

Personal Reflexions On Some Metaphysical Questions

The cosmogony described in the *Ιερός Λόγος* tractate of the *Corpus Hermeticum* answers certain interesting and important metaphysical questions in a particular and ancient way:

Δόξα πάντων ὁ θεὸς καὶ θεῖον καὶ φύσις θεία. ἀρχὴ
τῶν ὄντων ὁ θεός καὶ νοῦς καὶ φύσις καὶ ὕλη, σοφία εἰς
δεῖξιν ἀπάντων ὧν· ἀρχὴ τὸ θεῖον καὶ φύσις καὶ ἐνέργεια
καὶ ἀνάγκη καὶ τέλος καὶ ἀνανέωσις [...]

τὸ γὰρ θεῖον ἢ πᾶσα κοσμικὴ σύγκρασις φύσει ἀνανεου-
μένη· ἐν γὰρ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἡ φύσις καθέστηκεν

The numen of all beings is theos: numinal, and of numinal physis.

The origin of what exists is theos, who is Perceivation and Physis and Substance:

The sapientia which is a revealing of all beings.

For the numinal is the origin: physis, vigour, incumbency, accomplishment, renewance [...]

The divine is all of that mision: renewance of the cosmic order through Physis

For Physis is presenced in the divine. ⁽¹⁾

All such 'theological' answers - from classical Greco-Roman paganism and mysticism to Gnosticism to Christianity and Islam - lead us to enquire (i) if Being - whether denoted by terms such as acausal, born-less, θεός The One, The Divine, God, The Eternal, Μονάς - can be apprehended (or defined) by some-things which are causal (denoted by terms such as spatial, temporal, renewance), and (ii) whether this 'acausal Being' is the origin or the genesis or 'the artisan' ⁽²⁾ or the creator of both causal being (including 'time', and 'change') and of causal living beings such as ourselves.

That is, (i) has causal spatially-existing being 'emerged from' - or been created by - acausal Being, and (ii) are causal beings - such as ourselves - an aspect or emanation of acausal Being?

My admittedly fallible understanding now, after some years of reflexion and based as it is on my limited knowledge, is that formulating such a question in such terms - causal/acausal; whole/parts; eternal/temporal; ipseity/unity; emergent from/genesis of - is a mis-apprehension of what-is because such denoting is 'us as observer' (i) positing, as Plato did, such things as a theory regarding 'the ideal' ⁽³⁾, and/or (ii) constructing a form or abstraction (ἰδέα) which we then presume to project onto what is assumed to be 'external' to us,

both of which present us with only an illusion of understanding and meaning because implicit in such theories and in all such constructed forms are (i) an opposite (an 'other') and (ii) the potentiality for discord (dialectical or otherwise) between such opposites and/or because of a pursuit of what is regarded as 'the ideal' of some-thing. Hence, perhaps, why Heraclitus is reported to have written:

εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἔοντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεώμενα

One should be aware that Polemos pervades, with discord *δίκη*, and that beings are naturally born by discord. [Fragment 80]

πάντα δὲ γίνεσθαι καθ' εἰμαρμένην καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐναντιοδρομίας ἡρμόσθαι τὰ ὄντα

All by genesis is appropriately apportioned [separated into portions] with beings bound together again by enantiodromia. [Diogenes Laërtius, ix. 7]

In effect, our innate assumption of our existence as sentient individuals - separate from 'the other', be that other Being itself or other beings - leads us and has led us to formulate and to strive to answer certain metaphysical questions in a particular way. That is, from the position of an 'observer' whose answers are dependant on postulated concepts described or denoted by words such as 'time', 'change', God, theos/theoi, and 'the ideal'.

Is it therefore possible for us to discover our being, our physis - in effect, know Reality and discover the meaning of our existence - without such postulations, be they metaphysical or theological or otherwise? My fallible answer, based as it is on my limited knowledge and my own experience, is that it is possible; and possible by means of empathy and *pathei-mathos*. However, by necessity - given the personal (local) horizon of both empathy and *pathei-mathos* ⁽⁴⁾ - the knowing so revealed is (i) only our personal fallible answer, and also is (ii) always *sans denotatum* ⁽⁵⁾, a wordless empathic knowing that cannot be expressed (by words, terms) without in some way distorting it or denuding it of such numinosity as has been personally discovered (revealed) by empathy and *pathei-mathos*.

