

# Hermias

*On Plato*  
*Phaedrus 245E–257C*

Translation

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immortal, is a kind of one, as it were, and the first [of these three] is always, in a sense, more of a cause for the second and the second for the third, for the self-moved is the cause of the perpetually moved and the perpetually moved of the immortal. For, there being these two things, the unmoved, which is superior to all movement and life, that is to say, the One beyond being and the first henads, and the other-moved, which is inferior to and lower than all life and movement, the self-moved is closer to the unmoved (for the self-moved always wants to preserve itself, just as the unmoved<sup>31</sup> is always the first principle), and the immortal [closer] to the other-moved (for by being expressed in terms of the privation of death,<sup>32</sup> it is at once closer to other-moved things), and the unmoved things are also above the immortal and immortality is a kind of life, being a kind of exhalation (*pro ê*), as it were, of the essence of soul.<sup>33</sup>

We have observed, then, that this triad runs together into a kind of one in the soul. And in what follows too, dealing with matters connected with [the soul's] form (*idea*), he will again take a triad, one that is analogous to the triad already discussed but which is seen with more variance (*heterot ês*). For just as the number three, as it processes, advances, and progresses into greater extension (*diastasis*) and variance and in procession becomes inferior to itself, while always remaining three (that is to say, though becoming a square [number] (*tetrag ô nos*) and then a cube number (*kubos*),<sup>34</sup> always retaining the particular character of three), so too does the soul, from its condition of existing in a unified manner (which itself is, in a more concentrated fashion, a 'one-three'), after processing further and being made different,<sup>35</sup> again becomes a 'one-three', [but now] seen with greater extension, I mean in the [extended form] of the charioteer and the two horses.<sup>36</sup>

But what are the charioteer and the horses? (122) And first one must consider with regard to them whether one should class (*tattein*) them as (*kata*) the essences, as the powers, or as the activities [of souls], for people have had different views. I for my part say that it is as [their] powers. It wouldn't be as [their] activities because the horses are represented as active and there aren't activities of activities, and [also] because the activities of souls are different at different times but the horses are always the same ones (for it [*sc.* the soul] does not receive one lot of horses then another but always has the same ones). Nor [would it be] as [their] essences, because even in our case our essences

remain unharmed, for the essence of the soul does not suffer damage, for then it would also be destroyed; it is its powers that are harmed, and much more so [even], its activities.<sup>37</sup> Moreover Plato himself says *the gods' horses and charioteers are all good themselves and from good stock*, but of ours that they suffer damage and shed their wings. If then the essence of our soul remains undamaged but its powers suffer distortion and at times are even in abeyance,<sup>38</sup> they would with good reason be classed as powers. And Plato himself states this loud and clear, saying: *it [sc. the soul] is like the combined (sumphutos)<sup>39</sup> power [of a team of horses and a charioteer]*. And should someone say that *good themselves and from good stock* means 'from good causes',<sup>40</sup> what follows will tell against him, for our [horses and charioteers] too are from good [origins] in the sense of [good] causes, and so on that basis all [the horses and charioteers] will be good, whereas he says that ours suffer damage.

Plato was not the first to make use of a charioteer and horses: those among the poets who were inspired, [namely,] Homer, Orpheus, [and] Parmenides, did so before him.<sup>41</sup> But by them, inasmuch as they were inspired, they were sung of (*erein*) without [any stated] reason (*aitia*), for they were speaking under divine inspiration. But since Plato admits nothing into his philosophy that could not be assigned a reason, we should state the reasons, even if he himself, because he advances his arguments with greater dignity (*axiôma*),<sup>42</sup> omits to mention [those] reasons, and [also] because, up to a point (*teôs*), the [writers who came] before him also seem to take the charioteer and horses for powers [of the soul]. In Homer,<sup>43</sup> for instance, Zeus uses the horses that Poseidon is said to release, and is not always depicted as using them but sometimes as sitting on a throne.<sup>44</sup> But if it were the essence of Zeus to be conveyed by (123) horses and Zeus were just what the charioteer is, he would always act as a charioteer. As it is, he is also depicted doing other things. So it seems that the horses and the chariot are sung of as [representative of] different powers of his. And, thus far (*teôs*), the accounts of the divine and of the human soul must be one and the same (*koinos*).

