

Rhetoric and Love

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates and Phaedrus engage in a dialogue in which three speeches and accounts of love are set out. The first speech about love was originally given by Lysias, but in this dialogue, is read by Phaedrus. The account of love in this speech is that we should favor the non-lover over the lover because there are many benefits to the non-lover. Lysias says that love is madness and that love distorts the lover's reason. He says, the lover is "afflicted with a malady which no experienced person would attempt to cure, for the patient himself admits that he is not in his right mind and acknowledges that he is wrong in his mind" and because of this the non-lover is who we should favor for he is a reasonable person and is objective (Plato). The non-lover is not compelled by love to tell you what you want to hear and lie to you like the lover who will "praise your words and actions in a wrong way; partly because they are afraid of offending you, and also, their judgment is weakened by passion" (Plato). The non-lover is not weakened in this way and will tell you what is rational and reasonable because love is not there to affect his judgment.

Socrates gives the second speech concerning love which complements the first by Lysias. He argues that we should prefer the non-lover over the lover because there are many negative aspects to the lover. Socrates agrees that love is a madness and he adds that it is a madness which causes the desire for beauty to overwhelm the lover's sense of morality and control. That is how he defines love, "the irrational desire which overcomes the tendency of opinion towards right, and is led away to the enjoyment of beauty, and especially of personal beauty, by the desires which are her own kindred-that supreme desire...receiving a name is called love" (Plato). The

desire for the enjoyment of personal beauty means that the lover is always trying to control the one they love because they want to make them as pleasing as possible by making them act in the way the lover wants. Socrates says,

Now to him who has a mind diseased anything is agreeable which is not opposed to him, but that which is equal, or superior is hateful to him, and therefore the lover Will not brook any superiority or equality on the part of his beloved; he is always employed in reducing him to inferiority (Plato).

It does not satisfy the lovers desire if their beloved does not act in the way they want them to, so in order to make sure that the beloved acts in the way the lover wants, the lover makes the one they love the inferior. Love will ultimately bring no benefits to the lover because, “in making such a choice he was giving himself up to a faithless, morose, envious, disagreeable being, hurtful to his estate, hurtful to his bodily health, and still more hurtful to the cultivation of his mind” (Plato). The lover when he controls and makes his beloved inferior to him destroys his soul, body, and mind and this cannot be seen as being good.

After Socrates makes this speech, defaming love, he fears retribution from Eros, the God of Love, and he makes a speech showing that love is good, as an apology. In this speech, Socrates still says that love is madness but not in a negative way, for it is a divine madness and a blessing from heaven. He describes love in an allegory; the soul used to drive a chariot behind the gods, with two horses. One horse represents the positive impulses of the soul while the other is the soul's temptations for the desire for physical beauty and pleasure. The soul driving the chariot crashes it into earth. Love is the memory of all the beauty and wonder the soul witnessed when driving the chariot behind the gods. All of that to say that love is inspirational in that it leads us to search for the truth and beauty behind what is mundane in human lives. It leads us to try to see what the gods see and to remember what the soul saw when it was with the gods.

Socrates goes on praising love by saying that once we can move past the desires of love, one can turn that love into a search for real truth and a higher purpose (Plato).

In the three speeches, the way love is defined can be applied to rhetoric. In the first and second speeches, love is something that is done in a quest for power. The lover, or in the case of rhetoric the speaker, treats others as inferior and overpowers them into submission. In an argument, there always is a clear winner, the superior, and a clear loser, the inferior. In the second speech love is a con, an act of seduction. This definition of love is applied to rhetoric in much the same way, rhetoric is a con, in which the speaker is in a quest for power and achieves that power by appealing to the desires of the audience and then tricks them into agreeing with his argument.

In the third speech, Socrates talks about love in a positive light and uses that to define what rhetoric should be. At the end of this speech, Socrates discusses how, through the study of philosophy, one can turn his yearnings after a lover into a search for real truth. “if the better elements of the mind which lead to order and philosophy prevail, then they [the lovers] pass their life here in happiness and harmony-masters of themselves and orderly-enslaving the vicious and emancipating the virtuous elements of the soul” (Plato). A lover can turn his love into a higher purpose and rather than get a simple physical gratification out of it, turn love into a quest for truth. That is what Socrates thinks that rhetoric should be. In the definition of love in the third speech, there is no superior and no inferior, the lover and the beloved are equal. Rhetoric can be applied to this definition because the speaker and the listener are equals, they care about each other and are willing to let rhetoric change their beliefs to discover the truth. In order to discover the truth, rhetoric needs to include dialectic, which is a method of discovering truth by use of critical questioning. Rhetoric must include both argument and dialectic because rhetoric without

dialect is empty flattery and only used to gain power, like how love is defined in the first two speeches (Plato). Rhetoric is needed in dialectic to disclose the truth that has been discovered, so it does not become the self-interested lover, as in the first definition of love.

