

Scipio's Dream - Somnium Scipionis & the Cosmic Order

Dreams & Visions and the Wonder of It All

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The human quest to look behind the veil to see the mysteries of the divine has been with us since time immemorial. It comes in forms of religion, dreams and visions, ancient divinations, metaphysical doctrines and practices, and spirituality in general. Looking up to the heavens as the source of wisdom has always been a central feature in these pursuits.



Scipio's Dream – Somnium Scipionis (Cicero, On the Republic, Book VI)¹, is a vision and a manifesto of the Cosmic Order and its reflection down on Earth in terms of social order and human values. It weaves together the harmony of the heavenly spheres, the immortality of the soul, the doctrine of reincarnation, and how it all informs human destiny.

By the 1st century BCE, when Cicero wrote this, the classical views on cosmogony, cosmology and natural philosophy had been pretty much established. In this work we hear echoes of Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle – all combined to produce upright human behavior for the purpose of proper governance and the good of the state.

Proper leadership of the state is a reflection of the hierarchical universe, which emanates from the supreme source. Thus, in the dream, the knowledge is transmitted to Scipio by his grandfather – also representing the social hierarchy that is transmitted from the old to the young.



Scipio's Dream – painting by Raphael

This article looks at “*Scipio's Dream*” and elucidate the cosmological principles embedded in it. These are summarized, with some comments, and then further expanded using the principles from the ancient doctrine of Astrology – a discipline of the cosmic knowledge that has continued to fascinate humanity from antiquity to our time.

¹ Text and quotes are taken from: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/cicero-republic6.asp>

The cosmic vision begins with a message about Scipio's Destiny:

for when your age shall have accomplished seven times eight revolutions of the sun, and your fatal hours shall be marked out by the natural product of these two numbers, each of which is esteemed a perfect one, but for different reasons ---then shall the whole city have recourse to you alone you will, in the quality of dictator, establish order and tranquility in the commonwealth.

Such destiny is directly connected with heaven and eternity:

for all those who have in any way conduced to the preservation, defense, and enlargement of their native country, there is a certain place in heaven, where they shall enjoy an eternity of happiness. For nothing on earth is more agreeable to God, the Supreme Governor of the universe, than the assemblies and societies of men united together by laws, which are called States. It is from heaven their rulers and preservers came, and there they return. (13)

When Scipio wonders why bother lingering on earth rather than hasten to be in the temple of eternal perfection, his ancestor replies:

Mankind have received their being on this very condition, that they should labor for the preservation of that globe, which is situated, as you see, in the midst of this temple, and is called earth.

The origin of the soul is in the eternal fire called stars and constellations:

Men are likewise endowed with a soul, which is a portion of the eternal fires, which you call stars and constellations; and which, being round, spherical bodies, animated by divine intelligence, perform their cycles and revolutions with amazing rapidity. It is your duty, therefore, my Publius, and that of all who have any veneration for the gods, to preserve this wonderful union of soul and body; nor without the express command of him who gave you a soul, should the least thought be entertained of quitting human life, lest you seem to desert the post assigned to you by God himself.

The pre-requisite for returning to the realm of the divine is a life with strict regard to justice and piety:

Such a life as this is the true way to heaven, and to the company of those, who, after having lived on earth and escaped from the body, inhabit the place which you now behold.

The vision of "the place which you now behold", where the souls return to, starts almost as if it were written by a modern astrophysicist, observing space from a vantage point outside the earth, at the Milky Way, and is written like a cosmic journey. The universe appears beautiful and admirable, with stars that are never visible from earth, and everything appears to be of such magnitude that humans could not have imagined. In this vast place, the earth appears exceedingly small, and the observer is encouraged to remove his attention from the 'smallness' of the earth and take a view of the magnificent temples among which he arrived².

² The word 'cosmos' itself indicates perfection and beauty (hence our 'cosmetics).

From Online Etymology Dictionary: "**cosmos** c.1200 (but not popular until 1848, as a translation of Humboldt's *Kosmos*), from Gk. *kosmos* "order, good order, orderly arrangement," a word with several main senses rooted in those notions: The verb *kosmein* meant generally "to dispose, prepare," but especially "to order and arrange (troops for battle), to set (an army) in array;" also "to establish (a government or regime);" "to deck, adorn, equip, dress" (especially of women). Thus *kosmos* had an important secondary sense of "ornaments of a

This universe is composed of nine concentric spheres, with the earth at the center.

The exterior and the highest one is of the Supreme Divine which contains and binds them all.

