

# 4

## PHAEDO

### THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE DIALOGUE

**T**he *Phaedo* is the longest and most difficult of the four dialogues with which we are concerned; before analyzing it in detail, therefore, we will glance at the construction and arrangement of the whole.

The dialogue proper is preceded by a preliminary scene. Echecrates of Phlius meets Phaedo, a disciple of Socrates, and asks him to tell him about the last hours of his master. Phaedo is very ready to comply.

He first relates how, owing to the late return of the festal ship, the execution of the sentence has been delayed, and what happened on the very last day in the prison to begin with, up to the moment when Socrates's wife, Xanthippe, with their youngest little son, has taken leave of her husband and been led out (57a-60c).

Then follow the actual conversations in the circle of Socrates's disciples, who also have arrived there (60c-115a). In these can be distinguished further an introduction and three main parts.

The introduction develops out of a message from Socrates to the poet Evenus, bidding the latter follow him as soon as possible. It proposes the thesis that the life of a philosopher is simply nothing else but a preparation for death, or even is itself a continual dying. From this results the theme of the principal conversation: for such a conception of philosophy can only have sense if something in the philosopher survives death. Is that the case? Is the soul immortal? (60c-70c.)

The proof that it is so is given by Socrates in conversation with Cebes and Simmias, two of the circle. He proves it first in the first part of the dialogue — by taking death as the dialectically correlative process to being born, and relates them both to an essential substratum, namely the indestructible soul. Thereby death appears as a phase in a comprehensive whole, and is made relative. The same conclusion results from interpreting knowledge as reminiscence: for it follows thence that what remembers itself, the soul, must have existed be-

fore birth. But if that is so — and the thought is here linked with the preceding argument — the soul must also persist beyond death (70c-77a).

The doubt is expressed whether the latter inference really follows; and this leads to a brief interlude, in which Socrates encourages his friends to go on seeking truth even when he is dead (77a-78a).

Then begins the second part of the main dialogue, with a new train of thought. Only that can die which is composite, that is to say, corporeal; but what is simple, that is, spiritual, is indissoluble. The Idea is absolutely indissoluble; but it is shown that the human soul is related to the Idea and must therefore be indestructible likewise. It is fundamentally so by its nature; but according to its individual character it becomes so in proportion as it attains to pure knowledge, thereby detaching itself from the corporeal and assimilating itself to the Idea (78b-84b).

Thereupon follows a marked break, a second interlude. Socrates' arguments have made a deep impression on everybody. Cebes and Simmias, however, are not yet convinced, and Socrates encourages them to speak. The former is of the opinion that what has been said only proves that the soul survives a particular body, not that it necessarily survives all bodies in the course of its incarnations. The second critic conjectures that the soul is perhaps nothing else but the harmony of the body and must therefore perish with the body's parts. The objections turn the emotion into bewilderment, and this communicates itself also to the hearer of the account, Echecrates, with the result that the prison scene is again brought clearly before the mind. This makes the effect all the more vivid when Phaedo tells how Socrates heartens his friends and leads them back to the problem (84c-91c).

Here begins the third and most important part of the main discourse. Socrates first refutes Simmias' objection, by analyzing the relation in which the soul stands to the body, especially its conflict with the latter's instincts, from which it follows that it cannot be the function of the body. In his answer to Cebes he then finds the essence of the soul in the fact that it stands to the Idea of Life in a relation of necessity, which excludes death; hence it cannot die. These arguments form the climax of the whole dialogue (91c-107b).

It ends with a practical consequence: If the soul is of such a nature and dignity, it must be treated with corresponding care a duty which is corroborated by a mythological description of the mansions of the future life (107c-115a).

The close of the dialogue takes us back to the introduction and narrates the Master's death (115b-118a).

## INTRODUCTION

### *The Setting*

In the other three works the dialogue begins at once and introduces the reader directly to the situation; here it is embedded in a conversation between two men which takes place after all is over. This procedure has, firstly, a literary advantage: the author can bring before the reader events as well as conversations, and can depict the situation more fully than would be possible in a mere dialogue. But there is a further consideration. If the reader does not forget the introductory scene, but keeps it, as he should, before him all through as the determining element — Plato himself suggests this when, before the decisive arguments, he makes *Phaedo* describe the bewilderment which seizes everyone after the objections of Cebes and Simmias, and the same impression comes over Echecrates as he listens to the description — then he will feel how much greater reverence is shown by reproducing the tenor of just this dialogue from memory, than by presenting it directly. And one last point. The fact that the occurrence of this death and the picture of the man who underwent it rise out of memory, gives Socrates the place he holds in Platonic thought as a whole. *Phaedo* says: "I will try to relate it. Nothing is more pleasant to me than to recall Socrates to my mind, whether by speaking of him myself, or by listening to others." — "Indeed, *Phaedo*," answers Echecrates, "you will have an audience like yourself." The figure and its fate are taken straight from the present and raised to the timeless.

It is all very solemn. The conversation takes place not in private, as in the *Crito*, where the final decision is made between the tempter-friend and Socrates, but in a wide circle and at an official hour, so to speak. Not, however, in a strange, unfriendly publicity, as in the *Apology* before the court, but among friends and disciples, more intimately bound to the Master than wife and child. Officials cross the room: the Eleven, who loose the prisoner's fetters on the last day, to give him freedom of movement when he takes the step to death. The great religious festival with which the State, according to ancient tradition, celebrates the exploits of Theseus and the favour of the gods, penetrates even the prison doors. The State ship, which is sent every year to Delos in thanksgiving to Apollo, has returned. Socrates must now die, having enjoyed a reprieve during its voyage, which has been prolonged by adverse winds. So round the jail opens the wide space of the Aegean Sea and the glorious sunlight of Hellas.

*ECHECRATES. We were rather surprised to find that he did not*

*die till so long after the trial. Why was that, Phaedo?*

*PHAEDO. It was an accident, Echecrates. The stern of the ship, which the Athenians send to Delos, happened to have been crowned on the day before the trial.*

*ECH. And what is this ship?*

*PHAEDO. It is the ship, as the Athenians say, in which Theseus took the seven youths and the seven maidens to Crete, and saved them from death, and himself was saved. The Athenians made a vow then to Apollo, the story goes, to send a sacred mission to Delos every year, if they should be saved; and from that time to this they have always sent it to the god, every year. They have a law to keep the city pure as soon as the mission begins, and not to execute any sentence of death until the ship has returned from Delos; and sometimes, when it is detained by contrary winds, that is a long while. The sacred mission begins when the priest of Apollo crowns the stern of the ship: and, as I said, this happened to have been done on the day before the trial. That was why Socrates lay so long in prison between his trial and his death.*

And what emotion filled the place! It was so powerful that it still breaks out in the narrator's feelings:

*PHAEDO. Well, I myself was strangely moved on that day. I did not feel that I was being present at the death of a dear friend: I did not pity him, for he seemed to me happy, Echecrates, both in his bearing and in his words, so fearlessly and nobly did he die. I could not help thinking that the gods would watch over him still on his journey to the other world, and that when he arrived there it would be well with him, if it was ever well with any man. Therefore I had scarcely any feeling of pity, as you would expect at such a mournful time. Neither did I feel the pleasure which I usually felt at our philosophical discussions, for our talk was of philosophy. A very singular feeling came over me, a strange mixture of pleasure and of pain when I remembered that he was presently to die. All of us who were there were in much the same state, laughing and crying by turns ;particularly Apollodorus. I think you know the man and his ways.*

### *The Opening Events*

Echecrates asks who were present, and *Phaedo* gives a list of names.

One feels how important is the sentence which interrupts it: "Plato, I believe, was ill." The speaker goes on:

*On the previous days I and the others had always met in the morning at the court where the trial was held, which was close to the prison; and then we had gone in to Socrates. We used to wait each morning until the prison was opened, conversing: for it was not opened early. When it was opened we used to go in to Socrates, and we generally spent the whole day with him.*

The account gives a glimpse of the time which elapsed between the condemnation and death of Socrates. Then *Phaedo* continues:

*But on that morning we met earlier than usual; for the evening before we had learnt, on leaving the prison, that the ship had arrived from Delos. So we arranged to be at the usual place as early as possible. When we reached the prison the porter, who generally let us in, came out to us and bade us wait a little, and not to go in until he summoned us himself; "for the Eleven," he said, "are releasing Socrates from his fetters, and giving directions for his death to-day" In no great while he returned and bade us enter.*

Socrates's wife with her little son has arrived before them:

*So we went in and found Socrates just released, and Xanthippe you know her sitting by him, holding his child in her arms. When Xanthippe saw us, she wailed aloud, and cried, in her woman's way, "This is the last time, Socrates, that you will talk with your friends, or they with you." And Socrates glanced at Crito, and said, "Crito, let her be taken home" So some of Crito's servants led her away, weeping bitterly and beating her breast.*

The passage has a chilly air: the unregenerate heart of the ancients — or perhaps a miserly fate, not to be mastered even by a Socrates.

Then comes a minute trait, proving how well this master of perception knew how to attach profound reflections to any and every occurrence:

*But Socrates sat up on the bed, and bent his leg and rubbed it with his hand, and while he was rubbing it said to us, How strange a thing is what men call pleasure! How wonderful is its relation to pain, which seems to be the opposite of it! They will*

*not come to a man together: but if he pursues the one and gains it, he is almost forced to take the other also, as if they were two distinct things united at one end.*

The prisoner has been relieved of his fetters, and rubs his limbs, till now impeded; thus his words afforded a psychological observation apposite to the situation. If we look closer, however, the thought anticipates a later and more important one. For by representing pleasure and pain as absorbed in the entirety of life, he prepares the way for the relativizing of birth and death in respect of a total existence persisting through several incarnations.

Pleasure and pain are curious phenomena. They cannot exist together; when one comes, the other must go; and yet they are linked to one another. Aesop, Socrates thinks, would have made a fable out of it. The name does not come in by mere chance. Socrates has of late been occupied with him. For when Cebes, one of those present, hears the name mentioned, he says that Evenus, a mutual philosophical friend, has asked him to inquire the meaning of the report he has heard that Socrates has been composing poems in prison. Socrates replies:

*Then tell him the truth, Cebes, he said. Say that it was from no wish to pose as a rival to him, or to his poems. I knew that it would not be easy to do that. I was only testing the meaning of certain dreams, and acquitting my conscience about them, in case they should be bidding me make this kind of music.*

He then relates the dream — a very strange one, which makes one think:

*The fact is this. The same dream often used to come to me in my past life, appearing in different forms at different times, but always saying the same words, “Socrates, work at music and compose it.” Formerly I used to think that the dream was encouraging me and cheering me on in what was already the work of my life, just as the spectators cheer on different runners in a race. I supposed that the dream was encouraging me to create the music at which I was working already: for I thought that philosophy was the highest music, and my life was spent in philosophy. But then, after the trial, when the feast of the god delayed my death, it occurred to me that the dream might possibly be bidding me create music in the popular sense, and that in that case I ought to do so, and not to disobey.*

And with a certain rationalistic parsimony — which is indeed part of his general character, but is promptly outweighed by the touching spontaneity of this obedience to the divine voice — Socrates tells how he has tried to fulfill the requirement. First he composed a hymn to Apollo; then he reflected that a poet should create, not from rational thought-processes, but from free imagination. Feeling, however, that he was not capable of that, he took over such “works of imagination” as he had at his disposal, namely some fables of Aesop. These he then put into verse, and so fulfilled the injunction of the dream as best he could.

## THE MAIN DISCOURSE

(Introductory)

### *The Message to Evenus and the Nature of Death*

The grand motif then begins:

*Tell Evenus this, Cebes, and bid him farewell from me; and tell him to follow me as quickly as he can, if he is wise. I, it seems, shall depart to-day, for that is the will of the Athenians.*

*And Simmias said, What strange advice to give Evenus, Socrates! I have often met him, and from what I have seen of him, I think that he is certainly not at all the man to take it, if he can help it.*

*What? he said, is not Evenus a philosopher?*

*Yes, I suppose so, replied Simmias.*

*Then Evenus will wish to die, he said, and so will every man who is worthy of having any part in this study. But he will not lay violent hands on himself; for that, they say, is wrong.*

The narrative continues, indicating by the outward gesture that the thought is becoming more serious :

*And as he spoke he put his legs off the bed on to the ground, and remained sitting thus for the rest of the conversation.*

*Then Cebes asked him, What do you mean, Socrates, by saying that it is wrong for a man to lay violent hands on himself, but that the philosopher will wish to follow the dying man?*

*What, Cebes? Have you and Simmias been with Philolaus,*

*and not heard about these things?*

*Nothing very definite, Socrates.*

*Well, I myself only speak of them from hearsay: yet there is no reason why I should not tell you what I have heard. Indeed, as I am setting out on a journey to the other world, what could be more fitting for me than to talk about my journey, and to consider what we imagine to be its nature? How could we better employ the interval between this and sunset?*

The condemned may not lawfully be executed till after sunset. Till then many hours have still to go. Most men would see in this time only the intolerable waiting for death as it approached ever nearer; he, however, will fill it in with philosophic discourse — and we may well understand from the foregoing pronouncement that Socrates held this last discourse with the same calmness and precision as all the countless others in houses and streets, gymnasium and workshops.

Cebes begins it with the question, why one may not take one's own life. Socrates replies that the proposition, "It is better to die than to live", is true "of all others alone absolutely and without exception"; it does not however mean suicide, but — as will presently be explained — the continual transition from the immediately vital and psychological to the spiritual.

*The reason which the secret teaching gives, that man is in a kind of prison, and that he may not set himself free, nor escape from it, seems to me rather profound and not easy to fathom. But I do think, Cebes, that it is true that the gods are our guardians, and that we men are a part of their property.*

Again it is emphasized:

*Then in this way perhaps it is not unreasonable to hold that no man has a right to take his own life, but that he must wait until God sends some necessity upon him, as has now been sent upon me.*

Cebes, a sharp-witted young man, makes an objection: The "flock of the gods" is here on earth, here the gods are masters, and good masters too — why then should the philosopher be required to die and thus escape them?

Socrates answers:

*I should be wrong, Cebes and Simmias, he went on, not to grieve at death, if I did not think that I was going to live both with other gods who are good and wise, and with men who have died, and who are better than the men of this world. But you must know that I hope that I am going to live among good men, though I am not quite sure of that. But I am as sure as I can be in such matters that I am going to live with gods who are very good masters. And therefore I am not so much grieved at death: I am confident that the dead have some kind of existence, and, as has been said of old, an existence that is far better for the good than for the wicked.*

Simmias, the younger friend of Cebes, would like to know more:

*Well, Socrates, said Simmias, do you mean to go away and keep this belief to yourself, or will you let us share it with you? It seems to me that we too have an interest in this good. And it will also serve as your defence, if you can convince us of what you say.*

Here occurs another very brief interlude. It increases the tension; moreover, it places Socrates's character once more in a wonderfully intimate light.

*I will try, he replied. But I think Crito has been wanting to speak to me. Let us first hear what he has to say.*

*Only, Socrates, said Crito, that the man who is going to give you the poison has been telling me to warn you not to talk much. He says that talking heats people, and that the action of the poison must not be counteracted by heat. Those who excite themselves sometimes have to drink it two or three times.*

*Let him be, said Socrates: let him mind his own business, and be prepared to give me the poison twice, or, if need be, thrice.*

*I knew that would be your answer, said Crito: but the man has been importunate.*

*Never mind him, he replied.*

This is no Stoic gesture; the man is full of life. It is real superiority — and, to make it credible, the passionate interest of a great philosopher, who feels himself gripped by the problem and now puts everything else aside, even the question whether he is to die an easy or a hard death.

### *The Theme*

*But I wish now to explain to you, my judges, why it seems to me that a man who has really spent his life in philosophy has reason to be of good cheer when he is about to die, and may well hope after death to gain in the other world the greatest good. I will try to show you, Simmias and Cebes, how this may be.*

*The world, perhaps, does not see that those who rightly engage in philosophy, study only dying and death. And, if this be true, it would be surely strange for a man all through his life to desire only death, and then, when death comes to him, to be vexed at it, when it has been his study and his desire for so long.*

Simmias has to laugh at these words, although he is “in no laughing mood”. He thinks what people would say if they heard this. This supplies the background to the question, “in what sense true philosophers desire death and deserve death”. But the discussion, must take place among such as are existentially adapted to it: “We will speak of this among ourselves only, dismissing those people (who are not concerned in it)” (64c).

