

Reason and Passion in the Platonic Soul

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It seems sometimes that no topic is left in Plato's philosophy that has not already been thoroughly discussed, even to the point that whoever ventures to propose an interpretation — any interpretation — is bound to be taken to task, by some because they see no novelty, by others because they see no truth. This is true no doubt of the twin pillars of Platonic philosophy: his theory of ideas and his doctrine of soul. On the latter as on the former, interpretations differed widely already within the Academy itself, and one can read the history of hellenistic philosophy in great part as the history of the interpretation of the Platonic concept of soul — as the neo-Platonic tradition bears ample witness.

In this paper I shall not venture into the tempestuous seas of the interpretation of the Platonic doctrine of soul in general. I propose to deal with only one aspect of it, which itself will bring upon us waters great enough: the question of the relation between the rational and the irrational elements in the Platonic soul. I shall try to show how Plato's solution to this question provides in fact an answer to problems that arose within Greek thought before him, and how it fits in with other aspects of his psychology and metaphysics.

I

In his famous lecture of 1916, John Burnet claimed that Socrates' main innovation was a new conception of the soul, different from the common Greek view in his time.¹ Burnet's comprehensive review of the uses of the Greek word *psyche* — which is here translated "soul" — in Greek literature from Homer to the classical times is well known and generally accepted, and I only have to summarize his findings as a reminder.

In the contexts which interest us, the *psyche* is the "breath of life," it is what leaves the person when he dies, swoons or sleeps. To Homer the soul exists after death but it lacks strength and vigor. It is likened to a shadow, to a dream, to smoke that dissipates in the air, to a bat that abandons the dying body.² It is what appears

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1. J. Burnet, "The Socratic Doctrine of the Soul," *Essays and Addresses* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929), pp. 126-162.

2. *Odyssey*, xi 207, x 495; *Odyssey*, xi 222; *Iliad*, xxiii 100; *Odyssey*, xxiv 6

in other persons' dreams, like the man's "double." In any case, it is not what feels and wants in us, our center of consciousness, what we usually refer to by "I" or "self." To Homer, wants and feelings are located in the blood, and his heroes feel and grasp with the *thymos* and the *noos*, not with the *psyche*. Therefore, in the *Nekyia*, the souls have to drink blood before some strength and understanding is given to them. But, as Burnet stresses, this is not because they have lost in their death something they had during life; rather, also during bodily life they had nothing to do with understanding and consciousness, and so they remained after death. Indeed, it seems sometimes that the soul's main, if not only role, in the Homeric conception, is to leave the body — or to threaten to do so, as in the Greek idioms corresponding to the English 'to lose one's life,' 'to love one's life,' 'to risk one's life,' and the like, where the Greek would have '*psyche*' for 'life.'

Psyche has also another use which is relevant in our context: Burnet notes that in tragedy feelings are ascribed to the soul, but these are normally dark and obscure feelings, close to what we would call today the subconscious or the dream-consciousness. Such are the feelings of oppression and gloom which accompany horror and despair, such is anxiety and depression, such is Phaedra's love for Hippolytos — all have their source in the *psyche*. The *psyche* is also the seat of the heavy conscience and of the feelings of blood affinity. The soul is, therefore, in the Greek before Socrates, the bearer of life and the seat of animal feelings, unexplained and unexplainable. But it is not yet what has knowledge or ignorance, goodness or badness.

There was also another concept of soul. Burnet calls it the "Orphic" conception of soul. A great scholar declared some twenty-five years ago that he doesn't know what "Orphism" is. I shall not claim that I know. To our purposes it will be enough to accept that about the fifth century before the Christian era some holy books were current under the name of legendary Orpheus. These books seem to have presented a different view of the soul, which I shall still call "Orphic," *faute de mieux*. On this view, the soul is a divine creature which sinned and was condemned to be imprisoned in the body. The aim of the Orphic cult was to secure the final release of the soul from the bondage of the body, i.e., from the wheel of death and reincarnation. The way to the salvation of the soul is through commands and prohibitions which lead to the purification (*katharsis*) of the soul. But, Burnet notes, the soul has still nothing to do with man's waking and conscious life, with his personality.

On the other hand, the Ionian scientific and philosophical tradition identified the soul with, e.g., air or fire, and saw it as responsible for waking consciousness, but on this view the soul was merely a part of the cosmic *arche*, enclosed in the body for a short time. The Ionian tradition did not, as a rule, take much interest in the individual soul.

