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Philosophizing with Plato about the Reality and Immortality of the Human Soul

Philosophical arguments for the immortality of the soul which appeal to our reason have been developed throughout the history of philosophy. But while we do have some impressive fragments of the Presocratics on the human soul, a systematic philosophical investigation into the soul and its immortality begins with, and, at least in ancient philosophy, also culminates in, Plato¹. I shall try to summarize the most significant Platonic arguments for the immortality of the soul, but not in a merely historical way but in an effort to philosophize with Plato about being itself, searching for what is valid in his arguments and for what is true in their premises and trying to point out some of their weaknesses and strengths. In other words, my ultimate purpose in this paper is to seek the truth about the soul and its immortality.

*Some of the arguments Plato develops for the immortality of the soul are simultaneously arguments for its existence, and of these some are good arguments for the reality of the soul but not good, or at least very insufficient, arguments for its immortality. I shall also consider some of the objections raised against the belief in immortality by Ludwig Feuerbach and others, trying to support the valid Platonic arguments for the immortality of the soul by new reasons put forward against these objections². Moreover, at the risk that my opinion that there is a *philosophia perennis* in the sense of the valid contributions of philosophers of all schools and times might be considered ahistorical, I will show that the deepest though less developed reasons for the Platonic teaching on the immortality of the soul are personalistic arguments very much comparable to those presented by Max Scheler, Gabriel Marcel, Dietrich von Hildebrand and others in the last century³.*

I. Ontological Philosophical Proofs for Soul and Immortality

1 See particularly, Plato's *Phaedo*, *Politeia* 10, and *Phaedrus*.

2 See Ludwig Feuerbach, *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit*, Nürnberg 1830, in *Werke in sechs Bänden*, ed. b E. Thies, Frankfurt 1975 ff., I, pp. 77-349.

3 See M. Scheler, "Tod und Fortleben", (1911-1914), *Schriften aus dem Nachlaß I*, Bern, 1986; D.h von Hildebrand, "Die Unsterblichkeit der Seele", in: D. von Hildebrand. *Die Menschheit am Scheideweg*, Habel, Regensburg 1955. G. Marcel, *Présence et immortalité*, Flammarion, Paris 1959. See also Josef Seifert, *Das Leib-Seele Problem und die gegenwärtige philosophische Diskussion. Eine kritisch-systematische Analyse*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1989².

a) Death and destruction, Plato tells us, are always a dissolution of a whole consisting of parts. Also man can only die because he is a whole being composed of two parts, body and soul, the body itself being composed of innumerable distinct parts which allow for its destruction through taking it apart and separating its parts. Moreover, not only the body but the admirable unity of body and soul that compose the whole of a human being, can be broken. Body and soul can be separated from each other and this is man's death. But the subject of thought and of will, the person's self, the soul, is utterly indivisible and uncomposed of parts. It does not possess any really distinct and separable parts, not even mathematically speaking distinct parts. The simplicity and unity of the subject of consciousness does not even resemble the absolute physical indivisibility of the mathematical point, first of all because it is a real being and not a mere "location without extension in any of the three dimensions", and secondly because it does not have any precise location in space as points do. This absolute immaterial simplicity of the subject of consciousness seems an excellent starting point to prove the reality of the soul. This argument was expounded in Plato's *Phaedo*, and defended by many later philosophers, from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Leibniz and others.

Now Plato uses the same evidence as starting point for a proof of immortality of the soul, saying: Since the human soul, the self or the I of the person, is a simple substance, which does not consist of parts, it cannot die but is indestructible, given that death and destruction are always a decomposition of a composite whole into its parts.

To this argument one can object, however – that for a simple, but nevertheless contingent, substance there could be another kind of death: not a separation of parts but a total destruction or an extinction of the very being and life of the soul, and a return to that nothingness from which each creature was created. Scotus puts it thus:

...not all destruction is the result of separating one thing from another. Take the being of an angel, and let it be assumed as some do that its existence is distinct from its essence. Such a being is not separable from itself and nevertheless it can be destroyed if its existence is succeeded by the opposite of existence.⁴

Already Plato formulated this thought⁵. If we do not exist by necessity but could also not exist and could never have existed, we could also be deprived of existence. If we are created by divine omnipotence from nothing, it would be thinkable that the same omnipotence annihilates us.

4 See Duns Scotus, transl. A. Wolter, *Philosophical Writings*, 4th ed. New York 1962, p. 156. See also G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophische Abhandlungen*. in G.W. Leibniz, *Die philosophischen Schriften*, hrsg. v. C.J. Gerhardt, G. Olms, Hildesheim 1965, in 7 Bänden, Bd. VI. Bd., Nr. XI, Die sog. *Monadologie*, VI, 607-623, nr. 17.

5 Plato, *Timaios*, 41 b.

Besides, another objection can be raised against this argument: namely that it neither proves the happiness of a life after death nor even the consciousness of our existence after death. This does not deny its value of proving that only an absolute annihilation and privation of the actuality of existing could end the soul's existence – and not the common forms of destruction which presuppose a composite whole.

b) A further ontological argument put forward by Plato rests on a metaphysical similarity between the human soul and the eternal ideas (essential forms) of things. There are two spheres of being, Plato tells us: On the one hand, there is the sensible world of material things composed of parts. And they exist in time and are destructible in time. On the other hand there is an invisible and purely spiritual sphere of the eternal forms which only the intellect can perceive, and this world, which is not sensible and not material, is neither material, nor composed of parts nor temporal. It contains the intelligible forms such as “justice itself”, the “triangle as such”, “the eternal laws” of number, of love, of beauty, etc. And these essential forms and paradigms of concrete things are timeless, uncomposed and therefore can never perish, a position which also realist phenomenologists espoused⁶.

Now, as the eternal forms and essences (essential plans, eide) of things are not known through our senses of sight, hearing, or touch, so the soul is likewise not perceptible through the senses. Likewise, the human soul is not composed of non-identical parts outside other parts and thus belongs to the inhabitants of a spiritual realm. Being thus similar to the non-material forms and eternal ideas, the human soul must also be imperishable and eternal. Just as the eternal form of the just in itself is imperishable, the soul can never perish.

Against this impressive argument, however, we can object: Our soul, while it resembles the timeless essences of things in some respects (it is invisible and not composed of parts), is wholly dissimilar to them in other respects. Abstract ideas are essentially distinct from souls: they are not dynamic agents but static ideal archetypes; they are not individual persons who live in time, but life-less and timeless forms; they are not conscious nor do they depend in any way on a body as our souls obviously do in the present life in many ways. Therefore the timelessness of ideas – which they possess precisely at the price of lacking concrete life and real existence – cannot simply be asserted of souls.

