

## PENOLOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY IN PLATO'S *TIMAEUS* AND *LAWS*<sup>1</sup>

THE eschatological myth in the tenth book of the *Laws* (903 b–905 d) contains a paragraph which purports to explain why, in the next world, efficient treatment of souls according to their deserts is ‘marvellously easy’:

ΑΘ. Ἡπερ ἂν ἔχοι ραστώνης ἐπιμελείας θεοῖς τῶν πάντων, ταύτη μοι δοκῶ φράζειν. Εἰ μὲν γὰρ μὴ πρὸς τὸ ὅλον αἰεὶ βλέπων πλάττοι τις μετασχηματίζων τὰ πάντα, οἷον ἐκ πυρὸς ὕδωρ ἔμψυχον, καὶ μὴ σύμπολλα ἐξ ἑνὸς ἢ ἐκ πολλῶν ἔν, πρώτης ἢ δευτέρας ἢ καὶ τρίτης γενέσεως μετεπιληφότα πλήθεισιν ἄπειρ’ ἂν εἴη τῆς μετατιθεμένης κοσμήσεως· νῦν δ’ ἔστι θαυμαστὴ ραστώνη τῷ τοῦ παντός ἐπιμελουμένῳ. 903 e 5  
904 a 1

**e4** μὴ *post* γὰρ *add. corr.* Laur. LXXXV 9 (*vide* Post, *Vatican Plato*, 36–7, 39); εἰ μὴ γάρ Apelt (*Jahresb. ü. d. Gymn. . . . zu Jena*, 1907 (no. 848), 18); **e6** ἐμψύχον Cornarius; ἔμψυχον Stallbaum; *secl.* Bury; ἐκ πυρὸς ὕδωρ, ἔμψυχα καὶ μὴ, Badham (*The Philebus of Plato*, vi); ἔμψυχον <τ’ ἐξ ἀψύχου> Solmsen (*Studien zur Textgeschichte und Textkritik*, *her.* H. Dahlmann und R. Merkelbach, 272), *cf. id.* *Plato’s Theology*, 160 n. 21; **e6** καὶ ἡ Cornarius; **a2** τὰ *post* εἴη Ast, *cf.* Solmsen *loc. cit.*, n. 12.

‘I think my account explains how it would be in point of ease of supervision of everything for gods. For if, failing always to look to the whole, one were to mould everything by changing shapes, as for example from fire water with soul in it (*or*, living water) and not many things from one or one from many, then (*apodosis*) when they (τὰ πάντα?) had got hold of a first or second or third *γένεσις* they would be infinite in point of number with respect to the *κόσμησις* which is (*or*, would be) being changed round. But in fact the supervisor of the all finds it (i.e. supervision) marvellously easy.’

This is obscure, on anybody’s standards: something, obviously, has been condensed to the point where it is almost Mumbo-Jumbo.<sup>2</sup> What was it?

<sup>1</sup> This article is a version of a paper read to the Southern Association for Ancient Philosophy in September 1972. I am grateful to members of the audience for a number of helpful comments and suggestions, and to Charles Kahn earlier for a stimulating informal discussion of the paragraph dissected in this article.

The lineation shown in the quotation is that of the Budé edition, which for the *Timaeus* and *Laws* I use throughout.

<sup>2</sup> The passage has been discussed by: Paul Stöcklein, ‘Über die philosophische Bedeutung von Platons Mythen’, *Philologus* Suppl. xxx (1937), 31–2; P.-M. Schuhl, ‘Une machine à peser les âmes’, *La Fabulation Platonicienne* (Paris, 1947), 105–8; *id.*, ‘Un cauchemar de Platon?’, *Revue Philo-*

*sophique de la France et de l’Étranger*, cxliii (1953), 420–2 (also in *id.*, *Études Platoniciennes* [Paris, 1960], 85–9); P. Kucharski, ‘Observations sur le myth des *Lois* 903b–905d’, *Bull. Ass. G. Budé, Lettres d’Humanité* xiii (1954), 31–50 (reprinted in *id.*, *Aspects de la Spéculation Platonicienne* [Paris, 1971], 73–96); Heribert Rahe, *Göttliche Epimeleia* (diss. Tübingen 1968), 124 ff. The very brief remarks of Gerhard Müller, *Studien zu den Platonischen Nomoi* (2nd edition, München, 1968), 96, seem to me on the right lines; so too those of A. C. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato’s Doctrines* i (London, 1962), 384, who cautiously adds, ‘It seems to me that it is anybody’s guess just what this passage means.’

## THE CONTEXT: 'ANAEMIC' MYTH

The sequence in which the passage occurs is a piece of persuasion: the Athenian Stranger explicitly describes it (903 b 1-2) as *μῦθοι τινές*, designed to *charm* (*ἐπαρθεῖν*), that are needed *in addition to* (*προσδεῖσθαι*) the immediately preceding 'proof' of the concern of the gods for mankind. This myth, therefore, if that is the right term for it, is analogous to the persuasive 'preambles' to the various sections of the legal code: just as they induce obedience to the laws, so this myth, like the myths of earlier dialogues, is intended to induce belief in articles of morality and religion (841 c, 885 b, 907 c). We should therefore expect that our myth will be composed in rather poetic, rhetorical, and heightened language; and indeed to some little extent so it is. It is written in the form of an address to a young man; we hear of Rulers (903 b 8), a *Petteia*-Player (903 d 5), Our King (904 a 6), some unnamed gods (903 e 3, 905 a 3, 905 b 6, c 6), and twice of Hades (904 d 2, 905 a 8); there is a quotation from Homer (904 e); and the young fellow is told in ringing terms that whether he makes himself ever so small and hides in the earth, or whether he soars up into the sky, he will never escape the sentence of the gods (905 a). All very edifying, no doubt; yet the prevailing tone of the myth is drily philosophical, and in the middle of it we have our little paragraph, which so far from being charming seems almost designed to put the lad off theology for ever.

