ESSAYS

ON

IMMORTALITY

In Relation to the Emancipation of Man

(An examination of certain representative philosophers from the Greeks to modern times)

Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctorate in Philosophy.

by

Pierre H. Conway, O.P.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

It is an astounding fact that today, when humanity is supposed to be enjoying the fruits of its hard-won emancipation from all stultifying authority and debasing subjection, and about to enter the millenium of the Good Life, even the most well-disposed observer is confronted with the appalling sight of the most hideous bestiality and mass slavery in history, and this particularly in those countries whence have come the finishing touches of the modern emancipation. If one should take refuge in the writings of the more cogent of the modern philosophers, there likewise the horizon of man's destiny has been narrowed down to a dark and motionless oblivion that stifles all his higher desires.

The works of Plato and Aristotle were permeated with the thoughts of man's nearness to the divinity and his title to a destiny transcending three score years and ten of earthly thralldom, but today the most recent contribution on the subject by an eminent Harvard professor, successor to William James, is a pitiful little book of twenty-eight pages which, in gushy and rather sentimental prose which carefully avoids any definite commitments, speaks of the possible usefulness of immortality for man so that he may continue his unfinished

business which consists principally in developing his own personality (The Hope for Immortality, Ralph Barton Perry, New York, 1945). Although a recent Gallup poll came out with the opinion that the majority of Americans still believe in immortality, it seems very questionable that this belief is a very firm one. The majority of those outside the few remaining orthodox church-goers who betray an interest in life after death seem to fall the pray of fantastic sects of dubious origin or to resort to spiritualistic mediums whose "voices" use bad grammar. This latter characteristic of the "voices" from the other world which have intrigued and captivated many an emancipated thinker prompted Thomas Huxley to say : "The only good that I can see in the demonstration of the truth of 'spiritualism' is to furnish an additional argument against suicide. Better live a crossing-sweeper than die and be made to talk twaddle by a 'medium' hired at a guinea a seance !" (Quoted by Engels, Dialectics of Nature, Frederick Engels, New York, 1940, p. 310).

However, if one consults the thinkers whose philosophy is rigidly consequent with the presuppositions of modern emancipation, that is, the spiritual and faithful descendants of the Renaissance, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach and Engels, the limits of man's emancipation are very clearly set down. Man is now emancipated from God and all that is spiritual, but at the cost of his own annihilation.

Mr. Perry posits the need of immortality for emancipated man to continue his autobiography, to continue telling the world about

that interesting and complex person who is himself. "For whatever I am interested in doing, I need time : time to come, time not yet expended. ... To retain possession of the energy, faculties and powers which one's interests require, is to be alive; and the regretful sense of their precariousness constitutes that general fear of death which is rooted in the very nature of vital interest." (op. cit. p. 5) Such rosy dreams on the part of the American brand of German philosophy so ably represented by Mr. Deway is derided by the consistency of such genuine dialecticians as Engels. "Already no physiology is held to be scientific if it does not consider death as an essential factor of life, the negation of life as being essentially contained in life itself, so that life is always thought of in relation to its necessary result, death, which is always contained in it in germ. The dialectical conception of life is nothing more than this. But for anyone who has once understood this all talk of immortality of the soul is done away with. Here, therefore, by means of dialectics, simply becoming clear about the nature of life and death suffices to abolish an ancient superstition. Living means dying." (Engels, op. cit. p. 164) No matter how many millions of years are required before animals with a brain capable of thought rise from matter and for a short span of time find conditions suitable for life, these thinking beings, part of the cycle of the eternal motion of matter, are "exterminated without mercy." (ibid. p. 25) "... Instead of the bright, warm solar system with its harmonious arrangement of members, only a cold, dead sphere will still pursue its

lonely path through universal space." (ibid. p. 20) Man has been emancipated from God and this is what he has been given. He is now the slave of blind unfeeling matter. His only freedom is the freedom of annihilation and nothingness. How has the emancipation of man led to such tragic conclusions fully echoed in the practical sphere of life ?

In searching for the cause of this paradox, this paradox which is assuming tragic and cosmic proportions, since in the name of freedom and progress it places man on a par with a grain of dust and allows him to be treated worse than an animal, one cannot but recall what to many is at best a myth long ago dissipated by the advance of man, but which nevertheless, long before man set out to become the master of the universe, accurately predicted the pattern and consequences of this emancipation, namely the scriptural account of the fall of the angels and the fall of the first man.

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning ? how art thou fallen to the earth, that didst wound the nations ? And thou saidst in thy heart : I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit in the mountain of the covenant, in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the most High. But yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit." (Isaias 14: 12-15)

Here one is confronted with the apparently incomprehensible occurrence of a great angel, and possibly the angel most like God, being cast down into the depths of hell. Yet the cause of his fall is also explicitly mentioned : "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will be like the most High."

How could such an angel, and other angels like him, with their clear intelligences and God-like perfection, ever revolt against their Creator, the source of all their beatitude ? St. Thomas Aquinas states that their sin could only be the sin of pride, a sin based upon their very excellence, which was so great that it led them to refuse to acknowledge any superior. (1, q. 63, a. 2, c) Thus one sees a supreme example of that terrifying and catastrophic perversion of which the intellectual creatures of God are capable, namely the utilisation of that very excellence with which the Creator has endowed them in order that they may share to a lofty degree in his own divine beatitude, as a motive to throw off the rule of God entirely and cut themselves off from the very good that is the source of their pride. Upon this sin follows the sin of envy, whereby the wicked angels hate and are pained by the goodness of God which they consider as an affront to their own excellence. For the singular good of the angel, by which he would excell all others, is surpassed by the infinite good of God. (ibid.) For no creature can be outstanding in its singularity, as long as there is one who possesses all his excellence in a greater degree.