II

This duplicity in the history of the concept of soul is repeated in the development of another central concept in Greek philosophy — the concept of *theoria*. This concept comes to Greek philosophical thinking from two sources:

First, the concept which can be called the “Ionian” concept of *theoria*. In this sense, the word denotes roughly “viewing,” as of a play or spectacle, or also an “embassy” to another state, or to the oracle, and the like. To travel *epi theoria* is to travel on an official mission, or to travel to the Games as a participant or as an onlooker; and for Herodotus *theorein* is little more than “sight-seeing.” It is not a long way from here to the meaning of “inquiry.”

But *theoria* is also the technical word for the “vision” at the mysteries, such as those of Eleusis. Aristotle tells us that the initiation in these mysteries did not involve the mastering of any intellectual content, but consisted in the seeing of some holy objects, and in being put in a certain *emotional* state.³ The initiated did not learn or understand anything, but underwent a forceful emotional experience that basically changed his psychological make-up and made him into a man happy (*olbios*) in this life, and more important still, in the next. So we read in the *Hymn to Demeter*:

Blessed is he among men on earth, who has beheld this.
 Never will he who has not been initiated, who has had
 no part in this,
 Share in such things. He will be as a dead man in
 sultry darkness.⁴

It seems that no moral obligations were attached to this salvation of the soul, but that it was a purely emotional and ritual affair. Moral or quasi-moral demands were made in the Pythagorean doctrines, apparently influenced by the Orphic. Here we tread again on moving sand: the distinction between Orphics and

3. Aristotle, fr. 15 Rose.

4. *Hymn to Demeter*, 480-482. See also C. Kerényi, *Eleusis*, tr. R. Manheim (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1967).

Pythagoreans is difficult and sometimes impossible, and even talk about the Pythagoreans themselves is tricky, for this sect existed in various forms for nearly eight hundred years. Nevertheless, it seems to me that in what concerns our main point, "the Pythagorean way" differs from "the Orphic way" in what the Pythagoreans themselves called, perhaps for the first time in this sense, *philosophia*. So far, at least, it is possible that one has to give some reason to those who say that even after the rise of Pythagoreanism, Orphism continued to care for the religious needs of the simpler people.⁵ By contrast, the main theme that the Pythagoreans introduced into Western culture, and that was to have the widest repercussions, was the theme of *the moral value of the intellectual activity*: the salvation of the soul is in its intellectual activity, or at least depends upon it.

The Pythagoreans are therefore to be credited with having introduced into Western thought the conscience of the moral worth of inquiry. The Ionians, such as Anaximander, Herodotus or the Hippocratics, devoted themselves to the search for knowledge; but they did not ascribe to their activity any moral import. They were driven by their curiosity, by their interest in the world and its affairs, or — perhaps — by the inner dialectic of their own inquiry.

In fact, the Pythagoreans unified the Ionian and the "Orphic" concepts of *theoria*. *Theoria* was for them, on the one hand, observation, inquiry, attempt to lay bare the structure of the universe, and on the other hand, it was the vision that conduced to the soul's purification and salvation. Both were one: the salvation of the soul was the quest for knowledge.

The Pythagoreans gave a new and profound meaning to *theoria* and to *katharsis* by unifying the scientific and the religious-ritual conceptions in their new concept of *philosophia*. But the Pythagoreans of the fifth century did not have a clear concept of soul, and certainly not a theory or doctrine that could hold together the two currents that Pythagoras had joined to his concept of *philosophia*. The tension between these two currents was apparently too great, the sect split, and the two elements in Pythagoreanism appeared clearly: the quest for knowledge on the one hand, and the search for the purification of the soul on the other.

