PLATO AND THE ENGLISH ROMANTICS

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If we reach and enter that course, it will lead thinking into a dialogue with poetry, a dialogue that is of the history of Being

Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*

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PREFACE

The present work is an exercise in intertextual hermeneutics. In accepting that literature and philosophy form a continuous text, it attempts to provide the space where the dialogue among texts, as well as that between 'reader' and 'text', can be carried out. It is not primarily an investigation of sources and influences, though it is an exploration into origins – the presuppositions conditioning the cultural span inhabited by the works under examination; such are basic Greek words, οὐσία, λόγος, ἔρως, ποίησις, ἀνάμνησις (etymology often acting as a point of departure into ontological linguistics). The underlying structure is the contra-diction between 'identity' (Limit/Same) and 'difference' (Unlimited/Other) which, translated into mythological terms evinces the 'love-play' or 'discourse' of the Apollonian and Dionysian forces, and transferred into rhetorical tropes elicits 'metaphor'.

The ardent post-modern debate concerning the 'end' of metaphysics has triggered the urge to revisit the original site, the textual τόπος where metaphysics has its 'beginning', the Platonic *Dialogues*. Roaming about the discursive and imaginative land-scape that provides the point of origination for the flight from the sensuous – Plato's alleged privileging of the transcendental signified over the empirical signifier – one realizes that what the text 'says' (despite what its characters sometimes 'speak') is a full immersion into the daily business of living. In their venture to grapple with the immediate problems of existence, the Platonic dialogues remain firmly set in the to and fro of 'everydayness' – the 'passion', the 'action', the 'discourse'. So I would argue that 'metaphysics' never really happens at the point of its supposed genesis, where physical desire (ἔρως) grounds meta-physical

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cognition; it is rather to be found in the 'interpretations' of subsequent commentaries, beginning with Aristotle.

My reading of Plato, emphasizing the 'dynamic' aspect of his ontology, is based on his own definition of Being (οὐσία) as 'power to act or suffer' – an assessment that has paradoxically been muted or 'marginalized' in the general tendency of western philosophical tradition which looks upon the Platonic notion of the real as something static, permanent and invariant. The argument discloses the possible kinship between Platonic metaphysics and Romantic aesthetics in the centrality of the ποιεῖν/πάσχειν model, which makes of 'poetry' and 'passion' the dialectical forces that constitute reality and creativity. The approach taken traces a common 'deep structure' in *logos* (dialectical procedure) and *mythos* (imaginative process), in the presence of μανία (intensified awareness) – the daemonic ἔρως that bridges the ontological gap between mortal and divine and the epistemological split of subject and object; it reads metamorphosis in the Romantic texts (the 'marriage' of Self and Other) in the light of Plato's anamnestic recognition. Such is the close intimacy with 'what is', the impassioned perception (νοῦς ἐρῶν) that deconstructs habitual consciousness (dissolution of ego or 'subject'), effecting a passage from 'ignorance of knowledge' to 'knowledge of knowledge', through 'knowledge of ignorance'. It is my basic contention that Platonic dialectic, in breaking the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of perception or forestructures (shadows), suspending all that was formerly held true and taken for granted, is the forerunner of such modern practices as Heideggerian 'destruction' or Derridean 'deconstruction'.

The cohabitation of Platonic philosophy and Romantic poetry in the same textual abode is not intended primarily to support (the much disputed nowadays) Romantic Platonism; on the contrary, intertextuality works backwards, attempting the rather unprecedented task of turning Plato into a Wordsworthian. In my demarcation of a field of research that is interdisciplinary, diachronic, and cross-cultural, Heidegger's thought has become a central point of reference, among other things for presenting the possibility of a convergence between Greek philosophy and Romantic poetry, turning my attention towards the hidden resources of my language – that language which is privileged with the 'speaking of being'. I believe that despite Heidegger's professed anti-Platonism (a possible result of his reading

Nietzsche reading Plato), there are strong similarities in their logo-centric reality models, beginning with the dominance of the ontological question (τὶ τὸ ὄν). Heidegger's partiality for the dialogue form alerted me to the fact that the dialogical exchange in its 'playful' dramatization of everyday situations, 'says' as much about Plato's 'truth' as his expressed utterances. In the adoption of the dialogic / dramatic form, the author-ial voice is dissolved and (like Dionysus) parcelled out among the personages of the Platonic θίασος. And here I need to borrow Gadamer's words, who undertakes to remind us all in the concluding statement of his *Philosophical Apprenticeships* (1985), 'that Plato was no Platonist and that philosophy is not scholasticism'.

The literary·reading of (Platonic) philosophy and the philosophical reading of (Romantic) poetry has been facilitated by the tracing of their lost foundation in ritualistic practices – Plato's depiction of the philosopher's condition not as a matter of theorizing and propositional thinking, but a form of 'madness' (τῆς φιλοσόφου μανίας καὶ βακχείας), still aware of the Dionysian origins of the 'discipline' he practises. Plato and the English Romantics may be seen as samples of a pre-post-Christian discourse, offering rival myths of interpreting 'being' and introducing formal explanations or metaphysical propositions operating outside the Judaeo-Christian historical, ideological, or imaginative context. The Romantic movement does not so much initiate an innovation in ontological models, I think, but the 'recollection' of a forgotten or 'suppressed' typology. The dominant Judaeo-Christian myth of patriarchal authority, centred on a rationalizing (logo-centric) and controlling 'ego' – ᾿Εγώ εἰμί Κύριος ὁ Θεός σου – ceases to be the only mode of experiencing, and expressing, human transactions with reality. From that point of view, the 'mistrust' of textuality that has been detected in western tradition (beginning with Plato) may be ascribed to a 'questioning' of the dogmatic authority and finality of 'script-ure' which, by providing ready answers, dulls (or lulls) sensitivity and erotic attentiveness to the event of 'being'.

