

Chaos and Eros. On the Order of Human Existence.

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The Dance of Words

Thinking is a festival and thus human beings experience, through cogitation, the sociable structure of their thinking. As they think, speak and listen they listen and speak and they are in the company of others. It was Plato, the sociable one, who thus spoke and was listened to: "And thinking, is it the same thing to you as to me?" This is the question that Plato puts in Socrates's mouth, when faced with Theaetetus in a dialogue named after him. Theaetetus in turn asks a question: "How do you describe it?" And Socrates replies: "As a discourse that the mind carries on with itself about any subject it is considering. ..., but I have a notion that, when the mind is thinking, it is simply talking to itself, asking questions and answering them, and saying yes or no."¹

We are not alone when thinking; for we hear while in thought that we are being spoken to. Words already exist, as in a dance in which arms embrace us so as to insert ourselves into the movement of the dancers. Socrates's words, as written by Plato, issued the invitation to join in the festival of thinking that creates a sense of community in Plato's dialogues and also provides our cogitation with its sociability. In the dance of words the movement of dancing takes the form of a dialogue. Whoever steps forward – Socrates explains in *Gorgias* – steps back in the process, in order to recognize and to continue, through his movement in dancing, the movement of the dance: "For I do not speak with any pretense to knowledge, but am searching along with you"²

In the dance of words we follow our thinking as if we were guided by it. Inserted into the dance we experience in respect of our thinking, i.e., our speech, the kind of security that Socrates

talks about in *Phaedrus*: "I am of course well aware that it can't be anything originating in my own mind, for I know my own ignorance".³ Yet who has thought up the speech, except the person who talks? Who is in thoughts so as to induce thinking? Who leads the words that are being said to their dance?

Plato gave his reply in *Symposium*, the text that sets the stage for a festival of cogitation. Aristodemus, Socrates, Agathon, Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Alcibiades and a few other unnamed persons have all gathered at Agathon's house for a banquet. At Phaedrus's suggestion they resolve to dedicate their feast to Eros, "so ancient and so powerful a god."⁴ One by one they propose to speak in praise of Eros, after it is revealed that none from among the many poets of earlier times had ever done so.⁵ In accordance with this plan, they make a start. Four of them have already spoken their words, when Agathon, the host, begins to make his speech in honor of Eros.

He praises him as a sociable God who promotes a sense of community. And he interprets through Eros what is unfolding in his speech. The world opens up to its paradisaical feast, to its choirs and dances and the meetings between Gods and humans during which they all stand by each other and congregate in perfect sociability. Once upon a time there was disintegration – alienation (*allogriotes*), as Agathon calls this other state of being.⁶ Each thing was separated from the other; things were in utter disarray; one thing confronted the other. Now, however, with the appearance of Eros, of whom Agathon speaks, the world emerges in a new shape: this is the feast of creation. Through Eros sociability (*synodos*) was no longer alienated.⁷ He takes away what alienates us and provides in plenty what makes us more familiar with one another.

The Disintegration of the One in the Act of Creation.

Eros is the choreographer of the festival that can be beholden in the world and yet it does not happen there. The feast of creation, the perfect sociability of all beings and things, is in the realm of creation never more than a paradisaical recollection, the memory of this great event. It is staged and while it is being staged it is the festival that is the focus of everyone's work. But the staging is also its actual purpose. There is a feast inside the creation and the feast fails to materialize in just this creation. The shape in which the world appears is the shape that it does not possess.

Eros, the choreographer, is welcome. For the cornucopia of things is at first its decay; its unity is at first its division; its community is at first its alienation. Little hangs together in this world because it is creation and all creation is at first form; but the form is the singular and its limitless diversity.

'Dividing up', 'separating', 'individualizing' – these are the words in the histories of creation, as well as 'expanding', 'stretching', 'multiplying', 'twofold', 'threefold', 'hundredfold', 'a thousand things', 'each of a different kind'. The creation of the world is being narrated in the same words in many different languages – in the *Tao Te Ching* and in the Koran, in the Bible and in Hesiod's *Theogony*, in the *Bhagavadghita* and in an ancient Egyptian hymn to Amun-Re.⁸

Creation is to give form and each form is such because it 'differentiates' itself; it is 'separated' as this one form from another one or from a multitude of others; within the mass of all that has been created it is so conspicuously shaped that it has become 'form', i.e., this 'unique', 'special', clearly 'determined', 'singular' form.

This account of creation histories may cause enchanted amazement. Indeed it would be strange, if it were not to do so. It is wonderful: the creation disintegrates as it emerges. The creation is the creativity of the moment; it is the 'path'. It is the path away from itself toward a shape in which it assumed form; it is 'there' und there in this singular form only: as the path of creativity 'to' and 'in' the forms of its creation.