III

I do not know how much Socrates was influenced by the Pythagoreans. But it is clear that he proposes a direction in which

5. E.g., K. v. Fritz, "Pythagoras," *Realencyclopädie*, s.v.

the Pythagorean problem can find a solution. It is irrelevant to our point whether he himself saw the link to the Pythagoreans or whether this was Plato's work. In any case, Socrates' innovation was to have seen the soul (*psyche*) as that thing in us which is the seat of justice and injustice, of knowledge and ignorance, of good and evil, and therefore as that part of us most worthy of care (*therapeia*).⁶ Socrates combined the Orphic theory of the purification of the soul with the Ionian scientific view of the soul as responsible for waking consciousness. The combination of both these aspects is by no means trivial; Empedocles, for one, knew both, and held them apart as *psyche* and *daimon*.⁷

Socrates not only claimed that the soul is worthy of care, but he also specified what this care is to be: the salvation of the soul is in continuous inquiry. Socrates' anchoring point is in his uncompromising rejection of the unexamined life. This is the lesson of the *Apology* and of the *Crito*. Socrates declared time and again not to have any positive doctrine of his own, only an insatiable drive to inquiry. This inquiry, however, is not of the type of Ionian cosmological inquiry. Not only is it anthropological — and in that Socrates is but a child of his times — but its motives are completely different, Socrates is not motivated by the curiosity of an Anaximander or a Herodotus. His inquiry has a *moral meaning*. Only unlimited inquiry can be unconditionally good for the soul.

This is the root of the Socratic paradox that *arete* is *episteme*, that moral perfection is knowledge. Since moral and intellectual endeavor are identical, their aims are the same: moral excellence is intellectual excellence. And although the endeavor may go on forever, the aim remains to point the way.

IV

Socrates' claim, rather than presenting a real solution, proposes a task: how is it possible that intellectual endeavor may have moral worth? How is it possible that mere intellectual effort may bring about such a profound change in the soul, that it should become better, that it should be saved even as in the mysteries? How can *theoria* in its Ionian sense take the place of *theoria* in the Eleusinian sense? And wherefrom comes to *theoria* in its intellectual sense that enormous psychological power that can bring about a change in the soul so deep that no place is left for *akrasia*, for the weakness of the will, so that knowledge by itself is sufficient to cause right action?

6. *Crito*, 47C8.

7. Burnet, pp. 157ff.

If Burnet is right, then Socrates saw that the answer to such questions must be given by a new doctrine of the soul. But it seems that Socrates himself did not offer a real theory of soul, but only pointed, in word and deed, to the soul as to the entity on which the moral problem centers.

Plato accepted Socrates' way of life as a paradigm whose moral worth is grasped by direct intuition. His aim was to give the metaphysical, epistemological, psychological, political, anthropological basis which can, to his mind, support the ethics which Socrates personifies. We are interested in a small section of this basis — the psychological basis, and some of its implications.

What is the soul to be, therefore, if its success is contemplation? The *Phaedo's* answer is clear: it is to be distinct from the body, immortal, and essentially rational. This last point is more important than is generally recognized. A new book on Plato's psychology, for example, complains that the assumption that the soul as the "principle of life" is identical with the knowing soul weakens the argument for immortality in the *Phaedo*.⁸ However, our considerations thus far point to the contrary, namely that the identification of the principle of life and the principle of knowledge is central in this context. I have dealt with this question elsewhere,⁹ and it suffices here to point out that the *Phaedo* argues for the immortality of the soul precisely on grounds of its being "close" to the ideas in the sense that it is able to relate to them by way of knowledge. The argument from recollection is not secondary or superimposed but rather the fulcrum which provides leverage for the whole dialogue.

Such, too, is the soul in "her real nature," as depicted in the tenth book of the *Republic*, without the "weed and rock and shell" that clung to her in her present state, in place of her original limbs which "have been broken off or crushed and marred altogether."¹⁰ In its purity the soul is solely rational. Its superior part, the *logistikon*, is all that is left from its original state, since its "association with the body and other evils."¹¹ When the soul associates with the body it loses its purity: its lower parts are "degenerations" of the *logistikon*. They attain their objects (grasp them, are attracted to them, etc.) by means of the body, and cannot forego this mediation. Therefore, the intentionality of these parts of

8. T. M. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology* (University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 33.

9. "The *Phaedo* as an Example of the Hypothetical Method," *Eshkolot VII* (1975), 45-65 (Hebrew).

10. *Republic*, 611BD.

11. *Ibid.*

the soul is directed to the sensible *reflections* of the objects that really are. The philosopher, by contrast, strives to attain the objects themselves by the soul itself. In other words, he longs for a state of "bodilessness," he "rehearses for death."¹²

But the *Phaedo*, and still more the *Symposium*, make clear that the senses are indispensable in the process of attaining the objects themselves, in its first phases. Here, for example, the importance of opinion (even of false opinion) is stressed, as the starting point of the process of learning. From this line of argument it would seem that the state of bodilessness is a limit state, not to be achieved in a limited length of time. But, on the other hand, Plato requires a real distinction between opinion and knowledge, and the metaphysics of the *Republic* is meant to support such a distinction.

