

## What are collections and divisions good for? A reconsideration of Plato's *Phaedrus*

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### Abstract

This article questions a widespread understanding of collection and division as depicted in the *Phaedrus*. According to this understanding, these procedures are introduced in this dialogue as a new method for philosophical inquiry specific to Plato's later conception of dialectic, the goal of which is definitions. The article argues that Plato rather presents these procedures as a foundation for thinking and speaking more generally and, when performed in a specific manner differing from the ordinary use, also for philosophical inquiry. It further argues that in consequence, the combined procedure of collection and division should not be regarded as identical with dialectical method as such, but rather as one among several procedures the dialectician may employ in philosophical inquiry. In order for such inquiry to result in definitions of the nature of what is marked off, it is finally argued, philosophical considerations external to, and in addition to, collection and division are called for.

### Introduction

In the second half of the *Phaedrus*, while Socrates and Phaedrus are discussing how one should speak and write nobly or beautifully, Socrates makes the following statement:

Now I am myself, Phaedrus, a lover of these divisions and collections, so that I may be able both to speak and think; and if I think anyone else has the capacity to look to one and over what are naturally many, I pursue him 'in his footsteps, behind him, as if he were a god.' And furthermore, those who can do this – whether I give them the right name or not, god knows, but at any rate – up till now I call them dialectical. (266b3-c1).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Translations are from C. J. Rowe (trans. and comm.), *Plato – Phaedrus*, 2nd ed. [*Phaedrus*] (Oxford, 1988); they have been modified slightly at certain points without notice. The Greek text used is that of the OCT.

This article will argue that Socrates here describes collection and division as procedures that underlie human speaking and thinking in general as well as philosophical inquiry, without identifying them with either. Establishing this thesis requires a detailed examination of Socrates' description of these procedures; an interpretation of the role assigned to collection and division in Socrates' speeches in the first part of the dialogue; and, finally, a discussion of the role the statement plays in the argument that unfolds between Socrates and Phaedrus in the passage 257b7 to 271c5.

The passage raises four questions the article undertakes to answer. First, Socrates' claims that he has up until now been calling people 'dialectical' (*dialektikous*) who are able to "look to one and over what are naturally many" (I defend this translation in section II below), and that he loves collection and division because they enable him to speak and think. Does he thereby mean to suggest that the ability of the dialectician is identical with collection and division or does he rather distinguish between them?<sup>2</sup> Second, we may wonder what collection and division are meant to provide: Are they meant to establish essential definitions or merely to help organize a subject matter of inquiry, or something related to it, in a systematic manner?<sup>3</sup> Third, Socrates claims that he is a lover of collections and divisions in order (*hina*) that he may be able speak and think. Is he thereby suggesting that collections and divisions enable him to think and speak as a dialectician or rather that such procedure assists human beings in general to think and speak?<sup>4</sup> Finally, Socrates claims that he has, up until

<sup>2</sup> See D. Henry, 'A Sharp Eye for Kinds: Plato on Collection and Division' ['Sharp Eye'], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 41 (2012), 229-55 for a recent discussion of this question.

<sup>3</sup> H. Fossheim, 'Division as a Method in Plato', in J. L. Fink (ed.), *The Development of Dialectic from Plato to Aristotle* (Cambridge, 2012), 91-112, argues for the second alternative, Henry, 'Sharp Eye', argues for the first. See also M. L. Gill, 'Division and Definition in Plato's *Sophist* and *Statesman*' in David Charles (ed.), *Definition in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford, 2010), 172-199.

<sup>4</sup> R. Hackforth (trans. and comm.), *Plato's Phaedrus [Phaedrus]* (Cambridge, 1952), note ad loc., suggests that Plato by "these words ... is careful to keep before our minds the necessity of applying dialectic to rhetoric," thereby opting for the first alternative, while G. J. De Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato [Commentary]* (Amsterdam, 1969), ad loc., states, in opposition to Hackforth, that Plato is not merely thinking of this, but that his "intention is wider: the entire life of the mind depends on διαρέσεις and ξυναγωγαί." The most recent commentary on the *Phaedrus*, H. Yunis, *Plato: Phaedrus [Phaedrus]* (Cambridge, 2011), note ad loc., follows Hackforth and maintains that Socrates cannot mean "mere speaking and thinking, for which dialectic is hardly necessary," but must be thinking of "speaking and thinking as a matter of τέχνη, whether ῥητορική or διαλεκτική."

now (*mechri toude*), called those who are able to look to one and over what are naturally many “dialectical”. But how we should understand the qualification “up until now”? Considered from a dramatic perspective, the sentence clearly suggests that Socrates has, up until this point in his (fictional) life called the people he describes dialectical, and one seems entitled to infer that Plato is indicating that his Socrates in general, when using this word, points to people able to “look toward one and over what are naturally many”. Most scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, have suggested that the statement should rather be read as the first announcement of Plato’s supposedly later conception of dialectic.<sup>5</sup>

While some of the questions raised by the passage are hotly debated, it is fair to say that something resembling a consensus regarding the way it should be read emerged during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For it came to be a widely held view that Plato’s Socrates here introduces a new conception of inquiry, according to which collection and division are identical with dialectic, provide essential definitions of Forms (whether or not these Forms are conceived of as different from Forms as discussed in e.g. the *Phaedo*), and replace other methods for arriving at definitions known from Plato’s supposedly early and middle period dialogues.<sup>6</sup>

This article contends that these suppositions do not find support in the *Phaedrus*. It contends that Socrates is describing collection and division in a manner that suggests that they are *both* basic operations of human reasoning underlying thinking and speaking in general *and* procedures central to dialectical reasoning. What distinguishes the dialectical use of collection and division from their ordinary use, it will be argued, is that dialectic is committed to uncovering the nature of what is inquired into, a commitment not necessarily

<sup>5</sup> See Hackforth, *Phaedrus*, 134, who states that the “verve displayed by Socrates in his account ... justifies the belief that here we have Plato’s first announcement of a new discovery to which he attaches the highest importance”, and that Plato in the passage “for the first time formally expounds that philosophical method – the method of dialectic – which from now onwards becomes so prominent in his thought”.

<sup>6</sup> See F. M. Cornford (trans. and comm.), *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge [Theory]* (London, 1935), 184-185; recent expressions can be found in e.g. N. Notomi, *The Unity of Plato’s Sophist* (Cambridge, 1999), 74-78, and – more reservedly – Chr. Iber (intr. and comm.), *Platon – Sophistes* (trans. F. Schleiermacher) (Frankfurt a. M., 2007), 223-224. The view ultimately derives from the work of Julius Stenzel, see section I below for details. For a good overview of the controversy concerning the question whether collection and division replace other methods for arriving at essential definitions, see L. Brown, ‘Definition and Division in Plato’s *Sophist*’, in D. Charles (ed.), *Definition in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford, 2010), 151-171.

characterizing ordinary speaking and thinking. Thereby collection and division acquire a teleological directedness that cannot be fulfilled through the use of collection and division alone, but requires additional philosophical considerations concerning the nature of what is inquired into. For this reason, collection and division should not be regarded as identical with dialectic or seen as a new method for defining Forms.

Since a basic assumption underlying the consensus view sketched above is that Plato developed a new conception of dialectic in his supposedly later dialogues, section I of the article presents some brief considerations concerning the origins of this assumption. The main task of the article – which is to address the questions raised by Socrates' claims that he is a lover of collection and division and that he has "until now" called those able to look to unity and over plurality dialectical (266b3-c1) – is undertaken in sections II, III and IV, in the following way.

Section II presents a detailed interpretation of the passage 265d3-266c2, which is the most explicit discussion of collection and division contained in the *Phaedrus*, arguing for the view that collection and division are not identical with dialectic.

Section III then illuminates the procedures of collection and division further by considering what they contribute to Socrates' two speeches on *eros* from the first part of the dialogue. The section argues that Socrates' first speech exemplifies collection and division as used in thinking and speaking in general, and that only his second speech begins to move in a clearly dialectical direction; it further argues that Socrates' second speech, in so doing, relies on insights not arrived at through collection and division.

Section IV concludes the article by turning to the discussion of beautiful speaking and writing in the second half of the *Phaedrus*. I argue that Socrates' aim here is not (contra a number of critics) to supply rhetoric with a scientific (or dialectical) basis, but rather, to consider how speaking well in general is related to philosophy or dialectic. In effect, this amounts to a deliberate broadening, on Plato's part, of the notion of rhetoric, from being conceived as a specialist skill (irrespective of how this is related to philosophy or dialectic) to being a skill that relates to thinking and speaking in general. The section concludes the argument concerning collection and division by arguing that they are procedures of particular usefulness in dialectical inquiry when the inquiry is concerned with complex wholes; but such inquiry stands in need of additional considerations concerning the power such wholes and their parts have, in order for the inquiry to be truly dialectical.

## I: Plato's later dialectic?

The now commonly accepted view that the *Phaedrus* is the first dialogue to announce Plato's later conception of dialectic rests at the most basic level on the emergence of developmental readings of Plato that became popular during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in particular on the idea that Plato in his supposedly later dialogues advanced a number of teachings that departed from those found in what had late in that century come to be regarded as the dialogues of his middle period. The view that Plato's conception of dialectic was among the teachings that changed – and changed radically – in the late period ultimately owes its present-day currency to two scholars, Julius Stenzel and Richard Robinson.

In his *Studien zur Entwicklung der Platonischen Dialektik von Sokrates zu Aristoteles* (1917),<sup>7</sup> Stenzel argued that the supposedly late dialogues display the new dialectical method of *diairesis* or division, and proposed the related view that this new method was the result of a change in Plato's ontological orientation.<sup>8</sup> Whereas Plato, according to Stenzel, up to and including the *Republic* was interested primarily in practical-ethical matters, the later Plato developed a new interest in theoretical questions pertaining to the philosophy of nature.<sup>9</sup> Stenzel maintained that this shift in ontological interest also effected a change in the manner in which Plato conceived of Forms. In what Stenzel regarded as Plato's Socratic period, which according to him culminates in the *Republic*, the distinctive character of a Form of a thing was conceived of as identical with the *aretê* of that thing, understood as the specific virtue enabling the thing to perform its own task;<sup>10</sup> in contrast, the

<sup>7</sup> J. Stenzel, *Studien zur Entwicklung der Platonischen Dialektik von Sokrates zu Aristoteles – Arete und Diairesis* [Studien] (Breslau, 1917).