Death is separation from the body; being dead is the state in which “the soul, separated from the body, exists by itself”. But the true philosopher detaches himself from the corporeal throughout his life, because of the very meaning of philosophizing. Whatever he may have to deal with and in every respect, he will “stand aloof from it, as far as he can, and turn towards the soul”, and in this will “excel the rest of men”. For — and here the thought touches the core of Platonic philosophy, namely the doctrine of reality and truth, true being and true knowledge — corporeal reality, to which sense-perception is coordinated, contains no genuine truth, but only a fluctuating content, apprehensible by uncertain opinion. Perception of real truth is only possible when the spiritual soul rises above sense-impressions. This will only be the case—will it not?—

*when none of the senses, whether hearing, or sight, or pain, or pleasure, harasses her: when she has dismissed the body, and released herself as far as she can from all intercourse or contact with it, and so, coming to be as much alone with herself as is possible, strives after real truth.*

*That is so.*

*And here too the soul of the philosopher very greatly despises the body, and flies from it, and seeks to be alone by herself, does*

*she not?  
Clearly.*

“That which is” is essential truth existing above phenomena; it is likewise the true and imperishable reality. This is made clear by an example:

*And what do you say to the next point, Simmias? Do we say that there is such a thing as absolute justice, or not?*

*Indeed we do.*

*And absolute beauty, and absolute good?*

*Of course.*

*Have you ever seen any of them with your eyes?*

*Indeed, I have not, he replied.*

*Did you ever grasp them with any bodily sense? I am speaking of all absolutes, whether size, or health, or strength; in a word of the essence or real being of everything. Is the very truth of things contemplated by the body? Is it not rather the case that the man, who prepares himself most carefully to apprehend by his intellect the essence of each thing which he examines, will come nearest to the knowledge of it?*

*Certainly.*

*And will not a man attain to this pure thought most completely, if he goes to each thing, as far as he can, with his mind alone, taking neither sight, nor any other sense along with his reason in the process of thought, to be an encumbrance? In every case he will pursue pure and absolute being, with his pure intellect alone. He will be set free as far as possible from the eye, and the ear, and, in short, from the whole body, because intercourse with the body troubles the soul, and hinders her from gaining truth and wisdom. Is it not he who will attain the knowledge of real being, if any man will?*

Cognition means for Plato something different from what will be formulated by his great disciple Aristotle. For the latter, things and their coherence make up reality; truth is the character of validity which is immanent in concrete being. The senses grasp individual things; the understanding works over the result of sense-perception, the ideas, extracts from them what is of universal validity, and expresses it in logical, abstract form, that is, in concepts. For Plato, however, truth is something at once valid and real. In fact it is the only real, self-subsistent, the Idea; while things represent mere half-realities. The senses,

therefore, which are co-ordinate with things, grasp only half-truths, opinions. If a man will possess himself of truth itself, his mind must free itself from all that is corporeal, even from his own senses, and turn itself with purely spiritual intuition to the Ideas.

This view of knowledge and the knower is not lightly to be dismissed. It is one of the four or five which have determined the history of philosophy. It is grand, bold and violent — in a certain sense, one can even say, inhuman; for it threatens to eliminate that sphere which in a special sense guarantees the human: the sphere of body and thing. Though again it is human in the very important sense that it is a man's prerogative alone to advance thus beyond all bounds of security, into danger and possible destruction — which is the result of these formulations. It is the man who stakes all on the spirit that appears here — and it is easy to understand that men who were still swathed in the protective bonds of organic existence, in instinct and symbol, could only feel this proclamation as a danger.

What follows discusses the various hindrances which arise from earthly life among things and events, and gives as the final choice: "either never to attain to knowledge, or only when we are dead; for then the soul will be by itself, separated from the body, but not till then" (66e-67a).

Hence the conclusion for the present hour:

*And, my friend, said Socrates, if this be true, I have good hope that, when I reach the place whither I am going, I shall there, if anywhere, gain fully that which we have sought so earnestly in the past. And so I shall set forth cheerfully on the journey that is appointed me to-day, and so may every man who thinks that his mind is prepared and purified.*

And once again:

*In truth, then, Simmias, he said, the true philosopher studies to die, and to him of all men is death least terrible.*

The thought is then taken up once more, and it is shown that in other cases too a man may freely resign himself to death — for example, through grief for a beloved one, or through bravery. But he does that not for the sake of death itself, for he considers death only as an evil. If he yet chooses it, he does so simply because it is the only way to avoid a greater evil — for instance, the loss of honor. He is brave, therefore, from fear. Real bravery would not spring from so contradic-

tory a motive, but would choose death because it leads to the state of true life, that is, to the true relation to the Idea.

Thereupon the whole ends on a deeply religious note:

*True virtue in reality is a kind of purifying from all these things: and temperance, and justice, and courage, and wisdom itself, are the purification. And I fancy that the men who established our mysteries had a very real meaning: in truth they have been telling us in parables all the time that whosoever comes to Hades uninitiated and profane, will lie in the mire; while he that has been purified and initiated shall dwell with the gods. For "the thyrsus-bearers are many", as they say in the mysteries, "but the inspired few." And by these last, I believe, are meant only the true philosophers. And I in my life have striven as hard as I was able, and have left nothing undone that I might become one of them. Whether I have striven in the right way, and whether I have succeeded or not, I suppose that I shall learn in a little while, when I reach the other world, if it be the will of God.*

*That is my defense, Simmias and Cebes, to show that I have reason for not being angry or grieved at leaving you and my masters here. I believe that in the next world, no less than in this, I shall meet with good masters and friends, though the multitude are incredulous of it. And if I have been more successful with you in my defense than I was with my Athenian judges, it is well.*

Plato is neither the promulgator of an aesthetic life, nor the prophet of an idealistic contemplation. His conceptions are based on a specific experience, namely that of the reality of mind and of that to which mind is essentially referred, "that which is". Consequently mind is not abstract reason in the modern sense, but the real substance of man, the foundation of existence and the basic force of personal life. Its essential correlative is truth, the just and the beautiful, value and significance, the Idea; again, however, not in the modern sense of abstract validity, but understood in the manner indicated by the designation, as precise as it is impressive, "that which is": as the truly real; as the very self of value and reality, beside which empirical objects are as unreal as the body is beside the soul. It is only this experience that gives meaning to Plato's conceptions. The moment it fails, they can only appear eccentric and "idealistic". They are also based on a specific decision: the resolve to take that reciprocity of mind and Idea as the real and to build one's existence on it. Platonic thought is insofar serious as the thinker abandons the basis of bodily life and

the sensuous phenomena correlated with it, and seeks by renunciation and training to enter the pure reciprocity of mind and Idea. Plato cannot be interpreted too unacademically. In his teaching one really hears the "call of death's boundary".

Perhaps this consideration throws a new light on Socrates's conduct before his judges. It may well be that an inmost "will to die" is at work in him, though of a different kind from that understood by Nietzsche. It would be the will to attain at last, by actual death, the freedom of the pure reciprocity of mind and Idea, after that "practice of death" which has accompanied his whole life as a philosopher. In the last resort, then, no longer anything ethical, not even the ethos of philosophical responsibility, but something metaphysical and religious, which bursts all bounds of "must" and "may"; a Dionysia of the spirit, as is hinted indeed in the words about the true thyrsus-bearers.

Thus the motifs are interwoven at the very beginning of the dialogue. The impending death of Socrates appears as the expression of that dying which, according to Platonic conviction, lies in the very nature of philosophizing. Socrates is a philosopher not only in will and endeavour, but in being and destiny — thus his personality and his fate manifest what philosophy is. Therefore the conversations which follow will be speeches, not of consolation, but of revelation. In them comes to light the meaning of philosophy as existence. It ascertains the significance which justifies it, the reality on which it rests, and the power by which it exists.

This will for the spirit is anything rather than decadent. That it sometimes became so later — when the fundamental religious and ethical will slackened, and the aesthetic element gained the upper hand — is nothing to do with Plato. What he has to say implies no faint-heartedness, no incapacity for the building up of life, no dualistic hatred of things. For the same philosopher who as thinker strives upward to the world of pure spirit, returns as lawgiver and educator to the world of the body and of things. The "hatred" that prevails here is one that loves. This will for the spirit presupposes the body and things, in order by overcoming them to win other individuals; in fact one might almost say that it provides for the optimum of vigorous and beautiful forms of body and matter, so that this conquest may attain its fullest significance. Plato's spiritual will presupposes that plenary man of whom his educational theory speaks; and his demand for death can only be rightly understood by that intensity of life to which the Republic gives expression. As soon as this connection is loosened, Plato becomes "Platonism". This is certainly decadence; it also is a "falling-off" from the original conception itself.

*When Socrates had finished, Cebes replied to him, and said, I think that for the most part you are right, Socrates. But men are very incredulous of what you have said of the soul. They fear that she will no longer exist anywhere when she has left the body, but that she will be destroyed and perish on the very day of death. They think that the moment that she is released and leaves the body, she will be dissolved and vanish away like breath or smoke, and thenceforward cease to exist at all. If she were to exist somewhere as a whole, released from the evils which you enumerated just now, we should have good reason to hope, Socrates, that what you say is true. But it will need no little persuasion and assurance to show that the soul exists after death, and continues to possess any power or wisdom.*

Here the real problem of the dialogue is posed: that notion of philosophy and that picture of the true philosopher have a meaning only if there is something in man which outlasts the present life the soul. And indeed this word means something different from the "strengthless shade" of the Homeric world. The latter could never support an existence like that with which Plato is concerned. It is a depotentialized man, lacking the density of body, the warmth of blood, the light of consciousness, the power of volition and the fulness of perception ; conceived after the manner of the shadow thrown by an object or of the shape that appears in a dream. The soul, however, that Plato has in mind is absolute reality, higher than everything the lack of which constitutes a "shade"; capable, therefore, of surviving the loss of life ; indeed so fashioned that it is only through this that it attains the full freedom of its nature. Just as little is Plato's soul to be confused with the departed spirit of primitive religion. This is a real being, but belongs to a region which is foreign to and contrasted with the life of this present world; it is a being not to be comprehended from this side, differently orientated, and arousing terror. It is full of energy ;but of a fearful kind, destructive of earthly life ;an energy that can only be held off by anxious awe, manifold sacrifice and painstaking religious and magical precautions. The soul, however, that Plato has in mind is orientated to the light, capable of realizing every kind and degree of the good. It looks beyond the present life and is destined to transcend it; but in such a way that it takes with it the significant content of the latter, indeed only then truly realizes it. Its cognate sphere is above, and its proper movement an ascent. It is a question therefore of the discovery of the spirit — that spirit which is determined by truth and goodness, and is the subject of valid action, and thereby not only is

real, but is ultimately the only real. The discovery of the spiritual soul is bound up with that of self-subsistent truth and impossible without this.

*Is all this fact? Is man's soul such that he can die confident that the essential part of him will remain alive and fulfil the meaning of his existence?*

*True, Cebes, said Socrates; but what are we to do? Do you wish to converse about these matters and see if what I say is probable?*

*I for one, said Cebes, should gladly hear your opinion about them.*

*I think, said Socrates, that no one who heard me now, even if he were a comic poet, would say that I am an idle talker about things which do not concern me. So, if you wish it, let us examine this question.*

*Let us consider whether or no the souls of men exist in the next world after death, thus.*

## THE MAIN DISCOURSE

(First Part)

### *The Relativity of Birth and Death*

*"Let us consider whether or no the souls of men exist in the next world after death,"* begins the discussion. And it at once takes a peculiar turn, in that the soul's capacity for outlasting the perishable earthly life is expressed by an obviously Orphic saying :

*There is an ancient belief, which we remember, that on leaving this world they exist there, and that they return hither and are born again from the dead. But if it be true that the living are born from the dead, our souls must exist in the other world: otherwise they could not be born again.*

If birth means that a soul passes from the sphere of death, or more accurately, from the state of being dead, being on the other side, into the state of earthly life, it must have existed there already. In that case, however, the future death of the being which now begins to live cannot mean that it is annihilated, but only that its soul returns to the

state of “being dead” which it was in before its birth. This argument conceives existence as a whole which realizes itself in a transition through different spheres, here and hereafter, and in a succession of different states, a transcendental and an earthly form of existence. Being born and dying are then the respective passages from the one sphere and state to the other, and point back to a third, underlying reality which persists through them that is to say that, taken separately, they have no independent and self-intelligible character, but only a dialectical one.

This is at once explained more fully:

*Well, said he, the easiest way of answering the question will be to consider it not in relation to men only, but also in relation to all animals and plants, and in short to all things that are generated. Is it the case that everything, which has an opposite, is generated only from its opposite?*

Then comes a series of examples: The greater arises from the lesser, the lesser from the greater, the stronger from the weaker, the faster from the slower, the worse from the better, the more just from the less just, the separate from the mixed, the warmer from the cooler, etc. The sense of the examples is clear: states are mentioned which have indeed a different character — “opposite” according to the loosely used word but are referred to an identical standard and an identical underlying reality. Although, then, they are mutually “opposite” and exclude one another, they yet arise “from one another”.

The pretended character of the relations mentioned is, however, only apparent; in reality it is merely a question of differences of degree. Not so the following passage, which is genuinely dialectical in construction and leads with suggestive force to the goal of the discussion, namely the relation of sleeping and waking with its respective transitions:

*Now, said Socrates, I will explain to you one of the two pairs of opposites of which I spoke just now, and its generations, and you shall explain to me the other. Sleep is the opposite of waking. From sleep is produced the state of waking: and from the state of waking is produced sleep. Their generations are, first, to fall asleep; secondly, to awake.*

Cebes must think further according to this scheme:

*Now then, said he, do you tell me about life and death. Death is the opposite of life, is it not?*

*It is.*

*And they are generated the one from the other?*

*Yes.*

*Then what is that which is generated from the living?*

*The dead, he replied.*

*And what is generated from the dead?*

*I must admit that it is the living.*

*Then living things and living men are generated from the dead, Cebes?*

*Clearly, said he.*

*Then our souls exist in the other world? he said.*

*Apparently.*

*The other side of the relation is now considered:*

*Now of these two generations the one is certain? Death I suppose is certain enough, is it not?*

*Yes, quite, he replied.*

*What then shall we do? said he. Shall we not assign an opposite generation to correspond? Or is nature imperfect here? Must we not assign some opposite generation to dying?*

*I think so, certainly, he said.*

*And what must it be?*

*To come to life again.*

*And if there be such a thing as a return to life, he said, it will be a generation from the dead to the living, will it not?*

*It will, certainly.*

Finally, the result of the whole :

*Then we are agreed on this point: namely, that the living are generated from the dead no less than the dead from the living. But we agreed that, if this be so, it is a sufficient proof that the souls of the dead must exist somewhere, whence they come into being again.*

What follows confirms this by an explanation: If there were a change, a “becoming”, only in one direction, from life to death, and not also in the reverse direction, from death to life, then “all life would finally be swallowed up in death”. The movement of be-coming, then, must be in both directions: which supposes that the soul already ex-

isted before birth and will still exist after death.

Accurately considered, what happens is not that the “greater” arises from the “lesser”, but that the same thing has first a lesser and then a greater dimension. Both dimensions are determinations of the same thing and are connected with one another by the process of extension. In the same way, “sleeping” does not arise from “waking”, but the same being is first awake and then asleep, and remains the same throughout these different states of life. More weighty is the further objection that the whole train of thought rests on a mythical or metaphysical presupposition. According to this there is in life a content which remains eternally the same, and which must ever be compensated anew on the one side for what it loses on the other: an assumption which has been taken over more or less consciously from the doctrine of reincarnation. But what the argument really means is this: being dead, or to speak more accurately, being without body, constitutes a state; being alive, or more accurately, being embodied, likewise. Existence passes through both states in turn, throughout the “becoming” of our life. Entrance into the first is dying, into the second, being born. There must be something underlying and supporting the whole: namely the soul, which, existing before birth, entered the realm of incorporeal being by a previous death.

That being alive and being dead, being born and dying actually stand in this dialectical relation to one another, is not proved. Strictly speaking, nothing whatever is, proved here, but only an experience expressed — that of an ultimate core of existence, lying behind the particular life-phenomena. It must not be confused with the Dionysiac experience. In this too, birth and death are made relative to something essential, namely the whole of life. By birth the shape of the individual being is formed from the total stream, by death it is again resolved into it: a transitory wave in that stream of life which realizes itself through all becoming and decay. To formulate this differently: in dying the individual form breaks up. This, however, means not only that something significant disintegrates, but also that something which was a limit and a fetter is burst open by the force of the totality of life. Herein death, the apparent destruction of life, shows itself as the culmination of life’s totality triumphing over every particular form — the counterpart of birth, in which the totality is likewise active, but in order to allow, by the act of self-restriction, the emergence of the separate form. In both processes the present life is the ultimate and essential thing to which all separate phenomena are made relative. The individual form seems to be independent within the bounds

of birth and death; actually, however, it is the whole running through the individual life-spans which is real, so that for this experience there is no more a true death, in the sense of a real ending, than there is a true birth, in the sense of a real beginning.

At first sight it would seem as though Socrates's arguments represented this line of thought, which — with more or less variation — sways all mythical and Dionysiac speculation, to continue its career later in the various forms of metaphysical or biological monism. But what Plato means is something radically different. The real thing to which he makes life and death relative, is not the vital whole streaming through time, but the self-based core of individual existence. The limitation of its span is overcome, not by taking it as a vanishing quantity compared with the vastness of the whole, but by having recourse to something which is qualitatively different both from the individual's life-history, with its beginning and end, and from the total stream of life in general: namely the mind. Man experiences himself as a mind, and perceives that beginning and end of the earthly lifetime have for such no absolute significance, but are subordinate to the individual sense of existence which the mind supports. The Dionysiac experience of victory feels individual existence to be immaterial, and throws itself into the great coherence of life as into the real; the Platonic experience, on the contrary, discovers the real precisely in the spiritual core of individual existence and nullifies by its indestructibility the beginning and ending processes of her present life.

