Christopher Moore
How to 'Know Thyself' in Plato's Phaedrus

Abstract: Socrates says he wants to "know himself" only once in the extant Socratic literature: after his long discussion of myth-rectification in the Phaedrus: What is this self Socrates wants to know? Is it his concrete individuality; is it a set of abstract truths about humans or souls in general; or is it nothing about selves at all? He hardly says, and the scholarship is split. Why does Socrates avow his concern for self-knowledge, of all places, only immediately after his diatribe about myth-rectification? Is myth-rectification especially popular but useless, or are myths rightly deployed only in investigations of one's own nature? Neither view explains why the discussion of myth-rectification, so early in the dialogue, is so detailed (229b4–229e4, 26 OCT lines), and Socrates seems to move between topics almost by free-association. This paper argues that by setting these two issues together – myth-rectification and knowing oneself – Socrates shows that the portrait of the myth-rectifier is to serve a model for the self-knower. Dealing with myths of the sort interesting to Socrates – concerned with civic geography and heroic lineages – involves piecemeal efforts and the acknowledgement of one's civic commitments, to the history, identity, and alliances of one's city. Becoming able to know oneself in the way interesting to Socrates also involves piecemeal rectification and acknowledgement of one's commitments, here to what is true about living well and worthy of pursuit. This latter work of rectification and acknowledgement requires knowing both about human nature generally and about one's current condition specifically. Knowing oneself thus depends not just on epistemological considerations, for example about what can one know about souls and characters, but on practical ones as well, for example about how one can make oneself a better person.

Keywords: self-knowledge, socrates, myth-rectification

Christopher Moore: Penn State University – Philosophy, 243 Sparks Building, State College, Pennsylvania 16801, United States, E-mail: crm21@psu.edu

I Introduction

Socrates says he wants to "know himself" only once in the extant Socratic literature: after his long discussion of myth-rectification[1] in the *Phaedrus*:

> But for these things I have no leisure at all. The cause of it, my friend, is the following. I am not yet capable, in line with the Delphic inscription, to know myself (οὐ δύναμαί πω κατὰ τὸ Δελφικὸν γράμμα γνῶναι ἐμαυτόν 229e5–6).[2]

What is this self (ἐμαυτόν) Socrates wants to know? Is it his concrete individuality; is it a set of abstract truths about humans or souls in general; or is it nothing about selves at all? He hardly says, and the scholarship is split.[3] Why does Socrates avow his concern for self-knowledge, of all places, only immediately after his diatribe about myth-rectification? Is myth-rectification especially popular but useless, or are myths rightly deployed only in investigations of one's own nature? Neither view explains why the discussion of myth-rectification, so early in the dialogue, is so detailed (229b4–229e4, 26 OCT lines), and Socrates seems to move between topics almost by free-association. This paper argues that by setting these two issues together – myth-rectification and knowing oneself – Socrates shows that the portrait of the myth-rectifier is to serve a model for the self-knower. Dealing with myths of the sort interesting to Socrates – concerned with civic geography and heroic lineages – involves piecemeal efforts

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1 "Myth-rectification" renders ἐπανορθοῦσθαι, translated elsewhere as "rehabilitate" (Jowett), "explain" (Fowler), "give a rational account" (Nehamas and Woodruff), "set to rights" (Rowe), "put into proper [shape]" (Hamilton), "correct" (Waterfield), "demythologize (implied by Ferrari 1987, 10–11), "rectify" (Yunis), "account for" (Anderson), and "straighten out" (Nichols). See §III below for full discussion.

2 Translations throughout are by the author unless noted; lineation from the OCT.

3 Regarding the first two possibilities: Griswold 1986, 43, thinks it is the individual; Yunis 2011 ad 229e5 and Werner 2012, 35–38, think it is the human generally; Rowe 1986 ad 230a3–6 thinks it is both, seen from the Socratic and Platonic perspectives respectively; both Nichols 1998, 94–101, and Nicholson 1999, 22–3, are ambiguous between Socrates' own soul and human soul in general; Ferrari 1987 says that it is "the human and especially the philosophical soul" – that is, "general truths about [one's] human nature" – but, also, "what it is to live the good life." Regarding the third: Westra 1992 believes that self-knowledge itself is impossible; the command "know thyself" should be taken as "understand the contrast between a person's physical being and a soul, and grasp the nature of the latter and its destiny and most appropriate state." Rappe 1995 believes it is possible, if one identifies the "self" with the "epistemic self," one's nature as a knower per se. Annas 1985 says that Plato, in his early career, believed that self-knowledge was possible only insofar as we take it as knowledge of something objective, namely one's position in society, and thus of justice and *sôphrosunê*; in his later career, he believed that the self was not the right object of knowledge, since it is not an object distinct from the knower.

and the acknowledgement of one's civic commitments, to the history, identity, and alliances of one's city. Becoming able to know oneself in the way interesting to Socrates also involves piecemeal rectification and acknowledgement of one's commitments, here to what is true about living well and worthy of pursuit. This latter work of rectification and acknowledgement requires knowing both about human nature generally and about one's current condition specifically. Knowing oneself thus depends not just on epistemological considerations, for example about what one can know about souls and characters, but on practical ones as well, for example about how one can make oneself a better person.

This fresh reading of Socrates' interpretation of the Delphic inscription – self-knowledge is practically oriented toward self-improvement, as modeled by the process of myth-rectification – depends on three subordinate interpretative claims. First, Socrates says that myth-rectification (ἐπανορθοῦσθαι 229d6) is laborious because it has to take the stories one-by-one (ἀνάγκη 229d5... ἕκαστον 230e6). He does not explain why this is necessary. The nature of the task gives the reason. Myth-rectification would be easier if every historical story of the mythic type – that is, the fictitious or erroneous type – could be dismissed at once. But myth-rectification starts from the premise that Greek history does not distinguish between human and legendary history, between heroes and monstrous creatures, and so each story must be assessed in turn. Myth-rectification also assumes that repair, not just rejection, is the goal, and since different stories have gone wrong in different ways, each needs its own correction. As a model for self-knowledge, this explains the reason Socrates is not yet able (οὐ δύναμαι πω) to know himself, despite having surely tried for a long time. Self-knowledge is not merely introspecting or having true beliefs about one's inner world. It is judging which of one's commitments are worthiest of acknowledgement, and making those, rather than others, the commitments on which one acts. This takes a long time: in part, because one's dubious commitments are not so marked and therefore one has to deal with them in turn; and in part, because the self-knower aims to commit himself to goodness, not just reject false beliefs.

Second, Socrates says that myth-rectifiers bring the stories in line with the plausible (προσβιβᾷ κατὰ τὸ εἰκός 229e6). Because Socrates later expresses skepticism about the rhetorician's confidence in plausibility-arguments (272d7–273d6), he may seem to reject myth-rectification because it too relies on plausibility. But he does not say this. He instead says only that having to deal with each story one-by-one makes rectification take too long. The reliance on plausibility in fact cannot be the problem, since what is plausible is simply what seems true to a person. A problem arises only if one thinks one can pursue the plausible without at the same time pursuing the truth; this is Socrates' criticism of Tisias, but not of the

myth-rectifiers. Just so, when a person audits his own beliefs, he aims to make them plausible – true from his perspective – because this is the only way to bring them closer to the truth.

Third, Socrates finishes his remark about self-knowledge by saying he wonders how he compares to Typhon.

> So giving leave to these things, being persuaded by what's conventional about them, I look, as I just said, not into them but into myself, whether I happen to be some kind of beast more twisted and furious than Typhon, or a gentler and simpler living creature, sharing in some divine and un-puffed-up portion by nature. (230a1–6)

Socrates says that he wants to know on which side of Typhon he is. But knowing this would not amount to having attained self-knowledge. It would be prefatory. Were Socrates more violent and hubristic than Typhon, he would make little progress coming to acknowledge his most significant commitments and aiming to conform to them. Only were he calmer and more steady would he be able to gain competence over himself and work to make himself better. By mentioning in this section only the comparison with Typhon, Socrates reveals his view of self-knowledge as fundamentally a matter of being able to make oneself better.

This paper begins with an overview of 229b4–230a6 and then shows that Socrates presents the discussion of myth-rectification as a model for self-knowledge. Once we explain why myth-rectifiers must go myth-by-myth, we can see why becoming able to know oneself takes so long. We can also judge the significance of myth-rectification proceeding in terms of plausibility. Socrates' remarks about his Typhonicity confirm the above analysis.