In fact, as a persuasive myth the whole sequence is distinctly peculiar; and it looks all the more peculiar when we compare it with Plato's other and earlier eschatological stories. Here are some features of some or all of the earlier myths, of the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*,<sup>1</sup> which are either entirely absent from ours in the *Laws*, or at any rate present only vestigially: (1) elaborate and detailed descriptions of the topography of the next world; (2) the conducting of the souls by guides from one point to another within it; (3) the notion of a judgement in some sort of court, analogous to judgement in this world, by picturesque persons such as Minos and Rhadamanthus, after the soul has given an account of itself (but cf. 959 a-c); (4) details of exquisite punishments; (5) perpetual punishment for the incurable; (6) the idea of a personal choice, in the afterlife, of one's next reincarnation; (7) the relevance of the experience of post-mortem reward or punishment to the making of that choice (see *Republic*). All or most of this has been swept away: compared with the earlier, full-blooded accounts, the myth of the *Laws* is anaemic.

But two fundamental notions survive: first, that there is some connection between one's fate in the next world and one's 'record' in this (souls are still somehow rewarded or punished: 904 c ff., esp. *τιμωρία* 905 a 7; cf. 959 b, *Ep.* 7. 335 a); second, that reincarnation does take place. This second point is, however, not made with perfect clarity: one has to rely on 'soul being associated now with one body, now with another' at 903 d 3-4, and on *πᾶσι θανάτοις* at 904 e 6, an odd expression that suggests, but only suggests, a series of deaths preceding successive reincarnations (cf. *Ep.* 7. 335 a).

## IMPERSONAL ESCHATOLOGY

Some features of the whole passage are, however, new and important.

(1) In earlier Platonic accounts, the next world was sharply differentiated from this world; it had a separate and more or less precisely defined location,

<sup>1</sup> *Gorgias* 523 a ff.; *Phaedo* 107 a ff. (cf. 80 d ff.); *Phaedrus* 246 a ff.; *Republic* 614 a ff.

typically under the earth. But where is it in the myth of the *Laws*? Nowhere in particular, apparently: it is described in physical and spatial<sup>1</sup> language, in wide and nebulous terms which suggest that in some way or other it is roughly *coextensive with*, or perhaps even *the same thing as*, the entire physical universe.<sup>2</sup> Hades still seems to be in business; but the poor fellow seems to have lost his private address.

(2) The whole object of the eschatological exercise is explicitly said to be the arranging of every 'part' of the universe, souls included, in the position which will contribute most to the good of the whole (904 b c, cf. 903 c 8 *μέρος μὴν ἔνεκα ὅλου ἀπεργάζεται*). We are no longer concerned simply with the reward or punishment of the individual soul, and the manner in which it chooses a new reincarnation for itself, in its own interests, but with ensuring that what happens to it should somehow be in the interests of the universe at large. What happens to it is described in spatial terms. If it is an improving soul, it goes a long way up, to some better place; if it is deteriorating, down, to what is commonly called Hades; but if—and this is a curious, and curiously amusing detail—if it is neither improving nor deteriorating, it moves sideways, horizontally, over some comparatively short distance (904 c-d). Further, the process is not, apparently, subject to more than minimal guidance from any personal agency: it seems to be automatic<sup>3</sup> or semi-automatic, with perhaps some remote control from a supervisor<sup>4</sup> who may have done no more than construct the system in the first place,<sup>5</sup> which thereafter operates by virtue of its own built-in mechanisms. Most of the verbs used to describe the soul's movement are neutral: it 'moves', 'goes', 'travels', rather than 'is sent' or 'is conducted' by a guide.<sup>6</sup> The whole process seems as automatic and inevitable as the motion of a cork or stone when released half-way down a depth of water: the stone automatically sinks, the cork bobs up.

My impression of all this is that we have here a physical, spatial, and—if I may use the word—*scientific* eschatology, covered by a thinnish veneer of mythical motifs in deference to the ostensible literary form.

## THE ORIGINS OF THE NEW SYSTEM

### *Plato's Penology*

Before Plato can have abandoned his earlier and more colourful species of eschatology, especially in a context where it would seem eminently suitable,

<sup>1</sup> e.g. τόπος 903 d 7 *et saepe*; ἔδρα 904 b 7; τὸ τῆς χώρας ἐπίπεδον 904 c 9; μεταπεσόντα εἰς βάθος τὰ τε κάτω λεγόμενα τῶν τόπων 904 d 1-2; and esp. 905 a 5-7 οὐχ οὕτω . . . ἀναστήσῃ.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Müller 72-3.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Theaetetus* 177 a, τόπος οὐ δέξεται.

<sup>4</sup> The notion of 'supervision' is pervasive: 900 c 8, d 2; 901 b 1, 3, c 3, 4, 6; 902 a 3, 7, c 2, 10, d 3, e 9; 903 b 5, e 3; 904 a 4; 905 d 2. (I take this list from É. des Places, 'Deux témoins du texte des *Lois* de Platon', *W.S. lxx* [1957], 256-7.) Personal intervention, however, is carefully limited: 903 d 5-6 οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἔργον τῷ πεπτευτῇ λείπεται πλὴν μετατιθέναι . . .

<sup>5</sup> συντεταγμένα (903 b 6), προστεταγμένοι (903 b 8), τέλος ἀπειργασμένοι (903 b 9-c 1), ἐμηχανήσατο (904 b 2), μεμηχάνηται (904 b 6), and ἔταξαν οἱ τάξαντες (905 a 3) suggest that the system, whatever it is, was arranged once and for all.

