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BY F. M. CORNFORD

BEFORE AND AFTER SOCRATES

THE UNWRITTEN PHILOSOPHY AND OTHER ESSAYS

PRINCIPIUM SAPIENTIÆ

THE ORIGINS OF GREEK PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

BY

F. M. CORNFORD

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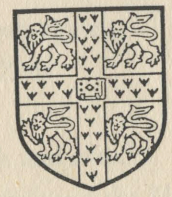

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The clearest statement is to be found where Epicurus, in the Letter to Herodotus (§ 76), turns from cosmogony to this field, which it will be convenient to call by its old name, meteorology. He begins by rejecting two current explanations of the motions that take place up in the sky, the turnings, eclipses, rising and setting of the heavenly bodies, and atmospheric phenomena. We must not think that they are controlled or ordained by any divine being. A god is essentially an immortal being who enjoys perfect bliss. His happiness is not to be impaired by 'trouble and care, anger or kindness'; such activities and feelings occur only 'where there is weakness and fear and dependence on neighbours'. Secondly, the same requirement of untroubled bliss forbids us equally to suppose that the heavenly bodies are themselves divine and moved by their own wills. Either of these religious views would contradict our notion of divine happiness and 'cause the greatest disturbance in our souls'. The last words reveal the fundamental objection. Epicurus frankly admits that no other purpose is to be served by a knowledge of meteorology, or of any other branch of physics, than 'peace of mind and a secure confidence'.[1] Our own happiness would be destroyed by the theological belief that any sort of divine providence interferes in the workings of Nature, that thunder and lightning are tokens of divine anger, or that the rain falls by divine grace. On the other hand, our happiness is increased by believing in gods as free from care as we should like to be ourselves. The solution is to translate them, out of harm's way, to Islands of the Blest in the intermundane spaces outside the boundaries of any of the innumerable worlds. These are described in language traditionally associated with the abode of the gods from Homer onwards.

Although Epicurus defends his belief in the existence of gods on grounds which profess to be rational, he does not care to conceal the more human motive for both asserting their existence and denying their activity. On his own principles the religious views he forbids us to accept ought to be entertained as possible, since they are certainly not contradicted by the evidence of our senses. Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, all saw in the regular motions

[1] *Ep. to Pyth.* 85.

of the heavenly bodies the clearest evidence, not of any blind necessity of 'natural laws', but on the contrary of divine intelligence and will. So did Sir Isaac Newton in the very work which at last revealed those laws of mechanical motion of which the ancients had no inkling. 'It is not to be conceived', says the *Principia*,[1] 'that mere mechanical causes could give birth to so many regular motions.... This most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being.' If Epicurus thought otherwise, it was not because he could point to any observable phenomenon inconsistent with the religious view; nor had he any rational ground for assuming that the universe must be so constituted as not to disturb his own peace of mind. His attitude, accordingly, has no claim to be called scientific. It is not based on observation or the evidence of the senses, but dogmatic to at least the same degree as that of his opponents.

If the reader has any doubts upon this point, they may be dispelled by a consideration of the rule laid down by Epicurus as peculiarly applicable to meteorology. In this department he is not content with the negative principle, already sufficiently lax, that any explanation may be accepted as true, if it is not contradicted by sense experience. He goes further and tells us that, for celestial occurrences, *all* explanations which sense does not contradict must be accepted as true, because they actually happen in several different ways. It is not merely that their remoteness denies us the opportunity of deciding between the alternatives by means of a closer view. 'Even if in our world there should be only one true explanation of a given phenomenon, yet thanks to the "equal distribution" (ἰσονομία) of things in the whole universe, the other explanations will hold good in other worlds. They must then all be accepted equally.'[2]

In dealing with other departments of physics 'there is only one explanation which harmonizes with phenomena. This is not so with the things in the sky: they admit of more than one explanation of their occurrence and more than one account of their nature

[1] Gen. Schol. to *Principia*, Bk III, trans. Motte-Cajori.
[2] C. Bailey, *Greek Atomists*, p. 261, referring to *Ep.* II, 87.

which harmonizes with our perceptions.... To accept one and reject another which harmonizes just as well with the appearances, is to leave the path of physical speculation and relapse into myth.' We can obtain 'indications' from what goes on around us and can be closely observed; but what goes on in the sky cannot be closely observed and 'may be produced in several ways'.[1]