Plato might retort to this objection, however, emphasizing that the human souls resemble the eternal forms just in those attributes which are decisive for their indestructibility: they are not material and they do not have parts extrinsic to other parts. And it is precisely this composite nature of material things and of man's body-soul-union which accounts for the possibility of death and destruction. As the

6 See A. Reinach, “Über Phänomenologie”, in A. Reinach, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Ausgabe mit Kommentar*, Bd. I: *Die Werke*, Teil I: Kritische Neuauflage (1905-1914), Teil II: Nachgelassene Texte (1906-1917), S. 531-550; D. von Hildebrand, *Che cos'è la filosofia?/What Is Philosophy?*, English-Italian, Bompiani Testi a fronte, Milano 2001, ch.iv; R. Ingarden, *Über das Wesen*, Hsg. von Peter McCormick, Universitätsverlag Winter, Heidelberg 2007. See also J. Seifert: *Ritornare a Platone*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2000, and *Sein und Wesen*, Universitätsverlag C. Winter, Heidelberg 1996.

soul lacks this character, it cannot die. Yet this answer, being based on a similitude between soul and ideas, cannot overcome the objection that a static eternal essence of numbers is wholly different from a unique dynamic living person. However, we will later discover in the same Platonic texts⁷ the seed of another, personalist argument for the immortality of the soul that I take to be completely convincing.

c) A third metaphysical argument of Plato is the following one:

... for the preceding argument shows that the soul will not admit of death, or ever be dead, any more than three or the odd number will admit of the even, or fire or the heat in the fire, of the cold. ...⁸

This argument that affirms the absolute inseparability of life from the soul anticipates the ontological argument for the existence of God, applying it to the soul⁹. It says: As each soul by its very nature as soul lives, and as there can be no 'dead soul,' so life is entirely inseparable from the soul. Just as evenness is inseparable from the number 2, and oddness inseparable from the number 3, so life is inseparable from the soul. And therefore – because of this essential link between life and soul which excludes the possibility of a dead soul – the soul must always live and possess immortality; and if it is immortal, it is also imperishable.

Magnificent and beautiful as this argument for the immortality of the human soul is, it remains doubtful, whether it is valid and based on true premises. For we have to note first of all that the middle term in the premises, the inseparability between life and soul, of which Plato speaks, is ambiguous: 1. Is it absolute, as the ontological argument for the existence of God indeed observes and concludes from several other premises to an absolute inseparability of life and real existence from God's essence?, or 2. Is its necessary connection only conditional in the sense "If and as long as a soul exists, it lives"? Plato does not consider in the *Phaedo* the possibility that the inseparability of existence and life from soul is only found, on the one hand, on the order of an inseparable necessary unity of moments in the realm of pure essences and ideas, and on the other hand, when applied to existing things and souls, it is only conditional: if there is a soul, and as long as it exists, it

7 Plato, *Phaedo*, 791-e.

8 See Plato, *Phaedo* 105 c – 107 a.

9 Let me try to summarize the sublime ontological argument for God's existence, developed by Anselm of Canterbury and contained in this Platonic argument in a nutshell: God as that "greater than which nothing can be conceived" (the *id quo maius nihil cogitari possit*, which is the name of God) must necessarily live and exist. For it would not be the infinitely great and good being if it did not exist in reality, independently of being an object of the human mind, and if it (God) did not exist by necessity. For it is greater to be also in reality than to have the poor being of a mere object of thought (being in the mind) and to exist necessarily than to exist contingently. Therefore God would not be God, God would not have his own absolute nature, if He did not exist really and necessarily. Thus life and existence belong to the very essence of God and God would not be Himself, he would not have this unique divine essence, if He did not exist by necessity but could also not exist. And this is impossible. See J. Seifert, *Gott als Gottesbeweis. Eine phänomenologische Neubegründung des ontologischen Arguments*, University Press C. Winter, Heidelberg 1995.

must live because, while there can be a dead man, there can be no dead soul. This evident and intelligible fact which is grounded in the necessary essence of the soul, that there cannot be a dead soul and that the soul must live as long as it exists, indeed makes of the soul a true image, a true analogy to God who exists and lives by absolute necessity. But the purely essential bond between life and soul which excludes 'dead souls' is nevertheless not the same as the absolutely necessary life and existence of God. Only to God real existence and actuality of life belong so inseparably that He is essentially and necessarily existing and living and immortal. On the other hand: it is not objectively necessary that the human soul exists. This is a most shocking metaphysical fact: it is altogether not necessary that I or you exist at all and thus it is also not absolutely necessary that my or your soul lives, since it is contingent and could not exist. Hence the human soul is created (which Plato himself admits in the *Timaios*)¹⁰. But then Plato's proof is invalid in this form because it contains twice a *quaternio terminorum*, confusing a purely essential/ideal necessary connection with a real one, and a *conditional inseparability* with an *absolute inseparability* of real life (existence) and soul. In God, as also mentioned by Plato in this context¹¹, there is indeed an absolute inseparability between life and his nature; not so in the soul. For, as the soul could not exist, it could also not live, and hence is not absolutely inseparable from existence and life in the way in which God is or the number three is inseparable from oddness.

Plato himself makes the distinction in the *Timaieus* between the absolute and essential indestructibility of being and life, which only God (the demiurge) possesses, and the relative inseparability of soul and life the soul possesses once it has been created and there he presents the inseparability of soul and life as a non-absolute one. As a matter of fact, he has the Demiurge, the father and creator of the world, tell the gods and souls created by him, that their immortality and possession of life are not of absolute necessity but are a gift of God to those who bear his image¹².

We might defend Plato's argument in this second form, saying: while indeed the human soul does not possess existence and life necessarily but is contingent, once it exists it cannot die. For life belongs to it so essentially that *once it is created*, it cannot ever be deserted by life; it cannot first live and then die. Being truly analogous to the ultimate inseparability of life from the divine nature, of existence and essence in God, life is analogously inseparable from the human soul once it exists. Therefore it makes neither sense to speak of a dead soul nor to speak of the death of the soul. For once a soul exists, life dwells in it and can never leave it.

In order for this argument to be convincing, however, many further things would have to be clarified. For example, it appears that this argument would also apply to animals. But are animal-souls immortal because one cannot assume a "dead

10 Cf. G. Reale, *Verso una nuova interpretazione di Platone*, 20e Aufl., Jaca Book, Milano 1997, Ch. 15 ff., where Reale explains Plato's teaching of divine creation.

11 *Phaedo*, 80 a.

12 See Plato, *Timaios*, 41 a-b.

animal soul”? Or do we not have to assume that the animal’s soul or the plant’s life-principle perishes in death? If we accept the mortality of plant and animal life, then Plato’s argument could apply only to the personal spiritual soul of man and then we would have to show the essential difference between the human soul and animal souls. We would have to show that we encounter in the rational soul of man a deeper and more intrinsic possession of life in comparison with the less profound possession of life in the animal, such that also for this reason the rational soul alone, the person, is an image of God. And this might prove difficult to show. Or we would have to hold that all souls and all living beings are immortal. But this seems most unlikely that all mosquitoes and trees are immortal. Let us conclude with a further ontological argument for the reality and immortality of the soul that is strongly alluded to in the mythological speech of the *Demurge* to the gods and souls created by him, and resembles the valid and sublime interpretation of the present argument hinted at above.

d) This fourth ontological argument, intimately connected with life and free will, is found in Plato and developed further by the great Franciscan masters, in particular by Peter Olivi. It rests on the auto-movement and self-determination of life and above all on the rational free acts of a living person. This argument says: That which does not receive its movement and the source of its motion from the outside but possesses the source of its movement from within, the human soul, cannot be left by its movement and cannot lose the source of its life. This argument, which contains a similar equivocation in the use of the term “self-movement” to the two equivocations we found in the ontological argument discussed above, is contained in Plato’s *Phaedrus*:

The beginning of our proof is as follows:

The soul through all her being is immortal, for that which is ever in motion is immortal; but that which moves another and is moved by another, in ceasing to move ceases also to live. Only the self-moving, never leaving self, never ceases to move, and is the fountain and beginning of motion to all that moves besides. Now, the beginning is unbegotten, for that which is begotten has a beginning; but the beginning is begotten of nothing, for if it were begotten of something, then the begotten would not come from a beginning. But if unbegotten, it must also be indestructible; for if beginning were destroyed, there could be no beginning out of anything, nor anything out of a beginning; and all things must have a beginning. And therefore the self-moving is the beginning of motion; and this can neither be destroyed nor begotten, else the whole heavens and all creation would collapse and stand still, and never again have motion or birth. But if the self-moving is proved to be immortal, he who affirms that self-motion is the very idea and essence of the soul will not be put to confusion. For the body which is moved from without is soulless; but that which is moved from within has a soul, for such is the nature of the soul. But if this be true, must not the soul be the self-moving, and therefore of necessity unbegotten and immortal? Enough of the soul’s immortality.¹³

13 Plato, *Phaedrus* 245 d - 246a.

While this argument is presented in Plato's *Phaedrus* in a way that dissolves the absolute distinction between God and the soul, and while this ontological argument for the life and immortal existence of the soul makes the soul as such ungenerated and the source of all movement in the universe, thus divinizing it, it has been presented later in another form which in no way confuses the distinction between God and world.

This other form of the argument, which was perhaps best expounded by the medieval Franciscan philosopher Peter Olivi¹⁴, could be regarded as a separate fifth ontological argument that we now turn to:

e) It contradicts the nature a personal soul, i.e., the essence of a being which freely and personally determines itself to act and becomes good or evil according to a soul's (person's) own choice, to be mortal. For death constitutes an ultimate victory of the forces of life-less nature against life. Death means that the life-less forces are more powerful than the living subject killed by them. And this superiority of power of the lifeless over life may be found in relation to plants and animals which are not free. But a human soul which is endowed with free will and thus with a deeper source of self-motion is more godlike and therefore cannot die. For it is impossible that the soul that is free and dominates by means of its free will its own body and the lifeless forces of matter throughout its life, in the end (in death) is dominated by them. It is impossible that a free agent dies because what would kill him, the material universe, is not only infinitely inferior in dignity to the soul but is also freely dominated by the personal soul which cannot be considered as an epiphenomenon dependent on matter and therefore, being the master of the body, must not be thought to be destroyed with the perishing of the body. It is impossible that in death the same material forces over which the free soul ruled during her life, and which were subject to her, now turn out to be stronger and become that which determines and dominates the soul and kills her. This pet argument of the Franciscan masters appears in Plato's *Phaedo* in two passages:

First, it is the direct continuation of the argument just discussed and sees in this dominion of the person over the body a sign that it is more similar to the divine and eternal being than to the material world of the senses, and therefore immortal¹⁵.

The free dominion of the soul over the body also holds a prominent position as one of the chief arguments of Socrates against Simmias' objection against the spiritual reality and immortality of the soul. Simmias holds that the soul could be immaterial like the musical harmony or tuning of a musical instrument and, just as the harmonious music perishes with the destruction of the instrument, so the soul could perish with the breakdown of the body. Against this objection, directed simultaneously against the spiritual reality and immortality of the soul, Socrates, referring to a famous passage of Homer's *Odyssey*, insists on the utmost difference

14 See S.V. Rovighi, *L'immortalità dell'anima nei maestri francescani del secolo 13*, Vita e pensiero, Milano 1936.

15 Plato, *Phaedo* 79e-80b.

between the soul and such a harmony or epiphenomenon of matter that would be bound to be destroyed in death. He argues so chiefly for the reason of the free dominion of the soul over the body¹⁶. Space-limits for this article do not permit me to discuss both versions of this profound and original argument further and to answer a series of difficulties that it has to face.

f) *Arguments 6-8* (Plato, *Phaedo*, 70 b – 72e): A sixth ontological argument¹⁷, or rather a series of three such arguments for the immortality of the soul propounded by Plato, can be called a “dialectical argument”¹⁸. As the warm emerges from the cold and conversely, so also the dead comes from the living, and the living must come again from the dead. There are three quite distinct reasons by which one can defend this argument and which one could also regard as three entirely distinct arguments, all of them found in Plato:

i) On the one hand, one could hold, or just believe that Plato holds what he literally says: that *all opposites* come from each other¹⁹. This principle was absolutized by Hegel in his dialectical method and is more than questionable because it confuses the “from which” in the sense of the mere *state from which* becoming occurs (which is always some contradictory opposite: the non-being of that which comes to be or the being of that which passes away) with the “from which” in the sense of the cause or source of becoming. The fact that becoming occurs evidently as movement *from non-being to being* (or from non-living to living), and vice versa, in no way implies that non-being is the cause of being – as this argument from the becoming of all things through their opposites suggests. And Plato himself certainly does not interpret it in this way; rather the Hegelian atheist Feuerbach does so in his *Essence of Christianity*:

...*nothing* is the cause of the world; – but a nothing which abolishes itself...²⁰

ii) The argument from the opposites in its more specific Platonic form – a second form in which it can be presented – maintains besides immortality also the prenatal existence of the soul²¹. This argument precisely does not imply the dialectical Hegelian-Feuerbachian understanding that the living comes from the dead, or

16 See Plato, *Phaedo*, 92e – 95a, especially 94c -95a.

17 Here and at the beginning of this paper we use ontological in a broad sense, referring to arguments that proceed from the fundamental nature of a being; above, we used the term in the narrower sense of the special Anselmian and Cartesian argument which proceeds from the divine essence to demonstrate directly His existence.

18 I do not follow here the sequence in which these arguments are developed in Plato's *Phaedo* but follow on the one hand a logical dependence of some of these arguments on others, on the other hand present this argument of Plato later because it appears to me weaker than the preceding ones.

19 See Plato, *Phaedo*, 71a: “This, he said, is certain enough: that all things come to be like this – the opposite from the opposite” (my translation).

20 L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, transl. from the German by George Eliot, introductory essay by Karl Barth, foreword by H. Richard Niebuhr, Harper & Row, New York/Hagerstown/San Francisco/London 1957, ch. 2, p. 43. Cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 101 ff., 297 ff.

21 Here Socrates makes reference to the orphic beliefs, and hence to some sort of religious “revelation”, even though he remains in a critical distance to the beliefs of the orphic religion. See on this B. Schwarz, “Bemerkungen zu Platons Menon”, in B. Schwarz, P. Premoli/J. Seifert

being from nothing as if these opposites were causes or origins from which the opposite sprang. Rather it implies the thesis that life cannot come from the dead as such, from that which does not possess life, but can rather only spring from a living soul. In other words, where do the souls of the new-born babes come from? Since they cannot come from matter, nor from an impossible splitting of parental souls, these souls must have already pre-existed and lived. But this is possible only if the souls of those who died live on and are reincarnated. Thus Plato does not consider these living souls *causes* of the new souls but proposes that these *same (living) souls* of the dead re-enter other bodies.