Plato was the first to set down the dialogical situation as the condition of hermeneutics – inter-personal, in-personal, and trans-personal communication – which even in its 'written' form escapes the fixity and uniformity of the omniscient author. As practised in the present undertaking, hermeneutics has functioned not only as a stance of 'astonishment' and openness to

'textual' being. Next to gaining 'right understanding from the texts themselves' (to paraphrase Heidegger), the actual experience of involvement into an interpretative 'dialogue' with the Platonic and Romantic work has led to the inevitable realization that, much as I wished to achieve the presuppositionless stance of phenomenology, my readings could only be those dictated by my culture and my sex: the ἑρμηνεία of a Greek female.

E.D.K.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THE DIALOGUE FORM

Apollo and Dionysus in Discourse

BEING AND FORMS IN PLATO

Form is factitious *Being*, and Thinking is the Process.
Imagination the Laboratory, in which Thought elaborates
Essence into Existence. A Psilosopher, i.e. a nominal Ph.
without Imagination, is a *Coiner* – Vanity, the *Froth* of the
molten Mass, is his *Stuff* – and Verbiage the Stamp &
Impression. This is but a *deaf* Metaphor – better say, that
he is guilty of Forgery – he presents the same ‹sort of› *Paper*
as the honest Barterer, but when you carry it to the *Bank*, it
is found to be drawn on – Outis, *Esqre*. His Words had
deposited no Forms there, payable at Sight – or even at any
imaginable Time from the Date of the Draft/ . . .

. . . *Λoyoς* ab *Ente* – at once the ~~essential~~ existent
Reflection, and the Reflex Act – at once actual and real &
therefore, filiation not creation / Thought *formed not fixed* –
the molten *Being* never cooled into a *Thing*, tho' begotten
into the vast adequate Thought. Est, Idea, Ideation – *Id* –
inde, HOC et *illud*. Idea – *atio*, seu *actio* = Id: iterum,
‹Hoc + Id, & then› Id + Ea (i.e. Coadunatio Individui cum
Universo per Amorem) = Idea: Idea + actio = Ideatio, seu
αγιον πνευμα, which being transelemented into we are
mystically united with the *Am – Eμι –*.

<div align="right">(Coleridge 1962: II, 3158; 3159)</div>

The 'spontaneous overflow' of Coleridge's thought as mani-
fested in the above passage contains in embryonic form, or rather
formlessness, the Romantic endeavour to deal with the epistemo-
logical and aesthetic problems and perplexities bequeathed to

them by an age-long tradition and controversy, that 'series of footnotes to Plato' which constitutes, in A. N. Whitehead's view, western philosophy. Drawing his metaphors from chemistry (or alchemy), minting, banking practice, Coleridge immerses himself into a questionable etymological exploration of the term 'idea', to conclude with a twisting (so common of Coleridgean habits in the structuring of his arguments as well as his poems) that terminates intellectual or imaginative tensions by translating them into the accepted dogmas of Christian theology. His reading of 'ideas' as energies of thinking rather than mental concepts, in that 'an idea is deeper than all intelligence', although retaining the ontological primacy of the term, infuses it with the Romantic dynamics of the 'will' and turns its, supposedly, fixed nature into a tensive field of action.

How far is the inherent 'dynamism' that Coleridge attributes to the Platonic Ideas, and which seems to contradict traditional views of the Forms as 'static' configurations of reality, justified by the use of the term – and the concept – in the Platonic text itself? Or, is the notion of form a constriction and imprisonment of 'being', as J. Derrida affirms: 'It might then be thought that the *sense of being* has been limited by the imposition of *form* – which in its most overt function, and ever since the origin of philosophy, would, with the authority of the *is*, have assigned to the sense of being the closure of presence, the form-of-presence, presence-in-form, or form-presence' (1973: 127).

The 'classical' definition of forms is given in the *Parmenides* where, after Parmenides' assertion that a 'form' is a thing thought of as being one and always the same, Socrates expands the hermeneutical horizon by adding further details which exemplify the essence and function of forms; very tentatively, induced by his interlocutor,[1] he admits that 'these forms [εἴδη] are as it were patterns fixed in the nature of things [παραδείγματα ἑστάναι ἐν τῇ φύσει]' (132d).[2] Whatever activity or energy forms are allowed is in their relationship to each other, and their transactions with the sensible world; forms relate to one another, as things in the visible world relate to one another (*Parm.*, 129d–e). A greater amount of dynamism is displayed in the encounter of 'forms' and the 'formless' receptacle which exists before all shapes and colours and sounds appear, for 'that which is to receive perpetually and through its whole extent the resemblances of all eternal beings ought to be devoid of any

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particular form' (*Timaeus*, 51a); the universal mould receiving all Ideas, always the 'same' and open to impressions,

> is stirred and informed by them, and appears different from time to time by reason of them. But the forms which enter into and go out of her are the likenesses of eternal realities modeled after their patterns in a wonderful and mysterious manner, which we will hereafter investigate.
>
> (*Tim.*, 50c)