Further, Plato himself says<sup>45</sup> in the *Timaeus* that the Demiurge, in framing soul simpler,<sup>46</sup> i.e. the essence (*ousia*)<sup>47</sup> of soul, took from among the kinds of existence (*on*) being (*ousia*), sameness, [and] otherness, clearly [meaning], as he himself says, intermediate being (which is between 'indivisible being and the divisible being associated with (*peri*) bodies' – the divisible being associated

with bodies is irrational life, and nature, and animations),<sup>48</sup> and, again, intermediate sameness (which is between indivisible sameness and the divisible sameness associated with bodies), and, similarly, intermediate otherness. And, having mixed these three together, he says, he framed the essence of soul. But those [*sc.* the essences] of the divine [souls] were from pure kinds, ours not: [in our case,] when mixing [them], he poured, he says,<sup>49</sup> not entirely pure [ingredients] but seconds and thirds. Now, the the horses and charioteer are powers of these three. And the single power of the soul, [the power] that is productive of these three powers, is its form. The power of existence, that is, of the being of the one of the genera,<sup>50</sup> is the charioteer, the power of sameness, the better of the horses, the power of otherness, the inferior horse. Further, if we think of two horses and a charioteer and fuse them together, the single power which is generative and productive of both the charioteer and the horses is the form itself of soul. ('Power' (*dunamis*) should be understood in the manner of the geometers, in the sense [in which] they are accustomed to say that the straight line can (*dunasthai*) [produce] the square.)

In the earlier section (*logos*) (245C5-246A2), then, he has discoursed on the essence of the soul, which contained within itself both self-movement and immortality (for these three were at the same time one), but here he is talking about the powers of the soul. In what follows<sup>51</sup> he will also discourse on its activities.

There being, then, these three things, [namely,] essence, self-movement, immortality, these three powers, [namely,] the form, the horses, and the more particular [phases of the] lives of the horses, are here taken as analogous (*analogon*) to them: the form of the soul, which is the single power of the whole soul [and which is] productive of the three powers of the charioteer and the [two] horses, has been taken as analogous to the single essence of the soul, which holds in a unified manner [its] self-movement and [its] immortality;<sup>52</sup> the horses have been taken as analogous to [the soul's] self-movement on account of their self-movement; the more particular [phases of the] lives of the horses, that is, the ascents and descents of the soul and the sheddings and sproutings of wings, [have been taken as analogous to the soul's] immortality.

But why has he called the power of the Same and the Other 'horses' and the power of the being of the one of the genera a 'charioteer'? Well, (124) that all partake of one another is clear, but each is referred to by what dominates. The

being is what has been used for the construction of the soul, the highest and  
 15 most perfect [element], and for that very reason set over the rest. Accordingly  
 the soul is not compelled to move of its essence. The other two, the powers of  
 the Same and of the Other, as being seen in motion and revolutions, have been  
 represented by horses. The wheels [of the chariot] are the same [things], [i.e.]  
 the Same and the Other. For, insofar as they travel out around the intelligible  
 they [*sc.* the Same and the Other] are horses, insofar as they return [to their  
 20 starting point], wheels.<sup>53</sup> And the better wheel is the circle of the Same, the one  
 that circles around the intelligibles and contains the elevating power of the  
 soul, and which for this very reason is called ‘smooth-running’.<sup>54</sup> And the other  
 [wheel is the circle] of the Other, the one that is also generative, the one that  
 circles around the objects of sense and opinion, and which is called ‘right’<sup>55</sup>  
 when it has its own virtue and thus possesses an indication of the right and the  
 25 straight [way], at which time it reports on the objects of sense without  
 distortion. (For instance, if opinion wants to view one of the objects of sense,  
 deliberation takes the lead and arouses and tautens the pneuma and it, to take  
 [sight as] an example, sends the [visual] rays out through the eyes, and they  
 impact the sense-object, and the sense-impression (*aisthêsis*), bending back  
 through them [*sc.* the eyes], reports to the pneuma and from there to opinion.  
 30 And thus the bending back is not strictly a circle, but a straight line, by running  
 a double course, mimics a circle, and this whole [process] is a true (*orthos*)  
 circle.)<sup>56</sup> But when [this circle] reports in a distorted manner (*diastrophôs*) it is  
 130,1 said to have all manner of distortions (*klasis*).<sup>57</sup> This [*sc.* the circle of the other]  
 also contains the downwards-leading and generative power of the soul, and in  
 the case of the divine souls, the one [*sc.* the power] that exercises providential  
 care over [its] inferiors.<sup>58</sup>

The above account<sup>59</sup> is sound and this is how one should believe things  
 are.<sup>60</sup> But it is also possible to divide as follows and to say that the intellective  
 5 part of the soul, i.e. the intellect, is the charioteer and say that the discursive  
 (*dianoêtikos*) soul is the circle of the Same or the better horse, and the  
 opinionative [soul] the worse horse or [the circle] of the Other. But one should  
 be aware that discursive thought (*dianoia*) also participates in the Other and  
 opinion in the Same, for any part of the soul you take participates in both.

When you consider the horses and the charioteer in relation to the very  
 10 highest part of the soul, the highest union of the soul, the [union] with the