The great merit of this argument consists in the fact that it clearly shows the difficulty of the question of the origin of the soul and that it insists on the eternal truth that a soul can never be caused by the forces of the material or biological universe as such, nor by another human soul. Souls can only come from something *living*, from living souls, from living persons²². It is also a great discovery that a source of new souls in this world is excluded. It is a first anticipatory profound objection to an evolutionary account of the origin of the human soul (person).

The weakness of the argument, however, lies in the fact that it neglects the possibility that souls be created by God from nothing, although Plato recognizes this possibility in his semi-creationism in the *Timaios* and in his metaphysics of the demiurge which Giovanni Reale has recently splendidly reinstated as a central and non-mythological part of Platonic metaphysics²³.

iii) The argument from the opposites could also be conceived as an empirical one that insists on the fact that the human race did not die out yet. It would then point out that if all souls only went in one direction – and would only be dying – the human race would have to die out in one generation. Since it does not die out, however, and since souls can only come from an invisible world of existing and living souls, our souls must have had life before and come from the dead and re-enter the body. They must even be eternal, a consequence that presupposes the eternity of the world and its cycle of life and new generations that would require infinitely many souls if no souls from the dead were to return. This version of the argument makes one additional problematic assumption: it assumes reincarnation (no doubt as a consequence of not taking into account the possibility of creation of souls). It also makes a third assumption: namely that there cannot be enough souls from eternity to fill all need for all new souls until the end of the world; this assumption is logically cogent if you assume a. the eternity of the world and b. the impossibility of an infinite number of souls.

(eds.), *Wahrheit, Irrtum und Verirrungen. Die sechs großen Krisen und sieben Ausfahrten der abendländischen Philosophie*, C. Winter, Heidelberg 1996, pp. 101-129.

22 Hans Jonas has pointed out the radical reversal of this metaphysics of life and its replacement by a metaphysics of death in which life is explained from the dead. See H. Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life. Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Harper & Row, New York 1966; Dell Publishing Co., New York 1968; Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill. 2001).

23 See Plato, *Theaetetus* 41 b. See also G. Reale, *Verso una nuova interpretazione die Platone*, cit.

This sixth to the eighth ontological arguments have especially one fundamental weakness; they do not consider even the possibility of the origin of the soul in some living Creator and maker of the soul, although Plato himself recognized such a possibility or even clearly taught the creation of souls through God (the *демиурге*) in the *Timaios*²⁴. His argument from the origin of souls from their opposite, the dead, however, presupposes that only the pre-existing souls can provide the pool and reservoir from whence new souls enter life. But this does not take into account an eternal source of creation of new souls.

However, we say, the argument as a whole according to which the origin of the souls must come from already existing souls, would be perfectly correct, *if there were no creation of souls from nothing*. For it is indeed the only thinkable origin of the souls save creation. But not to consider this possibility is a most problematic reduction of the possible answers to the origin of the soul. It is doubly strange because Plato himself defends the creation of souls in the *Timaeus*.²⁵ Besides the problematic exclusion of a direct creation of the soul in the *Phaedo*, and therefore the Platonic conclusion to the pre-existence and repeated rebirth of the soul, Plato also makes the strange assumption of such a loose connection of body and soul that my soul can be reborn in many distinct bodies, even in animal bodies. This assumption, strongly rejected by Aristotle, overlooks that there is such a profound unity of this body, of this your face and of this your unique soul, that such wanderings and meanderings of souls appear highly implausible²⁶. Above all, however, Plato's assumption of rebirth of souls is unnecessary to solve his problem from whence souls enter into the world, if there is a personal divine creator of souls.

The most significant metaphysical truth, however, that is contained in this Platonic argument, is the following: no innerworldly biological or mental cause can create or explain the origin of human souls.

h) A ninth (after f i-iii) epistemological-ontological argument presented by Plato has its root in a metaphysics and theory of knowledge. Plato claims that our obviously existing knowledge of timeless, eternal truths such as of the Pythagorean theorem, and any other knowledge of necessary timeless forms, is inexplicable through the experience of a world of changing things. This is developed especially in the *Meno*²⁷. For in this our world of change our cognition could never encounter such eternal reasons and immutable truths and forms as we know them with

24 See Plato, *Thaetetus* 30a-44d, especially 30b and 41 b.

25 A possible explanation of this is that the *Timaeus* might have been written later than the *Phaedo*, though it does not contain any rejection of its argument.

26 I do not think that we have cogent rational proofs that reincarnation is impossible, but only some arguments from plausibilities, though no absolute purely philosophical refutation. Of course, we may reject reincarnation for religious reasons.

27 See B. Schwarz, "Bemerkungen zu Platons Menon", cit. See also J. Seifert, *Ritornare a Platone. Im Anhang eine unveröffentlichte Schrift Adolf Reinachs*, hrsg., Vorwort und übers. Von Giuseppe Girgenti. Collana Temi metafisici e problemi del pensiero antico. Studi e testi, vol. 81, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2000.

certitude. Hence the soul must have existed already before birth and must have contemplated the eternal forms in an intelligible world (*cosmos noetós*), which is quite distinct from the present world of sense experience: it is not temporal but eternal, not obscure and object of opinion – *pistis* – but supremely intelligible and object of certain knowledge and understanding, of *episteme* that comprises *dianoia* – mathematical and related knowledge – and *noesis* (highest forms of philosophical understanding and intuition).

Hence, without the soul having lived in the intelligible world prior to the present life, the miracle could not be explained how our intellect – surrounded by beings all of which come to be and pass away and are only obscurely known without attaining cognitive certainty – possesses a certain and indubitable knowledge of lasting, timeless, and eternal truths. In order to explain such a knowledge (a priori knowledge), Plato holds, the rational human soul must have existed before birth and experienced this eternal world, and then, upon seeing similitudes and images of these intelligible essences or forms, remember what it has seen in the intelligible world before birth (knowledge is *anamnesis*: recollection). And from this life of the soul before birth, that must be assumed in order to explain this knowledge, it becomes at least plausible that the soul will also live after death.

There is not enough space here extensively to comment this central Platonic thought of the *anamnesis-theory*; I only wish to point out, by way of an objection, that the essential marks of a priori knowledge and of its object can simply not be explained by memory as such. Moreover, Plato fails to recognize the kind of such-being experience of necessary and supremely intelligible essences that are co-given in our present experience, an experience that cannot be reduced to empirical experience and inductive knowledge. This kind of experience and con-tuition that we gain in the present life provides a far better explanation of how we can arrive at the knowledge of eternal and necessary truths than the obscure and unsatisfactory *anamnesis* theory²⁸.

i) A tenth and “negative” ontological argument for the immortality of the soul was formulated in Plato’s *Politeia*, X: Each thing is destroyed through the most hostile evil which is as it were the proper evil of this thing and opposed to its proper good. No evil, however, is more hostile to the soul and more directly opposed to its innermost nature than injustice, moral evil as such. Therefore, if even this greatest evil that is most opposed to the soul, injustice, which is indeed a far worse evil for man than disease and even death, cannot kill the soul, then nothing can kill it.²⁹ (Kierkegaard’s argument for the immortality of the soul from

28 See B. Schwarz, “Dietrich von Hildebrands Lehre von der Soseinserfahrung in ihren philosophiegeschichtlichen Zusammenhängen”, in B. Schwarz (Hrsg.), *Wahrheit, Wert und Sein. Festgabe für Dietrich von Hildebrand zum 80. Geburtstag*, Habbel, Regensburg 1970, pp. 33-51. See also D. von Hildebrand, *Che cos'è la filosofia?/What Is Philosophy?*, English-Italian, Bompiani Testi a fronte, Milano 2001, ch. 4; and J. Seifert, *Ritornare a Platone*, cit. Cf. also K. Fedoryka, “Certitude and Contuition. St. Bonaventure’s Contributions to the Theory of Knowledge”, in «Aletheia», VI (1993/94), 163197.