The accepted interpretation of the Platonic soul presents it as composed of three heterogeneous parts: reason, spirit and appetites. It should be clear by now, that I prefer another view. It seems to me, with Guthrie and others,¹³ that the Platonic soul is essentially "uniform": its lower parts exist as such only in its bodily state. Its appetites for food and drink and the like cannot be imagined but in relation to some body. It is true that in the *Phaedrus* the souls of the gods too are described as a charioteer and a pair of horses,¹⁴ and it is conceivable that this refers even there to a tripartition of the soul, without any connection to the body. But the argument of the *Phaedrus* is better served if one assumes that the divine souls were constructed on the model of the human souls, and not the other way round. The difference between them is that in the divine soul the horses do not offer any resistance to the charioteer and to each other. In other words, if there is a division, it is only potential, or perhaps the divine soul is contrasted with the human soul precisely by cancelling the partition characteristic of the latter.

In any case, at least in its bodily state, the soul is a complex unity. By this I mean a unity which has parts, which parts in turn get their meaning from their place within the whole. Plato analyzes the structure of the complex unity in the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides*.

Moreover, the soul's parts are not totally heterogeneous. The

12. *Phaedo*, 64A.

13. W.K.C. Guthrie, "Plato's Views on the Nature of the Soul," *Recherches sur la tradition platonicienne, Entretiens, Tome III, Fondation Hardt* (Vandoeuvres-Genève, 1957), pp. 2-19. Reprinted in G. Vlastos, ed., *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, II (London: Macmillan, 1972), 230-243.

14. *Phaedrus*, 246ff.

widely accepted interpretation distinguishes sharply at least between reason and the two other, irrational parts. And from this distinction between reason as the contemplative element in the modern sense of the word and the two other elements as motive forces stems the amazement of the seeming Socratic paradoxes, that *arete* is *episteme* and that nobody does harm willingly.

Not only have modern interpreters found fault with Socrates. The thing looked no less strange in his contemporaries' eyes. Euripides, for example, criticizes him openly. Medea declares:

I know what evil I intend to do,
But stronger than my reasoned thought is fury,
Which brings the greatest evil upon men.¹⁵

And Phaedra, in a less grandiose vein:

We know what we ought to do, our reason is there
To tell us. We simply do not do it . . . a failure
Of will, perhaps, or perhaps we value some pleasure
More highly than our duty. . .¹⁶

But I refer especially to the modern concept of reason, because today our common understanding of this word is influenced mainly by the famous passage of David Hume:

Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and to assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates . . . In order to show the fallacy of all this philosophy, I shall endeavour to prove *first*, that reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will; and *secondly*, that it can never oppose passion in the direction of the will.¹⁷

Humean reason has no motive power, and therefore no preventive power either. It only adjudicates on matters of truth and falsity, it "regards the relations of our ideas," and chooses means to ends. But Plato's reason is not Hume's reason. The very deduction of the parts of the soul in the *Republic* makes abundantly clear that the *logistikon* has a driving force of its own. For the proof of the multiplicity of the soul turns precisely on the assumption that in certain situations two forces are at work in the soul in opposite directions, as in the case of the man who is thirsty but shrinks from the drink he has before him. In other words, Plato presents reason

15. *Medea*, 1077-1080, tr. R. W. Corrigan.

16. *Hippolytus*, 379-382, tr. R. W. Corrigan.

17. D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, II, iii, 3.

as a motive (in this case preventive) force. The proof is precisely Hume's proof, inside out: that reason *can* constitute a force opposed to another which is motive by itself.

In another passage in the *Republic* Plato notes that every part of the soul has its own pleasures and appetites.¹⁸ And in the *Gorgias*, Socrates shows Callicles that pure will, without an element of rationality, is impossible. Will must *know* its object, and it must know it *sub specie boni*.¹⁹

V

Plato thus puts forth a conception of soul as a single reservoir of energy, canalized in different directions.²⁰ (The canalization metaphor is Plato's own.) Moreover, there is not only a transfiguration of psychic energy, but each level of energy, each of the transfigurations, reconstructs the soul completely, creates a new *Gestalt*, informs the whole character for good and for bad.

