

Eros and self-understanding in Plato's *Phaedrus*

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Eros and erotic madness are focal topics in three speeches—Lysias' speech and Socrates' first and second speeches—in Plato's *Phaedrus*. However, their meaning is changed through the progression of arguments. This paper aims to find the suitable interpretation of *eros* and erotic madness and clarify that the meaning is related to the idea of self-knowledge or self-understanding as a process toward self-knowledge suggested in the dialogue.

Eros can mean both “love” and the “God of love”. The two different meanings lead to different understanding of *eros*. In Lysias' and Socrates' first speeches, *eros* means a problematic sexual desire. These speeches consider *eros* as harmful. On the contrary, Socrates' second speech considers *eros* as a God or some divine existence and gives it a positive evaluation.

The different meanings of *eros* also affect the understanding of erotic madness. Madness can mean both an internal state and a kind of possession by some external existence. The interpretation of madness has been a severe problem for scholars because Socrates has suggested in his second speech that madness also exists in a philosopher's soul. How can philosophy include madness if philosophy is rational? Some scholars have interpreted philosopher's madness as rational madness by regarding it not as possession by some external divine existence but by the inner intellectual desire of the philosopher for the Platonic Forms. This interpretation is based on texts that describe a philosopher's recollection of the Forms. A philosopher suffers erotic madness when he recollects the Forms that his soul saw in heaven before his birth on earth. This recollection is an intellectual activity performed through his inner memory. Therefore, the erotic madness derived from recollection can be rational.

This paper, however, argues that *eros* cannot be explained by a mere inner intellectual desire and that it has more complex functions. *Phaedrus* shows that *eros* is related to not only a philosopher's recollection of the Forms but also understanding of his divine nature that is shared by his beloved boy. Namely, *eros* forces the philosopher to see his divine nature through the boy who shares that nature. Thus, philosopher's madness should not be rationalized simply by emphasizing the philosopher's inner intellectual desire, and we must not neglect requirement of a specific other person who shares that divine nature.