So forms in a way exhibit a simultaneous dynamic and static quality in sending forth 'representatives' that come and go into the maternal mould, while they themselves remain aloof, undisturbed. The manner of interaction between forms and receptacle is given in the *Timaeus* through the metaphor of 'visitation' (forms 'enter into' and 'go out of her') in what appears to be an open thoroughfare, neither inviting nor detaining them. Plato's 'formless' receptacle of forms is the material χώρα, the space where forms arise and vanish. For, if 'that which is to receive all forms should have no form', 'the mother and receptacle of all created and visible and in any way sensible things', the matrix of creation, 'is an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible', (50e–51b). It is the 'marriage' of 'form' and 'space' that gives birth to 'image' or phenomenal reality observed by the senses; conversely, the formlessness of χώρα 'is apprehended, when all sense is absent, by a kind of spurious reason' and a 'dreamlike sense' (52b–c). So 'image' (or 'generation') is distinguished from 'space' (the 'nurse of generation'), and both are differentiated from 'idea', thus forming a triptych of existents. Yet when it comes to that, the metaphysical distinction dominating the Platonic strongly dualistic ontology – the difference between that spiritual 'place [τόπον] beyond the heavens' where 'true being dwells, without color or shape, that cannot be touched' (*Phaedrus*, 247c), 'the form which is always the same . . . invisible and imperceptible by any sense, and of which the contemplation is granted to intelligence only' (*Tim.*, 52a), and the sheer materiality of 'space [χώρας]', 'that must be always called the same' (*Tim.*, 50b), 'an invisible and formless being' (*Tim.*, 51a) – seems to be an extremely subtle noetic, and experiential, operation.

'Participation' of things in forms often bears traces of the

exercise of violence. In the *Phaedo*, for instance, the language of the text introduces 'occupation' and 'enforcement' as conditions that are 'suffered' by a thing and resulting from its association with form. Confrontation of 'form' and 'thing' is not only hierarchical but may lead to unpredictable consequences, as 'they are things which are compelled by some form which takes possession of them to assume not only its own form but invariably also that of some other form which is an opposite' (104d). Such an assumption would uncover 'forms' to be not mere 'energies' but 'powers' in the full sense of the word, leading to a 'political' rather than 'scientific' reading of Platonic cosmology, easily discerning the relationship of oppressor / oppressed in the ontological transactions between the spiritual and the material. A similar observation can be made concerning the central activity in Plato's creation myth in the *Timaeus*, the famous, or infamous, 'Mind, the ruling power, persuaded necessity to bring the greater part of created things to perfection' (48a). Since the – anyway ethically ambiguous – technique of persuasion, even in its most innocent form of verbal persuasion or rhetoric, is often condemned by Plato as a misleading and enchanting practice (of which poetry is a type), the proposition perhaps implies that the whole Platonic edifice of a moral universe (the cause 'endowed with mind' working out 'things fair and good') is based upon misappropriation of power. D. F. Krell attempts to decipher the mechanics of persuasion that brings a 'cosmos' out of a 'chaos': 'Timeaus's craftsman', he contests, 'possesses only one *techne* and that one is *poiesis*, production. We know nothing about his capacities in wooing and love-making. If he is the *logos* that cannot be persuaded', the critic wonders, how can he come to terms with the *alogon*? 'If he fears and despises *ananke* can he bring himself to lie with her – or induce her to lie with him?' In an attempt to clarify the relationship of ἔρως and λόγος, Krell protests: 'If he cannot be persuaded how will he learn the art of persuasion? Does not persuasion involve the give and take of dialogue and dialectic? Unless he does a bit of wandering himself how can *logos* persuade the *planōmenon*?' (1975: 415).

The activity of Ideas receives a milder presentation in the *Republic*, in Plato's effort to safeguard, once more, the 'uniqueness' and self-identity of each form, while justifying its pluralistic manifestations:

> And in respect of the just and the unjust, the good and
> the bad, and all the ideas or forms, the same statement
> holds, that in itself each is one, but that by virtue of their
> communion with actions and bodies and with one another
> they present themselves everywhere, each as a multiplicity
> of aspects.
>
> (V, 476a)

Moving in a reverse process, man must understand the language
of forms, passing from a plurality of perceptions to a unity
gathered together by thinking; the vision of forms presupposes,
as is often stressed by Plato, a prior 'unification' and 'collected-
ness'. This highest stage, the final θεωρία, is prepared for by the
preliminary phases of the dialectical process, which effect an
'intellectual' purification that cleanses the mind from preconcep-
tions, opinions, conditioning (as well as an 'ethical' one that kills
the pride of intellect) and allows a 'naked' contact of the soul
with reality as it is (τὸ ὄντος ὄν), the original state of what is
'there' – or 'here'. Seen from within the perspective of the
dialectical method, the Idea (Ideas) is that which *is* before we
project our concepts (ὑποθέσεις) onto it. And although such a
view tends to de-transcendentalize traditional interpretations
concerning the nature of Platonic forms, I agree with the
suggestion supporting the 'this-worldliness' of Plato's attitude
rather than his so-called 'escapism', the view expressed by L. A.
Cosman that 'the luminous world of forms is this world seen
aright. That seeing (itself fugitive) is accomplished by a katharsis
which makes appearance transparent, which allows the world
itself to shine through its appearances' (1976: 67). One could
even go as far as making paradoxical statements of the nature
that Ideas can only be reached by a mind free from 'ideas'. Such
subtle interplay of terms would be made meaningful if we turn to
the root signification of the Greek word ἰδέα which is 'to
observe, to see'; the implication might be that one refuses to see
reality *as it is* by making an abstraction out of it, turning it into
an 'idea' or 'picture' – in the sense the term is used by later
philosophers.

