Hermias

On Plato

Phaedrus 245E–257C

Translated by
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In memory of John Colman (1942–2020),
philosopher at the University of Tasmania
and Michael's long-time friend.

Introduction

The *Phaedrus*' theological centre of gravity

The level of exegetical energy dedicated to the portion of Plato's dialogue that is discussed in this volume of Hermias' *Phaedrus* commentary explains why the Neoplatonists assigned it a particular role in their program of reading Plato. The Neoplatonists grouped Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* together as dialogues that are concerned particularly with gods. In the Iamblichean reading order, they occupy the eighth and ninth positions, immediately before the synoptic *Philebus* (which was alleged to investigate the good as immanent) and immediately after the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* (which were taken to deal with nature).[1] Both *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* are also among Plato's most dramatically complex dialogues. While the latter has a host of speakers, the *Phaedrus* has a host of voices that are introduced through the two speakers, Socrates and Phaedrus. These include the absent Lysias, whose speech in praise of the non-lover prompts the discussion between Phaedrus and Socrates (230E–237A). This speech elicits from Socrates another speech, ostensibly agreeing with Lysias about the perils of involving oneself with someone who is in love (237A–243A). Socrates' divine sign intervenes both to prevent his departure back to the city and also to prompt a second speech on love from Socrates – the palinode or 'counter-song' that makes restitution for the terrible things seemingly said about love or the god Eros in his first speech (244A–257C). The final and longest part of the dialogue reflects on the practice of giving, and particularly writing, speeches such as those that Socrates and Phaedrus have provided (257C–279C). The dramatic complexity of the *Phaedrus* afforded its Neoplatonic interpreters considerable scope for theories of its structure and purpose. This means that not all parts of the dialogue get equal attention.

While Hermias' commentary on the *Phaedrus* is the only one that is extant, we can tell from the *Platonic Theology* of his classmate Proclus that the palinode was the part of the dialogue that attracted the most exegetical attention. Of the 308 citations of the *Phaedrus* in his *Platonic Theology*, only 18 fall outside Stephanus pages 244A–257C (i.e. outside the palinode). When Proclus refers his readers to what we assume to be his commentary on this dialogue, he at one point simply says 'my notes on the palinode' (*in Remp*. 2,12,1–5). So Proclus' attention in that work was clearly focused on the palinode. Moreover, Hermias' classmate took the *Phaedrus* to have a high relevance to the theological project of the *Platonic Theology*. The citations of the *Phaedrus* in the *Platonic Theology* are outnumbered only by citations of the *Timaeus*. They eclipse citations even of the *Parmenides*. So Proclus clearly took this dialogue to be one highly relevant to the understanding of Plato's account of the various ranks of gods.

Hermias similarly treats the palinode in greater detail than any other part of Plato's dialogue. But as we shall see, even within the palinode, some passages prompt more detailed and extensive exegesis than others. The pattern of this detailed commentary reveals the sense in which the Neoplatonists took the *Phaedrus* to be particularly concerned with *gods*. Moreover, much of Hermias' exegetical energy is expended in

[1] cf. *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* chs 24-26 with Westerink 1962, xxxvii–xl and Tarrant 2014.

pursuit of showing that Socrates' poetic description of the gods in the palinode is consistent with the teachings of two other inspired poet-theologians: Orpheus and Homer.[2] The extent of Hermias' theological preoccupation in the *Phaedrus* becomes clear when we consider some facts about the structure of his commentary.

This volume of our translation of Hermias' commentary resumes the exegesis of Socrates' palinode from *Phaedrus* 245E2, where Socrates makes the transition from the argument that all soul is immortal and indestructible. It ends with Socrates' prayer to Eros – an episode that concludes the palinode at 257B6. Before turning to a general description of Hermias' interpretation of the palinode, it will perhaps be useful to rehearse the structure of Socrates' speech since Hermias' audience would have known it very, very well.[3]

A.	243E9–245A8	Introduction and the four kinds of madness
B.	245B1–C4	Transition to the nature of soul
C.	245C5–246A2	Proof of the soul's immortal and indestructible nature as *arkhê* of motion
D.	246A3–D5	The structure or *idea* of the soul
E.	246D6–247C2	The celestial procession of twelve divine souls led by Zeus
F.	247C3–E6	Description of the place outside the heavens
G.	248A1–E3	Descent of human souls and the laws governing their initial incarnation
H.	248E3–249D3	The temporal periods for the cycles of incarnation
I.	249D4–250E1	Return to the topic of erotic madness – memory and the sight of beauty
J.	250E1–52C2	The corporeal experience of love for those who *have* become corrupt
K.	252C3–C6	The corporeal experience of love for those who are *not* corrupted
L.	253C7–254B5	The horses' response to visible beauty
M.	254B5–255A1	The charioteer's struggle with the horses in their response to visible beauty
N.	255A1–256A6	The response of the beloved to the lover and the backflow of beauty
O.	256A7–E2	The lives and afterlives of philosophic lovers versus lovers of honour

[2] The other source of inspired theological authority – the Chaldean Oracles – is largely absent from Hermias' commentary on the *Phaedrus*. By contrast, Proclus dedicated a chapter of his exegesis of the palinode to correlating details of Socrates' description of the place outside the heavens with the order of gods in the Oracles; cf. *PT* 4,27–31. For Proclus and the Oracles more generally, see Spanu 2021.

[3] A-C were translated in volume 1 of our translation and the present volume ends with Q.

P. 256E3–257A2 Summation of the benefit of erotic madness

Q. 257A3–B6 Concluding prayer to Eros

--------- End of volume 2 of our English translation and start of volume 3 -------

Hermias' commentary is divided into three books. The division between Book 1 and Book 2 roughly matches the start of the palinode (244A3), while Book 3 begins with the return to the topic of erotic madness at 249D4 (section I above). The page extent of the three books is roughly equivalent with the longest (Book 3) exceeding the shortest (Book 1 by only 13 pages. But the division of these roughly equivalent books into sections is radically different. Book 2 contains only 49 sections, while the portion of Book 3 that deals with the remainder of the palinode contains 98. So Hermias' commentary devotes nearly half of its pages to exegesis of the palinode (243E9–257B6) – an episode that takes up roughly a quarter of the pages in Plato's dialogue. Moreover, within that exegesis, the interpretation of 246A3–249D3 (sections D–H above) is the most detailed. The treatment of subsequent lemmata in Book 3 is far, far more abbreviated. Nor does the interpretation have the same synthesizing scope as witnessed in Book 2. After the comments on 249D3, Hermias' text sort of runs out of steam.

When we look at the content of that part of Plato's dialogue, the reason becomes clear. In this part of the work, Socrates describes *divine souls* – their nature and their activities. We can draw a useful parallel with the dialogues in the Iamblichean curriculum that precede *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* – that is, *Sophist* and *Statesman*. It may strike modern readers of Plato as odd that these should be considered dialogues on nature. But when we look at the patterns of citation in the extant works of the Neoplatonic commentators, we can see that they are overwhelmingly focused on relatively short segments of these dialogues. In the case of the *Sophist*, we can see that the Neoplatonists paid a great deal of attention to the description of the sophist as a *maker* of images – a sub-lunary demiurge.[4] In the case of the *Statesman*, nearly all citations deal with the myth of cosmic reversal.[5] These are dialogues 'on nature' in the sense that they contain relatively short episodes that admitted of an interpretation in these terms. Similarly, the *Phaedrus* is a 'theological' dialogue because at several points it describes gods both within and beyond the heavens. Of course, the *Phaedrus* discusses many other things too and most of them receive comment in Hermias' work. But the theological content gets the lion's share of attention and this surely explains the Neoplatonists' categorisation of this dialogue as 'theological'.

Hermias' reading strategies

So how should a reader make sense of the theology that is putatively revealed in Plato's dialogue? Hermias' reading of the palinode in the *Phaedrus* often, but not inevitably, falls into a certain pattern. Frequently he focuses on a *term* that he regards as particularly important and in many cases, this isolated term or phrase is one that is not regarded by contemporary commentators on Plato's dialogues as particularly meaningful. The exegesis of these key terms frequently leads on to a *division* or mapping

[4] cf. Steel 1992. For a list of relevant passages in Proclus where the *Sophist* is discussed, see Guérard 1991.

[5] cf. Dillon 1995.

of either the text itself or some aspect of reality that Hermias takes the text to be concerned with. Finally, Hermias often aligns or relates the ensuing division to *other Platonic texts*. So while the narrative arc of Hermias' commentary is guided by the discourse of Socrates, within that narrative arc we frequently find this pattern of isolated term, exegesis into a division, and inter-textual relations.

