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Mimesis, Eros, and Mania On Platonic Originals

PHILOSOPHICAL IMAGINATION AND THE MIDDLE

Vico's inspiring work reminds us of the importance of what he called the imaginative universal. An *imaginative* universal, of course, would strike many rationalistic philosophers as very odd. It will not so strike the person with even minimum exposure to the revelatory power of art. Vico not only gives our imagination wings, as Joyce said; he also had more wings than not a few philosophers. Think, for instance, of his opposite in spirit, Descartes. Or perhaps Hegel, whose version of speculative reason, one fears, betrays this intimate strangeness of being. One might say: a properly winged *philosophical* imagination knows this intimacy and this strangeness.¹ Can the name "Plato" stand for that philosophical imagination? This too will seem odd, since Plato is taken as the implacable foe of the poets. But who has endowed the philosophical tradition more richly with its philosophical images, such as the Cave, the Sun, the winged soul, and so on? Do not these images present some of the imaginative universals of philosophy itself, to which thinkers return again and again, and not because they are deficient in speculative reason but

1. The admirable work of Donald Verene helped open my eyes to the importance of the imaginative universal in Vico. Verene has also awakened us to the philosophical importance of images in Hegel, and especially his *Phenomenology*, in *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985). Verene offers us a more winged Hegel, but this is a "Hegel" to whom, as I will show later, Hegel himself came to *play false*. On the intimate strangeness of being, see my "Neither Deconstruction or Reconstruction: Metaphysics and the Intimate Strangeness of Being," in *International Philosophical Quarterly* (March 2000): 37–49.

because something offers itself for thought that is in excess of the concept, even Hegel's. What Hegel would take as their conceptual deficit may well be a surplus of significance through which the philosopher is endowed with winged thought.

Today for many, the name "Plato" is synonymous with "metaphysics," or the "metaphysical tradition." And, of course in our superior times, these things have been left behind, overcome, deconstructed. Richard Rorty will speak of Plato in terms of big P Philosophy; by contrast, he desires small p philosophy. One may be inclined to say with such small desires: Rorty can have his small p. But other philosophers with bigger desire are worth noting, not least Nietzsche. Has not Nietzsche won the polemos in the minds of many, even when the name "Nietzsche" is anathema?² I mean that even those who pride themselves on their analytical sobriety, or on having their ordinary feet on the everyday ground, are often at one with the dithyrambic Nietzsche in thinking the metaphysical flights of fancy of "Plato" are simply incredible in these enlightened times.

There are many reasons for this, among which I would include: a deficit in finesse for transcendence as other; lack of attunement to the sense that the given world might be a sign of something not immediately given, something divined through the given as imaging something beyond itself; the postulate that we are autonomous, and hence under no need to make reference to an ultimate good as other; the feeling that Plato is committed to a truth already there at work, not the product of our activity, one to which we must consent or submit. We do not think of ourselves as submissive; we think of ourselves as creative; we want to consent finally and only to what we claim is our own. Here again the Nietzschean inheritance seems decisive: the law is not given; we give the law, and then forget that we have given it. We wake up to the truth when we wake to ourselves as the true originals, in a world itself devoid of inherent truth, or form, or value. If we are originals, the name "Plato" seems to stand as metaphor for the metaphysical father whose spell for millennia has kept from us this our proper inheritance.

While there are many issues at stake here, I will focus on what might be said about Platonic originals. Does reference to Platonic originals entirely undercut what today might be said to fall under the rubric of "creativity"? Is Plato more complex than an exclusive "either/or" between submission and self-activity, a simple dualistic opposition between, say, mimesis and creativity? Or does what is genuinely original about the human being find itself lost in an unintelligible labyrinth if it short-circuits its reference to originals that

2. I qualify this: with some postmodern currents of thought Levinas seems to have supplanted Nietzsche: some kind of ethics of the other seems to have superseded the self-affirming will of Nietzschean aesthetics; though, unlike Levinas, one notes a diffidence about God; could one speak of atheistic Levinasians? And who does Levinas himself cite? Plato! See "Neither Deconstruction or Reconstruction."

are not the product of its own self-activity? Plato's image of this labyrinth is, of course, the Cave. But in the Cave we are not just seeking ourselves, though we seek self-knowledge; and the light by which we seek, is not our own. Can we offer an approach to Platonic originals that frees "Plato" from the cartoon versions of transcendence that we have inherited too uncritically from thinkers like Feuerbach and Nietzsche?

I think we can, and indeed already we find a seasoned consideration by Plato of elemental energies of being intimately tied to human originality, and in relation to originals not produced by human originality. I mean, of course, the energies of eros and mania as intimately present in the Platonic outlook on origins. Since the time of Romanticism these are often taken to chime in with the ethos of unprecedented originality claimed by, say, aesthetic modernity. True, Plato was important in a more positive sense for thinkers like Schelling and Schopenhauer, and poets like Coleridge and Shelley. True also, eros and mania have variously been resurrected in aesthetic modernity, indeed postmodernity, with respect to artistic genius and creativity. But then, more often than not, this is usually in a context that tends to look on "Plato" as a repressive father that kept these our original powers jealously under wraps, keeping for the gods the dangerous nectars, while throwing to us mortals the safer bones of "imitation."

Indeed normally, when we come to think of art, and hence "creativity" in a Platonic outlook, we immediately turn away to imitation, and give an account of mimesis that easily fixes into dualism, and with consequences for our understanding of human self-transcendence, as well as transcendence as other to us. I think the situation is more complex, indeed plurivocal. Mimesis, eros, and mania go together, each as different but complementary ways of approaching what is original, and this in both a human and other than human sense. One might even say that eros and mania suggest a *second underground*, more intimate to the soul than the first Cave, and in which the soul, so to speak, is under-grounded in what exceeds itself, an exceeding that, in turn, incites the soul above itself, beyond itself and the first Cave. This second underground will return diversely throughout our considerations to come of Kantian and post-Kantian originals.