The fact that the doctrine of reincarnation emerges in this context, shows the religious nature of the whole interpretation of existence. Apart from its metaphysical assertions, it expresses a definite and fundamental consciousness, according to which the reality of existence is not enclosed by birth and death, but extends far beyond them into the supra-temporal and supramundane and makes the temporal relative. The temporal appears as a transitional stage: man comes from elsewhere and goes elsewhere. All this gives to the mind, and through it to man, a certain strangeness and mystery; and it is this which, together with the luminous actuality of the Greek nature, gives its peculiar character to the Platonic conception of existence.

Logically as well as materially there is much to object to in the argument, but what Plato is really concerned about is to counteract the overwhelming impression made by the process of death, and not of death in general, but of that which the speaker Socrates must himself soon undergo. This dying process becomes something immaterial, just as that process which took place once at the beginning of his life

— being born — was immaterial. This is not only thought and said, but carried out with the deepest sincerity. The intrinsic force of the living spirit drives through the man's own perishableness to something lasting, which is beyond all change and has nothing to do either with being born or with dying. As long as one merely examines the arguments formally or materially, they look like a semi-logical play with half-meanings; they reveal their true meaning only when one penetrates to what really matters: how this man, ready for death and so intensely alive, evokes from himself the innermost thing in him, the consciousness of his spiritual soul; how this is distinguished from all that is contained in the biological flux, in the sphere of birth and death, and therein assures itself of its imperishability.

This, of course, brings to mind two special and complementary dangers of Platonic thought. The first of these is the nullifying of the historical. If birth and death are processes alien to the soul's nature, affecting only its garment, its house, nay its prison, earthly life as such loses its seriousness. The spirit, the person, have no binding habitation in it, but merely pass through it. The existential density of man is dissolved of man, who not only has but is a body; who is not an eternal being sojourning for a while in a temporal order which is foreign to it; but as a spiritual being exists historically, that is, in time, and whose temporal behavior decides an eternal life. The spirit is superior to the body and more real; but time attaches to the body; and history depends on the fact that the spirit exists in the body, as man. The danger of effacing the historical process appears also, therefore, in the proposition that the individual life repeats itself. For, if that happens, the value of the person in the flesh, the decision fraught with eternity in time, the seriousness, the splendor and the tragedy of the unique occurrence, disappear. The doctrine of reincarnation abolishes history. The other danger is the counterpart of the first: "spirit" is made equivalent to "eternal being". As the consciousness that death does not touch the soul's essence is exaggerated into the assertion that it does not enter into the range of the existentially serious at all, but is something external, so also the consciousness that the spiritual soul is indestructible is exaggerated into the assertion that it is uncreated, eternal. The spiritual experience in question here is so powerful that it breaks through its bounds and confuses the essentially different categories of indestructibility and uncreatedness: a spiritual Dionysism, so to speak, which betrays itself by its mythological background. It too throws into doubt the seriousness of human life, the sobriety of the real soul, the truth of the real human spirit, which is certainly

indestructible, but not uncreated, certainly a genuine spirit, but not God.

### *The Argument Confirmed: Anamnesis*

Cebes now supports this reference of the present life back to a previous one with a new argument:

*And besides, Socrates, rejoined Cebes, if the doctrine which you are fond of stating, that our learning is only a process of recollection, be true, then I suppose we must have learnt at some former time what we recollect now. And that would be impossible unless our souls had existed somewhere before they came into this human form. So that is another reason for believing the soul immortal.*

His young friend Simmias has not quite grasped the argument:

*But, Cebes, interrupted Simmias, what are the proofs of that? Recall them to me: I am not very clear about them at present.*

*One argument, answered Cebes, and the strongest of all, is that if you question men about anything in the right way, they will answer you correctly of themselves. But they would not have been able to do that, unless they had had within themselves knowledge and right reason. Again, show them such things as geometrical diagrams, and the proof of the doctrine is complete.*

The whole life of the Socratic-Platonic circle comes into view in this passage: the asking of questions “in the right way”, that great art of Socrates; the wonderful experience of how in this questioning something stirs in the mind of the one questioned, something that had remained to him strange hitherto, namely the knowledge of essence together with the place which it inhabits — so utterly different from empirical thinking and its sphere — absolute and eternal, and yet recognized as most intimately one’s own. One feels the overwhelming experience from which the critical philosophy arose, the experience of valid knowledge, which becomes aware of its own peculiarity and wonders where it comes from, since it cannot possibly come out of the empirical. The Platonic answer is: It comes from an existence which lies before birth. As soon as it takes place, then, reminiscence takes place.

Socrates notices that Simmias does not yet feel happy about it:

*And if that does not convince you, Simmias, said Socrates, look at the matter in another way and see if you agree then. You have doubts, I know, how what is called knowledge can be recollection.*

*No, replied Simmias, I do not doubt. But I want to recollect the argument about recollection. What Cebes undertook to explain has nearly brought your theory back to me and convinced me. But I am none the less ready to hear how you undertake to explain it.*

*In this way, he returned.*

Thereupon the Master expounds the doctrine of anamnesis thoroughly. First he speaks about "being reminded" in general:

*The knowledge of a man is different from the knowledge of a lyre, is it not?*

*Certainly.*

*And you know that when lovers see a lyre, or a garment, or anything that their favorites are wont to use, they have this feeling. They know the lyre, and in their mind they receive the image of the youth whose the lyre was. That is recollection. For instance, someone seeing Simmias often is reminded of Cebes; and there are endless examples of the same thing.*

*Indeed there are, said Simmias.*

*Is not that a kind of recollection, he said; and more especially when a man has this feeling with reference to things which the lapse of time and inattention have made him forget?*

*Yes, certainly, he replied.*

This reminiscence may arise either from the relation of likeness for example, between the painted picture of a man and the man himself or from that of unlikeness — say rather, of some contrast. At the same time the person who remembers forms a judgment as to how far the likeness or unlikeness goes. This judgment can only rest on the fact that he has in his consciousness "the equal itself", the phenomenon of equality as such — and also, be it added, "the unequal itself", the phenomenon of unrelatedness. By these he measures the different empirical relations of equality or inequality which he meets with. Now these relations never realize equality or inequality perfectly, but only approximately; therefore knowledge about the phenomenon itself cannot be derived from experience:

*At any rate it is by the senses that we must perceive that all sensible objects strive to resemble absolute equality, and are inferior to it. Is not that so?*

*Yes.*

*Then before we began to see, and to hear, and to use the other senses, we must have received the knowledge of the nature of abstract and real equality; otherwise we could not have compared equal sensible objects with abstract equality, and seen that the former in all cases strive to be like the latter, though they are always inferior to it?*

*That is the necessary consequence of what we have been saying, Socrates.*

Hence the inference:

*Did we not see, and hear, and possess the other senses as soon as we were born?*

*Yes, certainly.*

*And we must have received the knowledge of abstract equality before we had these senses?*

*Yes.*

*Then, it seems, we must have received that knowledge before we were born?*

*It does.*

It is the doctrine of the Idea, which answers the question as to the cause of valid knowledge. True knowing is accordingly knowing in the light of the absolute forms of being. These cannot be obtained from things, because nothing perceptible by the senses adequately represents its essential form. Therefore they must be found in themselves, in a sphere which is raised above every defect. To the question how the mind gets there, the Platonic dialogues have two answers. According to the one, when the mind, exalted by love, frees itself from the sensible aspects of a thing, it beholds that thing's essential form, the Idea. The other answer is that the mind has once, while it was yet unborn and free from the body, beheld the Idea, and then through birth forgotten it; but as soon as it concentrates itself on the phenomenon in genuine thought, it remembers the Idea. The "beyond", the distinction between the mental-categorical and the sensuous-contingent, is expressed in the first answer in a psychologically metaphysical way, by an asceticism, if one may call it so, of the act of cognition;

in the second answer it is expressed in a biographically metaphysical way, by a mythology of antenatal existence. In both cases valid knowledge is conjoined with death: in the first case as the sphere, detached from the present partnership of body and soul, of the purely spiritual act; in the second case as the sphere, separated from earthly life, of purely spiritual existence.

*Now if we received this knowledge before our birth, and were born with it, we knew, both before, and at the moment of our birth, not only the equal, and the greater, and the less, but also everything of the same kind, did we not? Our present reasoning does not refer only to equality. It refers just as much to absolute good, and absolute beauty, and absolute justice, and absolute holiness; in short, I repeat, to everything which we mark with the name of the real, in the questions and answers of our dialectic. So we must have received our knowledge of all realities before we were born.*

*That is so.*

*And we must always be born with this knowledge, and must always retain it throughout life, if we have not each time forgotten it, after having received it. For to know means to receive and retain knowledge, and not to have lost it. Do not we mean by forgetting the loss of knowledge, Simmias?*

*Yes, certainly, Socrates, he said.*

*But, I suppose, if it be the case that we lost at birth the knowledge which we received before we were born, and then afterwards, by using our senses on the objects of sense, recovered the knowledge*

*which we had previously possessed, then what we call learning is the recovering of knowledge which is already ours. And are we not right in calling that recollection?*

*Certainly.*

Hence now the inference, quite *ad hominem*:

*Then which do you choose, Simmias? Are we born with knowledge, or do we recollect the things of which we have received knowledge before our birth?*

*I cannot say at present, Socrates.*

*Well, have you an opinion about this question? Can a man who knows give an account of what he knows, or not? What do you think about that?*

*Yes, of course he can, Socrates.*

*And do you think that everyone can give an account of the ideas of which we have been speaking?*

*I wish I did, indeed, said Simmias: but I am very much afraid that by this time to-morrow there will no longer be any man living able to do so as it should be done.*

*Then, Simmias, he said, you do not think that all men know these things?*

*Certainly not.*

*Then they recollect what they once learned?*

*Necessarily.*

*And when did our souls gain this knowledge? It cannot have been after we were born men.*

*No, certainly not.*

*Then it was before?*

*Yes.*

*Then, Simmias, our souls existed formerly, apart from our bodies, and possessed intelligence before they came into man's shape.*

*Unless we receive this knowledge at the moment of birth, Socrates. That time still remains.*

*Well, my friend: and at what other time do we lose it? We agreed just now that we are not born with it: do we lose it at the same moment that we gain it? or can you suggest any other time?*

*I cannot, Socrates. I did not see that I was talking nonsense.*

And then the final result:

*Then, Simmias, he said, is not this the truth? If, as we are for ever repeating, beauty, and good, and the other ideas really exist, and if we refer all the objects of sensible perception to these ideas which were formerly ours, and which we find to be ours still, and compare sensible objects with them, then, just as they exist, our souls must have existed before ever we were born. But if they do not exist, then our reasoning will have been thrown away. Is it so? If these ideas exist, does it not at once follow that our souls must have existed before we were born, and if they do not exist, then neither did our souls?*

*Admirably put, Socrates, said Simmias. I think that the necessity is the same for the one as for the other. The reasoning has reached a place of safety in the common proof of the existence of*

*our souls before we were born, and of the existence of the ideas of which you spoke. Nothing is so evident to me as that beauty, and good, and the other ideas, which you spoke of just now, have a very real existence indeed. Your proof is quite sufficient if or me.*

These arguments contain some significant sentences: "If, as we are for ever repeating, beauty, and good, and the other ideas really exist...then, just as they exist, our souls must have existed before ever we were born...." Here is a conception which goes beyond the mere statement of pre-existence. According to this notion the Idea exists necessarily, and with the same necessity the soul also.

This means that the soul is of the genus of the Idea. An important conception, which will be taken up again later.

## THE MAIN DISCOURSE

### (A Doubt, and First Interlude)

Simmias is satisfied.

*But what of Cebes? said Socrates. I must convince Cebes too.*

*I think that he is satisfied, said Simmias, though he is the most sceptical of men in argument. But I think that he is perfectly convinced that our souls existed before we were born.*

*But I do not think myself, Socrates, he continued, that you have proved that the soul will continue to exist when we are dead. The common fear which Cebes spoke of, that she may be scattered to the winds at death, and that death may be the end of her existence, still stands in the way. Assuming that the soul is generated and comes together from some other elements, and exists before she ever enters the human body, why should she not come to an end and be destroyed, after she has entered into the body, when she is released from it ? You are right, Simmias, said Cebes. I think that only half the required proof has been given. It has been shown that our souls existed before we were born; but it must also be shown that our souls will continue to exist after we are dead, no less than that they existed before we were born, if the proof is to be complete.*

Socrates indeed thinks that with the proof of the soul's pre-existence its survival also beyond death is confirmed. For as soon as one

has recourse to the argument of the relativity of birth and death, the following conclusion results: If earthly life originates from the state of death, or more accurately, from the incorporeal existence of the other world, then conversely, from the death of the body must arise a new existence of bodiless spirituality. Then follows the fine passage :

*Still I think that you and Simmias would be glad to discuss this question further. Like children, you are afraid that the wind will really blow the soul away and disperse her when she leaves the body; especially if a man happens to die in a storm and not in a calm.*

*Cebes laughed and said, Try and convince us as if we were afraid, Socrates; or rather, do not think that we are afraid ourselves. Perhaps there is a child within us who has these fears. Let us try and persuade him not to be afraid of death, as if it were a bugbear.*

*You must charm him every day, until you have charmed him away, said Socrates.*

*And where shall we find a good charmer, Socrates, he asked, now that you are leaving us?*

*Hellas is a large country, Cebes, he replied, and good men may doubtless be found in it; and the nations of the Barbarians are many. You must search them all through for such a charmer, sparing neither money nor labour; for there is nothing on which you could spend money more profitably. And you must search for him among yourselves too, for you will hardly find a better charmer than yourselves.*

*That shall be done, said Cebes. But let us return to the point where we left off, if you will.*

*Yes, I will: why not ?*

*Very good, he replied.*

## THE MAIN DISCOURSE

(Second Part)

### *Indestructibility of the Soul*

So SOCRATES formulates the problem thus :

*Well, said Socrates, must we not ask ourselves this question?*

*What kind of thing is liable to suffer dispersion, and for what kind of thing have we to fear dispersion? And then we must see whether the soul belongs to that kind or not, and be confident or afraid about our own souls accordingly.*

Only what is composite can be decomposed. Composition and decomposition represent the same process, but in contrary directions. That being would be uncompounded which “always remains in the same state and unchanging”. But that which is “always changing and never the same is most likely to be compounded”. Mutability in time denotes composition, constancy in time simplicity of nature.

Here emerges one of the fundamental axioms of the Platonic view of being and the world: The nobler, the simpler. “Simplicity” however does not mean poverty of content or primitiveness, but the contrary of these: fullness of content, richness of value and being but in the form of comprehension. To this corresponds the other principle: The nobler, the more constant. Again however immutability does not mean rigidity. The criticism that the Platonic view of being is static proceeds from a special conception of movement. Whenever act, life and fecundity are seen only in the alternation of actions and states, this primacy of simplicity and immutability certainly implies stiffness. But these Platonic axioms proceed from a different fundamental experience, according to which there is not only the transitory act which a subject directs towards an object, and which begins, completes itself and ends but also the immanent act, which goes on in the agent itself and tends towards a state. The former is of its nature transient ; the more real it is, the more clearly it has beginning, progress and end. The latter however aims at duration. Its form is inner mobility, vibration. It would be perfect if it coincided with being itself. Even then there would be activity and life, but as self-collected vigilance, actuality, tension and rest simultaneously. This conception of life is connected also with the idea of simplicity. That mode of existence is perfect in which fullness of content goes with simplicity of the totally collected and transparent form, and act and vitality are realized in pure compenetration and development of its own essence. This complex of ideas is rooted in contemplation, in the experience of a life unfolding itself upward and inwardly by quiet and concentration.

From this standpoint the force of the Platonic arguments becomes clearer:

*Does the being, “which in our dialectic we define as meaning absolute existence, remain always in exactly the same state, or does it change? Do absolute equality, absolute beauty, and every*

*other absolute existence, admit of any change at all? or does absolute existence in each case, being essentially uniform, remain the same and unchanging, and never in any case admit of any sort or kind of change whatsoever?*

If the above-mentioned axioms are true of anything, they are true of that which signifies the fullness of being simply: the Idea. For it is this which makes possible the statements "this is this" and "this means that", which form the nucleus of knowledge. It is thus absolutely univocal, free from anything extraneous; entirely and exclusively coincident with itself, therefore at once full and simple, real and immutable.

Not so the manifold reality of things, which is formed after that original pattern:

*And what of the many beautiful things, such as men, and horses, and garments, and the like, and of all which bears the names of the ideas, whether equal, or beautiful, or anything else? Do they remain the same, or is it exactly the opposite with them? In short, do they never remain the same at all, either in themselves or in their relations?*

*These things, said Cebes, never remain the same.*

To these two spheres correspond different acts of perception in man:

*You can touch them, and see them, and perceive them with the other senses, while you can grasp the unchanging only by the reasoning of the intellect. These latter are invisible and not seen. Is it not so?*

*That is perfectly true, he said.*

The movement of the thought is clear: Things are manifold, composite, therefore perishable; the Ideas are uncompounded, simple, therefore indestructible. The action of the senses is directed towards things, and so shares their nature; the act of purely intellectual cognition is directed towards the Ideas, and so shares the nature of Ideas.