Thus we read in the *Tao Te Ching*:

There is a thing, chaotically shaped (*you wu hun cheng*)
It emerged even before Heaven and Earth,
So noiselessly and so spacelessly.
Unchanged, only reliant upon itself,
It moves in a circle, unendangered.
You can regard it as the Mother
Of all that is under the skies (*tian xia mu*).
I do not know its name
I call it path (*dao*) in order to give it an epithet. (XXV)

The path produces one thing (*dao sheng yi*),
The one thing produces two (*er*),
Two produces three (*san*),
Three produces ten thousand things (*wan wu*). (XLII)⁹

Creation is individualization, the appearance of creative power in individual forms through which something is being created. Creativity is the individual part because it comes apart in the act of creation. It becomes the one or the other, separating them from one another; it becomes this or that, and each takes on its own shape; it moves here and there and is always elsewhere. Creation parts as it is being created; it is, as Hesiod celebrated it in his *Theogony*, creation in separate parts; a plenty that is being divided up.¹⁰

Everything constitutes diversity; the singular is diversity. The creation in separate parts produces a large variety of things and something very concrete. What is being created is very varied and three-dimensional. Since creation is enshrined in the individual part, creativity unfolds into multitude. In so far as so much of it is individual, creation *becomes* an act of creativity. It is a cosmological scaffolding, the cosmos of animals and plants and humans. It is fullness of life; it is an event.

The following words were addressed to Amun-Re, the God Creator and universal deity of ancient Egypt:

Greetings, Unique One (*ua*), who turns into millions (*hehu*),
Who is long and wide without borders;
The structured image of power that creates itself.

...

The tremendously Powerful, who has lifted up Heaven
And who spreads out Heaven and Earth (*schem*) on its
Foundations.

He has assembled the star-filled skies and shown the stars
Their way.

...

He created man from his divine eye,
And belched the Gods from his mouth.
He has lifted up the skies, and with their solar disk
Fastened them to their struts.

He has (founded) this great Earth, and the ocean expands
In order to embrace it.

He has built man, livestock, and wild fowl that flutters up
And glides down, fish and plants.

...

He let the geese fly up into the sky,
And they came gliding down on the breath from his mouth.
He submerged the fish in the core of the flood
And enlivened their noses in the water.

He [moved away] toward Heaven and looked at what He had
Created
And we see through his sight. ¹¹

The creative element of creation emerges from its diversity; In what ways it is creation, becomes apparent in all the forms in which it assumes shape. What represents creation *before* it assumes its shapes, is what constitutes the 'mystery'; however, the actual creation becomes manifest in the diversity of its creative forms. The cosmos gains shape through the individual part in it; everything is a form of creation in the moment of creation. And thus it is more than that; it is the sign *for* creation, for the One that constitutes all creation.

It leaves one to wonder: Creation disintegrates just as it is being created. Signs appear in the process of 'disintegration'. In the creation story of the Bible the flow of the language provides the key to the signs which have been placed to signify the creation. They indicate that all is moving apart; all is the story of the God Creator in whom all is one.

The Creation, so the Bible tells us, unfolds in a series of interventions by a creative God. Successively his creations emerge in their full diversity. One by one, God produces many things and many beings. However, each time he further diversifies the world, God – it is said – still acts in the same manner. On each occasion, he 'separates', 'divides', or 'takes apart'; he creates two or more things out of one. According to the language of the Biblical creation story, the creative God becomes active by defining the limits of creation through creation. Only in this way things become the kinds of things that are separated from one another and are mutually differentiated. God is the limit of creation. It is 'individualized' by him – the *processio Dei ad extra*. Through the creative God each individual part is a singular element, the singular element. However, in this way each singular thing is also a sign, i.e., a sign of God who, acting creatively, drew the sign as a way of drawing a line; for as it is regarded as singular, each individuality in the universe of creation is this specific individuality:

In the beginning God created the *heaven* and the *earth*.
And the earth was without form and void;
And darkness was upon the face of the deep.

And God said, Let there be light;
And there was light.
And God saw the light, that it was good;
And God *divided* the light from the darkness
And God called the light *Day*,
And the darkness he called *Night*.

...
And God said, Let there be a *firmament*
In the *midst* of the *waters*,
And let it *divide* the waters from the waters.
And God made the firmament and divided the waters
Which were under the firmament
From the waters which were above the firmament.

...
And God called the firmament *Heaven*.

...
And God said, Let the earth bring forth *grass*,
The *herb* yielding seed, And the fruit *tree* yielding fruit
After his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth;
And it was so.¹²

Every singular thing that exists in the diversity of what has been created speaks of the one creation that assumed shape in the creation. It is what has always been: thing, animal, or plant. And it is a symbol – the symbol of the one thing that was creatively present during the creation. Creation, as will be remembered, is to give shape, and what has been shaped in an act of creation is therefore a form of *the* creation. It is the singular thing among many forms, and it can be recognized as such; it is 'completely' what can be seen; it is 'in itself' what it is and in this sense 'completed'. It is determined 'through itself' and in this sense perfectly 'absolute'; it can be understood only from 'within itself' and is hence, in its nature, its essence, not dissoluble. By virtue of its so being, the 'One' becomes transparent – which is called 'divine' because of its being *the* One. And yet *this* One – that in the shape of things, animals, or plants is one thing among many – will always and only be such. It can only be recognized among other things; it is determined in connection with other things and only through them; it can be understood only in its relationships with other things. It is a referent, but it is also the present; it is an enunciation, but also a manifestation; it is a sign, but also something that has been shown; it is *imago*, but *imaginatio* as well.

Creativity does not exist – insofar as 'exist' means that it is. Nor could it be something (anything) within something (anything). However it 'is' when there is 'something' (else) that so emerged from creation that it is this creation as if through itself, i.e., absolute in the act of creation and hence an absolute sign of creation itself.

