

Benedetto Neola¹

‘Upper’ Mereology of Human Soul and Salvation according to Hermias of Alexandria

1. Introduction

In this paper, I will try to foreground Hermias of Alexandria’s doctrine of the human soul by showing how the Neoplatonist managed to elicit his tenets from the exegesis of Plato’s *Phaedrus*. I will focus particularly on Hermias’ mereology of the soul with reference to the three highest components of the human soul (*i.e.*, discursive thought, intellectual disposition, and the one) to assess to what extent the theorization concerning these aspects lays the groundwork for the doctrine of salvation, which can be fairly labeled as Neoplatonic ethics and hence has a bearing on practical life. This survey will thus not only shed light on Neoplatonic psychology, ontology, and ethics, but also unveil some important exegetical strategies implemented by later Neoplatonists to expand upon Plato’s arguments on the immortality of the soul. After delving into Hermias’ θεωρία, in the final *Appendix* I will briefly set out to make the case that the theoretical construction on the upper mereology of the human soul had a significant bearing on Hermias’ practical life as well, notably when it came to coping with the loss of his beloved ones and to facing his own death. Therefore, in seeing how θεωρία and πράξις were closely intertwined, it will become clear that the philosophical exegesis of texts is not to be conceived of as

¹ Benedetto Neola, PhD holder, University of Salerno (Salerno, Italy) and Sorbonne Université (Paris, France), Alexander von Humboldt Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Philosophische Fakultät (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen); e-mail: benedetto.neola05@gmail.com; ORCID: 0000-0003-1692-4972.

a mere erudite effort, but instead as a salient aspect, charged with meaning, of late antique intellectuals' ordinary life.

2. Hermias of Alexandria and the Human Soul

Hermias of Alexandria (c. 410-455 AD) was a Neoplatonic philosopher who studied, first, in Athens in the Academy held by Syrianus and along with Proclus, and then held himself courses of Platonic philosophy in his hometown, Alexandria of Egypt, between around 435-455 AD². For his teaching, he was also granted a public remuneration from the city, called δημοσία σίτησις³. Upon his premature death, his wife, Aedesia, a relative of Syrianus, was allowed to retain the remuneration to see to it that their sons, Ammonius and Heliodorus, were trained in philosophy so as to inherit the ἐπιστήμη of their father. Therefore, they studied philosophy in Athens under Proclus, and Ammonius, once he returned in Alexandria, became professor of philosophy⁴.

The manuscript tradition attributes to Hermias the only ancient commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus* that has been handed down to us, namely the Εἰς τὸν Πλάτωνος Φαῖδρον Σχόλια⁵. This commentary is divided in three

² Cf. Damascius, *Vita Isidori* 54-56 Athanassiadi. For a general account of his figure cf. R. Goulet, *Hermeias d'Alexandrie*, Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques, v. 3, Paris 2000, p. 639-641; M. Perkams, *Hermeias von Alexandrien*, in: *Die Philosophie der Antike 5. Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und Spätantike (Ueberweg)*, ed. Ch. Riedweg – Ch. Horn – D. Wyrwa, Basel 2018, p. 148-150.

³ Cf. Damascius, *Vita Isidori* 56. On the exact nature of this remuneration cf. C. Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity. Topography and Social Conflict*, Baltimore 1997, p. 153; P. Athanassiadi, *Damascius. The Philosophical History. Text with Translation and Notes by Polymnia Athanassiadi*, Athens 1999, p. 157; Goulet, *Hermeias d'Alexandrie*, p. 639.

⁴ Cf. Damascius, *Vita Isidori* 56.

⁵ As a matter of fact, the *communis opinio* holds that the real author of the *Commentary* is Syrianus, Hermias' master. In other words, the *Commentary* would fall under the category of the commentaries ἀπὸ τῆς φωνῆς, that is, coming from the voice of a master and, in Hermias' case, from the voice of Syrianus (on the genre of the commentaries ἀπὸ τῆς φωνῆς, see the still fundamental, yet seminal work of M. Richard, *Ἀπὸ φωνῆς*, "Byzantion" 20 (1950) p. 191-222). Hence, when he was Syrianus' student, Hermias would have written down the lectures on the *Phaedrus* that Syrianus gave in Athens: cf., e.g., C.-P. Manolea, *The Homeric Tradition in Syrianus*, Ant. Stamoulis 2004. The discussion of authorship issue is beyond the scope of this article. However, it seems to me that we should at least take into serious consideration the objections against the *vulgata* put forth by, e.g., M.W. Dickie, *Hermeias on Plato Phaedrus 238d and Synesius*

extensive books and covers the whole of Plato’s dialogue⁶. It is a lemmatic commentary and, as such, it deals with individual words and phrases line by line, putting forth either extensive or very brief exegesis. In some cases, Hermias makes salient digressions on specific topics, such as the digression on demonology⁷, and that on contaminations and purifications⁸. Precisely because it is not a philosophical treatise, Hermias’ *Commentary* provides insights into almost every aspect of Neoplatonic philosophy, from the doctrine of the soul to ritual thought, from epistemology to mythology, and so on⁹. Moreover, being the only extant ancient commentary on Plato’s *Phaedrus*, it is thanks to this text alone that we can try to understand how the Neoplatonists approached the dialogue and how they managed to elicit

Dion 14.2, “The American Journal of Philology” 114/3 (1993) p. 421-440; H. Bernard, *Hermeias von Alexandrien, Kommentar zu Platons Phaidros. Übersetzt und eingeleitet von Hildegund Bernard*, Tübingen 1997; C. Moreschini, *Alla scuola di Siriano: Ermia nella storia del Neoplatonismo*, in: *Syrianus et la Métaphysique de l’Antiquité Tardive. Actes du Colloque International, Université de Genève, 29 septembre - 1^{er} octobre 2006*, ed. A. Longo, Napoli 2009, p. 515-578; S. Fortier, *The Nature of the Scholia on Plato’s Phaedrus*, “Phronesis” 63 (2018) p. 449-476.

⁶ The *Commentary* was first edited by Friedrich Ast in 1810, then by Paul Cuvreur in 1902, and finally by Carlo Martino Lucarini and Claudio Moreschini in 2012: all the passages that I am going to quote come from this latter edition (cf. C.M. Lucarini – C. Moreschini, *Hermias Alexandrinus. In Platonis Phaedrum Scholia. Ediderunt Carlo M. Lucarini et Claudio Moreschini*, Berlin – Boston 2012). Hildegund Bernard has provided the only translation into a modern language of the entire *Commentary*, to date (cf. H. Bernard, *Hermeias von Alexandrien*). Also, Dirk Baltzly and Michael Share have published the English translation of Book I (cf. D. Baltzly – M. Share, *Hermias. On Plato Phaedrus 227A-245E*, tr. D. Baltzly – M. Share, London 2018). However, they will publish soon the English translation of Books II and III as well. In addition, N. D’Andrès, *Socrate néoplatonicien. Une science de l’amour dans le commentaire de Proclus sur le Premier Alcibiade*, Paris 2020, p. 236-257, has recently provided in an Annex the first French translation of several passages from the *Commentary*.

⁷ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 70, 3-74, 16 Lucarini-Moreschini, on which cf. C. Moreschini, *Alla scuola di Siriano*, p. 549-552; C. Moreschini, *Gods and Demons according to Hermias*, in: *Studies in Hermias’ Commentary on Plato’s Phaedrus*, ed. J. Finamore – C.-P. Manolea – S. Klitenic Wear, Leiden – Boston 2020, p. 151-168.

⁸ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 78, 26-79, 34.

