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A discourse of the non-discursive in Plato and pseudo-Dionysius

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A DISCOURSE OF THE NON-DISCURSIVE
IN
PLATO AND PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS

A Thesis
Presented in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Ph.D.

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INTRODUCTION

“There is no use trying,” said Alice;
“one can’t believe impossible things.”
“I dare say you haven’t had much practice,”
said the Queen. “When I was your age,
I always did it for half an hour a day.
Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many
as six impossible things before breakfast.”
Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

“For you could not know that which is not, for it is impossible, nor express it; for the same thing is for thought and for being [οὔτε γὰρ ἂν γνοίης τό γε μὴ εἶναι οὐ γὰρ ἀνυστόν οὔτε φράσις τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἔστιν τε καὶ εἶναι] (*DK* 2.7-8). Parmenides indicates here, first, that thought is always the apprehension of some being. Whatever is thought is necessarily thought as something, that is to say, as some being. To think being is to think it as thinkable. Not only are being and intelligibility coextensive, as Parmenides states, but intelligibility is the very meaning of being.

In his middle period, Plato's understanding of being as form or idea [εἶδος, ἰδέα] seems to be a direct consequence of this identification of being and intelligibility. In the *Phaedrus* he writes, “For the colorless, formless and intangible are truly an existence that *is* most of all [οὐσία ὄντως οὔσα]” (*Phdr.* 247c). What is real are the “looks” [εἶδη] that sensible things display to the mind, it is the whatness that can be definitively grasped in thought. The forms are “an existence that *is* most of all” precisely because they and only they are altogether intelligible. Being’s reality consists in its perfect intelligibility. Conversely, sensible instances are less than really real in that they are constituted as multiple appearances of the forms, apprehended by sensation and opinion [δόξα] (*R.* 476a). As appearances, sensible entities are not mere illusion or nothing, but neither are they being itself, the reality that appears, the universal natures apprehended by the intellect. “That which altogether is [τὸ παντελῶς ὄν] is altogether

knowable, while that which in no way is is in no way knowable” (*R.* 477a), whereas “if something should appear such as at once to be and not to be, this will lie in between that which purely is and that which wholly is not, and neither knowledge nor ignorance will be about it, but again what appears between ignorance and knowledge” (*R.* 478d). Here, according to Plato, there are levels of being correlated to levels of cognitive apprehension, since being is identified with intelligibility.

However, in many of what are taken to be his middle and late works, Plato, unlike Parmenides, would seem to present being not as simple but as complex, a multiplicity of interrelated forms. Each form is not any of the other forms. It is different from them and thus shares in difference; difference, no less than identity, is necessary for and constitutive of being. The forms are intelligible only in relation to each other by the method of “collection and division” whereby the less universal forms are identified as differentiated specifications of the more universal, and the more universal forms are understood as unities overarching and pervading a multiplicity of less universal ones (*Phdr.* 265c). The forms’ differences from and relations to one another are necessary conditions for their intelligibility; “for through the interweaving of the forms with each other discourse [λόγος] comes to be for us” (*Sph.* 259e). Thus, for Plato here, he seems to think, it is precisely as intelligible that the altogether real must be a multiplicity of distinct, interwoven forms.

Plato’s principle of the ‘good’ as that which provides being is also grounded in the identification of being and intelligibility. Any thing, event, action, or process can be intellectually understood only in terms of the good which is ultimately the “why” for it. In the *Republic*, the sun, by providing light, is said to make it possible for sensible things to be seen and for the eye to see them. Likewise, the good provides that which makes the forms themselves able

to be known and the intellect able to know them (*R.* 508b-c). The good, then, is the enabling source of intelligibility and intellection. “When [the soul] is fixed upon that which truth and being [ἀλήθεια τε καὶ τὸ ὄν] illuminates, it thinks [ἐνόησέν] and knows and appears to have intellect [νοῦν]; but when it is fixed upon that which is mixed with darkness, upon that which comes into being and passes away, it opines and is dimmed and changes its opinions up and down and seem then not to have intellect (*R.* 508d). After all as Heidegger has pointed out, the very word “truth” [ἀλήθεια], can be heard as “unconcealedness.” While this is a contested claim there is good reason to incorporate Heidegger’s translation.¹ The truth of the forms is their unconcealedness, their availability or accessibility to the mind; and this is provided by the good, “That which provides truth to things known and gives power to the knower is the form [ἰδέαν] of the good” (*R.* 508e). Any and all beings, the forms, are intelligible only in virtue of the “look of goodness” that they have and display.

And yet, Socrates goes on to say “the good is not what truly *is* but lies beyond being [ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας] in seniority [πρεσβεία] and power” (*R.* 509b). Since the good provides being and intelligibility to the forms, which taken together constitute οὐσία, the whole of what is, it is itself not merely one of them, a member of a complex whole but lies “beyond” them. Each form is constituted as being by its proper determination. In the absence of differentiation, distinction, determination, and hence in the absence of multiplicity there is not intelligibility and therefore no being. Being itself is not the first principle but rather derives from the good, which itself is “beyond being.” Since every being is intelligible, and hence is, only in virtue of the determination whereby it is what it is, every being depends for its existence on that determination. Every being must have unity, must be some one being, in order to be; but being as

¹ See especially Sean D. Kirkland, *The Ontology of Socratic Questioning in the Plato’s Early Dialogues* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), pp.51-57.

a whole and each being within it involves multiplicity of content, without which it would not be intelligible. Therefore, each being can be only in virtue of the unity by which it is this one being. In short, for any being, to be is to be delimited and unitary, and hence have a dependence on the unifying definition by which it is the one being that it is. Having discovered that being as such must be dependent one turns to the good as the source on which being itself depends, that by which all beings are beings at all. Again, since to be is to be intelligible and therefore delimited, any being whatsoever is dependent on its determination and is thus derivative. Hence, to be is to be derivative. No being, therefore, can be the first principle, and the first principle cannot be any being; for if it were any being it would be finite and hence not within the complex totality of all beings, rather than the source of that totality. To put it yet another way, if the good were a member of the totality of beings, that is to say, were a being, it would be differentiated from the other beings within that totality and so would be determinate, finite, and dependent. No common term whatsoever including 'being' can embrace both the good and its products, for the good would then be included within the totality and differentiated from others within it. And it is the import and implications of this Platonic claim that my dissertation will undertake to analyze.

Focusing on two thinkers, Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius, this dissertation will unveil the ways philosophy itself, as it is understood in the tradition originating with Plato and extensions to Pseudo-Dionysius and beyond, cannot rationally account for its own ground, but must instead posit an abyssal depth that essentially exceeds its explanatory grasp. In short, it asks what lies behind being so that being may allow entities to manifest at all. The central theme of that which "lies beyond being" is not to be understood as assertions or even invoking some divine transcendence. Rather, it comes only at the conclusion of a definite sequence of philosophical reasoning and only in terms of that argumentation can its precise meaning be correctly grasped,

even if this ultimately suggests that philosophical reasoning throughout the “Platonic” tradition is ruptured from the inside out.

To put it as succinctly as possible, in my dissertation, I set out to study two figures in the tradition of Western thought who seem, at least at moments or under a certain interpretation, to be interested in a project of thinking precisely that which is beyond logic and the ordering power of language—Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. As a supplement, after interpreting these two figures, and at certain points throughout these interpretations, I will show how these earlier projects resonate with the projects of Heidegger, Bataille, and Derrida. Despite moving from the 4th century B.C.E. to (likely) the 7th and then 20th centuries C.E., my dissertation hopes to present a very well-defined discussion of the one basic dynamic, namely, that of, how to bring the extra-discursive into discourse. Just as a preliminary indication, we might note that Plato has recourse often to myth and Pseudo-Dionysius to self-contradictory speech (the *via negativa*), while the 20th century thinkers with which I deal all exhibit similar tactics—Heidegger pushes philosophy toward poetry and tautological philosophical speech, Bataille into the literary, and Derrida into the rhetoric modes of deconstructive analysis. Bringing together these figures and their logics of illogic, I am then ultimately concerned with how we come together into something like a community or into a group obligated to one another in ethical ways when we find ourselves faced with that which frustrates our ability to articulate or understand it.

The title “A Discourse *of* the Non-Discursive” should be read and treated with some care. It is not a discourse *on* the non-discursive, for to do so would be to make the non-discursive something definite and concrete. It would be to make the non-discursive what it cannot by its very nature be an element of that which is discursive. Rather, hearing the “of” in the title, we

should be made aware that the discourse found in this dissertation is the result of meeting head on the non-discursive and responding to it as it itself manifests without preconditions in the texts considered here. This is in keeping with Plato's notion of the εἶδος or ἰδέα, literally the "look" of some entity, and with Pseudo-Dionysius' insistence that we hymn God in songs of praise. Both philosophers are thinkers of response to the immediate appearance of the phenomena before them.

The purpose of this study is not to contribute to the extensive *Quellenforschung* that has already been undertaken on Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius but rather to elucidate the meaning of their vision of reality by looking through the philosophical tradition to recover the structures and argumentation that underlie them. Hence, this dissertation seeks to be an exposition of the central aspects of Platonic and Pseudo-Dionysian thought in terms of their philosophical foundations. To achieve this goal, we must look to both Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius not as distant historical figures that have long since died but rather as strange contemporaries. In fact, contemporary figures such as Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot, Bataille, and Marion are employed in our study of these two thinkers, these contemporary philosophers' thought has not been forced upon Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius, but rather they have been used as keys to unlock what would be otherwise hidden pathways in ancient and medieval texts that are our primary focus.

Our study is structured not as a sequential commentary on the Platonic or Pseudo-Dionysian corpus but as a series of closely interconnected essays, aiming to present their thought in its philosophical aspect as a coherent whole. The essays each build upon one another. The whole dissertation is broken into two parts, each corresponding to each of the thinkers in turn and each part consisting of three essays. The first of each part addresses the topic of discourse. That is to say, how Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius attempt to discuss the non-discursive. The

second chapter of each part deals with in what way the non-discursive is communicated to us as readers. Finally, the last of the chapters to each part take on the topic of the type of community that is founded in the wake of the eruption of the non-discursive in the political realm.

Chapter one focuses solely on Plato's *Phaedrus*, and it is the dialogue around which all of the Plato chapters are centered. A close textual analysis of the dialogue is undertaken, addressing, in particular, the phenomenon of ἔρως. As we will see, the dialogue opens us up to the excessive discourse and a phenomenology of excess. It will be shown that what appears does so excessively, such that everyday forms of discussion must be put aside and make room for a μῦθος that allows the excessive to appear as such. We will also see how Socrates is able to rehabilitate a form of λόγος from the sophists that incorporates the excess of discourse. The second chapter, focusing mainly on the *Republic*, centers around the explicit theme of excess of τὸ ἀγαθόν and the ways in which Plato attempts to communicate the exposure to it through the language of the good as being "beyond being" as well as the themes of pain and anguish found in the *Symposium*. Chapter three is concerned with community. And while it may seem best to set our sights upon the *Republic* for such an inquiry, the focus is placed on the *Lysis* and the initiation of lovers found in the *Phaedrus*. The purpose of this focus is twofold. First, I take the *Republic* not so much as a political treatise but a great dialectical myth concerning the good as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, which has been discussed at length in the previous chapter. Secondly, other than David Bolotin's interpretative essay, little attention has been given to the *Lysis* as a standalone dialogue. This chapter remedies this oversight. Particular attention is given to the discussion of lack and its relationship to the community of friends that it engenders.

Chapters four through six address Pseudo-Dionysius. Chapter four's focus is primarily on *Concerning Divine Names* and unfolds the relationship between *kataphasis*, or positive theology,

and *apophasis*, or negative theology. These two forms of discourse intertwine and result in the *via negativa*, moving us beyond affirmations or denials and into silence concerning God. The fifth chapter, presents Pseudo-Dionysius' notions of silence and predominantly corresponds to chapter III of *Concerning Divine Names*, whose focus is on prayer. Prayer as a form of communication results in the dissolution of the one who prays and opens us to the sixth chapter on community. This chapter attends to the two treatises on the hierarchies, the one celestial the other ecclesiastical. Although Christ is said to head both of these hierarchies, it is the mystery of Christ that is given weight, revealing that what appears to ground a seemingly highly regimented order and rank is nothing but the question-worthy status of the incarnation, for which there is no answer, not even among the highest Seraphim.

In a manner that perhaps deliberately parallels their own doctrine of the non-discursive, the authors who are our main focus remain invisible: they lie hidden behind their works and can be known only as they are manifest in them, so that the very names Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius inevitably refer to the content of the works rather than to the authors. The absence of biographical information about them encourages a reading of the works in purely philosophical terms, without preconditions, simply as a body of thought. And just as it is impossible to know the authors of our inquiry, the subject matter of this dissertation is impossible as well.

Or perhaps better said, the subject matter of this dissertation is *the impossible*. The possible refers to the sphere of organic life, of materiality, of continuity, or the real, while the impossible offers a share of the world of death and destruction, of discontinuity. We imagine our place within the possible world, identifying ourselves with its fragmentary appearances that we transform through the delusion of philosophy by thoughtfully conceiving a meaningful association of the fragments, an imaginary totality that we can understand. Our notion of a God

or of a good that exists in being guarantees the stability of this misbegotten conception. But we are of the impossible, our meaning cannot be subordinate to the possible world. Bataille writes, “man’s limit isn’t God, isn’t the possible, it is the impossible, the absence of God.”² Language is unstable, meaning is manifold, even “God” is only a placeholder, a word destined to be swept away with time. God is the mediation of the possible and the impossible. As such, the image of the perfect being always slips away in the human mind toward the impossible. In the order of profound concepts, God surpasses the categories of intelligence to the point of being beyond the possible and the impossible, equally beyond one as beyond the other. Thus Pseudo-Dionysius’ exposure gives God, as if by necessity, all the attributes of intellectual impossibility.

Recognizing that God or the good is not held within being means recognizing discursive heterogeneity, the infinite play of linguistic forms. Both Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius develop and deploy a complex system of technical terminology (εἶδος, ἰδέα, τὸ ἀγαθόν, ἔρωσ, θεαρχία, ἱεραρχία, ὑπερουσία) though superficially a betrayal of this notion should be read a symptomatic of their search for consequential language. Terms are adopted, refined, and abandoned based on their ability to produce an exposure to that which is ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας. We may not, as Parmenides points out, know or express the impossible, but we are nevertheless made aware of it through the faltering of language itself. We *feel* it, are *exposed* to it. The impossible is what not we can even become but nonetheless that toward which we can find ourselves aimed in both our ethical and practical life.

² Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, trans. Bruce Boone (Venice: The Lapis Press), p.25.

CHAPTER ONE

EROTIC AND PROPHEPIC RHETORIC:

The Art of Persuasion in Plato's Phaedrus

Ἐκόσων λόγους ἤκουσα, οὐδεὶς ἀφικωέεται ἐς
τοῦτο, ὥστε γινώσκειν ὅτι σοφόν ἐστί, πάντων
κεχωρισμένον.

Heraclitus, *DK22B180*

I. The character of ἔρως.

The *Phaedrus* is a unique Platonic dialogue; it consists of two seemingly unrelated topics. The first is comprised of three speeches, and explores the phenomenon of ἔρως and then abruptly ends. The dialogue then turns to a long discussion concerning the skill [τέχνη] of rhetoric and the perfection of speech. The relationship between these two parts has perplexed interpreters of this dialogue and has been dubbed the “problem of the unity of the *Phaedrus*.”³ Typically this relationship is explained in terms of rhetoric informing our interpretation of ἔρως.⁴ Many scholars, then, have attended only to the rhetorical structure of the erotic speeches, while completely ignoring their content. Consequently, the *Phaedrus* is understood to be less of an erotic dialogue and more of a dialogue concerning the skill of rhetoric. While the discussion of the art of rhetoric helps to clarify *how* Socrates’ second speech is more perfectly written than is Lysias’, i.e., it speaks more truly than does Lysias’ speech, by ignoring ἔρως one cannot explain *why* the former’s speech is more perfect. We will question what is the function of the

³ Charles L. Griswold, Jr. *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press: 1996), p.157.

⁴ Jane V. Curran, “The Rhetorical Technique of Plato's Phaedrus,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 19, No.1 (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press) 1986, pp.66-72; James S. Murray, “Disputation, Deception, and Dialectic: Plato on the True Rhetoric (Phaedrus 261-266),” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 21, No.4 (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press) 1988, pp.279-89. For a discussion of the *Phaedrus* as anti-rhetorical see, Brad McAdon’s “Plato’s Denunciation of Rhetoric in the ‘Phaedrus,’” *Rhetoric Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Taylor & Francis) 2004 pp.21-39. Even William G. Kelley Jr., who seems to appreciate the erotic aspect of the *Phaedrus*, focuses primarily on communication and rhetoric, “Rhetoric as Seduction,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 6, No.2 (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press) 1969, pp.69-80.

phenomenon of ἔρωσ, how does it allow the human being to express its experience of ‘what is’ [τὸ ὄν]? Only by interpreting the discussion of rhetoric within the discussion of ἔρωσ can the truth of rhetoric come to light.

THE DRAMATIC, MYTHIC SETTING

Walking just outside of the city walls, Socrates chances upon Phaedrus, who has spent a considerable time sitting with his teacher, Lysias. Phaedrus was treated with speeches composed by Lysias and, having heard them, Phaedrus now walks on the road outside of the city streets, for the former is less fatiguing than the latter. Inquiring into how Phaedrus spent his time with Lysias, Socrates is glad to hear that that time was spent filled with hearing Lysias’ newest speech. In fact, Socrates, Phaedrus states, is just the individual to hear this speech, since it is ἐρωτικός, erotic (*Phdr.* 227c). Upon hearing that this was the topic of the speech, Socrates states that he will not leave Phaedrus even if this should mean walking all the way to Megara. Not satisfied with letting Phaedrus practice his own rhetorical skill, Socrates forces him to read the speech exactly as Lysias has composed it and not to simply hear a summary of it as Phaedrus may remember it. Uncovering the motivation of Phaedrus and noticing the speech itself under his cloak, Socrates compels Phaedrus to read the speech so that Lysias may be present in his absence.

Walking, Socrates tells Phaedrus to lead him to where they will listen to Lysias’ words. And in approaching a plane tree, Phaedrus asks if this is near the place where it is said that Boreas carried off [ἄρπάζσαι] Oreithyia (*Phdr.* 229b). There are two aspects of this discussion to which we must gesture. First, overwhelmed by ἔρωσ, Boreas seized Oreithyia violently, carrying her away.⁵ Due to the power of ἔρωσ, Oreithyia was abducted from her home by a god;

⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI. 683.

ἔρως has the ability to rip one away from one's abode. Oreithya became an object of the gods, for good or for ill because of ἔρως. As such and according to this myth, ἔρως links us with and makes us submissive to the gods, tearing us away from our home despite ourselves. As we will come to see in further detail, ἔρως is the overwhelming exposure to the divine. Like Oreithya, we are victims of its power when it erupts, seemingly out of nowhere. With this myth which comes immediately before the three speeches of ἔρως sets the tone for the speeches. We will see that all of the speeches have differing ways of managing the exposure to ἔρως. Far from being simply an emotion that one feels, the Boreas and Oreuthya myth demonstrates to us that ἔρως appears to the individual from the outside; it presents itself to us without our consent.

Furthermore, Socrates explicitly links his own preoccupation of self-knowledge with this myth concerning ἔρως. He takes the myth at face value, suggesting that Socratic self-knowledge is obtained in the face of the excessive eruption of the erotic. Whatever Socratic self-knowledge is, it is recognized only when our normal everyday understanding of our human limitations is disrupted. For either of the choices Socrates is confronted with it, it is of a mythical nature: like Typhon or some other divine creature.⁶ Far from being concerned with personal identity, his self-knowledge is only gained when Socrates aims his investigation toward that which exceeds the human.

PROPHETIC SELF-KNOWLEDGE

It has been suggested that the theme of self-knowledge unifies the *Phaedrus*.⁷ Indeed, the dialogue opens with an inquiry into Phaedrus' movements, "Dear Phaedrus, whither and whence?" [᾿Ω φίλε Φαῖδρε, ποῖ δὴ καὶ πρόθεν;] (*Phdr.* 227a). While this question has been

⁶ *The Ontology of Socratic Questioning in Plato's Early Dialogues*, p.170.

⁷ *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p.2.

interpreted in numerous ways by various commentators,⁸ they would, I believe, agree that given the dramatic setting,⁹ Socrates' preoccupation with knowing himself, and references to the Delphic oracle,¹⁰ one can say that the most overt sense of the greeting entails self-knowledge. This topic carries over into the second half of the dialogue when Socrates asks, "Is not the whole of rhetoric a skill [τέχνη] that which leads the soul by means of *logos*? [ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων;]" (*Phdr.* 261a). Here, the concern is the movement of one's soul, its whither and whence. Furthermore, if one is to conduct a ψυχαγωγία correctly "the rhetorician must know the various forms of the soul [εἰδέναι ψυχὴ ὅσα εἶδη ἔχει]" (*Phdr.* 271c-d), and whether the soul is simple or complex, what power of acting it possesses, and what power it has to be acted upon (*Phdr.* 270d). Such knowledge of the soul is shown to be made possible only through ἔρωσ, as the Palinode makes clear. Thus, for the subject of rhetoric to become clear, we must come to understand erotic self-knowledge.

In this chapter, I will interpret the whole of the *Phaedrus* as an erotic dialogue first and foremost. It is true that this dialogue is concerned with the "erotic nature of communication,"¹¹ yet to fully grasp what Plato means by ἔρωσ, the necessity for communicating with the beloved must be explained. Furthermore, ἔρωσ, for Plato, is not a mere psychological, emotional or physical state. Rather through it, one partakes in what I will call a phenomenology of excess. That is to say, ἔρωσ, as understood by Plato, opens one's soul to an experience of a 'beyond' that cannot be grasped discursively. As a phenomenology of the movement of the soul makes clear, the soul neither exists objectively over and against the world, in a realm that transcends the

⁵ Cf. John Sallis and Charles Griswold: *Being and Logos* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 107-108, and *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, pp.25-28, respectively.

⁹ See *Phaedrus* 230a.

¹⁰ In particular, see *Phaedrus* 228a, 229e, 230a, 235d, 244a-b, 245cff, 279b-c.

¹¹ William G. Kelley Jr., "Rhetoric as Seduction," Vol. 6, No.2 (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press) 1969, pp.69.

physical world, nor is it an entity which exists in an absolute present. Instead, as the *Phaedrus* discloses, the soul unfolds throughout time. And yet, the temporality through which the soul reveals itself is not chronological but rather prophetic, for as Socrates states, “the soul is somehow prophetic [μαντικόν γε τι καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ]” and that “I am a kind of prophet [εἰμὶ δὴ οὖν μάντις]” (*Phdr.* 242c). If the *Phaedrus* is concerned with discourse or rhetoric, then, it must be a “prophetic discourse” that is erotic. Only a rhetoric that is itself both erotic and concerned with prophecy allows one to know oneself in a Socratic manner.

Self-knowledge is gained through ἔρωσ, since it is only in the experience of another with whom one undergoes an erotic experience that one can “see” oneself. For the beloved’s eye is a mirror within which the lover looks to see him or herself (*Phdr.* 254d, *Alc. Maj.* 132d, 133a). Because the soul is revealed through the beloved, it is always outside of itself; it exists ecstatically. Originating from an external source, the lover sees beyond him or herself, emptying the lover of any preconceived notion of who he or she may be. Thus the beloved is now a receptive site of “something more” than that which appears in its immediacy. It is through the beloved that the lover manifests. Moreover, it is through the beloved that the lover remembers the divine banquet, at which each human soul glimpsed a portion of ‘what is’ [τά ὄντα] (*Phdr.* 248a). Yet even though the lover is immediately before the beloved, “he is at a loss as with whom [ὅτου δὲ, ἀπορεῖ], he does not know what he suffers and cannot say it [καὶ οὐδ’ ὅ τι πέπονθεν οἶδεν οὐδ’ ἔχει φράσαι]. He sees himself in his lover as in a mirror but this escapes his notice [λέληθεν]” (*Phdr.* 255d). The ecstatically existing soul is always excessive with respect to both the lover and the beloved; it cannot be thought or discussed discursively, since the beloved cannot say what he or she undergoes.

DECONSTRUCTING ἔρωσ

As stressed above with the myth of Boreas and Oreithyia, ἔρωσ originates from a beyond that seizes the lover and so makes us a receptive site for the beyond, and accordingly if we are to discuss this exposure the resulting rhetoric must take account of this beyond. Socrates introduces his second, cathartic speech with a defense of μανία, because “love is a kind of mania [μανίαν γάρ τινα εἶναι τὸν ἔρωτα]” (*Phdr.* 265a). While the two previous speeches described μανία as a human sickness [νόσος], Socrates’ second speech portrays μανία not only as “given as a divine gift [θεία μέντοι δόσει διδομένης]” (*Phdr.* 244a), but says in stark contrast to the earlier speeches “the best things we have come to us through mania [τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἡμῖν γίγνεται διὰ μανίας]” (*ibid*). Furthermore, Socrates states “the ancients attest that madness, which comes from the gods, is more beautiful than the sound-mindedness¹² that is of human origins [κάλλιον μαρτυροῦσιν οἱ παλαιοὶ μανίαν σωφροσύνης τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ τῆς παρ’ ἀνθρώπων γιγνομένης]” (*Phdr.* 244d). In fact, in this speech Socrates will “show that this kind of madness is given by the gods for our highest bliss” (*Phdr.* 245b-c). Whatever his second speech reveals, it will show that μανία gives one insight into the truth and not sound-mindedness [σωφροσύνη] alone. Although we will have to qualify the manner in which the inspired speaker is able to reveal the truth to his audience, given what Plato has written elsewhere disparaging the inspired speaker,¹³ I will illustrate what type of rhetoric μανία necessitates.

¹² Edward G. Ballard, in his book *Socratic Ignorance*, claims that σωφροσύνη should best be translated as “wholeness of soul” or “integrity.” This certainly seems to be the case, if we keep in mind that “wholeness of soul” and “integrity” must be understood in terms of ‘coming-to-know’. Consequently, “wholeness of soul” and “integrity” should be understood along the lines of knowing that the soul is not-yet complete. Part of understanding the soul as a whole, then, is to understand that it contains a ‘not-yet’ quality. Edward G. Ballard, *Socratic Ignorance* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), p. 32.

¹³ Cf. *Ion*, *Republic*, and *Apology*.

Our discussion of the *μανία* that *ἔρως* brings with it will be similar to Derridean deconstruction insofar as the latter is a critical strategy for reading the history of metaphysics and unveiling its inner structures. Deconstruction reveals the foundations and aims of metaphysics and its interworkings, and moreover shows that these values are highly question-worthy.¹⁴ Through deconstruction, Derrida endeavors to unveil the ways in which metaphysical, discursivity cannot fulfill the requirements of its own economy, since heterogeneous elements are always present within the economy of which the closed economic system cannot take account. These elements form a “blind spot¹⁵ [*tâche aveugle*].”¹⁶ The blind spot is the disavowed background within which the closed economy of signification claims to function. Derrida terms this forgotten dimension of discursive metaphysics the supplement—a supplemental or vestigial page in the text of historical discourse. The supplement while treated by the writer of the text as extra, unnecessary, and superfluous is, in fact, proven, by the text’s own internal logic, to be necessary. To put it as concisely as possible, Derrida points out the necessity of a form of thinking that exceeds the limits of rational discourse and that deconstruction is a method for articulating that which exceeds discursive thought.

The present discussion of the *Phaedrus* will, however, differ from Derrida’s discussion of deconstruction in that our discussion will not simply focus on semiotics but will stress a phenomenology of excess. Through *μανία* and Socrates’ emphasis on prophecy, as will be

¹⁴ Certain assumptions in one’s claims are made and left unexamined, this structure, which organizes one’s inherited prejudices, Derrida terms the closed economy. An economy, in other words, is a structural obligation in which the values and ideals that define the rationality of the discourse are limited. It names the discursive context of the whole and directs the particular substantiations of the whole and thus cannot be investigated by some system of signification outside of the pre-established economy. Economy, in this sense, names the totality that metaphysical, discursive thought presupposes, i.e., a form of thought that fully discloses the subject of its investigation.

¹⁵ Jean-François Mattéi characterizes Socrates’ *δαμόνιον* as a “blind spot on which the vision of the soul is founded.” Jean-François Mattéi, “The Theater of Myth in Plato,” *Platonic Writing, Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles L. Griswold Jr. (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), p.72.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p.164.

shown below, Plato is calling our attention to an experience of an extra-discursive element of the human condition, which cannot be expressed within a rational account. The use of language, then, is not relegated to the study of linguistics alone, but rather language itself reveals the ontological underpinnings of the human being. Through our discussion of the various speeches it will be shown that λόγος itself brings the speaker to the edge of the extra-discursive.

In this chapter, we will examine each of the speeches, focusing briefly on the first two while placing greater emphasis upon Socrates' Palinode. I will interpret these speeches in light of what Socrates and Phaedrus discuss concerning how to speak well and reveal truth. The connection between the mythic and poetic qualities of Socrates' Palinode and of speaking beautifully [καλῶς] will be made clear. Next, we will turn to the subject of truth as ἀλήθεια and the need for rhetoric to step beyond human constraints through both μανία and ἔνθεος. Finally, Socrates says of himself "I myself, Phaedrus, am a *lover* of dividing and of bringing together [ἔραστῆς τῶν διαιρέσεων καὶ συναγωγῶν] in both speech and understanding" (*Phdr.* 266b). This process of dialectic is similar to the process of recollection [ἀνάμνησις], which Socrates emphasizes in his second speech, and by recollection he grasps together all at once [λογισμῶ ξυναιρούμενον] many perceptions (*Phdr.* 259b-c). In this last section, I will explain how Socrates recuperates λόγος from Lysias' influence.

II. The Need for Mythic and Poetic Rhetoric:

Socrates' second speech is a tale [μῦθος] (*Phdr.* 253c, 265c) describing the soul of the human being, its immortality, its composition, the soul's journey among the gods' divine banquet, and how the way in which the embodied soul recollects this divine banquet. It

emphasizes that Socrates tells a μῦθος and not a λόγος concerning the erotic soul.¹⁷ Even his first, forced speech is described as a μῦθος (*Phdr.* 237a, 241e, 243a). While Socrates does call both his first and second speeches elsewhere λόγοι, Lysias' speech is referred to only as a λόγος and never as a μῦθος (*Phdr.* 234c, 264e, 227c, 234d). In this section, we will deal with the difference, as presented in the *Phaedrus* with reference to Lysias' speech, between λόγοι and μῦθοι and why it is necessary that one tell the latter when speaking of ἔρωτος.

GIVING AN ACCOUNT VERSES TELL A FABLE

To differentiate between a discourse that is a λόγος and one that is a μῦθος, it would be too easy to translate λόγος as “rational discourse,” “logic,” or “ratio” and μῦθος as “tale” or “legend.” Doing so results in a misunderstanding of the meaning of both words. There are, for instance, many forms of λόγος: a speaking; a purging of opinions; eristic; ironic; mathematical; and that which is able to transcend mathematics,¹⁸ while a μῦθος should not be taken as a mere legend or fairytale, as if it is wholly separated from truth and therefore inferior to λόγος. It must be stressed that the difference between λόγος and μῦθος is not a difference between a more perfect and less perfect way of speaking, but rather two ways of disclosing the world. John Sallis suggests a way to think their dissimilarity. A μῦθος he says is “...a bond to something intrinsically opaque, a bond to an element of darkness in contrast to that which is capable of being taken up into the light of *logos*.”¹⁹ Both disclose ‘what is’ but in different ways; a λόγος clarifies ‘what is’ bringing it to light, whereas a μῦθος discloses ‘what is’ as obscure, vague, and ambiguous and originating from the divine, which is always distant from the human. The critical

¹⁷ While it is true that the Palinode begins with an ἀπόδειξις, one should not hear a logical proof in this instance, as Griswold explains, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 78, but rather a showing-forth, an exhibition, or exposition. The ἀπόδειξις lacks a self-sufficient logical rigor, such that “the rhetoric of argumentation is no less rhetorical (in the sense outlined in the later part of the *Phaedrus*) than the rhetoric of myth” (*ibid*).

¹⁸ *Being and Logos*, p.15.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.16.

difference between a μῦθος and a λόγος is that the latter ignores heterogeneous elements within the argument; Lysias ignores that the speech is about Ἔρως, a divine entity and that its affects are not simply human emotions. A λόγος such as this attempts to draw the phenomena it is explicating into a totality of thought that fully discloses the subject of its investigation. In other words, when a topic is investigated *via* a Lysian λόγος it is revealed as immediately present without need for further scrutiny. And in so doing, it attempts to silence the irreducible excess that is prior to the determination of its presence. Μῦθος, on the other hand, opens one and situates oneself within a peripheral space, providing one a unique standpoint in which thought is able to stretch out but never reach its end, but is still no less true.

Thus, for Socrates the difference between the two modes of discourse functions not only on a semiotic level but on an ontological one as well. I will reveal that ἔρως is spoken of most perfectly through μῦθος, since it is through ἔρως that an individual is made open to an excessive beyond, which in the *Phaedrus* is described as the illumination of Being *vis-à-vis* the beloved (*Phdr.* 234d, 250b, 255c), for which only the mythical can make room by expressing the experience of the beyond. Before engaging in a full discussion of Socratic μῦθος, it will be helpful to orient ourselves first by examining Lysias' λόγος.

LYSIAS' NON-LOVER

It is surprising that the speaker found in Lysias' speech is a non-lover who attempts to woo a young man by convincing him to gratify a non-lover instead of a lover. And yet the speech reveals itself to be quite banal, nothing more than a business proposition²⁰ spoken to the boy stating that a non-lover will be able to benefit him monetarily and socially while a lover can only bring him ruin. Furthermore, simply hearing the subject of the text Socrates calls it δημωφελής,

²⁰ *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p.46.

a thing of general utility (*Phdr.* 227d). The theme of the speech is democratic. It can be understood by everyone, it is not necessary to interpret the words. In fact, Phaedrus praises the speech for exactly this reason, “nobody could speak more comprehensively [πλείω] and more admirably [πλείονος ἄξια]” (*Phdr.* 235b). Moreover, choosing from among non-lovers gives the non-beloved a greater number from which to select an individual that will be valuable to the non-beloved (*Phdr.* 231d-e, 232c) for the whole of the non-beloved’s life (*Phdr.* 233c). Indeed, this individual is advised to love a person who is best suited to repay the non-beloved for his troubles (*Phdr.* 233e). Love relations are portrayed in terms of efficiency, gain, profit and that which is useful and effortlessly understandable to the audience. Given that the speaker can rationally express what he wants and how to go about getting it, he “is clearly associated with discursivity.”²¹

Lysias “sidesteps” the phenomenon of ἔρως completely.²² However, through his obstinate refusal to praise ἔρως in any way, Lysias’ speech reveals that such an effort only exposes his own belief in the hegemony of ἔρως. The text highlights the fears most individuals have concerning the force of ἔρως. The lover is continually depicted as fickle (*Phdr.* 231a 231c, 232e-233d, 234a) and as “more unhinged [νοσεῖν] than sound-minded [σωφροωεῖν]” (*Phdr.* 231d). Ἐρως is characterized as dangerous precisely because it cannot be contained within reason’s domain; it exceeds rational explanation. This λόγος has no resources to adequately contend with ἔρως other than ignoring it completely. And yet unable to dispel it, Lysian ἔρως remains in the disavowed background of the text.

²¹ *Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Phaedrus*, p.45.

²² Anne Carson, *Eros: The Bittersweet* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009) pp.124-29.

Moreover, the very structure of his speech illustrates an excessive, non-discursive element. Socrates comments on this in his first speech, the non-lover merely conceals his attachment to ἔρωσ (Phdr. 237b). Consequently, Lysias obscures his dependence on that which cannot be thought discursively. Notice that Lysias simply begins his speech *in mediā rēs*, without introducing or orienting the listener as to what the topic will be. He simply begins the conversation saying “you know [ἐπίστασαι] my state of affairs [πραγμάτων]” (Phdr. 230e); he does not explicitly state what these state of affairs are. The audience can only guess what has been said prior to the recorded text. Even though this λόγος is meant to be a purely rational account of ἔρωσ, its very origin already points beyond itself, beyond the economy of the λόγος. This λόγος cannot keep ἔρωσ within the boundaries of discursivity alone, and for this reason, it must assume an origin that is beyond itself. Moreover, divine philosophy [θεία φιλοσοφία] is mentioned in Socrates’ first speech, which is attributed to a concealed lover (Phdr. 239b). However, no explanation is made as to what divine philosophy entails; it is simply ascribed to the lover. But this should not be a surprise. That a concealed lover should make mention of something divine is understandable, since ἔρωσ opens one to the experience of the beloved, though not wanting to “fall victim” to the overwhelming power of ἔρωσ, the concealed lover cannot give an account of where the divine originates. Consequently, he cannot give a truthful and beautiful form of rhetoric concerning ἔρωσ (Phdr. 264a), hence the need for the Palinode, where Socrates, as a lover, is able to account for the excessiveness of ἔρωσ.

STARTING FROM THE BEGINNING

In the second half of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates begins a critique of the rhetorical style of Lysias’ speech (Phdr. 262d-264c) in terms of its lack of a beginning, an ἀρχή. Twice Socrates asks Phaedrus to reread the beginning, the ἀρχή, of the speech (Phdr. 262e, 264a), and twice he

and Phaedrus cannot find the ἀρχή. After he is asked a second time to reread the address to the non-beloved, Phaedrus deferentially admits “what you seek is not there” (*Phdr.* 263e). Socrates seeks out in vain an ἀρχή of the text.

We should be cognizant that an ἀρχή is not only a beginning point from which something arbitrarily commences but rather a sovereign power, an ordering beginning. It is that which is in control of itself and unable to be determined by the human being. It is an excessive force that is in control of what follows from it. The opening of the *Palinode* begins with a discussion of ἀρχή, which is the fount [πηγή] of motion that is uncreated [ἀγένητον] (*Phdr.* 245d). An ἀρχή is an originary, uncreated and therefore divine source. Lysias, however, generates a profane beginning by ignoring the overwhelming power of ἔρως. The approach that Lysias takes in this text is characterized by Socrates as beginning at the end of the current of the λόγος and swimming supine toward the beginning (*Phdr.* 264a). This is a strange image, but its meaning is clear if we keep in mind that an ἀρχή is a sovereign force that cannot be challenged by the human. Nevertheless, Lysias attempts to take possession of the force of ἔρως, but it is in vain, for he cannot gain control of the ἀρχή. In fact, Socrates describes Lysias as having erred against the god Ἔρως (*Phdr.* 242e). Instead of accepting the gift of ἔρως, Lysias actively rejects the propitious god.

Given our modern emphasis on individual autonomy, one may be tempted to follow Lysias' lead and force an impious beginning, attempting to partake in an autonomous choice. Lysias characterizes the lover as being inferior to the non-lover because the lovers are few, while the non-lovers are many (*Phdr.* 231d-e). Lysias wishes to demonstrate that the non-lover is able to choose with whom he consorts. He believes himself to be a master of his natural inclinations toward an individual who is deemed useful; and with a view to pragmatic, utilitarian, and self-

oriented interests, he chooses one of the many non-beloveds.²³ Consequently, the Lysian non-lover already has in mind a subjectively decided end toward which he directs himself—his ἀρχή is predetermined by his own desire. Likewise, the concealed lover, in Socrates' first speech, is characterized as a wolf after a lamb (*Phdr.* 241d), suggesting a stance of dominance. In the Palinode, however, the Socratic lover is depicted as perplexed [ἀποροῦσα] at his condition (*Phdr.* 251e), and this condition is called ἔρωσ (*Phdr.* 252b). Consequently, while the concealed lover hunts his prey, attacking it, the Socratic lover is, quite literally, in no such state to hunt, much less dominate the beloved. The Socratic lover is caught unawares, throwing him in ἀπορία. Only in ἀπορία can Socratic ἔρωσ function. Consequently, if the Socratic lover ever did grab hold of his beloved, the fearful awe would be forgotten, undermining the state of ἀποροῦσα and therefore his own ἔρωσ (*Phdr.* 251a).

EXCESSIVE DISCOMFORT OF A μῦθος

Deriving from πόρος, 'a way through', ἀπορία, with its *alpha privativum*, means 'to be without a path' or 'to be wayless'.²⁴ As such, ἀπορία names the condition one feels when one is lost or in distress. When one experiences resistance toward which one is aimed, one experiences ἀπορία. Recognizing this resistance and distance from that toward which one is aimed, waylessness is felt. The Socratic lover, in the throes of ἔρωσ, wishes to be with the beloved and truly has a relationship with him but the latter is always experienced as distant. The beloved withdraws from the Socratic lover precisely in his relationship with him. Distressed by the resistance experienced, the lover is thrown into ἀπορία. However, this condition is engendered by ἔρωσ itself. Hence, to be exposed to ἔρωσ is to run up against and attempting, but ultimately always failing, to cross the boundary between the lover and the beloved. Consequently, frustrated

²³ See *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, pp. 45-51.

²⁴ *The Ontology of Socratic Questioning in Plato's Early Dialogues*, pp.103-105.

at this distance, the Socratic lover can never give a discursive account of the beloved, since the latter is always in a receding relationship with the lover.

In the *Republic* Socrates recites a proverbial saying “The divine withdraws itself from the *logos*, as is said [θεῖον μέντοι κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν ἐξαιρῶμεν λόγου]” (*R.* 492e). Any account [λόγος] of the divine must necessarily use another form of communication other than a λόγος, such as μῦθος, since its subject matter essentially exceeds rational discourse. Socrates points to the inability of a λόγος to fully account for ἔρωσ, saying, “in the beginning of this tale [ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦδε τοῦ μύθου]” (*Phdr.* 253c). Here, Socrates is signaling to both the actual beginning of the μῦθος but also to the fact that it springs from a source—the ἀρχή—that lies outside of his control. Socrates gestures that the ordering beginning of his speech impresses itself upon him from a beyond and can only be communicated through the use of a μῦθος, an announcement that signals an excessive source that cannot be comprehended through discursivity alone. Ἔρωσ, which as we have examined exposes us to an overwhelming power, is the ἀρχή of his discourse. Realizing that a λόγος concerning ἔρωσ necessitates an excess, Socrates even calls upon the Muses to help him give his first speech (*Phdr.* 237a). And midway through this speech Socrates mentions that he “suffers the divine [θεῖον πάθος]” (*Phdr.* 238c) and states that “this place seems to have a divine presence [τῷ ὄντι γὰρ θεῖος ἔοικεν ὁ τόπος εἶναι]” (*Phdr.* 238d). He goes on to warn Phaedrus not to be surprised if he is apprehended by the nymphs [νυμφόληπτος] (*Phdr.* 238d), perhaps in much the same way that Oreithyia was seized by Boreas.

A Lysian λόγος cannot give a full account of our exposure to ἔρωσ precisely because it is concerned with what is present in its unreflective immediacy. The phenomenon of the erotic

appears from out of concealment only to be revealed as obscured. Indeed, we have just seen that ἔρωσ engenders ἀπορία, waylessness; a connection toward that which we are aimed but which is always distant and obscure is emphasized by this. Ἐρωσ gives rise to a feeling of discomfort, then. As we have just seen, Socrates literally suffers from the divine. The divine gives itself to Socrates and does so without a rational ground. It comes from and presents itself to him despite himself. Suffering, Socrates is confronted by that which overtakes him; it disrupts his rational comportment toward the world. Socrates is distressed by such an experience, able only to discuss it in terms of being taken over by mythical creatures. While his suffering the divine and the mythical account given of it may seem to be just another way of discussing and describing the nature of ἔρωσ, what it truly reveals is that ἔρωσ discloses itself in connection to Socrates non-discursively. The subject matter is not an object set over and against Socrates to be interrogated objectively and with dispassioned reason, but instead is already in relation with Socrates but as distant. Ἐρωσ appears to Socrates to have been presented to him prior to rational reflection and therefore as question-worthy and of concern.

After hearing Lysias' speech from Phaedrus, Socrates cannot agree that the speech is worthy of the phenomenon of ἔρωσ. Although he cannot say just who it is that would refute [ἐξελέγξουσί] him if he should agree (*Phdr.* 235b), Socrates professes self-ignorance once again and relies upon what he has heard from the likes of "the beautiful Sappho or the wise Anacreon" (*Phdr.* 235c). What he will say concerning ἔρωσ is not of his own invention but rather as Socrates states he "has been made full through my ears, like a pitcher, from the spring [ναμάτων] of another, due to slowness and I have failed to notice [ἐπιλέλησμαι] how and from whom I have heard it" (*Phdr.* 235d). Socrates is drawing attention to the fact that although ἔρωσ appears to him, it does so as obscured from him from a source other than himself; he is not

in control of his speech, rather the speech originates from a source outside of his control which presents itself to him but as obscure and distant.

Stressing the phenomenological character of μῦθος, Sean Kirkland describes it in the following way,

[M]yth has its essential character in allowing its subject matter to appear, while simultaneously marking its essential darkness or obscurity. It explicitly presents its subject matter as *excessive*, but does so precisely in the act of letting that subject matter appear *here*...Myth is neither fact nor fiction, but is more original than this distinction...it allows that which essentially exceeds human experience and withdraws itself from human understanding to appear to us nonetheless in its withdrawal.²⁵

By characterizing his erotic speech as a μῦθος, then, Socrates takes part in an “excessive beyond.” In fact, immediately before giving his second speech on ἔρωσ Socrates says “I am a prophet [εἰμὶ δὴ οὖν μάντις]” (*Phdr.* 242c).²⁶ Mantic knowledge and pronouncements draw their authority from a particular conception of truth;²⁷ a mantic pronouncement comes by way of intermediaries. For example, at the temple of Delphi, utterances were communicated by the

²⁵ Sean Kirkland, “Socrates Contra Scientiam, Pro Fabula” *Epoché*, Vol. 8, Issue 2 (Spring 2004), pp.313-332, p.318.

²⁶ This may be understood to be an example of Socratic playfulness or irony. However, as he states at 249d, “all my discourse thus far has been about the fourth type of madness...” This suggests that Socrates may be more serious about being a prophet than would first appear.

²⁷ There is a difference between a traditional μάντις and a Socratic one. A traditional prophet, a μάντις, is one who is defined by the ability to see not just what is, but what was, is and will be (*The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, p.16). Consequently, the μάντις’s mode of knowledge encompasses the three temporal aspects within “the absolute present, with no before or after, a present that, *like memory*, incorporates ‘that which has been, that which is, and that which will be’” [emphasis added], (*ibid*, p.74) bringing the whither and whence into a present mnemonic moment. In other words, the traditional μάντις has a prior connection to and is recalling to memory an autonomous realm of ‘what is’. Socrates does, however, find fault with the immediacy of the traditional μάντις’s craft. In fact, through the ἔλεγχος, he reveals that the immediacy of ‘what is’ is only apparent. For the *Socratic* μάντις, ‘what is’ is mediated by λόγος and μνημοσύνη. Due to this mediation, that ‘which is’ must, for the Socratic μάντις, always appear at a distance and be obscure. This obscurity arises out of an awareness of one’s “distance from Being” (*Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Phaedrus*, p.114.) as a memory whence one came, an awareness for which I will borrow the term “the ontology of distance” (*Socrates Contra Scientiam, Pro Fabula* pp.313-332). Such an ontology claims that the distance between the human and ‘what is’ cannot be overcome. It exists only in excess of the human. As a result of the overwhelming distance supposed in the “ontology of distance,” Socratic metaphysics of reflection cannot presuppose an originary unity of consciousness. But neither can it presuppose antinomies because that which is gestured toward by the Socratic μάντις exceeds discursive thought. As a result, ‘what is’ cannot be placed within a propositional dichotomy, since there is nothing to which it can be compared.

prophetess and then interpreted by a group of individuals to the inquiring individual visiting Delphi.²⁸ Even Hermes, the intermediary between the gods and human, was assigned the Bee-women. He interpreted their movement to give messages from Apollo.²⁹ In both of these cases, the truth of the oracular utterance is in need of interpretation through an intermediary. Truth does not present itself in its immediacy. By calling himself a μάντις, Socrates likens himself to an intermediary who interprets the gods' essentially withdrawing utterance to his interlocutor. However, whatever the oracular utterance may say, its origin is already removed from the audience.

What Socrates has recounted in his prophetic speech, then, is no less true than a λόγος, but, by characterizing it as a μῦθος, Socrates emphasizes a rapport with a beyond. A μῦθος speaks of an unconquerable limitation of one's rational understanding; in other words, it is concerned with that which is in excess of our propositionally based understanding. What is being recounting in the μῦθος cannot be reigned in and brought to conform to any sphere of rational knowledge (although it necessitates a speaking) since the experience of its subject necessarily exceeds this sphere. Socrates must reconcile how to describe, through language, through λόγος, an experience that is non-propositional (the excessively beyond), and he does so by participating in the excess through excessive speech via a μῦθος. Let us turn, once again but in more detail, to the first mention of μῦθος in the *Phaedrus*.

DECEPTION BY A WISE ACCOUNT

Concerned with the veracity of the myth, Phaedrus asks Socrates if he is persuaded [πείθει] whether the mythical narrative [μυθολόγημα] of the god Boreas carrying off Oreithyia is true (*Phdr.* 229c). Aware of Phaedrus' propensity for sophistic speeches, Socrates answers, "If

²⁸ E.R. Dodds, "Plato and the Irrational" *Society for the Promotion of Hellenistic Studies*, Vol. 65 (1945), p.22.

²⁹ *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, p.54.

I am disbelieving, as the wise [οἱ σοφοί] are I would not be out of place [ἄτοπος] and might contrive [σοφιζόμενος] and say that Boreas, *the north wind*, pushed her off of the neighboring rock while the maiden played with Pharmacea” (*Phdr.* 229c). Socrates casts the explanation that the wise would give in terms of natural phenomena: it was the north wind, and not *the god* Boreas, that pushed Oreithyia to her death; giving what today might we might term a scientific account. These wise individuals reduce the μῦθος to an allegory so that it might be understood through a natural explanation. But Socrates refuses to interpret this μῦθος even along allegorical lines,³⁰ explaining that one would have to use a boorish or an unsophisticated sort of wisdom [ἀγροίκῳ τινὶ σοφίᾳ] (*Phdr.* 229e) which uses probability [τὸ εἰκός], suggesting that such an interpretation does not reach the truth of the meaning of this μῦθος.³¹ (We will see in the next section the way that τὸ εἰκος deceives both the speaker and the audience.)

The import of this discussion lies in the emphasis of the use of οἱ σοφοί and the participial form of σοφίζεσθαι. The latter word, while it can suggest “to devise” or “to contrive” also suggests “to deceive” and “to play subtle tricks.” Originating from the same root, οἱ σοφοί, for Plato, also has this double meaning.³² The wise devise a naturalistic explanation about things found in μῦθος and so deceive their audience. John Sallis points out³³ that the deception arises because this interpretation of the μῦθος “makes no mention of love; it conceals, as it were, whatever love may have had to do with her [Oreithyia’s] fate...they suppress the alternative of

³⁰ Ludwig Edelstein, “The Function of Myth in Plato’s Philosophy” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol.10, No.4 (Oct. 1949) pp.463-481, p.466.

³¹ For a greater discussion of this exchange see *The Ontology of Socratic Questioning in Plato’s Early Dialogues*, pp.166-171.

³² *Being and Logos*, p.114.

³³ See also *Eros: The Bittersweet*, pp.123-29.

which the myth speaks, that the outcome might be an ascent into the company of gods.”³⁴ The deception occurs when the audience is told that there is nothing beyond that which they are told.

The opening lines of the *Apology* also speaks to the deceptive power of sophistic rhetoric. “How you, men of Athens, have been affected [πεπρόνθατε] by my accusers, I do not know. I myself nearly forgot [ἐπελαθόμην] myself, so persuasively [πιθανῶς] did they speak [ἔλεγον]. And yet they did not speak truthfully in what they said” (*Ap.* 17a). Socrates, in the *Phaedrus*, makes a similar statement to Phaedrus after the latter feigns ignorance concerning Lysias’ speech, “Oh, Phaedrus. If I do know [ἄγνοῶ] Phaedrus, I have forgotten myself [ἐμαυτοῦ ἐπιέλησαι]” (*Phdr.* 228a). In both passages, our attention is drawn to the power of rhetoric to make one forget oneself. The *Apology* explicitly gestures to the persuasiveness of rhetoric in contrast to truth’s ability to allow one to recollect oneself, while in the *Phaedrus* this may seem to be implicitly implied. If Socrates, like Phaedrus, had been affected by rhetoric’s power, he would not be able to literally “perceive [ἀγνοεῖν]” Phaedrus. The soul of Phaedrus would be unable to appear out of its ordinary background as described in the μῦθος of the Palinode. Instead, through μῦθος, Phaedrus’ soul is unveiled so much so that Socrates already knows that he learned Lysias’ speech by heart, practicing it and when he found someone sick to hear speeches [νοσοῦτι περὶ λόγων ἀκοήν] becomes gladdened, since Phaedrus could share in his Corybantic frenzy [συνκορυβαντιῶντα] (*Phdr.* 228b-c). “But you will hear the whole truth [πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν] from me. Yet, not by god, men of Athens, accounts [λόγους] finely decked out, but you will hear things said that are not well ordered [οὐδὲ κεκοσμημένους] and as they seem to strike me [ἐπιτυχοῦσιν]” (*Ap.* 17c). Socrates is not concerned with speaking in the rhetorical manner with a pre-established end in mind, but rather responds to how

³⁴ *Being and Logos*, p.115.

the phenomenon strikes him as in a pre-philosophical experience. Socrates has not forced a preconceived nature upon Phaedrus but rather, as the *Apology* shows, allows Phaedrus' disposition to reveal itself in its singularity. Socrates allows the whole of Phaedrus' character to reveal itself so that the excessiveness of the soul of Phaedrus unfolds according to its own manifestation.

If ἔρως is ignored, one can only believe that which λόγος *qua* λόγος reveals, that which is immediately present, and therefore completely and discursively knowable. Socrates' critique of Lysias' speech (*Phdr.* 262c-264c) revolves around the insight that a λόγος *qua* λόγος, while claiming to explicate the subject matter fully, must, nevertheless, assume that which is in excess of itself; that is to say, a μῦθος. I will turn to this topic now.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE GODS

Although the theme of his μῦθος is essentially non-discursive, Socrates nonetheless claims to speak the truth (*Phdr.* 247c). It has been revealed that μῦθος discloses the truth about ἔρως by calling attention to its excessive nature. Ἐρως originates from a beyond in a form of μανία. Described in terms of physical discomfort, for the entire soul of the lover is “stung into madness and is caused distress [οἰστρα καὶ ὀδυνᾶται]" and perplexed [ἀποροῦσα] at its condition (251c-e)—called Ἐρως (*Phdr.* 252b). The experience of ἔρως can in no way be rationally explained but only described in the condition of ἀπορία. Calling attention to the inability of language to capture such an experience, Socrates reminds Phaedrus of what the Homeridae write, “Mortals may call Ἐρως, Ἐρωτα ποτηνόν, “winged Love,” but [it] is named Πτέρωτα, “the Winged One,” by the gods”³⁵ (*Phdr.* 252c). In the *Cratylus* Socrates says, “for it is clear that the gods call things by the names that are by nature correct” (*Crat.*

³⁵ On the language of the gods see *Eros: The Bittersweet*, pp.159-164.

391e). While humans name ἔρωσ, “Ἐρωτα ποτηνόν,” the gods add the prefix ‘Πτ’ because “Πτέρωσ” is the correct name of this deity, since by its nature it makes wings grow. We know not why Hermogenes is told, when inquiring after investigating the names of the gods, it is said “of the gods we know nothing, neither of them nor of their names, by which they call themselves. For clearly they call names truly.” (*Crat.* 400e). Due to this essential distance from the divine, the truth about ἔρωσ is that it can never be understood or reduced to the language and experience of mortals. Only the gods can speak properly of it. Although human may not know the exact reason for the gods’ use of the name “Πτέρωσ”, the *Phaedrus* does give us one clue. Justifying the Homeridae statements, Socrates states, “You may be persuaded of this or not, but the suffering [τὸ πάθος] of lovers and the cause [αἰτία] of it [the name], but that is it” (*Phdr.* 252c). Πτέρωσ, then, is the correct title divine of Ἐρωσ, since the name describes the πάθος and the cause of ἔρωσ, which is to say it forces wings to grow (*Phdr.* 251b), driving the soul into μανία.

The language of the gods is the originary language from which human language has sprung. However, human communication falls short of this originary form of communication. We cannot grasp the αἰτία that language is meant to take hold of. This is why Socrates is able to claim to speak the truth through a prophetic μῦθος. Acting as a prophet, an intermediary for the gods, Socrates is able to utter what they reveal to him but in a manner that must, nevertheless, be interpreted by mortals. Only through μανία can one begin to speak the truth of one’s experience of ‘what is’ as a way of ἔρωσ. The next section is devoted to the way in which the human can experience the gods’ originary language but in such a manner so as not to displease the gods, overstepping what accords to the human.

III. Speaking Truthfully Pleases the Gods:

Although the focus in the second half of the *Phaedrus* changes from ἔρωσ to the skill [τέχνη] of rhetoric, the underlying substance of dialogue remains the same. Throughout the first half of the dialogue, Socrates and Phaedrus attempt, with greater or less success, to express the experience of ἔρωσ. According the Phaedrus, Lysias achieved this feat by way of a λόγος so nobly given that “nobody could speak more comprehensively and more admirably” (*Phdr.* 235b). Socrates, on the other hand, gives a μῦθος, a form of discourse and language that truthfully maintains ἔρωσ’s relation to its object but as essentially distant and obscured. As such, what presents itself to ἔρωσ provokes ἔρωσ to show itself in language as it is, i.e., unconquerable and withdrawing, emanating from an external, divine source, which arrives unanticipatably and inarticulately by means of wings. In the second half of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates has essentially the same goal, but now approaches this question through truth [ἀλήθεια] as it applies to the perfection of rhetoric by means of the beautiful [τὸ καλόν]. One must hone a form of expression that allows the unintelligible experience of τὸ καλόν to manifest itself. If one attempts to devise a logical discourse one commits an insult against Ἐρωσ (*Phdr.* 242c). If one speaks as Lysias has, believing himself to be explicating an objectively independent realm, which is epistemologically present to him and therefore is available to human analysis, Ἐρωσ will enact a form a punishment upon the speaker, blinding him to the unfolding prophetic temporality of ἔρωσ. Socrates as “some sort of prophet” does not address himself to an objectively present world. Instead he situates himself in a stance of openness and speculative response to his experience, which is essentially withdrawn and thus question-worthy. The lover must change him or herself in conformity with a particular god, who is revealed through the beloved, with whom he or she has a natural rapport, “being enthused [ἐνθουσιῶντες] they

receive from the god its customs and character [ἔθῃ καὶ τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα]” (*Phdr.* 252e, 253a). As a gift to the lover and the beloved, the gods give a part of their own divine nature.

I will now discuss the importance of sight in Socratic rhetoric and why a form of logocentric discourse such as Lysias’ does not allow for such perception. I will then turn to Socrates’ cure for the blindness that accompanies a Lysian type discourse in terms of the givenness of μανία as the only medium of communication with which the divine may be pleased. And satisfying the gods bestow upon mortals vision of the truth allowing for beautiful speech, which will praise the gods in the most correct manner mortals can, by (re)creating the divine banquet through communicating with the beloved.

BLINDED BY HUMAN CONCERNS

Socrates concludes his erotic μῦθος with a prayer to Ἔρως, asking that the god “neither take away nor maim the erotic art [τὴν ἐρωτικὴν τέχνην]³⁶ that the god has given [ἔδωκας]” him (*Phdr.* 257a), which due to the μανία it causes allows him an openness and sight of τὸ καλόν. He fears that he will suffer the same fate as Stesichorus, who was stricken blind after speaking ill of Helen but who regained his sight after a recantation (*Phdr.* 243a-b). Moreover, Socrates hopes that Lysias will cease from making such speeches, so that Stesichorus’ illness should not come to pass upon him. Lysias erred in his account of ἔρως not because he characterizes μανία as a sickness [νόσος] but rather because he claims that it is of profane origin. It is true that a lover, under the influence of the ἔρως, is more unhinged/sick [νοσεῖν] than sound-minded [σωφροεῖν] (*Phdr.* 231d), but because Lysias is speaking in a manner that

³⁶ Here, it is strange that Socrates should call this a τέχνη, given that this assumes a completely human origin and concern. But we must keep in mind that even after hearing the Palinode, Phaedrus is still under the influence of Lysias, who would certainly say that his form of discourse is a τέχνη. Socrates, then, is simply starting where Phaedrus is, using vocabulary that Phaedrus would accept as true. It should also be noted that this statement comes immediately before Socrates’ critique of rhetoric, whose practitioners claim that it is a τέχνη. So we should, then, ask the question, if Socrates’ practice of ἔρως is not a τέχνη, what characteristic does it have?

is “useful to the people,” he does not understand that it is ἔρωσ, the origin of this “sickness,” i.e., μανία, that opens the lover to that which is beyond that which people in their right minds cannot conceive. Consequently, his λόγος is not wholly erroneous (*Phdr.* 235e); it simply presents ἔρωσ as of human origin.³⁷

The Palinode reminds us that the non-lover’s mode of disclosing the beloved, and τὸ καλόν, is profane.

The kindness of the non-lover is mixed with mortal sound-mindedness [σωφροσύνη θνητῆ], profanely and ungenerously manages one’s affairs [οἰκονομοῦσα], begetting in the soul of the dear one a servile condition which the common folk approve of as excellence [ὡς ἀρετῆν] that will cause it to wander aimlessly about the earth and without understanding [ἄνουν] under it (*Phdr.* 256e).

The non-lover must blindly stumble within the world, hoping to simply fall upon an appropriate beloved. Socrates’ second speech reveals, however, that one should strive to please not humanity but the gods. After all, his forced speech was spoken, head covered and blind, to Phaedrus with the ironic hope that he may fall more deeply in love with Lysias (*Phdr.* 237a). The audience of his second speech though is unclear. It too seems to be directed to Phaedrus, yet Socrates asks, “Where is the youth with whom I was speaking. He too must hear this...” (*Phdr.* 243e). To

³⁷ In a similar discussion, Socrates speaks disparagingly of augury, a form of prophecy that is of a wholly profane origin (*Phdr.* 244c-d). This individual uses natural phenomena as omens to foretell the future. The ancients named this art, “by which individuals *seek out* the future while in possession of their senses [τὴν γε τῶν ἐμφρόνων ζήτησιν τοῦ μέλλοντος], “οἰονοιστική” (*Phdr.* 244c), because this art originates from ἀνθρωπίνη διάνοια (human understanding), it procures οἴσις (opinion), νοῦς (sensibility), and ἱστορία (learning through inquiry) (*Phdr.* 244d). Like the σοφοί who use natural phenomena to explain that which has its proper place in μῦθος, those who use augury literally search out [ζητεῖν], as if they were hunters. The term ἐμφρόνος has good connotations throughout Plato’s corpus. Here, however, given the context within which we find ourselves in the *Phaedrus*, Plato is troubling the notion that it is the *only* manner by which one is made open to the divine and ‘what is’. For, due to his or her active programmatic, searching out what they wish to already find, such an individual presupposes a target already to be found and which can be studied, investigated, and eventually overtaken, grasped and mastered. Such a prophet does not allow the phenomena to self-manifest, but rather forces an appearance upon the world. Augury, then, can only reveal the future in its everydayness, just as Lysias’ speech can only present ἔρωσ as it appears in its everydayness. In light of the prophetic temporality within which μῦθος unfolds itself to its audience, opening them to an experience of an excessive beyond, while augury unfolds the future in its everydayness, i.e., as it appears to the human in its immediacy, as a present ‘now’.

whom is he speaking? Socrates wishes to converse with Phaedrus not as he is in his immediacy, not as corrupted by Lysias, but to the Phaedrus who is a divine beloved. The audience is a divine entity, and the speaker, with the hopes of pleasing it and not the human-minded Phaedrus.

Likewise late in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates imagines himself speaking with Tisias, a rhetorician who advises not speaking the truth but what is probable [εἰκός],³⁸ and he says that one should speak in a manner “as far as is possible that is pleasing to the gods” (*Phdr.* 273e). A few lines later Socrates asks Phaedrus if he knows how one can behave and speak so as to please a god (*Phdr.* 274b) and he answers for Phaedrus, saying that if they are to discover the answer they “must no longer concern themselves any longer with human seemings [ἀνθρωπίνων δοξασμάτων]” (*Phdr.* 274c). Should the two please the gods with beautiful speech, they will bestow upon them gifts, which, as we will see shortly, the cicada μῦθος promises. First, however, I will look to the divine gift as such and later return to the μῦθος of the cicadas. Ἐρωσ, in other words, is not of a human origin but rather a divine dispensation (*Phdr.* 244c).

Ἐρωσ, THE DIVINE GIFT

In a later chapter I will give a full account of the nature of the excessiveness of the divine gift and of givenness. Here, however, relying on Derrida’s and Luc-Luc Marion’s thinking of the gift and of givenness, I will offer a brief phenomenological description as it applies to Socratic rhetoric. Given Socrates’ own emphasis on being given the gift of μανία from a source beyond the human, both Derrida’s and Marion’s philosophy of the gift resonates well and will open Socrates’ own claim up in a unique manner.

A gift by its very nature originates from an external source; it is quite literally a present from and a presencing of another. The origin of the gift is always outside of the gift itself. The

³⁸ Τὸ εἰκός is used to describe how the wise individuals must describe the mythical creatures. It seems to connote that which is readily understood by the human being.

giver is made present through the gift even though the giver may no longer necessarily be physically there; it is a presencing of non-presence. Ungrounded, the gift signals an essentially non-subject/object ordered relation to a given being, i.e., the beloved, and thus is able to reveal its singularity without preconceived notions. This notion of the gift is in opposition to the Lysian non-lover's promise to repay the non-beloved for any inconveniences that the latter may experience. The gift interrupts one's world,³⁹ disturbing one's ability to reason and to calculate the value of the gift. A gift, then, is aneconomic, it is without value dictated in advance, with without precomprehension. The idea of the gift is complex and paradoxical: "the gift, *if there is any*, would no doubt be related to economy,"⁴⁰ but at the same time, it is that which interrupts economy.⁴¹ The paradoxical structure of the gift, i.e., as both relating to and rupturing the closed-circle-of-economy is inherent within the concept of a gift. The obligation of the gift cannot be dispelled. It weighs upon the individual, who feels discomfort from never being able to repay the gift, since its true origin is always hidden. Jean-Luc Marion describes the paradoxical structure of the gift as "givenness." He writes that Being, or conceptuality, is only a preparation for givenness.⁴² The given gives itself and shows itself from out of itself without grounding itself. In other words, it is an unconceptualizable experience out of which the beneficiary's thoughts are reordered.

The gift, divine μανία, is *the* impossible but not the unnameable or the unthinkable; it is thinkable as that which is impossible, that which defies precomprehension. The place of the gift, the individual who is now the site for μαντική τέχνη, exceeds itself; the individual outstrips

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp.9, 13, 17. See also, Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp.7, 8, 27, 53-81, 99.

⁴⁰ *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, p.7.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given* trans. Jeffery L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p.2.

him or herself and truly becomes ἔνθεος, literally having a god inside. A form of expression must now be developed that can, to the best abilities of the human, place both the speaker and the audience in that space of non-discursivity. Lysias, however, attempts to make the gift of μανία and the accompanying discourse rational and therefore common place or useful to the masses. He attempts to lessen the resistance, obligation, and paradox that the gift exudes when one tries to discursively understand it by placing it within a circle of exchange; and consequently, he does violence against the gift, destroying it as a gift and a “present/presence.” A gift, then, must be impossible to exchange. It must originate from a dissymmetrical relationship between the benefactor and the beneficiary. From this dissymmetry, the beneficiary views the benefactor as holding infinite import, as being superior and held in awe, through his or her singularity. With the reverential relationship between benefactor and beneficiary the concept of divine dispensation certainly comes to the fore.

Socrates mentions a gift at least once more in the *Phaedrus* when he gives the μῦθος of the cicadas (*Phdr.* 258e-259e). This μῦθος is framed by a series of concerns over how to perfect the skill of speaking and writing. To understand these concerns, we must understand the cicada μῦθος.

THE GIFT OF THE CICADAS

Phaedrus is amazed by Socrates’ second speech. It is “so much more beautiful [καλλίω] than his first” (*Phdr.* 257c). Moreover, he worries that Lysias will not be able to write a speech rivaling Socrates’ because Lysias fears a specific politician, who rebukes him by calling him a speech-writer [λογογράφος] (*Phdr.* 257c). He may be remembered posthumously as a sophist. Socrates reassures him that being a speech-writer not shameful but rather “speaking or writing not beautifully [μὴ καλῶς] but unsightly and poorly [αἰσχρῶς τε καὶ κακῶς]” (*Phdr.*

258d).⁴³ Why else, Socrates tells him would statesmen put their names on the speeches and leave the theater with delight if the speech is well received? Phaedrus is then asked “What then is the mien [τρόπος] of writing beautifully or not?” (*Phdr.* 258d). Immediately following this question, Socrates tells Phaedrus a myth of the cicadas. And directly after this μῦθος, Socrates clarifies what he means by speaking beautifully. He asks, “to begin, if a speech is good and beautiful [εὖ γε καὶ καλῶς] must not the mind of the one speaking *see* [τὴν τοῦ λέγοντος διάνοιαν εἰδύϊαν] the truth about the matter of which he speaks?” (*Phdr.* 259e). To ask what is the perfection of speech is to inquire into the question of what beautiful speech is. In other words, Socrates investigates what type of speech allows τὸ καλὸν to manifest itself as it is. But what is the gift the cicadas will bestow upon the two not only to speak beautifully but to see the truth?

Socrates warns Phaedrus that they should not fall asleep in the noonday sun (*Phdr.* 259a) while the cicadas look down upon them but continue conversing, “sailing past them unaffected by their Siren charms” (*Phdr.* 259b). The song of the cicadas, although sweet-toned (*Phdr.* 230c), is dangerous. The continual droning of the cicadas has a seductive destructive power, which could lull them to sleep “because of our idleness of thought [δι’ ἀργίαν τῆς διανοίας]” (*Phdr.* 259a). Like the speeches of the sophists, the cicadas’ singing can drug the mind into an intellectual slumber. The cicadas challenge the two to continue conversing, and if they should pass the trial, Socrates assures Phaedrus that the cicadas “admiring us, they give the gift that the gods have given them to humans” (*Phdr.* 259b).

The cicadas sprang from a race of humans that existed prior to the Muses and upon hearing the Muses were so “struck outside of themselves with pleasure” [ἔξεπλάγησαν

⁴³ I follow Sallis in translating μὴ καλῶς not as “not well” but as “not beautifully” in keeping with the etymology of the καλῶς, *Logos and Being*, p.169.

