

General Introduction to *Hermias On Plato's Phaedrus*

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(draft version)

1. The place of the *Phaedrus* in the Neoplatonic curriculum

Hermias' commentary on the *Phaedrus* of Plato is the only example of the Neoplatonic commentaries on this dialogue to have survived in its entirety. We know most of the major figures in the Athenian school wrote commentaries on the dialogue. These include Iamblichus (c. 245–320), Proclus (412–85) and Damascius (c. 462–538). In addition, it is clear that Syrianus (d. 437?) – the teacher of both Proclus and Hermias – lectured on the dialogue. The relation of Hermias' commentary to the lectures of Syrianus will be discussed below. But it is clear that Plato's dialogue was a focus of interpretive activity for the Neoplatonists. But this was not always so for the Platonists prior to them. As will be clear from the next section, Iamblichus' curriculum for the reading of Plato's works was a turning point for the fortunes of the dialogue. Prior to this, the dialogue was valued more by rhetoricians and writers than it was by philosophers. But the inclusion of the *Phaedrus* in Iamblichus' canon – an ordered list of twelve dialogues that were alleged to convey the whole of Plato's philosophy – made the dialogue central to Neoplatonism. In order to better appreciate the broader context for the interpretation of the *Phaedrus*, it is worthwhile to spend some time on the Iamblichean canon and the place of the *Phaedrus* in it.

The Neoplatonists did not write commentaries on Plato's dialogues merely as an 'academic exercise' – a phrase in modern English that carries a sense almost antithetical to the spirit in which these inheritors of Plato's Academy entered into the business of interpreting Plato. The reading and interpreting of Plato's dialogues formed part of an educational program for instilling progressively higher gradations of the four cardinal virtues and assisting the student in achieving the goal or *telos* of the philosophic life – becoming like god. The program was built around ten dialogues that progress from the theme of self-knowledge to the civic virtues to purificatory virtues to contemplative virtues, with different dialogues apparently promoting contemplation of various kinds and orders of being in the Neoplatonic hierarchy.¹

In addition to being correlated with different gradations of the virtues, each dialogue had its own unique *skopos* or central theme. The *skopos* of each dialogue serves as a kind of 'magnetic north' for both distinguishing the parts of the dialogue and interpreting them in relation to the whole. Thus Olympiodorus understood the *Gorgias* as a text about the civic or political virtues and political happiness. The three conversations in that dialogue with Gorgias, Polus and Callicles were related by virtue of the fact that they illuminate the efficient, formal and final causes of the political happiness respectively. Finally, dialogues were classified as logical, physical or theological. The physical dialogues seem to have had some connection to the being of things in the realm of visible nature, while the theological ones dealt with incorporeal being. Thus the *Sophist* had as its central unifying theme or *skopos* 'the sublunary Demiurge' (at least according to Iamblichus). By contrast, the Iamblichean *skopos* of the *Phaedrus* transcends the level of nature or *phusis* by dealing with 'beauty at every level' – right up to Beauty Itself and the intelligible gods.

The following table shows how each of the ten dialogues of this basic curriculum fitted into each of these three schemes where that information is available. (We mark dialogues where we have at least one example of a relatively complete commentary with an asterisk.)

¹ This summary is based on Westerink's reconstruction of a lacunose passage in the *Anonymous Prolegomena*, cf. Westerink 1962, xl. On the grades of virtues and the goal of becoming like god, see Baltzly 2004.

1. *Alcibiades I* – introductory – on the self *
2. *Gorgias* – civic virtues *
3. *Phaedo* – cathartic or purificatory virtues *
4. *Cratylus* – contemplative virtues – logical – on names*
5. *Theaetetus* – contemplative virtues – logical – *skopos* unknown
6. *Sophist* – contemplative virtues – physical – the sublunary demiurge
7. *Statesman* – contemplative virtues – physical – *skopos* unclear
8. *Phaedrus* – contemplative virtues – theological – on beauty at every level *
9. *Symposium* – contemplative virtues – theological – *skopos* unknown
10. *Philebus* – contemplative virtues – culmination of previous dialogues – on the Good *

Two additional ‘perfect’ or ‘complete’ dialogues summed up the entirety of the doctrines communicated in the first decadic arrangement.

11. *Timaeus* – physical *
12. *Parmenides* – theological *

Of these two, the former was a *summa* of all physical teaching, while the latter presented all Plato’s theology in one dialogue.

Most of the dialogues included in Iamblichus’ canon include passages in which Socrates or one of the other characters relates a *myth* and the mythic passages tend to receive extensive allegorical interpretation. Iamblichus’ treatment of mythic elements in Plato’s dialogues tends to treat them as revealing theological truths – i.e. truths about the intellectual or intelligible entities – rather than ethical truths (i.e. truths about the soul and the effects of its moral failings on its post-mortem condition). The *Phaedrus*’ myth of the soul’s journey in company with the Olympian gods and the glimpse that it might catch of the ‘super-celestial place’ of the Forms (246E ff.) obviously provides grist for Iamblichus’ mill. In light of this, it is unsurprising that both the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* were classified as ‘theological’ dialogues. The soul’s flight and its fall into a body also contextualises the entire idea of the ascent and return to god through the Neoplatonic curriculum.

Interpreting the *Phaedrus* was thus a serious matter for the Neoplatonists. It stands near the apex of the Platonic dialogues through which the aspiring philosopher may approach the divine.

2. Platonism and the place of the *Phaedrus* up to Plotinus

The *Phaedrus* played a key role in the Neoplatonic reading order established by Iamblichus, but the dialogue’s place in the Platonic tradition was not always so central. Some of the explanatory factors behind the *Phaedrus*’ rising or falling fortunes are grounded in the text itself, while others are attributable to beliefs about the circumstances of its authorship.

One chronology of the composition of Plato’s works places it among his juvenilia and this doubtless led some readers to weigh it lightly compared to such philosophical masterpieces as the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedo*. Moreover, some readers might have doubted the originality of some parts of it. Thus Hermias himself (38,14–15) seems confident that one may find the speech of Lysias from Plato’s dialogue in a collection of Lysias’ works.² It is perhaps for this reason that the Platonising Stoic Panaetius even denied the authenticity of the *Phaedrus* (Asclepius, in *Metaph.* 104,18–105,19). It also seems from the evidence of Hermias that the dialogue was subject to criticism on the grounds of its method and its style.

² Aulus Gellius (*Noctes Atticae* 1.9.9–10) scorns the student who wants to begin his study of Plato with the *Phaedrus* because of the speech of Lysias.

Methodologically, Hermias reports that Plato was criticised for arguing both sides of the issue on the value of love. Moreover, writing in competition with Lysias ‘looks like the act of a malicious and quarrelsome youth’ (10,15) – a criticism that accords well with the story about this being an early work by Plato. Finally, Hermias reports that the dialogue was criticised for its ‘tasteless, pompous and high-flown diction’ (10,18).

The latter two comments by Hermias perhaps allude to the criticisms of Plato and the style of the *Phaedrus* by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1st century BC). In his *Demosthenes*, Dionysius engages with Plato’s text in a defence of Lysias as a stylist and in the course of doing so accuses Plato of mixing the clear and simple style of which Lysias is the master with a pompous and over-blown style. Hunter, who discusses Dionysius’ criticism of the *Phaedrus* with great insight, thinks that the criticism of Plato’s style in Socrates’ second speech may be the explanation for the claim that the dialogue was Plato’s first attempt at writing in this form.³ But Hunter’s book also points to another reason why the *Phaedrus* may not have been regarded very seriously by philosophers prior to the Neoplatonists. He uses several examples to show how familiarity with the *Phaedrus* in particular functioned as a marker of Hellenic identity in the Roman Empire. Through the Second Sophistic (1st to early 3rd century CE) this dialogue above all others achieved the status of a cultural icon. Writers and orators played with its imagery. Critics debated its stylistic merits or defects. In short, it was *popular* and as such many philosophers in the Hellenistic and early Imperial period might well have neglected it, feeling that it was ‘owned’ by the rhetoricians or simply not difficult enough to call for their professional expertise. Just as serious philosophers in the twentieth century did not engage with popular works like *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, so too the very fact that the *Phaedrus* was widely read by educated people who were not philosophers may have deterred philosophers from delving too deeply into it.

These are factors extraneous to Plato’s text that could have led to the *Phaedrus* being regarded as a minor work, worthy of little attention by philosophers. But there are features of the dialogue itself that may have helped to explain its relative neglect prior to Iamblichus. The *Phaedrus* presents the philosophical reader with a problem: ‘What is this dialogue about?’ The problem of the degree of unity had by the dialogue and the identity of its unifying theme – if indeed there is one – is a problem that continues to occupy modern interpreters.⁴ Similarly, Hermias’ commentary reports ancient disagreements about the *skopos* of Plato’s dialogue. Platonists prior to Iamblichus regarded the theme or *prothesis* of a dialogue as an important question to be addressed – even if they did not suppose that such a theme had the very strong unifying role of an Iamblichean *skopos*. As a result, it was perhaps unclear to Platonists prior to Iamblichus just what one should do with the rich feast of ideas and topics that make up the *Phaedrus*. In fact, if we turn to Hellenistic and Middle Platonic texts, we see relatively little impact of the *Phaedrus*. This is not to say that the work is entirely ignored, but it is far, far less in evidence than, say, the *Timaeus*, the *Republic* or the *Phaedo*.

It seems likely that Cicero read the *Phaedrus* and his engagement with that text (and of course the *Gorgias*) is evident from his *De oratore*. His concern centres on the relation of philosophy to rhetoric and to eloquence more generally. This particular interest is consonant with the manner in which Plato’s dialogue was taken up by other rhetoricians, though Cicero himself aims at an ideal in which philosophy and orator are one (*de Orat.* 3.141-42; cf. 2.18; 2.154). The *Phaedrus* is also lightly paraphrased in the Dream of Scipio (*Som. Scip.* 29). However, the dominant sources in Cicero’s text are the *Phaedo* and the myth of Er in the *Republic*, so that the argument for the soul’s immortality that is drawn from *Phaedrus* (245C-

³ Hunter 2012, 168 citing *Anon. Proleg.* 24,6–10.

