

RONALD H. EPP, Memphis /USA

## KATHARSIS AND THE PLATONIC RECONSTRUCTION OF MYSTICAL TERMINOLOGY

Greek religion in the pre-Archaic era made no persistent attempt to justify itself. Ritual rather than creed, imaginative mythology rather than analysis, intuition rather than reflection, *praxis* rather than *theoria* — these are the touch stones of early Greek religion. Yet throughout the Classical Age there was a growing reaction against these traditions, and in the Platonic dialogues there emerges a critical assessment of the elements of religious tradition to which Plato was heir.

For Plato's contemporaries, Homer was the pre-eminent symbol of nationhood, the unquestioned source of their earliest history, and the principal authority for the pantheon of Olympian deities that dominated their life. If the religion of Zeus, Hera, and Apollo was dominant, it was nonetheless challenged during the Archaic Age by a rival. A growing segment of the populace now allied themselves with cults which recognized vague and malevolent ghosts (κῆρες) residing in the deepest recesses of the earth. Chthonian worship, perhaps an outgrowth of animism, developed in manifold forms. Ἐνθουσιασμός — the possession of man by god — is essential to all these forms of worship, and Eleusinian, Dionysian, Orphic and Pythagoreanism are but the more dominant forms of Chthonian worship.

John Herman Randall Jr. recently argued that «the mysteries or secret rites, and especially the esoteric teachings connected with them, are more important for Greek philosophy and especially for Plato than the tradition of the Olympian deities<sup>1</sup>». It is my contention that Randall is correct, and to illustrate an instance supporting this claim, I propose to examine one tributary of mystical thought within the early and middle period Platonic dialogues<sup>2</sup>.

A reading of these dialogues discloses recurrent usage of concepts associated with the mystical cults (especially the Orphic-Pythagoreans): μαντική, μουσική, ἁρμονία, παλιγγενεσία, ἀνάμνησις and ἀριθμός are terms

1. *Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason* (1970), p. 56.

2. I have accepted the dialogue chronology proposed by Constantin Ritter (*Platon*, 1923). All translations unless otherwise noted are from the Loeb Library edition.





which repeatedly occur in a variety of religious contexts. Essential to the cult vocabulary were terms that designate the process of purification and the subsequent state produced by the cleansing. Yet among the differences in detail, one norm is constant — that purity (καθαρός) is indispensable to one who would approach the gods or holy things. A dread of something that infects, an anticipation of some avenging wrath, and the desire for a mechanism of cleansing — these are the archaic beliefs of fifth century cult practices to which Plato was heir<sup>3</sup>.

It will be argued that examination of the concept of κάθαρσις (purification), its cognates and synonyms<sup>4</sup>, casts new light on Plato's use of traditional religious materials. When one examines the transcultural research of Douglas, McLaughlin and Ricoeur, the importance of defilement is seen anew<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, A.W.H. Adkins and C.J. de Vries — two classicists of international renown — have recently reopened the debate concerning the scope of Plato's use of mystery terminology<sup>6</sup>. Having elsewhere treated the ethical significance of *katharsis*<sup>7</sup>, I will here concern myself with Plato's transformation of the religious cult uses of *katharsis*.

1. The cults placed great trust in the truthfulness of inspirations and dreams. They regarded such phenomena as belonging to the comprehensive art of *mantike*. A dramatic illustration is found in the *Cratylus*, where Socrates' opening remarks are interrupted by Hermogenes' statement that Socrates seems quite «like a prophet newly inspired, and to be uttering oracles» (396 d). Socrates' reply serves as our introduction to *katharsis*:

3. Cf. H.J. Stuckey, *Purity in Fifth and Fourth Century Religion*, TAPA 67 (1936), 286-295.

4. For detailed philological inspection of kathartic vocabulary see L. Moulinier's *Le pur et l'impur dans la pensée des Grecs* (1952) and J.A.G. van der Veer's *Reiniging en Reinheid bij Plato* (1936). Briefly, καθαρός expresses the notion of «clean», «pure» and «clear» — free of dirt or stain of any sort. Cognates of this term are καθαρότης (the quality of being καθαρός in any sense), καθαρεύειν (to be καθαρός), καθαίρειν (to remove the undesirable) and καθαρμός (a means of cleansing). *Katharsis* (κάθαρσις) means the process of making something *katharos*, an activity involving the removal of μίαιμα (the stained or defiled). Μιαινέειν (to stain) and μίασμα (the visible stain) are cognates of the latter term. As quasi-synonyms of καθαρός we find ἄγνός and ὄστος. Vide E. Willinger, *Hagios*, RGVV 19 (1922), 1-108, and K. Latte, *Schuld und Sünde in der griechischen Religion*, «Arch. f. Religionswissenschaft» 20 (1920), 254-298.

5. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (1966), T. McLaughlin, *Dirt* (1971), and Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967).

6. A.W.H. Adkins, *Clouds, Mysteries, Socrates and Plato*, «Antichthon» 4 (1970), 13-24, and C.J. de Vries, *Mystery Terminology in Aristophanes and Plato*, «Mnemosyne» 26 (1973), 1-8.

7. R. Epp, *Plato's Quest for Purification*, «Πλάτων» 24 (1972), 38-50.



Yes, Hermogenes, and I believe that I caught the inspiration from the great Euthyphro of the Prospaltian deme, who gave me a long lecture which commenced at dawn. He talked and I listened, and his wisdom and enchanting ravishment have not only filled my ears but taken possession of my soul, and today I shall let his superhuman power work and finish the investigation of names . . . but tomorrow, if you are so disposed, we will conjure him away, and make a purgation of him, if we can only find some priest or Sophist who is skilled in purification of this sort (396 de) <sup>8</sup>.

This passage allows us to infer the following : (i) that even a sober person (i.e. Socrates) can be inspired and possessed by the thoughts of another man and used as a point of departure; (ii) that such thoughts may not only touch but take possession of the listener; again (iii), that inspiration may be lasting or temporary in its effects; and finally, (iv) that the soul of a man may be allegedly purified by priests and sophists skilled in this sort of *katharsis*.

Some expansion is necessary on the issue of the efficacy of purificatory priests and sophists. Is the aforementioned quote reflective of the ironical side of Socrates or illustrative of a serious Socrates committed to religious traditionalism? There are three reasons why we should regard this passage as ironical : (a) there is no corroborative evidence in the early and middle-period dialogues to support Socrates' claim that the soul of man may be made pure by sophists and priests; (b) there is indirect evidence throughout the dialogues to suggest that Socrates believes that priestly and sophistic methods can not affect the human soul; (c) Socrates, firmly committed to the interdependence of knowledge and correct conduct, has no reason to give credence to those who believe in bettering man through non-cognitive means.

If one is not persuaded as to the irony of this passage, and persists in viewing it as a serious expression of Socrates' belief, there may be an explanation. Socrates may have been acknowledging the psychological effect that priests and sophists are able to encourage. Physicians prescribe sugar pills for psycho-somatic ailments. In the same fashion, Socrates may be «cured» through his belief in the efficacy of the priestly and sophistic methods; that these methods lack the substance necessary to bring about the long-term betterment of man does not diminish the short-term effects of belief in them.

This plausible account of the therapeutic effect of purificatory priests and sophists is supported by a series of passages in the *Republic*:

. . . begging priests and soothsayers (ἀγούρται δὲ καὶ μάντιες) go to rich men's doors and make them believe that they by means of sacrifices and incantations have accumulated a treasure of power from the gods that can expiate and cure . . . any misdeed of a man or his ancestors . . . since they are masters of spells and enchantments that constrain the gods to serve their end (364 bc).