What I offer is not a textual study of Plato on these matters, a study that might be coincident with the basic themes inspiring Platonic thought. On the whole I prefer Plato as a companion inspiring thought rather than an "object" of research production. So I offer a reflection on Platonic originals in the spirit of a metaxological philosophy. What I mean by metaxological philosophy I have variously tried to define in many works, but it will suffice for present purposes to recall that the word itself has Platonic origins referring us back to the notion of the *metaxu* in the *Symposium*, where eros is called a *metaxu* or a between. A metaxological philosophy sees philosophy as seeking a logos of the *metaxu*, an intelligible account of what it means to be between or intermeditate. It is a philosophy of "mediation," but not just of self-mediation, more a

philosophy of plurivocal intermediation. Much hangs on how we understand the “inter” that is mediated, and how it is mediated. I will say that this “inter” is diversely mediated by mimesis, eros and mania, and diversely intermediated because of the nature of the originals as other, as well as of human originality as participating in a more ultimate original. Nor does a philosophy of the metaxu exclude consideration of what ruptures or exceeds our self-mediation and intermediation.

Plato is a metaxological thinker; he is not just univocal, but plurivocal. I mean that while we find a commitment to the legacy of Socratic elenchus, namely, the search for definition in terms of essence, there are also other voices at play which cannot be reduced only to the rational search for univocal definition. Often today the quest for total univocity is seen, rightly, as the great enemy of art, for art cannot be univocalized. Socrates recognized this last point when he tells us that the listeners to a poem often seemed to be in a better position to give an account of it than its makers or rhapsodic performers (*Apology*, 22b–c). The question of creative otherness is at stake in the quarrel of poets and philosophers: poets, so to say, articulate what cannot be articulated: they speak a meaning that to some philosophers lacks meaning since it resists complete encapsulation in conceptual terms. At a minimum, there is a tension between the otherness of the creative act and any philosophical ambition to bring all otherness into the light of explicit logos. “To give an account” (*logon didonai*) for the philosopher here means to state determinately what the poem means, what it means intelligibly, beyond the equivocity which intrinsically seems to mark the poetic speaking itself. It might seem that this equivocity is something inherently negative, to be dispelled by a univocal definition of the sort acceptable to the rational requirement of the philosopher. I will come back to this again, and certainly a commitment to determinate univocity is part of Platonic thought. But the question is: Is that all? Is the search for univocity the ultimate quest? Are there other voices just as essential, and that perhaps relativize any absolutizing of the univocal?

One must answer, yes. Yes, because of the context in which the search is undertaken; yes, because of the dialogical character of that search; yes, because of the often aporetic character of the end of that search, since success or failure just in terms of univocity bring us to a limit where *more* than univocity seems also needed; yes, because at that limit *other ways of saying* are ventured, especially of a more mythic sort; yes, because to get to that limit we have to grant the *dynamism of passing* through context and through dialogue—this dynamism is erotic and perhaps more than erotic; yes, because at the limit something other may be granted that communicates energies of being that come from the source sought—this communication is mania, and mania may be divine, though it may be not. All these factors are interwoven in a metaxological understanding of Platonic originals.

ORIGINALS AND THE MIDDLE:
ON UNIVOCITY, DUALISM, PARTICIPATION

First, what of the ethos of thought of Platonic originals? There is the obvious fact that the context of Platonic thought is the world of *doxa*. The everyday has to be taken with great seriousness. We must have finesse for the ambiguities of the everyday and to read the signs of intelligibility in what often seems to be lacking in it. The context of *doxa* is an ethos of communication, and in that respect a world of intermediations. The ordinary words we use, the *logoi* towards which Socrates turned, articulate communications of putative intelligibilities; and so, if we examine these words, we can come to a more explicit understanding of these intelligibilities. The everyday ethos of thought is an implicit metaxu: a space of communicative interchange in which intelligibilities are at work, but in a manner that is taken for granted. But if taken for granted, how are they granted originally? The search for more univocal intelligibility in that equivocal ethos addresses this question.

This search is connected with the nature of Platonic originals, now here understood as eidetic units of intelligibility: the ideas or *eidē*. This does not mean that such originals *as found* are identical with the searching *as seeking*, or with the *finding as itself communicated* to mindfulness. There is *more* in the full ontological situation than a realm of eidetic units of intelligibility. We must never forget this context of the ethos: it is the intermediated space where intelligibilities are sought and communicated, and on the basis of which is made possible the qualified intelligibilities of life as lived in human community in the polis. Must the search for originals short change what more fully is in play in the ethos of communication? We can only answer that question by trying to do justice to what is fully communicated in the ethos. This is connected to the rationale for the return of the philosopher to the Cave. Only this way is justice more fully served.

I call the ethos of being the between: this is the ontological milieu within which we find ourselves, such that all philosophizing begins “in the midst.” From the midst, the sometimes extreme questionings of philosophical thought take form. We reach down into the depth of the midst, or up and out from it, but we are always within this milieu. There we awaken to what I called the intimate strangeness of being: so intimate we often have to struggle for the distance of thought in order to be mindful about it; yet strange, in the sense of striking us as astonishing, and in more troubled thought, as perplexing, as very hard to comprehend, as ever recalcitrant to our intelligibilities. This intimate strangeness is that before which we wake to wonder, or *thaumazein*, said by Plato to be the *pathos* of the philosopher (*Theaetetus*, 155d3). Wonder, we might say, awakens up the *passio essendi* of the philosopher in a new, or renewed porosity of being—porosity become an astonished mindfulness of being. Notice that this original *thaumazein* cannot be completely univocalized, even

if it sets off a search for univocal intelligibility. The communication of “more” than univocity is at play from the origin. From this our initiation in over-determined astonishment, more determinate forms of thought and articulation come to be shaped, as we seek the intelligibilities of what is there at play in the milieu. Once again this is all “in the midst,” even though here a vector of transcending in thinking itself seeks to comprehend what is not articulately known by us as at play in the between. Philosophizing “in the midst,” as faithful to that energy of transcending and what is communicated to it, is metaxological: it seeks a logos of the metaxu.

