Arguing for the Immortality of the Soul in the Palinode of the Phaedrus
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Introduction

Socrates’ second speech in the Phaedrus includes the argument that “all/every soul is immortal” (ψυχὴ πᾶσα ἀθάνατος 245c6, concluding at 246a2). This argument, distinct from the Phaedo’s, has attracted attention for its austerity and placement in Socrates’ grand speech about chariots and love. And yet it has never been identified as a deliberately fallacious argument. This paper argues that Socrates intends to confront his interlocutor Phaedrus with a dubious sequence of reasoning. He aims to show his speech-loving friend—rather than simply to tell him—that all kinds of speech, analytic as much as imagistic, can be persuasive without being truthful. It has been shown that Socrates deliberately utters bad arguments to Phaedrus on four other occasions in the Phaedrus. This argument, in what Socrates calls the “palinode” (243e9-257a2), operates in the same way. Plato is not a naïve arguer. He has written a dialogue different from what readers have come to expect. It is more about the devious charms of every kind of speech than about the specific failures of Lysianic rhetoric. It is directed at the susceptibilities as much of the philosophical reader as the novice Phaedrus.

The structure of the argument is “long, extremely involved, extremely compact and extremely difficult,” or, again, “highly compressed, which jeopardizes its coherence.” The fact of the argument’s gnarled, bewildering exposition will be a interpretative point for this paper. All the same, its strategy is clear enough. That which moves itself is immortal; the soul is one of

1 Lineation from Burnet, as is text except where noted; all translations by the author.
2 Demos 1968 summarizes the argument with no skepticism; Reed 1974 merely expresses skepticism about the scope of the conclusion; Sharples 1985 identifies a coherent argumentative strategy; Griswold 1986 reconstructs a valid sorites after filling in missing assumptions and explaining away troublesome claims and moves; Bett 1986 notes a few invalid inferences, and thinks that Plato simply did not notice them; Ferrari 1987, 123-125, hints at his dubiety but explicitly avoids the debate; Rowe 1987, 174-177, briefly mentions some problems but reconstructs the argument into two valid sub-arguments; Blyth 1997 believes the argument is valid but deliberately appears invalid; Nicholson 1999, 155-163, thinks the argument is fine as it goes; Scully 2003, 261e6-262c4, says, first, that Socrates argues like a presocratic, and that he “achieves truth and form, even while overt attention to rhetoric drops from view”; neither Fossheim 2010 nor Ryan 2012 make any criticisms; Yunis 2011, 135-138, reserves judgment but alleges difficulties; Werner 2012, 51-4, explicitly ignores “the logical details” to “focus on the broader conception of soul that the argument presents.”
3 Scott 2011 (244a5-257a2), Yunis 2011, 169-174 (257c4-258d2), Moore 2013a (261e6-262c4), 2013b (261a7-e4).
4 Demos 1968, 134-5.
5 Yunis 2011, 135-138. Cf. Griswold 1986, 78: “it is difficult to formulate a satisfactory analysis of what this passage means.” It is difficult to accept the claim of Bett 1986, 2, that it is “aiming for maximum clarity and logical perspicuity” or means to be a “rigorous” and “formal” “proof” (3).
these self-movers; so the soul is immortal. The argument links movement to life, and self-movement to ceaseless movement. The palinode includes this argument because it provides background for an ethical claim. Soul-immortality is a precondition for the better transmigratory placement for the person living with justice and analytic clarity (248e3-249b6). This is a life infused with the salutary mania of love, the celebration of which is the palinode’s sole burden (244a6-8). The palinode itself, Socrates says, is meant to turn Phaedrus toward philosophy (ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν… τρέψον 257b3-4) and a life of love accompanied by philosophical talk (257b6).

Few should find impossible a Socrates offering deliberately bad arguments for soul-immortality; he does so frequently in the Phaedo. The aloof grandeur of the palinode has, however, discouraged laying a suspicious eye on this part of it. But a range of clues point to Plato wanting his reader to scrutinize this argument and think about both its content and its form. I have already mentioned two of these clues. Socrates uses deliberately deceptive arguments elsewhere in the dialogue, and he employs an almost ostentatiously crabbed prose-style here. There are more. After the palinode, neither Socrates nor Phaedrus ever return to the proof of soul-immortality, revealing — were the argument to be one worth taken seriously — a shocking disregard for a profound existential matter. Indeed, when Socrates recounts the value of the palinode, he discards everything as play (τῷ ὄντι παιδίᾳ πεπαίσθαι 265c8-9) except the two forms of thought we call “collection and division” (265c8-266c1). It does seem that much of the palinode has purposes other than establishing the truth. To mention only one case, the speech begins with etymologies (244b6-d3), indications of resemblances between words, a practice engaged in generally, and throughout this dialogue, for rhetorical purposes. In a sort of over-pleading its case, the palinode states three times within six lines that it is going to give a

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6 Each soul “go[es] around the entire universe, coming to be now in one form, now in another” (256b7).
7 Peterson 2011, 165-195 says that the questions diagnose Simmias’ and Cebe’s confusion about their own supposed doctrinal commitments; Arieti 1986 argues that we come to know that we do not know about the immortality of the soul, and thus we can face death with true, philosophical courage. Rowe 1987, 174-177, uses the Phaedo instead as evidence that Plato’s commitment to soul-immortality is without doubt, but having written many arguments about soul-immortality does not mean that Plato must think that the present argument is a sound one.
8 Grandeur: as it is frequently so-called (Denniston, Greek Prose Style, 4; Yunis 2011, 135), given its terseness, abstraction, and lack of articles.
9 Similar, external, evidence is that Aristotle, in his survey of early views of the soul, mentions, of Plato’s, only that in the Timaeus and perhaps of other unknown writings (404b16-29), and of a theory of continuous motion, only Alcmaeon’s theory (404b29-34). 404a20-23 speaks of a group of theorists holding that motion comes from moving things, and that soul moves itself, so there is no reason to think that he speaks specifically of the Phaedrus (or of Laws 895b).
10 Yunis 2011, 132, citing also 238c4, 249e3, 251c6.
The Argument at 245c5-246a2

11 Will the “wise” find it believable, whoever they may be? If so, presumably not simply in the way of accepting the validity of the inferences, but in some deeper or indirect way.