For empathy and *pathei-mathos* incline us to suggest that ipseity is an illusion of perspective: that there is, fundamentally, no division between 'us' - as some individual sentient, mortal being - and what has hitherto been understood and named as the Unity, The One, God, The Eternal. That 'we' are not 'observers' but rather Being existing as Being exists and is presenced in the Cosmos. That thus all our striving, individually and collectively when based on some ideal or on some form - some abstraction and what is derived therefrom, such as ideology and dogma - always is or becomes sad/tragic, and which recurrence of

sadness/tragedy, generation following generation, is perhaps even inevitable unless and until we live according to the wordless knowing that empathy and *pathei-mathos* reveal. In this matter, Heraclitus perhaps had something interesting to say, again:

τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ' ἔοντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ
πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ
πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπείροισιν εἰκόασι, πειρώμενοι καὶ
ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων, ὁκοίων ἐγὼ διηγεῦμαι κατὰ φύσιν
διαίρεων ἕκαστον καὶ φράζων ὅπως ἔχει· τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους
λανθάνει ὁκόσα ἐγερθέντες ποιοῦσιν, ὅκωσπερ ὁκόσα εὐδόντες
ἐπιλανθάνονται

Although this naming and expression [which I explain] exists, human beings tend to ignore it, both before and after they have become aware of it. Yet even though, regarding such naming and expression, I have revealed details of how *Physis* has been cleaved asunder, some human beings are inexperienced concerning it, fumbling about with words and deeds, just as other human beings, be they interested or just forgetful, are unaware of what they have done. [Fragment 1]

What, therefore, is the wordless knowing that empathy and *pathei-mathos* reveal? It is the knowing manifest in our human culture of *pathei-mathos*. The knowing communicated to us, for example, by art, music, literature, and manifest in the lives of those who presenced, in their living, compassion, love, and honour. Germane to this knowing is that - unlike a form or an abstraction - it is always personal (limited in its applicability) and can only be embodied in and presenced by some-thing or by some-one which or who lives. That is, it cannot be abstracted out of the living, the personal, moment of its presencing by someone or abstracted out from its living apprehension by others in the immediacy-of-the-moment, and thus cannot become 'an ideal' or form the foundation for some dogma or ideology or supra-personal faith.

Plato, Art, and The Ideal

Since art can wordlessly communicate to us the wisdom, and the knowing of Reality, revealed individually by both empathy and the culture of *pathei-mathos*, it seems apposite to briefly consider Plato's rather influential notions of τὸ καλόν (of beauty) and of 'the ideal'.

As Isocrates wrote of Helen of Troy:

κάλλους γὰρ πλεῖστον μέρος μετέσχεν, ὃ σεμνότατον καὶ τιμιώτατον
καὶ θειότατον τῶν ὄντων ἐστίν.

Of all things valued, numinous, and divine, she had the greatest share: beauty.
[Encomium, 54]

However, with Plato, τὸ καλόν becomes impersonal, even when the subject he is writing about is human 'nobility'. That is, it becomes something unrelated to what is personally known and proven (revealed) by what is real (as for example in the deeds of a real-life individual). For Plato, it is related to or manifests ἀρετή ('virtue'), which in his philosophy becomes a hypothesized abstraction which a person may or may not possess and which, it is claimed, can be 'brought into being' by other abstractions, such as a Republic.

Thus, in Phaedo (78b), Plato writes about αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν and about αὐτὸ ἕκαστον ὃ ἔστιν: that is, of 'abstract' (true, ideal) beauty and of 'abstract' (true, ideal) being. In Kratylus 389d he has Socrates talk about 'true, ideal' naming (denotatum) - βλέποντα πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα.

Also in Kratylus (386d-386e), Plato has Socrates say:

μήτε ἐκάστῳ ἰδίᾳ ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων ἐστὶν δῆλον δὴ ὅτι αὐτὰ αὐτῶν οὐσίαν ἔχοντά τινα βέβαιόν ἐστι τὰ πράγματα

Each being has their own mode [of being] which is constant, and which is neither caused by nor related to us.

Furthermore, he writes that:

πρῶτον μὲν ἀεὶ ὄν καὶ οὔτε γιγνόμενον οὔτε ἀπολλύμενον, οὔτε αὐξανόμενον οὔτε φθίνον (Symposium 210e - 211a)

Firstly, it always exists, and has no genesis. It does not die, does not grow, does not decay.

ἀρχόμενον ἀπὸ τῶνδε τῶν καλῶν ἐκείνου ἕνεκα τοῦ καλοῦ ἀεὶ ἐπανιέναι, ὡσπερ ἐπαναβασμοῖς χρώμενον (Symposium 211c)

Starting from that beauty, that person must - because of such beauty - always as by a ladder move on, upwards.