Suppose we think of the metaxu, the middle as a complex community of being that allows for a plurality of “mediations” (we could also say “communications”) between beings, between self and other. This is to put the point in slightly more “modern” terms. Why do so? Because in modernity we find the predominance of the self as trying through its own original power to define the middle. The Platonic rejoinder would be: irrepressible otherness is resurrected again and again, even in the most hyperbolic efforts to assert such a dominance of the active self. Why is it resurrected? Because the complex nature of intermediated being cannot be reduced to the mediations of the self. Just as Platonic mimesis cannot be reduced only to a representational univocity, such as we are more likely to find in the modern mathesis of nature, so eros and mania bring about ecstatic unsettlings of the human soul that the modern *cogito*, clear to itself and self-certain, tends to shun. (How even “postmodern” can Plato seem to sound, if we understand thus this “pre-modern” philosopher!) How the point works its way out will become for us more evident in aesthetic thought: art is an extremely rich event, a crucial comportment towards being in which we try to approximate some open “wholeness” with respect to selving, and some ultimacy with respect to other-being. The ontological, metaphysical basis of art is at stake. What does art tell us about how humans conceive of being, and of themselves as participant in the process of being? The practice of art, as well as the philosophical reflections of superior minds, is extremely instructive here. Plato provides an essential contrast between more pre-modern and modern responses. There may well be some truth to the claim that a repeated temptation to dualism has immensely affected western culture throughout the Christian era. There may also be some truth to the claim that in response to otherworldly dualism, we find the onset of modern intraworldly dualism, as in Descartes between self and soulless nature. But how fair is the blanket charge that the “tradition” or “Plato” are to blame for such otherworldly dualism? If “Plato” is a metaxological thinker, if philosophy seeks a logos of the metaxu, the situation must be more complicated.

We might see something of this complexity first by, so to speak, *turning around* this issue of dualism in relation to the question of otherness. Return again to being in the midst. There in the milieu of being things are not univocally fixed. As existing in a process of becoming, they both are what they are

and are not fully what they are: to become themselves, they cannot be fully coincident with themselves, but yet must be themselves in order to become themselves. In short, things seem double and equivocal, with a kind of wavering indeterminacy that makes it hard to fix their intelligibilities. They appear but appear not fully; hence they as much suggest something withheld or perhaps lacking, as something present and given. How respond to this double condition of equivocal appearance? Perhaps the most immediately plausible response is what one might call the univocalization of the manifestation: fix it as determinate, make it to be this and not that, hold its flux still for mindfulness to get a stable vision of what it is, that is, if it is anything that can be so stabilized at all. In a word, reduce the wavering indeterminacy of equivocal appearance to univocal, determinate form.

There is where we find *one version* of Platonic originals. The equivocal appearances are not originals, for an original, it seems, must have a stable and reliable nature, relative to which the images of it gain whatever intelligibility they possess. An appearance is an image which both shows and does not show fully its original. Equivocal appearance suggests and withholds: suggests what it shows, and withholds just what is shown as *other* to complete appearing. The originals are other to appearing, even as they appear in the image. Did they fully appear, the images would no longer be images but originals. Did they not appear at all, the appearances would also not be images, for they would image nothing, and hence nothing would be appearing. The otherness of the original is interpreted by the univocalizing mind as pointing to the unchangeable stability of the originals. They are not sensuous or aesthetic, but eidetic; to be reached as other by dianoetic and noetic movements of mind; and they are mono-eidetic, uni-form in that they have a reliable and constant oneness, relative to which appearances appear to be plural, multiform. I do not need to develop the point further. There is a complex logic, more persuasive than granted by its antagonists, that leads from the double nature of equivocal appearances or manifestations to the so-called forms: univocal units of eidetic intelligibilities, indeed eternal units. These, it will be said, are the Platonic originals.

Consider now the dualistic way the point is often put, with relation to what is thought to be a major problem of the Platonic schema, namely, *participation*. We are all familiar with Aristotle's tart dismissal of participation as a mere metaphor. Should Aristotle have tried a bit harder? The problem here is put in essentially dualistic terms. The *eidē* are eternal unities that nevertheless are universal, and relative to which the features of generality we find in temporal things are to be explained. They are defined in terms of a contrast that veers towards an opposition of two discontinuous ontological orders. The problem is the following. The philosopher is concerned to make intelligible sense of what appears, to save the appearances; one of the ways is by understanding the general features that bind a plurality together into a similarity. Even stronger, a plurality seems to exhibit a certain unity across difference or

diversity; there is a certain general sameness across the diversity; to give an account of that sameness is to make rational sense of the things; it is to try and answer the question “What is X?” But what if the sameness across diversity cannot be the same as any one individual, precisely because it obtains across a plurality? Then the “factor” of binding sameness, in fact, is marked by an *otherness* to any one individual: in order to apply to a diversity, this sameness must be other to each and every instance of the things comprised by this diversity. Already the dialectical play of sameness and otherness is complex.

Platonic originals would seem simply to accentuate the difference: the otherness seems to be turned into an opposition. Were this so, the difficulty now would be that this very opposition would *undercut* the proposed solution to that very problem which resort to the forms was intended to solve. That is, we appeal to the forms as an intelligible otherness to make rational sense of the things given to us; but when our appeal to otherness takes the form of a dualistic opposition, intelligible otherness cannot be related to those things which it was supposed to make intelligible. Our solution repeats the problem, which is just one of intermediation, not dualism. Participation is a name for trying to mitigate this dualistic opposition and hence allow the forms to function as intelligible principles, that is, to be intermediating in the requisite manner.

Aristotle’s criticism implies that the forms as radically other are ontologically redundant to explain the things of genesis.³ It implies that participation simply renames the problem, pushing it back one step further. I would rather say: the point of his criticism is directed precisely at the space *between* the originals and the image, the forms and the things. He is correct to return us to this space of the between. But the implication now: if the extremes of this between are defined by a dualistic opposition, the forms are *not* what the things are, otherness is a gulf that allows no mediation, hence the “between” itself, understood in terms of the mediation of “participation,” remains as only a new name for the old problem. Even if one agrees with Aristotle on the necessity of some immanence of form, as Plato himself clairvoyantly did in his own *Parmenides*, the issue persists concerning the manner of this immanence, and the mode of manifestation proper to it. A critique of dualism does not do away with the otherness implied in the happening of immanent manifestation; certainly not if manifestation is always also a reserving of what is showing, and hence its continued otherness, even in the show of appearances.

