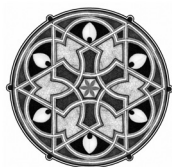


ORPHEUS  
AND  
THE ROOTS  
OF PLATONISM

Algis Uždavinys



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## PREFACE

The present book is closely related to that famous Pre-Socratic fragment about the bow and the lyre, where their “back-stretched” or “retroflex” harmony (*palintonos harmonia*) is said to depict the tense inner cohesion of a diverging unity. The same authority, Heraclitus of Ephesus, employs a Greek pun to show how in the bow itself, one of whose names is *bios*, both the name of life and the act of death coexist. Orpheus, as a mythical hero—indeed, one of the famed Argonauts—stands right at the centre of these junctions. So it is no wonder that this book shares in that harmonious tension: a tension rooted in the nature of the lyre and the bow, whose products may be piercing sounds or slaying arrows.

Here, we have first a tension within the author, who is intoxicated with his theme and yet committed to carry out his exposition in a discursive and academic manner. We can almost feel his plight: having in mind the “tremendous contemplation of the divine truth and beauty”, which would merit either a *bakchic* outburst or a “supra-noetic metaphysical silence”, he is forcing himself to compose a “scientific” treatise. Having heard the music of Orpheus’ lyre, he is trying to convey as best as he can the unspeakable beauty of those notes in an all too earthly human language.

Second, as a direct consequence of the first, there is tension for the reader as he tries to follow the argument itself: strands of myth and mythic lore mix with dense epistemological and metaphysical discussion; abstruse Egyptian and Babylonian sources stand next to conventional Greek philosophical and 21st century academic references. The thing is

said, yet not fully; inadequately expressed with an almost deliberate disdain for exactitude on a plane which becomes redundant in the light of spiritual vision. This book moves uneasily between the apophatic and the cataphatic: trying to say something, saying something, hinting at something else, then finally keeping silent, finding itself lost for words, leaving the doors thrown open to a different understanding.

Then we find a third sort of tension, springing from the duality at the heart of the subject: Orpheus is a strange hero, one who has music and singing for weapons. He is a seer and tragic lover, yet a crucial figure in the history of philosophy. His place in the history of Greek religion and thought is still, even in specialised circles, something of a riddle, enigmatic and vague.

This book, densely packed with references, challenges, and subtle invitations, is a recapitulation or a critical reassessment of ancient and contemporary literature devoted to Orpheus, the “paradigmatic itinerant seer”, “the Theologian”, “the Saviour”. It gives special attention to his relations with both the Egyptian and the Platonic tradition. At the heart of this book we have a glimpse into the substance, nature and development of the Orphic mysteries, but the reader must be warned: this is not a history of Orphism, and this is no ordinary scholarly monograph. Those who approach this book with respect for the ancient mysteries, humbly trying to understand why our ancestors across cultures unfailingly gave to Plato the epithet of “Divine” (*Divus Plato*, or *Aflatun al-Ilahi*, as the Arabs used to call him), hoping for that “epistemic and hermeneutical illumination mediated by the holy light of myths and symbols,” such will find a treasure here: not a wealth of answers to be sure, but a wealth of mystagogic insights and intimations, sparks perhaps of that “fiery beauty of truth” contemplated by the author.

The brief earthly transit of Algis Uždavinys started in Lithuania in 1962. He completed his studies in Vilnius, graduating from the former State Art Institute of Lithuania, now Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts, where he would eventually

become head of the Department of Humanities. Uždavinyš was widely respected as a prolific author in Lithuania and abroad. He was renowned as a translator into Russian and Lithuanian of Ancient Egyptian and Greek texts, of Traditionalist works by Frithjof Schuon and Martin Lings, and he was active as well as an art critic and author of numerous articles and monographs (a list of his books can be found at the end of this volume). His interest in traditional doctrines would eventually take him around the world and to Jordan and Egypt, where he met living representatives of the Prophetic chain of wisdom embodied in the Qur'an and the Sunna. These would foster and orient his research projects until his untimely death in 2010. Not long before his passing and after he had completed this, his final book, he told his wife: "I have nothing else to say." As someone who devoted his life to the understanding and cultivation of the Divine, Algis Uždavinyš must surely be taken as evidence of the ancient Greek saying "whom the Gods love, die young."