<sup>8</sup> The idea that the later dialogues present a new kind of logic corresponding to a change in Plato's conception of science was advanced already in 1897 by W. Lutoslawski in *The Origin and Growth of Plato's Logic*, a work influenced by L. Campbell's *The Sophistes and Politicus of Plato* of 1867. Stenzel's work took its point of departure in views of the kind found in these two works as well as works by other writers concerned with the chronology of Plato's dialogues. Stenzel's work, in turn, forms part of the basis for F. M. Cornford's interpretation of the discussion of dialectic found in the *Sophist* (see Cornford, *Theory*, 266, note 1, and 268, note 1), and Stenzel's general approach to the history of philosophy had an impact on the thought of Richard Robinson (see R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* [Earlier] [New York, 1941], 6). See also note 15 below.

<sup>9</sup> Stenzel, *Studien*, 1-2, see also 123-141.

<sup>10</sup> Stenzel, *Studien*, 8-9.

distinctive character of a Form in the later period was understood as “the substrate of the ‘permanency of species’ in the realm of classes of the natural sciences”.<sup>11</sup> The Forms thus came to resemble general concepts standing for natural kinds and Plato’s later ontological outlook therefore became the natural starting point for his pupil, Aristotle.<sup>12</sup> A consequence of this change in ontological interest, according to Stenzel, was that Plato’s conception of dialectic changed as well. It now became a method for defining Forms understood as natural classes by mapping their place in a hierarchy of Forms through division.<sup>13</sup>

A quarter century later Richard Robinson – who was influenced by Stenzel both in his approach to the history of philosophy<sup>14</sup> and in his understanding of Plato’s supposedly later conception of dialectic<sup>15</sup> – laid the groundwork for an understanding of the development of Plato’s dialectic still dominant today, at least in Anglo-American scholarship, even though he does not provide a full treatment of Plato’s later conception of dialectic. In his influential *Plato’s Earlier Dialectic*, Robinson notably claimed that “the word ‘dialectic’ had a strong tendency in Plato to mean ‘the ideal method, *whatever that may be*’.”<sup>16</sup> He nevertheless suggested that certain elements remained constant in Plato’s conception of dialectic, while others, such as the “conceptions of hypothesis and division ... belonged to Plato’s idea of dialectic for parts of its life only”,<sup>17</sup> with hypothesis belonging to its supposedly middle period, division to its supposedly late period. Like Stenzel, Robinson thus helped cement the

<sup>11</sup> “als Substrat der ‘Konstanz der Arten’ im naturwissenschaftlichen Klassenreich”, Stenzel, *Studien*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> M. L. Gill, *Philosophos – Plato’s Missing Dialogue* (Oxford, 2012) is a recent defense of the view that Plato’s treatment of forms in the so-called later dialogues “displays a distinctly Aristotelian bent” (10).

<sup>13</sup> Stenzel, *Studien*, 44 and 47-54; see also the almost verbatim echo in Hackforth, *Phaedrus*, 135-136.

<sup>14</sup> See note 8 above.

<sup>15</sup> Stenzel’s views had an immediate impact on German scholarship. Having come to the attention of English-speaking scholars (the second edition of the German original was reviewed positively in 1932 in both the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* and the *Classical Review*) his *Studien* was translated into English, appearing in 1940. In his review from 1941 of this translation (*The Philosophical Review*, vol. 50 (5), 542-544), Richard Robinson suggests that Stenzel is (543) “loose or highly speculative in many details”, but he nevertheless insists that Stenzel “has shown, to all those who can spare the energy to struggle through his frightfully obscure exposition, that the method of division, puerile though it may seem to modern logicians, really was a new and important theory to Plato in his later period”.

<sup>16</sup> Robinson, *Earlier*, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Robinson, *Earlier*, 74.

view that *diairesis*, or the use of division, is a method peculiar to the supposedly later Plato, a view now endorsed by many Platonic scholars.

In contrast to Stenzel, modern scholars tend to take the view of *diairesis* advanced by Stenzel for granted without argument, perhaps because they think that it is uncontroversially true that the use of division in philosophical inquiry is peculiar to the dialogues now commonly regarded as late.<sup>18</sup> It is therefore interesting to note that E. R. Dodds in his commentary on the *Gorgias* from 1959 recognized that the division of arts found in the passage 463e5-466a3 is an example of *diairesis* – although an early one according to Dodds<sup>19</sup> – and that Paul Friedländer from early on objected to Stenzel’s and Robinson’s suggestions concerning division, pointing out that division is used in a number of dialogues that are now commonly regarded as early.<sup>20</sup> That the real basis for Stenzel’s and Robinson’s view of Platonic division is not a systematic study of the use of collection and division in Plato’s dialogues – such a study would not support their view unambiguously, since it can be argued that collection and division are found in dialogues such as the *Gorgias*, the *Protagoras* and the *Republic*<sup>21</sup> – but is rather their understanding of the development of Plato and, in particular, of logic and science, is now often forgotten.

Platonists writing prior to the ascendancy of developmental readings of the dialogues viewed matters differently. Since they did not regard Plato’s thought as developing in any significant sense – the notion that the development of a philosopher’s thought should be viewed as something positive only resulted from the emergence of the German romantic and idealistic traditions in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century – it is not surprising that they

<sup>18</sup> See e.g. Rowe, *Phaedrus*, note to 266d3 ff., who claims that it is Plato, “rather than Socrates” who is a lover of collection and division, without other argument than the received opinion that this “recommended procedure for establishing definitions (the mapping of reality) ... plays a prominent role in three other dialogues, all late: *Sophist*, *Statesman* and *Philebus*.”

<sup>19</sup> E. R. Dodds (ed. and comm.), *Plato - Gorgias* (Oxford, 1959), 226.

<sup>20</sup> See P. Friedländer, *Platon 2*, 3rd edn. (Berlin, 1964), 337, note 9; *Platon 3*, 2nd edn. (Berlin, 1961) 229-30; and his ‘Review of Richard Robinsons *Earlier Dialectic*’, *Classical Philology*, vol. 40 (1945), 253-259, 253. P. Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago, 1933), 295, likewise objects to the idea that *diairesis* is a new method peculiar to the later Plato.

<sup>21</sup> To show this in detail lies beyond the scope of this study. Some helpful suggestions in this direction can be found in K. F. Johansen, *Studier over Platons Parmenides* (København, 1964), 45-51. See also Franz Lukas, *Die Methode der Eintheilung bei Platon* (Halle-Saale: C. E. M. Pfeffer, 1888) who seeks to account systematically for the way divisions structure the inquiry in a number of Platonic dialogues, hereunder dialogues now commonly regarded as belonging to the early (*Gorgias*) and the middle (*Republic*, *Theaetetus*) period dialogues.

did not share the view that Plato's conception of dialectic underwent a radical development. Since the standard developmental account of Plato's thought has come increasingly under criticism in the last few decades, it seems worthwhile to consider such approaches to Platonic dialectic. Here a mere sketch will have to suffice.

Some ancient Platonists, such as Plotinus, Proclus and Alcinous, regarded dialectic as a more or less unified method that utilized different procedures. They commonly regarded division as an important procedure, but in contrast to modern scholars they did not suppose that it was solely used in the dialogues we now tend to think of as late, nor did they hold the view that it led to essential definitions on its own. They rather saw it exemplified across Plato's dialogues and regarded it as intimately connected with other dialectical procedures aimed at discovering the nature or essence of something. In *On Dialectic* or *Peri Dialektikês*, Plotinus thus identifies dialectic with a disposition (*hexis*) of being able, among other things, to speak about every thing "in a reasoned and orderly way", stating what each thing "is and how it differs from other things and what it has in common with those among which it is" (I.3.4; 2-5; transl. Armstrong). This clearly suggests that he regarded collection and division, as discussed in particular in the *Phaedrus* and the *Sophist*, as an integral aspect of dialectic as such. In a similar vein Proclus, in his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, states that Socrates "almost everywhere hotly pursues" the procedures of collection and division discussed in the *Phaedrus* and the *Sophist* (*In Parm.*, 649, 17-651, 111). Proclus, like Plotinus, thus regarded the methodical discussions found in these two dialogues as relevant for understanding the argumentative procedures of Plato's Socrates in all of Plato's dialogues, not merely in the so-called later dialogues, since among these Socrates is the main interlocutor only in the *Philebus*. Alcinous, moreover, suggests that dialectic inquires into the nature of each thing "either 'from above', by means of division and definition, or 'from below', by means of analysis".<sup>22</sup> Plotinus mentions many other tasks dialectic enables one to perform that can hardly be resolved through collection and division, such as determining what common qualities beings have, what the good is, or whether a being really is what it is (I.3.4; 4-9).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Dillon, J. (trans. and comm.), *Alcinous - The Handbook of Platonism* (Oxford, 1993), chap. 5.1.

<sup>23</sup> It may be objected that the ancient Platonists, because they did not read Plato under the assumption that his thought developed, synthesized passages in Plato while overlooking radical differences. This may be true, but the point here is simply that the passages from the *Phaedrus* and the *Sophist* describing collection and division did not strike them as introducing



As mentioned, even some modern scholars writing after developmental readings of Plato became popular have suggested that division is a procedure used in Plato's dialogues generally, and they also question the view that collection and division in themselves are able to provide essential definitions; this, however, has been a minority view.<sup>24</sup>

The fact that scholars prior to the emergence of developmental readings did not see collection and division as peculiar to the supposedly late dialogues, and the further fact that some later scholars objected to Stenzel's and Robinson's view of divisions as providing essential definitions, suggest that this now commonly accepted view depends more on general assumptions concerning the way in which we should read Plato's dialogues – namely as marking a development in Plato's philosophical views and as part of a general development of logic and scientific thought – than on the texts themselves. At the very least, it should be admitted that the dialogues that expressly discuss collection and division do not immediately suggest that this is a new method.<sup>25</sup>

The question whether Plato changed his conception of dialectic, and, if he did, whether collection and division played a part in such a change is obviously complicated, and cannot be settled solely on the basis of an interpretation of the *Phaedrus*. But if it can be shown that the *Phaedrus* does not lend support to the modern understanding of collection and division as a new method for defining essences that supplant supposedly older methods, this will be an important challenge to the still prominent view of Plato's supposed development.

anything new because this is not something the text suggests by itself, but rather something that results from a preconceived idea of Plato's development.

