## Centaur and Charioteer

We can't help but admire a charioteer being drawn around proudly and magnificently by one, two or even more horses as he controls them effortlessly with a pair of flimsy looking reins. Right away the image of someone like Charlton Heston in **Ben Hur** comes to mind perched as he is on an elaborately adorned chariot determined to engage in a race against some dastardly foe. It's even more dramatic to imagine a whole slew of chariots drawn up for battle poised to charge headlong into enemy lines à la Cecil B. DeMille. A charioteer may be accompanied with another warrior responsible for either casting spears or shooting arrows.

And so this image which evokes both power and skill as well as sheer terror can't help but be representative of the human soul or *psuche* in all its manifestations. That is to say, the charioteer is in control of two horses, one representing what's good in us and the other, what's bad. The heroic character of a charioteer derives from the fact that he's struggling to keep in balance two opposing forces. Should he fail to pay attention even for a moment, the result is a disastrous accident. Without a doubt this is applicable to how we conceive ourselves as we wage an unceasing battle against the forces of evil. The chief source for this most noble of images is, of course, Plato's **Phaedrus**. Because of this text's importance, the part related to a charioteer driving two horses is quoted below. In fact, it's excerpted from another document on this same homepage dealing with the **Phaedrus**. After going through this brief document's account of a charioteer, we're in a better position to contrast it with a centaur which will be discussed as an alternate image of the human soul. As we proceed, it will become clear that the latter is favored.

A centaur is a creature straight from Greek mythology and recognized immediately. At first glance it seems an unlikely candidate as representative of our human constitution, but if we delve a bit further, the centaur just might fit the bill far better than anticipated. It has the body of a horse and the torso, head and arms of a man. Furthermore, it'd be difficult to imagine such a creature hitched to a chariot and consent to be driven around. This isn't possible, of course, because a centaur is part man and has no need to hitch up something he already is, his horse part. It'd be tempting to insert the picture of a centaur. However, it's better to leave that up to the imagination of each person who will conform it to his or her own liking in different

<sup>1</sup>We also have the image of a mermaid, the lower body of a fish and the torso of a woman. Mermaids by definition are female and centaurs seem to be primarily male. A mermaid's environment is the ocean. Perhaps if it were a land creature, it would hold the same value as a centaur, at least for the discussion at hand.

ways. If you could ask anyone what he or she thinks about a centaur, chances are high that the very consideration of one evokes an uneasy feeling. Actually it's best not to tread there because it arouses something deep within our unconsciousness, charged as it is with sexual overtones often beyond our control. That seems to be the real source of unease, sex latent with violence.

While our eyes automatically go to the human part of a centaur, we're really attracted to the sleek, muscular equine body. We can't help but be riveted by the sight, casting a furtive glance here and there while at the same time disguising a fear coupled with embarrassment we prefer to keep to ourselves. Right away we see something of ourselves in this creature, something we'd rather disregard. Nevertheless, when forced to communicate with the centaur, our attention is drawn naturally to the human head. Keeping in line with most images of this creature, it has a snub nose and pointed ears associated with a satyr. This is a dead giveaway that in addition to being human like us, it may come from the underworld. Furthermore, we humans walk on two legs whereas the centaur does so on all fours like many real-life animals. In addition, the centaur has human arms giving it a total of six limbs (seven, if we include the tail).

So before we engage in any halting attempts at communication, it just might be that we're dealing with a representative of the devil or the devil himself. As for the equine torso, we assume it's black, not white. If it were the latter, we might not be as afraid, an indication of how color affects our perception. Right away the centaur detects our reluctance, giving him the advantage by reason of our astonishment tinged with fear. So he uses this, taking the initiative to approach while waiting for us to react to his presence. The centaur has the added advantage of height, so he's looking down at us. Does he...or she or it?...have a smile, smirk or frown on his...her...almost Neanderthal-like face? Only an encounter with one will tell.

We use our acquaintance with horses as we approach a centaur, for we know how they act even if our knowledge of them is superficial. We consider a horse as the embodiment of wildness yet with the ability to be tamed. Their wildness is reenforced by their neighing as well as rising up on their hind legs as their cloven hoofs flail through the air. Then there are common images associated with horses. For example, we might recall a movie where someone enters a stable at night (thunderstorm and lightning, of course). Suddenly the horse is startled and shows a wild, almost evil, expression on its face made all the more dramatic by its mane flapping about. The most common image of a horse is as a symbol of the Wild West, cowboys, Indians and the like. So if a horse suddenly became human, how would it

respond to us (probably not very favorable)? Such appears the more sensible approach in our attempt to understand the centaur. We're uncertain as to its intelligence though cunning coupled with brute strength seems to be its chief characteristic. Keep in mind that this perception comes from a non-equine person's opinion; most likely horse lovers would have a more refined point of view.

Right away we're turned off by any combination of animal and human, yet the story behind them has some basis in reality. There are historical reasons for how and why a centaur came into being, but they are secondary here. Besides, anyone can look up information on the subject.<sup>2</sup> Also we shouldn't overlook an important point. Until fairly recently or with the invention of the steamship (even more so with the train), the horse was the acme of speed, agility and power all rolled into one and remained so across many cultures for countless centuries. In brief, a horse is a multi-fold image. It represents freedom, wildness, passion, domesticated energy as well as an instrument for battle. Add a chariot, and we get the ancient equivalent of a battle tank which struck terror into anyone standing in the way.