It is amusing to see how this dogmatist, in the very act of denouncing the dogmatism of 'myth', lays down a principle which is, to our minds, wildly unscientific. As Dr Bailey remarks, 'in this astonishing but wholly consistent conclusion lies the reason of the many curious passages in Epicurus' astronomy and meteorology which must strike any reader of the Letter to Pythocles or of the fifth and sixth books of Lucretius' poem, where again and again what we know to be the true explanation of a phenomenon is classed side by side with the most puerile hypotheses'. Eclipses of the sun and moon, for example, may be due to their extinction and rekindling, or to 'the interposition of some other bodies, either the earth or some unseen body or something else of this sort' (*Ep.* II, 96). Having rejected 'the slavish artifices (or technicalities) of the astronomers', the Epicurean does not think it worth while even to examine their reasons for believing that the sun's light is obstructed by the moon and for preferring this explanation to the view that the sun goes out for a while and lights up again. So long as eclipses are not taken to be omens of divine displeasure, it does not matter how they are caused. Any physical account is as good as any other for our peace of mind, and all accounts must be entertained. Again, after giving four alternative explanations of the motion of the stars, Lucretius concludes:

> Which of these causes is in operation in this world, it is not easy to affirm for certain; but what can be and is done throughout the universe in various worlds formed on various plans, this I teach, and I go on to set forth several causes which may exist throughout the universe for the motions of stars; one of which however must in this world also be the cause that imparts lively motion to the signs; but to dictate which of them it is, is by no means the duty of the man who advances step by step. (v. 526.)

[1] *Ep.* II, 86–7.

It was not by following the Epicurean principle that astronomy had in fact advanced, more than a century earlier, to the true explanation of eclipses, accepted by all serious mathematicians. If Epicurus wished to rescue the common man from the superstitious belief in omens, he would have done better to master their demonstrations and explain them in simple terms, instead of denouncing them for 'dictating' a single explanation.

We can now detect the deeper reason for the special application of this extraordinary principle to meteorology. 'What goes on in the sky and under the earth' had long been regarded as the peculiar region of the visible world in which divine agency and intentions were revealed. It had become a commonplace that belief in the existence of gods had had its origin in two causes: dreams or waking visions, and meteoric and subterranean phenomena. Primitive men, said Democritus,[1] had been terrified by the sight of what goes on in the sky—thunder, lightning, thunderbolts, comets, eclipses of sun and moon—and thought that these were caused by gods. Lucretius repeats this. After mentioning dreams, which the Atomists accepted as valid evidence, he turns to the second source of religious belief:

> Again they would see the system of heaven and the different seasons of the years come round in regular succession, and could not find out by what causes this was done; therefore they would seek a refuge in handing over all things to the gods and supposing all things to be guided by their nod. And they placed in heaven the abodes and realms of the gods, because night and moon are seen to roll through heaven, moon, day and night and night's austere constellations and night-wandering meteors of the sky and flying bodies of flame, clouds, sun, rains, snow, winds, lightnings, hail, and rapid rumblings and loud threatful thunderclaps. (v, 1183, tr. Munro.)

Lucretius goes on to enlarge upon the terror of divine anger supposed to be manifest in thunder, storm and earthquake. He professes to be disquieted not only by these exceptional outbursts,

[1] Democr. A 75 (*Vors.*[5] II, p. 102). Cf. Aristotle, *frag.* 10: the conception of gods arose from two sources, the soul's experience of inspired divination in dreams, and ἀπὸ τῶν μετεώρων, the regular movement of the heavenly bodies.

doctrines of man's physical constitution were predetermined by their general theory of the constitution of all bodies in the universe. Man must be composed, like everything else, of water, or air, or the four elements, or atoms. Modern writers constantly speak of fifth-century philosophers as coming to take a prevailing interest in 'biology' or 'physiology', as against 'physics'. But we ought to realize that no such sciences had any independent existence. The field was divided between natural philosophy (or 'physics') and medicine, and the conflict arose at the boundary which they reached from their opposite standpoints—the nature of man.

Hippocrates himself was well aware of this. In *Ancient Medicine* (xx) he speaks of certain physicians and philosophers who tell us that no doctor can know medicine and treat his patients properly unless he knows the nature of man.

> Their argument points to philosophy, like that of Empedocles and other writers on Nature who have described what man is from the beginning, how he first came into being and of what elements he was constructed. But, in my view, all that philosophers or physicians have written on Nature has no more to do with medicine than with painting. I also hold that medicine is the only source of clear knowledge about Nature; and that no one can attain to the certain knowledge of what man is, of the causes of his coming into being, and all the rest, until medicine itself has been properly comprehended.

He goes on to specify the right approach to these questions. The physician should start from the observed effects of various diets and habits of life on individuals. We are not to be content with unqualified statements, such as 'cheese is a bad food, because a surfeit of it causes pain'; we must know the nature of the pain, why it occurs, and what constituent of the human body is harmfully affected. Individual constitutions differ, according to the prevalence of this or that humour; and cheese will suit some temperaments, not others.

