony is valuable, for he was a distinguished disciple of Aristotle, and he wrote a *Life of Plato*.

The reference to Dicaearchus in Diogenes was made after he published the books in which he criticised the *Phaedrus*. But the ancient tradition concerning the dating of the *Phaedrus* goes back to the time of Plato. Xenophon says that 'Charicles and Critias, intrusted by the Thirty with drafting laws, inserted a clause that made it illegal to teach 'the art of speaking', i.e. the rhetoric (λόγων τέχνην μὴ διδάσκειν, *Memorabilia* I.ii.31)'. Then they sent for Socrates, showed him the law, and forbade him to hold conversation with the young. Socrates asked them to fix the age limit below which a man is to be accounted to be young. "So long," replied Charicles, "as he is not permitted to sit in the Council, because as yet he lacks wisdom. You shall not converse with anyone who is under thirty." The Thirty thus forbade Socrates to speak with Plato, who was in his early twenties.

The incident hurt Plato. In the *Lysis*, written after the restoration of democracy, in 403, Socrates enumerates to Lysis all the things he would like to do, but is forbidden because of his youth – he can visit a newly opened Palaistra, but only under the guardianship of a παιδαγωγός, a well trusted slave appointed by the boy's parents for that role. Then he points to all things his parents enjoy him doing, like reading and playing a musical instrument. When the boy acknowledges that he is not allowed to do things he does not

know how to do, Socrates gets to the point: 'So your father is not waiting for you to come of age to trust everything to you, but on the day he considers that you know better than himself, he'll trust both himself and his property to you … What about the Athenians? Do you think they'll trust you with their affairs, as soon as they realise that you know enough?' – Lysis replies: 'I do.' (209c,d).

In the *Republic* Plato turned the tables on the Thirty: 'If the guardian (ὁ φύλαξ) shall strive for a kind of happiness that will unmake him as a guardian and shall not be content with the way of life that is moderate and secure and, as we affirm, the best, but if some senseless and childish opinion (μειρακιώδης δόξα) about happiness shall beset him and impel him to use his power to appropriate everything in the city for himself, then he will find out that Hesiod was indeed wise, who said that the half was in some sort more than the whole' (466b5-c3). This indicates that the opprobrium of juvenility that beset the *Phaedrus* preceded Socrates' incident with Charicles and Critias.

In the *Phaedrus*, the Forms are divine essentially, god gets his divinity from his closeness to the Forms (249c6). Written in 405 B.C., the *Phaedrus* was protected by the amnesty issued by the democrats after their victory over the Thirty. Accused of introducing new divinities, Socrates expected to be accused of the views 'he' expressed in the *Phaedrus*. Counting on the widespread characterisation of the *Phaedrus* as something juvenile (μειρακιῶδές τι), he said in his defence: 'It would not be fitting for one of my age, O men, to come before you like a youngster making up speeches' (ὥσπερ μειρακίωι πλάττοντι λόγους, *Ap*. 17c4-5).

II.

Aristophanes' comedy, the *Frogs*, is pivotal for my dating of the *Phaedrus*. It was staged about six months after the naval victory of Arginusae, four months after the death of Euripides, and two months after the death of Sophocles. Dionysus is journeying to the world below to bring Euripides back to the Athenian stage. There, a contest between Aeschylus and Euripides is under way. Dionysus is the judge, but he can't decide (1411-1413).

Pluto, the Lord of the underworld, steps in: 'Then you'll effect nothing for which you came?' – Dionysus: 'And how, if I decide?' – Pluto: 'Then take the winner. So will your journey not be made in vain'. (1414-1416, tr. Rogers)

Thus spurred, Dionysus addresses the two contestants: 'Listen, I came down for a poet'. – Euripides: 'To what end?' – Dionysus: 'That so the city, saved, may keep her choral games. Now then, whichever of you two shall best advise the city, he shall come with me … Let each in turn declare what plan of safety for the state you've got' … Aeschylus advises: 'When they shall count the enemy's soil their own, and theirs the enemy's: when they know that ships are their true wealth, their so-called wealth delusion' (1417-1465). As the Scholiast observes, this counsel was given by Pericles at the commencement of the war (Thucydides i. 140-144)' (Rogers ad loc.). Dionysus declares Aeschylus the winner.

Pluto invites Dionysus and Aeschylus to entertain them before sailing away over the lake. The actors leave the stage, and the Chorus enter it.

In the strophe, the Chorus sings the praise of a blessed man who has a perfected his mind. It has been established that he is well disposed towards the City; he is returning home for the good of the citizens, for the good of his relatives and friends; for he is wise (1482-1490).

In the antistrophe, the Chorus finds it delightful not to sit babbling next to Socrates any more – having thrown away the art, and abandoned what is the greatest in it, the art of tragedy. Pursuit of solemn arguments, those petty quibbles, activity in which nothing is done, befits a man who had lost his reason (1496-1499).