Like the Homeric epics, the current work is formed by twenty-four untitled chapters. Given the character of the book, less informative than mystagogic, and less systematic than symphonic, we have preferred to leave the brief chapters as they are, adding titles for ease of reference only in the table of contents.

Five major sections may be discerned in the book: chapters I-III deal with inspired madness in general, and with Socratic mania in particular; IV-VIII with the relations between philosophy, prophecy and priesthood, considering Middle Eastern, Egyptian and Greek traditions in general; chapters IX-XII narrow the scope to the figure of Orpheus as a prophet, considering his place in the Pythagorean tradition and in the development of Greek philosophy; chapters XIII-XVII touch on some of the deepest aspects of Orphic symbolism, considering the Orphic *bakcheia* (initiatic rites) and way of life (the *bios Orphikos*); chapters XVIII-XXII relate all the above to the history of Greek wisdom-philosophy, from Homer down to Hermeticism with special attention to Plato's theories and

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their Egyptian associations. The book concludes with a chapter on the realities beyond the tomb (XXIII), followed by a surrender of all arguments and a moving self-disclosure (XXIV). Silence reigns pregnant with mystical resonance.

Juan Acevedo  
Director  
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## ORPHEUS AND THE ROOTS OF PLATONISM

*Melancholy and the awakening of one's genius are inseparable, say the texts. Yet for most of us there is much sadness and little genius, little consolation of philosophy, only the melancholic stare—what to do, what to do. . . . Here our melancholy is trying to make knowledge, trying to see through. But the truth is that the melancholy is the knowledge; the poison is the antidote. This would be the senex's most destructive insight: our senex order rests on senex madness. Our order is itself a madness.<sup>1</sup>*

\* \* \*

*To this we may add the conclusion. It seems that, whether there is or is not a one, both that one and the others alike are and are not, and appear and do not appear to be, all manner of things in all manner of ways, with respect to themselves and to one another.<sup>2</sup>*

### I

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates argues paradoxically that "our greatest blessings come to us by way of madness" (*ta megista ton agathon hemin gignetai dia manias*: *Phaedr.* 244a). The four

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1. *The Essential James Hillman: A Blue Fire*, introduced and edited by Thomas Moore (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 212 & 215.

2. Plato, *Parmenides* 166b. tr. F. M. Cornford, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 956.

kinds of divine inspiration, or madness, are viewed as a divine gift provided by the Muses, Dionysus, Apollo and Aphrodite (or Eros) respectively. In the same dialogue, the “divine banquet” is depicted as a metaphysical place of contemplation and vision. For Plato, the contemplation (*theoria*) of the eternal Ideas transcends our rational ability to comprehend and analyse these Ideas discursively.

The desperate longing for this paradigmatic contemplation is imagined as a yearning for wings and the regained ability to fly to the divine banquet. Accordingly, this pressing desire is the desire for wholeness, for noetic integrity, and for one’s true divine identity provided by dialectical searching, philosophical recollection and erotic madness. The hierarchically organized troops of gods are led by Zeus. They lack both jealousy and passion, being involved neither in plots, nor in heavenly wars:

The gods have no need for madness, let alone erotic madness; hence the gods are not philosophers. It is not surprising, then, that the gods seem to have no need for *logos* (let alone for rhetoric). Although there is a certain amount of noise in the heavens, there is no reference whatsoever to there being any discourse among the gods or between gods and men.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore the Platonic philosopher, as the madman who nurtures wings, is the dialectically transformed “speaker” (the fallen soul enchanted by the magic of *logos*) whose apparently mad desire and *erotike mania* are not so much directly sent from the gods as sparkling from within as a desire for the divine banquet and for wisdom. But the three other kinds of madness discussed in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, namely, poetic (*poietike mania*) telestic (*telestike mania*), and prophetic or mantic madness (*mantike mania*) indeed are sent by the gods.

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3. Charles L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Phaedrus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 97.

