The Immortality of the Soul in Greek Mythology and Its Rationalization

Yuann, Jeu-Jenq*

Abstract

In this paper, I intend to examine the idea of immortality of the soul (IS.) existing in ancient Greek religion and the rationalization of this idea in Greek philosophy (notably by Plato). By looking at both IS. in Greek mythology and the Platonic rationalization of it, I want to show that Plato's attempt, which undoubtedly exerts a tremendous impact on the development of philosophy, actually does very little to his original purpose, i.e. solidifying a religious belief by adding a rational ground to it. My reasons of saying so are: 1.) Rationalization of a religious idea eventually and even inevitably undermines the religious significance of this idea. 2.) Truth of a religious belief has to be conceived in the way that it appears through traditions rather than through a rational, universal and binding doctrine. The first point above will be explained by referring to Aristotle's modification of the Platonic idea of the soul and the second point by referring to Paul Veyne's idea concerning what 'truth' is.

Key Words : The Immortality of the Soul, Greek Mythology, Religious, Rationalization

---

* Associate Professor, Institute of Philosophy, Nanhua Management College

希臘神話中的「靈魂不滅」及其理性化

苑舉正*

摘要

本文旨在探討希臘神話中的「靈魂不滅」以及柏拉圖針對此一概念的論證。在此探討中，作者試圖論述：在這個理性化的過程中，柏拉圖並沒有達到他企圖強化宗教基礎的目的。提出這樣一個論述，是基於以下兩個理由：1) 宗教概念理性化的過程僅導致這一個概念失去了它原賦有的宗教意義；2) 宗教概念的真實性必須由傳統、而非由一個具有理性、普遍性以及強制性的原則中去了解。有關第一點，我們藉由亞理士多德針對柏拉圖的批判來說明；有關第二點，則藉由 P. Veyne 的「真實」(truth) 即「組成的想像力」(constitutive imagination) 這個概念來說明。

關鍵字：靈魂不滅、希臘神話、柏拉圖、亞理斯多德、宗教理性化

* 私立南華管理學院哲學研究所副教授

The Immortality of the Soul in Greek Mythology and its Rationalization

Yuann, Jeu-Jenq

1. The futility of proving religion on the basis of science

Wittgenstein in his lectures on religious belief makes it explicit that Father O'Hara's attempt to inject a scientific foundation into religious belief is doomed to be a failure.[1] He says: "In a religious discourse we use such expressions as: 'I believe that so and so will happen,' and use them different in which we use them in science." In science we talk about hypothesis, or about high probability, but these hardly make sense in religion. Someone who commits his life to certain religious belief does so not because he has examined the belief, its hypothesis and its probability and hence is convinced that his examination proved that his commitment is based on a reasonable foundation. Wittgenstein considers that this scientific examination sounds quite awkward in a religious context. That a believer holds his convictions has to be considered in terms of a total commitment which does not occur because of an accumulation of scientific evidence, but because of faith, or faith in dogma. Needless to say, the difference between scientific evidence and faith in dogma is obvious. "*The point is that*", says Wittgenstein, "*if there were evidence (in the sense of scientific*

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, Cyril Barrett (ed.) (Berkeley: University of California, 1955), p. 57.

inquiry), this would in fact destroy the whole business". In a similar context in which Feyerabend tries to exhort Father Otto Mauer that the latter's efforts to prove the existence of God are futile, he says: "*Believing in God was one thing. But trying to prove his existence was bound to end in failure - the idea of a divine Being simply has no scientific foundation.*"[2] We believe both Wittgenstein and Feyerabend are talking about the same thing that the validity of a religious belief is by no means influenced by scientific evidence; a believer would not change his convictions because of the intervention of science.

So, it is argued that religion and science belong to two distinct frameworks which scarcely have anything to do with each other. However, the issue here is not therefore solved by holding two separate frameworks. In fact, countless people tending to make religious belief more scientific are not without reasons. Their reason mainly lies in the fact that they have witnessed that the influence of science permeates contemporary society and therefore are worried by the fact that this permeation has turned science to be the mainstream of society. In the flow of the scientific permeation, religion is in jeopardy if not entirely put aside. These people (such as Father O'Hara and Father Mauer) would not like to stay still in the decline of the Church. They stand up against the trend. However, the measure to which they resort in order to defend their convictions is precisely what damages them, i.e. science. Their reason for this resort is quite understandable: they notice that an arbitrary imposition of the dogma of religious belief upon people's mind no longer work, so they adopt the method of persuasion, or to put it more precisely, of rational persuasion. Hence, the question is, how can they rationally persuade people that believing in the benevolence of God is rational? To the people who intend to lay a rational foundation in the realm of religious belief, it appears that the only resort is to detect the scientific elements consisting in religion. This may sound contradictory, but it is equally undeniable that today,

---

2. Paul Feyerabend, *Killing Time, The Autobiography of Paul Feyerabend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 68.

scientific reasoning, due to its overwhelming success, has formed an essential part of today's definition of rationality. In this regard, Feyerabend makes it plain by saying: "*...even the smallest project has to be adapted to scientific standards to be acceptable.*"[3] Clearly, what is meant by Feyerabend here is the fact that science not only offers empirical success but also turns out to be considered as the modern criterion of rationality. Consequently, a rational persuasion in one way or another, has to be scientific in order to be convincing. This is what is taking place today.

It is not without reason to say that, to many people, today's definition of rationality is practically constituted by the prominent (but by no means explicit) idea of science. Therefore, to them, it is conceived (though in vague terms still) as truth that 'what is rational' overlaps 'what is science'. However, here we want to point out that the reasoning underlying this overlap is by no means unprecedented. Though, obviously the former reasoning was not based on modern science, the tendency to hold something universally true and to trim diverse depictions of 'truth' on the basis of this universal truth is fundamentally unchanged. As a matter of fact, this tendency existed since the beginning of the development of philosophy, the predecessor of science. Despite the fact that we are in full awareness of the difference between philosophy and science, we nonetheless hold the thesis that the determination of putting forward the universal truth in rejecting other claims scarcely changes throughout the ages. Plato, who devoted his entire life to rejecting false images of truthlike claims, offers an excellent example in which he justifies a religious belief (IS.) by adding a rational basis to it. And we will see in what follows that his effort can actually do nothing but lead towards a total destruction of "the whole business", i.e. the destruction of the religious significance of IS.

2. IS. in Greek mythology

---

3. Paul Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 90.

Since, as we have said, we consider the idea of IS. as existing in Greek mythology to represent an essential religious belief in Ancient Greece, we inevitably have to explain to what extent we can say that Greek mythology could in some form represent Greek religion. Obviously, without establishing the relationship between Greek mythology and religion, we are not able to use IS. and its contents described in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to decipher a religious belief. Therefore, we are obliged in the beginning of this section to deal with this question: how appropriate is it to say that Greek religion can be represented by what consists in Greek mythology? To this question, the answer has to be addressed by understanding, first of all, what we mean by religion here.

While thinking about religion, we tend to keep its image from a more prominent monotheistic tradition (such as Christianity, Islamism and Judaism), and use a more general view, as it is described by M. Weber, in which the "primitive" worship of the supernatural is held as an essential part of religious behaviors.[4] We have to admit that, as a matter of fact, this manner of looking at religious behavior is very loose and general for it practically includes all peoples who, while confronting the mysterious nature of daily phenomena, would pay tribute to what cannot be understood or what is assumed to be a part of the other world. However, we do not see any inadequacy in examining religion in terms of this loose and general context. After all, religious behaviors are so common among societies of any kind that it would be absurd to set a limit to its definition within a particular form of it (such as that of monotheism). While considering religion in the sense of this loose-and-general definition, the ancient Greeks should by no means be

4. Weber defines that the origin of religion begins from an abstract process through which "the rise on the one hand of the idea of the "soul" and on the other of idea of "gods," "demons," and "supernatural" powers, the ordering of whose relations with the men constitutes the realm of religious behavior." See Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, Ephraim Fischoff (trans.) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 5.

excluded; they had their divinities (such as Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Athena, Apollo, Dionysis etc.) and they offered domestic animals to their gods in order to establish and secure their relationship with the divinities.[5] This is obvious to us, but another question naturally arises: if the religious behaviors of polytheism were based on the natural emergence of the Greeks' worship to the supernatural world, then on what basis can we say that this 'religion' superseded over the whole region of ancient Greece rather than merely the city-states such as Athens or of Sparta? For, it is equally understandable that each city-state, under different circumstances, has its mode of religious behaviors in which different divinities are worshipped and various rituals performed. So, in line with this reasoning, we should talk about 'religions' in Ancient Greece and not 'religion'. To the question above, we believe that Jean-Pierre Vernant's exposition of Greek mythology and Greek religion enables us to stand on a secured position in talking about the intimate relationship between mythology and religion in ancient Greece *as a whole*.