29 Plato, *Politeia* X. 608c-611a, an argument Plato summarizes (610e-611a).

despair that culminates in the affirmation “If there was nothing eternal in a person, then he could altogether not despair”³⁰ is very similar).

One can raise some objections to this deep argument, however. It is not clear that the greatest qualitative disvalue of something that is most opposed to its nature and constitutes somehow an attack on its innermost value and *raison d’être*, is always the cause of a thing’s destruction or death. For example, it is not the ugliness or meanness of a poem or statue that destroys it but a bomb or a fire, even though neither one of them are as great an evil that can befall a material thing as ugliness; similarly, even if injustice is more deeply opposed to the soul than disease or heart-failure, it is the latter rather than moral evil that destroys human life and could be thought to destroy the soul.

This last moral-ontological argument, however, hides a far deeper meaning that leads us to a second and far more important group of arguments for the immortality of the soul.

II. Anthropological, metaphysical and moral arguments for the Immortality of the soul from the Meaning of personal existence

Other arguments for immortality, which I take to be the most profound and complete ones, neither merit the opinion of Blessed Duns Scotus that they are of lesser value than the preceding ones nor the name he gives them: a posteriori arguments. Rather, they rest on the specifically personal nature of the human being and proceed from the entirely objective and necessary essence of persons. They are also not less ontological than the preceding arguments. They differ from them rather by finding their exclusive point of departure in that which more fully and more truly is than all other things, namely in the person³¹. In contradistinction to the more abstract ontological arguments, these arguments proceed from personal consciousness and thus proceed from the specificity of the higher level of reality, personal being, in contradistinction to all non-personal beings. Given that here alone, namely when we deal with persons, immortality makes real sense, these arguments are no doubt the deepest and most convincing ones, also in Plato³².

Precisely the personal identity and uniqueness of the soul emerges only in beings endowed with free will and bearing responsibility.

There are three main reasons why these personalist arguments which move exclusively at the level of a metaphysics of personal being are superior to the more general ontological arguments:

30 S. Kierkegaard, *Die Krankheit zum Tode*, übers. und komm. v. L. Richter, Frankfurt a.M. 1986², (translation mine).

31 See J. Seifert, *Essere e persona. Verso una fondazione fenomenologica di una metafisica classica e personalistica*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1989, ch. 9.

32 J.H. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Sermon 2, “The Immortality of the Soul”, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1987, pp. 14-21; p. 16.

1. In the first place, there is no deeper sense in being as such, or in the life of plants or animals being immortal; whether the grass in my backyard or the stones on a road will exist eternally or will be annihilated does not have great significance. Only free and rational beings capable of contemplation of truth, of justice and injustice, of love and hate, constitute being in the higher sense which clearly and unambiguously calls for immortality. Therefore any argument that moves on the level of general ontological categories (such as indivisibility) which could in principle also apply to atoms in the philosophical sense of indivisible simplest parts or energy quanta of matter, or to other non-personal beings, does not reach the level on which we can speak meaningfully of immortality. Such abstract starting points as from uncomposed being (as we find also in atoms in the philosophical sense of this term), self-motion which we find also in vegetative life, etc., will therefore be essentially inferior within arguments for immortality than a starting point with the specific features of personal being.

2. An even more important advantage of the personalist arguments for immortality is this: All of the personalist arguments for immortality lead not merely to the conclusion of some ontological indestructibility of the being of souls, but to a recognition of their *conscious and living* immortality. And only this “consciously lived immortality” deserves the name of immortal or eternal life.

Furthermore, when we speak here of life, we do not mean life in general, as in the above argument from the impossibility of dead souls, but we mean specifically personal, spiritual life which is both found in the starting point and in the conclusion of these personalist arguments for immortality. This touches an extremely important general foundational ground of these arguments: We have to realize that the rhythm of life which moves living beings upward on a curve of vitality to a climax and then downward to a weakening and finds its natural end in death, is only one side of human life which ties man to the rest of post-paradisiac organic living beings. But there is also an entirely different rhythm of life which characterizes man as a spiritual person and which aims at always higher and higher forms of fully conscious life. We shall encounter that the foundation of all the personalist arguments for the immortality of the human soul lies in this eternity-directed rhythm of personal life³³.

3. The most important one of all the big advantages of the following personalist arguments for immortality, however, is a further fact: Some of these arguments lead to the recognition of a *positive content* of the life after the death, which the purely ontological arguments for the immortality of the soul completely ignore but without which immortality would be senseless or even the cause of despair, as Kierkegaard points out.

33 The merit to have formulated clearly these two entirely different life-rhythms belongs to Hildebrand. See D. v. Hildebrand, “Die Unsterblichkeit der Seele”, cit. *Über den Tod*. Nachgelassene Schrift. Hrsg. von der Dietrich-von-Hildebrand-Gesellschaft, Eos Verlag, St. Ottilien 1980. 2.Aufl. 1989.

These personalist arguments, at least those which are based on positive features and values of persons, have the following formal logical structure (wherein the variable X refers always to a fundamentally personal reality or act):

1. If X (the quest for knowledge, moral goodness, etc.) is not subject to an absurd contradiction of meaning, the human soul is immortal and destined to attain a conscious (and blissful) immortal life³⁴. One can express this first premise in a positive way: Only in an immortal life the meaning of rational personal existence can be fulfilled.

2. X possesses ultimate metaphysical meaning and cannot be subject to an absurd contradiction of meaning. (The truth of this premise can be gathered in one of two ways: a) on understanding the inner truthfulness and prophetic character of personal acts and personal existence that promise an immortal life that cannot be a lie and justify what Plato calls the *great hope* (ἐλπὶς μεγάλη) for an immortal life³⁵; b) in order to give not only cause to hope but to ground a full-fledged proof, the second premise presupposes ultimately the dominion of meaning and of the good in the cosmos, and therefore the existence of God, a truth expressed in the last words of Stefan Trofimovich in Dostoyevski's *The Possessed*: "If God exists, I am immortal"). Therefore, a philosopher who admits the indubitable evidence of God's existence will recognize these arguments as proofs in the strict sense.

3.(Conclusion) Therefore the human soul is immortal and destined to a conscious (and blissful) immortal life.

If the two premises of these arguments can be clarified and firmly established, these arguments are absolutely cogent proofs because their logical form of a hypothetical syllogism of the form *ponendo ponens* (If S, P; S: P) is valid.