Illustration 1: the form of the soul

When Socrates pivots from the argument for the immortality of soul to his description of what the soul is like at 246A2, he uses a Greek word that is, in many contexts, properly translated as 'form' (*idea*). But in this specific context it is likely to mean no more than 'structure' or perhaps – relating *idea* to its root in the verb 'to see' (*idein*) – the way it looks, metaphorically speaking. Plato's Socrates goes on to tell us that the soul looks like a charioteer driving a team of two horses. Hermias, however, sees *idea* here in a technical sense. This naturally raises a question: If Socrates is now shifting to discussing the soul's *form* (in the technical sense), what aspect of the soul was he discussing *prior* to this? The sense of priority is not merely that of the order of discussion. It is assumed that the order of discussion must mirror the metaphysical order of the things under discussion. If the description of the soul as winged chariot team describes the soul's form, then – by Hermias' lights – the previous discussion of the soul's immortality must have been about something prior to the soul's form and this could only be the soul's one (126,17–21). Hermias reconciles the order of metaphysical and textual priority by insisting that the immortality demonstration (245C5-46A2) concerns 'the one of the soul'. The soul's own one is less expressive of plurality than its form. The soul's form is – at least in contrast to the soul's one – more pluralised and is characterised by Hermias as a one-many or a unity-in-plurality. The more pluralised character of the soul's form is presumably meant to explain why Socrates now characterises the *idea* of the soul in terms of the charioteer and the two horses. So Hermias has promoted what is very probably a non-technical use of one of Plato's words for 'form' into a technical one and in light of this promotion reads the presence of 'the one of the soul' into Plato's text.

Hermias ingeniously connects the soul's one with its form through its definition. At 125,19 we are told that the soul is 'an incorporeal, self-moved substance capable of knowing things.' Now, the demonstration of the soul's immortality proceeds – at least on Hermias' reading – through two demonstrative syllogisms that share a common premise, C1

> C1: Soul is self-moved.

Combining this premise with other premises for the A-syllogism yields

> A1: All that is *self-moved* is perpetually moved.
>
> A2: All that is perpetually moved is immortal
>
> So, soul is immortal.

Combing C1 with the premises of the B-syllogism yields

> B1: Everything self-moved is a first principle or *arkhê* of *motion*

B2: Every first principle of motion is ungenerated

B3: All that is ungenerated is imperishable

B4: all that is imperishable is immortal

So, the soul is immortal.

Selected terms from these demonstrations are chosen to illuminate the soul's one – the concentrated cause of all these features. The soul's one is principally self-moved and in virtue of this is also perpetually moved and immortal. These latter features stand to the self-moved as the *self*-moved stands to the *unmoved* – an unmoved first principle which is prior to all life and movement (126,26). So in the triad: self-moved, perpetually-moved and immortal, the self-moved is first. What is immortal, then, is closer to the lifeless, material things that are moved-by-another or hetero-motive. After all, immortality – what is *athanatos* – is a *privation* or lack of mortality, just as what is lifeless and hetero-motive is characterised by what it lacks. This leaves 'perpetually moved' as a middle term in this triad.

Having discovered this ordered triad implicit within the one of the soul, Hermias is then free to correlate its elements with three other significant triads. The first of these, naturally, is the triad of the charioteer, the noble horse and the unruly horse which we find in the palinode itself. Beyond that, however, we find a correlation with the constituents out of which the World Soul is constructed in the *Timaeus*. Finally, we find that the Iamblichean three-fold division between substance, power and activity looms large in the interpretation of the palinode.

This last division is a staple of later Platonism and structures Iamblichus' own account of the soul in his *De Anima*. Proclus' exegesis of the psychogony in the *Timaeus* similarly locates this threefold division first in the Demiurge's blending of the ingredients of the World Soul from the divisible and indivisible kinds of Being, Sameness and Difference (the soul's *substance*, *Timaeus* 35A1–B1); then in the *powers* of circles of the Same and the Different (*Timaeus* 36C6–D7); and finally in the animating and cognitive *activities* of the World Soul (*Timaeus* 36D8–37C5). Hermias similarly supposes that it frames the textual division of the *Phaedrus*. The argument for immortality corresponds to the soul's substance, while *Phaedrus* 246A6–B4 concerns the soul's powers (symbolised by the charioteer and horses). Hermias supposes that 246B6 marks a transition to Socrates' discussion of the soul's activities (135,15–19).

The correlations between these triads are not a simple one-to-one matching, for Hermias argues by elimination for the conclusion that the charioteer and horses must be understood in terms of the soul's *powers* – not its activities or substance (127.10–20). So, when we relate the charioteer and the horses to the great kinds or *megista genê* mobilised in the soul's construction in *Timaeus*, the charioteer is correlated with power of Being, while the noble horse is correlated with the power of the circle of the Same, and finally the less noble horse is correlated with the power of the circle of the Different (128,24–9). In addition to the correlations noted above, Hermias adds that we can also read the image of the charioteer and horses in terms of cognitive powers that are familiar from the *Republic*, matching the charioteer with intellect or *nous* (whose

activity is, of course, *noêsis*), the better horse with discursive thought or *dianoia*, and the worse horse with opinion or *doxa*. It is also possible to shift the centre of interpretive attention up a notch to the soul's highest union with the intelligibles and the gods – the soul's one. Having made this shift, both the charioteer and the better horse can be seen as 'always longing for the intelligibles', while the less noble horse 'attains them only by inference and division.' Alternatively, we can shift down to read the image at the level of the power of opinion, in which case the charioteer becomes discursive thought or *dianoia*, the better horse opinion that longs for discursive thought, and the lesser horse corresponds to 'the power that longs to govern lower things'.

These correlations are further complicated by the fact that Hermias takes Socrates to be describing the nature of both divine and human souls in these initial stages of the palinode. This, of course, is not unreasonable since the myth of the *Phaedrus* does, in fact, describe the souls of the gods as likewise composed of a charioteer and horses. The Athenian school gives all souls, both human and divine, vehicles and the Platonic licence for this comes from the *Phaedrus*, as well as the *Timaeus*.[6] While the vehicles of divine souls contain only the highest forms or first principles of the irrational soul, humans are composed of both an immortal and rational soul and the irrational and mortal soul that is created for them by the Younger Gods at *Timaeus* 42D–E. When we descend to consider the image in relation to the irrational aspects of the human soul, then the charioteer aligns – not with reason or *logismos* – but rather with opinion, while the better and worse horses correspond to the more familiar spirited and appetitive parts of the soul from the *Republic* (130,31–2).

Hermias concludes the intertextual connections of the *Phaedrus*' charioteer and horses with a largely undeveloped gesture toward the *Epinomis* – a foundational text for all subsequent Platonic theories of daimons and other beings intermediate between humans and gods.[7] Hermias claims that the identity of the charioteer and the horses changes depending upon the spheres and elements involved (131,3–9). The idea is not developed, but it seems that we are intended to see the image from the *Phaedrus* differently depending on whether we are thinking of souls that are angelic, daemonic, or heroic.

The first phase of Hermias' exegesis thus conforms to the pattern indicated above. The occurrence of the Greek word '*idea'* at *Phaedrus* 246A2 seems to him to demand a reading that contrasts the soul's form with some prior topic of discussion – the soul's one. This, in turn, leads Hermias to impose a division or framework upon Plato's text. Elements within this framework are subsequently correlated with other divisions in other Platonic dialogues or in the Platonic tradition more widely. Hermias' (or Syrianus') interpretive ingenuity is exhibited in this sequence of (a) finding a key phrase in the text and following the alleged implications of its presence, (b) integrating these implications into some view about the structure of the dialogue and finally (c) relating these insights to other dialogues.

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[6] That Hermias' views on psychic vehicles are properly assimilated to those of his classmate Proclus is shown in Finamore 2019.

[7] Timotin 2012, 86–93.

Illustration 2: lowered wings

The Greek word '*hupopteros*' provides a somewhat similar example of how a single word on Plato's part can lead to creative interpretation by Hermias. In this case, the isolated word similarly reinforces a textual division, but it does not really prompt Hermias to seek to align the *Phaedrus* with other Platonic dialogues.

Plato uses both *hupopteros* and *pteros* (and cognate terms) to mean 'winged' or 'feathered'. The second is by far more common, but there are two occurrences of the first form. There is, however, no real reason to think that these are anything other than synonyms in Plato. Hermias, however, is keen to draw a contrast between one of the uses of *hupopteros* and Plato's more common vocabulary for 'winged'. (He ignores the second occurrence of *hupopteros*.) When he first introduces the winged horses and charioteers that exhibit the form of *all* souls at 246a7, Plato writes '*hupopteros*'. Shortly thereafter, he describes the chariot of the great leader Zeus as winged with the use of *ptêros* – without the *hupo-* prefix (246e5). Hermias supposes that *some* significance must attach to this different vocabulary and uses his account of that difference in terminology to shed light on the long-standing question of the soul's descent.