<sup>24</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the first scholars employing developmental models for the interpretation of Plato's dialogues (e.g. Schleiermacher, Stallbaum, Zeller) regarded such dialogues as the *Phaedrus*, *Sophist*, and *Philebus* – i.e. dialogues we now too tend to think of as “methodical” dialogues that discuss the procedure of collection and division – as relatively early. The dialogues could, accordingly, be regarded as providing a methodological basis for Plato's Socratic conversations. An overview of earlier German attempts to date Plato's dialogues according to the supposed development of their philosophical content can be found in C. Ritter *Platon: Sein Leben, seine Schriften, seine Lehre*, vol. 1 (München, 1910), 230-231. Ritter's critical discussion of these attempts (pp. 223-232) is still worth reading in its entirety; many of the claims advanced in his day concerning the development of Plato's philosophical view of the soul, of rhetoric, of politics and the like are still being advanced today – often with the same absolute confidence for which Ritter criticized his contemporaries.

<sup>25</sup> This feature of the text is recognized by C. Kahn, *Plato and the Dialogue Form* (Cambridge, 1996), 299, note 6, who states that the emphasis on division in the *Phaedrus* is new, but that “Socrates insists that this is *not* an innovation!”

## II: Socrates' description of collection and division

The task of the present section is to interpret the passage 266b3-c1 carefully and to consider its connection to its immediate context, i.e. the section 265d3-266b2. This is the natural starting point of our inquiry into the function of collection and division in the *Phaedrus*, since this extended passage contains the most explicit discussion of these two procedures in the dialogue.

### *Speaking and thinking and the ability of the dialectician*

S.: Now I am myself, Phaedrus, a lover of these divisions and collections, so that I may be able both to speak and think; and if I think anyone else has the capacity to look to one and over what are naturally many, I pursue him 'in his footsteps, behind him, as if he were a god.' And furthermore, those who can do this – whether I give them the right name or not, god knows, but at any rate – up till now I call them dialectical. (266b3-c1)<sup>26</sup>

The first thing we should take note of concerning this passage is that Socrates does not state that collection and division are identical with the kind of knowledge he elsewhere calls dialectic (*dialektikê*)<sup>27</sup> or that the ability to perform them is all that characterizes those whom he here calls dialectical. What he claims is that he has called 'dialectical' those he considers able to look to one and over what are naturally many. This leaves open the possibility that dialecticians, according to Socrates, will also be able to perform other tasks in virtue of the fact that they are dialectical.

<sup>26</sup> τούτων δὴ ἔγωγε αὐτός τε ἐραστής, ὦ Φαῖδρε, τῶν διαιρέσεων καὶ συναγωγῶν, ἵνα οἷός τε ὦ λέγειν τε καὶ φρονεῖν: ἐάν τέ τιν' ἄλλον ἡγήσωμαι δυνατὸν εἰς ἓν καὶ ἐπὶ πολλὰ πεφυκόθ' ὄρᾶν, τοῦτον διώκω κατόπισθε μετ' ἵχνιον ὥστε θεοῖο. καὶ μέντοι καὶ τοὺς δυναμένους αὐτὸ δρᾶν εἰ μὲν ὀρθῶς ἢ μὴ προσαγορεύω, θεὸς οἶδε, καλῶ δέοῦν μέχρι τοῦδε διαλεκτικούς.

<sup>27</sup> E. Heitsch, 'Dialektik und Philosophie in Platons >Phaidros<', *Hermes*, 125.2 (1997), 131-152 argues, p. 133, that Plato here uses the word *dialektikos* to point to "die rhetorische Kunst, mit dem jeweiligen Partner in der für ihn angemessenen Weise zu sprechen", and does not mean "die eine, allen übrigen Wissenschaften überlegene >Dialektik<"; see also J. R. Trevaskis, 'Division and its Relation to Dialectic and Ontology in Plato', *Phronesis*, 12 (1967), 118-129, who questions the view that division and dialectic are identical.

A second point directly related to this is that Socrates claims to be a lover of collections and divisions with a specific purpose in mind: to be able to speak and think. This suggests that Plato intends a direct connection between Socrates' ability to speak and think and the ability to collect and divide. What that connection is, however, is open to question.

At first sight it might seem that Socrates is making the following suggestion: he is claiming that he is a lover of collection and division; he describes the ability to perform these operations as abilities to look to one and over many; he calls those able to perform these operations dialectical; and he finally claims that these dialectical procedures enable him – as a dialectician – to speak and think. If one assumes that dialectic is identical with collection and division, as most commentators do, it is likely that one will read Socrates' statement in this way.

But Socrates could also be suggesting that collections and divisions enable him, just as they enable any other human being, to speak and think, while at the same time suggesting that only those who are able to perform such divisions and collections on the basis of a certain kind of vision – described as an ability to look to one and over what are naturally many – deserve to be called dialectical. In other words, it is possible to read the passage as introducing a distinction between collection and division in general and a privileged or more adequate performance of these procedures, which we may call dialectical. Showing that the latter alternative is in fact the preferable reading is the main point in the overall argument of this article.

The first step in this task is to point out that Socrates describes his own attachment to collection and division in a manner significantly different from the manner in which he describes the ability of a dialectician; he uses the plain and practically colloquial doublet “to speak and think” (*legein te kai phronein*) when explaining what collection and division enable him to do, but he describes the ability characteristic of those he calls dialectical in a more careful and even labored manner here translated rather literally as an ability to look “to one and over what are naturally many” (*eis hen kai epi polla pephukoth*).

The doublet “to speak and think” also occurs several times in Isocrates (see *Panegyricus* 50 and *Antidosis* 207, 244, 277, 308),<sup>28</sup> where it designates intellectual activity in

<sup>28</sup> At *Gorgias* 449e6 Socrates suggests that rhetoric, since it enables people to speak (*legein*) about something, also enables them to think (*phronein*) about that something, while he at

general; those who master these abilities well, such as Isocrates according to his own evaluation and the Athenians in general, therefore outshine other men. We may assume that Socrates uses it in the same way, to designate the process of reasoning quite generally, depicted as carried out either in thought or in speech, thinking being, at least according to both the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, an internal dialogue the soul carries out on its own (see *Soph.* 263e3-9 and *Tht.* 189e4-190a7).

The ability that, according to Socrates, entitles one to be called dialectical, on the other hand, is described as a twofold ability, namely the ability to look (*horan*)

1) *eis hen* – toward one and

2) *epi polla pephykoth'* – over what are naturally many.

Before we look at the two prepositional phrases used by Socrates, a brief note on the participle *pephukota* is in order. Some translators and commentators take it with both *hen* and *polla*,<sup>29</sup> in which case both the one and the many are characterized as natural. This is, however, a rather strained construal of the Greek.<sup>30</sup> It may also be noted that Socrates in 265e1-3, where he describes division, explicitly states that the ability to cut or divide should be performed “according to natural joints” (*kat' athra hêi pepyken*), but he does not qualify his description of collection at 265d3-5 in a similar way.<sup>31</sup> For both reasons it seems preferable to take *pephukota* with *polla* only.

We should also note that Socrates uses two different prepositions when describing the ability of the dialectician, that is, *eis* and *epi*. *Eis* when used with *hen* suggests that the dialectician is able to look *to* a single focal point. *Epi*, on the other hand, when used with the accusative *polla pephykoth'*, suggests that the dialectician is able to look *over* an extended, natural manifold, i.e. that he is able to gain a correct overview of the natural layout

450a2 suggests that medical skill enables the doctor to speak and think about those who are ill, a further indication that the two verbs form a pair.

<sup>29</sup> See e.g. Hackforth, *Phaedrus*, note ad loc.

<sup>30</sup> Rowe, *Phaedrus*, note ad loc., therefore suggests that the participle should be read as masculine singular, agreeing with *tin' allon* and its predicate *dunatos* at 266b5, i.e. that it is the capacity that Socrates believes entitles one to be called dialectical that is characterized as being natural.

<sup>31</sup> See P. Ryan, *Plato's Phaedrus – a commentary for Greek readers [Phaedrus]* (Norman, 2012), note ad loc. Ryan reasonably suggests that Socrates' emphasis on what is natural when it comes to division may be explained by the fact that “it is easy, often tempting, to divide a collection along lines suggested by something other than nature”. I shall return to this point below.

of that manifold (see LSJ, s.v. *epi* with accusative, entry 7). If we assume that Socrates in this passage is drawing a distinction between a general performance of collection and division and a qualified, and distinctly dialectical, performance thereof, we may further suggest that the dialectician's use of collection and division is distinguished from the general performance in some way by the manner it is related to unity and natural plurality, described here as an ability to look (*horan*).

As we shall see below, Socrates describes division in general as an ability to divide according to natural joints, a fact that could be regarded as an objection to my suggested reading. At the same time, however, he clearly states that this ability may fail in achieving its aim. What I will be arguing in the following is, then, that the dialectical performance of division is differentiated from a more general use by the fact that a kind of pre-understanding – what Socrates described as the ability to look over what are naturally many – guides the divisions performed by the dialectician. I am, accordingly, not arguing that the fact that the dialectician attempts to divide in accordance with natural joints sets his use of division apart from the general use, but rather that the fact that his attempt to do so is based on something else than the (mere) ability to divide in itself sets dialectical division apart from division in general.

We may also observe that Socrates introduces the entire discussion of noble or beautiful speeches – in which the passage under consideration stands as central – by suggesting that unless Phaedrus “engages in philosophy sufficiently (*hikanôs*) well he will never (*oude ... pote*) be a sufficiently (*hikanos*) good speaker about anything (*oudenos*)” (261a4-5). We may take this suggestion as invoking a clear distinction between a general ability to speak – concerned with anything that may be spoken of – and a (philosophical) foundation for this general ability that, if adequately mastered, will enable one to exercise this general ability adequately. We shall return to this suggestion in section IV below, but for now we may simply suppose that this distinction also underlies Socrates' utterances in the passage we have been considering. With this in mind, let us now turn to Socrates' more elaborate description of collection and division.

#### *Socrates' description of collection and division*

What Socrates understands by collection and division is set out in greater detail as follows.