12 Confusingly to many readers (including Ryan 2012 and Rowe 1987; de Vries 1969 ambiguously calls it “the formal aspect”), Socrates calls the argumentative aspect τῷ ῥητορικῷ αὐτοῦ; see Yunis 2011 ad 235a1.

13 The dialogue calls this drawing psychagogia, on which see Moore 2013b, Moss 2013, Asmis 1986.
Understanding how Phaedrus would hear the argument, or how a reader would read it, takes thinking about how either Phaedrus or a reader would be primed to hear its words, especially ambiguous ones, and primed to interpret its claims, especially surprising ones. A sympathetic audience is disposed to make sense of statements in a favorable light: as both somehow true and somehow consistent with what preceded. Conversely, an argument that aims to persuade will try to articulate its claims in a way that will allow its audience to interpret them as true and consistent with what preceded. So a person studying the function of an argument must observe how an argument accomplishes its persuasive function: how it makes itself sound true. But one must also evaluate the logical validity of the claims and inferences it makes.

The following analysis studies each clause of this twenty-one line argument in the fashion just described. For each set of clauses it asks several questions. How would Phaedrus or a sympathetic reader hear the clause as relevant, true, and consistent with its surroundings? Why does the argument use certain phrases to draw its audience to its conclusion, that soul is immortal? And why is the argumentative quality of its inferences as it is, in each case?

On first perusal, the palinode’s argument about the immortality of the soul looks basically valid; a perusal of the many charitable reconstructions found in the secondary literature give evidence of this. The argument connects, in seemingly sensible ways, motion, life, and the sources of both. On second perusal, however, the argument appears instead to founder at every turn in a baffling mix of equivocation, question-begging, and baseless assertion. On a third perusal, the argument should seem indeed a rationally poor one, but one produced with subtle attention to the interpretative proclivities of a less-than-careful audience.\(^\text{14}\)

\begin{center}
c5 \hspace{1em} \text{ψυχὴ πᾶσα ἄθανατος.} \hspace{1em} \text{Every // All soul is immortal.}
\end{center}

The argument starts by stating its goal. The actual conclusion twenty lines later (246a1-2), however, drops the πᾶσα and adds the predicate “ungenerated” (ἄγενητον). This change reveals that the argument makes its audience think it will talk about individual souls—as are relevant to personal immortality—but appeal to soul in general for its evidence.

\(^{14}\) This is sort of the opposite of Blyth 1997, which argues that the argument appears (superficially) invalid but is actually (when seen in context) valid.
The πᾶσα here can mean either “every” or “all.” What Phaedrus has heard, however, disposes him to hear this as “every soul.” The conversation heretofore has spoken of individual people. The three speeches of the dialogue’s first half debate the salutary effect of love on distinct erastai and eromenoi. Half a page earlier, the palinode had spoken of the effects of the Muses on an individual soul (ψυχήν 245a2). Just three lines earlier, the palinode had spoken of souls as having types, experiences, and deeds (245c3-4). Furthermore, there would be no reason for him to hear “all soul” — either as a mass of soul-stuff or as a single World-Soul. Neither has come up. Most importantly, immortality applies to living things, creatures or gods, both of which are individuals, referred to as “every.”

The way one hears the πᾶσα makes a dialectical difference. The “every” reading distributes “immortality” to each person’s soul. The “all” reading does not. Perhaps soul considered a unity is immortal, but not individual instantiations. Thus the claim Phaedrus thinks the argument is making — that every soul is immortal — will not get proved if it shows only that all soul is immortal. To anticipate our analysis, one reason to think that the argument does in fact show only that “all soul” is immortal is that it drops the quantifier at its actual conclusion (246a1-2). The audience thus cannot puzzle over the meaning of πᾶσα at this crucial point.

c5 τὸ γὰρ [ἀεικίνητον] ἀθάνατον
[αὐτοκίνητον] For the [always-mover] is immortal:
[self-mover]

16 Ferrari 1987, 124, agrees that Plato means for πᾶσα to be ambiguous, but to hint that impersonal attitude toward soul expressed in this argument — even if it concerned individual souls — would not suffice to address the proper aim of psychological inquiry. This is, at any rate, a more charitable view than that held by Hackforth 1952 (and not rejected by de Vries 1969): “the distinction between collective and distribute sense is not here before his [sc. Plato’s] mind, any more than it need be in the case of πᾶν σῶμα at 245e4…,” which assumes Plato’s confusion about a most basic distinction between soul abstractly and individual souls, one that he has Cebes bring up (Phdo. 70a1-b3).
17 So though Griswold 1986, 84-85, Fossheim 2010, and Yunis 2011, 135-8, appear to bite the bullet when saying that the argument is not about personal immortality, they are right only from the perspective of the topic the argument has any purchase on; they are not considering what the argument aims to seem to be about. Yunis at least acknowledges that there is an ambiguity here.
18 Contrast Sharples 1985, 67, who begs the question when he says that one can generalize from a “characteristic of one, supreme existence of the soul-type” to “all instances of this type,” supposing that Plato provides this principle at exactly this place when he says “all soul is immortal.”
19 The vagueness of de Vries 1969’s claim — “the next section of the text seems to point to the [collective sense]; the [distributive sense], however, is not absent since the myth will treat of the individual soul” — does not account for the way the argument deliberately encourages taking πᾶσα in two different ways as the argument proceeds.
With this sentence, the argument lays out its argumentative strategy. It will link two distinct realms—physics (change) and biology (death)—and will claim that life is explained in terms of motion. How precisely it makes this linkage, to vindicate its claim, depends on the way one resolves a crux. But the argumentative burden is the same whether we read ἀεικίνητον (“always-moving”) or αὐτοκινήτον (“self-moving”). Showing self-motion to be always-moving—to harness the always-moving–immortal connection—requires a two-part argument: that the self-mover never stops moving, and that it always exists. Showing self-motion to be immortal—though it bypasses any claim about “always-moving”—still requires its own two-part argument: that it is always alive, and that it always exists. Since moving and being alive are equated at c6-7, the first part of both two-part arguments—“never stops moving” and “always alive”—amount to the same thing. In either case, the argument links self-motion and immortality through the twin features of continuous movement and eternal existence.