<sup>6</sup> φέρεται (904 c 7), μεταπορεύεται (904 c 9), μεταπεσόντα (904 d 1), μετέβαλεν (904 d 8), μεθιδρύσασα τὸν αὐτῆς βίον (904 e 2), διαπορευθεὶς (905 a 8). If οἰκίεσθαι (904 b 7), μετακομισθεῖσα (904 d 8), and διακομισθεὶς (905 b 1) imply an external agency, we need not suppose that it is personal rather than automatic and mechanical. For the most part, the movements seem simply to 'happen'.

two things must have happened. First, the older type of eschatology must have come to look inadequate; second, a replacement eschatology, superior to the old, must have been available. First, then, how did the need for a new-style eschatology arise? Why this new emphasis? Or rather, why the lack of the older and more colourful themes? I think we can trace the origins of the change in the very new and very radical penology developed by Plato in the preceding book of the *Laws*, no. 9. This theory of punishment is important in its own right, but its implications not only for eschatology but for psychology and indeed much else have not been properly appreciated.

In outline, Plato's penology is very simple. Punishment, by a somewhat misleading medical metaphor, is 'cure' of a 'disease' of the soul; it is psychic physic—medicine which aims to 'cure' the criminal in that it should improve his outlook, and therefore conduct, in the future.<sup>1</sup> Now efficient 'cure' demands efficient diagnosis: Plato is committed to performing a close and accurate inspection of the criminal's spiritual state. He *knows* he is thus committed: witness the remarkable degree of attention paid to the various circumstances in which crimes are done, in particular the criminal's background, record, state of mind, motive, sincerity, duplicity, gullibility, or whatever.<sup>2</sup> But exact knowledge of a man's dispositions is difficult—even today one might claim that the tools for such a job do not exist—and in practice Plato is driven to a variety of rather crude methods of estimation. Perhaps the least crude—certainly it is the one which approaches most nearly to modern psychological practice—is the serious philosophical discussions inflicted on heretics in prison: their reactions will reveal their dispositions and opinions, and determine whether they shall be let loose (909 a). More crudely, Plato takes anger and premeditation<sup>3</sup> as indications of psychic state, as well as age,<sup>4</sup> recidivism,<sup>5</sup> and social status.<sup>6</sup> In all this, what Plato appears to be doing is finding a series of excuses or aggravating circumstances which he then uses, like other legislators and judges, to justify milder or harsher penalties. In fact, he is not interested in excuses, guilt, or blameworthiness; his *sole* purpose is to discover the criminal's psychic state as accurately as possible, so as to facilitate effective punishment/cure.<sup>7</sup> His penology is a tool of social control, and is designed to serve the interests of Magnesia as a whole.<sup>8</sup> The upshot of all this is that Plato's penology is, in the wider interests of the state, micropsychoscopic; and micropsychoscopy is as difficult to perform as it is to pronounce.

There are associated difficulties and crudities in penal practice. On the face of it, 'cure' would, even to an ancient Greek, imply treatment, in which suffering, although perhaps inevitably great, is incidental and to be minimized. Yet, with a few exceptions<sup>9</sup> both major and minor, Plato's 'cures' all consist of the infliction of suffering. Not only that: this suffering is graded according to the seriousness of the actual crime.<sup>10</sup> There are two dubious assumptions here: (1) that the seriousness of the actual crime is an accurate indication of psychic state, (2) that the severity of a punishment is in direct proportion to its curative effect. Again, Plato *knows* that both these assumptions are strictly unwarranted:

<sup>1</sup> e.g. 854 d-e, 862 c, 933 e-934 b, 941 e-942 a.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. 863 a-864 b, 908 a ff., 910 c-d, 934 a-b, 938 b-c.

<sup>3</sup> 866 d ff., and the homicide law *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> 863 d, cf. 910 c-d.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. 909 a, 940 e.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. 854 e, 879 e, 941 e-942 a.

<sup>7</sup> 862 d (surely the most remarkable penology to be found in the ancient world).

<sup>8</sup> e.g. 862 e.

<sup>9</sup> 845 b, 909 a.

<sup>10</sup> 876 e-877 a is a telling example.

at 941 c–d he explicitly admits that there is no necessary correlation between the gravity of the crime and the psychic depravity of the criminal; and at 862 d–e he says at length that the best cure may not be to inflict suffering at all, but to talk to the criminal or honour him or even gratify him. To punish in a retributive or vengeful way is relatively simple; to punish in the radical forward-looking way Plato proposes is extremely difficult. In practice, he finds himself unable to do anything, for the most part, except fall back on the usual kinds of penalties imposed in Attic law without ever bringing them into line with his theory. Indeed, a close examination of the way in which Plato attempts to use social status as a guide to psychic conditions and to cure them by the gradation of punishment according to social class, reveals a series of deep-seated confusions that are almost incredible.<sup>1</sup>

In short, (i) penology is both difficult and complex, (ii) human legislators and judges will therefore inevitably make mistakes, and (iii) some criminals may actually succeed in escaping their due punishment and thus remain not cured, and so damage the state at large by their presence and influence.

### *Penology and Eschatology*

In the earlier Platonic dialogues, the purpose of eschatology was to act as a long-stop for failures in human justice. It was vital to establish a connection, for the sober contemplation of the Callicleses of this world, between one's record in this life and one's fate beyond the grave, and (in the *Republic*) between that record and fate and the kind of reincarnation one would eventually undergo. In short, the problem was one of justice: to see to it that rewards and penalties are distributed as people deserve—if not now, then later (e.g. *Gorgias* 523 e–524 a). The early myths do this relatively simple job by embroidering on a commonplace of Greek literature, that ultimately one pays for one's crimes. But these myths, observed with a cold eye, are merely good stories.<sup>2</sup> When Plato came to write the eschatology of the *Laws*, the range of duties required of an efficient eschatology had become very much longer. Just as penology took into account the interests of Magnesia, so eschatology must take into account the interests of the cosmos at large; whereas penology tried and failed to take scrupulous account of psychic state, so eschatology must succeed, and succeed infallibly, in examining the state of the soul; and finally, whereas human judges were inefficient in finding the right measures to be taken, eschatology must always unerringly ensure that what happens to the soul after death, by way of punishment or otherwise, is exactly appropriate.<sup>3</sup> An eschatology that would do all this, written in physical and mechanical rather than mythical terms, and showing how, by virtue of the very way the physical world is made, these results ineluctably follow, would be, as an instrument of persuasion, far superior to eschatology of the old type. Whereas earlier, simple problems of human justice produced straightforward eschatology, now sophisticated penological problems demand sophisticated eschatological solutions.