Vernant admits that the religious tradition existing in ancient Greece was hardly based on a uniform and strictly fixed form; it did not contain any dogmatic characteristic, nor sacerdotal caste, nor specialized clergy, nor sacred scripture, nor church. It was a religion without credo.[6] So to what extent can we say this was a religion which was nonetheless shared by a region comprising various city-states? To Vernant, this question can be answered by looking at the origin of Greek myths. The myths were composed of fables whose 'real' origin of Greek myths is hardly detectable.[7] However, despite the fact that

---

5. See Michael Morgan, "Plato and Greek religion" in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, Richard Kraut (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 227-9.

6. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mythe et religion en Grece Ancienne* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), pp. 21-2.

7. With regard to what do we know about the birth of Greek gods, Vernant says: "An inquiry into origins is always very difficult. In the case of the Greeks we are completely in the dark. However far back we may go into the past..., we are confronted with a religious system that has already undergone many transformations and borrowed much, and in

Greek religion lacked a uniform and fixed form and even though the origin of Greek myths was far from explicit to them, there was nevertheless a common religious structure in which divinities were revered and the supernatural worshipped by the Greeks in general. The establishment of this religious structure was due to a two-parts 'education' tradition.

> First through a purely oral tradition maintained in each household, especially by women: nurses' tales or old grandmothers' fables, as Plato called them[8], were absorbed by children from the cradle. These stories, or *muthoi* - which were all the more familiar for having been heard by children at the age when they were learning to speak - helped shape the mental framework in which the Greeks imagined the divine, situated it, and conceived it.
>
> As adults, the Greeks learned about the world of the gods through the voices of the poets. Through the tale about the gods, the remoteness and strangeness of the other world took a familiar, intelligible form...As a verbal form that could be memorized easily, poetry expressed and fixed the fundamental traits that went beyond the particularities of each city and were the foundation of a common culture for all of Hellas - especially those traits reflected in religious representations of the gods proper, the demons, heroes, or the dead. Had it not been for all the works of the epic, lyrical, and dramatic poetry, we could speak of Greek cults in the plural instead of a unified Greek religion. In this respect, Homer and Hesoid played prominent roles: their narrative about the divine

---

which it is very difficult to distinguish what is Indo-European, Mediterranean, Aegean, or Asiatic. Any attempt at a global explanation...one must be open to question." See Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, Jenet Lloyd (trans.) (New York: Zone Books, 1988), p. 101.

8. Republic 378C-D and Law 887D. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Carins (eds.)(John Clive Graves Rouse, 1961).

> beings acquired an almost canonical value and functioned as sources of reference for the authors who came after them as well as for the public that listened to or read them.[9]

Therefore, it should clear to us that Greek mythology represents a substantial part of Greek religion of the region as a whole. However, the unified outlook of Greek religion in the whole region did not therefore conceal its loose and general nature. In fact, as the Greek religion was transmitted through the region by listening to the fables of household women and the poetic songs of poets, we can even say that a coherent religion was not intended.[10] Although the Greeks did not have a coherent religion in which priests would lay the foundation of rites, this fact should not prevent us from holding that the legendary

---

9. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mythe et religion en Grece ancienne*, ibid. pp. 23-5. The English translation of the quoted text is taken from "Greek Religion" Anne Marzin (trans.) *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (London: MacMillan, 1987), Vol. VI, pp. 99-100. Paul Veyne also stresses the oral tradition of the populace of myths by saying: "It cannot be doubted that the Greeks believed in their mythology for as long a time as their nurses or mothers told them such tales". See Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?*, Paula Wissing (trans.) (Chicago: The University of chicago Press, 1988), p. 43 and p. 139 (footnote 56).

10. Feyerabend talks about the 'aggregate character' of the Homeric world: "Each god is given a well-defined part of the world as his field of action. The parts are not only separated from each other, they are also qualitatively different (sky, water, darkness) and adumbrate the elements, which started as regions with certain qualities attached to them and only later became substances that could wander around in the cosmos", "Action in our sense does not exist in this world; a hero does not decide to bring about a certain event and then cause it, he *finds himself involved in* one series of actions rather than in another and his life *develops* accordingly. All things, animals, carriages, cities, geographical regions, historical sequences, entire tribes are presented in this 'additive' manner - they are aggregates without 'essence' or 'substance'." See Paul Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 97. Feyerabend uses this aggregate character of the Homeric world to counter against Xenophane's argument holding that there could be only one god who supersedes everything under him, otherwise it would be entirely a matter of absurdity to compare which god is more powerful than the others.

element of Greek mythology was serenely accepted.[11] IS. was accepted by the Greeks as an example of this legendary element.

With respect to IS., we organize Greek mythology according to two poles: the immortals and the mortals. This divide is rough because between the immortals and mortals there were several intermediate kinds.[12] However, it does expose an essential part of Greek religion. The reason for saying this is not difficult to find. The immortality of gods defines their life "*in contrast to the poor men, the "ephemeral" beings who appear only to disappear, like shadows or wisps of smoke.*"[13] It is indeed dreadful to hear such a statement in which we human beings are helpless and temporal beings in front of the gods who could enjoy their long life in line with the flux of time without being worried by the terror of death. The feeling of confronting this terrible contrast exerted a social significance on the Greek mythology: "It expresses how a group of people in particular historical circumstances sees itself, how it defines its relationship to nature and the supernatural."[14] The desire to link the relationship between mortals and immortals, between nature and the supernatural characterizes IS., as it is said by Morgan:

> This concern with the state of divinity as a real human possibility was exemplified in other developments....These developments, of course, did not all involve the human

---

11. Paul Veyne, ibid. p. 17.

12. Jean-Pierre Vernant points three of them: the first is *makrobioi* (the long-lived) whose existence covers many myriads of years, such as the *numphai* (inferior divinity of nature, called by Homer the daughter of Zeus). Then, certain gods may experience a waning of their power and vitality, as Ares (the god of war), who was on the point of perishing in the jar in which two of his brothers had managed to confine him. And finally, certain men, in particular conditions, may accede to the status of the gods, and in their company live a blessed existence until the end of time [such as Menelaus]. See Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and society in Ancient Greece*, ibid., p. 112.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., p. 148.

> aspiration to divinity in the same way. But they did contribute to the existence of a context in which the gaps between gods and human kind was conceived as frequently transversable. One key to this set of changes:..was the belief in the immortality of the *human* soul.[15]

According to Wim de Parter, the idea that death would be the total destruction of man seems to be alien to Greek thought, and this is the threshold from which the immortality of the human soul emerges in Greek mythology.[16] However, just as Greek mythology was loosely connected to religion, the way according to which Homer exhibited the idea of immortality was by no means intended to be coherent or constant. IS. took place when Homer described it usually according to the form through which the soul (*psyche*)[17] left its lot, the body, and then to the House of Hades. Nevertheless, let us stress here once again that the idea of immortality in Greek myths is not a rigid doctrine so that it applies unanimously to all persons; in Greek myths all we have are *events* with which the described beings get involved. An example is Homer's description of the immortality of human soul is the Death of Hector.

