The Myths of Plato

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I shall begin this paper by saying that, in my view, the so-called Myths of Plato are themselves a myth, and that what are called his myths really represent, with some decorative devices, a very serious ontology, cosmology, rational psychology and theology which we moderns would do well to take seriously, since they may very well be true. The notion that Plato's accounts of reminiscence in the *Meno* and *Phaedo,* of the soul's mystical ascent in the *Phaedrus, Symposium,* and *Republic,* of afterlife conditions in the *Phaedo, Gorgias, Republic* and elsewhere, and of the creation of souls and the cosmos in the *Timaeus,* are all to be regarded as allegorical stories, whose true sense is to be sought in this world experiences and aspirations: all this represents the view of determined Cave-dwellers, content with Cave-phenomena, Cave-discourse and Cave-science, and so incapable of understanding Plato, who believes we can only understand the arrangements of Cave-life by seeing them in the light of what lies beyond them. If one regards philosophy as an attempt merely to clarify, and perhaps slightly to integrate and simplify, the categories and principles that one follows in ordinary talk and life, most of Plato's thought becomes a bad piece of mythology, one which turns abstracted meanings into substantial entities, regulative aspirations into explanations, and dim presumptions guiding our inconstant, troubled rationality into beautiful, inaccessible fixtures that absolutely are. To such philosophers of the Cave the most valuable Plato is to be found in those early dialogues which record the brilliant logic-chopping of Socrates, and in such late dialogues as the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* where there are few excursions into the transcendental, and where clarity and inconclusive rigour are the writer's main achievement. I have no wish to denigrate these great monuments of Socratic analysis: Plato could dally among the minutiae of exact argument, and construct arguments as trivial and as inconclusive as anyone else. He is sometimes, as in the great dialogue *Parmenides,* as much playing about with words as establishing transcendental conclusions. But one is certainly not understanding any part of Plato's teaching if one thinks of him as a Moore or an Austin talking Attic, and perhaps both making and correcting mistakes that the linguistic analysts made in the present century.

Before going on to consider a few of the so-called myths in the Platonic dialogues, I shall try to sketch the ontology, the

cosmology, the psychology and the theology of which I believe them to be an expression. In doing so I shall simply presuppose the thesis argued for in my 1974 work on Plato (and in a more popular work to be published by Quadrangle Books this present year): that Plato taught an Unwritten Doctrine in the Academy without making it crystal-clear just what he meant by it, that this Unwritten Doctrine can be reconstructed, though not with ease, from Aristotle's reports on Platonic teaching, that it rated rather as a vast, unfinished project than as a finished doctrine, and that it had many affiliations with Pythagorean number-theory. I believe that the Unwritten Teaching confronted Aristotle when he joined the Academy in 367, that he was, from the beginning, one of its most incisive critics, as also of Plato's written doctrines, and that he devoted a vast amount of energy, including two vanished treatises, to its refutation, which at least testifies to its importance for him in Platonic teaching. My views on the Unwritten Teaching, which agree with those of certain German scholars, are of course at variance with those of Professor Harold Cherniss, which have till recently, established something like an orthodoxy in this country. I do not, however, think that many controversial minutiae of the Unwritten Doctrines make a vast difference to the main outlines of Platonic ontology and cosmology: they only show how these are generally to be interpreted, and how seriously and how systematically Plato had conceived them.

Plato's doctrine involves, in the first place, an immense *inversion* in our ordinary view of what is, an inversion which goes with a great conceptual, axiological, and, shall I say it, religious revolution. Our ordinary view of things has for its logical subject or subjects the particular things stationed around us, that impose themselves on our senses and the senses of others, that are variously located in space and separated from one another by distances, that change rapidly or slowly from moment to moment, and are often many of a kind, or many more or less alike, and which seem to be inclined to conform to certain clear-cut, formal types which lead us to apply the same name to them all, though some of them are such poor type-specimens that we may hesitate to do so. Our ordinary view also includes other persons or souls alongside ourselves with whom we have communications, who are particular beings as we are, and who, like ourselves, face the same realm of sensible particulars, though they, like ourselves, also have an unmanifest inner dimension of 'thoughts' of which spoken words are the normal utterance. To this realm of particular things a host of determinations attaches, which are pinned down by the meaning of words that we clearly understand, rather than by

particular things to which they are applied: familiar or unfamiliar qualities, relations simple and complex, types whether roughly generic or ideally precise, logical functions such as identity, difference, being, non-being, etc., axiological denominations and so on. On the ordinary view all these items can only be said to *be* in so far as they cling to the changing particulars manifest around us, or less manifest within us, in a manner we cannot further elucidate. They are not part of the primary furniture of being, as are particular things themselves.