<sup>1</sup> I hope to examine the confusions systematically in due course, as part of a comprehensive account of Plato's penology in the context of the history of Greek ideas about the nature and purpose of punishment.

<sup>2</sup> See the apparent dissatisfaction with myth at *Gorgias* 527 a.

<sup>3</sup> Note that even Aeacus and Rhadamanthus can be in doubt (*Gorgias* 524 a).

As I have tried to indicate, the eschatology we find in *Laws* 10 fits the bill nicely. A Chess Player and Our King do indeed seem to be involved somehow, but for the most part the system seems to function mechanically, without intervention from any personal agency. A good soul seems automatically to go up, a bad one down; and all this in the interests of the cosmos at large. As in the *Republic*, the fate of the soul is entirely its own choice:

τῆς δὲ γενέσεως τοῦ ποίου τινὸς  
ἀφῆκε ταῖς βουλήσεσιν ἐκάστων ἡμῶν τὰς αἰτίας. "Ὅπη 904 c 1  
γὰρ ἂν ἐπιθυμῇ καὶ ὁποῖός τις ὦν τὴν ψυχὴν, ταύτῃ σχεδὸν  
ἐκάστοτε καὶ τοιοῦτος γίγνεται ἅπας ἡμῶν ὡς τὸ πολὺ.

[He (Our King) has worked out where a soul should go to match its changes of character.] 'But of the growth of a particular character he left the causes to the wishes of each of us. For the way in which a man desires, being whatever character as to his soul, in this way, on pretty nearly every occasion, every one of us, on the whole, becomes a precisely corresponding sort of person.' The point of these cloudy remarks seems fairly simple. The sort of person (τοιοῦτος) each of us is depends on (ὅπη . . . ταύτῃ), or is in some way an expression of, our desires (ἐπιθυμῇ),<sup>1</sup> which in turn depend on our psychological state (ὁποῖός τις τὴν ψυχὴν). The nuance of the participle ὦν is presumably that particular wishes depend on particular states of soul; the nuance of the καὶ before τοιοῦτος ('just' of such a character) is presumably that repeated wishes *precisely* determine the sort of person one develops into (γίγνεται). To summarize 904 b 6–c 3, we may say that ultimately it is the soul which determines one's treatment in the next world; soul determines wishes, and wishes, presumably repeated, go to form the character of the person. Now it is evident from 904 d that what is promoted or demoted after death is in fact the soul; but since there is, apparently, this correlation between the state of the soul on the one hand, and the character and therefore presumably actions of the person on the other (cf. *Republic* 618 b), to promote or demote a soul in such and such a *state* is necessarily to punish or reward such and such a *character*, and *therefore also actions performed in this life*. There is no need for a Minos or a Rhadamanthus to (as it were) tot up one's crimes and good deeds to determine what penalty or reward one deserves. *All* that is in question is the state of the soul; and the state of the soul automatically, mechanically, by itself, determines where the soul is to go, so that post-mortem psychoscopy becomes unnecessary. The eschatology of book 10 thus succeeds not only in maintaining the emphasis on justice of earlier mythological eschatologies—there remains a correlation between actions in this life and fate after death—but also succeeds in solving the penological difficulties of book 9: we have an infallible and automatic long-stop for human failures in psychoscopy. No one has to examine the soul to decide where it should go: the system pigeon-holes it automatically, in the interests of the cosmos, with an efficiency far exceeding that of the crude attempts of earthly legislators and judges to inflict appropriate penalties in the interest of the state as a whole.

#### ESCHATOLOGY IN THE *TIMAEUS*

The eschatology of *Laws* 10 is based on that of the *Timaeus*, in which living creatures suffer successive reincarnations, and may be promoted to a literally

<sup>1</sup> Stöcklein's 'sc. γίγνεσθαι' is unnecessary and misleading (op. cit. 36).

higher place, or demoted to a literally lower, depending on the quality of the life they have lived. The *Timaeus*' eschatology is conceived in the framework of the four-element theory (40 a, 42 b–c, 91 d ff.). The fiery heavenly region is the highest, followed by that of air; next comes earth, and the lowest is water. Birth as a man constitutes a first *genesis*, as a woman constitutes the second (42 b, 91 a; cf. *Phaedrus* 248 c–d); and the third and fourth and so on occur when one becomes an animal of the air or water or land. Certain features chime nicely with the *Laws*: (1) The process seems just to 'happen': πορευθείς 42 b, and μεταβαλοῖ; ἀφίκοιτο 42 d; μετεφύοντο 90 e; μεταβαλλόμενα 92 c; and at 91 d the various categories of animals are simply said to 'come' (γενέσθαι) from various categories of men. (2) It is by no means clear that every reincarnation requires some personal intervention by a deity; for instance, when a god is said at 92 a to have given foolish animals many feet so that they might be drawn more closely to the earth, it is the once-for-all constitution of such animals that seems to be meant, not that the god on every appropriate occasion equips a foolish man with four feet and somehow reconstitutes him as that sort of animal. The nearest we get to personal intervention in reincarnation is 92 b, where οἱ μεταπλάττοντες make water animals out of men who are very stupid indeed. But there is nothing, so far as I can see, by way of direct intervention by a person which cannot be explained as light mythical—and indeed rather whimsical—colouring. So too with the mention of Hades at 44 c. (3) There is no mention of any trial or judgement, or of any choice of one's next life. (4) We find the same insistence, though less clearly stated, that a reincarnation for the worse is one's own fault (42 b–c–d), and the same emphasis, in similar language, on the correlation between the trend of one's character and the nature of the reincarnation: compare κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα τῆς τοῦ τρόπου γενέσεως (42 c) with γένεσεως τοῦ ποίου τινός (904 b 8). In short, both in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* the next world is simply the physical universe, in which one may improve or spoil one's position. It is not a place with precise frontiers.