⁴ For the *status quaestionis* see Werner 2007.

46A) plays a relatively minor role (§25). While it is not, perhaps, surprising that this argument for immortality is the only part of the *Phaedrus* that Calcidius draws upon in his *Timaeus* commentary given the purpose of his work, the mythical context of the Dream of Scipio would surely have afforded scope for the inclusion of images from the *Phaedrus* had this dialogue been regarded as central to Platonism by Cicero.

When we turn to those Middle Platonists who sought to convey Plato's *dogmata* in their works, such as Alcinous and Apuleius, we find that they also make very little use of the *Phaedrus*.⁵ The latter's *Doctrines of Plato* II.8 distinguishes two kinds of rhetoric and this is doubtless on the basis of the distinction drawn in the *Phaedrus*. But on the whole, ideas from the *Gorgias* dominate this section. Similarly II.14 distinguishes between three different kinds of lovers and the mostly chaste lovers of *Phaedrus* 256A–E are the inspiration for the third kind. Like Apuleius, Alcinous makes use of the argument in the *Phaedrus* for the soul's immortality (chapter 25). In addition, however, he concludes his chapter on the soul by attributing a tripartite division to even divine souls, so that they possess precursors of the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul in humans. It seems entirely possible that here Alcinous draws on Socrates' second speech and applies the imagery of that speech to some brief theological speculations. After all, if the gods too drive their chariots to the super-celestial place to feast upon the vision of the Forms, then they too have horses – albeit better ones than we.

Philo of Alexandria and Plutarch of Chaeroneia clearly advert to the *Phaedrus* at many points. Their engagement with the dialogue seems to have focused on the portion of the text that was most important for the Neoplatonists – the myth of the soul's ascent in the company of the gods. But at least for Philo, the *Phaedrus* plays a complementary role to the most important Platonic dialogue: the *Timaeus*. Runia notes:

In questions concerning the creation and structure of the cosmos no other Platonic work can add much, in Philo's view, to what the *Timaeus* has to say. But naturally other facets of Platonic doctrine, especially in aspects of ethics and eschatology, impinge on its contents. Above all the *Phaedrus* myth, with its veiled description of the ascent of the soul and its contemplation of the noetic world complements the *Timaeus* for Philo in an important way. If for the Neoplatonists the whole of Plato's *theōria* was contained in the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*, we might change this to the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus* myth, and we would not be far from the mark. (Runia 1986, 374.)

Thus in Runia's estimation the *Phaedrus* was a very important work for Philo. However, Philo's influence on the subsequent tradition of pagan Platonism was limited by the context in which he utilized the work of Plato – that is, in the exegesis of Mosaic texts.

Plutarch was clearly more influential on the subsequent course of the Platonic tradition than Philo. In addition, as Brisson notes, Plutarch practiced a form of allegorical interpretation that derived metaphysical claims from mythic passages in Plato, as well as from other myths such as that of Isis and Osiris.⁶ In this respect, his use of mythic material resembles the Neoplatonists'. But, as with Philo, the *Timaeus* was a cornerstone of Plutarch's Platonism and when he turned to the topic of love, the *Symposium* was more central to his philosophy than the *Phaedrus*.

3. Plotinus and the *Phaedrus* at the origins of Neoplatonism

⁵ This generalisation holds for Apuleius' distinctively philosophical works. Consistent with the thought that the *Phaedrus* was a work of more interest to rhetoricians and philosophers, we find him using allusions to it in the *Metamorphoses*; cf. Winkle 2013.

⁶ Brisson 2004, 63–7.

Neoplatonic interpreters of the *Phaedrus* treat Plotinus as a turning point in the correct understanding of Plato's dialogue. Proclus contrasts Plotinus and Iamblichus with previous interpreters on the ground that they, unlike those who came before them, understood that the celestial places (247A–D) that loom so large in the Neoplatonic understandings of the dialogue belong to the *intelligible* and not the visible realm.⁷ It is not clear that this is entirely fair to the Platonists prior to Plotinus. Defenders of Philo or Plutarch might beg to differ. But it is at least a key element in the Neoplatonic narrative of how the true understanding of Plato's philosophy was recovered from a state of previous neglect.⁸

It is certainly true that Plotinus alludes to the myth (*Phaedrus* 245A–56B) at several points in the *Enneads*. But there is no one detailed exegesis of the sort that we find in the subsequent commentary tradition. Perhaps the most systematic incorporation of elements from what turns out to be the crucial passages at 247A–D occurs in *Enneads* 5.8.9–10. Here Plotinus invites the reader to imagine an intelligible rather than a spatial heavenly sphere as a prelude to his account of what the souls who follow Zeus in the journey to the super-celestial place will experience. It is unclear that there is a sharp differentiation of the three distinct 'places' in this noetic topography that subsequent Neoplatonists make so much of: the super-celestial place, as distinct from the sub-celestial arch, and the heaven in general. Yet he does highlight that the psychic 'tourists' following Zeus will see Justice Itself and Moderation Itself (5.8.10.13–14). These two forms are mentioned by Plato at 247D6–7 and will be treated by Proclus as part of an important triad – including Knowledge Itself – whose elements are correlated with different features of the noetic topography. So it is certainly true that Plotinus has mentioned features of Socrates' palinode that are highly significant within the subsequent commentary tradition. It is indeed fair to view him – from the viewpoint of the later tradition – as having taken important steps in the right direction.⁹

As is so often the case, however, Plotinus' doctrine of the undescended soul means that Iamblichus, Syrianus and Proclus will only be able to agree with him so far. The disagreement about whether the soul comes down entirely into the body emerges in the context of the correct appreciation of the *Phaedrus* in *Enneads* 4.3.12.5. Here, in explaining that the soul does not descend entirely from Intellect, he says that the soul's 'head remains above the heaven'. It seems likely that Plotinus has in mind here *Phaedrus* 248A2–3 where the 'head' of the lucky human charioteer who successfully follows the gods is raised 'into the place beyond the heavens.' It is for this reason that Saffrey and Westerink characterised the use to which Plotinus puts the palinode's myth as 'anthropological rather than theological'.¹⁰ It interprets the ascent of the soul as a journey to the interior of the self rather than to a (non-spatial) quasi-place outside oneself.¹¹

4. Iamblichus and the earlier commentary tradition.

We have suggested that Iamblichus' inclusion of the *Phaedrus* as one of the twelve dialogues in the Neoplatonic reading order dramatically changed the fortunes of a dialogue that had been somewhat neglected by the earlier Platonic tradition. The evidence of Hermias and Proclus gives us some notion of the innovations in the understanding of the dialogue introduced by Iamblichus in his commentary.¹²

⁷ *PT* 4.19,7–8 and 21,14–15

⁸ Buckley 2006.

⁹ It was Biellemeier who first undertook to chart the history of the interpretation of Plato's *Phaedrus* among the Neoplatonists. He shared the distaste for Neoplatonic reading strategies that was common at the time and remarked upon Plotinus' role as a turning point in the interpretation of the dialogue, which he characterised as a 'transition from a philosophical to a mythical standpoint' (p. 19).

¹⁰ Saffrey and Westerink, *PT* 4, xxiii.

¹¹ Tarán 1969.

¹² The existence of this commentary is explicitly attested to by Proclus at *PT* 4.68,22–3.

Hermias' introductory material shows that Iamblichus sought to unify the various speeches in the dialogue by identifying a *skopos* for the entire work. From that *skopos*, the division of the text into parts follows. The work is about 'beauty at every level' and the various parts of the dialogue correspond to beauties on different levels – beauties which are the objects of different kinds of love had by the different characters in the dialogue. The first fragment of Iamblichus' commentary preserved by Hermias claims that Plato's text exhibits a ring structure. The dialogue moves from (i) visible beauty (in the physical form of Phaedrus, a beauty loved by Lysias) to (ii) beauty in *logoi* (Lysias' speech is the exemplar, being the *logos* with which Phaedrus is in love) to (iii) beauty of souls (Socrates' first speech deals with the science of virtue, particularly in relation to the soul since the distinction between licentious, passionate love and rational love – each belonging to different spheres in the soul – is central to Socrates' argument) to (iv) beauty of the encosmic gods (in the first part of the Socratic palinode), and finally to (v) the very source of beauty (in Socrates' description of the 'super-celestial place' at 247B-48C). The dialogue then descends back through each of these levels of beauty by means of the method of division to (vi) psychic beauty and that of virtues and knowledge, and then (vii) the beauty in speeches, thus 'joining the end to the beginning'.

This structure explains why the dialogue is classified as 'theological' in Iamblichus' canon. Stages (iv) and (v) concern beings that the Neoplatonists regarded as divine. The 'encosmic gods' of stage (iv) are the Olympians that lead the souls on their field trip to see the Forms (cf. *Phaedrus* 247A). These seem to be divine *souls*, since they are described as having horses and chariots as well. Proclus' extensive discussion of the Olympians in *Phaedrus* 247A seeks to specify exactly which order of divine souls Socrates describes here (*PT* 6.84,12-92,15). We cannot glean from our surviving evidence a similar determination of the exact level of the divine souls involved, but we think that one may be confident that Iamblichus had something to say on the matter.

In stage (v) of the dialogue the super-celestial place and the divinities 'glimpsed' by the souls that can ascend beyond the sub-celestial arch and stand on the 'vault of the heavens', by contrast, are extra-cosmic divinities. We think it is safe to assume that Iamblichus' reading of this passage focused on the correct interpretation of what he took to be especially significant phrases such as 'the sub-celestial arch' (*Phaedrus* 247B1), the 'rotation of the heavens' (247C1) and the 'super-celestial place' (247C2). These seem to have been regarded as symbols of the very highest orders of reality. In the not entirely consistent reports of Hermias and Proclus at least, there is great emphasis on the meaning of 'the heaven' or Ouranos and its relation to other key principles in his ontology such as 'the first' and 'the Demiurge'.¹³ Iamblichus was followed in this method by Theodore of Asine, who was perhaps his student at one point and almost certainly someone with whom he had substantive philosophical disagreements.