*Let us assume then, he said, if you will, that there are two kinds of existence, the one visible, the other invisible.*

*Yes, he said.*

*And the invisible is unchanging, while the visible is always changing.*

Yes, he said again.  
 Are not we men made up of body and soul?  
 There is nothing else, he replied.  
 And which of these kinds of existence should we say that the  
 body is most like, and most akin to?  
 The visible, he replied; that is quite obvious.  
 And the soul? Is that visible or invisible?  
 It is invisible to man, Socrates, he said.  
 But we mean by visible and invisible, visible and invisible to  
 man; do we not?  
 Yes; that is what we mean.  
 Then what do we say of the soul? Is it visible, or not visible?  
 It is not visible.  
 Then is it invisible?  
 Yes.  
 Then the soul is more like the invisible than the body; and the  
 body is like the visible.  
 That is necessarily so, Socrates:

All this means that the nature of the soul — and here the thought  
 touched on above is followed out to the end — is similar to that to-  
 wards which its essential act, namely pure knowledge, is directed.  
 The soul is itself simple and indestructible. In the next passage the  
 same thing is explained again and more emphatically.

*Have we not also said<sup>1</sup> that, when the soul employs the body in  
 any inquiry, and makes use of sight, or hearing, or any other  
 sense, for inquiry with the body means inquiry with the sens-  
 es, she is dragged away by it to the things which never remain  
 the same, and wanders about blindly, and becomes confused and  
 dizzy, like a drunken man, from dealing with things that are ever  
 changing?*

*Certainly.*

*But when she investigates any question by herself, she goes  
 away to the pure, and eternal, and immortal, and unchangeable,  
 to which she is akin, and so she comes to be ever with it, as soon  
 as she is by herself, and can be so: and then she rests from her  
 wanderings, and dwells with it unchangingly, for she is dealing*

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<sup>1</sup> *Phronesis*: the word is richer in meaning than the ethically stressed “prudence”.  
 It signifies the full development of understanding, a living in knowledge, an ex-  
 isting in intercourse with the truth.

*with what is unchanging? And is not this state of the soul called wisdom?*<sup>1</sup>

*Indeed, Socrates, you speak well and truly, he replied.*

*Which kind of existence do you think from our former and our present arguments that the soul is more like and more akin to?*

*I think, Socrates, he replied, that after this inquiry the very dullest man would agree that the soul is infinitely more like the unchangeable than the changeable.*

*And the body?*

*That is like the changeable.*

There are certain primitive forms of philosophical experience; the one in question here declares truth to be the basis of being. This does not mean that truth is in the service of being — any sort of pragmatism would be fatal to what is meant — but that reality depends ultimately on validity; that a being is to that extent real to which it affirms and accomplishes a truth which is wholly disinterested, purely self-subsistent and valid for its own sake. Thus truth — the Idea — is that which simply is. But the mind is coordinated to the Idea, and so participates in its state of being. Firstly in virtue of its nature, simply because it is mind — that primary essence which in the evolution of life becomes more and more differentiated from the material. Secondly on the ground of its tendency, in that a man's mind becomes the more real the more exclusively he attends to the Idea.

It is this experience which is the underlying motive of the *Phaedo*, and which its arguments seek to elucidate.

These latter are not abstractly correct “proofs”, even though they claim to be such in the first instance. In fact they do nothing more than interpret that awareness in logical terms.

*Now tell me, Cebes; is the result of all we have said that the soul is most like the divine, and the immortal, and the intelligible, and the uniform, and the indissoluble, and the unchangeable; while the body is most like the human, and the mortal, and the unintelligible, and the multiform, and the dissoluble, and the changeable?*

### ***The Philosophical Way of Life***

The investigation ends with some religious and practical reflections. A dead body decomposes more or less rapidly ; if it is embalmed, it may even last a very long time. But it is different with the soul. It has

the possibility and the duty of going

*hence to a place that is like herself, glorious, and pure, and invisible, to Hades, which is rightly called the unseen world, to dwell with the good and wise God, where, if it be the will of God, my soul too must shortly go.*

This is the goal for which she must prepare herself, thus:

*I will tell you what happens to a soul which is pure at her departure, and which in her life has had no intercourse that she could avoid with the body, and so draws after her, when she dies, no taint of the body, but has shunned it, and gathered herself into herself, for such has been her constant study; and that only means that she has loved wisdom rightly, and has truly practiced how to die. Is not this the practice of death?*

If she does this,

*does not the soul, then, which is in that state, go away to the invisible that is like herself, and to the divine, and the immortal, and the wise, where she is released from error, and folly, and fear, and fierce passions, and all the other evils that fall to the lot of men, and is happy, and for the rest of time lives in very truth with the gods, as they say that the initiated do? Shall we affirm this, Cebes? Yes, certainly, said Cebes.*

But if she refuses to do this, and

*if she be defiled and impure when she leaves the body, from being ever with it, and serving it, and loving it, and from being besotted by it, and by its desires and pleasures, so that she thinks nothing true, but what is bodily, and can be touched, and seen, and eaten, and drunk, and used for men's lusts; if she has learned to hate, and tremble at, and fly from what is dark and invisible to the eye, and intelligible and apprehended by philosophy do you think that a soul which is in that state will be pure and without alloy at her departure?*

No, indeed, he replied.

*She is penetrated, I suppose, by the corporeal, which the unceasing intercourse and company and care of the body has made a part of her nature.*

Yes.

Her existence will then be a corresponding one:

*And, my dear friend, the corporeal must be burdensome, and heavy and earthy, and visible; and it is by this that such a soul is weighed down and dragged back to the visible world, because she is afraid of the invisible world of Hades, and haunts, it is said, the graves and tombs, where shadowy forms of souls have been seen, which are the phantoms of souls which were impure at their release, and still cling to the visible; which is the reason why they are seen.*

*That is likely enough, Socrates.*

*That is likely, certainly, Cebes: and these are not the souls of the good, but of the evil, which are compelled to wander in such places as a punishment for the wicked lives that they have lived.*

As these souls are entirely bound to the corporeal, they must soon enter into bodies again — and into such, of course, as are similar to their inferior nature, that is, into animal bodies — and those of such animals as have most affinity with their respective characters.

This consideration makes it imperative to lead a philosophic life:

*None but the philosopher or the lover of knowledge, who is wholly pure when he goes hence, is permitted to go to the race of the gods.*

And again:

*The lovers of knowledge know that when philosophy receives the soul, she is fast bound in the body, and fastened to it: she is unable to contemplate what is, by herself, or except through the bars of her prison-house, the body; and she is wallowing in utter ignorance. And philosophy sees that the dreadful thing about the imprisonment is that it is caused by lust, and that the captive herself is an accomplice in her own captivity. The lovers of knowledge, I repeat, know that philosophy takes the soul when she is in this condition, and gently encourages her, and strives to release her from her captivity, showing her that the perceptions of the eye, and the ear, and the other senses, are full of deceit, and persuading her to stand aloof from the senses, and to use them only when she must, and exhorting her to rally and gather*

*herself together, and to trust only to herself, and to the real existence which she of her own self apprehends: and to believe that nothing which is subject to change, and which she perceives by other faculties, has any truth, for such things are visible and sensible, while what she herself sees is apprehended by reason and invisible. The soul of the true philosopher thinks that it would be wrong to resist this deliverance from captivity, and therefore she holds aloof, so far as she can, from pleasure, and desire, and pain, and fear; for she reckons that when a man has vehement pleasure, or fear, or pain, or desire, he suffers from them, not merely the evils which might be expected, such as sickness, or some loss arising from the indulgence of his desires; he suffers what is the greatest and last of evils, and does not take it into account.*

*What do you mean, Socrates ? asked Cebes.*

*I mean that when the soul of any man feels vehement pleasure or pain, she is forced at the same time to think that the object, whatever it be, of these sensations is the most distinct and truest, when it is not. Such objects are chiefly visible ones, are they not?*

*They are.*

*And is it not in this state that the soul is most completely in bondage to the body?*

*How so?*

*Because every pleasure and pain has a kind of nail, and nails and pins her to the body, and gives her a bodily nature, making her think that whatever the body says is true. And so, from having the same fancies and the same pleasures as the body, she is obliged, I suppose, to come to have the same ways, and way of life: she must always be defiled with the body when she leaves it, and cannot be pure when she reaches the other world; and so she soon falls back into another body, and takes root in it, like seed that is sown. Therefore she loses all part in intercourse with the divine, and pure, and uniform.*

This, then, is the Master's last answer to the questions of the two young men:

*The soul of a philosopher will consider that it is the office of philosophy to set her free. She will know that she must not give herself up once more to the bondage of pleasure and pain, from which philosophy is releasing her, and, like Penelope, do a work,*

*only to undo it continually, weaving instead of unweaving her web. She gains for herself peace from these things, and follows reason and ever abides in it, contemplating what is true and divine and real, and fostered up by them. So she thinks that she should live in this life, and when she dies she believes that she will go to what is akin to and like herself, and be released from human ills. A soul, Simmias and Cebes, that has been so nurtured, and so trained, will never fear lest she should be torn in pieces at her departure from the body, and blown away by the winds, and vanish, and utterly cease to exist.*

The answer to Evenus has now been justified. It has become clear how seriously it was meant and how much of a piece it was with the inmost purpose of Platonic philosophy.

This is not the place to examine the thesis itself — to ask whether the act of thinking really represents a purely spiritual act, and whether human and philosophical existence should be founded on it ; or whether on the contrary every act, even that which is distinguished by the highest value in the scale, is human, that is, at once spiritual and corporeal. Plato at least maintains that true thinking is of a purely spiritual nature and directed towards a similar object. It must be assumed, then, that Platonic existence implies an experience which supports this assertion — and it must be one which is ever recurring in history, for Plotinus and Augustine and the Platonism of the Renaissance and of the modern period say the same thing.

The question has already been touched on, how this philosophical attitude tallies with the concreteness of the Greek feeling for the body; and we said that it had nothing to do with true dualism, but rather presupposed just this vivacity of man's being. The Platonic intellectual life is the product of a double movement. The one movement starts from the body and its qualities as trained by gymnastics, from the artistically shaped world of forms, from an earthly reality permeated by politics, only to leave all that behind and to rise by an act felt as purely spiritual to the world of the Ideas, assumed to be just as purely spiritual. The other movement returns, with the insight into life and the fullness of values acquired there, to the terrestrial world, to reform it more in accordance with truth, in order that the next movement of knowledge may rise from it all the purer. The Platonic intellectual life thus has a dialectical character. In this lies its specific achievement; but from this too comes its danger. If the basis of form-endowed corporeality is lost sight of, the intellectual act loses itself in mere abstraction or in mystical unsubstantiality; if the ascent

towards the spiritual is relaxed, the whole thing becomes aesthetic dilettantism. One is reminded of the apparently contradictory attitude of the yoga discipline, which requires that the neophyte whom it would lead to the transcendence of the mystical ascent shall be equipped with strong vitality and unimpaired power of enjoyment. In the same way the Platonic liberation presupposes as given that which is to be abandoned. It is a question then, after all, of the total man; only he is dissected, as it were, into a dialectical system, and the totality is realized in the counter-play of forces. Only when this dialectical counteraction and interaction breaks down does the danger become pressing.

For the rest, an ultimate humanity lies in this very tension. To man's deepest nature belongs the possibility of confronting that which touches his own sphere as a liminal value, namely pure spirit, and of making the perilous venture towards it. Freedom to venture forth into the extra-human is one of the most significant notes of man.

## THE MAIN DISCOURSE

### (Second Interlude)

#### *Consternation*

The dialogue has reached its first great climax, and the assembled company rests in the feeling of having achieved something great.

*At these words there was a long silence. Socrates himself seemed to be absorbed in his argument, and so were most of us.*

Cebes and Simmias, however, are speaking in a low voice to one another. Socrates notices it. He sees that there is something still unsolved, and he likes the two intelligent critics; so he invites them to speak:

*Simmias replied: Well, Socrates, I will tell you the truth. Each of us has a difficulty, and each has been pushing on the other, and urging him to ask you about it. We were anxious to hear what you have to say; but we were reluctant to trouble you, for we were afraid that it might be unpleasant to you to be asked questions now.*

*Socrates smiled at this answer, and said, Dear me! Simmias, I shall find it hard to convince other people that I do not consider*

*my fate a misfortune, when I cannot convince even you of it, and you are afraid that I am more peevish now than I used to be. You seem to think me inferior in prophetic power to the swans, which, when they find that they have to die, sing more loudly than they ever sang before, for joy that they are about to depart into the presence of God, whose servants they are. The fear which men have of death themselves makes them speak falsely of the swans, and they say that the swan is wailing at its death, and that it sings loud for grief. They forget that no bird sings when it is hungry, or cold, or in any pain; not even the nightingale, nor the swallow, nor the hoopoe, which, they assert, wail and sing for grief. But I think that neither these birds nor the swan sing for grief. I believe that they have a prophetic power and foreknowledge of the good things in the next world, for they are Apollo's birds: and so they sing and rejoice on the day of their death, more than in all their life. And I believe that I myself am a fellow slave with the swans, and consecrated to the service of the same God, and that I have prophetic power from my master no less than they; and that I am not more despondent than they are at leaving this life. So, as far as vexing me goes, you may talk to me and ask questions as you please, as long as the Eleven of the Athenians will let you.*

So begins the wonderful interlude, from which the flight of thought will grow grander and bolder. One feels what must have been the power of the man who had such clarity of thought, such grandeur of mind and so deep and lively a religious sense. One feels also what a fund of spiritual youthfulness must have been alive in the circle to which he could speak in such a manner.

Simmiias answers:

*Good, said Simmiias; I will tell you my difficulty, and Cebes will tell you why he is dissatisfied with your statement. I think, Socrates and I daresay you think so too, that it is very difficult, and perhaps impossible, to obtain clear knowledge about these matters in this life. Yet I should hold him to be a very poor creature who did not test what is said about them in every way, and persevere until he had examined the question from every side, and could do no more. It is our duty to do one of two things. We must learn, or we must discover for ourselves, the truth of these matters; or, if that be impossible, we must take the best and most irrefragable of human doctrines, and embarking on that, as on a raft, risk the*

*voyage of life, unless a stronger vessel, some divine word, could be found, on which we might take our journey more safely and more securely.*

This confidence of thought is fine; equally fine is the Master's reverence for truth and for the dignity of the seeking mind, to which no one must do violence — not even one who believes himself to have perfect insight. Simmias continues:

*And now, after what you have said, I shall not be ashamed to put a question to you: and then I shall not have to blame myself hereafter for not having said now what I think. Cebes and I have been considering your argument; and we think that it is hardly sufficient.*

*I daresay you are right, my friend, said Socrates. But tell me, where is it insufficient?*

Whereupon Simmias formulates his doubt.

*To me it is insufficient, he replied, because the very same argument might be used of a harmony, and a lyre, and its strings. It might be said that the harmony in a tuned lyre is something unseen, and incorporeal, and perfectly beautiful, and divine, while the lyre and its strings are corporeal, and with the nature of bodies, and compounded, and earthly, and akin to the mortal. Now suppose that, when the lyre is broken and the strings are cut or snapped, a man were to press the same argument that you have used, and were to say that the harmony cannot have perished, and that it must still exist . . .*

And he again reinforces the argument very aptly:

*And I think, Socrates, that you too must be aware that many of us believe the soul to be most probably a mixture and harmony of the elements by which our body is, as it were, strung and held together, such as heat and cold, and dry and wet, and the like, when they are mixed together well and in due proportion. Now if the soul is a harmony, it is clear that, when the body is relaxed out of proportion, or over-strung by disease or other evils, the soul, though most divine, must perish at once, like other harmonies of sound and of all works of art, while what remains of each body must remain for a long time, until it be burnt or rot-*

*ted away. What then shall we say to a man who asserts that the soul, being a mixture of the elements of the body, perishes first, at what is called death?*

Socrates now looked pensively before him, in the way he used to do so often, and with a gentle smile:

*Simmius' objection is a fair one, he said. If any of you is readier than I am, why does he not answer? For Simmius looks like a formidable assailant. But before we answer him, I think that we had better hear what fault Cebes has to find with my reasoning, and so gain time to consider our reply. And then, when we have heard them both, we must either give in to them, if they seem to harmonize, or, if they do not, we must proceed to argue in defence of our reasoning. Come, Cebes, what is it that troubles you, and makes you doubt?*

The other accordingly states his misgivings:

*I will tell you, replied Cebes. I think that the argument is just where it was, and still open to our former objection. You have shown very cleverly, and, if it is not arrogant to say so, quite conclusively, that our souls existed before they entered the human form. I don't retract my admission on that point. But I am not convinced that they will continue to exist after we are dead. I do not agree with Simmius' objection, that the soul is not stronger and more lasting than the body; I think that it is very much superior in those respects. "Well, then," the argument might reply, "do you still doubt, when you see that the weaker part of a man continues to exist after his death? Do you not think that the more lasting part of him must necessarily be preserved for as long?" See, therefore, if there is anything in what I say; for I think that I, like Simmius, shall best express my meaning in a figure. It seems to me that a man might use an argument similar to yours, to prove that a weaver, who had died in old age, had not in fact perished, but was still alive somewhere; on the ground that the garment, which the weaver had woven for himself and used to wear, had not perished or been destroyed. And if any one were incredulous, he might ask whether a human being, or a garment constantly in use and wear, lasts the longest; and on being told that a human being lasts much the longest, he might think that he had shown beyond all doubt that the man was safe, because*

*what lasts a shorter time than the man had not perished. But that, I suppose, is not so, Simmias; for you too must examine what I say. Every one would understand that such an argument was simple nonsense. This weaver wove himself many such garments and wore them out; he outlived them all but the last, but he perished before that one. Yet a man is in no wise inferior to his cloak, or weaker than it, on that account. And I think that the soul's relation to the body may be expressed in a similar figure. Why should not a man very reasonably say in just the same way that the soul lasts a long time, while the body is weaker and lasts a shorter time? But, he might go on, each soul wears out many bodies, especially if she lives for many years. For if the body is in a state of flux and decay in the man's lifetime, and the soul is ever repairing the worn-out part, it will surely follow that the soul, on perishing, will be clothed in her last robe, and perish before that alone. But when the soul has perished, then the body will show its weakness and quickly rot away.*

Both objections are to be taken quite seriously. Simmias refers to the Pythagorean theory that the soul is the harmony of the body. If that is so, it does not exist as something in its own right, but only as the sum of the proportions and rhythms determining the body. The significance of this becomes clear at once if we translate it into the ideas of Nietzsche, for whom the body is not merely the biological element, but the human totality as such, certainly perishable, but even so full of an inexhaustible significance; while the soul, as the Zarathustra puts it, is "something about the body" the inward, musical aspect of it, therefore dying with it, or even before it. That the theory makes a deep impression on Simmias, is easily understood. He is young and impressionable, and feels the power inherent in this combination of beauty and perishableness. What Cebes says may be stated roughly as follows: That the soul which is under the influence of truth is stronger than the body, is evident; the only question is, whether this strengthening of the real by the valid, this irradiation of eternal power from the truth, is sufficient to overcome mortality altogether.

