The dialogue Socrates and Phaedrus in Plato’s Phaedrus centers on a speech given by Lysais. Phaedrus heard Lysais’ speech, and is quick to praise the work. After hearing the speech Socrates believes he can do better, and gives his own speech on the matter. At the end of his speech Socrates states that his speech is bad because the original was also subpar. The speech is a copy of a previously bad speech. Socrates statement about Lysais poor speech serves as the beginning of his argument to favor philosophy and the pursuit of knowledge and truth over the written work. Later in this exchange Socrates begins to discuss the difference between knowledge and opinion when Socrates brings it to Phaedrus’ attention that “most people, however, don’t realize that they do not know the true essence of an argument” (p.15). Socrates continues his thought by stating that because people “have not reached an agreement at the beginning of an investigation, they proceed as if they know, resorting to what seems plausible, when they have agreed neither with themselves or with others” (p. 16). Without knowledge man will rely on opinion. If he proceeds based on opinion then nothing can be gained about what he says.

In his following speeches he argues that the real pursuit should be of knowledge and truth. If most people don’t know the true essence of their argument, then there is implied the danger of not knowing the nature of an argument, but also implies the importance of truth, and that it, and knowledge should be pursued. It’s known previously in this dialogue Socrates prefers knowledge which only comes from learning/knowing yourself before anything else. When Socrates moves on to discuss the previous status of winged days, souls, and their forms he states that the learned knowledge is result of remembering those winged days. The forms are knowledge. Understanding the forms builds knowledge and knowledge gets you closer to remembering more of those winged days. Therefore you must be a slave to philosophy and it’s pursuit of knowledge.

Questions

1. What role, or purpose, does madness play in the argument of Socrates?

2. Why is a speech about love used to discuss knowledge?