⁹ Finamore, Manolea, and Klitenic Wear have recently published the first volume entirely dedicated to the contents of Hermias’ *Commentary*, notwithstanding the problem of its authorship: cf. *Studies in Hermias’ Commentary on Plato’s Phaedrus*, ed. J. Finamore – C.-P. Manolea – S. Klitenic Wear, Leiden – Boston 2020. For an in-depth study of Hermias’ Platonism, see B. Neola, *Il Platonismo di Ermia di Alessandria. Uno studio sugli in Platonis Phaedrum Scholia. Prefazione di Claudio Moreschini*, Napoli 2022.

from it their theological and philosophical tenets¹⁰. Nonetheless, we are not dealing with a systematic treatise. Hermias' work has nothing to do with Proclus' *Platonic Theology* or *Elements of Theology* (συγγράμματα or πραγματεΐαι). As a lemmatic commentary (σχόλια as ὑπόμνημα), Hermias' text provides a brief exegesis of the Platonic passages and, as such, represents our most complete and extensive source for understanding the spirit with which Platonic philosophers of the 4th–6th century AD approached this text¹¹.

We can elicit from Hermias' *Commentary* a precise and elaborate doctrine of the human soul as a whole¹². However, in what follows, I will limit

¹⁰ It seems that Proclus as well composed a *Commentary on the Phaedrus*, perhaps even a *Commentary on Socrates' palinode* in the *Phaedrus*. Although these works did not survive, Proclus' treatment of Socrates' palinode can still be reconstructed thanks to Book IV of Proclus' *Platonic Theology*, for the Diadochus elaborated on the *Phaedrus*' central myth to construct the doctrine of the intelligible-intellective gods. On Proclus' lost commentaries on the *Phaedrus* cf. H.D. Saffrey – L.G. Westerink, *Proclus. Théologie platonicienne. Livre IV*, Paris 2003, p. XXXVIII-XXXIX; D.P. Taormina, *I limiti dell'umano. Proclo lettore della Palinodia del Fedro*, in: λόγον διδόναι. *La filosofia come esercizio del render ragione. Studi in onore di Giovanni Casertano*, ed. L. Palumbo, Napoli 2012, p. 865-878; M. Rashed, *L'héritage aristotélicien. Textes inédits de l'Antiquité. Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée*, Paris 2016, p. 473-561.

¹¹ On the possible equivalence between σχόλια and ὑπόμνημα, as well as on the various types of commentaries in Antiquity, cf. A.-J. Festugière, *Modes de composition des Commentaires de Proclus*, "Museum Helveticum" 20/2 (1963) p. 77-100; P. Donini, *Le scuole, l'anima, l'impero: la filosofia antica da Antioco a Plotino*, Torino 1982; J. Mansfeld, *Prolegomena. Questions to be Settled Before the Study of an Author, or a Text*, Leiden – New-York – Köln 1994; I. Sluiter, *The Dialectics of Genre: Some Aspects of Secondary Literature and Genre in Antiquity*, in: *Matrices of Genre. Authors, Canons, and Society*, ed. M. Depew – D. Obbink, Cambridge – London 2000, p. 183-204; H. Baltussen, *Aristotelian Commentary Tradition*, in: *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, ed. P. Remes – S. Slaveva-Griffin, London – New York 2014, p. 106-114; L. Cardullo, *Conservare e tramandare la storia di una tradizione: il commentario filosofico antico*, in: *Il valore e la virtù. Studi in onore di Silvana Raffaele*, ed. E. Frasca, Acireale – Roma 2019, p. 1-10; Neola, *Il Platonismo di Ermia di Alessandria*, p. 76-80.

¹² Some aspects of Hermias' doctrine of the soul have been explored by C. Moreschini, *Alla scuola di Siriano*; A. Longo, *La réécriture analytico-syllogistique d'un argument platonicien en faveur de l'immortalité de l'âme (Plat. Phaedr. 245c5-246a2). Alcinoos, Alexandre d'Aphrodise, Hermias d'Alexandrie*, "Philosophie antique" 9 (2009) p. 145-164; A. Longo, *What Is the Principle of Movement, the Self-moved (Plato) or the Unmoved (Aristotle)? The Exegetic Strategies of Hermias of Alexandria and Simplicius in Late Antiquity*, in: *Studies in Hermias' Commentary on Plato's Phaedrus*, ed. J. Finamore – C.-P. Manolea – S. Klitenic Wear, Leiden – Boston 2020, p. 115-141;

myself to reconstructing what may be described as the ‘upper’ mereology of the human soul, to the extent that it significantly bears on the Neoplatonic ethics of salvation. It is commonly held that Plato’s *obscuritas* in the *Phaedrus* aroused and still arouses major philosophical concerns among both ancient and modern interpreters, from several different perspectives. As far as the doctrine of the soul is concerned, known as Socrates’ palinode, it is namely the central myth of the dialogue, representing the human soul as a winged chariot striving to reach the Plain of the Truth¹³. Indeed, it lends itself to profoundly different readings, from the problematic correspondence between chariot (ὕπόπτερος ζευγος/πτηνὸν ἄρμα/ὄχημα), horses (ἵπποι), and charioteer (ἡνίοχος/κυβερνήτης) and the parts of the human soul to the consistency of this depiction with significantly distinct accounts of the human soul found in other Platonic dialogues (mostly the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus*). Also, the allegedly rational ἀπόδειξις that precedes the myth and sets out the immortality of the soul upon consideration of its self-motion turns out to be likewise puzzling on account of both its *incipit* (ψυχὴ πᾶσα ἀθάνατος) and *desinit* (ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀγέννητόν τε καὶ ἀθάνατον ψυχὴ ἂν εἴη), not to mention the arguably scientific unfolding of the λόγος itself¹⁴. While a comprehensive survey of the ancient reception of these *Phaedrus* passages evades the scope of the present discussion¹⁵, it is

J. Finamore, *Hermias and the Soul’s Pilot*, in: *Defining Platonism. Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of John M. Dillon*, ed. J. Finamore – S. Klitenic Wear, Steubenville 2017, p. 228-237; J. Finamore, *The “Second Trace of Life”: Hermias and the Irrational Soul*, in: *Platonic Inquiries. Selected Papers from the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies*, ed. C. D’Amico – J. Finamore – N. Strok, Prometheus Trust 2017, p. 187-198; J. Finamore, *Hermias on the Vehicle of the Soul*, in: *Platonic Interpretations. Selected Papers from the Sixteenth Annual Conference of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies*, ed. J. Finamore – E.D. Perl, Lydney 2019, p. 109-123; J. Finamore, *Hermias and the Ensoulment of the Pneuma*, in: *Studies in Hermias’ Commentary on Plato’s Phaedrus*, ed. J. Finamore – C.-P. Manolea – S. Klitenic Wear, Leiden – Boston 2020, p. 35-49; S. Fortier, *The Nature of the Scholia on Plato’s Phaedrus*; S. Klitenic Wear, *Hermias on the Activities of the Soul: A Commentary on Hermias, In Phdr. 135.14 – 138.9*, in: *Studies in Hermias’ Commentary on Plato’s Phaedrus*, ed. J. Finamore – C.-P. Manolea – S. Klitenic Wear, Leiden – Boston 2020, p. 100-114; B. Neola, *Sulla gnoseologia neoplatonica: ovvero sull’integrazione dell’articolazione stoica e dell’universale aristotelico*, “Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica” 113/2 (2021) p. 475-484; Neola, *Il Platonismo di Ermia di Alessandria*.

¹³ Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 246a3-257b6.

¹⁴ Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 245c5-246a2.

¹⁵ For in-depth discussions of the *Phaedrus*’ reception in Antiquity, see, e.g., A. Bielmeier, *Die neuplatonische Phaidrosinterpretation*, Paderborn 1930; C. Moreschini,

of great interest to focus on Hermias' exegesis to the extent that it best typifies the Neoplatonic approach to those issues and betrays the inner connection that, according to later Neoplatonists, Plato would have enigmatically established between ontology and ethics.

