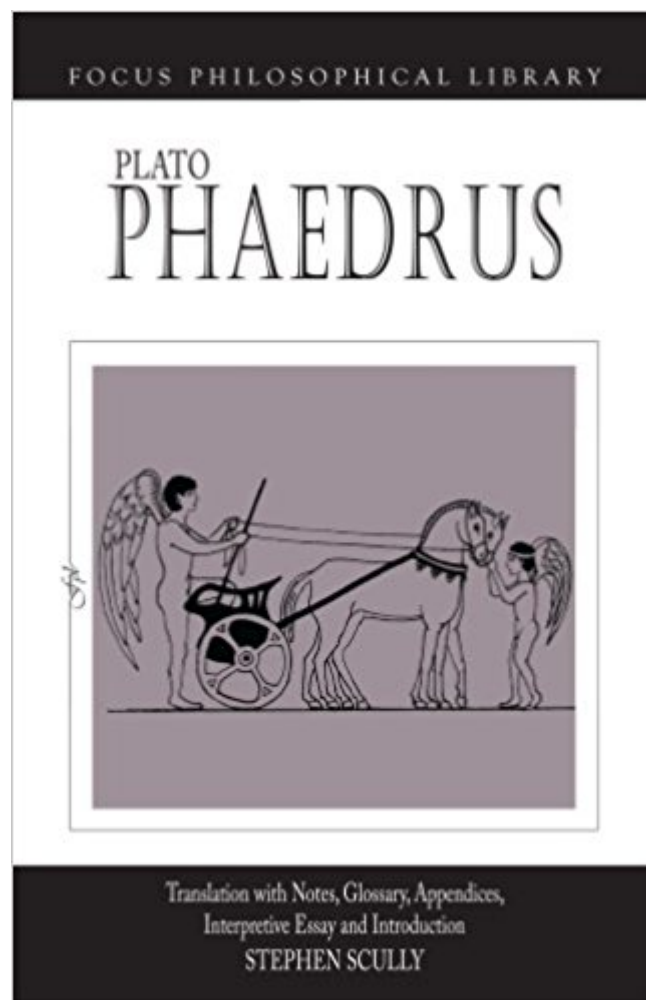


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Plato : Phaedrus: A Translation With Notes, Glossary, Appendices, Interpretive Essay And Introduction (Focus Philosophical Library)



Synopsis

This is an English translation of one of Plato's least political dialogues of Socrates and Phaedrus discussing many themes: the art and practice of rhetoric, love, reincarnation, and the soul. It includes an introduction, notes, glossary, appendices, and an interpretive essay and introduction. Also included are rarely seen illustrations, stone carvings, and vase paintings. Focus Philosophical Library translations are close to and are non-interpretative of the original text, with the notes and a glossary intending to provide the reader with some sense of the terms and the concepts as they were understood by Plato's immediate audience.

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Customer Reviews

This is a fine translation, both fluent and accurate. It captures the range of tonalities of the original in elegant English that is neither stiffly formal nor cheaply colloquial. The supplementary matter is appropriate and useful. The introduction is crisp and clear, the interpretive essay illuminating. Scully has done a sound and serious job of translating and annotating for the general reader. Above all, his translation is excellent in respect to style and clarity: really a pleasure to read.
-- David Konstan, Brown University

Translation in English with introduction, notes, glossary, appendices, interpretive essay and introduction. The text includes new insights into the nature of Greek love, including rarely seen illustrations (stone carving and vase painting).