> Death cut Hector short and his disembodied soul took wing for the House of Hades, bewailing its lot and the

---

15. Michael Morgan, ibid., p. 230.

16. Wim de Pater, *Immortality: Its History in the West* (Leuven: Acco, 1985), p. 1.

17. The idea that human existence is a combination of body and soul is not consistently described by Homer. In fact he talked about various modes of souls out of which the most prominent two sorts are displayed by F. Peters: "This connection between life and movement on the one hand and consciousness on the other is not at all obvious in Homer who designated two separate entities to explain life and consciousness. For Homer *psyche* is the "birth of life" (and also, in what may be a completely different stratum of belief, an individualized "ghost" that lives on in an attenuated fashion after death) that escapes normally from the mouth of the dying hero... In contrast there is the *thymos*, the spirit located in the midriff (*phrases*) whereby a man thinks and feels." F. E. Peters *Greek Philosophical Terms* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), pp. 166-7.

> youth and manhood that it left. But Price Achilles (who killed Hector with his spear) spoke to him again though he was gone. 'Die!' he said, 'As for my own death, let it come when Zeus and the other deathless gods decide.'[18]

From "the death of Hector" we see that at the time of death, the "principle of life" ceases to be and then (usually immediately) an ethereal body (a body without physical existence) originating from the corporal body, goes to the House of Hades. This ethereal body, known as soul or ghost, the residue of the person, stays in Hades leading a shadow existence there without flesh and bone. When Odysseus tried to embrace the soul of his mother, he was disappointed when that the soul of his mother always flitted away from his arms. The soul of his mother, which could not talk or communicate with living humans unless it drank blood of the sacrificed sheep[19], answered,

> My son, most ill-fated of all mankind, it is not Persephone (the wife of Hades, god of death) that is beguiling you, but all people are like this when they are dead. The sinews no longer hold the flesh and bones together; these perish in the fierceness of consuming fire as soon as fire has left the body, and the soul flits away as though it was a dream.[20]

This fable does not say really anything about the continuation of a conscious life (the souls cannot talk unless they drink the blood of sacrificed sheeps); the souls were unconscious. Moreover, Homer admitted that the continued existence of soul in Hades was an 'unhappy' life.[21] That means the rejection of death, thinking life might

---

18. Homer, *The Iliad*, Book XXII, E. V. Rieu (trans.)(Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1950), pp. 405-6.

19. Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book XI, Samuel Butler (trans.) (New York: Walter J. Black, 1944), p. 132.

20. Ibid., p. 136.

21. While Odyssey praised Achilles for such a great honor Achilles had received while he was alive and in the House of Hades, he was the prince among the dead, Achilles answered

be able to continue its course after death was not entirely a 'success' in Greek mythology. The ethereal existence in the House of Hades should not be considered as the 'ideal' form of IS.; it was merely a 'denial' of the total destruction at death. We can say that Homer's presentation of the 'afterlife' is quite 'negative'.

There is another more positive way of talking about afterlife in Homer. In *The Odyssey*, Homer said apart from the House of Hades, there are the Elysia (islands of the blessed), where those who are elected by the gods will go and become cognates of the gods. Menelaus, king of Sparta, for instance, was elected and promised to be brought by the gods to the Elysian plain, a place which is at the end of the world and where men lead an easier life than anywhere else. "*This (being brought to Elysia) will happen to you (Menelaus) because you have married Helen, and are Zeus' son-in-law*".[22] Elysia, understood roughly as a place of paradise after life, is not reserved for the morally virtuous persons, as is the case in many other religions (we can clearly see that the reason which enabled Menelaus to be sent to Elysia has basically nothing to do with moral virtue, but has a great deal to do with his intimate relationship with the gods). This is understandable as we know that one of the essential features of Greek myth is anthropomorphism; the divine world reflects the world in which we live or *verse versa*. If the line differentiating the distinction between human beings on the one hand and divinities on the other hand is not clear, so that a human being can be the husband of Zeus' daughter Helen, then it is equally understandable to say that the fate of this particular person, Menelaus, can be different from other mortal beings.

To this point, however, we cannot say that the ambiguity of the difference between divinities and human beings contains anything mistaken because this is the way through which the fables were told

---

with a rather sad mood: "Say not a word in death's favor; I would rather be a paid servant in a poor man's house and be above ground than king of kings among the dead". Ibid., p. 142.

22. Ibid., Book IV., p. 51.

among Greeks generation after generation. A clarification with regard to this ambiguity was never considered to be something urgently needed to be carried out and a theological systematization would have been deemed as something entirely outlandish. To this, de Pater comments: "This made that in Greece there was rather not a generally accepted doctrine, but only a generally known mythology, which left much freedom for thought. All this was favorable for the coming up of an independent philosophy."[23] And we believe, other than a clarification of the ambiguities existing in Greek myths, the arise of an independent philosophy has many things to do with the moral issue at stake here. If in the supernatural world the difference between hell (the House of Hades) and paradise (the Elysia) was unclear to such an extent that what a person had done in this world would not affect the afterlife, then it became quite troubling to people who were rigorously engaged in the discussion of moral ideas (such as goodness, justice, virtue, benevolence, piety, and so on). There were people who deeply believed that myths must be criticized in order to incorporate moral ideas into common belief, urging people in general to comply. Otherwise, it would be senseless to make a distinction between good and bad, moral and immoral, justice and injustice. Therefore, ethical ideas prompted the rationalistic formulation of religious system in which the idea of immortality plays a role of crucial importance. This ethical aspect is the driving force behind Plato's rationalization of IS..

3. Plato's rationalization of IS.

Plato endeavors to incorporate IS. into his philosophical system in order to 'rationalize' religion so that the ambiguities consisting in Greek mythology can be trimmed on the basis of 'truth'. The first task with which Plato confronted is to prove that IS. is true and universal. Plato's proof of IS. contains two parts: The first part refers to the idea that our birth is merely an awakening from a forgetful

---

23. Wim de Pater, ibid., p. 12.

sleep and that to learn is in part to remember knowledge which must have been gained in another life. The second part refers to the idea that the soul is immortal because it can have a share in the eternal world of ideas.[24] At the end of *Phaedo*, while having argued for the truth of IS., Plato demonstrates that IS. is a condition on the basis of which our conduct in this world has to be judged. By demonstrating the idea of 'last judgment', Plato practically exposed a view of religious belief which tends to hold the moral outlook by constituting a philosophical system through arguments. This religious purpose is clearly exposed by J-F. Revel: "*Philosophy, notably that of Plato, continued to appeal to myths and to juxtapose a great rigor of rationality with the mythic or religious conceptions.*"[25] Our position is entirely in agreement with Revel's view: in the following intend to interpret Plato's proof of IS. as a 'rationalization' of a religious idea. We begin from the first part and then we will proceed to the second part.

The proof given in *Phaedo* of the immortality of the soul consisting begins from disciples of Socrates being puzzled by the fact that their master had no sign of fear on the day of his execution (*Phaedo* 58e). They gathered around him and were eager to know the reason why he was not afraid of death. Socrates answered by rejecting the idea that death is not simply the release of the soul from the body (*Phaedo* 64c) (We assume that this rejection also means that Socrates was not satisfied by the popular idea mainly conceived from the tradition of Greek mythology, as we have seen, that at the time of death the soul leaves the body behind and goes to the House of Hades). Socrates claimed that his presumption of the existence of souls in the other world was based on an old legend (*Phaedo* 70c)[26]. However, the mere

---

24. These two parts are paraphrased from the preface added to *Phaedo* by Edith Hamilton. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ibid., p. 40.