ὑφ' ἠδονῆς]” (*Phdr.* 259b-c), they continually sang until they cared not [ἠμέλησαν] for food and drink. “They escaped their own notice [ἔλαθον], having died” (*Phdr.* 259c). In the case of the cicadas, they received from the Muses in the form of “from birth they require no nourishment, singing continually, until they die” (*Phdr.* 259c). Their gift is not merely a distancing from the body, but rather occurs because they were ἐκπλήττονται, “struck out of themselves,” they are now νυμφόληπτοι, “caught by the nymphs”—just as Socrates was when he began speaking in dithyrambics (*Phdr.* 238d) after calling upon the Muses (*Phdr.* 237a)—to such an extent that this race of humans turned cicada so honoring the Muses by their enthusiasm they became the intermediaries to the Muses.

It is unclear within the μῦθος itself what the gift Phaedrus and Socrates should hope to receive. Certainly it would seem odd if the gift given to modern mortals, (as it was for the cicada-men), should be self-forgetting, since this entire dialogue is devoted to self-remembering. Yet if we keep in mind the givenness of the gift, its presencing of non-presence and its non-discursive element, the gift compels the recipient to alter one’s preconceived notions of the world. There may be a kind of forgetting that is involved. The cicada-men were so affected by the divine’s presencing of non-presence that they were struck out of themselves and so they forgot their human life and as a result were given the gift of becoming intermediaries, belonging neither to the mortal nor to immortal worlds, moving within a liminal, pre-philosophical space. This space is terrifying; it recedes, it is a continually non-manifesting world. Through this terror, the cicada-men forgot their need for bodily nourishment. Their response, transforming into cicadas, is a speculative and profound reply to the petrifying question-worthiness of the Muses’ tunes. The cicadas symbolize the correct response to the divine, unlike an orator who is able to rival Lycurgus, Solon, or Darius, believing that he will attain a certain immortality and while still

living and so believes himself to be equal to the gods (*Phdr.* 258c), consequently forgets himself. This individual is not truly divine since he strives not to please the gods but rather a human audience. Mortality and immortality are conflated. The divine is reduced to something readily comprehended and the human is given greater abilities than what accords to it.

One clue to the gift Socrates and Phaedrus are likely to receive is mentioned at 262d. Here, Socrates exclaims, “the prophets of the Muses, who are singing above our heads, a gift of honor would come, having inspired us [ἐπιπεπνευκότες ἅν ἡμῖν].” Should the two undergo the terrifying trial that the cicadas will put them through they are given the gift of ἐπιπνεῖν, they are literally “breathed into” by the Muses, thus becoming infused with the divine and now being ἔνθεος, they are a site for the divine to appear. Philosophical μανία is “of all enthusiasms [πασῶν τῶν ἐνθουσιάζσεων] the best” (*Phdr.* 249e). This is their gift: to escape their own notice as concerned with simply human affairs to such an extent that Socrates later asks Phaedrus, “would things which the human opines [τι τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων δοξασμάτων] continue to be of concern for us?” (*Phdr.* 274c).

Sallis claims that the gift Socrates and Phaedrus will receive is a similar independence from the demands of the nourishments the body, which fetter us to the body as an oyster to its shell, distancing the human from the divine banquet.⁴⁴ If Socrates and Phaedrus do, in fact, gain the distance from the body as the cicadas have, obscuring their human needs, it should be interpreted as a distance from what immediately appears. An independence from corporeal desires is necessary, since each the of the desires competes and causes a civil war since each demands to be satisfied without harmony now, in the present moment (*Phd.* 66b-d). Such desires fetter an individual to a temporal presence, i.e., to an objectively present and immediate world.

⁴⁴ *Being and Logos*, p.165.

Breaking free from, or having escaped the individual's notice of oneself, the corporeal allows room to be made within the individual so that 'what is' may appear as it is, finding the individual perhaps for the first time in a world that is essentially obscure, mysterious, and withdrawn.

Instead of the body, which is nourished by human δόξα (Phdr. 248b), it is the wings of the soul that feed on "the divine, e.g., the beautiful [τὸ καλόν], wisdom [σοφόν], and goodness [ἀγαθόν]" (Phdr. 246e). Furthermore, when a philosophically minded individual sees [ὄρῶν] beauty [κάλλος], this individual recollects true beauty and feels the wings grow (Phdr. 249d), driving them, as we have seen, into ἀπορία. In keeping with the language of givenness, the gift given to Socrates and Phaedrus will be the ability to allow things to manifest themselves without preconceived notions and as question-worthy, as prophetically temporal, thus permitting the subject matter to present itself as exceeding discursivity. In the Palinode, an example is provided of a lover who has become corrupted, perhaps by the siren song of the cicadas, and consequently does not look toward τὸ κάλλος when he sees his beloved and so does not feel a sense of awe but instead acts like a beast giving into corporeal pleasures (Phdr. 250e). If Socrates and Phaedrus can resist the immediacy of the body, or rather human concerns, they will be able to recollect the divine banquet at which their souls were once present gazing upon ὁ κάλλος.

SACRIFICING HUMAN Λόγος

Furthermore, by distancing themselves from their human all-too-human way of being, Socrates and Phaedrus wish to be as pious as possible, attempting to please the gods not in usual human actions such as worship and animal sacrifice⁴⁵ but rather to make a sacrifice of human communication as discursive λόγος and to communicate through a μῦθος.

⁴⁵ *Being and Logos*, p.174.

For example the *Apology*, grants us insight into the relationship found between λόγος and μύθος in the *Phaedrus*. Socrates recounts to his jurors that he has gained a reputation for a certain kind of wisdom, human wisdom [ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία], while Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias, and other sophists are depicted as “wise in some wisdom greater than what accords to the human” (*Ap.* 20d). Socrates repeatedly emphasizes throughout his defense that he is pious; after all he is simply investigating the Delphic utterance that he is the most wise (*Ap.* 21a). Consequently, Socratic philosophy has its origins at the temple of Delphi, a place of prophecy. Socrates undertook to investigate whether the oracle’s announcement is true. Upon hearing that no one is wiser than he, Socrates said, “what can the god be saying, and what does he riddle [ἀνίττεται]?” (*Ap.* 21b). Socrates is subjected to an αἴνιγμα, a riddle, or literally a dark-saying, whose sole purpose is to reveal the excessively obscure quality of that with which it is concerned. An αἴνιγμα must be understood as essentially unsolvable and an excessive sign or portent of ‘what is’ and the discourse resulting from it must take account of this excessiveness. Socratic philosophy takes account of an essential limitation between the human and the divine, it is a journeying for an answer of which one is ignorant, which is nevertheless human wisdom. The sophists, on the other hand, ignore the essential limitation inherent to the human being, believing that they can gain a form of immortality while still alive. The difference between these two types of wisdom marks a kind of wisdom that accounts for human ignorance and a wisdom that ignores or forgets its own ignorance and limitations.

Socrates makes a claim similar to the one at *Apology* 20d within the *Phaedrus*. Here, Socrates tells Phaedrus that to explain what the look [ιδέα] of soul is would be “utterly divine [πάντη πάντως θείας] and a very long discussion, however it seems within human power [ἀνθρωπίνας] to describe it in a shorter manner” (*Phdr.* 246a). Charles Griswold emphasizes

that the use of a μῦθος allows Socrates to condense what would be an impossibly long discussion into a manageable length; μῦθος, in other words, allows for a more “economical form of speech.”⁴⁶ While this is so, if we read *Phaedrus* 246a with *Apology* 20d in mind, the emphasis is laid not on describing the ἰδέα in a shorter manner but rather in a manner that befits the human, through μῦθος. The distinction I wish to draw attention to is between what is divine and what is in the power of the human. Keeping in mind that the Palinode is a μῦθος, telling μῦθοι, at least about the soul and ἔρως, is the kind of discourse that *is* human. It allows the matter at hand to appear, but appear as obscure and therefore as question-worthy. If this is so, giving a λόγος about these subjects is beyond the human being and in stepping beyond the boundaries of the human forces the human being to be ignorant of his or her own ignorance. Giving a μῦθος, a kind of discourse that allows the excessive to appear but appear as excessive, placing both the speaker and the audience into a state of μανία, is perhaps the most human kind of discourse when describing the human being and self-knowledge.

SEEING BEAUTY

Socrates, through his μανία, wishes to lead, in a ψυχαγωγία, Phaedrus back to the originary, inarticulate moment when ἔρως first took him over in which he was “stung into madness and caused distress [οἰστρα καὶ ὀδυνᾶται]” and was perplexed [ἀποροῦσα] at its condition, ἔρως (251c-e) and finally back to the experience of the originary language of the gods. Human language can only express this experience in μῦθος, essentially an ἀίνιγμα, whereby Socrates attempts through μῦθος to interpret the intermediaries’ utterance, the divine for which he is now a site, through prophecy, *allowing* τὸ καλόν to manifest, nourishing the wings of the soul.

⁴⁶ *Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Phaedrus*, p.149.

Lysias' ἔρωσ is not a responsive ἔρωσ. He has a preconceived concept of who the beloved is, and so the Lysian lover is closed to the true appearance of the beloved as it emerges. In contrast to this subjective model of love, the Socratic lover does not force a conception of what is good or beautiful upon the beloved. Instead the beauty of the beloved strikes him as an illuminating but blinding light (*Phdr.* 250b-251a). The object of ἔρωσ, according to Socrates, cannot be desired as part of a rationally calculated decision on the lover's part. Rather, the object of ἔρωσ reveals *itself* to be desirable (*Phdr.* 250a-c). Even in his forced speech, Socrates points along these lines. By veiling his ἔρωσ, the concealed lover can claim that he embodies σωφροσύνη and thus will not be dragged into excess [ὑβρις] (*Phdr.* 238a). And yet, note the manner in which Socrates defines ἔρωσ in his first speech:

Without rational opinion [ἀνευ λόγου δόξης] that strives toward the correct path, and toward the enjoyment of beauty [πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἀχθεῖσα κάλλους] and when this desire gains victory, by the force of desires that are like itself toward personal beauty, it takes its name from that force, and is called love [ἔρωσ] (*Phdr.* 238b-c).

Here, Socrates, albeit not as correctly as in the *Palinode*, ties ἔρωσ to the beautiful [τὸ καλόν]. The Socratic lover, then, under the influence of the ἔρωσ, does not choose with whom he falls in love; it is simply a matter of being struck by and responding to τὸ καλόν found within the beloved. Erotic striving, then, cannot be a result of a future calculation of how one is to master the beloved. Rather, it originates with the vision of beauty as it appears to the Socratic lovers. The beloved's soul is a conduit that shines forth with its own particular luster [λαμπρός] of 'what is.' Λαμπρός is the beauty that lovers have seen brilliantly showing forth [κάλλος δὲ τότ' ἦν ἰδεῖν λαμπρός] of a specific god that the Socratic lover once saw following in the divine train led by Zeus. In order for ἔρωσ to arise, the lover must be completely caught off

guard, throwing the lover into a state of ἀπορία, compelling him to gaze awestruck upon the beloved.

Indeed, after hearing even Lysias' speech Socrates proclaims, "How divinely [δαιμονίως] given, comrade, so much so that I am struck out of myself [με ἐκπλαγῆναι]" (*Phdr.* 234d). He states further that this results not from the speech itself but rather says, "I was affected because of you [ἐγὼ ἔπαθον διὰ σέ] Phaedrus, it seemed to me as I gazed upon you [πρὸς σέ ἀποβλέπων], I became aware and recognized [ἀναγιγνώσκων], that to me, you seemed to shine [ὅτι ἐμοὶ ἐδόκεις γάνυσθαι] on account of your speech" (*Phdr.* 234d). It was not until Socrates gazed upon Phaedrus, who, true to his name—derived from φάω, meaning "to shine, to give light, radiant, beaming"—literally "brightened up [γάνυσθαι]" that Socrates became bewitched by the speech. The nature of the speech itself is bewitching not due to what is said but because of the image of Phaedrus' excitement. Those who have been newly initiated through seeing 'what is' [τά ὄντα], when they see the god-like face [θεοειδὲς πρόσωπον] (*Phdr.* 251a), shutter with fear in response to the appearance of the beloved's face. Consequently, the love and desire Socrates shows for Phaedrus are not entirely due to intellectual stimulation, but rather are based in the physical appearance of Phaedrus.

The enthusiasm with which Phaedrus gives the speech, even though it presents a bastardized version of ἔρωσ, is able to illuminate, and in so doing (re)awakens [ἀναγιγνώσκειν] ἔρωσ for the beautiful [τό καλόν] toward which the speech hints.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁷ Other references to shining and obscurity take place between 250a-e, or the section of the Palinode that Socrates dubs "in honor of memory" [μνήμη κεχαρίσθω] (*Phdr.* 250d). And while we will see the greater significance of the role of μνημοσύνη and 'to be reminded' [ἀναμιμνήσκειν] in the last section of this paper, perhaps we may ask ourselves, in advance, what is the significance of verbs concerning shining, appearing, radiance with regard to ἀναμιμνήσκειν? And why is it through μνήμη that beauty is revealed? The notions of memory, being reminded and shining can only be related if forgetting is to be understood not in terms of oblivion but of obscuring and distance.

prior connection to ‘what is’ in the form of ἀναγιγνώσκειν allows for τὸ καλόν to appear out of the obfuscation of the world, so that the lovers are ἐκπλήττονται, literally “struck out of themselves,” upon seeing the beloved (*Phdr.* 250a). Due to this condition, true lovers could in no way set a subjective goal for themselves, for they are outside of themselves. Instead, they abide within the divine mysteries of ‘what is,’ responding to its illumination. Appearing in the beloved, τὸ καλόν announces itself, such that the beloved becomes the origin of the striving toward τὸ καλόν, pointing further to ἔρωσ’s responsive characteristic. Keeping with the language of illumination and obscurity, one could say that it is the structure of ἔρωσ that allows for the radiance of the εἶδος of beauty to shine through the beloved and to be perceived by the lover. The lover and the beloved have already gazed upon beauty, and consequently, it is the experience of ἔρωσ that allows those objects in the world to shine more brightly than those objects that do not participate in beauty. In fact, no other quality, neither δικαιοσύνη, σωφροσύνη, nor any other εἶδος (re)awakens desire [ἐπιθυμία] in the soul except beauty [νῦν δὲ κάλλος μόνον] (250b), which alone is a divine dispensation [ἔσχε μοῖραν] so that it shows forth, discloses, and *most* reveals [ἐκφανέστατον] and is loved the most (*Phdr.* 250d-e). We must not fail to hear the superlative “ἐκφανέστατον.” Of the images the soul once gazed upon, it is beauty that shines *most* clearly, since it is most closely aligned with what is human, desire for the beloved. Although the soul becomes heavy and comes to earth as a result of some mishap furnished by forgetfulness/obscurity⁴⁸ [λήθης] (*Phdr.* 248c), the beauty it saw shining in brightness [κάλλος δὲ τότε ἦν ἰδεῖν λαμπρόν] (*Phdr.* 250b) is not obliterated from its memory—it is merely obscured.

⁴⁸ In the word λήθης we must hear its root verb λάνθανω, to be unseen, go unnoticed, or obscure.

One connects the beloved to the obscure non-presence of τὸ καλόν by means of ἔρωσ (Phdr. 253a). It is not the beloved *qua* beloved that inspires the memory of the gods, but rather the beauty shining through the godlike face [θεοειδὲς πρόσωπον] of the beloved. The beloved is an erotic conduit through which the divine glimmers with eroticism. And as such, the relationship to τὸ καλόν can only be described through erotic μαντική, as when one tries to qualify the paradoxical nature of the experience of the temporality associated with ἀναμνήσκειν. All utterances of and actions performed by a μάντις are in the form of an αἴνιγμα, since they cannot be discursively understood. By extension, others cannot fully understand the lover and the lover, himself, is unable fully to understand himself. Ἐναμνήσκειν functions in the manner of an active recognition and restoration of that which is no longer present, exactly like what is uttered in the form an αἴνιγμα and what is told in a μῦθος. Socratic μαντική, as a form of ἀναμνήσκειν, is an active response to the excessive flash of ‘what is.’ It is a non-discursively grounded attempt to make sense out of being reminded of one’s prior excessive connection to ‘what is.’ As a consequence of the obscurity of ἀναμνήσκειν, the receptivity of ἔρωσ, the Socratic μάντις is transformed into an active desire toward ‘what is,’ that is to say, toward Beauty

Since it is by use of μῦθος that Socrates attempts to lead Phaedrus back up to the divine banquet, τὸ καλόν is revealed through the truth of what is spoken. It is only through ἔρωσ that an individual may become open to τὸ καλόν. However, since “love is a kind of madness [μανίαν γὰρ τινα εἶναι τὸν ἔρωτα],” the visual perception of τὸ καλόν is a gift from the gods. The gods give the gift of μανία and therefore of philosophical μαντικός, so that an individual may become a prophet of the intermediary’s utterances and interpret them in a manner

that befits the ἀνιγμα. This is why Lysias' speech is essentially a failed attempt; it does not reveal ἔρωσ as question-worthy, since it does not unveil one's phenomenological experience of ἔρωσ. The εἶδος of an earthly thing naturally through itself has a brilliance [λαμπρός] or a luster [φέγγος] to it, which appears to the lover; ἔρωσ is the response to the illumination of Being, revealing the passive nature of ἔρωσ. As responsive, ἔρωσ cannot be a result of a future calculation of how one is to master the beloved, it, instead, originates with the vision of beauty as it appears to the Socratic lovers. The beloved's soul is a conduit that shines forth with its own particular brilliance [λαμπρός] of 'what is.'

LEADING THE SOULS OF THE CITIZENS

Above we saw that the whole of rhetoric is a skill of leading souls, it is a ψυχαγωγία, which is necessary in the first place since the soul has lost its wings. The *Phaedrus* describes how the soul loses its wings, i.e., ἔρωσ (*Phdr.* 248a-b.) Human souls attempt to follow their divine leaders up to the “back [νῶτα] of the heavens where immediately the revolving heaven carries them round and they look upon [θεωροῦσι] what is outside of the heavens [τὰ ἔξω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ]” (*Phdr.* 247c). Souls compete with each other in their race upward, attempting to follow the gods to this place and vying for the best position. And yet, where these souls strive to reach, τὰ ἔξω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, is higher than what accords to the human being, since they attempt to see what only the divine should. Consequently, “All partaking in great toil depart with an incomplete view of ‘what is;’ and they are expelled, nourished by opinions/seemings [δοξαστῆ]” (*Phdr.* 248b). Without a view of ‘what is’ most individuals concern themselves only with human δόξα and not at all with truth, and so must be led back to the originary state of the soul in an effort to regenerate their souls. Relying upon a λόγος that is of human origin only reveals what the concept is as already understood by both the speaker and the audience. It deals,

therefore, only with δόξα, instead of the prophetically temporal unfolding nature of ‘what is.’

Without the ability to distinguish between seeming and ‘what is,’ one cannot even persuade the audience and lead the souls [ψυχαγωγία] of the audience (*Phdr.* 260e-261a).

Phaedrus, though, has heard that one need not know the truth about which one speaks but only what seems to be so [τὰ δόξαι], since persuasion, according to Phaedrus, results from what seems to be true and not from what is true (*Phdr.* 260a). Phaedrus’ opinion concerning rhetoric was common in the Greek world. A city-state is fraught with the dangers of competing fears, hopes, desires, opinions, thoughts, and every other idiosyncrasy found among individuals. It is a realm inscribed with both ἀληθής and ψευδής,⁴⁹ so much so that the relationship between the two becomes fluid and dynamic. In fact, Gorgias writes, “Contests of philosophical speeches [φιλοσόφων λόγων] in which quick wittedness is displayed makes the opinion based on belief changeable,”⁵⁰ suggesting that philosophy is based as much on opinion as is sophistry.

The true skill [τέχνη] of Socratic rhetoric reveals the difference between seeming [δόξα] and ‘what is’ [τὰ ὄντα]. Indeed, if an individual possesses the skill of rhetoric, whether true or false, he or she will have the ability to make the same thing appear [φανῆναι] to the same person now as just and at another time unjust (*Phdr.* 261c-d); proceeding by small steps from a concept to its contrary, he or she can deceive the audience (*Phdr.* 261e-262a). Yet, in his example of a merchant deceiving a buyer that a donkey is a horse (*Phdr.* 260bff)—due to ignorance not only on the customer’s part but the vendor’s as well—Socrates connects the skill of rhetoric to the need for knowledge of the truth. One can surely deceive one’s audience if they themselves do not have knowledge of ‘what is,’ and yet if one does not have this knowledge

⁴⁹ Marcel Detienne, *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Press, 1999), p.134.

⁵⁰ Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, ed. D.M. MacDowell (Eastbourne: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), §13.

either, it is possible to deceive even oneself. Worse yet, if an orator or sophist attempts to convince the city-state what he believes justice and goodness are, but is in fact ignorant, not only will the populace be deceived but the speaker will as well. In other words, the skillful rhetorician must know the truth if he is not to be deceived as well. The skillful rhetorician must strive to please not a human audience but a divine one.

The ψυχαγωγία fails between the merchant and the consumer and between the orator and the city-state because they are not one, but many. Each has his or her own δόξα of the topic. Consequently, the speaker is unable to lead the audience whither the speaker wishes not knowing whence the audience has come, since each has their own definition.⁵¹ On the other hand, if the speaker can reveal the λαμπρός and φέγγος of the εἶδος, the sudden emergence of the brilliance and luster catches the speaker and the audience unawares, throwing them in ἀπορία, revealing ‘what is’ in its non-discursive manner of self-manifestation. In the Palinode, the audience—just as the Socratic lover is—is perplexed [ἀποροῦσα] at its condition (*Phdr.* 251e). The audience is now in a state of receptivity, the sudden emergence of ‘what is’ allows them to see the εἶδος as question-worthy. The audience is ‘empty’ in the sense of exceeding rational understanding, so that all are now ἀποροῦσα at their own condition. What results are many individuals listening together as one being led by the speaker’s words. Listening together, however, only arises when the speaker can lead the audience’s souls where the speaker moves outside of the realm of discursive thought by becoming erotically enthused.

IV. Dialectics and Recollection, the Recuperation of λόγος.

In part, this chapter has been a defense of Socratic μῦθος, paying special attention to the way μῦθος non-discursively expresses an experience of the pre-philosophical prophetic

⁵¹ Disputation, Deception, and Dialectic: Plato on the True Rhetoric (Phaedrus 261-266), p.285.

temporality of ‘what is.’ Through such an experience the individual becomes, by being “somehow prophetic,” a site of an excessive beyond, whose utterances disrupt the complacency of the everyday preconceived attitude of the many. However, what has not been discussed are those passages in which giving an account, a λόγος, are explicitly mentioned as beneficial, i.e., those passages where dialectics [διαλεκτική]⁵² are discussed. I have shied away from a positive discussion of λόγος up to now, since it was necessary to clearly and thoroughly reveal that a Lysian λόγος necessitates a Socratic μῦθος. And although the relationship has up to now appeared unilateral, it is in fact more fluid than this. If λόγος, as expressed through διαλεκτική, is understood in the fashion Socrates intended, Socratic μῦθος is every bit as dependent upon a Socratic λόγος as a Lysian λόγος obliges Socrates to tell a μῦθος. To put it differently, Socratic διαλεκτική unveils the temporality of the appearance of an εἶδος as it appears through a physical entity, which will correlate to the prophetic temporality of the μῦθος.

Socrates’ discussion of διαλεκτική is set in the middle of an investigation of perfecting rhetoric, or speaking beautifully, so that the truth of the matter may come to light. As Phaedrus understands it, rhetoric has the power to make anything seem like anything else, since it is only concerned with δόξα. Perfected speech, διαλεκτική, is a form of communication that unfolds the originary manifestness found in our pre-philosophical experience, so that ‘what is’ shines through entities found in the phenomenal world. However for Socrates, διαλεκτική, which consists in division [διαίρεσις] and collection [συναγωγή], is not a scientific programmatic put forward to test the validity of an argument. “Dialectic, in the *Phaedrus*, is not the syllogistic

⁵² Through this chapter I will keep what is translated as ‘dialectics’ in the Greek to emphasize the radical difference between Plato’s notion and Hegel’s development of dialectics. For Plato, διαλεκτική is not a programmatic process through which a concept must develop. Instead, it simply occurs and in so doing reveals the prophetic temporality of the εἶδος.

method of argument which it becomes for Aristotle; it designates two different, but related, practices.”⁵³ Διαίρεσις and συναγωγή are not dichotomous processes but function simultaneously to show the unity and multiplicity of a given εἶδος, throwing one into a similar state of aporetic μανία as felt by the true lover when first experiencing his beloved. Consequently, contrary to Charles Griswold’s claim that commentators “have difficulty explaining the sense in which the use of the method of division and collection could constitute divine erotic madness as it is described here,”⁵⁴ when used together properly διαίρεσις and συναγωγή throw one into a state of μανία, forcing the interlocutor to consider the way of being of the εἶδος that multiplicity of it appearing can be gathered into a oneness. ‘What is’ becomes question-worthy through διαλεκτική. As such, διαλεκτική, then, is not only a rhetorical tool for dissecting arguments but by gesturing back to Socrates’ Palinode it will be revealed to be a mode of communication that unveils the prophetic temporality of ἔρως and of the soul.

EROTIC DIVISIONS AND COLLECTIONS

Recommending an improvement of Lysian λόγος, Socrates develops his discussion of διαλεκτική, a Socratic λόγος. After having disrupted the everyday attitudes of his audience through his μῦθος, a Socratic rhetorician must now lead the souls [ψυχαγωγία] of the audience, through giving accounts [διὰ λόγων], to the truth (*Phdr.* 261a), while nevertheless maintaining a sense of distance between the human and ‘what is.’ While the Lysian λόγος cannot unify its audience due to the multiplicity that δόξα necessitates within the audience, Socratic διαλεκτική reveals a unified εἶδος behind the multiplicity of the appearances, which

⁵³ The Rhetorical Technique of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, p.67.

⁵⁴ *Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Phaedrus*, p.116.

lead to δόξα being mistaken for ‘what is.’ In fact, it is said that if a speaker who does not “see the truth [ὁ τὴν ἀλήθειαν μὴ εἰδώς], and having chased down opinions [δόξας δὲ τεθηθευκώς] possesses a laughable skill of speaking [λόγων ἄρα τέχνην]” (*Phdr.* 262c). Chasing down what one opines leads one into a similar problem of the infinite regress that the one, who relies upon a boorish wisdom, giving a discursive account of mythical creatures. This type of λόγος has nothing that unifies it because it is blind to the εἶδος which unifies the discourse.

Socrates puts forward an essential description of the human.

For a human being must understand according to the εἶδος that which is *said* [ξυνιέναι κατ’ εἶδος λεγόμενον] gathering/grasping together [ξυναιρούμενον] from many perceptions [αἰσθήσεως] into one by means of reckoning [λογισμῶ]. This is recollection [ἀνάμνησις] of those things which our soul once saw [εἶδεν] journeying with god. And looking down upon that which we now say is, lifting our head to what *is* most of all [τὸ ὄν ὄντως].⁵⁵ On account of which it is justly said that only the mind [διάνοια] of the philosopher is winged (*Phdr.* 249b-c).

It is striking that ἀνάμνησις is connected with gathering according to the εἶδος (gesturing toward a prophetic temporality), its association with wings (emblematic of ἔρωσ), the reference to perception [αἰσθήσις], and the emphasis on λόγος. Within this passage, everything that holds importance in the Palinode is placed within the context of εἶδος. Through this it will be revealed that Socrates’ conception of διαλεκτική is every bit as concerned with ἔρωσ and open to prophetic temporality as is μῦθος. In other words, Socrates’ ἐρωτική τέχνη, which as a divine dispensation, allows him sight of τὸ καλόν and is intimately linked with διαλεκτική.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ This is a difficult phrase to translate literally into English, “being beingly,” while allowing it to be understood readily. I would like to thank Sean Kirkland for his help in rendering this phrase in a manner that can be philosophically understood.

⁵⁶ Charles Griswold makes a similar claim, “Socrates’ ‘erotic art’ (257a7-8) is the dialectical rhetoric that uses the power of questioning to accomplish this end,” *Self-Knowledge is Plato’s Phaedrus* p.116. He does not, however, adequately explain what he means. I will remedy this oversight.

Not only is ἔρωσ alluded to by the reference to the winged thought [διάνοια] of the philosopher, but in fact, Socrates exclaims

I myself, Phaedrus, am a *lover* [ἐραστής] of these divisions [διαίρεσεως] and collections [συναγωγῶν] in order that speaking [λέγειν] and thought [φρονεῖν] be possible and if I believe another is able to *see* [ὄρᾶν] what by nature is in one and the many, I follow after him and walk in his footsteps [ἵχνιον] as if he were god. And only god knows [οἶδεν] if I correctly or incorrectly call those whom I address as dialecticians (*Phdr.* 266b-c).⁵⁷

THE TEMPORALITY OF THE εἶδος

An εἶδος, in the *Phaedrus*, is that by which one orients one's understanding; without it, neither speaking nor thought is possible. Certainly the sophist and orator speak and think but uncritically. If speaking and thinking critically facilitates ἀνάμνησις, then the sophists do neither. Socrates is drawing our attention to the human manner of speaking and thinking, “the unexamined life is not a human life” (*Ap.* 38a). An uncritically lived life is rather a life of the oyster, as the *Philebus* reveals, “To live not the life of a human but of some certain mollusk or as much as sea-animals living in the midst of oyster bodies [ζῆν δὲ οὐκ ἀνθρώπου βίον ἀλλὰ τινος πλεύμονος ἢ τῶν ὅσα θαλάττια μετ' ὀστρεῖνων ἔμψυχά ἐστι σωμάτων]” (21c-d). Furthermore, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates likens the immediacy of the body to the fetters of an oyster shell. Such an individual is closed off from how the world, in its self-manifestation, affects him or herself, one lacks the sight of τὸ καλόν which is so necessary for philosophical μανία. Consequently, one uncritically looks to one's own δόξα. Διαλεκτική, on the other hand, opens one to the experience of the εἶδος as question-worthy, being both one and many and thus a sign-post to prophetic temporality.

⁵⁷ Even though, the words for collecting at 266b and the word for gathering at 249b-c are different and commentators have suggested that these passages are discussing unrelated processes.⁵⁷ The terms are different because the processes of gathering [ξυναϊρούμενον] and collecting [συναγωγή] describe the same phenomena but at different stages of assembling the self-evident manifesting of the εἶδος and not different processes altogether.

Traditionally an εἶδος is understood as the thing in itself, the “Form.” For example, during the divine banquet, the soul gazed upon, albeit with difficulty (*Phdr.* 247d), justice itself [αὐτὴ δικαιοσύνη], sound-mindedness [σωφροσύνη], knowledge [ἐπιστήμη], and beauty [κάλλος] (*Phdr.* 250b). Habitually thought, then, an εἶδος as “an existence that *is* most of all [οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα]” residing in “the place above heaven [τὸν δὲ ὑπερουράνιον τόπον]” (*Phdr.* 247c), is believed to be the “world of forms.” But perhaps we are too much like Lysias in regard to this answer as to what is an εἶδος, assuming and relying upon a closed economy of terminology, As Sallis argues, “...the question, as formulated, already presupposes its answer, presupposes that we know what the ‘is’ means as the very condition of the possibility of even understanding the question.”⁵⁸ The question posed in this way assumes that we are able to articulate our experience of the εἶδος in a significant manner. Furthermore, εἶδος is oftentimes translated by continental thinkers as the “look” of the thing. This translation, however, has become fetishized, gesturing to an explanatory power, to which we no longer give thought. It has become accepted that the εἶδος is “that which is seen, the seen, that which presents itself to a seeing, that which shows itself so as to be manifest to a seeing.”⁵⁹ And while it is admitted that the human “sees” the εἶδος indirectly in the λόγος and that this “indirect seeing” is ἀνάμνησις,⁶⁰ the import of the self-manifestation of the εἶδος through a Socratic λόγος in ἀνάμνησις is not thoroughly explained. Surely, as Plato writes, the εἶδος is revealed to the perceptions and thus is wholly distinct from the world of phenomena, but appears through the phenomena of the world. Indeed we are told that ὁ κάλλος not only brilliantly shone during the soul’s divine banquet but also is visible in bodily shape [ἐναργεστάτης] through the

⁵⁸ *Being and Logos*, p.145.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.152.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

perceptions [αἰσθήσεως], “for vision [ὄψις] is the sharpest of senses that come to us through the body [τῶν διὰ τοῦ σώματος ἔρχεται αἰσθήσεων]” (*Phdr.* 250d), albeit obscurely, vaguely, and ambiguously, and in a multiplicity. There is, however, a temporality that lurks in the background that has not been explicitly explored.

According to Liddell and Scott, εἶδος has three senses: “that which is seen: form, shape, figure;” “a form, sort, and a particular kind of nature, a particular state of things or course of action;” and lastly, “a class, kind, sort, whether genus or species.” These definitions point to a movement of appearing to an individual. In other words, the εἶδος includes an individual to whom it appears in its self-manifestation. It is not, then, in the object which is seen but is that which is perceived through the senses; it is the movement of appearances. Furthermore, the noun εἶδος is derived from the verb ἴδειν, which means “to see, to perceive, to behold.” Yet when the verb is used in the perfect tense, εἰδέναι, (the first person of which is οἶδα, literally “I have seen”) is used in a present tense sense meaning “I know.” Not only, then, to the Greek ear would there have been an association between knowing and seeing but there is also a specific temporality at work. The movement of the manifesting of an εἶδος and the knowing that is associated with this movement is subject not to linear temporality but, rather, to a prophetic type.

To know according to the εἶδος, accordingly, requires that one perceive the movement of appearances manifesting immediately and presently before oneself, which is in fact the εἶδος emerging out of its mythic past of the divine banquet. And yet this past condition is also that toward which the individual’s soul and sight are directed in a futural act that presents itself in the present moment of perceiving. To know something according to its εἶδος is to have seen, in the past, and yet this seeing/knowing has been forgotten and must be recollected by perceiving the εἶδος again in the present, through ‘what is said,’ which gestures toward the future condition of

the soul. In fact, given that it is from the εἶδος that anything is understood, “the one which is directive for the gathering must somehow be available to the gathering prior to the carrying through of that gathering,” that is, Sallis concludes, “the one of the gathering must somehow be manifest in advance.”⁶¹ In a distinct sense, the human must already ‘know,’ pre-reflexively and non-discursively, the εἶδος that he or she is attempting to make manifest. This suggests that to understand according to the εἶδη of ἡ δικαιοσύνη, ἡ σωφροσύνη, ἡ ἐπιστήμη, or ὁ κάλλος would entail seeing, perceiving, or beholding these εἶδη in the present, which entails coming to know them again through an ἀνάμνησις of the divine banquet.

THE MADNESS OF διαλεκτική

This movement of appearing can be explained in terms of Socratic διαλεκτική, which will reveal this movement in terms of διαίρεσις and συναγωγή. I will now explore this and show that, although, he uses a different vocabulary, Socrates is nevertheless concerned with revealing an εἶδος in such a manner as to throw his interlocutor into divine μανία.

In the middle of their discussion of speaking beautifully and immediately before the discussion of διαίρεσις, συναγωγή, and διαλεκτική, Socrates tells Phaedrus “The two [speeches on ἔρωσ] were in some way opposites. The one said [ἐλεγέτην] one should court the favor of the lover, the other the one who does not” (*Phdr.* 265a). To that Phaedrus exclaims “And very manly.” But Socrates corrects him “I believed you were going to speak truthfully, that it was ‘madly’ [μανικῶς], which is the thing I was searching after. We said that ἔρωσ was a type of μανία, right?” Granted, ἔρωσ is a type of μανία and perhaps it is that to which Socrates is referring. However, philosophy is the fourth type of μανία and Socratic διαλεκτική is the philosophical mode of speaking beautifully. Moreover, though, Socrates emphasizes that the

⁶¹ Ibid, p.150.

speeches were opposites, which shortly thereafter it is revealed that they both originate from the same εἶδος (*Phdr.* 266a). Our question is, then, what does it mean for two opposite accounts of ἔρωσ to have their origin in one εἶδος? And what resemblance to divine μανία does it have?

Although an εἶδος is a unity, our initial experience of it is scattered [διεσπαρμένος] (*Phdr.* 265d) into a multiplicity. The unity can neither be immediately perceived nor known but must be gathered through reckoning [λόγισμος]. Given that we find ourselves in the midst of the multiplicity of images, a means of gathering and sifting through the array of images is necessary. A necessary and sufficient condition for a soul to take a human form is that it should be able to understand that which is said [λεγόμενον] according to its εἶδος (*Phdr.* 249b). Here, we cannot help but hear derivations of λόγος. Socrates is advocating for a type of λόγος, διαλεκτική, which will disclose the unity of the εἶδος. I have attempted already to sketch out what this λόγος entails, but I will now begin to examine this in more detail.

If we look to the first usage of εἶδος in the *Phaedrus* the distinction between Socratic λόγος and Lysian λόγος will become clearer. Socrates says he pities the individual who must explain the εἶδος of mythical creatures, since he is caught in an infinite regress (*Phdr.* 229d). This ‘wise individual’ [σοφός] using “a boorish or unsophisticated wisdom brings each of them into accordance with probability [προβιβᾶ κατὰ τὸ εἶκος ἕκαστον].” Τὸ εἶκος, as is revealed in Socrates’ critique of Tisias’ manner of speaking (*Phdr.* 272d ff), is that which appears to the many in its immediacy regardless of what the truth of the condition within which the audience finds itself is. Lysias, too, is unsuccessful but in a different manner. Lysias’ λόγος lacks an ἀρχή, a ruling principle, which functions in a like manner to how Socrates will later describe an εἶδος. One of the failures of Lysias’ is that it cannot take into account its own excess;

consequently Lysias is forced to invent for himself an ἀρχή. But as we have seen, this results in a vicious circle; he is compelled to speak repeatedly of the same topics, all of which seem radically distinct.

Recall that an ἀρχή is not an arbitrary beginning point but rather a sovereign power from out of which events, topics, and concepts arise; it lies outside of the power of the human to make an ἀρχή arise; it arrives on its own accord. There is something of the divine in the ἀρχή. And yet the ἀρχή is not wholly distant from the discourse, but is rather present throughout it, guiding that which is said. Like an ἀρχή, the εἶδος can neither be forced nor ignored but must unveil itself through the course of a discussion.

It is not insignificant that Socrates calls his process of διαίρεσις and συναγωγή διαλεκτική and not an ἀπόδειξις,⁶² a demonstration or a pointing out. Instead, Socrates claims that the correct relation of these two is found “through an account [διὰ λόγον].” Furthermore, he explicitly states that understanding arises when one is able to grasp, into one, by means of reckoning [λόγισμος], the drastic diversity of what appears to the senses [τὰ αἴσθημα] according to the εἶδος of that which is *said* [λεγόμενος]. Language is the site from which ‘what is’ manifests itself to us. Through the ἔλεγχος, for which he is famous, Socrates reveals that the immediacy of the self-evident unified appearance of one’s δόξα is only apparent. Socrates approaches the εἶδος from where his interlocutors begin, that is, from that which they opine

⁶² Socrates does use the term ἀπόδειξις in the beginning of his μῦθος when discussing the nature of the self-movement of the soul. However, one should not hear a logical proof, as Griswold points out, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 78, but rather a showing-forth, an exhibition, or exposition. The ἀπόδειξις lacks a self-sufficient logical rigor, such that “the rhetoric of argumentation is no less rhetorical (in the sense outlined in the later part of the *Phaedrus*) than the rhetoric of myth” (*ibid*).

[τὸ δόξαμα].⁶³ Derived from the verbal root δοκεῖν, which itself means “to seem to one” or “to appear to one,” a δόξα is the way a matter, in its immediacy, presents itself to one in one’s thinking. Consequently, to bring oneself into accord with the εἶδος of that which is *said* [λεγόμενος] is to wade through the appearances of the εἶδος, while attempting to find a unity, thus making the εἶδος question-worthy. For how can something appear both as a multiplicity and as a unity?

According to Lysias, each individual has his or her own δόξα of ἔρωσ. The many, immediate and self-evident appearances found in our experience are, for Lysias, taken as completely unrelated. As was shown above, his λόγος purposefully attempts to suppress the ἀπορία experienced when the individual is confronted with the unity of the manifold appearances of ἔρωσ—the μανία that results from ἔρωσ cannot be both a sickness and divine. As a result, the multiplicity with which ἔρωσ manifests itself is taken for the εἶδος of ἔρωσ. Through διαλεκτική, Socrates is able to trouble the apparent self-evident immediacy of the εἶδος of ἔρωσ.

There do exist certain matters of discussion which no one but the most obstinate could disagree, e.g., “when someone says the names ‘iron’ or ‘silver’ do we not all think of it?” (*Phdr.* 263a). And yet, “what if one should ask of ‘just’ [δικαίου] or of ‘good’ [ἀγαθοῦ]? Do we not carry the one to the other [οὐκ ἄλλος ἄλλη φέρεται] and debate [ἀμφισβητοῦμεν] with one another and even with ourselves?” (*Phdr.* 263a). Further clarifying his point, Socrates asks Phaedrus with which of the two pairs one is able to more easily deceive another; to which he answer “evidently in those cases which we make to wander [πλανώμεθα]” (*Phdr.* 263b). Those

⁶³ *Self-Knowledge is Plato’s Phaedrus* p.175 and “Disputation, Deception, and Dialectic: Plato on the True Rhetoric,” p283.

cases which one is able to make “wander about” are those where one does not know the truth, i.e., that there is an excessiveness to the given phenomenon, they do not “understand according to the εἶδος that which is *said* [ξυνιέναι κατ’ εἶδος λεγόμενον]” and so must *chase down* δόξα. We are told that Ἔρως is of the debatable type [ἀμφισβητησίμων] (*Phdr.* 263c), since two opposing accounts can be given; from the same εἶδος at least two δόξα can be reached, neither of which were thought to be in contradiction with the other until Socrates approached them through διαλεκτική.⁶⁴

As the two sets of erotic speeches, the two casting ἔρως as profane and Socrates’ own μῦθος describing ἔρως as divine, show Ἔρως is of the debatable type of δόξα about which people speak (*Phdr.* 263c). From the same εἶδος, two diametrically opposed conclusions can be reached. It is the task of the one who knows διαλεκτική to pick one out from another, to pick out in an account [λόγος] the two and expose which of the two is the more praiseworthy. After Socrates’ critique of Phaedrus’ beloved’s speech, two chance utterances were made that involved “δυοῖν εἰδοῖν” that would not be unpleasant to grasp, if τέχνη could teach it (*Phdr.* 263d).⁶⁵ It is one of which is “to lead [ἄγειν] together the scattered things, seeing them at the same time [συνορῶντα], into one idea [εἰς μίαν ιδέαν] in order that each one be made evident [δῆλον] by definition [ὀριζόμενος]...just now I was speaking about Love, we defined [ὀροσθέν] it, whether it is good or bad” (*Phdr.* 265d).

⁶⁴ The one who is skilled in rhetoric, who has knowledge of διαλεκτική, must first carefully divide [διηρῆσθαι] and grasp [εἰληφέναι] an impression [χαρακτήρα] of *each thing that shows itself* [ἐκατέρου τοῦ εἶδου] in which the many necessarily make to wander [πλανᾶσθαι] and which they do not (*Phdr.* 263b). Phaedrus agrees and says that the one who had this would observe well [κατανενοηκώς] a καλὸν εἶδος. This beautiful εἶδος is that through which other εἶδοι allow themselves to become manifest in their truthfulness.

⁶⁵ We should be wary of the claim that τέχνη is able to accomplish this, for the reasons of the limitations of the human being given above.

The individual who knows how to properly execute συναγωγή is able to define [ὀρίζειν]⁶⁶ the topic making it evident so that, “through this, the account [λόγος] becomes manifest [σαφές] and with itself agrees with it” (*Phdr.* 265d). When one defines a matter it becomes both evident [δῆλον] and manifest [σαφές]; its unity shines through. To define an issue, then, is a collecting together so that which is scattered may be seen together at the same time. Ἐρως, like μανία, is debatable because it presents itself in two ways, profane and divine. Experienced as such its εἶδος appears as accidental and coincidental, something that can be bandied about like an orphan, belonging nowhere and having no home. However, a ὄρος, from which ὀρίζειν is derived, is a boundary stone; it limits a portion of a field, allowing a specific parcel of land to emerge into appearance. Without delimiting, say, a parcel of land within a field there is no specific context from which the former can emerge; in its immediacy it is simply an amorphous, unstructured space. Through delimiting an εἶδος of a specific locale it comes into view for the first time, and presents itself as something specific, as a discreet unity. Συναγωγή allows an entity to become manifest; it demarcates that ‘which is’ and that ‘which is not’ with respect to the εἶδος. Collecting, through delimiting, the parcel of land, the field is now able to come into view and be collected under a unified εἶδος.

Although it is only through ὀρίζειν, as a delimitation and συναγωγή, that an εἶδος manifests itself, to fully reveal the matter at hand, and bring one’s interlocutor into ἀπορία and thus a philosophical μανία, διάρρησις is also necessary. To illustrate his point, Socrates

⁶⁶ “Disputation, Deception, and Dialectic: Plato on the True Rhetoric,” p.286.

discusses cutting [τέμνειν]⁶⁷ a body “according to its form [κατ’ εἶδη],” where the joints are by nature, and trying not to take after a poor butcher (*Phdr.* 265e). To the poor butcher, the body does not even present itself as a body; he does see it visibly before him but rather only as an amorphous lump of flesh. He can neither discuss it nor think about what it is, and since he does not have sight of the εἶδος of the body he cannot understand it even in its oneness. By one common εἶδος of the body there are two natures, both parts called by the same name, differentiated as “right” and “left.” There is an immediate distinction between the two. Here, as with the example of the field, the εἶδος of the body cannot emerge without διαίρεσις; the body cannot be understood to be of two halves, let alone a body proper at all. But a good butcher can divide the body according to its εἶδος, as consisting of two relatively symmetrical halves, perhaps pre-philosophically and certainly for the first time as question-worthy. Only now is a Socratic λόγος able to be given.

The contradiction of the two sets of speeches reveals itself after διαίρεσις and συναγωγή are used in combination. For instance, after διαίρεσις has occurred, the εἶδος of the body is seen as that which has two halves, and when συναγωγή is able to connect the two halves the εἶδος is now understood to be that which is a unity and a multiplicity. The individual who is skilled in διαλεκτική understands that the pre-philosophical, non-discursive experience of the εἶδος of the body is neither one nor many. The body, as such, becomes truly question-worthy. Likewise, Ἔρωσ does not even appear to Lysias, at least not evidently and truly. He is unaware of the right half of ἔρωσ, the “part of μανία, that has the same name as the other half

⁶⁷ Τέμνειν is an ambiguous terms. It suggests “to cut, to maim, to wound,” also “to cut as a surgeon does,” “to cut asunder, to sever,” and “to cut into shape, to cut lengthwise, to plough.” This verb can suggest imply skill or lack there of.

but now divine” (*Phdr.* 266b). A Socratic account [λόγος] must be given so that the individual is confronted with the question of how it can be both one and many. But the question can only be answered in the form of a recollective μῦθος which exposes the individual to the experience of ‘what is’ as it was experienced before embodiment. As with the example of the body, but now more pronounced, there is no immediate contradiction between the first two speeches and Socrates’ μῦθος, they are discussing wholly separate phenomena. It is only once a Socratic λόγος, through διαλεκτική, is given that the μῦθος reveal itself as more praiseworthy. It is at this point that a Socratic μῦθος must be told so that the audience can recollect the soul’s vision of the εἶδος it saw at the divine banquet.

Again, Socrates exclaims, “I myself, Phaedrus, am a lover [ἐραστής] of these, of dividing [διαρίσεως] and of gathering [συναγωγῶν]...and if I believe another is able to *see* [ὄρᾶν] what by nature is in one and the many him I follow after and walk in his footsteps [ἵχνιον] as if he were god” (*Phdr.* 266b). Truly such an individual is divine insofar as through διαλεκτική he or she throws another into ἀπορία, being aware of the innumerable appearances of an εἶδος to which the individual is exposed in the present must. In fact, he or she is one who gathers together these appearances. The unity of the εἶδος lays outside of the power of the audience. However, this unity can only be recognized through ἀνάμνησις and thus is able to lead Socrates in an earthly reenactment of the divine banquet. Much like Socrates’ own ἐρωτική τέχνη, which grants him sight of τὸ καλόν through prophetic temporality, διαλεκτική gestures to a pre-philosophical beyond. Both ἔρως and the divine (and by extension the divine gift of μανία) are mentioned in connection with διαλεκτική. This individual appears

to bring the same strange mixture of pleasure and pain as the beloved does for the lover, driving him into μανία.

Above, διαλεκτική was explained in terms first of a συναγωγή, which allows one to collect disparate sensory perceptions into a cohesive unity understood according to the εἶδος. This allows one to speak intelligibly about the subject, something that Lysias for a variety of reasons was unable to accomplish. Next I addressed διαίρεσις. This half of Socratic διαλεκτική allowed the pre-philosophical, the always already understood εἶδος, to become question-worthy for the first time. A Socratic account, a Socratic λόγος, is able to begin here, in the rupturing of discourse. These processes together seed the ground for ἀνάμνησις, as Socrates indicates at 249b-c of the *Phaedrus*. The individual's διάνοια grows wings through finally being exposed to the εἶδος as τὸ ὄν ὄντως, what *is* most of all. In terms of the first half of the dialogue, τὸ ὄν ὄντως was revealed only in the recollective μανία through the experience of the beloved. Here, the same μανία, the state of being taken outside of one's everydayness, is achieved through the one who is skilled in διαλεκτική.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EXCESSIVELY GOOD:

The Erotic Tale of the Sun in the Phaedrus, Symposium, and the Republic

The sun, from the human point of view (in other words, as it is confused with the notion of noon) is the most *elevated* conception. It is also the most abstract object, since it is impossible to look at it fixedly at that time of day. If we describe the notion of the sun in the mind of one whose weak eyes compel him to emasculate it, that sun must be said to have the poetic meaning of mathematical serenity and spiritual elevation. If on the other hand one obstinately focuses on it, a certain madness is implied, and the notion changes meaning because it is no longer production that appears in light, but refuse or combustion, adequately expressed by the horror emanating from a brilliant arc lamp.

Georges Bataille, “Rotten Sun” *Visions of Excess*

I. Presently Existing Versus Excessively Existing:

Plato’s writings are rife with the movement upward. In his *Palinode*, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates speaks of the soul’s ascent, pulled by a horse-driven chariot to “the place beyond the heavens [τὸν δὲ ὑπερουράνιον τόπον]” where “the colorless, formless and impalpable ‘existence that *is* most of all’ [οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα] resides” (*Phdr.* 247c). In *Republic* book VII, the cave-dwelling captive is forced to move upwards out of the cave, making his ascent into the blinding light where “the good” [τὸ ἀγαθόν], which is said to be “lying beyond being [ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας]” (*R.* 509b), is revealed. Furthermore still, in the *Symposium*, Diotima’s “ladder of love” describes the erotic initiation in which the initiate is led upward from a particular, singular, and arbitrary beauty to a type of knowledge that is of a universal and necessary type of beauty (*Sym.* 210d). The ladder ends with a sudden [ἐξαίφνης] vision of beauty itself (*Sym.* 210a-211d). The lovers, in the *Phaedrus*, recollecting what is most of all [τὸ ὄν ὄντως] (*Phdr.* 249d), suffer from the fourth type of *μανία* and are struck-out-of-themselves

[ἐκπλήττονται] (*Phdr.* 250a), while the prisoner looks up at the sun “in its own place” (*R.*

516b) instead of at mere images of it. It seems very much that Plato wishes to describe a plane of insight in which Socrates loses himself, passing beyond this realm of being, into the “‘ineffable’, in ‘transcendence’.”⁶⁸

Socrates does, after all, in his opening discussion with Glaucon in *Republic* book VI, say, “philosophers are able to grasp those things that are ever and in accordance with themselves [οἱ τοῦ ἀεὶ κατὰ ταῦτὰ ὡσαύτως]” (*R.* 484b). Those who have a philosophical nature are ever in love [ἀεὶ ἐρῶσιν] with a kind of learning [μαθήματος] that makes evident [δηλοῖ] to them something of “that which *is* ever and most of all [τῆς οὐσίας τῆς ἀεὶ οὐσης]” and is not wandering [πλανωμένης] due to coming-to-be and passing away (*Rep.* 485b). So that which is evident may become clear and not wander about, Socrates states, at *Phaedrus* 263b, that one must “acquire a certain mark of the look [τοῦ εἶδου] of each.”

Martin Heidegger gives us a particularly helpful interpretation to trace the etymology of the term εἶδος. He reminds us that the εἶδος is literally the “look” or appearance of a thing. It allows an entity to show and present itself, to be seen, as the very thing that it is. Accordingly, the εἶδος names the being-ness [οὐσία]⁶⁹ of the entity in question. It is the appearance of something as “the standing in this and placing in appearance [*das Stehen in diesem und Sichstellen in es*],”⁷⁰ by which he means to suggest that the εἶδος is that which stands as a stable structure for a completed entity; it is the permanent and identical structure of an entity—leading

⁶⁸ Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p.59.

⁶⁹ See Heidegger’s GA 18, p.345. Here he discusses the implications of οὐσία as understood by the Greeks as presence. He writes οὐσία “means [*vermögen*], possessions and goods [*Hab und Gut*], the household [*der Hausstand*], the estate [*das Anwesen*].” Heidegger emphasizes the entity’s being available [*verfügbar*], its usable [*brauchbar*] nature.

⁷⁰ Martin Heidegger, *WegMarken*, “Vom Wesen und Begriff der Φύσις ” (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967), p.346.

us to read the Greeks as the thinkers of metaphysics as an ontology of *Vorhandenheit*. That is to say, Heidegger seems to believe that the Greeks, Plato and Aristotle in particular, based their ontology on a pure presence, which is separate from the movement of the phenomena of the world.

This is an understandable interpretation, since τὸ ἀγαθόν is ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, literally τὸ ἀγαθόν lies along side being, and so it is meta-physics. It certainly appears that τὸ ἀγαθόν has little to do with being. In fact, Heidegger writes, «*ein Wissen von der φύσις (ἐπιστήμη φυσικῆ)*» is in an essential sense metaphysics so that «*voraus, da Metaphysik ebenso sehr »Physik« ist als die Physik »Metaphysik«*». ⁷¹ Metaphysics, for Heidegger, is that which lies outside of or beyond the sensuous essence of φύσις; ⁷² the student of φύσις, according to Heidegger, must turn away from the ὕλη simply given the way the Greeks thought τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικά and its accompanying mode of knowing, ἐπιστήμη. This Greek tradition, according to Heidegger, studies “being-ness,” οὐσία, simply as the universal feature of all things that are, and therefore excludes the Heideggerian question of the event of Being as a dynamic background dimension that is radically different from beings. Consequently, τὸ ἀγαθόν, it would appear, must be a permanent structure that is removed from the movement of the manifestation of entities.

Heidegger is not the only thinker to believe that Plato is looking toward a stable ever-existing present object. It has been said by other scholars that Socrates is working out a mathematical project of τὸ ἀγαθόν, investigating the ratios and proportions that exist between the oneness of τὸ ἀγαθόν and the infinite array of the images that it produces. This is identified

⁷¹ *Wegmarken*, “Vom Wesen und Begriff der Φύσις,” p.312, p.313.

⁷² *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, p.39.

with unity and “the Good with the One treat ‘truth’ as mathematical structure;”⁷³ furthermore, “Mathematical structure is both generated and revealed (a-leth’ed) by the generator of the numbers.”⁷⁴ Proponents of such an interpretation argue for the permanence of the ontological status of τὸ ἀγαθόν, since “the goodness (ἀρετή) of a thing is shown by its permanence, beauty, and form...The basis of order therefore is unity, and thence unity or one-ness is the cause of all good, or good in itself.”⁷⁵ Since τὸ ἀγαθόν ‘lies beyond being,’ it is said to be self-sufficient, “Thus worth consists in ‘in-itselfness’ or self-hood’...Self-sufficiency is good when it arises from such all-inclusiveness.”⁷⁶ While I will not directly argue against Heidegger’s interpretation, to which I am greatly indebted, the relationship that the human being has to τὸ ἀγαθόν as something stable and permanent and as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας must be reinvestigated. To gesture toward a neglected hermeneutical approach, I will focus upon a phenomenology of excess. Through this discussion, I wish to recoup the term “presence.” A metaphysic of presence, according to this interpretation, does not signify a permanent structure of being, divorced from the world of phenomena. Rather by “presence” I will mean a total excess and surplus of being and meaning. It is an ineffability that is founded within the overwhelming exposure of the movement of entities themselves. If it is true that Socrates passes beyond this realm of entities into an ineffable and transcendent realm, it is due not to the withdrawal of entities but rather to an experience of excess or overabundance that is characteristic of τὸ ἀγαθόν.

In this chapter, I will borrow from Paul Frieländer’s insight into the moments of pain and agony inherent in Plato’s ascent to help explain the experience one has when confronted by that

⁷³ Samuel C. Wheeler III, “Plato’s Enlightenment: The Good as the Sun” *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Apr., 1997), pp.171-188, p.172.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.173.

⁷⁵ “Plato’s Enigmatic Lecture ‘On the Good,’” p.12.

⁷⁶ “Plato’s Idea of the Good,” p.250.

which is excessively present. Through such an experience, Socrates is made aware of that which is beyond one's normal and everyday comportment toward the world; he is placed in a state of "special receptiveness,"⁷⁷ what I have, in the previous chapter, termed "philosophical and erotic μανία." This discussion will give way to the event of givenness to reveal the structure of τὸ ἀγαθόν as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, through the analogy of the sun as a source that excessively gives gifts of images and forms found in the world of appearances. It will be shown through this analogy that τὸ ἀγαθόν is the dynamic movement of phenomena. Finally, I will reveal that Socrates is an earthly site of excess, evoking an excessive experience in himself and others, much as τὸ ἀγαθόν is said to do.

II. A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Good:

In this section, it will be revealed that Socrates is exposed to the overwhelming nature of τὸ ἀγαθόν. In this discussion, we will see that Socrates is not portrayed as retreating from the phenomenal world into a world that transcends it, but rather that he is immediately confronted with the world of phenomena. And being confronted by the world in this way, the question-worthiness of it manifests itself. This is to say, the initial appearance of the world moves out of its untroubled and pre-conceived manifestation and comes to light as fundamentally frustrating to human understanding. This frustration is due not to a limitation of the human intellect but rather the phenomena themselves are beyond the scrutiny of discursive understanding. The phenomena essentially lay outside of rational communication, such that the only means by which to communicate such exposure is through a vocabulary of frustration, pain, and toil. This will be revealed through a discussion of Socrates' unique habit of stopping and turning himself toward his own thought [νοῦς]. Instead of fleeing from or being merely unconcerned with the

⁷⁷ Plato: *An Introduction*, p.61.

overwhelming and immediate exposure to ‘what is,’ Socrates attempts to make his way through this exposure by communicating it with others in an attempt to make rational sense out of that which is fundamentally frustrating. This process is characterized as difficult and filled with pain and toil, driving Socrates into philosophical μανία.

Following Friedländer, I wish to draw attention to those passages in the Platonic corpus where traveling “along the way [κατὰ ὁδόν]” is marked with toil, pain, difficulty, distresses [πόννοι] (*Sym.* 210e), or, as Friedländer characterizes it, “anguish”⁷⁸ so that ‘what is’ suddenly [ἐξαίφνης] appears. The frustration, which one attempts to rid oneself of by further developing discursive methods, is a continual process and drives one into “philosophical μανία.” I will characterize this toil and pain and the sudden manifestation of ‘what is’ that results from the initial experience of that which lies beyond discursivity but which is nevertheless necessary to articulate for human experience and knowledge as philosophical μανία, which is given by the gods for our greatest happiness (*Phdr.* 245c). In other words, one attempts to recapture the initial experience of ‘what is’ through discursive means, moving upwards, as it were, toward ‘what is.’ However, no form of communication is able fully to grasp this experience, since it lies beyond being.

SOCRATES’ UNIQUE HABIT

On his way to Agathon [εἰς Ἀγάθωνος] (whose name means “the Good,” τὸ ἀγαθόν), “Socrates turned himself toward his own thought [τὸν οὖν Σωκράτη ἑαυτῷ πως προσέχοντα τὸν νοῦν],” and being left behind as he walked “along the way [κατὰ ὁδόν],” he sent Aristodemus in his place (*Sym.* 174d).⁷⁹ This behavior, as odd as it seems to those

⁷⁸ Cf. *Plato: An Introduction*, pp.67, 69, 74.

⁷⁹ In fact, Agathon continuously pesters both his slave and Aristodemus to call Socrates to the banquet. The “image” of himself that Socrates has sent in his place, in fact, gestures toward him. Stanley Rosen writes “Socrates’ absence

attending the symposium, is, we are told, “a certain habit that he has [ἔθος γὰρ τι τοῦτ’ ἔχει],” in which he sometimes stands apart from whither he goes and “by chance [τύχη] there he stands” (*Sym.* 175b). Alcibiades later recounts similar behavior, which he witnessed during a military campaign, to this same group of friends. Socrates stood fixedly deep in thought [συννοήσας] from dawn of one day till dawn of the next, and when the sun rose he offered a prayer to the sun [προσευξάμενος τῷ ἡλίῳ] and then went on his way (*Sym.* 220d). These references to Socrates’ unique habit of standing apart [ἀφίστασθαι] from his mundane surroundings and turning himself toward his own thought explicitly draw our attention to broader concepts in Platonic thought, such as τὸ ἀγαθόν and the sun. Furthermore, through the illustration of Socrates’ particular habit, Plato gives us a recommendation for how one is to correctly comport oneself toward both the sun and the good, even though both stand in excess of the phenomenal world.

We may be tempted to characterize Socrates’ odd habit as a movement away from the phenomenal world and a withdrawal into inner subjectivity. Portraying Socrates’ customary behavior as a turning to his own νοῦς may lead us to believe that Plato conceived of our relationship with the world in a modern subject/object model, in which the world is set over and against the individual. According to this model, what appears to us and ‘what is’ may be ontologically separated, thus leading us into a radical skepticism. After all, sense objects are said to be unknowable,⁸⁰ since they are unstable, irregular and always changing, and so can only be objects about which one merely opines. In other words, according to this interpretation, sensible objects can appear as what they are not in a radical sense. Consequently, individuals who “hold

is as important as his presence,” *Plato’s Symposium* (Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 1987), p.27. Pointing ahead to the last section of this chapter, Socrates himself, like τὸ ἀγαθόν, makes images of himself, which throw his interlocutors into ἀπορία.

⁸⁰ “Plato’s Enlightenment: The Good as the Sun,” p.176.

fast to such objects wander [πλανώμενοι] amid that which are many and are in all kinds of ways [έν πολλοῖς καὶ παντοίως], are not philosophers,” while “those who are philosophers are able to grasp [έφάπτεσθαι] that which is capable of always holding itself in all respects [οἱ τοῦ ἀεὶ κατὰ ταῦτὰ ὡσαύτως ἔχοντος δυνάμενοι]” (R. 484b). In fact, *Republic* book VII describes the cave dwelling individual who, unfettered, is turned away and compelled “by force [βία]” (R. 515e), from the collected, shared closed-economy of images found within the cave and is led upward toward the sun’s blinding light. There his eyes slowly begin to grow accustomed to the light. The allegory of the cave describes the manner in which the individual begins a study of the shadows he once saw, then reflections, images, then the night-time celestial bodies until, finally, “one is able to look down upon and gaze at the sun itself in according with itself in its own space [τὸν ἥλιον αὐτὸν καθ’ αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ χώρᾳ δύναιτ’ ἄν κατιδεῖν καὶ θεάσασθαι]” (R. 516b).

THE ANGUISH OF PHENOMENA

Passages such as these seem to suggest that Socrates’ turning himself toward his own thought is a purely theoretical exercise, especially if one interprets the allegory of the cave as an image of the discussion of the geometry of the divided line. Here, as it is typically depicted, is a hierarchy of being, in which there is a strong and absolute break between the sensual world and the world of ideas and forms.⁸¹ However, if we pay attention not only to the outcome of the ascent but to the *process* itself, we notice that the prisoner’s ascent, and by extension the philosopher’s intellectual ascent, is fraught with pain and toil due to exposure to the phenomena themselves. Take note that ἀλγεῖν, suffering or bodily pain, is used twice in *Republic* 515c-e

⁸¹ See Ian Mueller, “Mathematical Method and Philosophical Truth” *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.183-194.

and once to “ὄδυνᾶσθαι,” “suffering,” to describe the now freed prisoner’s condition of being exposed to light of the sun, illuminating the phenomenal world. The illumination of entities is so bright and places the prisoner in a state of ἀλγεῖν that the prisoner is in a state of ἀπορία (*R.* 515d) in his attempt to reconcile what he formally experienced, in the cave, to what he is now exposed. There is no radical break to be found. Rather, we are presented with the prisoner working his way through the phenomena, attempting to make rational sense out of them, until he arrives at the truth, which is always present throughout the process. Plato describes a similar process in both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. The “ladder of love” begins with one particular beautiful body up until one sees beauty itself and then, at last, the final secret (*Sym.* 211b), which is realized only after “every previous distresses [πόννοι]” (*Sym.* 211a). Moving up the ladder, one does not simply leave behind the initial phenomenon of the beautiful body. Instead, the lover is confronted with how to resolve the fact that the beauty found in this particular body is now found in multiple bodies and eventually in intellectual concepts, finally beauty itself (*Sym.* 211c), which will suddenly [ἐξαίφνης] appear within this movement of appearances. Similarly, in the *Phaedrus*, the lover suffers philosophical μανία due to the beloved’s presence, by which the lover recollects true beauty (*Phdr.* 249d). The lover is said to be experiencing both μανία and ἀπορία due to the “soul being stung and caused to suffer [ἡ ψυχὴ οἰστράῃ καὶ ὄδυνᾶται]” due to the beloved’s affects upon him (*Phdr.* 251d). See also, *Phaedrus* 251c where the entire soul throbs and gesticulates as those whose teeth are cutting through the gums due to the beloved’s presence which causes the feathers of the soul to grow in the lover, which is nothing other than the lover recollecting beauty and “what is most of all [τὸ ὄν ὄντως]” that he saw during the divine banquet awoken by the experience of the beloved’s “divine face” (*Phdr.* 251a). Exposure to the phenomena of the world has a profound effect upon the individual. Far from

being illusions and things to be left behind completely, these phenomena are felt throughout the entire process of gaining insight into the truth.

We could say that the process that the prisoner and lover are going through is itself nothing other than the pain and toil of the movement through the sensible objects, and that the truth arrived at cannot be found except through the pain and toil, which agitates the soul enough to move beyond but never leaves behind the initial manifestation of entities. In other words, the technical language that accompanies the ascent to ‘what is’ is not a dispassionate comportment, but should be read as “a way to the sciences, through the sciences, and beyond them,”⁸² and in fact the whole of book VII should be read as “one great dialectical myth.”⁸³

REENACTING THE DIVINE BANQUET

Mythical language concerning the highest forms of reality is taken up in the *Phaedrus*. While no human soul has fully glimpsed this place, the gods stand on the “back [νῶτα] of the heavens where, immediately, the revolving heaven carries them round and they look upon [θεωροῦσι] what is outside of the heavens [τὰ ἔξω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ]” (*Phdr.* 247c). Moreover, “the divine mind [θεοῦ διάνοια] in the way round [περιόδω] looks down upon [καθορᾷ] justice itself [αὐτὴ δικαιοσύνη], sound-mindedness [σωφροσύνη], and knowledge [ἐπιστήμη]” (*Phdr.* 273d), but the human soul “sees some things and not others [τὰ μὲν εἶδεν τὰ δ’ οὐ]” and because they are troubled by the unruly horse they “with toil look down upon ‘what is’ [μόγισ καθορῶσα τὰ ὄντα]” (*Phdr.* 248a). According to this myth, to be ensouled in a human body requires not only that one has already glimpsed at least a small portion of οὐσία ὄντως οὔσα during the divine banquet (*Phdr.* 249e) but that the path to this place is

⁸² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p.76.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.70.

inherently fraught with toil, μόγις. To be human, then, according to the myth, is to reenact the divine banquet, here on earth, attempting to catch sight of the truth but always fundamentally through much toil.

Κάθαρσις, or perhaps a “loosening” or “setting-free” [λύσις] (*Phdr.* 244d-e), is one such enactment and communication of μανία. To illustrate, μανία as κάθαρσις expresses itself when excessive suffering becomes too much to bear, allowing one to participate in pure excess, while, at the same time, “setting oneself free from present ills [λύσιν τῶ ὀρθῶς μανέντι τε καὶ κατασχομένῳ τῶν παρόντων κακῶν εὐρομένη]” (*Phdr.* 244e). Here, we are not only a receptive site for the excess but the source of it as well. Only in μανία, in being exposed to excess, can one, in a sudden outlet, release oneself from the excess by *participating* in the excessiveness of it. Consequently, we are able to express the excess *as fundamentally* excessive. For example, Achilles, who is overcome by excessive pain, can only release himself from it by participating in an excessive expression of that pain. Upon seeing Patroclus’ corpse, he “rends his hair with his hands [χερσὶ κόμην ἤσχυνε δαΐζων]” and “wails terribly [σμερδαλέον δ’ ὄμωξεν]” (*Iliad* XVIII 27, 35). His anguish is so awful that it exceeds human expression, a form of communication without discursive content, and as such its significance cannot be understood by the merely human. While his handmaidens can only cry with him, the goddess, Hera, hearing his excessive crying, comes to his aid. Only in the participation in that which exceeds the human can Achilles truly express his traumatic experience, transcending the human, calling upon the goddess and the divine itself. If, then, philosophical ἔρωσις shares in this givenness, which as the fourth type of μανία it seems that it must, one not only passively receives the distress of the illumination of Being but, through its excess, one actively participates in the agitation of illumination.

At the end of her initiation rites, Diotima, in the *Symposium*, tells Socrates that a “wondrous vision, beautiful in nature, will suddenly [ἐξαίφνης] be perceived” (*Sym.* 210e), but not until he has completed “all of the previous distresses [ἔμπροσθεν πάντες πόνοι]” (*Sym.* 210e). The previous distresses refer to the initiation into erotic matters that those who are philosophically minded, like Socrates, must undergo. To refer to the initiation in terms of a distress suggests that the initiate undergoes, suffers, or is affected by [πάθειν] something to which he is exposed. This, I believe, is the essentially and internally failed discursive exercise the initiate goes through over and over to make propositional sense of the initial experience of the beloved, as described in the “ladder of love.”