Plato does not actually refer to Ideas as living powers but
reserves the notion of 'dynamism' for the idea of 'being' – ὄν or
οὐσία (deriving from οὖσα, participle feminine of εἰμί / am).
The most thorough and extensive argument about the 'empowered'

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nature of the real appears in the *Sophist* where the definition (λόγος) of 'being', whether in an embodied or bodiless state, is set down as 'power' (δύναμις): 'I am proposing as a mark to distinguish real things that they are nothing but power' (247e). This 'power' that constitutes the essence of 'being' is further defined as power to 'affect' (ποιεῖν) or 'be affected' (πάσχειν). Having established the characteristic mark of reality as 'the presence in a thing of the power of being acted upon or of acting' (248c), the 'dramatis personae', the Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus, carry on the discussion which was actually initiated earlier, by bringing face to face the two diametrically opposite positions concerning the nature of the real – that of the materialists (the exponents of flux) and that of the so-called idealists (the 'friends of forms').[3] In his usual philosophical practice Plato literally 'throws' on the ground the binary opposition and, like an interested but detached observer, follows the undulatory motion of the argument wherever it leads – which is usually 'nowhere'.

Beginning with the assumption that 'reality is just as hard to define as unreality', he sets down the basic premises of the parties involved in this 'quarrel about reality' like 'a battle of gods and giants'. The hypotheses of both contestants, materialists and idealists, receive due attention and presentation – in their most extremist positions (246a–249c). The task facing the Stranger and his interlocutor is to challenge each party in turn, Theaetetus undertaking to act as their spokesman. The seeming deadlock into which the either / or dialectical process ultimately corners itself is miraculously resolved by Plato (in the persona of the Stranger) offering not only one but two possible solutions: (a) the neither, and (b) the both / and:

> On these grounds, then, it seems that only one course is open to the philosopher who values knowledge and the rest above all else. He must refuse to accept from the champions either of the one or of the many forms the doctrine that all reality is changeless, and he must turn a deaf ear to the other party who represent reality as everywhere changing. Like a child begging for 'both,' he must declare that reality or the sum of things is both at once – all that is unchangeable and all that is in change.
>
> (249c–d)

The acceptance of both 'unchangeability', i.e. rest, and 'change', i.e. motion, as equally real, rather than posing the problem of the contradictory nature of οὐσία, facilitates the wrenching of reality from the clusters of either 'rest' or 'motion': instead of 'being' rest or motion, reality 'embraces' rest and motion – or rest and motion partake of reality which is then raised (or lowered) to a 'third' category or form. Reality or 'being' is neither motion nor rest, nor yet motion-and-rest at once, but 'different' or 'other' than motion or rest, in which, however, both κίνησις and στάσις (equally real) participate; the real is a 'third thing' neither static nor kinetic (250b–d).

Defining reality in a negative manner – not by what it is, but by what it *is not* – the argument concludes itself in characteristic Platonic ironic fashion by leaving the speakers – and readers – as perplexed as in the opening situation. To make matters worse, in an attempt to 'force a passage through the argument with both elbows at once' (251a), the Stranger introduces the 'linguistic' aspect, the multiplicity of names by which any given thing is called. The issue of the distinction between 'being' and its 'name' is discussed in the *Sophist* a little before the point where our intrusion into the text was made; the relation of 'word' to 'thing' is presented in equivocal terms leading, one way or the other, to a logical impossibility. The 'non-existence' of language is expounded as follows: if one assumes that the name (of reality) is different from the thing (i.e. reality) then he is surely speaking of *two* things, i.e. the name as other-than-reality. If, on the other hand, one assumes that the name (of reality) is the same as the thing (reality itself), 'either he will have to say it is not the name of anything, or if he says it is the name of something, it will follow that the name is merely a name of a name and of nothing else whatsoever' (244d).

The notion of 'pluralism' of names by which reality can be called,[4] necessarily creates the appropriate intellectual climate for the surfacing into the discussion of the concept of 'blending' (κοινωνία) of forms, which is a corner-stone in Platonic thought. The metaphor through which the ontological problem of the 'mixing' of forms is read, is a linguistic one: as with the letters of the alphabet so with the forms of reality, i.e. some are blendable and some are not. Dialectic science, or the 'grammar of reality', is the art responsible for pointing out which forms 'are consonant and which are incompatible with one another', and the dialectician

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is the one who can 'see clearly' this possibility (253b–e). Having confirmed the potentiality – indeed the necessity – of 'blending', the next step in the argument proposes that 'being' or 'existence' is the form which intermingles invariably with 'rest' or 'motion' since they both 'exist' without being 'existence' itself (254d); such subtle differentiation establishes the original three forms, each of which is *different* from the other two, and the *same* as itself. This further discrimination multiplies the number of original forms from 'three' to 'five', while it acknowledges that these two newly discovered Ideas, 'sameness' (ταὐτόν) and 'difference' (θάτεϱον) are, like 'existence', blendable with all other forms (255a–e).