25. Jean-Francois Revel, *Histoire de la philosophie occidental de Thales a Kant* (Paris: Ni.L editions, 1994), p. 31.

26. In *Meno* Plato also talked about that it was on the basis of Greek myths that he conceived the immortality of human souls. He said: "Those who tell it are priests and

existence of the soul is not enough; it needs to be supplemented with a positive function that "*the soul exists after death and retains some active force and intelligence*" (*Phaedo* 70b). This intelligence enables us to attain "*truth and clear thinking*" (*Phaedo* 66a). In attaining truth, the soul, even in its bodily existence, has to employ its intelligence to purify itself from the predicament of bodily pleasures and desires. There is only one way to ensure that the soul can be completely prevented from being polluted by the apparently tempting seductions of bodily pleasures and desires: the pursuit of wisdom (i.e., to be a philosopher) (*Phaedo* 69a). Therefore, when life ends and the soul leads ahead towards another world to which it belongs, the death should therefore to be considered as a cheerful event for philosophers. Because, from the other world, the souls of philosophers will live in happiness with what they contemplated and anticipated in this world (*Phaedo* 68d). So it is argued that it would certainly be desirable to use intelligence in order to unveil truth, which is covered by various modes of existence in this sensible world. However, here a question naturally arises: What is the trace according to which we can say that our intellect is able to prove that the soul contains knowledge of previous life (or lives)? To this question, Plato's answer consisting in *Meno* is as follows:

> The Soul, since it is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other world, has learned everything that is. So we need not be surprised if it can recall the knowledge of virtue or anything else which, as we see, it once possessed. All

---

priestesses of the sort who make it their business to be able to account for the functions which they perform...What they say is this - see whether they are speaking the truth. They say that the soul of man is immortal. At one time it comes to an end - that which is called death - and at another is born again, but is never finally exterminated. On these grounds a man must live all his days as righteously as possible"(*Meno* 81 a-b). From this quotation, we can see that the permeation and the popularity of Greek myths among Greeks unanimously and deeply existed in Plato's mind. For it was on the basis of this mythical foundation that Plato further elaborated his idea of 'recollection' from which he proved that we can learn truth which somehow does not belong to this sensible world.

> nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, so that when a man has recalled a single piece of knowledge - *learned* it, in ordinary language - there is no reason why he should not find out all the rest, if he keeps a stout heart and does not grow weary of the search, for seeking and learning are in fact nothing but recollection (*Meno* 81c-d).

The example of recalling knowledge of previous lives used in *Phaedo* is the idea of absolute equality. The idea of absolute equality applies to the situation when we compare two objects, say we see two stones in two different places. From seeing one stone we say it looks equal to another. We are able to say this because, while we see this stone, we recall the shape of another stone (*Phaedo* 73c). However, to different persons, these two stones might appear equal or unequal (*Phaedo* 74b). Therefore, these two stones are not absolutely equal because their equality might vary in relation to different persons. However, the idea of absolute equality which enables us to say that these two stones appear equal to us is not therefore in any sense influenced by different persons or by the way they are perceived in different circumstances. For it is quite explicit to us that the idea of absolute equality, as long as it is an idea, does not change in relation to circumstances of the sensible world. Now, if the idea of absolute equality which we apply while gazing at two objects is somehow detached from this world, then how do we know it or from where does this idea come? Plato's answer is this. While someone looks at one stone and compares it with another, he has to resort to sight or touch or one of the other senses in order to carry out this comparison. However, when we see that two 'equal' things do not imply the idea of 'absolute equality' in themselves, we should say that the idea of absolute equality comes prior to our ability of seeing and touching and of other senses.[27] Furthermore, as we possess our

---

27. The idea of repudiating sense perceptions in Plato's philosophy also contains a mythical root. Plato said: Is there any certainty in human sight and hearing, or is it true, as the poets are always dinning into our ears, that we neither hear nor see anything

senses from the moment of birth, we must have obtained the idea of absolute equality before birth (*Phaedo* 75c). Hence, we must admit that before birth we already contain knowledge of absolute type (not only regarding the idea of equality, but also all other ideas such as that of beauty, goodness, uprightness, holiness, etc.). That is precisely what our souls have learned in the previous worlds, but, according to Plato, we have forgotten at the moment we were born. Nevertheless, it does not completely disappear without leaving a trace. It is the same as whenever we see a stone, its shape recalling the shape of another stone. Simultaneously, with this recalling, the idea of absolute equality naturally applies. This application that takes place in line with the process according to which we exercise our senses on sensible objects, is called by Plato, the 'recovery' of our knowledge before birth. "*I suppose that what we call learning will be the recovery of our knowledge, and surely we should be right in calling this recollection*"(*Phaedo* 75e), writes Plato. We, while applying the idea of absolute equality, recall what was conceived by the soul in the previous existence (*Phaedo* 76c). This is the proof for the existence of the soul in the previous world.

The second proof intended to expose that the soul exists eternally after life proceeds as follows. What we have seen regarding the knowledge about the world of absolute ideas forms a basis on the foundation of which Plato begins to expose that the souls exist not only in the previous lives but also after life. The argument is still based on the dualistic presumption that we, as human beings, are part body, part soul (*Phaedo* 79b). This dualistic scheme with relation to the ultimate formation of human contains a significant influence in understanding Plato's philosophy. Indeed, few people would disagree with the fact that an essential part of the Platonic philosophy consists in forging a dualistic scheme of metaphysics. Plato proposed a metaphysics in which the sensible world which is characterized by changes is distinguished from the intelligible world which is constituted of immutable and

---

accurately? Yet, if these senses are not accurate and clear, the rest can hardly be so, because they are all inferior to the first two" (*Phaedo* 65b).

eternal Forms. For Plato, the world of Forms is the real world, whereas the phenomena consisting in the sensible world are real merely in a weaker sense; they are 'shined' by the truth which exclusively belongs to the world of Forms. In other words, sensible things exist only in a contingent way, i.e., by participating in Forms. And philosophical contemplation is the only means through which we can perceive truth. The antagonism between the sensible world which is characterized by its nature of constant change and the world of Forms which is characterized by its nature of eternity and universality forms basically the philosophical system of Plato.[28] We will, on the basis of this system, look at Plato's proof of IS..

What is in principle the reason which makes the difference between the changing character of the sensible world and the universal eternity of the formal world? To this question, Plato makes an analogy with respect to the nature of a composite object and an incomposite one. Plato said that, due to its nature, a composite object is liable to alternation (or break up), whereas an incomposite reality, which is really one thing among others, is not affected in this way (*Phaedo* 78c). The difference between what is submitted to alternation and what is not can be explained by looking at the difference we have seen between what is perceived by senses such as material objects and what is detached from this world and what can be contemplated only through thinking. So, the difference turns out to be the difference between what is captured by senses and what by thinking. In terms of visual sense, the difference refers to that between what is visible and what is invisible (*Phaedo* 79a). Taking the example of difference referring to the visible and the invisible, we see that the body which contains the nature of resemblance and relation belongs to the former, whereas the soul belongs to the latter because the existence of the soul can be detected by nothing sensible but thinking (*Phaedo* 79b). Note here that, according to Plato, the visible equals the changeable. So the soul, as invisible,

---

[28]. Jean-Francois Revel, ibid., p. 116.

would as such be unchangeable and stable.[29] However, the soul, while it is occupied by the body, can be confused by the changing nature of the body and hence gets a nature of instability. The 'unstable' or 'polluted' soul thus needs to be purified. The 'purification' can be achieved only under the condition that the soul detaches itself from the sensible world so that it can pass into the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless (*Phaedo* 79d). Yet, this would not happen unless the soul is engaged in investigating itself through wisdom (*Phaedo* 79d). That is the process according to which the soul can return to the divine place to which it belongs. And this is precisely what we mean by philosophy.

Now, as we have seen the distinct nature of the soul does not belong to the sensible world, but rather to another world (the world of Forms). However, Plato deems that merely on the basis of the world of Forms we can not reach the immortality of the soul. Another argument is needed to explain why the soul is, by its nature, immortal.[30] This argument has a great deal to do with what Plato had proved so far. As we have seen, the soul differs from the body in the sense that its nature belongs to another world which is constituted by universal and immutable Forms. All we have in this world of Forms is incorporeal in the sense that it cannot be conceived by senses but by thinking only.

---

29. The equation between the visible and the changeable is made clear by de Pater. See Wim de Pater, ibid., p. 32.

30. The need of an argument for the immortality of the soul in spite of the proved thesis that the soul belongs to the divine world is because that at the time of Plato there was another school (the Pythagoreans) which thought of the nature of the soul in terms of another point of view. The basic thesis of Pythagoras referred to the idea that everything comes from the opposition between the limited and the unlimited (cf. de Pater, p. 16-7). It was generally on the basis of this thesis that in *Phaedo* Simmias (a Pythagorean) said: "The body is held together at a certain tension between the extremes of hot and cold, and dry and wet, and so on, and our soul is a temperament or adjustment of these same extremes, when they are combined in just the right proportion. Well, if the soul is really an adjustment, obviously as soon as the tension of our body is lowered or increased beyond the proper point, the soul must be destroyed, divine though it is..." (*Phaedo* 86b-c).