Diotima’s initiation into erotic matter is not the only method by which the beautiful itself suddenly, and thus non-discursively, appears but also appears in the correct instruction of the lover instilling in the beloved the correct habits and character (*Phdr.* 252d-253c) and after this, the lover must account for the initial experience of beloved. *Vis-à-vis* the beloved, the lover recollects the divine banquet, during which the human soul follows a certain god and lays hold of that god “by memory [τῆ μνήμῃ]” (*Phdr.* 253a). This individual is said to be “enthused [ἐνθουσιῶντες]” and receives from this god “habits and practices [ἔθη καὶ τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα]” (*Phdr.* 253a), which the lovers say is given by their beloved. By imitating [μιμοῦμενοι] the god, they lead the beloved into that practice and idea [ιδέα] of the god by means of persuasion and ordering [ῥυθμίζοντες] (*Phdr.* 253b). This describes the initiation of the beloved into the way of ἔρως (*Phdr.* 253c). It is a type of learning, just as “the idea of the good [ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ιδέα] is the greatest object of learning [μέγιστον μάθημα]” (*R.* 505a). And yet, this initiation is never completed; the lover is “always being initiated into the perfect initiations [τελέους ἀεὶ τελετάς τελούμενος]” (*Phdr.* 249c), since it is not through the

beloved that the lovers receive their divine habits and practices but rather through divine dispensation, originating from a source beyond and despite themselves, since “from Zeus, they draw inspired water, just as bacchantes and pour it into the souls of those they love” (*Phdr.* 253a). This flow of waters, which Zeus named yearning [ἴμερος], plentifully falls [πολλὴ φερομένη] upon the lover, and when filled to the brim it flows outside, rebounding off the lover and returning to the beloved who is, in turn, filled with ἔρωσ, “but is perplexed as to with whom and does not know at what he suffers, and consequently is unable to speak [φράσαι] of it” (*Phdr.* 255d). The initiation rites, then, are an ever increasing cycle of agitation resulting in μανία. It is this responsiveness to the beloved that one must dwell within even though it leads to nothing but ἀπορία (*Phdr.* 251e), the lover will reach the highest and most profound experience of the initiation.

TRAVELING THROUGH THE PHENOMENA

However, if, as Diotima tells us, everyone seeks τὸ ἀγαθόν (*Sym.* 206a),⁸⁴ the question arises, to what is the philosophically minded individual exposed that the masses are not? Diotima gestures towards an answer,

These are the erotic matters, which even you Socrates, could be initiated into. For the highest mysteries [τὰ δὲ τέλεα καὶ ἐποπτικά], I do not know if you are the sort of person for the sake of which these things are, *if one correctly abandons oneself* [ἐάν τις ὀρθῶς μετή] (*Sym.* 209e-210a).

Here, Diotima casts doubt on the young Socrates’ ability to be initiated into the erotic mysteries. Later she makes this doubt more clear. Socrates is too concerned with the sight of a multitude of bodies, so much so that “he has been struck out of himself [ἐκπέπληξαι]...only to behold them

⁸⁴ Socrates makes the same statement at *Republic* 505d-e; “everyone seeks those things that are [τὰ ὄντα ζητοῦσι]” and emphasizing this to a greater extent he says of τὸ ἀγαθόν that it is “that which every soul pursues and brings about for its own sake....”

and to be with them” (*Sym.* 211d-e). Diotima explicitly chides Socrates for not being the type who would “abandon himself,” giving himself over to the exposure of excess, instead he strives to lessen the agitation by being with the multiple bodies, uncritically affected by them. However, the young Socrates’ experience differs from the more mature Socrates’ depiction of the lover, whom he describes in the *Phaedrus*. Here, he speaks of the initial experience that the lovers have of their particular beloved as not only “striking them out of themselves [ἐκπλήττονται],” but “they do not understand that which they suffer [τὸ πάθος ἀγνοοῦσιν]” (*Phdr.* 250a). Instead of ignoring or attempting to alleviate this suffering, as the young Socrates does before undergoing the initiation rites into the erotic mysteries, the lover, in the *Phaedrus*, seeks to understand what it is about this *particular* beloved that makes him stand out from among the anonymous masses. It forces the lover to ask why this *particular* beloved causes him discomfort and throws him into ἀπορία (*Phdr.* 251c-251e). Charles Griswold Jr. is correct to stress that

the lover is struck by beauty and *then* he divinizes the beloved. It is the beloved’s beauty and not his character that attracts the lover. Presumably if the beloved’s soul were the object of the lover’s attentions, it would be because it was beautiful. In contrast with the approach of the nonlover, the lover does not calculate his potential profits and losses in selecting a beloved. Indeed, he does not really stop and choose the beloved at all...Nor will the beloved respond to the lover with a computation of gain and losses...it seems that he is the source of character for the beloved. There is no indication that the beloved is beautiful because he *knows*, in a discursive sense, *what* beauty is...the beloved just *is* beautiful.⁸⁵

The lover, if he is a true lover and is not concerned with an economy of exchange between himself and his beloved, must be concerned with the beloved’s divine character, which is the source of true beauty. This source of the beloved’s attractive force must always remain a mystery; the beloved simply is beautiful and places the lover in a condition of ἀπορία. Such a

⁸⁵ *Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Phaedrus*, p.125.

lover, like Achilles, must “abandon himself” to the suffering and as a result dwell in the discomfort that the unknowing of ἀπορία brings with it.

The young Socrates, even though undergoing the experience of many beautiful bodies, does not, it would appear, give pause and properly reflect upon this experience. He simply takes it for granted, taking pleasure in gazing upon the multiplicity of the beautiful bodies. We must not forget that the “ladder of love” begins with an experience of a particular beloved. The ascent through the stages of Diotima’s initiation makes clear that the initiate “comes to see such a certain single means of knowing [τινὰ ἐπιστήμην μίαν τοιαύτην] that is of this type a beauty” (*Sym.* 210d). This singular means of knowing brings forth what Diotima terms “a great open sea” of beauty (*Sym.* 210d). An open sea manifests itself in many different forms and is undergoing continuous changes. Consequently, “the problem of how to reduce the fluidity or fluency of oceanic speech to its ultimate unity is the problem of the transition from discursive thought to intuition.”⁸⁶ As Gadamer asks,

But how are we to reconcile the manifold of true reality with the unity of the true good?...we cannot treat the matter as if we were dealing with some new, ultimate step leading from the multiplicity of ideas to the ‘principle’ of the one and the good. On the other hand, one would certainly not want to say that the idea of the good is comprehended ‘in just the same way’ as all the other ideas.⁸⁷

A paradox has come into view; a unity appears as a multiplicity, which can only be understood to be a unity by first being revealed in its multiple forms, and thus that unity is itself only understandable as overwhelming, unutterable, inexpressible, at least discursively so. And yet, the young Socrates, concerned only with the multiplicity of beautiful bodies, is unconcerned with grasping the unity of the beautiful itself, which is manifest in each of the distinct appearances of the beautiful bodies. The paradox of the one and many, along with the inability to comprehend

⁸⁶ Stanley Rosen, *Plato’s Symposium* (Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 1987), p.268.

⁸⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy,” trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p.86.

just how this unity can be spoken of, is, I believe, the toils and pains in Diotima's initiation of which she speaks and warns Socrates.

Consequently, correctly abandoning oneself does not constitute quietude. The lover initiated into erotic matters through the "ladder of love" is forever faced with the task of attempting to discursively account for the initial non-discursive experience of the beloved. Let it be noted that within Diotima's ladder proper there is no indication that the experience of "loving one body itself" (*Sym.* 210a) is able to be discursively accounted for; it is simply stated as occurring; but if this experience is analogous to the non-propositional experience of the beloved described in the *Phaedrus*, certainly an inference can be drawn. Within the ladder proper, the lover is concerned with discursive argumentation, increasing in complexity as the ascent becomes higher. One can only imagine that this inability to account for the experience of the beloved causes an intellectual friction, toil, and discomfort within the lover, driving him into philosophical *μυρία*, until, at last, beauty itself suddenly manifests. The "ladder of love" is bookended by two non-discursive exposure points between which one gives a discursive account of the initial experience. This is to say, in attempting to account for the beloved's presence, the lover pushes conceptual language to its extremes and finally ruptures it. The final vision of the beautiful itself, which one suddenly [*ἐξάφνης*] sees, is something "wondrous [*θαυμαστόν*]" (*Sym.* 210e). As Stanley Rosen writes, "The 'wonderful' (*θαυμαστόν*) nature of beauty in itself is a sign that no *logos* can be given of it. Diotima's poetic account, with its emphasis upon visual imagery, is rather a prophecy of the step from philosophy to wisdom."⁸⁸ The sudden appearance of this something that is wondrous simply seizes the lover. Only in his travel through the

⁸⁸ Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Symposium* (Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 1987), p.269.

different ways in which the one and particular beloved manifests does the lover (re)experiences him.

ECSTATICALLY GREETING THE SUN

Philosophical *μανία* is not an emotion, if this would entail a mere subjective condition or a possession of the subject. It is “given as a divine gift [θεία μέντοι δόσει διδομένης]” (*Phdr.* 244a) and, consequently, is a state of being that one cannot renounce but rather suffers (*Phdr.* 238c, 252c, 255d). By abandoning himself, at Diotima’s behest, the lover lies in supplication. Ridding himself of the quest to possess the beautiful, he instead participates and gives birth in beauty, since the work of *ἔρω*s is giving birth in beauty in both body and soul (*Phdr.* 206b, 206e). The goal is not the beautiful itself but what comes from it (*Phdr.* 206e), i.e., beautiful discourse. Certainly, what beautiful discourse is, for Socrates, as is revealed throughout the dialogues, is that form of discourse which ends in *ἀπορία*, waylessness, or non-knowing, which is meant to spur one on to further investigate that which one is made not to know.⁸⁹

Regardless of his deference, Socrates, in both the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic*, does express that the place above the heavens and *τὸ ἀγαθόν*, which lies beyond being, appear to him. In fact, although stress is laid upon the inability to speak discursively of and thoroughly to describe *τὸ ἀγαθόν*, it must nevertheless be known in some sense. Moreover, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates goes on to give a *μῦθος* of that place beyond the heavens, saying “for I must dare [τολητέον] to speak the truth” (*Phdr.* 247c). Derived from *τολμάω*, *τολητέον* suggests an “undertaking” or “bearing something terrible or difficult.” So, again, Socrates emphasizes the toil, pain, and agitation that his way of inquiry places him in.

⁸⁹ This is certainly the case for the Socratic dialogues, which all end in *ἀπορία*. I believe that, through this dissertation, I have and will point out certain places in the Middle dialogues where Plato is still concerned with *ἀπορία*. We have seen that this is the case in the *Phaedrus*, the *Symposium*, and now in the *Republic*. That this is Plato’s concern in the Late dialogues, I cannot say.

In *Republic* book VI, Socrates states that humans oftentimes speak of a “good itself [αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν]” in the case of all those things that we set down as many. “Referring them to one idea [κατ’ ἰδέαν μίαν] of each one as if being one, we address/greet [προσαγορεύομεν] each one as it is [ὅ ἔστιν]” (R. 507b). Setting aside a discussion of τὸ αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν until the next section, let us, for the moment, focus upon the significance of greeting or addressing each entity as ὅ ἔστιν. We have seen above that Socrates, in the *Symposium*, greets the sun, the offspring of τὸ ἀγαθόν, by offering a prayer. This form of greeting seems appropriate, since the sun is a one of the “gods in the heavens [τῶν ἐν οὐρανῷ θεῶν]” (R. 508a). According to Jacques Derrida, to greet another, to say *salut*, opens a space for the origin of community, of a religion. The greeting, in other words, is a responsive openness to the unforeseeable irruption of the visitor. The former facet, the gathering, is a call from the visitor; an obligation is laid upon the addressor. This obligation takes the form of faith placed upon the addressor, being burdened with the trust that the visitor is who he/she/it says it is. The respondent is obliged to take the promise of the visitor in good faith and credit.⁹⁰ Consequently, intentionally placing himself as the addressor, Socrates approaches the sun, and thus the divine, in supplication. It is given, and thus is a site of reception.

Socrates’ custom of turning himself toward his own thought [νοῦς], which compels him to stop and stand apart from his everyday surroundings, is described as occurring by chance, τύχη. Τύχη should not be thought of as ‘luck’ or that which is uncaused or even as an event that occurs at random. Instead, what occurs by τύχη happens contrary to what the individual does or intends. Derived from the verb τυγχάνω, “to hit a mark with an arrow,” τύχη suggests, then, to be hit or to obtain something from the gods. We could say that Socrates’ habit that comes

⁹⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” *Act of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), p.71.

through τύχη is an overwhelming exposure to ‘what is.’⁹¹ Socrates is, then, seized by an irresistible and irrepressible force, which compels him to turn to his own νοῦς, contrary to what he may desire. Consequently, Socrates’ habit comes upon him, striking him with a force that cannot be defended against. In fact, when considering the matter that has placed him deep in thought “he cannot advance it [οὐ προὔχωρει αὐτῷ]” (*Sym.* 220d). This resistance causes Socrates to stand apart from the everyday circumstances in which he finds himself and to attempt to articulate that which is inherently incommunicable. And, as a consequent, the matter appears to him, due to its resistance, as question-worthy. The paradox of τὸ ἀγαθόν as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας strikes him and, unlike the many who are unaffected by it, Socrates dwells in this experience. The active, external force of τύχη places the individual in an essentially passive state, or perhaps better put, Socrates “stood fixedly, in that place [αὐτόθι εἰστήκει].” And so it makes the individual a receptive site of exposure to that which is essentially beyond him or her.

Socrates has been forced into an immediate and non-discursive state during his confrontation with the sun, forcing him to stand apart whither he goes, or rather from his everydayness. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates characterizes the lover as “standing outside [ἐξιστάμενος] of human interests and toward the divine, but he is rebuked by the many as out of his senses [παρακινῶν], they have forgotten that he is being enthused [ἐνθουσιάζων]” (*Phdr.* 249d).⁹² “Enthusiasm and divine madness do not mean a merging of the soul with something entirely different, but simply an aloofness or withdrawal from what people ordinarily call serious activities (ἄνθρωπινα σπουδάσματα).⁹³ But what people call “serious activities” are rather trivial matters to the lover, who forgets his “mother, brothers, and friends, neglects property and

⁹¹ See *The Ontology of Socratic Questioning in Plato’s Early Dialogues*, pp.73-75.

⁹² In *Republic VII*, the individual who has made the ascent from the cave and has again descended receives ridicule, 517a.

⁹³ *Plato: An Introduction*, p.80.

does not care for loss, but despises all customs [νομίμων] and properties he took pride in previously” (*Phdr.* 252a), so overwhelmed is he by the beloved. So, quite contrary to the notion that turning toward one’s own νοῦς is a withdrawal from the phenomenal world, it is in fact an opening up to the world so that the lover may experience that which is beyond the human. The philosopher, then, as a lover of learning that makes being “that *is* always” evident, not only suffers from divine μανία (*Phdr.* 249d) and is enthused [ἐνθουσιάζεω] (*Phdr.* 249e) but through the correct use of memory [ὑπομνήμασιν ὀρθῶς] (*Phdr.* 249c) is able both to initiate the beloved into the mysteries of ἔρωσ such that the beloved is in ἀπορία and through ἀνάμνησις to see beyond [ὑπεριδοῦσα] that which the many say exists [εἶναι] and lift his head to τὸ ὄν ὄντως, “what *is* most of all,” which “makes a god divine” (*Phdr.* 249c). Such an individual is himself always perfectly initiated into perfect mysteries because he stands outside of [ἐξιστάμενος] the busy dealings of the human, since the philosopher is enthused, *via* the recollection of the illumination of τὸ ὄν that the *beloved* awakens in him. Just as in the *Symposium* Socrates turns himself toward his own thought, in the *Phaedrus* we are given the image of the erotic philosopher standing outside of human affairs, which is not a theoretical activity but rather a response initiated by the divine character of entities.

III. The Solar Economy of τὸ ἀγαθόν.

We will now turn to an explicit discussion of τὸ ἀγαθόν; in particular, how and in what way τὸ ἀγαθόν makes itself manifest to the human being, while it is itself depicted as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, “lying beyond being.” When asked by Glaucon to give a thorough account [διήλθε] of τὸ ἀγαθόν (*R.* 506d), Socrates replies “let us dismiss, for now, what the ‘to be’ [εἶναι] of τὸ ἀγαθόν is. For it appears to me [μοι φαίνεται] to be greater than my reach

for the present thrust [ὀρμήν]” (R. 506e). While Socrates will remain utterly silent about τὸ ἀγαθόν itself,⁹⁴ since it eludes conceptual thinking, it must, nonetheless, in some way manifest itself to the individual according to a different manner of thought than that which is discursive.

Τὸ ἀγαθόν “appears” to Socrates; it literally “shines through” despite it being distant and beyond the ability to be reached by thought. While one cannot discuss τὸ ἀγαθόν itself, one can investigate it indirectly through a discussion of its offspring [ἔκγονος] and interest [τὸ τόκον] (R. 507a). In what follows, I will draw attention to the economic language and imagery that is used to discuss τὸ ἀγαθόν. Glaucon’s and Socrates’ conversation revolves around the double meaning of τὸ τόκος, meaning not only ‘offspring’ but ‘monetary interest;’ consequently, the exchange revolves around not only an erotic tone of generation but also that of gift giving and of repayment. This discussion is reminiscent of *Republic* book I, in which Cephalus and Socrates discuss one’s correct comportment toward wealth [οὐσία] and toward ἀρετή itself (R. 330d-333d).

But, first, it will be necessary to focus upon the significance of the sun standing in proportion with τὸ ἀγαθόν. The “solar economy” of τὸ ἀγαθόν will bring to the fore not only its ontological status through an exploration of the analogy with the sun but also the philosophical and erotic μανία that accompanies it.

THE SUN AND THE EYE

Although unable to speak of τὸ ἀγαθόν directly, Socrates is able to speak of it by way of an analogy with the sun, which is most like [ὁμοιότατος] it (R. 506e). Τὸ ἀγαθόν “has

⁹⁴ John Sallis also notes the silence of Socrates, *Being and Logos*, p.402, but I will emphasize that the reason is based upon erotic prophecy and thus the inability to be articulated discursively.

been begotten to stand in proportion with itself [ἐγέννησεν ἀνάλογον ἑαυτῷ]. As τὸ ἀγαθόν is in the space of that which is an object of thought [ἐν τῷ νοητῷ τόπῳ] with respect to thought [νοῦς] and what is thought, so the sun is in the space of sight and what is seen” (R. 508a-c). So, while τὸ ἀγαθόν gives the εἶδη their “‘to be’ and existence [τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν],” allows the εἶδη to be known (R. 509c), the sun—“one of the gods in the heavens [τῶν ἐν οὐρανῷ θεῶν]” (R. 508a)—through the outpouring of light, not only gives the eye the capacity [δύναμιν] to see entities but also gives [παρέχειν] the coming-to-be, growth, and nourishment [καὶ τὴν γένεσιν καὶ αὔξην καὶ τροφήν] of terrestrial objects, although itself is not any of these (R. 509b). In fact, the eye, the “most sun-like [ἡλιοειδέστατόν]” of the sensory organs (R. 508b), allows entities to manifest to the human soul, “when it grasps this, where truth and ‘what is’ [ἀλήθεια τε καὶ τὸ ὄν] shine [καταλάμπει], it thinks, comes to know, and appears to have thought” (R. 508d). The eye appears, at least metaphorically, to be a thinking organ since it allows the εἶδη of entities to shine through, making them manifest through the movement of appearances.

However, the eye “receives its power, as it were, just like an overflowing [ἐπίρρυτον] from out of an expenditure [ταμειυομένην]” (R. 508b). Consequently, the power of the eye is not the origin of sight. Rather its power originates from an expenditure of the overflowing of a divine solar origin. The power of sight found in the eye and originating from the sun is nothing other than that which the sun expends; it is what the sun, and thus the divine, does not need. Nevertheless, it is this wasteful expenditure that gives the eye not only the ability to see but what the eye is itself; not being an origin but it itself an expenditure, the eye is a place of accumulation of divine power. Little wonder, then, that simply hearing about the manner in which the sun and

τὸ ἀγαθόν give their abilities to the body and the intellect through expenditure, Glaucon sensing madness utters “by Apollo, what a daimonic excess! [”Ἀπολλων δαιμονίας ὑπερβολῆς]” (R. 509c). Returning to the *Phaedrus*, the beloved’s soul is a conduit that shines forth with its own particular luster [λαμπρός] of ‘what is’ (*Phdr.* 251a). The flowing out [ἀπορροήν] of beauty enters through the eyes, where the overflowing [ἐπιρρυείσης] nourishes [τῆς τροφῆς] the roots of the soul’s feathers (*Phdr.* 251b), causing a great vacillating discomfort. The soul, like the eye, is not the origin of its own capacity; rather it derives its power from an excessive source to which it is exposed. But when the lover attempts to make sense of this, he is maddened [ἐμμανής] (*Phdr.* 251e). Similarly, exposed to this insight, Glaucon must take recourse to the language of an excessive exclamation, since everyday language will not be able to capture what is being communicated.

While the eye and the power of sight are of the utmost importance for allowing the world to manifest itself, the power of sight is not its own but comes only from a divine source, i.e., the sun. The eye, then, does not have the ability to grasp this divine power. The eye undermines its own function in the face of its desire for reaching the excessively divine. The eye, we could say, strives to become the sun, for the eye is a symbol of the sun (R. 509d). There is an excessive desire to be the brilliance of the sun. Unable to become an equal to the sun, the eye must turn away from the divine overflowing source of its power, and so the soul must turn away as well. Both become ‘blind’ in the sense of being driven to μανία and ἀπορία. As a result, the sun, as the offspring of τὸ ἀγαθόν, is not only a source of illumination and enlightenment but also a source of pain (R. 515c, 515e, 518b) and μανία, which the sun engenders in those brave enough to gaze upon it (R. 509c, 517c). In other words, the sun, while marked with goodness, rationality, beauty, and truth, it is equally marked by non-discursivity and μανία.

THE EXCESSIVE GIFTS OF THE SUN

If the sun stands in analogy with τὸ ἀγαθόν, then it would seem, as I will now argue, that the latter also drives one to philosophical μανία through the excess of gifts that it bestows. Socrates states that “the idea of the good [ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα] is the greatest object of learning [μέγιστον μάθημα]; by availing oneself of it with just things and the others they become useful and beneficial [χρήσιμα καὶ ὠφέλιμα]” (R. 505a). This suggests that an entity or concept only becomes beneficial, in the sense of being an object of utility, if one knows how it is good or what relation it has to the “good.” Only by studying the greatest object of learning is one able to judge the “good” of anything in the sense of its use-value or in what way it might be beneficial. Τὸ ἀγαθόν is, therefore, a “pre-condition” of knowledge and ethics, according to Sallis.⁹⁵ Such a conception of τὸ ἀγαθόν as a ground or pre-condition of moral reasoning is itself found within the *Republic*.

We cannot ignore the overt language of economy that introduces the discussion of τὸ ἀγαθόν. As already mentioned, when Glaucon urges Socrates not to withdraw from and defraud him [ἀποστῆς] of the goal toward which they are aimed (R. 506d), Socrates answers that he can speak only to what “appears to be the offspring of the good [ἔκγονός τε τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ φαίνεται].” “Well, speak” Glaucon replies, “since you will pay me back [ἀποτίσεις] the narrative of the father afterwards” (R. 506e). Socrates responds, “I wish I were able to render what is due [ἀποδοῦναι] and for you to receive in full and not now simply the interest [τοῦς τόκους]. Receive this, the interest and the offspring of the good [τὸν τόκον τε καὶ

⁹⁵ *Being and Logos*, p.401.

ἔκγονον αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ]” (R. 507a). Playing on the double meaning of τὸ τόκος, as not only offspring but also monetary interest, the conversation takes on a tone of gift giving and of repayment, suggesting that the concept of τὸ ἀγαθόν could by certain individuals be conceived of in a closed-economy of exchange.

While the above interchange is certainly one of those comical and playful moments in Plato’s writings, we should not simply disregard it as *mere* word play. Instead, this play on words gives us insight into a discussion that would otherwise be obscured. For instance, the vocabulary of an economy of moral goodness was already introduced in *Republic* book I. Polemarchus asks his wealthy father, Cephalus, “Am I, then, your inheritor [σῶν κληρονόμος]?” (R. 331d). He asks this in jest, for the discussion up to this point has revolved around one’s just comportment toward wealth. According to Cephalus, justice is related to wealth [οὐσία];⁹⁶ he need not worry about being put into a position of lying concerning repayment of his debts. He relies upon his wealth [οὐσία] to make sure that he can balance the scales of economic exchange. What is given to him he can repay in equal exchange. When Socrates asks him, “What do you believe to be *the greatest good* [μέγιστον ἀγαθόν] you have enjoyed from the possession of your great wealth [πολλὴν οὐσίαν]?” (R. 330a), Cephalus answers that having great wealth reduces the anxiety of suffering or doing unjust acts. Cephalus need not worry or think critically about what the just action to take is given what his wealth and luxuries bring him. He has an opinion of the justice of repayment that is straightforward, unrefined, uncomplicated, and unsophisticated.

For Cephalus, one’s correct comportment toward wealth lies in being the mean [μέσος] between extremes: between his grandfather, who increased the family’s wealth, and his father,

⁹⁶ There is a two-fold sense to οὐσία, it means both “property” or “wealth” but also “being” or “substance.”

who wasted and spent large portions of it. And yet, Cephalus reveals himself to be unconcerned with bringing-forth something new. He is completely satisfied with what is immediately apparent; he is concerned only with maintaining his wealth at its present state, since he is concerned only with the μέσος.⁹⁷

As Socrates interprets Cephalus' stance, justice is "speaking truthfully to render what is due [ἀποδιδόναι]" (R. 331c-d). Everyone knows that this is true; this definition is the common opinion of the people (R. 331c). With this conception of justice, along with his self-described economic disposition, Cephalus strives to serve and propagate the status quo. As a result he "must adhere to the laws, human or divine, or he would have to spend his time finding out what justice is rather than in doing it...For Cephalus the just is identical to the law of the city...."⁹⁸ He endeavors to dispense and distribute the values which already exist, those that are already assigned and given by a system of signification so that these same values may change hands, circulate, and return to the same source. There will always be a return to the point of departure and a reappropriation. In other words, Cephalus concerns himself with exchangeability, homogeneity, and use-value. All value, for him, must be spent, rationally consumed, and finally exchanged for another commodity of equal value. Consequently, he already has a pre-conceived notion of what Justice is and everything that disagrees with it is excluded from consideration. He simply accepts and argues toward this concept instead of unfolding it. As a result, Cephalus represents the most extreme possible refusal to accept excess, expenditure, and philosophical tension.

Socrates too is, in a sense, not wholly unconcerned with the status quo insofar as he begins with the common, everyday opinions of his interlocutors. He even, as is revealed in the

⁹⁷ Cf. *Being and Logos*, p.326, for a similar interpretation.

⁹⁸ Allan Bloom, "Interpretive Essay," *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968), p.315.

Crito, stays true to the laws of Athens. What separates Socrates, however, from someone like Cephalus, or anyone else in Athens, is that he does not perpetuate the status quo but rather seeks to push the common understanding of concepts to their utmost extremes, pushing them to their breaking point. Socrates reveals that a particular concept does not fulfill the requirements that itself or the individual presupposes. Instead, the concept bursts through the conceptual framework in which it has been placed; it impacts the individual precisely because of the paradoxical status that it reveals. Such a rupture provokes us to consider the question-worthy status of the concept we hold.

For example, Socrates states that it is equally well known that if the lender should be crazed [μᾶνείς], then it would be unjust to either render to him what is due or to tell him the truth (*R.* 331c-d). Cephalus has never considered the consequences of this counter-argument, nor is he particularly troubled by this tension, given that he immediately departs, leaving his son to take up his argument. Unlike Socrates, who turns toward his own thought when confronted by the excessiveness of a concept, Cephalus removes himself completely from the area of exposure. And yet, Socrates has not simply refuted Cephalus' position, by arguing eristically; if this were the case, if Socrates were content to permit himself and interlocutor to refuse or refute the concept, he would fall into the same unphilosophical, tensionless space from which he attempts to remove himself and his interlocutor. Socrates does not do away with or attempt to destroy the concept of Justice or the great Good. He instead erodes the rationally held concept through an account that reveals the limits of the concept from within the concept itself.

THE GIVENNESS OF τὸ ἀγαθόν

If τὸ ἀγαθόν is a pre-condition for knowledge, this should not be taken to suggest that it is a concept of which we have objective and discursive knowledge. Socrates reminds

Adeimantus that he has heard of τὸ ἀγαθόν many times; Socrates, here, emphasizes nonetheless that “we do not have sufficient knowledge of it [οὐχ ἰκανῶς ἴσμεν]” (R. 505a). Even though their philosophical discourse has been continually aimed at τὸ ἀγαθόν, it has neither come into view, nor perhaps even been spoken of, discursively at least. In other words, even though the topic has been investigated by means of λόγος, it is possible, as Friedländer writes, that it “cannot be grasped even by the *Logoi*.”⁹⁹ This is why, when pressed by Adeimantus to give an account of it Socrates chides him, saying “does it seem to you just to speak as if one knows about that which one may not know [τις μὴ οἶδε]?”¹⁰⁰ (R. 506c). Clearly, then, τὸ ἀγαθόν does not simply indicate an imperative and universal obligation but rather a way of being that is awakened in the individual when one’s inability to articulate it is revealed. What Socrates terms τὸ ἀγαθόν, then, does not suggest “absolute goodness” in the moral sense. It is the conceptual name given to the originary experience of that which exceeds mere human experience.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ *Plato: An Introduction*, p.63.

¹⁰⁰ Socrates professes ignorance of τὸ ἀγαθόν in the same way as he acknowledges his ignorance at *Apology* 21d, “that which I may not know [μὴ οἶδα] I do not believe to know.” The use of the negative μὴ and not οὐ suggests that Socrates is not denying, in fact, that there are things which he does not know, but rather that he believes simply in thought that there may or may not be. He signals deference to the excessively unknowable. Socrates comports himself in a fundamentally human fashion, which is to say, with regard to the inherent limitations of knowledge.

¹⁰¹ In his discussion in the *Cratylus* Socrates gives the etymologies of τὸ ἀγαθόν. In so doing not only will what Socrates means by τὸ ἀγαθόν be made more clear, but also a movement that characterizes the ascent upward will be emphasized. Cratylus states that many of the names investigated signify motion (*Crat.* 437c-d). If all things are in motion, then that which does not impede this movement is “ἀγαστόν,” “deserving of admiration” (*Crat.* 412c), which itself, according to Liddell and Scott, is derived from the verb “ἄγαμαι,” “to wonder at, to be astonished.” According to this etymology, τὸ ἀγαθόν is given to that which is ἀγαστόν in regard to “θοοῦ” (*Crat.* 412c), “the quick, nimble, active.” Far from an essentially ethical connotation, although this is a derivative meaning, τὸ ἀγαθόν is applied to that which is *astoundingly* nimble or active. Τὸ ἀγαθόν, then, is that which is worthy of reverence insofar as that which is τὸ ἀγαθόν allows the thought of the individual to be carried away with an almost divine speed. For our purposes, what is important to keep in mind is that τὸ ἀγαθόν does not necessarily resemble “the nature of goodness, but rather that all the primary names into which it is resolved are assigned by the name-giver to elemental components of the nature of goodness that they naturally resemble,” Plato, *Cratylus*, trans. C.D.C Reeve “Introduction” (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998), p.xxxiv. The word “τὸ ἀγαθόν” does not, then, necessarily exhaust the concept of the word when one utters it; there is something else besides that conveyance of a certain concept that is at the same time confirmed when one utters the word.

The gift which Socrates refers to in his exchange with Cephalus does not wholly disappear. It is still present, but rather vanishes from which it is not suited. In this sense, the gift penetrates itself as a gift; it exists outside of itself so as to manifest itself as a gift that cannot simply be exchanged. It moves out of the anonymous homogeneity of the world of exchange-value and appears as unique. Marion writes concerning the gift, "...better the gift I give strictly to the degree that it renounces Being, that it makes an exception to presence, that it undoes itself from itself by undoing subsistence in presence."¹⁰² In other words, the gift does not ground itself but is, rather, a sign of its own ungroundedness. The gift has no origin to which to return. Socrates' example of returning a loan to a crazed lender pushes the concept of gift giving to its breaking point, such that the circle of exchange is ruptured. The concept of a just exchangeability is revealed to point always beyond the closed borders within which Cephalus has placed it. What Cephalus believed to be a self-subsistent entity reveals itself as dependent upon this particular presence and circumstance. Socrates has attempted to show Cephalus that the economy of Justice, and all instances of ἀρετή, cannot be reduced to a concept, in which the object of investigation is immediately manifest to us and to which we apply some theoretical concept. If one is tempted to do so, one runs the risk of believing that that which is manifest can and should be immediately understandable and thus destroys the gift as a gift.

THE TRUTH OF τὸ ἀγαθόν

Socrates will discuss τὸ ἀγαθόν in the same manner as he has discussed the greatest economic good. As in *Republic* book I, in book VI we must be on our guard against desiring either payment in full or being able to return a gift to its origin. In fact, before moving into a full

¹⁰² Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffery L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p.79.

discussion of τὸ ἀγαθόν, Socrates warns Glaucon “to be aware that I not beguile you of the thing heard, a spurious account rendering the interest [κίβδηλον ἀποδιδούς τὸν λόγον τοῦ τόκου]” (R. 507b). Socrates signals to Glaucon that whatever he hears, he must only regard it as something like that toward which he is aimed and not the goal; it is no more than a sign pointing beyond itself and thus should not be taken as a literal representation of that which he seeks. This is especially so since even in the case of “just and beautiful things, the many would choose those things which are seemings...but no one prefers to have those things which are seeming in the case of the good, but all seek those ‘things that are’” (R. 505d). When seeking τὸ ἀγαθόν no one is satisfied with opinions but rather only with the *truth* [ἀλήθεια] of the matter. And yet, as we have seen above, Socrates is silent concerning τὸ ἀγαθόν and can only speak of its offspring and interest; he can only pay back his debt to Glaucon, by way of images, which in fact fail in their fulfillment of that toward which they are aimed. Consequently, if Socrates is concerned at all with an economy, it is an economy that is marked by a perpetual reemergence and upsurge of a new reality. Here, Socrates engages in the squandering of concepts.

Socratic squandering is markedly different than the squandering of wealth in which Cephalus’ father partook. In the latter case, Cephalus’ father’s actions resulted in the utter destruction of his wealth, which Cephalus attempted to remedy and to reach the truth, the ἀλήθεια, of the greatest good by becoming the mean, a midpoint between the passing-away and coming-to-be of monetary exchange. Socrates, on the other hand, undoes concepts so that one is thrown into ἀπορία. The negation of the dyad, the either/or, is never reached. Socrates, much like the god Ἔρως, is concerned with the in-between state (*Sym.* 202e), that state in which

neither negations nor affirmations are reached, since that with which Socrates is concerned lies beyond being.

If we look to Socrates' etymology of ἀλήθεια found in the *Cratylus*,¹⁰³ we find a playful indication that Socrates himself did not believe the truth to be found in a μέσος between two conceptual poles, an either/or, as it seems to for Cephalus and others in the dialogues. Ἀλήθεια gestures toward motion and movement. Socrates breaks the word into two full words, “ἄλη” and “θεία,” “ceaseless divine wandering” (*Crat.* 421b). Consequently, ἀλήθεια does not simply suggest “truth,” let alone a correspondence theory of truth. Rather, one must embody the character of ἀλήθεια, as ceaselessly wandering in the divine. It should be noted that this ceaseless divine wandering differs remarkably from the wandering described by πλάνη, derived from the verb πλανᾶω, meaning “to err.” Plato uses this word, as we have seen above, to indicate a kind of wandering between two delineated points, e.g., coming-to-be and passing-away. In a sense, this type of wandering is no wandering at all but rather a staid motion where no movement is accomplished except between two points that the individual has decided upon in advance. It is a motion that vacillates between an either/or. On the other hand, ἀλήθεια, according to the etymology found in the *Cratylus*, has no such restrictions placed upon it. In fact, as ceaseless divine wandering, ἀλήθεια opens the human into a daunting space and an astonished way of being, so that when one speaks ἀλήθεια one is confronted by that which ruptures all conceptual thought. In the *Phaedrus*, the lover is said to recollect τὸ ὄν ὄντως, that which is beyond the heavens. It is that “by which god is divine [θεὸς ὧν θεῖος ἐστίν]” (*Phdr.*

¹⁰³ See *The Ontology of Socratic Questioning in Plato's Early Dialogues*, pp159-162, for another discussion of this topic.

249c). The god is divine given that is it beyond the realm of being and it is within this space that the winged mind of the lover dwells when thinking of ἀλήθεια.

REACHING OUT TOWARD τὸ ἀγαθόν

In *Republic* book VI, Socrates depicts τὸ ἀγαθόν as beyond the possible condition of human experience. It is not being with respect to existence [οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος], but, rather, “lying beyond being [ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας]” it exceeds [ὑπερέχοντος]¹⁰⁴ existence in both honor [πρεσβεία]¹⁰⁵ and capacity [δύναμις] (*R.* 509b). Consequently, τὸ ἀγαθόν cannot be thought in the same terms that entities can be. However, if τὸ ἀγαθόν is truly ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, the questions arise: what role can it play in being? And, moreover, what provokes one to reach out toward τὸ ἀγαθόν?

For Sallis, lying beyond being “means, in turn, that the good always shows itself *as it is not*.”¹⁰⁶ Τὸ ἀγαθόν, we are told, manifests itself only by way of images, its offspring [ἔκγονος] and its interest [τὸ τόκον], in such a way that it is not reducible to these images. However, we should not think of the self-manifestation in terms of withdrawal, unconcealment,¹⁰⁷ or as a protection against being profaned.¹⁰⁸ Instead, the presence that is made manifest by τὸ ἀγαθόν, through its offspring and interest, must be thought only in terms of an excess or an overabundance of πρεσβεία and δύναμις. Πρεσβεία is related, at least in meaning if not in form, to σεβίζω, “to worship or honor,” which itself is related to both the nouns σέβας, “reverential awe,” or “the object of awe, an object of wonder,” and the adjective σεβαστός,

¹⁰⁴ Ὑπερέχοντος suggest a “holding above” or “to be above or rise above the horizon.”

¹⁰⁵ While Samuel C. Wheeler III emphasizes that πρεσβεία is here referring to age and therefore logical priority, “Plato’s Enlightenment: The Good as the Sun,” p.185, I wish draw attention to its etymology

¹⁰⁶ *Being and Logos*, p.412.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.406.

¹⁰⁸ *Plato: An Introduction*, p.63.

“reverenced, august.” The latter two words are derived from the verb σέβομαι, “to feel awe or fear, to dread or fear.” The etymology of πρεσβεία will prove useful in terms of how we experience τὸ ἀγαθόν as excessive. We experience the overwhelming character of the power of τὸ ἀγαθόν, which cannot be expressed verbally. Overwhelmed by the recognition that the existence and the ‘to be’ of entities are nothing compared to that which exceeds them, no one is capable of verbally expressing the character of this power. It can only be revealed through the manner in which one behaves when confronted by such an experience. In fact, immediately before introducing the topic of τὸ ἀγαθόν Socrates states that it is “that which every soul pursues and brings about for its own sake [τούτου ἔνεκα], announcing like a prophet some ‘to be’ [ἀπομαντευομένη τι εἶναι], perplexed [ἀποροῦσα] and unable to receive sufficiently [οὐκ ἔχουσα λαβεῖν ἰκανῶς] just what it is” (R. 505d-e). If τὸ ἀγαθόν is a pre-condition of knowledge, it must be a pre-condition that is subject not to propositional discourse but, rather, to prophetic discourse; it must appear to us as ecstatically divine, as revealed in the previous chapter. In this prelude to τὸ ἀγαθόν, Socrates is clearly gesturing to excess. In this moment, one thought that the ground of one’s beliefs was steadfast but is now revealed to be nothing but prophetic signs gesturing toward that which cannot be expressed propositionally. One is either led to grasp that which has always appeared to be steadfast, ignoring the excessive experience, or to give oneself over to the experience, submerged and overwhelmed, allowing one’s thought to be spontaneously led until it reaches the rupturing point of discursivity, and to resort to speaking like a prophet. Thus, Socrates’ ignorance of τὸ ἀγαθόν does not result from it slipping away from him, hiding in obscurity, or even from its being a kind of supplement hidden in a blind spot.

Rather because he is blinded by the radiance of the images of τὸ ἀγαθόν, he is quite literally at a loss as to what to do with the excess of goods that τὸ ἀγαθόν gives.

Τὸ ἀγαθόν, consequently, appears in a two-fold manner; in its immediacy, τὸ ἀγαθόν reveals itself as a rational ground. However, to receive it fully and meaningfully, we must acknowledge the excessive element it contains. Appealing to the excessive element that permeates Socrates' mode of being and specifically to passages in which ἔρωσ, τὸ ἀγαθόν, and the sun come together, a non-discursive understanding of and relationship with that which is beyond one's everyday comprehension of the world is necessary. Passages such as these highlight Socrates' depiction of philosophy as "of all enthusiasms [πασῶν τῶν ἐνθουσιιάσεων], as the greatest form of μανία" (*Phdr.* 249e). By emphasizing the common pursuit of discussing the 'to be' of τὸ ἀγαθόν, while simultaneously stressing its prophetic nature, Socrates is pushing even this concept to its limit point. He ruptures the 'to be' of τὸ ἀγαθόν internally, revealing that it is not simply an ethical term which one is to follow as an imperative, but rather emphasizes that it is a way of being, Socrates attempts to communicate this rupture in such a way that brings to the fore its own insufficiency to be expressed discursively.

Friedländer cautions us, however, "to suspect an intentional mystification on Plato's part would be a misunderstanding. Plato is not a Neoplatonist."¹⁰⁹ And when he writes, "Plato's highest idea does not extinguish being, but is, as it were, within the chain of being; only it is so far above everything else that paradoxically it may be called *beyond* being, though still beyond *being*,"¹¹⁰ he seems to be missing a crucial point. In this sense, τὸ ἀγαθόν would be nothing other than a supplement to, or a remainder of, 'being.' As both the *Phaedrus* and the *Cratylus*

¹⁰⁹ *Plato: An Introduction*, p.64.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.77.

make clear, the gods have their own language that truly reveals the being of entities to which we are not privy. So all naming, while not mere convention, does allow entities to appear, but only as humanly understood. Hence, while the term ‘being’ is used by humans, it can only be used for the purposes of human conceptuality, so that we may recognize its offspring and interest when they manifest. Τὸ ἀγαθόν could not manifest itself to us whether as lying beyond being or within being, that is to say, as knowable, unless such language is utilized. However, τὸ ἀγαθόν *qua* τὸ ἀγαθόν is ineffable and we must, if we are to comport ourselves correctly with relation to it, recognize it as such, announcing its ‘to be’ prophetically, that is, as concerned with the divine. In other words, it must be thought of as existing prior to human conceptual knowledge. It is nothing other than the overabundance of our discursive experience. Socrates must reveal to his interlocutors that human discursive language must be sacrificed and squandered, if they are to correctly comport themselves to τὸ ἀγαθόν. And it is the communication of the insufficiency that allows us to recognize, paradoxically, that τὸ ἀγαθόν is one idea. To put it another way, only by revealing the insufficiency of τὸ ἀγαθόν to fulfill its own function as a ground of rationality does it, become possible, for the first time, to conceive that a multiplicity of concepts should exist in relation to it. It is, after all, a way of being and not a concept; the overwhelming power of which must be felt as ceaseless divine wandering and to which we must lie in supplication, offering a prayer.

IV. Socrates as Erotic Image Maker:

The discussion thus far has opened into an interpretation of τὸ ἀγαθόν as a site of excess. It was revealed that while τὸ ἀγαθόν *qua* τὸ ἀγαθόν is ineffable, the language that we assign to it, even ἐπέκειντα τῆς οὐσίας, is a conceptual framework which we must use to attempt to understand it. The conceptual understanding cannot wholly exhaust τὸ ἀγαθόν. Such

understanding always implies or gestures toward that which exceeds one's grasp. Although language conveys ideas and concepts, it cannot present τὸ ἀγαθόν as itself. The agitation felt by the individual when he or she recognizes this limitation of language is characterized by σεβαστός, reverential divine awe. The toil that accompanies the experience of τὸ ἀγαθόν *qua* τὸ ἀγαθόν denotes first and foremost an excess and the experience of it as *sui generis* and not reducible to any other way of being in the world. One's thought turns to it in a spontaneous response. This experience and the way of being in the world that results was said to give rise to philosophical μανία. I would now like to shift our focus slightly.

Within the present section, I will show that Socrates himself is an earthly site of excess. Describing himself as “greedy for making images [γλίσχρως εικάζω]” (*R.* 488a),¹¹¹ Socrates bears a striking resemblance to τὸ ἀγαθόν, so much so that “Socrates, it seems, is also akin to the good.”¹¹² While this image of Socrates as akin to the good has been associated with Socrates' art of midwifery,¹¹³ I will show that Socrates' very presence is excessive, characterized by agitation, confrontation, and disturbance in others. Like τὸ ἀγαθόν, Socrates exceeds discursive understanding precisely because his presence, as will be revealed, is inexpressible, primary, and not derivable from anything else.

SOCRATES AS EROTICALLY OUT OF PLACE

Socrates characterizes himself as ἄτοπος, literally “out-of-place,” with regard to the “wise individuals” with whom he contrasts himself, for he is persuaded by the mythical narrative of Boreas and the customary beliefs concerning it (*Phdr.* 229c). Furthermore, Socrates is geographically ἄτοπος. Famously Socrates is loath to leave the city even on threat of death,

¹¹¹ John Sallis turns to this passage in the *Republic* as well, *Being and Logos*, p.405.

¹¹² *Being and Logos*, p.405.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* p.412.

since as he says “the country place and the trees will not teach me, but the men in the city will” (*Phdr.* 230d). Despite being like a foreigner when outside the city’s walls (*Phdr.* 230a), Socrates is nevertheless more familiar with the terrain than is Phaedrus (*Phdr.* 229b-c); for he knows the location of Boreas’ altar, whereas Phaedrus, who has walked the same trail many times, says, “I have altogether not perceived it [οὐ πάνυ νενόηκα]” (*Phdr.* 229c). Phaedrus is so struck by Socrates’ peculiar ability to notice his surroundings that he calls Socrates “the most-out-of-place one [ἄτοπώτατός τις]” (*Phdr.* 230c). There is no place, either inside or outside the city, which Socrates can properly call home. While he relies upon his fellow citizens to converse with, he exceeds the city standing outside of everyday human affairs. He exists in a liminal state, straddling the threshold of the urbane city life and the wilderness, and as we will see presently, the human and the divine, as well as the rational and the non-rational.

Socrates’ display of ἀτοπία is so radical that Alcibiades admits that Socrates “is not similar to any human being [τὸ δὲ μηδενὶ ἀνθρώπων ὅμοιον εἶναι], neither those of long-ago nor those existing today, this is worthy of total wonder” (*Sym.* 221c). As a result, Alcibiades will praise Socrates by means of images “for the sake of the truth [τοῦ ἀληθοῦ ἔνεκα]” (*Sym.* 215a). Just as Socrates must speak of the offspring and the self-generated interest of τὸ ἀγαθόν, images of it, instead of τὸ ἀγαθόν, he says Alcibiades must speak in a similar manner concerning Socrates, likening him to both Sileni and to Marsyas, the satyr (*Sym.* 215b). Consequently, Socrates is so unlike anyone else, in both his own self and in his words, that Alcibiades must look to images that present a mixture of the human and the erotically divine to gesture toward Socrates’ being. The form of communication, then, used to best describe Socrates cannot be a literal description but rather must be mediated through images, images which Socrates himself generates.

Socrates, we are told, “most resembles [ὁμοιότατον] the Sileni,” so that when “the two halves are opened [διοιχθέντες] they appear to hold statues of gods [ἀγάλματα ἔχοντες θεῶν]” (*Sym.* 215b). Socrates, like a Silenus-statue, appears as he is not, but in a unique manner; although there are two parts to the statue, the external and internal, they are not in fact separate. The façade both hides and gestures toward its excess of images. A Silenus-statue is a Silenus-statue only insofar as it contains the promise and enticement of the images of gods, which spill out of it when opened. Likewise, Alcibiades anticipates that Socrates, when opened through conversation, will pour forth an irrepressible excess of images of the divine.

“For see,” Alcibiades exclaims, “that Socrates is erotically disposed [ἔρωτικῶς διάκειται] toward the beautiful ones and is always around ones such as these and is struck-out-of-himself [ἐκπέπληκται], and further he is altogether ignorant and knows that which he does not know [ἀγνοεῖ πάντα καὶ οὐδὲν οἶδεν]” (*Sym.* 216d). While this is the same depiction as the lover’s enthusiasm and philosophical μανία that Socrates describes in the *Phaedrus* (249d-250a), Alcibiades explains that Socrates’ eroticism is “something external in which he veils himself [τοῦτο γὰρ οὗτος ἔξωθεν περιβέβληται]” (*Sym.* 216d). Continuing with his metaphor of the Silenus-statue, Alcibiades states, “if you would, drinking companions, unfold [ἀνοιχθεῖς] his interior, he is more full of sound-mindedness [σωφροσύνης] than you would believe” (*Sym.* 216d). Alcibiades recounts the following: “I don’t know if any one has seen him being serious and unfolded [ἀνοιχθέντος] the statues inside. But I myself have seen them once and they seemed to me so divine and golden, utterly beautiful and wondrous, so that, briefly put, I had to do what Socrates commanded” (*Sym.* 216e-217a). He again emphasizes his fidelity to Socrates, admitting, “I was at a loss [ἠπόρουσιν], I went around having been made a slave

[καταδεδουλωμένος] by this human more so than anyone else has by another” (*Sym.* 219e). Socrates both reveals and conceals himself simultaneously, driving Alcibiades into ἀπορία.

SOCRATIC σωφροσύνη

What is unique about Socrates and what strikes Alcibiades into ἀπορία is the way in which philosophical erotic μανία and σωφροσύνη seem incongruent but cannot be thought as existing independently from each other within Socrates’ being. When engaging with Socrates, Alcibiades is subject to ἀπορία so much so that he is compelled to admit, “supposing myself having been dishonored, I admired both the sound-mindedness and the manliness [τε καὶ σωφροσύνην καὶ ἀνδρείαν] of his nature...although I could not be angry with him or deprive myself [ἀποστερηθείην] of being with him, nor did I find a way [ἡγύπόρουσ] how I could bring him near me” (*Sym.* 219d). While dismayed at Socrates’ dismissal of his erotic advancements, Alcibiades admires the rigid resistance of sound-mindedness that Socrates exhibits and yet it is this that leads Alcibiades to long for Socrates, revealing Socrates’ eroticism.

Although Alcibiades is drawn to Socrates in the hopes of having his way with him (*Sym.* 217a-d, 219b-e), hoping to be one of the beautiful ones that strike Socrates out-of-himself, Socrates due to his sound-mindedness is unmoved by the former’s erotic advancements. Indeed, because of his sound-mindedness, Socrates is unconcerned with the beauty someone may have, with regard to their wealth or honor, “feigning ignorance [εἰρωνεύομενος] and playing [παίζων] with humans, his whole life long” (*Sym.* 216e). There seems to be nothing that affects Socrates. Consequently, in attempting to woo Socrates, Alcibiades is met with an insurmountable impasse. The hidden beauty he finds in Socrates, his σωφροσύνη, is beyond Alcibiades’ control. Just as Socrates replies in the form of supplication when met head-on with the ineffable

and “unmanipulateable beauty [ἀμήχανον κάλλος]” of τὸ ἀγαθόν (*R.* 509a), revealing that every discursive concept of τὸ ἀγαθόν is question-worthy (insofar as they all fail to wholly capture it), it throws him into a distressful state of ἀπορία, so too is Alcibiades when he unfolds Socrates. After unfolding Socrates, Alcibiades is met with images spilling out so much so that he cannot penetrate the excessiveness of Socrates’ sound-mindedness.

Overcome by Socrates’ nature, Alcibiades is subjected to a unique moment of rejection whose daunting character is likened to a snake bite, and whose affects can in no way be understood except by one who has suffered the distress [ὀδύνη] (*Sym.* 218a), since it appears incalculable and arbitrary. In the experience of unfolding Socrates’ divine nature Alcibiades states, “I was struck [πληγείς] and was stung [δηχθείς] by his philosophical accounts” (*Sym.* 218a). Furthermore, this experience of the agony and distress caused by the experience of Socrates’ excessive and divine sound-mindedness is shared by everyone who has engaged with Socrates in the correct manner: “we are all struck-out-of-ourselves [ἐκπεπληγμένοι] and possessed [κατεχόμεθα]” (*Sym.* 215d), claims Alcibiades, who later states that everyone present, “having had a communal share [κεκοινωνήκατε] of his philosophical madness [τῆς φιλοσόφου μανίας] and Bacchic frenzy” (*Sym.* 218b). When opened, Socrates forces everyone within his sphere of influence into a state of bewilderment and ἀπορία.

The question before us is what is Socratic σωφροσύνη? How is it possible that what is usually thought to be a steely demeanor can give rise to philosophical μανία? I will now briefly answer these questions and in so doing finally reveal the way in which Socrates is truly an earthly site of excess.

A DRUNKEN SOCRATES

After his sudden and drunken appearance, Alcibiades bids everyone to drink and fulfill the agreement of his fellow companions to become drunk (*Sym.* 213e). After swilling the largest cup, Alcibiades orders the slave to refill the cup so that Socrates may drink but immediately exclaims “ὅπόσον γὰρ ἂν κελεύη τις τοσοῦτον ἐκπινῶν οὐδὲν μᾶλλον μὴ ποτε μεθυσθῆ” (*Sym.* 214a). William S. Cobb translates this phrase as “No matter how much anyone orders him to drink, he drinks it and still never gets drunk.”¹¹⁴ While other translations differ slightly,¹¹⁵ all render the Greek with the emphasis that Socrates never feels the affects of alcohol.¹¹⁶ In fact, Stanley Rosen claims that “Socrates is immune to intoxication...”¹¹⁷ This suggests, for Rosen, that Socrates has achieved a state of being that is beyond the physical realm, that he has steeled himself against the world so as to be unaffected. However, the final clause “οὐδὲν μᾶλλον μὴ ποτε μεθυσθῆ” should be rendered “*no more* the drunk” (*Sym.* 214a). This translation reveals that it is not that Socrates is in no way affected by intoxicating drink, rather that Socrates is, in a way, already intoxicated. Socrates is awashed in the phenomena of the world, as shown above; he is overwhelmed and makes others intoxicated by his presence. I will show not only that this form of intoxication is congruent with Socratic σωφροσύνη as depicted in the *Symposium*, but reveals Socrates’ excessive exposure to phenomena. This calls attention to the liminal state of the rational and the non-rational Socrates inhabits.

¹¹⁴ William S. Cobb, *Plato’s Erotic Dialogues* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993).

¹¹⁵ Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff render the phrase thusly, “Socrates will drink whatever you put in front of him, but no one yet has seen him drunk” *Plato: Complete Works* ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), while W. R. M. Lamb’s translation reads “However large the bumper you order him, he will quaff it all off and never get tipsy with it” *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 1953).

¹¹⁶ As far as I am aware, only Christopher Gill translates this phrase in a similar manner as I do, he renders it “However much you tell him to drink, he drinks without ever getting more drunk.” Although in endnote 21, he states “Socrates’ imperviousness to drink seems to be presented as part of his exceptional toughness and invulnerability to weakness, emotion or desire.” Christopher Gill, *The Symposium* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd, 1999).

¹¹⁷ *Plato’s Symposium*, p.291.

Socrates will become “*no more* the drunk.” Instead of suggesting a state of withdrawal from the world, something akin to what Socratic σωφροσύνη has been commonly interpreted, this passage indicates that Socrates is already overly affected by the phenomena, so much so that his usual way of being is no different than that of intoxication. Granted, Alcibiades, who is clearly drunk, acts much differently than does Socrates; the former attempts to control the circumstances in which he finds himself,¹¹⁸ unlike Socrates, who, as we saw above, is always seized by that which exceeds conception and gives himself over to the non-knowledge that accompanies this exposure. In other words, Socrates is seemingly unaffected by intoxicating drink, not because he is impervious to that which is corporeal but rather because, in a sense, he is already overly affected by phenomena such as “the beautiful ones” to the extent that he is stupefied, and thus is in a sense intoxicated. It is clear from Alcibiades’ depiction of Socrates that he is nothing other than the unfolding of himself, spilling out divine images. He is the open space within which all phenomena are allowed to manifest themselves in their immediacy. Like the χώρα, Socrates is a place that belongs neither to being nor to non-being, but rather is a third genus (*Tim.* 48e), a place in which the phenomena are able to manifest but which themselves can be addressed neither affirmatively (as being) nor negatively (as non-being). As such, Socrates is already out of his rational wits to the extent that he is always participating in philosophical erotic μανία.

However, it must be said that Alcibiades does stress that “no human has ever yet seen Socrates intoxicated” (*Sym.* 220a) and immediately above this, he admires both the sound-mindedness and the manliness [τε καὶ σωφροσύνην καὶ ἀνδρείαν] of Socrates’ nature, both

¹¹⁸ Not only does Alcibiades come suddenly and without notice, but in so doing he demands that everyone should drink to be drunk. And even when he claims to listen to whatever course of action Eryximachus should prescribe, Alcibiades gains control of the situation by claiming that because he is drunk and all the rest are sober he would make a poor showing. Although drunk, Alcibiades is unaffected by the world around him.

of which were exhibited in the retreat from Delium. He excelled Laches in his collectedness [ἔμφρων] and “bearing himself haughtily casting his eye suspiciously side to side, gently giving a sidelong glance on friend and enemy alike,” just as “he passes through those here” (*Sym.* 221b). Characterizing Socrates’ everyday behavior as sound-minded would seem to be the farthest depiction from μανία of any kind. And nevertheless, these passages frame Alcibiades’ account of Socrates standing barefoot in the cold, while on campaign, as well as his standing from dawn of one day till the next, deep in thought and offering a prayer to the sun. As indicated above, this behavior is indicative of Socrates’ philosophical μανία and exposure to the excessive nature of the sun. Consequently, if μανία is characterized by an excessive exposure to the phenomena, the σωφροσύνη that Socrates displayed both on the battlefield and when discussing with beautiful boys is indicative of such an exposure as well, but now radicalized such that what σωφροσύνη is is now question-worthy. We might be tempted to focus on the *Republic*, the dialogue in which Plato presents his conception of the ideal polis.

CHAPTER THREE
THE DIS-COMMUNITY OF LOVERS:
Initiation of lovers in the Phaedrus and kinship in the Lysis

...and finally, concerning the flaw in language such words as *communism* or *community* seem to contain, if we sense that they carry something completely other than what could be *common* to those who would belong to a whole, a group, a council, a collective, even where they deny belonging to it, whatever the form of that denial.

Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*

I. *Political Community versus the Communion of Lovers:*

In turning our attention to the issue of community, we might be tempted to focus on the *Republic*. However, if we were to place the *Lysis* and the *Phaedrus* at the center of our interpretation, we would find a radically different notion of Platonic community. Indeed, the difference between these notions can be seen in the very different ways in which the two proverbial expressions, the Homeric expression, “Ever, god leads like to like [αἰεὶ τοὶ ὁμοῖον ἄγει θεὸς ὡς τὸν ὁμοῖον],”¹¹⁹ as well as the saying, “Friends have all things in common [κοινὰ γὰρ τὰ τῶν φίλων],”¹²⁰ are understood throughout the writings of Plato. Oftentimes these are employed with political connotations,¹²¹ e.g., *Republic* 419a-424a and *Laws* 716c and 837b. In fact, at *Republic* 424a, Socrates uses the latter proverb to justify his argument that the establishment of the Good of the city-state should be aimed not at an individual or even toward a class of individuals but rather toward the city-state as a whole (*R.* 420b). Furthermore, law is aimed at “the city as a whole, fitting together [ξυναρμόττων] the citizens by persuasion or compulsion, requiring them to give a share of benefit to one another the benefit that each class

¹¹⁹ *Lysis* 214a, *Laws* 716c, *Laws* 837a, *Phaedrus* 255c.

¹²⁰ *Phaedrus* 279c, *Lysis* 207c, *Laws* 739c, *Republic* 424a and 449c.

¹²¹ See Mary P. Nichols “Friendship and Community in Plato’s *Lysis*,” *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), p.1.

can bring to the community [κοινόν]” (R. 519e-520a). Ultimately, we are reminded that only those individuals who themselves participate and share in the Good [τὸ ἀγαθόν], and can thus be called good, can be friends.¹²² What binds these individuals, then, together in a community is τὸ ἀγαθόν. The city, as a whole, looks to the one [τὸ ἓν], for the other name for τὸ ἀγαθόν is “the one.”¹²³ Through law, the citizenry is all aimed at the same future goal, each of them governed by the same sovereign force, that is, τὸ ἀγαθόν. As a result, τὸ ἀγαθόν must be made to appear immediately present to the citizenry, since it is shared by all and would define them as being alike.

ASSIGNED A ROLE BY τὸ ἀγαθόν

In the *Republic*, Socrates attempts to reveal the sovereignty of τὸ ἀγαθόν by examining the body politic. For instance, in *Republic* book II, Socrates tells his companions, “let us observe a city coming-into-being λόγῳ” (R. 369a), that is, in *logos*, in demonstrable word. This argument not only reveals the birth of a city but it allows Socrates and his interlocutors to witness the coming-into-being and the subsequent passing-away of justice as well; that is, it allows them to speak of the relationship individuals must express toward one another if the city is to function properly. Moreover, recalling the discussion from book I concerning whether it is better to live the just life or not, Glaucon questions whether Socrates is serious that one should be just rather than unjust and asks whether there “exists a kind of good [τὸ ἀγαθόν]” which we should desire for both its effects and for its own sake (R. 357b). Socrates remarks that it is to this kind of good that justice belongs, linking the concepts explicitly, and states that it is of this which they will speak and look for in their city and within its citizenry.

¹²² Cf. *Lysis* 214c-d and *Phdr.* 255c.

¹²³ *Being and Logos*, p.410.

So that the city becomes a unity, the entirety of the citizenry “must be forced and persuaded [ἀναγκαστέον...καὶ πειστέον] to do that which will make them the best craftsman of their own task [ἐαυτῶν ἔργου]” (R. 421c). When the citizenry is thusly ruled, by each fulfilling his or her own task, the city will be a unity (R. 423d). Accordingly, as Socrates states, only in such a good city will “we find the cobbler a cobbler and not a pilot in addition to his cobbling, and the farmer a farmer and not a judge added to his farming” (R. 397e). There is the presumption that one’s identity can be wholly captured by living within the political sphere, which must be mediated through law. Justice, consequently, is that which allows each and every individual to work for “all in common [ἅπασιν κοινόν]” (R. 369e), allowing for a community that can participate in τὸ ἀγαθόν.

For the city to be ruled justly and called good, each individual must know to what his or her own nature most properly fits so as to provide not only for oneself but for others as well. Regardless of whether an individual is an artisan, an auxiliary, or a ruler, in the city in *logos*, a stipulated ideal has everyone fulfilling his or her own τέλος perfectly, never straying from his or her particular task. For each individual is immediately identified and defined through his or her own task, since there is an excellence [ἀρετή] of the task assigned to each thing or individual (R. 353a). Just as the organs of the body are to work with excellence (R. 353a-353d), the soul of an individual is able to accomplish its own task with excellence when it functions according to justice (R. 353e). Consequently, a cobbler, an architect, an auxiliary, or a philosopher ruler accomplishes his or her own task with excellence, i.e., from justice, for the sake of and in reference to the common good of the city.

The members of a political community are not only good individuals but share in what this goodness provides them. This suggests that a political community is fostered through the

reciprocal interactions between its different inhabitants.¹²⁴ Because each of the individuals are alike, insofar as each is working toward the same goal, and share in all things, these individuals are immediately recognizable to each other either through word or deed as members of this particular community. Granted there are many differences which distinguish exactly how justice is expressed in each of the four cities in *logos*,¹²⁵ there is one common element to be found: justice is defined as each individual performing one task that is naturally fitted to his or her own nature, so that one should mind one's own affairs (*R.* 369d-370c). Defined in a more refined manner, Socrates states, "according to this, then, the possession and doing both of that which is akin to one [οἰκείου]¹²⁶ and of what belongs to oneself would be agreed to be justice" (*R.* 433e-434a).

COMMUNITY BEYOND BEING

Considering all of this and viewing the trope "friends have all things in common" in light of the *Republic*, it might well appear that friendship and the resulting community are useful only to reinforce qualities shared within the group, decided by the philosopher rulers or whoever is the governing force within the state. This results in a closed economy of meaning and significance, introducing a homogenizing force upon the group. However, given that this proverb is the penultimate line of the *Phaedrus*, whose purpose is reveal the initiation into erotic-matters, it must be examined carefully in this context as well. If the proverb is interpreted through the initiation of erotic-mysteries which the lover and beloved must undergo, it indeed takes on a completely new meaning, and the sayings with which we began point to a quite different form of human community.

¹²⁴ See especially Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 1371b1 15-25.

¹²⁵ See especially *Being and Logos*, pp.346-368.

¹²⁶ The concept of τὸ οἰκεῖον will prove vital for sections of the present chapter.

There is one indication of this other notion of community that can be found in the *Republic*, if we take seriously the claim that the idea of the Good is ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας (*R.* 509b). As this has been addressed in the previous chapter, I will speak only briefly of it here. While it is unclear how we are to interpret this particular phrase, it can be said that τὸ ἀγαθόν is beyond ‘what is,’ beyond what is knowable and sayable, it is what is discursively unthinkable. And so, a question forces itself upon us: what does it mean to say that two (or a group of) individuals share in all things which τὸ ἀγαθόν bestows upon them, if that in which they share and are made to be like is itself “beyond being?” That is to say, if τὸ ἀγαθόν is not found within the realm of being, of coming-to-being and passing-away, what are the individuals sharing in and what characterizes them as being alike?

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates speaks of a lover who is “by nature dear to” the beloved (255a-b), even though at earlier times the latter may not have recognized it through the social pressure of his peers. Their relationship is termed a ὁμιλία, a communion (*Phdr.* 255b).¹²⁷ This ὁμιλία is closer than the beloved’s friends and even of his or her family, which is governed by law. Whatever marks their ὁμιλία, it is marked by an excess of social norms. Indeed, the lover, it is said, when he esteems his particular beloved above all others “looks down upon all the laws and dignities, which he once prided himself in” (*Phdr.* 252a); and moreover “mortal sound-mindedness [σωφροσύνη θνητή] and mortal and thrifty rules of the house [οἰκονομοῦσα]” (*Phdr.* 256e) are understood to be hindrances to a true erotic community. The lover understands

¹²⁷ In the *Symposium*, Socrates defines Ἔρως as a “great spirit” [δαίμων μέγας]. One of the characteristics that mark this entity most is interpreting and carrying over the things of human to the gods and of the gods to the human, so that “the whole itself is bound together itself” (*Sym.* 202e). The human and divine realm are separated save the power of Ἔρως. The divine realm is not whole transcendent from that of the human because “the god with the human do not mingle or join together, but because of Eros all the communion [ἡ ὁμιλία] is and the conversation between the gods and human and vice-versa. And that the individual who is wise in these matters is a spiritual man” [δαίμωνιος ἀνὴρ] (*Sym.* 203a). In the *Phaedrus*, the philosophical prophet is also an individual who is an intermediary between the divine and the human.

that the question of the erotic community revolves around the necessity to recognize mortal law but nevertheless that there is a rupture in the totality of the lawful community. This type of community or kinship calls into question one's being, contesting it. Furthermore, it is not grounded in law but in nature [φύσις], the continual movement of an upsurge and of a burgeoning-forth. Truly, ἔρως disrupts the city,¹²⁸ which, as we will see, gestures toward the ungovernable and the essentially empty sovereignty of τὸ ἀγαθόν. In fact, as we will see, political structures obscure ἔρως and what it fundamentally is to be human.

Moments like these in the works of Plato make explicit reference to an altogether different type of community; a kind of kinship that is more (than) human and perhaps even, according to Plato, a privileged type. Plato not only returns to the erotic community in three dialogues, but also the type of knowing associated with this form of community is privileged by Socrates. He continually insists that he does not understand anything other than erotic-matters [τὰ ἐρωτικά] (*Sym.* 177e), and consequently he says of himself that he is a paltry and useless thing, save the gift from the gods have given him, i.e., to quickly come to know [γνῶναι] a lover and a beloved (*Lys.* 204b-c). So vital is this ability to Socrates that he asks the god Eros not to deprive him of his erotic art [ἡ ἐρωτικὴ τέχνη] (*Phdr.* 257a), which has been given to him.

We will next turn to the *Republic* and offer an interpretation of the type of community that τὸ ἀγαθόν, as traditionally conceived, engenders and the shortcomings of this strictly political model. Within this discussion, it will be shown that the definitions of justice and σωφροσύνη, which characterize the individuals who share in τὸ ἀγαθόν, are themselves problematic. We will, then, reveal another manner in which community may reveal itself, this time in the guise of an erotic community, disrupting and erupting out of the political community.

¹²⁸ *Being and Logos*, p378.

It will be revealed to us that, in the city in *logos*, each individual becomes indifferent with regard to the city-state and to him or herself. Only by revealing the limitation of the immanence, by transgressing it while nevertheless never wholly leaving the city, will the Platonic concept of the initiation in the erotic mysteries be demonstrated. Related to this, it will also be shown that the sovereignty that τὸ ἀγαθόν represents is nothing; it is empty, inarticulateable, an unconditioned unknowing, which Socrates has termed ἀπορία. In fact, the political and rational community is necessary to inspire the type of love of τὸ ἀγαθόν that ecstatically breaks out of the rational confines of the political and to enter into the erotic community.¹²⁹ The result of this rupture of the political will require that the individuals re-introduce themselves to one another, this time with reference to the excessive and non-discursive element which manifests itself. As this chapter progresses, we will see that such a re-introduction requires a new interpretation of the two sayings with which this chapter began and finally a reconsideration of what it means to belong and exist in a community with one's beloved.

II. An Introduction by way of Prophetic Recollection:

Watching his city in *logos* coming into being, Socrates attempts to reveal, by means of speech τὸ ἀγαθόν and justice as immediately present, as concepts set in advance. However, observing the coming-into-being of a city through λόγος has its limitations. As Sallis has already examined many of these limitations and in what way the *Republic* casts these limitations with regard to such a city's birth,¹³⁰ I will look only to specific aspects of these limitations. One of these is how the city in *logos*, the city that embodies τὸ ἀγαθόν most fully, is the city in which the individual's identity, as exhibited through the claim that each individual mind his or her own business, is fully revealed through such a city. Reducing the citizens' identity in this

¹²⁹ Cf. The relationship between λόγος and μανία in chapter one.

¹³⁰ See especially, *Being and Logos*, pp.346-382.

manner does not permit the irreducible, excessive, and divine origin¹³¹ of τὸ ἀγαθόν to reveal itself.

We will now examine the topic of the relationship between justice and σωφροσύνη and their relationship to τὸ ἀγαθόν. This relationship will open a discussion of the critical limitation of the city in *logos* and the need to take erotic μανία seriously. It will be revealed that this city, in whatever of the four forms it may take, from a city of artisans to a city ruled by the philosopher, is subject to a profoundly limiting form of immanence.

THE WORK OF IMMANENCE

Immanence suggests that nothing is left out of that through which an individual is identified. This is revealed insofar as the city in *logos* is a unity through the use of law, since, as seen above, law is aimed at the city as a whole (*R.* 519e). With regard to the city in *logos*, then, each individual must know to what his or her own nature most properly fits so as to provide not only for oneself but for others as well. Each individual must work for the common good, since the coming-to-being of the city results from the insufficiency of one's own needs, since one "lacks in many things [πολλῶν ἐνδεής]"¹³² (*R.* 368b). Justice, therefore, arises out of the recognition that humans are beings that are lacking something which another can provide and make up for. Those who are just, those who share in τὸ ἀγαθόν, wish to share and reproduce both justice and τὸ ἀγαθόν within the city, making up for such a lack.