8. Cf. *Crat.* 395 a, 400 a, 407 d, 409 d and 428 e.



Again, we are told that these divinely inspired men are associated with the Orphics, for

... they produce a bushel of books of Musaeus and Orpheus. . . they use in their ritual, and make not only ordinary men but states believe that there really are remissions of sins and purifications for deeds of injustice, by means of sacrifice and pleasant sport. . . . (364 b-e)<sup>9</sup>.

Socrates' attitude toward these cult claims is, to say the least, skeptical if not openly hostile. The priests and soothsayers may be able to persuade others («and make not only ordinary men but states believe that there really are remissions of sins»); however, Socrates' view appears to be that these men are chiefly interested in their own material enrichment (364 b). Socrates' hostility does not appear to be directed at their claims of divine power. Perhaps this is because he recognizes the blessings of possession by the Muses (*Ion* 534 a, *Euthyd.* 277 d), and is said to have experienced periods of withdrawal (*Symp.* 175 a-c) in which he was directed by superior powers (*Apol.* 31 de). The source of their power is not the issue; rather, Socrates questions the reasonableness of their claims to «expiate and cure».

Plato understood the pervasiveness of belief in the efficacy of priestly ritualism<sup>10</sup>, and for that reason made it his task to examine critically and, if need be, reinterpret the beliefs involved. Negatively, such criticism would involve the rejection of stultifying ritualism, yet in a positive sense such criticism would disclose that Plato discovered a certain affinity with «priests and soothsayers» when he recognized the philosophical significance of *katharsis*.

2. Despite this affinity, Plato is in fundamental disagreement with practitioners of *mantike techne* with respect to their methods and goals. To illustrate this claim, let us examine certain passages in the *Republic* where the truthfulness of dreams is the issue<sup>11</sup>. The dreamer, be he asleep or awake, is one who mistakes resemblance for identity; the reason for this is that said dreamer possesses only opinion and not knowledge (*Rep.* 476 cd). Socrates recognizes that the content of dreams is influenced by two factors: (a) the role that reason plays in the waking hours:

9. Recently D.J. Stewart argued that Socrates was personally committed to the religious tradition of Orphism as is evidenced by *Socrates' Last Bath*, *JHPH* 10 (1972), 253-259.

10. Cf. P. Boyance, *Platon et les cathartes Orphiques*, *REG* 55 (1942), 217-235, L. Moulinier, *Orphée et l'orphisme à l'époque classique* (1955), and T. Wächter, *Reinheitsvorschriften im griechischen Kult*, *RGVV* 10 (1910), 1-144.

11. Cf. E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1966), ch. 4.



... but if he has thus quieted the two elements in his soul and quickened the third, in which reason resides, and so goes to rest, you are aware that in such a case he is most likely to apprehend truth, and the visions of his dreams are least likely to be lawless (*Rep.* 572 ab).

and (b) the intervention of divine forces:

I composed these verses. . . because I wanted to test the meaning of certain dreams, and to make sure that I was neglecting no duty in case their repeated commands meant that I must cultivate the Muses in this way. . . The same dream came to me often in my past life, sometimes in one form and sometimes in another, but always saying the same things «Socrates» it said, «make music and work at it». (*Phd.* 60 e-61 d)<sup>12</sup>.

Socrates recognizes that the cults believed that divine intervention was the source of dreams, and yet he is not content to let the issue rest. Rather, he asks (a) how we can prove whether we are at this moment sleeping — and all our thoughts are dreams — or whether we are awake (*Tht.* 158 b); and (b) does not the dreamer, sleeping or awake, liken dissimilar things, mistaking resemblance for identity? (*Rep.* 476 c). Socrates does not challenge the cults with respect to the source of the dream, but rather he questions the cognitive value of such experiences. He is allied with the cults — and opposed to popular experience — in that he recognizes a personal daimon which appears to him in sleep and wakefulness. In the *Phaedrus* one such experience is allied with the necessity for *katharsis*:

When I was about to cross the stream, the spirit and the sign (δαίμόνιον) that usually comes to me came — it always holds me back from something I am about to do — and I thought I heard a voice from it which forbade my going away before clearing my conscience (ἀφοσιώσθαι), as if I had committed some sin against deity. Now I am a seer (μάντις) not a very good one, but, as the bad writers say, good enough for my own purposes; so now I understand my own error. How prophetic the soul is, my friend! . . . Now I, my friend, must purify (καθήρασθαι) myself; and for those who have sinned in matters of mythology there is an ancient purification (καθαρμός), unknown to Homer, but known to Stesichorus. (242 c-243 a).