Take the example of the idea of absolute equality. Since the idea of absolute equality is characterized by being changeless and universal, it does not concede to its opposition, i.e., the idea of inequality. As it is impossible for an idea of absolute type to contain its opposition, whenever the opposition appears, "*it either withdraws or ceases to exist*" (*Phaedo* 102e). By the same token, the idea of immortality is in direct opposition to that of mortality. Now, as it is presumed that the soul leaves the body at the moment of death, it must be derived that the soul equals the principle of life, whereas its opposite, namely the end of life, must equal death. If it is clear to us that life and death are opposites and they both are conceived by us in the sensible world, then following Plato that true knowledge is revealed by ideas existing in the world of Forms, it is understandable to infer that life and death belong respectively to the ideas of immortality mortality. However, here, unlike the idea of absolute equality, the idea of immortality does not perish when confronting its opposite because to be perishable is precisely the nature which is in opposition to the very idea. "*So now in the case of the immortal, if it is conceded that this is also imperishable, soul will be also imperishable as well as immortal*" (*Phaedo* 106c). Therefore, in terms of Plato, it is proved that "*when death comes to a man, the mortal part of him dies, but the immortal part retires at the approach of death and escapes unharmed and indestructible*"(*Phaedo* 106e). Therefore, we say, by looking at the nature of the soul, Plato offers two proofs of IS., which exposes that the soul exists not merely before birth but also eternally after death; the soul, by participating in the nature of divinities, is hence immortal.

This is not however, the end of Plato's proof of IS. In fact, the objective of Plato contains not only a philosophical argument but also a religious implication. The latter is far more important than the former. To this point, de Pater makes an explicit comment: "*Not philosophy, but trust in God is the basis for his belief in immortality*".[31] Revel even comments on Plato's philosophy as a whole by holding that

---

31. Wim de Pater, p. 25.

the main idea underlying it is intended to 'insert' rational elements into myths and religious conceptions.[32] Indeed, after the proof of IS., Plato immediately draws our attention to the idea that IS. by no means implies that we could get rid of the consequences of the wicked acts we committed in this world.

> If death were a release from everything, it would be a boon for the wicked, because by dying they would be released not only from the body but also from their own wickness together with the soul, but as it is, since the soul is clearly immortal, it can have no escape or security from evil except by becoming as good and wise as it possibly can. For it takes nothing with it to the next world except its education and training, and these, we are told, are of supreme importance in helping or harming the newly dead at the very beginning of his journey there (*Phaedo* 107c-d).

There are judgments carried out by those who are charged with office of escorting souls from this world to the other and the souls would be brought back to this world given that they have there undergone the necessary experiences and remained as long as it required (*Phaedo* 107e). More than that, the souls staying in the House of Hades are not guaranteed to have a new life after vast periods of time. The incarnation could be carried out entirely in terms of punishment. The wicked souls might also be reborn as 'perverse animals' depending on their conduct during life (*Phaedo* 82a).

Obviously. this is a moral view attempting to exhort people to do the right thing (which is, to Plato, to engage in philosophy) in order to be exempted from severe judgment after death. Regardless whether this moral view successfully exerts its effectiveness on regulating people's conduct, it is nonetheless undeniable that this view

---

32. Revel says: "La philosophy elle-meme continuera, notamment chez Platon, a faire appel au mythe et a juxtaposer une grande rigueur de raissonement a des conceptions mystiques ou religieuses." See Jean-Francois Revel, ibid., p. 31.

is founded on the basis of fear. To be fearful of the consequence of misconduct in life is the motivation which urges people to do what is considered good. Here, without thinking whether it is good or not to establish a moral view on the basis of fear, we are nonetheless inclined to look at it in terms of Feyerabend's comment.

> This they became later, during the archaic age and as a result they 'lost [their] humanity. Hence, Olympianism in its moralized form tended to become a religion of fear, a tendency which is reflected in the religious vocabulary. There is no word for 'god-fearing' in the *Iliad*. This is how life was dehumanized by what some people are pleased to call 'moral progress' or 'scientific progress'.[33]

In this quotation, as the vague idea about the afterlife is reconstructed by Plato in accordance with a more explicit manner in which punishment and reward regarding what we have done in this world are clearly defined on the basis of fear, we can understand (but not necessarily agree with Plato) why this process of 'dehumanization' is considered by some people a 'moral progress'. For, as it is argued by Plato, we now have good reasons for getting rid of bodily pleasures and desires and in acquiring truth by contemplation. Nevertheless, it does not seem to be clear that the 'moral progress' should also be considered a 'scientific progress'. Obviously, this problem needs explanation which, as we will see, is crucial to our examination of the Platonic rationalization of IS..

Note that this 'progress' of science has nothing to do with the contemporary view of modern science such as new discovery as confirmed in laboratory experiment. However, though anachronism plays no role in our understanding here, Plato did have a view of science which has nonetheless a great deal to do with modern science. The Platonic theory of science is exposed by Revel.

---

[33]. Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 192.

> Science is 'the true opinion accompanied with reason'[34] which means reason understood in the sense of sufficient reason, cause, etc. Having a scientific knowledge is different from having an opinion, even true opinion, of something; it is also to know *why* it is true. Nevertheless, with this 'why question', we would never be able to meet its answer in the level of phenomenon, but, always transcending the phenomenon, look towards it in the noumenon. In other words, knowing something is not pointing toward its manifestations, but its essence which is an absolute Form existing in the world of ideas.[35]

Obviously, what is meant by Revel with regard to Plato's idea of science is an epistemological principle on the basis of which we acquire 'true' knowledge. If we apply Revel's exposition to the Platonic proof of IS., we can say that all Plato does is in fact a 'scientific' formulation of this idea. And, as we have said, in this proof Plato intends to add a rational foundation to the religious idea which was in the eyes of Plato by no means sufficient to be considered as truth. Indeed, if we are justified to consider this process of proving the rational foundation of IS. in terms of the Platonic science, then we can say that all Plato does is not different from using 'science' (in the above-mentioned sense) to pave the way for a rational reinforcement of the

---

34. The original text of Plato reads: "True opinions are a fine thing and do all sorts of good so long as they stay in their place, but they will not stay long. They run away from a man's mind; so they are not worth much until you tether them by working out the reason. That process, my dear Meno, is recollection" (learning) (*Meno* 97e).

35. My translation of Revel's text: "La science c'est: < <l'opinion vraie accompagnee de raison> >, raison devant etre pris dans la sens de raison suffisante, cause, etc. Avoir une connaissance scientifique, ce n'est pas seulement avoir une opinion, meme vraie, sur quelque chose, c'est aussi savoir *pourquoi* elle est vraie. Or ce pourquoi, nous ne le recontrons jamais au niveau des phenomene mais tourjours par un depassement du phenomene vers le noumene. En d'autres terms, connaitre une chose c'est connaitre non point telle ou telle de ses manifestations, mais son essence, et cette essence c'est la Forme absolue qui existe d'elle dans le monde des Idees." See Jean-Francois Revel, ibid., p. 125.

very idea. However, as we have seen, Wittgenstein and Feyerabend comment about the futility of tending to add a rational or scientific basis for the formulation of religious ideas, With this in mind, we intend to show that Plato's attempt is equally futile as his proofs do not improve the religious meaning contained in Ancient Greece and instead, merely express the religious view of Plato himself. Of course, we would not deny that everybody has the right to express what he or she sees as being adequate regarding religion. Nevertheless, we do not agree with the idea that what one person proposes is the only truth and what is suggested by others is nothing but sheer nonsense. Unfortunately, this is exactly what takes place in the mind of Plato; he not only put forward his view of the immortality of the soul but also denounced the views of others (notably that of Homer) as nothing but false images.