Personalist arguments for the immortality of the soul can take their point of departure in many different personal acts and consequently can be (and have been) presented in many forms:

a) A first personalist argument proceeds from cognition and plays a central role in Plato's *Phaedo* and in other dialogues: between the human soul and the eternal ideas there exists an akinness and ordination such that the soul finds its spiritual nourishment only in the understanding and contemplation of the intelligibility of eternal essences and truths, towards which the intellect is ordained by its very nature. Plato describes this also in the grand image of the soul growing wings in the sight of the beauty of the eternal forms and truths³⁶. In virtue of this metaphysical affinity which orders the person towards the contemplation of eternal truth, the true home of a person's intellect can only be where there is eternal contemplation of eternal truth; therefore the soul must be immortal in order to fulfill the deepest quest for truth and to find nourishment and fulfillment of the mind.

Moreover, the metaphysical ordination of the person to know aims not only at the lasting continuation of the same kind of contemplation of truth we possess

34 This applies only to some arguments.

35 *Phaedo*, 114 c. Cfr. also *ibid.*, 63 c; 67b; 68a; 70a.

36 *Phaedo*, 79 a ff. See also *Phaidros* 248 b ff.

already in this life and to its liberation from the many obstacles the present life puts up against contemplative life, but entails also a striving for a substantially higher and more perfect knowledge and ever growing knowledge, contemplation and spiritual wedding of the mind with eternal truth. The thirst for knowledge is directed to the whole of truth and thus can never be fulfilled in time and within the limits of our present experience and life. This is so not only because the mind will at no point in finite time know all he desires to know but because man's mind aims at a contemplative wedding with the being and truth he knows; it aims at a cognitive union with the truth which is only possible through an ever-lasting possession of knowledge³⁷.

For these three reasons – 1) the incompleteness of all knowledge acquired in time and the striving for completeness of knowledge, 2) the multitude of disturbances of contemplation of truth in this life and the desire built into the essence of knowledge of an unperturbed vision of truth, and 3) the aiming at an ever-lasting and far more perfect contemplation of eternal truth, a spiritual “wedding” with it – the desire to know necessarily entails the desire for immortality. For only in an immortal life the quest for knowledge can be fulfilled.

The philosopher therefore, according to Plato's *Phaedo*, learns how to die and desires his death, standing before the following alternative: either his life lacks ultimate fulfillment and meaning (in fact, either his life is afflicted with an absurd contradiction of meaning) – or there is an eternal life of cognition in which the goal of all cognitive quest is accomplished. Then man is immortal³⁸. Thus the philosopher and philosophy is a particular proof of immortality: in knowing that it is meaningful and a fulfillment of the deepest essence of man as such to pursue the investigation of truth, man knows that he is immortal.

This argument is much stronger than the one Duns Scotus discusses that no natural desire of any species can remain unfulfilled in all members of this species. In its abstractness, this principle cannot convince us. Instead here, when we deal with the high value of personal being, the frustration of the goals which flow from the essence and dignity of persons, of knowledge, of the moral order, etc. would call into question the whole world-order; their remaining eternally unfulfilled would constitute a metaphysical objection to the world. Atheists see this when they raise the problem of pain and the problem of evil. A charge against the Creator could be derived from a violation of the high personal order of values with which the arguments for immortality deal. Therefore, on this level, cogent demonstrations for immortality are possible if one recognizes the link between the issues here discussed and the whole order or absurd state of being as such. It is not mere factual or relatively trivial desires (such as the spider's desire for its victim) let alone evil inclinations (such as man's prideful ambitions or sadist tendencies) with which

37 This point could be unfolded much more drawing on the distinction of Dietrich von Hildebrand in *What is Philosophy?* between the notional and the contemplative theme of human knowledge.

38 *Phaedo*, 64 a – 70a, bes .66e.

we are dealing here, not even only with high goods and human tragedies as they happen frequently and - if God's existence is accepted - are obviously permitted by God. Rather, if there is no afterlife at all, the ultimate order, good, and meaning of being as such are called into question and the foundations of the spiritual world are shaken, *if the soul is not immortal*. So much on the first premise of this argument.

But also the second premise proves true. There is an ultimate meaning in our quest for truth. And it is not only the existence of God which proves this. Rather, the inner value of the quest for truth proves its own meaning and hence proves or at least trustworthily "prophesizes" immortality. As we shall see later, also the second premise can be brought to evidence: namely that no ultimate absurd contradictions to the ontological meaning of things can exist.

b) A similar argument is based by Augustine on the striving for happiness³⁹. Each person desires happiness. A happy person, however, will never agree freely and voluntarily that he be deprived of the happiness he experiences. But if his happiness is taken away from him against his will, then he is certainly unhappy for this very reason: for happiness contains as an element that what I want to happen to me (and more objectively put: that of which I understand that it is good in itself and for me) happens to me and not what I abhor or dislike. Therefore happiness demands immortality, as also Friedrich Nietzsche clearly recognized when he wrote: "Woe speaks 'pass away'; all delight, however, wants eternity, wants deep, deep eternity". And again, since the desire for happiness is deeply inscribed in human nature, and is linked to the ultimate essence of man, this desire is not some meaningless drive but an expression of the ontological essence and truth of the person. Therefore, it prophesizes in an ontologically well-founded way that man indeed will be immortal.

c) Gabriel Marcel develops a further personalist argument of special depth which proceeds from the nature of love, an argument that can also be seen in the comparison Plato makes between the lover and his desire to see the beloved with the love of the philosopher for truth and his desire to see it in its fullness⁴⁰: « Many a man has been willing to go to the world below in the hope of seeing there an earthly love, or wife, or son, and conversing with them. And will he who is a true lover of wisdom... not depart with joy? Surely he will, my friend, if he be a true philosopher. For he will have a firm conviction that there only, and nowhere else, he can find wisdom in her purity. And if this be true, he would be very absurd, as I was saying, if he were to fear death»⁴¹.

Let us return to Gabriel Marcel's philosophy of love and immortality that can be seen as a sort of continuation of Plato's insight but returning wholly to the interpersonal love, which for Plato is more an image of something higher, love of

39 Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIII, Migne, P.L., XLII, 1022. Cf. also the comments of Duns Scotus in A. Wolter (transl., ed.), *Duns Scotus, Philosophical Writings*, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis/New York 1962, pp. 143-44, 165 ff.

40 Plato, *Phaedo*, 67e-68b.

41 *Phaedo* 67c-68c.

wisdom, while in Gabriel Marcel true interpersonal love itself reveals us the real ground of immortality or of the hope in immortality. Love, in its transcendent structure, not only desires the happiness and fulfillment of the loving person in the union with the beloved; it also intends the good and happiness of the beloved person, and thus it realizes the same truth about happiness and immortality which Augustine formulates with respect to our own person, for the *other person*, for the beloved thou. At the same time love desires union, a union which can only be fulfilled in a community and communion of persons who love each other; for there is no true union among persons except through love. And this union and communion intended by love both as source of my own and of the other person's happiness is necessarily intended as an unending community that can only be fulfilled in an eternal community. Thus Marcel can say⁴²: "To love someone is to tell him: thou wilt not die"⁴³. If however love aims at union and at an indestructible faithful community, at the happiness of the Thou and is therefore only fulfilled, if there is immortality⁴⁴, then the question poses itself, whether what is noblest and most sacred in human life, love and faithfulness, lies and can promise by its very essence something which does not exist in reality. According to Marcel, to accept the materialistic identification of the beloved person who dies with the corpse would be a betrayal of the beloved person⁴⁵. Therefore hope for immortality and even a certain victorious affirmation of immortality is built into the essential ontological structure of love itself. The prophetic voice of love, its internal truth does not admit believing the treason to accept as illusion what the ontological mystery of being and of love proclaims: "thou wilt not die".