II Myth-rectification and self-knowledge

Socrates' claim about self-knowledge is intertwined with his remarks about myth-rectification. Socrates and Phaedrus have been looking for a place from which Phaedrus could recite Lysias' speech. They turn toward the river outside Athens' walls.

> PHAEDRUS: Tell me, Socrates, is it not here from where, from the Ilissus, Boreas is said to have seized Oreithuia? – SOCRATES: So it's said.
> PH.: So was it from here? At least the rivulets appear charming and pure and clear, and just right for girls to play beside.
> S.: No, but from down about two or three stades, where we cross over to the sanctuary in Agra. And somewhere there is the altar of Boreas itself.
> PH.: I haven't really noticed. But tell me, by god, Socrates, are you persuaded that this story is true? (229b4–c5)

This reference to the Boreas story is hardly mere trivia. Athens took Boreas as a favorite son-in-law. Though he abducted Oreithuia – perhaps on her procession to the Acropolis – he also married her, and then twice destroyed the Persian fleet.[4] The Athenians commissioned Simonides to celebrate the second defeat, and the song was sung every year at the Festival of Athena to invoke the winds to accompany the Panathenaic ship to the Acropolis.[5] Both Aeschylus and Sophocles wrote plays about Oreithuia and the Boreads.[6] Vase-painters decorated dozens of pots with surprisingly sedate scenes of the abduction.[7] References to Boreas also had, popularly, an erotic dimension.[8] Ibycus likens *erôs* to mania and to Thracian Boreas, a parching lightning rushing from Aphrodite.[9] Just as Ibycus had contrasted the turmoil of love with the calm garden of the maidens, in Hesiod's contemplation on Winter, harsh Boreas is said to violate everything except the virginal maidens warm by their mothers' sides.[10] Given Phaedrus' praise of the bucolic rivulets and Socrates' song about the grove (230b2–c5), the figure of Boreas is doubly well-suited for the context. His being depicted as a winged horse,[11] and contrasted with Typhoeus,[12] makes him even more deeply relevant to the dialogue.

Given the connection of Boreas to talk about Athens and love, key themes in the *Phaedrus*,[13] Phaedrus' question about him is remarkable, and there are a range of possible explanations. Has recent political discussion activated his curiosity?[14] Does he have an antiquarian interest in stories about the gods?[15] Might his concern for appearance and aptness (φαίνεται, ἐπιτήδεια 229b8) show

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4 Acusilaus fr. 30 Jacoby; Hdt. 6.44, 7.189, Paus. 1.19.6 (and 1.38.2, 3.15.1–4, 5.19.1).

5 Simonides fr. 534 Page; Munn 2000, 26, 30–1.

6 Aesch. fr. 281 *TrGF*; Soph. fr. 870 N (found in Strabo 7.3.1 who cites this section of the *Phdr.* in its connection), *Ant.* 981–6.

7 Gardner 1898, Walters 1931, Agard 1966, Simon 1967.

8 Keuls 1993, 52; Kaempf-Dimitriadou 1979.

9 286 P: ἐμοὶ δ᾽ ἔρος οὐδεμίαν κατάκοιτος ὥραν τε ὑπὸ στεροπᾶς φλέγων Θρηίκοις Βορέας ἀίσσων παρὰ Κύπριδος ἀζαλέαις μανίαισιν ἐρεμνὸς ἀθαμβὴς ἐγκρατέως πεδόθεν φλάσει ἡμετέρας φρένας (6–12).

10 Hes. *WD* 519–523.

11 Boreas a horse: *Il.* 20.220.

12 Hesiod, noting the good services Boreas and his brothers provide (*Th.* 378–9), contrasts his usefulness (θνητοῖς μέγ᾽ ὄνειαρ 871) with the painful random gales caused by Typhoeus (869–74; an alternative name for Typhon).

13 Athens: 227a1–b5, c9–d2, 230d3–e1, 243c2–d3, 257c4–258c10, 278e4–279c8; love: 227c5 and passim.

14 Th. 2.29 suggests that considerations about allegiances with Thrace brought up discussion of relevant myths.

15 Yunis 2011, ad 229b4–5.

his affinity for plausibility over truth (cf. τὸ εἰκὸς 229e6)?[16] The dialogue does not develop any of these possibilities. It leaves us to infer only two concrete facts from Phaedrus' questions. Both questions express his diffidence about the power of examination. He relies on someone else for a view rather than resolving to think about it himself. But not only does he want to hear rather than to think. He wants to hear the result of a thought rather than the thought itself. He wants Socrates to report his belief about the Boreas story – this matter of significance to Athens – rather than account for the plausible and implausible features of the story.

Socrates' response certifies that Phaedrus had wanted to hear a simple report, and that he was wrong to, by explicitly avoiding giving him one. Socrates instead introduces the method of the *sophoi*, the intellectuals he later calls myth-rectifiers.

> If I weren't convinced [sc. that the story is true] – as the intellectuals aren't – I wouldn't be out of the ordinary; I'd make the sophisticated claim that a Borean gale, while Oreithuia was playing with Pharmaceia, came down off the nearby rocks and thrust her off, and that it was by coming to her end in this way that it came to be said that she had been seized by Boreas – or from the Areopagus, for that story too is told, that from there and not from around here she was seized. (229c6–d2)

Socrates says that some people are not persuaded by the Boreas story. He then reflects on the kind of examination that follows such an episode of skepticism. Such examination tries to explain why other people *are* persuaded by the story. It assumes that a central key fact is right: Oreithuia really was taken, and Boreas was responsible. It tries simply to explain that fact in a more plausible way. Boreas the north wind is a phenomenon one might regularly experience, and so it could plausibly explain Oreithuia's being seized; Boreas the monster is not, and so it could not plausibly explain it. What then explains why people have ever told the myth? Socrates' implication is that some people must have had a misunderstanding, misheard someone else, or made another sort of mistake, and they reported what they thought they heard to be so. Socrates says that there is another version of the myth. All historical narratives are susceptible to some uncertainties.

We do not know whether Socrates invented this rectification, or whether he had similar rectifications to draw from.[17] It does not appear to matter. Socrates

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16 Ferrari 1987, 4, 9–12.

17 Approximately these two versions of the myth are attributed to Acusilaus, frr. 30–31 Jacoby. Paleaphatus Περὶ Ἀπίστων 22 says that Boreas was a man, not a wind; Heraclitus the Paradoxographer Περὶ Ἀπίστων 28 emphasizes that he was a king. Yunis 2011, ad 229c5, claims that Socrates' rectification "is an obvious one"; it would take no great originality to invent it. All

continues to a more important point, that coming up with such plausible stories is not for him.

> But I, Phaedrus, while I find these sorts of things charming in other ways, I find the man responsible for them to have too much cleverness and labor and to be not altogether fortunate, if only because for him it is necessary afterwards to rectify also the form of the Hippocentaurs, and again that of the Chimaera, and then a mob flows of such Gorgons and Pegaguses and masses of other intractable, strange, and extraordinary natures. If someone isn't convinced by these things he will bring each in line with what is plausible, using some rustic kind of wisdom, and he will need much leisure. (229d2–e4)

Socrates gives a single reason for disapproving of the life of the myth-rectifying intellectual. He cannot stop at a single rectification. He is forced to confront an unending stream of mythical beings. The necessity of continued rectification uses up all one's time. Socrates does not express doubt about the success of such rectifications. His charge is that this unavoidable burden is simply too laborious. He has something more pressing to do.

> But for these things I have no leisure at all. The cause of it, my friend, is the following. I am not yet capable, in line with the Delphic inscription, to know myself. Indeed it appears laughable to me, being still ignorant about this, to look into alien things. So giving leave to these things, being persuaded by what's conventional about them, I look, as I just said, not into them but into myself, whether I happen to be some kind of beast more twisted and furious than Typhon, or a gentler and simpler living creature, sharing in some divine and un-puffed-up portion by nature. (229e4–230a6)

The myths and their rectification may be interesting or politically relevant, but Socrates judges the myths alien, outside the scope of his urgent focus on himself. This judgment leaves him to accept those myths as culture presents them to him; he believes what is conventionally thought about them (τῷ νομιζομένῳ 230a2). By contrast, he investigates himself. We will discover what Socrates' self-investigation involves, rather than simply assuming what it is, by looking to what the myth-rectifiers' investigation involves. If the contrast is complete, we will see that just as the intellectuals do not simply accept what they first thought about the myths, Socrates does not simply accept what he first thought about himself. He must determine which of his ideas, assumptions, and commitments he finds unpersuasive and then try to give them a better account. It is a matter of querying oneself and making oneself acceptable to oneself. Socratic dialectic, done socially or privately, is probably his means. As is clear from the dialogues, this process takes all one's time.