Thus it may be truly said that the angels wished to be like God. Such great excellence had God showered upon them that they desired as a crowning glory to owe that excellence to no one but themselves by their emancipation from dependence upon any other being. Although they could not be God, nevertheless they desired to create heaven and earth, inasmuch as they desired to hold their unique position in the universe, second only to God, entirely by their own powers, dependent upon no other being. They desired that supreme beatitude for which God had created them solely by the force of their own natures. (ibid. a. 3, c.)

But God created another creature, "a little less than the angels, "yet made in his own image and endowed with intelligence, man, composed of body and soul, and set in a paradise of joy. (Gen. 1: 27 & 2: 8) There again the same tragic story is re-enacted : a creature of God using the very excellence for which he should praise and adore God unendingly as a motive to separate himself from God and cut himself off from the source of all his goodness, to annihilate himself. The angel who had been cast down from heaven comes to tempt the man and his wife, saying : "For God doth know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof (of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), your eyes shall be opened : and you shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3: 5)

Thus Adam too, presuming upon the divine mercy, sinned by

pride. That inordinate appetite for one's own excellence, by which a man aspired to be equal to God inasmuch as he will not be subject to Him. Nevertheless God, whose mercy outweighs his justice, promised them a Redeemer. Until the coming of that Redeemer, only the chosen people, the Jews, thanks to the Law and the Prophets, retained a clear notion of the divine destiny of man, of his immortality transcending his earthly death. Yet even among the most backward of peoples and the most corrupt the latent awareness that man was a creature made in the image and likeness of God, transcending the animals and attaining to a participation of the immortality of the spiritual substances by his intelligence, seems never to have vanished.

This obscure and more or less instinctive recognition of man's immortality assumes a far more distinct delineation in the hands of the greatest of the pagan philosophers of the west, such as Plato and Aristotle. It is a striking fact that these men, deprived of the clear knowledge and assurance of their transcendency over matter that was immediately known to the angels and the first man, groping in the misery of the human race for that which was best in man, should have, by the necessary recognition of their humbled state, been led to a profound recognition of the primacy of God and from there to the recognition of man's possible greatness under God.

With the coming of Christ the shadows were transformed

into light and man's immortal destiny, strengthened and elevated by the promises of a merciful God, became a clear reality. Now man was promised more than he could ever have aspired to even in the state of original justice : a participation in the very life of the divinity by the boundless mercy of God and the merits of the Son of God.

Under the impetus of the strengthening grace of God and with faith elevating man's intelligence to a full recognition of man's God-given dignity, the world, by the divine touch of the Gospel, began to arise from the sensualism and corruption in which it had lain. (cf. Rom. 1 : 23 sq.) The dignity of man was seen to transcend this world, secrets of the divinity were opened up to him. The unknown God was made known to man. (Acts 17 : 23) God had not called him a servant; He had called him friend. (John 15: 15)

But wherever there is excellence in an intellectual creature, there also is the groundwork for pride, the desire to have one's excellence by oneself alone independently of God, the very source of that excellence, a desire for that singularity which is the privilege of God alone.

Thus, in keeping with that "mystery of iniquity" which was the sin of the angels, the sin of the first man, and is all the sins in the world, one is confronted with another revolt against God, one that is all the more terrible, since it is the revolt of man

elevated by God to a state infinitely above his natural one. It is all the more devastating since God's forbearance under the reign of Christ is seized upon by man in revolt to pursue his folly to its utter catastrophic conclusions.

In effect, whether one believes in Christ or not, it is a patent historical fact that the Renaissance, precursor of modern times, fostered the revolt against the God of Christianity, a revolt which endures today and whose consequences are before our eyes. Nor can anyone deny that it is man's excellence that is at the base of this revolt, an excellence gradually nurtured by that very Christianity which is now attacked as the enemy. The perfection to which civilisation had attained in the fifteenth century was the fruit of the preaching of the Apostles and the blood of the martyrs, the toiling of the doctors and saints of the Middle Ages. Yet that revolt was conceived in Averroism at the very peak of medieval Christianity. Its far reaching devastation was foreseen and combated by St. Thomas. Breaking into open expression in the Renaissance, it became the corner stone of the modern revolt, a fact fully recognized by its leaders today such as Engels. (cf. cit. p. 184)

What was the nature of this revolt ? It is plain to all that it was a revolt of man against any authority other than himself, and a revolt stemming directly from an excellence in man which was the product of Christianity. It was and is, consequently, in its ultimate

analysis, a revolt against God, or, if one does not believe in God, against any superior other than one's self. Yet, as the scriptural accounts of the fall of the angels and the fall of the first man foreshadow, it was a revolt based on man's excellence that had been made clear and assured to him in the name of God. Whence but from the heritage of Christianity could the man of the Renaissance acquire the assurance of the power of his intellect, the untrammelled freedom of his will, the dignity of his person and his domination over nature ?

Thus one is brought up once again with the catastrophic sight of man, raised to excellence by God, stripping himself of all his prerogatives in order to possess that excellence by himself alone. This is truly catastrophic since in his effort to retain only that which is his, only that which is subject to no superior control, man must draw farther and farther away from God the source of all his being. He must, if he will be completely independent, eventually seek refuge in annihilation, in nothingness. To be free of God, he must hide himself from His face, as our first parents attempted to do amidst the trees of paradise.

One may scorn such a scriptural and theological prevision of man's revolt as a myth, or at best a mere divinized projection of man's own nature, but the historical fact remains that the independent seeking of man's excellence, the attempt to establish a homo-

centric universe, which began with Averroism and the Renaissance, has led step by step to the progressive denial of the very attributes upon which that excellence was founded. The striving of man to be his own God is leading him steadily to debase himself lower than animals, lower than plants, lower than matter, to absolute nothingness.

Thus, in the interests of holding his own excellence for himself, man in revolt is led to deny the most sublime of his natural prerogatives, that which raises him above and beyond all the vast material universe, namely, his spirituality and consequent immortality. In tracing the fortunes of the doctrine of immortality it will become evident how man in seeking to be great by himself and through himself necessarily abdicates from those very goods which constitute the greatness which is his goal.