Starting with the third clause, the argument links movement and life through equation of their mutual cessation. Life occurs when something is being moved and moves something else; death occurs when movement stops. Because the following clause says that things that move themselves never cease being moved (c8), the implication is that death comes from the cessation of a specific kind of movement: being moved—specifically, by something else (c6-7). Why does the argument mention moving other things (τὸ … ἀλλὸ κινοῦν)? Presumably it is to stipulate a precondition for considering a thing a candidate for life: it must have a causal role in the world, affecting other things, as shadows, for example, though moved, do not.

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20 See Decleva Caizzi 1970 and de Vries 1969 for the long debate. A precise analysis of the benefits and disadvantages of each reading is interesting and possible but too long for this space.
21 de Vries 1969 takes the καὶ as “semi-explanatory,” apparently implying that the movement of other things is explained by its being moved by something else; but such explanation seems not to be the relevant issue, when defining life.
Something remains strange about this view of life as being moved and moving other things. It is too capacious, requiring one call “bows, axes, billiard balls”\textsuperscript{22} alive. Nobody considers such instruments living or, when they cease moving, dead. In fact the indirect wording, focusing on death, blunts attention to this dubious definition. Its plausibility demands thinking only of natural bodies: moved by souls and moving, say, their tools.

But to hear c6 referring to embodied souls requires importing three assumptions, three claims that the argument would otherwise have to prove. First, the body must be physically and not just conceptually distinguishable from the soul (as it is at Phaedo 64c3-7, Gorgias 524b), such that the latter can move the former. But this begs the question against the person who thinks that body and soul die together, and it allows the unsubstantiated inference from all things that have motive power to soul as an instance of something that has motive power. Second, it must be the body and not the soul that is held responsible for moving other things. But this contradicts a later point in the argument, that everything comes-to-be from a beginning, and soul alone is a beginning. Stating the assumption explicitly would inoculate the audience from accepting the later point. Third, it must be the body, not the whole creature, that is properly called alive and dead. This will make soul itself seem possibly alive, and thus immortal. But the dialogue otherwise refers to creatures, body-soul fusions, as being alive (246b6), and death to be their separation. To the extent neither bodies alone nor souls alone are fusions, they would not also be alive or dead.

Whereas c6 aims to bring to mind animal bodies and thereby import un-argued theses, c7 does the explicit linkage between life and movement. It does so on the basis of a rhetorically-jingly parallel (παῦλαν ἔχ[...], παῦλαν ἔχ[...]).\textsuperscript{23} The simplicity of the parallel cannot square two improbable consequences. A momentary pause in moving other things entails momentary death. And as long as something keeps being moved and moving other things, for example, a tree-branch used as a bow, that thing remains alive. Either, then, the claim is false, or life means something irrelevant to the proof that soul is immortal.

\textsuperscript{c8} μόνον δὴ τὸ αὑτὸ κινοῦν, Only the thing moving itself,

\textsuperscript{22} Rowe 1987.

\textsuperscript{23} Plato rarely uses παῦλαν; he does so nowhere else in this dialogue. The most famous usage is at the climactic point of the Republic, when Socrates says that until philosophers rules as kings, or vice versa, cities will have no cessation of evils (Rep. 473d5, reiterated 501e4; cf. Ep. 336e4.). The only other times are when Socrates speaks of pleasure as the cessation of pain (Phlb. 51a3, Rep. 584b3).
This piece of reasoning aims to show that self-movers are always moved. If being moved is one of the criteria for being alive—as c6-7 assert—then c8-9 provides the first of the argument’s two parts (“always-living,” leaving “always-existing” for later).

But the reasoning, based on the purported reasoning that a self-mover does not leave itself, is undermined by the claim at c6-7. That earlier claim admitted either that some movers stop moving (i.e., when they die), or that things that move other things sometimes change what they move (i.e., causing a death). So it seems a self-mover may either stop moving, or change its object and thereby move something besides itself.

The argument’s emphatic δή and its assertion that the self-mover cannot leave itself fails to vindicate it. Why can it not lose its essential property? Of course, if τὸ ἀὑτὸ κινοῦν refers to the property itself, it cannot lose its property while staying what it is. But the argument cannot be concerned with properties alone. Since every property is, by definition, an atemporal universal, every property is, trivially, immortal.25 Soul, however, is treated as a thing, to be individuated, predicated, and causally involved in the world. The proper question will be: if it moves itself, will it always move itself? It is obvious that self-movement will always be self-movement. But it is not obvious whether soul will always have the property “self-movement.” So c8-9 has to be taken as making a claim about things that move themselves (helped by repeated use of pronouns: αὐτό, ἑαυτό), but it can make a true, if worthless, claim only about self-movement as a property.

With this καὶ (“and”) the argument moves to its second part, showing the eternal existence of the self-mover. It does so at this segue by recognizing a second purported feature of self-movers: that for the things that they move, they are a starting source. This is consistent with other things also being the beginnings of motion, as the ensouled bodies at c6 are. But the

24 Cf. de Vries 1969: it “marks the evidence of the inevitable conclusion.”
25 De Vries 1969 appears to fall for the fallacy.
indefiniteness of ἀρχή frees the argument eventually to seem to have shown that only self-movers are beginnings. What this will require is another slip between a property (“the beginning of something” as the named quality of the first moment of a process) and a thing (“the beginning of something” as an actual thing, a kernel, that originates the process). Many things can gain the property of a beginning, for example the living body. But the argument comes to emphasize beginnings as “things.” It starts doing so here, by doubling ἀρχή with πηγή, “fount.” The word “fount” does not come up later in the argument, and is not here defined. It serves simply to add rhetorical strength to “beginning.” “Fount,” as a concrete thing referring to the sole source of, for example, a stream, infuses the otherwise nominal, relative “beginning” (“beginning” as property) with a sense of ontological reality and absolute origination.

d1 ἀρχὴ δὲ ἀγένητον. And a beginning is ungenerated.