If the citizenry is to become a unity and to know what it lacks, each member must practice σωφροσύνη (*R.* 389d), setting a limit on the individuals' needs (*R.* 373d-e). The practice of σωφροσύνη does not come naturally to the masses, however; they must give ear to

¹³¹ Cf. Chapter two.

¹³² Later in this chapter, just as οἰκεῖον will hold importance so too will ἐνδεές. They will be reconceived outside of the closed-economy of a political realm.

and obey the rulers (*R.* 389d-e). At least for the artisan class, and I do not believe it need be limited to this class, the practice of an art “is acquired primarily by imitation, by subordinating oneself to a master practitioner of the art” and “excellence in the practice of the arts throughout the city as a whole requires that there be knowledge (or right opinion) regarding the ends to be served by the arts.”¹³³ This, according to Sallis, requires a hierarchy found *within* the city itself, which is achieved and kept according to σωφροσύνη, or the avoidance of extremes.¹³⁴ It is a unilateral scale of being. The higher levels of the hierarchy determine the lower, which depend upon the latter for their existence and intelligibility. For example, if a practitioner is to know the end, the τέλος, toward which his or her art is aimed, e.g., cobbling, the practitioner must look to the next higher individual found in the hierarchy, the master under whom the practitioner learns. The practitioner’s art is assimilated by and made to resemble that of the master, who sits higher in the hierarchy of knowledge concerning the art. And so that the hierarchy should not run *ad infinitum*, e.g., this master must have learned art from another master who learned the it from another and so on, there must be a singular determination which provides intelligibility to all those who are within the hierarchy. This determining factor would be the form, the εἶδος or ἰδέα, of the art.

To place this within the broader schema of Platonic writing, the realm of intelligible objects is governed by τὸ ἀγαθόν. Socrates, in the *Republic* states “that which provides truth to the things known and gives power to the knower is the idea of the good [τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ

¹³³ *Being and Logos*, p.366.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p.367.

ἰδέαν]” (508e). Furthermore, there must be “an art of the final ends—final *within* the context of the city...,”¹³⁵ if the city is to be a unity. So that each element within the city, its citizenry, can be thought to be as a unity, τὸ ἀγαθόν is necessary; “the good and the right [τὸ ἀγαθόν καὶ δέον] ...bind and hold anything together” (*Phd.* 99c). Those who have knowledge of this final end and give context to all other arts *within* the city are the philosopher rulers. They are those who have wisdom. Consequently, it is said that everyone must subordinate themselves and the practice of their task to those who are wise, i.e., to the philosopher. Only under such conditions, in which both justice and σωφροσύνη co-exist, can there be harmony and unity which define the city.¹³⁶ The philosopher rulers through their wisdom give context, binding and holding the city as a whole, not only to what class every individual belongs to but also what this particular individual’s task is. Given the hierarchy described above, τὸ ἀγαθόν must appear immanently *within* each of the cities in *logos*, founded *within* the political structure of the city, if each individual is identified through the mediation of the “living body of the community.”¹³⁷

DISAVOWING ἀπορία

And yet, τὸ ἀγαθόν as a sovereign force with positive content cannot itself be completely immanent. After all, τὸ ἀγαθόν “lies beyond being [ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας]” (*R.* 509b) and thus cannot be found *within* the city in *logos*, or rather within the realm of coming-to-being and passing-away. For λόγος is a form of discourse that reveals and illuminates things as they are, but as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, τὸ ἀγαθόν appears as it is not. If we were to use λόγος, the infinitely excessive sovereignty which τὸ ἀγαθόν represents would have to be reduced to a

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p.104.

¹³⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p.9.

finite entity, i.e., brought into the realm of becoming and passing-away. If we are to discuss a hierarchy at all with regard to this notion of τὸ ἀγαθόν, it is not a matter of a scale of being but an intensification of it. We must remember that, in the *Republic*, Socrates states, concerning τὸ ἀγαθόν, “that which every soul pursues and brings about for its own sake [τούτου ἕνεκα], announcing like a prophet some ‘to be’ [ἀπομαντευομένη τι εἶναι], perplexed [ἀποροῦσα] and unable to receive sufficiently [οὐκ ἔχουσα λαβεῖν ἱκανῶς] just what it is” (505e). As inherently resisting intelligibility, τὸ ἀγαθόν can only lead one into ἀπορία, waylessness, or unknowing. However, unable to reconcile this and to disavow such ἀπορία, the human being is liable to place τὸ ἀγαθόν within the realm of discursive thought.

Plato must have had this disavowal in mind, as *Republic* book VIII makes clear. It is inevitable that within the ruling class there will be fractures and that “political over throw [πολιτεία μεταβάλλει] comes from the origin itself [ἐξ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἔχοντος τὰς ἀρχάς]” (R. 545d). The aristocratic community, the community ruled by the philosophers and based in λόγος, falls under its own weight. The philosopher rulers, perhaps because they must return to the proverbial cave, lose true insight into τὸ ἀγαθόν, for “although being wise individuals [σοφοί], the ones who you have educated as leaders of the city will nevertheless not attain, by means of reasoning [λογισμῶ] together with sensation, the proper time of begetting children, but it will pass them by and they will beget children when they should not. There is a period governed by divine birth, comprehended by perfect numbers” (R. 546b). Consequently, although the philosopher rules are called wise, they are nevertheless forced to engage in practical political matter and the opportune and divine time to beget and rear children is obscured. The identity of the body politic becomes less clear. While it appears that τὸ ἀγαθόν must originate from *within*

the city, in *logos* itself, since all the arts within the city are directed toward the rulers and by them, this cannot be the case—unless, of course, the philosopher rulers hide themselves as tyrants. Like those of the oligarchic state, who have established for themselves some good, which was the cause of their ruin (*R.* 562b), the tyrannical state arising from a democratic one has also established its own good. Such declines result from the establishment of a finite good that can be found within the limits of the λόγος of the city. This too must be the cause of the rise of timocracy out of the aristocracy.

By taking τὸ ἀγαθόν as a good established for their own ends, then, the philosopher rules miss the divine, or rather the excessively intelligible nature of τὸ ἀγαθόν. In fact in book IV of the *Laws*, the Athenian states “wherever a city-state does not have a god but its principle is mortal, there the people have no rest from bad things” consequently we must “order both our homes [οἰκῆσεις] and states in obedience to the immortal thing in us, the understanding of thought [τὴν τοῦ νοῦ διανομήν] calling it law” (*Laws* 713e-714a). Here, law is explicitly linked to that which is other than or more than human. Furthermore, in *Laws* book III, Plato defines σωφροσύνη in accord with the reverence with which one should approach τὸ ἀγαθόν. Here, the Athenian stranger states, “there is something additional with regard to both honorable and dishonorable things, that of not to speak [οὐ λογοῦ] but something would be more worthy of a kind of speechless silence [ἄλόγου σιγῆς]” (*Laws* 696e). According to this radicalized form of σωφροσύνη, even to utter the name τὸ ἀγαθόν is too much, not to mention establishing it as one’s own end. The only response to such an experience is a speechless silence, which opens one to the vacuous eruption of the experience of το ἀγαθόν.

INITIATION INTO τὸ ἀγαθόν

Certainly such an experience is uncomfortable, for it overwhelms us. This will require special preparation. Twice in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates makes significant references to the initiation [τελετή] into mystic rites that true lovers undergo (*Phdr.* 249c, 253c).¹³⁸ The lover and the beloved are taught knowledge which makes them akin. Furthermore, the one who undergoes this initiation “alone becomes truly perfect [τέλειος]” (*Phdr.* 249c). This may seem identical to what has been said in the *Republic*. However, the τέλος, from which τέλειος is ultimately derived, of the individual in the city in *logos* was directed toward is a specific and tangible, intelligible goal, that of minding one’s own business, which was revealed to entail knowing one’s place within the hierarchy. And yet, as we will see, this concept of τέλος is one which entails the recognition of its own principle of insufficiency when applied to the initiate, at the same time as it engenders within the initiate the desire to overcome this insufficiency, while recognizing that the initiate can never do so.

While little is described of this erotic initiation, we are told that the initiation is accomplished by “the man who rightly employs remembrances” (*Phdr.* 249c). In previous chapters, it was revealed that such remembrances are due to the exposure to the beloved’s true excessive and pre-rational nature; beauty [τὸ καλόν] shinning through his “godlike face [θεοειδὲς πρόσωπον]” (*Phdr.* 251a). In this way, the beloved functions as the conduit for, but not the source of an excessive sovereign force. It cannot be mastered or assimilated by the lover. The beauty is not found *within* the beloved rather, the beloved is beautiful by participating in τὸ καλόν itself. If it is true that Plato uses τὸ ἀγαθόν and τὸ κάλον somewhat

¹³⁸ At *Symposium* 210a, Diotima tells Socrates that he can be initiated in the erotic-matters, if he follows the “ladder of love,” which she describes. The nature of the progression throughout the ladder of love and especially the final stage in which beauty itself is suddenly revealed, will help our understanding of the initiation between the lover and the beloved.

interchangeably,¹³⁹ just as τὸ ἀγαθόν cannot be found *within* the city so too the drive toward τὸ ἀγαθόν by means of ἔρως for τὸ καλόν, shining through the individual, is *not found within* the individual beloved but rather the outside of the individual which is visible only in the “the madness of the erotic [τῆς ἐρωτικῆς μανίας]” (*Phdr.* 256d). The experience to which the lover looks, in fact, appeals to nothing, for the initial exposure can neither be justified nor be accounted for in itself; the experience exists outside of itself. It is not the beloved who is the source of τὸ κάλον, but rather the recollection of “what *is* most of all,” which exists in “the place above the heavens.” And so, just as τὸ ἀγαθόν is ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας so too is τὸ κάλον to which the lover is exposed through the beloved. Τὸ ἀγαθόν and τὸ κάλον, then, are not simple identities but rather ruptures within the homogeneous nature of the community. This drive toward what is beyond the discursive is the important function of the initiation into an erotic community. We will return to the discussion of the exact nature of the initiation and the effect it has on the lover in the final section of this chapter.

Now, however, we will explore the experience of the initiation into that which exceeds discursive understanding. And yet, it does provoke a form of community between the lover and the beloved. In the remainder of this section, I will discuss the necessity of (re)introducing oneself to the lover—something unthinkable in the city in *logos*.

A PROPHETIC INTRODUCTION

Due to the prophetic and ecstatic temporality of the soul¹⁴⁰ and the excessiveness of both the beloved and the lover that is revealed in the erotic experience, neither individual has the

¹³⁹ Sarah Allen, *The Philosophical Sense of Transcendence: Levinas and Plato on Loving Beyond Being* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009) p.21. See *Symposium* 204e. Also see, *Phaedrus* 250d, where the lover recollects τὸ κάλον, which was seen during the divine banquet, where it was revealed to reside in “the place above the heavens” (*Phdr.* 247c), which is similar to the language of τὸ ἀγαθόν as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας in the *Republic*.

¹⁴⁰ See chapter 1.

capacity to discursively greet each other, as they truly are, in advance. Moreover, that which both individuals possess, even their own identity, is not their own, but exists ecstatically. The identity of each will manifest itself in the ecstatic rupture of reason, opening each individual's identity beyond its own capacity.

Before giving his Palinode, in the *Phaedrus*, and more specifically immediately prior to discussing the different forms of *μανία*, Socrates engages in a playful but significant exchange with Phaedrus. He warns Phaedrus to caution Lysias to make a recantation, just as he himself is about to do and to praise the lover instead of the non-lover, who desires not only rationally to understand his non-beloved but to possess him as well. Phaedrus assures Socrates that he will do so, to which Socrates answers,

Socrates: This I believe, if until you would be that who/what you are [ἔωσπερ ἄν ἦς ὅς εἶ].

Phaedrus: Speak therefore confidently

Socrates: Where is the youth to whom I was speaking? This he too must hear, lest if he be overtaken by the pleasure a non-lover.

Phaedrus: *Here*, beside you, very much neighboring [μάλα πλησίον] always present whenever you wish.

Socrates: So then, beautiful youth, keep in mind that the former account was Phaedrus' ... (*Phdr.* 243e-244a).

Whom is Socrates addressing? Who is this beautiful youth? Certainly Phaedrus is the only other individual present; but why, then, does Socrates ask where the beautiful youth is while addressing Phaedrus? And how does this influence the way we approach the Palinode and the rest of the *Phaedrus* as a whole? If one's identity is immediately manifested within the political realm, Socrates would have no need to ask who or what Phaedrus is. Given that this exchange begins the Palinode, the speech that will describe the initiation into the erotic mysteries, it would

appear that it is here where Socrates first tells of an aspect of the human that cannot be reduced to the immediacy that the political stresses.¹⁴¹

The answers to the questions above lie in the first line of the above conversation. While this line is nearly impossible to render into grammatically correct English, it is, nonetheless, necessary to translate the sentence literally if the significance of what would otherwise be passed by as a mere playful moment is to be revealed. The difficulty lies in the temporality implicit in this exchange. In the first clause, the uncertain subjunctive future conditional is used “if until you would be [ἔωσπερ ἄν ᾗς],” while in the second clause the present tense indicative “that who/what you are [ὅς εἶ]” is utilized. Consequently, on the one hand, the present moment is saturated with a conditional future; while on the other hand, this same conditional future is brought into the present moment. The ecstatic and excessive being of Phaedrus, and the human being in general, is here being emphasized.

The ecstatic and prophetic temporality of the soul is brought to the fore. If one’s futural aspect is the same as one’s past, i.e., one is headed toward the celestial abode which one previously left. Phaedrus would be that which he has always already been. To put it differently, Phaedrus may again become that which he is and originally was, that is to say, the uncorrupted soul, partaking in the divine banquet. Phaedrus was, is, and may again become the beautiful boy unspoiled by Lysias’ influence. Socrates is not recognizing Phaedrus’ identity or being in this passage. Rather, he is contesting it, putting it into question, raising the ἀπορία to which one may be exposed while experiencing Phaedrus. “If until you would be that who/what you are.” There is no guarantee of Phaedrus being who or what he is but Socrates is contesting whether he

¹⁴¹ Note also that although the dialogue takes place outside the city walls, Socrates and Phaedrus are nonetheless not so far outside the city as to be in the wilderness. While both the place of their discussion and the content of it may exceed the city, it never quite leaves it behind either—after all, even after their ecstatic journey into the celestial banquet they must return home, within the city’s walls.

can be this individual. Challenging Phaedrus' being in such a manner, with the temporality of the language used, we must experience another as always existing within a prior exteriority, or a being whose existence is composing itself in its being shattered.

Socrates calls attention to his faith, and to the uncertainty that lies therein, that Phaedrus has not presently been completely "overtaken by the pleasure of a non-lover," i.e., Lysias and his speech, but only *if* and *until* Phaedrus becomes both what he may become and that which he *is*, *his* beautiful boy. In other words, Socrates is simultaneously speaking to the present Phaedrus, who is under the threat of Lysias' influence, and calling out for and encouraging the beautiful boy, who was previously and may again become the Phaedrus uncorrupted by Lysias. Thus, not only does this passage draw our attention to the fact that Phaedrus exists ecstatically, but also that his future (as the uncorrupted beautiful boy) is inherently uncertain and fragile. It is not at all clear that Phaedrus will turn out to be/return to his beautiful state. Only if Phaedrus recollects his prophetic past and the divine banquet, through being wooed by Socrates, would he move toward his future, beautiful self.

So, Socrates introduces Phaedrus to his true self, perhaps for the first time, a self that must be contested if it is to come into existence. In fact, Phaedrus urges Socrates to speak confidently when confronted by the odd temporality of Socrates' strange request. Indeed, Phaedrus introduces himself to Socrates as the beauty boy. In saying "*Here*, beside you very much neighboring always *present* whenever you wish," Phaedrus gives himself over to Socrates as the beautiful boy. Phaedrus' being "present" should not be understood in a spatial or even a temporal manner. Rather, his being present is a comportment toward Socrates. As introducing himself as a beautiful youth, Phaedrus gives himself to Socrates as a possible, and thus contested, beloved. Phaedrus, now, has been introduced to himself without the reference point he has had

previously (as a non-lover, who is in control of himself), but rather now from an external sovereign force which is neither present nor controlled by either individual. He can no longer define himself as an isolated individual, without reference to another, but rather only in reference to Socrates, as a possible beloved. Their point of communion begins here, in the destruction of Phaedrus' identity as Phaedrus. And if the boy is Phaedrus, the temporality of the exchange suggests that Socrates cannot anticipate and guarantee Phaedrus' character as beautiful. Consequently, Socrates begins his erotic endeavors without preconditions or preconceptions concerning with whom he is speaking. Jean-Luc Marion has characterized this erotic disposition toward the world as asking the question, "Can I love first?," which he states "means to behave like a lover who gives himself, rather than like one who is loved tit for tat."¹⁴² Socrates risks loving by comporting himself as a pre-conditional lover. Socrates gambles that Phaedrus will reveal himself to be a beloved. Socrates can place no preconditions upon this relationship and so they must reintroduce themselves to each other.

III. *What Use is a Lover and Friend?:*

We are now confronted with the question of what a lover or friend is, especially in light of the reintroduction that characterizes individuals entering the erotic community. The ontological status of the lover or friend must be examined along with what he or she provides, if anything. In this section, we will follow the discussion of how the phenomena of *φιλία* and of being a *φίλος*¹⁴³ unfold within the *Lysis*. This description will help to unveil the relationship

¹⁴² Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), p.71.

¹⁴³ I will leave the Greek terms *φιλία* and *φίλος* largely untranslated, since there is no exact English equivalent. Furthermore, for the purpose of this chapter I will not make a hard and fast distinction between *φιλία* and *ἔρως*. Although the noun *φιλία* suggests affection or friendship and even fondness for a thing or holding something dear, distinguishing it from the eroticism of *ἔρως*, their verbal forms *φιλέω* and *ἐράω* makes it difficult to distinguish, for they both mean "to love" or "to desire." One major difference is that *φιλέω* connotes a familial tie as "to love and cherish one's wife or child" or "to welcome as a guest," and these latter meanings will become important in the final section of the present chapter, making it different from *ἐράω*. The two concepts, for Plato, are not clearly

between the Socratic lover and beloved and, consequently, the initiation into the erotic mysteries that characterizes the type of community in which they participate.

A USEFUL FRIEND

It has been noted that utility and use-value permeate the *Lysis*.¹⁴⁴ Socrates presents the φίλια that Lysis' parents display toward him in terms of use-value (*Lys.* 207d-210d). Lysis, it is assumed, will be shown φίλια by his parents if he proves himself wise in certain matters, e.g., reading letters and tuning the harp, and in so doing he is useful to them (*Lys.* 210d). The concept of usefulness again returns later in the dialogue, this time in the guise of whether or not two individuals who are like or unlike are of benefit to each other (*Lys.* 214d-216b). While the first passage characterizes φίλια as one-sided, the second gives at least the possibility for a mutual and reciprocal benefit.

Accordingly, there have been two lines of interpretation of what characterizes the benefit and usefulness of a φίλον. On the one hand, it has been said that the individual's own self is one's true φίλον; David Bolotin writes, "Let us then interpret Socrates' latest suggestion to mean instead primarily that those who are good are friends to the Good that is their own and in this sense friends to themselves."¹⁴⁵ While what is at issue in the later discussion of φίλια, according to Mary P. Nichols, is that the two individuals enter into a community of reciprocal benefit and

distinguished. For example, in the *Lysis*, Hippothales clearly desires an erotic relationship with the boy Lysis and yet in the dialogue the verb φιλέω and its noun form φίλια are used to describe their relationship. Moreover, in the *Phaedrus*, clearly an erotic dialogue, the highest form of ἔρωσ is indistinguishable from φίλια, 255e. This is not to say that there are no distinguishing features between the two words or that the *Lysis* is not an attempt to tease out the nuances of φίλια, but rather that I cannot, in this chapter address these differences and given the ambiguity between the two to which Plato gestures, such a discussion would lead us too far astray from the topic at hand. For a discussion of the relationship between φίλος and ἔρωσ, see James Harden "Friendship in Plato's 'Lysis'" *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (1983) pp.327-356. Here, he summarizes the Pohlenz-von Arnim debate, pp.331-334.

¹⁴⁴ Don Adams "The *Lysis* Puzzles," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Jan. 1992), pp.3-17.

¹⁴⁵ David Bolotin *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship: An Interpretation of the Lysis with a New Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 1989), p.192.

recognition that cannot simply be reduced to use-value,¹⁴⁶ but which, as reciprocal, must be of some benefit to both individuals. Contrary to current scholarship, I will argue that whatever the form of community that is found in φιλία it can be governed neither by self-interest¹⁴⁷ nor even by reciprocity.¹⁴⁸ As the present section will show, both of these interpretations are subject to an ontological certainty. This is to say, both interpretations lead one to make a fetish of the ἀπορία, the waylessness, or non-knowledge that φιλία places us in and which is central to Socrates' philosophy. Both interpretations place upon Socratic philosophy a positive content which cannot be found within ἀπορία. Consequently, the dichotomy represented here is a false one. We should be concerned not with the articulation of the subject/object relationship but rather, with the relationship of knowing and unknowing.

THE CERTAINTY OF FRIENDSHIP

The human strives to gain certainty within the world. The striving is an attempt to bring the world and oneself under the authority of the metaphysics of presence. One way of achieving this is to make the beloved an object of perfection, placing upon the beloved all the traits one wished oneself to have. In the *Lysis*, such a drive is demonstrated by Hippothales singing the praises of Lysis. These praises are aimed at Lysis' noble lineage, which as Ctesipuss tells Socrates makes Hippothales ridiculous (*Lys.* 205d). He speaks of nothing which is personal [ἴδιον] but rather of that which "the whole city already knows" (*Lys.* 205b-c), or rather of what society says about Lysis. Consequently, Hippothales has entered and even placed Lysis into the

¹⁴⁶ "Friendship and Community in Plato's *Lysis*," pp. 3, 7, 11. Although I agree with much of what Nichols has said in her wonderful essay, I diverge from her analysis insofar as she claims that the community of friends "...can be translated into a larger community, one that transcends any given pair of friends and that endures over time. Such a community does not serve as an alternative to political community, but as their standard" (p.19). I will be arguing that this community does in fact constitute an alternative to politics and can in no way be reduced to a political community.

¹⁴⁷ *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship: An Interpretation of the Lysis with a New Translation*. See also, Don Adams "The *Lysis* Puzzles," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* Vol.9, No.1 (January, 1992), pp.3-17.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. "Friendship and Community is Plato's *Lysis*."

social hierarchy of economy and of exchange. And thus, if he should gain Lysis as a beloved, he would believe that he has gained a type of certainty with regard to his social standing. And like τὸ ἀγαθόν found *within* the social hierarchy of the *Republic*, he cannot but help to view Lysis as a socially engineered good. Perhaps Hippothales believes Lysis to be τὸ ἀγαθόν. But certainly he cannot recognize Lysis as *his* ἀγαθόν, for he implicitly admits that Lysis belongs to the city. Accordingly, Lysis not only belongs to the social structure but is furthermore reduced to the status of a use-object—either way, he cannot properly belong to Hippothales in any meaningful manner.

Being called ridiculous, Hippothales seeks out Socrates' help as to how one should speak and behave to endear [προσφιλής] one's favorite to oneself (*Lys.* 206c). However, he is met with further critique. Socrates states that these songs of praise are not aimed at Lysis but rather at Hippothales himself (*Lys.* 205d-e). Socrates warns that anyone "wise in erotic-matters [τὰ ἐρωτικά σοφός]" should not sing songs of his beloved until he should have captured him, "fearing what the future may result in" (*Lys.* 206a). Those wise in such matters understand that the character of the beloved must unveil itself over time and cannot be seen in the immediate moment. This suggests that the human being, the beloved in this case, is not a static entity, but one whose ontological and ethical status is always at stake. We must always fear what the future may bring and thus live under constant threat of our ethical well-being becoming corrupted.

Hippothales is confronted by the uncertainty of his being and of his relationship to the community as a whole when presented by the unannounced erotic arrival of Lysis. Hippothales believes himself to be a sufficient being within the community he finds himself composed of Ctesipuss and of his other cohorts. He identified with the pre-reflective whole. And yet the arrival of Lysis opens Hippothales to the desire to move beyond these limits. What he believed to

be a self-sustaining whole now reveals itself to be ruptured by the unanticipated arrival of Lysis.¹⁴⁹ However, instead of crossing these boundaries he sets another barrier to sidestep the experience of ἀπορία which φιλία engenders. To manage this, he sets up for himself a false image of who he is with regard to Lysis and the community. In the language of Marion, Hippothales is attempting to find certainty of his own being through vanity by asking “what is the use?”¹⁵⁰ concerning this relationship. Unwilling or unable to contest Lysis’ being, Hippothales reduces Lysis and himself to the status of an object. Such songs of praise, consequently, force both individuals to believe that they have ontological certainty of who they are and also what is good for them. Lysis believes he is good given his lineage, while Hippothales thinks himself as good and complete if he should possess the object of his affection.

Secondly and more importantly, Socrates states that Hippothales is undermining his own desire to possess Lysis. According to Socrates, the young boy becomes harder to catch, becoming haughtier [μεγαλαυχότεροι] and more assured of his status as being good (*Lys.* 206a-b). Surely this has the result of allowing Lysis to believe that he is too noble for Hippothales, giving the former a false sense of certainty about who and what he is. However, there may be another and related reason. Socrates uses the curious phrase “harder to catch/conquer [δυσάλωτύτεροι].” Likening Hippothales to a hunter who makes noise and scares away that which he wishes to seize upon, Socrates states that discourses [λόγοι] should not be used to “enchant and to make savage” the object since this is “greatly in want of harmony” (*Lys.* 206b). Furthermore, Hippothales harms himself through his poetry based on utility. Hippothales does everything he can to give Lysis a metaphysical certainty, defining him in advance.

¹⁴⁹ *Plato’s Dialogue of Friendship and a New Interpretation*, p.73.

¹⁵⁰ *The Erotic Phenomenon*, pp. 16-26.

Metaphysical certainty, however, only befits objects that are completed and finished with regard to their being. Consequently, objects as such cannot profoundly concern us as humans, since the ontological status of an object is completed and thus not a risk and so of no real concern for us. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates explains why he rarely, if at all, leaves the city (230d). He states that the trees and country places do not teach him anything but that the people of the city do; in the *Lysis*, Socrates states that possessions such as the best quails and dogs or even all the gold of Darius mean nothing to him when compared to finding a φίλον (211e). Given that Socrates' philosophy revolves around dialogue with others, urging them "to give a contestation of their life [ἐλεγκον τοῦ βίου]" (*Ap.* 39c), the ἀπορία that this engenders opens one to one's own ignorance. As such, objects in no way contest our being and thus cannot be of real concern for us. We may possess them but they are not mine in a profound sense. By reducing Lysis to an object that has use-value, Hippothales has made it truly impossible to be with his beloved. Lysis comes to understand himself as an object with determinate qualities. Hippothales, too, understands both Lysis and himself in this manner. Both become ontologically isolated although they live among others. Communication and a community are thus rendered impossible. Consequently, there opens an insurmountable distance between the two individuals, which is depicted through the narrative of the dialogue. It is unclear whether Hippothales has ever had direct contact with Lysis. Furthermore, Hippothales hides from Lysis so as not to irritate him (*Lys.* 207b).¹⁵¹ Although he sings his praises, Hippothales cannot be with Lysis because he has already given Lysis over to the city itself.

It has been shown that Hippothales defines himself through Lysis. However, his definition of Lysis is founded only upon the contingency of Hippothales' uncertain conception of

¹⁵¹ *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship and a New Interpretation*, p. 80.

his beloved. His self-certainty “can proclaim itself as loudly and strongly as it wants, but it finally avers itself to be always provisional, waiting in delusion on another principle, which would finally truly assure it.”¹⁵² If Hippothales does in fact wish to capture Lysis, he cannot but fail, since Lysis, who represents the whole which Hippothales is after, is not graspable.

Hippothales needs Lysis to enter into the community, which is the whole, the opposite of the isolated being Hippothales suffers from. But this whole cannot be objectified. Thus, he is on a fool’s errand since that which he seeks cannot be found within the world of being since it is beyond being.

A φίλῖα grounded in utility, then, results in self-forgetting. We forget that we are essentially human, not reducible to objects with a predetermined value, instead of an individual whose future is uncertain, existing toward another. We would begin to believe that we are truly good either by the praise of a lover or by obtaining a beloved believed to be morally excellent, and will thus assume to be in full possession of τὸ ἀγαθόν. Such an individual can never experience the ἀπορία of τὸ ἀγαθόν, which is revealed through the experience of φίλῖα.

BEING SIMILAR AND FRIENDSHIP

Quoting the Homeric saying “Ever, god leads like to like,” further on in the dialogue, the concept of usefulness reappears but now in terms of individuals being like, or similar [ὅμοιος] to one another, and therefore able to be of mutual or reciprocal benefit.¹⁵³ In his discussion with the young boys, Lysis and Menexenus, Socrates begins slowly to unhinge their understanding of the foundation of φίλῖα, revealing that the relationship of those who are alike or similar [ὅμοιος]

¹⁵² *The Erotic Phenomenon*, p.19.

¹⁵³ Naomi Reshotko in her article “Plato’s ‘Lysis’: A Socratic Treatise on Desire and Attraction” *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (March 1997) pp.1-18, reveals that this statement is not simply referring to human friendship but attraction in general, p.4. Reshotko’s concern is “in cases where Socrates ignores reciprocity as a criterion, his account of friendship will strike us as implausible if we assume that φίλῖα refers narrowly to human friendship” p.3. It will be shown that I too share this concern but for different reasons.

cannot fully account for the experience of *φιλία*, since two individuals who are wholly alike are of no benefit to one another (*Lys.* 214e-215a). (The assumption that two vicious individuals should be friends is quickly dismissed, for these individuals are injurious to each other and are unbalanced so as not to be even a friend to him or herself.) Two individuals who are good *qua* good would be of no use to each other, since such an individual is sufficient in him or herself (*Lys.* 215b). There is no reciprocity between these individuals because, as Socrates asks, “how can such things be cherished [*ἀγαπηθείη*] by each other, when they can in no way aid [*ἐπικουρίαν*] each other” (*Lys.* 215a).

However, there is another way in which to understand what it is to be *ὅμοιος*. To account for the phenomenon of *φιλία*, Socrates must create a third option, one in which the human exists between the wholly good and the wholly bad. Friends are alike in sharing the character of being neither/nor, neither good nor bad, as Socrates states, again, breaking with the binary logic of a hierarchy. Two individuals, alike in being neither good nor bad, but existing between the two concepts, can, it is supposed at this point of the dialogue, be friends. For example, the human *per se* is neither good nor bad but is made so through the presence of goodness or that which is bad. When an individual is not yet corrupted by the bad, e.g., ignorance, though it is nonetheless present in him or her, this individual will desire [*ἐπιθυμῆν*] the good (*Lys.* 217e), i.e., wisdom. Only two individuals who are good, in a qualified manner, can become friends, since “friendship is reciprocal, it requires that our friend love us in return, that he or she concur or be willing....”¹⁵⁴ It would appear, then, that friendship, if it is not grounded in self-interest, must be grounded in a community of reciprocity. It is to this last claim that I will now draw our attention.

RECIPROCITY AND FRIENDSHIP

¹⁵⁴ “Friendship and Community in Plato’s *Lysis*,” p.3.

Nichols' argument for the reciprocity inherent within the phenomenon of *φιλία* rests upon a mutual understanding of the two individuals who cultivate "both self-awareness and belonging, it offers support for our complex identity as human being and citizens."¹⁵⁵ The *φίλον* is one's own to the extent that this individual is *mine*. However this same individual is different than myself since this individual is capable of withdrawing his or her *φιλία*; I have no control over his or her giving or withholding the *φιλία*. Friends, in other words, are simultaneously alike and unlike. Moreover, both are alike insofar as not being wholly either one's own, belonging to one's friend, or wholly the other's, being able to withdraw one's friendship. The knowledge that friendship does indeed exist is secured, according to Nichols, when the two individuals reflect upon their experience of sharing in certain things and differing in others, but "who are similar in their self-sufficiency."¹⁵⁶

The self-sufficiency of which Nichols speaks here is, however, not one that is found within the individuals themselves. Rather, it appears to lie in the recognition that neither individual is sufficiently his own nor sufficiently belonging to the individual him or herself and it is this experience that "supports the pursuit of truth, suggesting both the necessity and possibility of that pursuit, necessary because one's own is experienced as other, possible because another is experienced as one's own,"¹⁵⁷ opening one to a reciprocal relationship. Moreover, Nichols speaks of friends and the type of community that arises between individuals who experience a type of fulfillment that is not grounded in each other. The truth is not found in either individual alone. In fact, she writes, "The experience of friends offers us access to a world that must be known rather than mastered, and one that is not so radically different from ourselves that it must

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p.16.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

remain unknown,”¹⁵⁸ and that “the knowledge the philosopher seeks is both his own and elusive.”¹⁵⁹ Accordingly, the reciprocity discussed by Nichols results from an awareness that “we can know more than we do, and that we can become more than we have yet become.”¹⁶⁰

While it is difficult for me to argue with the general content of Nichols’ argument, since she emphasizes many of the issues with which I myself am concerned. I will even say that it is necessary to recognize that one needs another, a beloved, to experience the erotic moment, yet it must be asked what exactly is meant by reciprocal and is reciprocity necessary for true φίλια? Nichols’ concern that philosophy cannot be a purely intellectual pursuit, which is not informed by human experience, is correct; for as was shown above if a purely theoretical conception of τὸ ἀγαθόν is established within the city-state even the philosopher-rulers cannot eliminate the inevitable decline of it. After all, Nichols writes, “if one pursues the truth because it is one’s good, one’s good would become the measure of the truth rather than the truth the measure of one’s good,”¹⁶¹ which if pursued simply as a cure for one’s own deficiencies and ignorance then “love of the good collapses into self-love.”¹⁶² And yet, the questions must be posed, what is being exchanged within this reciprocal relationship? What characterizes the exchange? And what is the benefit that the friends gain from one another so that they do indeed cherish each other? In short, can anything be given in return?

THE NEED FOR A NON-RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP

There are moments in the *Lysis* where non-reciprocal relationships are brought to the attention of the young interlocutors. And while these examples are seemingly dismissed and

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p.11.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p.3.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p.15.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p.10.

¹⁶² Ibid, p.7. Nichols is attempting to find a way not to fall into the trap that friends are friends solely for the sake of a lack and for self-interest, which seems to be the case in Bolotin, Reshotko, and Haden.

refuted by Socrates and the young boys, they nevertheless illuminate the concept of *φιλία*. For instance, the question of whether or not there are horse-lovers [*φίλιπποι*], quail-lovers [*φιλόρτυγες*], dog-lovers [*φιλόκυνες*], wine-lovers [*φίλοινοι*], sport-lovers [*φιλογυμνασταί*], and most importantly wisdom-lovers [*φιλόσοφοι*] is asked (*Lys.* 212d). These examples are given within the context of Socrates asking Menexenus whether or not both parties involved must exhibit *φιλία*. It would certainly be odd if one were to say that animals, inanimate objects, and concepts, such as wisdom, should show *φιλία* to a human.¹⁶³ And so it would appear that none of these relationships can be an example of a *φίλον*. However, there is a deeper concern. Individuals do exhibit *φιλία* for such things, welcoming them, and so phenomenologically speaking there must be a way in which the human being does in fact exhibit *φιλία* toward these objects, especially if we are to admit that there are wisdom-lovers, of which Socrates is certainly one. Nevertheless, there is no reciprocity between the individual and any of these.

The example continues so far as to ask whether a new-born child, who has not yet begun to exhibit *φιλία* or hatred, if chastised by his or her parents, *at that moment*, has *φιλία* preeminently with regard to the parents. It is concluded that it is not the one who exhibits *φιλία* but the one who has *φιλία* bestowed upon him or her that is the *φίλον*. In other words, although the new-born may not be inclined to show *φιλία* at such a time, the parent does and so is a *φίλον*. And yet the conclusion is reached that “individuals must be shown *φιλία* by their enemies” (*Lys.* 213a),¹⁶⁴ i.e., the child by his or her parents, and consequently these examples are absurdities and impossible, according to Socrates and his young interlocutor. The same could be

¹⁶³ It is this concern that Reshotko attempts to solve.

¹⁶⁴ Certainly the parent-child relationship will be questioned by Socrates, since he is concerned not with a *φιλία* based in law but rather a natural kinship, which exceeds the demands of law.

said of unrequited love or of someone who wishes to befriend someone who does not share that wish. Hence the claim that “one cannot become a friend unless another does so as well.”¹⁶⁵

If reciprocity must be the foundation and that which grounds the phenomenon of *φιλία*, then one must first be concerned with whether or not one’s *φιλία* will be returned and whether or not some return on the investment will be had. This assumes that one has formed a judgment of the other’s being to even begin to undertake the risk. The two “friends” must also share some idea of that toward which they are aimed if reciprocity is necessary to ground *φιλία*, since they could not be friends unless this concept had been formed prior to the friendship; this assumes that the two individual do become self-sufficient in their relationship.¹⁶⁶ Related to this, one must also, it would seem, have to have an idea as to what it means to be a friend and thus have a concept of what *φιλία* is—the very question the dialogue undertakes to investigate and ends in *ἀπορία*. However, such absurdities are only the case *if* reciprocity is assumed. If we do not make such an assumption, something else comes to the fore. That which allows for the experience of *φιλία* cannot lie in the object toward which it is shown but must rather be a *compartment* of the individual who exhibits such a relationship.

Although reciprocity opens us to the realization that we are incomplete and insufficient beings, we should give emphasis not only to the positive moment in the relationship with the *φίλον*, but also to the negative moment in the Socratic questioning which gives rise to *ἀπορία*, waylessness, or perhaps non-knowledge, an openness, to which our attention should be given. The lover, the subject, must renounce itself as a private and isolated being. The *φίλον* must recognize that it cannot grasp wisdom as a whole and yet must nevertheless strive to obtain it.

¹⁶⁵ *Friendship and Community in Plato’s Lysis*, p.11.

¹⁶⁶ Nichols does point out that the two friends do not merge into one being, as is demonstrated in Aristophanes’ speech in the *Symposium*, and thus can be thought of as a pair, p.11. But nevertheless it appears that one or both individuals must, in a sense, be sufficient if reciprocity is assumed.

This striving drives the individual into a state of non-knowledge, ἀπορία, to which the individual must give him or herself over. After all, those who are already wise, as the gods are, or those who simply believe themselves to be wise, no longer love wisdom, or rather are no longer philosophers (*Lys.* 218a), because they possess (or believe that they possess) wisdom in its immediacy. However, there is a type of individual who, while having ignorance within him is not yet corrupted enough by ignorance and so who “supposing not knowing that which they may not know” (*Lys.* 218); this is exactly how Socrates characterizes his own form of knowing at *Apology* 21d when he says “that which I may not know I do not think I know.” This individual is a philosopher, or a lover of wisdom. Moreover, it is only this individual who exhibits φιλία toward τὸ ἀγαθόν (*Lys.* 216e-217a). The act of opening oneself to the experience of the ἀπορία of φιλία is enough; it is a comportment in the individual and not found within the object. Consequently, when the φίλοι come together they do not become sufficient beings but rather are confronted by a concern that reveals their utter inability to answer what it is that they are confronted by, in this case what it is to be a φίλον and more generally what is τὸ ἀγαθόν. The two are faced with the impossibility that question imposes and to the knowledge of that which cannot be known. While the satisfaction of φιλία, if any is to be found, does indeed lie somewhere other than in the other in whom we show φιλία, this does not suggest that in this other place the two φίλοι are similar in that they are self-sufficient in this experience.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ See *Friendship and Community in Plato's Lysis*, p.16.

FRIENDSHIP AS IGNORANCE

Φιλία, like philosophy itself, awakens us to our ignorance, and allows us to be erotically drawn toward that of which we are ignorant, i.e., the beloved and wisdom itself. Recognizing this ignorance is an act of self-remembering. One recollects that τὸ ἀγαθόν is ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας. It should be noted that οὐσία can mean not just being or existence but also one's own, one's substance, or property. That to which we are drawn and that place within the φίλοι experience each other is τὸ ἀγαθόν but as that which lies outside not only being but also beyond one's property or what is one's own; it lies beyond economy altogether. The φίλον is not properly one's own.¹⁶⁸ Thus, when we experience τὸ ἀγαθόν as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας we experience that which is nothing, since it is beyond being. There is no self-sufficiency to be found within such an experience. Both individuals are exposed to the absence of being and meaning. They are met with the unsayable and so are made open to ἀπορία by the insufficiency of one's being while at the same time desiring to be sufficient, i.e., to grasp τὸ ἀγαθόν.

Furthermore, we should be wary of the claim that “Ever, god leads like to like.” For Socrates not only says that there is a dark-saying, or riddle [αἰνίττονται] (*Lys.* 214d) concerning the conclusion that those who are good alone exhibit φιλία toward that individual who is good, he furthermore states, “Our account shows by means of a sign [σημαίνει] that there are individuals who may be good” (*Lys.* 214e). Not only is their discussion characterized as being a dark-saying, a manner of speaking that is normally attributed to prophetic utterances, but also that their very account of that matter gestures beyond itself, acting as a sign to the truth of the matter. Socrates must characterize the poetic statement as enigmatic because it will reveal something about the human being that cannot be captured through language and binary logic.

¹⁶⁸ This is similar to Nichols' interpretation except that I do not emphasize the need for reciprocity.

As was just stated, we can only exhibit φιλία when we recognize our own ignorance, suggesting an openness to the very phenomenon of φιλία. The individual who is neither good nor bad represents an open space ready to receive, without preconception, the presence of the good or the bad. There is no strict predelineated boundary of the one who is neither good nor bad. Such an individual is thrown or abandoned in the space of ἀπορία, that space in which we must admit of due to our own non-knowledge.

FRIENDSHIP BEYOND BEING

Socrates suggests that we give ourselves over to ἀπορία not only in his own examples given above but also when he uses a language of prophecy which gestures to an area that lies beyond being. This form of language should not surprise us, since the whole of the *Lysis* is governed by the god Hermes¹⁶⁹—the god who acts as the mediator between the gods and the humans. Socrates uses a very specific vocabulary

I have become dizzy [εἰλιγγιῶ]¹⁷⁰ due to the waylessness of the argument [ὑπο τῆς τοῦ λόγου ἀπορίας] and it ventures according to the ancient proverb ‘the beautiful is φίλος.’ It certainly resembles something soft, smooth, and sleek, on which account and in like manner it easily slips through and evades us because of these qualities. For I say that τᾶγαθόν is the beautiful...*Accordingly*, I will speak, announcing as a prophet [ἀπομαντεύμεος], that the beautiful and τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ is φίλον to neither the good nor the bad. What it is toward which I am prophetically speaking [μαντεύομαι], you must hear (*Lys.* 216c-d).

The only way to speak of τὸ ἀγαθόν is by way of prophetic utterance, a manner of speaking that allows that which is inherently distant and obscure to appear but as distance and obscure.

¹⁶⁹ James Haden, *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Dec., 1983), pp.327-356 “Friendship in Plato’s ‘Lysis,’” p.344.

¹⁷⁰ Εἰλιγγιῶ is the perfect aspect of the verb ἰλιγγιάω meaning “‘To be or become dizzy,’” “‘to lose one’s head,’ caused by looking down from a height or by drunkenness.” Both of these meanings suggest a feeling that forces one outside of one’s rational mind. Looking down from a great height, in the context of the dialogue, does not suggest that Socrates is elevated or has some knowledge that transcends the world, but rather that the rational world has receded, leaving Socrates looking down into an abyss of ἀπορία, waylessness, perhaps even non-meaning.

We have seen in chapter one that prophecy is connected with μανία, especially philosophical μανία, which requires recollection. Furthermore, “the beautiful moves us, but cannot be possessed.”¹⁷¹ This is certainly the case in the *Phaedrus*, where the beautiful that shines through the god-like face of the beloved makes the wings of the soul grow (*Phdr.* 251a-b). It is the soul’s wings that drive the human to recollect that which the soul once beheld, i.e., what *is* most of all [τὸ ὄν ὄντως] (*Phdr.* 249c), which the gods have seen and which are “the things outside of the heaven” and “a place above the heavens” (*Phdr.* 247c), which I take to mean is ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, since it is this upper area that all souls are greedy [γλιχόμεναι] for but which is impossible to reach (*Phdr.* 248a). Consequently, the beautiful, that with which the philosopher is most concerned, *is* τὸ ἀγαθόν and is a φίλον to the human being, which as we have seen above is the neither good nor bad, and it is this that is slipping through us and yet evading our grasp. It forever resists our grasp despite its inherent closeness, driving one into ἀπορία.¹⁷² And so, due to their prophetic givenness, the beautiful and τὸ ἀγαθόν are, in a sense, prophetically speaking, more inward to me than is myself. The soul, as expressed in chapter one, is prophetic, which now as is revealed not only the beautiful belongs to but τὸ ἀγαθόν as well. However, according to the *Phaedrus*, neither the beautiful nor τὸ ἀγαθόν is found *within* the beloved or the lover, but both are only conduits for the divine. As such, as will be explained further in the next section, neither individual can in advance be certain that the beloved will truly bestow upon him that which he will give. There can be no guarantee of a reciprocal relationship. Socrates becomes dizzy from the prophetic μανία and ἀπορία which now grip him. He is wholly outside the economy of reason.

¹⁷¹ “Friendship and Community in Plato’s *Lysis*,” p.12.

¹⁷² See chapter two.

THE ECONOMY OF FRIENDSHIP

Furthermore, all conceptions of φιλία in terms of any sort of economy are inadequate since, without the introduction of the “first friend [πρῶτον φίλον]” (*Lys.* 219c), out of which the very phenomenon of φιλία erupts (*Lys.* 220b), it falls outside of the circle of economy exactly as does τὸ ἀγαθόν. The first friend cannot be rationally argued for but must nevertheless be taken as a starting point of φιλία. It is simply presupposed and shown necessary by means of *reductio ad absurdum*. That which we normally term ‘friends,’ those entities either because of or for the sake of something else, are merely images or phantoms [εἶδωλα] of the “first friend,” which is “truly the friend [ἀληθῶς ἐστι φίλον]” (*Lys.* 219c-d). All phantom friends only appear to be friends because they not only depend upon a concept under which they can be understood as friends and thus are immediately understandable, but also because they all emerge from reason, calculation, and exchange value. In fact, phantom friends such as gold, silver, earthenware not only can be exchanged for other items or be replaced but must be exchanged for something else if they are to have value (*Lys.* 219e). Thus phantom friends cannot be seen in their uniqueness. “Every object of attention such as this is not zealously pursued for real things, which are prepared *for the sake of* something else, but for that something that all such things are prepared for” (*Lys.* 219e-220a). The terminology of for the sake of, if it is not understood within a greater context—one within the context of a first friend, the true friend is a friend for the sake of no other thing (*Lys.* 220b)—leads only to an endless cycle of attempting to ground φιλία.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ It should be noted that although the first friend grounds the argument that φιλία does exist, it itself is groundless, since no argument can prove its existence.

The terminology in the passages concerning the concepts “for the sake of” and “because of” (*Lys.* 218d-220e) slowly moves us away from all economy. It is because of the bad that τὸ ἀγαθόν is shown φιλεῖν (*Lys.* 220c), and yet if in theory the bad ceases to exist, one would not exhibit φιλία toward τὸ ἀγαθόν because it would be without benefit. However, that which we call τὸ φίλον in which all things end [ἔτελεύτα], are those things “for the sake of another” and bear no resemblance to these things (*Lys.* 220d-e); τὸ φίλον is not for the sake of anything. It exists prior to and despite all such language. Socrates and his young interlocutors conclude that that which they have been calling τὸ φίλον is not for the sake of something but for the sake of a foe. But as we have just seen, without the bad or the enemy, there would be no friend—and yet this has already be refuted by previous arguments. To remove us completely outside the language of use-value, the introduction of desire [ἐπιθυμία] and lack [ἐνδεής] are employed.

DESIRING AND LACKING A FRIEND

As revealed above, one can only exit the realm of asking “what is the use?” by a radical event, such as divine beautiful/τὸ ἀγαθόν slipping into one vis-à-vis the beloved, engendering a recollection of one’s prophetic past and future. What is at issue here is the question, can one exhibit φιλία toward τὸ ἀγαθόν? The answer must be affirmed in the negative, if use-value and/or the promise of reciprocity are used. This is inevitable since both place one in a compartment of economy and exchange, even possible exchange, while both φιλία and τὸ ἀγαθόν are beyond such an economy—beyond all economy. There is a preconceived notion of the possible use-value of the one towards whom one shows φιλία, in this manner of thinking. If one befriends another with the preconceived idea that the befriended will be of some benefit, placing the befriended within a sphere of economy, the friend advances toward the befriended as

if the former possessed the truth of what *φιλία* is. And so, he behaves like one who believes that he or she possesses wisdom and so is no friend to wisdom, thus undermining friendship all together.

To force a pre-determined rational framework upon *φιλία* is to miss the phenomenon all together. One is not open to the phenomenon. In his discussion, with Menexenus, of the question of what is *φιλία*, Socrates begins with the former's experience [*ἔμπειρον*] of it.¹⁷⁴ Socrates asks Menexenus how *φιλία* strikes him in its immediacy. Presumably Socrates is asking the youth to put aside what he has been told by his elders (the law and traditions of the social hierarchy), especially Hippothales, who sings praises of Lysis (*Lys.* 205d-e), and his cousin, Ctesippus. In other words, Socrates asks not only Menexenus but Lysis as well to reflect upon the experience of the phenomenon of *φιλία* as it is expressed between them. They share in some things and differ in others (*Lys.* 207b-c).¹⁷⁵ But what they share and how they share it is another question altogether, which I will discuss in the next section.

Through the introduction of the terminology of desire and lacking, we are taken outside of any thought of a closed economy. For instance, the erotic-matters for which Socrates is renowned are not static desires but are concerned with an ongoing process. For instance, when speaking about his life-long quest for a friend, Socrates states that he has a strong erotic-longing [*ἔρωτικῶς*] for the possession of a *φίλον* (*Lys.* 211e). And yet, he has not yet satisfied this

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p.13. See also, pp.3, 11, and 19.

¹⁷⁵ Nichols' explains that when the friends Lysis and Menexenus are asked which of the two is older, wealthier or more beautiful they both laugh. This reaction shows that whatever may separate them, they share their laughter, p.13. However, laughter is a form of communication that offers nothing of a propositional manner. Instead, both individuals lose themselves, their sense of "I" or even of a "We" for that matter. All that is left is an empty space around which the two orbit. Those who share in such laughter share no home, abode, or kinship. I will show that this is the case in the final section of this chapter in reference to *οικεῖος*.

erotic-longing and never had possessed it, at least as one would usually define “possess.”¹⁷⁶

Socrates recognizes through his knowledge of erotic-matters and prophetic utterances that, as has been shown previously, the human being is not an object among other objects in the world. The human cannot be understood through propositional language or thought; the human exists ecstatically, irreducible to discursive understanding, and so is impossible to possess. Through his knowledge of erotic matters, Socrates is made aware of his profound lack of a φίλον, which only furthers his desire for it.

Whatever the quality of the desire and lack discussed in the *Lysis* is, it must revolve around the recognition that neither can be fulfilled. If the desire or the lack is for a φίλον and τὸ ἀγαθόν they can never be hypothetically fulfilled, that is to say, within the limited span of our mortal lives, but rather there is an ontological necessity to the lack and to an ongoing desire. It is necessary that if one desires and is erotically inclined [ἐπιθυμοῦντα καὶ ἐρῶντα] (*Lys.* 221b) one will exhibit φιλία toward that which is desired and erotically loved [ἐπιθυμεῖ καὶ ἐρᾷ]. The origin of φιλία is no longer “for the sake of” or “because of,” both of which are indicative of use-value and of exchange, but desire itself; and we desire what we lack [ἐνδεές] (*Lys.* 211d-e), which is to say, what we will never possess.

One displays φιλία for these things because in a sense these things are more proper to oneself than are those things which one possesses in a static manner. Desire individualizes the lover, since it is the lover’s alone, whether reciprocated or not. In a sense, if τὸ ἀγαθόν is going to be a φίλον, which it must be if philosophy is a real possibility, and if φιλία is a true

¹⁷⁶ Laszlo Versenyi in his article “Plato’s ‘Lysis’ *Phronesis*, Vol. 20, No.3 (1975) pp.185-198, reminds us that “Those that are deficient desire, love, hold dear that in which they are deficient, and what they are deficient in is what is *phusei oikeion*, what by nature belongs to them but is as yet unobtained and unpossessed,” p.188. I believe that what we lack by nature is, in my language prophetic, since it is that which is always yet unobtained and always unpossessed.

phenomenon, nothing belongs to the lover more to him or her than that toward which the desire is aimed. That which *I* desire is what *I* lack. Such a lack defines me more than that which I possess as just another object, since what I possess as an object is external to me. Not only can it be physically taken away from me but ontologically it is what I am not. Moreover, it forces me into a comportment of self-forgetting; I believe that I am defined by an object, that I am completed by something which lays outside of my being. A true desire and that which I truly lack and am defined by must not denude itself completely, i.e., become an object. Desire denudes in the sense of not uncovering; it reveals the one who does not manifest—this is similar to how τὸ ἀγαθόν and τὸ φίλον must not be denuded. Desire and that which I lack reveal a principle of insufficiency which defines me by putting my being into question, contesting it.

IV. The Initiation into a Home without a Hearth:

Derrida writes, in *The Politics of Friendship*, that the end of the *Lysis* is dominated by the concept of οἰκειότης¹⁷⁷ or rather, as used in the dialogue, of τὸ οἰκεῖον, kinship, or being akin.

Derrida asks whether οἰκειότης implies, due to its etymological roots,

an indissociable network of significations which are of import to us here, a semantic locus totally assembled, precisely, around the hearth (*oikos*) the home, habitat, domicile—and grave: kinship—literal or metaphorical—domesticity, familiarity, property, therefore appropriability, proximity: everything an *economy* can reconcile, adjust or harmonize, I will go so far as to say *present*, in the *familiarity* of the *near* and the *neighbor*.¹⁷⁸

The οἶκος, as hearth, makes present the inhabitants to each other. They are immediately at hand and fully able to be made recognizable. This has historical roots as well. The οἶκος,

found itself in a rather precarious position, squeezed between the stronger claims of the individual and the polis. For the special relationship between city and citizen which is such a defining feature of classical Greece in general and of democratic Athens in

¹⁷⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 2005), p.154.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

particular could only be achieved by damping down other affiliations that might get in the way. Links with tribal associations, family-cults, and ancestral domain had been deliberately undermined by the founders of democracy at the end of the sixth century and a whole host of polis-organizations erected in their place.¹⁷⁹

Giving in to the pressures of the city, the οἶκοι became “the private space[s]...They might be considered ‘zones of commodifications’, magic spaces that turn people into products, enabling uncomplicated transactions a world away from ‘love-affairs’ and ‘seduction’.”¹⁸⁰ Whatever may have been private in the household, whatever may have been sacred, is now reduced to what is common and belongs to the people; this is reflected by the words that are opposed to τὸ οἰκεῖον, i.e., δημόσιος and κοινός. This description of the zone of commodification reminds us of Lysias’ speech in the *Phaedrus*, in which it is suggested that a lover should choose a beloved not based on love but for purely economic reasons, of which Socrates exclaims that it “benefits the people [δημωφελεῖς]” (*Phdr.* 227d). And so it would appear that, within Plato’s time of writing the *Phaedrus*, the home had already been infested by the city’s effects, and now comes to resemble just another space in which things, including people, can be exchanged for one another.

And yet, Derrida asks whether a friendship without presence is possible. He inquires into whether or not an aneconomic friendship is possible, before which “truth itself would start to tremble,”¹⁸¹ implying that a community founded upon aneconomic principles erupts in the destruction of truth as a discursive concept. If, as I have suggested, it is the purpose of a τὸ φίλον to throw one into ἀπορία, waylessness, and because this form of thinking exists outside of the everydayness in which one finds oneself, it is little wonder that Socrates speaks for need of initiation into erotic mysteries, which is “the desire [προθυμία] of true lovers” (*Phdr.* 253c). As we have just seen, desire [ἐπιθυμία] is the cause of φιλία, which is indicative of a

¹⁷⁹ James Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), p.183.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.112.

¹⁸¹ *Politics of Friendship*, p.155.

desire for kinship, as David Bolotin suggests.¹⁸² That is to say, φιλία is a desire to be part of a larger whole. But desire is for that which I lack [ἐνδεής], in this case, a desire for a type of kinship that cannot be reduced to the demands of the city, especially if it is τὸ ἀγαθόν toward which we exhibit φιλία, since by its nature it must always be outside of the city as realm of being. Moreover, this lack [ἐνδεής], which defines me, is not only that what one is not; it will never come “to be,” it cannot be in being. It will never come to manifest, unless it falls into the zone of commodification. As a result, kinship, for Plato, does not rely upon a political model of exchangeability, use-value, and economy. Whatever the relationship between the two friends is, it exceeds the political.

DISRUPTIONS, IN THE SOUL, OF THE POLITICAL

Dissatisfied with the democratic state, there is little wonder that Plato attempts to return to a concept of a type of initiation into certain mysteries that resist the mores of the city. As was revealed above, the erotic initiation runs contrary to law or custom [νόμος] (*Phdr.* 252a, 256e). This not only challenges the social norms of the city, and thus disrupts the hierarchy which (mortal) σωφροσύνη is supposed to engender, but more specifically defies the family unit itself, which “does not maintain itself by nature alone, but is supported by convention or by the laws.”¹⁸³ To a certain extent the final scene of the *Lysis* reveals a disruption within the social hierarchy. The two young interlocutors are beckoned home by their pedagogues, who were said, earlier in the dialogue, to rule over [ἄρχειν] Lysis because he must be instructed (*Lys.* 208c), are now, even though ultimately unsuccessfully, warded off. Perhaps the adolescent interlocutors are made aware that there exists a kind of kinship that is more originary than that which is grounded in law.

¹⁸² *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship: An Interpretation of the Lysis with a New Translation*, p.187.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

The question, then, arises, what holds together the members of this community that is contrary to social conventions? And with whom do we display οἰκεῖον? We find an answer within the *Lysis*. Emphasizing the need for a kinship that is outside of the traditional household, Socrates claims that there are individuals who are “more akin [οἰκείοτερον]” to one than are one’s own family members (*Lys.* 210e), and these individuals “by some natural kinship [φύσει πη οἰκεῖοί] are each others’” (*Lys.* 221e). Furthermore, it is said that the lover “would neither love [εραῖ], nor desire, nor exhibit φιλία if he did not chance to be akin [οἰκεῖος] to the beloved [ἐρωμένω] either by soul, by some disposition/habit [ἦθος] of the soul or way of the soul” (*Lys.* 222a). While it is difficult to understand the soul’s significance in the *Lysis*, the *Phaedrus* does shed light upon this topic.

So unusual and profound is this natural bond that the “beloved is struck out of himself” [ἐρῶντος ἐκπλήττει] when he discovers that all of his other friends and those who are akin are nothing compared with the enthused friend [ἔνθος φίλον] (*Phdr.* 255b). The beloved ex-ists when this natural bond is discovered. In other words, he or she steps outside of the immediacy of the traditional home. Due to the language of the divine, being enthused, and of being struck out of oneself—ex-isting—natural kinship is similar to a kinship of those who have been initiated into sacred knowledge and certain mysteries, in this case the erotic mysteries.

Normally initiation into the mysteries implies a coming together of like minded individuals who are bound within a community through the secret knowledge they gain, and which “enforce...socially important representations,”¹⁸⁴ which is to say, representations that enforce important knowledge for the secret society. Furthermore, these individuals hold secrets that not all of humanity possess and are “lifted to a higher plane; it is, in some peculiar sense,

¹⁸⁴ F.M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p.46.

sacred or holy; its members are something more than ordinary mortals, they are in some degree *divine*. Thus the Kouretes are called *daemones*, and even *theoi*; the magician for Hesiod is a ‘divine man’ (θεῖος ἀνὴρ).”¹⁸⁵ (It should be noted not only that Socrates hears what he refers to as a δαιμόνιον but also, in the *Symposium*, claims that one who is wise in the matters of ἔρως and thus able to interpret the things of humans to the gods and the things of gods to the human is a δαιμόνιος ἀνὴρ (*Sym.* 203a). And when rightly initiated into erotic-matters, an individual is able to suddenly [ἐξαίφνης] experience the beautiful, τὸ καλόν (*Sym.* 210a-e), which lies outside of the discursive reasoning of the “ladder of love.”) The ‘secret knowledge’ that joins the erotic members is the knowledge of the soul, which can only be illuminated by the fourth type of madness, that is philosophy, as found in the *Phaedrus*.

TRACKING DOWN THE DIVINE IN THE SOUL

It has been shown that erotic initiation requires the correct employment of memories (*Phdr.* 249c), by which one recollects what the soul has experienced during the divine banquet. This includes, among other things, recollecting that the soul had followed in the train of Zeus and the other gods (*Phdr.* 250b). It is said that each soul was a follower of a particular god, who the individual honors and attempts to imitate (*Phdr.* 252d). Consequently, the initiation is into the knowledge of one’s own soul and that of the beloved’s. The natural kinship is found within the soul of the individual.

At first, neither the lover nor the beloved is aware of the god whom they followed. The exemplary god is Zeus, since it is the individual with a Zeus-like soul who displays a philosophical nature (*Phdr.* 252e), and it is with this sort of soul that we will concern ourselves for the purposes of this chapter. Because of this philosophical nature only such an individual

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p.96.

would be attentive to how one lacks or falls short of being Zeus-like, since Socrates' way of knowing is being cognizant of what he may not know. Indeed, Socrates claims that if individuals are not yet aware of the character of another's soul, these philosophical individuals will search out anyone who can teach them and then "track down within themselves [ἰχνεύοντες δὲ παρ' ἑαυτῶν]" the nature of their own god (*Phdr.* 253a). In this way, these individuals are able to grasp the god by memory and they become enthused and receive from him the habits and the practices, as far as it is possible for a human to partake in the god (*Phdr.* 253a). Two interrelated aspects of this passage must be brought into relief. First, the philosophical lover remembers that the soul has journeyed together with Zeus to "what *is* most of all [τὸ ὄν ὄντως]" and it is this which causes "god to be divine [θεὸς ὧν θεῖος ἐστίν]" (*Phdr.* 249c). The name "Zeus" is given to the god simply as a name, a human concept given to him, but because he has seen 'what *is* most of all' he is in fact divine; he is not *a* god but the divine itself, that which is completely beyond human comprehension. Second and related to this, the lover does not find Zeus within himself but only tracks [ἰχνεύω] the god. This is to say, Zeus has left a footprint, trace, or clue [ἶχνος] within the soul. The lover never finds the god but only what is left behind, an absence. This may, perhaps, be one reason why Socrates states that he still does not know what kind of soul he has; he is still tracking down the divine in his own soul.

In addition, the beloved does not have the character of the god either. In fact, the lover does all that he can to give the beloved the character of the god (*Phdr.* 252e). The beloved is only believed to be the cause of the lover's enthused state (*Phdr.* 253a). Furthermore, it is not even the character of the beloved which attracts the lover; the cause, rather, is beauty

[τό καλόν] (*Phdr.* 249d-252e).¹⁸⁶ Τὸ καλόν as the cause of the desire toward the beloved is significant because it is the mark of excess, which allows the lover to partake in philosophical μανία (*Phdr.* 249e). Singling out [ἐκλέγεται] a loved one from beauty, and as if the loved one were a god, the lover sculpts and adorns the beloved like a statue, so that he will honor and worship him (*Phdr.* 252d-e). If we return briefly to the topic of how the 6th century Athenian democratic state attempted to replace household gods and family-cults with a public form of worship, there should be little wonder why the lover makes the beloved a god-like statue. He is creating for himself a god who has sacred significance for him. In other words, the lover is creating a home in which the divine is able to manifest in such a way as not to be subsumed under statist power. The lover “divinizes”¹⁸⁷ the beloved, making the beloved god-like, by being struck into philosophical μανία through the excessive beauty that shines forth from the loved one. As the source of his philosophical μανία, the beloved is treated by the lover to be truly god-like; in fact, the lover is in the service of the beloved “as if he were equal to a god [ὡς ἰσόθεος θεραπευόμενος]” (*Phdr.* 255a).

However, we should take notice that every god is present within the divine banquet which the lover recollects, save Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, who “alone stays in the house [οἶκῳ] of the gods” (*Phdr.* 247a). Consequently, whatever we recollect of the divine banquet and of the gods, we do not recollect an οἶκεῖον that revolves around a hearth. There is no hearth around which the gods and the souls within the divine banquet gather. The human soul is not privy to the house of the gods. We recollect viewing and following them only after they have left their house. A community that gathers around a hearth is not for the human but belongs only to

¹⁸⁶ See especially, Charles L. Griswold, Jr. *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1996), pp.121-133, although I come to different conclusions as he does.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.125.

the gods, or perhaps to the divine itself. Neither the lover nor the beloved manifest themselves to each other; their characters are always underway, in development. As such, a human kinship must resist what has been prescribed to the individual through the law; the being of their character must always be contested. And so, their home is one without a hearth.

ENCASED WITHIN OUR OWN FLESH

It must be asked, why does the lover make the beloved god-like at all?¹⁸⁸ While it is certainly true that the lover is reenacting what has occurred during the divine banquet,¹⁸⁹ there is more to it than this; there is a strictly phenomenological reason as well. Alone we become hardened, as it were, to the phenomenon of τὸ καλόν. By “alone” I do not mean solitude in the strict sense of the word, for one can be alone within the world populated by others. Instead, to be alone suggests that one not question the world around one, but only look to how phenomena appear in their unquestioned immediacy. As the Socratic dialogues reveal, a consideration of ἀρετή is possible only in dialogue with others—comporting oneself in relation to others, dwelling in the pre-cognitive realm of ἀπορία. The non-lover depicted in Lysias’ speech in the *Phaedrus* is an example of how one can be alone even within the company of another, for neither the non-lover nor the non-beloved questions the world around them, they forget themselves and their relationship with each other. Each is only concerned with the gain and benefits that the other can provide. They are isolated within the flesh of their own bodies, truly desiring only what is in their own self-interest.

Without being in a kinship and without the recollection that τὸ καλόν of the beloved brings with it, which initiates us into the erotic mysteries, we are, as Socrates says in *Phaedrus*, an oyster [τὸ ὄστρεον]. Here, Socrates states, “We being cleansed [when participating in the

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 127.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

divine banquet] and not entombed as now in that which we carry about us and we name the body, to which we have been fettered as is the custom of an oyster [καθαροὶ ὄντες καὶ ἀσήμαντοι τούτου ὃ νῦν σῶμα περιφέροντες ὀνομάζομεν ὀστρέου τρόπον δεδεσμευμένοι]” (*Phdr.* 250c). Without the catharsis that the initiation gives to us, we are within the world but are unaffected by the communally shared experience, unable to undergo the ἀπορία which τὸ καλὸν forces us into. We are unaffected by the phenomena of the communal dwelling place. While the shell provides protection for the vulnerable insides, it does so to such extent that the soul is encased, distancing it from and distorting the vision of the phenomena around it. Consequently, one is drawn outside of the community into a world that is all of one’s own. As a result, one cannot respond to the call that the community sends out, and so one cannot place oneself in correct relation to others and therefore one cannot situate oneself in relation to the beloved.

Indeed, oysters, due to their shells, are destined to live an isolated and solitary life. The verb ὀστρακίζειν, “to banish by potsherds, or shells” or “to ostracize,” is related to τὸ ὀστρεῖον. To be an oyster is thus always already to be self-ostracizing. Although oysters lay together in their beds, there is no community among them. Still encased, each is fettered to his own private worldview, not one of them experiences ἀπορία. Perhaps we should think of τὸ οἰκεῖον as a kinship revolving around a hearth, as a private worldview, a cloistered life, or at least a worldview that is fit only for a god.

By treating the beloved as if he were a god, the lover is opened to the call of τὸ καλὸν and of the divine. Such a call can only be heard and supplication can only occur if one is opened to the divine vis-à-vis the beloved. However, as having no hearth, the kinship that is shared between the lover and the beloved is a kinship that is, at the same time, an absence. Unlike the

oyster-like individual, however, the two lovers share in their absence. They desire to be together, but it is this desire that keeps them as lovers, as the *Phaedrus* makes clear (255e-256d). Their erotic longing cannot be fulfilled; they understand that they must remain in a constant state of ἐνδεής. The two ex-ist outside within one another, existing ecstatically towards one another; their being as isolated individuals is contested and their sense of identity is negated. Their being, defined by mortal conventions, is shattered.

SACRIFICING THE BELOVED

As others have suggested, the union or communion of lover and beloved is not like the lovers of Aristophanes in the *Symposium*, who will be bound together as a whole.¹⁹⁰ What appears to be at issue in this speech is the two individuals, the lover and the beloved, becoming a third entity; such a union would result in the two individual losing themselves through their becoming a totality. According to Aristophanes, the desire for becoming complete is one of finding one's missing tally [σύνβολον] (*Sym.* 191d) and to recoup our archaic nature [ἀρχαία φύσει], which he calls ἔρωσ (*Sym.* 193a). I, however, approach the problem in a slightly different light. Certainly, the two cannot become a totality, belonging to each other immediately developing into a third entity. Not only is there no “world soul”¹⁹¹ into which the two individuals could dissolve, but more significantly the lover and beloved literally do not exist. In the experience of the lover “divinizing” the beloved, the former sacrifices the latter. He rips apart the beloved's former identity, disrupting his familial ties, and gives him to the unsayable divine, to which τὸ ἀγαθόν belongs. And in so doing the lover renounces himself, witnessing what he too is, a non-being. The lover is now absent and the beloved dissolved, revealing the

¹⁹⁰ *Friendship and Community in Plato's Lysis*, p.1 and *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship: An Interpretation of the Lysis with a New Translation*, p. 188.

¹⁹¹ *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, pp. 84, 144.

sacred, excessive nature of both, showing what is “there,” what is present when the lover and the beloved are no longer. Losing their self-identity, they collapse into a singularity that is present no-where; there is no community to be found here. They now revolve around the unsayable, non-knowledge that ἀπορία represents.

Furthermore, the desire for τὸ καλόν that drives one into a philosophic μανία is now exercised upon the beloved too, so that the excess of the beloved may be seen by the beloved himself: “He is in love but is at a loss [ἀπορεῖ] as to with whom; he does not understand what he undergoes [πέπονθεν] and is not able to speak it...he sees himself in his lover as in a mirror but forgets [ὡσπερ δ’ ἐν κατόπτρῳ ἐν τῷ ἐρῶντι ἑαυτὸν ὁρῶν λέληθεν]” (255d). In fact, this reflection of himself obscures the immediacy of his view of his own self: he is de-centered and distanced from himself, such that he can no longer understand his own condition, and does not even know with whom he is in love. But just as a mirror is essentially empty, the lover too is ‘empty’ in the sense of exceeding rational understanding, so that the beloved, through the influence of the lover, is now ἀποροῦσα at his own condition. What results are two individuals living together in kinship, sharing something that cannot be expressed within the merely human and that must therefore remain in silence. The two individuals share an opening to experience the excessively impossible. For if the two were ever to consummate their relationship, in the mundane manner, they would simply become mere objects to each other, thus bringing the kinship into being and thus destroying it. Whatever the community is, it takes upon itself the impossibility of its own immanence; it is the impossible community.