In it are the **eternal Fixed Stars, which revolve around the earth in never-varying courses**, (the daily motion, from east to west. -MBE.). The seven spheres below that are the abodes of the planets, which are globular, round, originated from the eternal fire and animated by the divine spirit. The planets revolve around the earth from west to east in their orbits, contrary to the motion of the higher heaven. In astrology this is called the geocentric model – a view of the universe as it appears to the eye of the observer on earth.

Schema huius praeiudicis diuisionis Sphaerarum.



As the planets are listed in their cascading spheres from high to low, they are also briefly described by their astrological/metaphysical function.

The sphere of Saturn is the highest (no attributes provided). Next comes Jupiter – “so benign and salutary to mankind”. In astrology Jupiter is known as ‘the great benefic’ – the source of help, salvation and well-being. Then comes Mars, “the fiery and terrible planet” – known in astrology as ‘the lesser malefic’ and the source of strife. Next is the Sun - “the leader, governor, the prince of the other luminaries; the soul of the world, which it regulates and illumines, being of such vast size that it pervades and gives light to all places.” The Sun is central in the astrological doctrine, with the same attributes listed above. Here, it is interesting to note that the centrality of the Sun is true in both the heliocentric and geocentric models of the solar system. For Venus and Mercury no attributes are provided, except to say that they attend on the Sun. In astrology they are also called ‘attendants’ as they always appear in close proximity with the Sun. Mercury is responsible for communication and Venus inspires love, beauty and harmony.

The Moon, which is the lowest and closest to the earth, has a special role as a demarcation line between ‘above and below’ – a transition place for the souls in the journey upwards or downwards. It has no authority of its own and “shines with a borrowed light” from the Sun. The sublunary realm is where the souls incarnate into physical mortal life. It is the place of the transience and impermanence, where generation and corruption occur, and where coming to into being is followed by dissolution. Above the Moon everything is eternal. The astrological attributes of the Moon include fluctuations, growth and decay, the daily functions of life and the physical body, while the Sun, by comparison, represents the spirit.

woman's dress, decoration" (cf. *kosmokomes*"dressing the hair") as well as "the universe, the world." Pythagoras is said to have been the first to apply this word to "the universe," perhaps originally meaning "the starry firmament," but later it was extended to the whole physical world, including the earth. "

<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=cosmos>

Following the astonishing vision comes a mysterious loud and pleasant sound, which the elder *Africanus* calls The Music of the Spheres. Here too, the explanation begins with the physical natural rationale and continues into the higher meaning/realm of celestial and human harmony. The source of this sound is the motion of the planets in their spheres, and is audible only in this transcendental state. Normally it is not available to the earthly human ear which has been deafened to it by this continuous loud sharp pitch.

This sound is formed by unequal intervals, divided according to the most just proportion, it produces various concerts of harmony and give out sounds that are divided by seven distinct intervals, which is generally the regulating number of all things.

As this celestial music is imitated by learned and skilled musicians, it becomes the intermediary between heaven and earth, bringing down the harmony and perfection of the universe, and opening a way for the soul to return to the celestial regions.

Music is not the only channel for the ascension to the divine – sciences are the other: The narrator adds here that likewise, for this purpose, many others have employed their sublime genius in cultivating the divine sciences.

Yet, in the quest for the other-worldly music has a special place, since it has the experience of harmony at its core.

The idea of “The Music of the Spheres” which makes the connection between music and science, i.e. cosmology and numbers, goes back to Pythagoras (6th c. BCE), who sought to unify the whole universe –planets, solids and musical tones into a “number system” of ideal proportions that produce harmony.

An outstanding example of such a connection is found in the life of Albert Einstein, for whom music was an integral and essential part of daily life, and who always carried his violin on all his travels. Einstein was also the scientist who sought to unify our understanding of the physical universe. Einstein was born under the astrological sign of Pisces, whose attributes include spirituality, heightened intuition and music. Similar love and need for musical expression is found among many scientist³.

The Astrological Doctrine – As Above So Below

The connection between the planets and human life and soul in the astrological doctrine is much more complex than the brief and incomplete description in Scipio’s Dream.

Astrology is a system of divination that has its roots in ancient Mesopotamia about 4000 years ago.



³ <http://cerncourier.com/cws/article/cern/29252>

‘Divination’ implies seeking to know the will and intention of the divine – what the gods have in store for us. It is an observational science that finds correlation between celestial phenomena and events on earth – life on earth is a reflection of the forces of the heavens, as in the famous paradigm: “As Above So Below.”