If many of Aristotle’s points hit the mark with regard to a certain dualism,⁴ nevertheless, if the context of thought is the ethos of the metaxu, Platonic thought *inevitably brings us back to the between*. Let us think of Plato pri-

3. Obviously, this discussion could be expanded in detail to take in other criticisms, such as the third man argument, the issue of ontological duplication, the question whether a form can be a cause, not to mention the knowability or unknowability of form.

4. See *DDO*, chapter 4, on the problems of static eternity; also *Beyond Hegel and Dialectic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), chapter 1, on time and eternity (abbreviation *BHD*).

marily a thinker of the middle where we discover complex intermediations of self and other. This middle is revealed as dynamic, especially if we take notice of human eros. Suppose we say: all being is a participation in the middle. Suppose we then say: individual things go to comprise the middle, but they do not exhaust it. How could they, if they already are in communication, *are at all* in being intermediated? Let us say that individual things exhibit a certain commonness, a certain community. How do we explain this community? Even if one of our resorts is to appeal to the forms, notice we have not left the middle. Will this begin to satisfy Aristotle? Obviously more must be said.

Notice that, whether we hear “yes” or “no” from Aristotle, we can *still say* that these forms are never univocally identical with any one individual. If they were, their communal character, and the happening of community, would be impossible. In the middle itself, we have to say that any nominalistic reduction of being to a collection of particulars does not make sense finally. We could say that the forms are themselves possibilities of “being together” that also arise in the middle. They are other to the individual things as more than determinate particularities, but they essentially name the fact that the individual itself is not exhausted by its particularity; its individuality as a member of the middle community points beyond bare particularity. The individual in the middle is beyond itself as a member of the community of being. Universal form names this sur-particular participation in the “beyond”—a “beyond” of itself which is its “being together” with others, more proximately with others of its own kind, more mediately with all other beings. And this “beyond” is, nevertheless, also right here and now in the middle. (A sign of this doubleness of the “beyond” might be seen in the way the word “*meta*” can mean both “in the midst,” and also “over and above.”)

Note also that now the issue is not quite how individuals participate in the forms; the deeper issue is that *both* are modes of participation in the middle. Universality and particularity are modes of participation of individual things in the community of being. That community of being is the middle, but the issue of making sense of the middle for the philosopher can be exhausted neither by the enumeration of a collection of particulars, nor the abstraction of a set of general concepts. Universals themselves might be said to be nonparticular, sur-particular modes of participation in the middle. Does not this escape the stricture of Aristotle, even though more might still be said?⁵ If someone still were to say that participation remains a metaphor, perhaps one can only direct attention to the experience of *participation in community we actually do have in the middle*. It may indeed be the case that there is a metaphorical extension of human community to being beyond the human. But this does not undercut the suggestion, though it does ask us to explore further the nature of the communication, which is plurivocal. And it may be

5. See *BB*, chapter 9, on intelligibilities as modes of being together in the between.

that such metaphorical speech is not a logical defect but the fundamental way we have of making sense of being in community. For human community, and communication, are carried by an eros of likening in which we know, not univocal identity or difference, but the inseparability of unlikeness and likeness. It may also be less that we metaphorically extend human community to being beyond the human, but that *to be at all* is to be in metaxological community, and that this is *constitutive* also for human community, apart from any metaphorical extension. Perhaps also such metaphorphizing (notice again the *meta* and its ferrying power) is itself possibilized by metaxological community. There are many large issues I cannot take up here (on communities, see *BB*, chapter 11).

To mitigate the questionable consequences that follow from a univocalizing dualism, my suggestion is that we *turn around*, in a metaxological direction, the significance of participation. We can then acknowledge that there is a strain in the Platonic philosopher who, as a thinker of the middle, is yet driven to the extremes. Philosophical eros is for the ultimate; a sense of the otherness of being emerges in the middle; eros is drawn on by the presentiment that being in the full is not exhausted by what is shown in doxa, whether shown univocally or equivocally; as oscillating between equivocality and univocity, the world of doxa can lend itself to a reduction of the promise of the middle; what we make of being is sometimes pitifully poor in relation to that promise. Some will see this view as objectionable: the “Plato” who throws to us the bones of the feast. One could well say the opposite: there can be a dogmatism of doxa that asserts itself as the measure of being, as if it were on a par with the ontological richness of the middle. It is this dogmatism that lacks a feel for the feast. It would have us live from the thin gruel of the taken for granted middle, while prescribing any eros for otherwise filling food. But did not Plato in the *Laws* (see 796) recommend that life be lived as if it were the play of a kind of divine feast day? Did not the Athenian Stranger there suggest (828b) that there be 365 feast days in the year?

Perhaps driven by the contrast between different ways of dwelling with the middle, by a radical eros, Plato had a tendency to pit the extreme against the middle, as more ordinarily domesticated. The extreme can be dangerous, of course, just as eros and mania can, and the middle can be differently domesticated, and not always by commonsense, but perhaps too by philosophy. That contrast between extreme and middle can result in the otherness of being now being reformulated in terms of a dualistic opposition. This can happen if we stress the *reserve* of the intelligible in sensuous showing. One can also understand why it might happen in dialogues of limit situations, most especially in *Phaedo*, where the extreme looms up in radically negative form, namely death. It is surely understandable why this sense of otherness is articulated in stronger dualistic terms in this context of limit situation, and entirely compatible with less pronounced dualistic forms in other dialogues where such an extremity is not directly before one. In that regard, Platonic dualism is made more under-

standable as a response to the different kinds of otherness that emerge in the middle. That said, the forms as originals, and participation as a communication of the originals, are susceptible to a more nuanced understanding that preserves their otherness without fixing on a univocalizing dualism.

Below I will suggest that is it this dualistic otherness that easily comes to the fore when treating of *mimesis*: we are tempted to spread the middle out in a spatial, geometrical structure, univocally emphasizing the extremes as set in opposition to each other. I will suggest a more nuanced view of mimesis, since both *eros* and *mania* undercut this univocal “spatialization” of the middle. One can think of Platonic originals in terms truer to the middle and the dynamic energies of being that emerge there—whether it be the energy of ambiguous showing in mimesis, or the original energy of self-surpassing emergent in the soul with *eros*, or the original energy of being erupting from the other in mania and overpowering the self of quotidian consciousness. But before turning to these points in detail, one final consideration, relative to the larger setting beyond Plato.