As noted above, there was a disagreement between Plotinus and subsequent Platonists about whether the soul ever really descended from on high. Among those who rejected Plotinus' 'unfallen soul' there was also a dispute about the nature of the descent.[8] Was the soul changed in its substance when it entered the realm of Becoming? Did it lose some of its powers? Or did it retain those powers, even if their exercise or activity was impeded by embodiment? Hermias' view is the last of these options and he uses *hupopteros* at 246a7 as another piece of evidence for its correctness (131,10–31). This word can be used at 246a7 because the image of the winged chariot can be applied to *all* souls – whether human or divine. Sometimes, however, the wings of human souls are *lowered*. (That is alleged to be the force of the *hupo* in *hupopteros*.) We always have the power of the soul's wings, which is the power of ascent. But, unlike the gods, our power of ascent is not always actualised. When Plato says later at 251b7 'for formerly it was winged', Hermias takes this to mean that its wings are lowered: its power of ascent is still present, but cannot now be actualised until it is nourished by sensible beauty which prompts recollection of the sights seen above. Zeus is described, therefore, as having a winged chariot because the powers of gods are always actual.

The success of this interpretive stratagem (as Hermias would doubtless have seen it) makes it plausible that the textual division between substance, power and activity noted in the previous section is really present in Plato. In the distinction between substance or form, powers and activities, the *Phaedrus*' image of the wing corresponds to a power, while the journeys undertaken by winged souls correspond to activities. Plato's deliberate use of *hupopteros* alerts the sufficiently discerning reader to his real position on the descent of the soul.

[8] cf. Steel 1978.

Illustration 3: the inventory of lives

Hermias' adventures in inter-textual connections between the *Phaedrus* and other Platonic dialogues are not inevitably prompted by casual variants in vocabulary like the distinction between *hupopteros* and *pteros* or the presence of the word *idea*. Sometimes the questions emerge quite naturally from the contents of the different dialogues. In some cases, the resolution of the question about the relation of the *Phaedrus* to other dialogues exhibits Hermias' creativity.

Phaedrus 248D2–E3 lists a series of nine lives into which souls who descend into Becoming may be initially incarnated. Those who have glimpsed the most of the intelligibles will (of course!) enter into the birth of a man who is to be a philosopher or a lover of beauty. Second place is the life of a lawful king and so on through to the tyrant who comes ninth. This notion of a range of lives or ways of life on offer to souls immediately recalls the choice of lives in the myth of Er in *Republic* 618A–619D. Both Hermias and Proclus address the relation between the selection of lives depicted there, where souls freely choose the lives that they will go on to live in their incarnated state, with the assignment of lives here at the initial incarnation.[9] The question of the relation between these two texts is obvious to any reader who knows both so it is perhaps unsurprising that the Neoplatonic interpreters of both dialogues should address it. Both Proclus and Hermias distinguish the choice of lives in the two dialogues in the same way.[10] The *Phaedrus* rewards souls in their initial incarnation in proportion to their achievement in viewing intelligible reality. The *Republic*'s choice of lives involves souls who have lived in the realm of Becoming already in previous incarnations. In the former, we see the operation of the law of Adrasteia. In the latter, souls choose wisely or unwisely not only among a much wider range of more specific forms of life, but, in addition, these lives come with fortunes or fated events attached to them. These fortunes constitute something rather like the 'fine print' in what each soul selects. The soul who quickly grasps the life of the tyrant may realise, prior to his drinking from the river of forgetfulness, that he is also fated to experience terrible things, like eating his own children (*Rep*. 619B7–C1).

While this connection between the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic* is obvious enough, there is another puzzle about the two dialogues that is less obvious and it is one that Hermias takes up at 172,4. What is the relation between the spectrum of psychic constitutions in the *Republic* and the nine kinds of life into which a soul may be initially incarnated according to the *Phaedrus*? The *Republic* treats the philosophical, timocratic, oligarchic, democratic and tyrannical ways of life as the result of different relations among the three parts of the soul: reason, spirit and appetite. So one might reasonably suppose that the permutations among the psychic parts determines the kinds of lives that are possible. But the *Phaedrus'* list of nine ways of life does not easily map onto the five lives of the *Republic*. Hermias' response to this (172,4–175,12) is two-fold. First he implicitly introduces a fourth part of the soul, alongside reason, spirit and appetite. Second, he makes some lives imitations of others.

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[9] cf. Proclus, *in Remp.* 2,185,23–186,6; 282,15–17; 305,1–18 and especially 319,25–330,4.

[10] Compare Hermias 171,19–172,3 with Proclus *in Remp.* 2,185,23–186,6 and 305,1–18.

The first four lives in the *Phaedrus* list (at least as Hermias explains them) are as follows

1. The philosophical
2. The kingly or military
3. The political or commercial
4. The gymnastic and medical

These lives result from the soul living 'in accordance with' (*kata*) one of *four* psychic parts or aspects: reason, spirit, appetite or nature (*phusis*). In the case of these lives, the person lives in accordance with one of these parts, but with reason in charge. The additional part that is not familiar from the *Republic* is nature or the principle of the body. The person who dedicates himself to this part of the soul (with reason in charge, of course) conveniently aligns with practitioners of the sciences of the body: *gumnastikê* or physical training and medicine. For the Neoplatonists, nature is the final form of life that derives from the One. Below nature in the order of being, there is only matter. So it marks a kind of end point. So how does Hermias manage the remaining five ways of life?

The next life identified in Plato's text is the life of ritual and prophecy – the telestic or mantic life. Hermias uses the fact that nature is the final living emanation from the One to his advantage here. The life below the one that is lived in accordance with nature *has no power of its own*. So it must turn back upon the gods for its power – just as the person who plays the role of the seer turns to the gods for his or her power of seeing the future. Hence the fifth, telestic life corresponds to the phase of reversion in the metaphysics of remaining, procession and reversion. Hermias is quick to point out that the ritualistic and prophetic life here is *not* the kind that involves one of the kinds of divinely inspired madness. After all, it is the *philosopher* – who is also characterised as a lover of beauty and poetical at 248D3 – who shares directly in the divine gift of madness. Rather, the telestic life that is in fifth place is one that involves the human skill of ritual purification or divination.[11] Hermias thus draws a line between the divine gifts of ritual and prophecy at *Phaedrus* 244B ff. and the fifth-placed life.

The remaining four lives are:

6. Poet or some other kind of imitator
7. Craftsman or farmer
8. Sophist or demagogue
9. Tyrant

All these lives Hermias characterises as like imitations or images (*mimêtikos kai eidôlikos*) of those that 'come before them' (173,1–3) although, contrary to what you might initially expect, it appears that he actually means only of the first two of the initial four, the sixth and seventh being 'true imitations', the eighth and ninth imitating their models 'for the worse'. The sixth and seventh are distinguished from one another by the manner of imitation. The poet is expressly said to imitate the philosopher and the king by means of *words*, while the craftsman imitates them by *deeds*. So each of these two 'true imitators' seems to have two paradigms: both the philosopher and the king.

[11] A distinction that Hermias had already drawn at 104,19–29.

Nothing is explicitly said of poets imitating the lives that are in third or fourth place. Hermias merely notes that the imitators involved in the sixth way of life are 'three removes from the truth' and include not only poets, but also painters (173,12–16). However, when Hermias expands on what it means for the seventh-ranked lives to imitate 'those before them' his brief remarks suggest that he has philosophers and kings as his paradigms for craftsmen and farmers. The former, in their woodworking or leather-working 'bring things into being from non-being', while the latter manage nature to bring forth produce or animals that are healthy. The image of the statesman as shepherd of the hornless, bipedal herd of humans at *Statesman* 267A–C seems likely to be a salient Platonic touchstone for the idea that farmers correctly imitate the second-ranked kingly life. The last-placed lives are imitative too, but not *truly* so since they include 'dissimilarity'. Here too, the eighth and ninth lives are delineated by the familiar contrast between words (sophists and demagogues) and deeds (tyrants). Moreover, Hermias distinguishes the two lives subsumed in eighth place by their aims: while the sophist wants to be a teacher of virtue and of decent customary behaviour (*nomos*), the demagogue wants to orate to the mob. Perhaps, then, Hermias supposes the sophist to be a defective imitator of the philosopher while the tyrant is a defective imitator of the king or statesman. In fact, this way of relating the four ways of life would align Hermias' reading of the *Phaedrus* conveniently with the conclusion of the *Sophist*. There both the sophist and the demagogue are people who belong to the sub-branch of the imitative art that has merely opinion and not knowledge. What distinguishes sophists from demagogues is whether they address themselves to the many in long speeches or to private individuals in short speeches. Immediately prior to the concluding summary, the Eleatic Stranger distinguishes the philosopher from the sophist and the demagogue from the statesman (268B–C).