Hermias is adamant that the human soul is a substance which does not need an earthly body to exist. On the contrary, when the soul is separated from the earthly body, it regains its authentic condition. Commenting on the supposed ignorance that Socrates attributes to himself in the *Phaedrus*¹⁶, Hermias explains that what Socrates ignores is himself *as* pure and absolute soul (ὥς αὐτοψυχὴ καθάρᾳ) since he is still in a body, whilst he already knows himself *as* embodied soul (ὥς ἐν σώματι)¹⁷. When the soul descends into the sensible real, it becomes weaker in that it participates in increasing multiplicity¹⁸. Hermias plainly holds that the soul derives its existence (ὑφεστάναι)¹⁹ from three different principles (ἀρχαί): the divine, the intellect, and the soul itself. This multilayered ontological derivation

Elementi dell'esegesi del Fedro nella tarda antichità, in: *Understanding the Phaedrus. Proceedings of the II Symposium Platonicum*, ed. L. Rossetti, Sankt Augustin 1992, p. 191-205; H.D. Saffrey – L.G. Westerink, *Proclus. Théologie platonicienne*, p. IX-XLV; U. Criscuolo, *Esegesi della 'biga' di Fedro 246a ss. fra medio e neoplatonismo*, in: *L'ultima parola. L'analisi dei testi: teorie e pratiche nell'antichità greca e latina. Atti del terzo Colloquio italo-francese coordinato da Luigi Spina e Laurent Pernot*, ed. G. Abbamonte – F. Conti Bizzarro – L. Spina, Napoli 2003, p. 85-104; R. Brouwer, *Hellenistic philosophers on Phaedrus 229b-30a*, "Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society" 235 (2008) p. 30-48; C. Moreschini, *Plato's Phaedrus in Middle-Platonism: Some Interpretations*, "Revue de philosophie ancienne" 38 (2020) p. 93-105.

¹⁶ Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 229e5-230a1: "I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself [οὐ δύναμαι πῶ κατὰ τὸ Δελφικὸν γράμμα γινῶναι ἑμαυτόν]; and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that" (tr. A. Nehamas – P. Woodruff, *Plato. Phaedrus*, in: *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. J.M. Cooper, Indianapolis – Cambridge 1997).

¹⁷ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 33, 14-17.

¹⁸ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 67, 26-31: "Because of this it was his habit [Socrates' habit] to lead the young to the recollection of the universal by induction and by particular [examples] since the soul, having dropped out of the shared revolution of the gods and been confined to generation and become as it were cut off and individual [ἀποστενωθεῖσα ἐν τῇ γενέσει, καὶ οἷον ἀποτεμαχισθεῖσα καὶ ἄτομος γενομένη διὰ τῶν μερικῶν καὶ οἰκείων ἑαυτῇ] is then wont to recollect" (tr. D. Baltzly – M. Share, *Hermias*).

¹⁹ Elsewhere in the *Commentary*, Hermias implies a difference between εἶναι and ὑφεστάναι. While εἶναι should be taken to refer to the ontic structure of a thing, ὑφεστάναι should refer to the actual existence of that thing: cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 142, 32-33.

accounts for the presence within the soul of three different components, namely the one (ἓν), the intellective disposition (τὸ νοερόν), and the discursive thought (διάνοια), which constitutes the soul’s *ιδίωμα*²⁰. This ontic structure heavily determines the salvation path that all soul is supposed to pursue during its hearty stay.

Originally and at first the soul was united with the gods (Ἐξ ἀρχῆς μὲν οὖν καὶ πρῶτον ἦν ὡτο τοῖς θεοῖς ἢ ψυχῇ) and that ‘one’ of its was joined to the gods (τὸ ἐν αὐτῇ ἐκείνο συνῆπτο τοῖς θεοῖς). Then, withdrawing from that divine union, it descended to intellect (Εἴτα ἀποστᾶσα ταύτης τῆς θείας ἐνώσεως κατήλθεν εἰς νοῦν) and no longer possessed [all] there is in a unified manner and in one but gazed upon it and saw it by means of simple apprehensions and, as it were, direct contacts [on the part] of its intellect. Then, withdrawing from intellect too and descending to reasoning and discursive thought (Ἐπειτα καὶ τοῦ νοῦ ἀποστᾶσα καὶ εἰς λογισμὸν καὶ διάνοιαν κατελθοῦσα), it no longer gazed upon it by means of simple apprehensions either, but by moving syllogistically and step by step and one thing after another from premises to conclusions. Then, departing too from pure reasoning and the psychic mode (Ἐπειτα καὶ τοῦ καθαροῦ λογισμοῦ ἀποστᾶσα καὶ τοῦ ψυχικοῦ ιδιώματος), it descended into generation and was infected with great irrationality and confusion. It must, then, return once more to its own origins and go back once more to the place whence it descended (Δεῖ οὖν αὐτὴν πάλιν ἐπὶ τὰς οἰκείας ἀρχὰς ἀναδραμεῖν, καὶ ὅθεν κατήλθεν ἐκεῖ πάλιν ἀνελθεῖν) and in this ascend and restoration there four types of madness assist it²¹.

It should not escape our notice that the formula δεῖ οὖν [...] πάλιν, nearly at the end of the text, is quite salient in that it links the ontology to the Neoplatonic *deontological* ethics. In other words, Hermias says that precisely because the human soul has the above-mentioned ontic structure, deriving its being, as it is, from the divine, from the intellect, and from itself, *as a result*, the human soul must then (δεῖ) endeavor to come back where it belongs. We, human beings, ought to deliver ourselves from the

²⁰ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 89, 1-14. As we shall see, the intellectual disposition is actually the highest part of the διάνοια: cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 88, 23-26. The soul derives its being partly from itself in the sense that it can be its own cause of well-being (εἶναι εἶναι). But the εἶναι εἶναι is *ipso facto* superior to the simple εἶναι. Thus, if the soul can provide itself with well-being, all the more so it must grant itself the simpler being: cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 89, 10-14.

²¹ Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 93, 18-30.

sensible dimension in virtue of the ontic structure of the soul which ensouls us. Secondly, it is worth stressing the importance of the last sentence in the cited passage, according to which the four madnesses described in the *Phaedrus*²² would illustrate the path to be pursued in order to return to the origin of the soul, that is, the divine. Thus, in the eyes of Hermias, it is Plato himself the one who has handed down, however enigmatically, the salvific path implied by such as psychological and ontological structure²³. First and foremost, Plato enigmatically revealed that the human soul possesses within itself something which is not psychic strictly speaking, something which does not belong to the psychic mode of existence. From Iamblichus onwards, this component is called the one of the soul²⁴ and could be conceived of as a divine fragment within the human soul. Following in Iamblichus' footsteps, Hermias draws a sharp distinction between two figures that in Socrates' palinode represent the same thing, *i.e.*, the intellect, and holds that, while the charioteer of the winged chariot (ἡνίοχος)²⁵ stands for the soul's intellect, the steersman of the chariot (κυβερνήτης)²⁶ represents the one of the soul instead²⁷. Iamblichus himself defined the latter as θεῖα ψυχή

²² Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 244a3-245c4 (mantic, telestic, poetic, and erotic madnesses).

²³ In Hermias' view, Orpheus is the paradigmatic example of a soul who pursued this path by participating in all four madnesses: cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 92, 28-93, 8.

²⁴ Or the ἄνθος, the flower, of the soul, in keeping with the Chaldean vocabulary: cf. Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* 1, 3, p. 6, 1-6. The one of the soul is further labeled as the ὑπαρξίς of the soul, meaning an ancestral principle within the soul: cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 158, 31-159, 1, on which see B. Neola, *Il Platonismo di Ermia di Alessandria*, p. 122-144. On the term ὑπαρξίς in Proclus, see C. Steel, "ΥΠΑΡΞΙΣ chez Proclus, in: *Hyparxis e hypostasis nel Neoplatonismo. Atti del I Colloquio Internazionale del Centro di Ricerca sul Neoplatonismo*, ed. F. Romano – D.P. Taormina, Firenze 1994, p. 79-100.

²⁵ Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 248a1-4: "As for the other souls, one that follows a god most closely, making itself most like that god, raises of its charioteer up to the place outside and is carried around in the circular motion with the others" (tr. A. Nehamas – P. Woodruff, *Plato. Phaedrus*).

²⁶ Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 247c6-d1: "What is in this place is without color and without shape and without solidity, a being that really is what it is, the subject of all true knowledge, visible only to intelligence, the soul's steersman" (tr. A. Nehamas – P. Woodruff, *Plato. Phaedrus*).