Socrates has sinned against Love, and *katharmos* is necessary. The inspiration for the first speech was derived from the Muses (237 a), and yet it was not a true inspiration for it led to discourse that «was foolish and somewhat impious» (242 d). It is the cautioning of the inner voice familiar to us from the *Apology* (31 d) that alerts Socrates to his error, and recommends logos rather than purificatory priests for «atonement by recantation» (ἀποδοῦναι τὴν παλινφθίαν). Accordingly, Socrates offers a second discourse as his recantation. He makes use of a metaphor from kathartic lore when he states that he wishes «to wash out the brine from my ears with the water of sweet discourse» (243 d). Water was the most common purgative in the cults, but

12. That Socrates is referring to a god, vide *Apol.* 33 c.



in Socrates' case the purgative is *logos*. The legend of the Sicilian poet Stesichorus also serves as a metaphor, for the poet had been stricken by blindness, and it was only through the writing of an account of human frailty that the poet's sight was restored. Now Socrates likens himself to Stesichorus, hopeful that discourse will serve as a *katharmos* and bring restoration of his inner sight.

To reiterate, Socrates has made use of the ritualistic language of *katharsis* and adapted it to suit his own ends. In illustrating this one may appeal for further evidence to the *Euthyphro* where its namesake, when speaking of his father's homicide, employs traditional usage:

For the pollution (μίασμα) is the same if you associate knowingly with such a man and so not purify yourself (ἀφοσιοῖς) and him by proceeding against him (4 c).

Euthyphro has stated that μῖασμα (pollution) results from an impious act and requires purification through the legal prosecution of the divine offender.

Whereas in the *Euthyphro* the term ἀφοσιοῖς is employed in the ritualistic sense, in the *Phaedrus* a derivative of this term ἀφοσιώσωμαι means the clearing of one's conscience (242 d). Actually, both terms are synonyms for *katharmos*, which can be appreciated through the substitution of the word «correction». My point here is that in all of the cases where *katharsis*, its cognates, or its close cousins are employed, Plato is employing the term in a new manner. The means of correction are not ritualistic but pedagogical: one does not seek to rid oneself of a material pollution, but of the shame (αἰσχύνη) of error. One is not purified by a priest or seer, but through one's own efforts; not through a formalistic rite, but through *logos*. Self-correction via *logos* heralds a new procedural format, except that in this context it is left in its generalized form rather than particularized through a paradigm case. The end product of correction is improvement, which in the last analysis means ethical improvement. The traditional religious rituals, prayers, and sacrifices may be regarded by the citizenry as *katharsis* for wrongdoing; however, in Plato's eyes such practices do not pardon or cancel the original fault. The new method which Plato employs is not recommended because it can or cannot cancel out error, but mainly because *logos* alone affords the opportunity of understanding the basis of one's actions, and thus provides the requisite knowledge for the correction of one's ways.

3. It may strike the reader as incongruous that we should credit such stature to *logos* in the context of a dialogue which treats at such length the blessings of *mania*. It will be our intent to show why it is the case that madness and *logos* are compatible and how both spring from the same source.