Such being the typical attitude of the physician towards the study of Nature, we should expect him, when he came to formulate a general theory of knowledge, to find the sources of knowledge in observation of facts by the use of the senses. Aristotle, himself the son of a practising physician, outlines this type of

operations, and can give an account of all these things', with the irrational practice of the confectioner, which can produce pleasure (not health) because by mere experience (without art) it has 'preserved a memory of what usually happens'.

The evidence all points to the conclusion that the empirical theory of knowledge was a medical theory, first formulated by Alcmaeon. It arose naturally from reflection on the actual procedure of the practising physician. It dates from the time when the most intelligent doctors were feeling the impulse to disentangle their art from its magical antecedents. This was the same impulse towards rationalism that had already driven the Milesian philosophers to disengage cosmogony from its mythical trappings. But whereas the philosopher had recourse to abstract postulates about the original state of things, the physician, with his attention constantly fixed on individual cases needing to be dealt with practically, moved in the other direction, from observed particulars to generalizations.

Under ancient conditions, moreover, medicine was the only practical art that was impelled by its immediate interests to build up something that we can recognize as the embryonic form of empirical science. In the last hundred years natural philosophy (as it used to be called) has come to be known as 'natural science' and even simply as 'science', as if its characteristic method of observation, hypothesis and experiment were the only means of arriving at knowledge, and the habits of matter in motion were the only things that can be known. Since the term 'science' has now acquired these arrogant associations, the application of it to the natural philosophy of Greece is perpetually misleading the reader, since it at once suggests to his mind the whole apparatus of the modern laboratory and the whole outlook of its denizens. It also suggests a long list of specialized departments—physics, chemistry, biology, philosophy and so on—and these specialist names are frequently used in histories of ancient philosophy as if these several disciplines had already been distinguished. All these illusions should be dismissed from our minds. The only discipline before the time of Aristotle which can safely be described as 'natural science' at least in a nascent stage is medicine. This was

clear enough to Aristotle himself. When he set his three pupils or colleagues, Theophrastus, Eudemus, and Meno, to write the histories of earlier thought, he divided the field into (1) metaphysics and natural philosophy, (2) mathematics, and (3) medicine. Evidently he felt the force of the Hippocratic contention that medicine stood alone as a long-established art with a starting-point and procedure of its own, independent of, and even opposed to, the principles and procedure of the physicists and metaphysicians and of mathematics.

We can also see why none of the other practical arts of antiquity showed any tendency to develop into a science. Medicine, as we have seen, had its point of contact with natural philosophy where the two met in the question of the 'nature of man'. But there was nothing whatever to connect the arts of building, weaving, agriculture, pottery and so on with the speculations of the philosophers about the origin of the world and the ultimate constituents of matter. It could not occur to anyone's mind that the debate whether matter consists of atoms or of the four elements could have any bearing on the invention of more efficient types of loom or plough. The common idea that the Ionian philosophers in particular aimed at the 'conquest of Nature' and the harnessing of natural forces to industrial production is due entirely to the confusion of their aims and methods with those of the modern man of science since the Renaissance. The Ionians were not setting out to discover 'laws of nature' with a view to setting the forces concerned to drive machines and thereby raise the level of human comfort. If this had been their aim, they would have had to follow the physician's procedure. They would have started with careful observation of facts and advanced to generalizations, with constant recourse to experiment, to see whether their conclusions would work. But we find nothing of this sort. The 'experiments' recorded as having been made by natural philosophers are very few, and they hardly deserve the name. They are, in fact, illustrations of foregone conclusions.[1]

Of all the natural philosophers, the Atomists, as being the most

[1] Cf. the *clepsydra* and wineskins of Empedocles and Anaxagoras above, pp. 5 f.

the whole of Platonism is an expansion and completion of the Socratic doctrine, Goodness is knowledge. The theory of Ideas gives to this formula a more definite content by adding a clearer conception of the nature of knowledge and of its objects; it tells us also how this knowledge is gained. But this development does not arise solely from reflection on the Socratic formula. The new light comes from another source, already indicated in the *Gorgias*, namely the mathematical and religious philosophy of the Pythagoreans. The Platonic theory of Ideas is described by Aristotle as a variety of Pythagoreanism, its peculiar features being due to reflection on what was implied in Socrates' attempts to define moral terms. In his eyes Platonism was, in fact, rather Pythagoreanism modified by Socratic influence than Socraticism modified by Pythagorean influence. This view of the historical perspective has an authority which cannot be shaken by anything less than a proof that it is inconsistent with the Platonic writings. In my opinion, no such proof has ever been produced.