²⁷ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 157, 7-16; 158, 24-159, 1; Iamblichus, *In Phaedrum* frg. 6. Cf. Bernard, *Hermeias von Alexandrien*, p. 13-19; Moreschini, *Alla scuola di Siriano*, p. 520-521; B. Neola, *L' "uno" e l' "intelletto" dell' anima umana: ricezioni neoplatoniche del Fedro di Platone*, "Methexis" 33/1 (2021b) p. 197-222.

and held it as the only means to attain the θεοκρασία, the union with the gods²⁸. The epistrophic process of the human soul thus consists in a progressive identification of the soul with a specific component within itself, culminating in the unification with its one whereby to attain the union with the one of the gods. The ultimate goal is granted by the ontic structure of the soul, whose components correspond to the different levels of being (divine being/one, intellective being/intellect, and strictly psychic being/discursive thought) and could thus be viewed as the soul’s anchorages in the axiologically different τάξεις of being. Of course, it is up to the human soul whether or not to unify with the highest part within itself and therefore with the highest class within the being. No part within the soul is constantly actualized but stands as a sheer potentiality.

This holds particularly true for the human intellect (*i.e.*, the charioteer/ἡνίοχος) and accounts for the fact that Iamblichus and later Neoplatonists, including Hermias, reprimanded Plotinus’ so-called undescended soul theory²⁹. The human soul cannot possibly possess a part always contemplating the intelligible without being conscious of it. Otherwise, all human being would always be happy. Plotinus mistakenly ascribed to the human soul the perpetual intellection proper to the hypostatic Intellect. Moreover, he unduly overlooked the existence of an entire πλῆθος of intellects moving from the hypostatic, divine Intellect to the erratic, feeble human intellect³⁰, and thereby put the undescended part of the human soul (τι αὐτῆς) in direct contact with the noetic realm (ἐν τῷ νοητῷ αἰεὶ)³¹, thus ultimately identifying with one another two utterly dis-

²⁸ Cf. Iamblichus, *Vita Pythagorica* 33, 240, 6-9; Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 8, 7, p. 270, 2-7. On the one of the soul, see, at least, G. Shaw, *Containing Ecstasy: The Strategies of Iamblican Theurgy*, “Dionysius” 21 (2003) p. 53-88.

²⁹ Cf. Proclus, *In Timaeum* 3, 334, 10-27 (= Iamblichus, *In Timaeum* frg. 87); Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 167, 3-6. On the contrast between Plotinus’ and later Neoplatonists’ views on the human soul cf. J. Rist, *Integration and the Undescended Soul in Plotinus*, “The American Journal of Philology” 88/4 (1967) p. 410-422; C. Steel, *The Changing Self. A study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism*; Iamblichus, *Damascius and Priscianus*, Bruxelles 1978; H.J. Blumenthal, *The Psychology of Plotinus and Later Platonism*, in: *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, ed. J.J. Cleary, Leuven 1997, p. 269-290; R.M. Van den Berg, *Proclus and the Myth of the Charioteer*, “Syllecta Classica” 8 (1997) p. 149-162; A. Longo, *Note sulla dottrina plotiniana dell’anima non discesa*, in: *Quid est veritas? Hommage à Jonathan Barnes*, ed. M. Bonelli – A. Longo, Napoli 2010, p. 219-231.

³⁰ Cf. Proclus, *Elementatio Theologica* 166, 4.

³¹ Cf. Plotinus, *Enneades* 4, 8 [10], 8, 2-3; 4, 1 [4], 1, 12-13.

inct intellectual principles. Instead, the human soul is endowed with an intellectual disposition (διάθεσις) to actualize. Hermias further confirms this by saying that the apex of the human soul is the intellectual soul or, to take up the Aristotelian vocabulary, the δυνάμει νοῦς³². Hermias' τὸ νοερόν is tantamount to Iamblichus' κατὰ νοῦν διάθεσις³³ and Proclus' λόγος νοοειδής³⁴ in the sense that we are not dealing with an always-contemplating part within the human soul (such as the undescended soul in Plotinus), but with a mere potentiality and disposition to actualize. However, even when a human soul does indeed succeed in activating its intellectual substratum, it does not share in the purest intellectual apprehension proper to the divine Intellect, but rather partakes, in an ultimately discursive manner, in the intellectual light of the particular intellect, namely the last substantial instantiation of the unparticipated Intellect³⁵.

Following the same line of thought, the one within the human soul (*i.e.*, the steersman/κυβερνήτης) must be awakened in order to unite with the gods or, perhaps better, human beings must be awakened in order to perceive the union of the one within themselves with the gods³⁶. This could be attained

³² Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 88, 24-26.

³³ Cf. Iamblichus, *De anima* 51.

³⁴ Cf. Proclus, *In Timaeum* 1, 245, 13-25.

³⁵ S. Fortier, *Proclus on the Climax of the Phaedrus (247c6-d1)*, in: *The Reception of Plato's Phaedrus from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. S. Delcomminette – P. d'Houine – M.-A. Gavray, Berlin – Boston 2020, p. 199-218, clearly argued that our soul is capable of intellection insofar as, after a process of purification, it can receive the light of a particular intellect (μερικὸς νοῦς) and thus render its own λόγος νοοειδής. This would be the meaning of *Timaeus* 27d6-28a4, where we are told that the intelligible is grasped by the νόησις along with the λογισμός, and of *Phaedrus* 247c6-d1, where Socrates states that the real being can be grasped exclusively by the νοῦς and is the object of the ἐπιστήμη. The intelligible is seized by the particular intellect alone, with which our intellective disposition can unite, thus sharing in its intellectual insight. However, the fact that Hermias and Proclus conceived of our intellectual disposition in the same terms does not also mean that they shared the same interpretation of *Phaedrus* 247c6-d1: cf. Bernard, *Hermeias von Alexandrien*; Moerschini, *Alla scuola di Siriano*; Fortier, *The Nature of the Scholia on Plato's Phaedrus*; Neola, *L'“uno” e l'“intelletto” dell'anima umana. On human intellect according to later Neoplatonists*, see also D.G. MacIsaac, 'The Nous of the Partial Soul in Proclus'. *Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato, “Dionysius”* 29 (2011) p. 29-60.

³⁶ Unfortunately, our human soul οὐκ ἀεὶ ἐνθουσιᾷ: cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 90, 17 (see C.-P. Manolea, *Possessed and Inspired: Hermias on Divine Madness*, “The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition” 7 (2013) p. 156-179, as to why the soul cannot possibly always experience such a divine state).

only if the soul manages to purify its luminous vehicle (ἀγγοειδὲς ὄχημα). Also elaborating on the mysterious ὄχημα of the soul in the *Phaedrus*³⁷, later Neoplatonists hold that the human soul ensouls three different bodies or vehicles: the luminous vehicle, the pneumatic vehicle, and the earthly body³⁸. Expect for the luminous vehicle which eternally belongs to the soul, the pneumatic vehicle and the earthly body are taken up by the soul during its descent into the sensible realm. The pneumatic vehicle is composed of the cosmic elements and its presence is a *condicio sine qua non* for receiving the irrational life afterwards. Hermias likens those elements to chitons that the soul wears during the descent³⁹. Finally, the earthly body is taken up on earth, in keeping with what Plato imparted in the *Phaedrus*⁴⁰. Upon death, the soul leaves the body and the pneumatic vehicle behind while ascending to the intelligible and keeps the luminous vehicle alone. The luminous vehicle is the ungenerated and immortal receptacle⁴¹ of the divine illuminations or the divine breath, as it is endowed with a sublime αἴσθησις enabling it to perceive the divine emanations⁴². Even if the gods, αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι, constantly irradiate τὰ δεύτερα, human souls are not always able to perceive that light. They are illuminated without being aware of it⁴³. Purification through philosophy and performance of rituals⁴⁴ may deliver the soul of all sensible accretions and activate in due succession the intel-

³⁷ Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 247b1-2.

³⁸ On the doctrine of the soul's vehicles cf. J. Trouillard, *L'Un et l'âme selon Proclus*, Paris 1972; J. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, American Classical Studies 14, Chico 1985; Finamore, *Hermias and the Ensoulment*.

³⁹ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 201, 24-26.