Chapter II

THE GREEKS

I. Homer and Hesiod

In the opening paragraphs of Erwin Rohde's valuable work on the Greek belief in immortality : Psyche, Seelencult u. Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen, he lays down as fundamental to all mankind the acceptance of life as the natural lot of man, to which death comes only as an intruder. His first sentence is : "Nothing in the immediate consciousness of man seems less in need of an explanation or of proof, nothing seems so self-evident, as the phenomenon of life, as the fact of his own life. On the contrary, the cessation of this so self-evident existence, wherever encountered, never ceases to astound him. There are certain peoples for whom every death appears as an arbitarary cutting off of life, due if not to some visible power, to some hidden magical force. Thus incomprehensible does it remain to him that this actuality of life and consciousness could come to an end of itself."

Ernst Cassirer, the contemporary German philosopher, recently deceased, endeavoring to give in his Essay on Man, a functional definition of man, i.e. an idea of man derived from his various activities : religion, art, science, and so forth, lays down as a common characteristic of mankind, the "deep conviction of a

fundamental and indelible solidarity of life." He goes on to say : "The feeling of the indestructible unity of life is so strong and unshakable as to deny and to defy the fact of death. In primitive thought death is never regarded as a natural phenomenon that obeys general laws. Its occurrence is not necessary but accidental. It always depends upon individual and fortuitous causes. It is the work of withchcraft or magic or some other personal inimical influence." Whatever Cassirer's opinion, this passage is significant. Thus, while material nature remains essentially corruptible in general, corruption nevertheless appears as violence in the particular nature in which it occurs.

Such a firm belief in the perpetuity of life leads to something of a paradox in the examination of the belief in immortality as mirrored in the surviving witnesses of early Western thought, such as the works of Homer. The attachment to earthly life as the supreme reality, of itself perpetual, but foreshortened by the will of the gods, relegates the question of life after death, of the state of the soul after it has left the body, to a very secondary place. A belief in the quasi-immortality of physical, material life, interrupted only by some external cause, tends to eliminate consideration of life after death, since this is a purely accidental and unnatural state of man.

Thus it is not in Homer, Rohde states, that one will find

glimpses of man's immortality, in the strict sense of the survival of the soul after death. Life and existence on this earth is so assuredly a good to Homer's personages that it is necessary to the attainment of any other good. There is no danger that any of them would wish to exchange life for death. "I prefer not to speak to Death, " says Achilles to Odysseus. No uncertain speculation of a life after death can outweigh the value of the certain life one had here in the sun. Thus, the "shades" are represented as strengthless and voiceless. Odysseus' own mother does not recognize him nor speak till she has drunk the sacrificial blood and acquired its "life" nor does the prophet Tiresias. The shade of Achilles says : "Seek not to console me for death, glorious Odysseus. I would rather be on earth as the hired servant of another, in the house of a landless man with little to live on, than be king over the dead." However, this does not imply a repugnance towards immortality, but rather a definite love of life. The present life was something real and good. In it a man could find the full expression of his being. But death and what lay beyond naturally appeared vague, uncertain; What was most obvious in it was that it implied the loss of certain treasured faculties of this life. Consequently, it was death and the loss it entailed which were abhorred, not immortality. Immortality, in the sense of an indestructible continuation of a pleasing life was something all the Greeks desired. Thus, if the Greeks abhor death, it is not because they abhor immortality, but rather because death menaces

the immortality which they naturally desire. They were not lovers of death, like the Marxists.

But besides the Homeric beliefs, beliefs no doubt representing the cultured thought of those times to which belong the first surviving witnesses of Western civilization, are there no other sources to which one may go in search of a belief in immortality, an immortality transcending death ? There are certainly no other literary sources, of the same epoch. If one turns to other monuments such as graves, the problem becomes even more enshrouded, since here one is confronted with certain expressions of belief, but whose significance is not always immediately evident. However, in Homer there is a description of a funeral rite which gives a clue to the meaning of such monuments and which also seems to imply a strong popular belief in immortality more vigorous than that expressed by the characters of Homer who presumably represent the more cultured and possibly more sceptical thought of the age, though not necessarily Homer's own views, since he was writing poetry, not philosophizing. Still it is to be remembered that poetic information, especially of the Homeric type, is very useful, since, as Aristotle says, what poets present must be believable by the people to whom they address themselves.

Rohde finds evidence of such a belief in the funeral rites

of Patroclus, killed by Hector before Troy. Whereas the Psyche, that other self of man, which leaves the body after death, and which wanders, a feeble, colourless, thoughtless shade of the physical man against the mournful, dreary landscape of Hades, has forever lost all grasp upon life and occupies no further place among the thoughts of men living upon the earth a real existence, nevertheless, the funeral rites of Patroclus which Homer depicts in keeping with traditional customs betray a belief in the substantiality of the departed soul which is stronger than Homeric thought.

In effect, while the body of Patroclus is completely burned upon the funeral pyre, a rite destined to accomplish decisively the permanent relegation of the psyche or shade from the realm of life, on the fringes of which it still lingers as long as the body, the instrument of life, still remains intact, there are certain offerings made to the psyche of Patroclus which are evidences of an entirely un-Homeric apprehension concerning the substantiality and powers of the departed soul. Bulls, sheep, goats and pigs are killed and laid around the pyre. The next day sheep and cows are killed, jars of honey and oil are placed around the corpse. Finally four horses, two of Patroclus' dogs and twelve young Trojan prisoners are killed. All is then burned. All night long wine is poured out upon the ground to placate the psyche of Patroclus. The next day the fire is put out with wine, the bones of Patroclus collected, placed in a

golden jar and buried in the hill. Finally combats are instituted to honor the soul of Patroclus.

