
Revisiting Plato's *Phaedrus*: Rhetoric and Storytelling in Academic Advising

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Abstract: This article argues that Plato's *Phaedrus* offers important insights into narrative approaches to advising. Specifically, the *Phaedrus* evokes questions around the relative merits of persuasion via rhetoric and inspiration via storytelling. After a brief summary and analysis of the original text, the author invites the reader into an imaginative space in which time is collapsed—the groves of Academe—and proposes a new ending to Plato's dialogue in which Socrates and his student Phaedrus turn their conversation to various themes around the power of story, the primacy of interpretation, and the meaning of education. In evoking these themes, the author hopes future scholars and practitioners will follow suit into the groves to dialogue with thinkers of the past.

Keywords: narrative theory, Plato, power of story, interpretation, imagination

Atque inter silvas Academi quaerere verum.
And seek for truth in the groves of Academe.

—Horace, *Epistles* 2.2.45

Any of us here in academe can easily relate to this line from the Roman poet Horace (65–8 B.C.E.). Indeed, don't we all wish to see ourselves, all of us academics, as being in search of truth in some idyllic setting among whatever groves we might have on campus, or maybe just outside our office window out there on the quad, or even in the campus coffee shop? A lovely metaphor. Indeed, a nostalgic one in this pandemic age, as our groves shrink to Zoom meetings in our home office spaces. But note that "Academe" is capitalized above. Horace was referring to a real place, the first Academe: Plato's Academy. Horace was describing in a letter to a friend a field trip he took to Athens several hundred years after Plato founded his school there. It must have been an idyllic place.

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The Academy (*Academia*) was originally a public garden or grove in the suburbs of Athens, about six stadia from the city, named from Academus or Hecademus, who left it to the citizens for gymnastics. . . . Few retreats could be more favorable to philosophy and the Muses. Within this enclosure Plato possessed, as part of his patrimony, a small garden, in which he opened a school for the reception of those inclined to attend his instructions. Hence arose the Academic sect, and hence the term Academy has descended to our times. (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d., “Plato: The Academy” section)

So, in a sense, we academics in the West can all trace our lineage back to that quaint garden planted with olive and plane trees. Did academic advising take place in the groves of Academe? Almost certainly.

One of the very best and first examples we have in Western culture of an academic advising interaction is in the *Phaedrus*, which was written by the founder of that first Academy, Plato (ca. 370 B.C.E./2005). In it, Plato imagines a dialogue that might have taken place between his teacher, Socrates, and a young man named Phaedrus, a prospective transfer student, so to speak. Among other things, Plato was writing about what shall constitute a good education. But in his typical fashion he does not give us a straightforward answer. The *Phaedrus* is no philosophical treatise that tells us point for point what should constitute a decent education worth having. Rather, Plato shows us an interaction between a great teacher (or, dare I say it, academic adviser?)—Socrates—and an enthusiastic student—Phaedrus. Together, as equal partners in the dialogue, Socrates and Phaedrus consider the question of what Phaedrus should study and who shall be his teacher. The ideas concerning what constitutes an education worth pursuing and worth having seem to emerge naturally in the course of that most natural of human communications: narrative. Plato spins us a most edifying yarn.

Let us unwind that yarn. Socrates was famous for not wanting to leave the city of Athens. As the dialogue begins, Socrates is trying to avoid the heat of the summer by uncharacteristically taking a walk beside a cool stream outside the walls of Athens. He chances upon a young man named Phaedrus who raves enthusiastically about the speeches being given by a teacher of rhetoric named Lysias. Such teachers of rhetoric were called “sophists” and were mostly “itinerant professional teachers and intellectuals who frequented Athens and other Greek cities in the second half of the fifth century B.C.E.” (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d., “The Sophists [Ancient Greek]” section). But Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates took a dim view of such educational approaches because they generally served to make wealthy young men even wealthier by teaching them to argue skillfully so as to make the worse appear to be the better case, whether in the courts, the marketplace, or the legislature. Not all of these itinerant scholars were without moral compass. Many made significant contributions to Western thought. (For a more comprehensive and balanced account of the sophists, see Guthrie [1971].) But, “due

in large part to the influence of Plato and Aristotle, the term *sophistry* has come to signify the deliberate use of fallacious reasoning, intellectual charlatanism, and moral unscrupulousness" (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d., "The Sophists [Ancient Greek]" section). Clearly, Plato regarded Phaedrus's teacher, Lysias, as such a one and lambasted him in this dialogue, the *Phaedrus*.