#### PRELIMINARY RECONNAISSANCE OF 903 e 3–904 a 4

We may now return to that murky little paragraph with which we began. At its beginning and end it alleges in effect that it is an explanation, or part of an explanation, of why it is *easy* for gods to exercise their supervision; so there may also be some clue as to just how this supervision is carried on, and hence something about the nature of the soul. But apparently embedded in the paragraph is some reference to a procedure according to which the supervision would *not* be easy. That is, the paragraph says that it *is* easy, because the method adopted is *x* and not *y*. The run of thought is: 'If one were to mould in such and such a way, as for example so and so, instead of some other way, then certain results would follow.' That is to say, moulding by changing shapes (μετασχηματίζων) is an acceptable procedure in principle; doing so as one would if one were to derive ensouled water from fire is *not* acceptable; on the other hand, to mould by changing shapes as one would if one were to derive many from one etc. *is* acceptable; and the being infinite in number after various γένεσις expresses apparently the undesirable consequences of methods such as getting ensouled water from fire—because the immediately following νῦν δέ clearly implies that these methods are difficult and the results undesirable. On this view of the train of thought there is the further implication that

moulding by changing shapes by getting many somethings from one something is the method *actually used*, which is marvellously easy—and this in spite of the fact that the description of this actual method is wrapped up in a vague conditional expressed by optatives.

A further unwelcome complication is the *μή* in e 4. It occurs in only one manuscript, and whether we accept it or not is a matter not of palaeography but of *ratio et res ipsa*. My own view<sup>1</sup> is that it should probably be ejected, as being the insertion of a scribe who thought that we have here yet another mention of neglect by the gods—such remarks are very frequent in the half-dozen preceding pages—or that the apparent mention of incorrect methods in this paragraph must imply such neglect. But if we retain it, we have two options. The first is to take it closely with *πρὸς τὸ ὅλον ἀεὶ βλέπων*. The implication of this is simple enough: *τις* adopts wrong methods because he is neglectful of the interests of the whole. But what if we take it with the preceding *εἰ*, perhaps altering *μὲν* to *μή*, with Apelt? The sequence of thought would then be: 'Unless in our regard for the whole we were to mould by changing shapes, as for example by getting ensouled water out of fire, instead of one from many, then an infinite number would result.' On this reading *οἶον* etc. becomes the preferred and actual method, and *καὶ μή* introduces the improper method. So the status of the two crucial central clauses, *οἶον . . . ἔμφυχον* and *καὶ μή . . . ἔν*, is, on a doggedly pessimistic examination of the paragraph, in total doubt. Either may be the preferred method, and either may be the improper one. But since to live is to choose, I shall assume that the *μή* of e 4 is an intrusion, and that *σύμπολλα . . . ἔν* accordingly describes the *right* procedure.

There are a number of other delicate decisions to be taken. On any reasonable reading of the passage, what are referred to in *μετεληφότα* are presumably *τὰ πάντα* in e 5; and these in turn are *τῶν πάντων* in e 3-4. I take these things to be 'all the constituents of the universe', the universe as a whole being termed *τὸ ὅλον* and *τὸ πᾶν*.<sup>2</sup> This would suggest what I believe to be the case, that the *γενέσεις* being referred to are stages in the configuration of matter (perhaps the notorious trio referred to at 894 a, which *may* be the generation of line from point, surface from line, and solids from surfaces).<sup>3</sup> But an alternative line of interpretation deserves to be explored. The *γενέσεις*, in this eschatological context, strongly suggest reincarnations (cf. *Timaeus* 42 b, 91 a). Now what are reincarnated are not 'all the constituents' of the whole, but souls, or, as it is put at the end of the preceding paragraph, *ἡθῆ*. Does therefore *τὰ πάντα* mean simply 'all of them', i.e. all the various characters, good, bad, and indifferent? Hardly: quite apart from the question of what moulding or changing the shapes of *ἡθῆ* might mean, we are forced to ask what possible relevance or similarity such a procedure could have to the derivation of ensouled water from fire. And would *σύμπολλα* be *ἡθῆ* or not? But if we revert to the view that *τὰ πάντα* are not souls but things in general, parts of the cosmos, but yet hold that *γενέσεις* is a reference to reincarnations, then a subject for *μετεληφότα*, which could not now be *τὰ πάντα*, will have to be spirited out of nowhere, or at the very least without warning, and with much intervening, from the *ἡθῆ* at the end of the preceding paragraph. Such a predicament could,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. note no. 98 in my *Notes on the Laws of Plato* (B.I.C.S. Suppl. 28, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> e 5; 904 b 5, 6, 903 b 4-5, c 1-2, c 4, d 2; cf. 905 b 7.

<sup>3</sup> P. Kucharski, *Étude sur la doctrine pythagoricienne de la tétrade* (Paris, 1952), Appendice II, 71-4, contains a useful discussion of the passage.



however, be alleviated greatly by resurrecting a conjecture of Ast: insert  $\tau\acute{\alpha}$  after  $\epsilon\tilde{\nu}\eta$ , so that  $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\iota\lambda\eta\phi\acute{o}\tau\alpha$  has a subject in the shape of  $\tau\acute{\alpha}$  τῆς μετατιθεμένης κοσμήσεως. We then have this general sense: 'If one were to fashion all the parts in one way rather than another, the things of (*or*, involved in) the ongoing rearrangement (i.e. souls) would after partaking of the first or second or third γένεσις (i.e. reincarnations) be infinite in number.' In other words, correctly executed reincarnations are dependent on the arrangement or processes of the physical world being of one character rather than another. That would fit very well with what we have seen to be a prominent feature of book 10's eschatology, that it is described in physical and spatial terms: what happens to the soul after the death of the body happens within a *physical* system.