S.: First, there is perceiving together and bringing into one form items that are scattered in many places, in order that one can, by circumscribing each thing, make clear whatever it is that one wishes to instruct one's audience about on any occasion. Just so with the things said just now about love, about what it is when circumscribed: whether it was right or wrong, the speech was able to say what was at any rate clear and self-consistent because of that.

P.: And what is the second kind of procedure you refer to, Socrates?

S.: Being able to cut it up again, into forms, according to its natural joints, and not try to break any part into pieces, like an inexpert butcher; as just now the two speeches took the madness of reason as one form together, and just as a single body naturally has its parts in pairs, with both members of each pair having the same name, and labeled respectively left and right, so too the two speeches regarded derangement as naturally a single form in us, and the one cut off the part on the left-hand side, then cutting it again, and not giving up until it had found among the parts a love which is, as we say, 'left-handed', and abused it with full justice, while the other speech led us to the parts of madness on the right-handed side, and discovering and exhibiting a love which shares the same name as the other, but is divine, it praised it as cause of our greatest good. (265d3-266b1)<sup>32</sup>

Before looking more closely at this passage, we should note that Socrates prefaces it by stating (at 265c9-d1) that two forms or procedures (*duoin eidoin*)<sup>33</sup> were exhibited by chance (*ek tuchês*) in the speeches he delivered previously in the dialogue – namely the two

<sup>32</sup> Σω. εἰς μίαν τε ιδέαν συνορῶντα ἄγειν τὰ πολλαχῆ διεσπαρμένα, ἵνα ἕκαστον ὀριζόμενος δῆλον ποιῆ περὶ οὗ ἂν αἰεὶ διδάσκειν ἐθέλῃ. ὥσπερ τὰ νυνδὴ περὶ Ἔρωτος—ὃ ἔστιν ὀρισθέν—εἴτ' εὖ εἴτε κακῶς ἐλέχθη, τὸ γοῦν σαφές καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ αὐτῷ ὁμολογούμενον διὰ ταῦτα ἔσχεν εἰπεῖν ὁ λόγος. - Φαῖ. τὸ δ' ἕτερον δὴ εἶδος τί λέγεις, ὦ Σώκρατες; - Σω. τὸ πάλιν κατ' εἶδη δύνασθαι διατέμνειν κατ' ἄρθρα ἧ πέφυκεν, καὶ μὴ ἐπιχειρεῖν καταγνύναι μέρος μηδέν, κακοῦ μαγείρου τρόπῳ χρώμενον: ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἄρτι τῷ λόγῳ τὸ μὲν ἄφρον τῆς διανοίας ἐν τι κοινῇ εἶδος ἐλάβετην, ὥσπερ δὲ σώματος ἐξ ἑνὸς διπλᾶ καὶ ὁμώνυμα πέφυκε, σκαιά, τὰ δὲ δεξιὰ κληθέντα, οὕτω καὶ τὸ τῆς παρανοίας ὡς ἐν ἑν ἡμῖν πεφυκὸς εἶδος ἠγησαμένῳ τῷ λόγῳ, ὁ μὲν τὸ ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ τεμνόμενος μέρος, πάλιν τοῦτο τέμνων οὐκ ἐπανῆκεν πρὶν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐφευρῶν ὀνομαζόμενον σκαιόν τινα ἔρωτα ἐλοιδόρησεν μάλ' ἐν δίκῃ, ὁ δ' εἰς τὰ ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μανίας ἀγαγὼν ἡμᾶς, ὁμώνυμον μὲν ἐκείνῳ, θεῖον δ' αὖ τινα ἔρωτα ἐφευρῶν καὶ προτεινόμενος ἐπήνεσεν ὡς μεγίστων αἰτίων ἡμῖν ἀγαθῶν.

<sup>33</sup> This is the translation suggested by Hackforth; for discussion, see Ryan, *Phaedrus*, note ad loc.

procedures he goes on to identify as collection and division in 265d3-266b1 – and that it would be gratifying if one could grasp their power (*dunamis*) in a skillful way (*technê[i]*); he further states that the rest of the speeches were “playfully done, by way of amusement” (*paidiai pepaisthai*). He thereby identifies the procedures of collection and division as procedures that has certain powers or abilities and suggests that they can be grasped skillfully; at the same time he implies that they were not employed in his own speeches on the basis of such a grasp (for they exhibited these procedures only by chance). If we assume that grasping the procedures of collection and division skillfully is characteristic of the dialectician, the implication is that Socrates’ two speeches in one way or another do not yet exemplify a fully skillful use of the power of collection and division.

This impression is confirmed by the fact that Socrates a few lines earlier (at 265b5-c1) suggested that his second speech on *eros* expressed the erotic experience through an image that “allowed us perhaps to grasp some truth, though maybe also it took us in a wrong direction” and that this enabled him to mix together “a not wholly implausible speech” (*ou pantapasin apithanon logon*), which he also describes as “some mythical hymn” (*muthikon tina humnon*). Whatever merit the speech possesses, the implication of this statement is clearly that it may not be wholly truthful. If we assume that the aim of dialectic is to uncover reality – a fair assumption in the light of the way Socrates uses this expression elsewhere in Plato (see especially *Rep.* 533a10-c6 and 534b3-4; see also *Phaed.* 99e4-102a1 with 65a9-3 and 78d1-3) – it again follows that Socrates’ use of collection and division in his second speech does not fully exhibit or exemplify this science. On the other hand, since Socrates explicitly states that both speeches exemplify collection and division, it seems to follow that collection and division cannot in themselves be identical with dialectic.

Let us now examine Socrates’ description of collection and division more closely. It is clear that Socrates regards each procedure as performing a distinct task. Collection helps *horizein*, i.e., to circumscribe or define, something and, by doing so, helps to clarify a subject of instruction. Division, on the other hand, is an ability to cut something up – presumably that which is gathered into a unity by collection, if we are to follow the example Socrates provides at 265e3-b1 – and to do so in a specific manner; it must involve cutting this something into forms (*eidê*) at the natural joints (*arthra pephuken*), and not attempt to break any part into pieces “in the manner of an inexpert butcher”.

We should start by considering what Socrates means by claiming that collection helps *horizein* something. The verb *horizein* is often taken to mean ‘to define’ in the sense of defining the essence of something. If we take Socrates as meaning to say that collection is an ability to give essential definitions of something, this looks like a serious objection to the suggestion that collection in general is not an ability that only the dialectician is able to perform, at any rate if we think that only a dialectician is able to provide essential definitions. But we may rule this objection out simply by observing that Socrates has already indicated that his speech (he here seems to be thinking of both his speeches as one, a point to which we shall return below) may have failed to grasp the whole truth about *eros*, a point he now repeats when he describes how the power to collect is illustrated by what he did when he defined love: “Just so with the things said just now about love, about what it is (*ho estin*) when circumscribed (*horisthen*): whether it was right or wrong, the speech was able to say what was at any rate clear and self-consistent because of that.” (265d3-7).

The important thing to note here is that Socrates allows that a proposed ‘definition’ or circumscription may be right or wrong, while at the same time characterizing such a proposed circumscription (i.e. what he says about *eros* at the beginning of his first speech) as exemplifying collection (265d3-7). It follows that he does not think that for a process to exemplify collection, it must define successfully, in the sense of doing so correctly and truly. To avoid confusion, it therefore seems better to translate *horizein* simply as ‘to circumscribe’ (we shall return to this point in the next section). Moreover, we have suggested that not only does Socrates leave open whether his proposed circumscription of *eros* is right or wrong, he also expressly avoids committing himself to the view that the process of which it was part was conducted on the basis of a skill. From this it follows that he neither thinks that a proposed circumscription arrived at through collection must be, if not correct and true, at least proposed through skill.

We may now consider more carefully the procedure of division. This procedure, it seems, is more complex than collection; as Socrates makes clear, it consists in 1) being able (*dunasthai*) to cut (*diatemnein*), into forms (*kat’ eidê*), according to natural joints (*kat’ arthra hêi pephuken*) and in 2) not trying (*mê epicheirein*) to break any parts of what one is cutting.

Clearly the procedure is more than a simple ability to divide; it is teleological in nature since the aim of this ability is to divide according to the natural joints of what one divides. But it remains a question whether divisions, in order to be divisions that exemplify



this ability, have to achieve this aim. If they have to, the suggestion that Socrates distinguishes between a general ability to divide and a dialectical ability to look over what are naturally many (at 266b3-7) will appear untenable. But we do not have to draw this conclusion.

First, we may well think that divisions that do not achieve their aim, because they fail to cut something in accordance with its natural joints, are still examples of this ability. Socrates does not state that division is simply an ability to cut in accordance with natural joints; on the contrary, he characterizes the ability in terms of the intention not to break any part (cf. *mê epicheirein*, understood to mean ‘not to attempt to ...’). But it is possible for one to intend not to do something but still do it, or fail to avoid doing it; for instance, if one does not have a proper and full understanding of what one is doing. That such an inadequate performance of the ability to divide according to natural kinds is still an example of the exercise of the ability is a point we shall return to in section IV below.

Second, and in direct continuation of the previous point, it remains a question whether Socrates’ speeches on *eros* divide the nature of *eros* at its natural joints. If they do, as the summary at 265e3-266b1 at first sight suggests, this speaks against the suggestion that the procedure of division as employed in them does not exemplify a fully skillful (or dialectical) grasp of division. But if it can be established that they do not, or at any rate that only one of them does so, and can only be said to do so in a qualified manner, then this is confirmation of the thesis that divisions may be examples of the ability to divide according to natural joints, even if they do not divide correctly, since Socrates explicitly states that *both* his speeches exemplify division. To establish this, however, we need to look more closely at the divisions performed by Socrates in his speeches.

### III: Collection and division in Socrates’ two speeches

When we now turn to Socrates’ two speeches, we shall limit ourselves to observations concerning the way collection and division inform their composition while disregarding most of their content. Our first aim is to demonstrate that Socrates’ first speech is based on collection and division but does not exemplify dialectical inquiry. Our second aim is to show that the divisions of his second speech form part of a inquiry using dialectic, but that this inquiry is motivated by considerations concerning the nature of *eros* and the soul that do not depend on collection and division.