Hermias' attentiveness to the potential for connecting *Phaedrus* 248D–E to other dialogues is matched by this attentiveness to the details of the text itself. When Socrates describes the first of the nine lives, he doesn't simply describe it as that of the philosopher but includes other options, saying that the soul that is to be born into it will be planted 'into the seed of a man who will become a lover of wisdom *or* of beauty *or* [someone] who will be cultivated in the arts or prone to erotic love'.[12] The second- to fifth-ranked lives are characterised in terms of *two* options – for instance 'lawful king or military commander'. The same holds true for all the lives listed except for the last: the tyrant. Moreover, Socrates' method of enumeration changes midway through his list of nine, from the use of accusative to the dative case. Hermias uses all these facts as clues to *which specific intelligibles* the souls were able to see prior to their descent into bodies (173,32 f.).

Recall that at 247D6 Socrates says that the souls who follow gods and will see Justice, Moderation and Wisdom in the place above the heavens. Hermias seizes on the presence of Wisdom here to suppose that the soul who has seen this will enter into the life of a philosopher. While Beauty is not mentioned in the triad of sights seen at 247D6, it is subsequently contrasted with Justice and Moderation at 250B1–C1 in terms of the

[12] Trans. Woodruff and Nehamas in Cooper 1997.

obviousness of its earthly imitations. So Hermias – not unreasonably – assumes that souls will have glimpsed it above. It is the vision of this intelligible that is distinctive of those who enter into the other options enumerated under the first-ranked life. Hermias reduces what seems to be four options – 'a lover of wisdom or of beauty or [someone] who will be cultivated in the arts or prone to erotic love' – to three by dint of treating the cultivated (*mousikos*) person and the erotic person as specific ways in which a soul can be a lover of beauty. While the philosopher has glimpsed Wisdom above, the two kinds of lover have seen Beauty.

What specific intelligible vision distinguishes those who, having seen less, enter into the second-ranked life of a lawful king or military commander? Hermias mobilises etymological reasoning to argue that it must be some of the five greatest kinds or *megista genê* from the *Sophist*. He relates the word for 'king' (*basileus*) to base (*basis*) and stability (*to hedraion*), thus confirming that souls who enter the second rank have seen Rest. But kings and military commanders initiate (*kinein*) things and generally get stuff done. So they have similarly seen Motion. In treating all as the same before the law and in fending off alien intruders, we can see in the lives of the king or the military commander the evidence that their souls having glimpsed Sameness and Difference.

Hermias cannot – or at least does not – sustain this analysis at length. Those who enter the third-ranked lives of political and commercial activity either have partial views of what the kingly soul has seen or are more concerned with Justice. The fourth-ranked life concerned with medicine or physical training has seen Health or the Body Itself, while the fifth-ranked life of mantic or telestic activity belongs to souls who have viewed the 'elevating gods'. Recall that the lives ranked sixth to ninth are regarded as images of the first four – a fact that Hermias presumably supposes is signalled by the shift from accusative to dative case in their enumeration. Those that are true imitators have seen more of Sameness, while those that imitate their paradigms but with an admixture of dissimilarity witnessed Difference prior to their descent into Becoming.

Finally, Hermias subjects the nine ways of life to a numerological interpretation and aligns it with the twelve gods who lead the souls in their tour of the intelligibles. While Hermias notes other possible divisions, he spends some time in considering the nine lives as three triads. The first triad (composed of the philosophical life, the kingly or military life and the political or commercial life) is Zeusian since Zeus is a philosopher, a king, and the statesman of the cosmos. But this Zeusian triad can also be understood in terms of Athena (philosophy), Ares (war), and Hera (royalty). Somewhat less plausibly, the second triad is Apollonian since it include the mantic role (Apollo) and physical training – a role that Hermias connects with competition and thus with Hermes. The third triad belongs to Hephaestus since it is concerned with the making of appearances.

This complex interpretive confection is not likely to win the approval of many modern interpreters. But this example, along with the previous ones, illustrates the way in which Hermias uses the text of the *Phaedrus* as the occasion for the performance of 'Platonic literacy' – the capacity to weave together threads from this dialogue with other dialogues or to accepted Platonic principles (e.g. the metaphysics of reversion) in such a way as to manifest the non-discursive wisdom or noetic insight that the Platonic

curriculum was thought to cultivate. After all, in the Platonic curriculum, the *Phaedrus* is supposed to communicate the 'theoretic virtues' (which are closely allied to *nous* and to noetic activity). More specifically, the dialogue comprises the *theological* aspect of the theoretic virtues. It thus seems likely that what the *Phaedrus* was thought to teach could not be set out as a simple body of information that could be conveyed discursively. So a dazzling performance of synthesis in the context of teaching perhaps served as an external sign of an inward condition – the possession of these highest levels of virtue. If this is so, then we should treat Hermias' commentary in something more like the manner in which we treat the encomia of Themistius or Julian the Apostate. We can, of course, ask whether Themistius' *Oration* 1 accurately describes the deeds and character of its subject, the Emperor Constantius. But if we only asked that, we would deprive ourselves of other important reflections on how the oration demonstrates Themistius' rhetorical and philosophical education or the effect that it likely produced in its intended audience. Similarly, if we simply measure Hermias' reading of Plato's dialogue against the standard of likely correpondence to Plato's authorial intent, we overlook the way of life in which it was produced, as well as the moral or intellectual goals of that way of living. So we urge readers to ask not what Hermias can do for our understanding of Plato's *Phaedrus*, but ask instead how Hermias' notes on this text give insight into the way Platonism was performed in late antiquity.

Competing theotaxonomies for the *Phaedrus*?

While Hermias' scholia constitute the only surviving sustained work on the *Phaedrus*, we have some reason to believe that his companion, Proclus, either wrote a commentary on the work or at least an extended essay in which he interpreted the palinode in detail.[13] Though this work by Proclus is lost to us, we are reasonably well informed about this understanding of the palinode by virtue of things that he says about the *Phaedrus* in his *Platonic Theology* and the commentary on the *Parmenides*. While Proclus certainly has things to say about the order of lives and reincarnation in both the *Republic* commentary and the *Timaeus* commentary, these remarks do not stand out as radically different from what we find in Hermias' *Phaedrus* commentary. Nonetheless Proclus' treatment of other elements from *Phaedrus* 246D–247E in the *Platonic Theology* at least seems to diverge in important respects from the account that Hermias provides.

Both Hermias and Proclus isolate similar features of the text to interpret. It matters to both of them to determine *which order* of gods Zeus, who leads the procession, belongs to. It matters to them why Socrates identifies *twelve* gods, and what Hestia's remaining behind signifies. They similarly isolate triadic aspects of Plato's text for symbolic interpretation. It matters to both philosophers how we should understand the relation between the place beyond the heavens, the sub-celestial arch, as well as the Ouranos or heaven. Both Proclus and Hermias give detailed interpretation of the nature of the place beyond the heavens: that it is true Being that is without colour, without shape, and

[13] We find specific references to writings on the palinode at *in Remp*. 2,309,20–1; 312,3, 339,15–16 and *in Parm*. 949,38–9 and 1088,26–7. Elsewhere both Proclus and Philoponus refer to *hupomnêmata* on the *Phaedrus*. For a discussion of the nature of the work or works by Proclus, see Saffrey and Westerink 1968-97, vol. 4, xxxviii–xxxix and, more recently, Rashed 2016.

intangible (247C6–7). Each is concerned to integrate these textual elements into a theotaxonomy – an account of the kinds of divinities under discussion and their relation to both superior orders of gods and those divine beings that come after them.