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the same, Socrates is highly competent at making difficult things look easy; consider his two speeches in this dialogue.

III Two analogical practices

The narrative of the passage brings into parallel myth-rectification and knowing oneself. In particular, the language with which Socrates describes myth-rectification is the language of self-knowledge and improvement he uses elsewhere.

Both practices share the language of searching. Being ignorant about himself, Socrates says, it would be laughable "to look into alien things" (τὰ ἀλλότρια σκοπεῖν 230a1). A sentence later, Socrates says of himself, "I look into not those things, but into myself" (σκοπῶ οὐ ταῦτα ἀλλ' ἐμαυτόν 230a3). In both places, the verb σκοπεῖν ("look into," "investigate") is taken as the appropriate one for both activities. The work done on implausible myths is elsewhere described as "inquiring into,"[18] "deconstructing,"[19] "curing,"[20] "treatment,"[21] or "revealing as believable."[22] That σκοπεῖν is Socrates' choice here recalls his constant reference to dialectical examination as σκοπεῖν. Plato uses the word hundreds of times. Just in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates speaks about investigating Phaedrus' beliefs that came from wise people (260a9, cf. 260a6); whether their account accords with Hippocrates' (270c7); whether Lysias' speech is structured organismically (264c7); what the powers are of anything one investigates (270d3); and how to prepare a good speech (259e1). The Palinode narrator also says that the followers of Zeus look into whether their beloveds are predisposed toward philosophy, and then help them become more philosophical (252e2). Speaking of myth-rectification as a process of σκοπεῖν, then, assimilates it to more familiar Socratic practices.

The other word Socrates uses to describe myth-work is ἐπανορθοῦσθαι (229d6). All ancient authors use it with positive inflection, meaning to "rectify" or "restore" some situation to a good state.[23] The earliest extant usage is from Thucydides, at the climax of Nicias' speech; the general tells the Athenians to bring themselves back up from their low point (7.77.7.6). Aristophanes uses it in the context of fixing up a mess (*Lys.* 528), and Xenophon paraphrases Socrates as saying that friends help each other when they "fall down" (σφαλλόμενους *Mem.* 2.4.7.1). In the *Laws* and the *Republic* Plato uses the term in constitutional

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18 ἱστορήσας, Palaephatus 269.9

19 ἀνασκευή, Heraclitus Paradoxographer, epigraph

20 θεραπεία, ibid.

21 ἀντιφάρμακον,Heraclitus *Homeric Allegories* 22.1; on these last three terms, see Stern 2003, 62–64.

22 ἐμφῆναι πίστιν, Eust. 1504.55 Stallbaum

23 Thompson 1868 gives a proper translation but sees the wrong object when he says that "the office of the mythologer is humorously said to be to 'rectify' or 'integrate' by restoring to their proper shape the monsters he has to do with"; as I show below, rectification applies especially to speeches, reports, and norms.

contexts, referring to the actions legislators take to maintain the quality of a legal system.[24] More frequently he uses it in conversational and investigative contexts, to refer to making arguments more consistent, articulated, responsive, adequate, or true.[25] People should help each other give the best argument possible (*Tht*. 167e7); the young can correct the errors of their negligent elders (*Grg*. 461c7; *Tht*. 143a4); and analyses may be improved upon further reflection (*La*. 200b4).[26] Socrates' efforts to make Simonides consistent, in his poem about becoming and being good, by distinguishing key psychological words, are twice called ἐπανόρθωμα (*Prot*. 340a8, d7).[27] This means that for Plato, the term is connected with the central practical-analytical function of philosophy, improving the way one thinks, especially in dialectical settings. (Even the legal cases have this sense of intellectual and moral improvement.) If Socrates says he always seeks self-knowledge, but we also know him to do this mostly through conversations in which he is constantly correcting and being corrected, then readers would take ἐπανορθοῦσθαι to be a term appropriate both for myth-correction and self-correction. This cross-over terminology would suggest shared processes.

The same can be said for the way by which the myth-rectifiers do their work, "using some kind of rustic wisdom" (ἅτε ἀγροίκῳ τινὶ σοφίᾳ χρώμενος 229e7). It is not immediately clear what this is supposed to mean, even if we note a joke on the wild beasts that get rectified and on Phaedrus and Socrates' journey beyond the city walls. Perhaps the most we can say is that Socrates means that the myth-rectifiers must speak bluntly, even cynically, puncturing traditional pieties and accusing their predecessors of confusion.[28] This may not, of course, be the way the myth-rectifiers refer to themselves; it is Socrates' own understanding of their practice.[29] What is notable is that in the Socratic conversations written by Plato, the adjective ἀγροῖκος almost always refers to saying what one takes to be true irrespective of social niceties and conventional morality. Socrates apologizes for his "crudeness" in saying that death matters not at all to him (*Apol*. 32d3); that the argument against doing injustice has never been contravened

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24 *Leg*. 644b3, 653d4, 769c2, d7, e8, 772b3, c3, 781b4, 951c2, 957b2; *Rep*. 361a2, b2, 425a5, e6, 426e6.
25 *Sym*. 180d2, *Grg*. 462a2, *Ep. II* 311d4, d7, *Rep*. 604d1, *Euthyp*. 9d2, *Pol*. 276e6, *Prot*. 340d8.
26 The frequent uses by Isocrates and Isaeus are consistent with these other early fourth-century uses.
27 Socrates uses this noun to refer to attempts to improve the definition of knowledge at *Tht*. 183a2.
28 Cf. *Euthyd*. 283e2, 284e9, where Dionysodorus is accused of speaking rustically in saying that some people – unbeknownst to them – want their friends to die.
29 On ἅτε see Smyth §2085.

(*Grg.* 509a1); and that he would like to ask more questions redeeming the usefulness of philosophy (*Eras.* 136e5). So-called rustic speech contrasts with polite silence.[30] Socrates' efforts of self- and other-examination has always been found uncultured and direct (*Apol.* 17c9–d1), as speaking without urbane restraint (cf. *Phdr.* 269b1). He refers to his urgent request to know the difference between knowledge and wisdom, to get a conversation going, as being "rustic" and from a "love of language" (ἐγὼ ὑπὸ φιλολογίας ἀγροικίζομαι, προθυμούμενος ἡμᾶς ποιῆσαι διαλέγεσθαι *Tht.* 146a5–8).[31] Saying that the myth-rectifier uses some sort of rustic wisdom would then put one in mind of the unimpeded register of the Socratic search for true and good commitments.

The myth-rectifier works on those stories that are unconvincing (ἀπιστοίην 229c6, ἀπιστῶν e2). Socrates regularly introduces his own investigations with the same terminology. Socrates' most famous investigation into knowledge begins with him saying that we distrust what people say when we learn that they are not expert (*Tht.* 144e6). Socrates admits that he doubted, before Protagoras' big speech, that virtue could be taught; while he does doubt it less now, he has just a small question to ask (*Prot.* 319b1). In the reverse direction, what he once found certain before talking to Hippias, a man famed for wisdom, he now might doubt, if Hippias does not agree (*HM* 300c10). Just before the heart of his inquiry into language in the *Cratylus*, Socrates says that he has expressed what he thinks is right, but admits that it is not set in stone. Since his interlocutors have already done more investigation, he expects to have his views revised by them; he even hopes to become their students. Once Cratylus says that he agrees with Socrates, Socrates says that he has long been amazed – and doubtful (ἀπιστῶ) – about his own wisdom. "Thus it seems necessary to me to consider yet again what I even mean. For one being deceived by oneself is of all things worst." One must always return to a topic, reviewing and reassessing it (*Crat.* 428d2). In

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30 *Grg.* 462e6: Socrates is about to say what he really thinks of rhetoric, "if it's not so rude to speak the truth" (μὴ ἀγροικότερον ᾖ τὸ ἀληθὲς ειπεῖν); he seems to be echoing Polus' complaint that Socrates' commitment to consistency is a sign of "crudeness" (461c5). *Phdr.* 260d3: Socrates wonders whether their argument against rhetoric – that an ignorant speaker can bring his city to ridicule or harm if it too is ignorant – has been spoken too crudely. *Critias* 107a3: Critias recognizes it is somewhat crude to beg his listeners' indulgence for his coming speech, but he has good reasons to need it. *Rep.* 361e1: Glaucon apologizes for lauding the value of injustice, excusing his crude speech by saying that this is what others say. *Grg.* 486c2: Polus excuses himself for speaking so bluntly about the powers of tyrant (it is this speech to which Socrates alludes when he excuses himself for speaking bluntly at 509a1). Cf. Isoc. 5.82, Michelini 1998.