Before turning to the new solution of the problem of knowledge presented in the *Meno*, it is well to remind ourselves that to a disciple of Socrates this problem meant, in the first place, the problem of that knowledge which Socrates had identified with goodness. The theory of Ideas is sometimes treated as if Plato had set out to discover a theoretical justification for what is now called 'science'. We must cling to the fact that in Plato's time no one of the imposing array of specialized natural sciences as now conceived and established—physics, chemistry, geology, botany and so on—had any existence. It cannot, therefore, have been the purpose of the theory of Ideas to provide them with a 'methodology'. We learn, moreover, from Aristotle that Plato in his youth had adopted the Heraclitean principle that all sensible things are in a perpetual flow of change, so that there can be no knowledge of them: and Aristotle adds that in later life he held fast to this opinion. Plato was not seeking a basis for any science of the sensible world; he was, in the first instance, seeking to give an account of that knowledge which must direct the conduct of human life. The objects he discovered were not laws of nature, if by that we mean formulas describing the sequence of sensible phenomena, or anything of

that sort. The theory grew upon his hands into a doctrine of an intelligible 'nature of things', consciously opposed to the materialism which identified reality with the elementary components of tangible bodies. But in its inception it was rather a theory of Ideals to regulate moral conduct. Socrates had been convinced that all men, if their minds could be cleared of the mists of prejudice and false beliefs, would see the true end of life and could not then fail to desire it. But they cannot be just until they know what Justice is. The theory of Ideas asserts that Justice and other such ideals are eternal objects of thought which can be known and which possess universal and unconditional validity. They are not part of the furniture of your private world or of mine; nor are they arbitrary conventions of society. They form a common world independent of us all. They are, in fact, the absolute objects of the Socratic knowledge on which all virtue depends.

The *Meno* opens abruptly with an old question: how is goodness acquired? Is it innate, or formed as a habit by exercise, or can it be taught? Socrates observes that before we ask how goodness is to be acquired, we ought to know what it is. The definitions suggested by Meno fail to stand criticism; and he complains that Socrates is like the electric fish which benumbs its victims. At this point a dialogue of the earliest type would have ended in a confession of failure; but in the *Meno* this part is only prefatory. Plato goes on to raise the general question: how is it possible, in such an undertaking, to proceed further? From our failure to define the common character in a number of things called 'virtues', it appears that we do not *know* the thing we are looking for. How, then, is it possible to look for it, and how can we ever tell whether we have found it or not? This problem had been crudely formulated, possibly by some sophist who criticized Socrates' search for definitions. It demands an answer.

It seemed quite clear to Plato that knowledge of the kind that Socrates sought, knowledge of the meaning of moral terms such as 'goodness' or 'virtue', could never be accounted for by the apparatus of the empirical theory of knowledge. Goodness cannot be perceived by any sense, and a definition of it cannot be distilled out of accumulated impressions of colours, sounds, and

features of the doctrine which go beyond what would now be commonly admitted.

Obviously it is only knowledge of a certain kind that can be thus recovered. Historical knowledge in the widest sense—the facts and events of human or natural history—is not contained in the inner consciousness. We are not born with the knowledge that the battle of Marathon was fought in 490 B.C., or that fire burns if we touch it. Such facts are learnt by sensible experience, or taught by various sources of information; and they are registered in the ordinary personal memory. To these records Plato refuses the name of knowledge. They constitute what, in common with the empiricists, he calls 'experience which merely preserves a memory of what usually happens', in contrast with 'art' which understands the nature of its object and the reasons for its procedure.[1]

It is clear that in Plato's middle period his attention was concentrated on mathematical truth and those moral ideals the knowledge of which, as sought by Socrates, was to regulate conduct. The essential feature of these objects, that which makes them in the full sense knowable, is their eternal and unchanging nature. They are outside and beyond the flow of time and becoming in which everything the senses can perceive is involved. All previous philosophy had been the search for some permanent and unchanging 'nature of things'; but the physicists had imagined that this was to be found in some ultimate form of matter. Plato, having accepted Heracleitus' intuition that nothing in the sensible world is exempt from change, but every form of matter is perpetually dying and being reborn in a different form, could only declare that the permanent reality was immaterial and accessible only to pure thought. In the objects of mathematics and in the moral forms he recognized realities having these necessary attributes. Knowledge, accordingly, was limited to our apprehension of them.