In the *Phaedrus* we read that in reality the greatest of blessings come to us through madness (μανία), when it is sent as a gift of the gods (244 a). This is Socrates speaking. The inspired priestess, (Sibyl) or prophets, through the mantic arts, have provided man with a means for great blessings subject to the qualification that *mania* is truly god inspired. The word *mania*, often translated as madness or frenzy, is suggestive of irrationality or the absence of self-control. According to Professor Pieper, Plato means by *mania* a «loss of command over oneself, a surrender of autarchic independence and self control»<sup>13</sup>. Whereas in the earlier dialogues (*Ion*, *Apology* and *Meno*) *mania* is spoken of negatively as a loss or relinquishment of power, in the *Phaedrus* Socrates speaks of it affirmatively and with qualified approval.

There are two principal forms of *mania*, one arising from human disease, the other from a «divine release from customary habits» (265 a). The distinction is clear: *mania* may have a physiological origin, or a non-physiological source. Socrates' discussion revolves around the latter, and he further specifies four species or kinds of divine mania: (i) the *mania* of divination or prophecy inspired by the Delphic Apollo; (ii) Dionysian *mania* which heals the sick by *katharsis*; (iii) Muse-inspired poetical *mania* which is productive of a truer poetry than sane poetic composition yields; and (iv) the *mania* of Eros which the true lover displays (244 b-245 b).

Our concern is with the second type, θεία μανία, which effects the cure of sickness by καθαρμῶν τε καὶ τελετῶν:

Moreover, when diseases and the greatest troubles which have been visited upon certain families through some ancient guilt, madness has entered in and by oracular power has found a way of release for those in need, taking refuge in prayers and the service of the gods, and so, by purifications and sacred rites, he who has this madness is made safe for the present and the after time, and for him who is rightly possessed of madness a release from present ills is found (244 e).

Platonic scholarship has largely ignored this passage, or found it incomprehensible<sup>14</sup>. Let us see if we can shed some light on its meaning and import.

*Katharsis* is offered here as the historical remedy for «diseases and the greatest troubles which have been visited upon certain families through some ancient guilt». What is apparent is that those who suffer from said guilt are tormented by psychic, not physical, wounds. Professors Hackforth and Pieper concur that Plato here has in mind the Orestes story; that he recognized along with the tragedians that men may suffer from «ancient guilts» for generations to come. In such a case, the affected individual and preceding generations

13. *Love and Inspiration: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus* (1964), p. 49.

14. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Platon I* (1920), p. 322, n. 3.



are, as Pieper says, «indivisibly implicated»<sup>15</sup>. The stress on the fact that men are «affected» rather than «afflicted» is crucial; for there is no suggestion in the passage that Plato believes in a material *miasma* which passes from generation to generation afflicting all who have been associated with the stain of blood. To rephrase this, generations of men may suffer a heritage of psychic wounds, not a heritage of physiological pollutions.

The method employed by those who seek to free themselves from such *miasmas* is based on the concept of release (ἀπαλλαγήν), usually provided through oracular power (προφητεύσασα). This traditional manner of release or deliverance is offered by the cults — καθαρμῶν τε καὶ τελετῶν. Plato's recognition of these practices is significant, because it points to a very important element in Plato's views on how release is to take place — a man must be «rightly possessed» (ὀρθῶς μανέντι). Consequently, it is only through divine powers that deliverance is found. To show that the cults have contributed to an understanding of man's nature is a difficult task; yet, nonetheless, this is part of Plato's intent. Whereas the *mania* of the inspired poet or prophet was held in esteem by Plato's contemporaries, the kathartic rites of the followers of Dionysus «seemed absurd and even repugnant to the sober and respectable citizen»<sup>16</sup>. Plato stresses the divinity of *mania*, and emphasizes with the cults that a divinity is discoverable within the breast of man. That such a daimonion resides in man is evident from the passage at 242 c; however, having recognized that men are possessed, there is still the difficulty that Socrates must face: namely, how is it that being «rightly possessed» allows an alleged internal power to discover truth? According to Socrates' first discourse on love, a man may be inspired and yet err. We have seen that correction of this error takes place through the *katharsis* afforded by *logos*. Hence, the only means at our disposal to detect whether we have erred again is the rational weighing and comparing of our assertions. The mysteries, with their emphasis on initiation, man's divinity, and the necessity for *katharsis* have much to offer the φιλόσοφος. They offer him the elements from which he may choose relevant religious elements and assimilate them into an intellectual framework. As we know, for the Platonic *philosophos* the ideas are the highest truths and the only true mysteries (*Phaedrus* 250 c), and *logos* is the means whereby one is initiated into that mode of living that leads to the apprehension of these truths<sup>17</sup>.