So let's get back to the more familiar and comfortable image of a rider upon a horse or a charioteer already introduced. In Plato's **Phaedrus** he is in charge of a pair of winged horses, one representing beauty and good and the other representing the opposite. Clearly the charioteer is fully human. Not only that, he's in a chariot drawn by two or more horses as well as being slightly elevated above them. The distinction between the two couldn't be clearer, human and animal, with the former in charge of the latter. This image of being in charge is both appealing and reassuring. Also the driver can assume the character of a hero (again, Charlton Heston). Because Plato's text fleshes out our familiarity with this image, there's no need to get into a description here between the relationship between charioteer and two horses. Suffice it to say that we're dealing with two very different images, one half human and the other half horse compared with a full-fledged man in charge of two horses. Such is the image which the **Phaedrus** excerpt has exerted down the ages. Nevertheless, in this essay preference is for the centaur which, despite its familiarity, evokes both repugnance and fear. By bringing this to light and putting it behind us, we can see that the image of a centaur can be very attractive for describing our human condition.

With these common perceptions of a horse as well as a centaur in mind, we can focus more upon the contact point between the human and equine torsos. Actually there

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>The best known positive example from antiquity is Chiron who had taught Achilles. Chiron differs from traditional centaurs in that his front legs are human, not equine.

seems no clear-cut point of division; both pass into each other seamlessly. In the case of the charioteer which, of course, is hitched to horses, the difference between the two is obvious and requires no distinction. Perhaps one day when Plato was hammering out his ideas about the soul or *psuche* he came across a military parade rumble proudly through the streets of Athens. In addition to this were the Olympic games where he had seen sleek horses race around a track, the charioteers eager to impress the crowd and win the prize. One day he saw a particularly striking charioteer decked out in a magnificent vehicle drawn by two magnificent horses. Then *voila*. Here was a living example of what he had wished to formulate. Before his very eyes was an image of the soul which had a nobility he was attempting to articulate for a long time but until now had been at a loss to give it flesh and blood.

And what could be a better way to project the image of a soul, everyone being familiar with the image of a chariot? It was a brilliant stroke of insight, the charioteer as exemplifying the soul and the two horses representing the "beautiful" and the "opposite." Plato decided to add wings to both horses, natural enough, as they seemed to prance proudly by him on a carpet of air. Even the rumble of the chariot's wheels enhanced this image, giving off an awesome sign of power. Despite the apparent ease with which the driver kept the two horses in sync, it was no easy business. No small wonder that Plato says driving the two is "inevitably a painfully difficult business.<sup>3</sup>" The driver has to keep both in perfect balance as possible else he'll end up in a ditch or worse, get himself and the horses killed.

This image, archetypal of the ancient world's most formidable fighting machine, has served for millennia and continues to serve well as a foundation for understanding the soul and the two basic characteristics of good and evil. Unfortunately for us both are pretty much at war within ourselves. However, the centaur offers a more palatable image, one more suited to today's mentality instead of attempting to update the **Phaedrus** image. From what I've gathered (and I'm not 100% certain about this), a centaur doesn't play a role in Plato's writing. One thing is for sure. It represents something that makes us uncomfortable; for many it borders upon the demonic or if not that, then something un-human for lack of a better word. A centaur doesn't have that critical distance between a driver and horse under his command because the two

<sup>3</sup>The image of a charioteer à la Plato isn't found in the Bible. However, St. James refers to a horse with regard to discipline of the body: Obviously James was not a devotee of Plato. Apart from this, everyone was familiar with a chariot, military or in the stadium. James speaks as follows: "If anyone makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also. If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies" [Jms 3.2-3].

are fused. And instinctively we're uncomfortable with that fusion where the human and horse natures run into each other. One can't be separated from the other whereas with a chariot, the driver can go on his merry way once the horses have returned to the stable.

So here we have a strange beast both like and unlike ourselves roaming around though we haven't a clue as to what it does all day. Obviously it doesn't graze like a horse but must eat as well as interact as a human though in the shadows by reason of its hybrid character. Most likely a centaur associates with others of its kind, nothing else. Such a creature seems ideally suited for roaming around at night, not so much as during the day. This plus other negative characteristics makes a centaur an unlikely candidate as representative of our spiritual constitution, for the human torso and head don't have control over the equine part as in the case of a charioteer. However, there's no need for control since without the equine part the human couldn't get about. So unlike a charioteer with its horses, the centaur lacks the idea of the human controlling its horse-nature. In fact, there's nothing to control which is why this creature appears so unsettling.

Because a centaur is at once familiar and alien to us, we can't quite cuddle up to it. However, we may compare this amalgam with the image of charioteer we've inherited essentially from Plato. We may not be aware of this inheritance in and by itself; certainly we feel its repercussions in how we perceive ourselves. Even if a person hadn't heard about the **Phaedrus** image, he'd agree readily with it once having read the account. Even apart from the story one's whole life on a day to day basis can be put in terms of I-as-charioteer struggling between the two forces of good and evil. At times the struggle may be at rest but never is resolved. The interval time when our inner conflict abates is a kind of truce after which we resume our familiar struggle.

Should we adopt a centaur as an image to describe the *psuche*, we'd have to lay aside centuries of tried and true ways of visualization (i.e., the ensemble of charioteer images) plus get over the negative ones which border upon or are suggestive of the diabolic. Then we'd have to run with it over a period of time, bounce it off other people—the best way of validation—and check the results. We can also throw part of the burden upon the centaur. Perhaps it needs to look in a mirror to get a picture of itself and not go by the reaction of fully human beings it encounters.

On the other hand, a charioteer has a clear image of himself more by what others think of him than if he were to glance at himself through a mirror. These perceptions, in turn, form an awareness of himself which obviously depends upon the character of his two horses. An unruly steed will upset his master whereas a docile one will please him. Rarely are the two at rest when yoked together which means some kind of perpetual governance is needed over them. And so we have a three way struggle difficult to keep in check. Actually we could go on and on about this which in essence is what the **Phaedrus** excerpt outlines below. However, should we apply this approach to a centaur, we'd run into all sorts of problems. More accurately, we're bringing our pre-conceived ideas to a beast where they don't fit, that being the real problem. Thus we're required to look at this beast in a manner quite different than what we're familiar with.