All this means, of course, that the memory containing this knowledge is not the personal or individual memory, the waxen

[1] *Gorg.* 501 A: τριβῇ καὶ ἐμπειρίᾳ μνήμην μόνον σωζομένη τοῦ εἰωθότος γίγνεσθαι.

withdraw by itself to contemplate realities the senses cannot reveal. This is that 'purification', followed by the vision of truth, which the mysteries enjoin. In this world, at the best, the withdrawal can be but imperfectly achieved. Bodily death will be the final and complete deliverance.

Thus the conversation in the *Phaedo* opens, not with argument, but with a passage of religious eloquence upon the meaning of life and death, in which the author's conviction has plainly carried him beyond the domain of rational proof. Doubts are raised later, and arguments devised to counter them. Recollection is again offered as a proof of pre-existence: the soul which can exist apart from the body is the element in us which thinks and knows the Forms which exist apart from material things.

It is only when this conception of the rational soul and the objects of its thought has been clearly brought before the reader's mind, that one of the young Thebans puts forward the materialistic view of the soul or vital principle as a mere 'harmony' or 'adjustment' of the physical opposites comprising the body. Such a soul could not exist independently; but pre-existence has by this time been established by the proof of Recollection, which is bound up with the existence of the Forms (92 D). And about the existence of the Forms Plato has no serious doubts.

The harmony doctrine is closely related to the medical theory of health as the balance or due proportion of opposite 'powers' in the body; indeed it seems to identify the soul with the healthy condition of the living body, disease being an upsetting of the balance, which, if it goes beyond a certain point, will entail the dissolution of the bodily elements in death. Plato's doctrine of the separately existing intelligence is sharply opposed to this, just as, on the side of the objects of intelligence, his separate and eternally existing Forms are contrasted with the images which, according to the empirical epistemology, flow into our senses from material bodies. The medical-empirical apparatus of materialism seemed to Plato utterly inadequate to account for the knowledge which we certainly obtain in mathematical discovery, as well as for the knowledge of absolute moral standards on which 'virtue', in the full Socratic sense, depends.

CHAPTER V

SEER, POET, PHILOSOPHER

WE have now before us some picture of the two competing theories of the sources of knowledge and some indications of their respective origins. The Platonic theory finds the ideal type of knowledge in the eternal objects and coherent logical structure of geometry. Discovery in this field can be indefinitely pursued by concentrated thought without reference to visible and tangible things. It seemed plain that in this advance pure thought was tracing out the order of an unseen reality inaccessible to the senses, not extracting or abstracting knowledge from an influx of sense-impressions. The *Phaedo* and other dialogues of the middle period leave no doubt that, in Plato's mind, this theory of knowledge is indissolubly bound up with a firm belief in an immortal soul or intelligence, which itself belongs to the world of unseen reality and is only temporarily housed in the body with its senses and animal desires. So much of the doctrine of *Anamnesis* was certain and (as Plato hoped) demonstrable truth.

Enveloping it is a fringe of 'mythical' belief derived from the religious side of Pythagoreanism. The kinship of all life—divine, human, and animal—provides a scale of being along which the migrating soul may rise or sink according to its merits. This belief is retained and valued for its moral significance: it affords a hope of divine justice to redress the manifest inequalities of merit and reward in this life. Transmigration also offered the prospect of escape from the wheel of rebirth to the company of the gods, on condition that the soul shall have kept itself 'pure'. In the *Phaedo* itself we can trace the stages whereby the notion of purity had advanced from a mere ceremonial avoidance of uncleanness to the conception of the intelligence withdrawing from the contagion of its bodily associate and drawn by its love of wisdom and knowledge to the contemplation of truth.

music we hear in the *Phaedo*, this swan-song of Socrates which overpasses the limits of sober agnosticism, had not been heard from his lips in the past seventy years. Otherwise, when he wanted myths to set to music, he might have found some theme more inspiring than the beast fables of Aesop. And this Socrates, after saying that he was no myth-maker, ends with a long myth about that other world, symbolized as an earthly paradise. By such means Plato has contrived to convey, through Socrates' own mouth, that he is carrying his master beyond the limits of his historic self as presented in the *Apology*. Indeed, the protreptic discourse forming the first episode in the conversation is presented as a revised Apology, 'more persuasive than the speech I made in my defence before the judges'.[1]