In short,  $\tau\acute{\alpha}$  πάντα cannot be souls; and *if* γένεσις are reincarnations we need Ast's  $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ —whereas we do not need it if the γένεσις are stages in the configuration of matter. Since we had better manage without crutches, if possible, I suggest we dispense with  $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ , and render: 'If one were to fashion all the constituents in one (an improper) way rather than in another (a proper), then when they (i.e. the constituents) had partaken of the first or second or third stage of creation, they would be infinite in number.' And what, pray, does that mean?

#### EARLIER INTERPRETATIONS

Schuhl and Kucharski<sup>1</sup> have already attempted to solve the riddle. Schuhl does not go very far. Reading  $\xi\mu\psi\upsilon\chi\rho\omicron\nu$  for  $\xi\mu\psi\upsilon\chi\omicron\nu$ , he treats  $\omicron\iota\omicron\nu$  . . .  $\xi\mu\psi\upsilon\chi\rho\omicron\nu$  as a mere sketch of a sort of Heraclitean chaos, a world of constant change and instability;  $\kappa\alpha\iota$   $\mu\eta$  . . .  $\tilde{\epsilon}\nu$  sketches a world of stability, regularity, and order. I see no need for  $\xi\mu\psi\upsilon\chi\rho\omicron\nu$  (as will appear), but in a very general way Schuhl's interpretation seems to move in the right direction. Kucharski's study, however, is much more thorough. He takes 'many from one and one from many' as referring to a fixed number of types, and interprets methodologically; it is essential that the gods should be able to recognize a certain type of category of soul as being appropriate for a certain place; if there were an infinite number of categories and places, their task would be impossibly difficult. The many and the one are thus classificatory: it is because the range of categories is limited that the gods' task is easy. The trouble with this is that it makes the mention of deriving ensouled water from fire even more bizarre. Presumably the two methods, good and bad, are somehow on all fours with each other, and  $\epsilon\kappa$  will have at least roughly the same value both in  $\omicron\iota\omicron\nu$  . . .  $\xi\mu\psi\upsilon\chi\rho\omicron\nu$  and in  $\kappa\alpha\iota$   $\mu\eta$  . . .  $\tilde{\epsilon}\nu$ —yet water cannot bear to fire anything like the same relationship that  $\tilde{\epsilon}\nu$  category would to σύμπολλα categories or σύμπολλα to  $\tilde{\epsilon}\nu$ . Furthermore, Kucharski's solution seems to presuppose personal intervention in each case of reincarnation. I therefore scramble back to the one piece of firm ground I can find, namely that  $\omicron\iota\omicron\nu$  . . .  $\tilde{\epsilon}\nu$  must describe two alternative *physical systems*, one of which facilitates and one of which hinders the mechanical reassignment of souls. After all, fire and water do suggest that the point is to do with physics<sup>2</sup> rather than methodology.

<sup>1</sup> See the list of discussions at the beginning of the article.

*Platon und der Orient* (Stuttgart, 1945), 85 n. 1.

<sup>2</sup> So too in essence Julia Kerschensteiner,

## A NEW SOLUTION

Before I hazard my own solution, we may polish off the *apparatus criticus* with regard to ἐμψυχον. The expression ὕδωρ ἐμψυχον is so extraordinary that it is hardly surprising that attempts have been made to emend it, the first being at least as early as Ficinus, who translated *aquam frigidam*. Cornarius's ἐμψύχον, 'making cold', seems to me mysterious and pointless, and in any case the verb ἐμψύχω is not otherwise securely attested for the classical period. Stallbaum suggested ἐμψυχρον as indicating the *mutandi arbitraria licentia*. Well, perhaps. What Badham thought the advantage of ἐμψυχα καὶ μὴ was I cannot fathom. The neatest emendation is Solmsen's. He quite rightly says that the derivation of living things from lifeless matter is part of the case of the opposition, as expounded at 88g b ff. Yet that case certainly did not involve the derivation of water from fire: rather the four elements were taken as basic. Solmsen does not say what he would suppose the point of ἐκ πυρός ὕδωρ would be. I therefore think we have a duty to try harder to make sense of ἐμψυχον.

The notion that there might be a reference to Heraclitus in the words οἶον ἐκ πυρός ὕδωρ ἐμψυχον is not a new one: Ast put it forward in 1814 in his commentary, and several others have followed him. But very little has been made of it, so far as I know, presumably out of a healthy scepticism (which I share) about the usefulness of hunting for the Presocratics in the thickets of *Laws* 10. But 903 d 5-6, as Solmsen suggested long ago (*Plato's Theology*, 154) does seem to contain a reference to Heraclitus' chess-player, in his fragment 52 about a child playing,<sup>1</sup> and playing at *Petteia*:<sup>2</sup> αἰὼν παῖς ἐστι παίζων, πεσσεύων· παιδὸς ἢ βασιληγῆ. And on further inspection I find that not only is our little paragraph flanked on one side by an apparent reference to this fragment, but also surely on the other: ἡμῶν ὁ βασιλεὺς at 904 a 6 looks like a reference to its final words, which imply a king of some sort—παιδὸς ἢ βασιληγῆ. I take it that the first reference, to a chess-player alone, is at the very least<sup>3</sup> a hint that we are to think of Heraclitus, for whom it is true (fr. 119) that ἦθος ἐστί δαίμων, i.e. it is our character that determines our fate—which is precisely one of the points Plato is here himself at pains to argue. It is surely significant (1) that at 903 d 7 Plato, as though deliberately to echo Heraclitus' terminology, says the chess-player has merely to promote or demote ἦθος, not (as we'd expect) ψυχὴν (cf. 904 c 8); and (2) that in Heraclitus character is expressed in physical terms, the destiny of the soul, as here in the *Laws*, somehow depending on its physical state (fr. 24, 25(?), 36, 117, 118).<sup>4</sup> These approving references before our paragraph are then picked up immediately after it by 'Our King'; and just possibly αἰώνιον in 904 a 9—used in the *Laws* this once only—is a further hint that we are to have Heraclitus' αἰὼν in mind. But sandwiched in between there is a *correction* to Heraclitus, an assertion that not Heraclitean, but Platonic, physics are necessary.