The disintegration of the One in the act of creation was an inevitability. Or else there could have been no creation. There is indeed much cause for wonder when we read what the creation stories tell us. The more strange and remote things are from each other, the more they are supposed to reflect their likeness? The more peculiar each thing is, the more it is supposed to reveal the universal? The more diverse things are and the more they appear in a big jumble, the more the One and their communality is supposed to come out?

The question that our wonderment produced in retrospect often turns the joyous wondering into a odd pain. What was so certain in our wonderment, has disintegrated through our questioning. Now these questions are more pressing than all others. They have introduced irreconcilables, contradictions, confusion, and this cannot persist. We still remember what emerged so wonderfully through our amazement. It calls for investigation as to where and how it might be recaptured. It is a wondrous pain to sense what one is searching for and to search what one is sensing. As Plato wrote in *Parmenides*: "Believe me, there is something noble and inspired in your passion for argument."¹³

Eros, the philosophical, pervades the mythical language of the creation stories and highlights the necessity from which creation is chaos. The discourse of *Parmenides* explains the depictions in the creation stories. It depicts the disintegration of the One through itself.¹⁴ If this is not a nothing, but really *is*, if the One has a being, then it is both the One and Being. It is the One that *is*, and it is the One that is *Being*. As it is phrased in *Tao Te Ching*: "The path creates one thing, [and] the one thing creates two." Plato said: "Therefore, of a One is, there must also be a number. Now, if number is, there must be many things, that *are*, for we must admit that number, unlimited in plurality, also proves to have being."¹⁵ It is the being of the One. Or to put it in mythical terms: Creation is the One as it disintegrates; it is what has been carved up, divided; it is

complex and separates into its parts. Nothing is similar to another thing, everything is chaotic. And yet everything is not dissimilar in one respect: all parts belong to creation.¹⁶

Order: A Structure of Chaos.

The world is a community of the un-communal. All things and all beings exist in it as separate parts of the whole; the whole exists exclusively through its separate parts; each part by its existence makes the whole impossible. The world as a world comes apart.

And all this is a community; for all beings and things, making up a part, are parts of the whole; one part participates in the whole just like all other parts; in relation to the whole, all parts resemble each other; everything is one thing within the whole. The world finds itself at one in its parts.¹⁷

There is a 'history' in all things. They separate and they reunite. There is chaos and there is creation. And things exist in chaos as well as in creation; they exist in either. They are 'in-between', or to be more precise: they are the event of this world; they form the community of what is not communal in which everything is whole only through something else; the whole exists exclusively in its parts and each part exists merely as a part of the whole.

Nothing exists in the world in such a way that it is not also something else: this is the 'history' of things. They do not exist, but they happen by being similar and dissimilar at the same time; by being the same and yet different; by being the one and the other. They disintegrate and they are one; and, as they disintegrate and become a whole, they are both at the same time. In this sense things are as they are: the event of the world; they are earth in relation to chaos, and they are above all something else; they are Eros; they are 'history'.¹⁸

Eros makes happen what things are. It is the history which rests in things. Through the movements of Eros, things come apart and they unite through him. Through Eros they are parts just as they are whole.¹⁹

The world is the world through Eros. It therefore is a world that represents movement. As Plato put it in *Theaetetus*: "... all things are the offspring of a flowing stream of change."²⁰ Things are

things in movement; they are things in the moving state of Eros. They are 'in-between' things, either in chaos in which the creative Eros divides itself, or in creation toward which strives Eros, the unifying force.

All things enjoy their 'order' through Eros – as it is properly called here. To be sure; for they are given a place in Eros, in the movement 'in-between', where they exist in-between as they disintegrate and unify; where they are here and there; where they are chaos and creation at the same time. Ordered within Eros, everything that exists is on the move to become something else, to stir things for their unification. Creation assumes order in chaos. Or to put it the other way round: Order is a structure of chaos.²¹

Eros, the Creative God: Three Images.

But what is their 'structure'? What does chaos in order look like? And what represents order in chaos? How come that Eros, the God of the world, unites and separates things in this way? How does it happen that the movement of the creative force is a movement both into disunity and toward a shaping of things? In what ways are things being structured so that they become 'order' and 'chaos'; 'creation' and 'disintegration'; a communal world as well as a disjointed multitude? How do they move in such a way, as they keep moving, that they are not just moving, but also manifest themselves and hence represent something? What constitutes 'something' – as it always does – even though it is never just 'something', but always merely the one or the other? How does Eros, the desiring God, also embody the God of Plenty?