As is well recognized, some version of Platonic dualism has been extraordinarily influential in determining the shape of ontological, metaphysical vision in the west. One does not have to be a Nietzsche or Heidegger to realize that. Nor does one have to denounce Platonism as nihilism. This is now altogether too crude. I will say: premodern metaphysics did not emphasize active selfhood in the modern way because its participation in the middle was marked by a strong sense of the otherness of being. You might put this down to terror before the unknown in nature, as some debunking modern enlighteners have done. Again this is entirely too simplistic, though not without a touch a truth. Pre-modern humans lived, like us, in the middle, but the middle in its otherness communicated its perplexing enigma as much as the self asserting itself. This can take an affirmative, celebratory form, as in a kind of reverence that has ontological roots, as well as a terrified and even nihilistic form.

I will not dwell on this except to say that we moderns are sometimes shamed by the joy pre-moderns took in the *beauty of the cosmos*. And that on the part of those Platonists who allegedly had nothing but the “evil eye” for beauty and the superlative worth of being. One has only to think of the *aesthetic cosmogony* of the *Timaeus*, where the Demiurge, while forming matter according to geometrical forms, is most concerned to make the world the best and most beautiful possible. The coming to form of the cosmos is an *aesthetic act* that affirms the *ontological good* of what comes to be. Not the horror of being, but the worthiness of being to be affirmed—this is what, one might almost say, is *sung*.

Dualism is a manageable, because *crude* way of dealing with different senses of otherness. Philosophical views that are influential in the wider culture cast their spell in their cruder forms, and only because they lend themselves to formulation in a coarser version (think of Hegel’s afterlife in Marx). One might say as much about “Plato” with regard to dualism. But one is the

victim of a self-incurred obtuseness, if one neglects the joyful participation in the beauty of the middle that often marks pre-modern humans. One has only to look at some of the art to see this joy. The Greek celebration of the human body is witness enough to this. But even in the seemingly miserable Middle Ages, we are often stunned. Look, for example, at the serenity of being of those extraordinary faces carved on the door of Chartres Cathedral. Joy in the cosmos involves a kind of metaphysical *aisthēsis*, though these serene faces communicate something even beyond that immanent joy.

My point is not to defend dualism. As I indicated, in the long run dualism undermines the otherness it ostensibly defends; but in a certain sense, it is almost unavoidable that the senses of otherness be formulated in its terms. Something like Platonic dualism may have been carried forward into Christianity in the contrast between the herenow and the hereafter; and at the end of the Middle Ages, perhaps ambiguities with this theological dualism come to pitch the human being back into the middle as a “nature” divested of communications of the divine. Dualism and otherness are identified with and consigned to the other world, while the active human self comes on the scene of a nature that is progressively stripped of its enigma and worth. The seeming eclipse of the divine as other, the atomistic contraction of the singularity of things, nature as a valueless mechanism, homogenous quantity, the human self contracted into the self-expanding expression of its own will to power, these together shape a new dualizing of the middle. The middle is not the ontological milieu, aesthetically astonishing, holding together selfness and otherness. Univocalizing power pulverizes the plurivocal middle. Otherness becomes the externality of a dead nature to be exploited by a self that, to feel itself participant in the middle, now asserts its own original power over against any claims of heteronomy.

Consider the sense of otherness in the middle conceived of as a Cartesian mechanism. The Cartesian dualism is far more insidiously destructive of the sense of significant otherness than is the Platonic dualism. Certainly the sense of otherness carried by Platonic *eidē* is gone. One might be tempted to say: we now have mere things; but do we have things at all? We do not have the community of being. And there is no participation because in the homogeneous continuum there is a sameness which reduces all differences. Participation demands an intermediation of sameness and otherness, an interplay of likening and unlikening. In the indifferent continuum of the Cartesian “middle,” there emerges only the self-assertive self which, to protect its own vanishing into the continuum, sets itself in opposition to the rest of being. This is an astonishing change, not least because it signals the dying of astonishment. Astonishment before being is overtaken by its counterfeit double, a hubristic curiosity that slyly lurks in doubt.

Let us be clear. This is essentially a degenerate relatedness in the middle and to the middle, for implicit in it is a degenerate relating to otherness that seems to spread all over modernity in the succeeding centuries. Where find

room for ontological joy in nature, or reverence in the Cartesian world? Who could write a poem to Cartesian nature? What eros is aroused there, what mania there to inspire? What could one love there? The answering silence is revealing. The shadow of an ontological nihilism is cast. The shadow is less dispelled by the light cast from a reason uprooted from the ontological milieu, as it is lengthened the more the light broadcasts itself. Of course, certain thinkers (Kant and post-Kantian) did wrestle in different ways with the senses of otherness, and not least with reference to the ontological significance of art. Their struggles can best be seen as trying to do more justice to the middle, despite the danger of disfiguring its promise. Indeed a relation to Plato, or Platonic themes, and a recurrence of eros and mania, as we shall later see, will figure significantly in such thinkers as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Nor will our trials with the underground be lacking.

MIMESIS, ORIGINALS, AND THE MIDDLE

I now turn to mimesis, eros and mania as essential illuminations of our participation in the between, as well as ways of addressing dualism. Mimesis is inseparable from a metaphysics of image and original in which a *double* attitude towards the image seems unavoidable: the mimesis proves to be both revealing and concealing of original being. This perhaps lights up something of the paradox of Plato as a thinker: most critical among philosophers concerning the status of images; greatest genius of the philosophical image, his similes still fresh for us. Indeed his image of the divided line itself is a mimesis of our ontological and cognitive ethos: the lower mimics the higher but is also bound to it; likewise ascent and descent, as up and down a continuous and discontinuous ladder, are made possible through truer energies of being and knowing released in the soul. We will come to these energies with eros and mania, but one can see how the doubleness of mimesis, as a kind of creative equivocality, can be frozen into a metaphysical dualism. Dualism, as we saw, may be a way of guarding otherness but it also can lead to aporiai: it can undercut otherness in the defense of otherness. Rather than a dualistic spatialization of otherness, the interplay of the mimetic relation needs to be understood plurivocally.

