

CONCERNING THE PROCREATION OF THE SOUL AS
DISCOURSED IN TIMAEUS.*

THE FATHER TO AUTOBULUS AND PLUTARCH WISHETH
HEALTH.

1. SINCE it is your opinion that it would be requisite for me to collect together what I have discoursed and written dispersedly in several treatises explaining, as we apprehended his sense and meaning, what opinion Plato had concerning the soul, as requiring a particular commentary by itself; therefore I have compiled this discourse, which asks for your consideration and pardon not only because the matter itself is by no means easy to be handled, but also because the doctrines herein contained are somewhat contrary to those held by most of the Platonic philosophers. And I will first rehearse the words as they run originally in the text itself of Timaeus.†

“ There being one substance not admitting of division, but continuing still the same, and another liable to be divided among several bodies, out of both these he produced for a middle mixture a third sort of Substance, partaking of the nature of the Same and of the nature of the Other, and placed it in the midst between that which was indivisible and that which was subject to be corporeally divided. Then taking

* See Boeckh's dissertation *Ueber die Bildung der Weltseele im Timaeos des Platon*, now reprinted in his *Kleine Schriften*, III. pp. 109-180. For the passages relating to music, see Westphal's *Harmonik und Melopöie der Griechen*, pp. 134-136. See also the note prefixed to Plutarch on Music, vol. I. p. 102. (G.)

† Timaeus, p. 35 A-B.

all three, he blended them into one form, forcibly adapting to the Same the nature of the Other, not readily condescending to a mixture. Now when he had thus mixed them with the Substance, and reduced the three into one, he again divided this whole matter into so many parts as were thought to be necessary; every one of these parts being composed of the Same, the Other, and the Substance. And thus he began his division."

By the way, it would be an endless toil to recite the contentions and disputes that have from hence arisen among his interpreters, and to you indeed superfluous, who are not ignorant yourselves of the greatest part.

But seeing that Xenocrates won to his opinions several of the most eminent philosophers, while he defined the substance of the soul to be number moved by itself; and that many adhered to Crantor the Solian, who affirmed the soul to consist partly of an essence perceptible to the mind, partly of a nature concerned with sensible things and subject to opinions; I am apt to believe that the perspicuity of these matters clearly dilucidated will afford you a fair entrance into the knowledge of the rest.

2. Nor does either of the two conjectures require many words of explanation. For the one side pretends that by the mixture of the divisible and indivisible substance no other thing is meant than the generation or original of number, seeing that the unit is undividable but multitude is subject to division; however, that out of these is begot number, unity terminating plurality and putting a period to infinity, which they call the unlimited binary. This binary Zaratas, the scholar of Pythagoras, named the mother, but the unit the father of number; and therefore he believed those numbers were the best which approached nearest in resemblance to the unit. Nevertheless, this number cannot be said to be the soul; for it neither has the power to move, neither can it be moved. But the Same and the

Other being blended together, of which one is the original of motion and mutation, the other of rest and stability, from these two springs the soul, which is no less active or passive itself to stay or to be stayed, than to move or to be moved.

But the followers of Crantor, supposing the proper function of the soul to consist in judging of those things which are discernible to the understanding and those which are liable to sense, as also of the differences and similitudes of these things, as well in themselves as in reference one to another, allege the soul to be composed of all, to the end she may have a true knowledge of the whole. Now the things of which the All is composed are fourfold, — the intelligible nature, always immutable and still the same, and the sensitive nature, which is passive and subject to alteration ; and also the nature of the Same, and the nature of the Other, in regard the two former in some measure participate also of diversity and identity.

3. All these philosophers likewise equally hold that the soul neither derives its beginning from time nor is the product of generation, but that it is endued with several faculties and virtues, into which Plato, as it were, melting and dissolving its substance for contemplation's sake, supposes it in his discourse to have had its original from procreation and mixture.

The same was his opinion concerning the world ; for he knew it to be uncreated and without end, but not perceiving it so easy to apprehend how the structure was reared, or by what order and government supported, unless by admitting its beginning and the causes thereto concurring, he followed that method to instruct himself. These things being thus generally by them laid down, Eudorus will allow to neither side any share of probability ; and indeed to me they both seem to have wandered from the opinion of Plato, if we intend to make the most likely rule our

guide, — which is not to advance our own conceits, but to come as close as we can to his sense and meaning. Now as to this same mixture (as they call it) of the intelligible and sensitive substance, no reason appears why it should be more the original of the soul than of any other thing that ye can name. For the whole world itself and every one of its parts pretend to no other composition than of a sensitive and an intelligible substance, of which the one affords matter and foundation, the other form and figure to the whole mass. And then again, whate'er there is of material substance, framed and structured by participation and assimilation of the intelligible nature is not only to be felt but visible to the eye; whereas the soul still soars above the reach of all natural apprehension. Neither did Plato ever assert the soul to be number, but a perpetually self-moving nature, the fountain and principle of motion. Only he embellished and adorned the substance of it with number, proportion, and harmony; as being a subject capable of receiving the most goodly form which those ornaments could produce. So that I cannot believe it to be the same thing to compose the soul according to number, and to affirm the soul to be number itself. Nor can it be said to be harmony because harmoniously composed, as he has clearly demonstrated in his Treatise of the Soul. But plain it is, that those philosophers understood not the meaning of the Same and the Other. For they tell us how the Same contributes rest, the Other motion toward the generation of the soul. Though Plato himself, in his treatise entitled the Sophist, disposes and distinguishes Essence, the Same, the Other, together with Motion and Rest, as being five things altogether differing one from another and void of mutual affinity.

