

Plato on the apple of the eye



Abstract and train of thoughts

The head is the most divine part of the body, and ruler of all other parts.

The gods endowed the front of the head with organs informing the forethought of the soul.

First they constructed light-bearing eyes so that the pure fire within us, which is akin to that of day, flows through the eyes in a smooth and dense stream — from within without. 4

In daylight, a fire-stream issuing from the eye meets a fire-stream coming from the object of vision, i.e., it flows out like unto like and, coalescing therewith, it forms one kindred substance along the path of the eyes' vision. And this substance, having all become similar in its properties because of its similar nature, distributes the motions of every object it touches, or is touched, throughout the body and informs the soul thus bringing about that sensation which we now term "seeing." 5

Psyche, when looking outwardly, sees the shadows and images of other souls.

But when she looks inwardly, she evolves her own essence and the reasons which she contains.

At first, she sees herself. 7

When she penetrates deeper into the knowledge of herself, she finds within herself both intellect, and the orders of beings. 7

When she proceeds even deeper, she perceives with eyes closed the celestial hierarchies and the essential unity of being. 7

Love is its own act and harvests the spectacle of celestial beauty.

Love is the eye of the desirer. By its power, the lover can see the beloved. 8

Sight sees out of time, in an instant. The other senses function in time. 8

My eye and God's eye is one eye, one sight, one knowledge, one love.

If the soul shall see with the right eye into eternity, then the left eye must be as though it were dead. 9

**Brahma moves about, becoming manifold within the heart where
the arteries meet.**

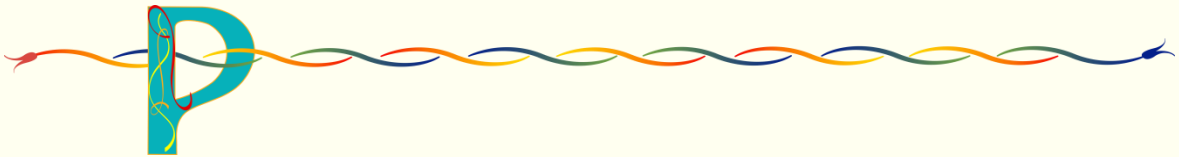
Like the spokes fastened in the nave of a chariot wheel.

Iris is the chariot wheel. 10

The aperture of the eye is the axle hole. 10

Suggested reading for students.

On the soul of the spiritual man lit by its own light. 11



The head is the most divine part of the body, and ruler of all other parts.

Eyes of pure women, wholesome stars of love.
— ALFRED LORD TENNYSON¹

Those true eyes
Too pure and too honest in aught to disguise
The sweet soul shining through them.
— OWEN MEREDITH²

The eye is the most occult organ of all.³ The *third eye retreated inwards* when its course was run . . . but it has left behind a witness to its existence. This witness is now the PINEAL GLAND.
— HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY⁴

The soul [tends] to turn its vision round to the region where dwells the most blessed part of reality, which it is imperative that it should behold.
— PLATO⁵

The gods endowed the front of the head with organs informing the forethought of the soul.

First they constructed light-bearing eyes so that the pure fire within us, which is akin to that of day, flows through the eyes in a smooth and dense stream — from within without.

From Plato's *Timæus* (tr. Bury)

[44d] The divine revolutions, which are two, they [the gods] bound within a sphere-shaped body, in imitation of the spherical form of the All, which body we now call the "head," it being the most divine part and reigning over all the parts within us. To it the gods delivered over the whole of the body they had assembled to be its servant, having formed the notion that it should partake in all the motions which were to be.

[44e] In order, then, that it should not go rolling upon the earth, which has all manner of heights and hollows, and be at a loss how to climb over the one and climb out of the other, they bestowed upon it the body as a vehicle and means of transport. And for this reason the body acquired length, and, by God's contriving, shot forth four limbs, extensible and flexible, [45a] to serve as instruments of transport, so that grasping with these and supported thereon it was enabled to travel through all plac-

¹ Tennyson: *Idylls of the King*, "Gareth and Lynette," line 367

² Edward Robert, Earl of Lytton (Owen Meredith) Bulwer-Lytton [son of the author of *Zanoni*]: *Lucile*, Pt. II, canto 2. Cf. "Eyes so transparent that through them the soul is seen." Theophile Gautier: *The Two Beautiful Eyes* (Ils sont si transparents qu'ils laissent voir votre âme.)