Eros is the choreographer. Let us ask him how he sets the world in scene. He divides himself into two parts: He is Eros in the shape of amicable, sociable love as well as Eros in the shape of cantankerous, divisive discord. Empedocles of Agrigent, the pre-Socratic philosopher of the fifth century B.C., tried to understand the world through the two personae of Eros. The events of the world, he declared, are either happenings of sociable love (*philia*) or of discordant dispute (*neikos*), each constantly following upon the other. As he put it: "I want to spell out two things. At one point, the one thing grows out of several things; but soon it divides up again and ceases to be several things in one. All mortal

things have a dual origin and they also appear in duplicate as they disintegrate. The one generates and destroys the unification of all elements; the other, explodes as the two come apart, even if it has barely had time to assume shape. And this constant interchange never stops. At one point all things become one through love, but soon the individual elements separate in hate-filled dispute. Insofar as the one thing has learned to emerge from several things, as several things come out of the disintegrating one, they all come into being, and life is not a constant for them; however, insofar as their interchange never comes to an end, they are beings that are immutable as the circular movement continues." ²²

What happens in the universe also occurs among human beings: "The *competition of the two forces*," Empedocles continues, "is clearly reflected in the multitude of their parts. At one point they merge those parts that are physical through the act of love at the height of blossoming life; at another, these parts, torn apart by the evil powers of discord, wander around separately and aimlessly on the shores of life." ²³

Empedocles developed his thoughts in the context of a compact cosmology. Things are as they are. *Philia* and *neikos*, sociable love and cantankerous dispute, had always existed among humans in this world, and they would do so forever. Everything was seen by him as a constant circular movement of unification and dissolution.

Is this correct? Is Eros in the shape of two powerful figures the Eros that is opposed to himself? Is Eros himself the structure of decay; is he divided into two parts and hence the embodiment of dispute in the world? Does the path that leads from the one thing to two already reach its fork within the one thing? Is the dualism therefore as 'old' as the unity; are there two paths, and is there not one path which actually is what it is called, i.e., a *path*?

The cosmos that we see around us is of astonishing beauty. Within it all assumed a compact unity and includes what is contradictory and dissonant. Its beauty lies in its self-bearing density. However, it cannot be its beauty alone. There are questions. Eros – sometimes sociable, at other times cantankerous – invites us to investigate. He is the Eros with its dual shape, and yet he cannot be one *and* two at the same time; he cannot be *the* Eros who is divided within himself and hence his own opposite. Who then is Eros?

It is images that tell the history of Eros. After all he is always in-between, rather than somewhere – like in a word, in a sentence or in an explanation. He *is* history, the dance of words that tell a story. He alone can therefore appear in images, parables that tell the story within the things through the things. They are mythical images.

Plato tells three parables in his *Symposium*, his *Theaetetus*, and in his *Laws* that draw pictures of Eros, the creative God. He appears as follows: Human nature, we read in *Symposium*, has not always been the same as it is today; indeed, it was quite different.²⁴ Once upon a time there were three genders of humans, male and female and a third, joint one that he called *koinos*. This third gender had disappeared and existed only in its name, i.e., the androgynous gender (*genos androgynos*). According to Plato, this gender was composed in equal parts of the male and female. The shape of androgynous humans was globular, "with rounded back and sides, four arms and four legs, and two faces, both the same, on a cylindrical neck, and one head, with one face one side and one the other, for ears, and two lots of privates, and all the other parts to match."²⁵

Androgynous humans, Plato continues, were "similar" to the Gods, their progenitors; they were, so to speak, their "equals"; for they were one within themselves, rather than two; they united within themselves the one as well as the other; their differences notwithstanding, they were at one with themselves; they were "globular". Plato therefore called them "round" and assigns to them an attribute of the Divine. The circle, it will be remembered, is the geometric figure of a divine being.

And so the story continues, or to be more precise: "history" begins. The androgynous humans became too self-confident, too conscious of their power and strength, of being similar to the Gods. Their sense of elevation made them arrogant.²⁶ They wanted to ascend to Heaven and overrun the Gods. At first the Gods -Zeus and the others – were perplexed. They did not think it right to kill the androgynous humans. They did not want to abandon the common bonds that the latter said existed between them. However, they also realized that they could not condone the violations of the androgynous humans. Zeus found it difficult to think of something that would stop the latters' wantonness. But he found the means to weaken them. "I shall split them up again," he said.²⁷

And so human beings are separate, man und woman, after they had once been both, man as well as woman. Each merely comprise one half, whose other half is missing. They see the other and are merely the one that the other half does not embody. They are in fact only the one thing, since this one thing did not exist if it were not for the other. The other half, so they argued, belongs to me, for without it I would not be myself. I long for the other as I long for myself. My nature is desire – Eros.

Plato's story reads as follows: "Now, when the work of bisection was complete it left each half with a desperate yearning for the other, and they ran together and flung their arms around each other's necks, and asked for nothing better than to be rolled into one. So much so that they began to die from hunger and general inertia, for they neither would do anything without the other. ... Fortunately, Zeus felt so sorry for them that he devised another scheme. He moved their privates round to the front, ... and made them propagate among themselves, the male begetting upon the female. ... So you see, gentlemen, how far back we can trace our innate love for one another, and how this love is always trying to reintegrate our former nature, to make two into one, and to bridge the gulf between one human being and another." ²⁸

Eros – who is Eros? He is the weakness of human beings, if compared with their earlier nature when they were still androgynous, God-like, and 'round.' He represents human strength if measured against their present nature because it enables them to unite although they have become two parts. Eros is the blending of human nature. Humans are weak; they want what is not their due: a divine existence. They fail; Zeus rents them apart. Humans are also strong; they want what is theirs: their own individual existence. They thus attain for themselves what Zeus created for them. Eros is men's strength in their weakness. If they follow him, they accept that they are not one but two; they find direction precisely in being one in the process of separation. Eros protects human beings; he makes them strong provided they accept that they are weak.