31 This is the only extant use of the verb ἀγροικίζομαι through the third century (per LSJ s.v.), giving reason to think this ethical application of "rustic" is special to Socrates.

many other dialogues, the central puzzle about wisdom, virtue, or soul is introduced with the verb ἀπιστῶ.[32]

Finally, Socrates says that both myth-rectification and knowing oneself require leisure (σχολή 229e3, e4). Leisure is the time for building virtue.[33] This point had just been thematized at the beginning of the dialogue.[34] Phaedrus had asked whether Socrates had time (σχολή 227b8) to hear about his morning with Lysias; Socrates responded with a quotation from Pindar about valuing speech-activities over other less-beneficial business (ἀσχολίας 229b9–10).

Besides sharing language, the two connected passages in the *Phaedrus* share a concern for mythic stories. This is obviously so in the case of the myth-rectifiers. Their work begins only upon realizing that they are not persuaded by a story. But Socrates also treats myths as the starting-point for some of his own investigations. The way he introduces the Typhon image is so unexpected, so rhetorically wrought, so full of puns, so poignantly connected to his range of abstract interests and then so explicitly interrupted (230c6), that the reader cannot avoid seeing the mythic status as salient.[35] Typhon was already prefigured by the mention of Boreas, to whom Hesiod explicitly links him. As mentioned above, Socrates' inquiry into Typhon must be prefatory to a complete investigation of himself. At this point he is asking only about his most basic contrasts with Typhon. Both the myth-rectifiers and Socrates begin with an uncertainty about their relations to mythic beings.

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32 Socrates doubts that virtue is knowledge; he has reasons to think it is not, and this issue is of central importance to the question whether virtue is teachable (*Men*. 89d2, 6). He is doubtful whether Euthydemus and Dionysodorus can really teach virtue more efficiently than anybody else (*Euthyd*. 274a4). He is also incredulous whether he really does have knowledge at all times, per Euthydemus' contention; and he would like nothing better than to be refuted on these points, since he would then know about his wisdom (295a2). Wondering whether knowledge could know itself, and finding that some powers cannot be reflexive, Socrates notes that for the powers they doubted could be reflexive, they can still hope a great man will intervene and explain (*Chrm*. 168e4). It is not easy to doubt (*Rep*. 331e5) Simonides' definition of justice, because the poet is wise and godlike; nevertheless, Socrates does, and this instigates the remainder of the dialogue. After the final argument for immortality, Simmias says that he does not doubt anything (*Phdo*. 107a9), but really, because of the importance of the discussion, and his scorn for human weakness, he does actually have some private misgivings. Socrates says that Simmias is right to say this, and says that they should investigate more and more clearly. Socrates then recapitulates and says that the soul requires life-long care, if it is indeed immortal. See also *Phdo*. 77a9, 87a8.
33 Cf. Anastasiadis 2004.
34 Cf. Yunis 2011, 87; White 1993, 12; Ferrari 1987, 15; Rowe 1986 ad loc.; Griswold 1986, 250n11, Burger 1981, 9–10, 127n4.
35 On the literary structure, see Yunis 2011 ad loc.

Plato also unifies the two practices by unifying their discussion. The discussions are braided together during Socrates and Phaedrus' walk seeking a good place to read Lysias' speech. They have just foregone a display of Phaedrus' memory, and they are preparing to contemplate the value of Lysias' paradoxical speech on love. That means they are here reflecting on set speeches. Since both rectifying myths and trying to know oneself are related to set speeches, they are related to one another.

The relation between the two practices is most powerfully shown by the fact that Socrates' discussion of neither makes sense in the dialogue on its own. On the one hand, the myth-rectification discussion is too long and has too much detail for it to exist simply for Socrates to reject it. Socrates is the one to have introduced it, in response to Phaedrus' theoretically naïve question, and he is the one to have given it its complete development. Instead of providing all the detail he does, Socrates could simply have said that he lacks time for thinking about the truth of myths because he spends all his time thinking about himself. Or he could have said that he does not believe gods do bad things; Boreas is a god; and the myth about Boreas is that he did something bad.[36] Socrates would not need to have given an example of myth-rectification, or listed the reasons for finding myth-rectifiers unfortunate men, or enumerated the range of monsters they need to deal with, or reiterated exactly what the rectifiers do ("bring things in line with the probable," etc.). At no later point in the *Phaedrus* does myth-rectification again arise (Phaedrus merely says that Socrates has invented the Theuth myth, 275b4), and at no earlier point did Phaedrus express any interest in myth-rectification or related processes. This discussion occurs in the very pregnant early pages of the dialogue. It would be foolish to dismiss the remarks as a Platonic aside, a score-settling against annoying intellectuals,[37] given that this ignores the much-vaunted rule that literary works must be fully integrated (264b3–e2). It would be better to find the reasons Socrates would have for setting out the practice of myth-rectification in such detail. Since this dialogue is otherwise full of paradigm production (246a5, 263a6–b1, 264c7–e2, 265e3, 270b1, etc.), it is reasonable to suppose that this section also serves as a paradigm for some harder-to-grasp practice.

Whereas the myth-rectification discussion seems oddly long, the self-knowledge discussion seems oddly short. What is the self – in contrast to foreign things – that the Oracle commands one to know, what abilities constitute such knowing, what is the epistemology of this knowing, what are the conditions of its satisfaction, what causes the process to have taken so long and to continue

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36 I thank Elizabeth Belfiore for this idea and for comments on an early version of the paper.

37 A possibility suggested though not defended by Rowe 1986 ad 229c6.

to take so long, and in what part of Socrates' depicted practices, if any, is he seeking to know himself? While this is the dialogue's only explicit admission that he seeks self-knowledge, the *Phaedrus* recurs to issues of self-knowledge (e.g., 228a6, 245c3–5, 255d5–6).[38] This means that the passage at 229e6 presages a key theme of the dialogue.

IV The necessity of continuous myth-rectification

Socrates could have said that he has no time for myth-rectification on a number of grounds: it aims not for truth but for plausibility; it is reductionistic about mythology and culture; it assumes that the world has always been the same way; or it is needlessly impious. But he does not make these criticisms.[39] He cites a different problem. Myth-rectification, as a practice, simply takes too long given his other obligation, coming to know himself. But it is puzzling why it must take so long. Socrates states that the myth-rectifier must confront and deal with monster after monster, but he does not reveal the source of this necessity. Most commentators take little note of this issue.[40] But the necessity is what causes the problem; if one could meaningfully rectify only a few myths, then doing so would not get in the way of striving for self-knowledge.

Socrates appears not to be thinking about *sophoi* who, as part of whatever other pursuits they have, merely rectify a story here or there. He calls the relevant people excessively clever, put-upon, and not altogether fortunate (229d4), and he explains this by saying that once they have corrected the Boreas story they must set aright an unending mass of other creatures. He must then be thinking about a class of people for whom such rectification is a central part of their work. Who would fit this description?

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38 Cf. Griswold 1986.
39 This view contrasts with Werner 2012, 30–35. Hackforth 1952, 26, thinks that Socrates' charges are really just apotreptic, dissuading Phaedrus from querying Socrates' coming inspiration by local deities, e.g. at 238d1. Verdenius 1955, 268, says that the method fails for not being directed by self-examination, but this argument seems misplaced, since it is hard to see how investigating the truth of the Boreas story could involve self-examination.
40 Verdenius 1955, 268, says "the art of allegorical interpretation is still in its infancy, so that it works slowly and laboriously"; Rowe 1986 says nothing; Griswold 1986, 37: "the throng of mythic figures is gigantic"; Ferrari 1987, 11: the rectifiers are "mere antiquarians, for whom completeness" is key, and that they have "no better reason [to address these stories] than that their stories are bruited about"; Nichols 1998, 94: "once begun, there is no end to it… something in human beings… forever produces such tales"; Nicholson 1999, 20–21: "*mythologêmata* constitute a system"; and Yunis 2011 ad loc: the stuff is tedious and there is always more material.