The words οἶον ἐκ πυρός ὕδωρ ἐμψυχον work quite well as a loose and possibly rather sarcastic report of certain fragments of Heraclitus. In fragment 30 we have πῦρ αἰέζωον, ἀπτόμενον μέτρα καὶ ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα, in which πῦρ

<sup>1</sup> See now Theophilus Beikos, 'Heraclitus' fr. 52', *Φιλοσοφία* i (1971), 154-75, esp. 167-8 on our passage.

<sup>2</sup> The precise nature of the game is obscure: see R. G. Austin, 'Greek Board Games', *Antiquity* xiv (1940), 257-71. (I owe

this reference to Prof. E. R. Dodds.)

<sup>3</sup> Whether one thinks something more is meant will depend on the interpretation of fr. 52.

<sup>4</sup> See G. S. Kirk, 'Heraclitus and Death in Battle', *A.J.Ph.* lxx (1949), 384-93.

ἀποσβεννύμενον suggests the conversion into water we have in fragment 31: πυρὸς τροπαὶ πρῶτον θάλασσα, θαλάσσης δὲ τὸ μὲν ἤμισυ γῆ, τὸ δὲ ἤμισυ πρηστήρ. Fragment 36 reads: ψυχῇσιν θάνατος ὕδωρ γενέσθαι, ὕδατι δὲ θάνατος γῆν γενέσθαι, ἐκ γῆς δὲ ὕδωρ γίνεται, ἐξ ὕδατος δὲ ψυχή. Now if we are right to look in this direction for the meaning of ἔμψυχον, that meaning now becomes almost comically clear: Plato adopts Heraclitus' manner of expression and his quirky conceptual framework, and describes ὕδωρ as ἔμψυχον simply because if it is death to water to become earth (or to become fire, for that matter), the water must be in some sense 'alive' first. 'Alive' is of course a perfectly normal meaning of ἔμψυχος. The wickedness and perhaps humour of Plato's report lies of course in his taking the figurative death of water in Heraclitus literally, and in drawing a firm conclusion from it: that water must be 'alive'. This conclusion allows him to make an implied correction to Heraclitus in 904 a 6–7: that what are really ἔμψυχοι are not any of the elements, but actions, which are ἔμψυχοι because they are produced by ψυχή as the source of all motion. But his major attack lies in the contrast between the Heraclitean physics of οἶον ἐκ πυρὸς ὕδωρ ἔμψυχον, and the preferred physics summarized in καὶ μὴ σύμπολλα ἐξ ἑνὸς ἢ ἐκ πολλῶν ἓν. The ground of the attack seems to be that Heraclitean physics allows direct transformation of one element into another. I therefore suggest that the desirability of the preferred method is that such transformation is *not* possible—and that this impossibility is directly helpful to efficient disposal of souls after the death of the body, whereas Heraclitean physics would make it difficult.

It looks therefore as if καὶ μὴ σύμπολλα ἐξ ἑνὸς ἢ ἐκ πολλῶν ἓν refers to the relationship between the elements,<sup>1</sup> as conceived in Platonic physics. Now it is perfectly true that, as we are apt to say, three of the four elements are transformable into each other in the physical system described in the *Timaeus*; indeed Plato himself once speaks thus loosely and provisionally (53 e). But earth, of course, is strictly not thus transformable; and the degree to which even the other three may be transformed into each other is fairly limited. Certain strictly defined conditions have to be met. At the very least, the equilateral triangular faces going to form the particles of one element have to be dispersed and recombined so as to form the particles of the second. For example, the faces of an icosahedron may be regrouped to form two octahedra and one pyramid. And if a particular substance falling under the general heading of one element happens to be formed of equilateral triangular faces of a different (say larger) *size* from the equilateral triangular faces of the substance into which it is to be transformed, and which falls under the heading of a second element, then the equilateral triangular faces with which one starts will have to be not merely dispersed and regrouped but themselves broken up into their constituent scalenes, which will then have to regroup in smaller numbers and in the correct patterns, so as to form new equilateral faces of the appropriate size—and *mutatis mutandis* for changing from smaller to larger faces. It is evident therefore that transformation between one element and another is always more or less indirect. Moreover, it can take place only when local conditions are propitious; in particular, we learn (56 d ff.), there has to be an agency to bring about the transformation by forcibly breaking up the original pattern: fire, notably, may break up air and water. In short, transformation can never take place 'just like that', at random: a number of rather elaborate

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Müller, *op. cit.* 96.

procedures have to be gone through, for which circumstances are not ripe on all occasions and in all places.

The upshot is that all these inhibiting factors ensure that the four main world masses remain relatively constant, stable, and delineated, though there is of course a certain fuzzing at the edges where the three elements that are transformable come into contact with each other (57 c). Now perhaps Plato, if pressed, would have conceded that Heraclitus did not maintain that the elements were constantly changing into each other on a wholly random basis; but his (rather unfair) point here is that for all we learn of any inhibiting mechanism Heraclitus provides, he might as well have maintained it. That is to say, transformation is in Heraclitus too direct and easy by half, and would lead to a total confusion of the world masses, all passing into each other all the time. But in Plato's system, you simply cannot get water from fire 'just like that' (*Timaeus* 54 b ff.). There are basic 'bricks', out of which the elements are made and into which they have to be resolved (*διαλυόμενα*, 53 e; cf. 57 b) before they can be transformed into each other. On this interpretation the rather general formulation *σύμπολλα ἐξ ἑνὸς ἢ ἐκ πολλῶν ἔν*, which is very reminiscent of the language used in the discussion of the transformation of the elements in the *Timaeus* (54 b–d), could have various meanings; but I suggest as possible renderings: 'instead of getting many particles/faces/scalenes from one element, or one element out of many particles/faces/scalenes'.