It has been argued that the beloved is passive, the relationship is asymmetrical, and that the lover imposes his hegemony upon the beloved.¹⁹² And to a certain extent this is true, the

¹⁹² Ibid, p.127

philosophical lover does attempt to pattern the beloved after the Zeus-like soul he believes he has; after all, “From Zeus they draw water, just as Bacchantes, pouring upon the soul of the beloved and they make as much as is possible, most like their own god” (*Phdr.* 253a). The true lover, then, through his or her desire, leads the beloved, who is brought into measure with the *ιδέα*, the look of or perhaps the nature of, the god who the former follows, through the initiation into the erotic mysteries (*Phdr.* 253b-c). However, as we have seen, that which governs and holds sovereignty over the kinship of the lover and beloved is not something that can be discursively known. If it is not the character of the beloved which attracts the lover but rather the beauty shining through him and if it is *τὸ καλόν* which allows the lovers to recollect not only the gods but that which makes the god divine, i.e., the *τὸ ὄν ὄντως*, which itself, exactly as *τὸ ἀγαθόν* is said to be, is in the place beyond the heavens, outside of existence, then by its very nature the hegemony is self-undermining. It is the sign of its own unfulfillment, a hegemony that must always remain to come.

Besides, when the lovers are in the gymnasium and touch, longing [*ἰμερον*] erupts out of the beloved and overflows into the lover (*Phdr.* 255c). Here the beloved is individualized by this eruption of longing and desire, through the lack of his lover. He knows himself to be a beloved, although he forgets with whom, only when he admits of the one whom he lacks. The longing speaks to him by showing what arouses him. Only then does he recognize what he may become or is becoming.

As we have seen, first, the lover does not love the beloved's character, or to put it differently, his uniqueness but rather acts only as a conduit for the divine and thus could be said to forget the beloved and that the beloved forgets who it is he loves. In fact, they both forget themselves, at least in the sense of their mortal lives. This suggests that both wish for their own

destruction, they both wish to receive that which is impossible, kinship with the other. This can only occur in the *μανία* that defines philosophical *ἔρως*. Just as the beloved overflows with longing and forgets, the lover too forgets his mortal life and, through this self-forgetting, they both recollect who they are in a more profound manner. Both enter into a realm of *ἀπορία*, of non-knowledge. And lest they be tempted to fall back into the world of objects, the initiation must be reenacted time after time, and each time they both experience non-knowledge, the death of themselves and they grow wings returning to the hearthless celestial banquet never to grasp what *is* most of all.

INTERLUDE
A MYSTERY WRAPPED IN A PUZZLE CLOAKED IN AN ENIGMA:
The Life, Times, and Translation of Pseudo-Dionysius

In *Epistle I*, addressed to Gaius the monk, Pseudo-Dionysius affirms that the “quite positively complete unknowing” he is aiming at provoking is in fact a certain peculiar kind of “knowledge of that which is in excess to everything that is known” (1065A). And indeed our knowledge of the identity of Pseudo-Dionysius coincides with our unknowing; we do not know anything certain about the historical author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. There are several ways of referring to the author: Dionysius; Pseudo-Dionysius; Denys; the Areopagite; but even the title “the Areopagite” is purely hypothetical, since our author presents himself only as Dionysius.¹⁹³

The *Corpus Dionysiacum* makes its first appearance during the reign of Justinian (532-33), in a controversy between Orthodox bishops, Ephesus Hypatius in particular, and a group opposed to them who gathered around Severus of Antioch.¹⁹⁴ The Severians were monophysites and used the *Corpus* as proof of the orthodoxy of their doctrine, although Hypatius expressed doubt as to the authenticity of the work. However, throughout the medieval period the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* had been venerated as the disciple of Paul, mentioned in Paul’s letters, and even identified with Denys, the bishop of Paris, who was martyred.

Only during the Renaissance, due to the work of Lorenzo Valla and Erasmus, was the authenticity of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* again put into question.¹⁹⁵ Two modern scholars, Hugo Koch¹⁹⁶ and Josef Stiglmayr,¹⁹⁷ also call into question the author’s identity. Their argument rests

¹⁹³ Filip Ivanonić, *Symbols and Icons: Dionysius the Areopagite and the Iconoclastic Crisis* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010), p.9.

¹⁹⁴ William Riordan, *Divine Light: The Theology of Denys the Areopagite* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), p.23.

¹⁹⁵ *Symbol and Icon*, p.10.

¹⁹⁶ Hugo Koch, “Proklus als Quelle des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in her Lehre von Bösen,” *Philosogus* 54 (1895), pp.438-54.

on Neo-Platonic terminology in general and in particular the posing of the question of evil found in part four of *Concerning Divine Names*, which according to them depends on Proclus' *De malorum subsistentia*. With this in mind, Pseudo-Dionysius would appear to have been a contemporary of Proclus, who died in 485, or to have lived little after him. In fact, Pseudo-Dionysius attributes to his teacher Hierotheus a work entitled “Θεολογικαὶ στοιχειώσεις,” a title of a treatise Proclus had written. This may indicate that the author wished to hide behind the name of his master, the last exponent of Neo-Platonism. Whatever the case may be, Pseudo-Dionysius most likely studied at the Academy in the wake of Proclus and was greatly influenced by him.

CHRISTIAN OR NEO-PLATONIST?

What is the true intention of the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*? Given the abundance of Neo-Platonic terms together with the sincerity of Christian doctrine and familiarity with liturgy,¹⁹⁸ there is much debate as to whether Pseudo-Dionysius was a Christian or a pagan. Was he a Christian initiated into Neo-Platonic doctrines who used the “things of the Greeks” (*Ep. VII 1080B*) to express the truth of the faith, or a Neo-Platonist who wished to prolongate the life of pagan thought by introducing them into the sphere of Christian language? Scholars are divided.¹⁹⁹ I make no explicit reference to either heritage of Pseudo-Dionysius. I wish to let the writings speak from out of themselves, giving us a radicalization of both Neo-Platonic and Christian thought. And there is no reason to separate the two; a thinker can be both simultaneously. It is clear that the Areopagite was familiar with scripture, with the patristic tradition, and with Neo-Platonic doctrine. Emphasizing one over the others seems, to me, forced.

¹⁹⁷ Josef Stiglmayr, “Der Neuplatoniker Proklos als Vorlage des sog. Dionysius Areopagite in der Lehre Vom Übel,” *Historisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1985), pp.253-73.

¹⁹⁸ *Divine Light*, p.28.

¹⁹⁹ Riordan, Ivanović, Fran O'Rourke, and Andrew Louth emphasize Pseudo-Dionysius' Christian background, while Koch, Stiglmayr, and Eric D. Perl stress his Neo-Platonic leanings.

I will proceed with the notion that there is no conflict between being a Christian and a Neo-Platonist.

Valdimir Kharlmov has nicely synthesized our knowledge about Pseudo-Dionysius and his *Corpus*,

The *Corpus Dionysiaca* in its content and origin conjures up almost any meaning the word mystical can connote. It is mysterious, veiled, hidden, clandestine, concealed, arcane, esoteric, symbolic, otherworldly, and supernatural; and if one were asked to write a biography of the author, it might be the shortest book in the world.²⁰⁰

In the end, we cannot draw any sure and definitive conclusion of the true identity and affiliations of the author of the *Corpus Dionysiaca*, just as Pseudo-Dionysius wished to present himself in the key words of his work—ineffable and unknowable.

At the very least, the supposition that Pseudo-Dionysius attended the Academy of Athens seem convincing. Surely the Neo-Platonic tradition found its way into the *Corpus*. However, there is a development of the Neo-Platonic tradition in his work. As we have seen, Plato wrote, in what is for Neo-Platonism the single most important passage in his works, that “the good is not what truly *is* but lies beyond being [ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας] in seniority [πρεσβεία] and power” (R. 509b). Since the good provides being and intelligibility to the forms, which taken together constitute οὐσία, the whole of ‘what is,’ it cannot itself be merely one of them, but must lie beyond them. As that by which the forms are intelligible and are beings, the good is epistemology and ontologically prior to the forms, and in this sense “older” than being, and makes ‘what is,’ in the sense of transcending it in power. Of course, in Plato, the precise ontological status of the good in relation to the forms and to the intellect remains ambiguous, since he also calls it an “ἰδέα” and an object of intellection; but Plato at least recognizes here that

²⁰⁰ Vladimir Kharlamov, *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole: The Concept of Theosis in the Theology of Pseudo-Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), p.69.

being, as the multiplicity of the forms, cannot be ultimate, i.e., that it depends for its existence and intelligibility on a principle that transcends it, and he identifies this principle as the good.

Pseudo-Dionysius develops his doctrine of God as “nameless,” “unknowable,” and as “beyond being.” His negative theology is not fundamentally a theory of theological language but a philosophical position taken over directly from the Platonic tradition. Pseudo-Dionysius’ God is transcendent, not in a vague, unspecified manner, but in the very precise metaphysical sense that it is not at all included within the whole of reality, of the things that are. If God has no name, that is because it is not anything at all. God is not merely beyond human thought, as if there were some other sort of thought that could reach it, or as if its incomprehensibility were simply due to a limitation on our part. Rather, God is beyond thought as such, because thought is directed, by definition, to beings, and hence to that which is delimited and derivative. When we hear that God is beyond being, we imagine some thing, even if a “superessentiality,” lying above or beyond being. But this fails to take seriously enough the meaning of “beyond being,” for it still thinks God as something, some being. Rather, we must recognize that for Pseudo-Dionysius, God is simply not anything.

William Riordan has individuated four points of divergence from the Neo-Platonic tradition: the unity of God in Pseudo-Dionysius versus the Neo-Platonic view of emanated hypostases; the goodness of God’s universe and the Neo-Platonic doctrine concerning material beings; God’s love for his universe and different Neo-Platonic teachings; and the ascent of the mystic according to Pseudo-Dionysius versus the Neo-Platonic ascent.²⁰¹ But Pseudo-Dionysius’ brand of Christianity is certainly a radical one, not adhering to today’s orthodoxy. He challenges our very notion of what it is to be God at all, forcing us to question what God is and thus what it

²⁰¹ *Divine Light*, p.77.

is to be a Christian. It is a Christianity that fully accepts and adopts its Neo-Platonic roots and incorporates their perspective wholly and in its most radical form.

THE *CORPUS DIONYSIACUM*

The *Corpus Dionysiacum* consists of four treatises: the *Celestial Hierarchy (CH)*; the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy (EH)*; *Concerning Divine Names (DN)*; *Concerning Mysterious Theology (MT)*; and ten epistles, all addressed to specific individuals. This gestures that Pseudo-Dionysius may not have wished any of his writings to be read in isolation or as academic pieces, but rather presents them to us as being part of a community. The *Corpus Dionysiacum* is communal and should be regarded as part of a larger community.

The *Celestial Hierarchy*, organizes, in a rigid hierarchical system regulated by laws, various categories of angels. The first three chapters introduce the hierarchy, both the celestial and the human, and give definitions as to what it is to be a hierarchy. Chapters four through ten present the celestial hierarchy by explaining the meaning of “angel” and that the hierarchy is classified into three ranks, each of which is classified into three orders. The next four chapters treat problems of the hierarchy, e.g., why all celestial entities are named “celestial powers;” why human hierarchs are called “angels;” why the prophet Isaiah is said to have been purified by the Seraphim; and what the traditional number of angels signifies. The last chapter considers scriptural descriptions of angels.

The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, consisting of seven chapters, describes liturgical functions and ecclesiastical orders. Each chapter considers a theme such as the tradition of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and its scope; the rite of illumination; the sacrament of the Eucharist; the rite of ointment; the ordination of bishops, priests, and deacons; the orders of the initiated and monastic tonsure; and funeral rites.

Made up of thirteen chapters, *Concerning Divine Names* is the longest and most complex of Pseudo-Dionysius' writings. It examines names attributed to the divine by scripture, revealing the divine as ineffable and unknowable, since it exceeds all entities. Although he employs *kataphasis* for naming the divine, the most appropriate path is *apophatic*, which consists of depriving the divinity of every attribute and all names. And yet, the divine is the productive cause of entities and so can be hymned or praised by all names. It is simultaneously deprived and endowed with every name. The second chapter introduces the concepts of union and distinction and clarifies the manner that names celebrate the divine, referring not to the first principle but to its emanations and creative powers. The third chapter, which serves as a foundation for chapter five of my dissertation, speaks of the importance of prayer. The successive chapters discuss names such as good, light, beautiful, love, ecstasy, zeal, evil, being, life, wisdom, mind, word, truth, power, justice, salvation, inequality, greatness, smallness, difference, similarity, dissimilarity, rest, motion, omnipotence, eternity, time, and finally, perfect and the one.

The *Mysterious Theology* is perhaps densest not only because it is so brief, consisting of only five chapters, but because its influence and centrality to the *Corpus* as a whole suggests that it represents the entire system of Pseudo-Dionysius and should be placed within the whole context and reexamined, since its density escapes immediate comprehension. The very title Περὶ μυστικῆς θεολογίας could be misleading and needs to be explained. The word “μυστικός” could be translated as “mystic” or “mystical” but it does not, for the Areopagite, convey a suprarational but rather something that is mysterious or hidden from others. For this reason, I have diverged from the traditional title, “Mystical Theology” and opt instead for “Mysterious Theology.”

The *Epistles* deal with various subject matters and, because they are of a synthetic character, could be used as an introduction to Pseudo-Dionysius' thought as a whole. The first speaks of the coincidence of knowledge of God and the non-knowing of God. The second affirms that God is in excess of every source, a source that is beyond divinity and beyond the good. *Epistle III* explains that the mystery of Jesus—also the divine nature, even after the Incarnation—remains unknowable and hidden. The fourth letter continues the discourse of the third, establishing the humanity of Jesus but at the same time, he remains excessively-existent. The fifth resumes the argument of the divine darkness of non-knowing. *Epistle VI* establishes that refuting an error does not necessarily mean comprehending the truth. In the seventh epistle, Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of the sophist Apollophanes, of the eclipse of the sun that occurred after the death of Christ, which was observed by Pseudo-Dionysius himself in Heliopolis. In the eighth letter, the Areopagite strengthens the importance of the hierarchical order of the Church, rebuking the monk Demophilus for criticizing a priest. *Epistle IX* speaks of scriptural and liturgical symbolism. Finally, in the tenth, Pseudo-Dionysius foretells to Saint John the Evangelist the end of his imprisonment on Patmos.

It is the recognition that God *at once* exceeds the world and being and yet is thoroughly present in them that constitutes the heart of the Areopagite's thought. God is beyond all the perfections of created entities and nonetheless is the preeminent center of the circle that exceedingly-is all of the points on the circumference (*DN 821A-B*). As God, it "pre-contains" as a cause what entities have as their effects. God who is their cause surpasses them all in totality. "Truly there is no exact likeness [ἐμφάρεια] between caused and cause, for the caused carry within themselves only such images [εἰκόνας] of their originating sources as are possible for them, whereas the causes themselves are located in a place exceeding the caused...The fire

which warms and burns is never said to be burnt and warmed” (DN 645C). What is important for our consideration is that a cause cannot give what it does not have. God must possess in God’s own way all that it gives to entities to receive and possess in their dependent participating manner. The term “likeness” [ἐμφάρεια] is derived from the verb ἐμφέρω, “to bear, to carry in.” God is “carried within” entities, to the extent that they can. In fact, “it is all...it has the names of everything that is...for it is their cause, their source, and their destiny [ὡς αἰτίας ὡς ἀρχῆς ὡς πέρατος]. It is all in all [τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσι], as scripture affirms” (DN 596C).

ISSUES OF TRANSLATION

There are two terms to which I would like to draw explicit attention. The first is Pseudo-Dionysius’ distinctive and frequent use of the prefix “ὑπερ-.” Although meaning “above, beyond, or super” these translations suggest that God is a transcendent entity held above the world of phenomena. However, this is misleading, as we will see in the last section of this chapter; in fact “*being* determines method, and not the reverse.”²⁰² Pseudo-Dionysius is primarily concerned with how the phenomena appear to us in their initial manifestation. I have translated the prefix as “exceeding or exceedingly” to emphasize the intensification of the word that Pseudo-Dionysius has in mind. The term is exaggerated to such an extent that it passes beyond its finite meaning, acting ultimately as a negation (DN 640B).

The second term to which I will draw our attention is θεαρχία (*thearxia*). Although it very often names the mystery of the trinity, this is not always the case. At times it is used by itself as a name to which things are praised. In general, I have left θεαρχία untranslated and in the Greek. Where I have translated it, θεαρχία has been rendered as “primordial-God” to

²⁰² *Divine Light*, p.34.

suggest that what is named here is prior to conceptuality. Θεαρχία is Pseudo-Dionysius' name for the highest and purest sense of God.

PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS' "PROJECT"

To point ahead to our discussion of Pseudo-Dionysius in connection to Bataille, I have used the term "project" in quotation marks to indicate that Pseudo-Dionysius does not have a project in the usual sense of the word. Rather it is a project of non-project, undoing itself in the process. *Apophasis* unworks the rational mind and makes it a site of exposure for that which exceeds the discursive. His "project" could never be a personal hermeneutic superimposed upon the subject matter. Project implies an action or a necessary to action. Pseudo-Dionysius has something else in mind. We are left at the mercy of the "project." Subsumed under it and held in its sway. Discursive reasoning gives way to a surrendering of the exposure of θεαρχία. That being said, Pseudo-Dionysius does have a method, as such but is himself directed by the phenomena themselves.

We come to know God in two respects, the soul's double movement of ascending up into God and becoming God through deification. We see *Concerning Divine Names* as Pseudo-Dionysius' treatise on affirmative theology, *kataphasis*. That is, it is about what can be affirmed to God because of its immanence in entities and its self-manifestation in scripture. While *Concerning Mysterious Theology* is a treatise on negative theology, *apophasis*. It is a denial of all of these affirmations in recognition of God's not being limited to any entity according to our way of knowing.

The hidden God exits out of itself; it immanentizes itself in entities. Pseudo-Dionysius' term for this is πρόοδος, meaning "a going forth, advancing." God is thus known through sensible objects and names. In a singular way God remains [μονή] within itself and sustains

every entity in itself. By attraction of its goodness, God draws all, in love, back to itself. The Dionysian term here is ἐπιστροφή, “a turning back.” This divine respiration, all coming forth from God and returning to it, takes place *within* God. The going forth is not a spatial distancing of entities from God. The πρόοδος is the entities’ arising into being while remaining within God; their ἐπιστροφή is its increasing resemblance to God.

The affirmative theology is a turning of the human mind toward the immanent God who poured forth itself out into entities and of its incarnation. The affirmative theology, then, is the soul’s deepen loving recognition of God who is, in its πρόοδος, *all* (MT 1032D-1033C). The soul is taken up in admiration of God’s expansive self-giving. In affirming that God is all, the soul begins with the highest and ends with the lowest as it traces the path from the center of the divine nature out through the divine procession and then the created emanations.

The God who is immanent in and manifest through the created πρόοδος is excessively-affirmed beyond it. It is, then, necessary for the soul to negate all that it has affirmed of the self-manifesting and revealing God. The soul, even as it continues to affirm that all are God *by participation*, must also deny that all are God *as God*. What God is *as God*, they are according to their mode of being, as emanations. The negative theology is a profound realization that God is radically different from entities. In order more deeply to understand God as it actually is, then, the soul must deny what it has previously affirmed about God. Beginning with the lowest entities, which are not God as it is (MT 1033C-1040D), the soul ascends to denying the highest affirmations regarding the divine nature and the trinity (DN 709C-712A). That is, God is not limited to our conceptions of it. Thus, through these acts of negating, the soul is taken up into the ἐπιστροφή back to God.

The soul is finally lead into a third act, which surpasses both the previous two; this third is known as the *via negativa*. The soul understands that God is beyond both affirmations and negations. It ceases discourse and in silence rises up further into God. The soul is being attracted by God and led up [ἀναγωγή] and out-of-itself [ἑκστασις] into union [ἔνωσις] with God who is communicated through silence itself (*MT 709C-712A*).

CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT GOES DOWN MUST COME UP:

The Aporia of the Kataphatic and Apophatic Discourse of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

Πᾶν τὸ αἰτιατὸν καὶ μένει ἐν
τῇ αὐτοῦ αἰτίᾳ καὶ πρόεισιν ἀπ’
αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπιστρέφει πρὸς αὐτὴν
Proclus, *Elements of Theology*

Das Leben Gottes und das göttliche Erkennen
Mag also wohl als ein Spielen der Lieben mit sich
selbst ausgesprochen werden; diese Idee sinkt zur
Erbaulichkeit und selbst zur Fadheit herab, wenn
der Ernst, der Schmerz, die Geduld und Arbeit des
Negativen darin fehlt.

G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*

I. The essential undecideability of God:

In the opening chapter of *Concerning Divine Names*, Pseudo-Dionysius warns us “we dare neither to speak nor think anything about that which excessively-exists [τῆς ὑπερουσίου] and the hidden divinity [κρυφίας θεότητος] except what sacred scriptures have divinely have made manifest to us [ἐκπεφασμένα]” (DN 588A). He again repeats this just a few lines later, “Concerning this then, as has been said, about that which excessively-exists and the hidden divinity, one dare not to speak or to think except what the things that the sacred scriptures have divinely shown to us” (DN 588C). Despite exhorting us to accept what scripture reveals to us, it gives us a conflicting discourse about God’s nature. For example, “Thusly, the nameless fits the cause of all, which is excessive to all existing things, and so do all the names of existing things” (DN 596C); God is both ineffable and nameable. In fact, when speaking of God the Areopagite writes, “theologians hymn it as both without name and from every name” (DN 596A). Pseudo-Dionysius is drawing to our attention that our discourse of the nature of God is fundamentally shot through with contradiction. Our source from where we gain knowledge of God is unclear,

but rather presents us with a God that is question-worthy. In other words, Pseudo-Dionysius presents us with a fundamental *aporia*; how does one name that which is nameless?

It is this *aporia* that confronts us in *Concerning Divine Names* and with which the Areopagite is deeply concerned. Moreover, from out of this, he develops two methods for discussing God. “It is necessary to pronounce and to affirm [καταφάσκειν] to it [God] all the announcements of ‘what is’. As cause of everything, it is yet even more proper to deny [ἀποφάσκειν] them all, since it excessively-exists [ὑπερούση], it is above everything” (MT 1000B). Here, he presents us with *kataphasis*, or affirmative theology, by which we attribute characteristics and names to God through an interrogation of entities. And also he presents us with *apophasis*; literally an un-saying or a speaking-away (and perhaps in its most radical form the *via negativa*)²⁰³ which denies that God can be given any attribute or name, calling to our attention the absolute and essential ineffability of God. This entails a movement of the soul and intellect, first downward and then in a flight upward.

And there, the word going down from that which is above, toward the extremities, according to so great a descent, it spreads out toward a proportionate multitude; but now, ascending away from that which is below toward the “exceeding-lying thing” [πρὸς τὸ ὑπερκείμενον], [the word] draws itself in [συστέλλεται] according to the proportion it ascends; and after the entire way upward, it will be wholly voiceless and will be merged with the unspeakable [ὄλος ἄφωνος ἔσται καὶ ὄλος ἐνωθήσεται τῷ ἀφθέγκτῳ] (MT 1033C).

First engaged in a long and difficult, yet necessary, battle with language, becoming entwined with it, we make ever more affirmations of God, attempting to express its ineffable nature. And then when the weight of discourse is almost too much to bear, we move through it, shaking free

²⁰³ *Divine Light*, p.175. William Riordan makes the helpful distinction between *apophatic* theology and the *via negativa* or “superlative theology.” While both consist in making negative statements concerning the divine, the *apophatic* is concerned with distinguishing God from the sensible and conceptual world or the world of beings; the superlative form is the recognition that God is beyond knowing in all forms.

of it until all there is is silence. Pseudo-Dionysius presents us with a project of discourse that undoes itself, leaving us in the aftermath of the destruction of discourse.

INTERTWINING LANGUAGE

Delimiting human knowledge, Pseudo-Dionysius writes, “if every way of knowing [αὐτὸ γινώσκεις] is of the things which are and is held to the limits [καὶ εἰς τὰ ὄντα τὸ πέρασ ἔχουσιν] of the things which are, then that which lying beyond all existence [ἢ πάσης οὐσίας ἐπέκεινα] is thus removed from [ἐξηρημένα] all knowing” (DN 593A). To think being is to think it as thinkable. What it is to be being is to be intelligible. Being means what is presented to thought. That which is is that which is apprehended by thought. Insofar as we apply *kataphasis* to God, being and intelligibility coincide; after all, “The *affirmative theology* (or method, as it is sometimes called) is a turning of the human senses and intellect toward the immanent God who has poured Himself out into His creation.”²⁰⁴ However, we must also employ *apophasis*, since “the negative theology is a profound realization in the soul that God is radically different from all His creatures.”²⁰⁵ Although God is beyond existing entities and so removed from knowing, this does not mean to suggest that *apophasis* is not a legitimate disclosure of God. To be beyond existence must be taken in a wholly negative sense, God “is the cause of all existing entities, it is nothing [αὐτὸ δὲ οὐδέ], since it is removed as excessively-existing everything” (DN 593C). God is not any one entity. To deny the attributes of God would be to treat it as a conceptual object even one that can be spoken of negatively. The term “being” cannot capture both entities and God. Our thought cannot grasp God precisely because God is not there to be apprehended. In applying both *kataphasis* and *apophasis*, we are left with a fundamental *aporia* that God is both manifest in and removed from entities.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, pp.44-45.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

Chapter VII of *Concerning the Divine Names* further details these two forms of discourse.

Never, then, is it true to say that we know God; *not from its nature*, for this must be unknowable and is excessively-lifted above [ὑπεραῖρον] all reason and thought [πάντα λόγον καὶ νοῦν]; *but from the arrangement of all existing things*, as *having thrown-forth from itself* [ἐξ αὐτοῦ προβεβλημένης] and containing all sorts of images and semblances of its divine paradigms, we ascend, by a path and order [ὁδοῦ καὶ τάξει], as it is in our capacity, into that which lies beyond everything [εἰς τὸ ἐπέκεινα πάντων], in the taking away [ἀφαιρέσει] and preeminence of everything and in the cause of all. *Wherefore, God is known in all things and as distinct from all things. Both through knowing and through unknowing God is known* [καὶ διὰ γνώσεως ὁ θεὸς γινώσκεται καὶ διὰ ἀγνωσίας] (DN 869C-872A).

We cannot know God from its own nature, or as cause of everything, because as such God resists a discursive account. However, God is not beyond human thought as if there were some other form of thought that could grasp God or due to a limitation of our thought. Rather thought is always directed toward being, while God is beyond being. This does not mean to suggest that there is no connection between entities and God, however. As “thrown-forth” or revealed from itself, “from the arrangement of all existing things,” we have a path toward God. What manifests is an appearance of God, even if that appearance does not wholly reveal what manifests here. That which is projected from God is nevertheless from God, which cannot appear clearly; in fact, God must withhold its full manifestation. God presents itself to us by not appearing fully. There is a movement from God to that which is “thrown out from it,” through which we can establish a connection between God and its projections. Human reason itself is evidence of this movement of the manifestations of God, for as the Areopagite writes, “the creation of the visible universe having projected [προβεβληται] the invisible things of God, as Paul has said, and also from true reason [ὁ ἀληθῆς λόγος]” (Ep. IX 1108B). As Heidegger has pointed out truth, ἀλήθεια, suggests “unconcealedness.” The truth of entities is the unconcealedness, their availability as coming out of concealment, or obscurity. Truth entails the movement of darkness into the light.

In this way God is known simultaneously through knowing and unknowing. God reveals itself by withholding itself.

It may be tempting to separate *kataphasis* from *apophasis*, between God and its projections so as not to be agitated by the *aporia* engendered by such a connection. But Pseudo-Dionysius does not allow this; God is “known in all things and as distinct from all things.” Furthermore, in *Letter IX*, Pseudo-Dionysius gives a description of the relationship between these two modes of theological discourse:

Theological tradition has two aspects, on the one hand, the unsayable and mysterious, and on the other, the open and evident. The one resorts to symbolism and involves initiation. The other is philosophical and uses demonstration. *Furthermore, the unsayable is intertwined with what is said* [καὶ συμπέλεκται τῷ ῥητῷ τὸ ἄῤῥητον]. The one persuades and treats earnestly the truthfulness of the things said. The other acts and enacts by means of God and by instructions in a mystery which cannot be learned through teaching, (1105D).

The Areopagite, here, tells us explicitly that *kataphasis* and *apophasis* are “intertwined.” Although the two modes of discourse are different, approaching God from different directions, we cannot completely distinguish them. And so, while it may be tempting for us to separate *kataphasis* from the *apophatic* on the grounds that they are two completely different forms of speaking, to do so would be to ignore and thus to not be affected by the *aporia* which characterizes God.

It is important, and indeed vital, to understand that *kataphasis* and *apophasis* function simultaneously in our discourse concerning God—they are “intertwined.” Recognizing this, the reader is confronted by an *aporia* of how and in what way God is both “known even in all and apart from all,” (*DN 872A*) transcendent and yet immanent,²⁰⁶ as well as how we can only speak

²⁰⁶ The relationship between the terms “transcendent” and “immanent” is a highly complex one. O’Rourke makes references to God’s transcendence. The term “transcendent” is misleading for there is nothing laying over and beyond the world of beings, or the immanent. The immanent, or that which is a particular entity, does however presuppose something prior to itself, the “transcend,” which is in fact not reducible to a being. We will see that the two terms are not as exclusive as we may be lead to believe.

meaningfully of God, who is ineffable, when using both *kataphasis* and *apophasis*. The two modes of speaking, then, create an *aporetic* tension within the reader's mind, "it is in the tension between the two propositions that the discourse becomes meaningful."²⁰⁷ Left with either *kataphasis* or *apophasis* alone, all discourse concerning God is empty. God only becomes question-worthy when one is confronted by the *aporia* that is engendered through both forms of the intertwined discourse.

GOD AS UNDECIDEABLE

With these two forms of discourse coinciding, we are confronted with the statement "X is beyond names," and this "generates the *aporia* that the subject of the statement must be named (as X) in order for us to affirm that it is beyond names."²⁰⁸ A name or any set of names, no matter how large and extensive, can only be finite; a name defines and delimits that which is named over and against something else. To be intelligible is to be a determinate something, a particular 'this.' The realm of being is intelligible by virtue of the differentiation from one another and it is this differentiation that constitutes Being itself. The differentiation of one entity from another is what makes all entities intelligible. And so, when we affirm that God is that which is unsayable, we are still affirming something of God and thus delimiting it against something else; we are affirming that God is that which is named as ineffable. Consequently, we are left, when either affirming or denying this claim of ineffability, with an essentially undecidable statement. In other words, the ineffability of God can neither be affirmed nor negated. For if we affirm that God is in fact ineffable, then God would have to be named, undermining the claim altogether, and yet, its negation must also be undecidable, since to do so would be to utter a false claim within the well ordered arrangement of God's creation, and

²⁰⁷ Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1994), p.3.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.2, Cf., pp.207-209.

reducing God to an entity. Anticipating this, Pseudo-Dionysius not only names God as ineffable but as “ὑπεράρρητος,” exceedingly-ineffable (*DN* 582D, 640D). Although this too is a name, it is meant to signify that God is inherently unnameable. “Thus, although there is in no sense a demonstration of God’s existence, there is the unmistakable presumption of its demonstrability.”²⁰⁹ That is to say, Pseudo-Dionysius has no proof for the existence of God, for there can be none, although God’s existence must be presupposed if discourse is to make sense at all. Thus the existence of God can neither be affirmed nor negated.²¹⁰ Once again, the interconnection between *kataphasis* and *apophasis* and the *aporia* which arises out of their intersection is emphasized.

It must be noted that Pseudo-Dionysius’ discourse should not be confined to a theory of language but has its roots within the Neo-Platonic metaphysical²¹¹ worldview.²¹² As Eric D. Perl puts it,

When we hear that God is beyond being, we inevitably image something, a “superessentiality,” lying above or outside of being. But this fails to realize the meaning of “beyond being,” because it still thinks God as something, some being. Rather, we must recognize that for Dionysius, as for Plotinus, God is simply not anything, not “there” at all. If our thought cannot attain to God, this is not because of a weakness but because there is no “there,” no being, no thing that is God.²¹³

²⁰⁹ Fran O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), p.7.

²¹⁰ Eric Perl quite correctly states “But Dionysius’ Neoplatonic negative theology transcends atheism no less than it does theism. To be sure, Dionysius is not a theist, since theism, as ordinarily understood, involves the claim that God exists....But neither is Dionysius an atheist for on his principles it is not more correct to say ‘God is not’ than to say ‘God is’ (i.e., as being). Simply to deny that God exists, to say ‘God is not’ or ‘There is no God’ is still to consider God as some (putative) being, and then to deny that there is such a being....Indeed, both ‘theism’ and ‘atheism’ are distinctly modern phenomena which cannot properly be read into Neoplatonism” (*Theophany*, p. 15). However the Areopagite thinks God, it exists prior to the distinction between existing and not existing. The certainty that God exists, while maintained by the orderly arrangement of the world, can never be guaranteed through demonstration and thus through discursive reason.

²¹¹ I use the term “metaphysics” and not “ontological” because technically Dionysius cannot have an ontology, if by this we mean a study of being. The main focus of Dionysius’ attention is aimed at that which lies outside of the sphere of being. If there is an ontology, it must be limited to *kataphasis* alone.

²¹² Eric D. Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany: State of New York Press: 2007), p.13.

²¹³ *Theophany*, p.13. However, I believe, for reason that will become apparent in the unfolding of this chapter, that Perl falls victim to his own warning and places God on the side of being.

God is “the cause of all existing things, *it is nothing* [αὐτὸ δὲ οὐδέν], since it removed [ἐξηρημένον] as excessively-existing everything” (DN 593C).²¹⁴ That is to say, the Areopagite is coming out of a tradition of thought which claims that the phenomena of the world do not have a firm metaphysical ground upon which they rest. As we saw above, God, according to Pseudo-Dionysius, is not a thing or an object, or subject to onto-theology, in fact “it is nothing,” and as we will see, God is an intensification of existence to such an extent that it opens up as an overflowing void of being, of non-being,²¹⁵ or as he tells us above, nothing. However, Pseudo-Dionysius is clear that God is “all things in all things and nothing in any” (DN 872A). The *aporia* of God is brought to the fore here, escalating when we wrestle with the undecidability of God. God is “nothing in any” insofar as God is not an entity at all; God is not included within the whole of creation as a member of it. And yet, God is “all things in all things” in that God is immediately present in all things as their constitutive determination. God is the Being by which entities have existence. God is

that which is exceedingly-existent [ὁ ὧν ὑπερούσιός ἐστι], the under-lying cause of the ‘to be’ of the whole according to capacity, the creator of being, of coming-into-being [ὑπαρξέως], subsistence, existence, nature, source [ἀρχή], and measure of ages and framer of times and again of things that be. Time of things coming into being, the ‘to be’ of entities howsoever existing, birth of entities howsoever born (DN 817C).

And as such, God is beyond or removed in that it is not itself one of existing entities. And yet all entities depend on God, which is the measure making all entities be insofar as it provides a unifying determination by which each entity is what it is. If all determinations of all things are the presence of God in them, then God is not simply “in all things” as if God were something

²¹⁴ O’Rourke, in her book, p.82, links God’s non-being with formless matter, although she admits that this is not explicit in Dionysius it is suggested by early commentators on his work. This, however, would lead us to interpret Dionysius’ God as wholly transcendent to the world, which as will be explained below cannot be the case.

²¹⁵ Non-existence or non-being is ascribed to God at least twice: once at DN 697A τὸ ἀνούσιον; and once at DN 704B, τὸ μὴ ὄν. See also, *Mysterious Theology* chapters 4 and 5, where it is said that God is neither a physical nor intellectual entity.

other than God's self. God is rather the whole of reality. If God were merely other or separate it would be another entity and thus limited in relation to other entities. As "nothing in any," infinite, beyond, it must not be separate but present to all, and precisely as present to all entities, God is not one of them and so is "nothing in any." Although God's existence must be the case, given the well-ordered arrangements of entities, God is "all things in all things," this existence can neither be affirmed nor denied, and thus is "nothing in any." Indeed, God is called "pre-perfect" [προτέλειος] (*DN 648C*), and as such entities "pre-exist [προοῦσαν] in the good and from the good bubbling-out [ἐκβλυζομένην] into entities." (*DN 712C*). God is a pre-ontological groundlessness from which entities emerge.

Furthermore, Pseudo-Dionysius himself states with regard to the individual who attempts to track down God through hymns of praise, "You will find many of the theologians, who have hymned it not only as invisible and unembracable but simultaneously unexaminable and untraceable [ἀνεξιχνίαστον], since there is not one trace [ίχνους] of those who have penetrated to its hidden boundlessness" (*DN 588C*). One not only finds oneself without a trail to follow but there is not even a trace of oneself when moving toward God. One is, in the attempt to track down and seek after God, subsumed and drowned in the open void that is God. Losing oneself completely and elevating oneself to the sight of God does not, however, occur naturally (*DN 589A*), to do so, one's everyday comportment to both God and the world must be interrupted. In fact, "taking the things excessive to us [ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς] as akin to ourselves and by being wrapped up with that which is congenial to perception and comparing divine things according to our own, we are deceived by the appearance we give to the divine and forbidden word" [κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον τὸν θεῖον καὶ ἀπόρρητον λόγον] (*DN 865C*). Relying upon our own thoughts, or what appears to us immediately and taken for granted, we believe that God is an entity.

However, giving ourselves over to the divine and taking things in excess to us as kindred to us, we are no longer able to say for certain whether God exists. And thus, the “forbidden word” is that which cannot be spoke and yet what is presupposed, i.e., the guarantee that God exists.

BEYOND LANGUAGE

Ultimately, however, the *apophatic* “consists not in negations but in silence of the mind, rising above thought altogether.”²¹⁶ We can, however, never dispense with language, for through it we wrestle with profound concerns. But we can become victims as well as beneficiaries of language. We must learn how to handle words effectively and at the same time we must preserve and intensify our ability to gaze at God directly and not through opaque concepts which distort it. And since God is that which is beyond the grasp of rational thought and resists the probing of discursive meditation, the mind passes beyond conceptual thought and slips beyond language; moreover, Pseudo-Dionysius describes God not only as unsayable but “excessively-unsayable.” As we have just seen, to say that God is ineffable is too much. We must be thrown into the fundamental *aporia* concerning God’s existence. Here, Pseudo-Dionysius explicitly moves us beyond binary logic; “do not believe that denials lie over and against [ἀντικειμένως] assertions, but that it is very much prior to this opposition,²¹⁷ exceeding privations, exceeding all renouncement [ἀφάρεσιν] and all announcement [θέσιν]” (MT 1000B). Absolutely nothing may be said of God, not even that it is ineffable. Pseudo-Dionysius achieves this, as we will see,

²¹⁶ *Theophany*, p.12.

²¹⁷ In fact counter to Aristotelian logic, if a denial were simply the opposite of its assertion, the denial would still be grounded in discursivity, it would simply be what the assertion is not. For the Areopagite there is no subject/object relation between thought and the world. As Thomas Michael Tomasic has argued (“The Logical Function of Metaphor and Oppositional Coincidence in the Pseudo-Dionysius and Johannes Scottus Eriugena,” *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 68, No. 3, (Jul., 1988), p.371), Pseudo-Dionysius frees all language from the semantical categories of ‘subject’ and ‘predicate’ defying the law of the excluded middle, the law of non-contradiction, and all the basic forms of discourse provided by λόγος ἀποφαντικός, leaving us with what Tomasic has termed metaphorical discourse. Metaphorical discourse allows for a discourse that is by its very nature excessive, i.e., it allows for a non-discursive form of discourse. And without the restrictive propositional discourse, the world presents itself to us in a new manner, as ‘pre-cognitive’, a world that exists prior to discursive propositional thought. This is especially necessary if God exceeds all idols which include all words and concepts.

through an intensifying the name ‘ineffable’ until it breaks free of its conceptual framework. When gathered into the ultimate intensification of beingness, we pass over and beyond being. God must not be thought as unthinkable or unsayable in the sense that the human mind, if it were just slightly more acute, could comprehend God,²¹⁸ but rather God is essentially unthinkable. Pseudo-Dionysius states that God is “ὑπεράγνωστον,” excessively-unknowable (*DN* 592D, *MT* 997A). Negative theology, then, does not end in words or even in unknowing but beyond even this. The union of the intellect occurs “in the cessation of every intellectual activity [πάσης νοεῶς ἐνεργείας ἀπόπαυσιν]” (*DN* 593C). Furthermore, “ceasing from our intellectual activities, we throw ourselves into an excessively-existing ray, as far as possible” (*DN* 592 C-D). Moreover, Pseudo-Dionysius states that we are united with the unknowable “in the inactivity of every knowing [πάσης γνώσεως ἀνεωργησία]” (*MT* 1001A), and that “plunging into the darkness excessive intellect we find not little-speech [βραχυλογία] but absolutely non-speech and non-intellection [ἀλογίαν καὶ ἀνοησίαν]” (*MT* 1033B-C). If being and intelligibility coincide when we speak we are necessarily in the realm of being and so we are not gazing upon God. A “god” that can be spoken of either positively or negatively is not a god but an entity. After all the Areopagite writes “and if someone, having seen God, understood what he saw did not see God itself but something of those things which are and are knowable [τῶν ὄντων καὶ γνωσκομένων]” (*Ep.* V 1065A). This argument allows us to see the justification of Pseudo-Dionysius moving beyond language and thus beyond being.

²¹⁸ This will be further discussed in the next chapter. However, it should be noted here that Eric Perl writes “The ascent might be likened to hearing a sound that gradually increases in pitch until it passes beyond the range of hearing. In one sense, there is discontinuity: we go from hearing to not hearing, from sound to silence. So also, in ascending from Intellect to the One, we go from thinking to not thinking, from being to not any being. But, as with the sound, in another sense there is continuity, for the transition take place through the continuation of the process by which we reach the highest level of cognition,” *Theophany*, p.95. While this is a helpful example to a certain extent, it does not do justice to the radical difference between discursive thought and the non-discursive, from the movement of λόγος to ἀλόγος.

And so, there are claims, e.g., God’s ineffability, that while true cannot be discursively proven, although they must be assumed.²¹⁹ While systematic reasoning is something we could not do without, neither can we possibly do without direct perception of God, which entails an unsystematic form of language. This given reality is an infinite which passes beyond all understanding and yet admits of being directly apprehended. This chapter will discuss the essential *aporia* found in *Concerning Divine Names*.

Focusing mainly on *Concerning the Divine Names*, we will first draw attention to *kataphatic* discourse. In this section, it will be explained why every name applies to God and in what way. The names of the ‘good’, ‘being’, the ‘one’, and ‘light’ will be explained. Here, it will be explicitly shown in what way we are able to ascribe names to that which is unnameable. This will be revealed to be a necessary step and initiation into the topic of the next section, that of *apophatic* theology. It will be shown, here, the proper way to discuss God lies in hyperly-affirming names to God through the prefix ‘ὑπερ-’. This intensification of conceptual thought

²¹⁹ Eric D. Perl in *Theophany*, page 6, seems to still want to think God. “To think being is to think it *as thinkable*. Indeed, it follows not merely that being and intelligibility are coextensive, as Parmenides plainly asserts, but that intelligibility is the very meaning of being: by *being* we can only mean ‘what is there for thought,’ since thought cannot extend to anything else, ‘anything else’ is mere empty noise—in short, nothing (τό μὴ εἶναι).” Although he does correctly say “Genuine apophysis, then, consists not in negations but in the silence of the mind, rising above thought altogether” (*Theophany*, p.12) and “Dionysius expressly adopts the Parmenidean and Platonic account of being and thought as coterminous, and therefore locates God beyond both together” (*Theophany*, p.13), he continues on “Because God is all things in all things, to see anything is to see God in that thing. All knowledge is knowledge of God because all being, all that is given to consciousness in any mode, is nothing but the finite, differentiated presentation of God. Since all things are nothing but God-in-them, there is nothing to be known in anything but God-in-it” (*Theophany*, p.93). Furthermore, he states “The alternative to the principle that to be is to be intelligible, therefore, is the nihilism which afflicts so much of contemporary thought and culture. For if being is not what is apprehended by thought, then thought does not apprehend being. This in effect means that there is no being, since whatever we call ‘being’ is not being but a projection, interpretation, illusion—in short, nothing (*Theophany* pp. 111-112). This line of reasoning applies only to *kataphasis* and does not take seriously the different *aporia* that arise when it is intertwined with *apophysis*. What is commonly called the ground of being, if this is God, is truly nothing—in short, there is no ground. It is *this* that must be thought through. What does this suggest for our conception of being, of what it is to be intelligible? As these chapters unfold, I will make my position clear. But here it can be stated that, while entities are something, they are transitory, unstable accumulations of the excessive-flow that God is. While this is not nihilism as such, at the center of being there is nothing; the rules of logic and finite entities all presuppose that which they cannot prove or disclose. We will see that the negation involved is not privative or empty but rather excessively-bubbling over with being, it is an absolute excess of being. In chapter six, we will see that the structure and hierarchy of reality and of the body politic is anarchic.

acts as a negation, since the concept is intensified to such an extent that the finite meaning no longer holds sway. However, even to speak negatively of God is to think God in opposition to something, so the Areopagite must resort to excessive-affirmations, which serve to erupt the concept from the inside by intensifying it. Lastly, we will turn briefly to *Concerning Mysterious Theology*, in which the *via negativa* will be applied to God. Although this text will be discussed in the next chapter, it will be necessary here to demonstrate that and in what way discourse must end in silence.

II. The aporia of kataphasis and symbols:

As was stated above, Pseudo-Dionysius gives us two forms of theological discourse. This section will discuss the philosophical form associated with *kataphasis* and symbols. Although there is a difference between the Areopagite's theory of symbols and use of the *kataphatic* discourse insofar as the former relies upon physical representations to describe God while the latter focuses on conceptual representations, they both make affirmations concerning God's existence.²²⁰ Caught in the divine outflow, projecting from out of itself to all entities, *kataphasis* serves to allow the mind to descend from its conception of God to the multiple manifestations of entities.

Concerning Divine Names aims to show what names scripture gives to and how they apply to God. Although this text does speak of the unnameability of God, its primary task is *kataphatic*. Furthermore, its task is to reveal, given the fact that we must name God, what these names disclose concerning the character of God. Moreover, the text ends with the Areopagite gesturing to the lost or fictional text, *The Symbolic Theology*. Regardless of whether this latter text is fictional or was intended to be written but never was or merely lost, the fact remains that *Concerning Divine Names* is an introductory text. *Kataphasis* is the beginning of the long

²²⁰ *Divine Light*, p.179.

journey downward from God into entities. Next, the use of symbols in the revelation of God will be discussed. Finally, we will see how the use of both names and symbols is the preparatory step not only to other texts, such as *Concerning Mystorious Theology*, but for the experience of the fundamental *aporia* of God.

THE EXITING AND ENTERING OF THE GOOD

The fourth chapter of *Concerning Divine Names* is dedicated, for the most part, to the name ‘good’ with reference to God. The Areopagite begins this chapter,

Let us make room for the name ‘good’ [ἀγαθωνυμία], already mentioned in our discourse, which theologians have given special honor to, the excessive-god divinity [ὑπερθέω θεότητα], by calling it, as I believe, the primordial-God²²¹ sustaining source [τὴν θεαρχικὴν ὑπαρξίς],²²² calling it goodness [ἀγαθότητα]. And that the good, as essential good [οὐσιώδεις ἀγαθόν], and that by its ‘to be’ [καὶ ὅτι τῶ εἶναι] stretches to the utmost [διατείνει] goodness into every entity (DN 693B).

The name ‘good’ is the first name in *Concerning Divine Names* to be ascribed to God; in fact, God is “ὁμόθεον καὶ ὁμόαγθον,” “at once both God and ‘good’” (DN 593B), God is first and principally goodness itself, which according to Pseudo-Dionysius is that which makes whole not only different entities but their relation with one another. The name ‘good’ makes the world intelligible by giving each entity what it is to be. Described not only as ὑπαρξίς, a “sustaining source,” from which entities emerge, but also as “stretching to the utmost,” the ‘good’ is the name for God as present in all beings. God as named ‘good’ is diffused in all entities “they are

²²¹ The term θεαρχία “is almost absent in subsequent Christian writers; it belongs predominately to the Dionysian theological vocabulary...in its Greek form, this word implies God’s genealogy (analogically speaking) or generation: divine principle or origin, order, source, and beginning, which points to the ‘hidden divine nature that transcends being (ὑπερουσίου καὶ κρυφίας θεότητας).’ In particular, this meaning is used to draw a distinction and relationship between the Godhead and persons of the Trinity (or trinitarian processions)...” *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole*, p.153. In other words, θεαρχία names the God that is prior to the trinity and thus prior to all similarity and dissimilarity. I take this to mean that θεαρχία names the “primordial God,” then. As this word contains ἀρχή, I have, for the most part, translated ἀρχή and its use as a prefix or suffix as “primordial” to help convey that God is not an entity.

²²² Ὑπαρξίς is derived from ὑπάρχω, which means “to begin, make a beginning,” “to begin to be, come into being, arise, spring up,” “to be in existence, to be there.” As ὑπαρξίς, then, God is that out of which entities come forth. It is, as such, an open space, a generative void.

through the excessively-good [διὰ τὴν ὑπεραγαθότητα]...they can be uplifted to the good-source of all good things and become partakers of the illuminations thence bubbling forth [ἐπὶ τὴν πάντων ἀγαθῶν ἀγαθαρχίαν καὶ τῶν ἐκθειῆθεν ἐκβλυζομένων ἐλλάψεων]” (DN 696C). It is that which all things participate in since the ‘good’ is the generative source from which all entities emerge as in an upsurge and by which all are determined, “beings *are* because of the value infused into them by the Good.”²²³ Therefore, entities are not wholly divorced from their sustaining source but rather “bubbling out of it,” remaining within it, since it stretches out to everything. There is a clear movement of entities.

This movement is further explained, as it is said,

The good reverts [ἐπιστρέφει] everything to itself and is the primordial-collector [ἀρχισυναγωγός] of those things scattered, as the one-source [ἐναρχική] and one-producing deity [ἐνοποιὸς θεότης]; and as source [ἀρχῆς], as the holding-together [συναρχῆς], and as end [τέλους] all things are incited to it. And it is the good, as scripture tells us, from which all things are supported and is as from an all-perfect cause it has united all things in being...all things are reverted into it (DN 700A-B).

The ‘good’, then, is not only that in which entities are found, it is that which holds together the arrangement of entities. It is also the source, or beginning [ἀρχή] and the end [τέλος] toward which they are aimed, making the arrangement of the entities a unified, intelligible whole; God is simultaneously the ἀρχή and τέλος.²²⁴ As has been mentioned by others,²²⁵ this is the Neo-Platonic “cycle of remaining, procession, and reversion.”²²⁶ Again, everything moves out from the ‘good’, as from a generative source, and is collected by it, and returns to it. It is the beginning, middle, and end from, in, and toward which all things tends. As a movement, this

²²³ *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics and Aquinas*, p.67.

²²⁴ Cf., *Theophany*, pp.35-44 for a full account of this.

²²⁵ See in particular *Theophany* and *Divine Light*.

²²⁶ *Theophany*, p.35.

suggests that not only are entities dynamic, and always already manifestations of God, but that God itself is a dynamic movement as well.

The hidden God ‘exits’ out of Himself: He “immanentizes” Himself in His creation. Denys’ term for this is *πρόοδος* (*proodos*), meaning “a going forth, advancing”...In a singularly dynamic way, He remains (*μονή* [*monē*], from *μένω* [*menō*], to remain or abide) within Himself and He lovingly sustains all creatures in Himself. By the attraction of His goodness, He draws all, in love, back to Himself. The Dionysian term here is *ἐπιστροφή* (*epistrophē*), meaning a “turning back”. This divine respiration, all coming forth from God and returning to Him, take place *within* God...The going forth (*proodos*, *exitus*) is the creature’s arising into being while remaining (*monē*) within Him; its return (*epistrophē*, *reditus*) is its increasing resemblance to its Creator.²²⁷

This movement allows one to trace the causes to the effects and vice versa;

“‘Remaining’...refers to the enfolding or undifferentiated containment of effects, or rather as, the cause. Remaining is the identity of the effect with the cause... ‘Procession,’ in turn, is the unfolding or differentiation whereby the effects are different from each other and therefore from the cause, so exist at all as distinct, determinate beings, as effects” and lastly “‘Reversion,’ in turn, signifies the relation of the effect to the cause as its end, or goodness.”²²⁸ In other words, entities occur in the midst of God as the sustaining source, whereby they are the same insofar as they are existing things. They are given intelligibility and being as coming from the same source. However, as proceeding from the source, entities are differentiated not only from each other and are considered to be the specific entities that they are but also from the sustaining source from which they arise.²²⁹ And finally, these entities are not simply different from each other but are collected together again as aimed toward the same end, bestowing upon them intelligibility once again. In fact, Pseudo-Dionysius writes of God

...and being, as it were, *an appearing out of itself by itself* [ἐκφανσιν ὄντα ἑαυτοῦ δι’

²²⁷ *Divine Light*, p.44.

²²⁸ *Theophany*, pp.37-38.

²²⁹ Again, we should not think of the ὑπαρξις as an entity set over and against the entities that emerge from out of it but rather as a primordial source, a pre-ontological groundlessness.

ἑαυτοῦ]...and an erotic movment, simple, self-moved [αὐτοκίνητον], self-operating, pre-existing [προοῦσαν] in the good and from the good bubbling out [ἐκβλυζομένην] to entities, and again returning to the good (*DN 712C*).

We should pay special attention to the phrase “ἐκφανσιν ὄντα ἑαυτοῦ δι’ ἑαυτοῦ.” God “comes out into the light or appears” out of itself through itself. Such an appearing is the movement of God emerging from out of darkness into the light, presenting itself and approaching the one thinking of God as from a distance. This indicates a connection that is already accomplished between God and the individual. Approaching us in an act of “bubbling out” God makes itself manifest through a movement of appearing. God is, then, nothing other than the movement of the unfolding and enfolding of entities; “all being comes out from, is in, and reverts into the beautiful and the good” (*DN 705D*).

GOD AS THE SUN, GIVING BEING

To illustrate the way that God, as the good, is the cause of intelligibility of entities, Pseudo-Dionysius uses the example of the sun. “Let us now hymn the name light, according to which we think the good” (*DN 700C*). We have just seen how the name ‘good’ is the name for the self movement of entities out of, toward, and remaining within God’s manifestation. According to this name there is no radical separation between God and entities. The name ‘light’ helps us think this in further detail, since ‘light’ is from the ‘good’ and an image of goodness. Thus the good is hymned by the name ‘light’

as an archetype appearing out of it in images [ὡς ἐν εἰκόνι τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ἐκφανόμενον]. Just as the goodness of the divinity [θεότητος] lying beyond everything, pervades from the highest and most honored entities utterly to the furthest most and yet is in excess of all [ὑπὲρ πάσαι ἐστί], neither the foremost outstripping [φθανουσῶν] its superiority nor the things below crosses over its grasp, but it gives light to everything capable (*DN 697C*).

‘Light’ is an archetype for the ‘good’, a foundational expression of it, which manifests itself in images. And so ‘light’ names the ways entities appear in the world. Furthermore, the sun

“illuminates everything capable of receiving its light and possesses light exceedingly-purely, unfolding out [ἐξαπλῶν] everything in the visible cosmos” (DN 697C-D). The sun’s light, just like the name ‘good’ not only encompasses everything but it literally “unfolds” that which is visible. Light and the presence of light of the objects that it illuminates are inseparable. Presence and withdrawal belong to the entity alone and does not describe an act of juxtaposition. Thus, for light to be is for it to be presence. It is pure presence. Therefore, light, both sensible and intellectual, is not only accessible but self-manifesting. Light is both the means of vision that lends to transparency of the entities perceived and is in its own nature transparent. ‘Light’ gives entities their movement of appearance without itself being an entity; it names the givenness of entities to not only come to be seen but “it is the cause for the origin and life of visible bodies, nourishing them and causing them to grow” (DN 700A). It is furthermore said that “life of the living existence [οὐσία] of all that is, the origin and cause [ἀρχὴ καὶ αἰτία] of all life and existence, which through its goodness brings entities in their ‘to be’ [εἰς τὸ εἶναι] and maintains them” (DN 589C). According to the name ‘light’ it is a gift from God that not only makes determinate entities possible but also continues to give their intelligibility as well. Light solves the problem of how entities are part of God itself and of their composite nature in the structure of both perception and intellection. Light unfolds the intelligible nature of entities and allows them to move us as well. The light is not only within entities and different from them but it is manifested in every entity while not being reduced to them. All entities are good by this light which is inseparable but distinct from them. The good cannot be an entity because it would then be an intelligible entity and so it must be formless like light itself. Light is the intellect’s and gives rise to an exposure that is overwhelming so that there is no “inner” or “outer” of the entity. ‘Light’ names the unified exposure of presence without distinction, an exposure, which is like

erotic longing “divine erotic longing is ecstasy [ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἔκστατικός ὁ θεῖος ἔρωσ] so that the lover belongs not to the self but to the beloved” (DN 712A). What is good in entities is the light, shapeless like God because it is direct vision, and is generative of the intelligibility of all things and responsible for existence and life, which are free gifts from God. This movement, then, is metaphysical and not simply epistemological.

Certainly, there is an epistemological component to Pseudo-Dionysius’ thought as well. Just as we see our surroundings due to the light of the sun, revealing the world to us, the principles of the world are revealed to us through God’s preeminent power, “and declare that the good is called intellectual light [φῶς νοητόν] because it fills quite fully every excessively-heavenly mind with intellectual light and expels all ignorance and wanderings from every soul in which they might be, and imparts to them intellectual light and purifies their intellectual vision” (DN 700D). If the intellect perceives entities of its vision, it sees the light by which it sees them, namely the ‘good’, “the good, then, exceeding every light is called intellectual light. As fontal ray and flood of light exceedingly-bubbling [ὡς ἀκτὶς πηγαία καὶ ὑπερβλύζουσα φωτοχυσία]” (DN 701A). The good is light *proprio sensu*. We should note that for Pseudo-Dionysius, unlike for Plato, there is no turning or spatial metaphor used to describe illumination. He overcomes a distance that maybe attributed by the introduction of a model of representation. The language of illumination used here stresses the continuity between perception of entities and the illumination itself.

Just as the sun illuminates the particular entities, God, as the good, too, illuminates the world making it intelligible. Speaking of the rays of the sun in relation to the entities on the Earth, “due to these they are and have life, continuous and undiminished, purified from every single corruption and death...” (DN 693C). The sun, as the ‘good’, gives the sustaining being

and continued existence to all things, making them knowable, since to be is to be intelligible.

“We are thinking of none other than the capacity [δυνάμεις] which lead forth to us from it [τὰς εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐξ αὐτῆς προαγομένης]...the excessively-existing hidden God...producing-existence [οὐσιοποιούς], bearing life and giving wisdom” (*DN* 645A). We can know these capacities, according to Pseudo-Dionysius. The gifts of God are unfolded through their participations. We discover God as we proceed through the manifestations. The distinction between the ontological and epistemological is blurred in Pseudo-Dionysius, since they both entail one another.

And just as Pseudo-Dionysius’ metaphysics is one of movement of appearances into the light from obscurity, so too is his epistemology. We have already seen that “from the arrangement of all things” God manifests “as thrown-forth by it” [ὡς ἐξ αὐτοῦ προβεβλημένης],” as such the word “προβάλλειν” plays an important role in his thought. This word has a double valiance; it suggests both a veiling and an unveiling. God unveils itself from the arrangement of all things, on the one hand, while on the other, “the creation of the visible universe is a veil before [προβέβληται] the invisible things of God” (*Ep. IX* 1108B). The divine is veiled in the finite, created world. God is manifested throughout multiple images of its infinite perfection, covering in form what is formless and pre-ontological. The world has a two-fold structure. Entities simultaneously reveal and conceal the divine. They are images of God and yet hide God’s infinite and ineffable nature. They equally reflect God’s bubbling forth nature but they also limit the disclosure of this nature due to their limited and finite nature. It is according to this paradoxical character that we must proceed in our investigation of God.

Continuing with Pseudo-Dionysius’ image of the sun, he writes,

For just as our sun is not calculating and choosing, but by means of its ‘to be’ sheds light on all things able to partake of its light according to their own capacity, so too the good,

excessive to the sun, as the preeminent archetype, is an excessive obscure image, by its existence sends to all things that are rays of whole goodness. Due to these [rays] laid as a foundation all the intelligible and intelligent existences and the energies and capacities, and because of these latter they exist, have life both continuous and undiminished...and are illuminated as to the reasons of things, in a manner particular to themselves. They again convey to their kinfolk in spirit things appropriate to them and they have their abiding from goodness...and while they set out to it, they have both being and good being (DN 693B-696A).

The sun expends its energy without reason or choosing, it simply illuminates the world by its ‘to be.’ The sun discloses entities without a ground for its doing so, it simply gives its ‘to be’ as a gift. The appearing of entities, then, begins from the entities themselves, since there is nothing ontological behind their appearance. There is only the movement of appearance itself. ‘Light’ names this appearance of the disclosure of entities according to their own manner of appearance. It is a letting of entities manifest themselves in their own way or by their own capacity. This does not mean to suggest all there is are mere appearances. God is present in the appearance of each entity, but as the movement of the appearance itself. As “nothing in none,” God is not an entity manifested in the individual entities, and yet God is nevertheless the being behind the appearances. Along the same lines, in chapter V of *Concerning the Divine Names*, Pseudo-Dionysius also ascribes the name ‘being’ [τὸ ὄν] to God. He writes, that his intent here in writing this chapter is “to hymn the procession [πρόοδον] of the primordial-God, source-existence [θεαρχικῆς οὐσιαρχίας], the thing which makes-things-exist [τὴν οὐσιοποιόν], into everything that exists. The divine name ‘good’ makes manifest the whole processions of the cause of all things” (DN 816B). He further continues saying,

now then, since we are speaking of these things, come, we should offer hymns up to the ‘good’ as truly what is [ὡς ὄντως ὄν] and making-existence [οὐσιοποιόν] to every last thing. It which being, excessively-existing, is the under-lying cause [ὑποστάτις αἰτία] of the whole which is capable, the creator of being, of that which is sustained [ὑπάρξεως], subsistence, of existence, of nature. Source and measure of ages and being of time and the age of things that are, time of things coming-into-being, the ‘to be’ of things howsoever existing, the beginning of thing howsoever begun...the being in things existing and things howsoever being reality and subsisting” (DN 817C).

Far from being a static presence, the name ‘being’ is a dynamic movement. Take note of the language used, the compound word “οὐσιοποιός.” The name ‘good’ as ‘being’ is itself a “making-of-entities.” ‘Being,’ then, names the coming into being of entities and not of a presence in the sense of being objectively there. As Jean-Luc Marion writes, “Better, the gift is given strictly to the degree that it renounces Being, that it undoes itself from itself by undoing subsistence in presence.”²³⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius radically rethinks being. As we have seen, being is dynamic; it itself is a movement, which calls forth our thinking and wrestling with the fundamental *aporia* that such a movement of appearance presents to us. The movement of entities presupposes God’s existence but this existence is hidden and concealed from us, thus calling to mind the question-worthy status of God’s existence.

To illustrate how and in what way God is the being from which all particular entities emerge and again return, the Areopagite uses the example of a circle, its radii, and its center. Every radii is brought to a unity in the center of the circle; the center contains every radii. As the radii move from the center, they become more differentiated, “and in the center itself, they are completely unified but standing a little distant from it, they are slightly separated and when more apart, more so. And the nearer they are to the center the more they are united to it and to each other” (*DN* 821A). As God is literally unfolding out [ἐξαπλῶν] into the differentiated entities which we experience, through πρόοδος, each becomes more distinct, just as the radii from the center of a circle do when they move outward from its center. But as each moves toward God, through ἐπιστοφή, each moves into a unity back to the sustaining source, or ὑπαρξίς. The

²³⁰ Jean-Luc Marion *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffery L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p.79. O’Rourke writes “A further difficulty of Dionysius is that he too, like Parmenides, had a restricted view of Being: Being is equated with existence as actual, without room for the concept of potency; he fails to penetrate to the absolute and universal nature of being, in itself transcendental and transcendent,” *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, p.204. I believe that what has been said above, refutes O’Rourke’s critique of Dionysius, that is to say, that for Dionysius being itself is dynamic.

center holds all radii equally and is the source from which they radiate outward. Being and unity are different and being like multiplicity requires unity, “this must be especially known, that according to the preconceive form [προεπινοούμενον εἶδος] of each one, entities united are said to be made one, and the one is elemental of all, and if you take away the one there will be neither the totality or part” (DN 980B). There is a distinction between what an entity is and that unity which makes it what it is “through the overwhelming indivisibility of the whole divine oneness, in which all entities are uniquely collected and are excessively-unified and are with it excessively-existing. Wherefore also all entities are rightly attributed to it; by which, from which, through which, in which, and to which all entities exist are co-ordered and abide, are held together, are filled and are returned to it” (DN 980B). This unity is present in an entity’s organization but also is an immanent principle of the organization. The existence of an individual entity is properly explicated in reference to the entity’s unifying principle, and not simply to the entity itself. We must see not just what the entity is but *why* it is, and if this is to be a proper explanation it must not be an abstract principle but in a special way internal to the intelligibility of the entity. We have seen that it is the names ‘good’ or ‘light’ which bridge the physical and intelligible. The names ‘good’ and ‘light’ function as productive forces in entities, not by reasoning or action but as its own force because the ‘to be’ of the entity is inherent in its very being. Just as light is immaterial, it is not strictly speaking in matter as a quality inhering in a substratum but rather is directly what the entity is. Light and the good are inseparable from the entity, for they have the power to make an entity. For example, the radii, as emerging from the οὐσιοποιός, appear from out of themselves. Pseudo-Dionysius returns to the example of the sun to describe how entities are both undifferentiated and differentiated both from each other and from their emerging, sustaining source.

Although the sun's light comes from a unified source, its light reveals multiple objects in multiple ways. Each entity is manifested in its particularity, but also the sun reveals them as unified, as a collection of entities that are able to be seen as a grouping. For example, the Areopagite writes,

For, if our sun, is one being and giving a uniform light, it makes the being and qualities of perceived things, although they are multiple and various, it nourishes and guards, perfects and makes them separate, unites and *makes to shoot up again* [ἀναθάλλει], and gives productivity to, increases, *makes to leap forth* [ἐξάλλάττει], and settles, and *makes to burgeon out of* [ἐκφύει], stirs up, and gives life to all; and each of the whole, in a manner appropriate to it, participates in the one and same sun and the one sun preeminently in itself is the cause of the many participants (*DN 824B-C*).

While the sun gives a uniform light and unifies that which it illuminates, what it illuminates is multiple. The unified light, then, from the sun multiplies itself when it makes entities manifest. Furthermore, although the sun is one, a unity, it nourishes and makes a multiplicity of entities grow and burgeon forth. God is the universal principle of all that is. It, like the sun, is responsible for the production and existence of entities. This suggests that God is responsible not only for the unity of entities but also for their multiplicity, but it cannot be the cause of multiplicity, what is different from it by it remaining within itself. It would appear that either God is not the principle of multiplicity or it is and so cannot remain by itself, that is that it would alter its nature. God must give something that it does not have, that is being. God “is being in things that are and things howsoever existing and subsisting. And for God is not some being but absolutely and unboundly...and it neither was, nor will be, nor became nor becomes, nor will become (*DN 817D*). The good is not found in God as a principle. God is the principle of the good by its not being the good, although it is the generative force of being. God is formless, it is separate from all names. God is the power of all the specified names. It is the power to give rise to all possible names. If God is formless in respect to all the names, it has the power to generate them all. “To say it again that the being of all entities and to their ages from the pre-existing” (*DN 820A*).

Again, we see that ‘light’ makes entities spring into existence, making them manifest from out of their undifferentiated source.

GOD AS CAUSE

Although, the Areopagite is giving a *kataphatic* account of being, it would be a mistake, to think God as the first efficient cause, as in Aquinas’ account where “God’s essence can be grasped through knowledge of things that are caused by God. For whatever God is, God is *essentially*, and if God is the first efficient cause, God is so essentially... This means that God is related to things as the artisan to the artifact. But production of this sort requires a grasp of the intelligible form of things.”²³¹ Certainly, God is the cause of existence in that it imparts being to entities by giving what it does not have. And so, we are explicitly told that “God is not some being [ὁ Θεὸς οὐ πῶς ἐστὶν ὄν] but simply and without delimitation, having comprehended and pre-contains [προειληφώς] the whole of the ‘to be’ in itself” (*DN* 817D). God does not initiate motion or explain how an event gives rise to another that is numerically distinct from it but like in kind. And so if God is the cause, it must be in some other way than a first efficient cause. In fact “to describe God positively as ‘cause’ would be to regard him as a being and ascribe to him the attribute of causality... when [Dionysius] calls God ‘cause’ he does not mean this in the modern sense, in which one being is the cause of other being and God as the ‘first cause’ is the ‘supreme being.’”²³²

Although, Pseudo-Dionysius uses the image of an impression from a seal (*DN* 644A), which would seem to gesture toward the artisan and craft relationship, this is not entirely the case. As in the example, the wax which receives the seal differs in quality, hard, smooth, clean or already printed upon (*DN* 644C), giving rise to the different impressions. It would appear that, as

²³¹ Richard A. Lee, Jr., *Science, the Singular, and the Question of Theology* (Palgrave: New York, 2002), pp.42-43.

²³² *Theophany*, p.17.

the example states, God is the preeminent cause, which would stand in a causal relation, as the exemplary cause, to entities, of the impressions. However, each impression is not just simply of a seal but rather of the archetypal, or perhaps primordial seal [ἀρχετύπου σφραγιδος] (*DN* 644B). The seal itself is hidden from us; there is nothing to which we can compare it. To show this the Areopagite writes, “excessively-lying above this is the nonparticipation of the all-creative divinity, for the fact that there is no touch or contact [ἐπαφήν] with it” (*DN* 644B).

Although God is “all-creative,” the divinity as such does not touch entities, and so does not have a causal relationship to entities at least in the traditional sense. Anthony J. Steinbock, in his book *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, states that God is a vertical cause to distinguish it from traditional efficient causation.²³³ “I use the term ‘verticality’ because of the existential sense it bears—the orientation, the meanings, and the dynamic movement it evokes.”²³⁴ Moreover, he states “Verticality is the vector of mystery and reverence; horizontality is what is in principle within reach, graspable, controllable.”²³⁵ Consequently, “The unpredictability of the vertical, the dangerous, spontaneous, undomesticable quality of the vertical is incompatible with what we predominately value and are encouraged to value. If we live in a ‘horizontal’ world that suppresses the vertical, it is nonetheless a world that is susceptible to verticality and beyond control; it is a world into which the vertical erupts.”²³⁶ In other words, the vertical is the name for the eruption of the divine into the world of entities. God as cause, then, is not a cause in the normal sense of the word, but rather a disruption of our everydayness. If we shift the focus from

²³³ Eric Perl also uses the term vertical to describe God as cause. He writes, “The causation in question, therefore, is not the ‘horizontal’ causation of one thing by another within the same ontological order, as when we say, for example, that parents are the cause of their offspring or an earthquake is the cause of a tidal wave. It is rather the ‘vertical’ causation of a lower ontological level by a higher one, as when we say that the intelligible form Fire (i.e., ‘fieriness’) is the cause of sensible fires in that it makes them to be what they are, to be fires, and so makes them to be” (*Theophany*, pp.17-18). It is clear that the two authors mean something different by the term vertical cause but both wish to suggest that God cannot be a cause in the same sense as an entity is the cause of another.