Humans are weak because they are sensitive; because they can have experiences that change them. A God cannot be made to diverge from his nature by anything. Even if he transforms himself and occasionally appears in a different guise, he always

remains one and the same. Humans, by contrast, can be unsettled by everything; they will be unsettled by a glittering pebble that captures their attention on the verge of a path just as by some bad news that captivates them. For by their nature they are geared to absorbing impressions that 'overwhelm' them. What happens is that something occurs *with* them. It is as if they were being carried away; as if they were being elevated in the texture of their personalities; as if they were being 'moved'; as if, floating freely, they were turning this way and that, before they relapsed into what formed the texture of their personality.

But is it still the same texture? What exactly does it mean when we say that humans are being carried away, are being elevated and moved; that they turned this way and that, as they were floating freely? What is this human sensibility, this weakness that makes them malleable in their experiences?

In *Theaetetus* Plato relates the parable of the human souls that are as soft as wax. "Imagine then," he writes, "for the sake of argument, that our minds contain a block of wax, which in this or that individual may be larger or smaller, and composed of wax that is comparatively pure or muddy, and harder in some, softer in others, and sometimes of just the right consistency. Let us call it the gift of the Muses' mother, Memory, and say that whenever we wish to remember something we see or hear or conceive in our own minds, we hold this wax under the perceptions or ideas and imprint them on it as we might stamp the impression of a seal ring. Whatever is so imprinted we remember and know so long as the image remains; whatever is rubbed out or has not succeeded in leaving an impression we have forgotten and do not know." ²⁹

Souls are as soft as wax; they are the imageable, malleable material of their experiences. But in this, their 'weakness' souls are also their own sculptors. As Plato continues in his parable, they can be composed of true and erroneous imaginations, depending on how they twist and turn "in the field of objects both known and perceived." Accordingly, if a soul went straight ahead and related corresponding impressions and perceptions with one another, its imaginations become truthful; if, on the other hand, this soul twists and correlates its perceptions crosswise, its imaginations turn into falsehoods. ³⁰

Men prepared their thoughts by nursing their souls. They are not the masters of their cogitations, for they are weak; they achieve cogitation only by twisting and turning the images in their soul toward the correct picture. But in this imaging process they are also the sculptors, the form-givers of their thinking. They can shape their thinking through their soul; they can determine the nature of their thoughts by nursing their soul; they can decide whether something is right or wrong. Human beings are tied to the structure of Eros. The one exists just like the other: justice and injustice; the ugly and the beautiful; good and evil, truth and falsehood. Within this structure humans are free. Eros seizes their soul depending on how they nurse it.³¹

Human beings become human within the structure of Eros; or to be more precise: humans form themselves into human beings. They creatively shape the chaotic material of their experiences into the *Gestalt* of their existence. Materially speaking, in the eros of perceptions everything pulls them apart and shunts them into a deceptive notion of things. They see things, even though all their imaginations are wrong. As a result things do not fit, and so men perceive a chaos that is completely 'chaotic'.

By contrast, things do come together if imaged in the eros of the searching soul. A light appears above the cultured soul, a soul that has turned in such a way as to produce a merger of its imaginations with things. As it perceives things, the world of all things suddenly opens up. Having assumed shape vis-à-vis the chaos of perceptions, the soul now recognizes the shape of what it is perceiving. It sees the shape of chaos within itself: Eros works with creative discipline for the culturing of the human soul.

In his *Laws* Plato relates the parable of the marionettes who might be taken to represent human beings.³² Again the conversation revolves around the One and the multitude; around the one essential shape of every person in the face of the many sentiments that pull him away from his self; or to be exact: around *the* shape of *the* sentiments. The question with which the parable begins is a rhetorical one: "Well then, we may take it that any human being is one person?"³³ To put it differently, should we not adhere to the notion that everyone of us is a person for himself?

Of course, but as Plato also notes, all of us still have two counsellors who contradict and do not comprehend each other; these

manifest themselves in pleasure and pain; or there are divergent expectations that manifest themselves in confidence and fear. And on top of all this there arise considerations of what is the better and what is the worse in life. We are chaos, and yet we *are* this chaos only through *ourselves*: in the creation of our *Gestalt* from chaos.³⁴

The Night of Evil.

Eros, the choreographer, shapes humans in the way they have geared themselves up for him. He sets the stage for their lives in this way or that, depending on the blueprint that they provided him with. Eros represents the wild steps of dancing in so far as he knows no rules; but he equally represents the measured steps of a dance in that he also acts to shape creatively.

In his *Symposium*, Plato compressed this context into a simple consideration. What we are doing, drinking, singing, articulating here and now does not in itself represent virtue.