While many other examples could be adduced, it does seem evident that Plato posits some abstraction - whether described by him in terms such as ἰδέα, εἶδος, or involving αὐτὸ (i.e. form, ideal, 'true'/of itself) - and which abstraction, because it has no genesis, does not die, does not grow, and yet which invokes change - a moving-on by, or discord resulting from, the pursuit of such an ideal by individuals - is independent of and often damaging to our living (and thus numinous) reality as individual diverse human beings possessed of the faculty of

empathy and able to learn from the culture of pathei-mathos.

In contrast, when Aristotle, in an oblique reference to Plato, writes τοῦ δὲ καλοῦ μέγιστα εἶδη τάξις καὶ συμμετρία καὶ τὸ ὠρισμένον ⁽⁶⁾ he is referring to what is real, what actually exists - ὥστε διὰ τοῦτο ὀρθῶς οἱ γεωμέτραι λέγουσι καὶ περὶ ὄντων διαλέγονται καὶ ὄντα ἐστίν: διττὸν γὰρ τὸ ὄν. That is, to the beauty of geometry as manifest, for example, by geometricians when - as in Euclid's Elements - they make logical deductions from schemata and harmony and consonancy. Aristotle goes on to write that τὸ καλόν is especially revealed (δείκνυμι) in mathematics: ἃ μάλιστα δεικνύουσιν αἱ μαθηματικαὶ ἐπιστήμαι.

Also, when Aristotle deals with ἀρετή he considers it a μέσον (meson, median, a balance between 'being' (actually existing) and 'not-being' (a potentiality), γν. Metaphysics 9.1051a) and thus discards Plato's εἶδος of an abstractive 'good' and 'bad'. Which discarding was an excellent philosophical beginning given how Plato's abstractive 'ideal' of some-thing with its implication that a person "must - because of that ideal - always as by a ladder be moving on, upwards," is and has been the genesis of discord and suffering.

Empathy and pathei-mathos, however, emphasize the importance of living in the "immediacy of the personal, living, moment", sans the pursuit of some ideal or of some assumed perfection; with what is 'good' being not some abstraction denoted by some faith, dogma, ideal, ideology, or by some collocation of words, but rather is a function of, a wordless revealing by, our personal, our individual, empathic horizon, by our pathei-mathos, and by the collected human pathei-mathos of millennia manifest as that is in the culture of pathei-mathos. Which revealing is that what-lives is more important than any ideal, than any abstraction or form, with 'the good' simply being that which does not cause suffering to, or which can alleviate the suffering of, what-lives, human and otherwise.

Thus the 'meaning' of our physis, of our living, so revealed, is just that of a certain way of living; a non-defined, non-definable, very personal way of living, only relevant to us as an individual where we - appreciating our human culture of pathei-mathos, and thus appreciative of art, music, literature, and other emanations of the numinous - incline toward not causing suffering and incline (by means of empathy, compassion, and honour) toward alleviating such suffering as we may personally encounter in the "immediacy of the personal, living, moment".

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The genesis of this essay was some correspondence, in February and March 2015, with an

academic, and which correspondence concerned certain metaphysical questions. I have paraphrased parts of, or utilized quotations from, or rewritten certain passages from, several of my replies. All translations (and errors) are mine.

Notes

(1) Myatt, David, *Ιερός Λόγος: An Esoteric Mythos*. 2015. ISBN 978-1507660126.

(2) In respect of theos as artisan (δημιουργόν) qv. the Corpus Hermeticum; for example Poemandres 11.

(3) qv. *Plato, Art, and The Ideal*, below.

(4) The 'local horizon of empathy' is a natural consequence of my understanding of empathy as a human faculty, albeit a faculty that is still quite underdeveloped. For what empathy provides - or can provide - is a very personal wordless knowing in the immediacy-of-the-living-moment. Thus empathy inclines us as individuals to appreciate that what is beyond the purveu of our empathy - beyond our personal empathic knowing of others, beyond our knowledge and our experience, beyond the limited (local) range of our empathy and that personal (local) knowledge of ourselves which pathei-mathos reveals - is something we rationally, we humbly, accept we do not know and so cannot judge or form a reasonable, a fair, a balanced, opinion about.

For empathy, like pathei-mathos, lives within us; manifesting, as both empathy and pathei-mathos do, the always limited nature, the horizon, of our own knowledge and understanding.

(5) Denotatum - from the Latin, denotare - is used here in accord with its general meaning, which is "to denote or to describe by an expression or a word; to name some-thing; to refer that which is so named or so denoted."

(6) *Metaphysics*, Book 13, 1078a. "The most noticeable expressions of kalos are schemata and harmony and consonancy."
