

The Myth of the Cicadas and the Philosophical Life in Plato's *Phaedrus*

In this paper, I suggest that the cicada interlude of Plato's *Phaedrus* reveals that 1) Socrates is suffering the *philosophical* (as opposed to *timocratic*) divine mania described in the *Palinode*; 2) Socrates and Phaedrus share a lover-beloved relationship; and 3) Socrates, in that moment, is living philosophically. These conclusions also corroborate Ferrari's and Werner's claim that Socrates, through the cicada myth, is teaching Phaedrus to live a philosophical life and warning him of an unphilosophical life.

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates and Phaedrus discuss two topics at large: eros and rhetoric. These subjects come about in a more socially natural manner than that of the pointed questioning that Socrates typically employs in other dialogues. The *Phaedrus* reads less like an interrogation than it does a conversation between friends, with longer, drawn-out passages full of evocative imagery and fewer slews of staccato'd "yes Socrates" and "it seems so to me, Socrates" while being bombarded by question after question, stumping interlocutor after interlocutor.

The conversation shifts from being predominantly about *eros* to being predominantly about rhetoric some time around the cicada interlude of 258e6–259d8. Phaedrus says that speech-writing is shameful in itself, and Socrates points out the noisiness of the cicadas around them as a response—this act is admittedly rather abrupt, as it doesn't directly or immediately respond to the conversation at hand, and it suddenly draws attention to the environment external to the conversation. Socrates then brings up the *myth* of the cicadas, wherein the cicadas give up food and drink for the love of song and thus earn a gift (*γέρας*) from the Muses, before returning to the question of speech-writing at hand. This interlude serves as a narrative divider between the eros half and rhetoric half of the dialogue, but there must be more to it thematically.

The Palinode, I suggest, reveals elements to the cicada interlude that suggest Socrates's own relation to the philosophical life. In *Plato's Four Muses*, Andrea Capra notes the similarity between Socrates and Phaedrus of the dialogue and the cicadas of the myth. Both have dialogue, ignore a bodily need, and earn a gift (—so Socrates hopes). I add onto Capra's framework with elements from the Palinode. In these cases, one does not *merely* ignore bodily need, but the cicadas' and duo's ignoring acts result in their suffering *mania* as well: the cicadas suffer poetic *mania*, and Socrates and Phaedrus suffer erotic *mania*. The link between eros, philosophy, and the situation of the *Phaedrus* is thus established; in parallel reading with the Palinode, then, the cicada interlude reveals great thematic continuity and insight into Socrates's own actions, despite the seemingly random nature of the telling of the myth.

Works Cited

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