⁴⁰ Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 246c2-6: “but a soul that sheds its wings wanders until it lights on something solid [στερεοῦ τινοῦ], where it settles and takes on an earthly body [σῶμα γήινον], which, then, owing to the power of this soul, seems to move itself”.

⁴¹ Cf. Proclus, *Elementatio Theologica* 196.

⁴² Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 77, 22-25.

⁴³ Cf. what Proclus, *De decem dubitationes circa providentiam* 3, 16, 24-28 says in discussing the relationship between human beings and divine providence: “Just like someone sleeping in the light of the sun may because of his sleep not be aware of being illuminated, but on waking up would see himself bathe in light. Such a person might then think that the light is present, and is present to him for the first time, although it was he who was not present to the light, because of his ignorance” (tr. J. Opsomer – C. Steel, *Proclus: Ten Problems Concerning Providence*, London – New Delhi – New York – Sydney 2012).

⁴⁴ On the *continuum* between philosophy and rituality, see C. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism. Oracles of the Gods*, London – New York 2014.

lectual disposition and, then, the one of the soul by purifying its luminous vehicle⁴⁵. This is the path towards the ἔνωσις τοῖς θεοῖς⁴⁶.

However, behind all these considerations lays the fundamental assumption that the soul or, more precisely, the rational soul is immortal, in keeping, once again, with what Plato imparted in the dialogues and notably in the *Phaedrus*⁴⁷. As I mentioned, in this latter dialogue, Plato momentarily argued for the immortality of the soul on the basis of its alleged self-motion. Hermias firmly believed that the *Phaedrus* proof was the demonstration *par excellence* of the immortality of the soul: οὐδαμοῦ γὰρ οὕτω δυσχυρίσατο ὡς ἐνταῦθα τῇ ἀθανασίᾳ τῆς ψυχῆς⁴⁸. Drawing on the lost *Commentary on the Phaedrus* by Proclus, John Philoponus tells us the reason as to why this proof had a *place de choix* among later Neoplatonists. While the *Phaedo* elicits the immortality of the soul from the soul's ἐνέργειαι, the *Phaedrus* proves its immortality upon consideration of the soul's οὐσία, namely the self-motion (αὐτοκινησία)⁴⁹. Rivers of ink have flowed over the proof of the immortality of the soul in *Phaedr.* 245c5-246a2⁵⁰. In addition to the issue of the alleged inconsistency of Socrates' arguments, the initial statement, namely ψυχὴ πᾶσα ἀθάνατος, still raises a host of questions as to how we should interpret the phrase ψυχὴ πᾶσα. Hermias already testifies for the existence of several different interpretations of this sentence. For instance, he reports that, according to the Stoic Posidonius, Plato would have meant the soul of the cosmos. Also, Hermias blames the Middle-Platonist Harpocration on the ground that he would have mistakenly taken the phrase

⁴⁵ On the contaminations and purifications of the luminous vehicle, see Hierocles, *In Carmen Aureum* 26, 3, 1-5.

⁴⁶ Cf. G. Shaw, *Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, "Traditio" 41 (1985) p. 1-28; G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, Pennsylvania 1995; I. Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity. The Invention of a Ritual Tradition*, Göttingen – Bristol 2013.

⁴⁷ According to the Middle-Platonist Atticus, the immortality of the soul was the only δόγμα which held together the Platonic tradition (αἵρεσις): cf. Atticus, frg. 7 des Places, *apud* Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 15, 9, 1, 1-15, 9, 3, 1.

⁴⁸ Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 125, 25-26.

⁴⁹ Cf. Philoponus, *De aeternitate mundi* 253, 19-254, 3 Rabe: "ὅσω οὖν ἡ οὐσία τῆς ψυχῆς τελειότερα καὶ κρείττων τῆς ἐνεργείας αὐτῆς, τοσούτω καὶ ἡ ἐνταῦθα [in the *Phaedrus*] περὶ τῆς ἀθανασίας τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπόδειξις κρείττων καὶ ἀκριβεστέρα τῆς ἐν Φαίδωνι".

⁵⁰ Cf., e.g., R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus. Translated with Introduction and Commentary*, Cambridge 1952; G.J. De Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato*, Amsterdam 1969; C. Rowe, *Plato, Phaedrus. With Translation and Commentary*, Warminster 1986.

to allude to each kind of soul, including the soul of ants. On the contrary, Hermias firmly believes that Plato meant the rational soul alone⁵¹.

Let us first set out the actual premises of the arguments in isolation in [their logical] sequence, since Plato has presented them in a scattered fashion. The first [of the two arguments], then, goes like this. The soul is self-moved; that which is self-moved is in perpetual motion; that which is in perpetual motion is immortal; therefore the soul is immortal. This argument, then, will show us that [the soul] is not destroyed by its own agency. [And the second like this]. The soul is self-moved; that which is self-moved is a source of motion; the source of motion is ungenerated; that which is ungenerated is imperishable; that which is imperishable is immortal; therefore the soul is immortal. This argument shows us that the soul is not destroyed by anything else either⁵².

However, a systematic philosopher such as Hermias goes far beyond Plato’s arguments and reconstruct a precise metaphysical and theological system in which the soul finds its place⁵³. To justify the existence of such

⁵¹ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 107, 27-108, 6. *Per incidens*, the anonymous author of the *Axiochus*, usually referred to as Pseudo Plato, seems to interpret ψυχή πᾶσα as ‘the soul as a whole’: cf. Pseudo Plato, *Axiochus* 372a5-7. According to Beghini’s recent reconstruction, the philosopher hiding behind the mask of Plato could be Philo of Larissa: cf. A. Beghini, [Platone], *Assioco. Saggio introduttivo, edizione critica, traduzione e commento a cura di Andrea Beghini*, Baden 2020.

⁵² Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 109, 21-28. On Hermias’ treatment of the proof of the immortality of the soul in *Phaedrus* 245c5-246a2, see Longo, *What Is the Principle of Movement*.

⁵³ The fact that the *Scholia on the Phaedrus* is not a systematic treatise does not entail that Hermias is not a systematic philosopher. It is worthwhile to distinguish between, on the one hand, the formal aspect of a text and, on the other, the philosophical mindset of its author. In other words, what Hermias says in explaining Plato’s dialogue in a manner which may not appear to be constantly systematic always implies an underlying, precise system of thought. It cannot be otherwise, since in Late Antiquity philosophy patently displays dogmatic and systematic characteristics, and the exegetical effort is intended to show that Plato himself handed down a coherent and consistent system of thought. This attitude towards Plato’s philosophy ultimately dates back to the Imperial Age, when it stood as a reaction against the sceptic reading of Plato’s *corpus* widespread in the Hellenistic Academy: see, e.g., *The Origins of the Platonic System: Platonisms of the Early Empire and Their Philosophical Contexts*, ed. M. Bonazzi – J. Opsomer, Leuven 2009. However, in Late Antiquity this trend was further reinforced by the smooth transition of philosophy into a *religious* philosophy, notably thanks to Iamblichus’ *magisterium*, ultimately bringing out the view that both Plato and ancient Greek figures of wisdom, such as Orpheus, Homer, and Pythagoras, were the-

a thing as the self-mover and therefore to make clearer Plato's arguments, Hermias resorts to the Neoplatonic triad of being (εἶναι), life (ζωή), and intellect (νοῦς)⁵⁴. He argues that, on the one hand, some entities receive their being from other entities and, on the other, some beings receive the being from themselves (e.g., the heaven and the intellects)⁵⁵. Similarly, some beings receive their life from others, while other beings possess a life from their own. For instance, a human being receives life from another human being and the Sun, whilst again the heaven and the intellect own the life παρ'ἑαυτῶν. In the first case, we are dealing with an ἐπείσακτος life, while in the latter with a συμφυῆς one⁵⁶. Finally, some beings receive the intellectual faculties from outside and *ipso facto* become intellectual while not being intellectual by nature, such as ὁ δυνάμει νοῦς, while others possess the intellection by their own nature and think themselves, such as ὁ ἐνεργείᾳ νοῦς⁵⁷. This λόγος must be applied also to the case of movement. Some beings receive the movement from other beings, that is, the ἑτεροκίνητα, while others are their own source of movement, that is, the αὐτοκίνητα. This construction is further clarified by Hermias through

ologians inspired directly by the gods. As a consequence, on the one hand Plato's dialogues, along with, for instance, the Orphic poems and the *Chaldean Oracles*, ended up being viewed as sacred texts imparting revealed knowledge, while, on the other, the figure of the exegete came closer to being that of a priest: cf. e.g., P. Athansassiadi, *Apamea and The Chaldaean Oracles: A Holy City and a Holy Book*, in: *The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity. Essays in Honour of Peter Brown*, ed. A. Smith, Swansea 2005, p. 117-143; P. Athansassiadi, *P. La lutte pour l'orthodoxie dans le Platonisme tardif, de Numénios à Damascius*, Paris 2006; P. Athansassiadi, *The Creation of Orthodoxy in Neoplatonism*, in: *Philosophy and Power in the Graeco-Roman World. Essays in Honour of Miriam Griffin*, ed. G. Clark – T. Rajak, Oxford 2007, p. 271-291; P. Athansassiadi, *Mutations of Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Farnham – Burlington 2015.