The theotaxonomies that result from Hermias' and Proclus' common interpretive concerns at least *appear* rather different though. Hermias' reading of many of these key elements correlates them with divinities in the Orphic tradition, while references to the Chaldean Oracle*s* are largely absent. By contrast, Proclus' reading of the same elements in the *Phaedrus* yields a theotaxonomy that identifies some of them with what he calls 'intelligible-intellective' gods and 'hypercosmic-encosmic' gods.[14] This vocabulary is not found in Hermias. Moreover, Proclus often attempts to correlate the gods described by this new vocabulary with elements in the Chaldean Oracles.[15]

In what follows we will summarise and contrast the theotaxonomies we find in Proclus and in Hermias. Saffrey and Westerink, in volumes 4 and 5 of their edition of Proclus' *Platonic Theology*, have given the question of the relation between the two authors the most consideration. Unlike us, they are happy to assign the views expressed in Hermias simply to Syrianus – a subject on which we think it is better to remain agnostic. With respect to at least some of the divergences, Saffrey and Westerink supposed that Proclus went well beyond his teacher, Syrianus. Of course, they credit Syrianus with significant innovation in the interpretation of the *Phaedrus* too. While Iamblichus and Theodore of Asine had sought to correlate elements of *Phaedrus* 246E–247E with higher principles in their metaphysical systems, they assign to Syrianus the idea of rigorously aligning gods in the Orphic genealogy with distinct features of Plato's myth. Proclus, on their view, takes this insight yet further and aligns Syrianus' Orphic *Phaedrus* theotaxonomy with the Athenian school's interpretation of the *Parmenides* and, moreover, with the Chaldean Oracles.

Proclus' theotaxonomies of the *Phaedrus*

The intelligible-intellective gods

Proclus takes some elements of the palinode as evidence for an order of gods that is intermediate between those that are intelligible and those that are intellectual. This intermediate order is called 'intelligible and intellectual' and it forms the subject of book 4 of the *Platonic Theology*.[16] Elsewhere Proclus indicates convergence with the views of his teacher Syrianus on the fact that this order of gods is discussed in the *Phaedrus*.

> Divine Knowledge is celebrated also by the Socrates of the *Phaedrus* (247d), when he pictures the ascent of the universal souls to the intellectual and

[14] *PT* 1,25,11–14 foreshadows the *Phaedrus* as the principal source of information about these two orders of divinities.

[15] These two facts – the prominence of the Oracles in Proclus' exegesis of the palinode and the vocabulary of 'intelligible-intellective' - may in fact be related. Book 4 of the *Platonic Theology* which discusses this order of gods and in which we find Proclus' fullest remaining treatment of the *Phaedrus* introduces the intelligible-intellective order by reference to *Orac. Chal.* fr. 77.

[16] Proclus' exegesis of the palinode and of *Phaedrus* 247C6–D1 in particular is carefully examined in Fortier 2020.

> intelligible orders, and relates that they contemplate there Justice itself and Moderation itself and Knowledge itself, being joined in essence with the median rank of these gods; and there, he also declared, is Truth, which proceeds from the intelligibles and shines intelligible light upon all the median classes of gods, and he linked that knowledge to that Truth. These things were fully discussed by my teacher and myself in our investigations of the divine insights of Socrates in the *Phaedrus*. (*in Parm*. 944,6-18 , trans. Dillon and Morrow)

Within *Platonic Theology* book 4, chapters 4–26 consist in an elucidation of the three triads of intelligible-intellective gods identified on the basis of Proclus' reading of elements within the palinode, and in particular 247B-248C. The first triad of intelligible-intellective gods is identified with the 'place beyond the heavens' or 'super-celestial place' (*Phaedrus* 247C3–7) seen by the divine souls standing atop 'the vault of heaven' (247B7–C1). This place below the vault of heaven – *hupouranios apsis* or 'sub-celestial vault' as it is often translated – is the third triad of the intelligible-intellective order.[17] Appropriately enough, the heaven – or more specifically its circulation – which lies intermediate between the place beyond the heaven and the arch under it, is the middle triad.[18] Proclus gives attention to aspects of Plato's text that concern each. Thus, the description of the place beyond the heavens in privative terms ('colourless, shapeless and intangible', 247C6–7) is treated as a kind of apophatic description of this triad in *Platonic Theology* 4, chapter 12, while the Forms that the souls see (Justice, Moderation and Knowledge) are treated as positive affirmations about this triad in chapters 13 and 14, as are 'the plain of truth' at 248B6, the 'meadow' and 'the nourishment of souls' (248C1–2) in chapter 15. In the midst of this exegesis of the *Phaedrus*, Proclus spends a chapter correlating what he regards as Plato's system of triads of intelligible-intellective gods with the teachings of the Chaldean Oracles.

The hypercosmic-encosmic gods

Proclus interprets the text of the palinode at length again in book 4 of the *Platonic Theology* in order to shed light on a different order of divinities. The exegesis of the *Phaedrus* in *Platonic Theology* book 4 centres on quasi-locations at the very edge of the myth (so to speak). The intelligible-intellective gods are explained via the place beyond heaven, the heaven, and the arch below the heaven, as well as elements of the myth associated with these places. Book 6 concentrates on the theological significance of Zeus and the other gods who lead the squadrons of souls up to these places and afford them the opportunity to see things beyond the heavens (246E4–247C2). It is important to remember that in the myth these gods are themselves *souls*. After all, they are depicted in Socrates' speech as having a structure analogous to a charioteer driving a team of horses, just as human souls are. The divine souls differ from human souls, of course, in only having horses who are good in nature. Unlike human souls, they never fail to feast upon the sight of the intelligibles beyond the heaven, but they belong to the psychic order nonetheless. Accordingly, chapters 15–24 of book 6 of the *Platonic Theology*

[17] cf. *PT* 4, chs 23–26.

[18] cf. *PT* 4, ch. 20.

examine a class of divine souls[19] that are simultaneously hypercosmic and encosmic. These hypercosmic-encosmic souls, like the intelligible-intellective gods, provide an intermediary between Proclus' order of purely hypercosmic divinities and the encosmic gods equated with the stars and planets.

The purely hypercosmic divinities are also called 'leading gods' and their role is to *assimilate* the visible cosmos and all that it contains to its intellectual causes. The *Phaedrus* does not figure as prominently in Proclus' exegesis of this order of divinities as other Platonic dialogues do. However, having discussed the hypercosmic, leading gods in *Platonic Theology* 6, chs 1–14, Proclus turns to the intermediaries between the leading gods and the encosmic ones in ch. 15. The justification for introducing these gods as intermediaries between the encosmic gods and those that are hypercosmic is based on the text of the *Phaedrus* itself. At 246B7–C2, the divinely possessed Socrates relates that soul, in one form or another, governs the *entire* cosmos. Yet the encosmic gods have individual allotments over which they exercise providence. Hence there must be, above the encosmic gods, an order of divine souls that are not so individualised in their providence. These are the hypercosmic-and-encosmic gods who are sometimes also called 'liberated gods'.

The distinctness of the hypercosmic-and-encosmic gods from the merely encosmic ones is established in *Platonic Theology* 6, ch.19 when Proclus clarifies the identity of the 'great leader Zeus' (*Phaedrus* 246E4). The Zeus in question cannot be among the intellectual or noeric gods, since that Zeus is identified with the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* and it is not possible that he should be coordinate with, or belong to the same rank as, Hestia as the *Phaedrus* suggests. Nor can the Zeus in question in the *Phaedrus* be a purely encosmic Zeus, for Socrates calls him the *great* leader. But when Diotima calls Eros a *great* daemon in the *Symposium*, Proclus insists that this means that Eros is *above* the other daemons. So, by parity of reasoning, if Socrates calls Zeus 'great' in the palinode of the *Phaedrus*, this must similarly place him *above* the encosmic gods. Yet it is not possible, Proclus argues, that we should make Zeus hypercosmic and the rest of the gods in the palinode encosmic, for then our twelve gods are not uniform and we really have eleven plus one – not twelve. The remaining alternative then, is that the gods in question belong to a rank of divinities that is both hypercosmic and encosmic. These mediate between the purely hypercosmic or leading gods and the purely encosmic ones.

It is inevitable that, in a form of Platonism that locates its roots in Pythagoreanism, the fact that at *Phaedrus* 246E4–6 Socrates identifies *twelve* gods should occasion comment. Proclus claims that the number of liberated gods is, in fact, an unlimited plurality that is innumerable by human conceptions (*PT* 6,85,6–9). Yet the number twelve is fitting (*prosêkein*) to this order of divinities because it is a number that is complete or perfect. This practice of using what appears to be a determinate number symbolically is one that Proclus supposes that Plato also made use of in the *Timaeus*. On the one hand, there is a dividing of the souls 'in number equal to the stars' (*Timaeus* 41D8–E1). But then,

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[19] cf. *PT* 4,51-15-20. In truth, the leading gods that are prior to the hypercosmic-and-encosmic gods have the psychic nature 'in a concealed manner' – as they must, since they are among the causes of the psychic nature of the intermediate gods.

subsequently to the Demiurge revealing to them the laws of fate, there is a sowing of the souls into the Earth, the Moon and the other organs of time, i.e. the planets (42D4–5). But of course the stars are not the same in number as the planets. So Proclus is anxious not only to deny that any one-to-one matching is implied, but to regard these numbers as not the kind of thing that one counts on one's fingers (*PT* 6,86,20–22). This, in general, is his approach to Platonic numbers, like the *Timaeus*' Great Year, that other interpreters wish to calculate. Proclus thinks that it is better to consider these numbers symbolically. Even where he computes particular numbers, as in the case of the nuptial number in the *Republic*, he is keen to stress the non-literal, symbolic significance of the numbers arrived at. The symbolic significance of the twelve assigned to the gods of the *Phaedrus* is that of 'all-perfect procession' for, on the one hand, these gods mark the limit of the invisible and transcendent powers of the cosmos. On the other hand, they ride upon or preside over the celestial gods (*PT* 6,86,25–87,3).