The next argumentative step is to take a form, 'motion' for example, and to indicate that although it partakes in other forms such as 'being', 'sameness', and 'difference', *as such* it is heterogeneous to all other three; having existence (οὐσία) yet it *is not* existence, and 'In fact, it is clear that motion really is a thing that is not [existence] and a thing that is, since it partakes of existence' – hence, 'It must, then, be possible for "that which is not" [i.e. is different from existence] to be [to exist], not only in the case of motion but of all other kinds' (256d). The conclusion to which the dialogue had been oriented from its beginning is that *non-existence* (difference) *exists* in that it is 'different from' and not 'opposite to', existence; it is present in every form, including existence itself, and is an indispensible ingredient of any created thing which at the same time *is* and *is not*. Thus Plato has furnished a logical framework to support a really absurd proposition and to refute the central premise of Parmenides, that 'Never shall this be proved, that things that are not, are' (258d), by equating *nothingness* with *difference*: 'When we speak of "that which is not," it seems that we did not mean something contrary to what exists but only something that is different' (257b). This proposition, τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι, marks a turning point of momentous significance for the evolution of western thinking because it admits of the existence of a form 'other than being' – an 'otherness' – parcelled out among created beings; it attributes to 'no-thing' a measure of reality (where certainly 'things' or 'something' *can* come from 'nothing' – despite assertions to the contrary, as for instance King Lear's famous privative utterance: 'Nothing will come of nothing' (I, i, 89)):

So, when it is asserted that a negative signifies a contrary,

we shall not agree, but admit no more than this – that the prefix 'not' indicates something different from the words that follow, or rather from the things designated by the words pronounced after the negative.

(*Soph.*, 257b–c)

Having effected the 'parricide' of father Parmenides, and having identified the nature of not-being as 'otherness' (rather than 'non-existence'), and after locating its presence 'parceled out over the whole field of existent things', and having 'dared to say that precisely that *is really* "that which is not" ' (258d–e), Plato orientates the inquiry into human discourse – both as an object of investigation and as significant metaphor – with the intention to prove that 'non-being' can be spoken, i.e. false articulation exists. This premise, whose target is to expose the falsity of sophistry in that it is capable of making statements – 'speaking' – different from (or other than) the things that 'are', is modified in a very interesting manner in the *Cratylus* by the assertion that 'falsehood may be spoken [λέγειν] but not said [φάναι]' (429e) – which places Plato before Heidegger in the distinction of logos into 'speaking' and 'saying'.

The analogical relation between language (λόγος) and reality (οὐσία) is a constant point of reference throughout the dialogues, and functions on two levels: (a) it traces the parallel operations of λόγος and οὐσία in a blending of simple elements into complexes, and (b) it recognizes a 'natural' affinity between the 'thing' and the 'word' in 'naming' (or a similarity of syntactical patterns in 'predicating'), in that the structures assumed by combinations of letters or syllables are 'imitations' of the way the elements of reality blend or 'weave' together. In the *Sophist* (261d–262d) Plato argues that the signs we use in speech (φωνῇ) to signify 'being' (οὐσίαν) are of two kinds, one called 'names', ὀνόματα, the other 'verbs', ῥήματα. The presence of both sorts of signs in interaction with each other (συμπλοκή) is a presupposition of λόγος, whereas the stringing together of elements from the same category never makes up a statement. As the intersection of blendable sounds produces meaningful names, so the weaving together of verbs with names 'states' something. The concept of 'fitting' and combination of simple elements is equally fundamental in Plato's linguistic as well as ontological universe.

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In the *Cratylus*, the problem of the relation between reality and language arises in its 'naming' (etymological) rather than its 'predicating' (logical) aspect. The question of whether imitation of the essence of a thing is made by syllables and letters – τοῖς γϱάμμασι ϰαὶ ταῖς συλλαβαῖς τοῦ ὄντος (424a–b) – leads to a close examination of the blendability of 'letters' (vowels, consonants, mutes), an operation seen as analogical to the mixing of 'words' to form sentences. The principle that underlies all these activities seems to be: as with 'being' so with 'predicating' and 'naming'. The initial assumption (to be later subverted within the same dialogue) is that 'the essence of the thing remains in possession of the name and appears in it' (393d). The word ὄνομα (name), to begin with,

> seems to be a compressed sentence, signifying ὂν οὗ ζήτημα (being for which there is a search), as is still more obvious in ὀνομαστόν (notable), which states in so many words that real existence is that for which there is a seeking (ὂν οὗ μάσμα).
>
> (421a)

So the root meaning of 'name' uncovers the essence of language as a pursuit after 'being' (ἡ τοῦ ὄντος θήϱα) and justifies the definition of 'naming' as an art whose artificers are the 'legislators', in possession of the knowledge of how to put the 'natural' name of each thing into sounds and syllables – for 'as his name, so also is his nature [ϰατὰ φύσιν τὸ ὄνομα εἶναι]' (395a).

Assuming that the authenticity of such a statement can be provisionally accepted – if not on epistemological then on mythological grounds, as revelatory not of the 'being' of things but of the Platonic (and Greek) model concerning the nature of reality – then the following etymological investigations may be taken as valid in their own right, within the context that produced them:

> For example, that which we term οὐσία is by some called ἐσσία, and by others again ὠσία. Now that the essence of things should be called ἑστία, which is akin to the first of these (ἐσσία = ἑστία), is rational enough. And there is reason in the Athenians' calling that ἑστία which participates in οὐσία. For in ancient times we too seem to have said ἐσσία for οὐσία, and this you may note to have been

the idea of those who appointed that sacrifices should be first offered to ἑστία, which was natural enough if they meant that ἑστία was the essence of things. Those again who said ὠσία seem to have inclined to the opinion of Heraclitus that all things flow and nothing stands; with them the pushing principle (ὠθοῦν) was the cause and ruling power of all things, and was therefore rightly called ὠσία. Enough of this, which is all that we who know nothing can affirm.