15. Pieper, op. cit., p. 60.

16. I. M. Linforth, *Telestic Madness in Plato, Phaedrus 244 de*, «Univ. of California Publications in Classical Philol.», XIII, 6 (1946), p. 171.

17. Cf. Socrates' descriptions of the uninitiated at *Tht.* 155e, *Grg.* 493 b, *Phd.* 69 c and *Phdr.* 249 c, 250 c, and 253 c.





4. It is important to note that the weaving of these religious materials into the fabric of philosophy is frequently done in a setting which Plato labels, in some strict sense, μυθολογία. Since the publication of J. A. Stewart's study on this topic, Platonic myth has generally been regarded by contemporary scholars as an organic part of his philosophical dramas; myth is essential to Plato's style, rather than mere poetic ornamentation<sup>18</sup>. Plato's own view on the role of myth is best expressed in the *Meno* where he remarks that such stories are not to be taken literally, but rather, as valuable lessons in giving us hope and courage in our quest for knowledge (86 b). This cautioning remark can be further appreciated for the suggestion it carries: that for Plato, philosophy is not *sophia*, not a system of truth, but a search, a pursuit, a love of wisdom. Philosophy is not what satisfies the intellect alone, but it is the organic interplay of all the human powers and functions. Myths can play a vital role as prophecies, or as imaginative constructs which lay bare the fundamental conditions of conduct and knowledge; mainly, because they appeal to that part of man's nature which is manifested as feeling, desiring, and acting, rather than as logical articulation. As Stewart observes:

It is good, Plato will have us believe, to appeal sometimes from the world of the senses and scientific understanding, which is «too much with us», to this deep-lying part of human nature, as to an oracle. The responses of the oracle are not given in articulate language which the scientific understanding can interpret; they come as dreams, without thought of doctrinal interpretation. Their ultimate meaning is the «feeling» which fills us in beholding them<sup>19</sup>.

The myth of the *Phaedo* presents the reader with a vivid spectacle of the fate awaiting one's soul in an elaborately described underworld. Socrates speaks of a world purer and fairer (καθαρώτερος καὶ καλλίων) to which we pass at death (109 d); among the wonders of this world is a lake where the souls of men

... dwell and are purified (καθαιρόμενοι), and if they have done any wrong they are absolved by paying the penalty for their wrong doings, and for the good deeds they receive rewards, each according to his merits (113 de).

Plato does not speak here of rebirth, but only of physical punishments awaiting both the curable and the incurable parts of the soul. However, a different fate awaits

... those who are found to have excelled in holy (ὅσιος) living are freed from these regions within the earth and are released (ἀπαλλαττόμενοι) as from prisons; they mount

18. J. A. Stewart, *The Myths of Plato* (1905), p. 70.

19. Ibid., p. 21. Stewart's argument may be contrasted with the not uncommon view of V. Macchiero who argues that the myths are objective truths relating to another world (*From Orpheus to Paul*, 1934).



upwards into their pure (καθάρων) abode and dwell upon the earth. And of these, all who have duly purified themselves by philosophy live henceforth altogether without bodies and pass to still more beautiful abodes which it is not easy to describe, nor have we now time enough (114 bc).

Socrates has drawn a qualitative distinction between the two superior classes of souls: (i) souls which are ὅσιος (holy or righteous), and (ii) souls elevated above those belonging to the previous class which have been sufficiently purified through *philosophia*. Professor Hackforth suggests that the distinction between the two is based on the purity of the soul at death. All souls (even the holy), save those sufficiently purified by philosophy, retain something bodily even after the event of death (*Phaedo* 80 e, 82 bc); this bodily residue would be viewed as a quality or taint of the soul rather than as actual bodily substance<sup>20</sup>. If death is the complete separation of body and soul, the soul cannot carry with it anything bodily. Despite the difficulty of this passage, it does afford us several insights into the nature of *katharsis* and related concepts.