Iamblichus' understanding of the *skopos* of the *Phaedrus* thus accomplished several things for the subsequent Platonic tradition. First, it gave the dialogue a subject matter highly relevant to philosophers in late antiquity. Given the connection between the ordering of things by divine providence and the beauty of the things so ordered, it made the dialogue a theological work. 'Beauty at every level' is thus tantamount to divinity at various levels. Insight into aspects of the divine not evident to others was the stock in trade of the philosopher in late antiquity.¹⁴ Second, and following on from the first point, it placed the dialogue in a program of moral and intellectual development whose goal was assimilation to the divine. Any doubts that readers might have had about Socrates' motives in relation to the young man he leads to the romantic spot by the river could now be seen as concern for

¹³ Saffrey and Westerink *PT* 4, xxvii–xxix attempt to provide a more detailed reconstruction of Iamblichus' position on the basis of our rather tenuous evidence.

¹⁴ cf. Brown 1971, Fowden 1982, Dillon 2005.

Phaedrus' spiritual well-being. Assimilation to the educational context of the Iamblichean ascent through increasingly more spiritual gradations of the virtues serves to negate the eroticism of the dialogue. Finally, Iamblichus' understanding of the purpose of the dialogue rescues it from the rhetoricians and literary critics. It discusses speech and writing, but only as illustrations of the beautiful at the level of *logoi*. The dialogue's real business is with higher – and distinctively philosophical! – matters.

4. Hermias' commentary and the philosophy of Syrianus

These prefatory remarks bring us to the book that you now hold in your hands – a work that bears the title *Scholia* (or notes) *on the Phaedrus of Plato* and whose author is listed as Hermias. For reasons that will become clear in what follows, we will refer to this work a commentary, for that is surely what it is. The work comments systematically on lines or lemmata from Plato's text, though it does so in ways that differ in some respects from other works that we unhesitatingly call commentaries.¹⁵ What remains controversial about the text attributed to Hermias is the relation that it bears to lectures given within the Neoplatonic school at Athens.

Hermias was, along with Proclus, a student of Syrianus in Athens probably somewhere around 430 CE. While Proclus went on to become head of the Neoplatonic school in Athens, Hermias returned to Alexandria where he led the school there. His wife was Aedesia, a niece of Syrianus. With her he had two sons, Ammonius and Heliodorus, the former of whom succeeded him as head of the school in Alexandria. The work on the *Phaedrus* is the only writing by Hermias that survives.

One of our two sources of information with respect to Hermias is the biography of Isidore written by Damascius (c. 462–538), who was familiar with both the Athenian and Alexandrian schools.¹⁶ It has been widely thought that Damascius' assessment of Hermias as a philosopher has a bearing on the authorship of the *Phaedrus* commentary. Damascius described him as hard-working, but unoriginal and says that unlike his classmate, Proclus, he did not go beyond the work of their teacher Syrianus (fr. 54, Athanassiadi).

It is clear that Hermias' text bears evidence of a classroom setting. At various points the writer and Proclus both ask questions of Syrianus (96,24–97,11; 154,18–23 and 161,13). As one would expect of notes taken from lectures, there is also some repetition in Hermias' commentary.¹⁷ Finally, there are strong terminological and stylistic similarities between Hermias' and the extant commentary of Syrianus on books 13 and 14 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. In our translation we note the difficulties associated with translating *hopôs pote* in anything approaching a consistent manner. This phrase looks like Syrianus' own verbal tic. It occurs 14 times in Hermias and 12 times in Syrianus' commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Significantly it almost never occurs in any of the other Neoplatonic commentaries.

These factors led early on to the view that Hermias' work was substantially derived from the lectures of Syrianus.¹⁸ Zeller, the first in the field, for example, commented: 'sein philosophischer Standpunkt ist durchaus der seines Lehrers.'¹⁹ The question at issue among scholars at present is just *how* substantial is this dependence. One of the editors of the new

¹⁵ See below p. xxx

¹⁶ Athanassiadi 1999.

¹⁷ Thus, for instance, Couvreur's edition omits 8.4–14 (= 9.1–11 in the pagination of Lucarini and Moreschini used in this volume) on the ground that it simply repeats what has already been said. But Praechter opposed athetesis on these grounds since repetition is just what one would expect from notes taken on lectures.

¹⁸ cf. Zeller 1865, 747–50, Praechter 1912, and Bielmeier 1930.

¹⁹ op. cit. 748. For more recent authors, see Saffrey and Westerink, *PT* 4, xxxi, who regard Hermias' commentary as 'la rédaction des notes, prises ἀπὸ φωνῆς, au cours donné par Syrianus sur ce dialogue.'

Teubner edition of Hermias (Moreschini) and the author of the only modern language translation of the commentary (Bernard) have both urged a reassessment of the older view.

Bernard notes that Damascius' judgements in the *Philosophical History* are not simply those of the dispassionate observer.²⁰ So we cannot simply assume on the basis of his testimony that there is no trace of Hermias' own originality in the commentary. As early as Bielmeier's 1930 book there was recognition of the distinct possibility that notes from Syrianus' lectures in Athens might have been added to by Hermias upon his return to Alexandria. Indeed, Bielmeier himself supposed that much of the material on Iamblichus in the commentary might be the result of the intercollation by Hermias of material from Iamblichus' commentary on the *Phaedrus* after his return to Alexandria. Bernard's strongest case for Hermias' independence from Syrianus was also noted by Bielmeier. Hermias seems to follow Iamblichus' understanding of *Phaedrus* 247C6–9 rather than that of Proclus and Syrianus and may, in fact, be working with a different text of Plato at this point. This judgement is fraught, however, for two reasons. First, because 247C6–9 presents a textual crux that editors still struggle with and, second, we rely on Proclus' accuracy in his report of Syrianus' view of the passage.²¹

Similarly, Moreschini has argued that the incorporation of ideas relating to the *Chaldean Oracles* and Orphic poems represents another layer of work superimposed over the notes taken from Syrianus' lecture – a layer added probably upon Hermias' return to Alexandria.²² His overall conclusion is one that he sums up in this way:

Convorrà, in conclusione, accettare l'ipotesi fondamentale della dipendenza di Ermia da Siriano, ma non nel senso che l'Alessandrino abbia trascritto *sic et simpliciter* le dottrine del maestro, bensì che le abbia riprese con una sua elaborazione personale.²³

Similarly, Bernard sums up her view in these terms

daß es sich eher nicht um eine bloße Mitschrift und um eine 'Sammlung von Scholien' im gewöhnlichen Sinne handelt, wie etwa von Allen und Dillon leicht abwertend behauptet, wengleich der Titel 'In Platonis Phaedrum Scholia' diese Vermutung nahelegt.

Elsewhere, she recommends that we deny Hermias' work the same status as a 'photocopy' of Syrianus' lecture.²⁴

We are not persuaded that we have the evidence that allows the questions raised by the authors we've been discussing to be settled. In the first place, we lack an appropriate vocabulary for describing the kind of interaction between teacher and student that would allow us to isolate different degrees of dependence. We have the phrase '*apo phonês*' that is attached to commentaries that are explicitly acknowledged as coming from a lecture setting.²⁵ But even though we have a word for it, that single word conceals a multitude of possibilities. We have no information on how a presentation was recorded, either in general or in any particular case. It could be, at one end of the spectrum, virtual dictation if the delivery was

²⁰ op. cit. 19–23.

²¹ Manolea 2004, 52 criticizes Bernard sharply for concluding that Hermias holds to an interpretation of *Phaedrus* 247C6–9 distinct from that of Syrianus on this question without showing that she has undertaken a thorough investigation of the evidence for Syrianus' view.

²² Moreschini 1992. Moreschini is criticized by Cardullo 1995, 26–8 and Manolea 2004, 55–6 for neglecting Syrianus' own enthusiasm for Orphic material and the *Oracles*.

²³ Moreschini 2009, 521–2.

²⁴ Bernard 1995, 220–224, cited with approval in Moreschini 2009, 522, n. 24.

²⁵ The classic treatment is Richard 1950 and he too notes the range of degrees of independence from lecture material. Commenting upon the work entitled 'Scholia on book A of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* made by Asclepius from the voice of Ammonius' Richard writes: 'Mais plusieurs nuances sont possibles: ou bien Asclepius a stenographie les paroles de son maitre; ou bien il s'est propose de reproduire a sa maniere, avec un liberte plus ou moins grande, ses enseignements.'

slow enough or, at the other end, very hurried note taking if the lecturer gabbled. Obviously, too, the ability, understanding and objectives of individual note-takers must have varied and we have little to assess these by. Finally, there is no guarantee that the note-taker, or someone else, hasn't revised the text (as the 'titles' of some of Philoponus's records of Ammonius's lectures tell us he did) for use in later lectures or just to fill perceived gaps.

Now add to this uncertainty the fact that Hermias' text is not even labelled *apo phonês*. We have no way of knowing whether this is because the convention had not come into use at the time of the work's composition (whatever that may have meant) or whether the genre existed but Hermias' work would not have fit within its parameters.²⁶ What Marinus tells us about the creation of a commentary on the *Phaedo* to which Proclus' name attached only helps to generate further uncertainty. Describing Proclus' studies with the aged Plutarch on this dialogue, Marinus says.

With him [sc. Plutarch] Proclus read Aristotle's *On the Soul* and Plato's *Phaedo*. The great man also exhorted him to write down what was said, making an instrument of his zeal, and saying that, when these notes were completed, there would be treatises on the *Phaedo* in Proclus' name. (trans. Edwards)

Is this an *apo phonês* commentary by another name? Or is it a looser relationship between teacher and student of a sort to which Hermias' text might belong? We have no way of knowing.

In the midst of all this uncertainty, the existing scholarship frequently characterises the relation between Hermias' book and Syrianus' lectures in terms derived from contemporary academic practices. Thus, as we saw, Bielmeier argued that Hermias probably revised the notes he took in Syrianus' lectures, supplementing it with material from Iamblichus' *Phaedrus* commentary. Yet he was nonetheless willing to characterise the product of this revision as 'nur der Niederschlag der Interpretation des Dialogs durch Syrian' and 'ein etwas überarbeitetes Kollegheft' of the school. The problem here, we believe, is that terms like 'Kollegheft' are merely suggestive, without precise application conditions.