Phaedrus is taken by the persuasiveness of a speech Lysias has recently given on the nature of love and why a young man should submit to the affections of an older and wiser man. In fact, Phaedrus has a copy of the speech with him and has been rehearsing it while walking along the stream. Socrates asks Phaedrus to recite the speech of Lysias. He does so, but it turns out to be filled with flashy turns of phrase without real merit or moral anchor. Socrates sees what Phaedrus does not, that it is rhetoric of the worst sort, self-serving discourse designed to bend another to one's purposes without seeming to do so.

Even so, Socrates, feeling playful, I suppose, decides to show Phaedrus how skilled he can be at such sorts of language games. Socrates composes a speech on the spot that far outshines the arguments Lysias has given, on the same topic: on the nature of love and why a young man should submit to the affections of an older and wiser man. But Socrates is ashamed of himself for stooping to Lysias's level and even gives the speech with his face covered by a cloth because he is embarrassed to be arguing a position that he does not really believe to be right. Phaedrus, ever the impressionable student, is now completely taken by Socrates's skill at rhetoric. But seeing Socrates's obvious shame, asks him to set aside what he clearly does not believe in and deliver the speech that he would rather have given. Socrates then composes a second speech, a *tour de force* on the nature of love based on solid philosophical and moral principles. Indeed, he claims that the highest and worthiest form of love is love of wisdom—literally, *philosophia*—and that the worthiest way to practice that form of love is not to seduce young men for their physical favors but rather to guide them in the joint study of philosophy.

To accomplish this, Socrates ceases being a dialectician and becomes instead a storyteller. Rather than try to persuade Phaedrus with logic and good reasons, he weaves a most elaborate story about *psychagogia*, the progression of souls through life and after death. The recursive nature of this should not be lost on us. Just as *The Thousand and One Nights* is a collection of tales within the framing tale of Scheherazade, so is Socrates now a teller of tales within the framing tale of Plato's *Phaedrus* about an old philosopher and a young student walking by a stream just outside Athens.

Socrates engages in an extended metaphor to explain his meaning to Phaedrus. Indeed, it takes the form of a myth, that eldest of story forms, all for the edification of the impressionable Phaedrus. Regarding the nature of the soul, Socrates says, "Let it then resemble the combined power of a winged team of horses and their charioteer" (Plato, ca. 370 B.C.E./2005, p. 26). And with that, we're off to the chariot races, as it were. Socrates's story describes how our souls are like chariots pulled by winged horses. If a soul is absolutely good, then the charioteer can guide that soul's chariot up to heaven. But the souls of humans who are not quite so pure

and have trouble governing the obstreperous winged horses find themselves dragged down below the earth for 3,000 years.

Socrates creates a far more elaborate myth than I am relating here. The important thing to note for our purposes is that Plato, who wields the power of story well in the framing tale, also has his main character wield the power of story well in order to reach out to and convince Phaedrus. And as with horses and charioteers and souls, so with students.

And then, well, if the better elements of their minds get the upper hand by drawing them to a well-ordered life, and to philosophy, they pass their life here in blessedness and harmony, masters of themselves and orderly in their behaviour, having enslaved that part through which badness attempted to enter the soul and having freed that part through which goodness enters; and when they die they become winged and light. (Plato, ca. 370 B.C.E./2005, p. 37)

Well, clearly philosophy is not the only valid choice of major in our day and age. But Phaedrus, completely taken by the overpowering truth of Socrates's discourse, agrees to strive to study philosophy, in effect changing his "major" from rhetoric to philosophy. Like Socrates, we modern advisers do not and should not seek to put minds at ease but rather to challenge them, to develop them, to inspire them, to acculturate them, to educate them. And like Plato, we use narrative and dialogue to do it *well*.