Now the essence of Platonism is that all this gets inverted. What primarily are, are not particular things, but the generic or specific natures or characters that they instantiate. These alone are ontically ontic, while their instances derive all that they are from their instantiation of them. And these ontically ontic generic or specific characters are as changeless as their instances are changeable and vanishing, and they are as epistemically and axiologically perfect as their instances deviate from perfection in illucidity or in badness. Our experience of understanding what it is to be something, and perfectly something, also takes precedence over our experience of imperfect, illucid instances of that something, and not only is this so, but we can see in the former the true source, the explanatory cause of the latter, it being part of what it is to be an ideal, generic type that it can be *present* in imperfect instances, and imperfectly *participated* in by them. I am not on this occasion going to argue for Plato's great inversion, the turn of the soul to what he would like to be a higher, truer vision, except to say that it stresses a side of our experience as fundamental as the side which acquaints us with particulars, and without which it would not be possible to have dealings with particulars at all. For, if vanishing, multiple particulars are the units of sense-experience, generic types are the units for the intelligence, and it is only if the former units illustrate the latter that they can in any way be known or managed.

Platonism of course goes much further than believing in the prime reality of generic types. It believes them to be ordered in an immense type-hierarchy, some more specific, others more generic, and some on a level with one another; it also locates them in an advancing series of dimensions, the most simple being the discrete dimension of the natural numbers, the next being the continuous dimension of lines and their proportions, the next the dimension of plane figures, the next that of solids, while a last probably covered the possibilities of regular movement. There is reason to think that, from this ordered hierarchy of ideal types all sensuous quality was to be banished: these belonged to the realm of instantiation, and

their explanatory nature lay in the arithmetical, geometrical and dynamic patterns which underlay them: read the *Timaeus* on these points. There is also reason to think, from what Aristotle tells us, that the type-hierarchy included nothing deviant, defective, unnatural, artificial or fortuitous except in so far as, on a well-known Socratic principle, a knowledge of what is perfect necessarily implies a knowledge of all that might deviate from it, fall short of it, fortuitously combine with it or be poorly modelled upon it. The type-hierarchy further embodies two Archai or principles which are far more basic than it is, and which derive from Pythagoras. The one is a principle of continuous quantity, capable of indefinite increase and decrease, and as such unprincipled and bad, but the necessary raw material of all that is good and well-formed. The other is a principle of definite limit, which disciplines the continuum and breaks it up into orderly units and unit-complexes and patterns, thereby generating, in a series of acts which are only in form successive, the natural numbers, the lines, the surfaces, the solids and the regular sorts of movement. The second principle was called Unity or the One (τὸ ἕν) in the Unwritten Teachings, but it was called the Idea of Good in the *Republic:* it was the originative source of all the Eide, and through them the source of all their imperfect instances. In its profound simplicity the whole hierarchy of the Eide lay latent, and their whole extension was simply the spelling out of its power. But it was also the source of all the intellectual acts that apprehend the Eide, and illuminate human souls. And I also think that among its primal offspring was an ideal intelligence which human souls imperfectly instantiate, the Very Knowledge itself spoken of in the *Phaedrus, Parmenides,* and elsewhere, and the fabricator, according to the *Timaeus,* of our very beautiful, but in many ways flawed, cosmos.

Platonism is not, however, solely a philosophy of what transcends instances: it is also a philosophy of the Cave and of Cave-inhabitants, of the instantial world. On the Platonic view the deviations from good form which are only implicit at the eidetic level become explicit in the realm of instances: we pass into a region of disorder, of mutual interference, of imperfect participation, of the chaotic forces which the forces of Mind and Idea never perfectly bring to heel. And in the instantial world are also those two great Nothings, the media of instantiation, which are, in their undisciplined form, essentially and irremediably bad. The one is the great Nothing of empty Space, the Nothing which allows a multiplication of cases without distinction of character, and which also allows of all those senseless clashes which such a multiplica-

