Robert Ritchie

Dr. Emily A. Zakin

PHL 105H

31 January 2017

Phaedrus Writing assignment

In the metaphor that Socrates uses to explain a human soul, it is broken into three parts. There is a charioteer and two horses, one black and one white, pulling his chariot. The white horse is of the type that pulls the chariots of the gods. It is described as beautiful and “a lover of honor with modesty and self-control; companion to true glory, he needs no whip, and is guided by verbal commands alone” (253 D-E), representing what is noble in the soul. The black horse is the opposite. It is ugly and will ignore all the charioteer’s commands, representing the appetitive part of the soul. The charioteer naturally tries to guide the horses. It attempts to gain a view of the universe, or true knowledge as Socrates describes it, but its attention is constantly being drawn away by the horses. This is the key difference between the gods and humans in this metaphor. The gods, who have two horses of the white type can spend all their time looking on at the universe, while mortal souls struggle to not fall to earth.

Afterwards, Socrates goes on the explain how the soul falls in love within this metaphor. The three parts all have different reactions. The charioteer’s “entire soul is suffused with a sense of warmth and starts to fill with the tingles, and the goading of desire (253 E) while the white horse ducks its head in shame, and the black horse does everything it can to try and make the charioteer suggest sex to the boy. The charioteer and white horse resist the black horse due to their sense of shame, but eventually the charioteer gives in and approaches the boy. However, every time he does, he pulls so hard on the reins that the black horse’s mouth is bloodied, and eventually the black horse no longer wants to approach the boy and “the lover’s soul follows its boy in revere and awe” (254 E). Here Socrates is describing how love gives a person the chance to conquer its soul and earthly desires. By frequently fighting one’s desires, they can gain control over them, and from there one can freely pursue wisdom. Thus, the madness of love is opportunity for one to have such an experience, and gain control over oneself, not a curse which makes one act irrationally.