But why did Plato write dialogues instead of just telling us what he wanted us to know? By writing dialogues, he was better able to exemplify to his readership how what we now call Socratic Dialectic or the Socratic Method could be used to arrive at truth, rather than to ply his readers with some dry philosophical treatise that asserted claims and provided arguments. In watching Socrates and Phaedrus interact, we are being told a story, which is a far more palatable way to learn (and be advised) than to have a list of "bullet points." By writing a dialogue Plato is demonstrating the process for us and saying in effect "here's how it can work when two people who are open to discovering truth (or goodness or beauty) interact with each other. Here's how you can philosophize: by engaging in dialectic." This dialectical process has its risks: ". . . we have no surefire way of knowing that the assumptions arrived at dialectically, without passion or interest, are absolutely true. . . . We all hope that we do not inadvertently urge a student to take action that will in some way be harmful to that student in spite of our best intentions" (Hagen, 1994, p. 87).

Beyond this, Plato wrote dialogues so as to push the reader beyond the complacent contemplation of a series of propositions. As Hyland (1968) notes, "the very function of the dialogue . . . is to drive the reader beyond the dialogue itself" (p. 40). By examining multiple viewpoints in the same work, the dialogue form allows for inconclusiveness, a reality with which we are all too familiar in our work with students, as we and they often yearn for the closure that eludes us. In writing

dialogues, Plato was not necessarily seeking to make assertions that would endure for all time; rather, he sought to show that the process of interpretation is context-bound. "The concrete portrayal of the experience of philosophy is at least as important an aspect of his 'doctrine' as the arguments presented. Indeed, one of the clearest points to emerge from a serious consideration of the dialogue form is that the 'argument' in question cannot be adequately understood without also understanding the experience out of which it arises—who presents it, under what conditions they present it, etc." (Hyland, 1968, p. 43).

As the *Phaedrus* ends, Socrates and his young student Phaedrus leave the cool of the stream by which they had been talking together and decide to return to Athens (Plato, ca. 370 B.C.E./2005, p. 68):

PHAEDRUS: But let's go, now that the heat has become milder.

SOCRATES: Shouldn't we pray to the gods here before we go?

PHAEDRUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Dear Pan and all you gods of this place, grant me that I may become beautiful within; and that what is in my possession outside may be in friendly accord with what is inside. And may I count the wise man as rich; and may my pile of gold be of a size that no one but a man of moderate desires could bear or carry it.

Do we need anything else, Phaedrus? For me that prayer is enough.

PHAEDRUS: Make it a prayer for me too; for what friends have they share.

SOCRATES: Let's go. (Plato, ca. 370 B.C.E./2005, p. 68)

But let's not stop there. While the *Phaedrus* gives us a splendid example of how to philosophize about academic advising (and so much more, of course), I propose that we provide an example of how to philosophize about academic advising that incorporates some of the more recent thinking about academic advising, especially from the humanities, such as narrative and hermeneutics. As before, rather than list propositions about advising, I wish to use the dialogical form for much the same reasons that I outlined above regarding Plato. This way of philosophizing about academic advising seeks not to put forward a doctrine but rather, like advising itself, is open-ended, susceptible to multiple interpretations.

I propose that we repurpose the characters of Phaedrus and Socrates, with whom we are already familiar, and slowly move them from where we left them into more contemporary times. This sweep of time passing will likely prove disorienting to them, so I ask for your patience, dear reader, as they adjust. Let's cause them to continue the conversation as they walk homeward towards Athens and further cause them to ruminate about narrative and advising. Just before they get to the city, they

will get to that place where we academics all came from. It's just a few kilometers outside Athens—the groves of Academe. In our imaginary dialogue, let's make Academe a magical place, where the two travelers can see all the way to our time, well, gradually, at least.

PHAEDRUS: Follow me, dear fellow. We are almost at the groves of Academe, where your other student, Plato, will be creating one of the most famous schools that has ever been, along with the help of *his* student, Aristotle.

SOCRATES: Who? Never heard of him.¹

PHAEDRUS: Don't worry about details for now. Once we get to the groves, we will be in a place of freedom, a discursive space devoted to truth, goodness, and beauty. We shall be able to imagine ourselves in any way we see fit.

SOCRATES: What? And bend the truth? Defy reality?

PHAEDRUS: Be steadfast, beloved new friend, and walk with me. Trust me. I will show you the way. You have taught me well; now the student has become the teacher. Ah! We have arrived.