The Muses are specified as the source of the poetic inspiration and of the three forms of madness; “the poetic sort seems to be the closest to Socratic-Platonic philosophizing and hence to be its most complex antagonist,” as Charles Griswold remarks.<sup>4</sup>

The telestic madness is anagogic, and leads the soul to its forgotten origins through the theurgic rites of ascent or other sacramental means of purification. The inspired telestic liturgies (*telestike, hieratike telesiourgia, theophoria*) are not necessarily to be regarded straightforwardly as “operations on the gods”, thus deliberately and incorrectly equating the animated cultic statues located in the context of particular ritual communications with the invisible metaphysical principles themselves. Otherwise, tacitly or not, the polemical premises for a certain iconoclastic bias are maintained. And so H.J. Blumenthal puts too much weight on the verb *theourgein*, supposing that one who does *theia erga* is one who operates on the gods, thereby making theurgy a nonsense.<sup>5</sup>

The mantic inspiration, or prophetic madness, which allegedly produces countless benefits, is evoked and evidenced, first of all, by the prophetesses at Delphi, thus recalling the close connection between the Apollonian shrine at Delphi and the philosophical self-knowledge required by Plato’s Socrates. According to Griswold, “Socratic prophecy seems to combine the human *techne* of division or dissection with the divinely given *techne* of madness; that is, it somewhat combines . . . madness and *sophrosyne*.”<sup>6</sup>

The Apollonian prophecy is inseparable from philosophizing and, hence, from rhetoric in its expanded general sense, showing and leading souls by persuasion or imperative—like a sacrificial priest, using the dialectical art of definition, divi-

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4. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

5. H.J. Blumenthal, “From ku-ru-so-wo-ko to theougos: word to ritual,” in *Soul and Intellect: Studies in Plotinus and Later Platonism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, Variorum, 1993), XI, p. 6.

6. Charles L. Griswold, *ibid.*, p. 76.

sion and collection. Yet neither is the sacrificer to be viewed as a paradigm of theological understanding, nor the user of the art of rhetoric made subject to his own enchanting power of persuasion. However, they may become types of self-duped “believers” or acquire the ideologically tintured, and therefore very “orthodox”, ability to talk about “truth”—or virtually any subject—and so become “difficult to be with”. As Griswold correctly observes, Plato’s Socrates

seems to fear the canonization of a *biblos*. That is, the written word lets us *persuade* ourselves too easily that we are in irrefutable possession of the truth, while in fact we are not. It facilitates our tendency to become dogmatists or zealots rather than philosophers. . . . Under these conditions philosophy can have the same corrupting influence that sophistry does or worse.<sup>7</sup>

However, academic paranoia differs from prophetic madness. The so-called prophets (*theomanteis*, *manteis theoi*, or Aristotle’s *sibullai kai bakides kai hoi entheoi pantos: Probl. 954a.36*) fall into *enthusiasm*, the state of a particular “inspired ecstasy”, and utter truths of which they themselves presumably know nothing. Hence, being *entheos* means that the body has a god or a *daimon* within, just as the Egyptian animated statue has a manifestation (*ba*) of a god (*neter*) within. Similarly, *empsuchos* means that both the physical human body and the cultic body (the hieratic statue or the entire sanctuary, itself full of images, statues and hieroglyphs) have an animating, life-giving and self-moving principle—namely, a soul (*psuche*)—inside them.

Orpheus is an example of one who has all these four kinds of inspiration or madness according to Hermeias the Alexandrian Neoplatonist, whose commentary on Plato’s *Phaedrus* reflects the views of his master Syrianus.<sup>8</sup> Since these four *ma-*

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7. *Ibid.*, pp. 207 & 208.

8. Anne Sheppard, *The Influence of Hermeias on Marsilio Ficino’s Doctrine*

*niai* assist the soul in its ascent and return to its noetic fatherland, Hermeias maintains that poetry and music are able to bring the disordered parts of the soul into order. The hieratic rites and sacramental mysteries of Dionysus make the soul whole and noetically active. Subsequently, the prophetic inspiration (*mantike mania*) is provided by Apollo and gathers the soul together into its own unity.