Like Hermias, Proclus distinguishes Zeus and Hestia among the twelve gods and represents their sum as two monads and a decad (*PT* 6,85,19–23). But he also relates their number to the Assimilative or Leading gods that come prior to them.[20] Within the Assimilative order Proclus distinguishes four sub-divisions: 1) paternal or demiurgic; 2) prolific or generative; 3) elevating or responsible for reversion; 4) undefiled and protective. The twelve gods of the *Phaedrus* are divided into four groups of three corresponding to these four sub-divisions. Zeus is, of course, singled out at the head of the paternal order and reverts upon the prior causes of the Liberated gods. Hestia belongs to the undefiled order and corresponds to a being's reversion upon itself. Each triad is ordered, with a monad at its head and an intermediate between this first term and the final term. As a result, we have the following groupings:

Paternal	**Prolific**	**Elevating**	**Guardian**
Zeus	Demeter	Hermes	Hestia
Poseidon	Hera	Aphrodite	Athena
Hephaestus	Artemis	Apollo	Ares

We noted in the previous section that Proclus dedicates a chapter to aligning the intelligible-intellective gods with the teachings of the Oracles (*PT* 4, ch. 9). There is no similarly sustained interpretation of the hypercomic-encosmic order with the Oracles. Instead, we find pervasive quotation of and allusion to the Oracles throughout book 6 of the *Platonic Theology*.[21] While we find Orphic material used to elucidate the order of leading gods that is prior to the hypercosmic-encosmic order, it is not invoked in the chapters in which Proclus reveals the hypercosmic-encosmic gods hinted at in the *Phaedrus*.

[20] For the four-fold division of the Assimilative gods, see 93,7–25. For the grouping of the Liberated gods into four triads, see *PT* 6, ch. 22.

[21] Indeed, one name for the order that is prior to the hypercosmic-encosmic gods – that is to say, 'leading gods' – is justified by reference to a convergence between the *Phaedrus* and the *Oracles*. cf. *PT* 6, ch. 2.

Hermias' theotaxonomy in the *Phaedrus*

Hermias' commentary shows evidence of many of the same orders or ranks of divinities that Proclus' work does. In particular at 139,31 we find the following orders: 1) intelligible, 2) intellectual, 3) hypercosmic, and 4) encosmic. This enumeration includes some members of Proclus' ranks, but omits others and one of those omissions is particularly salient to each author's exegesis of the twelve gods who are introduced at *Phaedrus* 247A2. As noted previously, Proclus inserts between the hypercosmic and encosmic gods a class of gods who are simultaneously hypercosmic-and-encosmic. By contrast, the theotaxonomy that Hermias aligns with the important elements of the myth in *Phaedrus* 246E-48E includes Orphic elements that are absent from Proclus' treatment of the same text in *Platonic Theology* 4 and 6. It perhaps misses the point to become fixated upon differences in the presentations of the theotaxonomy among members of the Athenian School. Commenting on what he took to be Eduard Zeller's[22] fastidiousness in these matters, Michael Allen observed:

> Zeller's … fretfulness stems from a commitment to consistency in an area where the Neoplatonists felt no need for it and where they projected alternate theotaxonomies on the assumption that a philosopher would find different arrangements suitable for different occasions. Indeed, they created a theistic algebra precisely because it enabled them to incorporate a large number of Greek or pseudo-Greek deities and subdeities; to accommodate the perennial controversies over who constituted the Olympian dodecade: and to experiment with a variety of divine relationships and thus elaborate on the basic Plotinian conception of the gods mediating the emanatory flow from the One down through the intellectual to the material world.[23]

This is a view of the construction of theotaxonomies that is consistent with our idea that the activity of commentary writing aims to develop a kind of 'Platonic literacy' not too different from late antique *paideia*. This involves, *inter alia*, the ability to *improvise* upon accepted ways of connecting sacred texts, such as those of Plato, Homer and the Orphic poems. So in the course of outlining the Orphic theotaxonomy that Hermias presents in his exegesis of the *Phaedrus*, we will also consider how the text of the *Phaedrus* provides a suitable occasion for a performance of this synthesis and how it differs from the reading of Plato's text that Proclus provides in his *Platonic Theology*. There may be doctrinal differences between Proclus and Hermias (or Syrianus) as well. But if one is willing to entertain the possibility that the commentaries provide evidence of performances of Platonic literacy, then it may be equally fruitful to consider the text of the *Phaedrus* as something like the score of a jazz standard like 'Summertime' that different artists perform in different ways. In what follows, we pursue the idea of studying Platonic literacy by considering how Hermias' reading mobilises the semantic affordances of Plato's text and those that were regarded as Orphic.

Among the Orphic gods classified in Hermias' theotaxonomy, Phanes is the highest one that is discussed in any detail. He is elder to Zeus, to Zeus' father Kronos, and to Zeus'

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[22] Zeller 1863.

[23] Allen 1980, 122.

grandfather Ouranos (148,17–20). Hermias mentions in passing Orphic dieties that are prior to Phanes, but this is for the purpose of equating Phanes with the tetrad.

> Ether will be the monad, Chaos the dyad, the Egg (for it is perfect) the Triad, and Phanes the tetrad – as Orpheus also says: 'With four eyes, glancing hither and thither.' (144,15–17)

In Proclus' theotaxonomy in his *Cratylus* commentary, Ether, Chaos and the Egg are likewise prior to Phanes, but in between these we find the Robe and the Cloud, corresponding to the second intelligible triad of his Platonic system. Damascius' presentation of the Orphic order also seems not to place Phanes in fourth place, so this presentation in Hermias seems to be tailored to make Phanes correspond to the tetrad – a number that figures conspicuously in Hermias' interpretations of the twelve gods that Socrates discusses at *Phaedrus* 246E4–247A4.

The particular salience of Phanes to the exegesis of the *Phaedrus* lies, first, in the fact that Phanes is a *winged* god (148,25). Given that the divine souls that lead the hosts upward are likened to flying charioteers with horses, a satisfying reading of Plato's text in relation to the Orphic theotaxonomy requires that Phanes be situated relative to them. Second, there is the association of Phanes with a source of illumination and thus with *colour*. When Socrates describes the super-celestial place at *Phaedrus* 247C, it is colourless and visible only to the mind. Phanes, in Hermias' exegesis, 'beams an intelligent light upon the intellective gods' (159,12–13).[24] As the source of this light, Phanes illuminates Ouranos first, while remaining himself 'beyond colour' (155,5–17). This alignment of Phanes with the colourlessness of the super-celestial place permits Hermias to perform a bit of interpretive virtuosity in relation to an Orphic fragment that seemingly identifies Phanes as visible light that is brightly coloured:

> as first-born nobody set eyes on him [sc. Phanes],
> save holy Night alone; all the others
> looked in amazement at an unexpected light in the ether;
> so brightly gleamed the colour (*khroos*) of immortal Phanes (Bernabé fr. 123; Kern fr. 86).

Since Phanes is prior to Ouranos and Ouranos is the first thing that is visible, his brightly gleaming colour cannot be light and colour in any *visible* sense. Situating the Orphic text in relation to the *Phaedrus* 246E6–7 triad of colourlessness, shapelessness, and invisibility allows the audience to see that Phanes' intrinsic illumination is surely an *intellectual* – not a visible one – in spite of what the surface meaning of the Orphic verse might suggest to the uninitiated.

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[24] As in Proclus' Platonic-Orphic correlations, Phanes is well placed to do this since he sits at the lower limit of the intelligible order of gods, immediately prior to the intellectual gods. Here Hermias' theotaxonomy seems to accord with that of his class-mate in the latter's *Cratylus* commentary and in his *Timaeus* commentary. In the latter, Proclus identifies Phanes with the Living-Being Itself and credits Phanes with shedding intelligible light; cf. *in Tim*. 1,430,15–18.