I suppose I should start by establishing the fact that I am anything but an expert on Plato. When pursuing my undergraduate degree in philosophy 30+ years ago, I read most of the dialogues and found them uninspiring, indeed, some like *The Parmenides* I found to be incomprehensible. All these years later, I have come to believe that without an understanding of Plato, one cannot understand the story of Western Culture. And so I have been trying to reread Plato with mixed results. I have never read any of his dialogues that I enjoyed as much as Scully's edition of *Phaedrus*. I have no Greek, I cannot assure you that it is an accurate translation. I can tell you that this is the first time I wanted to see the dialogue performed by really good actors. There are moments of great beauty in this dialogue- in the setting, the words and the thought. As pointed out by the other reviewers, there has been much debate on the central theme of this dialogue. Scully does an excellent job of explaining the different interpretations that other translators or scholars have brought to their readings and how his differs. So among other graces, Scully serves as an introduction to the literature around the dialogue and influenced by the dialogue (he offers passages by Shakespeare, Donne and Eliot as examples of that influence). I find myself swayed by what Scully sees as the central theme in the dialogue- the turning of the soul back toward its true understanding and nature. Around this theme of how we can guide or be guided back to the truth, Plato weaves a the myth of the charioteer to explain the nature and history of the soul, a Egyptian myth to explain the difference between writing and speech (influential on Derrida) and explains the difference between the true use of rhetoric and the common use of it in (somewhat) democratic Athens. All of this is woven around a framework of a holy place (part of what we have lost in our understanding of the Bible and of the Greeks is that God/s were present at certain places. Those places were holy because they were inhabited by God/s and people would go to those places to meet with and interact with that presence). Socrates, as always, proves to be more aware than any of his contemporaries of the presence and the gravity of God/s. The dialogue is also woven around an older man trying to seduce a younger man. That seduction is largely spiritual but there are moments when I think Socrates is supposed to be tempted. The language of the dialogue is full with metaphors for tumescence (the wing stubs of the soul throb, etc.). I would take Scully's theme and put it another way. I think that a lot of ancient philosophy is best understood as a relationship between a teacher and an acolyte. In this dialogue, Socrates is proven a teacher with many methods of turning the soul of young *Phaedrus* inward toward a remembrance of his vision of the forms. The dialogue as a whole is striving toward, a loving pursuit of what is true about the nature of our soul. The discussion of rhetoric, the use of myths, the gravitas of the holy place are all means a teacher uses to inspire his young lover toward remembering that vision. It is a beautiful work presented by Scully with great skill, sensitivity

and scholarship. Whether you read it as a key work in Western culture or to guide you on your own personal path, this is a great edition to read.

In this review I will compare 3 editions of Plato's *Phaedrus*: 1. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Hackett Pub Co, 1995). 2. Stephen Scully (Focus Pub/R. Pullins Co, 2003). 3. James Nichols (Cornell University Press, 1998). I have given all 3 editions 5 stars for their own unique perspectives. Throughout the centuries, scholars have debated on what exactly is the central theme of *Phaedrus*: is it a dialogue about rhetoric? Or is it about Love? Or perhaps it is about both? If so, how are we supposed to understand the connection between Rhetoric and Love? The book itself is divided into 2 parts: the first part is about Love and the second is about Rhetoric, and because of this division in the book that it generated a lively discussion about Rhetoric versus Love. The 3 editions I review here provided 3 unique perspectives. Nichols argues strongly that *Phaedrus* is definitely about Rhetoric, in fact he links *Phaedrus* to *Gorgias*. His argument is that in *Gorgias*, Plato discusses Rhetoric in relations to justice, and in *Phaedrus*, he discusses Rhetoric in relations to Love. Love, therefore is a subordinate subject to Rhetoric. Similarly, Nehamas also argues that *Phaedrus* is about Rhetoric albeit not as strongly as Nichols. It is a "sustained discussion of Rhetoric" in which Plato used Eros as examples. (xxxviii) Scully's interpretation is slightly different; this is where I find my own position to be closer to. His argument is that Love and Rhetoric are equal parts of Plato's *Phaedrus*. This unity is possible because "both [love and rhetoric] requires the philosopher at the helm. As a lover, the philosopher guides the soul of the beloved, as a rhetorician, he guides the soul of his partner in conversation." (88) My own position is that: it is about both with a slight emphasis on Love, and not on rhetoric. If Love is defined as that madness and uncontrollable urge to search for the ultimate truth and beauty, then, rhetoric is the tool to achieve that. Rhetoric, for Socrates, is understood as a tool that will guide the soul in search for the beautiful. What he is saying here is: it's all about Love, but you are not getting any Love, if it is without Rhetoric. Overall, I like Scully's edition the best for its completeness: in addition to the translation, it has a wealth of valuable information in the Appendix, including copies of poems by Sappho, Anacreon, Ibycus, etc; plus interpretive text and sample photos of "Phallus Bird". Highly recommended.

A modern translation and commentary; what it misses in the depth achieved by earlier translation-commentaries it makes up for with clarity of thought and expression. If you have the chance, read it aloud with a friend using a second translation. It'll double your pleasure!

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