(401c–e)

Socrates' ironic admission of ignorance concerning the nature of reality, although it 'deconstructs' the attempted definition while yet making it, yet in the recognition of the phonetic similarity of ἐσσία / ὠσία / οὐσία it allows to emerge in the name, if not the characteristic 'being' of the thing, two of its properties – its 'fireness' and its 'fluidity' – both of which can be attributed to the Heraclitean conception of reality, where not only things are in unceasing flow but the permanent λόγος within, below, or beyond things is that of 'fire' (Heraclitus 1979: 45–7).

The 'fiery' quality of 'being' is only mentioned once in the *Cratylus* in the passage quoted earlier, but its 'flowing' aspect receives a greater emphasis, in that it appears as the essential component of reality in a second attempt made by Socrates to get to the root meaning of the words ὄν / οὐσία: Ὄν and οὐσία are ἰόν with an ι broken off; this agrees with the true principle, for being (ὄν) is also moving (ἰόν), and the same may be said of not-being, which is likewise called not-going (οὐκίον or οὐκὶ ὄν = οὐκ ἰόν)' (421b–c). The concept of 'motion' appears to be the fundamental principle not only of 'reality' but also of 'truth', as in precisely the same passage and prior to the identification of 'being' with 'motion', ἀλήθεια is viewed as 'divine wandering' (421b).[5] Plato indulges in this spirit of apotheosis of movement by stressing that whatever facilitates κίνησις is good, whatever impedes it evil (419a–e); 'necessity' (the Platonic material element) is that which resists and obstructs motion (420d–e), ἐπιστήμη (knowledge) indicates that the soul 'follows (ἕπεται) the motion of things, neither anticipating them, nor falling behind them' (412a), and σοφία (wisdom) itself, although very dark and of foreign origin, is found out to mean '*touching the motion or stream of things*' (412b).

The counter-argument in the *Cratylus*, which follows in the usual Platonic practice of contra-diction, and endeavours to refute the position that supports the 'natural' signification of language by 'likeness', and to establish instead the theory of conventional representation by any 'chance sign,' is sustained (and the fallacy of the naturalness of 'names' exposed) through the reduction to absurdity of the 'naming' / 'moving' relationship. Reverting to their former discussion and getting Cratylus to admit their earlier argument, that 'in the names which have just been cited the motion of flux or generation of things is most surely indicated' (411c), Socrates (actually Plato) twists, I believe, both the process of the syllogism and its conclusion and – probably relying on Cratylus' weak memory – translates the assumption that language speaks of motion as that which is good and hindrance of motion as that which is evil (419a–420e) into 'all things are in motion . . . and this idea of motion is expressed by names' (436e) – silencing the evaluation principle. This obvious 'sophistry' of Socrates, probably justified by the Platonic argumentative principle of always bringing in the 'other' side of the issue, extends to a few paragraphs only compared to the thirty-or-so pages that the opposite exposition covers. It undertakes to prove the conventionality of language by disclosing the self-contradictory state of mind of the primal legislator (divine or human) who 'made some names expressive of rest and others of motion', thereby exhibiting his ignorance about the nature of reality and the possibility of its depiction in language, and allowing for the suspicion to creep in of 'one of the two not to be names at all' (438c).

The demolition of the theory that supported the presentation of 'being' in 'name' begins with the word ἐπιστήμη again – this time its etymology traced not to ἔπεται (following the motion) but, ambiguity taken into account, in the suggestion of 'stopping the soul at things than going round with them'; then μνήμη (memory) is given as an example expressing 'rest in the soul, and not motion' (437a–b). A few other illustrations associating 'motion' with evil and 'rest' with good are introduced, thus effecting a complete transvaluation of these two states of being (437b–c). Shortly after this rather thinly disguised effort to include the opposite or 'conventional' theory of language, the dialogue ends on an uncertain note admitting that knowledge of names does not yield knowledge of things, and cognition of

things in themselves is impossible since they (unlike names) are in a state of intermittent flux: 'Must not the same thing be born and retire and vanish while the word is in our mouths?' (439e). Socrates incites Cratylus to reflect well and when he has found the truth to come and tell him. In a masterful open-endedness that leaves the question alive and fresh as in the opening situation – only more compact and precise – the text has circled back to its own beginning in an, apparently, futile gesture; the problem, brought to the frontier of the realm of speculation, has exerted human intellectual capacity to its limits. The argument, having moved forward in the form of a bridge (a dual one) towards a possible answer, suddenly stops with no opposite shore in sight. Questioning its own voice, its own assumptions and premises (τὰς ὑποθέσεις ἀναιροῦσα), it reveals itself to be not a bridge, after all, but a jetty, thrusting itself forward into the unknown, and allowing the participants – and the readers – a glimpse into the dark waters of ontological linguistics that awaits the investigation of the 'unaided mind'.

Plato's scepticism about the relation of λόγος to οὐσία seems to be absent from the phenomenology of logos as expressed in Heidegger's 'logocentric' ontology: 'Language is the precinct (*templum*), that is, the house of Being. The nature of language does not exhaust itself in signifying, nor is it merely something that has the character of sign or cipher'. Turning away from the 'semiotic' towards the 'symbolic' or 'mythic' function of human utterance, Heidegger asserts that 'It is because language is the house of Being, that we reach what is by constantly going through this house'; consequently, 'Thinking our way from the temple of Being, we have an intimation of what they dare who are sometimes more daring than the Being of beings. They dare the precinct of Being. They dare language' (1971a: 132).[6]

THE MYTHOS OF LOGOS: PLATO AND HEIDEGGER

Plato's recognition of the archetypal character of 'conversation' becomes manifest in the indisputable priority that 'discourse' receives in his text, in a multiplicity of forms and functions: the actual dramatic mode adopted as a means of presenting philosophical inquiry after truth; 'dialectic' as the methodology applied to such enquiry; the 'psychological' colloquy of mind's interior dialogue with itself as the prototype for 'speech' (or vice

versa); the interaction of Logos–Mythos, which constitutes the basic structure of the Platonic writings; a compendium of dynamic relations between opposite forms such as Limit / Unlimited, Same / Other, Ideas / Receptacle, Nous / Eros, in conciliatory interplay or ironic tension; and finally, the textual correlation of two rhetorical practices, philosophic and poetic, abstract and concrete, that are hardly found as co-habitants in theoretical prose since,[7] portraying the living interplay between Concept and Image – which still leaves open the question (so arbitrarily settled in later years) of their proximity to truth.