As an image of the soul, the charioteer's primary job is to control the two horses which have minds of their own. The "good" horse may be more amenable to its master, but that's half the story. The driver and this horse don't gang up on the "bad" one, but the charioteer attempts to control it through the "good" horse. So both animals remain subordinate to their master who seeks to apply action indirectly. The charioteer is somewhat removed as well as elevated above the two horses meaning he has distance between both. From this position he can see what they can't see and directs them accordingly. Any reaction of one or both horses registers to him via the reins which he holds somewhat loosely though not in a fully slack fashion. A tug here and another there is sufficient to govern both. Despite the close relationship between the driver and his team, there remains a distance and hence time gap between them. This is a source of comfort to the charioteer or the *psuche* or soul who doesn't have to conform immediately to either horse, good or bad. In fact, this distance is an essential part of what defines the *psuche*.

Further reflection on this image leads to locating where the *psuche*'s directing part is located which are the reins connecting the charioteer and two horses. When one of the horses veers to the left and the other wants to go off to the right, the charioteer doesn't know this immediately. Yes, he can see it at once but isn't 100% sure until he feels the tension of such a move transmitted through the reins. One horse will pull the reins to one side or the other, these tugs being more reliable than visual contact. In other words, the sense of feel is just as important as the faculty of sight. The charioteer can detect through the reins the strength, determination or lack of it in either or both horses. Apart from any sudden movements, the driver keeps the reins slack but only to the degree that the horses know who's in charge.

No matter how quickly the information transpires, always a time lapse exists as mediated through the reins. The *psuche* as charioteer evaluates what's going on (again more by feel than by sight), and over time a reservoir of memories

accumulates which makes the charioteer a real expert, even a champion. Observers can't help but marvel at his skill which seems almost superhuman. Without these memories the charioteer would have little or no control and be unfit for such an exalted position. Even before setting out with his team the charioteer knows beforehand—has a memory of, or as we'd say now a program—based upon past experiences. He can project them into the future which thus enables him to traverse unfamiliar terrain with greater certainty.

If we switch over to the **Phaedrus** with one horse as "good" and the other as "bad," the *psuche*-as-charioteer opts naturally for the former at the expense of the latter. A feel for where the two might be going is known beforehand just as we know where a choice for the good will lead us and visa versa. This knowledge-in-advance is more an intuition and has a lot to do with the type of tug we give on the reins to one of the horses. In fact, it's an anticipation where one horse will force the other to go. At this point the charioteer must anticipate the direction to which one horse will veer off thereby immediately affecting the other one. So in the way the charioteer imposes restraint in order to ensure a harmony which makes for a smooth ride.

Such is the famous classic image bequeathed to us from Plato which has affected how Christianity formulated its ideas of the soul. As already noted, even if we're ignorant of it, we're inclined to think of ourselves as a charioteer in charge of two horses. That is to say, the charioteer is "I" and the horses represent which way we are to go, morally speaking. Despite the naturalness of all this, it seems that the two choices represented by the horses seldom are kept in balance, and so our ride almost always is bumpy. Even when we go to sleep memories of the day's "ride" makes us toss and turn. Thus for most of our lives we're struggling to keep our two horses in balance whether we realize it or not. However, on occasion we experience rare moments of inner peace as when we're relaxed. At this time the horses are stashed away in the stable, and the charioteer has left the race track or battlefield, depending on his occupation. Unfortunately the respite is brief, and we're back at it again wistfully longing for a rest always out of our grasp.

We believe whole-heartedly in ourselves as charioteer or the "I'm in charge" mentality and see no reason to opt for anything else simply because one doesn't exist. Everyone around us is acting the same, so why should we have doubt about it? Putting this in a slightly different light we could say that we comport ourselves  $as\ if^4$ 

<sup>4</sup>The two small words "as if" get a lot of attention by Hans Vaihinger who wrote a book with them as its title, **Als Ob** in German. An article about all this is found on this home page. To go into it here would be straying too far afield and detract from the thrust of this

we perceived ourselves as a charioteer in control of two horses. Note that the two small words are italicized to stress the imaginary way of our thinking. Actually this way of thinking is very common as we search for familiar images to describe out current state of mind or condition in which we find ourselves. In fact barely we reflect on how "as if" affects our thought and what flows from it. Grasping for the right image is essential to navigating in the world. While such a perception is common it's incomplete or better, deficient not in the negative sense but lacking a certain fulness we desire.

As Hans Vaihinger argues, as-if is a device proper to fiction, an aide which helps us describe something our minds are in the process of formulating. It's essential to the telling of a story about something that is important to us. In the case at hand, the story is how the two horses, good and evil, interact. If in truth they always enjoyed a harmonious relationship there would be no need for the fictive device of as-if. Taking this further in the sense of working backward, if you will, there would be no need for reins and more importantly, no need for a charioteer as well as chariot. Because the two horses are almost always in conflict, they can't be allowed to run wild. Taming them therefore provides an endless source of material for telling stories. In fact, the ability to tell a story wouldn't exist without this conflict, otherwise all would be sweetness and light...in a word, boring. So that's the alternative we run up against when experiencing brief respites from the struggle. Although we may enjoy some sweetness and light, we know from experience that it doesn't last long. We seem stuck in an imagery—a fictive device—from which escape is impossible.

Mention of the as-if way of looking at things may help us get a handle on what a well-intentioned charioteer (psuche) might do. The first thing that comes to mind is for him to stop and take heed of his situation. He is to evaluate the tension represented by the two horses, not impose a form of discipline upon them, that being in essence a temptation. It's easy to deal with the good horse because goodness is just out there obvious and appealing to everyone. That makes it disappear from memory more quickly, for nothing exciting is going on. As for the bad horse, more thought and imagination is required. First we have to deal with it in and by itself and secondly, its relationship with the good horse. That sets in motion how the good horse interacts

article.