4. Plato's criticism of Homer

In *Dialogues*, we can find Plato's critical remarks regarding Greek mythology in many places. The most explicit such criticisms are in *Republic*. The basic idea underlying this criticism is not different from his principal position, i.e., a dualistic scheme in which the phenomenal world and the world of Forms are separated by their nature. Human beings, if they are not engaged in philosophy, are in no position to participate in true knowledge which belongs exclusively to the world of Forms. We have seen this in the previous paragraphs and now we will see that on the basis of the same scheme that Plato launches a criticism against Homer.

Homer, the poet who, in terms of Plato, made descriptions regarding "*plants and animals, including himself, and thereto earth and heaven and the gods and all things in heaven and in Hades under the earth*" (*Republic* 596c), is an imitator (*Republic* 597e) who produces nothing of truth but imitations based on a small part of the object (*Republic* 598b). Plato says so because truth belongs to God alone (*Republic* 597c) and a poet such as Homer was actually 'creating' images of excellence (*Republic* 600e). Admittedly, these images were able to deceive some

people, but this deception was due to these people lacking ability to *"put to the proof and distinguish knowledge, ignorance, and imitation"* (*Republic* 598d). So, what is needed in order to judge the poetic tradition which talked about things pertaining to virtue and vice and all things divine (*Republic* 598d) is to contrast it with truth. However, since truth belongs exclusively to the world of Forms, how could it be possible that we, the mortal beings living in this world can acquire truth and compare it with what is untrue? Senses are certainly of no help because their perceptions are precisely what constantly deceive us. Other than senses, what we can rely on in order to detect truth is the ability in our souls. Nonetheless, as we have seen in the previous paragraphs, that soul, while combining with the body, can get confused by sensible phenomena so that some parts of it are likely to drag us to believe that *what appears true* is true, whereas our abilities of reason and calculation are still able to help us detect what is true and what is not (*Republic* 602d-e). Therefore, in our souls, there are two distinct parts, emotional feeling on the one hand and reason and calculation on the other hand. It is the latter part which puts it trust in measurement and reckoning must be the best part of the soul and the former part which opposes it must belong to the inferior aspect of the soul (*Republic* 603a). Moreover, poetry is associated with the inferior aspect of our soul and therefore produces a product being far removed from truth (*Republic* 603b). By resorting to an example relating to a heartbreaking incidence (such as the loss of a son), Plato explains why the poetic tradition has to be associated with the inferior part of our soul. He says that, despite the fact it is extremely painful to encounter such an incident, the suffered person should try to restrain his grief while he/she is with others (otherwise he/she would be in shame). Whereas, when left alone, he might allow more emotional feeling by releasing his grief (*Republic* 604a). Therefore, there are actually two opposite impulses in the person at the same time and about the same thing (*Republic* 604b). One is however directed by reason, the other by feeling.

Plato somehow in this opposition, considers that the rational part which demands restrain, gets the upper hand, whereas the feeling

part which leads us to chafe and repine is by all means inferior. His reason is this. In accordance with his philosophy in which truth does not exist in the phenomenal world, but rather in the world of Forms, nothing in the mortal life is worthy of great concern, and our grieving checks the very thing we need to come to our aid (*Republic* 603c). In such incidence, we should get our feeling restrained rather than behaving like a child, doing whatever our feeling urges us to do. Therefore, what reason tells us will stay constantly the same because it is always what we are supposed to do; what feeling tells us to do, on the other hand could vary depending on the external circumstances. To Plato, the best part of the soul is the part which is endeavored to conform to the precepts of reason, whereas the inferior part of the soul constantly varies in line with different occasions. Therefore, coming back to the issue with respect to the poetic tradition, it is clear that Homer appeals to the inferior part of the soul because all he does are 'imitations' "*of the heroes who are in grief, and delivering a long tirade in his lamentations or chanting and beating his breast*" (*Republic* 605d). The true reality which is characterized by its unchangeness, is accessible only to the best part of human souls. For, in situations of grief or pleasure, rather than excessively expressing what we feel, we urge ourselves "on our ability to remain calm and endure, in the belief that this is the conduct of a man" (*Republic* 605d). As a consequence, to Plato, if the mimetic part of the poet prevails, the prevalence might lead to the destruction of the rational part of the soul.

Plato says we normally would not be inclined to excessively express our feeling while we are on view because we are reluctant to be in shame. However, in theater, the poets can satisfy our feeling by looking at "the woes of others and it is no shame to it to praise and pity another who, claiming to be a good man, abandons himself to excess in his grief" (*Republic* 606b). So, without examining our true feeling, the poets could satisfy us with their imitations which are, though far removed from reality but nonetheless adequate to our natural desires. It is on the basis of this adequacy that the people whose mind is never properly educated by reason or even by habit (*Republic* 606a), enjoy the

tragedies and the comedies, holding that the poets expose images of excellence. According to Plato, this enjoyment could be harmful to a healthy development of the best part of our soul. For, "few are capable of selecting that what we enjoy in others will inevitably react upon ourselves" (*Republic* 606b). That means when we are used to the emotional feeling the poets' stories exert on us, we will eventually not be able to restrain ourselves in similar sufferings. Therefore, in order to safeguard the best part of our soul which concedes to nothing but reason, we should repudiate Homer's imitations as false. Otherwise, if we guide our entire life in accordance with what Homer told us, our city will be in the state of decadence as the guidance we conceive as excellent can do nothing but lead us away from truth. Thus, Plato concludes in his criticism of Homer: "... *we must not take such poetry seriously as a serious thing that lays hold on truth, but that he who lends an ear to it must believe what we have said about poetry*" (*Republic* 608b).

5. Problems of the Platonic rationalization

By looking at several passages of *phaedo* and *Republic*, we have seen that Plato not only intends to put forward a rationalized formulation of IS., but also strongly expresses his critical remarks against Homer. Regardless of what the Platonic philosophy implies here, we can be fair to Plato by saying that his intention is to expose truth which would not reveal itself unless it is contemplated by the purified, or the rationalized part of our souls. So, Plato argues for a rationalization of IS. However, we have to ask this question: Is Plato succeed in repudiating the Greek mythic tradition by propounding its rationalized formulation? To this question, we hold a negative position. We believe, in line with Wittgenstein and Feyerabend, that the scientific formulation of a religious concept in order to make it more persuasive is a futile effort. Hence, Plato's effort in exposing a rationalized form of IS. is futile too. Though this rationalization has exerted some crucial impact in the realm of philosophy, we will explain the futility of this effort by looking at two aspects. One is Aristotle's further development

in relation to the rationalization of IS. and the other one is the fact that all Plato does in rationalizing IS., at its best, is merely to represent one mode of belief among many; there is no fundamental difference between Plato and Homer as the 'truth' of their 'stories' belong to two different modes of beliefs. We begin from examining Aristotle's position with respect to IS..

5.1 Aristotle's criticism of Plato's formulation of IS.

The Aristotelian formulation of IS. is basically, in contrast to that of Plato, a step moving further to be more 'rational'. We are however not inclined to examine comprehensively Aristotelian formulation of IS., instead we will concentrate on the criticism Aristotle made against the Platonic formulation of IS. To this criticism, we are in agreement with de Pater who says that the Platonic formulation of the soul is "*too speculative*" for Aristotle.[36] The central point of this criticism refers to the idea that in the Platonic formulation, soul considered as a substance which can exist independently of the body is sheer nonsense. In other words, Aristotle considered the otherworldly existence of the soul which holds a position of essential importance in Plato's philosophy to be unfounded as the soul, though admitted by Aristotle as the principle of animal life (*On the Soul* 402^{a}8), could not be separated from the body; without the body there is no soul.[37] In relation to what we have seen in Plato that Form (which represents the soul) and matter (which represents the body) belong to separate worlds, Aristotle holds an entirely different position. This

---

36. Wim de Pater, ibid., p. 41.

37. The relation between the soul and the body is exemplified by Aristotle: "What is soul? It is substance in the sense which corresponds to the account of a thing. That means that it is what it is to be for a body of the character just assigned. Suppose that a tool, e.g. an axe, were a *natural* body, then being an axe would have been its essence, and so its soul; if this disappeared from it, it would have ceased to be an axe, except in name (*On the Soul* 412^{a}10-15).