Before looking more closely at the two speeches, some observations concerning their inter-relation are called for. Looking at the speeches from the perspective Socrates provides on them in his summary at 265e3-266b1, one may get the impression that they constitute two halves of one speech that together investigate the whole phenomenon of *eros*. This impression is not mistaken, but taken in isolation the summary tends to blur the fact that the speeches were, as Socrates points out at 265a1, opposed to each other.<sup>34</sup> More precisely, the two speeches together exemplify, as Socrates makes explicit at 262c5-7 (see also 265a2-3), a specific manner of speaking that he terms ‘to dispute’ (*antilegein*, 261c5, see also 261d10). By this he means to dispute in a broad sense, the activity of being engaged in an argument in general, but he includes under this also the more specific activity where the same person is advancing contrary arguments concerning the same thing, that is, discussing or disputing with himself or herself (cf. 261c10-4e).<sup>35</sup>

We shall return to the question how we are to understand Socrates’ conception of *antilegein* in part IV; for now the important thing to note is that the two speeches are eventually (but not from the start) presented as parts of one argument or “speech”, the aim of which is to make the same phenomenon – *eros* – first appear to be one thing, namely bad, and then appear to be the opposite, namely good. This is important to bear in mind for two reasons. First, if the speeches are intended to contradict each other, they must circumscribe their subject – *eros* – in basically the same way. Otherwise it might be objected that the first speech made one thing appear bad, while the second speech made something else appear

<sup>34</sup> Some commentators emphasize that there is a discrepancy between Socrates’ harmonious summary of the speeches and the speeches themselves. G. R. F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas* (Cambridge, 1987), 59 suggests that Plato “by tinkering with Socrates’ memory ... demonstrates that the leisurely perspective of analytic hindsight is just that: a perspective; and different from the perspective from which Socrates delivered the poetry he now misleadingly encapsulates”; Plato thereby signals that both the “poetic” perspective of the speeches and the “analytic” perspective offered in the summary are one-sided and “must supplement each other”. C. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Phaedrus*, 2nd edn. [*Self-Knowledge*] (Pennsylvania, 1996), 175-6 sees a discrepancy between Socrates’ description of an “art of thinking” at 265d3-266b2 that merely analyses our opinions, and the complex connection between pre-reflective knowledge and philosophical inquiry displayed in dialogue.

<sup>35</sup> That Socrates advances contrary arguments concerning the same subject in the *Protagoras* – the question whether or not virtue may be taught – and that this is a key element in the structure of the dialectical inquiry in that dialogue, is argued for in V. Politis, ‘What do the arguments of the *Protagoras* amount to?’, *Phronesis* 57 (2012), 209-239.

good, and therefore that the second speech did not really contradict the first. Second, since the two speeches jointly illustrate the activity of disputing, we cannot suppose that, when taken together, their aim is – purely and simply – to advance the account of the nature of *eros* through division, from a less satisfactory and complete to a more satisfactory and complete account – as Socrates’ summary might seem to suggest. Rather, they move from censuring *eros* (in the first speech) to praising it (in the second), as Socrates also points out (cf. 265c5-6). I shall argue that since both speeches exemplify collection and division, the shift from censure to praise is animated by something other than collection and division.

### *The collection underlying Socrates’ speeches*

As we have seen, when describing collection at 265d3-7, Socrates states that it helps to clarify what one wishes to teach and (referring to his previous speeches) that by circumscribing<sup>36</sup> *eros* in the way it did, “the speech was able to say what was at any rate clear and self-consistent because of that”. A closer inspection of the two speeches, however, reveals that only the first speech begins by circumscribing *eros*, namely as a particular kind of irrational desire or madness, while the second speech simply begins from the assumption that *eros* is a kind of madness (244a3-6).<sup>37</sup> This should not surprise us, given the fact that the speeches make up a single long speech exemplifying disputation: since the different parts of the disputation are concerned with the same subject matter, and since collection helps circumscribe the subject matter, it makes sense that only the first speech should exemplify collection and that the second should simply rely on that initial demarcation of the subject. Here is the description of the purpose of circumscription found at the beginning of Socrates’ first speech.

“In everything, my boy, there is one starting-point for anyone who is going to deliberate successfully: he must know what it is that he is deliberating about, or he will inevitably miss everything. Most people are unaware that they do not know what each thing really

<sup>36</sup> I render *horizein* and its cognates as ‘to circumscribe’ etc. for reasons given above in section II; see also below for further justification of this translation.

<sup>37</sup> That the reference of 265d3-7 “must be to [Socrates’] definition of love in the first speech” is correctly emphasized by Rowe, *Phaedrus*, note *ad loc.* See also De Vries, *Commentary*, note *ad loc.*

is. So they fail to reach agreement about it at the beginning of their enquiry, assuming that they know what it is, and having proceeded on this basis they pay the penalty one would expect: they agree neither with themselves nor with each other. So let us, you and I, avoid having happen to us what we find fault with in others: since the question before you and me is whether one should rather enter into friendship with lover or non-lover, let us establish an agreed definition of love, about what sort of thing it is and what power it possesses, and look to this as our point of reference while we make our enquiry whether it brings advantage or harm.” (237b7-d3)<sup>38</sup>

What motivates this speech – as well as the next, we may add (see 244a3-4) – is the question whether one should enter into friendship with a lover or a non-lover. This question raises a deeper question, what love is and what power it possesses, and Socrates is suggesting that circumscribing love will help settle the question whether love brings advantage or harm, the settling of which will help decide whether one should befriend a lover or a non-lover.

The passage thus seems to manifest a line of reasoning Socrates advocates in several dialogues known in the scholarly literature as the “priority of definition”: if we are to decide whether x has the property of y or z, we need to decide what x, essentially, is, since we are able to settle the question what properties x has only if we first understand the essence of x; and what that essence is cannot be decided by adducing examples of x. It would be premature to conclude, however, that it is this principle that Socrates is advancing here. First, there is nothing specifically Platonic in claiming that, in order to decide whether something has a certain property, we need to circumscribe what that something is; Isocrates, for instance, invokes this principle.<sup>39</sup> Second, the principle as stated here is not particularly

<sup>38</sup> περὶ παντός, ὧ παῖ, μία ἀρχὴ τοῖς μέλλουσι καλῶς βουλευέσθαι: εἰδέναι δεῖ περὶ οὗ ἂν ἢ ἡ βουλή, ἢ παντὸς ἀμαρτάνειν ἀνάγκη. τοὺς δὲ πολλοὺς λέληθεν ὅτι οὐκ ἴσασι τὴν οὐσίαν ἐκάστου. ὡς οὖν εἰδότες οὐ διομολογοῦνται ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς σκέψεως, προελθόντες δὲ τὸ εἶκος ἀποδιδόασιν: οὔτε γὰρ ἑαυτοῖς οὔτε ἀλλήλοις ὁμολογοῦσιν. ἐγὼ οὖν καὶ σὺ μὴ πάθωμεν ὃ ἄλλοις ἐπιτιμῶμεν, ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ σοὶ καὶ ἐμοὶ ὁ λόγος πρόκειται πότερα ἐρῶντι ἢ μὴ μᾶλλον εἰς φιλίαν ἰτέον, περὶ ἔρωτος οἷόν τ’ ἔστι καὶ ἢν ἔχει δύναμιν, ὁμολογίᾳ θέμενοι ὄρον, εἰς τοῦτο ἀποβλέποντες καὶ ἀναφέροντες τὴν σκέψιν ποιῶμεθα εἴτε ὠφελίαν εἴτε βλάβην παρέχει.

<sup>39</sup> See *To Nicocles*, 9: πρῶτον μὲν οὖν σκεπτέον τί τῶν βασιλευόντων ἔργον ἐστίν: ἂν γὰρ ἐν κεφαλαίοις τὴν δύναμιν ὅλου τοῦ πράγματος καλῶς περιλάβωμεν, ἐνταῦθ’ ἀποβλέποντες ἄμεινον καὶ περὶ τῶν μερῶν ἐροῦμεν. Socrates’ statement at 237b7-d3 seems literally to echo this passage. That the principle in this form is common to rhetoricians and Plato is argued in

controversial; it is obviously true that I cannot know whether something has a certain property if I do not know what that something is *at all* (cf. *Men.* 71b4-7). The principle only becomes controversial if you make strict demands concerning the way one is allowed to define something, for instance that you are not allowed to point to particular examples as definitions or to rely on commonly accepted views – the kind of strict demand that Plato’s Socrates commonly imposes on his interlocutors.<sup>40</sup>

The circumscription of *eros* that Socrates proceeds to offer does not live up to any such demands, but is simply based on commonly accepted opinions.<sup>41</sup> If we use his description of collection at 265d3-5 as our guide to understanding circumscription – it is a procedure that is supposed to bring “into one form items that are scattered in many places” by perceiving them together – what most readily presents itself as a circumscription of *eros* in the first speech is what we find in the lines 237d3-238a2. Here Socrates circumscribes *eros* as a kind of desire, specifically directed at pleasure, whose rule in the soul is *hubris*. He thereby brings one type of desire together with other types of desire under one heading or form, namely the desire that leads irrationally. In making this collection and associated circumscription, Socrates admits that he is merely spelling out “what is clear to everyone” (237d4) concerning *eros*.

If these observations are correct, we may conclude that the *horos* Socrates mentions at 237d1 simply means ‘circumscription’, not definition in any strict sense, just as *horizein* at 265d4 means ‘to circumscribe’. The *horos* simply circumscribes *eros* in a manner convenient for the argument Socrates is about to give, namely that the lover is harmful to the beloved. And since the second speech begins from the assumption that the lover is mad – where it is understood that madness is a form of irrationality and irrational desire – we see that this circumscription also underlies the second speech.

### *Divisions in Socrates’ first speech*

M. Brown and J. Coulter, ‘The Middle Speech of Plato’s *Phaedrus*’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 9 (1971), 405-23, see in particular 407-10.

<sup>40</sup> That the principle only becomes controversial once these demands are made is argued in V. Politis, *The Structure of Enquiry in Plato’s Early Dialogues* (Cambridge, 2015).

<sup>41</sup> See H.-G. Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke* 5 (Tübingen, 1985), 62.