Mimesis is also one of the great concepts in the tradition by means of which art's *grounding relation* to originals is articulated. Mimesis has a range wider than the aesthetic, with ontological significance with respect to beings themselves as images, and with ethical meaning in that we become good by imitation of those already good, as Aristotle reminds us. Mimesis has had a long dominance as the key aesthetic notion, relative to which more modern notions like "creativity," despite their current pervasiveness, have a much shorter history, perhaps emerging with strength in Renaissance humanism, and gathering to unprecedented influence from the time of Romanticism.

First we need to say that mimesis is more nuanced than any merely facile copying. This last notion follows a univocalization of mimesis, indeed a univocalization of being, in which image and original are congealed into a too fixed one-to-one correspondence. Mimesis is a relation, and hence has a *dynamic of relating* at work in it. The complexity of the relation has to do less with some univocal visual mirroring than a balanced relativity between an image and an original. That relation is double rather than univocal, indeed plurivocal in that an openness is necessarily inserted *between* original and image. There is a showing *and* a reserve of the original, and both the showing and the reserve are themselves ambiguously shown in the image.

Consider: The image imitates the original, and in that respect *shows* the original. Take the actor who mimics. I mimic your voice and make you present in my presentation of you: I am you as other; I represent you, not in a simply visual image but by dynamically making present something of the reality that is you, as other to me. And so the mimesis shows my ability to be other than myself: I must transcend myself to imitate you; but your otherness is not absolutely strange, since your life as other-being takes up a guest residence in the welcome of my imitation. My transcending to you in imitation bridges a gap between us, and also shows that your otherness is not so other as to be unbridgeable in an absolute dualism. Mimesis is a complex intermediation in which sometimes the representation of what is other to the image is paramount. At other times, the very power of the image to present and show takes on something of its own life, and seems to stand there in terms of its own achieved creative accomplishment: I mimic you so well, I seem *to be you!* I do it so well, I make you uncomfortable, I seem to have stolen your life.

An adequate account of mimesis cannot reduce it to facile copying, since then one might ask, why bother to copy at all? Given that we seem already to have the original in itself, why duplicate it? Thus the further point: if the otherness is to be shown, in one sense, it must be absent, in another sense, available for manifestation. The imitation is an agent of a manifestation which, as intermediating, communicates across a gap, and indeed may carry its own power, yet it never entirely destroys that otherness as other. Were it to do so, the mimetic relation would be destroyed: and we would have to speak of something more like self-creation *simpliciter*. I think it is important that the insights about originals present in Platonic thinking want to guard that sense of nonreducible otherness. Only when that safeguard is discarded, when indeed otherness as other is felt as a curb on human freedom or “creativity,” does the deeper rationale of a mimetic relation become corroded. That does happen in post-Romantic modernity. Imitation is suicide, says Emerson.⁶

6. *Emerson's Essays* (New York: Thomas Corwell, 1961), 32. I have discussed the contrast of mimesis and creativity in a number of places, for instance, *PO*, chapter 2; also in “Creativity and the Dunamis,” *The Philosophy of Paul Weiss: Library of Living Philosophers*, ed. L. Hahn (Chicago and LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1995), 543–57.

Despite the above complexity, there is a recurrent temptation to simplify mimesis into a univocally proportional relation in which we insist on a one-to-one correspondence between image and original. Such a univocalizing of mimesis easily closes down the open transcending latent in the activity of relating mimetically. Then, with this closure, it will seem we have two *fixed* orders of reality: the image and the original. The original is univocally fixed; the image is a more or less wavering counterpart of the fixed original; and the best imitations are the most univocally correct reproductions of the fixed original. The doubling here is to be fixed, in the best case, to a univocal one-to-one correspondence between the original and the image. Needless to say, no such univocal correspondence is possible on the terms of mimesis; for otherwise the difference would be undercut, and you would have something like a version of Leibniz's identity of indiscernibles—you could not tell the difference of the original if the image is absolute and exactly like the original. There must be difference for an imitation to work—you need the unlikeness of the image, as much as the likeness. One could say that the image, to be true, must be false, if truth means univocal correctness. But if the image is true by being false, there must also be a "being true" that *takes the equivocity of appearing* into account, that does not sidestep this equivocity.

I think the premoderns were never so literalist in their univocalizing that no allowance was made for this openness of the mimetic relation. This we see, for instance, in Plato's discussion of the difference of an *eikastic* and *phantastik* image (*Sophist*, 235d ff.). To appear as a true image, a phantastik image must depart from the exact proportions of the eikastic and be proportioned to the viewer: in a certain sense, to be true, it must be false to the original, and only by being false does it appear as true. This, I would say, is an *affirmative sense* of the equivocity of the image. Only with an uncompromising univocalizing of the mimetic relation, does insensitivity to these nuances become more pronounced. Here I find it revealing that modernity's quest for univocity (proximately in science and mathematics, more generally in relation to being as such) *paradoxically releases, in its relation to art, a glorification of equivocity*, and not least with respect to "creativity" and its indeterminacy. One wonders if the diminished prestige of imitation for modernity goes as much with this univocal inability to understand a nuanced mimesis, as with our impatience with any relation to an other that puts a curb on our vaunted "creativity." The aesthetic glorification of equivocity seems to compensate for the pulverization by univocal reason of the plurivocity of other-being.

I would say that when the univocal tendency is in the dominant in Plato, then the *negative vision of mimesis* comes more to the fore. The difference of the original and image, the ontological distance never absolutely abrogated, is seen to cut us off from the truth of the original. Then the difference is not stressed as, so to say, the condition of the possibility of the appearing of the original in the middle. This second affirmative difference is inseparable from the showing of the truth of the original. And since the univocalizing tendency

is one of the strains in Plato, we repeatedly find different forms of a certain ambivalent relation to what exceeds such univocal determination. I mean that the double evaluation, the positive/negative relation to "art," will also appear with respect to eros and to mania. Now it seems we are dealing with something divine, now with something delusionary. Do we perhaps always deal with *both*? If so, there is no absolute evasion of the equivocity of the situation. Sometimes this equivocity will be condemned, if it is taken as only as *failure* of the univocal test. But it will come in for a different praise when an other sense of being true beyond univocity is allowed to enter consideration, let us say, when philosophical *finesse* is granted its freedom beyond geometry. For philosophical finesse is just what we need to tell the difference between the delusionary and the divine.