²³⁴ *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, p.12.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, p.13.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, p.14.

horizontal to vertical causality, God becomes that which disrupts and resists our normal understanding of causality as that which is completely comprehensible by rational understanding.

After all, as is stated above, “God is not a being.” “It [God] is the cause of beings, *it is nothing* [αὐτὸ δὲ οὐδέν], as excessively-existing is removed from everything...And yet is the sustaining source [ὑπαρξίς] of goodness, *by its to be* [αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι] is the cause of all being...all things are around it and for the sake of it” (DN 593C-D), and “everything is around it” (DN 596C). Everything revolves around God, that is to say, is made to move because of it. And simply by its ‘to be’, simply by being this *movement* do things emerge. From the good, light is the fontal ray excessively-bubbling, it emanates or erupts, springing forth. Pseudo-Dionysius describes this as a πρόοδος, a procession. Light in the form of a ray illuminates all things and is at once of being and knowledge, the manifestation of God fills and constitutes every entity. “The good indeed is not entirely uncommunicated to any one existing entity but benignly shows forth [ἀγαθοπερῶς ἐπιφαίνεται] the excessively-existing ray, fixed, by illuminations [ἐλλάμψεσιν] analogous to each entity” (DN 588C-D). Moreover, “by its ‘to be’ it sends to all entities that are the rays of its whole goodness, according to their capacity. By reason of these rays subsisted all the intelligible and intelligent existing entities and capacity and activities” (DN 693B). The being of any entity consists in its knowing God and in its making God known to others. The procession of sensible to intelligible reality is not merely analogous to the procession of light from its source; it *is* the procession.

We have already seen that God moves in the πρόοδος-ἐπιστροφή pattern. Now we can understand how this applies to God as a cause. God as πρόοδος is an undiminished giving cause. It emanates from out of itself. As shown above, God is the activity by which entities

emerge. Considered as an undiminished giving cause God is exemplified as a “bubbling-forth” “and from the good, bubbling out into existing entities [ἐκ τἀγαθοῦ τοῖς οὔσις ἐκβλυζομένην]” (*DN 712C*). Moreover, God “is said to be perfect, both without increase and always perfect and as undiminished, as pre-holding [προέχον] all entities in itself and exceedingly-bubbling [ὑπερβλύζον], inexhaustible and same and exceedingly-full [ὑπερπλήρη] and undiminished abundance [χορηγίαν] in accordance with which it perfects all perfect things and fills [ἀποπληροῖ] them with its own perfection” (*DN 977B-C*). Note the ebullience in the discourse of God. Pseudo-Dionysius is contemplating God in its own work. God is an inexhaustible reality, without reasoning or choosing. Entities are an activity springing out from God, which its giving cannot not have occurred and cannot cease. It should be stated that God is not compelled to bubble-forth but is beyond necessity. For God to “fill” all things it must be “in all things” and “nothing in any.” The two mutually entail each other, since God must be by itself alone and simple. The imagery of emanation is successful in that it expresses the relationship of dependence that exists between the source and the entities which have bubbled-forth.

But there is an irreducibility of God. Although God gives being to entities, it itself is not a being.

Everything divine, even those made manifest to us are known by participation alone; and they in the way that they are according to their primordial abode [κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρχὴν] and foundation are excessive to the intellect, all existing, and knowing. For example, if we have named the excessively-existing hiddenness: ‘God’, ‘life’, ‘existence’, ‘light’, or ‘word’, we have no other thought than the capacity brought before us from out of it (*DN 645A*).

We have no knowledge of the things revealed to us except by the thoughts that are given to us from the entities themselves, but what they truly are, what their abode, or primordial seal, their sustaining source is, is always hidden and obscured from us. Moreover, “the goodness

excessively-named should be named, it has had pre-contained [προείληφε], in itself, all things” (597A). God “pre-contains” the entirety of what it is to be in itself. God, then, does not contain entities or impressions as a seal would, but pre-contains them, that is to say, pre-ontologically, or primordially. As ὑπαρξις, we have already seen that God is the source that allows entities to come into being from themselves. Here too God is understood as a pre-ontological source, a cause that is not a cause in the traditional sense but one that disrupts our very notion of what it is to be a cause. Entities are not held in God as in a container or vessel, as something possessed, but as pre-contained as having a place within God without imposing presence upon them. It is God giving itself without intermediaries. God gives room for entities to manifest. We have already seen that God is the paradigm for all existing things (*DN 869C*), and are in God without distinction but we should not and cannot conceive of God as containing them in the sense of possessing them. Rather, God pre-contains them, containing them in a primordial sense. The paradigms are the determining factors which make entities be at all. All the features of every entity are God in them, making them to be by making them what they are. In other words, God cannot be reduced to a container or mere seal for the paradigms or forms of entities. Rather as pre-containing entities there is no objective being to be found in God. There is only the movement of appearance. By which I mean that Pseudo-Dionysius overcomes the immanent-transcendent model. He overcomes the spectator-centered perspective. Pseudo-Dionysius maximizes the potential for unity. It is not the case that each entity imperfectly represents God. It is also that in each entity the unity of it is measured from the perspective of the pre-ontological unity of God. Entities are not themselves in God but only manifest themselves as entities when they move in the προόδος and ἐπιστροφή relationship.

Furthermore, it is written that God is “pre-existence, pre-being, pre-existing [πρὸ

οὐσίας ὧν καὶ ὄντος] and pre-time and the source of all creative powers, and the middle, and the end and for this reason, according to scripture, the truly pre-being [προῶν] is molded in many ways [πολλαπλασιάζεται] according to every thought of beings” (DN 824A). The middle voice “πολλαπλασιάζεται” is used here to convey that our concept of God appears to be many things in relation to us. It names both the individual’s action toward the object and the object’s self-presentation to the individual. It is a relation of exposure and the world from the side of that which is a manifestation originating with the object. Just as each impression is of the archetypal seal, which does not participate in any of the impressions and which itself must be able to take on many forms to shape all the impressions, God, too, as προῶν, is prior to the being of all entities but which manifests itself in relation to the human intellect. God is nothing but the self-appearing of entities as they appear.

Along the same lines, “of all things, the pre-being [προῶν] is the source and the end of existing things. Source as cause and the end for the sake of which and delimitation of all things and the limitless of every limitlessness” (DN 825B). As both the ἀρχή and τέλος, as that which simultaneously gathers and pre-contains the whole, God can neither be a multiplicity nor the whole but exists prior to this distinction. When God is said to be a unity, it is characterized in this way, “this must be especially known, that according to the pre-conceived form [προεπινοούμενον εἶδος] of each thing, the things united are said to be made one and the one is the elemental thing [τὸ ἐν στοιχειωτικόν] of all. And if one takes away the one, neither the whole or the part of anything will be” (DN 980B). As the pre-ontological, elemental most basic facet of what is, God is neither the totality nor the part, but that which makes them possible and necessary and is presupposed while never able to be proven, since it is not contained by the totality. We could say that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Analysis always

overlooks a remainder. We do not begin with being but with pre-being. Can we continue by negating or affirming to incorporate the remainder into the totality? What preceded entities is not being but pre-being, a not having a beginning. In saying this, we retrospectively speak as though entities were present before they began. And so we are drawn to negate this beginning again. In saying that God is nothing we must be careful to realize that there is something called “nothing” only if there is something over and against by which it is called “nothing.” The whole out of which entities became differentiated is both nothing, since entities have not yet emerged and is a cause since everything emerges from it. By adding “nothing” to entities one still has to add a remainder which is found in pre-being. But speaking, again retroactively, we believe as if there were already entities to be present or absent. We seem to be progressing in an infinite regress, while trying to find God as a cause. But this should come as no surprise since God is “all things in all things and it is no thing in them” (*DN 872A*). Discursive thought is limited to apprehending entities and God is not any entity, it is inaccessible to the intellect. In fact, Pseudo-Dionysius states, “it is necessary to ask how we know God, which is neither intelligible nor sensible [οὐδὲ νοητὸν οὐδὲ αἰσθητὸν] nor any entity whatsoever” (*DN 869C*). We must move beyond the intellect or discursive knowledge into a union with God itself. “It is necessary to know that the intellect in us has, on the one hand, a capacity of intellection, through which it beholds intelligible entities, and on the other hand the union exceeding the nature of the intellect, through which it is joined with things beyond itself” (*DN 865C-D*). At the peak, when union is achieved, discursive knowledge passes over into non-discursive apprehension, “souls, uniting and gathering their manifold reasonings into one intellectual purity, go forth in the way and order proper to them through immaterial and undivided intellection to the union excessive to intellection” (*DN 949D*).

The above description of the πρόδος-ἐπιστοφή cycle would entail giving an account of the effects back to their ultimate cause, God, except that when speaking of God as the good, the Areopagite explicitly states that God gives being to all things in the following way,

Since we are speaking of these things, come then, and let us praise the good as being what truly is [ὡς ὄντος ὄν] and making being to all existing things. It, which is, the excessively-existing thing, the underlying [ὑποστάσις] cause of the whole of the to be of things capable, and the creator of existing, the sustaining source, existence, and nature....And moreover, *God is not some being* [ὁ Θεὸς οὐ πῶς ἐστὶν ὄν] but simply and without delimitation, having comprehended and *pre-contains* [προειληφώς] the whole of the ‘to be’ in itself (DN 817C-D).

Surely God, as “truly what is,” the ὄντος ὄν, literally “beingly-being,” is the enactment or movement of what exists. In this way, God does not stand in relation to the world as an artisan to his or her craft, for not only is God not an entity, but there is a continual movement of entities coming into existence.

From this Pseudo-Dionysius claims,

And through knowing God is known, and through unknowing [καὶ διὰ γνώσεως ὁ Θεὸς γινώσκεται καὶ διὰ ἀγνωσίας]. And there is of it intellection, and word, and knowledge [ἐπιστήμη], and contact, and perception, and opinion, and imagination, and name and all the rest. And it is neither conceived nor spoken [λέγεται] nor named. And it is not any entity nor is it known in any one entity. *And it is all in all, and nothing in none* (DN 872A).

On the one hand, “it is the cause of all entities, but itself is none as excessively-existing removed from all [αὐτὸ δὲ οὐδὲν ὡς πάντων ὑπερουσίως ἐξηρημένον].” According to this mode of discourse, to best know God is to deny all characteristics of entities. While on the other hand, Pseudo-Dionysius claims that we have knowledge of God as a cause,

And yet since it is the sustain source of goodness [ἐπειδὴ δὲ ὡς ἀγαθότητος ὑπαρξίς], by its ‘to be’ [αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι] it is the cause of all entities, one must hymn the beneficent providence of the primordial-God [θεαρχίας] from all of the things caused. For it is the center of all things and for the sake of it entities are. It is prior to all things [ἐστὶ πρὸ πάντων] and in it all things are brought together; and by its ‘to be’ all things are made and have their existence (DN 593C).

God is known through both affirmation and by denials. Considered in its fundamental nature, God is completely unknown, but through the processions of its “bubbling-forth,” its emanation, God is known by entities. This is due to the manner in which entities both veil and unveil God’s existence. This is grounded in the very tension of the *aporia* of God itself. God communicates itself through the effusion of goodness in the “thrown-forthness” of its perfections; “the generous procession [ἀγαθοπρεπῆς πρόοδος] of the undifferentiated divine unity, multiplying itself excessively-uniquely through goodness and taking to itself many forms, is also a divine distinction” (DN 644A). And yet, Pseudo-Dionysius insists that all participations which are shared through the cause of all things are united “then the things united even within this divine differentiation are the acts by which it irrepressibly imparts being” (DN 644A). God remains “united even in its distinctions, excessively-pours [ὑπερχέουσα] in its unity and multiplies without going out from the one” (DN 649B). As a cause, then, God appears as a paradox and contradictory predications may be attributed to it.

Despite the *kataphatic* aspect to Pseudo-Dionysius’ writings, it becomes hard if not impossible not to read them *apophatically*; the Areopagite says as much at the end of *Concerning Divine Names*. “And neither do we apply the name goodness, as making it fit, but by the desire to know and to tell something concerning the unsayable nature, we reserve for it the name which is most revered. We should be in agreement in this matter with the theologians, yet we fall short of this. They have a preference for ascent through negations” (DN981A-B). This, however, should come as no surprise since *kataphasis* and *apophasis* are intertwined. Before moving on to the *apophatic*, let us now briefly turn toward the Areopagite’s use of symbols as these will act as a bridge to the *apophatic*.

PHYSICAL AND ICONIC REALITY

Pseudo-Dionysius does not simply discuss conceptual matters, but in moving from *kataphasis* to the use of symbols, he moves the discussion to physical entities. The Areopagite's influence over scriptural analysis went so deeply as to have quite an influence on the formation of the Church, particularly with regard to the Second Council of Nicaea, the council that decided the status of the use of symbols and icons. Named twice in documents from this council, Pseudo-Dionysius shaped the early and subsequent Catholic view of iconography.²³⁷ During a time in the formation of the Church fraught with controversy over whether or not physical objects, icons or symbols, should be venerated, the Areopagite's writings gave direction.

The origins of what was to become called the "Iconoclastic Crisis" began with the question of whether images of Christ should not only be made but worshiped; was it idolatrous to do so? "The accusation of idolatry provoked a sensitive point of Christian belief—it posed the question whether images of Christ were acceptable since He is contemporaneously divine and human."²³⁸ In support of images of Christ appeals to the incarnation were invoked. If the previous law against making idols still remained, the line of argument went, why had God, as the Son, made itself manifest physically? "To negate this means to diminish the genuineness of Christ's humanity."²³⁹ Moreover, Christ's love of humanity and incarnation does nothing to alleviate the question-worthy status of God's relationship with the world. The προόδος, then, even if ascribed to Christ, or especially because it is ascribed to Christ, is hidden from human understanding, despite speaking of it discursively.

The incarnation allows Pseudo-Dionysius to move from conceptual names as that which describes God to all physical entities as symbols of God's power; "there is understanding, reason

²³⁷ *Symbol and Icon*, p.81.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, p.74.

²³⁹ *Ibid*.

[λόγος], knowledge, touch [ἐπαφή], sensation [αἴσθησις], opinion, imagination, name...” (DN 872A). Due to the πρόοδος-ἐπιστοφή movement, each physical entity is a touch and sensation of God,²⁴⁰ “The Cause is touched and sensed in and through its effects.”²⁴¹ In fact, the use of symbols gives one the ability to move from “effects to causes, and then Jesus lighting our way, we shall see the contemplation blessedness of primordial beauty [τῶν ἀρχετύπων κάλλος] of the made bright manifest things” (CH 428C). Symbols, then, allow for knowledge of the sensible world, for matter is “some echo [ἀπηχήματα] of intelligible comeliness and it is possible due to these [material things] to be led to the immaterial primordials [τὰς ἀύλους ἀρχετυπίας]” (EH 144B-C).

SYMBOLS, CONNECTING THE WORLD

A symbol, σύμβολον, as “reflections of an invisible beauty” (EH 121D), is literally a tally-marker, which has been cut in a certain fashion to fit with only one other half. As such, the σύμβολον is defined by what it is not as much as by what it is. Each σύμβολον is a mirror image toward what it gestures—it is the opposite of what it intends. For example, a finite entity gestures toward “the excessively-bubbling up [ὑπερβλύζον] source” (DN 977B) from which it emanates and the material gestures toward the immaterial primordially. A σύμβολον, then, is itself an openness, a rupture, a pure overflowing of what it indicates. Indeed, symbols must have this paradoxical structure,

For the word of God itself asserts that it [God] is dissimilar and of the same rank as none, as different from everything and more paradoxical, it says there is nothing that is similar to it. Yet this argument is not contrary to the similarity towards it, for the same things are both similar to God and dissimilar (DN 916A).

²⁴⁰ This is said symbolically and not causally. We will see how this is consistent with what has been said above concerning God not touching entities.

²⁴¹ *Divine Light*, p.180.

Everything is both similar to and, at the same time, dissimilar to God, “and this is what it means to be a symbol.”²⁴² A symbol both conceals and reveals what it presents. It conceals God’s infinite and unsayable nature through it being able to be spoken of, but in the act of concealing a symbol reveals that God is unsayable, a topic to which Pseudo-Dionysius states he has given much thought.

For not even we should have gone into investigation from out of waylessness [ἐξ ἀπορίας] into an uplifting due to the exact explanation of divine inquires, if not for the deformities of the descriptions of the angels’ manifestations had shocked us, not allowing our minds to linger in the boorish images, but completely rousing us to reject material inclinations and accustoming us to elevate ourselves through things apparent to the excessively-cosmic (*EC* 145B).

Only in being troubled by the apparent discontinuities, by becoming estranged to the everyday, can one peer behind the veils or symbols, which hide the truth. And yet,

let us not think the appearances of the those things put together have been formed anew for their own sake, they are projected forward [προβεβλήσθαι] for the sake of the knowledge [ἐπιστήμης] of the unsayable and the invisible against the multitude... We must, contrary to the common attitudes concerning them, reverently enter into the holy symbols, and not dishonor them, being products and molds of the divine and they make apparent images of the unsayable and excessive-nature visions (*Ep. IX* 1105C-1108C).

Moreover, symbols are likened to veils (*Ep. IX* 1108B); consequently they both project what the divine is while simultaneously concealing it.

According to the Areopagite, however, God does not simply emanate unthinkingly, as the above example of the sun indicates, but also in the symbol of Christ reveals itself out of love for humanity;²⁴³ “Christ’s love for humanity is cited repeatedly as the motive for his Incarnation.... Throughout Deny’s understanding of Christ, Love reigns supreme. By His loving,

²⁴² *Theophany*, p.103.

²⁴³ There is much debate whether Dionysius is a Neo-Platonist who happens to be a Christian, and maybe not a Christian at all, or a Christian who uses Neo-Platonic language because it was that which he was familiar. I will not engage in this debate, for that see especially *Theophany* and *Divine Light*. Rather, I will let both approaches coincide and allow this to create an *aporia*, thus furthering the mysterious identity of the author and the author’s corpus as a whole.

ecstatically creating of the beings of the cosmos, they *are, continue in being, and are perfected.*”²⁴⁴

As loving toward humanity because it [*theachy*] truly and wholly shared in one of its under-lying things, in things belonging to us recalling to itself and lays upon the human extremity, out of which, in a manner unsayable, the simplex Jesus was composed...and now, according to our capacity, through the sacred veils of the love of humanity, made known to us through scripture and hierarchy, which enwrap intellectual things in perceptible things and things excessively-existing in things that are and place forms and shapes around the formless and shapeless (*DN 592A-B*).

Here, God, as Christ, is given an intent for acting in the world and even in the creation of the world. Again, the *kataphatic* language Pseudo-Dionysius employs opens up into an *aporia*, on the one hand, God bubbles over without thought, while on the other from out of love for humanity. It would appear that Pseudo-Dionysius wishes to challenge both the Neo-Platonic notion of emanation and Christian love of humanity, placing them side-by-side and thus forcing the reader into a deeper understanding of both.

“The function of the symbol stands in overcoming the contrast between God’s transcendence and the hierarchy that connects God with the material world.”²⁴⁵ Christ, who is both fully human and fully divine, both similar and dissimilar to both, is able to bridge the ontological gap between the heavenly and earthly realms.²⁴⁶ It marks not only the earthly and immediate manifestation of God, but draws our attention toward the hidden aspect which every σύμβολον presents, “they incite humans to go beyond the mere exterior perception;”²⁴⁷ moreover “symbols not only have a revealing role, but they also serve to conceal.”²⁴⁸ Instead of ignoring one aspect of Christ’s existence for the sake of the other, in order that the *aporia* of his incarnation to be resolved, the iconophile’s use of the writings of the Areopagite understood that

²⁴⁴ *Divine Light*, pp. 142-143.

²⁴⁵ *Symbol and Icon*, p.51.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.54.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.57.

“the icon exemplifies a paradoxical vision that amalgamates similarity and dissimilarity.”²⁴⁹

Letter III speaks to this.

“Sudden [ἐξαίφνης],” is that which is contrary to what is hoped for, and out of the, as yet, unmanifested is made manifest. But with regard to Christ’s love of humanity, I think that the word of God speaks in riddles [αἰνίττεσθαι], that the excessively-existing emerged from the hidden [τὸ ἐκ τοῦ κρυφίου τὸν ὑπερούσιον], into manifestation among us by having the existence of a human. But he is hidden, even after the manifestation, or to speak more divinely, even in the manifestation for in the truth of Jesus has been kept hidden and the mystery with respect to him has not been reached by reason or understanding [λόγῳ καὶ νῶ] but even when spoken of, it remains unsaid [ἀλλὰ καὶ λεγόμενον ἄρρητον μένει] and when conceived, non-known [καὶ νοούμενον ἄγνωστον] (1069B).

The incarnation strikes one as sudden, that is to say, as enigmatic, contrary to expectation. There is no reason for it despite its having been given. Furthermore, the symbol of Christ is so striking precisely because it conceals that which it makes manifest. But it is this strikingly enigmatic characteristic of Christ that makes a connection between what it conceals and what is disclosed. Christ is the *aporetic* space into which one is lost and made open to that which is essentially unsayable.

Connecting both *kataphasis* and the σύμβολον as modes to the “philosophical discourse,” the Areopagite compels the human mind already into *apophasis*. If every name is a sign of its own negation when ascribed to God and every σύμβολον gesturing toward what is concealed, we cannot but at the same time speak negatively of God; “to apprehend a symbol, a manifestation, is to apprehend some being, and hence not God himself.”²⁵⁰ After all, one must ask, what sort of unity can contain opposites. We are going to see, presently, that we should not think of the one or the unity which contains opposites as a thing, for God is beyond being. Instead, it is a zero point, a conceptual destruction. In the πρόοδος-ἐπιστροφή movement that is God, God becomes non-being, despite being ascribed to it. To put it otherwise, God is *aporia*,

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p.77.

²⁵⁰ *Theophany*, p.104.

that which is essentially able and defined by contradiction. It is to the *apophatic* mode of discourse that we will now turn.

III. Apophasis: Unsayable God:

We have just seen how and in what way names are ascribed to God: God as ‘cause’, ‘being’, the ‘good’, as ‘light’, and the ‘one.’ Such designations presuppose that God is the ground of being [ὑπόστασις], an underlying thing, which supports and gives being to entities. However, it was also stated previously that Pseudo-Dionysius prefers the *apophatic* mode of discourse. He favors this mode of discourse because God “is, in a manner, unspeakable and non-knowledge [καθ’ ἣν ἀφθέγκτοις καὶ ἀγνώστοις]” (DN 586B). In fact, “nothing that is or is known [οὐδὲ ἄλλο τι τῶν ἢ τιμι τῶν ὄντων συνεγνωσμένων] can lead out the hidden excessive to every word and intellect of the excessively-existing excessively-deity in excess of every excessive-existence [τῆς ὑπὲρ πάντα ὑπερουσίως ὑπερούσης ὑπερθεότητος]” (DN 981A). *Apophasis*, then, explicitly thinks God as the unsayable. After going through the long initiation process of *kataphasis* “they discover that although it is the cause of all things, it itself is not an entity, since it excessively-exists all things” (DN 593C). The endeavor of *kataphasis* is reevaluated, “the way of negation appears to be more suitable to the divine and affirmations are always unfitting of the hiddenness of the unsayable” (CH 141A), since “there is no name for it nor expression but is elevated above in the inaccessible [ἀλλ’ ἐν ἀβάτοις ἐξήρηται]. And neither do we apply the name goodness, as making it equal to it, but by a desire of understanding and saying something concerning the inexpressible nature, we give the most august names to it...hence even then theologians have given preference to the ascent by negations, as standing the soul out of things like it [ὡς ἐξιστῶσαν τὴν ψυχὴν τῶν ἑαυτῆ συμφύλων]” (DN 981A-B).

HYPERLY-DENYING GOD

Apophasis is not a simple negation of the names ascribed to God through *kataphasis*. Rather it hyperly-negates the names by attaching the prefix ‘ὑπερ-’. “The names, then, common to the whole deity [τῆς ὅλης θεότητος] as we have demonstrated from scripture...are excessive-good, excessive-God, excessive-existence, excessive-life, excessively-wise and whatever else is of a superabundant denial [ἄφαιρέσεως]” (DN 640B). Indeed, far from placing God below the level of being, denial places God beyond being “for the mindless and the insensible we must attribute to God, by excess [ὑπεροχήν] and not defect, just as we attribute nonsense to it which is above reason [ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ ἄλογον ἀνατίθεμεν τῷ ὑπὲρ λόγον]” (DN 869A).

Every name that has been ascribed to the divine is now denied so that, “after every one of our thoughts of divine-images, halting our own powers of thought, we cast ourselves, according to the laws, into the excessively-existing ray” (DN 592D). We must stop our own intellectual capacities if God is excessively-existing because “if all knowing is of existing things and they are limited to existing things, then what which lies beyond all existing things, is raised above all knowing” (DN 593A). To recognize that God is not an entity requires that our way of thinking, how we normally comport ourselves toward the world, is disrupted. Such a disruption pushes the concepts that the names designate from the inside to their breaking point. We give ourselves over to the divine itself, purifying not only language but ourselves in the process. “The god-like minds [θεοειδεῖς νόες] made one by unions, through the imitations of angels as far as is possible, since it is during cessation of every intellectual energy that such a union as this of the deified minds [ἐκθεουμένων νοῶν] toward the excessive-god [ὑπέρθεον] light takes place, hymn it most

appropriately through the denial of all entities [πάντων τῶν ὄντα ἀφαιρέσεως]” (DN 640B-C).

The deification [θεώσις] as found through *apophasis* serves to reveal the paradox that God is unlike us yet we are like God. Our relationship to God is both close and distant. We cannot comprehend God and yet we still have a sense of its presence, God is “all things in all and it is no thing among them” (DN 872A). God cannot be wholly other, separate, or transcendent, since God would then be an entity set over and against and limited by other entities, e.g., the world itself. As beyond being, God must not be separate from entities and precisely as present to all, God is not one of the entities, and so is beyond being. God is that by which all entities have their being and by which they are entities and so is beyond being in that God is not one of them that possesses being. If the determinations of entities is the presence of God, then God is not simply “in all things” as if God were some entity other than itself. God, rather, is the power by which entities are, deifying us.

In the Medieval period, many found *apophasis* particularly useful to discuss God’s unknowable character and used Pseudo-Dionysius’ language. In particular, “In Thomas Aquinas, for example, there are more than seventeen hundred quotations from Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite...Now it is certainly a sign of the ‘universal teacher’s’ peculiar greatness that he vigorously incorporated into his own thinking the ‘unscholastic’ element of negative theology and philosophy, as a counterpoise to *ratio*’s tendency to overemphasize the positive.”²⁵¹ Indeed, “Aquinas’ discussion of the possibility of our knowledge of God” is “the question of whether any created mind can see God’s essence. According to Aquinas, the purpose of Pseudo-Dionysius’ claim was to describe the situation of the finiteness of the human mind and the limits

²⁵¹ Josef Pieper, *Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems of Medieval Philosophy* (St. Augustine’s Press: South Bend, 2001). P.53.

of possible knowledge of God,”²⁵² furthermore, “Aquinas clearly acknowledged the infinite distance between the human mind and God.”²⁵³ However, despite finding Pseudo-Dionysius useful, Aquinas is unable to go all the way with him in terms of *apophasis* and its ultimate silence, to which we will turn shortly—“Specifically Aquinas wanted not to be forced, as he suspected the Pseudo-Dionysius was, into having to deny one can have any knowledge of God at all—into having to claim God is *simply* unintelligible.”²⁵⁴ The *apophatic* mode of discourse attempts to relate the effects and the names of God back to their ultimate source (through ἐπιστοφή), however, “the problem is whether it names that signifier according to our mode of understanding, which falls short of a proper understanding of God, can signify God...the causal relation between God and creatures must stand outside of the scope of Aquinas’ negative and analogical theology because these presuppose it.”²⁵⁵ And so, as we have seen, all naming, predication, and defining God must fall outside of and yet be presupposed within the discussion of God itself.

INFINITE INTENSITY

To discuss the effects of God, then, already takes for granted that God exists. But as we saw in the first section of this chapter, the existence of God must remain essentially undecidable. This is an act of “divine faith” (*DN* 872C), which revolves around a λόγος which is “simpler than simplicity and set free from all as excessively-existing [ὑπερούσιον]” (*DN* 872C). The λόγος of “divine faith” is able to be a discourse of God, since as “simpler than simplicity” it makes no presupposition about God’s existence, or rather is able to give room for God’s pre-ontological being to manifest. Furthermore, “if all knowledge unites the knower and the thing

²⁵² Robert R. N. Ross, “The Non-Existence of God: Tillich, Aquinas, and the Pseudo-Dionysius,” *Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 68, No. 2 (Apr., 1975), pp. 141-166 p.142.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.143.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Richard A. Lee, Jr., *Science, the Singular, and the Question of Theology* (Palgrave: New York, 2002), p.56.

known...nothing will separate the one who believes from the ground of true faith and it is through that he will come into possession of an enduring, unchanging identity” (DN 872D). Language and experience allows for the conclusion that God exists on that assumption that what they entail is true but also that neither would be intelligible if God did not exist. Faith desires to transverse this gap, all unnamings of God is the understanding striving to transcend itself to grasp what is beyond it. Any formula of God is empty of concept about God and refers only to the limits of the understanding and it is this that guarantees to refer to God. Faith describes the desire to make what faith desires present. Faith is the intersection of language and desire. It expresses the infinite distance between us and God and how to transverse it. There is nothing, no being, no mode of existence, nor expression of God, in a finite way of understanding, that can fully contain God; “and so it is as the cause of all things and transcending all things, it is rightly nameless and yet has the names of everything that exists” (DN 596C). To remedy this Pseudo-Dionysius uses the prefix ‘ὑπερ-’, which changes the register of discourse from the finite to the infinite.

The prefix ‘ὑπερ-’ acts as a corrective. All language, no matter how large, is finite and delimits something over and against something else, but, as we have seen, God is not an entity. *Apophasis* does not erase the names that Pseudo-Dionysius has given to God, after all scripture gives these names. The Areopagite places the prefix ‘ὑπερ-’ onto finite names so that our understanding of them is disrupted and disturbed. The hyperly-affirmed denial is an avowel of the superabundance which is unable to express itself. We are brought to the utmost limits of knowing; all intelligible concepts have been removed. We accept and assert that radical incommensurability of our thought and that of our goal. In fact, “God’s surpassing Being in Himself, *outrips all*. He is ‘ἄ’ (not) because He is ‘ὑπέρ’ (beyond).”²⁵⁶ The prefix ‘ὑπερ-’ is

²⁵⁶ *Divine Light*, p.186.

placed onto names ascribed to God in order to show that God is not any one entity, or even a set of entities—but rather it is an intensification of names to push the concept of God outside of the realm of entities, rupturing the concept of God itself. God is not only ‘good’ but “excessively-good” and not just God but “excessively-God.” Furthermore, it is said that “the non-living excessively-having life and the incomprehensible thing excessively-having wisdom [τὸ ἄζωον ὑπερέχουσα ζωὴ καὶ τὸ ἄνουν ὑπερέχουσα σοφία]” (DN 697A). In other words, God is not a life but life as intensified and not intellect but intense wisdom. As negating the finite concept which our minds would normally place upon God, ‘ὑπερ-’ intensifies the word such that it now has a completely new meaning. In fact, those fully initiated “‘into the sacred mysteries of our theological traditions say that the divine unities are the hidden and un-springing-out [κρυφίας καὶ ἀνεκφοιτήτους] excessive-foundation [ὑπεριδρύσεις] of the excessive-unsayable [ὑπεραρρήτου] and excessively-unknown thing [ὑπεραγνώστου]” (DN 640D). Those who are deified realize that God is nothing but the intensification of meaning and being. The prefix ‘ὑπερ-’ places God outside of the realm of the finite, and therefore stands outside of the human intellect altogether. The ‘good’ which is the cause of all things is eloquent but makes no utterance itself, now standing outside the reach of thought altogether. It manifests to those who have passed beyond all things where we “plunge into the darkness where scripture says, truly dwells the one which is in excess to all things” (MT 1001A). We now enter into the “divine darkness,” the “darkness of unknowing” by which we know in a manner beyond understanding. It is to this, the divine darkness, to which we will now turn.

IV. Saying nothing, the via negativa:

We have just seen that ‘ὑπερ-’ is a denial of names in the sense of intensifying them to such a degree that the finite conception one has of them is ruptured from the inside. Participating

in this intensification, one becomes deified, conforming our intellect to be like that of God's excessive nature, "...of those who are being lead by it, a protecting leader; of those being illuminated, illumination; of being perfected, source-of-perfection; and of the primordial-God those being deified [θεουμένων θεαρχία]...excessively-existing absolutely everything [ἀπάσης ὑπερουσίων], excessive-source of source and according to what is allowed by God and the human [κατὰ θεμιτόν] as good gives out a share of the hidden" (DN 589C).

In fact, through God "we are brought into contact with the unutterable and unknown [καθ' ἣν ἀφθέγκτοις καὶ ἀγνώστοις] and we are made to be joined together unutterably and unknowingly, in proportion to the superior union of the reasoning and intellectual capacity and activity within us" (585B-586A). Such contact is said to be "divinely-brought about lights [θεουργικὰ φῶτα]" (592B), through which "we will become angel-like, as scripture tells us, but until then, we use symbols appropriate to divine things and from these elevate ourselves...we cause ourselves, as best we can, toward the excessively-existing ray, in which every limit of all knowing have pre-existed unsayably [ἐν ἧ πάντα τὰ πέρατα πασῶν τῶν γνώσεων ὑπεράρρήτως προὔφεστηκεν]" (DN 592D). We are brought to the very limits of what is knowable when we give ourselves over to the divine ray which exists beyond entities. And in so doing, "we stop the activities of the intellect and to the extent that is proper, we approach the excessively-existing ray" (DN 592D). In fact, we are brought into conformity to that which is in excess of all knowing, "For if knowing is of existing things and is held to the limit of existing things, then that lying beyond all things is taken out of knowing" (DN 593A). Now we are not only hyperly-affirming concepts and words to God but we are moved completely outside of knowing all together. This Pseudo-Dionysius terms "divine darkness," which is "unapproachable light" (Ep. III 1073A), in which we are "uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow, which is

excessively-existing” (MT 1000A). Here, in divine darkness, the soul stands in direct contact with the manifestation of God, “where the mysteries of God’s word lie simple, absolute and unchangeable in the excessively-light darkness of a hidden-mysterious silence. Amid the deepest shadow they pour an excessive-luster on what is excessively-appearing” (MT 997A-B). God is unapproachable so that in comparison to our own intellect it remains shrouded in impenetrable darkness, not due to any defect of our intellect but due to the brilliance of “darkness in excess of intellect [ὑπὲρ νοῦν γνώφος]” (MT 1033B). God’s movement as appearance is now so present as to blind the soul, unable to gaze upon divinity itself.

Deified in this way the soul understands that God is beyond both affirmations and negations, “it is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all entities, and by being preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation, it is also beyond every denial” (MT 1048AB), and thus beyond all knowing whatsoever; assertions and denials belong to the realm of being. Only profound silence is left.

“With wise silence, we honor the unsayable” [τὰ δὲ ἄρρήτα σώφροσι σιγῇ τιμῶντες] (DN 589B). Faced with the logical outcome and consequences of the relationship between *kataphasis* and *apophasis*, one is confronted by a paradox and by contradictions. All there is left is silence of the mind. After having named God as the unsayable and through the *apophatic* excessive-affirmation, we realize that no words can capture God—not only is God unsayable, but excessively-unsayable (DN 592D). “The more we take the flight upward, the more our words are confined...we shall find ourselves not only running short of words, but in truth speechless and unknowing” (MT 1033B-C). We experience the unlimitedness that characterizes God. We should not confuse this silence, however, with either quietude or a laziness of the mind.

“It is not only that God is excessively-full of wisdom that its faculty of comprehension is without measure, but excessively-situated above all reason [λόγου], all intelligence, all wisdom” (DN 865B). The silence erupts from the confrontation of the *aporia* that has arisen from the interplay of *kataphasis* and *apophasis*. It is won after a long contestation with language.

As we have seen, the image of light has been ascribed to God, but God is such a brilliant light as to be darkness, blinding, bewildering (MT 997B). The light which has brought us out of ignorance now stupefies us, due to its overwhelming nature. The Areopagite quoting from 1 Corinthians 1:25, writes “The foolishness of God is wiser than human,” and although it may seem contrary to reason and out of place to attribute and praise this of God, it leads us up “into the unsayable truth and pre-rational [πρὸ λόγου]” (DN 865C), for “we attribute to it [God] *nonsense* [ἄλόγον]²⁵⁷ because it is excessive to reason” (DN 869A). We are exposed to the void that God represents. “This apophatic sense of mystery is not a mystery in the sense of a secret known only by an initiated few. It is not a doctrine that is to be accepted as true but which is held beyond rational explanation. Rather, it is a basic human response...to the nothingness in which being is situated.”²⁵⁸ For, “the one beyond thought is unthinkable to all thoughts, the good beyond word is unsayable by means of all reason [λόγῳ]...word unsayable, *non-sense* [ἄλογία], unconceptual, and without name, existing according to no thing’s existence” (DN 588B).

The divine darkness brought about by the overwhelming nothing of God is what Pseudo-Dionysius calls unity, which is beyond anything the human can achieve on its own (DN 585B), “and participating in its [God’s] gift of intellectual light...even in the union excessive to

²⁵⁷ I’ve chosen to translate ἄλογία here as “non-sense” to emphasize that God *per se* is prior to discursive thought altogether and when one confronts the non-being of God *per se* all reason breaks down.

²⁵⁸ *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, p.216.

understanding, through non-knowledge and most blessed efforts according to the rays of surpassing brilliance” (*DN 592C*). Speaking of Moses, Pseudo-Dionysius writes,

setting foot upon his most holy of places, upon the outermost extremity of thought—and at that time, he is released from them, from those things seen and of seeing and enters into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing, by which he truly shuts out knowing. Being seized in the wholly impalpable and invisible, he belongs entirely to him who is on the far-side of everything, and also to nothing, neither to himself nor to another, but absolutely to unknowing by means of an inactivity of all knowing according to the more powerful oneness and by knowing nothing, by coming to know exceeding thought (*MT 1001A*).

Within mystic union there can be no discourse available because nothing exists—neither God nor oneself; one belongs wholly to unknowing. Speaking elsewhere of the union with God, Pseudo-Dionysius writes, “but standing outside [ἐξισταμένους] of ourselves totally and completely and becoming wholly God. It is better to be of God and not of ourselves. For thus divine things will be given to those who are becoming with God. Hymning superlatively this, *the nonsense* [ἄλογον], mindless and foolish wisdom, we say that it is cause of all mind, reason, all wisdom and comprehension...and in it all treasures of wisdom and knowing are hidden” (*DN 865D-868A*). Everything is in union insofar as there are no distinctions to be made. There is no distinction between the divine and the human any longer precisely because neither exist; “conventional logical and semantic structures—the distinction between reflexive and nonreflexive action, the distinction between perfect and imperfect tense, the univocal antecedent of a pronoun—are broken down.”²⁵⁹ Language concerning the non-experience of God itself goes through an ἐπιστροφή, reverting back upon a non-ground, a pre-ontological meaning, which we have seen reason [λόγος] demands. God is swallowed up, concealed in its own revelation turning to nothing since “it alone may make itself manifest authoritatively and with knowledge”

²⁵⁹ Ibid, p.7.

(*DN* 588B). But as we have already seen, God is undecidable, from out of itself it can only manifest nothing and non-sense—its authority is a non-binding non-knowledge.

The entire work of Pseudo-Dionysius has been an arduous effort to express the inexpressible. A discourse that is concerned with words and concepts which by definition cannot be uttered or understood. He has a strategy to impose negation upon affirmation and affirmation upon negation, intertwining them, intensifying them both, whose only aim is to disrupt discourse itself. All we are left with is the insufficiency of this project, which is in fact a non-project, a means by which to destroy all conceptual thought. God may be neither affirmed nor denied. It is to this that we will now explicitly turn our attention.

CHAPTER FOUR
COMMUNICATING WITH SILENCE:
Prayer, Catharsis, and Suffering God

Was sich überhaupt sagen lässt, lässt sich klar sagen;
und wovon man nicht reden kann,
darüber muss man schweigen
Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Wittgenstein

Mystische Erklärung.—Die mystischen Erklärungen
gelten für tief; die Wahrheit ist, dass sie noch
nicht einmal oberflächlich sind.
Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, Nietzsche

I. Communicating silently in ascension:

In the previous chapter, we examined the integral relationship between the *kataphatic* and *apophatic* forms of theological discourse. We saw that far from being separate they are intertwined and that together they force us into a fundamental *aporia* concerning the status of God's existence. This relationship reveals that the existence of God is undecideable, which is to say we can neither affirm nor deny God's existence but God must, nevertheless, exist if anything does at all. Using *kataphasis*, or positive statements concerning God, one is initiated into inherently contradictory and paradoxical statements. For example, both being [τὸ ὄν] (*DN* 816B) is ascribed to God while it is said, simultaneously, that God is itself nothing [αὐτὸ δὲ οὐδέν] (*DN* 593C). Exposed to this *aporia*, Pseudo-Dionysius shifts registers to *apophasis*. Attaching the prefix ὑπερ-, "hyper or exceedingly," to ordinary words, the Areopagite hyperly-affirms terms such that they no longer can be attributed to God in the usual manner, and in fact the preposition acts as a negation (*DN* 640B). With the addition of ὑπερ-, the word is intensified so that it cannot be ignored. When a concept is exceedingly-affirmed, we come to realize that our

normal and everyday understanding of what it is to be divine cannot be reduced to language. We next saw that *apophasis* then develops into the *via negativa*, the silencing of the intellect. We realize that no discourse, not even negative discourse can reach the excessive mystery that God represents, since it is not a concern for the intellect but rather is an immediate response. The only way to communicate God, then, is through silence.

Aristotle set the course of Western philosophy by determining the basic form of communication as λόγος ἀποφαντικός. This is characterized by a subject-predicate structure (“S is P”) (*De Int.* 17a10-15). Λόγος ἀποφαντικός affirms something of something [τι κατὰ τινος] or denies something as something [τι ἀπό τινος] through predication (*De Int.* 17a25-27), and by virtue of this structure it is the only form of communication capable of being “true” or “false” in the sense that it either discloses or disguises reality (*De Int.* 17a1-5). In its fundamental structure of “something *as* something,” λόγος ἀποφαντικός is a relational structure. The different manners in which different determinations can relate to each other and form such relational unities, i.e., the forms of predication, are thematized by Aristotle as the categories, derived from κατηγορέω, “to publicly declare something as something,” “to accuse something as something.” We should note that the Aristotelian categories are not simply “linguistic” or “mental” structures in the 20th century conception of language, but rather structures the articulation of reality itself. Understanding this, but wishing nonetheless to emphasize God as a non-entity, Pseudo-Dionysius attempts to recuperate the articulation of reality under a different guise. He desires to bring communication back to a pre-theoretical hermeneutic.

SELF-EVIDENT SILENCE

While the saying “we honor the unsayable with wise silence” (*DN 589B*) has already been introduced not enough has been said concerning this silence. In fact, one facet has not been discussed at all; how are we to *communicate* the unsayable with silence? What does this silence entail? Far from being quietism, a retreat from language, this is a *wise* silence, a silence that must be earned through a long confrontation with language. At the end of his *Celestial Hierarchy*, Pseudo-Dionysius writes, “other things we have left aside, as with the things said, for regard to the symmetry of the argument [λόγου], and honoring by our silence that which, hidden, exceeds us” (*DN 340B*). To keep silent and to speak belong to one another; there is symmetry between the two. For example, of God, “theologians hymn it as the nameless one and from every name” (*DN 596A*)—naming emerges from out of the nameless, and returning again to silence. Only after wrestling with the attempt to communicate the unsayable does silence truly honor that which is hidden.

True silence is primary. There is nothing that lies behind it. It is self-evident and the indemonstrable beginning point of all communication. And yet, it dwells in the background, never making itself present. Like silence, God is an indemonstrable starting point of reflection; it is so immediately present as to be unnoticed. God is the unspoken presupposed exposure site “at the center of everything” (*DN 593D*), since it is through “the unknowing [ἄγνωσία] of what excessively-exists exceeds speech, mind, and existence [ὑπὲρ λόγον καὶ νοῦν καὶ οὐσία], which one should ascribe to it a knowledge which excessively-exists” (*DN 588A*) by which God is revealed. God is known through unknowing, a way of disclosure that is privileged over and prior to knowing, as is shown in the opening lines of *Concerning Mysterious Theology*.

As essentially self-evident but never experienced, like silence, God exists simply; silence *is*, just as God *is*, “imageless and exceeding-natural simplicity” (*DN* 592B). To say that God possesses some characteristic is to misrepresent the simplicity of God, “we see in nearly every theological work, the primordial-God [θεαρχία] is holy hymned as monad and union, on account of the simplicity and unity of its exceedingly-existing indivisibility...” (*DN* 589D). Anything said of θεαρχία is adding *something* to it; to communicate θεαρχία is to limit its indeterminacy. Like silence, there is nothing behind God; it is elemental (*DN* 980B). “Moreover, ascending, we say, since it is neither soul nor thought, it has neither the capacity to be an object presented [φαντασίαν] in thought, nor seeming, nor word, nor thought. It is neither word, nor thought—it cannot be spoken of or conceived of” (*MT* 1045D). Θεαρχία, as such, does not manifest itself. Existing simply, θεαρχία resists conceptuality. This is not due to an inability or lack of power on our part, but rather it exists in such a way as to be prior to appearing as an object of intellection. We are exposed to θεαρχία but we never experience it.

Silence is presumed by language itself, allowing language to manifest, just as θεαρχία is and is presupposed in all entities; “to hymn the being-making procession of the primordial-source-God source-of-existence [θεαρχικῆς οὐσιαρχίας] into all being” (*DN* 816B). As the pure being-making advancing movement, θεαρχία allows entities to become manifest as a site of exposure but in a manner that is not itself realized, “the good cause for all is both loquacious and laconic and at the same time speechless, since possessing neither speech nor thought it, exceedingly-existing, is an exceedingly-lying thing [ὑπερκειμένην] of everything” (*MT* 1000C). Θεαρχία is loquacious insofar as it is the movement of entities manifesting themselves, but is laconic and ultimately silent because it itself is never experienced.

SLIPPING INTO SILENCE

The word “silence” is a “slipping word,” as Bataille tells us.²⁶⁰ A slipping word grabs the attention in advance by being the abolition of what it states. The entire meaning slips away. When it is spoken, the mind glides, despite its own volition, to its opposite, returning us endlessly back to the word in a cycle of slipping away from the meaning of it. The movement of meditation is interrupted. There is nothing that is represented except the movement away from the concept itself. The slippage of the word has released another experience of language and of thinking which does not mediate. There is an immediate grasp of what the word means to connote. As soon as “silence” is spoken, it transgresses what it suggests. However, only in speaking the word “silence,” in communicating it, can silence itself be experienced and brought to the fore to be confronted. Only when “silence” is spoken and understood, when the contradicting sound is uttered, does silence itself strike us. The word “silence” allows the mind to slip beyond the word to the point of exposure that it presupposes.

Pseudo-Dionysius too has a concept similar to a “slipping word.” He states that the image of the sun is an “echo” of the good (*DN 697C*).²⁶¹ While the image of the sun is but an echo of the good, the good manifests itself when language aims at it and, which while distant from its origin, must be heard within a patient silence. Consequently, such echoing words point beyond themselves and so to a pre-discursive exposure of *θεαρχία*, “we consider the hiddenness and struggle to set free all the workings of our intellect” (*DN 645A*). Silence is listening to the

²⁶⁰ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience* trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p.16.

²⁶¹ See *Concerning Divine Names* 720A, 856B, and 868C for other references to echo. And while echo does have a slightly pejorative meaning, the language used signals a harkening to. It reveals the need to listen, in silence, to that which has already be uttered by God. For example, at 856B, God as life resounds “down to the last echo of life.” While everything that is alive is not life itself, everything shares in life as an echo, a sound that does not originate from itself but from what has already been spoken.

resounding echo of the pre-discursive emergence from language, giving words new fullness and meaning.

The word “God,” too, slips from the concept it means to convey; after all, God is said to be ὑπερθεότητος (DN 693B). “If we have named the exceedingly-existing hiddenness: “God;” “life;” “existence;” “light;” or “word” we have no other thought than the capacity brought before us” (DN 645A). Pseudo-Dionysius cannot merely speak of God, rattling off name after name as if the accumulation of names could build a god and not simply invent one. The name “God” is a confining concept and *only* when “God” is uttered, becoming a discrete something, “the cause of everything” (DN 593C), can it become clear that God “is not an existing thing since it is beyond all things” (DN 593C). Only when “God” is acknowledged as that which oversteps what it conveys does what it presuppose come into relief. When language is kept in close relation to the silence it presumes does Pseudo-Dionysius reminds us “do not believe that denials lie over and against assertions but that it [God] is very much prior to this opposition, exceeding-privations, exceeding all renouncement and all announcement” (MT 1000B). The truth that “God” assumes is prior to both saying and renunciation, it resides instead in silence, to which we can be attuned to only after “God” is uttered.

Pseudo-Dionysius communicates the character of God as unsayable by means of silence. There is a sovereignty of silence. This is no longer a silence that awaits mediation through language. It is a silence of discourse, or, better, a silencing of what subordinates the language of signification, to the articulation of sense. To attain a sovereign silence is to make immediate contact with the listener, such that in that listening there is a break with the demand which governs signification, that is the subordination of God to language itself. But we must speak of God and use language to do so, even if signification is suspended and meaning is slipped. To

communicate “God” can appear to be edifying. Can the Areopagite avoid the same fate? Dionysian communication is made of words; even if it does more than signify, it also signifies; it signifies nonetheless and therefore bears the risk of becoming staid. The communication about God is never pure; it cannot happen once and for all. It is necessary to begin and begin again.

LANGUAGE THROUGH SILENCE

Language does, nevertheless, unfold a concept, making it knowable to the extent that it can be, “and there, the word going down from that which is above toward the extremities, according to so great a descent, it spreads out toward a proportionate multitude” (*MT* 1033C). What “God” names becomes manifest and discursively known only when it is spoken of. It is necessary to speak of θεαρχία to know it. For example, we speak of those things which can be determined by language, what belongs to *kataphasis*, e.g., “the all-perfect name good [παντελή ἀγαθωνυμίαν]” (*DN* 689B), which is set apart from all other names and which the “primordial-God sustaining source is called goodness” (*DN* 693B).

Furthermore, “the good returns [ἐπιστρέφει] everything to itself and is the primordial-collector [ἀρχισυναγωγός] of those things scattered, as the one-source [ἐναρχική] and one-producing deity...” (*DN* 700A). Θεαρχία, as the good, then, returns what is said back to its pre-linguistical origin. In fact, all naming is determined by the good, which “gives-form [εἰδοποιεῖ] to the formless” (*DN* 697A). As such, the name good, from which everything proceeds, leads us back to communicate the formless, which cannot be spoken of. However, when we attempt to make our way back to θεαρχία, to comprehend what has just been uttered, “ascending away from that which is below toward the exceeding-lying thing [πρὸς τὸ ὑπερκείμενον], the word draws itself in [συστέλλεται] according to the proportion it ascends; and after the entire way upward, it will be wholly voiceless and will be merged with the unspeakable” (*MT* 1033C). And

so, authentic silence does not result from a flight from language but rather working our way through language and pushing it from within its interior, language ruptures and collapses under its own weight. Language is able to lead us back to the origin only because it propagates its own negation; it is a gesture toward the unsayable. Language collapses under the weight of communication. We do not simply run out of words to speak, but language falters, merging with that which is speechless.²⁶²

However, attempting to communicate God purely from *kataphasis*, one communicates only one's own presuppositions; for example, *Epistle I*, "Someone beholding God and understanding what he saw has not actually seen God but rather something *of his* which has being and is knowable" (1065a). Or

we must know that our intellects have the capacity of intellection, through which it looks at the intellectual things, but that union through it is brought into contact with the thing exceedingly-held to itself surpassed the nature of the intellect. We must then contemplate divine things, according to this union and not in accordance to ourselves but by our whole selves, standing in ecstasy to our whole selves [ὅλων ἑαυτῶν ἐξισταμένους] and becoming wholly God, since it is better to belong to God rather than to ourselves (*DN* 865D-868A).

Emphasizing both ecstasy and belonging to θεαρχία wholly, the Areopagite is attempting to recover a more original sense of "God" by setting aside a view of it that we have inherited from a theory of thought that has stressed pure and dispassionate theorizing. There is no pure external vantage point to which we can gain access to God, for we are always in the procession of God's manifestation.

Pseudo-Dionysius has various ways of communicating God through silence. Within this chapter we will unveil the ways in which the Areopagite is able to communicate that which essentially resists articulation. The first method of communication that will be discussed and

²⁶² The source from which communication arises is unstable and pre-ontological; this is why the Areopagite speaks of θεαρχία, in the *Concerning Mysterious Theology*, as a ὑπερκείμενον, a exceedingly-lying over thing, and not as a substratum, we lose that which has being and is thus what cannot be spoken of.

which will lay the foundation for the remaining sections of this chapter is the use of prayer. First, prayer is a form of communication which does not predicate anything of that toward which it is aimed. It falls outside of the true/false dichotomy which usual forms of language lay out. It will also be revealed that prayer does not affect God but rather transforms the supplicant. It will finally be shown that God is neither an object set over and against the individual nor found within the individual but rather manifests itself ecstatically in the prayerful space between the two. The dualism between subject and object has been dissolved. Ecstasy is another form of communication used by Pseudo-Dionysius. Here it will be revealed that the human itself has no ground for its being other than the ecstatic nature of the divine. Ecstasy is communication insofar as it challenges our own isolated being. Finally, suffering God is the form of communication for the divine, which most befits the human being. We suffer or undergo God in the sense that God happens to the individual despite the willingness of the individual. Silence does not mean non-communication, rather it lays bare the individual in a total loss, or a squandering of the self, opening the individual.

II. *Prayerful communication:*

We have just seen that silence is elemental and primary, mirroring the simplicity of θεαρχία. Here, a mode of communication that is able to maintain its relation to silence while communicating the exposure of θεαρχία will be revealed. In this section, we will examine prayer. Although it is a form of communication, whether spoken or simply thought to oneself, prayer exposes us to that which cannot be articulated.

The focus of chapter three of *Concerning Divine Names* is “the capacity [δύναμις] of prayer” (DN 680A). What is examined in this chapter, in part, is what prayer “accomplishes.”²⁶³ Pseudo-Dionysius describes how prayer influences the way we comport ourselves to the world. A discussion of prayer is necessary, since in our common era prayer “connotes a petition of some kind, a kind of ritual worship, or an attempt on our part to communicate vocally or interiorly with a Supreme Being. Often prayer tends to be an attempt to bend God’s will to our own.”²⁶⁴ In what follows it will be shown that Pseudo-Dionysius very clearly does not share our contemporary view of prayer. Rather, Pseudo-Dionysius’ prayer is an originary, pre-ontological exposure to θεαρχία.

THE PARADOX OF THE TRINITY

First, that toward which prayer is intended, for the Areopagite, is not a personal deity, or a “Supreme Being” but rather the trinity, which holds within itself the paradox of differentiation and unity. Maintaining this paradox, the trinity is prior to all conceptual thought and is closely linked with,²⁶⁵ if not identical to the θεαρχία,²⁶⁶ the primordial-God. Pseudo-Dionysius states, “first, if it may be permitted, let us thoroughly examine [ἐπισκεψώμεθα] the all-perfect manifesting name good of the whole procession [προόδων] of God and having invoked the primordial-source-good [ἀγαθαρχικήν] and exceedingly-good trinity...” (DN 680B). The name good is surely important for Pseudo-Dionysius; not only is it the foundation upon which he

²⁶³ We will see that prayer does not accomplish anything of value as understood under the rubric of utility and knowledge. Indeed, as the chapter unfolds, it will be shown that prayer brings ruin to the self or *ego* of the supplicant, reducing and returning it to nothing. If anything positive results it is non-knowledge.

²⁶⁴ *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, p. 54.

²⁶⁵ Θεαρχία is “described as the trinity” (DN 592A).

²⁶⁶ John N. Jones “The Status of the Trinity in Dionysian Thought” *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (Oct., 2000), pp.645-657, “For the sake of this article, I define Trinitarian thought as any thought identifying the highest moment of the Godhead as Trinitarian in some way. This would include, e.g., a subordinationist view that posits the Father as the source of the Godhead, but would exclude a view of Father, Son, and Spirit as subordinate to a prior principle with no Trinitarian identity” p.645n1.

builds his *kataphatic* theology, but here we are told that the trinity, θεαρχία, is prior to the name good. Having thoroughly examined the name or concept of the good, we see that within it hides the trinity. Only having invoked the trinity first can the good manifest. The name good, the most fundamental name, is dependent upon the trinity. In fact, all names are dependent upon the trinity, since “it is present to absolutely everything although not everything is present to it” (*DN* 680B).²⁶⁷ That upon which *kataphasis* is built originates from the paradoxical structure of the trinity, or θεαρχία.

Although it is a principle of differentiation, the trinity, as θεαρχία, is responsible for the unity of all things but in a very unique manner. “For all the formal trinitarian orthodoxy of the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, neither the One nor the Three of earlier trinitarian theology could be maintained in the conventional terms...so that to call God one was not strictly proper unless it was made clear that unity did not mean here what it meant anywhere else,”²⁶⁸ in fact, Pseudo-Dionysius calls God “exceedingly-being unity [ὑπερούσια ἔνωσις]” (*DN* 641c)²⁶⁹—it is a principle of being without it itself possessing being or without itself being an entity (*DN* 821D).

²⁶⁷ In other words, everything participates in the trinity while it itself does not participate. The trinity is prior to what is posterior. The latter depends upon the former, whereas that which is prior exist independently of the posterior. The good, then, exists without impinging upon the independence of the trinity. It may be tempting to think of this presence as a presence of something, that the union which we experience is a union with some entity. The trinity “is not in a place in such a way as to pass over from one thing and toward another. But to say that it is in all things is misleading since it leaves exceedingly all things and gathers all things” (*DN* 680B). In some sense the trinity is omnipresent, gathering all things. It is meant to demonstrate that it is impossible to say what reality is without being a unity. However, the trinity’s “transcendence,” its exceedingly-leaving all things cannot be separated from its omnipresence. We have seen that the trinity is all things but not of them and if the trinity were everywhere without simultaneously being nowhere it would not be different from its effects. But as exceedingly-leaving all things, by a procession, all entities are substantiations of it. As such, the trinity or the θεαρχία is not anything, it is not an entity. Rather it exists prior to being. And it is toward this that our prayers are aimed. Consequently, being prior to being all of our intellectual faculties are meant to cease—the trinity is ineffable, for all statements concerning it assume its indeterminacy and so language will never disclose the trinity.

²⁶⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1971), p. 347.

²⁶⁹ Unity is the basic condition of existence. It would be impossible to say what reality would be without considering it as a unity (*DN* 980B). Unity while itself is not subject to predication, is the foundation for it, since ‘to be’ is to be intelligible. “It is not one part or a plurality nor a total of parts. In fact its unity is not of this kind, for it does not share in unity nor have it for its possession” (*DN* 649C).

“The Thearchy in Pseudo-Dionysius is the only source of anything that is divine and is revealed in the universe without jeopardizing its transcendent hiddenness.”²⁷⁰ Θεαρχία is presupposed by entities but does not coincide with them.²⁷¹ As such, the trinity is a capacity of entities manifesting without being one of them,²⁷² and as such is itself prior to intelligibility.

The ineffability of the trinity is characterized as follows,

there is a making unite and communion to the one-primordial-source [ἐναρχικῆ] trinity, the exceedingly-existing sustaining source [ὑπερούσιος ὑπαρξις], the exceedingly-divine divinity, the exceedingly-good goodness, beyond everything all together, beyond every whole peculiarity, the oneness exceeding to the one-primordial-source, *the voiceless* [ἄφθεγκτον], the much-speaking, the non-knowledge, the wholly intellected, the placing of everything, removal of everything, that which is necessarily said...if one may say, the remaining [μονή] and underlying and foundation universal exceedingly-named (DN 641A).²⁷³

Furthermore, “the father is the only well-spring of the exceedingly-existing divinity and the father is not the son, nor the son the father, since the hymns purely guard the kinship of each of the standing-under primordial-God [τῶν θεαρχικῶν ὑποστάσεων]. These, then, are the unities and separations according to the *voiceless* [ἄφθεγκτον] unity and sustaining source” (DN 641D). By characterizing the trinity as “voiceless” twice, Pseudo-Dionysius draws to our attention that it remains unthinkable. We may pray to the trinity, but the trinity as voiceless cannot respond discursively. Consequently, the trinity, as Θεαρχία, is not a personal entity

²⁷⁰ *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole*, p.162.

²⁷¹ Θεαρχία gives without having the multiplicity in itself. It is the naturally burgeoning forth of the son and the spirit, which are responsible for the various entities of our experience. It itself is different from the various names we experience; Θεαρχία is formless with respect to the particular instances of it. Θεαρχία does not possess the rational structure of existence or of one particular instance of existence; it is the principle of all rational structures and is the groundlessness of all instances but as groundless it cannot coincide with them.

²⁷² “We say that God is capacity [δύναμις], as pre-having [προέχων] and exceedingly-having every capacity in itself and as cause of every capacity and producing everything as fits an inflexible and unencompassed capacity and as the cause of the very “to be” of capacity, either the universal or particular and as boundless in capacity not only by the production of all capacity but by being exceeding to all, even to the self-existent capacity.” (DN 889D). God, as pre-having capacity, gives capacity to all else without itself being equated with any of its effects or the capacity itself. Moreover, as the “to be” of capacity, God is the unfolding of capacity itself.

²⁷³ The trinity is the capacity of all individual entities of it. It is not an entity but the power which is presupposed in entities. It is formless and so has the capacity to be the differentiation of everything without being one of them. The trinity “pre-has” them as possible criteria for all entities.

toward which a prayer can be aimed. And yet, we are, nevertheless, urged to pray to the θεαρχία, and as such, we are advised to comport ourselves to it through a specific type of λόγος through prayer.

PRAYER AS A GROUNDLESS ΛΟΓΟΣ AND SONG

As Aristotle states, “prayer is a λόγος, but neither true nor false” (*De Int.* 17a5). In other words, prayer is a form of λόγος, of communication, that does not establish its own ground. Prayer is an invocation that allows the manifestation of what it communicates to appear as it is without grounding it within another concept. Consequently, prayer is a form of λόγος that is itself groundless. Pseudo-Dionysius’ own conception of λόγος is a saying whose soundless voice is able to call forth that which has been concealed in the sense of being presupposed. There cannot be a final conclusive word concerning God, since the essence of God is never conclusively utterable. Rather, we must think along with the one who speaks in the silent saying of language, reawakening us to a new experience of God.

Jean-Luc Marion writes that prayer takes the form “praise as...,”²⁷⁴ or what I have translated as “to hymn.” In a “hymn or praise,”²⁷⁵ a name is not attributed to God through predication, not even negatively, but rather only insofar as God is symbolically thought to be.²⁷⁶ Marion continues “It remains to specify a crucial point: instead of using the logical operations of

²⁷⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance* trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), p.186.

²⁷⁵ See the following for where hymns are discussed: *Concerning Divine Names* 593C-D; 596A; 637B; 652A; 681D; 684A; 701C; 709B; 713C; 816B-C; 820B; 820C; 824A; 868A; 872A; 909B 969A; *Concerning Concerning Mysterious Theology* 1025A’ *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 425D; 440D; 444A. In the latter most, the symbol of the Eucharist is hymned to represent something other than it is.

²⁷⁶ “But if someone should say that divine-manifestations were made directly and immediately to some holy individuals, let them learn, and distinctly, from scriptures, that no one has seen nor will see the hidden [τὸ κρύφιον] of God as it is in itself. Divine-manifestations were made to the pious fitting with the revelations of God, that is to say, through holy visions analogous to those who see them” (*CH* 180C). God’s revelation itself not as it is, but in a way that is shaped by the individual who receives the manifestation. We will see that the individual responds to God in a way that is hearing the call of God, and thus is unique to each individual. God does not exist in an objective entity, but manifests with respect to the disposition of the individual.

affirmation and of negation, Denys²⁷⁷ utilizes the operation designated by ‘as’; whence ‘as’ is not at all equivalent to ‘as if, *als ob*,’ but to ‘inasmuch as,’ and where the Requisite is especially not identified with *y*, which is not predicated categorically of the Requisite; *y* indicates the relation under which *x* aims at the Requisite; *y* presupposes distance and therefore refers back first to *x*.²⁷⁸ However God is praised, God is praised by the one praising; it is how the individual understands and is predisposed to God and does not make any claims as to what God is. “Now what is proper to the proper name consists precisely in the fact that it never belongs properly—by and as essence—to the one who receives it. *Never* is the proper name a name for the essence. This rule is even more applicable in the case of a possible God than in that of the finite recipients of names (humans, or even animals).²⁷⁹ The list of names Pseudo-Dionysius provides at *Concerning Divine Names* (596A-C) does not give the essence of God but names how *we* experience and receive God.

Pseudo-Dionysius, himself, claims that hymns and subsequently prayers are songs (*DN* 589B). As with a song sung, the individual is overtaken by the experience of the song itself; there is an *immediate* exposure to that which is sung. The songs are heard from that which is already spoken, like hearing an echo from a sound uttered prior to hearing it. And yet, these songs of hymn are not directed by the individual but rather by that to which one is exposed.

²⁷⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius is also known as “Denys,” especially by those who wish to emphasize the religious aspect of Pseudo-Dionysius, who was thought to be the first archbishop of Paris.

²⁷⁸ *The Idol and Distance*, p.187. Marion emphasizes the distance between God and the human. Distance, for Marion, seem to be his way of indicating that God’s nature radically differs from the human, which is true for Pseudo-Dionysius. However, the radical distance of the “God without Being” is a God that can have no relation to the human and thus there is a question of how and why this God should be a concern for us at all. I, on the other hand, emphasize God’s excessive presence, and so radically depart from Marion’s analysis on this point. However, his writings are, nevertheless, still useful and insightful.

²⁷⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), p.142.

God is hymned, by holy scriptures, as λόγος,²⁸⁰ not only because it is the chorus-leader [χορηγός]²⁸¹ of word, intellect, and wisdom, but because it pre-contains the causes of all things, only in itself and because it moves through all, as scriptures say, even the end of all things; and even more than these because the divine word is exceeding-simplicity [ὁ θεῖος ὑπερήπλωαι λόγος] and having been set free from [ἀπολελυμένος] all, as exceedingly-existing (DN 872C).

God, as the “chorus-leader,” is the one who composes the tune to which we listen and respond in an appropriate and harmonious manner. The song, the λόγος, is exceedingly-simple and thus pre-discursive and a response to this λόγος is sung in and shaped by the context of what has already been stated. If the song is directed perfectly, it is as if the leader recedes, since one is overwhelmed by the song. The chorus-leader is necessary for the inspiration and to keep the song continuing, but there is no difference between the song sung and the one from whom it

²⁸⁰ While this is a reference to the Gospel of John 1:1-3, this passage also tells us about how the Areopagite approaches λόγος in general. The λόγος, Christ, is spoken by God, the speaker, and is heard throughout the world, and can in this context be understood in a wider sense as “discourse” or “articulation,” “to make something clear and articulate.” The most concrete and fundamental connotation of the Greek verb λέγειν, is “(selective) gathering,” “picking out,” “collecting.” For example, when we read, we look at a multiplicity of written symbols and we collect them together into meaningful units: words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs. In this sense, reading and λόγος are a gathering: they are the formation of meaning and sense through the discovery of unity in plurality. The text only makes sense if one pays attention to the context within which the words are already written or spoken. This, for Pseudo-Dionysius, is precisely the original Greek sense of λόγος as λέγειν “to collect” or “to gather” the original essence of reason, of rationality, of discursively articulate meaningfulness, originally understood not as some subjective faculty but as the very way in which meaningful reality in itself is articulated. This also allows him to call λόγος a name for God, i.e., for the articulation of meaningfulness as such. God as λόγος is something that is *heard*, something whose address needs *listening* to and in which all things are gathered (DN 589D, 701D, 817D).

This λόγος is simple and truly what *is* truth [ὄντως οὐσα ἀλήθεια] around which as pure and unerring knowing of the whole, the divine faith [θεία πίστις] the enduring foundation of those who believe, which establishes truth in them and the truth in them, by an unchanging identity they having the simply knowing of the truth of those things believed. For if knowing unites the knowing and the thing known but ignorance is a cause of change in the one ignorant and separation from himself. (DN 872C-D).

God as λόγος gives us divine faith for what is actually our good. We must first believe or have faith, granted to us by God as λόγος, in things that we may not understand or know immediately. But this divine faith as a form of knowing unites the faithful knower and God, it allows us to grow in a position to understand God. God illuminates the faithful knower so that the individual may come to know how to approach God in a prayerful manner. “For Denys, conversion from sin is not simply a ‘moral questions’ or a matter of ‘values clarification’ but a deep, thorough *turning of one’s being* to true Being...This knowledge is highly charged with the Being of God Himself; it is a communication of God’s own Being,” (*Divine Light*, p.139). It would be misleading to claim that we are turned toward God’s “being” as if God had being as an entity does. Rather, prayer situates us within the mystery of God and as this makes us more like God, we ourselves become a mysterious being who needs to be continually investigated as living beings.

²⁸¹ We will return to God as “chorus-leader” in the next chapter on the hierarchy.

originates.²⁸² In other words, a hymn, in the form of prayer, allows the individual to understand and acknowledge that God is irrepressible—that which must be listened and responded to, even against one’s willingness.

Prayer does not affect or touch the object, i.e., God, toward which it is aimed but rather transforms the one who prays. The subject is dissolved in its division from the object and from the ground, God. Any attempt to possess the object *must fail*; the object being the whole, which cannot be captured. In renouncing itself and of the discursive nature of God the subject becomes non-discursive, the object the voiceless. The one who prays can only be exposed to God when the two are no longer distinct; when possession of it is impossible. God becomes a place of non-being, on its own it can generate no sound, and the site is where the power of speaking is consolidated. The isolated individual reinforces his or her removal from the possession of God; the communicant becomes lost in the echoes of God. This is a loss which at the same time constitutes a return to *what is there*, a return to that which one evades in discursive activity. The prayerful subject becomes absent in the activity of prayer itself. We will now turn to how this occurs exactly.