But even if we were to refine our terminology for isolating distinct degrees of dependence with a range of roughly *apo phonês* works, it is not clear that that we could usefully apply this finely tuned vocabulary to the work before us. Compare the situation in Essays 5 and 6 of Proclus' commentary on the *Republic*. Here Sheppard and Lambertson have attempted to use the whole of the Proclan corpus to isolate the respective contributions of Syrianus and Proclus to the theory of poetry and its allegorical interpretation. This is possible because we have works that we can clearly attribute to Proclus and those, like the *Metaphysics* commentary, that we can clearly attribute to Syrianus.²⁷ But we have *nothing* of Hermias apart from the commentary on the *Phaedrus*. Nor do we have any subsequent Neoplatonist who explains Hermias' views on various topics in the manner in which Proclus explains Syrianus' views. In short, even if we developed a system of clearer and more precise analogies for the dependence of a written work on the thought of a teacher, we lack the evidence regarding Hermias that would allow us to apply it to his case.

To grasp the depth of the problem, let's consider a pretty obvious structural feature of Hermias' text. Our work is broken into three books of somewhat uneven lengths with the divisions between books coming at points that seem fairly significant given the textual division of Iamblichus reviewed above.

²⁶ As Richard notes, the only work from the Athenian school that is at least sometimes characterised as *apo phonês* consists in Marinus' lectures on Euclid.

²⁷ To complicate the example somewhat, Lambertson and Sheppard draw upon Hermias as a source for the views of Syrianus, but that is irrelevant to the asymmetry we want to show between the case of Syrianus and Proclus and that of Hermias and Syrianus.

| Books and pages of Hermias | Number of pages dealing with lemmata | Number of lemmata discussed | Sections of Phaedrus covered | Number of Stephanus pages |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| 1, 1–86 ²⁸ | 68 | 71 | 227A–243E (opening of Socrates' second speech) | 17 |
| 2, 87–180 | 94 | 49 | 244A–249C (end of the central myth) | 5 |
| 3, 181–280 | 100 | 308 | 249D–279C | 30 |

Consider the obvious fact that the notes on the lemmata in book III are both briefer and tend more toward paraphrase. How should we explain this? In commenting on this structural feature, Bielmeier said ‘Man merkt zu Beginn des dritten Buches, daß Kraft und Interesse des Interpreten erlahmt sind’. Presumably ‘the interpreter’ here is *Syrianus*. He thus attributes the relatively superficial treatment of the material after the key episode in the dialogue to Syrianus rather than to Hermias.

Now, we would not recommend any alternative hypothesis. If Syrianus himself adopted the same textual division of the dialogue as Iamblichus then – ontologically speaking – it’s all downhill from 249C. Having ascended through the beauty of the encosmic gods and stood on the super-celestial arch to glimpse the source of all beauty, we now turn downward again to survey the beauty in human souls and then drop off yet again to survey the beauty in spoken and written speech. It would come as no surprise if Syrianus’ enthusiasm for discussing details dropped off sharply after the climax of the dialogue was past.

But notice that it is equally consistent with all our available evidence that Hermias’ notes tail off because *Hermias himself* wrote up less of Syrianus’ lectures (and perhaps revised what he did write less than he revised the notes on the earlier lectures – assuming for the moment that he did revise his notes in either Athens or Alexandria). Perhaps Syrianus had quite a lot to say about the later parts of the dialogue, but his student was uninterested in writing much about it – either at the time or perhaps subsequently. This supposition is not even wildly implausible. Recall that the latter part of the dialogue deals extensively with rhetoric and we have a body of work on rhetoric from Syrianus! We submit that the evidence available to us does not allow for any very decisive conclusion one way or the other.

Because we regard the ‘Hermias or Syrianus?’ question as evidentially intractable, we won’t hazard any solution. However Hermias is clearly the author of the commentary in *some* sense and in the notes to the translation we normally refer to him as such. We will, from time to time, relate what is said in the commentary to what we know of the philosophy of Syrianus from other sources. (After all, we can hardly relate it to what we know of the philosophy of Hermias from other sources for *his* thought!) Given the intimate connections between Proclus and Syrianus, we will also sometimes see fit to point out parallels with Proclus and to clarify obscurities in Hermias’ text by reference to Proclus’ works. As a result we will, on the whole, treat the commentary as evidence for the views of an ‘Athenian school’ around Syrianus and his pupils Proclus and Hermias. The drawing of finer distinctions among these philosophers is an enterprise that we think cannot be done in an evidentially responsible way.

²⁸ The first part of book 1, of course, includes some introductory material about the dialogue as a whole but discussion of the text starts on page 14, with the first lemma indicated at page 19. As a result the table does not represent *exactly* the relative degree of exegetical energy Hermias expends on each part of Plato’s text. Nonetheless, the general point that the part of the dialogue after the palinode is treated more superficially emerges clearly enough.

The second volume of our translation of Hermias will deal with the ascent of the winged human and divine souls to the sub-celestial arch, the revolution of the heavens, and the vision of the supercelestial place (*Phaedrus* 247C–50C). Proclus provides a detailed interpretation of this portion of the text in his *Platonic Theology* book 4, chapters 4 to 25.²⁹ In the introduction to volume 2 we will consider the similarities and differences between the exposition of this part of the *Phaedrus* that is given in Hermias and that provided by Proclus. What strikes the reader immediately is that Proclus characterizes the gods that he takes to be symbolised by Plato’s reference to the sub-celestial arch or the super-celestial place as simultaneously ‘intelligible and intellectual’. This class of gods mediates between the intelligible and intellectual orders of divinities in Proclus’ theology. This vocabulary is conspicuously absent from Hermias. Our preliminary verdict is that this difference is more apparent than real.³⁰ There is very significant agreement between the two texts about how to understand the highest and most theological portion of Plato’s dialogue. Here too we will argue that the most epistemically responsible course of action, given the limits of our evidence, is simply to speak of the Athenian school’s reading of the *Phaedrus* – meaning by this the views of Syrianus and his pupils as represented in Hermias’ commentary and Proclus’ other works.

5. Hermias’ commentary in the subsequent Platonic tradition

Hermias’ son, Ammonius (c. 435/45–517/26), very likely studied the *Phaedrus* with Proclus during his time in Athens before returning to head the school in Alexandria. Although some of his students (Damascius, Olympiodorus and Asclepius) note that they heard Ammonius lecture on Plato, the *Phaedrus* is not among the dialogues mentioned in this connection. If he made any use of his father’s commentary on the *Phaedrus*, this use has left no trace in his surviving written works nor among the reports of his students.

Further, among these students there is evidence for a work on the *Phaedrus* only by one of them – Damascius.³¹ The *Phaedrus* is cited in the work of Philoponus and Simplicius from time to time, but nearly always briefly and in the context of remarks on the soul’s immortality or its nature as self-mover. While the surviving works of Damascius mention the ‘super-celestial place’ eight times (compared with 56 occurrences in Proclus and 19 in Hermias), it occurs not at all in any of the other Alexandrian Neoplatonists. Simplicius discusses it briefly in relation to his treatment of place in Aristotle’s *Physics*.

It is possible that the appearance of a decline in interest in the allegorical interpretation of the mythical passages of the palinode among subsequent Platonists relative to its prominence in Hermias, Proclus and Syrianus is an artefact of the kinds of works that survived. But it also seems possible that later Platonists in both Athens and Alexandria had less appetite for the truly adventurous allegorising that characterised the philosophers around Syrianus. We do observe rather more restrained allegorising of the myths contained in the *Gorgias* in the commentary of Olympiodorus. Some of this restraint doubtless results from the religious politics of the Alexandrian context. But it may also be that these philosophers regarded Hermias’ allegorising of minute details in the *Phaedrus* as a bit too speculative.

²⁹ We have some evidence that Proclus himself composed a commentary on the *Phaedrus*– or at least wrote an extended interpretation of 247C–50C - that informed his exposition at *PT* 4,17-76. For a survey of the evidence and discussion of the alternatives, see Saffrey and Westerink *PT* 4, xxxviii.

³⁰ Saffrey and Westerink argued that Proclus introduced the terminology intelligible-intellective and hypercosmic-encosmic, although basing it on earlier interpretations, notably those of Syrianus (*PT* 4, xxix ff, esp. xxxvi–xxxvii). Our view at this point in the project is that this is very likely. Proclus has introduced a vocabulary, but not a significant conceptual change.

³¹ cf. Westerink 1977, 11, citing Damascius *Princ.* 1.263,9

Thus far the research on the presence and influence of Hermias' commentary in Byzantium has not yielded much. Michael Psellos' 11th century essay *An Explanation of the Drive of the Soul Chariot and the Army of Gods According to Plato in the Phaedrus* consists largely of passages from Hermias' commentary. He does not, however, name Hermias but instead refers these ideas to 'the Greek Theologians'.³²

The only other individual in the Byzantine world in whose hands we can definitely place Hermias' commentary was George Pachymeres. All our existing manuscripts of Hermias' commentary ultimately descend from a copy in the Bibliothèque Nationale and this document, Ms. Par. gr. 1810, was copied by Pachymeres.³³ This 13th century manuscript spawned 14th century copies in the Biblioteca Laurenziana and was thus available to the Italian humanist Marsilio Ficino (1433–99). Ficino's Latin translations of Plato's works – prefaced by *argumenta* (summaries of a sort) and in some cases accompanied by commentaries – were the most important means through which Plato's philosophy was made known in Western Europe during the Renaissance. We know that Ficino read Hermias and that he made his own Latin translation or summary of the commentary.³⁴

The relationship of this translation to Ficino's own translation of the *Phaedrus* and commentary upon it has been considered by Allen and Sheppard.³⁵ Sheppard argues that Ficino's acquaintance with the content of Hermias pre-dates his commentary on the *Symposium* (1469) by showing the close parallels between Ficino's account of divine inspiration and the content of the Hermias' commentary. Allen, on the other hand, concentrates on the *argumentum* that precedes the *Phaedrus* translation, as well as the *Phaedrus* commentary issued separately in 1496. Allen concludes that the Ficino 'did not refer in any systematic, sustained or candid way to his predecessor's work'.³⁶ So while Hermias' account of divine inspiration influenced Ficino's account of inspiration as it is found in his *Symposium* commentary, it seems that Ficino went his own way on many other matters relating to the *Phaedrus*. But, as Allen observes, there is nothing too surprising in this. Ficino's *Philebus* commentary displays a similar independence from that of Damascius, though we know that Ficino read this ancient work as well.³⁷

The author of the first English translation of the *Phaedrus* also drew on Hermias. Thomas Taylor's 1792 translation of Plato's dialogue has a short introduction in which he utilises Proclus' characterisation of the *Phaedrus* in *Platonic Theology*.³⁸ He excuses what he regards as the relative paucity of interpretive notes to his translation by the need to keep the volume affordable and promises to do better in his projected complete translation of Plato. The notes are indeed rather sparse and their distribution across Plato's text mirrors the manner in which Hermias' commentary trails off so that the last part of the dialogue after the palinode is treated rather briefly.³⁹ About a third of his explanatory notes draw on either Proclus or Hermias explicitly. His characterisation of the purpose of the dialogue in the 1792 edition is also not precisely that of the Athenian school. He says that its principal intention is to investigate true and false beauty and its attendant love (p. 2).