A certain univocal fixation of the between easily turns the mimetic relation into a (failed) quasi-mathematical grid of structural relations. The gap between the image and the original is fixed by that structural grid; and we can freeze into a posture of dualistic opposition between this world and the other, between images and originals. As I said, this is a perennial temptation; but it cannot be true to mimesis itself. The dynamic of relating immanent in the mimesis is evident with an investigation of the relation itself. This becomes more evident when we more explicitly take account of other energies of that dynamic. I suggest that erotic transcending and manic inspiration have much to do with naming that *happening of criss-crossing between image and original* that is present also in mimesis but too easily forgotten and frozen with the dominance of univocal mind. It is not so easy to univocalize eros and mania. One might even wonder why the image of the *bed* was chosen to discuss mimesis in the *Republic*. What are beds for? For sleeping, for resting, no doubt; but also for love. What would the divine idea of the bed then be? What kind of sleep would come over one, what kind of love would waken, on *that* bed? Nor should one forget that it is the couch of seductive luxury, so to say, that is being purified in the *Republic*.

Before turning to eros and mania, I conclude these present reflections with a remark on mimesis and the dynamic between. Mimesis *can* lead to a more static spatialization of the milieu of the middle. Then the ethos of the between is fixed in terms of certain *relata*, themselves fixed in their difference, and hence to be mediated by some *subsequent* relation of correspondence. But what if the middle is *already alive with correspondings*? Say: beings are, as already in response to each other; each is hence both itself and beyond itself; each shows itself and shows something more and other than itself; each is double in its appearing, appearing as itself, and also as showing its being in response to what is other, and even in its showing also reserved. Looked at this way, we dynamize the between, now seen as a network of dynamic respondings: a network of communication between one and the other, between same and other, between identity and difference.

From this point of view, it is not at all surprising that *music* is said to be the most imitative of the arts; for just that responsiveness, immediately at

work, is alive here. Music takes us back to the original plurivocity of the between, where the voices of being are being formed, and sound together in original resonance, and without being fixed in one voice alone. And if the soul is taken out of itself by music, as the Pythagoreans knew, it is also the most mathematical of the arts. Is not music then somewhat like the making of the Demiurge who weds in matter cosmic aesthetic discernment with geometrical form? This most imitative of the arts, music, is the most resounding: equivocal and needing finesse, yet structured by univocal form; appealing to depths of responsiveness in the psyche, while avoiding destructive formlessness. This preeminence of music as mimetic fits neither with modern logocentrism which so emphasize univocity that geometry overwhelms finesse; nor with postmodern anti-logocentrism, where finesse often is overcome by a formlessness that is the counterfeit of creation.

Is it not perfectly understandable that Nietzsche here would derive the origin of tragedy from the spirit of music? The original formlessness gives birth to the high civilizing form of tragedy, where art, religion, philosophical vision, ethical wisdom pass into each other in a manner at the opposite extreme to their modern division. The spirit of music seems the opposite of mimesis, but when we are transported by music it is just our *being re-formed* though the energies of music that make us *be other*. Kant hated the involuntary aspect of this transport. I would speak of the original formlessness as a primal porosity of being. I would speak of the transport as a dipping down into and release of the *passio essendi*, and it has to do with an idiot wisdom.

EROS, MIDDLES, ORIGINALS

We know that there are many discussions of eros in Plato. Its nature and presence is a focus in many dialogues: *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*. And in these dialogues, different faces of eros are shown, and not least in the *Symposium*, where we must take seriously the *plurality* of possible interpretations offered, and not think too univocally that we can identify simpliciter Plato's views with those expounded in Socrates's contribution to that dialogue. The great myth expounded by Aristophanes, and here presented with such power, not least, must make us consider that Plato wants us to consider these many faces of eros; wants us to consider the archeology of eros, as much as the teleology (Socrates). One recalls the story that Plato, on being asked by Dion as to what the Greeks were like, is said to have sent the works of Aristophanes in reply. There is also the story that found under the pillow of the dead Plato were the works of Aristophanes.

Eros gives expression to the porosity of our being, mingling, often in a fertile equivocity, the passion of being with our endeavor to be. Patience and striving mix there. The plurivocal, if not protean character of eros asks us to be ambiguous between celebration and caution. Some of Plato's dialogues, (e.g., the *Republic*)

seem more to offer an image of eros as needing discipline and purification; others, such as the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, seem less guarded about the indispensable affirmative powers of eros, though even then the equivocality between *eros uranos* and *eros turranos* is never forgotten.

My concern cannot be with all the subtle intricacies of Plato, even if one could ever be sure what Plato thinks, even did we seem to master all the details of his dialogues, not forgetting either the dramatic nature of these dialogues, and its indispensable role in the showing and communication of truth. These dialogues are images of philosophy as a living dialectic between singular humans, each giving voice to his understanding of truth, none possessing it completely, yet each contributing in the play of voices to the furtherance of the search. Philosophical dialogue plurivocally mimics the possible pathways to truth in the middle, as indeed also some of the possible departures from the path, also in the middle. Dialogue: a middle of plurivocal *logoi*, each seeking to be true to what is coming to articulation in the spaces of questioning and answering between thinking human beings.

Surprisingly also, I think that dialogue commands that we pay *attention to surfaces*. Surfaces are the interfaces of communication. Philosophy must be a mindfulness of surfaces as places of showing. Plato gives us a philosophy of surfaces by offering us the drama of human showing. For words can be the richest showings: articulated surfaces that can be the communication of the deepest hiddenness. It is not accident that we speak of eros surfacing: the incarnate human is aroused, inspired, besides itself. The surfacing promises an intimacy of communication to the one who loves or is loved. One might say that art is a happening where surface and depth coincide. The hypersensible shows itself as sensible. The intelligible shines. (Aristotle said (*De Anima*, 426b4–5 that *aisthēsis* too is a kind of *logos*.) The Platonic dialogue is a drama of surfaces, of words as the surfacing of souls in the between and in communication with each other.