It is not possible to explain such lavish funeral rites by a mere feeling of piety towards the departed. As Cicero says : "Quae pietas ei debetur, a quo nihil acceperis ?" Obviously these ceremonies are not the beginnings of a new and more convinced cult of the departed soul, because such elaborate consideration of a departed psyche are in definite contradiction with the Homeric attitude according to which all real life, all effective existentiality is only on this side of death. The only possible explanation is that Homer has here carried over the remains of a previous belief in the definite power of the departed soul. He does not attribute such power to the soul of Patroclus, but his depiction of the ceremonies betrays the existence of such a primitive belief as well as its possible survival among the people of his time although in a more latent form than the contemporary attitude expressed by Homer.

It might be objected that the belief in the existence of the psyche be it ever so vaporous, feeble and dim, is nevertheless some sort of a belief in immortality, in survival after death. However, it must be understood that this psyche was not a part of man, as the soul is part of man in contrast with his body and forming with it the complete man. Thus St. Thomas states that the separated soul cannot say "I," and that we pray not to St. Peter, but rather to the soul of

St. Peter. The psyche is rather "another self," an alter ego, a tenuous image of the whole man. Thus it is the psyche and the living man which are in contrast, not the soul and the body, although such a notion corresponds crudely to the incompleteness of the separated soul.

Thus whereas the belief in the psyche is often retraced to dreams and delirium, in which states, while a man may be lying motionless upon his couch, with all his senses at rest, he often beholds an image of himself going through all the processes of life and wandering into strange lands, this identification of the psyche with the dream-self may be the remnant of an anterior belief in the immortality of the soul itself. Homeric poetry, however, is not concerned with a psyche thus tenuously conceived. This is not a denial of the soul or a refusal to accept immortality, but rather the refusal to identify the nature of man with such a tenuous concept. This shying away from the psyche in Homeric poetry is not the Marxist's thirst for an oblivion where no God can touch him, but rather a thirst for life and reality which will not surrender to a concept that negates that conviction. In the shadowy psyche, the intellect and will are virtually nonexistent. Thus the very sentiment of the substantiality of the intellect and will would militate against their existing in a diminished state in the psyche after death. These are to be identified therefore only with the living man. Thus if the real life of Homer's heroes

appears to end with death, this is not the rejection of the concept of immortality, but rather the disinterest of the poet to continuing the history of his personages in a state so bereft of reality and substantiality as was the psyche thus conceived. The consistent trend of the Greeks, on the other hand, towards a genuine doctrine of the immortality of the soul is a plain indication of their implicit conviction of something perpetual in man. The fact that the state of the separated soul is, in a certain sense, unnatural for man, composed of body and soul, necessarily implies uncertainty in such progress. Consequently, the hard-headed attitude of Homeric poetry, which refused to preoccupy itself with the existence of other shadow-selfs different from man himself, may be considered to have paved the way to a concept of a substantial spirituality belonging to the nature of the real man rather than to some shade of himself. This may be seen in the occasional appearance in Homeric poetry of the word psyche to denote "life" rather than the shadowy alter ego of man.

Thus there appears in Homer both evidences of a popular belief in immortality and a realistic attitude in keeping with the nature of man conducive to an eventual clear-cut assertion of the immortality of the soul at the time of Plato and Aristotle. Although Homer himself does not attribute immortality to man in the strict sense, since even those few who are carried off to the Islands of Blessedness do not live on after death, but are rather spared from

death by the pleasure of the gods, nevertheless it became customary to attribute immortality to the heroes. This was usually done by positing in them some kind of relationship with the gods. Thus immortality was recognized as a kind of possession of the divine.

Are these gods the mere projection of human personality ? On the contrary, the greatest gods in Homer and Hesiod are impersonal. They are rather the recognition of a power superior to man, transcending the contingency of the universe. Thus the attribution of immortality to the heroes is not the correction of an "alienation" in the sense of Feuerbach, whereby man eventually comes to attribute to himself what previously in his ignorance he attributed to the gods, but rather the recognition in man of some share in that transcendency and incorruptible power which was detected in the universe. Although Homer may not have seen his way clear to attributing immortality to man, he definitely did attribute it to the gods. That this recognition of immortality was objective and not a mere projection of the desires of man is evident from the fact that his supreme gods are not anthropomorphic but impersonal. Personality does not seem to have been perceived as a necessary attribute of divinity. Thus, personal immortality for man will appear in proportion as personality is perceived as a perfection of the divinity.

That personality in the divinity is not the result of the projection of human personality is ably demonstrated by Mr. R.K. Hack

in God in Greek Philosophy. Thus he writes : "Modern thought automatically associates the concept of personality with the concept of theism; Greek thought did not necessarily associate the two concepts. ... Even the word Θέος is often used to refer to the action of some anonymous and impersonal divine power; the instances are cited in the Homeric lexicons of Capelle and Ebeling."

Thus, in Homeric poetry, the divine power sometimes manifests itself in the person of a god such as Zeus, sometimes as an impersonal power such as Destiny. "But the solid nucleus and the common element exist; the very substance and the one elementary principle of divinity is power."

The personally exercised divine power and the impersonal divine power are not merely two equivalent aspects of the same divinity. The impersonal divine power of Destiny has the edge over the personal divine power of Zeus. Zeus, like any other person, has a will of his own, and, since he is a god, a divinely powerful one. But when his will clashes with inexorable Destiny, he must cede. When Zeus is identified with Destiny, Zeus is unhuman. The immutable and humanly unattainable eminence of the supreme power is also visible in the fact that a hero could not be the son of Moira or of Ouranos, but he could be the son of Zeus. As time went on, the personal gods were to become more and more human until they merited no more than a casual lip-service addressed to them on esthetic grounds or to justify otherwise

reprehensible practices with a semblance of religion. The impersonal divine power on the other hand was to become more and more impersonal and assume its role, in the hands of the first philosophers, as the constituent stuff of the universe endowed with divine qualities. It is perfectly possible to say that the personal gods of Homer were anthropomorphic : created by the addition of superhuman power to human traits and whose character and conduct is a precise and true protrayal of the effect such power would have upon men and women. Naturally such gods are bound to wane under the sceptical light of reason. The impersonal supreme causal power, however, ruling both the gods and the universe, was destined to receive an ever clearer and purified delineation. With this power goes life and immortality, since death and annihilation are due precisely to the intervention of supreme power upon the fate of man. The immortality of the gods, on the other hand, suffers from its association with the less evidently immortal human raised to the rank of gods by the people in later times. At all events, Homer definitely envisages immortality as a trait of the divine power. He makes his personal gods immortal. Whether he believed in these gods or not, he has nevertheless presented the elements of human immortality, namely, the association of human nature with unending life. The rational statement of personal immortality will depend upon the recognition of personality as a perfection.