tion must entail. The other is the great Nothing, or rather Vanishingness of Becoming, which, while always trying to achieve stable being, never manages to do so. This great Nothing becomes edified into Time, an imperfect, changeable semblance of unchanging being, once some order and limit has been imposed upon it. But into this disorder is injected the saving presence of Soul, the presence capable of ascending to the ordered realm of the Eide and always dimly conscious of it, but also capable of descending into the disordered instantiations developing in space, and of imposing forms and numbers on them. Soul is remarkable amphibian, half timelessly eidetic and intellectual, and half instantial and sensuous. Through its permeation of bodies the sense-qualities come into being, being begotten of the impact of external on internal bodily motions. In one major instance Soul is cosmic, and presides over the cosmos: Plato sees this as an orderly assemblage of circles revolving about a central earth. I like this Soul which is all impersonal ratios and proportions, and I do not doubt that it speaks through the artists and prophets, as well as the scientists. But of course for us men, it is the lesser souls that are important, since we are among them. Plato believes with Pythagoras that these souls alternate between incarnation and disincarnation, undergoing a steady process of chastening education, of which a considerable part occurs, not when incarnate, but in the discarnate phases between incarnations. Then the freedom from the body is marked by a freedom from the compulsions, but not from the expressive and aesthetic uses, of sense. Discarnate life for Plato is peopled by as vivid a phantasmagoria of things frightening and lovely as in the clairvoyant journeys of such as Swedenborg and Dante. The Christian visions of Heaven and Hell borrowed much from Platonic sources, but they added the intellectual and moral senselessness of invariable endlessness in time, whereas in Plato sojourns in Heaven or Hell normally come to an end in further incarnation, and there is even a suggestion (*Phaedo*, 114 c) that we sometime transcend Heaven altogether. People generally think of the cyclical eschatology taught by Plato as being Indian or Eastern; it is important to realize that in Pythagoras and Plato it may well be originally Western.

I want now to go on from this general sketch to consider what are generally thought to be the myths of Plato. I begin with the *Meno* where a slave-boy's ability after a few trials and errors to construct a square twice the size of a given square is attributed to his soul's pre-existence, and to its having been born many times, and having seen all things here and in the other world. Since everything in the world is akin, what the soul sees here will recall

some of the knowledge it has accumulated in its long pre-existence (*Meno* 81). This story is taken by Natorp to be a mythic reference to *a priori* knowledge, a Kantian myth of which Plato had no cognizance. I believe the *Meno* must be interpreted more straightforwardly: the soul in its long career has had much opportunity to learn geometry, and has also in its discarnate phases had the chance of direct acquaintance with idealized instances of geometrical structures and their relationships. It is on this account that the slave-boy is so ready to arrive at the solution of his problem. The argument is of course not very strong, for why should the soul not have an inherent capacity to ideate geometrical universals and illustrate them mathematically, a capacity which has been merely touched off by the drawing of sensible figures and questioning? I think it plain that pre-existence and reminiscence have only been brought in because Plato independently believes in them, as parts of a vast cosmology, in which an immensely gradual intellectual and moral education of the soul is conceived. Alternatively, the whole argument may have been genuinely Socratic, for Socrates had Pythagorean associates and used their ideas semi-seriously. Socrates in the *Apology* imagines himself conducting dialectical inquiries into virtue when he is dead, and why should the soul not similarly have done geometry prior to this life, and seen fanciful squares drawn on fanciful boards by disembodied schoolmasters? This would at least explain why it now finds the exercise so easy.

I turn from the *Meno* to the *Phaedo*, a dialogue regarding which I have definite opinions. I believe that it is in the main a sober record of the reasonings actually put forward by Socrates on that last sublime day, and that Platonic additions have been made to it at discernible places. On that last day the soul's immortality was demonstrated by a typical series of logic-chopping, Socratic arguments: from the generation of opposites by opposites — opposites were always a Socratic obsession — from the strange arrival at precise mathematical concepts from defective illustrations, from the incomposite nature of the soul based on its invisibility, its indivisibility and its magisterial authority over the body, and from its being so essentially a principle of life that it cannot be associated with life's opposite, death. The Socratic character of the arguments also comes out in the repudiation of the Pythagorean view of the soul as a bodiless harmony, a view which would have appealed to Plato, and which is in fact the view adopted in the *Timaeus*. Into this web of Socratic argument the Platonic ontology of Eide is cunningly, but at a few points clumsily, injected, it not being difficult, with a little effort, to see where the