The question that Plato might have asked himself was: how is it possible that each of the levels of energy should completely reshape character? His answer: this is possible if it is the same psychic energy in all levels. These are two distinct ideas: the idea of the soul shaped in each of its levels, and the idea of the single psychic energy. But they are not completely separate: the second is the basis of the first. One can imagine three or more psychic levels, on each of which the soul is uniquely determined. But, as a precondition of such a possibility, Plato requires the doctrine of the *Symposium*: there is no essential difference between passion and reason — the summit of intellectual contemplation is also the summit of emotional yearning, and Eros encompasses both.

One can better understand Plato's position in contradistinction to Freud's. Freud too claimed that the psychic energy is one, but he maintained that the upper levels were sublimations of the lower levels. Plato thought the converse: the lower levels are degenerations of the upper level.²¹ However, there is no direct opposition between them: Freud's interest is in the description of the development of the upper levels in the individual soul; his is an ontogenetical approach. Plato's point of view, on the other hand, is that of the logical structure of the "forces" of the soul, and, in this

18. *Republic*, 580E.

19. *Gorgias*, 500ff.

20. *Republic*, 485D.

21. Cf. F.M. Cornford, "The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*," *The Unwritten Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1950), pp. 68-80. Reprinted in Vlastos, *Plato*, II, 119-131.

context, nothing is said of the development of the individual. At the lower levels cognition is minimal, obscure, and therefore the soul is able to relate only to objects which are not proper objects of knowledge, viz., the objects of the sensible world. The same is true of the emotions: the soul's attraction and repulsion at its lower levels are likewise related to improper objects.

As the soul is shaped into higher levels, its attraction is gradually directed to more adequate objects. But this is not another *type* of relation. It is still a drive that has a cognitive element. Since the objects of the sensible world are not susceptible of full knowledge, therefore when the soul is directed towards such objects, the cognitive element in its activity is minimal — it is a vague, obscure drive. When the soul is directed towards the ideas, the drive is still there, with no loss, but it is fully articulated, and the cognitive element in it is fully developed. This can be clearly seen in the description of the ascent of the soul in the *Symposium*.

This has implications for a matter which is normally considered as purely intellectual: Plato's theory of instruction. For the transition from opinion to knowledge involves, so it seems, only the giving of reasons for the opinion, its "tying down with the fetters of the logos." In fact, however, this transition is not only the result of a mere intellectual give and take. For Plato, we never have to do with mere opinions, but with opinions and their emotional contexts, or rather with opinions and their inseparable emotional aspects. Thus, the Platonic dialogue is never just a match of wits over intellectual positions, but it is also a pitching of personality against personality; not only a disentangling of logical howlers, but also a laying bare of the obscure and half-conscious feelings that necessarily go with them. The pain caused by the Socratic *elenchus* and by the ascent from the cave is much too real; a real change in intellectual positions necessarily implies, for Plato, a restructuring of the whole soul.

It is hardly necessary to stress that logical analysis of the Socratic *elenchus* and of the Platonic dialogue does not in general take us very far in the explanation of much of what goes on in Plato, and in some cases it can be downright misleading. For the Platonic dialogue takes place also on another plane, the emotional plane, where the clash between personalities occurs. However, relatively little attention has been paid to the *relation* between these two planes, to the emotional aspects of opinion as opinion, to the non-intellectual motivations in the course of the argument. The dialogue is not the presentation of an argument that stands on its own feet; it is the story of the interaction between two souls in all their aspects — Socrates and his interlocutor. Sometimes this

interaction succeeds as in the *Theaetetus*; sometimes it does not, as in the *Meno* or in the *Gorgias*.

Thus, logical fallacies too have their place in the Platonic dialogue. Their role is not only logical, such as laying bare the ambiguities hidden in the discussion, but they often aim also at leading the opponent astray, so as to commit him as deeply as possible to his position, for only thus can he *feel* his state of ignorance and not merely know about it. Socrates' interlocutor has to be thoroughly convinced of his ignorance; and such a conviction involves the soul in its entirety. At a certain point in the *Gorgias*, for example, Callicles abdicates his commitment to the success of the inquiry, and he continues to give his answers "in order not to introduce contradictions in [his] words."²² From this moment the real dialogue with Socrates ceases. And a few pages further Socrates can even forgo Callicles' participation in the conversation, and play himself both roles of questioner and answerer. The logical steps of the argument are its surface structure only. When the intellectual activity is conceived as a mere manipulation aiming only at avoiding contradictions, it is devoid of real worth.²³ Callicles' (or rather Gorgias') conception of the intellectual activity is perverse. Callicles wants to separate between manipulative reason and the will, which alone determines aims. This is not only the conception of his teacher Gorgias; it is also the modern view of David Hume. Plato regards this separation as dangerous for morals, and impossible in itself.