Plato's use of figurative or metaphorical language is, I believe, a parallel to his dialectical method; the collapsing of barriers between linguistic categories in metaphor mirrors the exercise of 'disputation' and 'confutation', tearing the known world into pieces, and leading to a 'violent distrust' of all that had formerly been 'held true' (*Republic*, VII, 539c). Companion to a technique of direct questioning – which breaks down not only the interlocutor's but also the reader's sense of order – the metaphorical process, through the open trafficking that it effects between classes formerly sealed, becomes the embodiment of the unrealized connections of things, i.e. a linguistic representation of unapprehended structures, or 'ideas'. A. Fletcher recognizes and expands the operation of metaphor in Platonic thought from a linguistic to an ontological function: 'The ironic mode of the Platonic dialogues appears to follow from Plato's epistemology. With him things are an allegorical imitation of ideas, or, in another formulation, appearances are the allegorical equivalence of a higher reality'; as a result, 'The Platonic distrust of sense experience has a positive consequence, for while he would say that such experience is merely a model of the truth (he calls it a "shadow"), Plato is yet left with the idea of a model' (1964: 232–3).

I would argue that Plato's formal irony is less epistemological (since the continuity between 'perception' and 'idea' is guaranteed through the $\mu\acute{\varepsilon}\theta\varepsilon\xi\iota\varsigma$ – participation – of ideas in the world of generation) than methodological. 'Irony' as such is the starting and finishing point of the Platonic dialogue; the rest is symbolism, or 'romance'. If 'irony' is seen as a statement of irreconcilables, a trope which permits opposite points of view to be included – but not integrated – then it presides over the dialectical process in two ways: in the Socratic admission of

'knowledgeable ignorance', ἓν οἶδα ὅτι οὐδὲν οἶδα, and in the perception of contradiction and paradox as the essential pre-supposition for the 'awakening' of the type of thinking that tends to draw the mind to reality:

> The experiences that do not provoke thought are those that do not at the same time issue in a contradictory perception. Those that do have that effect I set down as provocatives, when the perception no more manifests one thing than its contrary, alike whether its impact comes from nearby or afar.
>
> <div align="right">(Rep., VII, 523b–c)</div>

Perceptions that stimulate reflection, setting the mind on the dialectical quest after 'being', are of things that 'impinge upon the senses together with their opposites' (VII, 524d), i.e. expound a questionable identity, where unity is subverted by the presence of opposition. In the case of an object whereby 'some contradiction is always seen coincidentally with it, so that it no more appears to be one than the opposite', the soul, being 'at a loss', is alerted to thinking and 'thus the study of unity will be one of the studies that guide and convert the soul to the contemplation of true being' (VII, 524e–525a).

Irony also operates as a principle of structure in most Platonic dialogues, where inconclusiveness or refusal of 'closure' leaves the argument where it began, *in medias res*; the Socratic incitement to his pupils to go home and think, and if they find the truth to come and tell him, renders the open-endedness of the (spoken or written) discourse into an invitation for embarking on a solitary, exploratory hunting after 'being'. The Platonic sense of an ending in its manifestly ironic mode, at once affirms and subverts the possibility of communicating the truth about 'reality'. In his distinction between Socratic and Platonic irony, P. Friedländer differentiates precisely between what I consider as the 'methodological' and 'structural' use of the ironic register in the Platonic text: Socrates begins the dialectical process with a professing of ignorance; Plato ends the dialogue with a presenta-tion of multiple viewpoints (sometimes as many as the inter-locutors), and a willing suspension of judgement. In Friedländer's words, 'And thus Platonic irony, incorporating the whole teaching and magic of the figure of Socrates, is revealed as veiling and protecting the Platonic secret. However, as in a Greek statue

the garment not only serves as a veil but at the same time reveals that which it veils, so is Plato's irony also a guide on the path to the eternal forms and to that which is beyond being' (1958: 153).

So the 'real' question in the Platonic dialogues is the uncertainty of the dialogue form which, rather than providing definitive axioms, becomes an invitation to further exercise in 'thinking'. Plato's philosophy is an ironic mode of polarized tensions, surfacing not only in his ontological premises and methodological practices, but pointing to a conflict of contradictions within the author's ψυχή – an instance of which can be glimpsed in his simultaneous attraction / repulsion towards poetry, that ends in its ruthless persecution (*Rep.*, X, 603a–608b) – a frustrating conjunction of contrarities and a glaring example of self divided against itself. The ironic discourse is only one aspect in the multifaceted construction that the Platonic text *is*. Plato the artist manages to join and fuse 'irony' with 'romance', a simultaneous rejection and acceptance of the possibility of 'reconciliation of opposites', which makes for the paradoxical coexistence in the text of 'openness' and 'closedness' – the spiral and the circle. The nominally antithetical modes are seen as possible variants or expressions of the scission into two and unification into one, the clash of forces that is at the root of all existence. The question as to whether 'contraries' can be friendly is posed at a very early stage in the Platonic dialogues (*Lysis*, 216ff); in the work of his maturity, the *Laws*, Plato introduces the distinction between 'friendship' and 'love', the former expressing the affinity of similars, the latter the attraction between opposites (VIII, 837a–d).