I now pull out of the hat the rabbit whose ears have doubtless been sticking up over the edge for some time. Plato's point is simply that since efficient eschatology consists of disposing souls according to the four main world masses, his own physics facilitates such a procedure because they ensure that there *are* four such more or less discrete masses (see *Timaeus* 57 c) to which the souls may go. 'If one adopts a Heraclitean-type physics instead of a Platonic, then by the time things had passed into each other for the first or second or third time, they would be [not just four masses with more or less precisely defined boundaries but] infinite in number in point of their rearrangements', or 'the number of their ongoing rearrangements would be infinite'. In other words, you would have all elements turning into all the others all the time in all places,<sup>1</sup> a total confusion, making the disposal of souls impossibly difficult. The use of the word *γένεσις* for inter-element transformation is quite natural, and indeed it occurs in the *Timaeus* (54 b–c–d, cf. 53 e);<sup>2</sup> further, at 56 b air and water are said to be second and third respectively *κατὰ γένεσιν*, fire being first. The words *μετατιθεμένης κοσμήσεως* (904 a 2) are reminiscent of the *μετακόσμησις σωμάτων* (matter) caused by soul at 892 a. The significance of the picking up of the verb *μετατιθέναι* at 903 d 6 by *μετατιθεμένης* is simply that the changing round of souls is all part of the changing round of matter; the latter, if excessively easy or frequent, would hinder the former.

### CONCLUSION

My view of the passage is then that Plato wants to provide, on the grounds that it has a high persuasive value, a—if I may again use the word—scientific eschatology, cast in terms of physical processes. He wants to refer to, without

<sup>1</sup> This line of criticism of Heraclitus (or Heracliteans) is obviously all of a piece with that which we find in the *Cratylus*

and *Theaetetus*.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Mugler, *La Physique de Platon* (Paris, 1960), 54 n. 4.

precisely explaining in detail, the actual physical theory and procedures he has in mind—i.e. those of the *Timaeus*, where such an eschatology had already been sketched. In doing this, he chooses to present a strong contrast between his own physics and those of Heraclitus. The compression of the account of his own physics has led to compression of the contrast with Heraclitus': hence the extreme difficulty of this puzzling paragraph, which is probably best regarded as being a brief parenthetical λόγος embedded in μῦθος.<sup>1</sup>

What, if anything, does all this tell us of the nature of the soul? Not very much, I suspect: presumably the soul gravitates or rises, on the principle of like to like, broadly in the ways already described in the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus*. For instance, during its life on earth a soul that has become bad will have acquired a 'growth', as the *Timaeus* puts it (42 c–d), of a mass of earth and water, and somehow or other this load will force it to the appropriate region.<sup>2</sup> Here at least, the soul seems to be a physical thing (cf. 898 e–899 a). The old social truism that bad characters seek the company of bad characters (728 b–c, 904 d–e and *passim* in Plato and Greek literature, e.g. *Od.* 17. 217–18) is in this new eschatology explained by a physical process. Or perhaps the soul itself changes in its composition in some way, as distinct from merely gathering accretions of earth etc. (cf. *Phaedo* 81–2, *Gorgias* 524 e). But the mechanics of the process, whatever it is, are not described in our passage, and speculation about the details is not profitable (the opening words of our paragraph perhaps suggest that Plato himself was not very certain). What does seem to me of consummate interest, however, is Plato's attempt to break away from a mythical eschatology to a scientific, to show (using the old notion that crime generates its own ineluctable backlash) that the world simply *is* constructed in such a way that, by a procedure which is both infallible and extremely simple, not only is vice punished and virtue rewarded, but that these rewards and punishments (i.e. promotion and demotion, not torture etc., as in earlier dialogues) are conducive to the good of the cosmos. The naïve, popular view, then as now, would think of this good being achieved, if at all, by constant personal intervention in individual cases by a god or gods. Plato attempts to construct a system which is impersonal, economical, and self-regulating—a system which in spite of some mythological and theological trappings seems to me to represent a very definite thrust in a new direction. In effect, he tries to ground ethics in physics; and since the spotlight has always been on the earlier myths, this new system, in which νοῦς successfully exploits the works of ἀνάγκη, has never had sufficient attention. As Charles Kahn<sup>3</sup> has put it, 'Book X of the *Laws*, like the *Timaeus* as a whole, is essentially concerned with the reinterpretation of Nature in terms of Reason—a reinterpretation different in kind, but not in tendency, from that of Heraclitus himself.' Seen in this light, these pages of the *Laws* lead straight on to Stoicism<sup>4</sup>—but that is another story.

University of Newcastle upon Tyne

TREVOR J. SAUNDERS

<sup>1</sup> Note how the μῦθος is temporarily 'faded out' by words which profess to introduce an explanation of ῥασιώνη (903 e 3), and then 'faded in' again, once the point has been made, on the same note (ῥασιώνη, 904 a 3).

<sup>2</sup> One oddity I notice is the full use made of reincarnation in the esoteric *Timaeus*, by

contrast with the way it is apparently played down in the relatively popular *Laws* 10. Perhaps by now Plato thought the doctrine too easily ridiculed (cf. 885 c and *Gorgias* 527 a).

<sup>3</sup> 'A new look at Heraclitus', *American Philosophical Quarterly* i. 3 (1964), n. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. F. Solmsen, *Plato's Theology*, 156.