This is therefore Plato's answer to the Socratic problem. Moral excellence is knowledge and no one does evil willingly, because the soul is essentially one and it is impossible to separate between its cognition and its volition. True knowledge is, in itself, a motive power. The ascent in the levels of cognition is the progressive restructuration of the soul, a profound psychological change, comparable to the Eleusinian *visio beatifica*, a legitimate object of the language of the mysteries, so much to Plato's liking.²⁴

Only this unity of the activities of the soul can explain the betting in the beautiful in the *Symposium* and the descent to the cave in the *Republic*: the knowledge of the good is not mere knowledge but it is a unified activity of the soul, which includes cognition, desire and creation. At the lowest level, it presents itself as sexual attraction, in which too there is a minimum of

22. *Gorgias*, 405A5. Cf. *Meno* 83D1-2.

23. Cf. *Republic*, 533C, but there without the existential stress.

24. E.g., *Phaedo*, 69AC, *Symposium*, 210DE, *Republic*, 516B, *Phaedrus*, 247D, 250C, 253BC, *Timaeus*, 44C, *et passim*.

cognition,²⁵ and physical procreation; at the higher level it appears as philosophical knowledge, whose necessary consequence is political and educational activity.²⁶

Of course, Plato knew full well that there is knowledge of the good that does not cause its possessor to do the good. This is purely intellectual knowledge, as Callicles' knowledge in the *Gorgias*. Plato saw in this a deformity of the soul, which prevents it from real moral and even intellectual progress, at least beyond a certain point.²⁷ This is why the dialogue between Socrates and Callicles fails. Callicles would not discard his conception of reason as manipulative, in order to attain real knowledge, because he is not ready, from a certain stage on, to commit himself deeply and totally to his answers. The psychological peripety is not only a prior condition of true knowledge; it accompanies it as its emotional counterpart.

VI

There remains the question of the corruption of the soul. If the soul is a single force, what is it that breaks it apart, that introduces in it disharmony? In the accepted picture of the Platonic soul, disharmony stems from the differences between the heterogeneous parts of the soul. This account will not fit the interpretation I proposed, at least not as it stands.

The question of the source of evil in Plato has itself been extensively treated, and I cannot but note here the main difficulties and point to the direction of a possible solution. From what was said up to this point it should be reasonably clear that, for considerations internal to Plato's system, one should prefer, *prima facie*, the interpretation that sees the source of evil, for Plato, in corporeality. This is not to say that the source of evil is in the body. Because as long as the soul is imprisoned in the wheel of birth and reincarnation — and it makes little difference whether it is in the body of a man or an animal, or only is destined to be so embodied — for so long it is still impure. The basic distinction, as Guthrie notes,²⁸ is not between the soul in the body and the soul outside of the body, but between the soul destined to incarnation and the soul that escaped from the wheel and went back "to its place of

25. Cf. *Symposium*, 193D, 205E, *Republic* 586E.

26. See further my "Three Aspects of Plato's Philosophy of Learning and Instruction," *Paideia* V (1976), 50-62.

27. E.g., *Republic*, 519A.

28. Guthrie, "Plato's Views. . . ," in Vlastos, *Plato*, II, 236ff.

origin." The soul's pollution is not restricted to the communion with the body, this communion is only one of its symptoms.

But this means that the incarnation of the soul is a *sign* of its corruption, not the *cause* of it. It would not be true, then, to say that the soul degenerated because it fell into the body, but conversely: because it degenerated, it fell into the body. It is in this context that we must understand the myth cited in the gold tablets of Thurioi,²⁹ by Pindar,³⁰ by Empedocles,³¹ and in the *Timaeus*.³² the soul is a divine creature that sinned — about the sin there are several versions — and following its sin lost its purity and was condemned to the wheel of death and rebirth.