³ Cf. *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (HYPNOTISM) XII p. 395

⁴ Cf. *Secret Doctrine*, II p. 295

⁵ *Republic* 526e; (tr. Shorey)

es, bearing aloft the chamber of our most divine and holy part. In this wise and for these reasons were legs and hands attached to all men; and inasmuch as they demand the forepart superior to the hinder part in honour and dignity, the Gods gave us the most part of our going in this direction. Thus it was necessary that man should have the forepart of his body distinct and dissimilar. Wherefore, dealing first with the vessel of the head, they set the face in the front thereof [45b] and bound within it organs for all the forethought of the Soul; and they ordained that this, which is the natural front, should be the leading part. And of the organs they constructed first light-bearing eyes, and these they fixed in the face for the reason following. They contrived that all such fire as had the property not of burning but of giving a mild light should form a body akin to the light of every day.¹ For they caused the pure fire within us, which is akin to that of day, to flow through the eyes in a smooth and dense stream;

In daylight, a fire-stream issuing from the eye meets a fire-stream coming from the object of vision, i.e., it flows out like unto like and, coalescing therewith, it forms one kindred substance along the path of the eyes' vision. And this substance, having all become similar in its properties because of its similar nature, distributes the motions of every object it touches, or is touched, throughout the body and informs the soul thus bringing about that sensation which we now term "seeing."²

[45c] and they compressed the whole substance, and especially the centre, of the eyes, so that they occluded all other fire that was coarser and allowed only this pure kind of fire to filter through. So whenever the stream of vision is surrounded by midday light, it flows out like unto like,³ and coalescing therewith it forms one kindred substance along the path of the eyes' vision, wheresoever the fire which streams from within collides with an obstructing object without. And this substance, having all become similar in its properties because of its similar nature, [45d] distributes the motions of every object it touches, or whereby it is touched, throughout all the body even unto the Soul, and brings about that sensation which we now term "seeing."

¹ There is a play here on the words ημερον (mild) . . . ημερας (days); Cf. *Cratylus* 418c

² [Here is an overview of the continuum of vibrations, sensations, perceptions, feelings, and emotions from an esoteric perspective:

Physical *vibrations* picked up by sensory receptors are carried along nerves to brain centres.

From the physical brain centres, vibrations are reflected to the etheric brain.

From the etheric brain centres, vibrations are reflected to corresponding astral centres where they first appear as *sensations*. Sensation in Greek is αισθησις, sense-perception, from αισσω, or rapid motion, shoot, dart, glance as in light.

New sensations are transmitted upwards to the next "body," the lower mind (manas) or soul, where they are registered as mere *perceptions*.

Previously experienced perceptions, however, rekindle a desire (kāma) either to perpetuate a situation if pleasurable, or to escape out of a situation if painful, thus giving a foretaste of pleasure or pain, i.e., the two *feelings* proper, and consequent movements towards unity (attraction) or dis-unity (repulsion) from the object that is thought to have caused pleasure or pain in the first instance. The endless combinations and permutations of the two primordial feelings give rise to the entire range of complex human *emotions* that are constantly manifested either as "spontaneous," unconscious, bodily movements or as purposeful actions. — ED. PHIL.]

³ Vision is explained on the principle that "like is known by like": a fire-stream issuing from the eye meets a fire-stream coming from the object of vision. (Cf. the view of Empedocles)

CONSTITUTION OF MAN SERIES
HEAD IS THE MOST DIVINE PART OF THE BODY

But when the kindred fire vanishes into night, the inner fire is cut off; for when it issues forth into what is dissimilar it becomes altered in itself and is quenched, seeing that it is no longer of like nature with the adjoining air, since that air is devoid of fire. Wherefore it leaves off seeing, and becomes also an inducement to sleep. For the eyelids — whose structure the Gods devised [45e] as a safeguard for the vision, — when they are shut close, curb the power of the inner fire; which power dissipates and allays the inward motions, and upon their allaying quiet ensues; and when this quiet has become intense there falls upon us a sleep that is well-nigh dreamless;



Psyche, when looking outwardly, sees the shadows and images of other souls.

But as with thy natural eyes thou are not able to see me, I will give thee the divine eye. Behold my sovereign power and might!
— *The Bhagavad Gita*¹

But when she looks inwardly, she evolves her own essence and the reasons which she contains.