Hermeias regards the charioteer in the *Phaedrus* myth as the noetic part of the soul and the charioteer's head as the "one within the soul", or the soul's ineffable henadic summit which alone may be united with the One. Thus, finally, as Anne Sheppard explains, "the inspiration of love takes the unified soul and joins the one within the soul to the gods and to intelligible beauty."<sup>9</sup>

## II

Perhaps with a certain measure of irony, Socrates was viewed by the majority of Athenians as a chatterer, an idle talker (*alolesches*). But this alleged idle talker obeyed and followed his god Apollo. He philosophized in the streets on the god's behalf, and preached a kind of "spiritual pederasty" that leads the lovers (*eirastes*) of youths to the ideocentric love of Platonic truth and beauty. In this respect, Socrates is neither a "typical representative of the Greek Enlightenment", nor the "intellectual leader of Athenian intellectuals", as influential Western scholars would claim until recently, ". . . nor did he discourse, like most others, about the nature of the universe, investigating what the experts call 'cosmos' . . . Those who did so he showed up as idiots," according to Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.1.11).

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of *Inspiration*, Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 43, 1980, p. 105.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Initially acting as a typical idle talker, Socrates realizes himself as a moralist. Strictly speaking, the man who is persuaded by nothing in him except the proposition which appears to him the best when he reasons about it (*Crit.* 46b) is no metaphysician either, though Apollo commanded him (as he “supposed and assumed”) to live philosophizing, examining himself and others (*Ap.* 28e). Socrates saw his own work in “philosophizing”, that is, in summoning all citizens (but especially wealthy youths of aristocratic origins) to perfect their soul, as a sort of socio-political mission following the god’s command and acting on the god’s behalf. Therefore, his performance of thus understood “dialectical” work (*ergon*) can be imagined as a form of piety in service (*latreia*) to the god. Gregory Vlastos argues:

Were it not for that divine command that first reached Socrates through the report Chaerephon brought back from Delphi there is no reason to believe that he would have ever become a street philosopher. If what Socrates wants is partners in elenctic argument, why should he not keep to those in whose company he had sought and found his eudaimonist theory—congenial and accomplished fellow seekers after moral truth? Why should he take to the streets, forcing himself on people who have neither taste nor talent for philosophy, trying to talk them into submitting to a therapy they do not think they need?<sup>10</sup>

There is no explanation other than a supposed divine command (be it just literary *topos* or some inner experience) or Socrates’ own wild presumption, keeping in mind that Socrates was no mystic in any conventional religious sense, but rather a zealous social worker and rationalizing moralist serving his god for the benefit of his fellow Athenians. This

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10. Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Piety*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 558-59.

“madman’s theatre” is nevertheless regarded as a revolutionary project: “

And it is of the essence of his rationalist programme in theology to assume that the entailment of virtue by wisdom binds gods no less than men. He could not have tolerated a double-standard morality, one for men, another for the gods. . . . Fully supernatural though they are, Socrates’ gods could still strike his pious contemporaries as rationalist fabrications. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Socrates undoubtedly regarded his own “rationalism” and his leap from epistemological ignorance to public political and moral expertise as devised by the *daimonion*, the supernatural guide. His own front door was adorned, as A.H. Armstrong relates, by “an unshaped stone called Apollo of the Ways and another stone called a Herm with a head at the top and a phallus halfway down, which Socrates would tend at the proper time like every other Athenian householder”.<sup>12</sup>

In this respect he was quite traditional, although his presumably esoteric side (if this curious aspect of Socrates is not invented by Plato’s dramatic imagination) is close to the madness of Orpheus, the divinely inspired mythical singer. In the context of traditional Hellenic culture, Orphism and Pythagoreanism may be viewed as a “small sectarian movement”. Alternatively, Orphism may be presented as a new spiritual programme of radically revised anthropology and of both cosmic and personal soteriology, partly derived from Egyptian and Anatolian sources. In either case, the Orphic doctrines sharply differ from those of early Hellenic (the so-called Homeric and pre-Homeric) spirituality.

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11. *Ibid.*, pp. 545 & 547.

12. A.H. Armstrong, “The Ancient and Continuing Pieties of the Greek World,” in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 68.