Beginning with this speech, we should note that divisions are most obviously used to divide excess; this is clear from Socrates' claim that excess has "many limbs and many forms" (238a2-3), such as gluttony, alcoholism, and *eros* (238a6-c4). The fact that he talks of excess as having "many limbs" (*polumeles*; 238a3) suggests that this division is aimed at cutting in accordance with the "natural joints" of excess. We may further observe that he performs the division while looking to the various objects at which excess may be directed – food (238a6), drink (238b2), and bodily beauty (238c2). He thereby regards excess as a kind characterized by an 'object-directedness' and divides it into sub-kinds in accordance with the various objects it may be directed at, a way of dividing complex phenomena – such as knowledge, virtue, or various kinds of speech – that we find in many Platonic dialogues (see e.g. *Gorg.* 449e1-452e8, 463a8-c3, 464b3-465c7; *Chrm.* 165c4-166b6, *Rep.* 438a7-439a7). At the same time, we see that this division is rather trivial, and almost routine in nature; it merely spells out more clearly what Socrates must already have presupposed when performing the collection at 237d3-238a2, namely that *eros* is one of several types of irrational desires.

The division of excess, however, itself relies on another division that is neither trivial nor obviously in accordance with natural joints. When beginning his collection at 237d3-4 by stating that *eros* is a kind of desire, Socrates further claims that "we know that men desire the beautiful (*epithumousi tôn kalôn*) even if they are not in love." (237d4-5). By recognizing a non-erotic desire for beauty or what is noble – Socrates may be thinking of the desire for performing great deeds – he is led to the problem how one should distinguish an erotic from a non-erotic human being if both may be said to be desiring the same thing. He suggests this solution:

"We must next observe that in each of us there are two kinds of things (*duo idea*) which rule and lead us, which we follow wherever they may lead, the one an inborn desire for pleasures, another an acquired opinion which aims at the best." (237d6-9)<sup>42</sup>

It seems fair to assume that Socrates by the expression "two kinds of things" that are "in each of us" means two parts or principles of the soul. The further fact that he uses the term *idea*

<sup>42</sup> δεῖ αὖ νοῆσαι ὅτι ἡμῶν ἐν ἐκάστω δύο τινέ ἐστων ἰδέα ἄρχοντε καὶ ἄγοντε, οἷν ἐπόμεθα ἧ ἂν ἄγητον, ἡ μὲν ἔμφυτος οὔσα ἐπιθυμία ἡδονῶν, ἄλλη δὲ ἐπίκτητος δόξα, ἐφριεμένη τοῦ ἀρίστου.

suggest that what we have here is a division in the sense discussed at 265d3-266b1, namely of the soul, a division meant to support the ensuing division of desires by demarcating irrational desires from other desires. It is therefore remarkable that Socrates offers no justification for his division of the soul; the suggestion that they simply have to recognize these two parts (*dei noêsai*; 237d6) looks most of all like an appeal to commonly held beliefs about the soul.<sup>43</sup> The result is that the division between rational and irrational desires seems less than firm; at the very least we should wonder whether the division of excess is entirely adequate.

But while it is obvious that neither the collection nor the divisions contained in the first speech form part of a philosophically adequate inquiry into *eros*, they undoubtedly help structure the first speech in a clear and pedagogical manner, making it structurally superior to the earlier speech of Lysias, as Socrates emphasizes at 263d5-6. The speech thereby illustrates that collection and division may achieve the aim of imposing an effective order on a speech, and in this sense enable one to speak and think, without forming part of a dialectical inquiry.

#### *Divisions in Socrates' second speech*

This speech offers a division of divinely inspired madness complementary to the division of excess in the first speech; and like the division of excess this division is not particularly informative – Socrates acknowledges that he only states “things that are obvious to everyone” (244b5). The division of divine madness into inspired prophecy (244a8-244d5), rites of purification (244d5-245a1), and divinely inspired poetry (245a1-8) most of all resembles a kind of inductive reasoning meant to make plausible that *eros*, as madness, may be benevolent and divine: since we know that there are other kinds of divine madness and that they are benevolent, it is possible that *eros* could be a kind of divine madness too and benevolent.

This is not the only division found in the second speech, however. Just as the division of excess in the first speech presupposed a division of the soul, the division of divine madness depends on a general division of madness into good and bad madness that is introduced in the dialogue at 244a5-6. It is only on the basis of this division that Socrates is

<sup>43</sup> Brown & Coulter, ‘Middle Speech’, argue that the view of the soul here is the view of Isocrates, see also R. L. Howland, ‘The Attack on Isocrates in the *Phaedrus*’, *The Classical Quarterly*, 31 (1937), 151-159.

later able to regard the divisions performed in the first speech as one part of a whole, and so as by itself incomplete. The division of madness into good and bad thus reveals that what the first speech regarded as the trunk of a tree to be divided into its various branches, is, when viewed from a higher level, only a branch on a larger trunk, namely madness. The second speech thereby implicitly takes the first speech to task for having begun its discussion of *eros* too early, so to say, or with a supposed unity that is not really a whole.

The division of madness raises two important questions. First, what is the basis for this division? The first speech took for granted, while circumscribing *eros*, a commonly accepted view concerning the soul and irrational desires. The second speech, in contrast, seems to base its division of madness into good and bad on some kind of insight into the nature of *eros* that Socrates describes as a kind of divine inspiration or prophetic knowledge (242b8-d2, 262d2-7). Both speeches thus base their divisions of the soul and madness on an understanding of the soul and the nature of *eros* that do not stem from the procedures of collection and division, but comes to expression in collection and division.

Second, if the division between good and bad madness is guided by an insight into *eros* not stemming from a procedure of division, the question whether this division is any more sound and well-founded than the division of the soul in the first speech becomes pressing. In contradistinction to the first speech, however, which never questions its own divisions, the second speech proceeds to support its fundamental division of *eros* into good and bad. For the speech does not simply claim that *eros* belongs under the heading of divine madness, but instead seeks to argue that this suggestion is plausible. In arguing for this suggestion, the speech initiates a long and complicated investigation of the nature of the soul (introduced at 245c3-5) that involves a collection and division performed on the soul (see 246a3-4 and 253c7-d1, where Socrates uses the same expressions about the soul and its parts, namely *idea* and *eidê*, that he uses when describing collection and division at 265d3-5 and 265e1-3), and also a complex investigation of the proper objects of human desire, the Forms. This investigation, in turn, is based on considerations concerning the soul and the Forms that do not seem to rely on collection and division alone.

Collection and division in the second speech thus form part of a larger inquiry that may rightfully be regarded as dialectical, in the sense that it undertakes a genuine inquiry into the subject matters it treats off (whether it is a fully 'scientific' example of such an inquiry is another matter). This inquiry corrects the view of *eros* arrived at through collection and



division in the first speech, and parts of this inquiry are clearly based on something else than collection and division, be that a divinely inspired understanding of *eros* or some kind of prior knowledge of the soul and the Forms.

#### IV: Speaking and thinking, rhetoric and dialectic

This section, that treats of the discussion of beautiful speaking and writing in the second half of the *Phaedrus*, has two main tasks. The first task is to demonstrate that Socrates here aims at showing that speaking in general stands in need of philosophy if it is to be conducted adequately, not that rhetoric, if grounded in dialectic, may be rendered a genuine science or skill, a claim common in the secondary literature on the dialogue. This serves to conclude the argument that collection and division are procedures that underlie thinking and speaking in general. The second task is to show that collection and division, when used as dialectical procedures, are concerned primarily with the relation between wholes and parts and the question what powers they possess, and that the latter question has to be settled in part through considerations that do not depend on collection and division. This serves to conclude the argument that collection and division are not identical with dialectic, but rather procedures that may be necessary, while by themselves insufficient for establishing essential definitions. The section will concentrate on the passages 261a3-262c7 and 269d2-271c5.

Before taking up the passages, a short consideration of the dramatic background against which our first passage should be read is called for, since this will help us appreciate the real significance of the discussion of rhetoric in this passage. Throughout the *Phaedrus*, Socrates and Phaedrus are portrayed as lovers of *logoi* (see 227b9-11, 227d5-228a4, 228b5-c1, 236e1-5 and 242a7-b3).<sup>44</sup> At the same time, Phaedrus is depicted as interested in speeches primarily as a means of persuasion, i.e. in rhetoric (see 260a3-4 and 269c9), while Socrates is portrayed as interested in *logoi* understood both quite generally as speeches (261a4-5) and as philosophical arguments (257b6). This difference in their interest structures the dramatic exchange between the two interlocutors in the second half of the dialogue. When Socrates raises the question how one should write and speak in order to do so beautifully or nobly (258d7, 259e1-2) – the question that initiates the discussion of rhetoric – Phaedrus' interest in the question is a result of his admiration of the skill that enables a good speechwriter to

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of this *motif*, see Griswold, *Self-Knowledge*, 21-23.

write clever and persuasive speeches. Socrates, on the other hand, has a very different view of what it means to write and speak beautifully or nobly, a view he seeks to convince Phaedrus is superior, thereby seeking to redirect Phaedrus' interest from rhetoric toward philosophy (see 257b1-6).<sup>45</sup> Their differing interest in *logoi* also comes to the fore in Socrates' suggestion that one must have knowledge of the truth in order to speak and write, at least if you intend to do so nobly or beautifully, as against Phaedrus' objection that he has heard that the public speaker or politician (*rhêtôr*) needs to know only what appears just to the multitude, not what really is so (259e4-260a4).

*Rhetoric, antilogikê, and collection and division (261a3-262c7)*

It is against this dramatic background that we must read the opening lines of our first passage, where Socrates "summons" some arguments intended to persuade Phaedrus that "unless he engages in philosophy sufficiently well (*hikanôs philosophêsê[i]*), neither will he ever be adequate at speaking about anything (*oude hikanos pote legein estai peri oudenos*)." (261a4-5)

We should observe that Socrates is not simply suggesting that the arguments are intended to convince Phaedrus that rhetoric or political and public speeches require philosophy; rather, they are intended to convince him that, unless he engages in the activity of philosophy sufficiently, he will never become adequate at speaking *at any time about anything* (*pote ... peri oudenos*). The arguments clearly concern speaking in general, and are intended to make plausible a teleological view of speaking and its dependence on philosophy if it is to fulfill its end.