At the end of the dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus, Socrates discusses why he does not like writing. He is distrustful of writing because he believes it will lead to the spread of lies. He compares writing to a painting;

for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question they preserve a solemn silence. And the same may be said of speeches. You would imagine that they had intelligence, but if you want to know anything and put a question to one of them, the speaker always gives one unvarying answer. And when they have been once written down they are tumbled about anywhere among those who may or may not understand them, and know not to whom they should reply, to whom not: and, if they are maltreated or abused, they have no parent to protect them; and they cannot protect or defend themselves (Plato).

In writing, the argument is written down, so when one reads it, the author is not present. That means that it cannot distinguish between audiences and cannot respond to questions, clarifications, and criticism and no one can question writing of its motives and get an answer. In a dialectic, one uses questioning to find the truth and that cannot happen in writing, so it can spread lies. Writing can also be taken out of context and used in a way that is not consistent with how the author intended it to be used and, in that way, it can also spread lies. Writing cannot present the truth and it can only refer to it.

Socrates did not like writing because he believed it would lead to the spread of lies and Theo's job is exactly that. He would use his thoughts on writing to object to Theo's job because Theo writes letters to others as if they were from someone else. It is a lie when the person receives the letter, they think it was from a loved one and would think that the loved one put in the time and effort to write those beautiful words, but that is not true. It was Theo who was paid

to write it. What Theo writes in the letters may sometimes be the truth, but it may also just be things he came up with. An example of this is the part about the “cute crooked tooth.” Theo has apparently been writing letters for this couple for years and the first time he saw a picture of the couple he noticed that she had a crooked tooth, so he writes as the man in the relationship, that he loves that little tooth (Her). That may be the truth but more than likely it is something Theo made up to make the letters better and more romantic. That, Socrates, would say, is a lie and Theo is in his writing spreading lies, with what he writes in the letters and the letters themselves. Theo is referring to the truth in the letters because the people who are paying him to write it probably do love who the letter is for, but his letters are not presenting the truth because they are not authentic.

Theo is a romantic, which is shown in part through his job of writing love letters for other people. He is searching for love again after his failed marriage and he finds it with Samantha, his operating system (OS). It is hard to say if a person really does love someone (or in this case something) else. However, from his actions and how he talks about his feelings, it does seem that he really loves her. He expresses his love through his words; at one point he tells Samantha, “I’ve never loved anyone the way I love you.” Theo’s love for Samantha is also shown towards the end when she goes offline. He panics and runs through the city to try to figure out what happened to her. More than that, it is clear that he loves her by how he talks to others about her, like when he confesses to Amy that Samantha is an OS, and he talks about how close he feels to her despite the fact she is not a person (Her).

The definition of love that best captures how Theo feels, I think, is the love that Socrates talks about in his second speech. The love he feels does not fit in with the first two definitions because the love Theo has is not at all focused-on appearance and physical beauty. Samantha is

not a person and she is not physical, so his love for her is not based on anything physical. His love fits better with the third definition of love because that definition describes love as something that allows the lover to see what is beyond the appearance of reality and that is something that inspires people to search for the truth and beauty beyond the mundane. Theo and Samantha's love is almost beyond the appearance of reality because he loves an OS, something that cannot love or even feel. In his love for her, they also in a way are searching for truth and beauty of love that is beyond the mundane because Samantha is not a person, but a system. In their love, they try to find and understand the truth of how they can love each other.

I do not understand how an OS can feel true love. I think that she can mimic what a person in love feels because as an OS she has access to all the information and stories about love and other emotions. Samantha, with that information, can appear to love Theo by mimicking those emotions. However, she is not alive, and she is not a being. I am not sure a computer, no matter how advanced can learn to actually feel emotions. The fact that Samantha says she loves over 600 other people, I think helps to show that what she is feeling is not true love. I think loving more than one person romantically is possible to a certain extent. When in love with even just two different people romantically, I think a person feels a sense of confusion in trying to figure out who to be with and a sense of guilt, feeling that they are betraying the ones they love by being in love with another. Loving over 600 people romantically I do not think shows, true love. The fact that Samantha was "in love" with more than 600 and continues talking to more than one of them at once, makes me think that her love for Theo is false. Even if she can feel true feelings I would think the sense of guilt would overwhelm her to the point where she could not do it. Samantha could love over 600 people because she is not truly feeling love she is just mimicking the emotion.