So the two objections in fact make a deep impression. How seriously Plato himself takes them is seen from the fact that the impression transmits itself also to the hearers of Phaedo's narrative, namely Echecrates and his friends. The framing device breaks into the narrative itself and makes the crisis of the conversation the principal pause in the whole action of the dialogue.

*It made us all very uncomfortable to listen to them, as we afterwards said to each other. We had been fully convinced by the previous argument; and now they seemed to overturn our conviction and to make us distrust all the arguments that were to come, as well as the preceding ones, and to doubt if our judgment was worth anything, or even if certainty could be attained at all.*

Phaedo has said “we”, and Echecrates takes up the cue:

*By the gods, Phaedo, I can understand your feelings very well. I myself felt inclined while you were speaking to ask myself, “Then what reasoning are we to believe in future? That of Socrates was quite convincing, and now it has fallen into discredit.” For the doctrine that our soul is a harmony has always taken a wonderful hold of me, and your mentioning it reminded me that I myself had held it. And now I must begin again and find some other reasoning which shall convince me that a man’s soul does not die with him at his death.*

He then becomes pressing:

*So tell me, I pray you, how did Socrates pursue the argument? Did he show any signs of uneasiness, as you say that you did, or did he come to the defense of his argument calmly? And did he defend it satisfactorily or no? Tell me the whole story as exactly as you can.*

### ***Encouragement***

Phaedo is happy to be able to praise his master :

*I have often, Echecrates, wondered at Socrates; but I never admired him more than I admired him then. There was nothing very strange in his having an answer: what I chiefly wondered at was, first, the kindness and good-nature and respect with which he listened to the young men’s objections; and, secondly, the quickness with which he perceived their effect upon us; and, lastly, how well he healed our wounds, and rallied us as if we were beaten and flying troops, and encouraged us to follow him, and to examine the reasoning with him.*

One feels how the wonderful man prepares himself for a fresh ef-

fort but the delicacy, nobility and strength with which this is done, strike the reader afresh every time he reads the passage.

*ECH. How ?*

*PHAEDO. I will tell you. I was sitting by the bed on a stool at his right hand, and his seat was a good deal higher than mine. He stroked my head and gathered up the hair on my neck in his hand you know he used often to play with my hair and said, Tomorrow, Phaedo, I daresay you will cut off these beautiful locks.*

*I suppose so, Socrates, I replied.*

*You will not, if you take my advice.*

*Why not? I asked.*

*You and I will cut off our hair to-day, he said, if our argument be dead indeed, and we cannot bring it to life again. And I, if I were you, and the argument were to escape me, would swear an oath, as the Argives did, not to wear my hair long again, until I had renewed the fight and conquered the argument of Simmias and Cebes.*

*But Heracles himself, they say, is not a match for two, I replied.*

*Then summon me to aid you, as your lolaus,<sup>1</sup> while there is still light.*

*Then I summon you, not as Heracles summoned lolaus, but as lolaus might summon Heracles.*

*It mil be the same, he replied.*

One of the deepest secrets, perhaps, of intellectual Greece was this intermingling of philosophic passion and human beauty. And this forms the starting-point for the brilliant advance which Socrates makes in the cause of thought in the next paragraphs, and which at the same time proves his mastery as a pedagogue.

*But first let us take care not to make a mistake.*

*What mistake ? I asked.*

*The mistake of becoming misologists, or haters of reasoning, as men become misanthropists, he replied: for to hate reasoning<sup>2</sup> is the greatest evil that can happen to us. Misology and misan-*

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<sup>1</sup> lolaus was Heracles' armour-bearer.

<sup>2</sup> The word *logoi* means spoken words, but also the problem stated in them, and the logical process by which it is discussed.

*thropy both come from similar causes. The latter arises out of the implicit and irrational confidence which is placed in a man, who is believed by his friend to be thoroughly true and sincere and trustworthy, and who is soon afterwards discovered to be a bad man and untrustworthy. This happens again and again; and when a man has had this experience many times, particularly at the hands of those whom he has believed to be his nearest and dearest friends, and he has quarreled with many of them, he ends by hating all men, and thinking that there is no good at all in any one.*

Socrates says, then: Before we begin work anew, we must clear up what has just happened. For something has in fact happened: we have experienced the collapse of a *logos* which we took to be reliable, and this collapse has, to your feeling, cast doubt on all inquiry and knowledge. We ought not to cover this up, we must get over it intellectually. We must take care that it gives rise to no mistrust of the significance and power of thought in general — as, for instance, when a man has given his confidence rashly, been deceived, and now regards all men as untrustworthy. Socrates pulls his disciples together, sharpens their critical vigilance, and anchors them in a deeper affirmation of the power of thought this last by showing them that a radical judgment as to good or bad seldom proves right. And a man who is disillusioned and denies the trustworthiness of any men, is incapable of dealing with men in the right way, much less of educating them.

*Is it not clear that such a man tries to deal with men without understanding human nature? Had he understood it he would have known that, in fact, good men and bad men are very few indeed, and that the majority of men are neither one nor the other.*

The like holds good of thought and speech:

*And, Phaedo, he said, if there be a system of reasoning which is true, and certain, and which our minds can grasp, it would be very lamentable that a man, who has met with some of these arguments which at one time seem true and at another false, should at last, in the bitterness of his heart gladly put all the blame on the reasoning, instead of on himself and his own unskilfulness, and spend the rest of his life in hating and reviling reasoning, and lose the truth and knowledge of reality.*

*Indeed, I replied, that would be very lamentable.*

It follows from this:

*First then, he said, let us be careful not to admit into our souls the notion that all reasoning is very likely unsound: let us rather think that we ourselves are not yet sound. And we must strive earnestly like men to become sound, you, my friends, for the sake of all your future life; and I, because of my death.*

He himself is in a peculiar position in this respect:

*For I am afraid that at present I can hardly look at death like a philosopher; I am in a contentious mood, like the uneducated persons who never give a thought to the truth of the question about which they are disputing, but are only anxious to persuade their audience that they themselves are right. And I think that today I shall differ from them only in one thing. I shall not be anxious to persuade my audience that I am right, except by the way; but I shall be very anxious indeed to persuade myself. For see, my dear friend, how selfish my reasoning is. If what I say is true, it is well to believe it. But if there is nothing after death, at any rate I shall pain my friends less by my lamentations in the interval before I die. And this ignorance will not last forever — that would have been an evil — it will soon come to an end. So prepared, Simmias and Cebes, he said, I come to the argument.*

## THE MAIN DISCOURSE

(Third Part)

### *The Answer to Simmias*

Socrates first recapitulates Simmias's objection. Then he recalls once more the fundamental thesis of Platonism, that all learning and knowledge is a reminiscence of something once seen, and that therefore the soul must have already existed before birth. The two friends assent; it is thus easy for him to show that Simmias's objection cannot be upheld:

*You must choose which doctrine you will retain, that knowledge is recollection, or that the soul is a harmony.*

*The former, Socrates, certainly, he replied. The latter has*

*never been demonstrated to me; it rests only on probable and plausible grounds, which make it a popular opinion. I know that doctrines which ground their proofs on probabilities are impostors, and that they are very apt to mislead, both in geometry and everything else, if one is not on one's guard against them.*

But the disciples too are admonished of their responsibility.

*And you, if you take my advice, will think not of Socrates, but of the truth; and you will agree with me, if you think that what I say is true: otherwise you will oppose me with every argument that you have: and be careful that, in my anxiety to convince you, I do not deceive both you and myself, and go away, leaving my sting behind me, like a bee.*

Socrates confirms the refutation: If the soul were only the harmony of the body, two facts, which are yet undeniable, could not remain true. The first is that there is disharmony, contradiction and evil in the soul itself:

*Or rather, Simmias, to speak quite accurately, I suppose that there will be no vice in any soul, if the soul is a harmony. I take it, there can never be any discord in a harmony, which is a perfect harmony.*

The second fact is that the soul can contradict the body, resist it, overcome it. It can do this really, and the more so the more living it is :

*Well, now do we not find the soul acting in just the opposite way, and leading all the elements of which she is said to consist, and opposing them in almost everything all through life; and lord-ing it over them in every way, and chastising them, sometimes severely, and with a painful discipline, such as gymnastic and medicine, and sometimes lightly; sometimes threatening and sometimes admonishing the desires and passions and fears, as though she were speaking to something other than herself, as Homer makes Odysseus do in the Odyssey, where he says that*

*"He struck upon his breast, and mocked his heart:  
'Endure, my heart, even worse have you endured.'"*

*Do you think that when Homer wrote that, he supposed the soul*

*to be a harmony, and capable of being led by the passions of the body, and not of a nature to lead them, and be their lord, being herself far too divine a thing to be like a harmony?*

### ***The Answer to Cebes and the Decisive Argument***

The two young friends are Thebans, and Cebes is the cleverer; this explains the joke with which Socrates turns to the latter:

*Very good, said Socrates; I think that we have contrived to appease our Theban Harmonia with tolerable success. But how about Cadmus, Cebes? he said. How shall we appease him, and with what reasoning?*

If he has settled Harmonia, the wife of the founder of Thebes, perhaps he will have similar success with the stronger of the couple, namely Cadmus himself. Cebes begins to feel that it may not go well with his objection, and speaks guardedly:

*I daresay that you will find out how to do it, said Cebes. At all events you have argued that the soul is not a harmony in a way which surprised me very much. When Simmias was stating his objection, I wondered how any one could possibly dispose of his argument: and so I was very much surprised to see it fall before the very first onset of yours. I should not wonder if the same fate awaited the argument of Cadmus.*

But Socrates evidently takes his objection more seriously than that of Simmias; he recapitulates it fully, and then continues :

*That, I think, Cebes, is the substance of your objection. I state it again and again on purpose, that nothing may escape us, and that you may add to it or take away from it anything that you wish.*

The technique of the dialogue emphasizes the pause here by giving a glimpse of the Master's early life together with the scene of the last reunion:

*Socrates paused for some time and thought. Then he said, It is not an easy question that you are raising, Cebes. We must examine fully the whole subject of the causes of generation and decay.*

*If you like, I will give you my own experiences, and if you think that you can make use of anything that I say, you may employ it to satisfy your misgivings.*

And now there is a sort of review of his own intellectual development; facing death, he gives an account of his philosophic way. We must leave to itself the question what biographical importance the account has; part of it is probably correct in this sense too. In the dialogue, at any rate, it marks the genesis of the Platonic figure of Socrates.

*Listen, then, and I will tell you, Cebes, he replied. When I was a young man, I had a passionate desire for the wisdom which is called Physical Science. I thought it a splendid thing to know the causes of everything; why a thing comes into being, and why it perishes, and why it exists. I was always worrying myself with such questions as, Do living creatures take a definite form, as some persons say, from the fermentation of heat and cold? Is it the blood, or the air, or fire by which we think? Or is it none of these, but the brain which gives the senses of hearing and sight and smell, and do memory and opinion come from these, and knowledge from memory and opinion when in a state of quiescence?*

But he then loses confidence in all these speculations:

*Again, I used to examine the destruction of these things, and the changes of the heaven and the earth until at last I concluded that I was wholly and absolutely unfitted for these studies. I will prove that to you conclusively. I was so completely blinded by these studies, that I forgot what I had formerly seemed to myself and to others to know quite well: I unlearned all that I had been used to think that I understood; even the cause of man's growth. Formerly I had thought it evident on the face of it that the cause of growth was eating and drinking; and that, when from food flesh is added to flesh, and bone to bone, and in the same way to the other parts of the body their proper elements, then by degrees the small bulk grows to be large, and so the boy becomes a man. Don't you think that my belief was reasonable?*

*I do, said Cebes.*

*Then here is another experience for you. I used to feel no doubt, when I saw a tall man standing by a short one, that the*

*tall man was, it might be, a head the taller, or, in the same way, that one horse was bigger than another. I was even clearer that ten was more than eight by the addition of two, and that a thing two cubits long was longer by half its length than a thing one cubit long.*

*And what do you think now? asked Cebes.*

*I think that I am very far from believing that I know the cause of any of these things. Why, when you add one to one, I am not sure either that the one to which one is added has become two, or that the one added and the one to which it is added become, by the addition, two.*

What the problem consists in is made clear by some examples, of which the last is particularly impressive:

*I cannot understand how, when they are brought together, this union, or placing of one by the other, should be the cause of their becoming two, whereas, when they were separated, each of them was one, and they were not two. Nor, again, if you divide one into two, can I convince myself that this division is the cause of one becoming two: for then a thing becomes two from exactly the opposite cause. In the former case it was because two units were brought together, and the one was added to the other; while now it is because they are separated, and the one divided from the other.*

So the consequence is :

*Nor, again, can I persuade myself that I know how one is generated; in short, this method does not show me the cause of the generation or destruction or existence of anything: I have in my own mind a confused idea of another method, but I cannot admit this one for a moment.*

By this method, says Socrates, one cannot know “the cause of the generation or destruction or existence of anything”. More precisely: why anything begins or ceases to be, or exists, as this particular thing. The question is concerned, then, not with being real, but with being this; not with a thing’s presence or absence, but with its nature. The empirical method cannot explain this. So Socrates seeks further, and hits on the Philosophy of Nature:

*But one day I listened to a man who said that he was reading from a book of Anaxagoras, which affirmed that it is Mind which orders and is the cause of all things. I was delighted with this theory; it seemed to me to be right that mind should be the cause of all things, and I thought to myself, If this is so, then mind will order and arrange each thing in the best possible way. So if we wish to discover the cause of the generation or destruction or existence of a thing, we must discover how it is best for that thing to exist, or to act, or to be acted on.*

If Reason is the principle of all things, the meaning and cause of every phenomenon will be found by asking what is the best possible state in which it can be conceived — its ontological and logical optimum. This “best”, as evident in its necessity of significance, is the nature of the case in question, and the only satisfactory philosophy is to refer the phenomenon to it — a vigorous statement of rational absolutism, for which the rationally evident is also the worthily valid, and both identical with the essentially existent. The true, the good, and that which is, are ultimately one.