<sup>5</sup>For example, when on a hiking trip to the top of a given mountain we can say after having reached the summit something like "I feel as if I'm on top of Mount Everest." Obviously not true, but it implies knowledge of Mount Everest even if we've never been there. Our knowledge of that place, albeit imperfect and incomplete, is thus transferred to the modest hill which we've climbed and takes its name.

thereby setting in motion a chain of events. So before driving off in his chariot, the driver has to formulate a plan for controlling both animals. He may draw it up along the lines of as-if which has the advantage of presenting a plan where the two horses will bring him. If the charioteer decides to deal with this unruly situation straight-on and without imagination, he will be able to govern the horses but will do so with far more considerable difficulty.

After formulating an imaginary plan, the charioteer will communicate it to the good and bad horse via the reins. He could, for example, perceive the reins as if they were a electrical cord separating him from the horses. As soon as this association pops into his mind the reins become slim connecting wires for conducting an electrical current between the driver and the driven without them taking on this form. The reins will, of course, remain reins externally speaking. The manner of directing both horses becomes much easier not because of the reins per se but the power of imagination passed through the reins and then on to the horses. To an observer nothing has changed except what to him seems a magical transformation compared to the charioteer's earlier performances when he had to struggle keeping his chariot on the straight and narrow.

All this fine and dandy yet there remains the distinction between charioteer, chariot, reins and two horses. As with the **Phaedrus** example, it remains pretty much the same as depicting the human *psuche*. However, there is an option, and that is the centaur. The best part is that the image is partly familiar, a horse, though it's transformed in a totally different way. Now the charioteer becomes part of what he's been used to controlling, and the horse becomes part of the one who formerly had been in charge. What's especially noticeable is that the connecting point...the all important reins...have disappeared. The human half, formerly a charioteer used to dispatching orders, now has to deal immediately with what he was accustomed to have under his control. Not only that, the two horses, the good one as well as the bad one, have merged into one. In sum, the situation is radically different from the familiar chariot image. So does it suffice to image the human *psuche*?

Earlier Vaihinger's famous as-if fictive device was pointed out as means for describing how the charioteer might conceive exerting control over the two horses. Also he could picture in his mind something in the future by associating past experiences with the impending one and communicate it through the reins to the two horses. For example, he might anticipate an obstacle up ahead and say "turn left" or a sharp curve with the command "slow down." But for a centaur it's a different story. At first it might seem a less exciting existence, but that's because we're so accustomed

to think ourselves...our souls...as a charioteer dealing with the good vs. the bad. Since man and horse have become one, there seems to be no capacity for the function of memory or what we've been accustomed to think of in those terms. The man-part has no need to recall what the horse-part had done, not even a second ago. The two parts comprise one unit feeding directly into each other. In fact, speculating where the human torso connects with the equine one is irrelevant which is unlike looking for reins being the connection between the two.

So it seems that the centaur lacks the need for discipline. Such is part of our hesitancy at approaching this beast, for automatically we feel it has a need for discipline more than the two horses hitched to the chariot because of its wild, almost threatening nature. We can expand this fear of doing away with discipline if we look at ourselves as impartially as possible and without passing judgment. It turns out that we're pretty much addicted to the need for discipline even if we fail miserably at it. Discipline and our short-comings thus are inextricably entwined. Both work hand-in-hand to perpetuate a situation from which we try to extricate ourselves. Even if we do succeed, always there hangs over us the possibility of a relapse.

Awareness of a need for some kind of discipline and our failure to follow through on it as it relates to the two horses, the good one and the bad, is simply non-existent for the centaur. Whatever the horse nature does it registers at once on the human part and visa versa. There's no need for one to discipline the other. In fact, one doesn't perceive the other as different but part of the same body. If we follow through on this simple idea we can say that a centaur represents the substitution of discipline for understanding, that is, a type of understanding that works seamlessly between the man-part and the horse-part. Grasping this is quite delightful, really, and goes against something in our human nature which says it's too good to be true.

Taking this further, we could say that understanding represents the substitution, as it were, of memory for immediate perception. It turns out to be essential as we formulate a clearer idea of the superiority of understanding. Indeed, speaking like this can intimate that our recollective faculty isn't terribly important whereas we know from real life it's essential for getting around. So with regard to the image of a centaur, understanding belongs to the man-horse (or is it horse-man?) which perceives everything in one simple, all-inclusive glance. In other words, understanding = simple looking. The horse doesn't do it on its own nor does the man. Both are engaged as one being. Because this type of glance is so misunderstood by reason to our exposure to the long established charioteer image, we fear that as a substitute for our recollective faculty it will negate all our accumulative knowledge

and hence our recollective faculty. The end result would be knowing nothing...empty-headed at best. On second thought, unfortunately that's how too many people comport themselves even without exposure to this talk about a centaur.

But should we run with the centaur model, our man/horse or horse/man creature—it doesn't matter which comes first—we see that our essential unhappiness lays in our efforts to impose some form discipline. In its place understanding is called for. Note that by its very nature discipline is associated with some kind of form, visible or otherwise, and has a specific goal in mind, usually along the lines of reforming or adaptation. You could almost say there's an ideal "it" compared against a real "it," the two never measuring up. On the other hand, understanding as relative to the centaur lacks such form and therefore a goal. To untrained eyes understanding is as elusive as all get-out and hence suspicious, but if you could take a poll, it's the one thing for which everyone would give his or her all.<sup>6</sup>

Discipline is the most valuable asset for the *psuche* (charioteer) to control the two horses in its charge. Indeed, we can obtain valuable insight into this image, but the result always leaves us in the lurch or unsatisfied. This seems part of the reason why people are turned off with religion. The way it's presented relies upon repetition of stock phrases and concepts in an unreflective manner where discipline is promulgated without having an idea of that an alternative exists, even to the point of denying it. Such a tradition has been handed down from generation to generation and often did produce good results. Now this approach seems to have run its course despite continual efforts to retread it. Besides, the person presenting the material is terrified of losing his perch above and behind the good and bad horses which to him signals immediate disaster for his chariot. Hence the only recourse is a rehash of the chariot image and how the two horses clash continuously which is more attractive, superficially speaking.