⁵⁴ For a thorough analysis of this triad in the co-disciple Proclus, see P. D'Hoine, *Platonic Forms and the Triad of Being, Life, and Intellect*, in: *All From One. A Guide to Proclus*, ed. P. Hoine – M. Martijn, Oxford 2017, p. 98-121.

⁵⁵ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 111, 6-10.

⁵⁶ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 111, 12-16. Hermias' phrasing ἄνθρωπος γὰρ ἄνθρωπον γεννᾷ καὶ ἥλιος is a quotation from Aristotelis, *Physica* 194b13, on which Syrianus as well drew in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* to prove that man has both a perishable and an imperishable cause: cf. Syrianus, *In Metaphysica* 10, 27-29.

⁵⁷ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 111, 16-18. This further confirms that the human intellect should be regarded as a sheer intellectual disposition, for, as we have seen, Hermias takes the apex of our soul to be the δυνάμει νοῦς. Hence, the human intellect, *qua* δυνάμει νοῦς, belongs to those things which νοητικὰ γίνονται (111, 17), while not being intellectually actualized by nature.

a theological tenet, which here comes particularly in handy as it allows the Neoplatonist to show the agreement between Plato and Aristotle. The theological tenet is the following: “In all existing things nature does not move immediately from opposite to opposite”⁵⁸. Hence, if we accept the existence of the unmoved superior to the other-moved and that of the other-moved, then we are compelled to accept the existence of the self-moved as well, namely the soul⁵⁹.

Taking stock at this point, we can legitimately conclude that Hermias held the soul to be immortal, *qua* rational and thus self-moving being. While being first and foremost a rational entity, though, the human soul is endowed with multiple faculties (πολυδύναμος) or dispositions⁶⁰. Due to its over-engagement with the sensible dimension, the human soul constantly runs the risk of abandoning its *ιδίωμα*, namely the rational, discursive thought, whose highest aspect is the intellect. Instead, it should (δεῖ) return to its own causes (οἰκεῖαι ἀρχαί)⁶¹, the divine, the intellect, and itself. Thus, the first step of the reversion process is the conversion towards itself resulting in the soul’s self-knowledge, namely in apprehending that the soul’s *ιδίωμα* is the discursive thought⁶². Then, the soul shall become aware of the highest part of its rational component, that is, the νοῦς or the νοερόν or the δυνάμει νοῦς (Socrates’ ἡνίοχος). Nevertheless, being active νοεῶς, thereby sharing in the intellective light of the particular intellect transcending it, is not the summit of the soul ascent, for the soul owes something of

⁵⁸ Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 110, 25-26: “ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς οὖσιν οὐκ ἀμέσως ἡ φύσις ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐναντίου ἐπὶ τὸ ἐναντίον χωρεῖ”.

⁵⁹ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 111, 26-29: “And likewise with motion. It will be unclear which unmoved we are referring to – the kind that is inferior to the other-moved or the kind that is superior to it – unless the self-moved has been mentioned between”.

⁶⁰ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 152, 14-18; 165, 2-5; 208, 10-14. On the concepts of *πολυδύναμος* in late antique doctrines of the soul, see E. Eliasson, *L’anima e l’individuo*, in: *Filosofia tardoantica*, ed. R. Chiaradonna, Roma 2012, p. 213-231.

⁶¹ Quite interestingly, Hermias holds that Socrates is constantly attached to his own causes: cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 15, 19-23; 35, 1-4. On the figure of Socrates in Late Antiquity cf. *The Neoplatonic Socrates*, ed. D. Layne – H. Tarrant, Philadelphia 2014; D’Andrès, *Socrate néoplatonicien*.

⁶² This process involves, *inter alia*, the projection of the confused notions (ἐννοιαί) of the truthful rational principles that the soul possesses within itself κατ’ οὐσίαν (οὐσιώδεις λόγοι) as a gift from the Demiurge: cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 54, 17-25. On the projection process, and its roots in the Stoic articulation process, cf. C. Helmig, *Forms and Concepts. Concept Formation in the Platonic Tradition*, Berlin – Boston 2012; Neola, *Sulla gnoseologia neoplatonica*.

its existence to the gods themselves. The divine fragment within the ontic structure of the soul is the most united parcel of the soul (ἐνικώτατον) and, insofar as it brings a trace of the superessential One, it goes by the name of one (Socrates' κυβερνήτης)⁶³. This ineffable symbol of the unitary existence of the gods within the human soul⁶⁴ must be awakened in order for the soul to unite with the gods or, *rectius*, in order for the soul to stop being a soul to blend in with the divine, to exchange its psychic mode of existence with a highest and ineffable one, to escape a life ψυκιχῶς and plunge into a dimension θείως⁶⁵. This ultimate condition will be best fulfilled after the death and the separation from the body, when the soul who purified itself during its earthly stay will finally withdraw from the multiplicity, the partiality, and the dispersion to remain solely, as αὐτοψυχὴ καθαρά, with its purest and divine luminous vehicle.

3. *Appendix: A Note on the Relationship between Theoria and Praxis*

After this necessarily not-exhaustive description of Hermias' doctrine of the soul, it is interesting to shift, now in conclusion, to Hermias' ordinary life to show that this complex and multilayered system was not 'dead subject' but an important resource and precious treasure for coping with the threatening moments of the everyday life. Hence, moving from Hermias' *Commentary* to Hermias' ordinary life, let us read two striking passages from the *Life of Isidore* by Damascius, the last Diadochus of the Athenian Academy.

A boy, older than the philosophers [Ammonius and Heliodorus], was born to Hemeias from Aedesia, and when he was seven months old Aedesia was playing with him as is natural, and softening her voice she would call him "babion" or even "little child". On hearing this, he became angry and castigated these childish diminutives, pronouncing his criticism in a clear and articulate voice. *He [Damascius] relates many other extraordinary anecdotes about this child and says that* since he could not endure bodily existence, he

⁶³ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 88, 26-30.

⁶⁴ Proclus defines it as an ἄρρητον σύνθημα τῆς τῶν θεῶν ἐνιαίας ὑποστάσεως; cf. Proclus, *In Rempublicam* 1, 177, 15-23.

⁶⁵ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum* 30, 21-25; 152, 31-32; Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 3, 4, p. 110, 11-p. 111, 17.

departed from life at the age of seven; for his soul could not be contained in this earthly region⁶⁶.

It is said that as he [Hermias] was dying he swore to Aegyptus that the soul is immortal and imperishable. What gave him this courage was his virtuous life disowning the bodily nature, turning to itself and experiencing the separation as it already stood face to face with immortality⁶⁷.