*I thought that he would assign a cause to each thing, and a cause to the universe, and then would go on to explain to me what was best for each thing, and what was the common good of all. I would not have sold my hopes for a great deal: I seized the books very eagerly, and read them as fast as I could, in order that I might know what is best and what is worse.*

But he was disappointed:

*All my splendid hopes were dashed to the ground, my friend, for as I went on reading I found that the writer made no use of Mind at all, and that he assigned no causes for the order of things. His causes were air, and ether, and water, and many other strange things.*

He tries to explain by an example what the disappointment consisted in:

*I thought that he was exactly like a man who should begin by saying that Socrates does all that he does by Mind, and who, when he tried to give a reason for each of my actions, should say, first, that I am sitting here now, because my body is composed of*

*bones and muscles, and that the bones are hard and separated by joints, while the muscles can be tightened and loosened, and, together with the flesh, and the skin which holds them together, cover the bones; and that therefore, when the bones are raised in their sockets, the relaxation and contraction of the muscles makes it possible for me now to bend my limbs, and that that is the cause of my sitting here with my legs bent. And in the same way he would go on to explain why I am talking to you: he would assign voice, and air, and hearing, and a thousand other things as causes; but he would quite forget to mention the real cause, which is that since the Athenians thought it right to condemn me, I have thought it right and just to sit here arid to submit to whatever sentence they may think fit to impose. For, by the dog of Egypt, I think that these muscles and bones would long ago have been in Megara or Boeotia, prompted by their opinion of what is best, if I had not thought it better and more honorable to submit to whatever penalty the state inflicts, rather than escape by flight. But to call these things causes is too absurd! If it were said that without bones and muscles and the other parts of my body I could not have carried my resolutions into effect, that would be true. But to say that they are the cause of what I do, and that in this way I am acting by Mind, and not from choice of what is best, would be a very loose and careless way of talking.*

By this road, then, no real answer was obtained; so he had to take another road:

*That danger occurred to me. I was afraid that my soul might be completely blinded if I looked at things with my eyes, and tried to grasp them with my senses. So I thought that I must have recourse to conceptions <sup>1</sup> and examine the truth of existence by means of them.*

He then explains this in more detail:

*I mean nothing new, he said; only what I have repeated over and over again, both in our conversation today and at other times. I am going to try to explain to you the kind of cause at which I have worked, and I will go back to what we have so often spoken of, and begin with the assumption that there exists an absolute beauty, and an absolute good, and an absolute greatness, and so on. If you grant me this, and agree that they exist, I hope to be*

*able to show you what my cause is, and to discover that the soul is immortal.*

*You may assume that I grant it you, said Cebes; go on with your proof.*

*Then do you agree with me in what follows? he asked. It appears to me that if anything besides absolute beauty is beautiful, it is so simply because it partakes of absolute beauty, and I say the same of all phenomena. Do you allow that kind of cause ?*

*I do, he answered.*

*Well then, he said, I no longer recognize, nor can I understand, these other wise causes: if I am told that anything is beautiful because it has a rich color, or a goodly form, or the like, I pay no*

*attention, for such language only confuses me; and in a simple and plain, and perhaps a foolish way, I hold to the doctrine that the thing is only made beautiful by the presence or communication, or whatever you please to call it, of absolute beauty.*

What does all this mean?

Socrates had been confronted with the fundamental questions of philosophy: "What is that which is? How is it what it is? What makes it what it is?" With these questions he went to the philosophers of Nature, who had proclaimed that they treated everything by reason, that is, scientifically. It turned out, however, that they understood by this the reference of empirical phenomena to ultimate, metaphysically conceived constituents, such as water, air, fire, and so forth that they practiced, therefore, a kind of mythological physics — and Socrates got no answer to his questions. What he wanted to know was not, what things were made up of and into what they were resolved again, but what that was in them which came out to meet the receptive mind with such peculiar impressiveness: their nature, their meaning-complex, that about them which was absolute. This cannot be deduced from any analysis of their component parts — any more than the meaning of his own fate, of his present sojourn in prison, can be deduced from the fact that his bones and sinews are constructed in such and such a way and that consequently he is sitting on his bed in this posture. He wants to know by what structure of nature and meaning the matter and energy of experience, in their composition and dissolution, are justified by the standards of mind. He is not in prison because his body is anatomically built in such and such a way — we might add: because the chain holds him fast, because the court has condemned him, because political events at Athens have put

the conservatives in power — but because, from his insight into the ethical significance of what has happened to him, he has considered it his duty to remain rather than to escape. Because he has come to see clearly the ethical *eidos* which contains both the imperative, that which ought to be, and the “best” for himself, that is, the meaningful. Accordingly he does not want to know what physical or physiological processes are at work in the impression of the beautiful, but in what consists that complex of essence and significance which affects us powerfully, elevates and makes us happy, in the consciousness of a beautiful thing. It is the philosophical question as such, then, that he states; and we admire the exemplary clarity with which it is stated.

But how is this question answered? How could it be answered? Perhaps in a subjective sense, by saying that the significant content of things, what is categorical in them, is derived from the human mind itself, or from consciousness in general as realized therein, in the manner of idealistic apriorism. In that case only the mass of perceptions is given “from outside”; meaning is brought into them by the classifying activity of the mind itself. Or one could follow Aristotle and say that things themselves are constructed on a categorical scheme. Man grasps them by sense-perception ; the abstractive power of his mind extracts the essential structure from the percept and formulates it in the concept. Neither of these two answers would satisfy Plato. The former would not, because his experience of mental synthesis is too elementary to justify him in demolishing the reality of the world so radically as it does. The latter answer would not satisfy him, because something is urgent in him which the Aristotelian type of mind lacks: that peculiar craving for perfection and completeness, which at once removes it from the empirical with its incompleteness and inadequacy. To put it still more radically: that particular experience of what is called “essence”, of the meaning-force of the qualitative complex, its symbolic power and force of validity, by which the Platonic amazement is aroused. Only from this fundamental experience can the Platonic questions and answers in the last resort be understood.

So Plato must give a different answer. He says that each thing exhibits a certain stock of qualities, relations, arrangements and values, which necessarily gives the impression of validity. But on the other hand the imperfection, fragmentariness and perishability of the thing will not allow us to regard that validity as resting in the thing itself, but point beyond it. The sense-quality of the thing declares itself as secondary, and points to something primary which is connected with it and yet independent of it: a significant form free from all limitation, realizing all its consequences, immune from all defilements the *eidos*,

the Idea. This dwells in an eternal sphere, remote from all limitation and change; the thing, on the other hand, in the restrictedness and mutability of earthly conditions. What essence and meaning it contains, derives from the Idea: it participates in this.

If, then, it is asked what something is, the answer is: It is, in the form of participation, what its Idea is in the form of originality and essentiality. If one asks why it is what it is, the answer will be: because its Idea constitutes it such. The further question, however, why the Idea is as it is, and why it is at all, receives the answer: because it is so. Its being so is an original phenomenon, and as such absolute as well as evident. As soon as the Idea is really beheld, the question ceases. Why is this human being beautiful? Not because certain proportions of bone-structure or a certain state of tissue and skin are found in him, but because he participates in the Idea of the Beautiful. But the Idea of the Beautiful is "the Beautiful itself"; the original phenomenon of beauty, which as soon as it shines forth clearly convinces by itself. The question remains only in the region of things, which are not the Beautiful itself, but only participate in it, and are therefore imperfect and perishable; questioning comes to rest in the contemplation of the Beautiful Itself. All else, the various concrete cases of a physical, biological, sociological or historical nature are for this question secondary. They represent only the forms in which is actualized the fact which alone furnishes the true answer : that the Idea of the Beautiful is shown forth in the thing.

Each thing has its meaning above itself. It exists upwards and from above. Hence arises that tension between the empirical and the real which is superior to it; that urge towards the absolute, which is peculiar to Plato, the liveliness and seriousness of which is expressed in the conception of Eros.

*Again, you would be careful not to affirm that, if one is added to one, the addition is the cause of two, or, if one is divided, that the division is the cause of two? You would protest loudly that you know of no way in which a thing can be generated, except by participation in its own proper essence; and that you can give no cause for the generation of two except participation in duality; and that all things which are to be two must participate in duality, while whatever is to be one must participate in unity. You would leave the explanation of these divisions and additions and all such subtleties to wiser men than yourself. . . . But you, I think, if you are a philosopher, will do as I say.*

*Very true, said Simmias and Cebes together.*

This final assent is echoed as were the foregoing misgivings by Phaedo's hearers, Echecrates and his friends.

*ECH. And they were right, Phaedo. I think the clearness of his reasoning, even to the dullest, is quite wonderful.*

*PHAEDO. Indeed, Echecrates, all who were there thought so too.*

*ECH. So do we who were not there, but who are listening to your story.*

The question was asked: why is this horse beautiful? and the answer was: because it participates in the Idea of the Beautiful. Does not this way of thinking by-pass the investigation of the case and instead hypostatize mere words? This would be so if it were not related to a specific experience. This experience is so important that it may be characterized once again.

One who thinks Platonically forms a peculiar conception of the system of qualities belonging to a being, for example a horse, or of one of these qualities singly, for example beauty. A complex of qualities as well as a single quality appear to him not as determinations which, even though abstractly conceivable, yet according to their reality are entirely inherent in the thing, but as self-constituted significant forms which detach themselves from the thing. They are perfect, belong to the ideal order, and are exempt from the contingent, damaged and distorted world of the senses. Their force of validity is so great that it outweighs the reality of the empirical, nay, to the feeling of those who experience it, takes on the character of a higher reality. This is what Plato seems to mean when he says that the Idea is "that which really is". The nature of this super-reality is no doubt hard to define. The meaning of the Idea is differently defined in the different epochs of Platonic thought; it ranges from the symbolic expression of logical concepts to the notion of independent essences. Without attempting to exhaust it in any way, perhaps the following remarks may be made.

The Ideas are the point at which the question "what is?" finally arrives: that is, the essential simply. They are likewise the goal of the question "what ought to be? what is worthy to be? whence has the worthy its value?": that is, the valid simply. And these Ideas are images too. Not concepts or principles which are abstractly thought by the understanding, but forms which are beheld by the mind's eye. For Plato the ultimately real in existence consists neither in atomistic elements nor in formal laws. The knowledge-seeking investigation of this existence ends, not in logical combinations of characteristics, but

in significant figures. All that is capable of being experienced leads back to such figures. Every single quality, for instance velocity or purity of tone, has its *eidos*, likewise things, for example the horse or the lyre. These significant figures are images of essence in so far as they answer the question as to quality, images of value in so far as they answer the question as to dignity.

The Ideas are not merely symbolically conceived logical concepts or categorical forms, but something objective, self-subsistent. This follows already from the Platonic doctrine that all knowing is reminiscence, so that a man confronted with an object becomes aware that he has once, before his birth, contemplated its significant content, namely the Idea. The ideas do not depend on things, but form self-based articulations of validity. As little does their perception depend on that of things. Of course, anyone who is to perceive the nature of a horse must meet a horse, but only in order that this encounter may provide the occasion for the Idea once contemplated to light up before his mind. The Ideas of qualities, species, relations, and so forth, form an eternal cosmos lying above the world of things, and this is the true object of the mind, of its knowledge, appreciation and effort.

It is very difficult to answer the question, in what manner the Idea is “there”. The notions immediately available are those of reality and validity. The concrete, which meets the empirical thrust of my own concrete being, is real.<sup>1</sup> A logical law or an ethical norm, which my judgment and conscience perceive as binding, is valid. But a third form of the given seems to be attributed to the Idea, a form in which reality and validity coincide. It is a fundamental feeling among Platonists that reality is not a uniform predicate; it is not simply the fact, predicable of any and every object, that it is, instead of not being; reality has various degrees — and indeed an infinite number of them. The degree of reality that belongs to a being — apart from the rank of the significant content itself, which does not come into consideration here — depends on how far it realizes its Idea. It is not real simply, and on top of that more or less perfect; on the contrary, the degree of its reality corresponds to the measure in which it fulfils its essence. This line of signification points to something that needs no further realization, since it actuates the full content of its essence and val-

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<sup>1</sup> The modern man inclines to regard only material things as real, equating “mind” with “thought”, or rather with “thought-content”, though the latter is not real but imagined. In fact, the mind is thoroughly real; it is even, in a sense still to be defined, more real than corporal things.

ue, and thereby attains complete reality: the Idea. It is at once wholly valid and real, "that which simply is". There is here, of course, a problem; and Plato too seems to be aware of it. For the identity of validity and reality constitutes a form of being which can in strictness only be attributed to the Absolute. The Idea, however, is indeed "absolute", because simply valid; but it is not "the Absolute", since it does not exhaust the whole content of validity, but rather limits it. Thus the statement that it is that which simply is, is after all not quite correct; and the modern man inclines to regard only material things as real, equating "mind" with "thought", or rather with "thought-content", though the latter is not real but imagined. In fact, the mind is thoroughly real; it is even, in a sense still to be defined, more real than corporal things. the necessary implication of meaning leads in fact to the Idea's being reinforced by the Absolute in the true sense, namely the Good. Of this more anon.

The general character of the Platonic approach involves the danger of seeing in things the corrupting principle of the Ideas, of regarding this corruption as implied by matter, and of representing the origin of things by a dualistic myth about the downfall of spirit into matter. And in fact we find in Platonic philosophy rudiments which point in this direction; though, as already pointed out, there can be no question of a true dualism. The original power of vision and construction, the will to form the given, the impulses to train the right kind of man and, as the sum of human things, the right kind of State, are so strong that they do not admit of any fundamental rejection of matter. From this results a fluctuating condition, in which the inclination to see Idea and mind as the only reality and sensible things as a degradation, is counterbalanced by the will to see things as coordinated with the Ideas, and the purpose of action as the earthly realization of the latter. Thus the thing, after all, stands in a positive relation to the Idea. It has a real content of essence and value, though this is derived not from itself but from the Idea. The relation is expressed in various ways: the thing portrays the Idea, or participates in the Idea, or the Idea is present in it, so that the contemplating mind can be reminded by it of what it once gazed on in the life before birth. The rank of the thing, as already remarked, is in each case determined by the measure in which it participates in its Idea.

It follows from all this that the Idea is in close relation with knowledge, that it has to do with truth. It is emphasized again and again that it forms the true object of cognition. Knowledge as such is the contemplation of the Idea; truth as such is the emergence of the Idea in the mind's gaze. This does not mean, however, that the seeker after

knowledge must betake himself to a region of abstruse, purely inward contemplation. He must of course leave the senses behind and seek the Idea with purely spiritual sight; but he may, no must, remain in contact with things. These are indeed mere copies of the genuine, and not in the true sense real; but on the other hand they are copies after all, and as such have a share in that from which they are copied. So they too can be known; and the knowable in them is in fact just their relation to the Idea and their ideal content. The Idea, therefore, forms not only the true object of knowledge, but also that by which the thing becomes open and penetrable to the contemplating gaze. The Idea turns the lump of earthly half-reality into an object of knowledge, that is, into truth. The Idea — and every Idea — is the possibility of lighting up the dark, fluctuating, earthly being. This is expressed also in the close relation which it has to light. He who looks on things merely with the bodily senses “grows blind in soul”; the light which makes the soul see, and is at the same time itself the object of sight, is the Idea. “Light” — the symbol runs through all Western thought — denotes the intellect and intellectual acts: more precisely, intellectual acts in so far as they realize the valid, the true, the beautiful, and so forth. Thus the Ideas are figures of light; they show how the world and the things of the world become visible, estimable, comprehensible by the intellectual act. The notion of light is always recurring in Plato, and reaches its climax in the doctrine of the Good. The Republic demonstrates in detail that the eyesight and the object with its qualities are not by themselves sufficient for vision to take place, but that “a third thing, specially appointed for this purpose”, must be added, namely light. (507d-e.) Now, what the sun is for the bodily eyes, the Good is for the intellectual. So we read in the same context: “This, then, which gives truth to things known, and power (of knowing) to the knower, shall be called the Idea of the Good. Regard it as that which is the cause of knowledge and truth, so far as this is perceived (not by the external senses, but) by the mind ...” The faculty of knowledge and the object of knowledge are not themselves the Good; this must rather be regarded as “something other and still fairer than they”. (508e.) The true and ultimate light, the sun of the intellectual realm, is the Good. From it both the intellectual act of knowing and its object, the Idea, get their character of luminosity.

This leads us to the religious character of the Idea, and gives us occasion once more to take up the problem which has been indicated in its general lines. In the first place, the Idea is something ultimate: that in which the acts of cognition, evaluation, and so forth, end. If the Idea is beheld and appreciated, then truth is found, the valid is

affirmed, the valuable is realized. These statements, however, are backed by a further argument at the end of the Sixth and beginning of the Seventh Books of the Republic. (It must be added at once that the word "argument" does not sufficiently designate what is meant. As the whole style and tone of the passage shows, it is a question of something uttermost, which cannot be stated openly in words, but only guessed at and revered with awe and emotion.) Socrates says, then : Material light makes the object visible, and the eye capable of seeing. There is correspondingly an intellectual light, the Good, which sets the intellectual faculty of knowledge and its object, that is, mind and Idea, in the cognitive relation. Both knowledge and truth are " beautiful" the supreme expression for positive valuation ; but that Light itself "is something different and even more beautiful than they". It would no doubt be "correct to consider them both as of the nature of good";<sup>1</sup> but not "to regard either of them as the Good itself; rather must the essential nature of the Good be esteemed still higher". The partner in the dialogue answers with emotion: "The beauty you speak of is an immeasurable one" but Socrates says warningly: "Be silent!"<sup>2</sup> The passage which follows next says still more about the Good: it gives to things not only the possibility of being known, but also their "being and essence".<sup>3</sup> "The Good itself, however, is not essence, but surpasses even essence in dignity and power." And Glaucon again replies with a cry of emotion: "O Apollo, what a divine excess!" (509a-c.) The Ideas are the presuppositions of all cognition, but are themselves "without hypothesis" and "the origin of everything"; they are the significant figures of the world; the essential images, which disclose the mystery of existence to knowledge (5 lib). They are an ultimate, then, behind which it should be impossible to go further back. And yet there is still something behind them; an Uttermost, by which they in their turn have truth and being, validity and reality: namely the Good. This Good is represented by the image of the sun, and it is in the nature of the sun that things are seen in its light, but that it cannot itself be gazed on without injury. So the image denotes

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<sup>1</sup> *Agathoeides*: that which has the essential nature of the good.