Hesiod, the poetic successor of Homer, is, to quote Mr.

Hack again, far less the artist and far more the professional theologian than Homer. He is definitely engaged in giving an account of the source of the universe and, as such, brings Greek thought one step closer to the first definite philosophers engaged in seeking a more wholly rational explanation of the universe. It is thus that Hesiod draws a line of demarcation between the divine powers of nature and the highly person-like gods such as Zeus, giving the supreme role to the former. As long as personality was not considered a perfection, the transcendency of the divinity could be emphasized by distinguishing the divinity from the person-like gods. In the Theogony these supreme divine powers are active substances which without the intervention of any other agent can produce other beings, a notion which was destined to have the most profound influence upon Greek thought. The personal gods, on the other hand, although as immortal as ever, by becoming more and more human, become less and less divine. The gap between them and the supreme and impersonal divine powers which were incontestable, made them more and more dependent solely upon the belief of their worshippers. When their faith in them perished under the stress of reason, the gods perished with them. The belief in immortality, therefore, which was destined to assume an increasing substantiality, far from being an appendage to a superstitious belief in the gods of Olympus, itself on the wane, is rather carried along in the ever more rationalized conviction that there is some natural imperishable being which is the divine origin of all things,

including the subsequent gods.

II. Thales, Anaximander, Anaximines.

The notion that philosophy and rational science suddenly sprang into being with Thales in the sixth century S.C., that, until his time, all explanations of the universe had been purely mythical and, therefore, wholly arbitrary narratives with the gods playing the important rôles, is belied by what is known of Homer and Hesiod, his most outstanding predecessors. Veritate coacti, all the ancients had some notion of order. Following the natural impulse of the human mind, they endeavored to begin with the order of being rather than the order of learning. It is true that both of these poets explained much of the formation of the universe in terms of anthropomorphic gods, but it is equally true that both reserved the supreme productive and governing power to an impersonal divine source, a single omnipotent and eternal power. Thus their cosmogonies did not stand or fall with the gods.

The innovation of Thales was to concentrate upon a more clear delineation of the supreme divine power which Greek thought had inherited from Homer and Hesiod, unhampered by lengthy considerations of the hosts of gods who had to a large extent sunken into oblivion. In his choice of the living and divine substance within all things it is noteworthy that Thales follows closely in the footsteps of Homer.

Whereas Homer posits Okeanos as the genesis of all things, Thales posits water. This is certainly not a wholly revolutionary step, but somewhat of an evolutionary one. Thus Aristotle ranks Homer and Hesiod among the Θοφοι (Meta. IV). Homer's outlook had been primarily a moral one, concerned with the human and the divine. Hesiod had added to this the relation between nature and divinity. Whereas the scientific mode was an innovation, its terminus was not so different.

Thales was not trying to find an explanation of the universe which would dispense with gods, the divinity, but rather was trying to discover the nature of the divine source of all things. Just as the supreme divine power of Homer and Hesiod had philosophic validity, so also the supreme substance of Thales was vested with life and divinity and was quite compatible with the supreme divine power of Homer and Hesiod.

Homer, while retaining the supreme divine power aloof and impersonal, had been impelled in his reference of anthropomorphic gods by the political, social and religious tradition concerning the heroes. "In obedience to the principle that power is divine, the Greeks of every period attributed a portion of divinity to men whose power was above the normal human level. Such men were called heroes, a name which in Greek is the regular technical designation of a status which is intermediate between that of an ordinary man and that of a god." (R.K. Hack, God in Greek Philosophy, p. 16) The Mycenaean Greeks,

whose history Homer was to relate, had raised the whole mass of their ancestors to the status of heroes. The most natural way of establishing such a status beyond question was by divine affiliation. Since the ancestors were in a sufficiently distant past for their parents to be unknown, it was not difficult to attribute to them appropriate divine progenitors. Homer found himself both religiously and poetically before this fait accompli, and had necessarily to make the most of it in his epic.

Hesiod began to cut the ties that bound the anthropomorphic gods to the divinity by distinguishing their type of divinity from that of the impersonal, unchanging type of the supreme divine power. The task of arriving at a purer type of divinity was further facilitated by the spread of democracy among the Greeks. "The Greeks were beginning to be conscious that every human being possessed power, and in accordance with their firm belief that power was "god" and was divine, they affirmed that a portion of god was in every human being." (op. cit. p. 55) The old idea of man's kinship with human gods began to be replaced by the newer and more explicit idea of man's participation in a divine substance. The mystery religions, which guaranteed a happy immortality to all their adherents, from the king to the slave, swept Greece. The nature and essence of the principle of life, the psyche, which is shared by human beings and by every other living thing with the immortal divine powers, becomes a center

of interest. Thus Thales quite naturally finds himself examining the nature of the living divine universe.

What is known of the evolution of Greek thought shows that the belief in immortality, far from being tied to a belief in the anthropomorphic gods, owes its survival and gradual ascendency from unrecorded times rather to the wane of belief in immortality for the few beloved by the gods and the growth of the belief that every man shared in some way in the divine power originating from a supreme natural productive force, from a supreme divine substance, the exact nature of which the first Greek philosophers set out to resolve. Thus belief in immortality, far from being dependent upon what today would be called child-like superstition, was rather a definite concomitant of the early rationalising efforts of the Greek philosophers, hailed as the dawning of modern scientific thought.