To understand this teleological view properly, we will have to consider what Socrates means by being "adequate at speaking" and to "engage in philosophy sufficiently". We also need to see more clearly how this general claim about speaking is connected to Phaedrus' interest in rhetoric. Socrates proceeds to state the following:

Well then, will not the science of rhetoric as a whole be a kind of leading of the soul by means of things said, not only in the law-courts and all other kinds of public gatherings, but in private ones too – the same science, whether it is concerned with small matters or

<sup>45</sup> This is argued in E. Asmis, 'Psychagogia in Plato's *Phaedrus*', *Illinois Classical Studies* 11 (1986), 153-172; see also J. Moss, 'Soul-Leading: The Unity of the *Phaedrus*, Again', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 43 (2012), 1-23.

large ones, and something which possesses no more value, if properly understood, when it comes into play with things of importance than when it does with things of no importance? (261a7-b2)<sup>46</sup>

We should again take note of the generality of Socrates' statement – what he terms rhetoric may concern anything and can be performed everywhere. As Phaedrus points out (261b3-5), this account does not capture what is traditionally understood by 'rhetoric':<sup>47</sup> according to the traditional understanding, rhetoric is concerned mostly with lawsuits and questions concerning what is just (see 261c8), and with public speeches and questions concerning what is good (see 261d3-4). In consequence of this objects, Socrates proceeds to argue for his controversial view.

It should be observed that had Socrates wanted to argue simply that rhetoric should be grounded in philosophy, as is often assumed,<sup>48</sup> arguing for this controversial account of rhetoric would be superfluous. He could simply have argued that, in order to be adequate at speaking at all, one has to philosophize sufficiently; it would then follow that, since rhetoric is a kind of speaking, it too, requires philosophy. Or, even more simply, he could have argued directly that rhetoric as understood by Phaedrus stands in need of philosophy, and forget about the general activity of speaking. The fact that he instead proceeds to argue that rhetoric is not limited in scope, as Phaedrus believes it is, but may concern anything, demonstrates that Socrates' real interest lies in speaking in general.

Socrates' argument for broadening the scope of rhetoric to include speaking and thinking in general sets out from the two kinds of speeches Phaedrus acknowledges as

<sup>46</sup> ἄρ' οὖν οὐ τὸ μὲν ὅλον ἢ ῥητορικὴ ἂν εἴη τέχνη ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων, οὐ μόνον ἐν δικαστηρίοις καὶ ὅσοι ἄλλοι δημόσιοι σύλλογοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν ἰδίοις, ἢ αὐτῇ συμκρῶν τε καὶ μεγάλων πέρι, καὶ οὐδὲν ἐντιμότερον τό γε ὀρθὸν περὶ σπουδαῖα ἢ περὶ φαῦλα γιγνόμενον;

<sup>47</sup> We should be careful not to read into Phaedrus' position Aristotle's definition of rhetoric, that it is "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (*Rhet.* 1355b25-26, trans. Rhys Roberts), or modern conceptions of rhetoric derived from it. For Aristotle's view is evidently much closer to the view of noble speaking and writing that Socrates is arguing for than it is to Phaedrus'. Consequently, we misunderstand the dramatic exchange between Socrates and Phaedrus if we ascribe an Aristotelian understanding of rhetoric to Phaedrus.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. Hackforth, *Phaedrus*, 122; E. Heitsch (trans. and comm.), *Platon: Phaidros* (Göttingen, 1997), 126-135. For a recent and perceptive defense of this traditional view, see M. McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists* (Cambridge, 2008) 167 ff.

rhetorical, forensic speeches concerning the just, and deliberative speeches concerning the good. Both, Socrates argues, are essentially concerned with the act of disputing (*antilegein*), and he adds that the one who disputes with skill (*technê[i]*) is able to make the same thing appear to his audience sometimes one thing, sometimes the opposite (261c4-d4). Socrates then suggests that Zeno or the “Eleatic Palamedes” is basically engaged in the same activity, only he is not concerned with the just and the good, but with “like and unlike, one and many, at rest and in motion” (2616-8). Phaedrus accepts all this and Socrates accordingly concludes that

... the science of disputation is not only concerned with law-courts and public addresses, but, so it seems, there will be this one skill – if indeed it is one – in relation to everything that is said, by which a man will be able to make everything which is capable of being made to resemble something else resemble everything which it is capable of being made to resemble, and to bring it to light when someone else makes one thing resemble another and disguises it. (261d10-e4)<sup>49</sup>

Thereby Socrates reaches the conclusion that rhetoric may concern anything. However, by changing the name from *rhetorikê* to *antilogikê* or ‘the skill of disputation’, he again reveals that his own interest lies elsewhere than Phaedrus’. For what Socrates is in effect arguing is that the activity Phaedrus identifies as rhetoric – an understanding identical with the understanding of rhetoric advanced by the Platonic Gorgias (see *Gorgias* 452e1-4) – is a subpart of a much broader phenomenon, disputation. As Socrates’ illustrations drawn from traditional rhetoric also make clear, by disputation he means a very broad phenomenon that may be conducted with skill, but which is not itself a skill: the activity we engage in whenever we try to convince people that something is the case in opposition to claims advanced by an opposing party. Even Eleatic ‘antilogic’, in which Zeno specialized, is simply a particular version of it.

<sup>49</sup> οὐκ ἄρα μόνον περὶ δικαστήριά τέ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀντιλογικὴ καὶ περὶ δημηγορίαν, ἀλλ’, ὡς ἔοικε, περὶ πάντα τὰ λεγόμενα μία τις τέχνη, εἴπερ ἔστιν, αὕτη ἂν εἴη, ἣ τις οἴός τ’ ἔσται πᾶν παντὶ ὁμοιοῦν τῶν δυνατῶν καὶ οἷς δυνατόν, καὶ ἄλλου ὁμοιοῦντος καὶ ἀποκρυπτομένου εἰς φῶς ἄγειν.

Having established that rhetoric may concern anything and may be performed anywhere and is a kind of disputation, Socrates proceeds to demonstrate that skillful disputation depends on knowledge of the truth. It is not entirely clear whether Socrates by this means to suggest that the activity of disputing is identical with the activity of speaking in general, about anything, or whether he only regards it as a particularly important example of this. But it seems fair to assume that his demonstration is intended to make plausible the overall claim that, in order to speak adequately about anything, one needs to engage sufficiently in philosophy.

To show that disputation presupposes knowledge of the truth in order to be performed adequately or skillfully, Socrates focuses on the phenomenon of deception (*apatê*), apparently because deception, when it is the result of a dispute, is apt to illustrate what Socrates means by the complex claim that disputation performed with skill will enable one “to make everything which is capable of being made to resemble something else resemble everything which it is capable of being made to resemble”.

The first part of the argument runs as follows. Deception is most likely to come about concerning things that differ only a little from each other (261e6-7). Moreover, if you seek to deceive someone by making a thing appear as something else, it is easier to do this if you do it by small steps (262a2-3). But this means that deception requires precise knowledge of the resemblance and the dissimilarity between things (262a5-7).

If we try to illustrate what Socrates is arguing through the previous speeches – they are, after all, said to illustrate the activity of disputation (see 262c5-7) – we may say that, in order to make *eros* appear as something (e.g. either as good or as bad) you need to know what other good or bad things *eros* resembles. If you possess that knowledge, you may convince someone that it is bad by establishing that *eros* is similar to something bad, such as drunkenness, or convince him that it is good, by likening it to something good, such as inspired poetry.

The real crux of the argument, however, lies in the following claim: one cannot discern (*diagignôskein*) the resemblances other things may have to a particular thing, if one is ignorant of what each thing truly or really is (*alêtheian hekastou*; 262a9-11). And this means that one cannot deceive another in a skillful manner, unless one has recognized what each of the things is (*ho estin hekaston tôn ontôn*; 262b5-8). By this, Socrates must mean that one needs to know what something *essentially* is (the expression *ho estin* at 262b8 taken together

with *alêtheian hekastou* at 262a9 indicates this) if one is to deceive someone through the use of skillful disputation. If we turn to Socrates' own speeches, the claim must be that, in order to deceive another concerning *eros* in a skillful manner, one must know what *eros* essentially is.

We should note that Socrates is not making the implausible suggestion that you cannot deceive another about something unless you understand the essence of that something – for this, you would probably need to know only how that thing appears to someone else. What Socrates is claiming is rather that you cannot do so *skillfully*, or *with expertise* (see *technikos* at 262c5), without knowing the essence of the thing you are trying to 'dress up' as something else. The reasoning behind this claim must be something like the following: in order to deceive other people in a skillful manner you must know the essence of things, because this essence explains why certain things appear to resemble certain other things; the reason why *eros* may resemble drunkenness, for instance, is not simply our common opinions about *eros*, but rather something in the nature of *eros* itself.

Socrates may thereby be said to have demonstrated that one needs to engage sufficiently in philosophy in order to be able to speak adequately about anything. For philosophy or dialectic, the 'science' of the philosopher, is, according to claims about dialectic elsewhere in Plato, what gives us knowledge of essences (see especially *Rep.* 525b9-d3, 533a10-c6 and 534b3-4; see also *Phaed.* 78d1-3 with 99e4-102a1). As we have also seen, Socrates' reinterpretation of the concept of rhetoric indicates that the argument is not concerned with traditional rhetoric but with speaking in general; at the dramatic level of the dialogue this reinterpretation can be seen as intended to redirect the attention of the rhetoric-loving Phaedrus. What we still need to consider is how collection and division fit into Socrates' general claim about the dependence of adequate speech on philosophy.

#### *Collection and division in dialectical inquiry and the power to act and suffer (269d2-271c5)*

When Socrates concludes the first part of his argument concerning speaking and philosophizing, he proceeds to suggest, at 262c10-d2, that his two speeches on *eros* illustrated "how someone who knows the truth can mislead his audience by making play in what he says". He thereby presents himself as knowing the nature of *eros*. As we saw in section III, this knowledge results in part from something other than collection and division. As we also saw, collection and division were used in his second speech as part of a larger inquiry, while this was not true of his first speech. When we now turn to our last passage, we return to our main

question, how the use of collection and division as general procedures underlying speaking and thinking differ from the use of these procedures within dialectical inquiry.

Prior to our passage, in 268a5-269c5, Socrates criticizes conventional rhetoric for being a mere knack without any scientific or technical merit, a critique that leads Phaedrus to ask Socrates “how and from where” one may acquire “the skill which belongs to the real expert in rhetoric and the really persuasive speaker (*tên tou tô[i] onti rhêtorikou te kai pithanou technê*)” (269c9-d1). This skill is not the self-professed skill of sophists like Gorgias and Protagoras, but the skill that Socrates earlier termed *antilogikê*.