This statement, once supported, will give grounds for the claim at d4, that a beginning is imperishable. This executes the second part of the argument’s overall strategy. With self-movement connected to beginnings, beginnings to being ungenerated, being ungenerated to imperishability, and soul to self-movement, the argument infers a connection between soul and imperishability. But the connection between self-movement and lack-of-generation through the middle term of a “beginning” equivocates on “beginning,” as noted above in the discussion of c9. A beginning names the first moment of a temporally-extended process of generation. The sentence immediately preceding the argument makes this explicit. It states that the argument provides the “beginning” of the overall demonstration (ἀρχὴ δὲ ἀποδείξεως ἥδε 245c5). The dialogue strongly encourages hearing ἀρχη as “temporal beginning” reading, treating it this way

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27 Cf. Hipp. de flat. 1.17: τίς ἀρχὴ καὶ μηγὴ γίνεται τῶν ἐν τῷ σώματι κακῶν.
28 Burnet links c8 (“never self-abandoning or ceasing”) and c9 (“fount and beginning of movement”) by a comma. This supposes that they are related through an intermediary fact (“self-movers move other things”), and suggests that it is the self-mover’s nature as never-ceasing that explains its role as a beginning. This, of course, is not proven. If with de Vries 1969 and Rowe 1987, however, we understood a period before ἀλλὰ καί, then perhaps we are to observe a parallel: just as a self-mover is its own fount and beginning of movement (we are implicitly to assume), it is also the fount and beginning of movement for other things. Neither full-stop proponent himself reads this parallel; they take the καί simply to add another fact about self-movers: not only are they never ceasing, but they also provide the fount and beginning to other things. We are left with an ambiguity. Whatever the punctuation we prefer, the argument is setting up some illicit inferences.
29 The proclivity of commentators and translators to take ἀρχη as “first principle” (e.g., De Vries, Sharples, Rowe) occludes this fact, and plays into the argument’s hopes.
a dozen times as against twice as “rule,”31 and never (except purportedly in the present context) as “first principal.” One does not ask whether a beginning itself is generated; the question is not apt. As a property, a beginning simply is a beginning. Whether the real thing to which it applies has always existed, or has been generated by something else, is a question for empirical research, not for a priori claims about the nature of “beginning” as such.

**d1** ἐξ ἀρχῆς γὰρ ἀνάγκη πᾶν τὸ γεγομένον γίγνεσθαι,

*From a beginning necessarily everything that comes-to-be comes to be*

Understood familiarly (per c5 or c9), everything that comes to be “must” (ἄνάγκη) come from a beginning, since beginnings are defined in this way. This is a case of logical necessity; given that generation is temporally extended, and “beginning” names or marks the first point in a sequence, all generation starts its coming to be at the beginning. But by having its audience think that this claim is true on logical grounds (taking “beginning” nominally), the argument gets a free pass on its actual task, proving that beginnings are causally necessary (as ἀνάγκη is used at 246b4: piloting a chariot is necessarily hard because one horse is bad). The next clause presents the conclusion of a subsequent sub-argument, that beginnings differ from other kinds of generation in coming from nothing at all. Such a contrast assumes that both beginnings and generation participate in causal chains. By putting matters in these terms, the argument encourages the audience to think of beginnings, and thus of self-motion, as things and not properties; immortality properly applies only to things.

**d2** αὐτὴν δὲ μηδ’ ἐξ ἕνός-

*but it [the beginning] out of not a single thing:

Since a reader will likely have heard the previous line as making a definitional claim, this one will sound definitional as well. A beginning has no substantial existence, and so it does not come from anything. Not only is the audience predisposed to be thinking nominally; this claim would sound implausible otherwise. For beginnings considered as things obviously themselves come to be. Socrates—or nymphs, or Plato—composed the beginning of the palinode; he or they brought it into being.

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31 ἀρχὴ as “beginning,” often of a speech or process: 237b7, 237c4, 241b6, 253c7, 254a7, 258a1, 262d8, 263e3, 264a5, 264a6 (ἀρχετταί), 266d8, 272d4; only twice as “rule”: 238a2 (of pleasure, over us), 241a8 (mindless).
To support the claim that a beginning comes “out of nothing at all,” the argument makes the counterfactual assumption initiating a *reductio*. It supposes that a beginning should come to be (γίγνοιτο) from something (ἐκ του). Given that a beginning is either the sort of thing for which coming to be does not even apply or which obviously comes to be in the midst of chains of coming-to-be, the force and brevity of the ensuing argument should be a cause for suspicion. For in either case, the argument will have to be supposing something unusual about beginnings. If it derives some conclusions about beginnings from this unusual sense of them, it cannot, except illicitly, apply those conclusions to beginnings as we generally understand them.

This clause infers from the assumption the impossible result that overturns the assumption. The textual tradition preserves two readings. As with the crux at c5 (“always-mover” vs. “self-mover”), it does not matter which one prefers. They share a superficial plausibility and a deeper implausibility. Cicero and Iamblichus likely read οὐκ ἄριστα άρχη (γίγνοιτο) (“no longer a beginning”). Were a beginning to come to be from something, it would no longer come to be a beginning. This is a good inference only on a strained understanding of beginnings. Usually we think of beginnings relative to processes. Some beginning (e.g., the first leg of a relay race) brings about a subsequent beginning (e.g., the second leg of the relay race). So given the way we usually think, the reasoning would be absurd. The argument makes sense only if there is only one beginning (or one beginning for every causal sequence). With “absolute” beginnings in mind, then one absolute beginning cannot come to be from another absolute beginning; the temporally-prior beginning already monopolized the title. Thinking in terms of absolute beginnings—newly, since through d1 the argument had to mean relative, nominal beginnings—rescues the argument. Thus it is here that the argument equivocates on “beginning.” What holds for absolute beginnings—that they do not come to be—has not been shown to hold
for relative beginnings. If self-movers are relative beginnings, then a property of absolute beginnings—imperishability, as it turns out—has not been shown to hold for self-movers.32

The reading ἐξ ἀρχῆς is in MSS B and T, and read by Simplicius and Stobaeus. It states that if a beginning should come out of something, that something would not itself be a beginning.33 This would be so only if there is only one beginning, since anything else at all could simply not be a(nother) beginning. This equivocates in the same way the other reading does.