*Katharsis* is the means whereby one's soul is cleansed of the demands of the body. This approach helps us to understand why Plato has likened the body to a prison (*Phd.* 67 cd). No claim is made that the soul can be completely separated from bodily association while one lives; however, the separation once attempted must be as complete as possible. The means by which one is purged is through *philosophia*; and the consequence of such a life is passage after death into a realm superior to all others, a realm, as Plato himself admits, most difficult to describe. Yet how is such a view of κάθαρσις integrated with the related concepts of ἀνάμνησις and παλιγγενεσία?

5. Socrates cites his indebtedness to the priestly class for his remarks on *palingenesia*, and the meaning of the term involves the rebirth of souls (*Meno* 81 a)<sup>21</sup>. The concept of *palingenesia* is a prerequisite for the arguments for *anamnesis* (i.e. recollection); that is, the possibility of recollection presupposes the pre-existence of the soul. However, in the account of *anamnesis* given in both the *Meno* (81 a-e) and the *Phaedo* (70 c, 72 e, 76 c, 77 c), there is a related concept which is not sufficiently emphasized, though no less crucial to Plato's epistemology. The point we wish to make here is that the missing concept is that of *katharsis*. The reason why souls are periodically reborn anew is that they might be afforded the opportunity of attaining

20. R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus* (1952), p. 184, n. 1.

21. Cf. E. Ehnmark, *Transmigration in Plato*, HThR 50 (1957), 1-20; R. S. Bluck, *Plato, Pindar, and Metempsychosis*, AJPh 79 (1958), 405-413; and A. Cameron, *The Pythagorean Background of the Theory of Recollection* (1938).





sufficient purity in this life, and essential condition for escaping the Orphic borrowed «wheel of rebirth».

The *Phaedrus* myth illustrates the relationship between *palingenesia*, *anamnesis* and *katharsis*<sup>22</sup>. Here Socrates relates how souls in their distant past were allowed companionship with the gods, where they beheld

... the blessed sight and vision and were initiated into that which is rightly called the most blessed of mysteries, which we celebrated in a state of perfection. . . being permitted as initiates to the sight of perfect and simple and calm and happy apparitions, which we saw in the pure light (αὐγὴ καθαρά), being ourselves pure (καθαροὶ ὄντες) and not entombed in this which we carry about with us and call the body, in which we are imprisoned like an oyster in its shell (250 c)<sup>23</sup>.

Souls become imprisoned in a body, suffering a cycle of births and rebirths. However, souls are afforded an opportunity of grasping glimpses of the aforementioned «most blessed of mysteries». Sense perception may awaken our power to recollect the sights the soul once beheld<sup>24</sup>, and the individual «who employs such memories rightly in this life is always being initiated into perfect mysteries and he alone becomes truly perfect» (249 cd)<sup>25</sup>. Although the precise meaning of terms must always be determined from the context in which it occurs, *katharsis* and *anamnesis* are roughly synonymous: the soul is purified to the extent that it recalls truths while in the body.

In summary, our inquiry into Plato's religious use of *katharsis* discloses that he borrowed heavily from the cults; however, he selected carefully the materials employed, and offered a critical reconstruction of the principles by which these elements were used. In borrowing from the cults Plato knew how to retain the spiritual significance of those practices, while rejecting the ritualistic methods associated with its practitioners. In the passages quoted, purity is shown to be non-material — or to put it differently, *katharsis* is not effected through the application of material means to some material substance — as in Christian baptism through the application of wa-

22. Cf. R. S. Bluck, *The «Phaedrus» and Reincarnation*, *AJPh* 79 (1958), 156-164.

23. Notice the well known phrase from the *Phaedo*: «The thyrsus bearers are many, but the mystics few» (69 c). M. P. Nilsson, *Early Orphism and Kindred Religious Movements*, *HThR* 28 (1935), rightly argues that Plato sought to distinguish those who carried only the outward signs of Dionysus from the few that were filled with true Bacchic inspiration. The true Bacchants that attained a higher form of existence were the philosophers (p. 203).