The main Orphic doctrine follows the pattern already established in the *Pyramid Texts*, asserting that the royal soul has its goal in unity with the divine through ascent and recollection. With considerable modifications, this anagogic scenario became an integral part of Platonism, whose adherents practised rising up to the heights of philosophical contemplation through the anagogic power of *eros*, and were able to reach the noetic Sun by a combination of dialectical and telestic means. In short, Orphism maintained that the human soul is immortal and is subject to divine judgement:

The divine in us is an actual being, a *daimon* or spirit, which has fallen as a result of some primeval sin and is entrapped in a series of earthly bodies, which may be animal and plant as well as human. It can escape from the “sorrowful weary wheel”, the cycle of reincarnation, by following the Orphic way of life, which involved, besides rituals and incantations, an absolute prohibition of eating flesh. . . .<sup>13</sup>

The somewhat clumsy Socrates hardly fits the much demanding Orphic ideals, although he nevertheless functions in Plato’s *Symposium* as an Orpheus figure, being presented as a literary double of *Phanes*. The self-manifested *Phanes* of the Orphic cosmogonies should be described as *Protogonos* (the first-born, tantamount to the noetic light which appears from the egg of ineffable darkness), whose other name is the demiurgic *Eros*.<sup>14</sup> He carries within himself the seed of the gods and copulates with himself like the Egyptian *Atum*.

Sara Rappe emphasizes “the centrality of Orphic symbolism in the *Symposium* as a whole”, arguing that there is good reason to attribute the allegorizing use of Orphic material to

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13. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

14. Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive thinking in the texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 150.



Plato himself, and not only to Syrianus, Proclus, Damascius or Olympiodorus. She says:

The Orphic mystery purports to be an esoteric tradition, one that liberates people from the petrifying conventions of the mass sex-gender machine. Its purpose is to re-create the subject, to wrench him away from the public fiction in which he has hitherto been schooled. . . . The Orphic myth promises a return to the undifferentiated state before sexual identity arises, promising to deliver us back inside the egg to become in the Lacanian sense, *hommelettes*. But of course, this is a delusional aspiration, as the myth makes clear, and it is in fact a self-destructive delusion. . . . In my reading of the Orphic cosmology in Plato's *Symposium*, I have emphasized its function as an etiology for human consciousness, prior to its regeneration by philosophy. This is the exoteric mind that desperately requires enlightenment but because of its conditioning, all too rarely seeks it.<sup>15</sup>

### III

The alleged correspondences between Socrates and Orpheus, or rather, between Plato and Orpheus, are explored by Proclus, to whom an esoteric interpretation of Plato's dialogues is tantamount to the initiatory Orphic doctrine. Accordingly, the Orphic *Phanes* (like the Egyptian *Atum-Ra*) shows forth the soul as an image (*eikon*) of the shining divine Intellect. The recognition of the pharaonic *imago dei* (*tut neter* in the Egyptian royal theology) and of its restored Osirian wholeness (the right Eye of Horus made sound) itself constitutes a sort of initiation that enables the soul's access to the divine realm.

Rappe claims that since the time of Syrianus, either Orphism is attached to metaphysics in order to transform the

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15. *Ibid.*, pp. 152 & 155.

Neoplatonic doctrine into ritual, or the language of metaphysics is grafted on to a traditional Orphic narrative.<sup>16</sup> However, such theurgic convergency is initially based on Egyptian hermeneutical and cultic patterns. She argues as follows:

The “Rhapsodic Theogony” ends with a famous hymn to Zeus, in which his identity as the *coincidentia oppositorum* is revealed. . . . This vision of the world of Zeus gives us a kind of mirror of the Proclan universe, in which each being is an all, and all beings are in each. . . . The multiple states of being, each level mutually reflecting all of the others, proliferate as a hall of mirrors. It is this great world of mutual interpenetration endlessly expanding as a single drama, that the Orphic theogony captures. And not surprisingly, this vision is exactly the mythic equivalent of Proclus’ central metaphysical views.<sup>17</sup>

Proclus’ assertion that all Hellenic theology ultimately derives from Orphic mystagogy (*Plat. Theol.* I.5.25)<sup>18</sup> may be regarded as a normative and paradigmatic claim of his philosophical hermeneutics. Thus, Orpheus constitutes the archetypal mark of his metaphysical topography. In this particular sense, the name and image of Orpheus function more like the theological *arche*, like the canonized philosophical *hupostasis*, than as an unquestioned and factual person of ancient history. This imaginative assertion of Proclus, though belonging to the realm of semi-mythic genealogies, is shared by the countless followers of the ancient Hellenic tradition and constitutes one of its main etiological kernels. Consequently, it is this image of the esoteric Orpheus that counts, not one provided by the modern academic interpretations that present

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16. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

18. Algis Uždavinys, Introduction, *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, ed. Algis Uzdavinys (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), pp. XXIV-XXV.

