My concern is the early dialogues, dialogues like the *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, *Meno*, *Gorgias*, *Euthydemus*, and *Laches*, and what is important to me about them is that in these dialogues, unlike most of the middle and late ones, the accounts Socrates investigates do not have a life of their own, but are rather connected to interlocutors who have vivid characters. These accounts are connected so closely to their advocates that they embody what I will call the "core beliefs" of an interlocutor. The core beliefs of an interlocutor are those beliefs which form his self-image. Euthyphro's self-image as a religious seer is manifest in his views about piety, and Laches' self-image as a soldier involves staying steadfast at his post. Socrates investigates precisely an interlocutor's core beliefs.

Plato must think that interlocutors' characters are important to a dialogue because he spends considerable space and effort describing them. For example, almost one half of the *Laches* is "stage setting," and Plato develops the characters of Polus and Callicles among others with meticulous care. I must admit that I am one of those who believe that everything in an early dialogue is important. Nevertheless, a literary approach to the dialogues has been unfashionable in some philosophical circles for some time, although this is beginning to change. And there is good reason for change. Suppose that I look at the character of Nicias and conclude that he is a sort of "culture hound" -- one who uncritically soaks up any positions he hears. This "literary" insight is surely of philosophical interest. For it tells us how Nicias acquires his beliefs, and, if what I will argue is correct, how Nicias

---

1. The Socrates I talk about is the Socrates of the early dialogues.
acquires his beliefs will affect how Socrates talks with him, which in turn affects the clearly philosophical questions about the nature of dialectic.

Specifically what I am going to do is a sort of phenomenology of Socratic dialectic. First I will look at the character of an interlocutor, and then I will look at how Socrates talks with that interlocutor. I will do this for a large number of cases. My main conclusion is what I will call the "Phaedrus Principle." The Phaedrus principle, asserted explicitly at Phaedrus 270b-d, is that different psychic natures require for their proper education different logoi. The Gorgias (464b-465e), moreover, suggests the same educational view when it sets out the conditions for a real art: a real art (1) diagnoses the nature of its subject matter so that, (2) it discerns the proper condition of its subject, and (3) it discerns the means to engender that proper condition. Socratic dialectic is, presumably, a real art, and hence it should see that psychai with different initial conditions will require different means to bring about their proper condition. But whatever Socrates' level of consciousness about the Phaedrus Principle, I will show that he frequently employs it.

We can divide Socrates' dialectic into two main aspects: elenchus and psychagogia. In the former Socrates refutes the accounts of others, in the latter he leads the psyche to some view without directly saying what it is. Frequently Socrates practices elenchus and psychagogia at the same time. There is often, I will show, a divide in a conversation where Socrates moves from refutation of an interlocutor's position to a mixture of refutation and psychagogia. In the latter phase Socrates suggests views to an interlocutor, and then sometimes rejects them in such a bizarre way that his doing this ought to stimulate the interlocutor to wonder what went wrong.

Elenchus itself is a multifaceted activity. Socrates uses simple counter-examples on the one hand, and intentionally confusing eristic arguments on the other. Psychagogia is also complex. Sometimes Socrates uses classic protreptic arguments; at other times he refutes an account in such a way as to lead us, if not the interlocutor, to the source of the problem; and on one occasion he even uses a threatening speech. No single, specific characterization of the form of elenchus or psychagogia is possible.