Now, answer my question. We have been talking together for hours, by the stream of Ilissus for a very specific purpose: to help me decide on an education worth pursuing and worth having. What shall we call this sort of discourse? It seems itself to be a form of teaching. Could we be said to be engaging in individualized teaching or personal tutoring or perhaps in some other pursuit?

SOCRATES: No, certainly, it was individualized teaching. I was trying to advise you on taking a course of action, where I tried to help you see for yourself what the best course of study would be for you. You discovered it for yourself; all I did was help you stay focused on the issue.

PHAEDRUS: Indeed, that's true even though you are being overly modest. Given that we are now in the groves of Academe that will give its name to a whole new way of the life of the mind, perhaps we should call this important sort of discourse "Academic" advising, in honor of this place of the origin of the academic life, the place in which we now stand, the groves of Academe.

¹ Aristotle lived from 384–322 B.C.E.; Socrates died in 399 B.C.E. They never met, even though they had something in common: Plato (428–347 B.C.E.), who was Socrates's student and Aristotle's teacher.

SOCRATES: That seems a particularly fitting name for discourse about an education worth pursuing and worth having, both for its own sake and for the ways in which it might benefit those who hold it.

PHAEDRUS: But now answer a second question: why was it important that you used narrative to guide me to the right choice? You, being the wisest of persons . . .

SOCRATES: Oh, please . . .

PHAEDRUS: Did not the oracle at Delphi declare you to be the wisest among all persons?

SOCRATES: Yes, but . . .

PHAEDRUS: Stay focused now. The oracle had it straight from Apollo. Surely even you won't doubt Apollo. So then, you, being the wisest among all persons, could have chosen simply to tell me what to study and then produce compelling reasons for doing so. Why narrative?

SOCRATES: That's not even a Greek word, is it? Narrative?

PHAEDRUS: Indeed you are correct. It comes from over the sea, at Rome, where Latin is spoken. Do you prefer *historia*? Or perhaps *mythos*? Both are good old Greek words. Narrative and *historia* both have to do with knowing, making something known through story. *Mythos* works at least as well, having to do with talk, conversation, and advice as well as with story.

SOCRATES: Put thy question.

PHAEDRUS: It would have been so easy for you to assert your authority, O Socrates, and simply *tell* me to stop fooling around on the morally shaky ground of rhetoric and speechifying. Instead, you *showed* me that you could out-rhetoric Lysias, my speech teacher. And then, you brilliantly showed me, by composing a new splendid speech on the spot, that rhetoric used in the service of philosophy is not a bad thing at all, but one of the high roads to truth. Then, while I was helpless with admiration for you and your rhetorical skill, you gradually wooed me over to the study of philosophy.

SOCRATES: That's not a question.

PHAEDRUS: Why? Why did you do it this way?

SOCRATES: How else could I have done so?

PHAEDRUS: That's not an answer.

SOCRATES: When we first encountered one another by the stream you were entranced by the honeyed tongue of Lysias. You had even written down his speech word for word and had it with you in order to practice reciting it. You were probably ready to jump into bed with him if he asked you to because you were persuaded by his arguments.

PHAEDRUS: I . . .

SOCRATES: And so how would you have received it if I simply, as you put it, asserted my authority as pre-eminent philosopher and unattractive old coot . . .

PHAEDRUS: I wouldn't—I didn't—

SOCRATES: . . . and told you to cut the crap and major in something more worthwhile? You had stars in your eyes, sweet lad, and they weren't for me or anything I stood for. But I saw something in you. I saw you to be capable of majoring in a field that you were better suited for, one that you would ultimately respect more: philosophy. I could not set out to persuade you by logic or scientific method. I could only show you possibilities and let you feel that you had discovered the right path by and for yourself. I used narrative, *historia*, *mythos*, heck, whatever works.

PHAEDRUS: And maybe a splash of rhetoric.

SOCRATES: So maybe I'm not the Platonic Ideal of a philosopher. Whoa! Where did that come from?

PHAEDRUS: We are in the groves of Academe, so we have the wisdom of the ages available to us. Plato, your student, will immortalize you and incidentally, this dialogical or narratological approach we've been using today.

SOCRATES: Hm. Well, anyway, it's risky.