As qualities 'good and 'bad' do not stem from our actions. To act is in itself neither good nor bad. Rather the quality of an action is determined by the way in which it is executed.: "If it is done rightly and finely, the action will be good; if it is done basely, bad."³⁵

Plato added that this is also how Eros comes into play. Not every Eros is admirable or noble enough to be praised.³⁶ The Gods as well as men have given many freedoms to the lover.³⁷ How does he encounter the desiring God? And how does he face him? The lover determines his eros in Eros; he is creative through the desiring God. Eros divides in the lover's eros. There is the 'mean' eros, on the one hand, and the 'heavenly' one, on the other; there is 'decent', 'true', 'beautiful' love, and there is 'bad' love. For it is in these two ways that Eros presents a choice through eros. It is the love that reconciles itself with things as opposed to the love that has rebelliously risen against all things.³⁸

Of course, I am not talking here of little things, of the fleeting affair that rushes on between things like an unthinking child. I am speaking of Eros, the imposing figure of creation. Let us recall: everything that is creation is simultaneous decay. The things of this world occur within a structure of chaos. They are mutual strangers while being closely united. But it would be wrong to assume that things determine their formation into two alterna-

tives: as disorder *or* order; as decay *or* creation; as structure *or* chaos. No, this would be the dream, not the day of the world; it would be its lightness, not its heavy weight. Everything stands out glaringly among everything else in sun-light. Its bulky presence explodes the common space. And yet we can see it most clearly in this way.

The shapes are intertwined; the alien is inside the friend; the one appears in two halves; the crucial statement becomes a dependent clause. All has become a figure among the figures; it lies within a near perfect friendship or in a parting of ways, or in a sequence of sentences because we fail to formulate the one sentence that says it all. No thing appears in some kind of shape; when it comes to things, their shape is all-important, i.e., what becomes of them. What is interesting about creation is not creation itself; it is its history: the eros pushing for this or that shaping of things.

As we can read in Plato's *Symposium*, all force contains eros within itself.³⁹ He has "many other objects and many other subjects, and that his influence may be traced both in the brute and the vegetable creations, and I think I may say in every form of existence."⁴⁰ This, Plato continues, is what "I think I may say of every form of existence – so great, so wonderful, and so all-embracing is the power of Love in every activity, whether sacred or profane." Creation disintegrates. However, all of us who exist through Eros determine *how* decay becomes *the decay* and how creation becomes *the* creation.

Any encounter between the Gods and men, Plato elaborates in his *Symposium*, exclusively serves the purpose to 'nurse' and to 'heal' Eros. For he can easily be without constraints and excessive, if a person lets go. This is when Eros, instead of being 'beautiful' and 'heavenly' who lives in harmony with things, turns into the 'mean', 'wicked' Eros, who 'spoils' (*diaphtheirei*) and 'damages' (*edikesen*) things.⁴¹ In one passage in *Theaetetus* Plato says something terrifying in the words of Socrates: "Evils ... can never be done away with, for the good must always have its contrary; nor have they any place in the divine world, but they must needs haunt this region of our mortal nature."⁴²

If we speak of good, there is an implication of evil, even if it is not mentioned. To call human beings good, involves differentiation. Not anybody, but *they* are the good ones; and others, to be

sure, are then, of course, the evil ones. The latter have to be present; otherwise it would be illogical to be wanting to discover only those who are good people. One does not wish to be 'good' anymore, if this means admitting to oneself that someone else is 'evil'. However, this is not an adequate framework for understanding the problem at hand. It is Plato's second differentiation in the above quote that paves the way for a further and more appropriate understanding. As he put it, evil necessarily wanders about only among humans, not among the Gods. Evil is a human affair. The possibility of evil is encapsulated in the possibilities of human existence, i.e., its extreme. Evil is the extreme shape in the shape of human beings; it is the total contradiction, the centrifugal, the opposite, the chaotic. And it is of course also something terrifying. For it is evil that cannot leave anything alone, that must inflict harm upon everything. Man, perpetually indecisive, is extreme, in all respects and at all times. It bothers him that a rose *is* a rose; for he would just as much like it to be a carnation. And still it remains a rose. How it angers him that the world does not dance in accordance with his bizarre desires.

The human soul first has to be seen in its evil ways in order for us to appreciate what the culture of the soul consists of, that aims at nursing and healing eros. In *Philebus* Plato proposes to take illness rather than good health, if we want to see man's "greatest pleasures." Of course, he did not mean to say that the sick had greater pleasure than healthy people. What is at issue is the "magnitude of pleasure" and how violent it is. And at this point it becomes evident that the greatest pleasure (or the lack of it) arises from a certain depravity of body and soul, not from its proper efficiency.⁴³

And what exactly does the person experience who will simply let go with whatever and whoever comes over him; who samples to the extreme the many existences and feelings that he has? On the one hand, this person – according to Plato's analysis – always perceives himself as the one he at this moment is not. He *has* fallen apart, has turned into parts that are no more than fragments. He misses something of himself to the extent that he momentarily represents something; for what he feels at that moment is apparently only what he was not been looking for in his sentiments, i.e., the exact opposite.⁴⁴

However, this may become quite thrilling. The infliction - thus Plato's second observation – is "bittersweet." The person who has

become evil – everything is always wrong – may find pleasure in the evil of evil. It makes him tense against everything; it becomes pure agitation.⁴⁵ The evil person is essentially a perplexed human being. He is moved, in Plato's words, by a "stream of pleasure." It is almost mortifying how these pleasures – "all manner of varieties in your complexion, in your attitude, in the very breath you draw" – delect this person. They do not let go of him.⁴⁶

However, a soul that is aimlessly erotic will manifest itself in monstrous ways. The person that is created by it is grotesquely distorted. It is a creature of the night, of the night of evil: "But I fancy," Plato concludes his analysis, "that when we see someone, no matter whom, experiencing pleasures – and I think this is true especially of the greatest pleasures – we detect in them an element either of the ridiculous or of extreme ugliness, so that we ourselves feel ashamed, and do our best to cover it up and hide it away, and we leave that sort of thing to the hours of darkness, feeling that it should not be exposed to the light of the day."⁴⁷