<sup>2</sup> A word from the language of the Mysteries: *euphemei* means, originally, "speak words of good omen", in order that the sacred action may be happily accomplished. But as there was no security that the words would be really of good omen, the sense became changed to "keep a devout silence".

<sup>3</sup> *Ousia*, in the fuller sense, which combines "essence" with "being", the quid with the quod.

an inaccessibility, which recurs in speculative terms in the passage where it is said that the Good indeed gives to knowledge the power to know, to truth the character of truth, to the ultimately essential and existent essence and being, but that itself it is more than all this. As in the image of the sun the object is veiled from the eyes by the excess of the very element which is the presupposition of seeing, namely light: so here the intellectual object is withdrawn from thought by the excess of just that which is the presupposition of thinking, and thereby an absolute transcendence produced; for there remains no category for that which lies above truth, essence and being. What is the meaning of all this? First, the Platonic conception of Good must be made clear in all its force. It is not a particular form of value standing beside others — the True, the Beautiful, and the Just but is worthiness in general; that which is to be esteemed, affirmed and sought simply; significance in its final fullness and validity. And not merely as the object of an intellectual act — shall we say, of a fundamental, original and total affirmation behind all partial affirmations — but as a religious mystery, only to be approached by the cry of reverent wonder and the silence of awestruck veneration. With regard more particularly to the relation of the Good to the Ideas, this is equally mysterious and equally transcends the possibility of conceptual statement, for it includes the above-mentioned antinomy. On the one hand the Idea is the essential and existent, the object of knowledge as such, and so requires no further reduction or reason. It is valid because it is valid, is because it is, and therefore constitutes the ultimate for the objectively referred act of cognition and evaluation. Yet there is a reference beyond it. It is indeed simply valid, but limited, and therefore not all-comprehensive; it is indeed absolute, but not the Absolute itself, rather a refraction of this, a step it takes towards the finite. The Idea of Justice is, simply as such, not that of Courage; between them there is distinction and so delimitation. But behind them lies the Absolute simply, which is also the All-inclusive. It is no longer an “image”, but excels every image; it is not the subject of a particular proposition, but lies beyond every particular proposition. To keep within the phraseology of the dialogue, it is the “Sun”, “Light” simply, the significance of which does not consist in being contemplated, but in enabling the images to be contemplated and the corresponding particular propositions to be made about them. This mysterious character of the Good comes out also in the Ideas. To behold them, therefore, is not merely a philosophical, but a religious act. The Idea is an eternal essence full of numinous significance, and to approach it means to approach also the source of this significance, namely the Good. In the contemplation of

the particular Idea the Good is contemplated and experienced along with it, and the statements about its meaning only acquire their full sense when this religious experience is taken together with them.

As for the problems concerned with particular things, these are in no way affected by the reference to the Ideas, but must be worked out in connection with the respective data themselves. The theory of the Idea supersedes neither empirical nor phenomenological research, but only brings these into a metaphysical coherence which is attested by specific experience.

There follows now in the dialogue a somewhat complicated train of thought, which leads from the notion of the Idea to the general object of the whole exposition. According to this each Idea has an Absolute power of self-assertion and self-differentiation. It will not tolerate that anything included under its definition shall at the same time be included under that of another Idea: the expression, in terms of the Idea-theory, of the principles of identity and contradiction.

*It seems to me not only that absolute greatness will never be great and small at once, but also that greatness in us<sup>1</sup> never admits smallness, and will not be exceeded. One of two things must happen: either the greater will give way and fly at the approach of its opposite, the less, or it will perish. It will not stand its ground, and receive smallness, and be other than it was.*

Every qualitative definition differentiates itself from another with an energy which is represented by the image of a conflict for life and death. Important too is the next argument, according to which one quality does not originate from another, but can only come into being or cease. Every true quality is an original phenomenon and therefore underivable. Hereupon one of the company objects that according to the former statements everything originates from its opposite, so for example the state of being dead from that of being alive, and vice versa:

*Socrates inclined his head to the speaker and listened. Well and bravely remarked, he said: but you have not noticed the difference between the two propositions. What we said then was that a concrete thing is generated from its opposite: what we say now*

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<sup>1</sup> That is, the greatness of a concrete being, for example, our own body, in contradistinction from greatness in itself.

*is that the absolute opposite can never become opposite to itself, either when it is in us, or when it is in nature. We were speaking then of things in which the opposites are, and we named them after those opposites: but now we are speaking of the opposites themselves, whose inherence gives the things their names; and they, we say, will never be generated from each other.*

Things, concrete figures endowed with qualities, can originate from one another, for example, a dead thing from a living one; but not the qualities as such; not, then, the state of being dead, considered in itself, from the state of being alive, similarly considered. These predicates, on the contrary, differ from one another with the specific energy of quality. That "becoming", therefore, which manifests itself in relation to them, must be understood otherwise. The argument is not easy, and Socrates does well to make sure that he is understood:

*At the same time he turned to Cebes and asked, Did his objection trouble you at all, Cebes?*

*No, replied Cebes; I don't feel that difficulty. But I will not deny that many other things trouble me.*

*Then we are quite agreed on this point, he said. An opposite will never be opposite to itself.*

*No, never, he replied.*

Now there are statements which imply other statements. For example, if I say that something falls under the numerical Idea of three, I have thereby also said that it is odd.

*You know, I think, that whatever the idea of three is in, is bound to be not three only, but odd as well.*

*Certainly.*

*Well, we say that the opposite idea to the form which produces his result will never come to that thing.*

*Indeed, no.*

*But the idea of the odd produces it?*

*Yes.*

*And the idea of the even is the opposite of the idea of the odd?*

*Yes.*

*Then the idea of the even will never come to three?*

*Certainly not.*

*So three has no part in the even?*

*None.*

*Then the number three is uneven?*  
*Yes.*

The Idea of trinity necessarily imports into everything of which it takes possession the further predicate of oddness.

Socrates then starts afresh:

*Then, he went on, tell me, what is that which must be in a body to make it alive? A soul, he replied. And is this always so? Of course, he said.*

*Then the soul always brings life to whatever contains her?*

*No doubt, he answered.*

*And is there an opposite to life, or not?*

*Yes.*

*What is it?*

*Death.*

*And we have already agreed that the soul cannot ever receive the opposite of what she brings?*

*Yes, certainly we have, said Cebes.*

That is to say: the predicate of being alive is related to that of being a soul, as the predicate of being odd is related to that of being three. That which is soul is also necessarily alive. This is in fact stated at once and expressly:

*Well; what name did we give to that which does not admit the idea of the even?*

*The uneven, he replied.*

*And what do we call that which does not admit justice or music?*

*The unjust, and the unmusical.*

*Good; and what do we call that which does not admit death?*

*The immortal, he said.*

*And the soul does not admit death?*

*No.*

*Then the soul is immortal?*

*It is.*

*Good, he said. Shall we say that this is proved? What do you think?*

*Yes, Socrates, and very sufficiently.*

Here the train of thought concludes. This is what has been said:

Being alive is a necessary predicate of that which is soul. It belongs to its nature. But what belongs to a thing's nature cannot not be. Therefore the soul cannot be dead, and so cannot die.

### *The Force of the Argument*

It is clear that there is no question of a proof here. If Socrates wished to prove that the soul is immortal, he would have to go about it in a different way. For instance, he would have to ask : Is there a kind of living being which by its origin, development, behavior, by the content of its actions and the tenor of its whole being, gives the impression of entire mortality, and actually dissolves completely after a time? This is so, in the case of animals. But what about the life-principle of man? Does it differ from that of animals? Not by its mere biological structure, as, for example, cold-blooded animals differ from warm-blooded, or mammals from birds, but by a different kind of origin and a different character of actions, of self-possession and of relations with other beings, a difference in the whole bearing and sense of his existence ? There is such a difference of quality, not degree, and it must have its root in being. What is the reality in question? The answer must be: the spirit. Not merely a spiritual principle, such as determines every being, but the substantial spiritual soul. The vital manifestations of this soul would now have to be analyzed more closely, and it would have to be asked what inferences as to its nature could be drawn from them. It would further be seen that it cannot be destroyed by any conceivable cause, but is exempt from death by virtue of its nature. A proof of this kind is not even attempted, but Socrates starts from the Idea of the soul and says: This Idea is that of life as such; therefore it cannot include the predicate "dead" in its connotation. So the soul has nothing in common with death, but is immortal.

It might be objected that there is nothing more than an analytical judgment in question here. First the notion of an absolute life is constructed, then a characteristic feature included in it is taken out and without any justification applied to reality. Such a naive procedure, however, can hardly be credited to Plato; rather, there is missing from the exposition a link which is self-evident to the speaker. The Idea of the soul is not constructed, but dawns on the thinker from experience of his inward life, as the *eidos* of the latter. The speaker here is a Greek, most intensely sensitive to the fact of mortality. He sees that everything falls a prey to this mortality; but within himself he discovers something — the soul — which is different from all that dies. He does not invent this, nor does he conjecture it, but perceives it. As he

sees it in the face of other men, by virtue of their expression, so he sees it too inside himself: in the experience of cognition, in the process by which values are sought and found, in the moral conflict and its mastery, and so forth. In these processes he grasps the soul, sees it, hears it, feels it. In all this it is not a matter of subjective feeling, but of the “given process” of genuine experience, real encounter with that which is. This entity is distinct from everything corporeal: it is neither extended nor composite; it is rich, strong, creative, but at the same time simple and not to be taken hold of by any physical means. So too it lives in a different manner from all other living things, including one’s own body. Its life is not given to it by generation and birth, nor maintained by material food, but has a peculiar originality and independence. It is spirit; living in the body and yet distinct from it; correlative to it and yet, as is seen for instance in the facts of self-condemnation and self-mastery, sovereign over it. From all this shines forth the Idea of a living being whose life flows in a unique manner from its nature.<sup>1</sup> This Idea is looked on as the manifestation of that peculiar vitality which is experienced within oneself — just as the latter is illuminated in turn by the apparition and evolution of that *eidōs*. And now begins the analysis of the Idea thus discovered; not by any means a transference of unreal or conceptual elements to the real, obliterating boundaries, but the legitimate development of a meaning-complex which rests on a corresponding experience of being and shines forth ever anew from this.

There is a second consideration: the philosopher perceives that the soul’s vitality is not merely of a substantial nature. The soul is not living in the same way, for example, as water is flowing. That too is true perhaps, in the sense of the simple indestructibility of the soul, but there is more than that: the vitality of the soul is rather at once a fact given and a task set, and realizes itself in the attitude to truth, to justice, in a word, to that which ought to be. The moment it strives after truth, it becomes like truth, and therein consists the truly spiritual vitality and reality of the soul. This is the purer and stronger, the more entirely the soul devotes itself to truth, the more decisively it wills the good. The philosopher recognizes this and makes it the founda-

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<sup>1</sup> This impression is so strong that it is exaggerated in the doctrine of the spiritual soul’s existence before birth into that of absoluteness. The soul appears so essentially living that it is declared to be not only immortal but uncreated, not only indestructible but necessary. Here occurs that fatal shift which is characteristic of idealism; “spirit” is made equivalent to “absolute spirit”.

tion of his existence. He distinguishes the value-conditioned vitality and reality of the soul from that of the body, the biological; but also from the merely ontological vitality and reality of the soul as spiritual substance; he develops it in the continual effort after truth, and for the sake of this life makes the sacrifice of everything else. He lives resigned to the death of that which is only transitorily alive, in order that the eternally alive may flourish. By his doing this the *eidos* of the life in question here becomes ever clearer to him that of immortal life in general, as also that of his own immortality. This awareness is not "experience" or "faith" in any irresponsible or subjective sense, but the becoming attentive to a specific reality and the recognition of a task set thereby. At the outset is the readiness to see what is. In the act of seeing, the object to be seen comes out more boldly, and there with the possibility of intellectual analysis. Under this influence the organ of perception is again strengthened, making new and better vision possible — and so on. It is a matter, then, of a whole: a combination and interaction of object, organ and act; of datum, task and growth — it is a matter of philosophical existence.

A third consideration: the experience of the indestructibility of mind bears a religious character. The analysis of the Idea, as remarked above, comes up against a peculiar antinomy: on the one hand the Idea rests on itself, since it is a significant form of absolute validity; on the other hand it points beyond itself, since it is not the absolutely valid as such, but a form, and therefore something limited. So it has its roots in something that is definitive and ultimate, the Good. This Good has a thoroughly numinous nature; it is the proper divinity of the Platonic world. It emerges in every Idea; and if the Idea is the significant form in which entity becomes manifest and apprehensible by the intellectual act, it is also at the same time the form by which entity is lifted into the light of the eternal mystery. When, therefore, the perception of the Idea and of the thing in its Idea is performed in accordance with philosophical requirement, it merges into a religious act, and the result of the perception, namely truth, acquires the character of a religious intuition. It is this that gives the conversations of the dialogue that peculiar pathos which makes them other and more than a mere philosophizing in the modern specialist sense. The immortality of the soul is looked at from the standpoint of the numinous power of the Eternal Good. This power is able to give to knowledge a kind of assurance which surpasses mere logical certainty, no — to vary a famous saying in a very Socratic sense — "has the power of carrying problems".

This touches a last consideration, the existential character of the

whole line of thought. To be sure, there is in question a theoretical problem, clearly stated and accurately treated within its terms. But this problem also includes an existential question: whether the philosopher can be so sure of the truth he has found that he can on the strength of it lead a life so divergent from the views of other men. In more precise terms: whether this particular philosopher, Socrates, who is now speaking and is soon to die, can be sure that he has taught rightly and lived rightly throughout his long life ; that his conduct in face of the indictment has been correct; that his death will set the seal on all that he has told his disciples about the philosopher's relation to death. Such a certainty, existential in the strictest sense, can never accrue to him from a mere philosophical perception, nor yet from a merely ethical decision, but only from a religious assurance. How deep this assurance goes, becomes evident as soon as one thinks of the connection between the doctrine of the "Sun" of the Good and that divinity to whom Socrates is conscious of a particular obligation, namely Apollo. In the *Apology* the religious character of the Socratic existence appears especially in the passage where he speaks of the connection of his philosophical calling with the response of the Delphic Oracle. What he does is a service under Apollo, the god of the material and intellectual light of the world. The *Phaedo* also speaks of this service, and with a most personal interest. The connection of the symbol of the Good with the god of the sun and of intellectual light is more than external allegory. It is in the nature of the Socratic-Platonic mind, in all its search after the essential, not to sever religious ideas from the divine figures of tradition; its philosophical statements grow up rather out of the heritage of religious experience and ideas, so that this heritage makes itself heard in them. It is very significant that the conception which gives to Platonic thought its final completion, namely the Idea of the Good, is so intimately bound up with the name of Apollo, and that Socrates so emphatically professes himself to be Apollo's servant.

At the same time it should not be forgotten for a moment that the term in which Socrates-Plato finds the last expression of his religious will, namely the Good, attains to givenness in the Idea. The Idea is related to all sides of human and mundane reality; but the emphasis is on knowledge. In Plato's world the aesthetic moment plays a large part — though it must be added at once that the modern concept does not suffice to express what he understands by the Beautiful: namely the character of that which has turned out well, is truly formed and has attained to valid shape, simply as such. Very pronounced, too, in his world is the concern with what is costly and noble; the craving for

that perfection which reveals itself in the shape of the Beautiful, as expressed in the doctrine of Eros — for Eros as center of action, force, movement, forms the analogy to the objective might of the Good — and much more to this effect might be said. In spite of that it must never be forgotten that this world is that of the philosopher, and receives its characteristic determination through the relation to truth. The Idea is in a decisive manner the expression of truth; so too the religious element, which gives the philosopher the final assurance, is decisively related to truth. In the experience of truth Socrates becomes certain of the meaning of his own existence and of existence in general. The Socratic-Platonic philosophy is anything rather than a mere work of concepts, drawing its life only from the excitement of thought and knowledge; the man behind it is rich, strong, developed all round, and in touch with the most creative culture known to history. Yet the ultimate determinant lies in the wonderful passion for knowledge which fills it. The Platonic man wants to know, at any cost or, to put it more accurately, at the highest and most vital cost. The expression of this is the doctrine of the philosopher's relation to death; the witness to it the figure and death of Socrates himself. This will for knowledge is as prudent as it is resolute, as conscientious as it is bold. He knows how difficult are the problems, and how hard the limitations, but is convinced that there is such a thing as real, pure knowledge, knowledge which leads to the true certainty. It is this youth-strong will for truth, attacking the problems with such splendid organs of vision and thought, which makes Plato's works immortal. And it is truth in the fullest sense which concerns him; as majesty pure and simple, which cannot be subordinated to any end — but which, as soon as it is willed for the simple reason that it is truth, becomes at once the most fruitful of life-forces.