Precisely in order to alleviate this dullness of mind and spirit that can overtake a person we leave aside the image of charioteer and horses for the image of a centaur. Initial appeal lies in the fact that it's the next best thing to a human and a horse. But

<sup>6</sup>Taking the example of a centaur to the theological realm of Christology, applying it here wouldn't due. There'd be a tendency to associate a centaur with monophysitism, Christ being one (monos) nature (phusis) instead of two natures (divine and human) in one person. This isn't relevant to the subject matter at hand but simply thrown out as somewhat incidental. However, if one were to apply this centaur business to Christology, problems would arise. Who knows...perhaps it does have positive theological ramifications though this isn't the place to explore them.

we're faced with an immediate problem that needs to be overcome, and that pertains to how the two parts are joined. Furthermore, there's the larger question, why is this so? Obviously a centaur is alive, very much so, but does it have a soul? This is a question based on familiarity with the charioteer as representing the human *psuche* <sup>7</sup>, something that comes comfortably and naturally to us with this image from the **Phaedrus**. And by soul is meant the relationship it has to both the good and bad horse through the controlling reins.

The centaur goes about fully conscious of its surroundings like any other being though differs from them by being comprised of two distinct natures. It doesn't seem to fall under the category of a hybrid. That's the offspring of two animals or plants of different species or varieties such as a mule which is comprised of donkey and a horse. A mule looks like a "single" animal, not as two, as with a centaur. The human torso doesn't control the horse part saying something to the charioteer as, "go there" or "turn to the right." In fact, the centaur doesn't perceive itself as divided but as one. This type of understanding is perfectly natural to it, not imposed from without as would be the case with the chariot image. That consists of several working parts: the vehicle, driver, reins and two horses. In short, it's a complicated image and equally complicated to drive. Lots of training (as opposed to understanding) goes into handling how a chariot works, especially when used in battle. We could image an hypothetical situation where a charioteer might try to hook up his wagon to a centaur and command it to go here and then go there. The centaur's overall physique is the same as one of the horses, but the human half would balk at being so restrained. It isn't that the centaur is unrestrained or unwilling. His whole nature simply can't conceive of this.

The attempt to discipline a centaur therefore is impossible wherein lays the essential difference between it and a charioteer. The human side sees where it wants to go and as soon as this sight hits his eyes, off he runs, human and horse alike as one body. The human torso, unlike the charioteer, doesn't say to its equine part, "Let's go" and therefore issues instructions to it. No driver and no horse are present in the conventional sense and oh, yes, no controlling reins. It seems that the centaur enjoys a direct correspondence between itself and the outside world. The two are united, just as his body is united, by a glance at once simple and immediate minus reflection in the conventional sense (as would be the case with a charioteer). We could say that our centaur is perpetually watchful, on the look-out, where what he sees and what he

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>Throughout or when considering the idea of a *psuche*, that puts it as a kind of object. For example, someone or something must have a psuche, making the one possessing it anterior to psuche. A centaur goes a way to alleviate this problem.

is isn't differentiated. That gives him a certain freedom which we, so accustomed to the chariot image, mistakenly attribute as wildness, a wildness common to beasts whereas we're the ones who are beasts.

This essay concludes on a note of caution! The reflections just presented obviously are a bit disjointed and suffer from some a certain lack of understanding. However, the joy in exploring a the chariot image from the **Phaedrus** along with the centaur one turned out to be a wonderful exercise. If these reflections contribute to making a person more virtuous (whether he opts for a charioteer or centaur) is the most important result one could wish for.

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## Phaedrus 246a-248e

This is an excerpt posted on the Lectio homepage entitled *The Phaedrus by Plato*, the translation coming from **Plato: Complete Works** edited by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, 1997). The text which follows is in black and the notations are in purple.

246 That, then, is enough about the soul's immortality. Now here is what we must say about its structure. To describe what the soul actually is would require a very long account, altogether a task for a god in every way; but to say what it is like is humanly possible and takes less time. So let us do the second in our speech. Let us then liken the soul to the natural union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer. The gods have horses and charioteers that are themselves all good and come from good stock besides, while everyone else has a mixture. To begin with, our driver is in charge of a pair of horses; second, one of his horses is beautiful and good and from stock of the same sort, while the other is the opposite and has the opposite sort of bloodline. This means that chariot-driving in our case is inevitably a painfully difficult business.

Hikanos means satisfactory and pertains to what Socrates had just defined about the soul's immortality (athanasia), so now it's time to consider its structure or peri tes ideas autes: concerning (peri also as around, indicative of looking at a matter from all view points) its own self-ness. He opts for a human presentation, diegesis (dia- connoting through-ness) which means narrative, not a divine one which would take too long.

Socrates decides to liken (eikoa: cf. eikon or image) the psuche to a natural

union of winged horses. This union is expressed by the noun dunamis which means power as natural capacity or property with the adjective sumphutos which means congenital or kindred (sum- as with). The gods have such horses which are all good (agathos) and derive from good stock, the second use of the adjective. In comparison, every else has a mixture, meignumi being a verb. This meignumi implies the opposite of agathos, enantios, which is inferred, not stated. Driving this pair (agathos/enantios) is by necessity (anagke) both chalepos and duskolos or painful, hard to bear and hard (dus-) to satisfy, discontented.