seams lie. (These seams are discussed in my *Plato and Platonism).* But the importantly mythic part of the dialogue occurs at the end where Socrates is giving a Pythagorean account of the cosmos and of the destiny of the soul in it. Here we are given a vision of the true Earth as it floats in the aether, shaped like a regular dodecahedron, the most sacred of the Pythagorean solids, with its pentagonal sides shining in a variety of lovely colours. Our earth is merely the derelict, polluted part of the true Earth, a part which lies at the bottom of a sea of air and mist, and whose interior is filled by a number of dreadful rivers. The surface of the true Earth is described in very glorious language, comparable to the descriptions of Heaven in the Apocalypse or in Swedenborg, or in such Buddhist writings as the Gandavyūha and the Avatamsakasūtra. There the disembodied philosophers and the other saints of Platonism will be privileged to dwell, until they pass to levels of understanding and vision that transcend sensuous description. But the river-regions and lake-regions in the interior of the earth are places of purgation or permanent penance for the wicked, and particularly for those who have ignored the deep thread of identity binding soul to soul, and so have been led to inflict violence and wrong upon others. Only when they have had such wrong turned upon themselves in suffering, and have asked and received forgiveness from their victims, can they proceed to happier regions, and in the case of some very wicked souls this time is never. The picture is as glorious and as sombre as the Christian picture, much of which may have been borrowed from it, though with the addition of some arbitrary and vindictive features. I do not think that there is anything that deserves to be called mythic about it. It is a sober attempt to sketch the outline of those parts of our spiritual education which lie outside of bodily incarnation, and there must be some such parts if our spiritual education is to be completed at all. The demands of virtue and duty, and of the happiness that completes them, are very plainly not such, as Kant was to stress centuries later, as can be fulfilled within the limits of this bodily life. Of course, as Socrates says at the end of the narration, which may have been actually made, not by Socrates, but by one of the Theban disciples of Philolaus, no reasonable man will insist that the facts are just as stated. But, to contend that this or something very like it is true, is reasonable, since the soul is arguably imperishable and headed towards the perfection of virtue and knowledge.

Turning to another fairly early dialogue, the *Gorgias,* one has the description (523-7) of the naked state of the soul in the life to come, a state in which none of its crimes and perjuries, nor its secret

virtues, can be hidden, and in which no doubt all sufferings of its victims, or happiness of its beneficiaries, will be clearly apparent. The spiritual nakedness described in the dialogue is plainly an essential character of the disembodied life. Within the cover of the senses the sufferings of wronged victims can be ignored, but in the naked spiritual state we shall suffer them as if they were our own, and our own ugly hatred will be likewise quite manifest. I do not envy the disembodied Himmler confronted by the naked anguish of his victims, and himself revealed in his naked malevolence. The happy love of those whose spiritual nakedness reveals only beauty and virtue must likewise be considered, and this leads me on to the myth set forth in the *Phaedrus*.

Here we of course encounter the triadic Pythagorean psychology of Reason, Valour and Desire, symbolized by the picture of a winged charioteer with two horses, one high-spirited but docile, the other vicious and hard to manage. There is nothing mythic in this, only as much myth as there is in the various dramatis personae of Freudian psychology. Plainly there are three such principles in the human psyche, one long-sighted, cool and evaluative, another hot and aggressive on behalf of the personal self, and a third concerned only to savour immediate, low-grade satisfactions. The charioteer takes part in an immense cavalcade, each of whose cohorts is led by a god, and which proceeds to a point in the upper heavens where there is a vision of True Knowledge and all the Virtues, and also of absolute Beauty and of the shapeless, colourless essence of true Being, which is probably not different from Beauty itself. This vision lasts during a whole revolution of the heavens, during which time all the blessed Eide parade before the souls. In the *Timaeus*, likewise, the World-Soul sees all the Eide in the course of a single diurnal revolution. Some of the souls keep their place in the cavalcade, but others, unable to control their unrulier horses, sink down, lose their wings and suffer incarnation. The dialogue is mainly concerned to suggest that love, despite its carnal admixture, represents the soul's recognition of the beauty it once saw in the face and form of its divine leader, and which it now sees dimly reflected in the face of some beloved friend. I think it an accidental feature of Greek society that these friends were mainly male. I do not think that this story is meant to be really mythic. Platonism and Pythagoreanism see the sensible world as imperfectly embodying a series of mathematical patterns, arithmetrical, linear, planar, solid dynamic, and spiritual, each involving additional dimensions to the last, and being as much patterns of beauty and excellence as of intelligibility and true reality. In a phase of our psychic existence before we became