What constitutes, I believe, the major target of Plato's conciliatory dynamics, is the engrafting of the binary opposition on to psychology, an aspect of which is the soul–body interaction. Contrary to what may be believed about the 'philosopher of transcendence', the human body holds a most central position in both the discursive and imaginative parts of the dialogues, and is the 'root' metaphor on which transcendence is built (as with body so with soul). The harmonious relation of the two existents has the topmost importance of all symmetries, and the statement that 'the due proportion of mind and body is the fairest and loveliest of all sights to him who has the seeing eye' (*Tim.*, 87d), indeed echoes its modern analogue of 'unity of being' best expressed by Yeats in 'Labour is blossoming or dancing where / The body is

not bruised to pleasure soul' ('Among School Children', VIII).

The tension of the unresolved dialectic in the soul is, in Plato's view, the cause of all evil; he recognizes an internal condition of 'civil war' between various 'powers' which meddle and interfere with one another's 'functions' (*Rep.*, IV, 444b), a continual reassertion of polarities for the purpose of confrontation. Consequently, 'as in the domain of sight there was faction and strife and he held within himself contrary opinions at the same time about the same things, so also in our actions there is division and strife of the man with himself (X, 603c–d). The rhythm of dialectical progression that overcomes the principle of ambi-valence in the soul bears exactly the same pattern as that of the formal process of the method of dialectic: διαίρεσις and συναγωγή, or 'discrimination' and 'mixing'. The structural devices for psychic integration that Plato introduces are rendered metaphorically through familiar, humble, menial, 'feminine' household occupations – such as sifting, straining, winnowing, threshing, carding, spinning, adjusting the warp and woof – in all of which there is implied a notion of division.[8] Such is the art of discerning and discriminating: 'In all the previously named processes, either like has been separated from the like or the better from the worse'; every distinction or differentiation of the second kind is called purification – καθαρμός (*Soph.*, 226d).

The art of reconciliation of opposites is called by Plato the 'royal art', or 'political art', and its allegorical equivalent is the activity of 'weaving'. Paradoxically, the pair of opposites to be 'woven' together is none other than a 'pair of virtues', which are 'in a certain sense enemies from of old, ranged in opposition to each other in many realms of life' (*Statesman*, 306b–c). The 'virtues' engaged in a perennial relation of contradiction are courage and moderation, or the 'brave' and the 'gentle'. The royal weaving process combines them into a unity, not only in the individual soul, where 'it is meet for a good man to be high-spirited and gentle, as occasion requires' (*Laws*, V, 731d), but also in the state. Thus Plato, inverting the metaphorical analogy he had used in the *Republic*, of 'as in the state so in the soul', establishes a model of 'as in the soul so in the state'; the preoccupation of the statesman is to achieve a reconciliation of opposites – the 'kingly weaver' must effect the 'web of state', a fabric enfolding 'all who dwell in the city, bond or free, in its firm contexture' (*Statesm.*, 311b–c). The 'weaving' metaphor is

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as central within Platonic iconography as that of 'blending'; both are expressive of the necessity of bringing together dialectical opposites in the spheres of ontology, sociology, psychology, linguistics; and both are 'arts', i.e. teachable, transferable, conscious activities of the mind. The 'textile' process is the enterprise that underlies language production – in other words looming is the correlative of λόγος, a complex fabric of 'names' and 'verbs'; signification depends on combination of names:

> Because now it gives information about facts or events in the present or past or future; it does not merely name something but gets you somewhere by weaving together verbs with names. Hence we say it 'states' something, not merely 'names' something, and in fact it is this complex that we mean by the word 'statement' [τῷ πλέγματι τούτῳ τὸ ὄνομα ἐφθεγξάμεθα λόγον].
>
> *(Soph.*, 262d)

Plato's attitude to *logos* is as much indicative of the inherent ambivalence in his thought as any of the more pronounced paradoxes of his text. He defines the οὐσία λόγου (essence of language) as συμπλοκὴ ὀνομάτων, an 'intertwining', 'complication' (possibly carrying hints of the 'other' meaning of the word, 'close struggle', or 'engagement') of 'names' (ὄνομα being both the generic term for 'word' and the specialized term for 'noun' as distinguished from 'verb'). Λόγος, composed of substantive and verbal parts, is only one of the three 'significations' through which cognition of reality can be achieved, the other two being 'name' and 'image' (*Letters*, VII, 342a–b). In the *Laws*, Plato repeats this triadic scheme, somehow eliminating the imaginal and concentrating instead on the ontological and linguistic components: 'I mean, for one, the reality of the thing, what it *is*, for another the *definition* of this reality, for another, its *name*. And thus you see there are two questions we can ask about everything which is' (X, 895d). The same conception is put forward in the *Cratylus*, as we have seen, that imitation of the essence of a thing is made by 'syllables' and 'letters' (423e), this time emphasizing not the product but the process of the imitative operation. The suppression of the component 'image' as a viaduct to knowledge is justified by a long, and firmly sustained, argumentation in the *Statesman*: the higher form of reality has no perceptual correspondent, and therefore can only be appre-