32 Many scholars reject the ἐτι ἀρχη text (see de Vries 1969 for a comprehensive account of the history of reconstructing this text). They think the clause with “still a beginning” would require an εἴη (“would be”) rather than the γίγνοιτο (“would come to be”). This is because they would want to read: “the beginning would no longer be a beginning.” Though γίγνοιτο can mean “would be,” its use exclusively as a verb of development in this argument seems to count against that more colloquial meaning. (See Yunis 2011, 137 on this reading) This rejection is neither necessary nor desirable. The γίγνοιτο provides the parallel with the previous clause (εἰ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ ἀρχή γίγνοιτο: “for if out of anything a beginning should come to be”). The idea is that a beginning leads only to coming-to-be; so if a beginning came from a beginning, whatever came to be would have come-to-be, but now (ἐτι), in this case, it could not have come to be a beginning.

33 Some people accept the text but assume a different subject: “for if out of something a beginning should come to be, everything that comes to be [τὸ πᾶν γίγνομεν, d1] should no longer come to be out of a beginning.” The reasoning is that everything that comes to be would no longer be coming out of a beginning, per d1, but out of this intermediate stage. This reasoning once again assumes only absolute beginnings.

34 This is so whatever reading one accepts. The reading ἀδιάφθορον is from T and Proclus. Stobaeus read the less emphatic ἄφθορον. B has ἀδιάφθορον, “not different.” The beginning, since it is ungenerated, must not “change” in any way. The only way a beginning can change is to lose its status as a beginning: for the only property a beginning has is beginningness.
οὔτε αὐτή ποτε ἐκ τοῦ, neither will it ever out of something,
οὔτε ἄλλο ἐξ ἕκεινης γενήσεται, nor anything else out of it come to be,
eἴπερ ἐξ ἀρχῆς δεῖ τὰ πάντα γέγενθαι. if from a beginning everything must come to be.

Here we have the first part of another reductio. Assume, counterfactually, that a
beginning can be destroyed. It will not come back, since beginnings cannot come to be (per d2-
3), and there will be no further generation (per c9 and d1). The reductio goes through if the
situation involving no further beginnings or generation could not come to be. The argument
defers clinching the reductio to e1-2.

In this way a self moving itself is a
beginning of motion.
And this is not possibly destroyed nor
brought into being.

These two lines, inserted in the midst of the reductio, reiterate what has purportedly
already been shown. The claim that a self-mover is a beginning of motion reiterates c8-9. Back
then, the palinode had not treated beginnings absolutely or as really existent, only as nominal
descriptions of the first moments of a process. It had asserted, quite uncontroversially, that self-
movers are some of this sort of beginning. The second half of d8 claims that beginnings cannot
come into being. This reiterates d4-6, which spoke only of absolute beginnings. So the τοῦτο
to move itself (d8) equivocates. The insertion “not possibly” (οὐ… δυνατόν) reinforces the shift away
from the definitional (nominal, relative) sense of beginning. The first half of d8, “this is not
possibly destroyed,” gets its (dubious) support from the ensuing two lines.

or the whole heavens and entire {earth into one} [coming-to-be]
“whole universe,” is again used concretely; cf. 246c1-2, πάντα τὸν κόσμον). It is also, as we will see, the lynchpin of the argument.

The persuasive significance of the line is relevant to the textual problem. The charge against the “earth into one” (γῆν εἰς ἕν) reading of Philoponus, and accepted by Burnet, is that “heaven and earth” is rhetorical. 35 But this charge assumes, without evidence, that the argument does not depend on rhetorical forces, when in fact it may. A point in favor of reading “… and whole earth into one” (…εἰς ἕν) is that it strengthens the sense of “collapsing” and “standing still” in an unmoving, undifferentiated, unchanging monad. All the same, both sides of the crux include everything there is.

The inference is that with the destruction of the beginning, everything would come to a final stop. Though the argument does not say so, it assumes that this is an impossible outcome, and that it thereby overturns the assumption at the head of this reductio, “a beginning being destroyed” (ἀρχῆς γὰρ δὴ ἀπολομένης d5). But neither the inference (that it would bring about a final stop) nor the assumption (that a final stop is impossible) is very promising.

Why would the destruction of a beginning cause everything to fall into a stand still? Were the beginning some absolutely first thing, one that had no generation (a Big Bang, for example), all that happens and continues to happen in the world would seem already to have received its impetus, and the continued existence of that one absolute beginning would seem otiose. So the beginning that would be destroyed—in order for everything to fall into a stand still—must be the beginning of every coming-to-be (c9, d1, d7). These beginnings, as we have said, are relative, nominal, and plural. And yet the beginning that is ungenerated is not this kind. Thus here, once again, the argument equivocates on “beginning.” This is not merely a linguistic equivocation. By defending its claim that a beginning cannot come to be again (e2, relying on d2), the argument treats a “beginning” as a real thing susceptible by hypothesis to destruction. Beginnings considered nominally are not even logically susceptible to destruction. The thing that is a

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35 Ryan 2012, 180-183.
beginning can be destroyed, and so the property of beginningness no longer instanti
ated there; but beginningness is not destroyed. What stops some other thing from instan-
tiating beginningness? Nothing, as far as the argument goes. So the inference—that the destruction of beginnings would cause the world to stop—reaches logical incoherence.

But for the sake of argument, let us accept the inference. Its validity matters only if it leads to an impossible outcome. Whether it does or not is a serious difficulty. Given that the argument maintains the image of providing the inferential steps at each point, it is surprising that it does not state the step most important for clinching the impossibility. It does not say that the world will never stand still.