still belongs to the realm of the ineffable supra-noetic transcendence, but the goddess Neith (equated by the Platonists to Athena, the mistress of philosophy) calls the world of manifestation (*kheperu*) into being “through seven statements, which in a later magic text become the sevenfold laugh of the creator god”.<sup>170</sup>

Mankind originated from Atum-Ra’s tears, “in a temporary blurring” of Atum’s vision, though the period of the golden age is still regarded as the solar kingdom of Ra, where gods and humans inhabit the stage of the extended sacred mound of Heliopolis together. During this blessed time (*paaut*)—before the human revolt against Ra—the divine *maat* (truth, perfect harmonious order) reigns.

## XVII

In Platonic parlance, the main “initiatory” and “philosophical” goal of fallen humanity consists in the recollection of an ideal beginning and in solar contemplation of the enneadic totality of the Ideas. In order to do so, and achieve the desired goal, writing is established by Thoth and Sesheta as the instrument of revelation which provides access to the world of the gods; this is simply because it is, at the same time, the instrument of theophany and creation. In fact, the hieroglyphs (*medu neter*) are viewed as traces of noetic being, as archetypes and metaphysical symbols, even epiphanies of the gods themselves. They constitute the revealed body of divine knowledge necessary for salvation.<sup>171</sup>

After Ra’s departure and the subsequent end of the direct divine rule, the distorted human race lives in a state of punishment and blindness. Hornung describes this as follows:

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170. Erik Hornung, *Idea into Image*, p. 44.

171. Dimitri Meeks and Christine Favard-Meeks, *Daily Life of the Egyptian Gods*, tr. G. M. Goshgarian (London: John Murray, 1997), pp. 5-7.

Henceforth war and violence shape the lives of human beings. Having lost the paradisiacal innocence of their beginnings, they can regain access to the world of the gods only in death. Moreover, their rebellion suggests a dangerous threat to the continued existence of creation itself, insofar as it hints at the existence of destructive forces that seek to bring the normal course of events on earth to a halt.<sup>172</sup>

The memory of the divine presence is maintained by means of the Horus-like pharaoh whose rites enacted in the temple recall the initial foundation of the world as “revelation of the divine Face”. The ritual act of unveiling and adoration of the Face establishes the royal paradigm of pious contemplation.

The Egyptians, in order to become a “holy people” once again, needed to walk “on the water of God”, that is, follow the path of the deity (be it Atum-Ra, Amun-Ra, Ptah, Khnum or Sobek), proclaiming God’s power even to the fish and the birds. This manifestation of divine power is to be regarded as a kind of revelation, as a miracle to be proclaimed, according to Assmann, so that the whole universe is told of the power of God.<sup>173</sup>

This all-encompassing proclamation of social *maat* practice, recollection and revelation, means that the ideal person is one who “is able to remember”.<sup>174</sup> Accordingly, the ritual of the judgement of the dead assumes a kind of manual for the life-style and education of the living. The Egyptian initiate hopes “to go forth” and “to see Ra”, ritually maintaining the metaphysical memory that conveys the pattern of alchemical transformation as well as rational calculability, responsibility and accountability. In this context the “initiate” simply means the official member of the pharaonic state who is able

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172. Erik Hornung, *Idea into Image*, p. 48.

173. Jan Assmann, “Confession in Ancient Egypt,” in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, ed. Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 236.

174. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

to manage and present himself as a substitute (albeit inwardly and mystically) for the king—either ideally patterned as Horus’ image, or as the “mummified” and reanimated Osiris image. Finally, through the restored *akh*-identity, he hopes to be like a living god and stand in the sun barque.

Although the standard New Kingdom Egyptian is a politically responsible devotee of Amun and does not feel like a gnostic stranger in this world, death (*mut*) and initiation through the Osirian suffering and rebirth seems to be his only gateway to the noetic realm of Ra. Assmann argues that the gods are to be confronted “only by priests, indirectly in a statue ritual or directly after death”,<sup>175</sup> when the Egyptian in the form of his *ba* appeals to the court of Osiris for justice:

He does not accuse the gods for his misfortune, nor does he perceive his sufferings as unjust punishments for crimes he did not commit. He knows that the gods do not interfere in human affairs, and that a human being is exposed to all kinds of misfortunes that have nothing to do with the gods and have no religious significance whatsoever. They just occur. The only way to address the gods and to enter into forms of belonging and connectivity that bind him to the gods is to die and to present himself to the judgement of the dead.<sup>176</sup>

Proclus provides the following account, which presents an analogous but different story of royal succession and cyclic regression, based on the myth of the Titanic act of violence. Here the dismemberment of Dionysus (that partly follows the Osirian pattern) represents the proceeding of the One into the Many. Proclus says:

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175. Jan Assmann, “A Dialogue Between Self and Soul: Papyrus Berlin 3024,” in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten with Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 388.