PHAEDRUS: Certainly. Perhaps I should put another question to clarify this. How can we say that Academic advising, informed by a narratological cast of mind, is risky?

SOCRATES: Well, it does not admit of a method for one thing.

PHAEDRUS: Are you saying that pursuing some activity methodically is less risky?

SOCRATES: Indeed that is the case. But blind obeisance to a method can cause us to be blind to nuance of meaning.

PHAEDRUS: In the future, you will have given your name to a method of inquiry—the Socratic Method—and we're doing it together right now.

SOCRATES: But it is not a method in the sense that it will infallibly lead to the truth or to the right course of action. Neither can it be said that this Academic advising thing nor even Socratic Method can be methodical in the sense that it will infallibly lead to the truth or to the right course of action.

PHAEDRUS: So, I can agree that neither the Socratic Method nor Academic advising is methodical in that sense. Can we say that those who do Academic advising should be skeptical of any method, Socratic or otherwise, that claims to *always* lead to the truth and to the right course of action?

SOCRATES: Certainly.

PHAEDRUS: So, in default of a method that would govern me as an Academic adviser in all situations and lead to absolute truth, how can I best prepare myself to be a narratological adviser?

SOCRATES: Three things spring to mind.

PHAEDRUS: Ah. Only three. Let us take them one by one.

SOCRATES: Very well. The first is to place often before your mind many and varied narratives, the more demanding the better.

PHAEDRUS: You mean read? Listen to the tales of Homer, Hesiod, and Aesop?

SOCRATES: Yes. I can neither read nor write myself . . .

PHAEDRUS: Others will come along and do that for you. Your work will not be forgotten.

SOCRATES: . . . but now that we are in the groves of Academe I can see that there will be many wonderful narratives, written and otherwise, to come in the millennia to follow. By Zeus! Some of these narratives appear to be projected on the walls of . . . caves?

PHAEDRUS: As it were. Earlier this afternoon you took a strong position against writing.

SOCRATES: Being, well, a Socratic adviser myself, I can attest to the unlikelihood of coming to understand immutable truth. You can chalk up my waffling on this point to having an open mind. After all, our original author, Plato, was in the quandary of having me speak out against the stultifying effect that writing has upon memory, yet he only had writing itself in which to convey the message.²

Which leads me to the second way to prepare oneself to be or become a narratological Socratic adviser like me: the cultivation of a hermeneutically trained mind.

PHAEDRUS: Now there's a word that hadn't yet been invented in our day: hermeneutics. Named after the god Hermes, I expect.

SOCRATES: I think we're both getting the hang of what's available to us here in the groves of Academe. Yes. Hermes the messenger god, interpreting the messages of the gods to humans. But the trickster god, too, because no single interpretation is wholly correct for all time. Hermes the Guide. Hermes the Protector. But also Hermes Who Keeps Us Guessing.

A hermeneutically trained mind is one that is loyal to Hermes: a clever mind, a mind that plays with alternative interpretations, a mind that is open to change and reinterpretation, but a mind that guides and gives good advice withal.

A hermeneutically trained mind is one that can tolerate ambiguity. Not only tolerate ambiguity but can even cultivate it, mine it for its until-now-unobserved solutions.

PHAEDRUS: O Socrates, this does not sound at all like you.

SOCRATES: Then perhaps you have more to learn about me and about the value of a hermeneutically trained mind to the process of Academic advising. I am nothing if not flexible and open to all pathways to the truth. Absolute certainty is elusive or even impossible for those who seek to become Academic advisers. We advisers find ourselves thrown into the flux of existence wherein the possibility of coming to an absolute bedrock of certainty eludes us; however, we try to console ourselves with the illusion of one.³

² See Plato, ca. 370 B.C.E./2005, pp. 62–65.

³ Socrates, whether he knows it or not, is quoting from Jean Grondin's (1999/2003) *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*, p. 104.

PHAEDRUS: Certainly true. But we've been discussing Academic advising here in the groves of Academe. Are you saying that there is never any one solid interpretation but rather only illusions of one?

SOCRATES: I am. Think of the change of major you went through in the original dialogue that we were both in just a few pages ago.

PHAEDRUS: From rhetoric to philosophy.