The strophe describes the man going to save Athens, and the antistrophe presents this man as one of those around Socrates. Whom among them could Aristophanes see as such a man, and hope that the audience would applaud him? Only Plato.

Aristophanes regales the audience with a well-known incident from Plato's life. 'When he was about to compete for the prize with a tragedy, he listened to Socrates in front of the theatre of Dionysus – Aelian (V,H. ii.30) has πρὸ τῶν Διονυσίων, "before the festival of Dionysus." – and then consigned his poems to the flames. From that time onward, having reached his twentieth year, he was the pupil of Socrates (διήκουσε Σωκράτους).' (Diog. Laert. Iii,5-6).

The *Frogs* closes with the Chorus imploring the powers below: 'give the poet ascending to light good journey, and good counsels of great benefits to the City,

'So we at last shall be freed from the anguish, the fear, and the woe,

Freed from the onsets of war. Let Cleophon now and his band

Battle if battle they must, far away in their own fatherland'

(tr. of the three closing lines B.B. Rogers).

Let us imagine Plato in his early twenties, how must he have felt, sitting there in the theatre. To see yourself as the leader of the Athenian State in your imagination, and to be pointed at as such in a packed theatre, the audience roaring with applause, is very different.

But there was something wrong with Aristophanes' presentation; throwing away his tragedies, Plato was not abandoning art (μουσική), he was embracing it. For philosophy is the greatest μουσική, to which he invites the reader in the Palinode:

'The region above the heavens has never yet been celebrated as it deserves by any earthly poet, nor will it ever be … This region is occupied by being which really is, which is without colour or shape, intangible, observable by the steersman of the soul alone, by intellect, and to which the class of true knowledge relates.' (247c3-d1).

The second part, devoted to rhetoric, is dry in comparison. It is therefore introduced with the myth of cicadas, who announce to Calliope and Ourania those who philosophy even in the midday heat, when others sleep. These two Muses, 'having as their sphere the heavens and discussions both divine and human, give rise to the most beautiful voice' (259b-d).'

The third part is very different, introduced as it is with the myth about two Egyptian gods, Theuth and Thamus. Theuth invents writing and presents it to Thamus: “This study, O King, will make the Egyptians wiser and improve their memory; what I have discovered is an elixir of memory and wisdom.” Thamus replied: “Your invention will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned … through reliance on writing they are reminded from outside by alien marks, not from inside, themselves by themselves … To your students you give appearance of wisdom, not the reality of it … they will appear to know much when for the most part they know nothing.” (274c-275b, tr. Rowe)

A philosopher writes ‘for amusement (παιδιᾶς χάριν), laying up a store of reminders both for himself, if he reaches a forgetful old age, and for anyone who is following in the same track’ (276d).

If we want to understand the dialogue, we must take into account the historical circumstances in which it was written. With anachronism, Plato indicates the time he finished the dialogue. In his first speech, after describing the lover’s noxious attentions to the boy, Socrates was to narrate the benefits the non-lover would bestow on the boy. But he says to Phaedrus ‘Not a word more shall you have from me; let that be the end of my discourse’ (241d1-3). As he was about to leave, Phaedrus begged him to stay and discuss what was said. Socrates stopped: ‘You’ve a superhuman capacity when it comes to speeches, O Phaedrus; you’re simply amazing. Of the speeches which there have been during your lifetime, I think, no one has brought more into existence than you … Simmias the Theban is the one exception (Σιμμίαν Θηβαῖον ἐξαιρῶ λόγου); the rest you beat by a long way.’ (242a7-b5, tr. C.J. Rowe). At the time of the dramatic staging of the dialogue – the Peace of Nicias, signed 421, abandoned 414 B.C. – Simmias was a little boy. This we can infer from the *Phaedo*, where we find Simmias and Cebes referred to as youngsters (νεανίσκοι, 89a3).

Implicated in the mutilation of herms, Phaedrus was in exile since 415. This is the latest possible dramatic date for the *Phaedrus*.

Simmias could not come during the war; I believe he came to Athens when ‘the exiles returned, and the Peloponnesians with great enthusiasm began to tear down the walls [of Athens and of Piraeus] to the music of flute-girls, thinking that that day was the beginning of freedom of Greece.’ (Xenophon, *Hellenica* II.ii.23, tr. C.L. Brownson). The anachronism implies that Plato finished the *Phaedrus* after he witnessed Simmias’ eager questioning of Socrates and everyone around him.