In that speech Socrates had declared that he knew nothing about any after-life in an unseen world: death, for all he knew, might be

from the prison of the body till the gods release him. Does ἱερός suggest that Socrates was set apart under a taboo, like a ἱερεῖον or a ἱερόδουλος dedicated to Apollo, not to be touched till the festival was over? At Rome a criminal under sentence of death was *consecratus* to Dis Pater or some other god, and called *sacer*. In Euripides. *Alc.* 74, Thanatos says he will cut off a lock of Alcestis' hair (as from a sacrificial victim), ἱερὸς γὰρ οὗτος τῶν κατὰ χθονὸς θεῶν/ὅτου τόδ' ἔγχος κρατὸς ἁγνίσῃ τρίχα. Virgil, *Aen.* IV, 696, Dido's struggling soul cannot escape, *Nam, quia nec fato merita nec morte peribat, Sed misera ante diem, subitoque accensa furore, Nondum illi flauum Proserpina vertice crinem Abstulerat, Stygioque caput damnaverat Orco.* Juno sends Iris to cut the lock, which is *Diti sacrum*, and so release her soul. Both Alcestis and Dido are dying before their fated day and by an undeserved death; hence they are not yet consecrated to Dis in the ordinary course. Socrates also is dying *nec fato merita nec morte*. He has been waiting for his release at the hands of the god to whom he is dedicated. Is there also, perhaps, an allusion to the religious manumission of slaves? Enfranchisement was sometimes performed before an altar with the deity as witness. This was especially frequent in the cult of Apollo. 'At Delphi such a form of manumission might be called an ἀνάθεσις (dedication) and the person thus manumitted became ἱερὸς καὶ ἀνέφαπτος, sacrosanct, that is to say, as touching his liberty.' But a large number of inscriptions of the second century B.C. at Delphi represent Apollo in a different light, as a principal in the transaction, himself purchasing the slave, not in order to retain him in the temple as ἱερόδουλος, but to set him free (Farnell, *Cults*, vol. IV, pp. 177 f.).

[1] 63 B: χρή με πρὸς ταῦτα ἀπολογήσασθαι ὥσπερ ἐν δικαστηρίῳ... πιθανώτερον πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἀπολογήσασθαι ἢ πρὸς τοὺς δικαστάς; D: ἅμα σοι ἡ ἀπολογία ἔσται; E: ὑμῖν τοῖς δικασταῖς βούλομαι ἤδη τὸν λόγον ἀποδοῦναι; and at the end, 69 D: ταῦτα οὖν... ἀπολογοῦμαι; E: εἴ τι οὖν ὑμῖν πιθανώτερός εἰμι ἐν τῇ ἀπολογίᾳ ἢ τοῖς Ἀθηναίων δικασταῖς.

We must, accordingly, not be misled by the story of the oracle declaring that no one was wiser than Socrates into supposing that Socrates felt himself to be the prophet of the Delphic god. Among the wise men of all ages he is perhaps unique in his firm repudiation of the idea that he had any revelation to offer. Plato has faithfully recorded this attitude in the *Apology*. The Socrates there portrayed declares that he is telling the truth about himself, and we have no ground for doubting that he is the real Socrates as seen by the only friend capable of understanding him. Nothing inconsistent with that portrait can be accepted from Aristophanes' irresponsible travesty in the *Clouds* or from the simple-minded self-portraiture of Xenophon.

It is only in Plato's middle dialogues that Socrates first takes on, in addition to his real character, the poetical or prophetic traits needed for the full disclosure of the Platonic revelation.[1] The recognized convention of the imaginary conversation, an offshoot of the prose mime, gave legitimate scope for such a development without misleading the reader. We have already described this transfiguration of Socrates, and pointed out that Plato himself has sufficiently indicated that he was aware what he was doing. The Socrates of the *Phaedo*, the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus* has a message to deliver; and he delivers it partly in the form of discourses where the method of question and answer is becoming a mere form, partly in the symbolic imagery of poetical myths.

Socrates in the *Crito* (56B) describes himself as the sort of person who will not be won over to obey any motive other than the reason (λόγος) which, upon reflexion, seems to him to be the best. The 'true self', to which Socrates listened, becomes in the *Phaedo* the separable immortal soul of the Pythagorean tradition. It is there called by the inclusive name 'psyche', but it is opposed to the senses and passions connected with its bodily associate, and in

[1] We may well suppose that it is to this Platonic Socrates that the words of Alcibiades refer, when he describes in the *Symposium* the extraordinary effect of Socrates' conversation: ὅταν γὰρ ἀκούω, πολύ μοι μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν κορυβαντιώντων ἥ τε καρδία πηδᾷ, καὶ δάκρυα ἐκχεῖται ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων τῶν τούτου· ὁρῶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλους παμπόλλους τὰ αὐτὰ πάσχοντας. (*Symp.* 215D, E.) The passage comes appropriately in a dialogue devoted to the Platonic doctrine of Eros.

the *Republic* it appears as the 'reflective part' (λογιστικόν). As such, it corresponds to that intelligence (νόος) which, in Parmenides' poem, leaves the senses and the sense-world behind and penetrates the region of eternal metaphysical truth and mathematical reasoning. But it is not a faculty of purely passionless thought and intuition; it has its own characteristic desire in the passion for wisdom, philosophy, and its own pleasure in the enjoyment of truth (*Rep.* 580).