Socrates’ begins his explanation how one acquires this skill with the ironic assertion that Pericles became the most consummate of all when it comes to rhetoric because he acquired “babbling (*adoleschia*) and lofty talk about nature (*meteôrologias phuseôs peri*)” from Anaxagoras, who also helped him arrive at “the nature of mind and the absence of mind (*epi physin nou te kai anoias aphikomenos*)”; for these abilities, Socrates suggests, are required by all the major crafts (269e1-270a8).<sup>50</sup>

Behind the irony, however, is a serious point, namely that rhetoric as now conceived of by Socrates – as a kind of soul-leading that depends on disputation – must be concerned with the nature of things. More precisely, Socrates proceeds to claim that rhetoric needs to determine the nature of the soul (*dei dielesthai phusin ... psuches*; 270b4-5), since rhetoric is analogous to medicine; but whereas medicine treats of the body, rhetoric treats of the soul (270b1-2).<sup>51</sup> This means that, if one as a rhetorician intends to install lawful pursuits and virtue in someone else, and to do so skillfully rather than on the basis of a knack and experience, one will need to know what soul is, just as a doctor, in order to produce health skillfully, needs to know the nature of the body (270a4-9).

It could therefore appear that Socrates is changing the direction of his discussion of rhetoric, from the claim that *antilogikê* must be based on knowledge concerning essences to the claim that it must be grounded in knowledge of the nature of the soul. We need not see this as a new, separate argument, however, but may regard it as complementary; rhetoric, conceived as *antilogikê*, must, in order to become a real skill, be based on knowledge

<sup>50</sup> I take for granted without argument that Socrates’ praise of Pericles and Anaxagoras is ironical.

<sup>51</sup> This view of rhetoric probably has a basis in historical fact; Gorgias thus likens the power of words to magic rituals in his *Encomium of Helen*, 8-10; see also *Theaetetus* 167a5-d2.

concerning both the matters it treats of and the nature of the soul, since the soul is what it aims at influencing. Moreover, even while the nature of the soul is at the center of Socrates' final argument concerning the basis for *antilogikê*, the discussion concerning the way one acquires knowledge of its nature is presented in general terms and concerns any matter that we may wish to inquire into, as is made explicit at both 270c10-d1 (*peri hotououn phuseôs*) and 271b7-c1 (*oute ti allo oute touto*). Emphasizing this point does not amount to denying that the soul has a very prominent place in the overall argument of the *Phaedrus*, concerned as it is with self-knowledge, *eros*, and the leading of souls; but it does amount to claiming that we are allowed to use Socrates' description of the inquiry into the nature of the soul as a basis for understanding dialectical inquiry in general.<sup>52</sup>

Socrates begins his argument concerning the requirements that must be met in order to obtain knowledge of the soul by posing the following question:

Then do you think it is possible to understand the nature of soul satisfactorily without understanding the nature of the whole? (270c1-2)<sup>53</sup>

The expression "the nature of the whole" (*tês tou holou phuseôs*) may give one the impression that Socrates is suggesting that one needs to know the totality of the things that are (*to pan*) in order to determine the nature of the soul adequately. But this is not the case. When Phaedrus suggests that Hippocrates is of the same opinion when it comes to understanding the body (270c3-5),<sup>54</sup> Socrates suggests that they should look both at what Hippocrates *and* at what the true account say about nature (270c9-10) and proceeds to state the following:

Shouldn't one reflect about the nature of anything like this: first, is the thing about which we will want to be experts ourselves and be capable of making other experts simple or complex? (270c10-d3).<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> For this reason, I for the present purpose leave aside Socrates' claims about the required knowledge of different kinds of speeches and souls.

<sup>53</sup> ψυχῆς οὖν φύσιν ἀξίως λόγου κατανοῆσαι οἷε δυνατόν εἶναι ἄνευ τῆς τοῦ ὅλου φύσεως;

<sup>54</sup> Here the expression probably means the whole of nature, but see the discussion in De Vries, *Commentary*, note ad loc.

<sup>55</sup> ἄρ' οὐχ ὥδε δεῖ διανοεῖσθαι περὶ ὄτουοῦν φύσεως: πρῶτον μὲν, ἀπλοῦν ἢ πολυειδές ἐστὶν οὗ πέρι βουλευσόμεθα εἶναι αὐτοὶ τεχνικοὶ καὶ ἄλλον δυνατοὶ ποιεῖν . . .



This suggests that Socrates by the expression “the nature of the whole” means “the nature of wholeness” rather than “the nature of all there is”.<sup>56</sup> For in order to decide whether something is simple or complex, one has to understand what that something is as a whole, not what the whole of reality is. Socrates then proceeds to state the following:

Next, if it is simple, we should consider, shouldn't we, what natural power it has for acting and on what, or what power it has for being acted upon, and by what; and if it has more forms than one, we should count these, and see in the case of each, as in the case where it had only one, with which of them it is its nature to do what, or with which to have what done to it by what (270d3-7)<sup>57</sup>

As can be seen from the whole passage 270c9-d8, Socrates spells out two distinct tasks that must be carried out in order to determine the nature of something. First, one needs to decide what that something is as a whole, and this requires deciding whether that something is simple or complex and, if complex, determining exactly how many parts it has. Next, one needs to decide what power to act and to be acted upon the thing possesses, either the whole thing itself or its constitutive parts. That these are indeed two consecutive tasks is emphasized when Socrates proceeds to spell out how one should determine the nature of the soul – as *proton* at 271a5 and *deuteron* at 271a10 make clear. These two tasks are what is required in order to indicate “precisely the essential nature (*tên ousian ... tês phuseôs*)” of the soul (270d9-e5) or, indeed, of any other matter (271b7-c1).

The consequence of these claims for our general question concerning collection and division is this: the first task described by Socrates – deciding whether a thing is simple or complex – seems to be what collection and division are intended to help one perform, even if the procedures do not on their own ensure that this task is performed adequately, as the analysis of Socrates' speeches made clear. Socrates used collection and division both in determining what *eros* is and in determining the nature of the soul, as we have seen, but the

<sup>56</sup> This view is defended convincingly by Hackforth, *Phaedrus*, 150, and De Vries, *Commentary*.

<sup>57</sup> ἔπειτα δέ, ἂν μὲν ἀπλοῦν ἦ, σκοπεῖν τὴν δύναμιν αὐτοῦ, τίνα πρὸς τί πέφυκεν εἰς τὸ δρᾶν ἔχον ἢ τίνα εἰς τὸ παθεῖν ὑπὸ τοῦ, ἐὰν δὲ πλείω εἶδη ἔχη, ταῦτα ἀριθμησάμενον, ὅπερ ἐφ' ἐνός, τοῦτ' ἰδεῖν ἐφ' ἑκάστου, τῷ τί ποιεῖν αὐτὸ πέφυκεν ἢ τῷ τί παθεῖν ὑπὸ τοῦ;

determination of *eros* and the soul found in the first speech were made questionable and rejected through the assumptions concerning madness and the nature of the soul in the second speech.<sup>58</sup> It now turns out that the use of collection and division within philosophical inquiry is limited not only in the sense that it depends on some kind of prior understanding of the subject to which they are applied. For it seems clear that Socrates is not suggesting that the attempt to decide what power the thing inquired into possesses can be decided upon through the use of collection and division. Deciding what power the thing inquired into possesses rather seems to be a separate task, to be undertaken after collection and division have been employed. We may suggest that the attempt to decide what power a thing or its constitutive parts possess is a way of testing whether the collections and divisions performed on something have been carried out correctly. In the second speech, where Socrates stipulates four kinds of divine madness (244a5-245c5) in the attempt to show that *eros* has a share in the good kind of madness, he is in turn led to stipulate three parts of the soul (246a6-b6). On this basis he then proceeds in the remainder of the speech to give a highly complex account of the way these three parts interact with one another and act on and react to their respective objects, and this is what finally enables him to give an account of the power of *eros*. This suggests that the account of the powers the various parts of the soul possess is meant to support the suggested division of the soul and of divine madness, rather than being the result of these divisions.

If these observations are to the point, it follows that, while collection and division may be necessary for arriving at essential definitions, they are not sufficient. We may conclude that the commonly accepted claim that collection and division are introduced as a new method for arriving at essential definitions is wrong for the simple reason that they are unable to provide essential definitions on their own. As Socrates describes collection and

<sup>58</sup> That collection and division are applied to the soul as well as to madness in the two speeches is clear from 237d6-9 and, especially, 246a3-4 with 253c7-d1. It should be noted that division here divides the soul into parts or aspects (described as a black and white horse and a charioteer in the second speech), and not souls into sub-kinds of souls. Socrates does proceed to describe different kinds of souls in the second speech after having finished describing the three main 'parts' at 253d1, just as he mentions a third task to be carried out by the rhetorician at 271b1-5, namely to arrange or classify (*diatassein*) the kinds (*genê*) of souls and speeches; whether or not collection and division is meant to help us make this kind of classification is a question I will not enter into here.

division in the *Phaedrus*, he makes clear that it is only in combination with other considerations and insights that they may help us at arriving at such definitions. It is this complex combination, I suggest, that Socrates calls the “ability to look to one and over what are naturally many”.

Moreover, if it is correct that the aim of collection and division is to help us understand the connection between complex wholes and their parts, these procedures are not intended to help us in “the mapping of reality”, a task of dialectic that many commentators see as specific to the later Plato,<sup>59</sup> – or at least this is not the only or the primary aim of collection and division. Rather, collection and division are intended to help us in addressing a problem that stands at the center of dialogues such as the *Gorgias*, the *Protagoras* and the *Republic*, namely how something that is one – for instance the soul, knowledge, or virtue – can also be many, in the sense that it contains different parts or aspects. Socrates’ claim that he has up until now called those able to look to one and over what are naturally many dialectical (266b7-c1) may therefore be understood to suggest that Plato’s Socrates in general uses the word ‘dialectical’ to designate people who are able to see a complex matter correctly, understanding both this matter as a whole and in regard to its various parts or aspects.

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<sup>59</sup> The expression is taken from Rowe, *Plato: Phaedrus*, note to 266d3 ff., but it is a very common view in the secondary literature; it ultimately goes back to Stenzel’s interpretation of Platonic dialectic.

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