24. Concerning *anamnesis* vs. empirical knowledge see F. M. Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae* (1965), pp. 45-87.

25. Cf. *Symp.* 209 e, 210 a, and *Phdr.* 249 c.



ter. This means that it is no longer the case that one must be rid of a material pollutant; rather, *miasma* is now seen as a state of the soul which can be corrected through education. Where the cults spoke of deliverance, Plato speaks of liberation that aims at freeing the soul from its entombment within the realm of sensual experience so that it may be initiated through *logos* into the realm of ideas.

## ΚΑΘΑΡΣΗ ΚΑΙ ΠΛΑΤΩΝΙΚΗ ΑΝΑΠΛΑΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΑΚΗΣ ΟΡΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ

Περίληψη.\*

Είναι γενικά παραδεκτή ως ιστορικό γεγονός ή όφειλή του Πλάτωνος στους προδρόμους του φιλοσόφους, ή όφειλή του όμως ιδιαίτερα στις σύγχρονες του θρησκευτές των μυστηρίων και της λατρείας δέν έχει διακριβωθεί και τόσο καλά. Στο άρθρο αυτό ή προσοχή συγκεντρώνεται σε μία σημαντική μυστηριακή έννοια και εξετάζεται ή φύση, ή μέθοδος και ό σκοπός της, έτσι όπως συμπληρώθηκε και μεταμορφώθηκε από τον Πλάτωνα. Πρόκειται για τον όρο *κάθαρσις*, τον εξαγνισμό ή καθαρμό της ψυχής, που τόσο ένθερμα επιθυμούσαν αυτοί που άσκούσαν ή μαντική τέχνη.

Πρώτα εξετάζονται οί άπόψεις του Πλάτωνος για την αποτελεσματικότητα της ιερατικής τελετουργίας και θυσίας ως κάθαρσης για την επανόρθωση της άδικίας. Διερευνάται ιδιαίτερα ό *Φαίδρος* για να προσδιορισθί, αν ή *μανία* έχει φιλοσοφική σημασία. Άκόμη εξετάζεται ό ρόλος του μύθου στη σχέση του με την όρολογία της «κάθαρσης», όπως συμπληρώθηκε από τον Πλάτωνα, για να μή ισχυρισθί κανείς ότι τά θρησκευτικά φαινόμενα είναι άπλοϊ μύθοι και ότι δέν έχουν κυριολεκτικό ή συγκεκριμένο νόημα. Τέλος διαφωτίζεται ή σχέση που ύπάρχει μεταξύ των όρων *παλιγγενεσία* - *ανάμνησις* - *κάθαρσις*, για να προκύψη τό συμπέρασμα ότι ό Πλάτων δανείσθηκε έκλεκτικά έννοιες της λατρείας, αλλά τις ανασύνθεσε κριτικά ώστε να ίκανοποιήσουν τις απαιτήσεις του λόγου. Ό Πλάτων κράτησε προσεκτικά την πνευματική δύναμη των πράξεων αυτών, αλλά απέριψε τις μεθόδους τους. Ως προς τον όρο *μίασμα* τό συμπέρασμα από την έρευνα είναι ότι δέν αναφέρεται σε κάποιο ύλικό κηλίδωμα, αλλά σε μία ψυχική κατάσταση, που μπορεί να θεραπευθί με μία παιδεία διαποτισμένη από ή φιλοσοφία.

Memphis, Tennessee

Ronald H. Epp

\* Μετάφραση Μ. Δραγώνα-Μονάχου.