HIEROTHEUS’ INITIATION

Pseudo-Dionysius writes that we must situate ourselves to the trinity, and more generally to the world, by approaching it prayerfully, he writes, “first, it is necessary that we, by prayer, come up to it [ἐπ’ αὐτήν], as the primordial-source-of-the-good, and being brought more near it, *to be initiated* into it as to all good gifts which are established around it...for when we have

²⁸² God is “all beings and none of beings [πάντα τὰ ὄντα καὶ οὐδεν τῶν ὄντων]” and “all things in all things and nothing in any [ἐν πᾶσι πάντα ἐστὶ καὶ ἐν οὐδενὶ οὐδέν]” (DN 596C and 872A respectively). “Pseudo-Dionysius’ God is all things in all things in that whatever intelligible content is found in any thing, and so that thing itself, is God-in-it, in the distinct way that is constitutive of that being; and he is nothing in any, in that he is not any one thing, distinguished from others within the whole or reality and constituted by that distinction” (*Theophany*, p.31). As the chorus-leader, God both is and is not the song of hymn sung; God disappears within the context of the song itself.

invoked it by wholly pure prayers and with an untroubled mind and by a suitability toward the divine unity, we will also be present to it” (DN 680B). Not only is it we who come into the presence of the trinity through prayer,²⁸³ but we are initiated, or changed by the experience. Furthermore, “we are lead by the light to the primordial-God-source [τοὺς θεαρχικούς] hymns by which we are exceedingly-mundanelly *enlightened and molded by the sacred songs of hymns*, so to see the primordial-God-source illuminations given to us” (DN 589B). In and by prayer we are transformed and molded by the exposure itself. Θεαρχία’s presence is irrepressible, conforming us despite ourselves.

Speaking of his teacher, Hierotheus, Pseudo-Dionysius writes,

he, after the theologians, surpassed, as you know, all the other divine instructors, wholly away from home [ὅλος ἐκδημῶν], wholly standing outside of himself [ὅλος ἐξιστάμενος ἑαυτοῦ] and suffering [πάσχω] the communion with the things hymned and all who have heard and have seen him was distinguished as a divine hymnist, to be apprehended-by-God [θεόληπτος], by all who have heard and have seen him, having been known and not known (DN 681D-684A).

Hierotheus, in his ecstasy, is “suffering communion with the things hymned.” Despite himself he undergoes this communion, and he is a divine hymnist, or singer. He is one who speaks of the things to be hymned under the influence of God. Hierotheus is so affected by God that he is outside of his rational mind, standing in ecstasy. He steps outside of the subject/object dichotomy to which he is normally subjected to and being apprehended, θεόληπτος, or perhaps “possessed by God,” has an unmediated exposure of the divine things. Partaking in such songs, the rational mind comes to a halt and becomes a site to hear the silence that is always already present,

²⁸³ The relation to entities is one of a first principle, it is independent and has ontological priority. The trinity is internally related to itself; its existence is self-derived.

“unknowing by means of an inactivity of all knowing according to the more powerful unity and by knowing nothing, by coming to know exceeding-thought” (*MT* 1001A).²⁸⁴

Furthermore, Hierotheus is no longer known to those around him after his initiation. He becomes something other than what he previously was; his entire comportment undergoes a radical change. At *Concerning Divine Names* 872D, it is written “the individual who is in union with the truth knows clearly that all is well with him, even if everyone else knows him as displaced, or having had stood outside of himself [ὡς ἐξεστηκότα].” Our disposition is opened to that toward which we become attuned, gripped by that to which we are exposed. Shaped by the ‘voicelessness’ of the songs, we are initiated into a non-discursive way of being, the divine nature is “the cause of all beings, though itself being nothing [οὐδέν]...it is removed from all states of being [ἔξἑως], movement, life, imagination, seeming, name, reason [λόγου], thought, conception, existence...” (*DN* 593C-D). Standing outside of himself, Hierotheus’ own person is groundless because that by which he is apprehended, since θεαρχία is, as we have seen, without a ground. Hence, as a form of communication, this form of prayer listens to the groundlessness of God’s being. Initiated into the ways of God, we, like Hierotheus, become nothing and do not share in any human states of being. We become something alien to our fellow human, standing outside of all reason.

²⁸⁴ Furthermore, the cessation of intellectual capacity is not something that one can achieve on one’s own, “we cannot try to stop the intellect on our own, for the intellect, and our activity or freedom in general, *cease to work only because God suspends them*. More precisely, the work of effort on our part is stilled because God ‘*occupied it in another way*,’” furthermore, “what holds activity in abeyance—‘above’ or despite my activity in which I must in some sense be engaged—is something of a different order” (*Phenomenology and Mysticism*, p.59). God is so present, in an excessive and ungovernable manner, that the intellect is forced into ecstasy. The intellect is completely shut down due to the overwhelming experience of God. The divine arrives on its own accord with excessive force. God illuminates the intellect in order to leave it halted so that the intellect may be responsive to God.

THE GIVENNESS OF PRAYER

To show this change in one's comportment to the trinity we have through prayer, Pseudo-Dionysius uses two examples.

Let us stretch ourselves upward by our prayers to the lofty peaks of the divine and good rays, as if a luminous chain suspended from heavenly heights, coming hither, ever grasping it upward by one hand, then another, we seem to draw near, but truly we are not leading it downward, it being both above and below, but we ourselves are lifted upward toward the lofty sparkling luminous rays. Or having stepped onto a ship and holding onto ropes reaching from some rocks, such as are reached in return, for us to grasp, we do not draw the rock to us but we, in truth, and the ship are brought to the rocks. For another example, if someone standing on the ship pushes away the rock, he does nothing to the stationary and unmoved rock, but he will separate himself from it and the more he will thrust away the more he will be hurled from it (*DN 680C-D*).

Either of the examples we choose to examine, the message is clear, it is the individual who is affected by prayer and not God. And yet despite, or rather in spite of this one way relationship we, as supplicants, are still urged to pray. For in prayer, there opens an ontological incommensuration between the "hidden divinity" (*DN 588C*) and we who seek after it.²⁸⁵

Θεαρχία presents itself to us through prayer but as insurmountable. "Prayer, as it were, makes the reality of our relationship to what is higher, what is ultimate. As such it has been called 'ontological prayer', prayer which expresses the nature of our ontological condition."²⁸⁶ After all, such recognition is "standing the soul outside of [ἐξιστῶσαν τὴν ψυχὴν] things like itself [ἐαυτῆι συμφύλων]" (*DN 981*). The soul is outside of that which is proper to it, rational thought and discursivity, finding its pre-ontological origin. We, as supplicants, now understand ourselves

²⁸⁵ There must be some anxiety over the distance felt and it is the turn to prayer that helps to lessen both the anxiety and the apparent distance from God. Pseudo-Dionysius does speak of evil and sin. Evil is "an impotence and weakness" (*DN 732B*) and "lies in the inability of existing things to reach their natural perfection" (*DN 728C*), which is a perversion of ἐπιστοφή. In other words, it is a "deficiency of knowledge" (*DN 736A*). An individual does not choose to sin but rather occurs from a lack of knowing what is good for the individual. Far from a simple privation theory of evil "for Pseudo-Dionysius, however, evil remains outrageous precisely because it is irrational, because there is no reason, no justification for it. The privation theory of evil, expressed in a radical form by Pseudo-Dionysius, is not a shallow disregard or denial of evident evils in the world, we can only say that for no reason, and therefore outrageously, the world as we find it does not perfectly love God, the Good, the sole end of all love" (*Theophany*, p.64). Evil remains outrageous but so does the good, for θεαρχία is without a rational ground.

Consequently, our goodness has no reason behind it either. It cannot be justified and so must be taken with faith.

²⁸⁶ Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Continuum, 1989), p.92.

to be under the influence of the divine and that we are powerless in the face of it, just as Hierotheus is while in ecstasy. Shaped by songs of hymn, we are made ready to hear the silence and to know ourselves as given over to the silence. And as always in silence, we are made aware of the need for further prayer and supplication; the initiation process is never complete. The presence of the divine can always be further clarified by prayerful attunement.

Within prayer we recognize and acknowledge that to which we pray cannot be appropriated discursively. We find ourselves within a world, whose ground falls away. Our initiation is one into a world that is itself mysterious and question-worthy, “this is the kind of divine enlightenment into which we have been initiated by the hidden tradition of our inspired teachers, a tradition at one with the scriptures. We now grasp these things in the best way we can and *as they come to us*, wrapped in the sacred veils of the love toward humanity” (DN 592B). The phenomena present themselves to us despite any effort on our part after we have been initiated; we receive them simply, the divine freely gives itself. Consequently, within prayer, we find ourselves already within the presence of God, for the luminous chain is present “both above and below.”²⁸⁷ Provided this, prayer discloses and orients us toward the givenness of God’s manifestation. Distancing himself from a theoretical mode of relation to beings, Pseudo-Dionysius proposes that we are always already within the presence of God, engaged in everyday dealings with God’s manifestation in the world. God is manifest in all entities, including the human body, for “there is not evil in our bodies” (DN 728C). It must be stressed that we are not fallen creatures because we are embodied, or that distance is an indication of sin, according to the Areopagite. Instead, this is an embodied form of prayer. This is a lived experience and is neither merely theoretical nor wholly contemplative. When we are aware of this, there is a

²⁸⁷ This is a non-localized presence. The omnipresence is the condition for entities at all. God continuously gives itself by participation. All entities are what they are given this participation. Although this may seem as if *θεαρχία* must be wholly transcendent, its transcendence cannot be separated from its omnipresence.

distinctive kind of presence in all things.²⁸⁸ Our comportment toward the world is not neutral, it is nuanced depending upon how we approach and hear it.

THE SCREAM OF PRAYER

Prayer further rejuvenates the individual, being a reversion, to reinvestigate the mysterious nature of *θεαρχία*. Prayer stirs us out of our own concern and belief of what God is and what is our own good. In fact, opening the first chapter of *Concerning Mysterious Theology*, entitled “what is divine darkness [τὴς ὁ θεῖος γνόφος],” Pseudo-Dionysius invokes a prayer to the trinity.

Trinity! Exceedingly-existing! Exceeding-divinity! And exceedingly-good! For Christians, guide of the wisdom of God lead us up to the point of that which is exceedingly-unknowing of the mysterious words and to that which is exceeding-light, to the outermost height, where the simple, unqualified, unmoved mystery of God’s words have been veiled owing to the exceedingly-light darkness of the concealed mystery of silence; amid the deepest shadow, the exceedingly most manifest thing is exceedingly-brilliant. And amid the wholly elusive and unseen, it exceedingly fills the sightless thought with exceedingly beautiful adornments (*MT* 997A-B).

Pseudo-Dionysius’ prayer is an exclamation and a scream, “trinity!” in response to its overwhelming and immediate manifestation. It is a scream that grips him and us pre-rationally and meant to situate us within the experience of the trinity itself. Prayer as a scream suggests that there is an affective or emotional component to this experience. Again, speaking of his teacher, Hierotheus, Pseudo-Dionysius writes “but having suffered the divine things [παθῶν τὰ θεῖα] and from his sympathy [συμπαθείας] with them, if I must speak thusly, having been perfected to their unlearned and mysterious union and faith” (*DN* 648B). Hierotheus cannot be said to have learned anything from his divine sufferings, for he was immediately present in the experience, there was no subject/object dichotomy, and hence he can only be said to have “sympathies,”

²⁸⁸ Anthony J. Steinbock terms this epiphany, which he defines as “a mode in which ‘Being,’ ‘Ereignis,’ and so forth, leaves the realm of the *impersonal region* and becomes radically *personal*” (*Phenomenology and Mysticism*, p.162).

literally “a suffering-with” them. What Hierotheus experienced cannot be taught, it can only be awoken or incited by suffering the silence of the divine.

THE BEAUTIFUL GOD CALLS US BACK

We are now in a position to see in what way the human is made a receptive site for the divine manifestations due to prayer.

Following these primordial-God bindings [τοις θεαρχικοις ζυγοις], which govern the whole holy ranks of exceeding-heavenly orders, honoring the hiddenness of the primordial-God which exceeds the intellect and existence, with inscrutable and holy intellect, we honor the unsayable with wise silence, we raise ourselves to those things which illuminate us in the sacred word and are led-by-light to the primordial-Godly hymns, by which we are exceeding-mundanelly enlightened and molded to the sacred hymn of praise...it is cause, source, existence, and life of everything and even to those who fall away from it both as a *calling back* [ἀνακλησις] and resurrection (DN 589B-C).

Θεαρχία calls us back to itself. Drawing on etymology, Pseudo-Dionysius, in his discussion of the name beauty, writes “beauty calls [καλοῦν] all things to itself, whence it is called beauty [κάλλος]” (701C-D).²⁸⁹ Everything is a calling out of the divine’s love culminating in the incarnation.²⁹⁰ Beauty is only beauty in its ability to be experienced, in our hearing its call or echo in all entities. “The beautiful which is exceedingly-existing is called beauty because of the beauty bestowed upon all existing things, each according with what it is, and as the cause of good-suitability and splendor in everything because like a light it hurls light into all things the beauty-causing givenness of its well-spring ray” (DN 701C). Standing under beauty’s well-spring ray, we are awashed in its presence. We are not meant to merely contemplate the beauty

²⁸⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius draws this etymology from Plato’s *Cratylus* 416c.

²⁹⁰ There is a profundity of experience within the prayer which distinguishes it from every other experience. Having opened oneself to the unapproachable outpouring of light, the unexpected manifests as “sudden” (*Ep. III* 1069B). The experience of this as “sudden” is immediate, “one is ‘struck,’ surprised in a way that the experience is not only not anticipated but non-anticipatable” (*Phenomenology and Mysticism*, p.118). The “sudden,” which Pseudo-Dionysius here speaks of is the realization of God’s love for humanity in the person of Christ, which is called “mysterious” (*CH* 181B). That God should take a human form is completely unanticipated, leaving its wholly ineffable character it takes on what is known. But this further exacerbates the mysterious nature of God.

of the mysterious calling out to us but rather to be fully exposed to it, suffer it, to be transformed by it; we are to be a vehicle of that mystery.

And so, beauty does not adhere in an entity as an objective characteristic but rather only reveals itself as beautiful in its manifestation as “the fontal beauty [πηγαίαν καλλονήν] of every beautiful thing, pre-eminently in a pre-having in itself [ἐν ἑαυτῷ προέχον]” (DN 704A). The beautiful is that which, like a fountain, pours forth and is found neither in the fountain as an object, for beauty is its own pouring forth, nor found wholly upon that which it falls but rather is found in the very act of the outpouring. In fact, “the beautiful is the source [ἀρχή] of all things, as the making cause [ποιητικὸν αἴτιον] and moving and holding together the whole by the erotic longing [ἔρωτι] of its proper beautifulness, the limit of all things, and cherished [ἀγαπητόν] as the final cause [τελικὸν αἴτιον], since all things come-to-be for the sake of the beautiful” (DN 704A).²⁹¹ Beauty manifests itself in the making of all things, collapsing the distinction between being the source and end of all things. In short, beauty is found in the relationship between the one calling out and to beauty’s own calling back.

This erotic calling back of the beautiful is related to the πρόοδος-ἐπιστροφή movement discussed in the previous chapter. “To boldly say it with truth, the cause of all things due to an excess [ὑπερβολήν] of goodness erotically longs [ἐρᾷ] for all things, makes all things, perfects all things, sustains all things, reverts [ἐπιστρέφει] all things. And the divine erotic longing [θεῖος ἔρωσις] is good, of good, through the good. For erotic longing, the benefactor of everything, pre-exists [προϋπάρχων] in excess in the good, it did not permit it to remain unproductive in itself but moved it to productive action in the excess which is generative of all

²⁹¹ For Pseudo-Dionysius use of ἔρωσις and ἀγάπη, see John M. Rist “A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Pseudo-Dionysius *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 20 No. 4 (Dec. 1966), pp.235-243. Pseudo-Dionysius’ use ἔρωσις is indicative of his Neo-Platonic roots, particularly in reading the *Phaedrus*.

things” (DN 708A-B). “God is Love.”²⁹² Excessively giving being, which pre-exists in the good, God attracts all things to it through being loved or yearned for. God as erotic longing also has another facet as well.

The cause of all things, by the beautiful and good, erotic longing of all things, through excess of erotic goodness, becomes out of itself [ἔξω ἑαυτοῦ γίνεται] in its providence toward all existing things and is as it were bewitched by good and being cherished [ἀγαπήσει] and erotic longing is led down, from above all things and beyond all things, to and in all things, according to an ecstatic capacity exceedingly-existing [ἔκστατικῆν ὑπερούσιον δύναμιν] without going out of itself (DN 712A-B).

God, as erotic longing, exists ecstatically. God moves out of itself, while remaining an imminent force, going toward all things. “God goes ‘out of himself’ without ‘going out from himself’ in that he is, as it were, intrinsically ecstatic, not a self-contained self but always already ‘out of himself and ‘in all things’ as their constitutive differences...God is pure exteriority, having no inner core of ‘selfhood,’ no ‘interior’ that could be distinguished from his ‘outward’ productive activity. God is not a ‘self’ of his own, a being, but only the self, the determining identity of others, of all things....”²⁹³ God does not occur as an entity over and against us as a subject but rather manifests within the sphere of God’s own ecstatic self-manifestation. In short, God exists neither as an objective entity nor merely within the consciousness of an individual but within the world of lived experience. We are, when prayerfully attuned, in immediate contact with God, washed over in its presence.

We will now move to a full discussion of ecstasy in the following section. In the following sections, we will turn to the Areopagite’s *via negativa*. Our focus, for the most part, will be aimed at the text, *Concerning Mysterious Theology*. The form of communications found in the following sections will be: ecstasy and inebriation; catharsis; and lastly, transgression.

²⁹² *Theophany*, p.44.

²⁹³ *Ibid*, p.46.

III. Following in the Footsteps of Our Father, Divinely and Ecstatically Inebriated:

Quoting from the *Song of Solomon*, Pseudo-Dionysius writes that God partakes in “strong drinks and suffers from hangovers [αί μεθαί καὶ αἱ κραιτάλαι]” (MT 1033B) and writing *Concerning Mysterious Theology*, he advocates for participation in “divine darkness,” a divine blackout as it were, in which we “plunge into darkness” (MT 1033B). Now, while drunkenness may seem to be a topic unworthy of the divine,²⁹⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius in *Epistle IX* describes and ascribes inebriation to God, writing, that God is said to be drunk [μεθύειν] “on account of a excessive-fullness [διὰ τὴν ὑπερπλήρη] of delight that exceeds thought [ὑπὲρ νόησιν]” (1112b), and “as drunk, God stands outside of [ἐξέστηκώς] all good things, being the excessive-fullness [ὑπερπλήρης] of all these things” (*Ep. IX* 1112C). Drunkenness and ecstasy arise from being exceedingly-full, swept away from normal and everyday concepts of the world until they no longer hold sway. Characterizing God in ecstasy of all good things—that which makes all things intelligible—suggests that God, as drunk, stands outside of this. That is to say, God’s nature is not intelligible, precisely because intelligibility does not say enough about God’s existence. And so while “to exist” does gesture toward God, “existence” never fully reveals God

²⁹⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius does ask whether it is not more proper to deny drunkenness to God than speech and thought (MT 1033C-D). The issue here are those symbols which are similar and dissimilar. God is more similar to speech and thought than to being drunk and so it would seem that drunkenness is so dissimilar to God’s nature that it should not be attributed to it. However, “Since God is not any being or object of thought, it is false, and false in the same sense, to say that God is Word, Mind, or Being as to say that he is lion, stone, fire, worm. All expressions of God, the exalted and intelligible no less than the lowly and sensible, are infinitely, and in that sense equally, inadequate, and hence all are ‘dissimilar’. For this reason Pseudo-Dionysius even says that the obviously ‘dissimilar’ expressions are in fact more appropriate, as more clearly indicating the infinite otherness of all things from God” (*Theophany*, p.103). To say that God is drunk may be dissimilar insofar as drunkenness is a vice of immoderation, it is nonetheless, perhaps, in spite of this, most appropriate to attribute it to God to reveal that God is outside of what human reason can comprehend. The Areopagite writes, “scripture itself asserts that God is dissimilar and that it is not comparable with anything, that it is different from everything, and that more puzzling still that there is none like it at all. Nonetheless, words such as this do not contradict the similarity of things to it, for the very same things are both similar and dissimilar to God, they are similar to it to the extent that they share what cannot be shared and they are dissimilar to it in that as effects they fall very short of their cause and are infinitely and incomparably subordinate to it” (DN 916A). Drunkenness, even though it in fact falls short of describing God and is thus dissimilar, is in a sense similar in that it describes God as that which cannot be shared or understood by us. There is no symbol that is utterly so dissimilar to God so as not to be appropriate to God simply for the fact that God is so foreign to everything that the dissimilarity only reinforces it.

because “to exist” is not an intense enough concept to communicate God’s way of being. Accordingly, God is said to ὑπερούσιος, exceedingly-existent (*Ep. IX 1112C*).

TO EX-IST IN DRUNKENNESS

God’s drunkenness and ecstasy gestures to a presence that is too ebullient to be expressed in the normal categories of language. We have seen above that God has no self; God is ὑπερθεότητος, exceeding-divinity (*DN 693B*), out stripping its own being. For example, every name is predicable of God so much so that God overflows with existence and “God brings forth existence according to a flowing out of existence [ἐπεὶ καὶ οὐσίας παράγει κατὰ τὴν ἀπὸ οὐσίας ἔκβασιν]” (*DN 824C*). God, then, as the act of pouring forth is the overwhelming intensification of the manifestation of existence and so appears *to us* to be drunk and raging, since God stands outside of reason’s dictates. God is said to stand outside of the good by pouring forth and being a fontal source of it. God is an unapproachable possibility by the power of its ‘to be.’ “As the sustaining source of goodness by its own ‘to be’ [αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι] it is the cause of all existing things... and by its ‘to be’ [τῷ εἶναι] it is the production and origin of all things” (*DN 593D*). Far from merely existing, God overflows and is the source of coming-to-be, and the description of this experience as drunk is a creative image used by Pseudo-Dionysius to evoke this God to which we pray, but never comprehending what we experience; “the mystical experience of God is not a static experience, but a perpetual discovery.”²⁹⁵

“To exist” would simply point to a pure presence which is not applicable to God’s irrepressible and insistent expenditure. God pours forth, as we are told, its goodness and existence into all things just as the sun gives sustenance to living things on earth. And just as the sun does “not calculate or deliberate [οὐ λογιζόμενος ἢ προαιρούμενος] but by its own nature

²⁹⁵ Richard Sorabji, “Myths about Non-Propositional Thought,” *Language and Logos*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp.295-314, p.308.

sheds light on all things that are able to partake of its light” (*DN* 693B), so too God by its nature pours forth existence without reckoning. God is not motivated to sustain a potential aggregation of existent entities; instead it must appear to us to have no motivating end but only to be a fontal. As such, God is a pre-representational impulse. For instance, if “being” is the accumulation of essence or reason, God depicted as drunk is the contrary to this; God’s drunkenness is the total loss of being and accumulated knowledge. God, as the sun, is a unilateral discharge; it is for nothing with regard for utility and relation. God exists without excuse or reason.²⁹⁶ There is no fidelity to existence, but rather to a chronic squandering which violates reciprocity and thus also the principle of relation found in “to exist.” “Ecstasy,” then, is the name for God as pure upsurge, as a productive impulse. Consequently, ecstasy is the only suitable manner to communicate God’s mode of being.

Furthermore, attuned to God in the most correct way through prayer, we drink God in, making us drunk with God’s overwhelmingly non-discursive nature. And while human drunkenness, as we are told, oftentimes has a pejorative meaning of an “immoderate fullness [ἄσούμετρος ἀποπλήρωσις]” (*Ep. IX* 1112C), it is however through this immoderate fullness that “the soul standing outside of [ἐξισταμένη] absolutely everything associated with the living body, of that which is perceptible, and of that which is well-ordered [τῶν σωματικῶν

²⁹⁶ Eric D. Perl astutely points out that for Pseudo-Dionysius evil is uncaused [ἀνάτιον] (*DN* 732D). “For it is only beings and their activities, things that are and that take place, that must have causes, without which they would not be or happen. To look for the cause of evil is to ask why it occurs. But evil is not something that occurs, but not-something that does not occur. It is not an act of non-love, but a non-act of love,” *Theophany*, p.62. He continues “For Pseudo-Dionysius, however, evil remains outrageous precisely because it is irrational, because there is no reason, no justification for it. The privation theory of evil, expressed in radical form by Pseudo-Dionysius, is not a shallow disregard or denial of the evident evils in the world. It means rather that, confronted with the evils in the world, we can only say that for no reason and *therefore* outrageously, the world as we find it does not perfectly love God, the Good, the sole end of all love” p.64. In the same manner that Pseudo-Dionysius, according to Perl, does not want to establish a cause of evil, there can ultimately be no cause of God or the good either. This cause is always something presupposed but can never be affirmed, not even exceedingly-affirmed. We saw in the previous chapter that God’s existence is essentially undecidable. We must pass beyond God in all forms of thought and being. God itself must appear outrageous, outrageously existent.

ἀπασῶν αἰσθήσεων καὶ κοσμικῶν]” (DN 981B), for “standing outside of sound-mindedness [τοῦ φρονεῖν ἔκστασιν] is a consequence of drunkenness” (Ep. IX 1112C). While discursive thought is proper to the human,²⁹⁷ through ecstasy we overstep this. The human, as ecstatically inebriated, is taken outside of one’s body as a symbol of its own being. We transgress the symbol of the body. This however is contrary to everything that is natural to us, “that is why so many continue to be unbelieving in the presence of the explanation of divine mysteries, we behold them only by means of the perceptible symbols associated with them. What is necessary is to uncover them, to see them in their nakedness and purity [γυμνὰ καὶ καθαρὰ]. For beholding them in this way, we can revere the font of life flowing into itself” (Ep. IX 1104B-C),²⁹⁸ and no longer attending to the external garb of symbols we “alone have the simplicity of mind and the receptive, contemplative capacity to cross over to the simple, marvelous, exceeding truth of the symbols” (Ep. IX 1105C). We move beyond *kataphasis* and even *apophasis* altogether and enter into the *via negativa*. Here, we peer behind the symbolic clothing and see the world and ourselves denuded of external appearance and we see God within us as the fontal act of production. Reason no longer holds sway. We, in our ecstasy, become absorbed into the exterior, what is outside of us—flowing outside of ourselves—and opened to what is not only outside of us but of reason as well. This is why Hierotheus is said to be “ὅλος ἐκδημῶν,” literally “wholly out of one’s home,” or “alienated.” He no longer belongs to himself and the world but rather to the foreignness of the divine, becoming absorbed into God’s fontal and ecstatic nature.

²⁹⁷ *Theophany*, p.90.

²⁹⁸ Eric D. Perl states “there can be no non-symbolic knowledge of God, no knowledge of God without the concealment of symbolism. Only a symbol, in that *qua* symbol it conceals what it reveals, can make God known without objectifying him as a being, enabling us to know God without violating his unknowability, and thus truly to know God” (*Theophany*, p.105). But here, Pseudo-Dionysius does seem to suggest that only in peering behind the veil of the symbols, seeing them, and therefore God, naked are we *exposed to* God. So it may be true that we cannot know God without symbols but as will be shown throughout what follows, knowledge of God is nothing compared to the experience of, or better put, the exposure to God. In fact, mere knowledge of God is not to experience God at all and by emphasizing non-knowledge of God, exposure to God is superior to any type of knowledge.

ECSTATIC SOVEREIGNTY

In fact, Pseudo-Dionysius writes “according to this, we pray to be born [γενέσθαι] into the exceedingly-light-darkness; and through blindness and unknowing, to see and to know the exceeding-sight and exceeding-knowing itself. This is neither to see nor to know, for this is truly to see and to come to know...” (MT 1025A). Again using the vocabulary of prayer and supplication, the Areopagite requests that discursivity be taken away and replaced with divine unknowing, that we share in the divine overwhelming manner of being. The Areopagite prays that we should be given to ourselves in such a way that this givenness, or being born, is not self-grounded. The soul is driven out of itself toward what is unlike its finite nature by means of the negations, “for it is the way of negation, apophatic theology, that surrenders the soul to the unknowable God.”²⁹⁹ Our integrity as an individuated person is called into question.³⁰⁰ The individual soul is taken from itself and given to the ineffable and infinite nature of God, after the soul stands outside of itself and is brought into unknowing. Far from being abandoned by God, the soul experiences, receives itself but now as living within God and not from or in the world. We experience the self as now wholly unique and mysterious, instead of as from a profane nature. Again, we are completely within the realm of the *via negativa*. And so we too, then, are thought to be inebriated when we no longer abide within the sovereign domain of human reason but instead submit ourselves to God’s non-discursive sovereignty.

God’s non-discursive sovereignty is characterized in the following manner,

God is named great according to its own particular greatness it gave of itself to everything, exceedingly-pouring [ὑπερχεόμενον] and exceedingly-stretching out [ὑπερεκτεινόμενον] outside of all greatness...both according to its exceeding-fullness and great-operation and its fontal gift, insofar as these are being participated by all in pouring of boundless-gifts are undiminished in any way and have the same exceeding-

²⁹⁹ *Denys the Areopagite*, p.103. Louth does not make the distinction between *apophasis* and the *via negativa* that I do, but the meaning is the same.

³⁰⁰ *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, p.199.

fullness and are not lessened by the unparticipation but are still more exceedingly-bubbling over [ὑπερβλύζουσι]. This greatness is boundless and without measure or number and is preeminence with regard to the absolute and exceedingly-stretching flood (DN 909C).

The greatness, or sovereignty arises from God's exceedingly-bubbling over, which does not participate in anything but in which everything participates. As a fontal source, God gushes forth as in a flood giving of itself totally to everything. Concerning God's sovereignty, Pseudo-Dionysius writes, "it [God] establishes it, it makes it secure, and holds it together. It binds the whole completely to itself. It leads out everything from out of itself as from some all-powerful root [ἐκ ρίζης παντοκρατορικῆς προάγουσαν]" (DN 936A-D).³⁰¹ God is the source, or root, of all creation from which all things naturally burgeon forth. As a root, God is the essentially hidden excess or nutritive surplus from which everything emerges, "from this Source burst forth all, in their 'being-ful', 'good-ful', and beautiful similarities to it..."³⁰² In fact, at *Concerning Divine Names* 893C, Pseudo-Dionysius terms God "ὑπερδύναμον," "exceeding-capacity." God's capacity is that through which all other capacities have their potentialities but which itself is not reducible to a specified capacity. As exceeding-capacity, God is without, or prior to reason and of the capacity of the cause and effect of entities. As such, God is not grounded in the interplay of cause and effect. The task of God as the root is to spontaneously produce and to consume life. God's sovereignty is nothing but the uninhibited flow of abundance.³⁰³

However, this is a sovereignty that does not come wholly from the outside but rather occurs within the divine respiration. Divine sovereignty does not occur through the fiat of an

³⁰¹ This echoes the language of the son and the spirit burgeoning forth, like flowers, from the father.

³⁰² *Divine Light*, p.127.

³⁰³ It could be asked whether God acts from necessity or freely. If God is the pure production of being, God is not free not to produce. But this does not suggest that God is necessitated by a principle higher than itself because it is not a being, not even the highest being, and so cannot be subject to any principle. It is the primordial origin of the coming-to-be of entities. "Only a God who is not a producer but Production itself can "produce" without entering into a relation with his products" (*Theophany*, p.50). There is some debate as to whether Pseudo-Dionysius believes in creation or emanation. I cannot enter into this debate at the present moment but I will say it is of some interest that Pseudo-Dionysius nowhere refers to creation *ex nihilo* but only to God as cause.

external law giver but through our going out, receiving and dwelling within God; the distinction between oneself and God does not hold. Oneself is neither God nor an isolated self (*MT* 1001A), and divine sovereignty refers to a time prior to such a distinction.

Becoming absorbed within the divine erotic longing one is immediately exposed to it, as is revealed in Hierotheus' suffering and sympathies with divine things. "Knowledge is regarded as superficial—it is only thinking about things; feeling engages the depths of the human person—it is in love that man discovers himself."³⁰⁴ A religion and a God that is not felt and lived are dead and neither a religion nor God at all. Such an exposure cannot be a merely theoretical endeavor but rather lived within the absorption of God. We disappear despite ourselves, even though we must not.³⁰⁵ It is in the "despite ourselves" that gives rise to ecstasy. Unless we acknowledge and feel something greater than ourselves, what surpasses our own power and understanding, what is greater than we are despite ourselves, something which we, as isolated beings must not and cannot be, then we would never reach ecstasy. "Recognizing the surpassing goodness of God, these souls are drawn out of themselves ecstatically toward It. They, too, are taken up into the divine erotic attraction to the Divine Goodness, and they willingly enter into the great divine ecstasy. Thus, they who have come from God pass beyond themselves into God."³⁰⁶ Emerging intellectually impotent from the exposure, we stand at the limit of what is possible to be experienced. Our own intellectual activity can do nothing to serve as authority. Exposed to God in this manner, we stand outside of the world, becoming ἐκδήμιος and standing in ecstasy and thrown outside of our normal, everyday, rational disposition toward the world.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ *Denys the Areopagite*, p.123.

³⁰⁵ The symbol of the body is both similar and dissimilar.

³⁰⁶ *Divine Light*, p.198. I disagree that we "willingly enter into the great divine ecstasy" if this means that it is begun by our own powers. Furthermore, we pass beyond God as well, as will be shown in the next section.

³⁰⁷ We can recognize in this the relationship what we have with divine symbols. To understand a symbol as a symbol is to ignore the outward appearance of the symbol and to become attuned to what it reveals in a concealed manner. The physical or conceptual manifestation is put aside and the hidden meaning, which cannot be show itself as

Becoming absorbed within the divine, our own intellectual powers cease not due to an effort on our part but it results from the excessive appearance of God. Speaking of Moses' ecstasy Pseudo-Dionysius writes, "being seized in the wholly impalpable and invisible, he belongs entirely to that which is on the far-side of everything, *and also to nothing*, neither to himself nor to another, but absolutely to unknowing by means of an inactivity of all knowing" (MT 1001A). Moses is seized by the divine, unable to produce anything on his own and becomes a product of God, which is nothing. Ecstasy cannot be the meeting of God (MT 1000D); if it were we would define God. Instead it occurs in challenging what we believe God to be "denying that which is in excess of every denial [ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ἀφαίρεσις]" (MT 1033C), challenging knowledge itself.³⁰⁸ In other words, the language of being divinely inebriated and in ecstasy allows Pseudo-Dionysius to communicate that the traditional logical, rational structures, and order of the world are recognized to be illusory, and for the first time able to be critiqued.

IV. Purging the rational mind:

If there is a theme that runs throughout the beginning of *Concerning Mysterious Theology* it is that of κάθαρσις, a cleansing or ritual purification in the form of an ἀπόλυσις, a setting-free, a loosening, or deliverance, from "everything perceived and understood, everything perceptible and understandable [ἀσθητὰ καὶ νοητὰ] all that is not and all that is [οὐκ ὄντα καὶ ὄντα]" (MT 997b); we are set free from existing entities all together. Once undergoing the κάθαρσις, we are initiated into the divine mysteries. The Areopagite describes Moses' ascent toward the summit of Mount Sinai and his descent into the mysteries of divine darkness (MT

concealed, is attended to. We penetrate deeper into the divine mystery and thus unknow all things and by becoming overwhelmed to the light of the divine, we are blind and thus see the divine darkness which is hidden in light.

³⁰⁸ John N. Jones claims that the πᾶν here "does not mean 'all together' but 'each'." ("Sculpting God: The Logic of Dionysian Negative Theology, *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (Oct. 1996), pp.355-371, p. 363.) This would imply that God is not beyond all denials or assertions but each one independently of each other. I believe that I have here and in the previous chapter shown why this cannot be the case.

1001A)—we must note that every ascent is equally a descent, every enlightenment is equally a divine blackout. Before beginning his climb, “the divine commands Moses first to go through an absolute purification [ἀποκαθαρθῆναι] and then to banish [ἀφορισθῆναι] himself from those who have not undergone this” (MT 1000C).³⁰⁹ Moses’ departure may seem due only to his desire to ascend the Mount, however if we turn to *Epistle IX* 1108C, a different motivation comes to light, “We have therefore to run counter to the common people’s belief, if we are to take up the holy word and stride toward the sacred symbols.” Moses must ritually purify himself as a sign that he will now transgress the traditions of the idolatrous community. Submitting himself to the divine, which is pre-representational and pre-ontological, Moses sets himself apart from those whose community revolves around the idolatry of the golden calf—a community that is founded upon exchangeability, use-value, and homogeneity. They have set for themselves a good, something that they want in advance and unable to hold their desire in check they create an idol for themselves. On the other hand, Moses is purified and is set free from a world that revolves around the traditional structures of discursive intelligibility.³¹⁰ It is necessary for Moses to

³⁰⁹ This is not a separation from the multitude in the sense of a total renunciation from them, but rather Moses is to come back and initiate them into the mysteries. “By the hierarchy, according to the law, the elevation toward spiritual worship [λατρείαν] is initiation. The religious instructed individuals for the holy tabernacle by Moses’ sacred mysteries, the first initiator and leader by the law...he called all the sacred services of the law an image of a type shown to him on Mount Sinai. Those initiated are those who are being conducted to a more perfect mystery of the symbols of the law” (EC 501C). There is an ethical component to κάθαρσις. Those who are higher in the hierarchy are bound to instruct those below. We will return to this in the next chapter.

³¹⁰ “In summary, I may say this not inappropriately that the participation of the primordial-God knowledge is purification [κάθαρσις], illumination, and perfecting; purification, as it were from ignorance [ἀγνοίας], by the knowing of the more perfect mysteries [μυστήσεων] according to worth fitness, enlightening by the self-same divine knowing [θεία γνώσει], through which it purifies that which did not before contemplating the things now made manifest by the higher illuminations and perfecting further by the self-same light according to the abiding knowing [ἐπιστήμη] of the manifest mysteries” (CH 209C-D). Also, “The holy work of the sacraments as god-like capacity [θεοειδῆ δύναμιν] is the purification of the initiated, as a middle the enlightening mystery of the purified and as last and summary of the former the perfecting of those one instructed in the knowledge [ἐπιστήμη] of their proper instructions” (EC 504A). In these passages, κάθαρσις is an initiation in the mysteries of divine knowledge. In the first passage “ignorance” is not used in the technical sense of divine darkness but rather ignorance, here, is used as more closely associated with believing that God is subject to human standards or can be captured in idols. Instead, as the passage from *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* makes clear, being initiated into the sacraments makes one god-like, or deifies one. We are transformed in the process of supplication as purification.

separate himself so that he can become a heterogeneous element in the community, introducing something which can have no use-value and cannot be assimilated and so cannot be ignored and must be confronted. Moses' catharsis, a union with the non-knowledge that characterizes God, is an anti-accumulation practice which ends in a separation from the masses. Consequently, he violates the reciprocity which governs the logic of exchange, i.e., that every loss should be correlated with a gain. Having emphasized Moses' catharsis and Hierotheus' being ἔκδημος, there is a perpetual re-emergence and breaking with the established economy of the community in which one finds oneself.

CATHARTIC PREPARATION

The ecstatic unification that results from catharsis is the goal of mystic exercise and not, for the Areopagite, a union with some eternal presence for “[Moses] does not meet/consult with [συγγίνεταιαι] God itself, for it may not be seen [ἀθέατος], but rather beholds [θεωρεῖ] its place [τόπον]” (MT 1000d). Moses does not meet or consult with God but rather with the *empty space* of a God passing by unseen (Exod. 33.18-23). Moses, in ecstasy and undergoing catharsis, is beyond anything that he could induce on his own; there is no reason behind the experience. It is crucial for us to emphasize that God's place, its τόπος—what Moses experiences—is nowhere but *here* in the world of appearances.³¹¹ The prefix ὑπερ- that the Areopagite is so fond of to describe that which applies to the divine does not, then, signal absolute transcendence from the phenomenal world any more than Moses' ascent is only an upward climb and not also a descent into the abyssal ground of ‘what is,’ which absolutely resists conceptuality's penetration. There is nothing behind the representation of the concept. The prefix ὑπερ- signifies a framework that is utterly alien and foreign to a dependence upon the rational concept. Catharsis results in the

³¹¹ Similarly, the trinity is not in any place as such, DN 680B, but rather manifests itself in all things.

exposure to and the ability to communicate the ὑπερ-, since we are purified from rational concepts, which hold the same significance for all people.

To gesture toward the manner in which Pseudo-Dionysius begins our descent into divine darkness let us, again, note the prayer which opens *Concerning Mysterious Theology*. This is a particularly odd prayer, invoking not a particular individual: God, Jesus, Mary, or some saint, but rather the mystery of the trinity. In this prayer, it is said of such mysteries “amid the deepest shadow they pour exceeding-brilliance on what is exceedingly-manifest [ἐν σκοτεινοτάτῳ τὸ ὑπερφανεστάτον ὑπερλάμποντα]” (MT 997b). The exceeding-brilliance [ὑπερλάμποντα] does not make that which is exceedingly-manifest [ὑπερφανεστάτον] appear in the sense of showing it as obvious or knowable, but rather by blinding us, it reveals what is more than manifest and as essentially foreign and thus outside of the economy of knowledge. The prayer invokes something foreign, strange, and is set free from rationality because its ultimate source while manifesting itself within the conceptual life of the human being cannot be comprehended and penetrated by the individual as a rational subject, so that through the prayer we are situated at the very limit of conceptuality itself.

As such, for the Areopagite, ritual purification is not meant to make us ready for some esoteric knowledge, but rather is a spiritual exercise for non-knowledge. For instance, Pseudo-Dionysius in *Epistle III* writes, “what is to be spoken remains unspoken [ἄρρητον] and what is intellectable is unknowable [καὶ νοούμενον ἄγνωστον]” (1069b). Now, while *Concerning Divine Names* certainly focuses on affirmative theology, we are told that the text is simply a preparatory step for genuine theologico-philosophical thinking. Here, in *Concerning Mysterious Theology*, Pseudo-Dionysius is outside of *kataphasis*, there is no closed economy of knowledge

for him. Radical unknowing, the *via negativa*, is a perpetual purging and a re-emergence of God's upsurge.

Furthermore, catharsis is not a purification of the body as the site of emotion,³¹² instead it intensifies our emotional attunement to the world; it is the desire for what is new, it flows from a logic of negation at which we will never arrive. As the abolition of integrated being, catharsis corresponds to an intensification of the negative and of the nothing that God is. It is the flux of an impersonal desire renewed by the impulse of God's upsurge. For claiming that God is beyond every assertion and denial, Pseudo-Dionysius gestures toward a loss of a conventional and stable theological worldview and in this space we must now give a discourse that will inevitably reveal itself to be in excess of itself. Theologico-philosophical discourse, as Pseudo-Dionysius understands it, begins only in the aftermath of the destabilization of affirmative discourse.

CATHARTIC CREATION

Consequently, his thought should be interpreted in some sense as 'creative.' Pseudo-Dionysius purges all language from the semantical categories of subject and predicate, defying the laws of the excluded middle and of non-contradiction, and from all the basic forms of discourse provided by the Aristotelian λόγος ἀποφαντικός. In fact, counter to Aristotelian logic, the Areopagite writes "we should not conclude that the negations are simply the opposite of the affirmations, but rather that the cause of all is *considerably prior to this*, beyond privations, beyond every denial, beyond every assertion" (MT 1000B). If Dionysian denials were simply the opposite of their assertions, they would still be grounded in discursivity; they would

³¹² For Iamblichus κάθαρσις is not a total removal of the passions or of the body "If it is purification from passions and freedom from the toils of generation and unification with the divine principle that the ascent through invocations procures for the priests, how can one attach the notion of passions to this process? For it is not the case that such activity draws down the passionless and pure into laying down to passion and impurity; on the contrary, it makes us, who have come to be subject to passions by reason and birth, pure and immutable...as the truth of things itself desires to teach is, disposing the human intellect to participation in the gods, leading up to the gods and bringing it into accord with them through harmonious persuasion" (*De Mysteriis*, I.12.42).

simply be what the assertions are not. Pseudo-Dionysius reminds us, at *Concerning Mysterior Theology* 1025B with the metaphor of the sculptor, that this is a creative act. “Through renouncing [ἀφαιρέσεως] all of ‘what is’ from it, just as it is the nature of sculptors, removing [ἐξαιροῦντες] all the hindrances having covered the pure view of the hidden thing [τῆ καθαρᾷ τοῦ κρυφίου θέα], and by an act of renouncing [τῆ ἀφαιρέσει] alone, they make manifest the hidden away beauty itself by itself.” This ‘creative’ act should not be thought to be engaged in any τέχνη, skill or craftsmanship, or as a creation of an idol. Rather, it is a fundamental and spontaneous response to divine darkness. All there is in such an act is the total removal of everything that is present, since the “pure view of the hidden away beauty itself by itself” is essentially hidden, never to be manifest in anything.

Only by removing and cleansing what is present, what is already known, what is already manifest, can the hidden beauty show forth. The hidden beauty always calls out to us, but we can be confused and believe that the call originates from what is present. It is only through a renunciation of what is manifest does the true call of the beautiful echo and resonate. So as not to risk making an idol, the sculptor must know that his creation does not correspond to the divine.

The idol fixes the divine for us permanently, for a commerce where the human hems in the divine from all angles...It is characterized solely by the subjection of the divine to the human conditions for experience of the divine, concerning which nothing proves that it is not authentic. The human experience of the divine precedes the idolatrous face...The idol reflects back to us, in the face of a god, our own experience of the divine...It delivers to us to the point of enslaving it to us, just as much as it enslaves us to it.³¹³

The divine must appear as in a manifestation to its deliverance through the renunciation of what is already present. Therefore, the “creation” is just as much of a destruction. It is the breaking down of the manifestations and a demand for a human experience that cannot find support in a self-grounding. Instead of emphasizing the act of creation and by placing the stress on the

³¹³ *The Idol and Distance*, pp.5-6.

removal of what is already present, the Areopagite puts us in a space that is prior to truth and falsity, placing us squarely in an exposure to the abyssal ground and space of God's "to be." Just as the sculptor purges what is unnecessary, what is present and already known, to reveal what is not present in the marble, our κάθαρσις is a purification of what is manifest in its immediacy to reveal the unspoken, hidden, presumed, and unanticipated. It is the negative space, that which is removed, the space around the sculpture that defines the truth more so than what is present.

The Areopagite rejects the scientific subject/object relation between thought and its world that the uninitiated glorify through the use of idols. Pseudo-Dionysius also rejects any notion of truth as correspondence between a subjective re-presentation and an independent, objectively present reality.³¹⁴ "Hymning superlatively this, the nonsense [ἄλογον], mindless [ἄνοον] and foolish wisdom [μωρὸν σοφίαν], we say that it is cause of all mind, reason, all wisdom and comprehension...and in it all treasures of wisdom and knowing are hidden" (DN 868A). Our wisdom is foolish when compared to divine wisdom, which, however, as we have seen, looks like drunkenness to us. When God's wisdom speaks, we remain silent. And in remaining silent, God speaks and so does Pseudo-Dionysius. If he does speak to us through his writings, it must be by a foolish wisdom. And yet, from this foolish wisdom, which given all of its *apophatic* language and the nonsense of the *via negativa*, all treasures are hiddenly kept. And so Pseudo-Dionysius, then, in his foolish wisdom must be speaking God's wisdom. By engaging in a philosophical mode of thinking that always threatens to exceed itself, we are required to employ a form of thinking that does not search for eternal essences but rather situates itself at the limit of appearance and conceptuality itself.

³¹⁴ For example, although the Areopagite writes of God, "it is the eternity of existence, the source and measure of existence" he immediately writes "it is before existence, being, and eternity, it is the productive source, middle, and end of all things" (DN 824A). This is just one of many passages where Pseudo-Dionysius clarifies himself in this way. God is not identifiable with eternal existence, nor is there any reason to suppose that they exist in any form.

Non-discursive language allows for a thinking that exposes us to the disruption of the apparent ordering of our world and out of this experience creatively generates a non-discursive philosophical form of thought. The need for something like a non-discursive language, which is the creative, speculative, intuiting, intoxicated response arising from the exposure to the disruption of the apparent order of the world is necessary if God exceeds all idols, all words and all concepts. To experience the divine, then, we must purify ourselves from social norms by becoming inebriated. Being intoxicated is being driven into an ecstatic state where traditional and formal logic do not apply.³¹⁵

V. *Death and our critical transgression:*

The cathartic preparation seems to have been complicated, difficult and exhausting, for Moses cannot begin his ascent until “after every purification is complete [μετὰ πᾶσαν ἀποκάθαρσις].” In fact, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* describes the “hierarchic rites” as “holy contests [ἱερός ἀγωνία],” “within which he is placed under Christ as judge, since, as God, he is the institutor of the awards of the contest...and following in the divine footprints [θεῖοις ἴχνεσι] of the first athletes” (401c-404A), whose purpose it is to purge the initiate from the influence of the perceptible, conceptual, and idolatrous world (*EH* 401A). Characterizing them as “contests,” ἀγωνία, and the initiates as athletes, the physical and the psychological exertion and discomfort that is associated with cathartic preparation is brought to the fore. As we will presently see, the contests result in the transgression of the isolated self.

Divine erotic longing is ecstatic [ἔστι δὲ ἑκστατικός ὁ θεῖος ἔρωσ], not permitting lovers to be themselves but rather of their beloved. This is shown by the providence of the superior to the inferior, and equals by their coming together and the inferior by a

³¹⁵ Christ, the Areopagite reminds us, speaks in parables so that the Holy of Holies should be “shaken free of the masses [τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀποσεσῶσθαι]” (*Ep. IX* 1108A). A parable is thought “illogical” because it is an essentially metaphorical and creative response to the experience of the overwhelming intensification of presence that is indicative of the divine, which takes that which seems to be patently clear in its immediate manifestation and places it outside of our conceptual understanding so that something unanticipated may come to the foreground.

more divine respect toward the superior thing. Also, the great Paul, when possessed by divine erotic longing and participating in its ecstatic capacity says “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” As a true lover and standing outside of himself as he says to God and not living the life of himself but the life of the beloved (*DN 712A*).

We see here that ecstatic erotic longing is the total surrendering of oneself to the other. God becomes that in which we are born but as a non-subject of non-knowledge, or divine darkness. Only in this drunken and ecstatic darkness do we truly touch and communicate with each other. Moreover, purged from all that is perceptible and intelligible, *κάθαρσις*, then, results in the death of the subject.³¹⁶ There is a fusion, which is opened in Christ’s ecstatic love of humanity. Only in betraying one’s isolated existence does life and communication emerge. We are brought to the limit of what is possible for existence, dying in the process. We are shot through by the love of Christ for humanity, and made vulnerable on an ontological level. We are annulled. It is necessary to die since individual existence is capacious, always emerging and re-emerging in the cycle of God’s movement.

Chapter one of the *Concerning Mysteries Theology* makes a distinction between the *ego*, the conceived self, the traditional subject as the center of human life and the source of human action associated with making assertions and denials, and that which suffers, or undergoes the exposure to the divine without planned action and is rather a spontaneous irruption,³¹⁷ as the exclamations in the prayer to the trinity reveals. Immediately after this prayer, Pseudo-Dionysius says,

I, myself, pray for these things: that you, dear Timothy, with utmost relentless honing around the mysterious sights [τῆ περι τὰ μυστικὰ θεάματα συντόνω διατριβῆ] abandon both the operations of perception and thought and all objects of perception and thought; all that is not and all that is; and toward union, as is accessible, unknowingly stretch forth to what wholly exceeds existence and knowing. (*MT 997B*).

³¹⁶ See *Divine Light* pp.247-251. William Riordan mentions the similarity between purification and death as found in non-Christian cultures. He only tangentially discusses this in reference to Pseudo-Dionysius.

³¹⁷ See *Phenomenology and Mysticism* pp.168-178. The distinction between the “I” of the individual and a spontaneous response to the divine is discussed.

Timothy is being advised to lose himself by unremittingly spending time with the mysteries “which calls to mind the ritual tortures and ordeals of archaic initiations,”³¹⁸ until he is released from everything, including himself, spontaneously stretching forth into unknown depths. After enduring such a purgation, “one is neither oneself nor another [καὶ οὐδενὸς οὔτε ἑαυτοῦ οὔτε ἑτέρου] by an inactivity of all knowing [τῆς πάσης γνώσεως ἀνεργησιᾶ]” (MT 1001A). All that is left of the self is a purely responsive site disrobed of any personal identity.

Describing the purification rites, Pseudo-Dionysius states, “In the trail, he has overthrown, in his struggles, after the example of the divine, every activity and with every impulse which stands in the way of his deification [πρὸς θέωσιον ἐναντίας]. By dying to sin in baptism, one could say that he mysteriously *shares in the death of Christ himself*” (EH 404A). We are called to suffer, to die, and become deified, as Christ had done on the cross, through being cleansed by water.³¹⁹ On the Cross, Christ is purged from individualizing corruption of the body and rational mind through,³²⁰ and perhaps because of the suffering endured, Christ’s participation in the divine darkness is revealed. Completely spent and in a state of bewilderment, torment, and confusion, Christ has been overcome by suffering, only now in his overwhelming exhaustion can he fully surrender to God. In the throes of death and purged from all rational discourse, Pseudo-Dionysius reminds us that Christ can only cry out, “My God, my God, why

³¹⁸ *Divine Light*, p.250.

³¹⁹ “As for baptism, the Fathers emphasize its initiatory function more and more plastically by multiplying images of death and resurrection. The baptismal font is compared to both the tomb and womb; it is the tomb in which the catechumen buries his earthly life and the womb in which the life eternal is born. The homologism and to initiatory death is clearly expressed in a Syrian liturgy...” Mircea Eliade *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* trans. Willard R. Trask (Dallas: Spring Publications: 1994), p.120. The link with death and rebirth found within baptism must have been known to Pseudo-Dionysius, a Syrian born writer.

³²⁰ Again, there is nothing inherently sinful in being embodied, but embodiment suggests the working of the intellect, which as we have seen makes neither affirmations nor denials of θεαρχία but rather what is next to it and thus we “sin” in the sense of missing our mark.

have you forsaken me? [Ὁ θεός μου ὁ θεός μου εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπές με]” (Mk 15:34),³²¹

which is echoed in Pseudo-Dionysius’ own “cry of the prophet,” “Knowledge of you is wondrous, it is outside of me [ἐξ ἑμοῦ]; it is high, it is not possible for me” (*Ep. V* 1073A).

Knowledge of God becomes the impossible for which we strive. These cries originate from the painful recognition that the divine is so excessively present that it has overwhelmed the self, and that the *ego* is no longer present. It is the rational self that is distant from God, and not God who is in itself absent. God has completely overwhelmed the individual; it is now God who lives in the individual, who has been displaced and stands in ecstasy to him or herself. In the cry of prayer there is no meaning; it cannot be justified. It is a form of communication that speaks out without a subject being present. The cry is a supplication, a request for a reply, but since it is directed toward that which exceeds rational understanding, it is a request that will be met in vain, but through this we are opened to that which exceeds our comprehension. Here, self-surrender reaches its peak. It is an utter abandonment of the self, a transgression against one’s own biological birth and a desire to die and to be born anew without an *ego*, which is exactly what Pseudo-Dionysius states that he hopes for Timothy.

The death cry or the prayer of Christ and Pseudo-Dionysius’ own “prophetic cry” indicates the death of, or rather transgression of the ego by its reduction to nothingness, after all, as we have seen, in divine darkness we do not find union with God, but more profoundly belong to nothing (*MT* 1001A). “Annihilation is deeper than union because in union there is still the experience of (the self) being united with God. Annihilation is also deeper than the station of oneness because, while there is the experience of all spatio-temporal creation as if it were

³²¹ It is of note that Pseudo-Dionysius this passage is from Mark and not from Luke, 23:46, where Christ cries out “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” The uncertainty found in Mark results from the complete loss of self through the suffering and deification on the cross. Christ literally has lost himself in this process and so it appears that God has forsaken him. There is no “I” or spirit to be committed, let alone a God into whose hands he could be delivered.

nothing...In annihilation, however, it is the self that is annihilated in God and that is of no essential significance.”³²² In annihilation and death we experience non-knowledge. It is even impossible to know that God dwells within one, for such knowledge would require a difference in a unity of indistinction. Annihilation is the return to nothing, or rather to the generative source of θεαρχία which is prior to being. “Being” is traded for the intensity of the experience. The intensity of this is oriented around one’s own extinction. Death, then, is a desire to return to θεαρχία, to the pre-ontological. Our life is based upon and molded by death, in which we become lost to ourselves, taken into divine darkness and intensified into a site of pre-articulated speech. When the initiate “dies” he or she becomes “indifferent to all contrary things” (EH 404C). Since only that which is rational, grounded in binary opposition, can admit of contraries, when one dies to every assertion and every denial, one becomes an open space in which contraries are able to co-exist without opposition. Dying to one’s old life, the life of perceptible and conceptual notions, one is now able to make the descent into divine darkness.

Whatever it is to live a meaningful (Christian) life for the Areopagite it is to transgress established laws that have become idols for us, purging ourselves from them. Likewise, we too are initiated into a world, a world emanating from the void of discursive thought, and not a member of the slavish masses who believe they know and who “think that by their own intellectual resources can have direct knowledge of what has made the shadows its hiding place [σκότος ἀποκρυφήν αὐτοῦ]” (MT 1000A). In fact, in submitting ourselves to divine darkness “it [the divine] could reveal itself [ἀποφάνοιτο] authoritatively and stand firmly [κυρίως

³²² *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, pp.109-110.

καὶ ἐπιστητῶς]” (DN 588B). By inverting theological language, the authoritative relationship God has over us as a present entity giving us laws falls away, transforming it into a exceedingly-present void to which we must craft a creative response.³²³

Through divine drunkenness we are now able to “straddle both heresies and the guiltless [καὶ τὰ ἐναγῆ καὶ τὰ καθαρὰ διαβαίνουσι]” (MT 1000C). In other words, if we are take Pseudo-Dionysius’ thought to its ultimate conclusion, we must understand that those who transgress God as that concept that is knowable and present pass “beyond the summit of every holy ascent, transgress [ὑπερβαίνουσι] every divine light, every voice, every word from heaven, and who go into the darkness [εἰς τὸν γνόφον εἰσδυομένοις]” (MT 1000C), so as to become, for the first time, open to the divine, which is to transgress God’s laws and God itself. It is transgression that opens us to true communication, the ruin of self-identity, permanence, individuality. God must be defied, stepping into heresies to reveal to us that God is not an entity. The mystic response understands that the prohibition against heresies must be challenged in order to unveil the hidden nature of God; the forbidden must occur and as forbidden, if the hiddenness of God is to manifest. The law as a condition for the survival of a discrete being must be put aside or broken for a law that is unconditionally applicable to all entities and thus to none. There is no guarantee that the one engaged in mysticism will come out ethically intact, for in the moment of the *via negativa* everything is lost. We must be completely empty, even of the expectation of being born anew, giving up the hope of the resurrection and even of God itself. And to give up this desire is to risk everything. Christ’s love of humanity becomes all the more sudden and surprising in recognizing that it applies to no one at all and yet is nevertheless given.

³²³ That God is a void that is atop the hierarchy will be further explained in the next chapter. It will be shown that Pseudo-Dionysius’ hierarchy is essentially anarchic.

We must suffer God, entering into a “theopathic state,”³²⁴ laying aside knowledge for the sake of unknowing. We must become what we are by embracing what we are not and can never be, i.e., that which is without an *ego*. Dying to the self, we become empty. Standing on both sides of heresies and purity simultaneously, the soul is both God and is not God, both pure and impure. We suffer God because of the upsurge it reveals in the order of creation. When we suffer God, it is the disorder that signifies God’s overwhelming presence. It is to this experience that we must pray. Prayer may result in ecstasy and catharsis but it accomplishes nothing positive, but only disruption. To find the divine, we must experience a disruption in ourselves, struggling with our own finite created self and existence, pushing beyond it and fighting to become what we are not. The individual engaged in prayer can only recognize a profound desire to overstep what we are. It is supplication without response, ending in a community that cannot revolve around the affirmation of a collective identity but rather the dissolution of identifiable traits. By dying to the self, it is an anonymous flow of community. Such a community cannot be political since it does not begin from a controllable process but rather the blinding overflow of the autonomy of God. It is to this topic that we will now turn.

³²⁴ *Inner Experience*, p.52.

CHAPTER SIX
ANARCHY IN THE HIERARCHY:
The Decapitated Hierarchical Community

Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich den aus der
Engel
Ordnungen?
Denn das Schöne ist nichts
Als des Schrecklichen Anfang, den wir noch grade
ertragen,
und wir bewundern es so, weil es gelassen
verschäht
uns zu zerstören. Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich.
Rilke, *Duineser Elegien*

I. *Liturgical community:*

Having placed our focus on *Concerning the Divine Names* and *Concerning Mysterious Theology*, it may seem as if Pseudo-Dionysius' project is a solitary one; one individual's journey to and through the concept of the divine. However, all the works of the Areopagite, four treatises and his ten letters, are addressed to others, and thus they are concerned with making connections between individuals and these works present Pseudo-Dionysius as part of a *society* bound and defined by relationships. Indeed, "there is no such thing as an individual, a being conceived as a closed, self-contained unit which extrinsically enters into relation with other beings."³²⁵ Far from being an isolated author of texts, Pseudo-Dionysius presents himself emphatically as a member of an ordered community, in which one member turns toward another for advice and counsel, in which there are teachers and disciples, as well as, holy men, propounders of false teachings, and raisers of objections. In fact, in *Epistle VIII* he rebukes a monk, Demophilus, for overstepping his place in the hierarchical order of the church by criticizing a priest, his superior.³²⁶ The works of Pseudo-Dionysius, then, situate themselves explicitly, and importantly, within the framework of a strictly ordered monastic community.

³²⁵ *Theophany*, p.80.

³²⁶ *Symbol and Icon*, p.16.

It may be that the works of the Areopagite are philosophical but by addressing them to specific individuals this is not how *he* presents them to *us*. They are concerned with responding to the living needs of a Christian community,³²⁷ predominately through the interpretation of scripture. *Concerning Divine Names* deals with scriptural names ascribed to God. The *Celestial Hierarchy* is concerned with the meaning of the imagery given to the angels, where the divine is first made manifest. This hierarchy “forms an intermediary between the incorporeal angels and wholly corporeal, visible things,”³²⁸ through which, finally, the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* expounds and interprets the ceremonies of the Church. This latter hierarchy is the space in which the liturgy of the community is performed, expressing the mystery of the faith. With these two texts on the hierarchies “the universe (in all its invisible and visible multitude) is an everlasting, radiant, cosmic liturgy.”³²⁹

So certainly Pseudo-Dionysius is concerned with a community. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Pseudo-Dionysius does not engage in polemical exchanges. There is a sense of sureness in his writings, one that is based on the tradition that has been handed down to him through the hierarchy in which he finds himself. We have seen as well that the two modes of theological discourse are interwoven. That is to say, what is written, open and evident is intertwined with that which requires initiation. The former is for and available to everyone, giving them a foothold in a tradition, while the latter is only for those who can respond appropriately to the teachings. A hierarchy incorporates both directions. In fact, a similar sentiment is found in the opening chapter of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, “for the divinely transmitted scriptures are existences of our hierarchy. As we affirm that these scriptures, all such

³²⁷ Andrew Louth, “Apophatic Theology: Denys the Areopagite” *Hermathena*, No. 165 (Winter 1998), pp.71-84, p.78.

³²⁸ *Divine Light*, p.48.

³²⁹ *Ibid*, p.52.

as were given from our holy-initiators in inspired words of theology are most august. And further whatever our leaders have revealed to us from the same holy individuals, *by immaterial initiation* [ἄυλοτέρᾳ μυσίσει]” (EH 376B-C). Scripture is the formless expressed in the multiplicity of material goods and the liturgy is the timeless expressed in temporal actions. We are initiated into a community in which the divine is expressed in human terms while keeping it fundamentally mysterious.

It will be helpful from the outset to say that the hierarchies incorporate both *kataphasis* and *apophasis*. Indeed, a traditional interpretation of the hierarchies will reveal that both are ridged structures which govern the entities that fall within them. The hierarchies, in part, function as fixed measures of the amount of divine found within a particular level. These levels are, in the case of the Celestial Hierarchy, unchanging and within the Ecclesiastical they are used to give each participant authority over the lower strata. The *kataphatic* element of the hierarchies gives us a highly organized structure of reality. In fact, this structure is only realized under the ridged organization of the hierarchy. Although the hierarchies give us a rank and ordering of the angels and the clergy, there is an *apophatic* quality as well.³³⁰ I will radically depart from a traditional explanation of the hierarchies through employing *apophasis*. The liturgy expressed in the hierarchies allows us to recognize the divine as inherently mysterious through the enactment of the liturgy itself. “The liturgy is *eschatological*, in the sense that it points beyond this world to the final consummation when, in Deny’s terminology, hierarchies will display rather than merely seek to achieve their purpose.”³³¹ The purpose of the hierarchy and the significance of its structure are necessary to recognize the importance of this lived experience while at the same time gesturing beyond the hierarchy. The reality which the highly organized hierarchy

³³⁰ “Apophatic Theology: Deny the Areopagite,” p.77.

³³¹ Ibid, p.82.

necessitates is revealed to presume a level of being that exceeds the structure of the hierarchy itself. Christ is seated at the summit of both hierarchies but as an enigmatical receding *Abgrund*. Far from simply telling us what the liturgy means, the hierarchies are means of expressing the divine as question-worthy, allowing us to participate in that mystery. If we are to place the mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius anywhere “that place is within the Church and the Church’s liturgy.”³³² The object of the hierarchies is to establish homogeneity. However, the hierarchy is not an abstract entity. It is the group of individuals living in aspirations inherent in the process of establishing homogeneity. But founded by individuals, there are always heterogeneous elements, irreducible facts. Hierarchy finds itself deprived of functional satisfaction and thus terms them *apophatically*. Consequently, the community that Pseudo-Dionysius is concerned with is one that is always on the verge of overcoming its own limitations. In fact, it is my view that through the *apophatic* hierarchy we transgress an organized form of community altogether and enter into the darkness of the Dionysian God.

The hierarchies work on different registers, epistemologically, metaphysically, and ethically. Although the hierarchies function within each of these, Pseudo-Dionysius does not seem to make a strong delineation between them. They are, in fact, interconnected and interwoven within the discourse of community.

Before discussing what the two forms of hierarchies or communities achieve, I will first give a brief overview of each of them and how they are related. After that discussion, I will then give an account of the significance of what it is to be a hierarchy and what its function is for Pseudo-Dionysius. Finally, I will demonstrate that despite, or rather only because of the highly regimented organization that is found in both hierarchies, we are left ultimately with a “headless”

³³² Alexander Golitzin, “The Mysticism of Dionysius the Areopagita: Platonist or Christian?” *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Sept. 1993), pp.98-114, p.101.

hierarchy, one not grounded in being or ‘what is’, but rather in an abyssal depth that endlessly recedes.

THE CELESTIAL HIERARCHY

In his *Celestial Hierarchy*, the Areopagite presents us with an account of those immaterial beings, generally termed ‘angels.’³³³ They are called angels for “the reason that all the heavenly capacities hold as a common possession an inferior capacity to conform to the divine [θεοειδές] and to enter into communion with the gift of light from God [Θεοῦ φωτοδοσίαν]” (CH 196C). This angelic realm is depicted as being closer to God, θεαρχία in particular (CH 177C, 180A, 186C, 209B), than we are, (a topic to which I will return to below) being “forever around God [περὶ θεόν] and permanently united with it, without intermediaries” (CH 200D). It is, however, impossible for us to know “the hidden truth about the celestial intelligences” (CH 140B), instead we can only know what has been revealed to us by God *via* the angels, what “the primordial-God has mysteriously revealed [ἡ θεαρχία μεμυσταγωγώηκεν] through them” (CH 200C). In fact, angels help “human beings solve a major epistemological problem.”³³⁴ Through the angels, God becomes manifest to us. “And so all the angelic beings follow the first rank of intelligent beings in heaven as their source, after God, of all sacred knowledge of God and of all imitation of God, for it is this latter order which mediates the primordial-God enlightenment to all other beings, and to us” (CH 301D-304A). Angels allow the unmanifested to become manifest. Through being wholly other to the human, angels are able to make θεαρχία appear as it is, an irreducible element of our experience.

³³³ *Symbol and Icon*, p.27.

³³⁴ Martin Parker, “Angelic Organization: Hierarchy and the Tyranny of Heaven” *Organizational Studies* 30 (11), pp. 1281-1299, p.1284.

Because the angels are immaterial, symbolic language must be used to describe them in terms of what we perceive, and that language is to be found in scripture. The language of angelic revelation is discussed in detail in chapter two of the *Celestial Hierarchy*. All such language refers to images drawn from sensual experience so that we may be drawn together into a communion with that of which it speaks; “let us therefore look as far upward as the light of sacred scripture allows and in our reverent awe of what is divine, let us be drawn together toward the divine” (*DN 588A*). To respond to this language is to be raised up toward the celestial realm and thus to the divine. This language is symbolic, which is to say that what is conveyed is conveyed indirectly. For, if we interpret what scripture gives to us literally, we are faced with absurdities: “Perhaps one will also think that the excessively-heavenly places are filled with certain herds of lions, troops of horses, and bellowing songs of hymn, flocks of birds, and other living creatures and material and less honorable things” (*CH 137C-D*). Pseudo-Dionysius gives us two reasons for “why forms are naturally attributed to the formless and shapes to the shapeless” (*CH 137D*):

It is not alone our capacity which is unable immediately to elevate itself to the intelligible contemplations [ἐπὶ τὰς νοητὰς ἀνατείνεσθαι θεωρίας] and that it needs appropriate and intellectual instructions which present images suitable to us, of the formless [τῶν ἀμορφώτων] and exceedingly-natural contemplations; but further, that it is most agreeable to the revealing scriptures to conceal, through forbidden and sacred enigmas [δι’ ἀπορρήτων καὶ ἱερῶν αἰνιγμάτων] and to keep holy the secret truth respecting the exceedingly-mundane intellects inaccessible to the multitude. Not everyone is sacred, and as scripture says, knowledge is not for everyone (*CH 140A-B*).

The latter concern is directed toward that which is clear and obvious, seeking to awaken faith in those who do not yet believe, while that which is forbidden and enigmatic is the exposure to the mystery of the divine, it is a growing understanding of the faith mediated through the experience of the liturgy of the Church and a more profound grasp of the hidden significance of scripture. It is an immediate exposure and response to that which is enigmatic for those who have already

been properly initiated. This mirrors the interconnection between *kataphasis* and *apophasis*. The *apophatic* moment is embedded within a rational context. *Apophasis* proceeds logically through the *aporia* that is engendered through a contestation of language, making visible the forbidden enigma. The awakening of faith occurs within a *kataphatic* theological context. The *apophatic* aims to induce an exposure that will emerge from a *kataphatic* context, but which refuses discursive thought. The forbidden enigma is not a doctrine that is to be accepted as true, but rather is held beyond rational explanation. It is a sense of wonderment that is rediscovered within the enactment of the liturgy but which also points beyond the horizon of it. Part of Pseudo-Dionysius' other point is that by means of negations we are able to form immaterial concepts. By ridding the mind of particulars we are led to a deeper understanding of reality. We move from sensible particulars and then beyond the concept of those particulars. It is a practice and exercise that must be repeated through which the human intellect is able to no longer be dependent upon concepts.³³⁵ The *apophatic* language of dis-ontology, in continually moving toward a removal of 'what is' suggests a different mode of comparison, one less likely to reduce the particularities of language to a homogenous set of doctrines.