involved with the senseless multiplicity of space, and the transience of time, and the obscuring weight of our bodies, we enjoyed a perfect understanding of that axiological, ontological hierarchy, not worked out in reasonings, but in a single, comprehensive glance. Now the beauty of an attractive face, and even more the beauty of a congenial mind and character, brings to mind the ineffable riches of the patterned hierarchy yonder, nothing falling short of due proportion, nor failing to maintain unity in expressive variety, and so forth. We experience passion when faced with such a conjunction of spiritual and bodily good form which cannot be explained by what is visibly present: we are transcendental creatures and suffer transcendental transports from whatever suggests the pure hierarchy of being. I see nothing mythic and symbolic in all this, only a reference, sometimes a little figurative, to what Plato believed to be the geography of being, and the soul's place in it.

The *Symposium* tells a similar story. I believe that the account of the Banquet, and the speeches made at it, is entirely historic and Socratic — we know how faithfully records of discourses and discussions were preserved — but with the advent of the mythical prophetess Diotima Plato enters the scene, and describes the ascent of the soul from the admiration of sensuous, bodily beauties, through the beauties of laws and institutions and the sciences, to the admiration of Beauty itself, the principle of Order and Good Form and Mathematical Proportion in everything. I do not think that there is anything mythic in this account. What Socrates or Plato is describing is a sort of Yoga which proceeds systematically from the sensuously illustrative and individual to the poetic and generic, and which carries the vividness of the former over into the latter. For while it is not easy, it is undoubtedly possible, to rise to a concentrated awareness of Beauty itself, and to feel in it the vanished yet concentrated presence of the specific forms from which one has risen to it. Those who have never practised this particular sort of eidetic Yoga will make nothing of the exquisitely beautiful mysticism of *Symposium* 210 and 211, and even question whether anything more can be here than an exercise in unmystical "abstraction." They cannot conceive that Beauty itself may be infinitely more intense, multifarious and in a sense "concrete" than any of the poor semblances that spring from it, that it may, as it were, conflate in itself all the Italian cities one has ever seen, all the fine cadences one has ever heard, and all these in greater passion and purity and unity than anything that one has ever experienced. The same sort of Yoga is depicted in the dialectical ascent described in the

Republic, where the mind that has risen from the calculative procedures of the mathematical sciences to the pure Ideas of Number, Proportion, Figure, Motion, Intellection etc., then achieves a further ascent to the principle of Unity, Order and Goodness specified in all these Ideas, and that not as an effort in empty abstraction but in face to face encounter, and can then apply the simple austerities of its vision to the infinite complexities and distortions of instantial existence. The figure of the Cave is of course a figure, but it does not stand for a series of mental developments that would end up in a mathematics department or a philosophy department of M.I.T. It is as much religio-mystical as it is intellectual and analytic, and it is meant to terminate in a sort of samādhi or ecstasy which is certainly not practised in mathematical or philosophical departments. It is meant to lead to that concentrated awareness of Unity-in-multiplicity, of the Good Definite overcoming the Bad Indefinite, an awareness which is the source of all coherence in science and order in society, and in default of which a man cannot be ruler or leader in a Platonic state. The *Republic* also terminates in an eschatology. Er the Pamphylian wakes up from the pyre on which his body is about to be burnt, and gives an account of his experience in the other, the disembodied world. It is very like the account in the *Phaedo,* and involves the same conception of the disembodied life as an interim between incarnations, with perhaps an ultimate liberation from the need for incarnation. It must also involve that experience of Heaven and Hell which must necessarily arise when souls stand naked before one another, and before the ultimate standards, and experience in their own persons the benefits and services, or the evils and wrongs, that they have done to others, sometimes being consigned to those unending torments which Christianity awarded much more liberally. The sojourn in the upper world ends up with a vision of the planetary system seen as turning on the spindle of Necessity, with Lachesis, Clotho and Atropos singing as they weave the web of history. I do not believe any myth is intended here, only the picture of a spiritual education regularly alternating between embodiment and disembodiment, and presided over by forces that sing since they are logically optimistic, believing that order and goodness must prevail in the end, no matter how much leeway may be given to disorder on the way. This last is also the lesson of the myth in the *Statesman,* where the world alternates between periods when the divine helmsman is at the tiller, and periods when he allows the world to take its drifting course. The interesting picture of time running in reverse, with men born from the earth and dying in their cradles, is, of course, a fantasy, though