By contrast, the 1804 edition has an introduction that seems to draw whole sentences from Hermias' commentary.⁴⁰ Taylor's introduction repeats Hermias' view that the theme of the dialogue is beauty at every level. Taylor's view of Plato is so thoroughly imbued with

³² Arabatzis 2010.

³³ Fryde 2000, 207.

³⁴ cf. Allen and White 1981.

³⁵ Allen 1980, Sheppard 1980.

³⁶ art. cit. 123.

³⁷ art. cit. 125.

³⁸ Taylor 1792

³⁹ Taylor has only two notes after 256B and these concern the identity of 'Theuth' and Pan.

⁴⁰ Taylor and Sydenham 1804.

Neoplatonist assumptions and technical vocabulary that he simply transliterates ‘*skopos*’ when he observes: ‘it must not, therefore, be said that there are many scopes; for it is necessary that all of them should be extended to one thing, that the discourse may be as it were one animal.’ (p. 286) Unlike the 1797 edition, this translation of the *Phaedrus* positively groans under the weight of the notes recording the observations of Hermias on the dialogue.⁴¹

Already in his 1792 translation of the *Phaedrus* Taylor felt compelled to respond to people he derides as ‘verbal critics’. He characterises these critics as people who pride themselves on their understanding of Greek but in fact know nothing of the *true* meaning of Plato’s philosophy. He took particular pains to respond to those who doubt the merit of Neoplatonists such as Hermias and Proclus for shedding light on the thought of Plato. He writes:

... the verbal critic, so far from being convinced of his own blindness, thinks he sees farther, even on the most abstruse subjects, than men who had no occasion to learn any language but their own, who possessed the most extraordinary intellectual abilities, the most ardent thirst after truth, and the most desirable means of obtaining it, living instruction. The men I allude to are the latter Platonists, whom the verbal critic, though he is perfectly ignorant of their writings, perpetually reviles, instances of which may be seen in the Prolegomena of Thompson to his Parmenides, in the Account of the Writings of Proclus by Fabricius, in the intellectual system of Cudworth, and above all by De Villoison in the Diatriba, vol. 1 of his Anecodota Graeca p. 225. (Taylor 1792, 7–8).

The names of Taylor’s verbal critics are familiar from Tigerstedt’s study of the increasing antagonism toward Neoplatonic or ‘eclectic’ readings of Plato in the 16th and 17th centuries.⁴² Hermias’ commentary seems to have had little obvious or direct impact on the 15th century articulation of the Neoplatonic reading of Plato in Ficino. Now the value of the Neoplatonic commentary tradition in general was itself being called into question by Taylor’s ‘verbal critics’.

For the fate of Hermias – at least in English scholarship on Plato – worse was yet to come. We noted above that Taylor’s translation of the *Phaedrus* in the 1804 edition included a great deal more in the way of references to Hermias and other Neoplatonists. The five-volume translation by Taylor and Sydenham was the subject of two lengthy and very negative notices, the first immediately after its publication and another five years later.⁴³ Myles Burnyeat has argued that the anonymous author of these critical notices was no less a person than James Mill, the father of John Stuart Mill and close friend of George Grote. Mill, like Grote, had a great love for Plato, but their Plato was the restlessly inquisitive Socratic Plato. This was, of course, the exact antithesis of the Neoplatonic Plato who is systematic and final in his (admittedly concealed) teachings. While Mill does not comment upon Taylor’s treatment of the *Phaedrus*, he evinces amazement at the value that Taylor places on Proclus. It is reasonable to assume that Hermias would fare no better in Mill’s eyes.

Mr Taylor has accomplished, what it did require very strong evidence to prove was in the present age capable of being accomplished; he has succeeded in getting up the belief, whole and entire, of all the unmeaning, wild and ridiculous reveries of the

⁴¹ It is unclear to us how Taylor had access to Hermias’ commentary at the time at which he did this work, which preceded Ast’s 1810 edition of Hermias. (He in fact published a notice of Ast’s edition in the *Classical Journal* in 1823 and it is perhaps worth observing that in this notice he proclaims his confidence that the surviving notes of Hermias were drawn from a full-scale commentary by Hermias in much the same way in which the notes from Proclus’ *Cratylus* commentary were imperfectly excerpted!) For the enduring mystery of the sources that Taylor worked from, see Catana 2011, 309.

⁴² Tigerstedt 1974.

⁴³ Both reviews are reprinted in *Apeiron* for 2001 and we cite them as Mill 1804/2001 and Mill 1809/2001. Burnyeat 2001 provides an insightful analysis.

latter Platonists; nay, more than this, he has added to the belief, an admiration, which words sink under him in expressing; — no man ever regarded a revelation from heaven with more extatic adoration, than Mr Taylor does the sublime discoveries of Proclus! (Mill 1809/2001,154–5)

It is a measure of the extent to which the tide was running against Neoplatonism that Mill finds it incredible that anyone could manage to *believe* the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato – far less admire it. Far from sharing Taylor’s admiration, however, Mill judges that Proclus and the latter Platonists compare unfavourably even with something as ludicrous as Jacob Boehme’s understanding of the New Testament:

The writings of the German (cobler, we think it was) are even a pattern of rationality, compared with those of the Alexandrian sages. Those men were in fact the charlatans of antient philosophy; and we have nothing in modern times to compare either with the phrenzy of their writings, or the infamy of their lives. A gross mixture of the allegorical genius of Oriental theology, with the quibbling genius of the worst kind of Grecian metaphysics, and an audacious spirit of mystical, irrational and unintelligible fancy-hunting, respecting the invisible powers of nature, and the economy of the universe, constitutes the essence or the animating principle of that absurd and disgusting jargon which they exhibit to us under the profaned name of philosophy. Add to this, that they were, almost without exception, impostors and mountebanks, *THAUMATURGI par metiér*, that is, lying professors of miracle-working, of conversing with the gods, of revelations from heaven, and other cheats by which they could purloin the admiration of an ignorant and abused multitude. (Mill 1809/2001, 155)

As Burnyeat acutely observes, at least so far as academic scholarship on Plato goes, Taylor sank without a trace. He continues to be read by those with an enthusiasm for theosophy, but not by most academic philosophers.

One may hazard to add that when Taylor and the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato sank, it took Hermias down with it. While the secondary literature on Plato’s *Phaedrus* in English is truly vast, very little of it makes any reference to Hermias’ commentary. Nor did Hermias fare well in languages other than English. An edition of the Greek text of Hermias with notes was included with Ast’s *Platonis Phaedrus* in 1810.⁴⁴ This edition of Hermias was reviewed by Taylor in the *Classical Journal* in 1823, but it cannot be said that it created many other ripples. Thompson drew on it in his 1868 translation of the *Phaedrus* with the observation that thanks were due to Ast for publishing the entire *Scholia Hermiae*, ‘for amidst a heap of Neoplatonic rubbish, they contain occasional learned and even sensible remarks.’⁴⁵ As both Taylor and Thompson observed even then, Ast’s edition was in need of many corrections since it was founded upon a single manuscript, M. A more satisfactory edition of Hermias was achieved only with the posthumous publication of Couvreur’s work in 1901.⁴⁶ Couvreur’s text was translated into a modern language for the first time in 1997 by Hildegund Bernard.⁴⁷ Barring unforeseen discoveries, what is likely to be the definitive version of the Greek text was published in 2012.⁴⁸

It appears from this very brief account of the history of Hermias’ commentary that the scholarly world has not exactly deemed the content of this work a matter of burning urgency. In the final section of this Introduction we will offer a few observations to justify our labours in providing the first English translation of Hermias on Plato’s *Phaedrus*.

⁴⁴ Ast 1810. This was the first complete edition of the text. See Lucarini and Moreschini 2012, xlv–xlviii

⁴⁵ Thompson 1868, ix

⁴⁶ Couvreur 1901.

⁴⁷ Bernard 1997.

⁴⁸ Lucarini and Moreschini 2012.

6. Some high points in volume 1

The translation in this volume follows Hermias' commentary up to *Phaedrus* 245E2, i.e. up to and including Socrates' argument for the soul's immortality based on the fact of its self-motion. This corresponds to pages 1–123 in the 280 page Teubner edition (or to pages 1–118 of Couvreur's edition) and reaches to Book 2, section 9 in the numeration of lemmata.

Volume 2 will thus cover a bit more of Hermias' text, but will have a shorter introduction. In this penultimate section of the introduction, we will alert the reader to some of the important themes in this volume.

A not uncommon problem with works in the commentary tradition is seeing the forest for the trees. Because the commentary follows the text and often pursues detailed interpretive points arising from it, it is easy to miss general themes. Some commentaries make this task harder, some easier. So, Proclus' commentary on the *Republic* is partly composed of essays of various lengths on important aspects of Plato's dialogue; for instance, his criticisms of Homer. Thus sustained attention to a particular theme arises from the, admittedly unusual, nature of the commentary. Olympiodorus' *Gorgias* commentary, which – like Hermias' commentary – arises from a teaching context, is obviously divided into lectures, with the lectures themselves further sub-divided into a general interpretation of the text (*theôria*) and detailed interpretation of individual textual points (*lexis*). It seems possible that Hermias' work was entitled 'Scholia' because it lacks such a regular division of labour between general and detailed interpretation. (The extracts preserved from what was called 'the scholia of Proclus' on Plato's *Cratylus* are similar in this regard.) Sometimes we get such a division of labour in relation to a lemma⁴⁹ and other times we do not. Moreover, Hermias chooses to include many bits of exegesis or explanation that philosophers may deem odd.