Commentators have always provided this implicit premise. Griswold says that the premise has “moral” backing.36 Others observe that neither Plato nor the Greeks ever imagined the world coming to an end.37 They might say that the premise has “cosmological-intuitive” backing. But we should perhaps not be so eager to provide the missing premise. We should ask ourselves what has happened, given the absence of this premise. What has happened is that the palinode has stopped arguing, and stopped at the crucial moment. It has simply and brazenly begged the question.

It may seem to us mortals, from a day-to-day perspective, that souls endure for a long time. But we worry, when we take the long view, that they do not last forever (cf. Phdo. 88ab). Thus we seek an argument that they do last forever. So we appeal to the world (as a macrocosm) for information about the soul (as a microcosm). From our mortal perspective, it seems that the world goes on for a long time. But, should we take the really long view, can we be confident that the world lasts forever? We must seek an argument for this too. Our uncertainty about the soul is identical to that about the world, excepting the relative duration we can safely assume. So to the extent we do not know about the soul, we do not know about the world. So assuming that the world will not come to the end is equivalent to assuming that a soul will not come to an end. But this was exactly what we wanted to prove rather than to assume.

ε3 ἀθανάτου δὲ πεφασμένου τοῦ ὤφ' ἐαυτοῦ κινουμένου, And that which is moved by itself having been shown to be immortal,

36 Griswold 1986, 82-83.
37 Cf. Hackforth 1959, 66n2, de Vries 1969, Rowe 1987, ad 245d7-e2,
This states the conclusion for the main part of the argument: the self-mover is immortal. Depending on our reading of c5 (“a self-mover // an always-mover is immortal”), the argument took one of two routes to this conclusion. If the argument stated that the self-mover is immortal, it went on to say that the self-mover never ceases movement and it always exists; since movement is the definition of life, the self-mover is always alive, and thus it is immortal. If the argument stated that the always-mover is immortal, it went on to say that the self-mover meets the double criteria of being an always-mover: moving always, and existing always. The recapitulation here covers up the dubious argumentation that preceded. It gives a fresh start for the final inference.

\[\text{e3} \quad \psi\upsilon\chi\epsilon\varsigma \quad \omega\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha\nu \tau\epsilon \quad \chi\alpha \iota \lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\nu \tau\omicron\upsilon\omicron \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron \quad \text{that this is the essence and definition of soul}\]

The final inference will be that given the soul is a self-mover, the soul is immortal. The lines e3-7 attempt to prove that the soul is a self-mover. This line gives the premise, for which the following provides the evidence. The premise is that soul (\(\psi\nu\chi\hi\)) is, in the most central way, a self-mover. It does so with a duplication, \(\omega\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha\nu \tau\epsilon \quad \chi\alpha \iota \lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\nu\), and a pair of demonstratives. Together these stress the centrality of self-motion to the soul. But the separate specifications of “essence” (or “being”) and “definition” (or “account”) do not get separately supported. Nor is self-motion shown at all to be the main feature relevant to soul. There are reasons to think that it is not, at least not obviously so (and it is definitely not shown that soul is self-motion, since this would conflate a thing that has properties with a single property). In the last four pages, \(\psi\nu\chi\hi\) has been mentioned three times, in quite different contexts, none appreciably connected to self-motion. The lover can damage the soul’s education, and that education is the most valuable thing in the world (241c5); the soul has divinatory powers, which in Socrates’ case alert him to his first speech’s impiety (242c7); and some souls are tender and virgin and are awakened and Bacchically aroused (245a2).\(^{38}\) All three examples in fact suggest that the soul is moved, at least in part, by external factors. Thus the duplication (\(\omega\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha\nu, \lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\nu\)) appears rhetorical, perhaps to discourage thinking about soul in other terms.

\[\text{e4} \quad \tau\zeta \lambda\gamma\omicron\nu \omicron \upsilon \alpha \iota \omega\chi\nu\nu\epsilon\iota\tau\iota \quad \text{someone will feel no shame saying.}\]

\(^{38}\) de Vries 1969 says that the soul must be tender and virgin “in order to be impressionable.”
The sense that the previous line had something rhetorical about it is strengthened by the editorialization here, commenting on the reasons rather than providing new ones. It implies that one may speak shamefully about soul. How so? The shame would perhaps come from saying grand things about something about which one should be humble. To speak without shame would amount to saying something very obvious or uncontroversial. The self-motion of the soul would not sound controversial (relative to the other things one could say about soul). Of course, its sounding uncontroversial would not make it uncontroversial. Still, a listener might think that there would be shame in denying that self-motion is the essence of soul.

For, every body whose source of movement is self-mov[ing],

\[\pi\alpha\nu \gamma\alpha\rho \sigma\omega\mu\alpha, \dot{\omega} \mu\varepsilon\nu \varepsilon\xi\omega\theta\varepsilon\nu \tau\omicron \varsigma\nu\epsilon\omicron\sigma\theta\alpha,\]

The palinode here commences its reasoning that soul is self-motion. It does so with a rhetorically-precise parallel structure, contrasting bodies whose source of motion is external with those whose source is internal. The reasoning seems easy: since the only difference between bodies externally moved and internally moved is the presence of soul, it must be soul, internal to the body, which provides its (internally-originating) motion. Because, by hypothesis, the source of motion is internal, the source of motion for the soul must also come from inside the body; but the body does not provide its own motion; and so only the soul, being hemmed wholly within the body, can provide its own motion; and so the soul is self-moving.

Before assessing this argument, it is worth pointing out the nature of the referents in this clause. The reference to bodies, \(\pi\alpha\nu \sigma\omega\mu\alpha\), must mean “every body,” because there are two classes of individual bodies indicated by the parallel structure (\(\dot{\omega} \dot{\omega} \ldots \dot{\omega} \ldots\)). But if so, this would suggest that \(\psi\nu\chi\eta \pi\alpha\sigma\alpha\) at the argument’s start (c5) meant “every soul.” Of course, that is how a reader would have taken it; this echo reinforces that interpretation. As we have found, however, the long span of argument above about beginnings (d1-e2) assumed the “all soul” view. So though e6-7 below will benefit—from the perspective of plausibility—from the individual soul view, the evidence for those claims does not come from an argument about individual souls.