a very exciting one, and with some relevance to modern speculations about time-reversal, change in the direction of entropy and so forth. But the notion that the bad or evil, in being excluded from the eidetically good, is also in a sense included in it — there is only *one* science of contraries — and that there are accordingly always possibilities of bad form and deviations from goodness in the realm of instances, is a profoundly valuable and illuminating idea. The existence of a world of instances logically demands *real* departures from perfection, which are merely implicit in the eidetic patterns which make up that perfection. Instances which never abuse this freedom to differ from their Eide would in fact not be instances. A world of monotonously recurrent, perfect instances, differing from one another like the shrubs in some gardens, would not really exhibit instantial variety: the recurrent instances would collapse into a single instance surrounded by countless mirror-images of itself. And there could, as Leibniz says, be no sufficient reason why such a meaningless self-mirroring should exist.

I turn finally to the *Timaeus*, the most mythically mythic (or supposedly so) of Plato's dialogues. Here we have the tale of a World-Fabricator or Artificer who is hard to find or declare, who neither makes the comprehensive, zoological pattern that he follows in his total fabrication, nor the original disorder which he orders in terms of that pattern. Here we also have the creation of ordered Time going together with the creation of the regularly revolving heavens and heavenly bodies, and, together with Time, the cosmic Soul which is responsible for the unending heavenly movement. Here also we have the making of the Soul out of a blend of three prior blends, a blend of the eternal essence of the Eide and the changeable essence of sensible things, a blend of eternal identity with the identity of changeable things, and a blend of eternal difference with the differences of sensible instances. The blend of these blends enables the cosmic Soul, in its revolutions, to run through the whole gamut of the Eide as well as through the whole range of their instances. The Soul is also ironed out into a long strip and divided into sections which realize the first three powers of the Dyad and Triad: into these divisions are then intercalated, in a manner that had a strange appeal to Plato, other finer divisions which assimilate the Soul's structure to that of a rather curious musical scale. Aristotle tells us that Plato also structured the Soul in manners that mirror the Point, the Line, the Surface and the Solid, and which corresponded to the cognitive differences of Intuition, True Judgment, Opinion and Sense-perception. The Soul thus structured was cut up into a number of

circular strips, each responsible for the regular motion of a planet or starry system, a topic of great interest in the Academy. The cosmic Fabricator then made inferior souls on the same sort of recipe as the cosmic Soul, only with less pure ingredients: the souls thus constituted had bodies manufactured for them by inferior divinities, and were liable to the same alterations of incarnation and disincarnation as in the other Platonic accounts. The geometric structure of the elementary bodies and their compounds is then gone into with much detail and with great ingenuity. Immense ingenuity is also expended on anatomy and physiology, on the theory of sense-perception, of breathing, of circulation, of reproduction and so forth. What does this whole story amount to?

It amounts to an assertion that the world instantiates a hierarchy of ordered patterns, in which the simpler arithmetical, geometrical and dynamic patterns are subordinated to the purposive patterns of life. This ordered, timeless hierarchy is objective to an Intelligence which is itself eidetic and timeless, but which is such that, with a kind of free self-giving, which is also after a fashion necessary, it cannot but flow over into instances, which it seeks perpetually to make as good as is compatible with their inevitably deviant, confusedly multiple and changeable, instantial status. The timelessly Good contains in itself the possibility of all such instances, and it cannot permit itself the *Phthonos,* the self-sufficient, divine Envy and Jealousy, which would prevent its abundance, its *Aphthonia,* from freely flowing forth into the realm of instances. It accordingly sets spherical bounds to the Space, which is no more than the empty possibility or *Room* for instances, and it also sets bounds of ordered recurrence to the disordered flux characteristic of the instance as such, and so creates Time, measured by the sempiternal motions of the heavens and of the various bodies in it. And it creates Soul as the great cosmic Animal which runs through all true thoughts and opinions, and which is a Thinker, a Theos, in the Judaeo-Christian sense of the word, and not a pure Thinkingness like the Divinity from which it springs. And it also creates finite souls which are an even more distorted image of its pure, embracing Thinkingness than the World-Soul, and which will have a chequered destiny according as they throw in their lot with the confused multiplicity of the instance or the ordered unity of the Idea. And the souls have built-in structures which enable them to cognize every species of ordered pattern, and also to impose whatever they thus cognize on the multiple flux of instantiation. It seems to me that in all this Plato is simply giving us his ordered picture of the universe, which in its essential form remains acceptable, even if its empirical details may have to be