These telling passages show us how late antique Neoplatonists shaped their whole lives in accordance with the eschatological and metaphysical doctrines elicited from Plato’s dialogues, that I have tried to reconstruct here. We can see how, faced with the death of a seven-years old son, two Neoplatonic parents strived to accept the tremendous loss. And how did they do it? Resorting to what is said in Plato’s dialogues, dialogues that they have read, studied, scrutinized, and interpreted for a lifetime. They could have thus told themselves that their seven-years old son was not dead, for he was ascending the path to the divine. His soul had a one within itself insofar as it derived from the divine. He was supposed to (δεῖ) come back from where he had once descended, and that is exactly what it did. Along the same lines, Hermias managed to face his own approaching death with courage and firmness insofar as he had been living his whole life disowning the bodily nature and turning to himself. In turning to himself, he gained awareness of the ontic structure of his soul and its μέτρα, its limits⁶⁸. On the deathbed, he knew that he was going to leave the enchantment of multiplicity and partiality of the sensible dimension to regain the status of an absolute and pure soul. He was confident that, on the path leading upwards, he would have dismissed the chitons that his soul had taken up when descending to earth. Freed from the earthly

⁶⁶ Damascius, *Vita Isidori* frg. 57: “Ὅτι τῷ Ἑρμείᾳ ἐκ τῆς Αἰδεσίας πρεσβύτερον τῶν φιλοσόφων υἱέων τίκεται παιδίον, καὶ ἡ Αἰδεσία τῷ υἱεῖ ἐπὶ πέντε μῆνας ἀπὸ γενέσεως ἄγοντι προσέπειζε τε οἷα εἰκός, καὶ βάβιον ἢ καὶ παιδίον ἀνεκάλει, ὑποκορίζουσα τὴν φωνήν. Ὁ δὲ ἀκούσας ἠγανάκτησε καὶ ἐπετίμησε τὸν παιδικὸν τοῦτον ὑποκορισμὸν, τὸρὰν καὶ διηρθρωμένην τὴν ἐπιτίμησιν ἐξενεγκών. Καὶ ἄλλα δὲ πολλὰ περὶ τοῦ παιδὸς τούτου τερατολογεῖ, καὶ ὅτι οὐκ ἀνεχόμενος τὴν ἐν σώματι ζωὴν ἐπὶ πέντε ἐτῶν τοῦ βίου ἀπέστη· οὐ γὰρ ἐχώρει αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν ὁ περὶ γῆν ὅδε τόπος” (tr. P. Athanassiadi, *Damascius*, who put Photius’ words in italic to distinguish them from those of Damascius).

⁶⁷ Damascius, *Vita Isidori* frg. 54: “ὁμομοκένη λέγεται πρὸς τὸν Αἴγυπτον τελευτῶντα ἀθάνατον εἶναι καὶ ἀνώλεθρον τὴν ψυχὴν. Ἐποίει δὲ τοῦτο τὸ θάρρος ἢ εὐζωΐα ἀναινομένη τὴν τοῦ σώματος φύσιν καὶ εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἐπιστρέφουσα καὶ συναισθανομένη τοῦ χωρισμοῦ καὶ ἄντικρυς ἥδη τῆς ἀθανασίας”.

⁶⁸ Cf. Proclus, *In Alcibiadem* I 227, 9-228, 1; 87, 22-88, 2.

body and the pneumatic vehicle, his soul was going to remain solely with the luminous vehicle to finally reunite with τὸ θεῖον, its highest ἀρχή. He had tried all his life to attain this goal by leading a life of purification and philosophy following the lead of Plato and the other ancient *auctoritates*. Hence, he could now firmly face death as he “already stood face to face with immortality”: for he knew that his rational soul was immortal and that it would not cease to move.

‘Upper’ Mereology of Human Soul and Salvation according to Hermias of Alexandria

(summary)

With my article, I try to show how the Neoplatonist Hermias of Alexandria (c. 410-455 AD) elaborated on Plato’s arguments on the immortality of the human soul in order to forge a coherent psychological and ontological system which is in tune with a precise ethics of salvation. In the final *Appendix*, I propose that these doctrines of the soul were not just erudite theories but turned out to be an actual and effective tool for coping with the threatening moments of the everyday life (notably for coping with the loss of the beloved ones and for facing death).

Keywords: Neoplatonism; Hermias of Alexandria; Plato’s *Phaedrus*; Doctrine of the Soul; Eschatology

Bibliography

Sources

- Damascius, *Vita Isidori*, ed. P. Athanassiadi, Athens 1999, tr. P. Athanassiadi, *Damascius. The Philosophical History*, Athens 1999.
- Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Platonis Phaedrum Scholia*, ed. C.M. Lucarini – C. Moreschini, Berlin – Boston 2012, tr. D. Baltzly – M. Share, *Hermias. On Plato Phaedrus 227A-245E*, tr. D. Baltzly – M. Share, London 2018.
- Plato, *Phaedrus*, ed. J. Burnet, Oxford 1903, tr. A. Nehamas – P. Woodruff, *Plato. Phaedrus*, in: *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. J.M. Cooper, Indianapolis – Cambridge 1997.
- Proclus, *De decem dubitationes circa providentiam*, ed. H. Boese, Berlin 1960, tr. J. Opsomer – C. Steel, *Proclus: Ten Problems Concerning Providence*, London – New Delhi – New York – Sydney 2012.

Studies

- Addey C., *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism. Oracles of the Gods*, London – New York 2014.
- Athanassiadi P., *Apamea and The Chaldaean Oracles: A Holy City and a Holy Book*, in: *The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity. Essays in Honour of Peter Brown*, ed. A. Smith, Swansea 2005, p. 117-143.
- Athanassiadi P., *La lutte pour l'orthodoxie dans le Platonisme tardif, de Numénius à Damascius*, Paris 2006.
- Athanassiadi P., *The Creation of Orthodoxy in Neoplatonism*, in: *Philosophy and Power in the Graeco-Roman World. Essays in Honour of Miriam Griffin*, ed. G. Clark – T. Rajak, Oxford 2007, p. 271-291.
- Athanassiadi P., *Mutations of Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Farnham – Burlington 2015.
- Baltussen H., *Aristotelian Commentary Tradition*, in: *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, ed. P. Remes – S. Slaveva-Griffin, London – New York 2014, p. 106-114.
- Beghini A., *[Platone], Assioco. Saggio introduttivo, edizione critica, traduzione e commento a cura di Andrea Beghini*, Baden 2020.
- Bernard H., *Hermeias von Alexandrien, Kommentar zu Platons Phaidros. Übersetzt und eingeleitet von Hildegund Bernard*, Tübingen 1997.
- Bielmeier A., *Die neuplatonische Phaidrosinterpretation*, Paderborn 1930.
- Blumenthal H.J., *The Psychology of Plotinus and Later Platonism*, in: *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, ed. J.J. Cleary, Leuven 1997, p. 269-290.
- Brouwer R., *Hellenistic philosophers on Phaedrus 229b-30a*, “Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society” 235 (2008) p. 30-48.
- Cardullo L., *Conservare e tramandare la storia di una tradizione: il commentario filosofico antico*, in: *Il valore e la virtù. Studi in onore di Silvana Raffaele*, ed. E. Frasca, Acireale – Roma 2019, p. 1-10.
- Criscuolo U., *Esegesi della ‘biga’ di Fedro 246a ss. fra medio e neoplatonismo*, in: *L’ultima parola. L’analisi dei testi: teorie e pratiche nell’antichità greca e latina. Atti del terzo Colloquio italo-francese coordinato da Luigi Spina e Laurent Pernot*, ed. G. Abbamonte – F. Conti Bizzarro – L. Spina, Napoli 2003, p. 85-104.
- D’Andrès N., *Socrate néoplatonicien. Une science de l’amour dans le commentaire de Proclus sur le ‘Premier Alcibiade’*, Paris 2020.
- De Vries G.J., *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato*, Amsterdam 1969.
- D’Hoine P., *Platonic Forms and the Triad of Being, Life, and Intellect*, in: *All From One. A Guide to Proclus*, ed. P. Hoine – M. Martijn, Oxford 2017, p. 98-121.
- Dickie M.W., *Hermeias on Plato ‘Phaedrus’ 238d and Synesius ‘Dion’ 14.2*, “The American Journal of Philology” 114/3 (1993) p. 421-440.
- Donini P., *Le scuole, l’anima, l’impero: la filosofia antica da Antioco a Plotino*, Torino 1982.
- Eliasson E., *L’anima e l’individuo*, in: *Filosofia tardoantica*, ed. R. Chiaradonna, Roma 2012, p. 213-231.