The rather diverse nature of the information that finds its way into Hermias' commentary is both a blessing and a curse. It can be a curse insofar as these digressions and odd facts break the flow of the broader line of interpretation and risk distracting the reader. This is a forest composed of very diverse species of trees! On the other hand, some of the odd facts thrown into Hermias' work will – we hope – provide data for historians of late antiquity. For instance, Hermias, or Syrianus, obviously felt the need to explain to his audience the meaning of Plato's wrestling metaphor at *Phaedrus* 236B9 (49,5–15). What does this imply about the prevalence of traditional athletics in late antiquity?⁵⁰ In addition, there are digressions to explain bits of Athenian history (e.g. the nature of the oath taken by the Archons) or the history of the Cypselids. Hermias also seeks to inform his readers on details about the history and operation of oracles, the nature of the Muses, the connection between Dionysus and dithyramb and a host of other matters pertaining to the gods and cult. We do not suppose that these historical claims are necessarily correct. After all, Hermias' classmate Proclus had some rather confused ideas about ancient Athenian festivals that are manifest in his remarks on the settings of the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*. Instead of using Hermias' text as a source for earlier history, we should rather use it as an indicator of what pagans of the fifth century CE actually knew, or falsely believed, about the Classical world. They take themselves to be the defenders of the great Hellenic traditions. It is worthwhile to seek to gauge the extent to which they in fact understood the traditions with which they so strongly identify.

It has frequently been observed that the Neoplatonic commentaries on the works of Plato are not merely exposition. Rather, the Neoplatonists constructed their own philosophy through sustained and detailed reflection on the texts that they regarded as authoritative

⁴⁹ For example, at 141,14–146,18, where, as Saffrey points out (*PT* 6, xxvii, n.1), the transition from *theôria* to *lexis* occurs at 145,28.

⁵⁰ cf. Remijsen 2015.

sources of ancient wisdom. This is not to say that their commentaries *never* shed any light on Plato's dialogues, the dialogues themselves serving only as a pretext for the construction of a philosophical edifice entirely distinct from anything Plato might ever have imagined. Certainly the Neoplatonic commentaries bring a great deal to Plato's texts that many Plato scholars regard as foreign to them. But they also address aspects of Plato's dialogues that remain of concern to contemporary scholarship on Plato. In relation to the *Phaedrus*, we discuss four of these: (a) the unity and structure of the dialogue; (b) the relation of its particularly rich attention to characterization and setting to its unity and structure; (c) the character of Socrates and, in particular, his eroticism; and (d) the role of rhetoric.

(a) Unity

The unity of Plato's dialogue remains a live issue for current scholarship. There is a certain irony in the fact that at *Phaedrus* 264C Socrates claims that any good written work needs to have a unity like that of a living thing, with all its parts ordered and integrated. Yet the *Phaedrus* itself seems to lack anything like this kind of unity. If this dialogue is supposed to be like a living being, finding the spine that links its front quarters to the back legs is not easy or obvious.

In section 4 above we noted that Hermias accepts Iamblichus' specification of the *skopos* of the *Phaedrus*: beauty at every level. He also accepts the quite stringent standard of unity that the discipline of the Iamblichean *skopos* imposes upon each dialogue and seeks to show how many of the seemingly irrelevant details of character and setting subserve the dialogue's *skopos*. Hermias does not *defend* the quite stringent requirement of thematic unity that he believes is entailed by the *logos-zōon* analogy of *Phaedrus* 264C. He simply adheres to it. Malcolm Heath has challenged the idea that Plato's *logos-zōon* analogy can plausibly be thought to support the strong thematic unity required by a Neoplatonic *skopos*.⁵¹ We consider Heath's arguments against the Neoplatonic reading of *Phaedrus* 264C as less than absolutely decisive. But in any case, the more important question is whether Hermias can provide a reading of Plato's dialogue that can exhibit it as conforming to that higher standard of unity.

One challenge for Hermias' project is the relation between the speech of Lysias and Socrates' first speech. First, both of these seem to concern a practical decision about who to bestow sexual favours upon – the lover or the non-lover. This question seems to have only a rather vague connection to the idea of beauty. We could, perhaps, begin to close the gap by saying that the practical choice comes down to the question of which prospect is more *attractive* – relations with the lover or with the non-lover. But 'attractive' in this context seems to have more to do with expediency than beauty. Hermias' interpretation relates the speeches to beauty by means of associating each speech with its author and the character of that author's love. The different kinds of love are directed upon different kinds of beauty. Hermias treats Lysias' speech – not implausibly – as disingenuous. It is the speech of a man who is in fact in love, but with a love that is licentious and corporeal. His advice to gratify the non-lover is, in reality, advice to gratify the licentious lover (52,24–54,3). The beauty upon which this kind of licentious love is focused is the love of that which is visible.

While Socrates gives voice to the first speech, Hermias associates it with Phaedrus and his erotic condition. This is not wildly implausible since Socrates does insist that the words of his first speech belong to Phaedrus (242E). Now, on Hermias' reading, Phaedrus is in love with speeches in general and this speech of Lysias in particular (19,20). Thus Socrates' first speech only *seems* to reprise, in a superior manner, the arguments of Lysias. In fact, Socrates' first speech is an exhortation to chaste love directed toward the soul. Even

⁵¹ Heath 1989, 18–19.

though such chaste, psychic love may be aroused by what is visible and material (viz. the words on the pages that Lysias holds, 52,10–11), the beauty upon which it is directed is the invisible excellence of the rational soul. Socrates' first speech thus properly belongs to Phaedrus and is appropriate to his condition intermediate between Socrates (who occupies the realm of intellect and concerns himself with intellectual beauty) and Lysias (who occupies the realm of Becoming and concerns himself with beautiful bodies).

The manner in which the theme of ascent through different kinds of beauty is pursued in Socrates' second speech – the palinode – is clear enough. But in Iamblichus' account of the trajectory taken through the many levels of beauty, the introduction of the discussion of speech and writing at 257C marks a turn downward from the apex of Beauty Itself in the palinode. This transition point has been crucial to modern debates on the unity of the dialogue. Among the modern commentators who think that there is some more or less unifying theme, the two most common candidates are love and rhetoric. The advocates of rhetoric as the unifying theme can give an account of what holds the speeches on love together with the discussion of rhetoric and writing in the latter half. These speeches are illustrations. The fact that they concern love is not essential. In contrast, they argue the champions of love cannot give any similar explanation of why *erôs* drops out of the discussion between Socrates and Phaedrus in the second part of the dialogue.

Hermias, however, has a response to this challenge. On his view, love is not the *skopos* of the dialogue. (That job is one that he would likely have deemed to be the work of the *Symposium*.) Rather, the second half of the dialogue is continuous with the first half because it now pursues beauty in *logoi*. But having taken Phaedrus up to the realm of intellectual beauty, the young man is now prepared to consider his previous object of love – beautiful speeches – with a more critical and philosophical eye. Hermias argues that Plato indicates as much to us by the fact that at this point in just a few lines he has Phaedrus call Socrates' speech wondrous (257C2) and address him as 'my wondrous friend' (C5). Wonder is, of course, the origin of philosophy (Plato, *Theaetetus* 155D2–3; Aristotle, *Metaph.* 982b12) and the prayer at 257B invites Phaedrus to live for love with the aid of philosophy. Hence the transition from the highest form of *erôs* and its object in the palinode to the discussion of beauty in speech and writing is subsumed into the narrative of Phaedrus' redemption from the material realm and his turn to philosophy.

(b) Characterization and setting

Nussbaum and Ferrari are examples of readings of the *Phaedrus* from (broadly) within the Anglo-analytic tradition in ancient philosophy that take the details of setting and characterisation to be crucial to the communication of Plato's philosophical point.⁵² At the time, these books were welcome departures from an approach to the dialogues that largely neglected the 'dramatic elements' to concentrate exclusively upon the manifestly argumentative passages. Hermias' reading of the dialogue similarly seeks to integrate details of setting and characterization into its interpretation. Hermias' approach to the dramatic elements of the dialogue differs from other attempts to find importance in, say, the fact that Socrates gives his first speech with his head covered. What marks Hermias' interpretative project as different in quality from that of Nussbaum or Ferrari is its *relentlessness*. Every detail is put under the interpretive microscope and a significance that is consonant with his understanding of Platonism is discovered. So Nussbaum and Hermias both find significance in the fact that Socrates' first speech is delivered with his head covered. In both cases, the interpretation is similar: the speech does not 'belong' to Socrates.⁵³ On Hermias' reading, it

⁵² Nussbaum 1986, Ferrari 1987

⁵³ cf. Nussbaum 1986, 202.

indicates in addition that he is talking about a lower-order *erôs* directed upon the excellence of the soul, while Socrates himself remains firmly fixed in the realm of intellect, focused upon the beauty of intelligibles. For Nussbaum, Socrates' first speech reflects a distinct phase of Plato's own thought – one that is emotionally colder and more rationalistic. The palinode presents a corrective to these earlier ideas. Hermias, however, carries his reading of Socrates' posture and position through to the fact that Socrates reclines with his head *elevated* when they make themselves comfortable on the river bank. (It shows that, in spite of lowering himself to the level of merely psychic love, the intellectual part of him reaches up from matter and generation.) Similarly Hermias finds significance in Plato's characters getting only their *feet* wet when they cross the stream. (This symbolises the fact that they only touch matter with the lowest of their faculties; cf. 34,25–35,2). Examples could be multiplied, but this would only multiply the incredulity of many readers. How should we understand the difference between the kind of significance that modern interpretations place upon the dramatic details of Plato's dialogues and the relentless search for significance that is typical of Neoplatonic readings?