SOCRATES: Or politics to medicine. Or any such change to the focus of our study. How shall we come to know whether it is the right decision?

PHAEDRUS: I have a feeling that you are going to say that just as there is no bedrock of certainty for advisers, so there is no bedrock of certainty for students to use as a standard of judgment in their choices, whether in Academic advising or in any other pursuit.

SOCRATES: Indeed, that is true.

PHAEDRUS: But back to Hermes. He's also the *trickster* god! How shall we reconcile that aspect of Hermes with the rest?

SOCRATES: I think that Hermes's tricks serve a purpose. He has a bag of linguistic tricks to keep us on our toes, to keep us from leaping to the conclusion that we have the One and Only One Valid Interpretation of a given narrative that will stand for all time. And that leads me to the third way to prepare to be a narratological adviser.

PHAEDRUS: Wouldn't you just know it?

SOCRATES: One must become a master of language, especially of what will be called "rhetorical devices" like metaphor, metonymy, and the like.

PHAEDRUS: You of all people! But isn't that just the same as saying one should become a master of rhetoric? I thought we were trying to get away from that sort of sophistry.

SOCRATES: Rhetoric used in the service of displaying a reverent attitude toward the student before us is no vice, such trickery is not trickery. Metaphor is not just flowery language, where additional meaning is smuggled into what might otherwise have been a simple, unadorned statement. Metaphor—now

that's a good old Greek word—is itself the most basic foundation for all language. We cannot speak, write, or even *think* non-metaphorically.⁴

When you were discussing the speech that Lysias had written about why young men should give their charms to older, wiser men who were not in love with them (seriously?), your language was florid and grandiose. You were smitten, in love. I had to use the languages of love to seduce you away from your would-be seducer and toward the study of philosophy. Not an easy task, I assure you. I had to pay careful attention not only to *what* you said but *how* you said it. And I had to make sure that you understood the higher nature of my appeal to you. *Agape*, not *eros*.⁵

PHAEDRUS: If I stay in what will come to be called “Academe,” I hope I can be as good an Academic adviser as you have been to me. But for now, I’m all about dinner. Let’s leave the groves of Academe and find some wine and comestibles.

SOCRATES: Perhaps another prayer as we walk? This time, you make the prayer.

PHAEDRUS: Dear Hermes and all you gods present and future in this place called Academe, grant that I may take to heart the power of story in this realm, may I be humble in the process of interpreting stories lest I too eagerly impose my own motives and meanings, may I always renew my quest for meaning and for understanding how things mean to others, and may I not abrogate my duty to you by blindly obeying only one method of attaining meaning and understanding.

Do we need anything else, Socrates? For me, that prayer is enough.

SOCRATES: Make it a prayer for me too; for what friends have, they share.

PHAEDRUS: Let’s go.

In this day and age, no one can gainsay that the practice of academic advising and also the conduct of research in academic advising are imbued with metrics-

⁴ Perhaps we can forgive Socrates for not properly citing his current line of thought, especially as it first came to light 2500 years after he lived. He is unwittingly referring to the groundbreaking work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) who made the strong case for the primacy of metaphor in thought: “Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. . . . We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language, but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (p. 3).

⁵ *Agape* is best thought of as transcendent, selfless love. *Eros* is characterized by cupidity.

based approaches. But the field of academic advising is richer than that and admits of other approaches. To rely only on metrics-based approaches is to risk losing sight of the open-ended, often inconclusive human interactions that are at the core of advising. It is to risk losing sight of the core values of higher education: “to champion lifelong learning, to advocate learning for learning’s sake and to support students, from a variety of backgrounds, to achieve autonomy, to pursue their dreams and to realise their potential” (Lochtie et al., 2018, p. 1). We advisers respect the need for metrics-based approaches; but we also focus on the human interactions that characterize our daily work. And so we are at play in the fields of imagination, in the groves of Academe, when we advise and when we engage in scholarship about advising.