The embarrassment is understandable, but inappropriate. The evil is leaving the night and propels itself into the daylight. And yet it has to be stopped. In its mania to tackle all sorts of things, our human monster begins to meddle in other people's affairs and pervades them with its chaotic restlessness that dominates its soul. It is seditious. It wreaks havoc to all human communality. It is unjust. It is therefore no coincidence that Plato discusses this quite extensively in his *Republic*, his dialogue about the question of how political constitutions originated from the constitutions – the *Gestalten* – of the soul.⁴⁸

As he shows, evil must be captured. It is not open to any persuasion, influence, negotiation; for it appears in the armor of madness. Chaos spreads in front of this human monster. Things become more washed out; beings more badly damaged, and communities disintegrate. But there is no complete chaos; even the most extreme chaos still represents 'something'. And if there is 'something', then there is also a way on which a thing, or two, will be created. Eros lives; creation assumes order in chaos. Indeed, Eros lives, even in the human monster. And thus it has armed itself against Eros in that it made him, who likes to jumble things up creatively, the master of creation. But in his role as master, Eros is tyrannical; he is the *Eros tyrannos*.⁴⁹ It is in this role that he *wills*

things, rather than wanting *things*. Eros, who creates things, is inside *Eros tyrannos*; but he has been transformed into Eros who devours things. The grimace puts on a human face and says very loudly: "I, it is *me*, I *am* – a human being." ⁵⁰ No, it is a mask and man's truth must be held up against the delusions of *tyrannikos aner*. Eros, the tyrannical master, is the counterfoil. ⁵¹

Divine Beauty: The Return of the One in the Community of Gods and Men.

As we can read in *Gorgias*, no conversation can be more serious among human beings than one about the way they should be living. ⁵² Our history began after the separation of the androgynous people. It is the history, called Eros, of the things that fall in upon themselves. This history also has an end that we must not pass over in silence. This end involved our knowledge of how we should be living. If we enter this knowledge without qualification, we do more than to set the scene, through our eros, the eros of the world, a dance of words: we unleash the dance of things; for the just soul is just toward the world: the structure of chaos.

Plato has described the culture of the soul in several places in his dialogues. And he has explained how the soul achieves the appropriate, i.e., 'good', *Gestalt* through the care it provides for itself. According to *Gorgias*, a certain and peculiar order that emerges in all of us, turns everyone and everything into a good person or thing. What makes this order peculiar is that it strives for the One through a multitude of psychic efforts by expecting no more from each part of the soul than that it contributes its share. In this way the whole will become a *symphona auta*. ⁵³

The person whose soul is ordered in this way is assumed to be "sound-minded"; for he will do what is proper "by gods and men", ⁵⁴ wherever he may be. He is assumed to be *just*, since he is doing what is proper; and he is assumed to be *brave*, since he does not try to escape from what is proper, even if this may be difficult or if he is disinclined to behave in this way. Finally, he is assumed to be *wise* (*sophos*); for he knows what he is doing, in contrast to the dissolute who – being torn in many directions – will always be the opposite of what he is or would like to feel. Unwilling to allow any part of his inner self to do something alien or to permit that the potentialities of his soul meddle into other people's business, this human being is

assumed to have tended his house well in the true sense of the word; he has gained mastery over himself; he has become his own friend; he has harmonized the key notes of his psychic potentialities so that he no longer represents diversity, but has become a whole person, level-headed and harmoniously structured. It is from this base that he proceeds to act.⁵⁵

This is the goal that should be borne in mind as one conducts one's life. The just person *lives* justice; he labors for the things among the things; he works for their durability, their communal-ity, their sociability. He is the communal person, the creative friend, who loves things wisely in such a way that he leaves them untouched. He loves what is creative about them, i.e., their variety; the individual that is unique; the other that shows him that he is the other's other, the only one. He loves the wisdom of things. They represent the infinitely wide and infinitely diverse space for a love that is infinitely wide and diverse. However different every-thing may be, he does not wish things to be different, animated as he is by *eros philosophos*, an eros that is shaped by wisdom.⁵⁶

Things cut through man and the cut could not be sharper. There is man in *eros tyrannos* who – as Plato puts it – lives the life of a robber; who has no man as his friend, nor a God; for he cannot find his place in any community. And then there is man in *eros philosophos* who lives the way it is good for the things. In the words of Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*, the "wise men ... say that the heavens and the earth, gods and men, are bound together by fellowship and friendship, and order and temperance and justice, and for this reason they call the sum of things they 'ordered' uni-verse ..., not the world of disorder or riot."⁵⁷

Through *eros philosophos* and in the shape of the just person, man becomes immersed in the divine. He generates a structure in which the things that have been rent asunder reunite. However, this act of procreation, we are told in *Symposium*, is a divine affair. It is a birth in beauty; for it is perfectly adapted, like their beauty is consonant with the Gods. Eros, contrary to a common percep-tion, is not oriented toward what is beautiful; he is geared to the divine, to the creation and the birth within a setting of beauty.⁵⁸