much modified. Instead of a sempiternal, spherical, geocentric cosmos, we may have to have a centreless, quasi-spherical, cosmos emerging out of a Big Bang or what not, and collapsing after aeons into its original unity and simplicity, only presumably to explode once more after a long age of quiescence, a picture more reminiscent of the Indian manvantaras and prālayas than the cosmologies of the Greeks and the Hebrews. But in this modern schema there would be nothing to prevent an ordering Soul or a dynasty of ordering Souls, looking after different regions and periods of the cosmos, and shepherding the inferior souls through the alternations of incarnation and disincarnation as in Plato. Problems of burgeoning population mean that these souls cannot be confined to the earth, but may well be switched back and forth from one part of the universe to another, according as this suits the needs of their spiritual education.

I tried in fact in the Gifford Lectures I gave at St. Andrews in 1964-6 to use the Platonic picture of the Cave as the basis of an eschatology and cosmology in which I still believe. This argues that we live, not, as it were, at the heart, but on the outer periphery of true being, and that our peripheral condition shows itself in the pervasive presence of philosophical problems that cannot be resolved on the surface where we dwell, but only as we retreat inwards to being's inmost core. I believe that the world of sense-experience, and of the language in which we so happily talk about it, is not the paradigm of the intelligible that modern Cave-philosophers have tried to make of it, but that it is throughout riven with absurdities which will take us beyond it to what I have called the Centre of Being. Everywhere it reveals an extraordinary mixture of utter relevance and profound collusion: like the members of a secret spy-organization, everything in this world is at once wholly indifferent to everything else, and yet engineers the most subtle correspondences and interchanges with everything else. Space, which is externality itself, and Time which is sheer vanishing supersession, are none the less the most cohesively unifying of media, in which the most remote things have a bearing on one another, and have this even when they have ceased to exist. And everywhere there is the most astonishing deference of one cosmic phenomenon to another, and sometimes to one quasi-central phenomenon: witness, for instance, the deference of all phenomena to the precedence of Light, so that whatever happens to the mass, velocity, length and age of things, Light will always outstrip them in speed, to precisely the same extent. The Cosmos is arranged like some small German principality where everyone pays homage to its Highness: *was je*

geschieht, muss Durchlaucht immer die schnellste sein. These absurdities are, however, small when compared with the great absurdities of Life and Mind. That material particles should so organize themselves that remote intentional references should be mediated by them, and remote goals pursued by them, is so utterly incredible that its very incredibility seems to be the very reason for its being. And even more absurd is the profound sympathetic entry of one conscious being into the experiences of another, experiences that he can never, in this world, literally share, so that he may even achieve that profound unity with the experiences of another which, in the talk of this world, is impossible. Happy marriages exist, and their happiness perhaps springs, in part, from the fact that they are impossible.

What I think is the case is that everywhere in our experience there is a tantalizing oneness-in-manyness, an interdependence in independence, which, as Plato says, drags us towards being, to a point where vanishing will vanish, where instantial multiplicity will lose itself in the unifying type, where sensuousness will be gathered up into pure gist, and where the deviant possibilities that go with externality, flux, sensuousness and multiplicity will pass over into the utterly simple and the simply good. I do not think that one must imagine oneself as ever living exclusively on the outer crust of being. In the life of fantasy one moves away from it: the sensuousness of fantasy has none of the unmodifiable compulsiveness of outer sense, while remaining similarly *anschaulich*. In one's dreams one has a dream-body, with dream eyes and ears, and a dream-environment, all infinitely shifting: a whole scene dissolves and is replaced by another, the identity of things and persons changes from moment to moment, and all is enlivened with flashes of genuine clairvoyance. One knows what people are about to say before they say it, one knows who they are, and where one's interview is taking place, one is instantaneously transported from place to place without worrying about intervening obstacles. This, we may suppose, is how it will be in the lower reaches of liberated life, since the sensuousness with which we invest matter is a spiritual creation, and owes only its compulsiveness to the bodily environment. Dante and Swedenborg and the Eastern describers of Sukhāvati all concur in the vivid sensuousness of some regions of disembodied being. After there will no doubt be some regions of lust and nightmare, as well as of blessed spectacle and reunion, just as in our earthly dreams. But in the higher ranges of thought and meditation, even in this life, we rise not only above time and space, but also above sensuousness: we have concentrated *Bewusstseinslagen* of pure gist which, in the