It is one thing to regard the dramatic elements of a dialogue as not necessarily irrelevant to the philosophical point of the work. It is quite another to suppose that every feature of the dialogue subserves the *skopos* of the dialogue. The Neoplatonists treat the dialogues as 'semantically dense'. They are micro-cosmoi with layered meanings corresponding to the kinds of being one finds within (and beyond!) the cosmos. So just as we may distinguish the hypostases of Nature, Soul and Intellect, so too we can read some feature of a Platonic dialogue physically, ethically or theologically. Likewise, just as it is an axiom of Neoplatonic metaphysics that 'all things are in all, but in each in a manner appropriate to the subject' so too the theme of a Platonic dialogue is mirrored in small details. Thus, the *Phaedrus*' *skopos* is beauty at every level and these levels are explored in an ascent from the corporeal to the intellectual. This trajectory of ascent through progressively higher stages is one that Hermias finds mirrored in Plato's description of the foliage in the spot where Phaedrus and Socrates stop (*Phaedrus* 230B). The tall plane tree, the intermediate chaste tree, and the short grass symbolise the ascent from visible to psychic to intellectual beauty that Socrates will lead Phaedrus through (34,14–18).

If we find it hard to believe that Plato's dialogues – finely crafted though they are – are quite so replete with significance this may be because we suppose the circumstances of their composition to be different from what Hermias and the Neoplatonists took them to be. They suppose that Plato wrote under divine inspiration – that he was an enlightened and beneficent soul who transmitted to us works that do not merely *inform* us of important things, but are mystagogic texts the reading of which *initiates* us in ways exactly analogous to the manner in which telestic rites initiate us. We think this at least forms a coherent set of doctrines. Only a literary version of the *Timaeus*' own divine Demiurge could imbue every detail of a dialogue with the rich depth of meaning that the Neoplatonists discover in them. But even if modern readers of Plato do not find the claim of semantic density (or its accompanying explanation) plausible, nonetheless as a result of reading Hermias such a modern reader may be prompted to productive reflection on the possible significance of some dramatic detail in the dialogue that we typically overlook.

(c) Socrates

The 'Socratic problem' is no longer the staple of Plato scholarship that it once was in the late 20th century. The project of recovering the historical Socrates from the works of Plato (and, perhaps, Xenophon) is one that has lost some of its lustre and it has been largely superseded by studies of the way in which the figure of Socrates was claimed by various schools of thought. Most obviously, all the Hellenistic schools of philosophy, save the Epicureans,

claimed to be the true Socratics.⁵⁴ Recent work has traced the reception of Socrates to the modern period and this work often employs the methods developed in reception studies.⁵⁵

Until recently the Neoplatonic reception of Socrates was a significant gap in this reception history. This was perhaps a result of arguments that the Neoplatonists had no interest in political philosophy or no tolerance for Socrates' own profession of ignorance or not much interest in what are sometimes identified as particularly 'Socratic' dialogues (e.g. the *Apology* or the *Crito*). None of these are good reasons for ignoring the Neoplatonic reception of Socrates.⁵⁶ Each significantly misrepresents the richness of Neoplatonism. Hermias' commentary – alongside the commentaries on the *Gorgias* and the *Alcibiades I* – is among the richest of the source texts for the Neoplatonic reception of the figure of Socrates. One of the papers in the collection by Layne and Tarrant concentrates specifically on Hermias and, moreover, on a theme that is particularly salient to contemporary studies of the *Phaedrus* – the question of Socrates' eroticism.⁵⁷

Geert Roskam takes up the theme of Socratic love in Hermias. Socrates is a beneficent and providential figure who – as the first sentence of Hermias' work makes clear – is present among human beings to lead them to philosophy. His role in this dialogue is to elevate Phaedrus and he does so in what Hermias regards as a characteristically Socratic manner. By attending to the individual character of the young man he seeks to elevate, he *purifies* him and puts him in a position to grasp the most important truths for himself. This emphasis on purification is, we believe, of a piece with the idea that the reading of Plato with a master like Syrianus effects a kind of *initiation* importantly like that which occurred in telestic rites. The cleansing that must take place prior to the revelation of sacred truths must, of course, be tailored to the individual condition of the initiate and symbolises not merely the operation of providence at the general level, but the individual providence exercised by the gods for all things.

As Roskam argues, at least in the Neoplatonic readings of Socrates' eros, his love for Phaedrus and for young men in general has no physical dimension whatsoever. This requires Hermias to explain away many passages in the *Phaedrus*. Roskam considers how he grapples with *Phaedrus* 255E–56E where the philosophical lover and his beloved 'lie together'. Hermias is not content to merely treat this in the context of the subsequent distinction between the superior lovers who do not 'do that which the many regard as blessed' (256C3–4) and those who occasionally give in to this temptation. Rather, Hermias seeks to avoid the implication that either of the two better kinds of lovers have sex. The touches of both kinds of lovers are merely the intimacy of family members. The alleged distinction between whether they do or do not do 'that which the many regard as blessed' is explained allegorically by reference to a distinction between the ways in which the different kinds of lovers revert from sensible to intellectual beauty (212,3–13).

In the context of this volume you can witness similar interpretative contortions when Hermias attempts to deal with Socrates' flirtatious remarks. Having been informed by Phaedrus of the import of Lysias' speech, Socrates jokes that he would have far preferred an argument from Lysias that favours should be granted to the poor rather than the rich and the old rather than the young (227D). It is clear that, in that case, admiration for Lysias would have bid Phaedrus to bestow his sexual favours on the aged and poor Socrates – an implication that Phaedrus is doubtless meant to apprehend! That this remark is flirtation is

⁵⁴ Vander Waerdt 1994.

⁵⁵ Ahbel-Rappe and Kamtekar 2009.

⁵⁶ The case is convincingly made in Layne and Tarrant 2014. Layne and Tarrant also provide ample references to the previous scholarship that argued in one way or another for the general idea that Neoplatonism is a 'Platonismus ohne Sokrates'.

⁵⁷ Roskam 2014. The other paper in this volume to concentrate specifically on Hermias is Manolea 2014.

something that most modern readers take as patently obvious. Hermias, however, takes Socrates to be seriously defending the thesis that it is correct to gratify the aged and the poor rather than the young and the wealthy. Moreover, Hermias affirms that this thesis is correct, even if contrary to the practice of the many. While conceding that the remark is jocular, he entirely misses – or suppresses – the flirtatious by-play that is obviously involved.

One question that we would like our text to answer is whether Hermias regarded *all* sexual relations as equally incompatible with the ideal philosopher as personified by Socrates or merely pederastic sexual relations. Roskam notes that ‘the evidence suggests little place for pederastic activities among philosophers from Plotinus on’.⁵⁸ Likewise, it is also true that Hermias married and had children, as did some of the other Neoplatonists who led the schools at Athens and Alexandria. But equally other leading Neoplatonists kept aloof from *all* sexual relations as part of their understanding of philosophy. Hermias’ wife (Syrianus’ daughter) became his wife only after his classmate, Proclus, was deterred from marriage to her by a vision. Is Proclus’ greatness relative to Hermias in the Platonic biographical tradition unrelated to his more spiritual abstinence? An abstinence urged upon him by Athena? Porphyry’s marriage to Marcella was supposed to be purely spiritual. So the attitude toward heterosexual sexual relations among the Neoplatonists seems to have been ambivalent. Was there a sense that sexual relations between males were particularly problematic?

In his comments on Lysias’ speech, Hermias adds to the criticisms of it that Socrates has already offered. He takes issue with 231E3 where Lysias’ non-lover notes that if the young man is concerned about propriety (*nomos*) the non-lover is sure to be more discreet than the lover, who will doubtless brag about his conquest. Hermias replies that Lysias’ claim that any shame attached to the granting of sexual favours is simply historically false (*par’ historian* 40,10). In defence of this he gives an account of the altars of Eros and Anteros and cites public professions of love between men. These attitudes were not confined to the Athenians, but it would take too long, says Hermias, to list what the Cretans, Spartans and Boeotians thought (41,17–18).

It is not clear what we should infer about Hermias’ own view of same-sex relations on the basis of this historical correction of one of Lysias’ presuppositions. It seems quite possible that he naively believed the relationships celebrated by the Athenians conformed to spiritual ideals of love between men and boys elaborated in the *Symposium*. After all, Hermias (or Syrianus) seems to have been a man who could assert – apparently in all seriousness – that Lysias was *simply wrong* to suppose that some lovers desire the body of the beloved prior to knowing his character. The confident counter-assertion is that ‘those who are in love (*hoi erôntes*) are above all looking for friendship and nobody is looking for friendship if he has no wish to discover the character of those with whom the friendship is to exist’ (42,2–3).

Masterson’s approach to same-sex desire and homosociality in late antiquity raises an interesting alternative. Masterson notes that in late antiquity one of the uses to which writing about same-sex relations was put was to enhance the authority of the writer.⁵⁹ The person who can discuss forbidden topics knowledgeably is a person whose learning demands respect. The act of writing a commentary on a work by Plato a thousand years after the fact affords Hermias an unusual context for making such a move in the display of his *paideia*. Viewed through Masterson’s trope of ‘the supreme knowingness of authority’ Hermias’ reports about the propriety *in Plato’s time* of love between men shows that he knows it all. Nothing – not even forbidden acts – falls outside his competence. But while the Roman legal

⁵⁸ Roskam 2014, 25. This is surely true and the reasons for Platonic philosophers to not celebrate pederastic activities are not hard to find. From the 390s onward Roman law set out increasingly horrible punishments various kinds of sex acts among men. See Masterson (2014), 19–25.

⁵⁹ Masterson (2014), 19.

writings that forbid same-sex relations make a similar display of their knowingness through their choice of vocabulary, they also condemn this threat to proper Roman manhood. But Hermias has the great advantage of discussing norms about same-sex relations that are in the far distant past and thus pose no threat to contemporary manliness. He criticises the words of Lysias' non-lover. He – a figure in the far-distant past – was factually incorrect about about the sense of propriety at *that* time. If Hermias regards the same-sex relations that were celebrated in that far distant past as more like the Platonic ideal than one might reasonably suppose, this could in no way constitute an endorsement of such relations in the present (and doubtless more morally debased) time. On this interpretation, Hermias' apparent naivety about what lovers really want – the young man with the lovely soul rather than the lovely body – is actually a studied pose. He demonstrates his authority by knowing about forbidden topics, but in a context that is importantly distant from the actual world he lives in. If, furthermore, he seems naïve about whether present-day lovers are more interested in bodies or souls, this merely shows the extent to which he is already elevated about the level of fleshly bodies. Such a hypothesis about the intent behind Hermias' remarks on pederasty is certainly more interesting. But we leave it to the reader to decide whether Hermias' bowdlerising interpretation of the sexual tesnion in Plato's dialogue represents a genuine or studied naivety.