Subordinate to Phanes, Hermias places the Nights. At least one of these seems to be, like Phanes, associated with the 'super-celestial place' of *Phaedrus* 247C3 (cf. 153,1), as well as the 'plain of truth' of 248B6 (cf. 153,27–154,4). Similarly, when the human souls that struggle up to the super-celestial place catch a glimpse of Justice, Moderation, and Knowledge at 247D6–7, Hermias interprets these too in terms of the Nights (161,7–20). There are three Nights corresponding to two of the typical three phases of emanation: one remains, while another goes forth (i.e. procession), but instead of reversion we have one that is intermediate between the others. The first of the Nights that remains is said to prophesy (and is thus aligned with Knowledge by Hermias), while the intermediate one is 'reverent' or *aidoios* (which Hermias equates with Moderation Itself). The third, which is presumably the one that goes forth, 'brings Justice to birth'. Hermias' commentary records that both he and Proclus asked questions of Syrianus about these Nights and their relative proximity to Justice, Moderation and Knowledge – the sights glimpsed by souls gazing upon the super-celestial place. Proclus' own use of the three Nights at *in Tim*. 3,88,18 (= Kern fr. 99) suggests a certain elasticity in the placement of these divinities in his own theotaxonomy.[25]

Below the Nights, Hermias presents three orders of gods: the order of Ouranos, the order of the Cyclopes, and the Hundred-handed Giants (155,2–3). Ouranos and Gê, or Heaven and Earth, emerge first from Phanes (155,5–6). Ouranos is illuminated by the light of Phanes, but is not to be identified with the Heaven in the sense of the visible universe or even its highest regions. Rather, Ouranos is an 'intellective god' who is the father of Kronos and grandfather of Zeus. Hermias uses the Orphic theotaxonomy as part of his argument that we should not understand the 'many blessed sights' and the pathways of the gods 'within the heavens' at *Phaedrus* 247A4–5 as referring to the *visible* heavens (149,19–24). The phrases 'sub-celestial arch' and 'vault of heaven' are significant for Hermias' commentary (as they are for Proclus' exegesis in his *Platonic Theology*). The identification of Ouranos or Heaven with the intellectual order of gods permits Hermias to justify a similarly non-spatial interpretation of the convex and concave surfaces of the heaven. These are not spatially defined places at the inner and outer limits of the visible heavens, but rather these quasi-locations signify the gods dependent upon, and so 'below' Ouranos and the all-embracing intellectual realm of Ouranos respectively (151,29–152,6). Hermias similarly takes the distinction between sights seen outside and inside the heaven in terms of this order of gods. Those that are 'within the heaven' are identified with 'the realm of Kronos and the *midmost* manifestation (*ekphaneia*) of the intellective gods' (152,22–24), since Kronos is the intermediate term in the sequence Ouranos-Kronos-Zeus.

The Cyclopes and the Hundred-handed Giants who follow after the order of Ouranos play a relatively minor role in Hermias' interpretation of Plato's text. At 155,20–25, he uses their character to interpret the fact that the place beyond the heaven is 'without shape'(*Phaedrus* 247C6). The Cyclopes, with their round eye, are identified as the first principle or *arkhê* of shape, while the Hundred-handers – here identified as Handworkers or *tektonocheiroi* rather than Hundred-handers or *hekatoncheiroi* as at

[25] cf. Baltzly 2013, note *ad loc*.

155,3 – are such as to perfect shape. Since the order of Ouranos which contains intellective gods is prior to the visible universe, so too the place beyond the heaven of Plato's text is without shape. The Cyclopes, as first principles of shape, are the Orphic key to this insight. The interpretation of Socrates' claim that the place beyond the heavens is 'intangible' (247C7) yields to a similar stratagem, but it is the Hundred-handers who are the key.

The most detailed exegesis of Plato's text through the Orphic theotaxonomy concerns Zeus as the 'great leader' of the twelve gods described at *Phaedrus* 246E4–247A4. The question of the identity of Zeus the great leader seems to be one posed and answered by Iamblichus, who identified Zeus with the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*.[26] As is often the case with members of the Athenian school, Hermias seems reluctant to reject the reading of the divine Iamblichus outright. So he complicates the picture by introducing a plurality of Zeuses. There is, on the one hand, the transcendent, demiurgic monad who is rightly identified with Zeus. (If we may assume agreement with his classmate Proclus on this matter, then this transcendent Zeus is one that Hermias identifies as an intellective god – not a hypercosmic one.) In any event, the text of Plato's *Phaedrus* must be understood to allude to a lower *series* of Zeuses than the demiurgic one and only the first of this series is *called* Zeus. The other two are known as Poseidon and Pluto (142,25–9). Orphic authority for this notion of three Zeuses is not openly quoted at this point: the view of Zeus as triple is simply stated. When, a few lines later, Hermias provides ancient theological authority for this doctrine it is *Homer* to whom he turns quoting selectively from *Iliad* 15.187–95. There Poseidon notes that the three are all sons of Kronos and urges Zeus to keep to his third share of their father's kingdom. But of course this is plausibly the very passage that Plato alludes to at *Gorgias* 526A when he discusses the three kingdoms of Zeus, Poseidon and Pluto. This Platonic connection, moreover, is sufficient to remind his audience of *Laws* 715E8, where Plato clearly alludes to some ancient version of an Orphic verse well-known to members of the Athenian school: 'Zeus the origin, Zeus the middle, all things result naturally from Zeus' (Kern fr. 168, line 2). Indeed, his companion Proclus quotes exactly this line in relation to the *Laws* passage. Thus, at least for an audience that is well-versed in these texts, Hermias recruits Homer to the cause of Orphic theology by means of Plato's *Gorgias* and *Laws* as middle terms. This recruitment is plausibly a kind of press-ganging. As Manolea notes, while the Homeric poems portray Zeus as the most important of the gods, there is no evidence that he is triple or that Poseidon and Pluto are manifestations of Zeus.[27] Nonetheless, connecting these various authors in this way is an impressive feat of Platonic *paideia* for an audience equipped to appreciate the performance.

What then of the gods who follow the great leader, Zeus at *Phaedrus* 246E5–247A2? Hermias' explanation of this part of Plato's text does not initially make reference to the Orphic taxonomy. Like Proclus, he divides the gods into four squadrons of three divinities each classified according to function. The group comprised of Zeus, Poseidon and Pluto are, of course, demiurgic. Another group of all male gods is 'protective'

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[26] 142,16–18 = Iamblichus *in Phaedr*. fr. 6a; cf. Proclus, PT 3,188,15 ff. For Syrianus, see *in Tim*. fr. 7 (= Proclus, *in Tim*. 1,314,22–315.4) with commentary in Klitenic Wear 2011, 80–84.

[27] Manolea 2004, 169.

(*phrourêtikos*), while two groups are made up of entirely of female divinities: the life-producing and those responsible for reversion (*epistreptikos*). Hermias does not give us the membership of these groups, but we can tell by their sex segregation (143,20–22) that the groups differ from the similar arrangement found in Proclus, namely:

Paternal	**Protective**	**Life-producing**	**Elevating**
Zeus	Hestia	Demeter	Hermes
Poseidon	Athena	Hera	Aphrodite
Pluto	Ares	Artemis	Apollo

This divergence between Hermias and Proclus is probably not particularly important. Each is working with the factors of the number twelve (2 × 6 and 3 × 4). Hermias' two groupings in terms of sex and in terms of function coincide exactly, while those of Proclus do not but are instead motivated by other considerations related to the particular gods in question. Orphic ideas enter into Hermias' exegesis again when one considers 'Why only *twelve* in the first place?' After all, Hermias himself will shortly introduce an additional god (Dionysus) who might plausibly claim a thirteenth place in the list of very important divinities. But twelve's completeness or perfection is confirmed not only by numerological considerations but by appeal to the *four*-eyed nature of Phanes (144,17). He forms a tetrad after the Ether as monad, Chaos as dyad, and the Egg as a perfect triad.

This sort of complex interplay between purely numerological interpretation and justification by reference to theological authority seems to be Hermias' preferred method. At 145,5–12 he is critical of interpretations that focus exclusively upon the properties of numbers in their attempts to understand the order of gods (e.g. making Poseidon third because of his trident). Rather, Hermias insists, we should look to the inspired theological texts in order to understand the powers of the gods. He then quotes Homer *Iliad* 5,428–9 where Zeus says to Aphrodite 'Not to you, my child, are given warlike deeds; instead, occupy yourself with the delightful business of marriage'. This sort of revelation from Homer the theologian, and not merely her sex, is presumably what justifies Hermias in assigning Aphrodite to the group of three life-giving goddesses.