At first, she sees herself.

When she penetrates deeper into the knowledge of herself, she finds within herself both intellect, and the orders of beings.

When she proceeds even deeper, she perceives with eyes closed the celestial hierarchies and the essential unity of being.

From Plato's *First Alcibiades* (tr. Taylor) Socrates to Alcibiades:

. . . the face of the person who looks in the eye of another person, appears visible to himself in the eye-sight of the person opposite to him, as in a mirror. And we therefore call this the pupil, because it exhibits the image of that person who looks in it.

If therefore the eye would see itself, it must look in an eye, and in that place of the eye, too, where the virtue of the eye is naturally seated; and the virtue of the eye is sight.

. . . the soul, if she would know herself, must look at soul, and especially at that place in the soul in which is wisdom, the virtue of the soul, is ingenerated;

*This therefore in the soul resembles the divine nature. And a man, looking at this, and recognizing all that which is divine, and God and wisdom, would thus gain the most knowledge of himself.*²

Proclus on the *Theology of Plato*, beautifully observes as follows on this passage:

“Socrates in the *Alcibiades* rightly observes, that the soul entering into herself will behold all other things, and deity itself. For, verging to her own union, and to the centre of all life, laying aside multitude, and the variety of the all manifold powers which she contains, she ascends to the highest watch-tower of beings. And as in the most holt of the mysteries,³ they say, that the mystics at

¹ *Bhagavad-Gita* 2 vs. 8; (tr. Judge)

² Taylor T. (Tr. & Annot.). *The Works of Plato: First Alcibiades*. (Vol. I of a set of five volumes & Vol. IX of “The Thomas Taylor Series”) Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 1995; line 133, pp. 158-59

³ viz. the Eleusinian mysteries; for thus he elsewhere denominates these mysteries.

first meet with the multiform, and many-shaped genera;¹ which are hurled forth before the Gods, but on entering the interior parts of the temple, unmoved, and guarded by the mystic rites, they genuinely receive in their bosom divine illumination, and divested of their garments, as they say, participate of a divine nature; the same mode, as it appears to me, takes place in the speculation of wholes.² For the soul, when looking at things posterior to herself, beholds the shadows and images of beings; but when she turns to herself, she evolves her own essence, and the reasons which she contains. And at first indeed, she only, as it were, beholds herself; but, when she penetrates more profoundly into the knowledge of herself, she finds in herself both intellect, and the orders of beings. But when she proceeds into her interior recesses, and into the adytum, as it were, of the soul, she perceives with her eye closed, the genus of the Gods, and the unities of beings. For all things reside in us according to the peculiarity of the soul, and through this we are naturally capable of knowing all things, by exciting the powers and the images of wholes which we contain.”³

Love is its own act and harvests the spectacle of celestial beauty.

Love is the eye of the desirer. By its power, the lover can see the beloved.

Love, thus, is ever intent upon that other loveliness, and exists to be the medium between desire and that object of desire. It is the eye of the desirer; by its power what loves is enabled to see the loved thing. But it is first; before it becomes the vehicle of vision, it is itself filled with the sight; it is first, therefore, and not even in the same order — for desire attains to vision only through the efficacy of Love, while Love, in its own Act, harvests the spectacle of beauty playing immediately above it.⁴

Sight sees out of time, in an instant. The other senses function in time.

Plato now wishes to speak concerning the amatory character, and to show how it is led back from sensible to intelligible beauty. What he says, therefore, is this, — that intelligible beauty shines forth in an intelligible essence, together with the spectacles which are there, and that from this beauty, sensible beauty is unfolded into light. For, as the light proceeding from the sun illuminates the whole sensible world, so beauty, originating from intelligibles, pervades through the regions of sense. But he calls the sight the clearest of all the senses, because it is more acute than the rest. Hence, it is considered as analogous to fire by those who compare the senses to the elements. But its superior acuteness is evident from this, that when sound, and that

¹ Meaning evil dæmons; for the assuming a variety of shapes is one of the characteristics of such dæmons.

² By the term *wholes*, in Platonic philosophy, every incorporeal order of being, and every mundane sphere, are signified.