Apart from the anachronism, it can be ascertained that Plato finished the *Phaedrus* before the aristocratic revolution. What makes it certain is the *Charmides*. Socrates’ main interlocutor is Critias. At the end of the dialogue Socrates bewails his inability to make a proper investigation; he did his best to discover what σωφροσύνη (‘self-control’, ‘self-knowledge’, ‘each person doing their own thing’) was, and failed. But Charmides waves Socrates’ ignorance aside – ‘I don’t really believe you at all’ – and expresses his wish to be instructed by Socrates. Critias not only approves, he orders him to let himself be educated by Socrates. Charmides says: ‘I’d be behaving terribly if I didn’t obey you, my guardian, and

didn't do what you tell me.' – Critias: 'I'm telling you.' – Charmides: 'Well then, I'll do it, starting today.' (176b9-c3).

The last couple of lines, which are of crucial importance for the dating of the *Charmides*, are best narrated by Socrates (he narrates the whole dialogue to his noble friend – *ô hetaire* 'my friend' 154b8, *ô gennada* 'my noble friend' 155d3):

'What are you two plotting to do?' I asked.

'Nothing,' said Charmides. 'We've done our plotting.'

'Are you going to resort to the use of force, without even giving me a preliminary hearing in court?' I asked.

'I shall use force,' he replied, 'since Critias here orders me to – which is why you should plot what you'll do.'

'But there's no time left for plotting,' I said. 'Once you're intent on doing something and are resorting to the use of force, no man alive will be able to resist you.'

'Well then,' he said, 'don't resist me either.'

'Then I won't resist you' (Οὐ τοίνυν ἐναντιώσομαι),' I said. (Translation Donald Watt).

Plato must have written and published these lines before the Thirty summoned Socrates and four others to the Round Chamber, ordering them to go and fetch Leon of Salamis for execution. Socrates says in the *Apology* that the other four went off to Salamis and arrested Leon, but he went home. (32c4-d7).

Plato narrates the incident at great length in his *Seventh letter*, referring to it as the reason for his disgust with the Thirty and his turning away from the evils of those days (*SL* 325a4-5). He returns to it when he speaks of the democrats, who 'condemned and executed the very man who would not participate in the iniquitous arrest of one of the friends of the party then in exile' (*SL* 325c2-5).

Beginning to write the *Phaedrus* after Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and ending it before he conceived the *Charmides*, Plato wrote and published it during the most difficult months in the life of Athens. This explains its bewildering complexity and contradictions.

The first part is written in the aftermath of the victorious naval battle of Arginusae. Entertaining the reader with its peaceful atmosphere, Plato appeals to the Athenians: accept the peaceful offer extended to us by Sparta.

The second part, devoted to rhetoric, which was the main tool of politics, was written before the defeat and destruction of the Athenian fleet as well, but only after the readers could read, appreciate and judge the first part. For Socrates dismisses in it the two speeches, which he had delivered in the first part. He maintains that they were playfully done just for amusement (παιδιᾶι πεπαῖσθαι, 265c8-9), and that the only thing worthy of serious attention are the two principles of dialectic, which they exemplify. On closer look,

the two speeches do not exemplify the two dialectic principles, which Socrates ascribes to them; Plato denigrated the Palinode with religious fanatics in mind.

The third part with its uncompromising denunciation of writing was written after the disastrous battle of Aegospotami, during the months of siege. With the prospect of an aristocratic revolution in the air, the *Phaedrus* could harm his political ambitions. The first two parts had been published, the best thing he could do was to denigrate them as 'writing'. From the *Seventh Letter* we learn that he wrote the *Phaedrus* at the time in which he was most eager to enter politics (*SL* 324b8-325b1).

If we read the third part attentively, we find that the dismissal of writing is directed only against the second part of the dialogue. For after elaborating on the myth of the invention of writing Socrates says: 'Then now we can decide those issues, when we have agreed on these.' – Phaedrus asks: 'What issues?' – Socrates replies: 'The ones we wanted to look into, which brought us to this: how we were to investigate and scrutinize the reproach aimed at Lysias about the writing of speeches, and speeches themselves, which would be written scientifically and which not.' (277a6-b2)

Phaedrus spoke about the reproach aimed at Lysias just after Socrates ended the Palinode: 'For sometimes now I have been amazed at how much finer you managed to make your speech than the one before; so that I am afraid Lysias will appear wretched to me in comparison, if he really does consent to put another in competition with it. Indeed, my fine fellow, just recently one of the politicians was abusing him with this very charge, and throughout all his abuse kept calling him a "speech writer"; so perhaps we shall find him refraining from writing out of concern for his reputation.' (257c1-7, tr. Rowe) With these words Phaedrus looks back on the Palinode as Socrates' spoken word, characterized in the third part as the living word of philosophy, and opens the second part, devoted to rhetoric, which is in the third part dubbed as writing, and dismissed as such. In the third part, the prominence of the Palinode is re-ascertained.