As we have seen, the religious belief in immortality carried Plato beyond the rational agnosticism of Socrates, truthfully reproduced in the *Apology*. As a consequence, in the middle dialogues from the *Gorgias* onwards, poetical myth appears as a distinct element alongside of the dialectical argument inherited from Socrates. In both elements it is the highest part of the soul that is at work. In the myth it exercises the old mantic power of prophetic vision, formerly attributed to the soul when it leaves the body in sleep, 'free to reach out, in its pure and independent condition, to perceive some new knowledge of things past, present, or to come' (*Rep.* 572 A). Thus Plato the philosopher resumes the role of prophet and poet which Socrates had disclaimed, although, by keeping dialectic and myth apart, Plato acknowledged his master's distinction between truth that can be established as knowledge by rational argument and truth that can only be divined and must remain a matter for belief and persuasion.

In this chapter we have dwelt upon the aspect of the philosopher as the conscious inheritor of a past in which the exceptional wisdom of the sage had been attributed to divine inspiration and expressed in poetry. But there is another side to the picture. As Plato himself says,[1] there was a quarrel between philosophy and poetry already of long standing, dating indeed from the days when the natural philosopher appeared as a distinct figure who had definitely laid aside the prophet's mantle and the poet's lyre.

[1] *Rep.* 607 B.

the intentions of the gods by the interpretation of their signs and omens. This is that pseudo-science of augury which Plato, and the ancients in general, clearly distinguished from intuitive or inspired divination. It was regarded as a rational procedure of inference or conjecture, comparable to the deciphering of a message in code.[1] Natural philosophy was bound to come into conflict with the pretensions of the seer.

It will be convenient to consider first the more profound and philosophic problem of destiny, which emerged clearly only at a late stage. If future events can be predicted, they must be already determined, either by the providential will and purpose of the gods or by inexorable necessity. And if they are so determined, man seems to be left with no free choice of his own actions in the future; however horrible the doom foretold by prophecy, he can do nothing to avert it. Already in Homer the contradiction is obscurely felt. The freedom of the gods themselves, though they are sometimes said to be all-powerful, is limited by Fate. We can hardly expect to find in Homer the solution of a problem which still vexes our contemporary philosophers.

In later antiquity the Stoics tried to cut the knot by identifying Fate with the will of Zeus, and by this time Fate had already come to be identified with the necessity supposed to be inherent in the chain of physical causes and effects.[2] The sequence could have been determined by Providence, and its future course is theoretically capable of being foreseen by divination. What has to be sacrificed is the freedom of man's will as commonly conceived. Man can only endeavour to identify his will with the will of Zeus and accept his destiny whatever it may be. Even so, a persistent critic could argue that his acceptance or non-acceptance must itself have been determined before he was born.

Epicurus, as we have seen, tried to break out of the network of inexorable necessity by the desperate expedient of endowing atoms with a minimum degree of freedom to swerve, for no reason, from

[1] Cf. p. 73 above.

[2] Cicero, *de Div.* 1, 121: 'Fieri igitur omnia fato ratio cogit fateri. Fatum autem id appello quod Graeci εἱμαρμένην, id est, ordinem seriemque causarum, cum causae causa nexa rem ex se gignat', etc.

the straight line of their fall through endless space. In so doing he was evading the logical consequence of his materialism. Democritus appears to have been made of sterner stuff, unless it is true that he kept his ethical doctrines on the different level of moral exhortation, unsupported by his physics. In the material world of atoms and void he is said to have left no room for Providence or for freedom. The infinite universe was not a work of design; events had no first cause; all that 'has been and is and will be' is predetermined from infinite time by necessity.[1] Democritus, accordingly, could accept and attempt to explain precognition of the future.

Epicurus, on the contrary, in order to protect his freedom, denied this determinism and with it the possibility of divination. The gods, moreover, were not to intervene in anything that happens inside the world we live in. Man is to shake off the terrors which had beset his primitive ancestors, when they imagined that 'what goes on in the sky and under the earth'—thunder, lightning, comets, eclipses, earthquakes—were portents of divine anger. As we have seen, the desire to exclude any divine significance here led Epicurus to devote much attention to the second department of his system, meteorology, and to assert in this field the extraordinary principle that, since this class of phenomena lies beyond the range of the close view, we must accept *every* natural explanation as true, if not in our world, then in some other.