And now I should try to tell you why living things are said to include both mortal and immortal beings. All soul looks after all that lacks a soul, and patrols all of heaven, taking different shapes at different times. So long as its wings are in perfect condition it flies high, and the entire universe is its dominion; but a soul that sheds its wings wanders until it lights on something solid, where it settles and takes on an earthly body, which then, owing to the power of this soul, seems to move itself. The whole combination of soul and body is called a living thing, or animal, and has the designation 'mortal' as well. Such a combination cannot be immortal, not on any reasonable account. In fact it is pure fiction, based neither on observation nor on adequate reasoning, that a god is an immortal living thing which has a body and a soul, and that these are bound together by nature for all time—but of course we must let this be as it may please the gods, and speak accordingly.

Zoon or that which is living in the sense of having existence and includes beings both mortal and immortal, thnetos and athanatos. Socrates uses the phrase all soul (psuche pasa) which cares for (epimeleomai: the preposition epi- or upon intensifies the meaning) that which is apsuchos, without (alpha privative) a psuche. It patrols or peripoleo (peri- or around prefaced to poleo, to range) all of heaven (the same adjective concerning all soul) while assuming different shapes (eidos: signifies that which is seen or is the particular form of a thing) at different times.

The soul's wings must be in perfect condition (teleos: relative toward and end or goal) in order to fly on high or meteoroporeo which means to fly through the air (meteoros: raised from off the ground prefaced to poreuo which implies carrying) enabling it to have the universe (kosmos: also as decoration) under itself, dioikeo meaning to administer and consists of oikeo (to dwell) prefaced with the preposition dia-, through. On the other hand, a psuche which sheds its wings and assumes (lambano: to take, receive) a body or soma comprised of the earth (geinos) wanders or antilambano (literally, to receive instead, anti- suggestive of against) until it lands on something solid, stereos also meaning that which is harsh. The verb katoikizo means to settle or bring home, kata- suggestive of in accord with this home. The verb

kineo or to move is used in conjunction with the noun dunamis meaning to have capacity, the ability as to move on one's own.

The adjective sumpan (sum = with and pan = all) as everything refers to psuche and soma as pegnumi, to stick or to fix. Furthermore, the designation or eponumia (surname where the preposition epi- (upon) is prefaced to the root onoma or name; i.e., name-upon) of mortal (thnetos) applies here. And so this sumpan is something devised, logizomai meaning to calculate, reckon and often with negative connotations. In other words, it not based upon observation nor reasoning (eido and noeo, the former applies to knowing and the latter to understanding), that a god is an immortal (athanatos) living being (zoon) with a soma and psuche and that both are connected (sumphuo: literally to grow together, sum-) for all time, aei (eternity) plus chronos (implies space as well). Anyway, such things are as the god wills or philos which means beloved or dear.

Let us turn to what causes the shedding of the wings, what makes them fall away from a soul. It is something of this sort: By their nature wings have the power to lift up heavy things and raise them aloft where the gods all dwell, and so, more than anything that pertains to the body, they are akin to the divine, which has beauty, wisdom, goodness, and everything of that sort. These nourish the soul's wings, which grow best in their presence; but foulness and ugliness make the wings shrink and disappear.

Socrates is now concerned with the cause (aitia) of the wings being shed, apobole (literally, a casting from, apo-) and what makes them fall away (apporeo: literally, to flow from, apo-) from a psuche. Because wings have the capacity (dunamis, also as power, might as well as property) to lift up things which are heavy and thus situate them in places where the gods dwell (oikeo), they are akin to the divine, the verb being koinoneo or to be in common (koinos, adjective) with. And so this realm which is theios is also kalos, sophos, agathos and the like, all nourishing (trepho: to increase, rear) the wings of a psuche. On the other hand, that which is aischros (literally, not ashamed) and ugly (kakos fundamentally means evil) cause the wings to shrink and disappear, phthino (connotes decaying) and diollumi (to destroy utterly, dia- or through suggestive of thoroughness).

Now Zeus, the great commander in heaven, drives his winged chariot first in the procession, looking after everything and putting all things in order. Following him is an 247 army of gods and spirits arranged in eleven sections. Hestia is the only one who remains at the home of the gods; all the rest of the twelve are lined up in formation, each god in command of the unit to which he is assigned. Inside heaven

are many wonderful places from which to look and many aisles which the blessed gods take up and back, each seeing to his own work, while anyone who is able and wishes to do so follows along, since jealousy has no place in the gods' chorus. When they go to feast at the banquet they have a steep climb to the high tier at the rim of heaven; on this slope the gods' chariots move easily, since they are balanced and well under control, but the other chariots barely make it. The heaviness of the bad horse drags its charioteer toward the earth and weighs him down if he has failed to train it well, and this causes the most extreme toil and struggle that a soul will face. But when the souls we call immortals reach the top, they move outward and take their stand on the high ridge of heaven, where its circular motion carries them around as they stand while they gaze upon what is outside heaven.

Zeus is a commander or *hegemon*, one who is in a position of authority to others and is in heaven (*ouranos*) who drives (*elauno* also applies to riding) his winged chariot first in procession, the verb *poreuo* being used here which can apply to carrying or conveying. While doing this, Zeus looks after everything as well as putting them in order, the two verbs being *diakosmeo* and *epimeleomai*. The first pertains to decoration and has the preface *dia*- or through prefaced to it, indicative of a thorough arrangement and care. The second has the preface *epi*- or upon prefaced to the verbal root for care. Like the just mentioned *dia*-, *epi*- is indicative of thoroughness though the accent is upon rather than through.

In Zeus' train is an army (stratia) of both gods and spirits comprised of eleven sections, this verb being kosmeo or implies adornment of these sections. The word for spirits is daimon or a divine agent, a word awkward to translate into English. Of all the gods, Hestia alone remains at their home or oikos while the others are in formation, tasso meaning to be drawn up as an army for battle. Each god has a command over the unit assigned (taxis: a drawing up, with kata or in accord with) to him.