If the existence of God as ultimate warrant of the truth of the voice of being and of all true goods is recognized, this argument wins cogency. Otherwise it is limited to a well-founded hope by virtue of the prophetic voice of love and meaning, but such a hope would lack its ultimate foundation and justification in an atheistic universe. For only if an infinite good exists, and is endowed with the power to rule the universe, can it be asserted apodictically that the deepest metaphysical good cannot promise illusions, or lie.

It is important here to understand the difference between countless unfulfilled desires and dashed hopes – in spite of which the world as whole can be meaningful – and those metaphysical requirements of meaning without fulfillment of which the world as whole would be fraught with absurdity. And therefore in love immortality is asserted not as an arbitrary whim or wish but as an outgrowth of the inner truth and nature of love.

42 Cf. on Gabriel Marcel's philosophy as such and especially on his philosophy of the *homo viator* and of hope R. Troisfontaines, S.J., *De l'Existence à l'Etre. La Philosophie de Gabriel Marcel*, Namur, Paris 1953.

43 Quote taken from R. Troisfontaines, S.J., *De l'Existence à l'Etre. La Philosophie de Gabriel Marcel*, Namur, Paris 1953, p. 141. He also says: "Le mystère de la mort n'est pas séparable du mystère de l'amour".

44 «L'amour exige une survie réelle d'autrui; il la découvre dans l'acte de transcendance».

45 "accepter l'identification matérialiste ce serait trahir". Troisfontaines, *ibid.*, 144.

d) Anselm of Canterbury (Aosta) developed a similar argument as Gabriel Marcel but grounded it entirely on the love of God⁴⁶, an argument to which we might also see some likeness in Plato's philosophy of the idea of the Good in the sixth and seventh books of the *Republic*, in the love of *absolute* beauty in the *Symposium*, and in some other texts⁴⁷. It is the supreme duty of the person, Anselm puts it, to love the infinite good above everything else. Any rational being is able to know that there exist goods and that there is a hierarchy of them, and that the highest good, God, ought to be loved most. Any being that is capable to love God freely, however, has to be immortal. For the fulfillment of this supreme call and duty to love God above everything else deserves praise and reward and does not merit punishment. The only reward, however, which is for the soul who loves God a reward at all rather than being the worst of punishments, is the eternal vision and the loving union with the supreme Good, with God. And this is only possible if the person exists and does not cease to do so. God's infinite goodness and also his justice demand therefore that he does not destroy the rational person who loves Him; and it excludes the possibility that God responds to his or her love which is the supreme moral virtue by any other reward besides that of an indestructible union with Him. Any other reward would be unfitting. Even if God offered an immortal existence filled with countless pleasures and even human love, such a world without vision and union with Himself would be a punishment and a most painful separation from his beloved for the person who loves God. Moreover, as long as the person loves God, he could never cease to love freely; and also his destruction would be a horrible punishment because it would separate the soul from the object of his love. Moreover, it takes eternity to live and fulfill the desire of love for perfect union. Therefore a person who loves God cannot be mortal but must be immortal if the good and just are preserved⁴⁸.

e) Let us return to the continuation of the above text from the *Phaedo*, to a fifth personalist argument for immortality and the first one in a series of very different Platonic arguments for immortality based on the moral order: the first of these is based in moral virtue, achievable only by the philosopher who loves wisdom: unlike in the case of the ordination of cognition to an eternal object outside itself, in the moral arguments, it is something *in the soul* that aims in its deepest meaning at immortality and is in some way nothing without it. But having a deep value and meaning in itself, it guarantees immortality through the inner prophetic voice of

46 Anselm of Canterbury (of Aosta, which refers to the birthplace of Anselm in Northern Italy), *Monologion*, 68 ff.

47 Plato, *Phaidros*, and most of all Plato's *Symposium* 211d-212a, where Diotima praises the absolute beauty itself as the supreme object of love.

48 Are then only good persons immortal who love God?, Anselm asks. And he answers: No, for even if the person perverts his highest vocation and duty and rejects freely the supreme Good, he both retains the same human nature which involves immortality and he deserves eternal punishment. It would therefore be unjust to annihilate the evil person – for also the infinitely many possible persons who will never exist and who never sinned are in that state of non-being. Therefore non-being as such cannot be a proper punishment for the worst guilt which man incurs when he rejects God.

its meaning and value, through the reality and real existence of this meaning and value in the soul and through the oughtness with which it is linked to immortality, like the true virtue that purifies the soul and promises the soul who arrives in the other world to dwell with the gods. Only the philosopher, says Plato, possesses true virtue that is not based on fear and some exchange of goods but on the pure love of the intrinsic value and beauty of virtue that cleanses the soul (*catharsis*) and purifies it, thus allowing it enter a blissful life and a life in community with God⁴⁹.

f) Another, sixth, personalist and very Platonic argument is the following one: Justice, which can never be realized on earth perfectly, demands for its fulfillment reward or punishment after this life, and – in view of the depth of moral goodness and evil – demands not only temporal but eternal consequences. But justice and morality cannot be illusions. The majesty and value of the moral order, and especially the voice of conscience prove the absolute reality of morality, whose ontological condition must exist and whose meaning must be fulfilled. One can hardly fail to see that these insights of Newman and similar ones of Scheler are like a philosophical comment on Plato's *Gorgias* and other dialogues.

In one of his most beautiful writings⁵⁰ Scheler opens with some wonderful sentences in which he points out, much as John Henry Newman had done earlier⁵¹, the mysterious and yet immediate experience of God as personal lord and judge that every man has in his conscience. Let us discuss some of the insights expressed in it⁵².

Scheler sees in repentance a fundamental and irreducible phenomenon. This act involves one basic way of co-experiencing God in conscience, which is a kind of spiritual perception of the veiled “outline of the invisible and infinite judge”. Scheler calls this experience a “co-apprehension of the holy judge” and adds that it is not based on any particular *interpretation* that we make of the stirrings of conscience and that it is even less a projection of something into them. This experience of God as holy judge belongs instead to the immediate experiential content of conscience, which is a “natural, word-less language that God speaks with the soul”, a “hidden ‘voice’ and sign-language of God”. We will have to examine more closely the manifold relatedness of repentance to God if we are to understand better the significance of these insights of Scheler⁵³.

This argument is also central to the *Gorgias* and the powerful passages on the judgment on the souls after death, on Minos and Adamantes looking at the naked souls stripped of all worldly titles, honors and ranks after their death, and judging them only in the light of the scars that moral evil made on their souls and the

49 Phaedo.

50 M. Scheler, “Repentance and Rebirth”, *On the Eternal in Man*. Cf. von Hildebrand's analysis of repentance in *Transformation in Christ*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2001, chapter 2.

51 J.H. Card. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of A Grammar of Assent*, Christian Classics Inc., Westminster, Md. 1973. In “Repentance and Rebirth” Max Scheler refers explicitly to the profound insights of Newman on conscience.