- Festugière A.-J., *Modes de composition des Commentaires de Proclus*, "Museum Helveticum" 20/2 (1963) p. 77-100.
- Finamore J., *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, American Classical Studies 14, Chico 1985.
- Finamore J., *Hermias and the Soul's Pilot*, in: *Defining Platonism. Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of John M. Dillon*, ed. J. Finamore – S. Klitenic Wear, Steubenville 2017, p. 228-237.
- Finamore J., *The "Second Trace of Life": Hermias and the Irrational Soul*, in: *Platonic Inquiries. Selected Papers from the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies*, ed. C. D'Amico – J. Finamore – N. Strok, Prometheus Trust 2017, p. 187-198.
- Finamore J., *Hermias on the Vehicle of the Soul*, in: *Platonic Interpretations. Selected Papers from the Sixteenth Annual Conference of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies*, ed. J. Finamore – E.D. Perl, Lydney 2019, p. 109-123.
- Finamore J., *Hermias and the Ensoulment of the Pneuma*, in: *Studies in Hermias' Commentary on Plato's Phaedrus*, ed. J. Finamore – C.-P. Manolea – S. Klitenic Wear, Leiden – Boston 2020, p. 35-49.
- Fortier S., *The Nature of the 'Scholia' on Plato's 'Phaedrus'*, "Phronesis" 63 (2018) p. 449-476.
- Fortier S., *Proclus on the Climax of the 'Phaedrus' (247c6–d1)*, in: *The Reception of Plato's Phaedrus from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. S. Delcomminette – P. d'Hoine – M.-A. Gavray, Berlin – Boston 2020, p. 199-218.
- Goulet R., *Hermeias d'Alexandrie*, Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques, v. 3, Paris 2000, p. 639-641.
- Haas C., *Alexandria in Late Antiquity. Topography and Social Conflict*, Baltimore 1997.
- Hackforth R., *Plato's Phaedrus. Translated with Introduction and Commentary*, Cambridge 1952.
- Helmig C., *Forms and Concepts. Concept Formation in the Platonic Tradition*, Berlin – Boston 2012.
- Klitenic Wear S., *Hermias on the Activities of the Soul: A Commentary on Hermias, In Phdr. 135.14 – 138.9*, in: *Studies in Hermias' Commentary on Plato's Phaedrus*, ed. J. Finamore – C.-P. Manolea – S. Klitenic Wear, Leiden – Boston 2020, p. 100-114.
- Layne D. – Tarrant H., *The Neoplatonic Socrates*, Philadelphia 2014.
- Longo A., *La réécriture analytico-syllogistique d'un argument platonicien en faveur de l'immortalité de l'âme (Plat. Phaedr. 245c5-246a2). Alcinoos, Alexandre d'Aphrodise, Hermias d'Alexandrie*, "Philosophie antique" 9 (2009) p. 145-164.
- Longo A., *Note sulla dottrina plotiniana dell'anima non discesa*, in: *Quid est veritas? Hommage à Jonathan Barnes*, ed. M. Bonelli – A. Longo, Napoli 2010, p. 219-231.
- Longo A., *What Is the Principle of Movement, the Self-moved (Plato) or the Unmoved (Aristotle)? The Exegetic Strategies of Hermias of Alexandria and Simplicius in*

- Late Antiquity*, in: *Studies in Hermias' Commentary on Plato's Phaedrus*, ed. J. Finamore – C.-P. Manolea – S. Klitenic Wear, Leiden – Boston 2020, p. 115-141.
- Manolea C.-P., *The Homeric Tradition in Syrianus*, Ant. Stamoulis 2004.
- Manolea C.-P., *Possessed and Inspired: Hermias on Divine Madness*, “The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition” 7 (2013) p. 156-179.
- Mansfeld J., *Prolegomena. Questions to be Settled Before the Study of an Author, or a Text*, Leiden – New-York – Köln 1994.
- Moreschini C., *Elementi dell'esegesi del Fedro nella tarda antichità*, in: *Understanding the Phaedrus. Proceedings of the II Symposium Platonicum*, ed. L. Rossetti, Sankt Augustin 1992, p. 191-205.
- Moreschini C., *Alla scuola di Siriano: Ermia nella storia del Neoplatonismo*, in: *Syrianus et la Métaphysique de l'Antiquité Tardive. Actes du Colloque International, Université de Genève, 29 Septembre - 1er Octobre 2006*, ed. A. Longo, Napoli 2009, p. 515-578.
- Moreschini C., *Plato's Phaedrus in Middle-Platonism: Some Interpretations*, “Revue de philosophie ancienne” 38 (2020) p. 93-105.
- Neola B., *Sulla gnoseologia neoplatonica: ovvero sull'integrazione dell'articolazione stoica e dell'universale aristotelico*, “Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica” 113/2 (2021), p. 475-484.
- Neola B., *L'“uno” e l'“intelletto” dell'anima umana: ricezioni neoplatoniche del 'Fedro' di Platone*, “Methexis” 33/1 (2021b) p. 197-222.
- Neola B., *Il Platonismo di Ermia di Alessandria. Uno studio sugli In Platonis Phaedrum Scholia. Prefazione di Claudio Moreschini*, Napoli 2022.
- Perkams M., *Hermeias von Alexandrien*, in: *Die Philosophie der Antike 5. Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und Spätantike (Ueberweg)*, ed. Ch. Riedweg – Ch. Horn – D. Wyra, Basel 2018, p. 148-150.
- Rashed M., *L'héritage aristotélicien. Textes inédits de l'Antiquité. Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée*, Paris 2016.
- Richard M., *Ἀπὸ φωνῆς*, “Byzantion” 20 (1950) p. 191-222.
- Rist J., *Integration and the Undescended Soul in Plotinus*, “The American Journal of Philology” 88/4 (1967) p. 410-422.
- Rowe C.J., *Plato, Phaedrus. With Translation and Commentary*, Warminster 1986.
- Saffrey H.D. – Westerink L.G., *Proclus. Théologie platonicienne. Livre IV*, Paris 2003.
- Shaw G., *Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, “Traditio” 41 (1985) p. 1-28.
- Shaw G., *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, Pennsylvania 1995.
- Shaw G., *Containing Ecstasy: The Strategies of Iamblichean Theurgy*, “Dionysius” 21 (2003) p. 53-88.
- Sluiter I., *The Dialectics of Genre: Some Aspects of Secondary Literature and Genre in Antiquity*, in: *Matrices of Genre. Authors, Canons, and Society*, ed. M. Depew – D. Obbink, Cambridge – London 2000, p. 183-204.

- Steel C., *The Changing Self. A study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism; Iamblichus, Damascius and Priscianus*, Bruxelles 1978.
- Steel C., "ΥΠΑΡΞΙΣ chez Proclus, in: *Hyparxis e hypostasis nel Neoplatonismo. Atti del I Colloquio Internazionale del Centro di Ricerca sul Neoplatonismo, Università degli studi di Catania, 1-3 Ottobre 1992*, ed. F. Romano – D.P. Taormina, Firenze 1994, p. 79-100.
- Tanaseanu-Döbler I., *Theurgy in Late Antiquity. The Invention of a Ritual Tradition*, Göttingen – Bristol 2013.
- Taormina D.P., *I limiti dell'umano. Proclo lettore della Palinodia del 'Fedro'*, in: λόγον διδόναι. *La filosofia come esercizio del render ragione. Studi in onore di Giovanni Casertano*, ed. L. Palumbo, Napoli 2012, p. 865-878.
- The Origins of the Platonic System: Platonisms of the Early Empire and Their Philosophical Contexts*, ed. M. Bonazzi – J. Opsomer, Leuven 2009.
- Trouillard J., *L'Un et l'âme selon Proclus*, Paris 1972.
- Van den Berg R.M., *Proclus and the Myth of the Charioteer*, "Syllecta Classica" 8 (1997) p. 149-162.