³ Taylor T. (*Tr. & Annot.*). *The Works of Plato: First Alcibiades*. (Vol. I of a set of five volumes & Vol. IX of “The Thomas Taylor Series”) Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 1995; Endnote 26, pp. 210-11, being a passage of Proclus’ *Theology of Plato*, also translated by Thomas Taylor, and added to his Notes to Plato’s *First Alcibiades*.

⁴ Plotinus: *Ennead* III v, “On Love,” ¶ 2; tr. MacKenna & Page. Full text in our Hellenic and Hellenistic Papers Series. — ED. PHIL.

which is visible, are produced together, as in the instance of thunder and lightning, we first see the lightning, and sometime after the sound reaches our hearing. The reason of this is evident: for sight sees without time, or in an instant; but the other senses require time. Sight also is analogous to intellect: for as intellect sees all things indivisibly, so likewise sight. For it directly sees the interval which reaches from hence as far as to the heavens.¹

My eye and God's eye is one eye, one sight, one knowledge, one love.

The man who abides in the will of God wills nothing else than what God is, and what He wills. If he were ill he would not wish to be well. If he really abides in God's will, all pain is to him a joy, all complication, simple: yea, even the pains of hell would be a joy to him. He is free and gone out from himself, and from all that he receives, he must be free. If my eye is to discern colour, it must itself be free from all colour. The eye with which I see God is the same with which God sees me. My eye and God's eye is one eye, and one sight, and one knowledge, and one love.²

If the soul shall see with the right eye into eternity, then the left eye must be as though it were dead.

The two eyes of the soul of man cannot both perform their work at once: but if the soul shall see with the right eye into eternity, then the left eye must close itself and refrain from working, and be as though it were dead. For if the left eye be fulfilling its office toward outward things, that is holding converse with time and the creatures; then must the right eye be hindered in its working; that is, in its contemplation. Therefore, whosoever will have the one must let the other go; for "no man can serve two masters."³



Where did you get your eyes so blue?
Out of the skies as I came through.⁴

¹ Taylor T. (Tr. & Annot.). *The Works of Plato*. (Vol. III of a set of five volumes & Vol. XI of "The Thomas Taylor Series") From: The Prometheus Trust, 1996. Endnote 19, p. 415, being Taylor's Additional Notes on Plato's *Phædrus*. [Westerink line 250c, p. 363.]

² Eckhart [Meister] von Hochheim O.P., *Sermons IV*, "True Hearing"; (tr. Claud Field)

³ *Theologia Germanica* (& quoting *Matthew* vi, 34; cf. *Luke* xvi, 13; tr. Winkworth). Meister Eckhart has been cited as possible author of this mystical treatise. [Full text in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series. — ED. PHIL.]

⁴ George Macdonald: *At the Back of the North Wind*, "Baby." [Eye photographed by John Rankin Waddell]

Brahma moves about, becoming manifold within the heart where the arteries meet.

Like the spokes fastened in the nave of a chariot wheel.¹

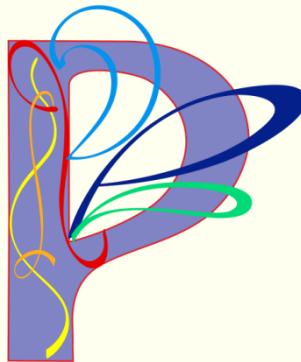
Iris is the chariot wheel.

Iris stands for the Soul. It exists in revolution around God to whom it clings in love, holding itself to the utmost of its power near to Him as the Being on which all depends; and, since it cannot coincide with God, it circles about Him. If the circumference of the centre were not in constant motion, the universe would be no more than one vast centre.

The aperture of the eye is the axle hole.

The pupil stands for the centre of being, unparted and impartible, a point of rest. It has no need of place and is not situated within any other being: it is poised over all beings at once, which are neither capable nor desirous of existing independently of it. Why?

Because in Unity there can be no knowing. The One can only know Itself through Plurality. But in the great illusion of form, giving rise to separateness, the One stands distinct and apart: it is present without being inherent.²



¹ Cf. *Mundaka Upanishad* iii, ii, 7; (tr. Nikhilananda)

² For an in-depth analysis of the subject matter by Plotinus, with commentaries by H.P. Blavatsky, see “Centre + Circle” in our Secret Doctrine’s First Proposition Series. — ED. PHIL.]

Suggested reading for students.



On the soul of the spiritual man lit by its own light.

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