52 M. Scheler, “Repentance and Rebirth”, 35.

53 See J. Seifert, “Scheler on Repentance”, in: J.F. Crosby, (Ed.), *Max Scheler*, «American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly», 79, 1 (Winter 2005), 183-202.

beauty of their virtues, sending some to eternal bliss, others to cleansing through suffering, and still others that are incurably evil, to the eternal punishment of what we would call hell. This Platonist argument for the afterlife and immortality is likewise present in Plato's remark in the *Apology* that freeing oneself of one's responsibility for injustice through death or through killing a person who shows us the truth is neither possible nor noble⁵⁴. This argument rests on the evidence that justice of reward and punishment forbids that a Hitler and a Saint equally are reduced to corpses and will never be drawn to the responsibility for their actions which they possess. If both die like rats or mice, the metaphysical order of justice remains eternally unfulfilled. For justice cannot be fulfilled without immortality.

The second premise of this argument asserts that indeed justice must be fulfilled. Cardinal Newman gave to this argument a special turn by relating it entirely to the voice of conscience⁵⁵.

Now Conscience suggests to us many things about that Master, whom by means of it we perceive..., the special Attribute under which it brings Him before us, to which it subordinates all other Attributes, is that of Justice – retributive justice.⁵⁶ But since there is an evident metaphysical necessity that justice must be fulfilled, persons are immortal.

g) A seventh personalist argument for immortality based on morality is this one: The moral life aims at a progress in moral perfection and even at the complete adaequation of the will to the moral law and to all morally relevant values and goods. Such a complete conformity of the will with the good is holiness, as Kant notes. No finite earthly progress in our moral life can however fulfill this essential tendency of the moral life to a transcendent perfection which is constantly threatened by our sins. Moreover, holiness as the complete conformity of our free will to all goods and as the perfect love of the Good is both essentially called for by the moral sphere which contradicts any satisfaction with our imperfect moral state and is never fulfilled in this life but can be fulfilled only in eternal life. And once holiness exists and is realized, it calls even more through its value for immortality.

Therefore the metaphysically grounded meaning of the moral life demands immortality. If this meaning triumphs in reality, (if God exists), the person is immortal.

III. Plato's proofs of the immortality of the soul compared to the Christian belief in eternal life

At the end of a brief discussion of the great number of impressive ontological and even far more impressive personalist philosophical arguments for immortality

54 Plato, *The Apology of Socrates* 39d.

55 J.H. Card. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of A Grammar of Assent*, Christian Classics Inc., Westminster, Md 1973, pp. 389 ff., particularly pp. 390, 394, 407. Cf. also his "The Immortality of the Soul", cit., p. 17 ff.

56 Newman, *ibid.*, pp. 390-391.

found in Plato and expanded by some philosophers of the 19th and 20th century, we want to examine whether there are not elements regarding eternal life that go beyond everything philosophy can say about immortality.

Plato himself says so in a remarkable passage in the *Phaedo*, through the mouth of Simmias:

“For I dare say that you, Socrates, feel, as I do, how very hard or almost impossible is the attainment of any certainty about questions such as these in the present life. And yet I should deem him a coward who did not prove what is said about them to the uttermost, or whose heart failed him before he had examined them on every side. For he should persevere until he has attained one of two things: either he should discover or learn the truth about them; or, if this is impossible, I would have him take the best and most irrefragable of human notions, and let this be the raft upon which he sails through life—not without risk, as I admit, if he cannot find some word of God which will more surely and safely carry him”.⁵⁷

Let me conclude these reflections by distinguishing the philosophical demonstrations of the immortality of the soul from the belief in a divine word from the other side, of which Plato is speaking and which the Christian believes to have arrived through revelation.

The structure and content of the philosophical proofs of immortality are entirely different in at least five regards from the religious belief of the Christian in eternal life⁵⁸. What then are the differences of the Christian faith in eternal life and philosophical arguments?

1. The Christian does not believe by virtue of rational arguments, but he founds his belief in eternal life on a miraculous historic event, which the first Christians saw and witnessed and which those of us who did not see it, believe on the strength of its inner truth and of their testimony: on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, without whose reality, as the Apostle Paul writes, the belief of Christians would be empty.

2. The Christian belief in the eternal life does not rest on rational proofs, but on an act of belief in the person of Christ or in the word of God spoken through prophets. Faith comes from hearing, is based on an act of loving trust and is confirmed by miracles which corroborate the inner testimony for the truth given by Christ: “If you do not believe me because of my words, believe at least in view of my deeds”.

3. The act of faith is directed not only at immortality but at eternal salvation which is believed to be a freely given grace of God and thus necessarily exceeds all purely philosophical hope and cannot be proven by philosophy. Salvation and eternal life, as the Christian believes in them, are a free gift of God, and thus are philosophically indemonstrable. Moreover, salvation is the fruit of Christ’s passion

57 Plato, *Phaedo*, translated by Benjamin Jowett.

58 This does not preclude that the entire Catholic Church, Luther and Calvin as well as other reformers were convinced of the validity of philosophical arguments for immortality although R. Bultmann and many “whole-death-theologians” such as P. Althaus contested and rejected these philosophical arguments.

and death on the cross and of the love of God, who has loved the world so much that he sent his only-begotten Son into the world and delivered him to the death on the cross, in order to save the world. It is evident that such a faith in salvation cannot be replaced by philosophical arguments and that its object – salvation – as it is a free gift of God, exceeds everything philosophy can demonstrate. In this light we note the following great limit of philosophical proofs for immortality: while they can argue for what follows from the nature of love or justice, they cannot exclude the possibility that in consequence of sin mankind has lost access to those goods for which he is made by nature. Thus philosophy cannot exclude that only through a free redemptive act those goods and that immortal positive life at which the deepest philosophical arguments aim can be attained by man. And it is this overwhelming message which the Paschal mystery reveals to the Christian.

4. The Christian believes, that his faith and belief in eternal life is not simply produced by his freedom or merits but that this faith itself which is necessary for salvation is a gift of divine grace (even if the Catholic faith insists on the necessity of our free co-operation with divine grace). Thus the mercy of God, who has to draw and to pull us, so that we arrive at the act of faith, is the origin of this faith, not rational demonstrations.

5. The Christian believes, even if he accepts that there is a living soul separated from the body after death (the *anima separata*), not only in the bare immortality of the soul but also in the bodily resurrection.

This does not exclude the immortality of the separated soul, even though P. Althaus and the “whole-death-theology” (*Ganztodtheologie*)⁵⁹ in the Protestant and Catholic communities of the 20th century do not agree with the classical doctrine that the soul lives prior to bodily resurrection, but play off belief in the resurrection against immortality. They mean that the Christian must assume the total destruction of the person in death and his completely new creation upon resurrection. Yet such a new creation of the same identical person (and his being judged for the sins of a previously destroyed person) is in itself impossible and would render any meaningful immortality, which requires the full identity of the earthly and resurrected person, impossible. The belief in the bodily resurrection is thus no contrast, but rather the fulfillment of the philosophical arguments for immortality. These can indeed be viewed by a Christian philosopher as a “propaedeutic to salvation”, as the Mexican philosopher Agustín Basave interprets them in his *Metaphysics of Death*⁶⁰.

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⁵⁹ See the critical discussion of this in Josef Seifert, “Das Unsterblichkeitsproblem aus der Sicht der philosophischen Ethik und Anthropologie”, «Franziskanische Studien», H 3 (1978).

⁶⁰ A. Basave, *Metafísica de la muerte* (1973).

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