Plato’s *Phaedrus*

I’ve created two sets of questions. The first is meant to help guide you some towards the main traditional ideas and themes of the work. These are questions you might want to pose to yourself before or after your reading. The second group is narrower, tailored to the specific problems of how the work can help us think about the aims of this course, and to the themes or ideas with which we continue to grapple in the present day.

General points of emphasis for reading:

1. Why do you suppose that Plato chose eroticism, and specifically the relationship of “pederasty” (an older male and an adolescent boy) to explore rhetoric?
2. What are your reactions to the terms of such relationships?
3. What is “dialectic” based on Socrates’ descriptions of it in the *Phaedrus*?
4. How does Socrates describe the “Form” of Beauty, and is the idea of the “Platonic Forms” familiar to you?
5. Among the oddest problems in the *Phaedrus* is the relationship of the first half of the work (the three speeches on “eros” [love]) to the discussion of rhetoric in the second half. Do you see themes, ideas, or problems that connect the two “halves”?
6. Do you find persuasive the arguments against writing versus reading?

General Questions and Topics for discussion in-class:

1. Utility and Politics: How do we determine given values, that is, what kind of knowledge do we need for “conjoint activity” (as Dewey calls it) to function correctly?
2. Do you think that Socrates’ ideas about the nature of our souls correspond in some way to the inclusive democratic model of the public in Dewey? How might these ideas seem like Lippman’s model, which requires experts to mediate knowledge to the public sphere?
3. Can you leave the city behind, as Plato and Phaedrus do, and how does private opinion become public opinion?
4. What are the implications of thinking of public values in terms of private values?
5. Do private agents act in the same way as public agents, i.e., are we right to think that the public world functions in the same way as our private world(s)?
6. How would (or did) Lippman or Dewey respond to the previous question?
7. While it is true that the first three speeches address “eros” (love), can they also be read more generally, that is, as a broader statement about how individuals interact with one another?
8. Does Plato set up analogies in the first three speeches between the subject of eroticism and the role that individuals have towards one another in a society?