By the early fifth century the logographer and mythographer Acusilaus recorded two distinct histories of Boreas' abduction of Oreithuia (frr. 30, 31 Jacoby), which were presumably set into a genealogy of Athenian and Thracian personages.[41] Herodotus, a half-century later, told of Boreas' relevance to then Athenian success in the Persian War. A great boreal wind (βορέης ἄνεμος μέγας) crushed the Persians rounding Athos in 492 (6.44). Twelve years later, when the Athenians saw a storm approaching the Persian fleet, they sacrificed to Boreas for luck again. As Herodotus writes,

> there is a story that the Athenians had called upon Boreas to help them, in consequence of another oracle, by which they were advised to 'ask the assistance of their son-in-law.' Boreas, according to the Greek account, married a woman of Attica, Erechtheus' daughter Orithyia, and in consequence of this marriage the Athenians (so the tale goes) supposed Boreas to be their son-in-law. (7.189, tr. de Sélincourt)

Herodotus expresses his skepticism about the myth: "I cannot say if this was really the reason why the fleet was caught at anchor… but the Athenians are quite positive about it: Boreas, they maintain, had helped them before, and it was Boreas who was responsible for what occurred on this occasion too." People thought that the storm ended only after sacrifices and charms set on the wind, but Herodotus notes that "it may be that the wind just dropped naturally" (7.191). This is merely one instance of Herodotus' myth-rectifying stance.[42] Though Thucydides does not mention Boreas, he does rectify Thracian mythology, presumably in response to political questions about Athenian alliance at the start of the Peloponnesian war (2.29).[43] Boreas would be a central figure in Athenian-Thracian politics, and that Plato knew about such politics is clear from his attention to the Bendis festival in the *Republic*.[44]

This evidence from three historians suggests that the *sophoi* Socrates mentions were those concerned about local histories, likely for political or more generally national purposes.[45] They were probably not mere allegorists, who assumed that earlier poets disguised metaphysical doctrine in narrative lan-

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41 At *Symp.* 178b9, Phaedrus cites Acusilaus as a convincing corroboration of Hesiodic genealogy.

42 See Rose 1940, Cook 1976, Stern 1989, Stern 1996, 12–3, and Gehrke 2011 41–2, 45, for examples. See Cohen 2000, 383 with n.74 for more on this particular story.

43 Cf. Hornblower 1997 ad loc., Lattimore 1998, ad loc, calling this "probably the most unusual digression in Thucydides."

44 Cf. Cohen 2000, 364–389, on these relations more generally.

45 Stern 2003, 55–6; Morgan 2000, 65–6; Gerhke 2011. We need not suppose that Plato means to refer to particular men. Rowe 1986's "rationalists" is simply too broad (and not much of a class against which to cut). Yunis 2011, following Ferrari 1987, 234–5, writes that "rationalizing and allegorical interpretations with the aim of removing supernatural and morally objectionable ac-

guage.[46] Socrates' era abounded in atthidographers and other researchers into geographical history.[47] The most detail about myth-rectification comes from the fourth century, and funeral orations in particular. The "Funeral Oration" from Phaedrus' erstwhile teacher Lysias establishes a plausible legendary history of Athens only having first excised its incredible elements (2.3–20). The Amazonian marvel is explained (3–6), and Heracles' deeds mentioned as models of courage but not themselves enumerated (11, 16). Demosthenes' "Funeral Oration" gives a similarly purified legendary history (60.5–9), dwells mainly on the moral of important myths (27–31), and even engages in explicit rationalization: "the Cecropidae knew their founder was said to be part dragon and part man, only because he resembled a man in intelligence and a dragon in strength (30, tr. Worthington). Hyperides (6.7), the *Menexenus*'s Socrates (239b), and Thucydides' Pericles (2.36) each observe the importance of giving a sterling genealogy, but then pass over it, drawing out the moral tone without having to worry about explaining away implausibilities.[48]

We can be sure speakers used myth-rectification regularly; from the fourth century we have a compendium of such work, the "On Unbelievable Things" by Palaephatus. In it, as in similar works, we find rectifications of Boreas, Centaurs, and Chimaera (the creatures mentioned by Socrates).[49] By looking at many of these stories, and reading Palaephatus' short preface, we can understand the purpose of myth-rectification. Palaephatus wanted to encourage belief in the legendary heroes by clearing away the improbable accretions to their stories. He did so guided by two goals: to find nature constant, and to save the appearances. What we see now is what we would have seen in the past; and the stories told now must have some basis in somebody's actual experience. Despite these two principles, Palaephatus was not atheistic; he did not rationalize away the stories of the gods of the Pantheon. He restricted his scope to properly human history.[50]

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tions on the part of gods became a trend among natural scientists, sophists, historians, and literary men of the fifth and fourth centuries"; this is right but it is worth thinking about their goals.

46 Thompson 1868, Hackforth 1952, Verdenius 1955, De Vries 1969, and Werner 2012 all think the *sophoi* are allegorists like Metrodorus – who revealed the metaphysical content in poetry hidden behind narrative – without sufficient argument. The difference between allegorical interpretation of poetry and "rationalization" or naturalistic myth-rectification, which they appear to conflate, is made clear by Morgan 2000, 62–7.

47 Pearson 1939, Stern 1996, 10–16, Lenfant 1999, 206–213.

48 See Loraux 2006 for the civic effect of epitaphic genealogy.

49 See generally Stern 1996, 25; Centaurs: Palae. 1, Heracl. Paradox. 5; cf. X. *Cyr.* 4.3.18–22; Chimaera: Palae. 28, Heracl. Paradox. 15, Plu. *Mor.* 248c, Strabo 14.3.5, Servius on *Aen.* 6.288; Boreas: Palae. 22, Heracl. Paradox. 28, Apollonius Rhodius 1.211–18.

50 Stern 1996, 9–25.

Historians want to provide a complete account of a city, region, or people. Because their work requires them to consider and take seriously certain aspects of the otherwise legendary Hellenic past, demythologizing one item – a hero or a lawmaker, for example – compels them to demythologize all the dubious material connected to him, which in turn rests on material subject to further demythologization. A proper laudation of one's founding fathers, for example, requires that those fathers be plausible, their actions be plausible, and the obstacles they overcame be plausible. Deliberators in a political debate will have similar requirements, if they appeal to historical precedent. Wanting to legitimate their historical claims, they will have first to insulate their evidence against charges of implausibility. For either history or politics, then, myth-rectification is an all-or-nothing affair. The goal of either pursuit need not be the wholesale disenchantment of nature itself. Given the connectedness of historical explanation, however, whatever good is sought requires a rational account that ramifies far through time and space.

The comprehensiveness of the myth-rectifying project does not itself explain its oppressive demands on one's time. After all, it seems one could simply deny the existence of all mythological beings, or dismiss them from any chains of historical causality. Rather than being confronted with one weird hybrid after another, one should seem to be able to allow oneself only the naturalistic, the physical, the plausible. Were this possible, Socrates would be wrong to pity the practitioner. Rather than being put-upon, the practitioner could, at a wave, dismiss the parade of horribles and live a life in accordance with natural plausibility.

Such an all-at-once dismissal is appealing, but at the same time it impossible. Socrates is not wrong to pity the practitioner. Socrates says that the myth-rectifier must go step-by-step. Two explanations for this necessity present themselves. The weaker, psychological explanation is that our individual concrete beliefs about weird creatures are so deeply entrenched that a high-level, abstract dubiety about them is not enough to extricate or negate those particular beliefs. We can decide to refuse to accept the reality of any mythic creatures, but when it comes to thinking about them in actual circumstances, the pull of our commitment to their existence trumps our universal dismissal. Phaedrus' request to hear examples to bolster his perhaps weak acceptance of a general claim is consistent with this explanation (262c9).

The stronger, epistemological reason for our being unable to dismiss all mythic creatures at once is that we can form no such concept – "mythic creatures" – all of whose members we can then dismiss on contact. A precondition to an all-at-once doubt is being able to identify a corpus of implausible beasts. Mindful of nature's constant path, we might believe that we can ascertain instantly those beings that swerve from it. But this is impossible. A mythic story

presents itself as true, internally coherent, and fitting within its context. There is no immediate marker that distinguishes, for example, a centaur from Achilles' horse in terms of plausibility.[51] The only way to determine the implausibility of a myth is to think about the details of the myth itself. A further obstacle to all-at-once dismissal is that the mass of monsters is so large that, considered as a mass, it might even seem plausible; land-animals with wings come to seem a regular occurrence, and one doubts that so many people could be so wrong about such a large part of human experience. All the same, each story alone, inspected closely against our experience of the world, may be wholly implausible. Further, true history is instructive and entertaining largely because it involves the unexpected and the novel. Neither of these qualities, therefore, could be used as criteria for dismissing stories as implausible. In writing local history, then, one can at best confront the stories as one meets them, and deal with them as rigorously as possible. Because even the most rational person cannot form a concept of dismissable stories independent of a judgment of those individual stories, the historian, in practicing his demythologizing trade, must deal with each (relevant) story on its own. This is why Socrates pities the professional myth-rectifier. Greek culture contains so much that is implausible, one will hardly ever get a chance to stop saying what is plausible.