It is instructive to observe the amount of space given by Lucretius to the several topics of meteorology. In Book V, 273 lines are occupied with the formation and motions of the heavenly bodies, their eclipses and so forth. In Book VI atmospheric and subterranean phenomena occupy 606 lines; and of these more than half are concerned with thunder and lightning, 102 with waterspouts, clouds, and rain, and 167 with subterranean things, earthquakes, volcanoes, the sources of the sea. All minor matters, such as snow, winds, hail, frost, ice, are dismissed in eight lines, as easily explicable by anyone who has grasped the principles of Atomism. It is obvious that neither Lucretius nor his master was interested in any science of astronomy or meteorology. Their interest was

[1] [Plut.] *Strom.* 7= *Vors.*[5] 68 [55] A 39 (vol. II, p. 94). The words τὰ γεγονότα καὶ ἐόντα καὶ ἐσόμενα are evidently a quotation.

pleasure in what is righteous because it is righteous, or what is righteous is righteous because it pleases the gods. Arguing from analogy, he gets Euthyphro to admit that the gods are pleased with righteous conduct because it is righteous; it is not their approval that makes it so. This admission is fatal to the definition, because it makes the character, 'pleasing to the gods', a mere accidental attribute of righteous conduct. So the definition fails, and we turn to priestcraft. But the admission itself contains a positive conclusion of great practical importance and one intimately related to the problems raised in the whole dialogue. It implies, moreover, the Socratic doctrine which we should expect to find in an early dialogue attempting to define one of the great virtues. All virtue is one, and it consists in the knowledge of good and evil or right and wrong—a knowledge immediately accessible to the eye of every human soul, when its vision is cleared of prejudice and false conceit. Euthyphro has claimed to be guided, in his own action against his father, by the intuitive power of the seer to know what the gods approve. But he cannot explain how he knows; and it is quite obvious that Socrates does not believe that he, or any other prophet, can tell what the gods think one ought to do. In the *Cratylus* (400D) Plato makes Socrates speak of the gods almost in the same terms as Protagoras: we should do best of all to recognize that 'we know nothing about the gods—neither about the gods themselves, nor about the names by which they call one another'—those names which Euthyphro interpreted. The conclusion is that in all matters of human conduct—those matters to which Socrates devoted his attention—we must be guided, not by what anyone tells us the gods approve, but by our own direct insight, the 'knowledge of good and evil'. If we see plainly, we shall act accordingly, and we may then believe (though we cannot know) that our action is approved by heaven.

If this interpretation is correct, the *Euthyphro* illustrates the opposition between the seer and the philosopher as envisaged by Socrates. We gain fresh light on the way in which the Socratic doctrine was obscurely felt by the prophets and priests as threatening their own position. Socrates believed in the insight of the 'true self' or intelligence which can know and will the good. He also

Most scholars now prefer to accept Plato's careful limitation of the scope of the divine sign, rather than Xenophon's account, according to which it sometimes gave positive advice, not for Socrates' guidance only but for his friends, and included questions of right and wrong. Whatever its scope, Socrates unquestionably accepted 'divination' (as he called it) in this form. He was not prepared, like some nineteenth-century agnostics, to dismiss as superstitious nonsense anything he could not understand and account for 'scientifically'. It is probable that, in the light of his own experience, he would accept the possibility of inspired prophecy in the case of the Pythian priestess and other oracles, although, like other men of his time, he must have been aware that the priests who put the prophecies into shape and interpreted them might use their power for political or self-interested ends.

(3) On the other hand, if Plato is right, this private oracle, coming apparently from some divine source outside, was not a positive guide to conduct. It did not relieve Socrates of any responsibility for his actions. As he says in the *Crito*, in deciding what he ought to do, he would not listen to anything but the reason (λόγος) which seemed to him, on reflexion, to be the best. This agrees with the conclusion we found in the *Euthyphro*: that man must use his own inward faculty of insight to distinguish good and evil, and not be guided by others who tell him that some action is right on the ground that they know it to be pleasing to the gods. This faculty was not, like the divine sign, peculiar to Socrates; it exists in every human soul.

In Platonism, with its doctrine of immortality and the recollection of the Ideas, this faculty, as we have seen, is identified with the divine reason in the soul which apprehends the eternal realities. In mythical terms it is man's guardian genius or daemon. It is connected with divination by dreams in the *Timaeus*. Their warning or soothing visions are sent by the reason to the irrational part of the soul, which cannot understand rational discourse. Inspired divination comes only when the power of understanding is fettered in sleep or by some disorder or by divine possession. The visions must be interpreted by sober reflexion afterwards. It will be seen that here significant dreams are not ascribed to any