position maintains that an inquiry of the nature of soul has to "*enable us to discover the incidental properties, or which fail to facilitate even a conjecture about them, must obviously, one and all, be dialectical and futile*"(*On the Soul* 402^{b}25- 403^{a}1). The basic idea underlying all this is that we cannot examine the essence of the soul within the traditional way, but must rely on *experience*. He explicitly says: "*When we are able to give an account comformable to experience of all or most of the properties of a substance, we shall be in the most favorable position to say something worth saying about the essential nature of that subject*" (*On the Soul* 402^{b}20). According to his experience, Aristotle finds that the traditional explanation of the idea of the soul is mistaken in the sense that it made much effort to explain the nature of the soul, but about the body which receives it, it gives no information at all (*On the Soul* 407^{b}25). Despite the fact that Aristotle admits that to determine whether the inquiry about the nature of the soul is dependent upon the soul itself or the complex of body and soul is a difficult question, he gives the upper hand to the latter on the basis of his empirical judgments. He says: "*If we consider the majority of (the affections of soul), there seems to be no case in which the soul can act or be acted upon without involving the body*" (*On the Soul* 403^{a}5). In presenting the necessity of looking at the complex of the soul and the body, Aristotle propounds his objection towards the Platonic theory of the soul in which thinking is considered a pure act of human beings, being the only way through which our soul can be purified. This is to Aristotle sheer nonsense. He simply holds that the separate existence of the soul is impossible for "*it (the soul) is always found in a body*" (*On the Soul* 403^{a}15). By the example of what is 'straight', Aristotle explains the necessity of examining the essence of the soul by taking the complex of the soul and the body into account. It is evident that 'straight' involves many properties arising from the straightness in it such as touching a bronze sphere at a point, whereas straightness divorced from the other constituents of the straight thing cannot touch it in this way (*On the Soul* 403^{a}13). In this example, it is clear that straightness ceases to exist unless it is found in a body. The

same explanation applies to all affections of soul (e.g. passion, gentleness, fear, pity, courage, joy, loving, and hating) which involve a concurrent affection of body (*On the Soul* 403^{a}15). In brief, we can say that Aristotle has turned the Platonic theory up side down; what was cherished by Plato as the driving force of our life, the soul and what was repudiated in his theory as nothing but the hindrance of the full development of the soul, the body are reversed by Aristotle. In examining the complex of the soul and the body, the latter prevails. The affections of the soul are "enmattered accounts" (*On the Soul* 403^{a}25).

On the basis of the body, Aristotle rejects the idea which holds that the soul is a harmony in the sense of the composition of the parts of the body. As a body might exist in various Forms, so are there various modes of soul in relation to the compositions of the body. We have to identify the soul with the ratio of the mixture (of bodily elements) so that what constitutes the flesh contains a soul which differs from the soul arising from what constitutes the bone (*On the Soul* 408^{a}9-18). However, if the soul could be divided into various parts, then how about our topic regarding IS.? To this question Aristotle's answers that the soul would not exist without the body, souls of particular things cease to exist as soon as the bodies which contain them, perish.

Aristotle does expose a formulation of IS. Nevertheless, the Aristotelian formulation not only differs from that of Plato but also ends the religious implication that the Platonic formulation purposively implies. Aristotle begins by distinguishing two kinds of intellect within the soul: the passive intellect through which all particular things are thought and hence become known and the active intellect which is a productive cause, making all thinkings about particular things possible. The relationship between the active intellect and the passive intellect is exemplified by Aristotle by the analogy of light and things. The things can be seen if lit by light (*On the Soul* 430^{a}10-25). Therefore, Aristotle propounds that knowledge conceived through the passive intellect is potential and that of the active intellect the actual knowledge. Between these two forms of intellects, the active intellect is more important for

Aristotle. Unlike the passive intellect, which is constantly mixed with human thought, the active intellect is different; its nature is "*separable, impassable, unmixed*". "*When separated*", continues Aristotle, "*it is alone just what it is, and this above is immortal and eternal (we do not remember because, while this is impossible, passive thought is perishable); and without this nothing thinks*" (*On the Soul* 430^{a}23-25). In other words, unlike Plato, who holds that our soul will continue to exist after death, Aristotle holds that only a part of the soul, the active intellect will stay in eternity. We can say that the Aristotelian formulation has little to do with personal immortality; it talks actually about the immortality of the active intellect. The immortality of the whole soul is, for Aristotle, too much (or too speculative).[38] This remark of de Pater is precisely what we intend to say in looking at rationalization of IS. Though understanding Plato's reasons rationalizing IS., we are inclined to hold the position that rationalization of religious ideas of any sort can do nothing to make them religiously more persuasive, and simply lead them towards a secularized form. We have seen such an example with Plato and Aristotle. While Plato intends to rationalize IS. in order to make it persuasive, comprehensive, systematic and moral, his successor, Aristotle, continues the process of rationalization until it finally ends in a secularized form. Moreover, the religious objective which Plato intends is dissolved in this process of rationalization. As we stated in the beginning of this paper, any attempt to rationally formulate a religious idea is futile. The process of rationalization, which we cherish so much in philosophy, can actually do nothing but create *qualitative change* in which the religious meaning that the idea originally implies disappears. In fact, according to Paul Veyne, the Platonic rationalization of Greek mythology was not only futile but also misleading because the meaning of Greek myths to the Greeks contained a cultural context which made perfect sense to the people concerned. Attempting to rationalize them in order to tell the Greeks what 'truth' is, is an absurdity for Paul

38. Wim de Pater, ibid., p. 44.

Veyne.[39] In the final part of this paper, we are going to see some reasons given by Paul Veyne considering that the rationalization of Greek myths is inadequate.

5.2 Paul Veyne's conception of truth as constitutive imagination

We assume that the driving force underlying the Platonic philosophy is the idea that something has to be true in order to be believable. Obviously, this idea has exerted a tremendous influence on the later development of philosophy. Even today, it is still generally considered to be essential by many. We have no particular objection to this idea, whereas we hold that an essential point with respect to the epistemological problem concerning the truth of knowledge can easily be blurred by this idea. The difficulty lies in the fact that according to what can we know that there is such a binding truth which is universal and eternal? If what is sensible and changing is corruptible precisely as Plato exposes, then to what extent can we say that truth lies in the other world? This does not seem to be intelligible because, after all, we human being live in this world and our changing nature which Plato condemns so much is precisely what characterizes this world.

If we accepted the Platonic position that truth is unchanging and universal, then it would be extremely difficult to explain the tremendous difference among different periods of time and in various places. Should we then insist that Plato is the first philosopher who has discovered the essential nature of truth? This does not sound very intelligible because the Platonic theory is claimed to be true, but in fact it contains many presuppositions (e.g. the dualistic scheme of the sensible world and the world of ideas, the inferiority of the senses in contrast to thinking, the superiority of absolute ideas, etc.). Without believing these presuppositions, the 'truth' of the Platonic theory is

---

39. Paul Veyne, ibid., p. 1. He says: "Far from being a triumph of reason, the purification of myth by *logos* is an ancient program whose absurdity surprises us today".

unlikely to be established. Therefore, at its best, we can say that the Platonic theory is *believed* to be true. But then, should not we say that myths among the Greeks were equally believed to be true? With regard to this question, we think Paul Veyne has offered an answer concerning what truth is.

Veyne makes it clear that looking at history would enable us to admit that in different periods of time and in various circumstances there are different groups who, from different modalities of belief, claim that they know, believe and conceive truth. Without holding this position, it would certainly become unintelligible to see why different groups of people enthusiastically defend what they believe in. In terms of this historical approach, the question of truth has to be understood by taking different cultural and traditional contexts into account. The conclusion we can draw from looking at this account is that there are different ways of conceiving truth. Although this 'truth' is by no means what Plato expects to be universal and binding, it does explain the reason why the Greeks were actually not very much disturbed by the fact that, from Plato's point of view, their myths contain serious gaps which somehow need to be further elaborated. In brief, with regard to the question concerning if the Greeks were reasonable to hold their religious idea as true, we tend to show that they were and that their reasonableness was in no position to be improved by adding a rational ground to it.