Let us remember the dance of words and that it might be a won-derful thing. But what kind of thing? To quote Socrates: "The first is that in which we bring a dispersed plurality under a single form,

seeing it all together – the purpose being to define so-and-so, and thus to make plain whatever may be chosen as the topic for exposition. For example, take the definition given just now of love. Whether it was right or wrong, at all events it was that which enabled our discourse to achieve lucidity and consistency." And what else might the dance of words mean? It means "the reverse of the other, whereby we are enabled to divide into forms, following the objective articulation; we are not to attempt to hack off parts like a clumsy butcher, but to take example from our two recent speeches. The single general form which they postulated was irrationality; next, on the analogy of a single natural body with its pairs of like-named members, right arm or leg, as we say, and left, they conceived of madness as a single objective form existing in human beings. Wherefore the first speech divided off a part on the left, and continued to make divisions, never desisting until it discovered one particular part bearing the name of 'sinister' love, on which it very properly poured abuse. The other speech conducted us to the forms of madness which lay on the right-hand side, and upon discovering a type of love that shared its name with the other but was divine, displayed it to our view and extolled it as the source of the greatest goods that can befall us."⁵⁹

It would be beautiful – the dance of words. Let us remember it when we look for the words among all those words.

Notes

1. *Theaetetus*, 189e-190a. The following quotations from Plato are taken from E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, eds., *The Collected Works of Plato*, Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton, N.J., 7th printing, 1973).

2. *Gorgias*, 506a.

3. *Phaedrus*, 235c.

4. *Symposium*, 177b.

5. *Ibid.*, *Phaedrus*, 242d-e, also calls Eros "a god". See also *Symposium*, 178a.

6. *Symposium*, 197d.

7. *Ibid.*, 197c-d.

8. See, e.g., Lao Tse, *Tao Te Ching*, XXV, XLII; Koran, 13th and 35th Sura; Bible, 1st Book of Moses (Genesis), 1; Hesiodotus, *Theogonie*, 30-35, 105-125 in: idem, *Sämtliche Gedichte*, transl. by W. Marg (Darmstadt, 1984); Bhagavadghita, IX, 17-19; Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete, transl. and ed. by J. Assmann (Zürich-Munich, 1975).

9. *Tao Te Ching*, XXV, XLII. I would like to thank Wolfgang Lippert, Erlangen University, for offering a more precise rendering of lines 1 and 6 in Ch. XXV and for his suggested translation of Ch. XLII.

10. Hesiodotus, *Theogonie*, 104-14 (note 8 above).
11. Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete, 293-97.
12. *The Holy Bible* (King James Version), First Book of Moses called Genesis, Chapter 1, 1-11.
13. *Parmenides*, 135d.
14. For the following see *ibid.*, 142b-148a.
15. *Ibid.*, 144a.
16. *Ibid.*, 144b-c.
17. See also *ibid.*, 158a.
18. Hesiodotus, *Theogonie*, 115-30 (note 8 above).
19. See also Marsilio Ficino, *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore* (1484), 1st Speech, Ch. 3: "De origine amoris."
20. *Theaetetus*, 152e.
21. See also M. Ficino (note 19 above), 139.
22. Empedokles, *Fragment*, 17, in: H. Diels, ed., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Hamburg, 1957), 60.
23. *Ibid.*, 61 (*Fragment* 20).
24. *Symposium*, 189c.
25. *Ibid.*, 189e-190a.
26. *Ibid.*, 190c.
27. *Ibid.*, 190d-e.
28. *Ibid.*, 191b-d.
29. *Theaetetus*, 191c-e.
30. *Ibid.*, 194b.
31. *Ibid.*, 194c-195a.
32. *Laws*, 644d ff.
33. *Ibid.*, 644c.
34. *Ibid.*, 644d-645b.
35. *Symposium*, 181a.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, 183c.
38. *Ibid.*, 180c-e, 185b ff.; *Republic*, 403a; *Phaedrus*, 243d.
39. *Symposium*, 188d.
40. *Ibid.* 186a-b. See also L. Klages, *Vom kosmogonischen Eros* (Bonn, 1963), 55.
41. *Symposium*, 180c-e, 185b-188b.
42. *Theaetetus*, 176a. See also *Republic*, 379c: "... one must look for other causes of the evil, not in God."
43. *Philebus*, 45c-e.
44. See also *Lysis*, 214d.
45. *Philebus*, 46c-d.
46. *Ibid.*, 47a-b. See also *Republic*, 610c-e and *Gorgias*, 509b.
47. *Philebus*, 66a.
48. See *Republic*, 571a-580c.
49. *Ibid.*, 573b. See also *ibid.*, 577d-580a and 587a.
50. On the lust for power see also F. Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, III, 2.
51. *Republic*, 588c-589b.
52. *Gorgias*, 500c. See also *Republic*, 578c.
53. See *Gorgias*, 500c, 506b; *Republic*, 441e.
54. *Gorgias*, 507a.
55. See *Republic*, 443d-e; *Symposium*, 196d; *Laws*, 631c-d.
56. See also *Symposium*, 204b, and *Lysis*, 210d.
57. *Gorgias*, 508a.
58. *Symposium*, 206b-e. See also *Timaeus*, 90a-d; *Republic*, 500d.
59. *Phaedrus*, 265d-266b.