What might be said about eros and the metaxu, in light of previous discussion of originals? Let me put the point about the energy of eros in terms of different views of “being true,” relative to our fidelity to what shows itself in the between.⁷ One might correlate mimesis with a more *correspondence* view of truth, in that an other original seems given to which the imitation is to be likened. We have already seen the difficulty of trying to fix a univocal one-to-one correspondence between original and imitation: there is openness in the correspondence, giving likeness in unlikeness, unlikeness in likeness. Correspondence points in itself to more than fixed univocal correlation: the dynamic of *passing between* the two sides of the mimesis, between one and the other.

I would situate eros here: eros reminds us of self-surpassing, eros is itself the dynamic of self-surpassing. “Being true,” in this instance, is fidelity to the

7. On “being true,” with references to the different senses of being, see *BB*, chapter 12.

movement of self-transcending in relation to truth as (originally) other to us, other because we do not possess it through ourselves alone. Indeed we are self-transcending to the extent that a call is made on us by what we do not possess: we are driven beyond lack as much by that lack, as by what we lack. The *passing between* is here to be discerned. But there is a temptation analogous to the temptation to fixity of mimesis: this is not now the fixing of an external original as ultimate; the temptation is rather to *intoxication with the self-transcending itself as original*. For eros seems to release something original in us, showing us to be more than mere passive images. If there is a passion of eros, it is a powerful passion, and hence as power is more than passion. So we are tempted to conceive of ourselves as originating the self-surpassing movement through ourselves alone. We might even then hold that truth, or “being true,” is a matter of being self-constructed, self-determined.

This, I think, can be but a reversal of the above temptation to univocal fixation, but like the latter, it has its own equivocity, in that the lack within self remains enigmatic, as does the plenitude of power that immanently energizes the movements of self-surpassing. *We first find ourselves in them*, we do not construct them ourselves. Whatever construction there is comes after this first finding. “Being true” must include fidelity also to this first finding, and not just to the subsequent constructions or self-determinations. Fidelity to “being true” may come in self-exceeding towards a limit, but there is an already given relation to the truth in the movement of self-exceeding. There is also a limit where we might well find ourselves visited with a *reversal*, relative to any complete claims to self-construction. Something is given and shown from the other sought, but now it is granted as communicated to self—from beyond self.

Is it not here that one might situate the happening of mania: something is communicated enigmatically to the soul from beyond itself, but it enters most intimately into that soul, so its strange transcendence is also intimate immanence? It makes us at home and not at home with our own “being true,” and with true being as other to ourselves. There is here neither univocal clarity nor certainty, nor complete self-mastery and self-possession. We seem rather to be possessed with a truth more *revealed* than simply found or constructed. Such a revelation would be neither an univocal foundation nor an equivocal construction. It would be a plurivocal *passing between* the passionate soul and the communicating origin. The soul must be porous to let be that passing.

I will return to mania, but consider further the point about correspondence: think here of eros as the coming to mindfulness in the soul of its being as *responsiveness*. (The word “soul” here is more resonant than the modern word “self.”) The soul *is in co-responding*, where response is always to or with something other to itself. Eros reveals an energy of self-surpassing in which the soul is more passionately energized in itself, while at the same time it reaches more extensively beyond its own limits: more intensively aroused, more extensively self-transcending. We know this from eros: something more fully comes alive in us and also some presentiment of desire for what is

beyond us also comes alive, as the sense of need or lack relative to which we must seek beyond. Thus the seeming paradoxical character: *innerness most aroused*, most passionately taken hold of, perhaps even besides itself so overpowering is the energy, and yet more fully itself in this being besides itself; and yet also the soul is *most driven out* to seek what it is not, besides itself because in itself it cannot be complete but must seek what is besides it, what is more than it, in order to be at home. *Being besides itself*: the double face of “besides”: intensive arousal of itself, extensive exceeding of itself to what is other or above.

If there is a temptation to univocal structure and correspondence with mimesis, with eros it becomes more explicit that there is something *beyond structure*: there is the dynamism out of which structure comes to shape. Beyond fixed form there is forming, structuring. If we fix mimesis to a structure of relation, eros more fully reminds us there is a structuring in the relation, indeed that there is something that exceeds structure. Indeed this excess is necessary if the form of *relation as a relating* is to be possible at all, relating *between* terms that are like and unlike, as are the image and the original in the relation of mimesis. There is a passage from one to the other: there is a movement between them; for the image images the original, and hence something passes between them; just as the original is such as to be imaginable in the images, and hence again something passes between them. How make sense of this passage between? Participation and mimesis point to this between, eros does so more dynamically relative to the movement of the human soul itself.

Proximately we seem to be turned to the dynamism of being in the self, but there is something unmastered about this. This is related to what I have called the *passio essendi*. We are passions of being before we are endeavors of being (*conatus essendi*). With eros the passion of being arouses itself, or is aroused in us, in a desire that knows itself as a restlessness called out beyond its own confines. The call initially is the opposite of mastery; perhaps it will enter some mastery of itself; but this will always be qualified by its being sourced more originally in the *passio essendi*. There is also an excess within. This might be called the inward otherness: eros beyond absolute mastery by us: the power in us that draws us, drives us beyond. We discover our own beyondness as in search of a more radical beyond. Eros is participant in the dynamic bridging of the gap.

Eros shows its sources in the sensuous body, this being its *aesthetic* happening. It is also more than aesthetic happening, since we also find the self-structuring power of an inward otherness, a power not confined to its own self, but moved to the transcendence of inward otherness in the direction of an other otherness: not its own beauty, but beauty as other, beauty itself. Any dualism of “in here/out there,” or of “up/down” breaks down. There is a plurivocally intermediated middle—metaxological, not univocal, not equivocal. Eros “bridges” the metaphysical dualism from our side, though it is not