V Knowing oneself as putting oneself in line with what is plausible

Socrates could have said that the most bizarre Greek myths do not convince him, but since he is not working out Attic history, he does not need to assess each story for its plausibility, and he does not need to rectify the ones he disbelieves. In fact, Socrates says none of this. He says only that he ignores this sort of thing (ὅθεν δὴ χαίρειν ἐάσας ταῦτα [sc. τὰ ἀλλότρια] 230a1–2), and (presumably if pressed or obligated to perform in civic ritual) accepts whatever others believe (τῷ νομιζομένῳ 230a2). He does not ignore the rectifiability of mythic stories out of a lack of interest or ability; he admits there are charms to engaging in myth-rectification (229d3), and he shows he can rectify the Boreas myth.

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51 Contra Nicholson 1999, 16, who thinks that Phaedrus' calling the Boreas story a *mythologê-ma* means that "if this myth should not be true, it is ... because of something about the whole class of myths." But the fact that some story is *called* a *mythologêma* is no evidence that the story is in fact fictitious and immediately dismissable; whether the story can be sustained in the light of scrutiny is what the historians investigate.

He ignores them out of a lack of time. He must investigate himself, leaving investigation of "foreign" matters aside.

Socrates says that he is not able yet to know himself, and that he investigates himself. Generations of readers found the first claim implausible, and thus spoken ironically; Socrates must be able to know by now.[52] Or they did not take it as implausible or ironic, but took the "himself" quite generically, as referring to the nature of humans, or of ensouled beings, or his immaterial soul.[53] But those who doubt Socrates' sincerity lack good reason for claiming that he does in fact already know himself, given the vaunted language with which Socrates discusses the acquisition of knowledge. Those who interpret Socrates' repeated mention of himself (ἐμαυτόν 229e6, 230a3; τοῦτο 230a1) as a mention of a generic object also lack grounds for restricting his meaning in that way, given Socrates' attention to one's personality and to personal responsibility.

I argued above that Plato wove together Socrates' remarks about myth-rectifiers and self-knowledge so as to encourage interpreting the latter on the basis of the former. This means that Socrates' inability yet to know himself is somehow similar to the myth-rectifier's inability yet to put all the myths in line with plausibility. It also means that the structure and goal of his self-investigation is somehow similar to the myth-rectifier's project.

The myth-rectifier comes to find a certain one of his beliefs implausible, and takes commitment to it contrary to his ultimate goals: understanding his city, praising his heroes, arguing for a military alliance. Rather than simply negate the belief, he aims to repair it, discovering what is most likely true. Just so, as we will see, the person seeking self-knowledge comes to find his beliefs implausible, and takes commitment to them contrary to his ultimate goals of living well. Rather than simply negate the troubling beliefs, he aims to repair them, discovering what is most likely true. The historian cannot know what is absolutely true: he deals with the unrecoverable past; thus he deals in plausibility. The seeker of self-knowledge cannot know what is absolutely true, either: he is a limited mortal and can test his beliefs only against his other beliefs, his experiences, his tentative abstractions, and his intuitions; thus he too deals in plausibility and the recognition that one can provide no account that is not itself open to further critique (cf. *Tht*. 210b1). The historian assesses and reconstructs his beliefs one at a time, having neither a rubric against which to judge stories dubious all at once nor a structure into which to rebuild those dubious stories all at once. The seeker of self-knowledge cannot tell himself to disbelieve

52 Brouwer 2008; Rowe 1986 ad 230a3–6: "Both *Phaedrus* and *Republic* answer the question Socrates poses."
53 Yunis 2011, 94, and Rowe 1986, 140–141 assume this without argument.

everything that does not accord with justice, or the good, or the true – these are, after all, just what he admits he does not yet know – and so he too must go one belief, one commitment, one desire at a time, inspecting each for its plausibility and coherence with his other views. If the *sophoi* are historians, the myth-rectifiers want to know about *their* country, *their* political past, *their* heroes. Their concern with local myths is not a concern with the nature of history as such; indeed, the implausibility of those myths depends on a preexisting attitude toward history (that it is constant, coherent, law-bound, etc.). The seeker of self-knowledge, too, wants to know about himself. But his concern with himself is not a concern for the nature of a self as such, as some entity distinct from the person engaged in knowing, except to the extent that knowing about selves (as intelligible, mutable, improvable) gives one confidence that self-knowledge is even possible, and provides the ideal to which one might be committed. The historian's task feels never-ending because the mistakes people have made in trying to understand their past are innumerable, and some of the most significant moments in the past are hard to make sense of. The seeker of self-knowledge can never stop either, given the depths of human ignorance and the difficulty of comprehending one's goals.

If this account is cogent, it denies the usual scholarly approaches to this passage. Yunis' recent excellent commentary on the dialogue says that the Delphic inscription means "'know your limits, i.e. as a human being" and that Socrates understands "the self-knowledge in question as knowledge not about himself *qua* unique human being but about himself *qua* human being, hence applicable to all human beings."[54] About plausibility, Yunis says that it is "what the masses believe," and insofar as it is "the norm for which mythical interpretation strives, mythical interpretation is doomed to be a vain, unproductive pursuit."[55] About the length of time this process takes, he, like most others, says nothing.[56]

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[54] Yunis 2011 ad 229e5, admitting that people interpreted the Delphic inscription in various ways. Rowe 1986 ad 230a3–6 says that "knowing oneself" means both "recognising the importance of one's soul … by contrast with the body" and answering a question about the "nature of the soul" by appeal to bi- or tripartition.

[55] Yunis 2011 ad 229e1–2. Ferrari 1987, 11, is less critical, but says that the myth-rectifier's "ostensible search for the truth behind the tales will degenerate into speculation on the tales as hearsay."

[56] Griswold 1986, 43, claims that the unending process of self-knowledge comes from two factors: "a person can always become something more, or different, than he presently is" and "the soul is genuinely difficult to know, for it seems to be, among other things, both simple and complex." These factors treat the soul as in principle knowable in the same way other presently-available objects are knowable.

We must then address several concerns. First, what is the "myself" that Socrates investigates? Second, what is the epistemic goal of knowing (γνῶναι) or investigating (σκοπῶ) oneself? Third, what precisely makes coming upon the ability to know oneself take so long? And fourth, in what way could "plausibility" be a worthy goal for the seeker of self-knowledge?

Socrates refers to himself in a colloquial way, not with theoretical rigor.[57] In this passage, using the reflexive pronoun, he is not referring to the self as such: there is no question of identity, the nature of self-reflexivity, or selfhood. Nor is there any reason to think he refers here to the soul as a metaphysical item, to its individuality, or to its immateriality or immortality. The narrator of the palinode, of course, talks about the soul, but very little can be drawn from this to apply to the passage at 229c–230a. The immortality argument – which is of questionable validity[58] – is about soul in general, not explicitly about individual, distinct, personalized souls. Not only is the immortality argument about soul in general, it finds that soul is self-moving and immortal. It seems unlikely that Socrates would want to know only this about himself; and since Socrates says he cannot yet know himself, something the knowledge of which his speech appears to demonstrate twenty minutes later cannot be that thing. Finally, Socrates has suggested that knowing himself is an ability; the argument about the immortality of soul is something to be familiar with, not something to be able to do. These reasons show that the austere and impersonal soul of the immortality argument is not the direct referent of the ἐμαυτόν.

The images of souls in the chariot-story are more the sort that Socrates means. These souls are individual (246b1, 248a1); they follow the gods most related to their private characters (250b7–8); they have different jobs (248d3–e3); they have a range of experiences, goals, and achievements (249c1–4, 250a1–4). They are not merely identical metaphysical structures of reason, spirit, and appetite; they are unique, temporally-extended, modifiable, self-aware, indeed self-modifying entities. Of course this is an image, not meant to present more than the kinds of experiences souls might undergo in pursuit of the goals they have. But if being a soul is most importantly an experience and a striving,

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57 Griswold 1986, 43, takes the "know thyself" means "this particular person," thinking this is a "very general, quite everyday, and prescientific sense"; I show that there is something deep about this first-person attitude.

58 Barnes 1982, 91–4, focused on the underlying Alcmeonian argument, declares it unsound; Bett 1986 denies its validity but thinks Socrates does not realize it; Griswold 1986, 83, is ambivalent, saying that the argument's "force is not... logical, but moral"; Ferrari 1987, 123–5, refuses to say but expresses considerable skepticism ("an argument that begins with a definition and ends with an eternal existent... is no less stimulating than it is dubious"); Blyth 1997 accepts its validity but says it is supposed to look invalid.

rather than a metaphysical structure, then the winged horse-drawn manned chariot is a very apt image.