(d) Rhetoric

Hermias' commentary also provides an opportunity to reflect on the importantly different relation between philosophy and rhetoric in late antiquity. Plato's dialogues themselves often oppose rhetoric to philosophy, the *Gorgias* perhaps being the most strident in this opposition while the *Phaedrus* arguably holds out the prospect of a philosophical rhetoric. In the context of education in the late Roman Empire, however, nearly all the people who formed the communities of the learned associated with the Neoplatonic schools would have been thoroughly trained in rhetoric. It was the dominant part of *paideia* in late antiquity – the gentleman's education that was the basis of a kind of cultural solidarity among the elite of the Empire and an important source of social capital.

In the system of education in late antiquity, the earlier division of the art of rhetoric into five parts (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery) was superseded by a philosophically inclined curriculum that diminished the role of the latter two parts and concentrated on composition and style rather than delivery. Progress through the standard curriculum proceeded as follows:

1. The *Progymnasmata* of Aphthonius. This work includes examples and accounts of fourteen exercises corresponding to the stock types of composition: myth, narrative, encomium, *ekphrasis*, etc.

Aphthonius was followed by four more theoretically oriented works and commentaries upon them:

2. Hermogenes, *On Issues*
3. ps.-Hermogenes, *On Invention*
4. Hermogenes, *On Ideas* (sc. on types of style)
5. ps.-Hermogenes, *On the Method of Forceful Speaking*

Hermias' teacher, Syrianus, composed commentaries on the two genuine works of Hermogenes among these latter four books. We know nothing certain about Hermias' education, though it is overwhelmingly likely that he studied rhetoric before turning to philosophy. After all, nearly every educated gentleman did. Certainly his class-mate Proclus excelled in his studies in rhetoric in Alexandria before coming to the school of Plutarch and Syrianus in Athens (*V.Proc.* §8–10). Thus, among the people we know were associated with the classroom setting reflected in our *Phaedrus Commentary* (Hermias, Syrianus and

Proclus), it is plausible that all were well acquainted with both the theory and practice of polished writing and speaking.

This fact helps to explain the emphasis that Hermias places on vindicating the style and structure of Plato over what he regards as the authentic speech of Lysias that is embedded within Plato's dialogue (38,14–15). If Plato is to fulfil the ideal of a learned man held by the educated men of the 5th and 6th centuries CE, then he must at least be a master of the art of composition. In summing up his case for the superiority of Socrates' first speech to that of Lysias, Hermias mixes stylistic and moral approbation and opprobrium in ways that are not easily separated. The reason, we submit, is that in order for someone to be regarded as 'a man in full' in late antiquity, he must be able to write and speak to the exacting standards of the rhetorical specialists. The Neoplatonists were, by and large, themselves specialists or people who had the benefit of specialist training. Thus an important role for stylistic questions in Hermias' notes is guaranteed by two things. First, Lysias' speech is – in Hermias' account of the *skopos* of the dialogue – a proxy for the visible beauty of sensible things that Phaedrus must journey beyond. This lower level of beauty must be transcended and this involves purification. In this context, purification is *literary criticism*. And, second, it is an expectation on the part of the Neoplatonists that Plato will exhibit all the accomplishments of an educated man. Given what they suppose education consists in, this means that he must be a superior writer.

7. Future uses of Hermias – a modest proposal

The previous section noted connections between Hermias' work on the *Phaedrus* and modern scholarship on the dialogue, as well as work in the history of late antiquity. We conclude with a modest proposal for mobilising Hermias' text in support of a way of understanding late antique Platonism that we might call 'psychagogic studies.'

As noted above, the commentaries on Plato's dialogues arose from the teaching of the Iamblichean curriculum. This program of study aims not merely to inform the audience about the thought of Plato (at least as it was understood by the Neoplatonists), but to render the participants in the teaching and learning event virtuous and to make them like god. It is in virtue of this transformative role that the Neoplatonists treat the reading of Plato with the master as analogous to ritual initiation. One does not merely learn Plato: one is *purified* and *elevated* by Plato. But how was this transformation supposed to occur? For our part, we recommend the hypothesis that this transformation was accomplished through the acquisition of 'new metaphors to live by'. This requires some explanation. A frequent complaint against Neoplatonic philosophising is that it proceeds through very loose associations of ideas – associative reasoning that is not underpinned by necessary *a priori* connections between concepts. These associations between ideas, moreover, are typically grounded in some allegedly authoritative text rather than in experience and common sense. Thus, apart from Plato's authority (*Timaeus* 40A–B, *Laws* 898A), there seems little reason to suppose that the activity of intuitive thought or direct cognitive insight (*noêsis*) – assuming for a moment that there is such a category of mental activity – has a kind of quasi-movement that is reflected in the motion of a sphere around its axis. Likewise, nothing in our experience of male and female suggests any particular connection with odd or even numbers, nor is it obvious why the number one should be limiting, while the number two (or the dyad) is productive and generative. These associations are simply given by the Neopythagorean tradition. Worse, some Neoplatonic associations of ideas seem to be positively undermined by reflection on our perceptual experience and common sense. The idea that procession, remaining and reversion are the fundamental aspects of *real* causation seems to be contravened by our perceptual experience of causation. In what sense does the motion that is communicated to

the object ball ‘remain’ in the cue ball whilst proceeding? In what way does the motion of the target ball ‘revert upon’ its cause?

We submit that the Neoplatonic commentaries are – in part at least – exercises in internalising associations of ideas that are not at all recommended by our experience as embodied creatures.⁶⁰ The connections drawn between different parts of the same text or different Platonic dialogues within those commentaries are illustrations of how to deploy alternative associations of ideas systematically. They are performances of a kind of ‘Platonic literacy’ that is parallel in some ways to the manner in which educated persons in late antiquity were able to draw creatively upon a shared body of texts to fashion the self-image that they projected to others. The idea of *paideia* as social capital has been discussed extensively by historians of late antiquity. By dint of clever and creative allusions to the texts known to educated men, as well as use of the styles of speech and writing learned in the schools of rhetoric, the *pepaideumenos* was frequently able to claim membership among the educated elite of the Roman empire and the privileges that went with that membership. While this literary and rhetorical education doubtless resulted in *some* internal transformation of the agent’s lived experience, its primary function and its importance derived from the manner in which it permitted the educated person to relate to *others*. By contrast, the capacity to creatively synthesize Platonic texts and to live in and through the semantic associations authorised by those texts was sought precisely for the difference it made to the agent’s lived experience. This, we submit, is what the acquisition of the various gradations of the cardinal virtues consisted in: the creative capacity to give meaning to one’s experience in terms of metaphors and associations of ideas derived from the Platonic teachings. It was, in the sense described briefly above, a kind of Platonic literacy. So in addition to providing further evidence for questions that we are already asking about Platonism, we hope that our translation will encourage new questions. Perhaps we could ask, ‘What kinds of metaphors for living and what manner of associations of ideas are encouraged by Hermias’ reading of Plato’s text? How do these metaphors and other associations run counter to established ways of imposing order and a narrative upon experience that were prevalent at the time?’ To ask these questions is not to ask whether Hermias accurately reports the intended meaning of Plato’s dialogue or to ask whether Hermias’ arguments for the theses characteristic of the Neoplatonic system are sound. It is rather to inquire into the potential for psychological transformation that is afforded by the performance of Platonic literacy in front of the audience of students. The posing of this question is as much a matter of the rhetorical effect of Hermias’ work as it is a philosophical investigation of the soundness of its arguments.

One test case for the sort of rhetorical inquiry we have in mind is the way in which Hermias performs Platonic literacy in relation to ideas associated with travel in the dialogue. The *Phaedrus* is a dialogue of journeys. Physically, Phaedrus and Socrates leave the city to go for a walk in the countryside. This bodily journey leads to the story of a psychic journey of the souls in Socrates’ palinode, when they travel in company with the gods to the arch of the heaven and gaze upon the super-celestial place. Socrates’ departure for the journey back into the city is, of course, postponed by the appearance of his divine sign. There may be more episodes as well, but these examples suffice to make the point. Now, travel in search of learning or experience of divine wonders was a regular feature of a philosopher’s life in late antiquity.⁶¹ What were the received metaphors in terms of which men and women in late antiquity interpreted the often taxing demands of travel? What associations would seem natural to the non-philosophical idiolect in relation to cities, the countryside, streams, shrines,

⁶⁰ cf. Baltzly 2015 for an example of the way in which the ‘self-subsistent’ as it is articulated in Proclus’ *Elements of Theology* seeks to replace our empirical concept of causation with one more apt to the world of intelligibles.

⁶¹ Cf. Watts 2004.

etc.? How would the web of associations encouraged by Hermias' performance of Platonic literacy alter the metaphors through which the educated elite of late antiquity interpreted and ordered the experiences of journeying from one place to another? These are questions that we think are not asked of texts in the Neoplatonic commentary tradition. Answers to them – conjectural though they must be – might help to explain the staying power of a body of philosophical writing that has struck so many modern readers as otherwise so lacking in interest.

Our translation is made from Lucarini and Moreschini's 2012 Teubner edition. Departures from their text, many of which are based on their own suggestions in the critical apparatus, are mentioned in the notes as they occur and listed separately in front of the translation. We have occasionally also consulted the older edition of Couvreur on textual issues and have made heavy use of the *apparatus fontium* in Lucarini and Moreschini and in Couvreur and of the notes in Bernard's German translation in identifying quotations and parallel passages. (A feature of Lucarini and Moreschini's *apparatus fontium* is the references to scholia based on Hermias in the various collections of ancient scholia on Plato. Since these for the most part transcribe Hermias more or less verbatim, we have not thought it worth referring to them in our notes.) In making the translation, we have frequently consulted Bernard's excellent translation, the only previous one into a modern language.