The closing words of the argument show how little question there is of a "proof" in the strict sense of the word, but rather of a *logos* which interprets experience and brings the mind's life into action.

*Then, it seems, when death attacks a man, his mortal part dies, but his immortal part retreats before death, and goes away safe and indestructible.*

*It seems so.*

*Then, Cebes, said he, beyond all question the soul is immortal and imperishable; and our souls will indeed exist in the other world.*

*I, Socrates, he replied, have no more objections to urge; your reasoning has quite satisfied me. If Simmias, or any one else, has*

*anything to say, it would be well for him to say it now: for I know not to what other season he can defer the discussion, if he wants to say or to hear anything touching this matter.*

*No, indeed, said Simmias; neither have I any further ground for doubt after what you have said. Yet I cannot help feeling some doubts still in my mind; for the subject of our conversation is a vast one, and I distrust the feebleness of man.*

*You are right, Simmias, said Socrates, and more than that, you must re-examine our original assumptions, however certain they seem to you; and when you have analysed them sufficiently, you will, I think, follow the argument, as far as man can follow it; and when that becomes clear to you, you will seek for nothing more.*

*That is true, he said.*

The next sentences give a practical application to the argument:

*But then, my friends, said he, we must think of this. If it be true that the soul is immortal, we have to take care of her, not merely on account of the time, which we call life, but also on account of all time. Now we can see how terrible is the danger of neglect. For if death had been a release from all things, it would have been a godsend to the wicked; for when they died they would have been released with their souls from the body and from their own wickedness. But now we have found that the soul is immortal; and so her only refuge and salvation from evil is to become as perfect and wise as possible. For she takes nothing with her to the other world but her education and culture; and these, it is said, are of the greatest service or of the greatest injury to the dead man, at the very beginning of his journey there.*

## THE MYTH CONCERNING THE FATE OF MAN AFTER DEATH

### *Meaning of the Myths*

The last sentence quoted leads up to a description of the world and its various regions, so far as these are co-ordinate with the stages and forms of human life. It is a description of a peculiar kind, with echoes from mythology.

Myths are made up of primitive figures and events; of gods and

their doings and fates, in which life is represented poetically. They are not allegories of reality, but reality itself interpreted. One who knows them — taking the word in the old sense of being in and possessing — has knowledge of essence and occurrence, being and meaning. The myths tell how a man must behave and act if life is to be kept in order; they are the forms of right living. The sense of the myth is analogous to that of the Idea. The latter makes the world clear to theoretical, that is, contemplative knowledge; it elevates reality to truth. The myth makes that reality practicable and familiar for life; it teaches wisdom and right action. Not by arguments and precepts, but, as we have said, by figures and events which contain the essence of the life-process itself. The proper place of the myth is in religious worship. Religious words and actions accomplish it, announce it and assume the worshipers into it. Idea and myth thus belong together. The former lights up the dullness of the merely present till it becomes truth; the latter overcomes the confusion of events, enables them to be understood as a divinely significant process, and allows life to find its order therein.

The description of the world as given by Plato at the end of the dialogue is not a myth in the full sense. For one thing, because it does not narrate any event. For myths narrate events which have happened “once upon a time” — in that long ago which denotes no definite point of time, but the horizon to time in general, and so to any period or point in time. But apart from this, Plato’s description lacks that primitive note which proclaims that life is here seen and lived directly in figures and events. More strictly speaking, this note has become only an echo; though it is still strong enough to produce a unity of symbol and meaning, an interpretation of existence and a preparation for life’s way, which place it after all in close proximity to myth. Plato himself is conscious of this, for he makes Socrates say at the close of his description:

*A man of sense will not insist that these things are exactly as I have described them. But I think that he will believe that something of the kind is true of the soul and her habitations, seeing that she is shown to be immortal, and that it is worth his while to stake everything on this belief. The venture is a fair one, and he must charm his doubts with spells like these. That is why I have been prolonging the fable all this time.*

Socrates’s purpose is to describe the structure of the world; not in the sense of a geography or cosmology, but in such a way that the vari-

ous regions of the world appear as habitations and at the same time expressions of human life, containing this life and at the same time being constituted by it. The reader must take what is said, then, not as simple description, nor yet as a mere objectivation of psychical states, but must see the objective setting and the life-element as interdependent data.<sup>1</sup> The saying “for what is within is without”, with its converse “for what is without is within”, is true here in the strictest sense. The geographical and cosmic landscape with its formations is the expression of the inner human scene with its decisions and fates, so that the man who is cognate with it beholds himself in it. Conversely it is that which is imposed on him and brings him always into the state which corresponds to his dispositions and spiritual actuality.

### *The Picture of Existence*

To understand the structure of the world described, and especially to explain what is the real point of it, is not altogether easy. But once one has worked through it, the picture displays itself large and simple to the inward eye.

The universe is spherical in shape a reflection of Greek feeling, which esteemed the neatly formed more than the boundless and immense. In the middle of it is suspended the earth, likewise spherical. It needs no support, not even that of the air, for the equilibrium of cosmic forces, those of the surrounding heaven as well as those of its own structure, hold it in suspense. If we take into account what is further said of it, it must be conceived as very large, larger perhaps than it is in fact. Its surface is pitted by gigantic basins or valleys, which are filled with air, clouds, and in short with everything that we call atmosphere. Such a basin is formed, for example, by the Mediterranean Sea and its surrounding countries, that is, the Greek *oikoumene*; it is so large that its inhabitants have obviously never set eyes on the enclosing walls. Depressions of a similar kind and of greater or smaller dimensions, deeper or shallower, are scattered over the face of the earth. They contain plains, mountains, seas, rivers, the whole living-space of mankind. So men live, strictly speaking, not on, but in the earth.

The true surface of the earth would only be reached if a man should succeed in reaching and climbing the walls of these depressions. As the air fills only the depressions, he would on completing his ascent

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<sup>1</sup> The most striking instance of such existential landscape-painting of post-mythical inspiration is Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

leave the atmosphere behind, and, as other men stand by the sea's edge, so he would now stand by the air's edge, while he himself would be in celestial space, which is pervaded by the ether. Thus there are three space-filling fluids. In the depressions is the air with its movements, obscurities and unrest; within the sea of air there is a yet lower depth which is filled with water and consists of the various rivers, lakes and seas; and finally the space above the true surface of the earth contains the pure light-element, the ether.

There too are plains, mountains and growth of every kind. Over it move the heavenly bodies, "still visible in their true shape", which latter is in the lower region of the earth concealed and distorted by the atmosphere. On the heights dwell the perfect, who have overcome the trial of death. They too possess cities and temples; in the temples, however, are not merely the images of the gods, but the gods themselves, and men have intercourse with them.

As on the upper side the celestial region joins that of the inner earth, so on the lower side of the latter the subterranean region. The way to this is through the water. The waters of the different depressions are in communication with one another and with the interior of the earth, where they collect in immense volume. An oscillating movement of the earth's interior, about the origin of which nothing is said, drives them out into the rivers and seas and draws them back again into the depths. Among the rivers four are of special importance. First, the Oceanus, the source of the seas known to the Greeks; then, on the opposite side of the globe, the Acheron, which after a long course sinks into the earth's interior and thereflows into the Acherusian Lake; next, the Pyriphlegethon, which rises between the two former and shortly falls into a space filled with fire inside the earth, where it forms a sea of boiling and muddy water; it is this river too which carries along with it the molten lava and sends it up through the volcanoes; lastly, the Cocytus, which receives the water of the Stygian Lake and thereupon plunges likewise into the inside of the earth.

The scenery of these rivers and lakes comprises everything mighty and fearful that experience and fancy surmise in the earth's interior, and forms the sinister region of Tartarus. Here, guided by their guardian spirits, arrive and are judged the souls of the dead. Those who "on account of the greatness of their crimes are judged irremediable", sink to the lowest depth of Tartarus, "whence they never more come forth" (113e). They cannot therefore re-enter the cycle of reincarnation, but are struck out of existence. It is otherwise with those whose moral state can be renewed by virtue of an inner core of good. After the judgment they are thrown into the waters of Cocytus, where they suffer

fearful torment. But at the end of every year they come to the shore of the Acherusian Lake and invoke those against whom they have formerly transgressed. If these forgive them, the punishment then ends; otherwise they must continue their expiation. Eventually however so we may probably interpret the vague description — they reach the abode of the blessed, which has already been mentioned.

Finally, those “who are found to have led exceptionally holy lives” (114b), ascend to the region above the earth and live there in converse with the gods. It may be presumed that they contemplate the Ideas, until their time comes to return to historical existence in a new incarnation and to bring with them thither the hidden memory of essential truth. Among these also are certain souls who do not return, but are finally transported, this time to a region of ultimate fruition — namely those “who have been completely purified by philosophy”. They “proceed to dwellings still fairer than these, which are not easily described, and of which I have not time to speak now”. Evidently the abode of the Good Itself is meant. There “they live without bodies for all future time” (114c).

The description of these regions and states is uncertain in detail, nor should it be made unduly precise by interpretation. We are dealing with words which still have about them something of the mythical message of “myth-sagas”, spells which a man “sings to himself” to give him helping and comforting knowledge. In these pictures Socrates’s teaching about mortal and immortal life acquires cosmic shape. Men go to their death with that “education and training” which they have acquired during life. If they have given themselves over to their senses and impulses, their guardian spirit leads them to Tartarus. The disorder in which they find themselves must be set right; this is done by the sentence of the Judge of souls. Those of them who have become thoroughly enslaved to evil are engulfed by a transcendent extreme of evil and so removed from the realm of existence. Nothing further is told us about the nature of this transcendent; it forms the evil Nowhere. Those souls however “who are found to have lived in a middle state (between good and bad)” (113d), undergo purgation. The wavering images of the subterranean streams and lakes with their horror represent the state of conflict and misery of these souls. A beautiful thought makes the men against whom the penitents have offended become present in some mysterious fashion and after each year (the rhythmical unit of time) decide whether the punishment is sufficient. Thus their condition is inserted into the personal relations of society and finally determined thereby.

The region above the earth is the place of spirit, light, truth, the

realm of the Ideas. Thither come those men who on earth have led a life according to the spirit. It is not clear from the description whether they too have to undergo a judgment, or whether their inward state simply becomes evident at death, so that their existence requires no further definition (113d). Their life bears henceforth the character of light and truth. To the same region and life those souls also ascend who have been purified by their punishment in Tartarus and have obtained the forgiveness of those whom they have wronged. From there also leads a way to a transcendent extreme, in this case a positive one. Into this place are taken up those who on earth have attained to perfect purity, those who have practiced “philosophy” in the true sense. These also return no more to the rhythms of existence. The corporeal has become so foreign to them that they are incapable of any further reincarnation. If the region above the air signifies the realm of the Ideas, we may understand the final transcendence as the region of pure Goodness, the ultimate mystery of light. To “disclose” fuller particulars about it is impossible, says the speaker to Simmias, in mysteriously veiled words; but even what has been set forth is itself magnificent, and “noble is the prize, and great the hope” (114c). Those who live in the region of the Ideas are destined to return to earth at the appointed time and to bring with them, in the hidden memory of their soul, the truth they have beheld.

## THE CLOSING SCENE

*You, Simmias and Cebes, and the rest will set forth at some future day, each at his own time. But me now, as a tragic poet would say, fate calls at once; and it is time for me to betake myself to the bath. I think that I had better bathe before I drink the poison, and not give the women the trouble of washing my dead body.*

Thus begins the final scene in the account of Socrates's death relieving the gravity of the moment with a delicate self-banter. The narrative, without further comment, shall bring this work to a close.

*When he had finished speaking Crito said, Be it so, Socrates. But have you any commands for your friends or for me about your children, or about other things? How shall we serve you best?*

*Simply by doing what I always tell you, Crito. Take care of your own selves, and you will serve me and mine and yourselves in all that you do, even though you make no promises now. But if*

*you are careless of your own selves, and will not follow the path of life which we have pointed out in our discussions both to-day and at other times, all your promises now, however profuse and earnest they are, will be of no avail.*

*We will do our best, said Crito. But how shall we bury you ?*

*As you please, he answered; only you must catch me first, and not let me escape you. And then he looked at us with a smile and said, My friends, I cannot convince Crito that I am the Socrates who has been conversing with you, and arranging his arguments in order. He thinks that I am the body which he will presently see a corpse, and he asks how he is to bury me. All the arguments which I have used to prove that I shall not remain with you after I have drunk the poison, but that I shall go away to the happiness of the blessed, with which I tried to comfort you and myself, have been thrown away on him. Do you therefore be my sureties to him, as he was my surety at the trial, but in a different way. He was surety for me then that I would remain; but you must be my sureties to him. that I shall go away when I am dead, and not remain with you: then he will feel my death less; and when he sees my body being burnt or buried, he will not be grieved because he thinks that I am suffering dreadful things: and at my funeral he will not say that it is Socrates whom he is laying out, or bearing to the grave, or burying. For, dear Crito, he continued, you must know that to use words wrongly is not only a fault in itself; it also creates evil in the soul. You must be of good cheer, and say that you are burying my body: and you must bury it as you please, and as you think right.*

*With these words he rose and went into another room to bathe himself: Crito went with him and told us to wait. So we waited, talking of the argument, and discussing it, and then again dwelling on the greatness of the calamity which had fallen upon us: it seemed as if we were going to lose a father, and to be orphans for the rest of our life. When he had bathed, and his children had been brought to him, he had two sons quite little, and one grown up, and the women of his family were come, he spoke with them in Crito's presence, and gave them his last commands; then he sent the women and children away, and returned to us. By that time it was near the hour of sunset, for he had been a long while within. When he came back to us from the bath he sat down, but not much was said after that. Presently the servant of the Eleven came and stood before him and said, "I know that I shall not find you unreasonable like other men, Socrates. They are angry with*

*me and curse me when I bid them drink the poison because the authorities make me do it. But I have found you all along the noblest and gentlest and best man that has ever come here; and now I am sure that you will not be angry with me, but with those who you know are to blame. And so farewell, and try to bear what must be as lightly as you can; you know why I have corned* With that he turned away weeping, and went out.

Socrates looked up at him, and replied, Farewell: I will do as you say. Then he turned to us and said, How courteous the man is! And the whole time that I have been here, he has constantly come in to see me, and sometimes he has talked to me, and has been the best of men; and now, how generously he weeps for me! Come, Crito, let us obey him: let the poison be brought if it is ready; and if it is not ready, let it be prepared.

Crito replied: No, Socrates, I think that the sun is still upon the hills; it has not set. Besides, I know that other men take the poison quite late, and eat and drink heartily, and even enjoy the company of their chosen friends, after the announcement has been made. So do not hurry; there is still time.

Socrates replied: And those whom you speak of, Crito, naturally do so; for they think that they will be gainers by so doing. And I naturally shall not do so; for I think that I should gain nothing by drinking the poison a little later, but my own contempt for so greedily saving up a life which is already spent. So do not refuse to do as I say.

Then Crito made a sign to his slave who was standing by; and the slave went out, and after some delay returned with the man who was to give the poison, carrying it prepared in a cup. When Socrates saw him, he asked, You understand these things, my good sir, what have I to do?

You have only to drink this, he replied, and to walk about until your legs feel heavy, and then lie down; and it will act of itself. With that he handed the cup to Socrates, who took it quite cheerfully, Echecrates, without trembling, and without any change of color or of feature, and looked up at the man with that fixed glance of his, and asked, What say you to making a libation from this draught? May I, or not? We only prepare so much as we think sufficient, Socrates, he answered. I understand, said Socrates. But I suppose that I may, and must, pray to the gods that my journey hence may be prosperous: that is my prayer; be it so. With these words he put the cup to his lips and drank the poison quite calmly and cheerfully. Till then most of us had been

able to control our grief fairly well; but when we saw him drinking, and then the poison finished, we could do so no longer: my tears came fast in spite of myself, and I covered my face and wept for myself: it was not for him, but at my own misfortune in losing such a friend. Even before that Crito had been unable to restrain his tears, and had gone away; and Apollodorus, who had never once ceased weeping the whole time, burst into a loud cry, and made us one and all break down by his sobbing and grief, except only Socrates himself. What are you doing, my friends? he exclaimed. I sent away the women chiefly in order that they might not offend in this way; for I have heard that a man should die in silence. So calm yourselves and bear up. When we heard that we were ashamed, and we ceased from weeping. But he walked about, until he said that his legs were getting heavy, and then he lay down on his back, as he was told. And the man who gave the poison began to examine his feet and legs, from time to time: then he pressed his foot hard, and asked if there was any feeling in it; and Socrates said, No: and then his legs, and so higher and higher, and showed us that he was cold and stiff. And Socrates felt himself, and said that when it came to his heart, he should be gone. He was already growing cold about the groin, when he uncovered his face, which had been covered, and spoke for the last time. Crito, he said, I owe a cock to Asclepius; do not forget to pay it. It shall be done, replied Crito. Is there anything else that you wish? He made no answer to this question; but after a short interval there was a movement, and the man uncovered him, and his eyes were fixed. Then Crito closed his mouth and his eyes.

Such was the end, Echecrates, of our friend, a man, I think, who was the wisest and justest, and the best man that I have ever known.