In my “*Phaedrus* 2.0” above, I have Socrates enjoin us to three ways to approach advising: 1) keep challenging narratives ever before oneself, 2) cultivate a hermeneutically trained mind, and 3) become a master of language. Like Socrates in the above imaginary dialogue, we must be flexible and open to all pathways to the truth. As Gadamer’s biographer, Jean Grondin (1999/2003) put it (and my version of Socrates quoted above): “We find ourselves thrown into the flux of existence wherein the possibility of coming to an absolute bedrock of certainty eludes us; however, we try to console ourselves with the illusion of one” (p. 104). An adviser who habitually encounters difficult narratives, who cultivates a hermeneutically trained mind, and who strives to become a master of language does not fall easily into the consolation of such an illusion. I assert that we can turn to the ancient traditions of the humanities—narrative, hermeneutics, and imagination—as we find in the *Phaedrus*, to show us the way.

My purpose in writing this article was to put Plato’s *Phaedrus* before the advising community as an exemplar of how academic advising can take place. The dialogue involves only two characters, a learner/advisee and a teacher/advisor. But vitally, as concerns advising, the two characters each exhibit epistemic humility, a stance or an attitude that one takes with respect to a text or a person where we do not presume to know beforehand how to understand that text or person. Both characters are at least willing to be changed in some way by the interaction, as they both pursue a discussion of the truth or of right actions to take. This is also known as dialectic: being willing to surrender one’s opinion in favor of the mutual pursuit of right actions or beliefs. Elsewhere, I have argued that academic advising can and should be viewed as dialectic (Hagen, 1994).

But beyond that, the *Phaedrus* exhibits the power of story in an advising interaction. Socrates engages in storytelling and elaborate extended metaphors in an effort to persuade young Phaedrus to take right action. Within the *Phaedrus*, this boils down to an injunction: “study philosophy, not rhetoric.” In presenting the *Phaedrus* as an exemplar, I do not wish to assert that all students should study philosophy. Rather, I present it as an exemplar of how one shall advise: with epistemic humility, in mutual search for the greater good of the student, fully engaging the power of story, metaphor, and the like. Ultimately, like the character Socrates, we assist in the quest for meaning. In that mutual quest we:

- come to understand students on their own terms,
- discover what is significant to *them*,
- understand how *they* construct meaning,
- recognize that meaning is not fixed but constructed,
- see the importance of understanding how the *student* makes meaning, and
- understand the centrality of hermeneutics to understanding and making meaning of the narratives of the advising interaction (Hagen, 2018, pp. 122–123).

At the end of the *Phaedrus* the two characters were likely very close to the groves of Academe. It seemed a shame not to press them into further service to say a few more things about rhetoric, philosophy, and narrative and their place in academic advising. In doing so, I wanted to demonstrate epistemic humility in action. Thus, in the second dialogue—*Phaedrus 2.0*—the learner/advisee and the teacher/advisor switch their functional roles, at least for a time. But the dialogue ends with Socrates back in the driver’s seat, as usual.

But this exercise was more than a fantasia or some *jeu d’esprit*. I sought to demonstrate the possible efficacy of using dialogue to engage in scholarly inquiry into academic advising. My hope is that you find something useful in that dialogue, though I recognize that it may be difficult to cite in your own scholarly work. It was intended to be heuristic and not necessarily cited. Dialogue allows us to examine and write about multiple points of view so that we might become better able to understand a difficult and wide-ranging concept like academic advising. There are things one can say about advising in a dialogue that one cannot easily say in a standard piece of hypothetico-deductive method. In my view, C. J. Venable (2018) was very successful in doing this in a work that appeared in this journal.

Lastly, my aim was to demonstrate the importance of imagination and interpretation—hermeneutics—in the conduct of advising.

Every interpretation, every hermeneutic motion, involves a leap of imagination as well. We try to appropriate the student’s mind and make it our own, at least for a time. We try to imagine what it must be like to be that student. We make this leap based on what they say, how they say it, how they look, their nonverbal cues, and so on, but mainly their words. We interpret our students to understand what it means to that student to be that student. We must allow ourselves to be interpretable to that student as well. (Hagen, 2008, p. 19)

Overall, my goal for this project is to inspire people in our field to read the *Phaedrus* for what it has to offer us, rather than summarize enough so they don’t have to read it. In my opinion, the *Phaedrus* is possibly the first and certainly one of the most important works in the theory and philosophy of academic advising and should be in everyone’s wheelhouse and on their bookshelves along with other standard works published by NACADA and Jossey-Bass.

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