ON WORDSWORTH'S "ODE"

V

<u>Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:</u>
<u>The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,</u>
<u>Hath had elsewhere its setting,</u>
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

COMMENTARY – Plato's doctrine of <u>recollection or anamnesis</u> is the basis for the ideas in Wordsworth's "Ode", specially as concerns the <u>soul</u>. Its source is Plato's *Phaedo.*

The *Phaedo* is one of the most widely read dialogues written by […] Plato. It claims to recount the events and conversations that occurred on the day that Plato's teacher, <u>Socrates</u> (469-399 B.C.E.), was put to death by the state of Athens. It is the final episode in the series of dialogues recounting Socrates' trial and death.[1]

The conception of the dominant in the *Phaedo* differs from Christian belief about it in one notable respect. Socrates is made to argue not only that it will continue to exist after death, **but also that it soul already existed before birth.** This conclusion is derived (73a-76e) from **the theory of 'recollection' *(anamnēsis),*** an intriguing doctrine which has had a perennial **fascination for students of Plato**. The theory that what we call 'learning' is really the regaining of knowledge which **the soul possessed in a prenatal, disembodied state is often regarded as quintessentially Platonic**. It has inspired poets as well as philosophers, and has resonances in much later theorizing about teaching and learning.[2]

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[1] http://www.iep.utm.edu/phaedo/#H1

[2] Phaedo. David Gallop - Translator, Plato. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1993. Page number: xviii