In effect, the oldest documents on the subject available, those of Choerilus of Samos and Diogenes Laertius among others, proclaim Thales as being the first to call the souls of men immortal. This statement of Thales however, is not an unequivocal blessing for the cause of human immortality, since for Thales everything that had life shared in the divine substance and was consequently immortal. Thus man seems to share the immortality of his share of the divine substance with the animals, the plants, and even magnetic stones, since they moved iron.

Immortality, from having been the lot of the few among humans, now goes to the other extreme of being the common lot of every living thing. Thales statement quoted by Aristotle that "everything is full of God," is well known. This is a step further in the universal extension of immortality beyond that of the mystery religions, since man now by his very nature, without any initiation and adoption, is gifted with immortality. It will remain to the successors of Thales to gradually narrow down the concept of the life which is immortal by distinguishing the material and spiritual elements of the universe. This gradual evolution of the notion of immortality keeps pace with the evolution of the meaning of psyche. In Homer and in the religious thought of his time, psyche stood for the other self in man, that misty shade of himself liberated at death and of far less consequence than the living man. By a gradual adaption of the word, traces of which are to be found in Homer, the meaning of psyche had been transposed from signifying the useless shade of man to mean life itself, a sense practically contradistory to that of Homer's time.

Anaximander, the pupil of Thales, while substituting the Indeterminate for the Water of Thales, nevertheless retains immortality as an essential part of this divine substance which pervades all things. Speaking of this Infinite and Indeterminate, Aristotle says : "Further, they identify it with the Divine, for it is 'deathless and imperishable' as Anaximander says, and governs and directs all things." (I Phys.)

For Anaximander as for Thales, if one is to accept the fragments and selections of his successors, there is no particular destiny reserved to the human soul. However, it is to be remembered that what remains of a philosopher's teaching is not necessarily the full expression of his doctrine. The remaining fragment may not be representative, or it may be a deliberate selection by a successor to fit in with his own plan. We have only so many lines from Thales. Is that all he taught ? Aristotle, in quoting Plato, omits much of his doctrine. Nevertheless, it is plausible to suppose that the first philosophers were too engrossed in grasping the vast unifying and explanatory principle of all nature to give exhaustive consideration to a single human soul. The finite and determinate substance of man, therefore, is mortal and subject to decay, "according to necessity all things pass away into that from which they came into being; for they pay each other the just penalty for their wrongdoing according to their order in time." (F V, 2, 9; quoted by R. K Hack, op. cit. p. 45) But this continuous process of birth and death is itself a form of incorruptibility, since substantially nothing ever entirely perishes, but due to its divine origin, goes on eternally assuming new forms. Even if personal immortality is neglected, the idea of immortality remains something divine. It is not a matter of indifference.

It might be plausibly held that just as Anaximander had set out to improve the cosmogony of his master Thales, by changing the

nature of the All from water to the indeterminate, so Anaximines, the pupil and associate of Anaximander, changed the nature of the All from the indeterminate to air. Anaximander had found Water too definite and consequently subject to destruction by its opposite. Therefore he substituted the Indeterminate. Anaximines found the Indeterminate too vague. Hence he introduced Air as being at once definite and yet, by rarefaction and condensation, capable of changing into everything else while retaining its identity.

Mr. Hack aptly notes that this gradual transition in the concept of the supreme substance is far from haphazard but denotes the gradual epuration of the concept of the divinity. In effect Air is less material than the Apeiron, and the Apeiron is less material than water. The supreme deity is evolving towards the pure act and the immaterial substance of Plato and Aristotle.

Furthermore, as Mr. Hack again notes, Anaximines in identifying the supreme god with Air Pneuma (rarefied Air, closely resembling Fire, the subtlest form of Air) is defining the divinity in terms of the Psyche. Thus, while the concept of the immortal divinity becomes more spiritualized, it also becomes more closely related to that participation of the divinity in man which is the Psyche, paving the way towards a definitely clear-cut spirituality in man. In the speculation of Heraclitus, the Pythagoreans and the Stoics, the substantial cause of life, now designated under the name

of Fire or Pneuma, will eventually be designated the divine Spirit.

111 Pythagoras

The name of Pythagoras stands out as that of a man who wielded a profound influence upon his time and whose influence embraced both the philosophical and religious spheres. Plato, in excoriating Homer, takes pains to laud Pythagoras "who was so greatly beloved for his wisdom, and whose followers are to this day quite celebrated for the order which was named after him." (Rep. X, 600) Diogenes Laertius proclaims him as the first to speak of "philosophy" and to call himself a "philosopher." (proem. 12). Yet his philosophy was aimed also at practical end, that of establishing a fruitful and blessed way of life for men. This was apparently a departure from the previous focus-points of the early Greek philosophers which consisted in an effort to grasp the significance of the whole ocean of the universe, in which man was just a tiny ripple.

What was the teaching of Pythagoras that created such a tremendous religious movement in Italy and caused Pythagoras himself to be revered as a god ? The soul is immortal, imprisoned in the body for some previous unearthly fault, a doctrine common to the Orphic religions and mentioned by Plato in the Phaedo (62 B). Has the soul a personality ? At least, it has not a personality dependent upon a body. Any soul could be clothed with any body (De Anima 407 b).

Whence its immortality ? Aristotle quotes Alcmaeon as saying that it is immortal "because it resembles the immortals, and that this immortality belongs to it in virtue of its ceaseless movement; for all the things divine, moon, sun, the planets, and the whole heavens are in perpetual movement." (ibid. 405 a) Pythagoras was also probably quite aware of our own best argument, namely that if we can participate in the knowledge of imperishable truths, our faculty (as against the Averroists) must be imperishable. The whole air is full of souls leaving bodies, finding bodies for subsequent incarnations. Pythagoras saw them in the moving particles of dust perceived in sunbeams (ibid. 404 a).