The opinion of Wilamowitz³³ that the source of evil according to Plato is in the soul itself or in part of it is well-known and has its followers. But I cannot accept it, for systematic, as well as textual reasons which I cannot discuss here.³⁴ I shall only point out that there is no need and no possibility of postulating a "bad soul" which is responsible for the irregular movements of the *chora*, or the "place" where the ideas are reflected: the soul in itself is only the source of ordered and directed movements. The Platonic "place" — the metaphysical counterpart of the "body" — has in it irregular movements, and they are responsible for the disruption of the regular movements of the soul. The soul's movement is always orderly and rational, but its mastering of the undirected movements of the "place" is never complete. All this is not to deny, of course, that the soul is the source of evil on the phenomenal or psychological plane.

Thus, on the mystical plane, the body is not in itself the source of evil in the soul, but only a sign or a symptom of its degenerate state. On the metaphysical plane, we have no explanation of the necessity of the communion of the soul with the body or with the "place": we are only told that the degeneration of the soul is expressed in the disruptions of corporeality or of the "place."

What is, then, Plato's meaning beyond the religious metaphor? What are we to make of the myth about the soul's sin and its punishment? Perhaps Plato saw here the limits of the possibility of rational explanation. Our question is in effect the question why

29. Diels-Kranz, 1B, 17-20.

30. Fr. 133 Snell, quoted in *Meno*, 81BC.

31. Fr. 115 DK.

32. *Timaeus*, 90A.

33. U. v. Wilamowitz-Moelendorf, *Platon*, II, 320-1.

34. *Timaeus*, 36, *Laws*, 896. For a full discussion, the reader is referred to H. Cherniss, "The Sources of Evil According to Plato," in Vlastos, *Plato*, II, 251.

certain chunks of matter think; or why the world as a whole is rational, but only partly so. Plato does not propose to answer these questions. He points to the limited rationality of the world and isolates the rational and the irrational elements in it, much in the same way as he points to the defective rationality of man and at the same time to his perfectibility.

VII

It may seem that we strayed far from our original subject, but in fact these considerations on the source of evil in the soul take us back to the very core of our problem. In considering the *Phaedo*,³⁵ I stressed Plato's view of soul as being essentially rational. But in the last section, another definition of soul was used implicitly, the one familiar from the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*, according to which the soul is the principle of movement.³⁶ However, already in the discussion of the *Phaedo* we saw that movement (there I spoke of "life") and rationality are both seen by Plato as of the essence of thought. For Plato these are not two different things. For movement is not to be understood only as spatial translation — this is clear also from the use of *kinesis* by Plato,³⁷ and especially from the very fact that soul in itself is not extended in space and does not necessarily occupy a body at all times, and therefore it is impossible that its *essence* should be to move itself spatially. Rather, soul is to be understood as the principle of change in the widest sense. This change may have spatial or sensible aspects or reflections (as change of place or of color), but *essentially* (as Plato understood "essence") it cannot be spatial or sensible. Thus, the change of which soul is principle, is *thought*.

Thought is change *par excellence*, caused by itself, ordered, directed always towards an end, in which a reason may be given for each step and for its place within the whole. Its paradigm is thought as it advances in a geometrical proof. *Phaedo* 97Cff explicitly identifies rationality and teleological arrangement. Hence the identification of thought and life: thought is life in its purity; bodily life is life only insofar as it is directed by the rational and teleological principle that governs the organism, i.e., only insofar as the bodily activities are organized and directed by a factor that unifies them towards a common goal. In this same sense the whole universe is an animal; and insofar as it is not such, this is due to the

35. Section IV, above.

36. *Phaedrus* 245E6, *Laws* 896A.

37. Cf. *Parmenides*, 138B8.

disruption of the "place" and its disorderly movements. By contrast, the world of the ideas as a whole is completely transparent and rational, and is therefore a "rational animal."³⁸ Life and rationality are one.

VIII

In the background of Socrates' demand for the care of the soul by means of a life of continuous inquiry, there were three different views of the soul: the popular view expressed in Homer, that soul is what distinguishes the living body from the corpse, i.e., life itself, and by extension also the seat of feelings and desires; the Ionian scientific view that soul is the thinking element, common to us insofar as we are rational and to the world insofar as it is such too; and the Orphic view that soul is a fallen god, that is destined to return, purified, to the place whence it came. But the synthesis of these views was effected only by Plato in his doctrine of the unified soul.

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38. *Timaeus*, 30C.