The Music of the Spheres does not play a role in traditional astrology, which concerns itself mostly with life down on earth by studying the celestial mechanism. The phenomena of interest are primarily the cycles and position of the planets and the luminaries in the sky, but also how they relate to the specific terrestrial space that surrounds us. All these are combined to produce the birth chart of a person – a snapshot of the heavens at the moment of birth, as observed from that specific geographical location. The contents of this birth chart is what I describe as “The Agenda of the Soul” – its mission and the worldly garment it must wear upon entry into the physical sublunary plane. The picture gets even more complex as each of the planets has not only its own sphere, but also its own domain in the Zodiac – the superior wheel of the Fixed Stars.

Other auspicious phenomena that portend change are the eclipses of the Sun and the Moon, and the synodic cycles of Jupiter and Saturn every 20 years, which are said to indicate historic, social, and economic changes in general.

The cycles of the Sun and the Moon are the great time keepers and calendar makers in the sky marking the day, the month and the year, as in Genesis (1:14) :

יהי מאורות ברקיע השמים להבדיל בין היום ובין הלילה והיו לאותות ולמועדים ולימים ושנים

The New Moon - ראש חדש - is the time in the monthly cycle when the Moon conjoins the Sun in the heavens. The Moon actually disappears from the eye for a couple of days, then reemerges and continues to grow and become full of light. These cycles of growth and decay are significant in human affairs, as mentioned above in Scipio’s Dream, and used as such in astrology as well.

The annual cycle of the Sun demarcates the four seasons: Spring and Autumnal Equinoxes (equal day and night) occur when the Sun crosses the celestial equator; Summer and Winter Solstice (longest day and longest night, respectively, in the northern hemisphere) occur when the Sun reaches maximum and minimum declination respectively north or south of the celestial equator. The Spring Equinox begins the astrological year at the sign of Aries, and it symbolizes renewal and a new life that springs forward from the death of winter. It is the time of our Passover – liberation and renewal of autonomous national existence – and the gentiles’ Easter – the resurrection from the dead.

The view of the planets as ‘attendants’, as well as the awe-full sound they make and their harmoniously integrated actions, is found in the reference to משרתים (literally ‘servants’) in קריאת שמע וברכותיה: ישתבח שמך לעד מלכנו, יוצר משרתים, ואשר משרתיו כלם עומדים ברום עולם ומשמיעים ביראה יחד בקול דברי אלהים חיים ומלך עולם. כלם אהובים, כלם ברורים, כלם גבורים, וכלם עושים באימה וביראה רצון קונם.

The prescribed motions of the heavens and the various conjoining and separation of the planets from one another clearly give a sense of order, harmony and even peace in the universe, as it is all guided by the Supreme Being. This is reflected in the *Kaddish* prayer: עושה שלום במרומיו... ומקבלין דין מן דין ואמרין קדיש בשמי מרומא . הוא יעשה שלום עלינו... עלאה... can be understood as the harmonious interaction between the angels, which in esoteric doctrines are the planets, as each in turn receives sanction, or empowerment from one another, announcing out loud the praise and the glory of God. The next verse ותשאני רוח ואשמע אחרי קול רעש גדול: ברוך כבוד ד' ממקומו taken from Ezekiel, 3:12, clearly expresses the loud sound of the spheres, that is heard in this transcendental experience.

Final Notes – Time-Space Travel and Vision

The heavens have always been a source of wonderment and mystery, and the yearning of the soul to reunite with the divine realm is palpable throughout the ages.

Gershom Scholem, the renowned Kabbalah researcher, points out that the quest of the mystics in the early Talmudic era was not to find out how the universe came into being, i.e. not the creation process, but rather to see for themselves with their own eyes what was behind the veil, and how it was operating, fully formed, replete with spheres, angels and the Throne of the Divine.

Similar to the young Scipio who sees a vision of the heavens in his dream, the motif of the Cosmic Traveler appears in many places in history. A prominent example is the Talmudic story about ארבעה שנכנסו לפרד"ס – יורדי מרכבה - the four sages who were seeking the forbidden knowledge of *Merkavah and Hekhalot* - מרכבה מעשה, also known as *Maaseh Merkavah* - מרכבה.

The Prophet Ezekiel's vision of Living Beings, the Six Wheels and the Figure on the Throne is also a manifestation of this aspiration.



The quest to know and understand the actual act of creation appears later, in a dramatic form, beginning with *Sefer Yetsirah* - ספר יצירה – The Book of Creation (or Formation) (3rd – 7th c CE) and became fully developed in the Lurianic Kabbalah (16th c.).

Further explanations the above mentioned examples is beyond the scope of this article.

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