Pythagoras, as Plato after him, while exalting the divineness of the soul, its immortality, seems to have done so because of religious conviction, a conviction which philosophic research served to strengthen rather than dissipate. To those intent upon demonstrating that the notion of immortality is purely a superstition based on ignorance and upheld for the benefit of religion, it might be adduced that Pythagoras held it for religious rather than rational motives. Yet this belief would appear to have inspired the philosophical research of Pythagoras and his mathematical discoveries seem only to have served to render him more convinced than ever of the immortal nature of the soul. Although that aspect of the soul which is a harmony of the various component parts of man perishes with death

(Phaedo 86), nevertheless the immortal soul lives on (cf. Philolaos).

IV Heraclitus

Heraclitus, while quoted as saying that "Pythagoras, son of Mnesarchus, worked out his inquiry more elaborately than all other men," (D.L. VIII, 6 in Hack, God in Greek Philosophy, p. 48), nevertheless had his own definite contribution to make. Retaining the close affinity of fire to all that is immortal as all his more recent predecessors had done, including Pythagoras, and which, when associated with the soul, is indicative of the persistent tendency to consider the soul as something immaterial, rose above the harmony constituted by the unity of the One introduced by Pythagoras to introduce his own superior harmony based upon opposites. "The most beautiful Harmonia is that of opposites" (frag. 46). "Fastenings are things whole and things not whole, that which is drawn together and that which is drawn apart, the harmonious and the discordant : the One is made of all things, and all things of the One." (frag. 59)

Did Heraclitus adhere to a belief in immortality ? He certainly did, for to him as to his philosophical predecessors, the divine, immortal/constituent of the universe pervaded man as it did all things. The difficulty remains, of course, of securing a personal immortality for man over against the eternal, changing permanence of

the primary substance. Pythagoras seems to have done this but on purely religious grounds, although immortality itself is attributable to the activity of the One in all things and the motion which it creates. Heraclitus, while reclaiming the divinity from its causal and immaterial relation with the world as pure unity unmixed with earthly, material substantiality and re-identifying it with the living world stuff under the form of Fire undergoing successive concretizations and successive purifications on the Way Down and the Way Up, nevertheless endowed this Fire with reason, made reason, psyche, becoming, synonymous with it.

Although Heraclitus elevates the notion of immortality by endowing the divine Fire which men breathe in with reason, he destroys whatever personal value it might have by making it consist in constant change. The Fire which is Soul and Reason, through the many changes it undergoes, goes from life to death, from cold to hot, from good to bad, from air to earth, etc. As the poet says, it is constant only in its inconstancy. But this constant change is a very definite assertion of the permanency of that which constitutes the universe, a permanency which transcends material evanescence, since it is the very change which would change it. Thus, change seems to be itself necessarily permanent, since if change changed to non-change, the change by which it changed remains. Thus the destruction of change is change; and this may go on ad infinitum.

Change, therefore, may never be gotten away from but persists throughout. Although the idea of personas immortality is not present, the idea of a dynamic being which no change can destroy, which remains throughout whatever evolutions it comprises, remains. The fire of the soul is put out by death and the soul becomes water, the water becomes earth. But on the "Way Up" the water rises from the earth and the soul from water. (frag.68) Contraries are bound together by the law which brings one from another, sickness from health, and hunger from sufficiency, To have joy one must have sorrow, to have peace one must have strife. To have permanency one must have change. To cease to change is to cease to be. To introduce unchangeableness in the nature of the soul would be to destroy the very roots of its felicity. "Homer was wrong in saying: 'May strife perish among gods and men!' because all things would pass away" (frag. 43). Therefore, if personality involved this unchangeableness, it would be possible only by self-destruction. Hegel and Marx will accept this contradiction and uphold it as an inescapable fact.

V Parmenides

Parmenides, probably a contemporary of Heraclitus, and possibly a disciple of Pythagoras, bitterly opposed the doctrine of Heraclitus on a supreme divinity which is constantly in a state of flux. Thanks to a revelation from a kindly goddess he learned "the

immobile heart of persuasive Truth" and " the opinions of mortals in which there is no true belief." The notion that all is change belongs to these latter. For Parmenides, the external world is becoming. A secondary reality but not the reality that is: it does not reveal being. On the other hand, "What is cannot be cut off from What Is; it neither scatters itself in every direction and way through the cosmos nor does it comes together" (FV, 18 B2). "What Is does not come into being and is imperishable, entire, unique, immovable and without end; it was not and will not be, since it is now one continuous whole" (Hack, p. 82).

According to Erwin Rondo, there is no purely physical treatment of the soul in the doctrine of Parmenides. Whereas the Ionians conceived of the soul as a part of nature, the Eleatics, starting from an a priori viewpoint of what the sum of all realtiy was, namely an immovable whole, which necessarily excluded any possible attribution of veracity to the appearance of changing multiplicity presented by the world, would also have to base their doctrine of the soul on such an a priori viewpoint. To Rohde's surprise, the Eleatics seem to have preferred to adopt merely the traditional viewpoint of nature, possibly considering such explanations under the heading of "opinions of mortals" and consequently of no great importance. Man is consistent of Light and Night (Warm and Cold, Fire and Earth). Along as these remain, man remains and the soul is bound up with them.

Zeno, in producing his various arguments, does not appear to be proposing physical doctrines but to be merely preventing the other more fundamental doctrines of Parmenides from attack. "The opinions of mortals" implies the distinction in man of the human, and the divine by which he participates in Being. Probably in virtue of this, man or something in man remains over and above changing reality, and probably because of this he could say, according to Simplicius :"God now sends the soul from visible world to the invisible one, now returns it" (Ad Aristot. Phys.). This is in keeping with Pythagoras' and the Orphic doctrine, and presuming the physical doctrines to be "opinions of mortals," establishes Parmenides belief in the immortality of the soul, even though only on the grounds of conviction rather than observation of nature.