Now to the argument assessment. The first difficulty is that this two-member “external vs. internal” analysis of movement differs from c6-8, which took up a three-member “moved by others vs. moves others vs. moves self” analysis. In other words, at c6-8, life for a body was implicitly defined as being moved by something distinct from the body and moving something
else distinct from the body. Now, being ensouled is defined as being moved by something internal to the body. On a normal understanding of soul, being ensouled is identical to being alive. This being so, we note two differences between c6-8 and the present e5. First, being alive no longer requires moving something else distinct from it. The earlier view warned about the tenuousness of life, that it depended on the living being’s precarious intermediate role in chains of movement. It did so to motivate confidence in the reliability of unalienable self-motion. This later view shines a gentler light on life, casting it as powered by that very unalienable self-motion earlier contrasted with it. The second difference is that in the later view, the source of motion is specified not as “distinct from” but as “internal to” the body. When motion—be it self-motion or motion otherwise unspecified—is distinct from the body, its continued existence after the dissolution or death of the body it once powered is irrelevant to the matter of personal immortality. An external force takes up none of the qualities of the body it moves. Its longevity would be like the longevity of the ground we walk on or air we breath: unimportant to us. When the motion is “internal” to the body, however, its continued existence does seem to matter. Its being internal seems to mean that it takes up, or even constitutes, central properties of us. Indeed, whereas in the earlier view, the body, as that which lives and dies, seemed to ground personality, now the body seems a mere container for the more personally crucial soul.

Because of these shifts of spatial emphasis, it is hard to establish the truth of the claim. Since body is distinct from soul, soul is somehow always external to body, and thus body may be moved by soul and moved from what is external. On this reading, the later and the earlier views say that same thing. Then “without soul” (αψυχοῦ) must mean “not connected to soul in any causal way.” How this would agree with 246b6—ψυχὴ πᾶσα παντὸς ἐπιμελεῖται τοῦ ἀψύχου, “every soul takes care of everything unsouled”—is uncertain. But there is an important distinction between the two views. Per c6-8, whenever a body is both moved by something else and moves something else it is alive. But on the reasoning here, it might not be ensouled, because its source of motion might not be self-moving. So it would be alive but without soul. This is counterintuitive. It is not clear, however, that the argument makes it impossible. It never once explicitly links soul with life.

These details show the shaky foundation of the argument as a whole. The argument must assert this line, however, simply to motivate the line that follows, and it is there that we find the key fallacy.
Here internal motion is equated with self-motion. But internal motion and self-motion are not always identical. Equating them requires seeing the body as a simple, bounded realm, such that motion can come from within it, and in coming from within it, it comes from itself. Were the body complex, its movement might come from the movement of enclosed micro-bodies. Whether those micro-bodies self-moved or other-moved, the macro-body would not be moving itself. Other things would be moving it, and those things could, in theory, abandon it (per c7-9). Were it not self-moving, but were it also ensouled, soul would not be self-motion. Because the argument depends on this line, and none other, to equate soul with self-motion, the argument has foundered.\(^\text{39}\)

What has gone wrong? The word “self” in “self-moving” is ambiguous. It means either that the mover is identical to the moved (the “reflexive” reading), or that the movement for some complex entity comes from inside a border (the “locational” reading). The latter meaning is what can definitely be shown by looking at living creatures, and can be agreed to by any audience to this argument. But the argument needs the first reading to vindicate its claims.

To bridge the two distinct readings, the argument deploys an amazing rhetorical maneuver. Rather than simply contrasting ἐνδοθήν ("from inside") with the previous line’s ἐξοθήν ("from outside"), it appends two demonstratives meaning “self”: αὐτῷ ("to itself") and ἐξ αὑτοῦ ("from itself"). Because it had been speaking of self-movement (τὸ αὐτὸ κινοῦν c8, τὸ αὐτὸ αὐτὸ κινοῦν d7, τοῦ ὑφ’ ἑαυτοῦ e3, [αὐτοκίνητον] c5), and goes on immediately to speak of self-movement (τὸ αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ κινοῦν e7), the argument equates all talk of “self,” and pretends that “from within” is identical to “from oneself” and to “oneself.” This is hardly an innocent clarification of the position and orientation of the internally-located movement. It is an attempt to dupe the audience into accepting that motion from within is self-motion, and that being ensouled is what accounts for this self-motion, and thus the soul is self-motion—as though the “self” of the body and the “self” of the soul were identical.

\(^{39}\) Rowe 1987: “Here at least the argument fails to achieve the rigour to which it otherwise pretends.”
The argument claims here that the soul is self-moving. But even if it is true that it is an internal soul that causes movement for a body, it is possible that something else moves the soul. (It is also possible, more damagingly, that soul is self-moving but does not always have that property.) For that the self-mover moves other things (c8-9) does not entail that all moving things are moved (immediately) by self-movers. The argument had even assumed that some things are moved by other things that are not themselves self-movers (c6-7). So there is no solid evidence that the soul is a self-mover; the feeling that it is comes from (i) its implicit association with a “beginning,” and (ii) the equivocation on the idea of “movement from out of oneself.” Living creatures themselves seem self-moving, and so on the overall argument they would be immortal; but obviously and by hypothesis they are not immortal.

246a2 ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀγένητόν τε καὶ ἀθάνατον ἠν εἴη. from necessity ungenerated and immortal soul would be.

The argument thus concludes: the soul has never come into being, and will never die. The “from necessity” (ἐξ ἀνάγκης) emphasizes the apparent strength of the logical form. But why is “ungenerated” mentioned here, and why is “imperishable”—presumably the more important aspect—not mentioned? Three possible reasons preserve the argument’s dignity: “ungenerated” stands in for “imperishable”; “immortal” simply means imperishable; or only “immortal” matters. But perhaps the argument drops the most important element because it did not provide good reasons for it.