If one's nature can in some respects be imagined through a story about a particular charioteer, and thus as a tale of striving, frustration, correction, and increased success, then knowing oneself can be taken as coming to appreciate oneself as this sort of soul. But investigating oneself is not, therefore, knowing that the soul is the sort of thing Socrates describes in the Palinode. That would be "investigating what people are like." Investigating oneself should be about oneself. And a person is not a generic image. It is not a charioteer. It is not some entity for which the charioteer stands. It is instead the beliefs, desires, and other commitments a person has, knowing which ones are important, and determining how well one's actions conform with one's ideals.

Socrates says he does not look into foreign things. These foreign things are not, in some sense, literally foreign; they are his own beliefs about Attic geography and history. They must be foreign to the extent they do not, for him, appear to play an important role in helping him live well. (Perhaps they are central for some other people.) Socrates does not enumerate the sorts of beliefs that contribute importantly to the way he lives. Throughout the dialogue, however, he expresses concern about a range of beliefs: for example, to whom should favors of love go (227c9–d1); what honors or scandalizes the gods (242b8–243b7); how would a free citizen act (243c3–d1); what encourages the continuation of philosophical conversation (258e6–259d8); and who is willing and able to teach (230d3–5). Socrates is obviously not simply interested in the abstract question about the nature of man.

If we take Socrates to be, in a central way, his most significant beliefs and desires, then to recognize and investigate oneself is to recognize and investigate those commitments. What does doing this amount to? It could seem that it is simply to discern those commitments.[59] This may be an adequately challenging task, given that we are changing and complex beings.[60] But if they are really commitments, norms we hope to live up to, we would not want merely to discern them. We would want to learn whether we are meeting them. If we are not, it might not be unreasonable to say that in some respect we fail to know ourselves. For if we *knew* them, we would naturally be *following* them. *Knowing* about justice should lead one to *being* just; not being just implies not adequately knowing justice. Naturally, this is the central Socratic paradox. The

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59 Thompson 1868: "the self-knowledge of Socrates consisted in the rigorous examination of the *notions* of his own mind rather than of its operations and faculties, and chiefly of those notions which relate to moral distinctions."
60 Griswold 1986, 43.

commitments on which we do not act must not be adequately vivid, not adequately known. We believe that we should act in various ways; but these beliefs do not always guide our behavior. We are not competent actors of our normatively constructed part. As the amateur compared to the expert, our beliefs about correct technical performance direct us only infrequently, or accidentally. Knowing our commitments, then, is having them attain the status of knowledge. And thus becoming able to know oneself is bringing one's most important commitments into an active, vivid, dominant status.[61]

Acting in accordance with one's central commitments takes time, perhaps one's entire life. (This is a theme of the dialogue.) This is not because our commitments are always changing; in fact our best commitments may not change. One problem is that some may conflict. We may not discover this conflict for a long time; and then we may not be able readily to determine which commitment deserves priority. Another problem is that our habits, impressions, and physical desires may draw us away from discharging the obligations our commitments create. Since we cannot extirpate all habits, impressions, or physical desires from ourselves, our actions will always skew from our commitments. This would be so even for Socrates. His taste for competition with Lysias seems to have drawn him from a commitment only to praise the gods (243a1–2). He can know himself – recognize himself, per the Delphic inscription – only progressively: seeking out potential conflicts, determining which commitments to retain, identifying divergence from ideal action, and attempting to eliminate such irrational behavior.

The Delphic inscription's meaning was always rather inscrutable. Could it mean something like "develop the vividness of your most important commitments"? There is evidence that it could mean "know your measure," "know what you can and cannot do," "know your place," "know the limits of your wisdom," "know your own faults," "know you are human and mortal," and "know your own soul."[62] These may all be taken as realizing that one is presently imperfect. It is the nature of the human to live up to certain high expectations (cf. *Apol.* 29e1–2, 38a5–6).

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[61] This is the view of Aristotle EN 1109b2–8: we investigate (σκοπεῖν) the problems to which we are most prone (εὐκατάφοροι), and then we pull ourselves in the opposite direction (εἰς τοὐναντίον δ᾽ ἑαυτοὺς ἀφέλκειν). He compares this process to the carpenter straightening bent timber (τὰ διεστραμμένα τῶν ξύλων ὀρθοῦντες ποιοῦσιν). Thanks to Christopher Raymond for the citation and discussions on this topic. See Moran 2001, Bilgrami 2006, Korsgaard 2009, and Larmore 2010 for contemporary formulations of this practical view of self-knowledge.
[62] Wilkins 1917.

One might think that Socrates could simply adopt and commit himself to the abstract norms he seems to endorse: do no harm, care for justice, love wisdom. But Socrates remains human, and so the psychological force of appetite, self-image, and limited memory prevent his perfect adherence to those norms. There is also the epistemological problem discussed above. It will not be instantly clear what decision is the harm-free one, or the one that cares for justice, or the one that advances wisdom. The cases are not self-evident. They take prolonged examination.

The myth-rectifiers had to investigate and reconstruct individual myths because no general criteria would explain away their "mythological" beliefs while preserving their "plausible" beliefs. The same reasoning would explain why it takes so long to come to be able to know oneself. A person has many beliefs that are relevant to the way he lives. The ones that seem dubious must undergo assessment. Phaedrus worries that all composition is bad (257d6). Is this so? No; he is right that some writing is bad, but not all of it. The more important thing is composing in a fine way and having the correct attitude toward one's compositions. Phaedrus thinks Lysias can serve as a mentor (228a1–4). Is this so? No; he is right that Lysias has impressive talent, but Lysias does not think about the true value of the things about which he writes. The more important thing is spending time with a person who challenges you. Socrates leads Phaedrus to find his beliefs less than convincing, and then to rectify them. This is a long process, one they have barely begun.

The myth-rectifiers bring their beliefs in line with the plausible (κατὰ τὸ εἰκός). On the analogy proposed here, so do those seeking self-knowledge. This does not reduce the analogy to absurdity, as is commonly thought. The person seeking self-knowledge wants to bring his beliefs in line with what is actual and true. Unfortunately, he can rely only on himself and his conversational partners, and even then he must rely on himself when deciding what to accept from his conversational partners. So he must rely on what appears to himself so. The plausible – what appears so to him – is one's only standard for judgment.[63]

Harvey Yunis (2011) claims that "the probable (τὸ εἰκός), which figures in the critique of sophistic rhetoric (259e7–260a1, 272d2–274a5), is what the masses believe (273a7–b2). Insofar as the probable is the norm for which mythi-

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63 Cf. Hecataeus, fr. 1, 7 Jacoby: "The following matters I write as it seems true (δοκεῖ ἀληθέα) to me: for the stories (λόγοι) of the Greeks are many and absurd, as it seems (φαίνονται) to me." Hecataeus is trying his best to put the stories in line with the truth, and thereby with plausibility from his perspective. That Xenophanes shares this epistemological modesty, see Bryan 2012, 6–57.

cal interpretation strives, mythical interpretation is doomed to be a vain, unproductive pursuit." But this is a misleading report and therefore a mistaken conclusion.[64] Phaedrus says he has heard that oratory requires knowing what persuades people rather than what is objectively true (259e7–260a4). Phaedrus does not use εἰκός-family words here. Socrates responds to Phaedrus' belief in two parts (260b1–d2; 261e6–262c4), but never denies that one needs to know what one's audience believes. He argues only that to the extent that one wants to avoid unintended harms and to be as persuasive as possible, one should also pursue knowledge. Later in the dialogue, Socrates recapitulates his claim against a focus on what is "persuasive" (πιθανοῦ 272d8) alone. In consideration for what people tend to believe, Socrates says, an orator sometimes emphasizes the plausible (τὰ εἰκότα 272e3, τὸ εἰκὸς 272e4, 273b1). This may often involve omitting what is true (πολλὰ εἰπόντα χαίρειν τῷ ἀληθεῖ 272e5). The advocates in the case between a weak brave man and a strong coward will lie, appealing to what usually happens, since an audience with no other evidence will have to rely on plausibility (273b4–c4). Socrates takes no issue with this maneuver as such. He instead says that a properly technical pursuit of rhetorical – as an overall discipline – will not forget to seek the truth too. After all, what is plausible (τὸ εἰκός 273d3) to people depends on, by being very similar to (δι' ὁμοιότητα 273d4), what actually is true (τοῦ ἀληθοῦς τυγχάνει 273d4). Socrates does not present *to eikos* as contrary to truth; he allows that it is compatible with, and connected to, the truth. *To eikos* differs from the truth in being the thing which people accept *as* true. Because Socrates has been talking about public speech, he is treating audiences without further specification; but he necessarily implies that the content of *to eikos* will differ depending on the audience. Elsewhere in Plato *to eikos* is not contrasted with the truth. Timaeus, speaking affirmatively, says that "from everything we have said about the kinds, this is what would be most in accordance with what is likely" (*Tim.* 56c8–d1).[65]