VI Empedocles

Whatever the doctrine of Empedocles on immortality might have been, it is certain that Empedocles himself was considered as an immortal and unblushingly accepted this title. He claims power over nature, the power to call up the winds and still them, to bring rain or dryness, to call up the dead from Hades. The legends surrounding his death say that he was caught up bodily to enjoy the deathless life of the gods, in keeping with the Homeric belief that life remained only so long as the body was present. However Empedocles

own concept of immortality would seem to contradict this.

At first appearance he would not seem to have one. All being is composed of the four elements and even thinking and perception are only modifications of them. Thus the existence of the soul would seem to be bound up with the juxtaposition and proportioning of the four elements by love and hate, and the soul would thus perish once this proportion had been disrupted. On the other hand Empedocles speaks of demons being shut up in the body in expiation of some crime. He himself mentions that he had at different times been a fish, a bird and a young maiden.

Can these two souls be reconciled, one a perishable one and the other a godly one imprisoned in the body in atonement for some past crime and endeavoring by successive purifications to regain its original happy and spiritual life ? Undoubtedly they may if the two souls are regarded as rationally distinct in the sense of Aristotle, one being a virtual animal soul presiding over the life of the perishable body and the other, the actual spiritual soul, an immortal spark of the divine "imprisoned" in the body.

VII Democritus

Whereas the predecessors of Democritus, even though their philosophical doctrines might lead them to materialism, nevertheless

proclaimed some kind of immortality for the soul in virtue of their religious beliefs, Democritus, according to Erwin Rohde (II, 192) was the first to accept the logical consequences of his system and exclude the immortality of the soul entirely. Significantly, Marx wrote his doctoral thesis on Democritus. This understanding of Democritus is justified by the interpretation of his philosophy by Aristotle, who makes all being consist for Democritus in "bodies and magnitudes" (De Caelo, 303 and Physics 231 a 18 ff). In effect, the spherical atoms of Democritus which communicate life and mind to living things and are his supreme being (FV, 55 A, 37 etc.) would appear to be material since they act upon the other visible, sensible atoms to maintain life and are acquired by breathing. Mr. Hack, however, in his book, takes exception to this view, maintaining that Aristotle misrepresented Democritus in order to be rid of his philosophy and that of Plato (p. 136) and that it is thanks to him and his interpretation that Democritus has come down to us as an out and out materialist.

To this end he points out that Democritus speaks of these spherical atoms as "escaping the senses" and being "observed only by speculative reason" (p. 150) He very aptly explains the morcelling of the One of Democritus' predecessor Parmenides by the necessity of maintaining a causal relationship between the diversity and mobility of the universe with the divinity. Aristotle praises him for thus

perceiving the logical conclusion of the negation of act and potency.

In keeping with the accidental unity of being, however, the immortality of the soul plays no part in the philosophy of Democritus, since, by his own assertion, at death the spherical forms that composed the psyche are dispersed (Jamblich. b. Stob. ecl. 384, 16f. W ; cf. Rohde II, 190). On the other hand, the elements of perpetuity and indestructibility remain in his philosophy since these spherical forms are the divinity itself, unchanging, eternal, incorporating reason and necessity (Hack, p. 140).

VII Anaxagoras

Anaxagoras is recognized, even by the severe and critical Aristotle, as being the first to set forth a divinity fully independent of matter (De Anim. 1, 2, 405 b; III 4, 429b; cf. R. p. 195). He is the first dualist to draw on purely philosophical grounds the clear-cut distinction between the formless material and the informing spiritual, a definite step towards the doctrine of body and soul as two specifically different sorts of being, although united in one.

The Spirit (nous) penetrates everything that has a soul: men, animals, plants. (fr. 6 R. 195) The Spirit penetrates them but is not sullied by them (Plato, Cratyl. 413 C). This doctrine of Anaxagoras, while purifying and elevating the notion of divinity, is

still not a plea in favor of the immortality of the individual soul. For him the death of the body is also "the death of the soul" (Plut. plac. phil. 5, 25, 2). The nous, however, of which the soul was a reflexion, remains in its unsmirched and eternal unity.

Thus, immediately before the lofty doctrines of Plato and his defense of the immortality of the individual soul, Greek philosophy with Anaxagoras has attained a purified, though vague, concept of the divinity. Personality as such is not yet attributed to it since it may not have been considered a perfection. If this reasoning is valid it may be easily conjectured that personal immortality for the human soul was not as yet a matter of great moment.

The speech of Pericles, a pupil of Anaxagoras, commemorating those who had died in the first year of the Peloponnesian War, has not a word to say about personal immortality. Their immortality lies in the memory their city has of them. "For the love of honor alone is ever young." (Moore, p. 116). Such a breach, however, between the speculations of the philosophers and the beliefs of the people, can be understood in the light of the former's striving for a rational explanation in contrast to the latter's demand for immediate practicality.

VIII Plato

Mr. Hack, in his illuminating book, God in Greek Philosophy,

speaks of the passionate religious and metaphysical systems of certain Greek philosophers, who "ressemble a Saint Paul whose curiosity about this world should not have been quenched by his certainty of an immediate heaven." (p. 142) In assessing the marvelous contributions of the Greek thinkers one is perhaps too prone to overlook that they were looking at the world in a scientific way for the first time, at least as far as occidental civilization is concerned, whereas the modern thinker has inherited the accumulated progress of science and, in some cases at least, the shattering clarification of Christianity. It is very hard for a man of the twentieth century to see the world as a citizen of Athens of the fifth century before Christ saw it.

But when one does make the effort to put aside inherited concepts and endeavors to look upon the universe with a virgin curiosity, one is immediately struck with the impression that the universe lying immediately without is very much alive. This is very evident in the constant pulsating of earth yielding up the fruits and flowers, beasts and men. The immediate source of life is indeed the universe of which man is an integral part. As long as such a universe may be considered self-sufficient it is quite normal to consider it divine and endowed with supreme power. It is also quite correct, consequently, to define the substance of this divine universe in terms of its sensible constituents.