How can I say that the Platonic idea of immortality in contrast to the idea in Greek mythology is neither more true or less false? We tend to answer this question by looking at Veyne's idea of "constitutive imagination". Paul Veyne, who does not hold the commonly assumed opposites of truth and belief, *logos* and myth, rationality and irrationality, puts forward an idea that truth is, by its nature, constituted from imagination.

> It was necessary to recognize that, instead of speaking beliefs, one must actually speak of truths, and that these truths were themselves products of the imagination. Far from being the most simple realistic experience, truth is

> the most historical. [Greek poets] were not forgers, nor were they acting in bad faith. They were simply following what was, at that time, the normal way of arriving at truth.
>
> I do not at all mean to say that the imagination will bring future truths to light and that it should reign; I mean, rather, that truths are already products of imagination and that the imagination has always governed. It is imagination that rules, not reality, reason, or the ongoing work of negative.[40]

We can say that Veyne understands the meaning of truth in terms of culture and society. Indeed, to him, the "social" meaning is exactly what makes a belief to be true. For he explains the meaning of constitutive imagination according to socialization. He says "*constitutive imagination is not an individual creative gift; it is a kind of objective spirit in which individuals are socialized*".[41] The constitutive imagination, rather than liberating us from "facts", actually creates boundaries. The reason that Veyne may say so is based on the idea that he is talking about history not philosophy. What the constitutive imagination conveys is actually a delimitation, which Veyne calls 'palace', 'fishbowl' or 'container'. Veyne says: "At each moment, nothing exists or acts outside these palaces of the imagination"[42], "Outside this bowl is nothing, not even future truth"[43], "Religion and literatures, as well as politics, modes of conduct, and sciences are formed within these containers"[44]. In line of this reasoning, the so-called

---

40. Paul Veyne, ibid., p. xi-xii.

41. Ibid., p. 108.

42. Ibid., p. 121.

43. Ibid., p. xii.

44. Ibid., p. xii.

'rational' means in portraying ideas recedes to a delimited mode of belief.

> Nothing will be more variable than the conception of rationality made by these successive architects, and nothing will be more immutable than the illusion by which each palace will pass for being adapted to reality. For each state of fact will be taken for the truth of things. The illusion of truth will make each palace appear to be completely situated inside the frontiers of reason.[45]

Coming back to the example referring to if the Greeks believed in their myths, Veyne's answer is "They presumed that their predecessors" (from whom they got their myths) "were telling the truth" and their believing in them was a tradition which "was the truth; that was all".[46] In this understanding, obviously "truth is a homonym that should be used only in the plural".[47] The truth of the mythical world is established on the basis of "a certain relationship between the listeners and the poet himself".[48] When the Greeks believed what their poets told them, the belief in "this mythical world was not empirical; it was noble".[49] "Their belief is based on trust"[50], says Veyne.

So, what effect can the Platonic criticism of Greek mythology exert on the Greeks? The answer is 'very little, if anything'. The reason for saying so is because the so-called 'rationalization' propounded by Plato by no means represents the anticipated 'binding and universal truth'; it is merely a mode of belief among many. Accordingly, this criticism which intends to 'awaken' the common

---

45. Ibid., p. 122.
46. Ibid., p. 7.
47. Ibid., p. 21.
48. Ibid., p. 19.
49. Ibid., p. 18.
50. Ibid., p. 28.

people and exhort them that their beliefs are actually false, is misleading in the sense that the common people would not even think about the question regarding the difference between truth and falsehood.

> Before taking the critical attitude that reduces myth to verisimilitude, the average Greek had a different viewpoint. According to is mood, mythology was either a collection of old wives' tales, or else the supernatural provoked a stance in which questions of historicity or fiction had no meaning.[51]

However, we hope that this formulation of 'constitutive imagination' should not lead us to hold or consider that the change from one 'fishbowl', 'palace', or 'container' to another becomes impossible. It is still possible, but the change is not undertaken by persuasion but by a 'rebellion'. The change takes place when the dependence on someone's words ends: there are ingenious people who get tired of depending on the words of someone else, so they come forward to "measure the marvelous against everyday reality and *pass on to other modalities of belief*".[52] This is considered by Veyne to be a work of genius (I assume Plato must be the case) who changes the 'fishbowl'. And the 'ingenious rebellion' will exert an impact on children, who will be socialized into the new program. Then, in the new program, the 'newly-socialized' people "will be as satisfied with it (the 'new' mode of belief) as their ancestors had been with theirs, and they will scarcely see a way of getting out of it, since they see nothing beyond it".[53] Of course, there might be a transition period in which people are gradually rather than abruptly aware of the ongoing change. However, what is essential here with regard to our concern is neither a replacement of falsehood with truth nor a progress leading ahead towards the disclosure of 'truth', rather it is a juxtaposition of two modes of beliefs. Therefore,

---

51. Ibid., p. 14.

52. Ibid., p. 27.

53. Ibid., p. 118.

it is more adequate to conceive the mythical world of the Greeks and the Platonic rationalization as two modes of belief.

From this conception, we conclude our paper by reiterating two points concerning why we hold that Plato's attempt to 'rationalize' the Greek religion is, at the same time, futile and misleading. In the first place, Plato's attempt is futile because, the further philosophical elaboration of IS. made by Aristotle would do nothing but put the entire meaning of religion in jeopardy. Secondly, Plato's criticism of Greek mythology by propagating the universal truth is misleading because a more adequate way of understanding religion of any kind should conceive this term in its plural form which has more to do with the cultural and traditional contexts than with the pursuit of a binding truth.

Comment

I found Yuann Jeu-Jenq's essay to be very, very interesting . Yuann has effectively shown how Plato's rationalization of the notion of immortality of the soul merely served to vitiate the notion's ability to serve a religious function. Through bringing in the work of Paul Veyne, Yuann has also provided the broader implications of his critique for a cross-cultural, pluralistic understanding of "truth".Considering both its sound scholarly methodology and its creative insights, I highly recommend that this essay be published in your journal.

I have very few critical comments indicating how this article might be improved. I have made some stylistic suggestion in the text itself. In addition, Mr. Yuann might consider the following as he finishes off the article's final draft:

1. My main suggestion is to hold off on the discussion about science and religion until the end of the paper. At the moment, the question of the relationship between the two is used to introduce the entire essay, but then is only raised once again in passing. This is confusing for the reader since the rationalization process initiated by Plato and continued by Aristotle was not really scientific except in a very loose, metaphorical sense. Since the article is basically about the deleterious effect that rationalization has upon religious faith, why not wait until the paper's concluding section to show how the scientific world view, as one particular type of rationalization, also has this effect (or does it?). Yuann might also use this opportunity to clarify whether he considers the scientific world view to be yet one more instance of constitutive imagination. (I would argue that it is. For instance, the discussion on page 35 about how change from one "palace" to the next occurs through "rebellion" is remarkably similar to Thomas Kuhn's description of the process of "paradigm shift" in science . [see Thomas S Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*].)

2. As a student in the study of religion, I thought of several authors in my field that would be helpful to Mr. Yuann as he continues to think through the issues put forth in this essay . Although he may not choose to incorporate their arguments into the present article, he may find

them worthy discussion partners for the future:

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* and *Faith and Belief*. Both of these works deal precisely with the issues raised in Yuann's article.

Gorden Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*. Kaufman is a leading liberal Christian theologian. His notion of "serendipitous creativity" sounds to be quite close to Veyne's concept of "constitutive imagination".

Suzanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*. In this work, Langer discusses various forms of rationality. This may help clarify how mythological, philosophical, and scientific ways of thinking can all be "rational", but in different ways.

Once again, I thoroughly enjoyed Yuann Jeu-Jenq's article on Plato's rationalization of the notion of "the immortality of the soul". I feel confident that the readership of your journal will also find his treatment of the subject to be creative and enlightening.