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# how to approach The Phaedrus

The Phaedrus is a difficult dialog to understand at first and there may be a tendency in discussions to just talk about other simpler things and to avoid directly discussing The Phaedrus. After all, everyone has lots of thoughts about "love," and it might be easier to talk about those thoughts than to try to figure out what Socrates is saying. Love is one of the most central aspects of every life, after all, so it's no surprise that we've all thought about it a lot.

Our assignment this week, though, is to first focus on understanding what Socrates has to say in that dialog. If we want to learn from him we'll have to focus attention on exactly what it is he's trying to explain to Phaedrus about love.

I have a suggestion:

One fruitful way to proceed in understanding that more complex third speech would be for different people in class to each take some passage from that speech and just explain what you think it means. (The first two speeches are less challenging, so it would probably be best to focus this on the third speech; you could probably summarize those first two speeches in a sentence or two.) Here is what you would do if you wanted to contribute to this exploration.

1. You would pick some passage, maybe a short paragraph, or maybe up to a page long. It could be a passage you really like, or it could be one that is puzzling, or it could be one you have questions about. After picking that passage...

2. Either quote it right there in the discussion forum, or point us to it with stephanus numbers (quoting would be best).

3. Then just say, as simply as you can, what you think that passage means.

4. Others will read what you think the passage means and will then add their own thoughts about what they think it means. Eventually that passage starts to make more sense to everyone. If you do this with a few passages then the whole dialog starts to make a lot more sense.

I think this would be a very useful way to proceed. If four or five different folks picked four or five different passages from that speech, and then the rest of us responded to what those folks wrote, I'll bet you'd start to get a better feel for what that third speech is saying. (This will also be a helpful method for approaching some of the other more challenging books we’ll be reading a little later in the quarter.)