Abstracting from the welter of detail in Hermias' theotaxonomy, the following patterns emerge. As Saffrey and Westerink argued, the identification of the key elements of the *Phaedrus* myth that stand in need of interpretation is shared with Proclus. Moreover, both authors reach across to other Platonic works to compare or contrast these elements in the *Phaedrus* with analogous or similar items in other dialogues. However, in Hermias, the extra-Platonic material that is used to illuminate Plato's theology is Homeric and Orphic. The Oracles are absent. Moreover, while the *Parmenides* plays a very important role for Proclus' theotaxonomy, Hermias invokes it only once in relation to his Orphic-Phaedran taxonomy. Proclus' vocabulary of intelligible-intellective or hypercosmic-encosmic is absent, but the commitment to a coherent and uninterrupted order from higher and more universal orders of divinities to lower and more particularised ones is also visible in Hermias.

Conclusion: the context of performance

Saffrey and Westerink's understanding of the similarities and differences between Hermias' and Proclus' treatment of the palinode is basically *doctrinal*. They suppose that while Hermias' commentary conveys the philosophical doctrines of their teacher, Syrianus, Proclus' *Platonic Theology* conveys a picture of Proclus' development of these underlying ideas to new levels of complexity and higher degrees of synthesis with other Platonic dialogues. Such an understanding presupposes that these philosophical texts exist principally in order to record the author's philosophical doctrines or – as Saffrey and Westerink suppose – in the case of Hermias, to record his teacher's doctrines.

Doctrines are, of course, crucial to post-sceptical Platonisms, but – given the role of non-discursive awareness or *noêsis* in the post-Hellenistic tradition – we should perhaps be cautious of falling into thinking that they are *exhaustive* of Platonism. As the various lives of Neoplatonist philosophers show, being a Platonist involved more than learning and accepting a body of doctrine. Indeed, according to their own doctrine, the highest levels of ethical (and thus cognitive) achievement are characterised by the Platonist's relation to entities whose natures outrun the limitations of language and discursive thought.[28] Moreover, we know from their doctrines that the exegesis of Plato's dialogues was conceived as a pathway to the achievement of the cognitive-ethical virtues that enabled these non-discursive epiphanies. Elsewhere we have recommended the view that the teaching contexts from which our Plato commentaries emerge might be thought of as performances of what we called 'Platonic literacy' – the capacity to creatively synthesise the texts of the Platonic canon so as to live in and through the metaphors and images authorised by those texts.[29] This kind of Platonic literacy we take to be analogous in important ways to late antique *paideia*. *Paideia* was the product of the intensive literary and rhetorical training that formed the shared background of much of the social and intellectual elite of the late Roman Empire. The beneficiary of such an education could work quotations from Homer into his written and oral communications with other elites in ways that were novel, clever and suited to the context. *Paideia* was an ability that was performed throughout life as a way, inter alia, of making a claim to treatment of a kind befitting one's station as an educated person. By contrast, we take Platonic literacy to be performed principally for oneself rather than others. It consists in living differently through seeing things differently, and seeing things differently through

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[28] In separate but linked contributions, d'Hoine and Gavray argue for the centrality of the *Phaedrus* to the Neoplatonists' hermeneutic approach, first, to the dialogic form of Plato's writings (d'Hoine 2020) and, second, to the allegorical interpretation of myth (Gavray 2020). With respect to the latter, Gavray finds a Neoplatonic rule of interpretation for myth that 'relates them [sc. the elements in the myth] to powers superior to the material world, which implies going beyond appearance and likelihood and rising to a level of reality *impossible to convey in words because of its radical transcendence*' (p. 169, our emphasis). We agree entirely, but ask in addition, 'What then separates the discursively inexhaustible import of myth from the non-mythic elements of Plato's dialogues?' We reply, 'Nothing.' We should see Neoplatonic interpretations of *all* texts as having both doctrinal and performative aspects – the latter being necessitated because the subject matter about which the interpreter of Plato's dialogues seeks to inform his audience simply cannot be contained by any single discursive account. The true grasp of these matters is something that could only be shown and not fully said and is, we claim, variously exhibited in performances of Platonic literacy.

[29] Baltzly and Share 2018, 34–6.

internalising associations of ideas that are in many ways contrary to those recommended naturally to us by our experience as embodied creatures.

Conceived within this framework, the commentaries that emerge from teaching contexts may be seen as performances for learners to emulate – not merely as bodies of doctrine to be learnt and accepted. The teacher weaves together Plato's insights with, say, Orphic insights so as to reveal a coherent and systematic 'way of seeing things'. Given the nature of what is seen (i.e. the order of intelligibles grasped noetically and all-at-once), it is plausible that there might be many such ways of seeing whose (inevitably partial) discursive specifications might be superficially different. There can similarly be many different performances of a jazz standard like *Summertime*, all of which reveal new connections and possibilities within the original score. Part of what makes a jazz standard a *standard* is the seemingly inexhaustible possibilities for valuable 'true' – and yet different – performances, each of which can manifest the players' excellence as jazz musicians. If we see Proclus' *Platonic Theology* and Hermias' (or Syrianus') *Phaedrus* commentary in this light, then differences in the context of the performance emerge. Some vestiges of the 'live' performance of the *Phaedrus* commentary are still visible (whatever one may suppose about later additions or changes to the text). By contrast, *Platonic Theology* attempts to synthesise a complete account of Plato's views on the various levels of gods from *all* the dialogues. To return to the analogy of music, the Hermias text is performance of a single dialogue (which may or may not have had some sound engineering back in the studio in Alexandria!). By contrast, *Platonic Theology* is more like a series of lectures in music theory – albeit one in which the teacher illustrates his points with many examples of performances. The former provides a single, sustained performance of Platonic literacy in relation to a single dialogue. The latter provides riffs and chords that a player could weave together into the performance of an exegesis of any of the dialogues in relation to which these techniques are illustrated.

The doctrinal and performative perspectives on the works of the Neoplatonists are not, of course, mutually exclusive. Surely they are *both* records of philosophical doctrines justified by argument and also illustrations of the teacher's Platonic literacy manifested in relation to one or more dialogues. Attending to both perspectives, and not confining ourselves merely to their doctrinal content, gives readers new questions to pose about them. When we view Hermias' exegetical performance of the palinode, we can say the following: it is one that creatively exploits the affordances of the Orphic rhapsodic theogony so as to weave it together with a Platonic dialogue in which *movement* is primary. The dynamism of Hermias' synthesis ranges from the simple emphasis on *winged* Phanes ('with four eyes, glancing hither and thither'), to the proliferation of Night into three goddess-phases corresponding to the phases of remaining, procession and reversion. The static and numerically distinct status of gods in relation to one another is also undermined by the proliferation of Zeuses (the one a monad, the other coordinate with Poseidon and Pluto). This dynamic performance of the Orphic taxonomy is orchestrated with the reading of a Platonic dialogue in which journeys feature prominently – not only the characters journey to the river bank where the conversation is situated, but the soul's journey in company with its own god in the

palinode.[30] Like the *Symposium* with which it is linked in Iamblichus' reading order of the dialogues, the *Phaedrus* also has multiple voices, with one speech revising the understanding of the previous one, as when the palinode re-writes Socrates' first speech.

Viewed from the point of view of Platonism as a way of life, what could such a dynamic reading of the *Phaedrus* hope to achieve? In the palinode, the human soul is imaginatively placed so as to have the spectacle of intelligible reality set before it *beyond the heavens*. Moreover, according to Platonic doctrine, that intelligible reality is alive and, in fact, alive with a life that is more unified and purer than that of the star-gods whose movements we see in the very heavens that we are imagined to transcend. What must such a life be like? How is it to be thought of as life? It must be a form of life that involves movement without space and plurality that is without separation. We submit that Hermias' performance of the palinode invites the audience to metaphors and semantic associations that better equip them to think the life of the intelligibles.

We also note that Hermias' performance of an Orphically-inflected palinode from the *Phaedrus* makes significant use of passages from Homer.[31] In particular, it uses Homeric passages as justification for claims about the Orphic theology which he integrates into his reading of the *Phaedrus*. This element of Hermias' performance, we think, points forward to the concluding sections of the dialogue in which Socrates and Phaedrus discuss writing and composition. The concluding volume of this series proposes to supplement the remaining sixty pages of the *Phaedrus* commentary with a translation of the Introduction to Syrianus' *Commentary on Hermogenes*' *On Style*. In presenting these works together, we will conclude our case for a closer integration of rhetorical and philosophical themes in studying the texts of the Neoplatonists.

[30] Baltzly 2020.

[31] Manolea 2004 argues that the use of Homer as a philosopher in his own right, whose views accord broadly with those of Plato, is the innovation of Syrianus.

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