



MCDSARE: 2021
International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on the
Dialogue between Sciences & Arts, Religion & Education

THE CONCEPT OF THE SOUL IN PLATO
AND IN PATRISTIC THOUGHT

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Abstract

This article focuses on Plato's conception of the soul, through which man as a psycho-physical being, lives with the perspective of immortality. The pre-existence and immortality of the soul is in fact the basis of Platonic philosophy. Plato presents the existence of the soul in the Phaidon Dialogue starting from the hypothesis that something called the soul has existence in the form of pre-existence and post-existence and has an intelligible nature, similar to the structure of Eidos (Ideas). The second part of the research considers the transition from ontology to metaphysics, focused on a different perspective given the patristic thinking in which man is created in his divine image, as a personal being composed of body and soul, a synthesis of the intelligible world with the material.

Keywords: soul; perfection; body; Plato; Christianity;

1. INTRODUCTION

From the epistemological point of view, the concept of the soul is part of a problem that philosophical research has sought to deepen, subordinating the problem of the soul to metaphysics. Thus, certain directions were issued, more or less universal, and in the space of patristic thinking the problem of the soul is a theologian. Philosophers have associated the soul as a form / essence of their existence with transcendental life. If the body comes by birth from the parents' bodies, having a common part (genetic), but also its own (DNA, physiognomy, etc.), the soul has its own metaphysical essence that induces the life that leads the body. The patristic shows that the soul individualizes the body it crosses without being through its structure touched and material (quantitative) body, and its presence implies the intellectual part of man, self-awareness and free will through which he perceives the biological body, but also the side emotional, sentimental and even mystical.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to investigate the problem of the soul in Plato's philosophy, but also the relationship of similarity versus criticism of the specific contents of patristic thinking. The essential notions are the definition of the functions of the soul, delimited conceptually by the tripartite problem and by



immortality. The core of Platonic conceptions, especially the ideational problem, is also developed by patristic thinking precisely through the possibility of a conscious occasion. The premise from which Plato starts in the process of proving the existence of the soul in the Phaidon dialogue is that something called the soul has existence in the form of pre-existence and post-existence (in correlation with the argument of generating opposites, which shows that the soul existed before the body was born). Exists after his death and has an intelligible nature, similar to the structure of the eidōs.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The research objectives, the working hypotheses and the hierarchy / choice of the selective bibliography on the topic of the soul will be established. The problem of the soul is analyzed in Plato's philosophy through the relation with the metaphysical aspects in relation to the patristic thinking. I will demonstrate the immortality of the soul by dealing with the main arguments developed in the Phaidon dialogue, in order to state the ontology of Being. The main arguments presented in the Phaidon dialogue are: the argument of opposites (70c – 72a), the argument of re-memory (72e – 76d), the argument of the affinity of the soul with Forms (78b – 80c) and the argument of indestructibility, which aims to prove the unity and simplicity of the soul (102b–107a), the argument of the self-moving soul (Phaedrus 245).

By using the methods of critical research, the dimensions of the soul will be highlighted: ontological, phenomenological and existential, - analyzing analytically the works of Plato, of the philosophers, but also some patristic works. These will strengthen the theory of the parts of the soul, in accordance with Plato's philosophy and the resized form of patristic thinking.

4. FINDINGS

The problem of the soul in Plato's philosophy is correlated with the ontology known by the conception or theory of Ideas. The term Idea (gr. *idea*) represents the prototype or paradigm (gr. *paradigm*) of sensitive and contingent things. Ideas in the first aspect, for Plato, represent the absolute, metaphysical reality in comparison with the idea (the term that designates people's ideas), the products of the activity of theoretical reflection. In Romanian, the Greek *eidōs* / *idea* is translated by form or essence, also defined as the theory of forms. For Plato, the real is only the world of Ideas, the world of eternal prototypes, made up of pure Essences or Forms. Plato, in the Phaidon dialogue, argues that the soul is immortal, because the idea is immortal. The existence of the soul, as well as the participation in ideas, comes in continuation of the ontology, explaining the multiplicity of the sensitive world. Plato's ideas are not simple mental concepts, but ontologically distinct entities in the World of Ideas, but at the same time represented under the sign of the Intelligible. If the soul did not exist before it entered the body, Plato could no longer develop the idea of knowledge by remembrance. In Plato's philosophy, the soul pre-exists the body and is configured in three parts: one rational, opposite to the other two, the sensual and the passionate. The conception of the soul is presented by Plato in general in the Phaidon dialogue, but also in some parts of the Phaidros dialogue and in the Republic.

In the dialogue Phaidon or On the Soul Plato conceives the need to demonstrate the immortality of the soul in the context of the death of Socrates. The fear of death is clarified by arguing that philosophy is the preparation for understanding this moment. Socrates, provoked by his companions, Criton, Cebes and Simmias, seeks arguments for both the pre-existence of the soul and its existence after the death of the body, considering that the two concepts do not overlap: "if, after the death of men, their souls, whether or not they exist. There is an old tradition, of which I have already mentioned, according to which they exist there, arrived from here, and also that they return here, in this world, and are born from the dead" (Plato, Phaidon, 70a- 77a).