Heaven contains many places which are wonderful (makarios: happy, blessed) where the those gods which are eudaimonos or blessed (eu- or well) with a good genius or fortunate take up and back. That is to say, epistrepho which means to turn around (epi- or upon) or to go back and forth. Each god is involved with his own work (prasso: to accomplish, manage) while anyone else may do the same because there is no jealousy involved. More accurately, phthonos is outside (exo) the divine chorus.

When the gods feast (thoine: meal, with epi or upon) at a banquet (daite, with pros or direction towards-which), they make their way or poreuo (with pros, direction towards-which) on high (ano: above) to what is called an apsis, a disk or orbit in the realm called hupouranios or literally above (hupo-) the heavenly realm,

this by a steep climb (*akra*: summit). En route the chariots of the gods move easily (*rhadios*) due to being balanced and under control, isorropos (literally, equally balanced, *rhope* being an inclination).

However, other chariots can hardly (mogis or scarcely) make (metecho: literally, to have with, meta-) the ascent because the bad (kakos: also as evil) horse is heavy (baruno: connotes being oppressed) drags (rhepo: connotes sinking) the charioteer to the earth and weighs him down (britho) if he hasn't trained (trepo: suggestive of nourishing and cherishing) the horse properly (me kalos: literally as not beautifully). As a result the psuche will experience extreme (eschatos: last in a series) toil or ponos (labor that results in pain or is pain). On the other hand, there are souls which are immortal (athanatos) who attain the summit or akros with pros, direction towards-which. From here they move (poreuo) outward or exo, standing (histemi) on heaven's high ridge (notos: the back or rear of a ridge). There circular motion or periphora (a carrying around or peri-) carries them around (periago or peri- again) while gazing (theoreo: to look at in the sense of beholding or inspecting) that which is exo or outside heaven.

The place beyond heaven—none of our earthly poets has ever sung or ever will sing its praises enough! Still, this is the way it is—risky as it may be, you see, I must attempt to speak the truth, especially since the truth is my subject. 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. Now a god's mind is nourished by intelligence and pure knowledge, as is the mind of any soul that is concerned to take in what is appropriate to it, and so it is delighted at last to be seeing what is real and watching what is true, feeding on all this and feeling wonderful, until the circular motion brings it around to where it started. On the way around it has a view of Justice as it is; it has a view of Self-control; it has a view of Knowledge—not the knowledge that is close to change, that becomes different as it knows the different things which we consider real down here. No, it is the knowledge of what really is what it is. And when the soul has seen all the things that are as they are and feasted on them, it sinks back inside heaven and goes home. On its arrival, the charioteer stables the horses by the manger, throws in ambrosia, and gives them nectar to drink besides.

The topos or place (also means occasion) beyond heaven (huperouranios: huper- as above or beyond) has praises which cannot be sung (humneo: also as to celebrate or commemorate) adequately (axia: worthiness with the preposition kata or in accord with) by poets. Nevertheless, Socrates feels compelled to take the risk (tolmeteon: connotes boldness) and speak the truth, alethes (literally, that which is

not concealed), aletheia (noun, with peri or around) being his subject matter.

Socrates asks somewhat rhetorically about this place or topos lacking color, shape and solidity or that which is achromatos, aschematisos and anaphes, all alpha privative. The second lacks schema (form, shape or figure) and the third literally means not to be touched and hence impalpable. It seems that the three negative qualities contribute to making this topos beyond heaven a being or ousia that really is, these words being expressed by two forms of this noun: ontos ousa. Despite its triple capacity for not being perceived, this ousia is what all knowledge is about, episteme (literally, knowledge upon or epi-). In other words, this being visible or theatos (theaomai: to gaze, behold) is contrary to whatever lacks color, shape and solidity and proper to the governing principle or kubernetes (literally, a helmsman) of one's intelligence or nous.

Socrates now moves to considering the mind or dianoia of a god (theos). Compare with the just mentioned nous only with dia- or through prefaced to it; i.e., through-the-mind. It is fed or trepho (suggestive of growth as well) by two things: intelligence or nous and episteme or knowledge upon or epi-, both of which had just been noted. With this divine exemplar in mind which hopefully Phaedrus is familiar with, Socrates applies it to the mind of any (apas suggests whole, all together) soul or psuche which has the intent (melo: to be the object of care or thought) of taking in (dechomai: also as to receive) that which is appropriate to it. The verb proseko means to have come, be at hand which is suggested by the preposition pros-, direction towards which).

If this is so, the soul will be delighted (agapao: to greet or regard with affection) in seeing and watching, eido (to see, perceive or behold) as well as theoreo (to gaze or behold and seems more uninterrupted than eido). The former is with respect to what is real which is rendered literally as the being (to on) through time or chronos. The second is with regard to what is true or alethes. There are two results flowing from this double type of beholding, if you will, feeding and feeling wonderful or trepho (cf. last paragraph) and eupatheo (eu- suggestive of well-ness and adverbial in form prefaced to patheo which means to be passive or receptive to influences). This continues for a limited time and doesn't seem un-extended, if you will. That is, circular motion (kuklos) brings the soul around (periphero: peri- or around) to (eis: into) its starting point, the noun periphora: (a carrying around, peri-) also being used.

*Periodos* is another word with the preposition *peri*- or around prefaced to it, here regarding *hodos* or road which suggests a rotation which we could say is founded upon awareness without an object. More accurately, this *peri*- motion is important and suggests objects, etc., moving around the soul which doesn't move.

Such movement offers a threefold view (kathorao: horao with the preposition

kata- or in accord with): 1) not simply of justice (dikaiosune) but as it is, auten or autos suggestive of self. 2) Self-control or sophrosune which connotes being moderate in all things and 3) knowledge, that is, episteme which is knowledge-upon (epi-).