Summary of the Analysis

The argument works to move its audience in two stages from self-mover to immortal, and in a third stage from soul to self-mover. The first of the two stages from self-mover to immortal is the position that when the self-mover exists, it always moves; the reasoning relies on the assertion that the self-mover never abandons itself. The second of the two stages is the position...
that when the self-mover exists, it always exists; this reasoning here relies on the idea that the self-mover is a beginning, and beginnings always exist. The final stage, from soul to self-mover, is that ensouled bodies, unlike soulless bodies, move themselves; this last span of reasoning relies on the view that an ensouled body’s self-movement depends on its soul’s self-movement.

The argument makes fallacious inferences at each of its three stages. In the first, there is no reason to assume that something that moves itself will never “abandon” that self-movement rather than stop moving altogether, or change to moving something else. The only thing that cannot abandon itself is the property of self-movement, but the argument must claim that a thing which self-moves will always self-move. In the second, even if beginnings are not generated and do not perish, the things that serve as beginnings may very well be generated and perish, and so those things that are self-movers are not, on account of serving also as beginnings, thereby ungenerated and unperishing. A further problem is that self-movers may be “relative” beginnings, but the argument about a beginning’s lack of generation and destruction holds only for “absolute” beginnings. In the third stage, souls are said to be located in bodies whose motion comes from within, but a self-moving body need not get its motion from a self-moving soul, and a soul that is self-moving need not always be self-moving (given that self-movement as its “essence and definition” was merely asserted).

These fallacies—and the others discussed in the course of the analysis—are hardly naïve. They tend to be obscured behind expressly rhetorical flourishes (e.g., παῦλαν… παῦλαν… c7, λήγει… πηγή c9, τε οὐρανὸν πᾶσάν τε γῆν εἰς ἑν // γένεσις e1, οὐσίαν τε καὶ λόγον τοῦτον αὐτόν c3, ἐνδοθεὶν αὐτῷ ἐξ αὑτοῦ e6, etc.). That they are neither oversights nor matters trivial or obscure to Plato is clear from the less tendentious, and often more plausible, talk of beginnings, souls, and bodies throughout the palinode and the rest of the Phaedrus.

Socrates’ Rhetorical Goal

Understanding the purpose of the palinode requires understanding the purpose of the other speeches in the first half of the dialogue. Near the start of the dialogue, Socrates encouraged Phaedrus to read straight through Lysias’ speech (228d6-e2). He did this to make two connected points. Phaedrus reacts with supreme enthusiasm to the speech’s cleverness (234d1-6). Unfortunately, the speech lacks a cogent argument (235a1-8). Socrates identifies, and even belabors, both points, presumably to encourage in Phaedrus both greater self-reflection and
greater examination of the argument. Socrates goes on to give a second speech. This one includes precise definition and naming (237b7-d5, 238a2-c4), and an argument based in purported claims of necessity (e.g., ἀνάγκη ποι ἡ 238e3, cf. 239a5, a7, b5, c5, 240a4 [ἐξ ὧν πάσαι ἀνάγκης], d1, e1, 241b4, b5, b7, c2). Socrates goes on to examine this speech, too, and discovers that it has its own problems. It talks only partially about erôs, and says what a free-born Athenian would find offensive (243c1-d1). Its impiety (242c1-d7) is based in its seeming plausibility (σεμνύνεσθαι ὡς τί ὄντε, εἰ ἀφα ἀνθρωπίσκους τινὰς ἐξαπατήσαντε εὐδοκιμήσετον ἐν αὐτοῖς 243a1)—with its articulation of the topic and seemingly demonstrative reasoning—coupled with its argumentative incompleteness (242e2-4). In both cases, Socrates appears to be presenting Phaedrus with something he will love—a performance of a verbal composition—that he should not love so uncritically. By discovering how much he unconsciously affirms dubious material, Phaedrus can discover how speeches may seem true or good without actually being true or good.

It seems plausible that with the palinode, being yet another speech, Socrates will continue this lesson. The palinode may in many ways be the best of the three speeches. But being the best does not mean that it will not incline Phaedrus to cheer or accept what he should rather take critically. Socrates’ remarks that the palinode was presented mostly in play encourages this view. His continued discussion of rhetorical problems would give Phaedrus or a reader the critical tools appropriate to it. Several pages after the palinode, Socrates observes the problem of equivocation in arguments: without defining certain terms, it is easy to convince people to believe or do what you wish (263a2-c12). “Soul,” “life,” and “beginning” are canonical instances of this kind of term. A little later, Socrates says that an important mode of speech is defining clearly and self-consistently (265d3-7), suggesting that Phaedrus should make sure that he has ensured that his favorite speeches follow this mode. Even earlier, however, the palinode itself admits that giving the form of the soul would be a divine task and one that would take a long time (256a3). The argument for the immortality of the soul of course assumes a particular form of the soul, or if it argues for it, does so in an extremely short amount of time.

My claim then is that Socrates presents Phaedrus the argument for the immortality of the soul to show Phaedrus that the fact that an argument sounds rigorous does not insulate it from the need to analyze it. Once Phaedrus (or the reader) does analyze it, using the interpretative tools the palinode and Socrates otherwise provide, its sheen of logical correctness will dull.
The fact that Alcmaeon already presented an argument like this, that Aristotle suggests that other thinkers too took a similar line,\textsuperscript{40} and that it “uses the style of the Ionian philosophers”\textsuperscript{41} supports my claim. Plato appears to have inserted a popular and clever-sounding argument into the palinode. It could have sounded familiar to his contemporary readers, who thus could have taken it precisely as a specious argument. This means that Plato’s readers could have understood—as we too should understand—that this dialogue helps us discover our vulnerabilities to every sort of speech (cf. 261a8-b2, d10-e4).

\textsuperscript{40} De Anima 405a30-32: Alcmaeon says about the soul: αὐτὴν ἀθάνατον εἶναι διὰ τὸ ἐοικέναι τοῖς ἀθανάτοις: τοῦτο δ’ ὑπάρχειν αὐτῇ ὡς ἀεὶ χινουμένη: κινεῖσθαι γὰρ καὶ τὰ θεῖα πάντα συνεχῶς ἀεὶ, σελήνη, ἥλιον, τοὺς ἀστέρας καὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν ὅλον.

\textsuperscript{41} De Vries 1969, ad 245c5ff.
Bibliography