The myth-rectifiers are not saying that they are putting stories in line with the probable in contrast to putting them in line with the truth. Socrates does not say that he puts himself in line with the truth. Neither even *could* put their focal material in line with some external objective standard that did not itself seem true to them. Both practitioners aim to make their beliefs cohere better with their other beliefs. Not to accept this is to ignore the private arena of self-

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64 But it is common; even Bryan 2012, 128, who shows how epistemically respectable *to eikos* can be, simply assumes that the *Phaedrus* criticizes *to eikos* as such; and Ferrari 1987, 11, refers to "merely 'plausible' speculations... [the] ostensible search for the truth behind the tales will degenerate into speculation on the tales as hearsay."

65 Citation and translation from Bryan 2012, 157.

understanding. It is the plausible (which is connected to truth), rather than the given (connected to tradition), or the desirable (connected to pleasure), that must guide a person's search for self-knowledge.

VI Typhonicity and the possibility of knowing oneself

When looking for models for the ἐμαυτόν I did not consider the Typhon-analogy that ends the self-knowledge passage of 229b4–230a6. It did not seem informative enough. After all, the analogy does not make clear how one would find out on which side of the Typhon one would be; it allows for only two types of person; and it does not explain why Socrates lacks the *ability* to know himself. But the minimalism of the analogy does not make it merely illustrative. Learning whether one is like the Typhon will be a precondition to learning whether one could ever succeed in seeking self-knowledge.

The Typhon is hundred-headed and morphologically complicated, with human and animal qualities. He speaks in animal and human voices. He fathered Gorgon and Chimera, the latter slain by Pegasus (again, the creatures mentioned by Socrates).[66] Typhon thought himself better than men and gods. He tried to defeat Zeus but failed. Zeus imprisoned him in a mountain; though Typhon could thereafter emit evil breezes, he could do nothing else. He had no savior or self-understanding, as Prometheus might have had.

The Typhon's relevance to the dialogue has been frequently discussed. What is most important in this context is that being like the Typhon would preempt the transformative self-knowledge discussed so far. The Typhon would get no benefit from the Delphic inscription's charge. He is too hubristic, too complex, and too inconsistent to improve himself.[67] Even after being buried in the mountain, he kept shouting. The opposite character, the calm, divine type, could improve himself.[68] Socrates' unexpected word ἡμερώτερον ("gentler," "calmer," "tamer" 230a5) emphasizes this. His final speech of the *Theaetetus*

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[66] Ps-Hyginus and Hes. *Th* 310–320. See also Goslin 2010, Too 1998.

[67] Cf. Griswold 1986, 40–41.

[68] Cf. Ficino, *Commentum cum summis capitolorum*, ch. 2: "the man who is a slave to the senses is a wild, many-sided, savage animal; but he who employs reason is a simple, gentle, divine animal" (tr. Allen). Verdenius 1955, 269, is convinced, without providing evidence, that this more divine type is the "philosopher," and interprets the rest of the descriptors in this passage accordingly. This view is too speculative, but acceptable if we understand a philosopher modestly, as one who aims to improve himself through reason.

summarizes his hoped-for effect on the young prodigy: by not believing he knows what he does not in fact know (οὐκ οἰόμενος εἰδέναι ἃ μὴ οἶσθα), Theaetetus will become "gentler" and "sound-minded" (ἡμερώτερος σωφρόνως 210c3); and this, Socrates says, is all his art can achieve. Socrates links self-knowledge and calmness together and to his general goal of making the young as good as can be, delivering as he says those who are "true to their birth" and "so beautiful" (γενναίων καὶ ὅσοι καλοί 210d1–2). This language is hardly casual; not only does it conclude the dialogue (as Socrates leaves to meet Meletus' accusations), but it also reflects almost exactly an earlier passage. In the "Digression," the notably unsocratic "philosopher" asks the abstract question, "What is man?" (τί δέ ποτ' ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος 174b4), but does not know what he does not know (οὐδ' ὅτι οὐκ οἶδεν, οἶδεν 173d9–e1); does not see what his neighbor does (174b2); and does not even know whether he himself is a human or some kind of beast (εἰ ἄνθρωπος ἐστιν ἤ τι ἄλλο θρέμμα b3–4). This Theodorus-approved philosopher lacks self-knowledge, is presumably unconcerned with his companions (τοῖς συνοῦσι 210c3), and would not know how he compares to a beast like Typhon. Just as Socrates states here that his maieutic goal with Theaetetus is to make him more gentle, in the *Gorgias* he says that good statesmen, among whom he includes himself, are to make men more gentle (516b2). He then quotes Homer as saying that "the just are gentle" (οἵ γε δίκαιοι ἥμεροι 516c2). Arguing that everyone thinks virtue is teachable, Protagoras says that musical education is about making children gentler, more rhythmic, and more harmonious (326b3); all of human life requires these traits. The Eleatic Visitor says that belief in Forms makes one more gentle (*Soph.* 246c9); and the Athenian Visitor says that the job of the legislator is to make his listeners gentler and more disposed to listen; this makes them easier to teach, and more able to attain moral excellence (*Laws* 718d4, cf. 766a3). Thus in hoping that he is calmer than Typhon, Socrates is hoping that he might be in the position to become a better person.

Seeking self-knowledge is always promissory. We do not know whether we can actually improve ourselves; we perpetually fear that our self-observation is mere spectatorship. We worry we are like the Typhon, a being of overly-disparate, overly-zealous traits. We always seek out evidence that we can become better than we are, that we are not to be locked in a mountain, spewing horribles, for all eternity.

VII Consistency of this view with the rest of the *Phaedrus*

We have already seen that this picture of self-knowledge is depicted in the Palinode. Socrates' prayer that Phaedrus give himself to love and philosophical talk (257b5–6), the latter strikingly depicted in the myth of the cicadas (258d7–259d9), strengthens it. The dialogue's closing prayer reiterates the lesson about self-knowing as working to become better and to know the good. "Grant to me to become fine within," Socrates says, "and that what I have on the outside befits what I have on the inside; and that I consider the wise man to be rich; and that I have no more gold than a temperate man could carry or manage" (279b8–c3). Socrates' final concern, the one for which he wants the gods' help and Phaedrus' agreement, is not about getting any information about himself. He does not ask for knowledge about human nature. It is to become well-ordered in all respects. He desires to follow the wise and the temperate, those who embody the most goodness. That he prays to the god, and puts his desires in the optative, means that he knows this goal will be hard or impossible ever to reach completely. He may not ever be able to obey the Delphic inscription perfectly. But his faith shows he means always to work hard on himself, in conversation with others (cf. *Alc. I.* 132c5–135e10), seeking the good (cf. *Chrm.* 174b10–176a7), to do so.

VIII Conclusion

The Socratic project announced in the *Phaedrus* is contiguous with the Socratic project encountered elsewhere: eliminating inconsistencies in one's beliefs, caring for one's soul, engaging in rigorous and helpful conversation, trying to knowing good and evil, and avoiding wrongdoing. The reason Socrates cannot yet know himself is the same reason he cannot yet have any knowledge. Coming to have fully consistent beliefs, adhering to each of the beliefs and desires to which one has committed oneself, and developing a perfect soul all simply take too much time, perhaps more time than humans have allotted to them. We must be proud to learn that we do not know what we thought we knew, and that we can recognize the errors we did not realize we were making.

This paper presents Socrates as concerned with improving himself and others through self-examination and refutation, and thus consistent with Socrates throughout the *Phaedrus* and in the other dialogues. This paper also

shows how Socrates clarifies his intellectual activity by showing how he compares it with another intellectual activity. It offers to *Phaedrus* interpretation two ideas: that Plato helps his readers envision private self-directed activities through the image of public and known activities (for which this passage is just one example of several); and that the dialogue, depicting Socrates' attempt to persuade Phaedrus into doing philosophy, presents a practical, examinative model of philosophizing to complement the abstract, theoretical mode imagined in the Palinode.[69]

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