Episteme has two types: 1) that which is close to change, the former being the verb prosistemi (histemi: to stand, to place prefaced with the preposition pros-, suggestive of direction towards-which) and the latter being genesis or the coming into birth or existence. Such episteme becomes different (heteros: one of two, second) when knowing different things which we take for real (ousa on), and the location of this real (onton) is down here, nun or now. 2) Instead, it is, somewhat awkwardly said, the episteme of what really is (on ontos) what it is (ousia).

Once the soul or *psuche* (not mentioned here) has both seen things as they are (ta onta ontos) and has feasted (estiao: to receive at one's hearth or house) upon them it goes to the inmost part (to eiso: within, to as specific, 'the' within) of heaven or returns (erchomai) home (oikade: adverb, as it were, for oikos or house). Now the charioteer puts the horses away, giving them ambrosia and nectar to drink, the drink of the gods. While all good and fine, what do the horses do next? Horses just stand there, for they don't lay down to sleep.

248 Now that is the life of the gods. As for the other souls, one that follows a god most closely, making itself most like that god, raises the head of its charioteer up to the place outside and is carried around in the circular motion with the others. Although distracted by the horses, this soul does have a view of Reality, just barely. Another soul rises at one time and falls at another, and because its horses pull it violently in different directions, it sees some real things and misses others. The remaining souls are all eagerly straining to keep up, but are unable to rise; they are carried around below the surface, trampling and striking one another as each tries to get ahead of the others. The result is terribly noisy, very sweaty, and disorderly. Many souls are crippled by the incompetence of the drivers, and many wings break much of their plumage. After so much trouble, they all leave the sight of reality unsatisfied, and when they have gone they will depend on what they think is nourishment—their own opinions.

Such is the bios or life of the gods, this word meaning not animal life but a course or manner of living. Socrates now speaks of so-called other (allos) souls, using allos in a positive sense concerning those which follow (hepo: also as to be busy about) a god. This divinity is not specified but is followed very closely, aristos usually applied to that which is best and often concerns virtue. Perhaps he has in mind god as daimon. Such a soul makes itself like that god, eikazo being the verb from which eikon or image is derived. It has a charioteer or driver of horses meaning that it is a

passenger going along for the ride. The soul raises this driver's head, huperairo which consists of the root airo (to raise) prefaced with the preposition huper- or above. Implied is that the charioteer has had its head down, let alone looking straight ahead. The place (topos) to which its gaze is to be directed is upward or eis with the preposition exo (re. topos) or literally into outside. Next the soul is borne around, sumperiphero or to carry with-around (sum- and peri- joined together) with other similar souls. It is used with the noun periphora noted above, a carrying around (peri-).

Despite other horses (and by implication, other souls) causing distraction (thorubeo: to make a noise, to cheer aloud), the soul at hand barely (mogis: mogos is a noun for toil or trouble) sees Reality, the verb being kathorao (above as horao with the preposition kata- or in accord with) and the noun as ta onta (the beings).

Socrates speaks of another *psuche* which rises and falls, *airo* and *duo* (to sink down), both with regard to *tote* or at this time/at another time. The pulling (*hepomai: hepo* or to be busy about, to follow after; noted above) of the horses is violent, *glixomai* (connotes striving after, to be eager) in different directions which makes the soul see (*eido*: to perceive, behold) some things which are real (*ta*, the [things] or presuming *onta* as just above) while missing (*adanuteo*: alpha privative, to be lacking strength) others. The reason for this? The horses are pulling the soul violently, *biazo*, to overpower by force.

Those souls which remain attempt (peirao: also to make a trial of) to keep up with the one just mentioned but cannot rise, that is, ano or above. Instead, they are submerged (hupobruxos: under or hupo- the water) all the while trampling and striking each other, pateo and epiballo (to tread upon and to cast upon, epi-) in their desire to be first. The result: thorubos (noise, uproar), hamilla (contest for superiority) and hidros (perspiration) as well as being crippled (choleuo: to become lame) by the kakia (essentially evil and implies coward-ness) of the charioteers who cause the plumage of souls' wings to break (thrauo: also as to shatter). This unfortunate experience (ponos: labor that results in pain) causes the souls to leave the sight (thea: seeing, looking) unsatisfied or ateles (alpha privative; without end or not accomplishing one's purpose). Such souls will substitute (chrao: to fall upon, conceive a desire) personal opinions (doxastos: matter of opinion, conjectural) as their nourishment or trophe (also pertains to livelihood).

The reason there is so much eagerness to see the plain where truth stands is that this pasture has the grass that is the right food for the best part of the soul, and it is the nature of the wings that lift up the soul to be nourished by it. Besides, the law of Destiny is this: if any soul becomes a companion to a god and catches sight of any true thing, it will be unharmed until the next circuit; and if it is able to do this every

time, it will always be safe. If, on the other hand, it does not see anything true because it could not keep up, and by some accident takes on a burden of forgetfulness and wrongdoing, then it is weighed down, sheds its wings and falls to earth. At that point, according to the law, the soul is not born into a wild animal in its first incarnation; but a soul that has seen the most will be planted in the seed of a man who will become a lover of wisdom or of beauty, or who will be cultivated in the arts and prone to erotic love. The second sort of soul will be put into someone who will be a lawful king or warlike commander; the third, a statesman, a manager of a household, or a financier; the fourth will be a trainer who loves exercise or a doctor who cures the body; the fifth will lead the life of a prophet or priest of the mysteries. To the sixth the life of a poet or some other representational artist is properly assigned; to the seventh the life of a manual laborer or farmer; to the eighth the career of a sophist or demagogue, and to the ninth a tyrant.

+ The End +