176. *Ibid.*, pp. 400-01.

Orpheus the theologian had handed down three races of man: first the golden, which he says Phanes governed; second the silver, which he says the mighty Kronos ruled; third the Titanic, which he says Zeus assembled from the Titanic limbs; thinking that in these three categories every form of human life was included (*In Remp.* II.74-75; *Orph.frag.* 140).<sup>177</sup>

Yet another version is presented in the so-called *Rhapsodic Theogony* (the *Hieroi Logoi in 24 Rhapsodies*). In a related prayer to Apollo-Helios (at the beginning of the Orphic Rhapsodies) this poem is described as the twelfth revelation of Orpheus.<sup>178</sup> According to this Orphic theogony, current among the late Neoplatonists (especially Proclus, Damascius and Olympiodorus), there were six successive divine kingdoms ruled by Phanes, Night, Uranos, Kronos, Zeus and Dionysus respectively. Phanes reigns before Night in this account, and his reign (understood both metaphysically and as a pedagogical myth of perfect *politeia*) is somewhat analogous to the reign of Ra. Dionysus corresponds to Osiris, who comes back to life at the level of *anima mundi*—not only as the ruler of Duat (the Netherworld, tantamount to his own, or Nut-Hathor's, body-temple), but also as a model for the deceased, that is, for the “initiate” and “philosopher”.

The main difference between the Egyptian and the Hellenic models is that the attainment of life (*ankh*) in the noetic Heliopolis depends not only upon knowledge and piety, but (first of all) upon service to the Egyptian holy state and to the pharaoh, the son of Ra, suckled by the goddess Hathor.<sup>179</sup> In the form of the *ka*-statue, located within the special mansions (wrongly designated as “mortuary temples” by modern scholars), he is expected to spend “millions of years” in

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177. Velvet Yates, *The Titanic Origin of Humans: The Melian Nymphs and Zagreus*, p. 194.

178. M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems*, p. 227.

179. Dietrich Wildung, *Egyptian Saints: Deification in Pharaonic Egypt* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), p. 20.

mystic union with the deity.<sup>180</sup> His mummy (the symbolic image of Osiris) is the exemplary receiver of life (*shesep rankh*), of the reviving solar rays, thus becoming “his hieroglyphic spell generating his immortality”,<sup>181</sup> and showing the theurgic way to his “initiates”—the bureaucratic and priestly staff. In this respect, he is the death-conquering immortal Horus, the golden Falcon. As Alan Segal remarks: “Eventually, ordinary Egyptians understood themselves and the transcendent part of their lives, by imitating the Pharaoh’s path through the underworld. The afterlife became the mirror of the self.”<sup>182</sup>

Since “the true and eternal life” begins (or rather, is regained) only with death, the term *ankhu*, “the living ones”, as Gerhard Haeny aptly surmises, is used in a double sense: “of those alive on earth as well as of those living in the hereafter”.<sup>183</sup>

## XVIII

The language of Plato describing the Forms is reminiscent of the Parmenidean and Orphic revelations. This is not presumably an anachronistic “Platonic” reading of Parmenides, as certain modern historians of Hellenic philosophy would claim. Parmenides’ otherworldly journey to the point where all the opposites meet, or are transcended, repeats that of Heracles and Orpheus. According to Kingsley: “Everyone runs from death so everyone runs away from wisdom. . . . Parmenides’ journey takes him in exactly the opposite direction. . . . To

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180. Gerhard Haeny, “New Kingdom ‘Mortuary Temples’ and ‘Mansions of Millions of Years,’” in *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron E. Shafer (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 86.

181. Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), p. 50.

182. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

183. Gerhard Haeny, *ibid.*, p. 92.

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