Plato builds part of Phaidros' argument on the myth of the ontology of the soul. The soul is symbolized by the allegory of the visit and the chariot to which two good horses are harnessed (in the case of the gods), or a good horse and a bad horse (in the case of men): and endowed with wings, winged carriage and on his visit. When it comes to gods, both horses and visitors are all good and noble; but in other cases, their way of being is mixed" (Plato, Phaidros, 246a-b). In the Platonic conception, the world is the most beautiful work of pure Intelligence, of the absolute Good. The demiurge is the creator of the soul of the world, which is prior to the universal material body, which it must animate.

In Plato's view, the fall of human souls is argued by the fact that men are mortal and the gods immortal: the state of death, does it not necessarily have to exist even after death since it is to be born again?" (Plato, Phaidon, 77b).

Plato describes divinity as having body and soul. In this case, it is not the body that is to blame for imperfection, but mortality. Human souls, before they fell, possessed a god-like body. The part of the soul: the horse with the habit, led to the fall from the pure state. This is a significant change from Plato's original conception that the sentient world, the body, is a prison for the soul, representing all that is evil, imperfect, while the soul, the intelligible world in general, is perfect, good. The soul approaches Ideas, as it participates in them as life, truth, reason, justice, beauty and good, but it is not itself an idea. The nature of the soul can only be known through symbols.

Phaidon is dedicated almost entirely to the immortality of the soul and is structured as a series of arguments, which critics share as follows:

1. The argument of opposites 70a – 72e

Everything that has an opposite comes into existence precisely from this opposite; coldness from heat, weakness from strength, sleep from wakefulness. In each pair of opposites there must always be a process of transformation, as is the case with death versus life: "if the mutual becoming of opposites of each other would not take place as in a circular motion, but the process would take place, rectilinear and irreversible, only in one direction, then ... in the end all things would freeze in the same state, subject to the same condition, and any generative process would cease." "Life and death are the opposite, and the process of one of them, namely, death is obvious to us. We could deduce that there is a second process by which living things have their origin in death. This conclusion must be drawn in the sense that "the souls of the dead must be somewhere from where they can return to life".

2. The argument of re-memory 73a – 77e

Man's ability to give abstract answers shows that we possess a type of knowledge (of Forms, as they exist) that must be received before birth because "souls existed apart from the body before they took human form." ". This argument of remembrance highlights the idea of the pre-existence of the soul, but also its immortality.

3. The argument of similarity 78b – 84b

The argument of similarity shows not only that the soul resembles the intelligible, immortal being, but also that it is somewhat of the same essence-idea. The soul is like an intelligible being because it is not visible and generally not perceptible (79b) so it has the power to lead. Forms, or universals and particulars, differ structurally: forms are invisible, unchanging, uniform, and eternal, while particulars are visible, changeable, compound, and perishable. The human soul is invisible, and explores Forms without the aid of the bodily senses. Thus the soul is "more divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform and indissoluble". The assertion that the soul is related to intelligible reality is thus based on the idea that intelligible reality is especially suited to the soul, so as to attain its most advanced and optimal state, wisdom.

The argument of Republic X (611) in favor of the immortality of the soul from the perspective of the indivisible nature of the soul is based on the similarity that recalls its uniformity and simplicity. To the body the soul is a simple, indivisible entity, it is, therefore, immortal.

In Phaedros Plato argues the immortality of the soul starting from its essence as a self-mover; he acts as the ultimate source of the motion of all things, for they can have no beginning or end in themselves: "all that is soul is immortal. Indeed, what moves by itself is immortal" (245). The conception of the soul is bound by the mind to the body. In his argument Socrates attributes a wide variety of psychological states that the soul feels, for example, pleasures (83d), desires, fears (94d). At the same time, the soul is not intellectually limited: it also has desires (81d), even passionate ones (such as eros 80b), but also pleasures, of learning (114e).

In patristic thinking, the soul created by God is presented as the reality (essence) of life, which leads the body with which it forms a unity. It has the quality of being untouched and incomprehensible material (quantitative), endowed with reason, self-awareness and free will, immortal by divine grace, immaterial, unique and unitary, indelible and unrepeatable, which through its faculties offers and directs human nature to spirituality.

Three opinions have emerged regarding the origin of the soul, namely: pre-existentialism, traducianism and creationism. Pre-existence (Origen / Plato) claims that human souls were created all at

once, at first and, sinning in the state of pre-existence were then placed in bodies, to punishment, and then, through the suffering endured in the body, to be purified. Traditionalism claims that the soul of the descendants comes from the souls of the parents, like the seedlings of plants. This view is countered by the nature and spirituality of the soul which cannot be divided or hybridized. Creationism holds that the soul is a direct creation that comes from God, not from parents. This affirms the distinction of the soul as a special principle of the body. The soul is brought into existence with the body.