disembodied state, will be much easier to sustain and operate with than they are in this present life, where we are always running up to and down from sensuous illustration. And in our higher experiences, even in this life, we can in germ experience that melting away of the bounds of persons, so that, while each remains other, each becomes perspicuous to the other, and the other to each self. This perspicuity, this spiritual nakedness, will be carried much further in the upper zones of being, and will put an end, at the very least, to that spiritual solipsism which we all know to be nonsense even down here. And, with the melting of the bounds of persons, will come, more significantly, the elimination of hatred and indifference and cruelty, and all that is most lamentable and appalling down here. And, as one draws much nearer to the Centre, the separated life-lines which lead to it will draw closer and closer together, and in so doing will leave less and less room for that deviance from the straight for which there is much room at the periphery. In the end there will be hardly any room for imperfection. We shall become an assembly of just men made perfect, lovely, loving beings grouped around a Centre from which they derive all they have and are. This Centre is by some envisaged as a blessed final State, the Peace that is always to be found at the centre of a whirling wheel, by others as a Norm of Correctness which inspires all right endeavour, by yet others as the Wisdom, Being and Bliss of a purified Self, by yet others as the Unity from which all Forms and Numbers spring, and by some even as a blessed and consecrated Nothing. But by many devout persons, it is, as Dante says, envisaged in our human effigy, in the guise of a person infinitely concerned with the illumination, the strengthening, and the moral education of each and all of us. I believe that all these figures have substance, though some more than others: they all express the geographical relations of the Centre to the periphery of being. For the Centre is rather like the pole of our earth: in it all lines of longitude come together, one faces all ways at once, nothing is far from anything else. It is even more remarkable than the geographical pole, for while the latter is far from other terrestrial points, the spiritual pole is, by a sort of fluxion present in all worldliness, and also on the periphery. I do not pride myself on being at all an original theologian: my theology is all to be found in Aquinas and Cusanus, in the Vedanta and the Mahāyāna, as well as in the writings of Plato and Plotinus. And I believe that it even accords with the great gulfs of difference and alienation on which some Judaeo-Christian-Islamic thinkers lay so much stress. For the more the absoluteness of Divinity is stressed, the less and less can it be ranged as an instance over against, and

exclusive of, other things, and the more and more must it, being Perfection itself, embrace everything that everything else has or is.

Am I sure that Platonism, or one of its transliterations, is true? I, living on the periphery and in this Cave, can in no manner be sure. But it is part of the phenomenology of our Cave that it seems to be open-ended, and to give on to an upper world which transcends Cave-limitations. Even if there is no liberated life beyond it, we still have, as morally, aesthetically, scientifically and beneficently concerned beings, to act and live in the light that seems to stream from the Cave's open end, a point made again and again by Kant in his ethical writings. We have to act *as if* we had an immortal soul to bring to perfection, and in perfection perhaps to transcend immortality, whether or not we shall ever have the chance to do so. I believe therefore that one has to remain an eschatologist, a believer in Last Things, and to believe that only in the light of such last things can one's doubts and philosophical difficulties be finally laid to rest. And it is for that reason that I am critical of what Professor Gadamer said recently that religion is indifferent to verification, that it does not care whether anything it believes in really ever happened or ever will happen. For I believe that the religious, which is also the philosophical, spirit, is infinitely willing to change its view of Last Things, to exchange a natural for a spiritual body (or vice versa) or bliss in *Svarga* for the unruffled emptiness of Nirvāna, and so on, but Last Things it still must have in some shape. Nothing would be more infernal than to go on mythologizing and theologizing and philosophizing if types and shadows *never* had their ending, and the newer rite *never* were here.

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