4. But these men are generally, as the most part of Plato's readers, timorous and vainly perplexed, using all their endeavors by wresting and tormenting his sense to

conceal and hide what he has written, as if it were some terrible novelty not fit for public view, that the world and the soul neither had their beginning and composition from eternity, nor had their essence from a boundless immensity of time, — of which we have particularly spoken already. So that now it shall suffice to say no more than this, that these writers confound and smother (if they do not rather utterly abolish) his eager contest and dispute in behalf of the Gods, wherein Plato confesses himself to have been transported with an ambitious zeal, even beyond the strength of his years, against the atheists of his time. For if the world had no beginning, Plato's opinion vanishes, — that the soul, much elder than the body, is the principle of all motion and alteration, or (to use his own words) their chieftain and first efficient cause, whose mansion is in Nature's secret retirements. But what the soul is, what the body, and why the soul is said to have been elder than the body, shall be made appear in the progress of this discourse. The ignorance of this seems to have been the occasion of much doubt and incredulity in reference to the true opinion.

5. First therefore, I shall propose my own sentiments concerning these things, desiring to gain credit no otherwise than by the most probable strength of arguments, explaining and reconciling to the utmost of my ability truth and paradox together; after which I shall apply both the explication and demonstration to the words of the text. In my opinion then the business lies thus. The world, saith Heraclitus, neither did any one of all the Gods nor any mortal man create, — as if he had been afraid that, not being able to make out the creation by a Deity, we should be constrained to acknowledge some man to have been the architect of the universe. But certainly far better it is, in submission to Plato's judgment, to avow, both in discourse and in our songs of praise, that the

glory of the structure belongs to God, — for the frame itself is the most beautiful of all masterpieces, and God the most illustrious of all causes, — but that the substance and materials were not created, but always ready at the ordering and disposal of the Omnipotent Builder, to give it form and figure, as near as might be, approaching to his own resemblance. For the creation was not out of nothing, but out of matter wanting beauty and perfection, like the rude materials of a house, a garment, or a statue, lying first in shapeless confusion. For before the creation of the world there was nothing but a confused heap; yet was that confused heap neither without a body, without motion, nor without a soul. The corporeal part was without form or consistence, and the moving part stupid and headlong; and this was the disorder of a soul not guided by reason. God neither incorporated that which is incorporeal, nor conveyed a soul into that which had none before; like a person either musical or poetical, who does not make either the voice or the movement, but only reduces the voice with harmony, and graces the movement with proper measures. Thus God did not make the tangible and resistant solidity of the corporeal substance, nor the imaginative or moving faculties of the soul; but taking these two principles as they lay ready at hand, — the one obscure and dark, the other turbulent and senseless, both imperfect without the bounds of order and decency, — he disposed, digested, and embellished the confused mass, so that he brought to perfection a most absolute and glorious creature. Therefore the substance of the body is no other than that all-receiving Nature, the seat and nurse of all created beings.

6. But the substance of the soul, in Philebus, he called an infinite being, the privation of number and proportion; having neither period nor measure either of diminution or excess or distinction or dissimilitude. But as to that

order which he alleges in Timaeus to be the mixture of nature with the indivisible substance, but which being applied to bodies becomes liable to division, — he would not have it thought to be a bulk made up by units or points, nor longitude and breadth, which are qualities more consentaneous to bodies than to the soul, but that disorderly unlimited principle, moving both itself and other substances, that which he frequently calls necessity, and which within his treatise of laws he openly styles the disorderly, ill-acting, or harm-doing soul. For such was this soul of herself; but at length she came to partake of understanding, ratiocination, and harmony, that she might be the soul of the world. Now that all-receiving principle of matter enjoyed both magnitude, space, and distance; but beauty, form, and measure of proportion it had none. However, all these it obtained, to the end that, when it came to be thus embellished and adorned, it might assume the form of all the various bodies and organs of the earth, the sea, the heavens, the stars, and of all those infinite varieties of plants and living creatures. Now as for those who attribute to this matter, and not to the soul, that which in Timaeus is called necessity, in Philebus vast disproportion and unlimited exorbitancy of diminution and excess, — they can never maintain it to be the cause of disorder, since Plato always alleges that same matter to be without any form or figures, and altogether destitute of any quality or effectual virtue properly belonging to it; comparing it to such oils as have no scent at all, which the perfumers mix in their tinctures. For there is no likelihood that Plato would suppose that to be the cause and principle of evil which is altogether void of quality in itself, sluggish, and never to be roused on to action, and yet at the same time brand this immensity with the harsh epithets of base and mischievous, and call it necessity repugnant and contumaciously rebel-

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