Arguing the functions of the soul exercised together with the body by the whole human person is the key concept of research. Even if he speaks of pre-existence and reincarnation, Plato conceptually expresses the tripartite reality of the soul (1. the rational part, which leads, represented analogically and symbolically by the visit, 2. the passionate part, by the good horse, 3. the appetizing part, by the bad horse). The same tripartite conception of the soul is found in the Republic, politically based. The soul is like a city, in which there are several social categories, but which are reduced to three: the rulers - philosophers, lords and sages of the city to whom corresponds the rational part of the soul (nous or logos), the military - to take care in at the same time by the good running of the city, and the people - which should include all the others, each fulfilling his providential order, the appetizing, inviting element of the soul corresponds to them (Plato, Republic, 433b).

Without supporting pre-existence and reincarnation, the soul in patristic thinking has three main faculties: the mind (nous), which is the generator of acts of knowledge and contemplation; lust (Gr. *epithymia* / lust, as the potency of all desires, which is related to the will); and anger, impulsivity. Lust and anger direct the soul to the body. In unison, patristic accentuates the understanding upper part of the soul, nous (mind), through which man holds the gnomic power either directly or intuitively, after a liberation from all material representations and images, through the reality of uncreated divine energies or grace. "As in a whistle the breath makes sounds according to the width of the whistle, so also the soul, appearing helplessly in a limp body, is shown once the body is strengthened, and then discovers all its intelligence" (Gregory the Theologian, 2009, p.103).

Patristic thinking rejects the Platonic idea of the preexistence of the soul and the mind, but considers that the two powers (lust and irascibility - the irrational part) are in relation to the mind (the new rational) although they differ. "So the soul has three parts (for there are three parts to it: reason, haste, and lust), if in haste there is love and love of men, and in lust, purity, and righteousness, reason is enlightened; and if in haste there is hatred of men and lust in fornication, reason is dark". Understanding is the organ of the intellect (nous), of the place where his divine face is conceived in man, while through the other two irrational faculties, related to the body, the soul has an organ through which it enters the sensitive material world, through which it perceives the body.

Man is created out of love and begins from somewhere and sometimes, as a unique, individual subject, as a conscious, free and rational personal being. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let us have dominion over the fish of the sea ... and over all the earth" (Genesis 1:27). Of all creatures, only man has been specially created by God. Thus, first of all, man is a being who cannot be defined in an exhaustive way because he bears the image of the One who cannot be defined; and second, the Holy Fathers manifested a profoundly creative and innovative freedom of thought and interpretation of biblical texts. Man is not the result of a divine commandment, as God created all other beings, things, and universes because - in the sense of evolving matter - he was not able to produce a being endowed with reason, freedom, conscience, and will.

God, through His great power and love, created man in the image of divine glory and gave him as his goal the likeness to which he must reach by his own will. Analyzing the scriptural text, we observe the distinction between the singular "and said" and the plural "Let us do", man (singular), according to our image and resemblance (singular) (plural); and we come to the conclusion that man is a subject of the image modeled on "the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). Then, the Holy Scripture tells us how God created woman precisely to elucidate the ontological data of the divine image: "And God made man in his own image, in the image of God made the man and woman" (Genesis 1:27). The distinction between man and woman has nothing to do with the ontological and indelible data of the image of God in man, because God is not divided into genders (male and female) so His image extends over all human nature. The book of Genesis 2: 7 tells how God created man: "Then the Lord God took the dust of the earth, and made it man's breath, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." What is important is not the material, procedural act, but the fact that human nature was constituted dually in body and soul, through the breath

of life of divine grace: guide and traverse the whole creature” (Grigorie de Nyssa, 1998, 34). The Greek translation *psihe* - soul, of the Hebrew *nephesh* has several meanings and would mean, in general, everything that is alive, even animals, but nevertheless the philosophical definition of man as a rational animal is not justified - because the spiritual nature of man is not based on body, soul and reason, but on the quality of person.

Man is the central being of creation, the material and spiritual axis of the world. Patristic theology bases the teaching on man on his quality as the image of God (the ontological data) and the resemblance to God defined as perfection, through the state of holiness as the fulfillment of man and man. Thus, man is not only a part of the world, but also its synthesis, able to contemplate and determine it.

5. CONCLUSION

The immortality of the soul is existential, ontological and not existential, phenomenological; therefore death is not an absolute end of being, but a transition to another form of existence, in which the soul, as a conscious identity of being, continues to exist in two eternal realities. The three faculties of the soul relate to each other and influence each other. Thus, according to the order of creation, lust yearns for good, for virtue, while irascibility fights for it by resisting evil with energy.

Philosophy presents man as a rational being, autonomous and capable of self-control, both at the personal level, through the discipline of instincts, and at the interpersonal level, through social laws. In the coordinates of modern thought, the description of human nature, in terms of knowledge, has focused only on the powers of the human mind due to the autonomy of science and technology that claim to explain everything that exists. In general, man is defined as the most evolved being, who has reached this state due to the instinct of self-preservation or through the struggle for survival.

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