The symbolic language found in scripture both conceals the esoteric meaning while simultaneously revealing it by providing images that are within our grasp. "For theology artlessly [ἀτεχνῶς] uses of poetic representations of sacred things, respecting shapeless intelligences [ἀσχηματίστων νοῶν], out of regard for our intelligences, so to speak, befitting it and in an uplifting way [ἀναγωγῆς] natural to it, and molding the inspired writing for it" (CH 137B). "If theology use poetic language it does so only to open the path that would be accessible to our

³³⁵ We have seen this to be the exercise of *apophasis* and especially of the *via negativa*.

imperfect nature.”³³⁶ Within this symbolic language, Pseudo-Dionysius uses like and unlike symbols, which “remain connected to liturgical communities.”³³⁷ *Apophatic* thought arises out of the communal engagement of a worshipping community running up against its own limitations. Some symbols possess a similarity to that which they symbolize, such as ‘word’, ‘intellect’, and ‘being’ (*CH* 140C). When scripture ascribes such names to God, it depicts God as rational, intelligent, and that to which all entities owe their existence. The unlike symbols are drawn from the material world and would seem ridiculous to apply to God. This is not only discussed in the *Celestial Hierarchy* but as well in *Epistle IX*, which presents us with a long list of inappropriate symbols which concentrate on anthropomorphism (*Ep. IX* 1104C-1105B): God as an individual of war, or drunk, an erotic lover, as jealous, deceitful, or wearing jewellery.

The Areopagite is clear, however, that these unlike symbols, are in a certain way, more appropriate to God because in fact God exceeds anything we can say of it. If we use like symbols such as being omnipotent and an all knowing creator we are likely to mistake God as truly being like this, that is to say, as an entity among others. God is not an entity but rather is in excess of every entity and conception that we may have of it, “in excess to every manifestation of existence and life, no reference to life can characterize it; every word and intelligence fall short of similarity to it” (*CH* 140C). And so, if we use unlike symbols and say that God is an individual of war or all consuming fire, there is little danger that we will literally apply these characteristics to God.

But surely there is no need to dwell on this, for scripture asserts that God is dissimilar and that it is not to be compared with anything, that it is different from everything and stranger still, that there is nothing like it. Nevertheless, words of this sort do not contradict the similarity of things to it, for the very same things are both similar and dissimilar to God [τὰ γὰρ ὅμοια θεῶ καὶ ἀνόμοια]. They are like it to the extent that

³³⁶ *Symbol and Icons*, p.54.

³³⁷ Paul Rorem, “Negative Theologies and the Cross” *The Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 101, No.3/4 (Jul.-Oct. 2008), pp.451-464, p.452.

they share what cannot be shared. They are dissimilar to it in that its effects fall short of their cause and are infinitely and incomparably subordinate (*DN 917A*).

Applying both sorts of names to God unveils the paradoxical structure of God as bestowing that which cannot be given, while simultaneously being far superior to what is given. It cannot be spoken of but only sensed. Such names brings visibility to that which is absolutely invisible and incomprehensible. And such names keep in play the movement toward the divine made possible through the interplay of *kataphasis* and *apophasis*.

The truest mode of language, as we have seen, to describe God is that of denial; “but at other times, its praises are exceedingly-mundanely sung by scripture itself, by dissimilar revelations [ἀνομοίοις ἐκφαντορίαις], when they affirm that it is invisible, boundless, and ungraspable [ἀόρατον αὐτήν καὶ ἄπειρον καὶ ἀχώρητον] and other things which recall not what it is but what it is not” (*CH 140D*). Negation describes God truly, since God is in no way like existing entities, “we rightly describe its non-relationship to created entities, we do not know its excessively-existing nature, and inconceivable, ineffable indefinability. If, then, negations in respect to divine things are true but affirmations are inharmonious, the revelation as regards to invisible things, through dissimilar representations, is more appropriate to the hiddenness of ineffable existing things” (*CH 141A*). Unlike symbols compel us to seek out God endlessly by denying what is said and disorienting us, opening us to a deepening wisdom of one’s tradition.

Angels, too, are best described through dissimilar symbols. Scripture intentionally tells us that angels are horses, bird, and wheels (*CH 137A*), since there is less danger of us ascribing these attributes literally, such as thinking that angels are “golden or gleaming men, glamorous, wearing lustrous clothing” (*CH 141B*) might compel us to do.

In order that individuals might not suffer from this, by thinking they are nothing more exalted than their beautiful appearance, the elevating wisdom of the pious theologians conducts to incongruous dissimilarities, not permitting our earthly part to rest fixed in unseemly images [αἰσχρὰς εἰκόνας] but urging the upward tendency of the soul and

goads it by the unseemliness of the phrases that it belongs neither to lawful nor seeming truth, even for the most earthly conceptions, that the most heavenly and divine visions are actually like things so base (*CH 141B-C*).

This language goads us; it is meant not to describe but rather to stir our devotion and lift us upward. It stirs us out of our complacency of thinking that God and angels are like us and compels us to view them as inherently question-worthy.

Taking his cue from scripture, Pseudo-Dionysius names nine angelic beings, appearing in three ranks: the first rank consists of seraphim, cherubim, and thrones; the second, dominions, powers, and authorities; and the third order is made up of principalities, archangels, and angels. These ranks are fixed and meant to fill the individual with wonder, in fact Pseudo-Dionysius gives the traditional Hebrew names to the highest rank of angels. Seraphim are ‘fire-makers’, cherubim means ‘fullness of knowledge’ or ‘outflowing of wisdom’ and thrones suggest ‘standing over every earthly defect’ (*CH 205B-D*). This wonder is meant to keep us on an ethical path, so that we “strive toward angelic life” (*DN 696C*).

Now divine manifestations were made to the pious as in keeping with revelations of God, that is to say, through certain holy visions, analogous to those who see them. Now the all-wise word of God naturally calls theophanies that particular vision which manifests a divine similitude depicted in itself as shaping the shapeless, from the elevations of the beholders, and the divine persons themselves are initiated into some mystery. But our fathers were initiated into these divine visions through celestial powers (*CH 180C*).

The angels initiate humans into a way of living that is in keeping with the divine, “to manifest the hidden goodness in themselves, to be, as it were, the angelic messengers of divine silence [θείας σιγῆς]” (*DN 696B*). By shrouding the divine in silence, the angels remind us of the incomprehensibility of it, initiating us into the divine mystery.

This revelation through the angels is meant to affect the human being. In fact, Pseudo-Dionysius tells us,

for probably not even we should come to a seeking out of a waylessness [εἰς ζήτησιν

μὲν ἐξ ἀπορίας] to an uplifting [εἰς ἀναγωγὴν] through a precise explanation of sacred things unless the deformed imagery used by scripture to describe the angels had shocked us, not permitting our intellect to linger on the discordant representations, but stirring us to reject utterly the material proclivities [τὰς ὑλικὰς προσπαθείας] and accustoming us to uplifting ourselves through manifestations to the things exceeding-the world [διὰ τῶν φαινομένων ἐπὶ τὰς ὑπερκοσμίους ἀναγωγὰς] (CH 145B).

Only through the discordant language used to describe angels, are we awoken out of our complacency and made ready to perceive the mysterious divine. Pseudo-Dionysius applies these principles to the way in which human emotions are meant to be applied to that which is in excess to us, “yet the scheme is so extraordinarily impressive, it dwells on the splendor of the celestial hierarchy, as to create an emotional presumption.”³³⁸ If emotions are to be applied to the celestial realm and have meaning for it, we must sublimate them. “For anger [θυμός], in entities without reason, takes its rise in the passions and their movement, which takes the form of appetite, is full of all kinds of unreasonableness. But with regards to the intelligent, we must think of anger differently, as denoting, according to my judgment, their courageous manner and their determined persistence in their godlike and unchangeable steadfastness” (CH 141D). Also, desire [ἐπιθυμία] is sublimated into a divine erotic longing [ἔρωτα θεῖον], which “by necessity exceeds reason and intellect [ὑπὲρ λόγον καὶ νοῦν]” (CH 144A). “Divine erotic longing is ecstasy [ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἐκστατικός ὁ θεῖος ἔρωσ] not permitting any lovers to be of themselves but those of the beloved” (DN 712A). We abandon ourselves, letting go of the distinction between self and other. Acting in such a way, the soul no longer exists in a formal sense, as a subject, but acts from out of the divine. Applying language correctly to the celestial realm allows for a transformation of the emotions and redirecting them. Understanding the angels keeps us on an ethical path, reminding us that we have a higher nature and that what we participate in is

³³⁸ Sylvia L. Thrupp, “Hierarchy, Illusion, and Social Mobility” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 2, No. 1 (Oct., 1959), pp.126-128, p.127.

beyond us. Through living the liturgical act of thinking God *apophatically*, we are drawn out beyond ourselves and into the divine which exceeds existence.

As stated above, the *Celestial Hierarchy* is concerned with applying these principles to understanding what is said in scripture concerning angels, treating each of the ranks separately. The first rank of angels is immediately present before God, and it is God's revelation that is received by them first. This interpretation of the three highest angelic beings is represented in a motif of purification, illumination, and perfection; the thrones standing above defects represents purification, cherubim illumination, since they are contemplative, and seraphim represent perfection in their continual union with God. The discussion of the second rank of angels: dominions, powers, and authorities serves to place our attention on the mediation in which revelation is given; "no doubt, as regards that message, which is said to pass *through* one into another angel [δι' ἄλλου εἰς ἄλλον ἄγγελον], we may take as a symbol of a perfecting completed from afar and obscured because of its passage to the second rank" (CH 240C). There is a πρόοδος, a procession, of transmitting God's being from what is higher to what is lower.³³⁹ In the angelic contemplation, whether it is direct, as it is with seraphim, or mediated, it is God who is loved and known, which passes through them all but to differing degrees; "wherefore by our sacred tradition, the first intellects are named perfecting, and illuminating, and purifying powers of those which come after, who are conducted through them to the excessively-existing origin of all, and participate, as far as is possible for them, in the purifications, illuminations, and perfections. For this is divinely fixed absolutely by the divine source of order that through the first the second partake of the supremely divine illuminations" (CH240C-D). Every angel, therefore, does not have equal access to revelation and participation in God, but "according to its

³³⁹ *Divine Light*, p.53.

rank [κατ' ἄξιαν]” (DN 893D). The first rank causes the illumination in the second, which are affected by the first. “Because all ‘effects’ are caused by God, therefore, in this descending chain of participation, all beings through ‘dissimilar similarities’ are ultimately partaking in the same single Cause. It is a structured collaboration, or synergy, between God and created beings.”³⁴⁰

There is a movement of illumination and participation. The second rank of angels receive illumination from the first rank, which illuminates and perfects the second and which are themselves purified, illuminated, and perfected by the first rank, which receives its own illumination by God itself. “Just as the first ranks possess eminently the holy-befitting properties of those after, so the latter possesses those of the earlier, not in the same way, but in a lesser manner” (CH 293B). Every being participates in the same source and cause, God.

The primordial-God capacity, coming to all things, spreads and extends irresistibly *through* all things and again is unmanifest to all, not only as exceeding all things in a manner in excess to existence, but also as hiddenly spreading its providential activities to all. But it is also manifested analogously to all intellectual entities, reaching out its own gift of light to the senior entities, through them, as first, imparting it in good order to the subordinate, according to the God-seeing measure of each rank (CH 301A).

The activity of every level of the hierarchy is the presence of God as manifested in that rank. The *Celestial Hierarchy*, then, introduces us to the principle of a hierarchically structured order that informs Pseudo-Dionysius’ understanding of universe. “Angelology becomes ontology.”³⁴¹ By passing “through one angel to another” God is manifest throughout the hierarchy as a dynamic whole in which we participate. “Intermediate beings mediate between God and beings more remote from God as *theophany*: as theophany they call other beings...back to their source from which all beings immediately derive, but they do not mediate Being, beings do not derive from other beings, but directly from the source and cause of all.”³⁴² God is present at every level of the

³⁴⁰ *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole*, p.172.

³⁴¹ *Theophany*, p.70.

³⁴² “Apophatic Theology: Denys the Areopagite,” p.76.

hierarchy in which we partake while allowing for the recognition of the divine as divine. And just as the celestial hierarchy is an “image of the thearchic ripeness [εἰκόνα τῆς θεαρχικῆς ὠραιότητος]” (*CH* 165B), so the ecclesiastical hierarchy mirrors, at a lower level, the splendor of the divine.

The two hierarchical orders allow for the presence of the divine to be revealed in terms of more and less presence. Although we do not directly participate in the Celestial Hierarchy, it functions as a paradigm for the Ecclesiastical, giving it its own structure. Christ sits atop both hierarchies and acts as an insolvable enigma around which both hierarchies revolve. These ranks and orderings intensify the presence of the divine to such an extent that they end in the overwhelming appearance of the divine. As we ascend the hierarchical orderings, the presence of the divine becomes so manifest as to blind us, exposing us to vertigo. The emphasis on hierarchies reinforces the movement of the divine felt by the human being. As hierarchical orderings both function as a conduit for the presence of the divine. The higher we move, the more profoundly the divine is felt. As an active transmitter for the divine, the hierarchies measure the extent to which each entity both receives and passes on the living expression of the divine. The higher an entity is placed on the hierarchies, the greater it is an expression of the divine nature. However, at their pinnacles, the divine is so apparent that it reveals itself as a puzzle of which there is no answer. The more we participate in the hierarchies, the more we are thrown into the mystery that Christ represents. We must hold ourselves within the hierarchies, as hierarchical, to be exposed to this mysterious abyssal depth. It is not just any hierarchy that will accomplish this paradoxical function of the hierarchy, but one that is founded upon the Celestial one.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

In the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* there is an extension of God's outreaching into the human realm, "our hierarchy is our world, our *true* world. It is the created analogue, on the level of human existence (which involves a body and soul, as opposed to the angels' lack of bodies)."³⁴³ "Our hierarchy [ἡ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἱεραρχία]," as Pseudo-Dionysius terms it, is our world, which does not stand over and against us, but rather is a world in which we participate. It is a space that opens up when we engage in the liturgy, which orients us toward the divine. The purpose of the whole arrangement is to draw humans into a union with God. Our hierarchy is the space where liturgy is performed, a space where rites are performed, "within liturgy there is then an image of the relationship of God to beings and thus liturgy—its performance and our participation in it—impresses on those beings that belong to our hierarchy a realization of the transcendence of the source from which they derive and to which they long to return."³⁴⁴ We do not achieve this movement toward God on our own, it is God's movement toward us. Pseudo-Dionysius' understanding of hierarchy is an expression of his sense of God's active search for the human,

let us quietly receive the beneficent rays of the truly good, the excessively-good Christ and let us be led by their light towards his divinely good deeds. After all is it not characteristic of his ineffable, incomprehensible goodness that he makes the existence of entities, that he draws everything into existence, that he desires everything to be always akin to him and to have fellowship with him according to their merit? Does he not come lovingly to those who have turned away from him? Does he not contend with them and plead for them not to spurn his love? Does he not support his accusers and plead on their behalf? He even promises to be concerned for them and when they are far from him they have only to turn back and there he is, hastening to meet them. He receives them with completely open arms and greets them with the embrace of peace (*Ep. VIII* 1085C-1088A).

Hierarchy is the outreach of God's love. To depend on God's love is to depend on others, within our community. It is the members of the hierarchy who purify, illuminate, and perfect, and who also stand in need of the same. The hierarchy is a community that is being saved and

³⁴³ "The Mysticism of Dionysius the Areopagita: Platonist or Christian?," p.104.

³⁴⁴ "Apophatic Theology: Denys the Areopagite," p.80.

mediates salvation. The hierarchy is not impersonal but we are arranged as part of a community, whose members are seeking to draw nearer to God and who draw others in the process (*CH* 165B-C). The Church itself becomes a space in which the different ranks of clergy enact the divine mysteries. The hierarch is able to approach the Holy of Holies (*Ep. VIII* 1088D), while the monks stand at the doors. The position represents the rank that they hold. This gives a picture of a community. The ordered arrangement of the Church reflects Pseudo-Dionysius' hierarchical structure of a graded participation of divine mysteries, with a secret source at its core, veiled from the outside but manifest to those outside through the hierarch, who "generously comes out to those outside the divine veils" (*Ep. VIII* 1089A). The Church is a space, a world, in which the divine is made manifest.

Our hierarchy reflects the same principles of the celestial. It takes on the form of triads, and the triads express a threefold movement of purification, illumination, and perfection. Although the two hierarchies are supposed to mirror each other, there are significant differences and the ecclesiastical hierarchy does not exactly map onto the celestial, "the parallelism between the celestial and the ecclesiastical hierarchies is nominal rather than strict."³⁴⁵ This difference shows itself most clearly in chapter V of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, which discusses the rank and ordering of the clergy. Again, every hierarchy is divided into three; however, the ecclesiastical hierarchy consists of only two triads of types of people, while the other triad is that of the sacraments: the rite of illumination, the gathering together [σύναξις], or Eucharist, and the rite of oil. The other two triads are: those who understand the sacraments and initiate others into them, the clergy—hierarchs, priests, deacons—and those who are initiated by them into the sacraments, the laity—monks, those who are baptized, and the catechumen. The significance of the hierarchical ordering corresponds to the triad of purification, illumination, and perfection.

³⁴⁵ *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole*, p.175.

The lowest order, the catechumen, penitents, and the possessed need purification and are being purified.³⁴⁶ The sacred people are being illuminated and are called the contemplative order. The monks are being perfected, while the deacons are responsible for purifying, and the hierarch's task is to perfect (*EH 504A-B*). Likewise, baptism is called illumination although it purifies as well and the Eucharist and the sacrament of oil are said to be perfecting (*EH 504C*). In the angelic triads there is nothing that corresponds to the sacraments. Furthermore, the three triads of the angel orders are classed by strongly delineated metaphysical ranking. Such a ranking corresponds to their proper position within the hierarchy which are fixed and permanent, "among angels, there is only inner individual development in the fullness of being that does not affect their ontological status,"³⁴⁷ whereas in the ecclesiastical hierarchy there is not a static ranking, "hierarchy is no longer about a single charismatic leader, but is a generalized relation in which we are embedded...."³⁴⁸ This is due to the fact that the individuals are of the same metaphysical status and our ranking is, therefore, not metaphysical but rather spiritual. Consequently, members can move upward from one rank to another. There is a movement upward and downward within this hierarchy. It is the spiritual efficacy of the individual that defines the rank of the individual. "Nevertheless, every change of hierarchical position in the human hierarchy is a spiritually transcending metamorphosis that necessarily should presuppose the transformation of the metaphysical quality."³⁴⁹ An individual unable to perform the actions assigned to their task in their rank, are not worthy of the rank and will be demoted; an unworthy priest is no priest at all. Moreover, Demophilus' offence was not simply one against the hierarchical order but against the

³⁴⁶ *Symbol and Icon*, p.28.

³⁴⁷ *Divine Light*, p.176.

³⁴⁸ "Angelic Organization," p.1286.

³⁴⁹ *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole*, p.177.

purpose of a hierarchy, that is to express God's love of humanity and to draw others to God, for Demophilus drove out a priest who was reconciling a sinner.

Although a priest derives his authority from the consecration, Pseudo-Dionysius speaks as if his authority most rightly comes from his ethical and intellectual qualities. The efficacy of a priest's ministrations depend upon his own purity. The members of the hierarchy are persons and their relationships within the hierarchy are personal relationships and for this reason the correlation between the worth of the priest and the dignity of his office is imperative. Just as the angels are holy beings who have an excessive purity who receive and pass on the rays of the divine, this should be the case in our hierarchy as well.

Naturally, then, the source and the foundation of all good order, invisible and visible, causes the God-activity rays [τὰς θεουργικὰς ἀκτῖνας] to approach the more godlike first, and through them, *as being more transparent intellects, and more properly adapted for reception and transmission of light, transmits light and manifestations to the subordinate*, according to what is suitable for them. It is, then, the function of these, the first contemplators of God to exhibit ungrudgingly to those second, in proportion to their capacity, the divine visions reverently gazed upon by themselves, and to reveal the things relating to the hierarchy, since they have been abundantly instructed with a perfecting knowledge in all matters relating to their own hierarchy and have received the effectual power of instruction, and to impart sacred gifts according to merit, since they, with knowledge, wholly participate in sacred perfection (EH 504D-505A).

The flow of light through the hierarchies is not a matter of impersonal power, but of a personal assimilation to God, so that the created order is perfected. The more the hierarchy reflects God, the more it becomes a manifestation of God. So the priestly order should be a group of people who share in the understanding of God; fundamentally his effectiveness as a priest is not separable from this sharing of God's-work. Pseudo-Dionysius says of the embrace in the ordination of priest:

Now the embrace, for the completion of the sacred consecration, has a religious significance. For all the members of the sacred ranks presents, as well as the hierarch himself who has consecrated them, embrace the ordained. For when the sacred habits and powers, and by divine call [θεῖα κλήσει] and dedication, a religious mind has attained a sacred completion, he is dearly loved by the most holy order of the same rank, being conducted to a most godlike beauty [τὸ θεοειδόστατον κάλλος], loving the intellects

similar to himself, and religiously loved by them in return. Hence it is that the mutual sacred embrace is religiously performed, proclaiming the religious communion of intellects of like character and their loveable benignity toward each other, as keeping throughout, by sacred training, their most godlike beauty (*EH* 513B).

It is a call which itself is an attraction to divine beauty. Belonging to the priestly order is a response to the call of God. Fulfilling that call is achieved by being fashioned after divine beauty to be made godlike. The priest is the one who understands God and his love and his understanding is exhibited in their lived world. Fundamentally the efficacy as a priest is not separable from that.

Throughout the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* we see that the Areopagite is fond of underlining how the whole orientation of the hierarchy *is aimed toward unity*. This unity is further detailed through the three sacraments described in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, that is to say, the rite of illumination, gathering together, or the Eucharist, and the rite of oil. The community of the liturgy opens a space in which the divine is made manifest. Participation in the liturgy is the enactment of God-work, *θεουργία*, *here* in our world. “From scripture it has been shown that the sacred divine birth is purification and an illuminating enlightenment. The sacraments of gathering together and of oil provide a perfecting knowledge of the God-works [*θεουργιῶν*] and that it is through this that there is effected both the unifying uplifting toward the primordial-God and the most blessed communion with it [*ἡ πρὸς τὴν θεαρχίαν ἐνοποιὸς ἀναγωγὴ καὶ μακαριωτάτη κοινωνία*]” (*EH* 504B-C). We are uplifted to the divine enabling us to become members of the divine community, where hierarchs “make known the works of God [*θεουργίας*] by way of sacred symbols and prepares the postulantes to contemplate and participate in the holy sacraments” (*EH* 505D). It is to these rites that we will now briefly turn.

The first rite is of illumination and primarily refers to rebirth as a divine birth [θεογενεσία], which makes deification possible (EH 392B). Pseudo-Dionysius refers to the teachings of his own mentor, Hierotheus, that “in the intellectual realm it is the love of God which first of all moves us toward the divine” (EH 392B). Being given a divine birth allows us to love God through being made like God, as far as is possible. It is the love of God that gives us a divine beginning, a divine birth; it is a procession toward the divine and the enactment of our divine existence. Describing the account of this rite, Pseudo-Dionysius writes, “yet it is not possible to hold, simultaneously, qualities thoroughly opposed, nor that the one who has had communion with the one [πρὸς ἓν] should have a divided life, if he clings to the firm participation in the one [εἰ τῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀντέχεται βεβαίως μεθέξεως]” (EH 401A). This symbolizes the opposition between the life the postulant is renouncing and the one he seeks, the lived life of dividedness and the life of unity in pursuit of τὸ ἓν.

The immersion into water, as we have seen previously, is our sharing in the death of Christ. Death is “the separation of two parts which had been linked together. It brings the soul into what for us is invisible where it, in the loss of the body, becomes formless” (EH 404B). Formlessness is the special attunement and receptivity to the formless divine that illumination brings to the individual. Through formlessness we are shaped by the divine and given a new form, we take on the illumination of the divine. “It is evident, I believe, those who understand the hierarchies that in a continued tension toward the one [διηνεκείν ἐν συντονία πρὸς ἓν] by the complete death and dissolution of what is opposite intelligent entities are given the immutable capacity to mold themselves on the divine-form [θεοειδοῦς]” (CH 401B-C). The life lived toward τὸ ἓν is a constant tension in which we dwell and by which we are shaped upon the divine. Furthermore, then the postulant puts on brightly colored clothing, “his courage and his

likeness to God, his firm thrust towards the one [πρὸς τὸ ἓν], makes him indifferent to all contrary things. Order descends upon the disorder within him. Form takes over formlessness, being made brilliant throughout his light-formed life [τῆ φωτοειδεῖ καθόλου ζωῆ λαμπρυνόμενον]” (EH 404C). A certain ethical disposition is required to be molded and shaped by the divine. The primary function of the community in which one finds oneself is essential as a model to demonstrate the life to be lead.

This movement toward τὸ ἓν underlies Pseudo-Dionysius’ understanding of the “divine Eucharist,” (EH 424D), which he terms σύναξις, a gathering together of the many into one, and “the reception of the divine Eucharist is a symbol of participation in Jesus” (CH 124A), by which the community is made one. He claims that Hierotheus called it “the rite of rites [τελετῶν τελετή]” (EH 424C), playing off of the etymology which recalls τέλος, the end or purpose and τελειῶσις, perfection. No other rite can take place without the Eucharist, “each of the hierarchic sacraments is incomplete to the extent that it does not perfect our communion and gathering to the one [τὴν πρὸς ἓν ἡμῶν κοινωσίαν καὶ σύναξιν οὐ τελεσιουργήσει] and by being incomplete it cannot work out our full perfection [καὶ τὸ εἶναι τελετή διὰ τὸ ἀτέλεστον ἀφηρμένη]” (EH 424D). We are perfected by this rite, “every sacredly initiating activity draws our fragmented lives together into a one-like deification. It forges a divine unity out of the divisions within us, granting communion and union with the one [τὴν πρὸς τὸ ἓν κοινωσίαν καὶ ἔνωσιν δωρουμένης]” (EH 424C-D). We are made one-like through participating in the liturgy of the Eucharist, drawing us together into a single community. “For it is not possible to be gathered together toward the one [οὐ γὰρ ἔνεστι πρὸς τὸ ἓν συνάγεσθαι] and partaking of peaceful union with the one while divided among ourselves” (EH 437A); the liturgy provides the

participation in τὸ ἕν. Pseudo-Dionysius understands this movement in terms of God's love out toward us and drawing us back to it in our answering this movement.

Pseudo-Dionysius' primary concern is the *movement* of the liturgical action. The enactment of the sacrament is brought to the fore. "When, then, the comprehensive song of the holy hymns have harmonized the habits of our souls to the things which are to be ministered and by the unison of the divine odes as one and concordant chorus of holy men has established an accordance with the divine things and with themselves and one another...he who devoutly contemplates these will see the uniform and one conspiration as moved by the one [ὡς ὑφ' ἐνός], the primordial-God spirit" (EH 432A-B). This movement of the liturgical action is accounted for in the hierarch's procession at the beginning of the liturgy. He comes from out of the sanctuary, going to the farthest part of the nave and returns,

I think we must now go inside the sacred things and reveal the meaning of the first of the images. We must look attentively upon the beauty which gives it divine form and we must turn toward the double movement of the hierarch, when he first goes from the divine altar to the far edges of the sacred place, spreading the fragrance and returns to the altar. For the blessed primordial-God exceeding all, while proceeding [πρόεισιν] outward because of the goodness to commune with those who participate in it, never truly departs from its essential stability and immobility...similarly, the divine sacrament of gathering together remains what it is, unique, simple, and indivisible and yet out of love for humanity it is made multiple...then it draws all the varied symbols together into a unity and conforms unity on all those sacredly uplifted to it. And it is the same with the divine hierarchic understanding which is especially his own...then freely he returns to the starting point without any loss. In his intellect he goes toward the one [τῆν εἰς τὸ ἕν ἑαυτοῦ νοεράν] and with a clear eye he looks upon the unity of things that are underlying the sacred rites. He makes the divine return [ἐπιστροφήν] to the primary things, the goal of his procession [προόδου] toward secondary things, which had been undertaken out of a love for humanity (EH 428D-429B).

The hierarch's movement makes the πρόοδος-ἐπιστροφή movement manifest in *this lived world*. Just as God moves outward in a procession, all things coming into existence and drawing them into communion with itself again the hierarch moves from his contemplation of τὸ ἕν, out

into congregation and imparts to them what he contemplated, returning back to his contemplation without any loss. Similarly the hierarch distributes the consecrated bread and wine.

The bread which had been covered and undivided is not uncovered and divided into many parts. Similarly, he shares the one cup with all, symbolically multiplying and distributing the one in symbolic fashion. With these things he completes the most sacred act. For because of his goodness and his love for humanity the simple, hidden oneness of Jesus, the most divine word, has taken the route of the incarnation for us and without suffering any change has become a reality that is composite and visible. He has beneficently accomplished for us a unifying communion with himself (*EH 444A*).

The incarnation is the revelation and movement into the multiplicity of the hidden and single divinity of Jesus and this is completed and made manifest in the Eucharist. It is accomplished by being performed and our attention is kept on the sacramental action.

The sacrament of oil completes the triad of the rites. Pseudo-Dionysius, in this case, is not concerned its use but with what it represents. The oil [μύρω], is, as the lexicon tells us, a mixture of balsam and olive oil, which the Areopagite remarks on its fragrance, to which we will turn presently. First, the oil symbolizes something hidden and secret, to be treated with reverence and awe (*EH 476B-D*). The oil is kept in a container “covered by a dozen sacred folds [δυσοκαίδεκα πτέρυξιν ἱεραῖς]” (*EH 473A*). The folds, which word is derived from the word for wings, signifies the twelve wings of the seraphim (*EH 480B*), who veil the presence of God. The oil is hidden although its fragrance is perceived by all around it, bypassing the rational mind altogether, “these divine beauties are concealed. Their fragrance is something in excess to any effort of the intellect...” (*EH 473B*), furthermore, “the concentration and the persistence of their contemplation of this fragrant, secret beauty enables them to produce an exact likeness of God” (*EH 473C*). Bypassing the intellect altogether, the scent immediately strikes us while being kept hidden. Such exposure represents how the divine makes itself manifest to us, allowing for a symbol of the divine’s hidden appearance. The sacrament of oil represents the movement of the divine and our immediate exposure to it. Furthermore, just as Christ is God made human, a

composite, the oil too is a composite of olive and balsam oil, and so this is symbolic of the God-human, “so it is that the composition of the oil is symbolic, giving a form to what is formless. It shows symbolically that Jesus is the rich source of the divine fragrances” (*EH* 480A), whose incarnation is “sudden [ἐξαίφνης]” (*Ep. III* 1069B), like the immediate exposure of the divine fragrance. Christ is the exposure to that which is in excess of discursive reasoning; a mystery that cannot be solved but only surrendered to.

Now that we have discussed the two hierarchies and given a brief account of what each entails, we will now discuss what it is to be a hierarchy at all. This discussion will unfold into the original meaning of ‘hierarchy’ which has been covered over by tradition and modern day concerns. While hierarchy does consist of rank and ordering, it entails more than this. We will see that it is an assimilation to divine likeness. We come to know God and in this knowing become more like it. “Since the order of hierarchy will mean that some are being purified and others purify, some are being enlightened, while others illuminate, some are being perfected, while other complete the perfecting initiation, each will imitate God in the way that is harmonious with its own function” (*CH* 165B-C). The hierarchy is an arrangement of a community, whose members seek to draw nearer to God *and* to draw others to God.

II. The original hierarchy:

Pseudo-Dionysius develops the neologism “ἱεραρχία,” hierarchy.³⁵⁰ Usually ‘hierarchy’ whether applied to the social, political, or economic realms, has the negative connotation of those who rule at the top of it are living at the expense of the lower strata. However, this is our modern conception of a hierarchy.³⁵¹ Given that he is here coining the term, we should not simply apply our notion of what it is to be a hierarchy for Pseudo-Dionysius but instead allow it

³⁵⁰ See *Divine Light*, p.47, *Theophany*, p. 65, *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole*, p.152.

³⁵¹ See “Hierarchy, Illusion, and Social Mobility” for such a modern application of Dionysius’ hierarchy.

to appear from his own writings. Ἱεραρχία is derived from two words, ‘sacred’ and ‘source;’ it names the source of the sacred. It entails the letting of the sacred come forth from its own source within a community of those being made one. It is this movement that is Ἱεραρχία. Pseudo-Dionysius defines it several times³⁵² but at the beginning of chapter III of the *Celestial Hierarchy* we writes,

Hierarchy is, according to me, a sacred order, knowledge and activity [ἐπιστήμη καὶ ἐνέργεια], which is assimilated, as far as is possible, to the likeness of God [θεοειδής] and conducted to the illuminations given to it from God, with a view to divine imitation [ἐπὶ τὸ θεομίμητον] (164D).

Taken in its original meaning, Ἱεραρχία is more than a simple rank and ordering; it also refers to what this sacred ordering makes possible: knowledge and activity.³⁵³ The sacred ordering gives knowledge and enables the members of the hierarchy to act effectively. The entire hierarchy is aimed toward assimilation to the divine. “The mark [σκοπός] of a hierarchy is assimilation and unity, as far as is possible, toward God” (CH 165A). The knowledge of God is a deepening likeness to it. We become united with God so that the divine activity is an activity that flows throughout us, “indeed, for every member of the hierarchy perfection is this, that each is uplifted to imitate God as far as is possible, and more wondrous still is that it becomes that scripture calls ‘a becoming fellow workman for God [Θεοῦ συνεργὸν γενέσθαι]’ and to show forth the divine activity in oneself, as much as is possible” (CH 165B). The more we know God, the more God acts through us, drawing us into a likeness to it.

MANIFESTING AT A DISTANCE

Pseudo-Dionysius, again, uses the theme of light to conceive of the revelation of God,

³⁵² See CH 165B-C, EH 373C, EH 500D-504A.

³⁵³ “Apophatic Theology: Denys the Areopagite,” p.78.

...and copying, as far as possible, and by perfecting its own followers as divine images, mirrors *most transparent* and without flaw, receptive of the primordial-light and primordial-God ray [ἔσοπτρα διειδέστατα καὶ ἀκηλίδωτα δεκτικὰ τῆς ἀρχιφώτου καὶ θεαρχικῆς ἀκτίνος], and devotedly filled with the radiance, and again spreading this radiance ungrudgingly to those *after it* [εἰς τὰ ἐξῆς ἀναλάμποντα] (CH 165A).

The light that radiates from God is not a light that shines on entities, but rather shines *through* them, to that which is nearest from that which is farther away. The light is first received by angels, in their rank and order, which passes “*through* one into another angel [δι’ ἄλλου εἰς ἄλλον ἄγγελον]” down to all things, even non-living entities (CH 177D).³⁵⁴ God is found not simply at the peak of the hierarchy but throughout the entirety of the hierarchy. The hierarchies are a theophany, the manifestation of God, itself,³⁵⁵ “Dionysius’ understanding of hierarchy, whether ontological, celestial, ecclesiastical, is a development of his account of the divine processions, of the constitutive perfections of beings, and hence of the whole of reality, as the differentiated presence of God.”³⁵⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius gazes into the manifestation of θεαρχία and sees within it the whole array of ‘what is.’ This moving manifestation is a holy icon of θεαρχία itself. Everything is an active conduit through which the divine appears. A hierarchy is not so much a mediation of knowledge, but rather is knowledge itself, a vehicle for divine revelation.

We should not conceive of this hierarchy as a static presence of God but rather as a movement, where God appears at a distance *through* the manifestation of entities. Pseudo-Dionysius states,

The distribution of the sun’s ray passes with ease through the first matter, as being more transparent than all, and, through it with greater clarity, lights up its own splendor. But

³⁵⁴ Dionysius states that God is “in our intellects, souls, and bodies, in heaven and on earth, that while remaining ever with itself it is also in and around and exceeds the world, that is exceeds heaven and exceedingly-exists, that it is the sun, stars, and fire, wind, dew, cloud, archetypal stone and rock... (DN 596B-C).

³⁵⁵ See *Theophany*, p.32-34 for a discussion of “theophany.”

³⁵⁶ *Theophany*, p.65.

when it strikes more dense materials, its distributed brilliancy becomes more obscure, from the inaptitude of the materials illuminated for transmission of the gift of light and from this it is naturally contracted so as to almost entirely exclude the passage of light (CH 301A-B).

The sun is not a light that passively shines on entities as an external source, but literally passes through, illuminating them from within. Its light is more obscured as it passes through entities, but nonetheless is a passage through all. God is pure light and this reception is accomplished

from the primordial-God by most exalted causes, for all the sacred intelligences by an excessively-existing hiddenness, is in a manner more clear and exhibits and distributes itself, in a higher degree, to the highest capacities around it, but with regard to the second, or us, the lowest intellectual capacity, as each is distant from, as regards the divine likeness, so its contact is brilliant illumination to the single unknowable of its own hiddenness. And it illuminates the second, severally, through the first and if one must speak briefly, it is firstly brought from hiddenness to manifestation through the first capacities (CH 305A-B).

God is “source of light,” to which “we must lift up the immaterial and steady eyes of our intellects, the gift of light, both primal and exceedingly-primal [καὶ τὴν ἀρχικὴν καὶ ὑπεράρχιον], of the divine father, which manifests to us the most blessed hierarchies of angels in types and symbols, let us then, from it, be elevated to its simple ray [ἀπλῆν ἀκτῖνα]” (CH 121A-B). What is prior is simple and transparent, like God, which “unifies by way of its own simplified unity” (CH 121B). The light from God does not simply shine but is received and passed on, coming into appearance, from out of hiddenness. The hierarchy, therefore, is an active transmitter of the divine light, spreading out from what is simpler and therefore nearer to God to what is more complex and thus farther away, giving shape to what is shapeless and unmanifested. The more the theophanous nature of the order of the world is perfected, the more it is assimilated to God, reflecting and manifesting God.

Furthermore, when speaking of this distance, Pseudo-Dionysius writes, “do not imagine that the proximity here is physical. Rather, what I mean by nearness is the greatest possible capacity to receive God” (EP VIII 1092B). If then the rank of priests is illuminating, he who is

wholly fallen from the priestly rank and capacity, does not illuminate, or rather, he becomes “unilluminated” (*Ep. VIII* 1092B). Such a priest is unable to enact the divine manifestation and is thus unreceptive to the divine. “The hierarch who lives in conformity with God and who has a full and complete share of the hierarch’s capacity is not content to enjoy the true and divinely enlightening understanding that comes from the words and works of the hierarchic rites but he also gives them to others in accordance to their place in the hierarchy [ἀλλὰ καὶ ἑτέροις ἀναλογίαις ἱεραρχικαῖς μεταδώσοντος]” (*EH* 513C-D). The hierarchy is not based on ones place within the hierarchy but rather on ones efficacy. The more the hierarch, or any entity, is able to enact the light-bearing capacity of the divine, the more similar is it to the divine. The more similar we are to God, the more we are able to receive God, the more we make it manifest to others. “The purpose of every hierarchy is an unswerving devotion to the divine imitation of the divine likeness and that every hierarchical function is distinguished in the sacred reception [εἰς μετοχήν ἱεράν] and distribution of an undefiled purification” (*CH* 208A). To receive the divine, and to be more like it, is not a passive capacity but an activity of passing along, or making manifest the divine to others.

What an entity consists in is its taking part in God’s making them to be. The productive power that is God runs throughout the hierarchy of being, each entity exercising its own proper activity. The light that runs throughout all entities is God in all of them. All entities performing the proper activities which are their very being, participate in the manifestation of the divine, taking part in the divine ordering of the whole.

Perfection for each of those appointed in an hierarchy is to be uplifted according to its proper analogy to the imitation of God, and...to become a cooperator [συνεργόν] of God and to show the divine activity revealed in itself [δειξαι τὴν θείαν ἐνέργειαν ἐν ἑαυτοῦ ἀναφανομένην] as far as is possible. As since the order of hierarchy is that some are purified and other purify, some are illuminated and other illuminate, some are

perfected and other perfect, the imitation of God is adapted to each in a certain way (*CH* 165B).

The hierarchical organization of entities is the divine activity manifest in them, becoming a cooperator with God, allowing the hidden God to make itself manifest. The being each entity is is the presence of God throughout the whole structured order, passing along from one entity through another. Thus, the central principle of Pseudo-Dionysius' hierarchy is immediate mediation. It is through the mediation of entities that God is immediately present to all. This is shown in the participation of the sacraments. The celebrant of a sacrament acts in the person of Christ and it is this activity that is the activity of Christ himself. It is this principle, in which the activity of the entity is the activity of God in it, that is extended to all reality, which as theophany, is sacramental in nature. The whole of reality is the enactment of the sacrament of participating in God. Every entity participates in God by giving and receiving light to and from one another, in one sacramental act. The divine flow of light is not an impersonal assimilation of God, but personal "out of a concern of us because it wanted us to be made deified [θεώσεως]" (*CH* 124A).

ΘΕΩΣΙΣ, BECOMING GODLIKE

We have seen that the rites concerned in the ecclesiastical hierarchy consists of finding unity with God. Coming to know God is actively becoming like God, "and deification [θέωσις] is being, as much as possible, like and in union with God" (*EH* 376A). Hierarchy is concerned with being as much like God as is possible, through which we are exposed to the divine light which "returns [ἐπιστρέφει] us to the oneness and deifying [θεοποιόν] simplicity of the father, who gathers us back in" (*CH* 120B). God is the cause of all things and as such "rational beings have the ontological capacity and metaphysical proclivity to strive for closer proximity to their Cause. They participate in higher effects that constitute participation in deifying activities, and,

by having a single Cause for their existence, this deifying ascendance leads to an actual union with God as their only source of divinity.”³⁵⁷ The hierarchy is a description for the intelligible reality as manifested through God. “We must say this, the blessed primordial-God, which by nature is the deity, the source of deification [ἡ θεαρχία μακαριότης ἢ φυσικὴ θεότης ἢ ἀρχὴ τῆς θεώσεως]” (*EH 376B*). The goal of such a hierarchy is the achievement of the divine harmony and the process of *θέωσις*.

We have seen that angels are closer to God than are humans, but we are nonetheless expressions of the divine light.

Each intelligent being, celestial or human, has its own set of primary, middle, and lower orders and capacities, and in accordance with its capacities, these indicate the aforementioned uplifting, directly relative to the hierarchic enlightenment appropriate to every being. It is in accordance with this arrangement that each intelligent entity, as far as it properly can and to the extent that it might, participates in that purification in excess to purity, that superabundant light, that perfection preceding all perfection. Nothing is perfect of itself. Nothing is completely free of the need for perfection. Nothing except that being truly perfect in itself and truly preceding all perfection (*CH 273C*).

Both hierarchies are expressions of the primal divine light and both are in need of further perfection, which is to say that they are not a full manifestation of the divine hiddenness. This demonstrates that there is, at least metaphorically, a continuity between the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies.

For the sake of our deification, relative to our ability [ἡμῶν ἀναλόγου θεώσεως], and because of his philanthropic sacred order he manifested celestial hierarchies for us; similarly constituting our hierarchy, as co-ministers with them, through imitation of their godlike priesthood, according to our capacity, so that through perceptible images revealed in sacred scriptures, of excessively-heavenly intellects, we might be uplifted from what is perceived by the sense to what is perceived intelligibly, from sacredly designed symbols to the simple, highest perfection of celestial hierarchies (*CH 124A*).

The celestial hierarchy is present to uplift us from out of our human nature and instill a divine one. We are able to climb the hierarchy by the divine’s reaching out toward us in the form of the

³⁵⁷ *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole*, p.169.

incarnation. Similar to the celestial hierarchy, “our hierarchy consists of an inspired [ἐνθέου], divine [θείας], and divinely-worked knowledge [θεουργικῆς ἐπιστήμης], activity and perfection” (EH 369A). Θέωσις lifts us to the divine, which is “a mystery that cannot be taught, it puts the soul firmly in the presence of God” (Ep. IX 1105D). Certainly, humans will never become angels but through θέωσις, through the continuum of being,³⁵⁸ “Pseudo-Dionysius laid the systematic foundation for speculative mysticism and apophatic methodology and, in his rather complex Greek language, enriched Christian vocabulary with such terms as ‘hierarchy’ and ‘mystical theology.’”³⁵⁹ Indeed, “enabling entities to be as God-like as possible and to be at one with it...a hierarch bears in himself a stamp of God, causes its members to be clear and undefiled mirrors reflecting the luster of the primordial-light and primordial-God rays [ἀρχιφώτου καὶ θεαρχικῆς ἀκτῖνος]” (CH 165A) and “deification [θέωσις] is being toward God [πρὸς θεόν] as possible and in union with it” (EH 376A). The hierarch is stamped or molded by the divine itself and is able to cause others to become like this, bringing us closer to God. The hierarchy reveals that which is in excess of itself, “each angelic person and each human person is called to a knowledge and love of God as He is *beyond creatures*.”³⁶⁰ Through adapting our nature to that of the angels, to that which is in excess of our hierarchy, receiving light passed through them, we become molded by this illumination making us divine and inspired.

As was just revealed “the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies are included as elements within the *one total hierarchy of creatures*, which extends from the highest seraph to the lowliest

³⁵⁸ *Theophany*, pp.83-99.

³⁵⁹ *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole*, p.6.

³⁶⁰ *Divine Light*, p.52.

element, all abiding within the One who is in and above them all.”³⁶¹ And so it should come to no surprise that Pseudo-Dionysius writes “this source of the hierarchy is the font of life [ταύτης ἀρχὴ τῆς ἱεραρχίας ἢ πηγὴ τῆς ζωῆς], the being of goodness, the one cause of everything, namely the trinity which in goodness, bestows being and well-being on everything” (EH 373C-D). The trinity, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is θεαρχία, the primordial-God. This suggests that θεαρχία, that which is the abyssal depth of being, is “the sole source of deification.”³⁶²

The θέωσις of intellectual entities mirrors the trinitarian manifestation of θεαρχία.

The procession [πρόοδος] of our intellectual activity can at least go this far, that all fatherhood and all sonship bestows by that ultimate source of fatherhood and sonship on us and on the celestial capacities. This is why godlike [θεοειδεῖς] intellects come to be and to be named “gods” or “sons of gods” or “father of gods.” Fatherhood and sonship of this kind are brought to perfection in a spiritual way, that is, incorporeally, immaterially, and in the domain of the intellect, and this is the world of the divine spirit, which is located beyond all conceptual immateriality and all deification [θέωσις], and it is the work of the father and of the son, who ultimately is in excess of all divine fatherhood and sonship (DN 645B-C).

Pseudo-Dionysius continues,

Since many, through deification [θεώσει] from it are made gods [θεοειδεῖ θεῶν] so as far as the godlike capacity of each allows, there thus appears to be what is termed differentiation and a reduplication of the one God, yet nonetheless it is the primal God, the excessively-divine and excessively-existing one God [ὁ ἀρχίθεος καὶ ὑπέρθεος ὑπερουσίως εἷς θεός], which dwells indivisibly within the separate and individual entities, being an undifferentiated unity in itself and without any mixture or multiplication through its contact with the many (DN 649C-D).

The source of our deification is in excess to all entities, and it is through this that we are “made gods.” We are able to overcome our own limitations since the cause is beyond being. Mediated through entities, θεαρχία is manifest immediately, making us Godlike and more than simply human. Θεαρχία multiplies itself, while remaining whole, through θέωσις. We, as far as

³⁶¹ *Divine Light*, p.49.

³⁶² *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole*, p.162.

possible, become like *θεαρχία*, taken up out of our own nature. Indeed, it is Jesus, in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* “who is in excess of the intellect, utterly divine intellect, who is the source and the entity underlying all hierarchy, all sanctification, all the workings of God, who is the most-primordial-God capacity [*θεαρχικωτάτη δύναμις*]” (372A). In fact, we become *Χριστοειδῆ*, “Christ-form” (EH 553D). “According to their proximity to Jesus, the primal Light of the Father, they become ‘photographed’ (from *phos* + *grapho*: to write with light). Written in their being in an ever-deeper and more beautiful inscription is the very *Light* that is Jesus Himself.”³⁶³ We become like Christ through *θέωσις*, which entails incorporating that which is in excess of the intellect. *Θέωσις* allows us to transcend our merely human nature.

Through *θέωσις* we become divine, more than what we were before, but only when we accept the place assigned to us in the hierarchy. We must be initiated into the divine to the degree appropriate to us. If we overstep our place, as Demophilus as done, we lose sight of the correct sublimation of the emotions, “so then give the correct place to desire and anger and to reason. Accept the place assigned to you by the divine deacon, let him accept what the priest have assigned, let the priest accept what the hierarchs have assigned to him” (*Ep. VIII* 1093C), and so may make a mistaken judgment concerning *θεαρχία*. Only in holding ourselves within the confines of the hierarchy as a place of enlightenment, does the tension of the question-worthy status of *θεαρχία* come to the fore in such a way that the human aspect of us can meet it appropriately.

THE ABYSS OF THE *ιεραρχία*

³⁶³ *Divine Light*, p.156.

The question before us now is what heads the ἱεραρχία of which the Areopagite speaks. At the celestial level, the hierarchy is structured around the understanding of Christ, while at the ecclesiastical level the hierarchy is patterned as the mind of Christ at the levels in which they participate in Christ. Humans are the working of Christ in *this* world; we are his activity expressed, purifying, illuminating, and perfecting each other, “he accomplishes the ontic perfection of this hierarchy in and through the hierarchy in each of its members.”³⁶⁴ There is both a radical unity and difference between Christ and the liturgical community. Each member is a participator in the imparticipatable (*DN* 644B); indeed, “of this sacred deification occurs in him directly from God [ἐγγινομένης αὐτῷ θεόθεν ἱεραρχίας θεώσεως]” (*EH* 373A), for “the divine rank of the hierarchs, then, is the first of the God-contemplative [θεοπτικῶν] ranks” (*EH* 505A). Each individual is an excrescence of θεαρχία caught in the cycle of πρόοδος and ἐπιστροφή. The members are centered around Christ and are Christ as participators in his manifestation through the unfolding of entities.

Every hierarchy...has one and the same capacity throughout all its hierarchical striving, namely the hierarch himself and...its being and proportion and order are in him divinely perfected and deified, and are then given to those below him according to their merit, whereas the sacred deification occurs in him from God directly. Subordinates, then, are to pursue their superiors and they also promote the advance of those below them, while these also, as they proceed, are led by others. And so it happens that because of this inspired, hierarchical harmony each one is able to have as great as possible a share in him who is truly beautiful, wise, and good (*EH* 372C-373A).

It is only through the highly regimented hierarchy that we can become living icons of Christ, who is, himself, a question-worthy entity. Although the angels are set in their hierarchical ordering and rank, e.g., cherubim cannot become a seraphim, even the seraphim still seek illumination. The angelic choir seeks after how Jesus became incarnate,

others, being quite at a loss [διαπορούσα] about Jesus himself, as desiring to be instructed in the knowledge of his divine work [θεουργίας τῆς ἐπιστήμην] on our

³⁶⁴ Ibid, p.164.

behalf, and Jesus himself teaching them immediately and showing to them, first hand, his beneficent work out of love to the human (*CH* 209B).

They begin to exchange inquires among themselves showing their “desire to know how God works” (*CH* 209B). The incarnation of Christ is a mystery even to the highest order of angels (*DN* 648A). Truly the foundation of the ἱεραρχία is a profound mystery of which there is no answer. Christ is an abyssal point which while heading the hierarchy is always receding, and it is this understanding of Christ that must force us to readjust what is to be a structured hierarchy.

III. Topology of the headless hierarchy:

We have just seen that Christ stands at the head of the hierarchy, at least as expressed through the paradoxical structure of θεαρχία, for “Jesus is at once the hidden Godhead and manifest divinity, revealed gift and transcendent darkness.”³⁶⁵ And we must continue to allow the original meaning of ἱεραρχία to manifest itself, if we are to gain a true understanding of the liturgical community that Pseudo-Dionysius is attempting to found. In this section, we will see that although Christ sits at the seat of the hierarchy, this seat is essentially and profoundly empty. It is a continually receding point that escapes our grasp. This will compel us to view the hierarchy *apophatically*. Using the language of topology to discuss our place in the hierarchy will help us realize and to illustrate how we are situated within a structure that is always under treat of exceeding the hierarchy. When we take the hierarchy as an expression of Pseudo-Dionysius’ *apophatic* thought, our participation in it must be radically reconsidered.

³⁶⁵ “The Mysticism of Dionysius the Areopagita: Platonist or Christian?,” p.108.

THE DARK SEAT

We have seen above that when Pseudo-Dionysius claims that angels are “closer to God and more divine than those which follow” (*DN* 817B-C) this does not mean that they stand in a higher strata and orders of God. Rather, entities “participate in God in many ways [πολλαχῶς]” (*CH* 177D). All things participate in God in the manner appropriate to them. Each entity participates directly in God by occupying its proper place within the hierarchy. Pseudo-Dionysius applies the πρόοδος-ἐπιστροφή movement to the hierarchy of entities, “we should think of a unifying and co-mingling capacity which move the superior to provide for the subordinate, peer to be in communion with peer, and subordinate to return to the superior and the exceedingly-lying thing [ὑπερκειμένων]” (*DN* 713B). And since the very being of each entity is its proper participation in God, the entity’s procession and reversion is the entity’s hierarchical ordering to every other entity. The hierarchy is an interconnected relationship. Every entity has an active role in the perfection of itself and of others, but which is not grounded in any being but rather in the “excessively-lying” thing, to which we are exposed only in a “pure abandonment” (*MT* 1000A) of ourselves. If we are to make our way through the hierarchy, we must be willing to give up our own sense of an isolated self.

If we take Pseudo-Dionysius seriously when he writes “thus each rank of the hierarchy is led, in its own degree, to the divine cooperation [θείαν συνέρειαν], by performing through grace and God-given capacity those things which are naturally and exceedingly-natural to the primordial-God [τὰ θεαρχία φυσικῶς καὶ ὑπερφυσικῶς ἐνόντα] and accomplished by it exceedingly-existing and manifested hierarchically for the permitted imitation of the God-loving intellects [καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἐφικτὴν τῶν φιλοθέων νόων μίμησιν ἱεραρχικῶς ἐκφαινόμενα]” (*CH* 168A-B), we find ourselves coming into union with θεαρχία. We must keep in mind that

the ultimate unity with the divine ends in ἀγνοσία, unknowing, and gives rise to the unknowability of the divine itself. This unknowing, that goes beyond rather than falling short of *kataphasis*, is at the center of Pseudo-Dionysius' thought. Unknowing begins with a gazing upon [θεωρία] the "place" of the divine beyond all contemplation (*MT 1000D*). One is freed from what is seen and one "plunges into the mysterious darkness of unknowing" (*MT 1001A*). The darkness of unknowing is an exposure with that which is beyond all, and thus is a participation in the "exceedingly-natural." It is an encounter when the polarity of the self and other is transcended and when "one is neither oneself nor another" (*MT 1001A*). The difference between immanence and transcendence has no absolute measure. The 'hierarchy' of binary difference of polarity is made infinite. It is a definitive rupture of commensuration. There are phases of intensity. There are not definite concepts but an intense sequence. We must keep in mind that Pseudo-Dionysius inverts the already paradoxical mystical language, as he places darkness above light and non-seeing above seeing. And so there is reason to believe that a similar reevaluation of what it is to be a hierarchy maybe in play in Pseudo-Dionysius' thought, if for no other reason than God is not an entity but is exceedingly-existing. If it is this that we are initiated into through the hierarchy, we must radically reconsider around what we gather in our community and so also how this reflects how we are related to one another in the hierarchy.

It was also shown that God proceeds, emanates, or rather creates³⁶⁶ from out of itself. This pattern of emanation is the πρόδος and ἐπιστροφή movement to which we have been introduced. It is an emanation out of the divine into entities and the return of everything back to and beyond their primordial-source, θεαρχία. If a hierarchy refers "to the arrangement of all sacred realities" (*EH 373C*) and the arrangement revolves around θεαρχία this is to say, that

³⁶⁶ See *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole*, pp,145-147, for a discussion of creation versus emanation in Dionysius' thought.

entities are created or emanate from a source that is beyond being, as it is an “excessively-lying” thing. This brings to our attention the paradox of the self-caused divine, which is both beyond being and the cause of all things, God is “all things in all things and nothing among things” (*DN* 872A), and which overflows into all entities. This paradox draws out the *apophatic* and non-being conception of the divine in its most radical expression.

The hierarchical conception of the expression of existence becomes subject to *apophasis*. The rank and order of existence ultimately returns into a primordial unity. There is a tension between the emphasis upon a rank and ordered succession of processions and an immediate relationship each entity has with its source. We must come to know Jesus, who is the light of the father (*CH* 121A),

let us, then, from it, be uplifted to its simple ray. For it never abandons its own inner unity [ἐνικῆς ἐνδότητος] but multiplied and going forth [πληθυνομένη καὶ προϊοῦσα], as fitting its goodness, for an uplifting and unifying blending of entities within its care, remains firmly and alone centered within itself in its unmoved sameness, and raises those who lawfully aspire to it and make them one, after its own oneness [καὶ ἐνοποιεῖ κατὰ ἀπλωτικὴν αὐτῆς ἔνωσιν]. For it is not possible that the primordial-God ray should otherwise illuminate us except having been upliftedly enveloped in sacred veils [τῶν ἱερῶν παραπετασάτων ἀναγωγικῶς περικελαλυμένην] (*CH* 121B-C).

Our relation is one of procession and reversion but also as an immediate relation with θεαρχία, which presents itself only through veils. It appears as it is not. If this is the case, we are expressed through veils as well. Our relation to others is inherently obscure. Granted our relation is one thought through a rank and ordering, this relationship is one that is not entirely static; the Areopagite must be rethinking the hierarchy of being as a fundamentally open ended hierarchy, subject to *apophasis*. For “speaking of a hierarchy clearly it is both an inspired and divine man [τὸν ἐνθεόν τε καὶ θεῖον ἄνδρα], one knowing all sacred understanding, one in whom an entire hierarchy is completely perfected and known” (*EH* 373C). Only in an “inspired and divine

man,” someone who is other than merely human, can the hierarchy, which emerges through θεαρχία be understood. However, as we have seen, the hierarchy that is found within the ecclesiastically ordered system only comes to light when one holds oneself in the strict ordering found in the hierarchy. But notice the outcome, “souls, uniting and gathering their manifold reasonings into one intellectual purity, go forth in the way and order proper to them through immaterial and undivided intellection to the union exceeding intellection” (*DN 949D*). By holding ourselves within the hierarchy of being do we ascent from discursive reasoning to the non-discursive silence.

ONTOLOGICAL DARKNESS

Entities are what they are by participating in the divine. But, as we have seen, entities “pre-exist” in the divine (*DN 712C, 820A*) and that the divine “pre-contains” entities (*DN 597A, 817D*), “pre-holds” them (*DN 977B*), and is even termed “pre-being” (*DN 825B*). The essence of the entity must already be in the divine in order that it is allowed to be in the first place. This essence is posited as being that which must pre-exist its own being so as to receive its being. Pseudo-Dionysius’ language does not distinguish between essence and existence in a way that allows us to solve the dilemma by simply conceiving of essences subsequently given in existence. The entity that pre-exists its own being haunts it as an ontological darkness such that there is a critique of spatial, temporal, and causal significance within the language of emanation and creation.

We should return briefly to the topic of participation through emanation. Speaking of the rite of oil and its fragrance, Pseudo-Dionysius writes,

Now it is clear, I believe, that the distribution of the fontal fragrance [ἡ τῆς πηγῆς εὐωδίας ἀναδοσις] to things exceedingly existing to us, which are more divine, are, as it were, nearer, and manifest and distribute themselves more to the transparent and

wholesome intellectual condition of the receptive capacity exceedingly-bubbling
[ὑπερβλύζουσα] ungrudgingly and entering in many ways (EH 480B).

This bubbling forth first wells up within the source and then flows from the source. How can an entity flow into the primordial cause and make them to be? They would first already have to exist in order to act as vessels receiving the flow of being. The language of emanation carries within itself this ontological darkness. To make some entity be at all implies an existence that must pre-exist its own being in order to be the object of activity that posits its existence. “The capacities to discern smells, indicate their capacity to welcome fully those fragrances which exceeds the intellect” (CH 332A). Emanation through the sense of smell indicates that it occurs prior to the intellect, that is it happens outside of the spatial and temporal paradigm invoked by the phrase “flowing into” used to express causal or existential meaning. The space in the hierarchy that is opened up through the sacrament of oil is a space that exists prior to discursive thought. We are introduced to a hierarchy whose spatial area is ruptured.

The self-diffusive character of the oil, is a metaphor for God’s emanation, which we saw in chapter four. The good is the trinity, whose diffusion is from itself in itself back to itself in the πρόοδος-ἐπιστροφή movement. The laws of causality are violated in the claim that the diffusion of fragrance is *both* the cause of all things *and* at the same time ‘all things’ of which it is the cause. The “pre” that is employed above is not meant to be understood in a temporal sense. There is no temporal priority between one level of reality and the next, it is causal. Rather than knowing entities that exist independently of that knowing, entities exist because God knows them. It is a creative knowing; “before there are angels God has knowledge of angels and it brings them into existence. It knows all else and, if I may say it thusly, it knows them from the beginning and therefore brings them into existence” (DN 869A). Any temporal metaphor of knowing things “pre” is joined to the spatial metaphor of knowing entities within God, of which

he says “everything is around it [περὶ αὐτὴν ἢ τὰ πάντα]” (DN 596C). Within this metaphor of encircling, the temporal and spatial metaphors are fused into a causal sense. Encirclement is the movement of one entity around another, of which the second exists before it is encircled. However, the metaphor of emanation makes clear that the things encircled are the result of the encircling. The procession of God into all things is the being of them, but the being of them is nothing but their reversion in which each entity is. God is the “pre” to entities; it encircles entities into existence. The hierarchy of being is essentially an encircling of entities into existence.

But is this not a tortured way of speaking of the entities that are brought into existence? The confusion of the cause and effect relationship points to a larger conflict between two paradigms of existence that are posited within the hierarchy of being. There is, first, a non-*apophatic* hierarchical paradigm of participation. Each level participates in the superior cause, which lies above it. Yet when we push this to its ultimate conclusion, every entity insofar as it is, is nothing other than the source of diffusion. From this perspective, the levels of being and the diffusion down through the levels of existence no longer exist. The levels are collapsed into one another. The hierarchical rank and ordering of the universe are enfolded back into one another. All entities are in their superior cause and insofar as they are in the superior cause, they are that cause, pre-existing.

THE HEADLESS HIERARCHY

It has been suggested that Christ, who is identifiable and reveals θεαρχία, sits at the head of the hierarchy.³⁶⁷ But we must understand this in its correct circumstance. It must be, even

³⁶⁷ *Divine Light*, p.155.

within the hierarchies, that the being of entities is beyond being, for this is the fundamental principle of Pseudo-Dionysius' thought. In fact, in the *Celestial Hierarchy* he writes,

First of all, however, let this truth be spoken; that it was through the goodness that the excessively-existing primordial-God [ἡ ὑπερούσιος θεαρχία], having fixed every being of entities, brought them into existence. For this is the peculiar characteristic of the cause of all entities, and of goodness surpassing everything, to call everything to communion of itself [τὸ πρὸς κοινωνίαν ἑαυτῆς τὰ οἰκείας καλεῖν], as each order of entities was determined from its own analogy. For all things being a share in providence, which bubbles out from the excessively-existing deity, cause of all things[ἐκ τῆς ὑπερουσίου καὶ παναιτίου θεότητος ἐκβλυζομένης]. For they would not be, unless they had participated in the existence and source of things...for the 'to be' of all entities is the deity in excess of the 'to be' [τὸ γὰρ εἶναι πάντων ἐστὶν ἢ ὑπὲρ τὸ εἶναι θεότης] (177C-D).

This brings together the paradox of participation and identification. Pseudo-Dionysius states that θεαρχία “calls entities into communion” with itself, but he also says that this communion or participation is their ‘to be’. As entities are “pre-contained” or ‘pre-held’ by God we could ask, what were the entities before they were called into existence in order that they might be called at all? This destabilizes the temporal sense of the “pre.” This is the stage of identification and immanence. Entities participate in the ‘to be’ of θεαρχία, they are that ‘to be;’ it is their ‘to be.’ And the being of all is the excessively-existing providence. Furthermore, “providence advances into all things and it comes into being in everything, it is something in something but in an abundance, nothing in nothing through nothing [οὐδὲν ἐν οὐδενὶ κατ’ οὐδὲν ἐστίν]” (*Ep. IX* 1109C). Pseudo-Dionysius, here, has arrived at an explicit concept of the nothingness of θεαρχία, that is beyond his usual language of beyond being. I take “οὐδὲν” to be referring to “providence,” which proceeds into all entities, is made in all entities, but, *per excellentiam*, it is in excess of all entities and so is nothing. *Apophatic* language affirms a hierarchy only to collapse it from within. What is the highest, θεαρχία, becomes a station of non-station. Insofar

as we become equal and in unity with θεαρχία, through θέωσις, we become as empty as the nothingness toward which we are aimed.

Existence is now understood as the manifestation or comprehensibility of that nothingness. We cannot know God, “for it is not this, but not that, nor is it in some way but not in some other but it is all things [καὶ γὰρ οὐ τόδε μὲν ἔστι τόδε δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲ πῆ μὲν ἔστι πῆ δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλλὰ πάντα ἐστίν]” (DN 824A-B). Pseudo-Dionysius’ view of reality is one of nested layers of existence whose ground is not a supreme being but a point that recedes infinitely just beyond every approach, a point he calls “nothing.” The outcome of viewing the hierarchy in terms of *apophasis*, reveals that it is essentially anarchic, without a ἀρχή. We must remove the ἀρχή, if we are to be exposed to the divine as it truly is. Without a final being to which one can point, thought is placed into a perpetual movement. *Apophasis* is continual movement, which when mapped onto a topology of existence reveals that existence itself is movement. To attempt to place a guarantee within the anarchic moment is to transform *apophatic* discourse into a non-*apophatic* one. If what we are exposed to is nothing there is no experience as such. All experience must have an intentionality to it, however Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of nothing. The motivation is meant to subvert the hierarchy. Despite his comments of the masses not understanding the sacraments, the mystery is not one that is only understood by a few, but is rather a basic response to the nothingness to which we are exposed and situated within. It is the waylessness experienced by both angels and humans. The hierarchy upon which we place existence is one where it continually over comes itself.

Again returning to the angels who inquire among themselves the question-worthy status of Christ, Pseudo-Dionysius writes, “they do not leap forth past the procession of enlightenment provided by the divine [μὴ προπηδῶσαι δὲ τῆς κατὰ θείαν πρόοδος ἐνδιδομένης

ἐλλάμψεως]” (CH 209C). The angels dwell in the mystery of Christ, which can only manifest itself as mysterious when they are exposed to the weight of what is revealed to them, given their proper place in the hierarchy. They are revealed to be what they are because of their questioning among themselves. To receive and transmit the knowledge of the ineffable God is what it is to be an angel, “the angel is an image [εἰκῶν] of God, a manifestation of the unmanifested light [φανέρωσις τοῦ ἀφανοῦς φωτός], a pure mirror, most transparent, unblemished, undefiled, spotless, receiving whole, if it is right to say, the bloom of the good-stamped deformity [τὴν ὠραιότητα τῆς ἀγαθοτύπου θεοειδείας], and unmixedly shining back in itself, as far as possible, the goodness of the silence in the sanctuary” (DN 724B). The angels reflect that which is unmanifested, making it manifest but as essentially unknowable.

Equally in the ecclesiastical hierarchy the divine is revealed as it is only when we hold ourselves within the hierarchical level.

But insofar as the divine is the source of the sacred order, in accordance with which the holy intellects acquire self-knowledge [καθ’ ἑαυτῶν ἐπιγνώμονες] anyone who returns to the proper view of nature will see his proper self in what he was originally, and will acquire this, as the first holy gift, from his recovery to the light. Now he who has looked upon his own proper condition with unbiased eyes, will depart from the recesses of ignorance, but being imperfect he will not, of his own accord, at once desire the most perfect union and participation of God, but little by little will be carried orderly and reverently through things present to things more forward, and through these, to things foremost, and when perfected, to the primordial-God summit. An image of this harmonious and sacred order is the reverence of the postulant, his self-awareness [ἑαυτὸν ἐπιγνωμοσύνη], the path he takes, with the help of his sponsor, towards the hierarch (EH 400B-C).

Only when comparing oneself to others, who hold a higher place in the hierarchy, does one gain a true sense of self. One realizes how far one is from the divine and that one must submit to the hierarchical structure of the community, if one is to make progress towards the divine. It must be stated again, that one’s proper place in the hierarchy is a sign of one’s ability to enact God. To

know God is a reflection of one's very being, "to be is to know God."³⁶⁸ And so, being aware of one's proper place in the hierarchical order brings about one's efficacy of knowing and enacting God, which is to know nothing. It is only by holding ourselves within the hierarchy that we are able to find an appropriate expression of the divine, which entails a necessary overcoming of the hierarchy. In fact,

the unions, appropriate to angels, of the holy activities, whether they should be called applications or receptions [ἐπιβολὰς εἴτε παραδοχὰς] of the goodness in excess unknowing and light, are ineffable and unknown...the deiform intellects, unified by these in a manner imitating the angels as far as possible, since in the cessation of every intellectual activity such a union of the deified [ἐκθεομένων] intellects to the excessively-divine light comes about, hymn it most properly through the taking away [ἀφαίρεσέως] of all entities (DN 593B-C).

In actively passing on the light of God, the angels conform the human intellect to God [θεοειδές] (CH 196C) to such an extent that it transgresses its own inherent limitations by the "taking away of all entities." Held in the tension of the hierarchy reveals the essentially unknowable and *apophatic* nature of God. This is increased as one is further initiated into the mystery of God, which cannot occur if one oversteps one's place in the hierarchy, since the tension felt within the hierarchy would be diminished, as it is in Demophilus' case. We must recognize how far we are from realizing the mystery of the primordial-God, while at the same time truly being initiated into the mystery, if God is to suddenly reveal itself as θεαρχία. When we stand under the weight of the hierarchical ordering can we overcome and surpass the ordering by finding unity with God about which Pseudo-Dionysius states "according to this, then, divine things are to be thought, not according to us, but our whole selves standing outside of our whole selves [ὅλους ἑαυτοὺς ὅλων ἑαυτῶν ἐξισταμένους] and our whole selves becoming of God, for it is better to be of God and not of ourselves" (DN 865D-868A), which is the purpose of the rites, "all this is

³⁶⁸ *Theophany*, p.97.

sacredly suggested by the symbolic tradition which makes naked the postulant of his former life, depriving him of the very last attractions of this world” (*EH* 401A).

It will be useful if we look, one last time, to a definition of hierarchy. “The purpose of hierarchy, then, is likeness and union with God, as far as possible, having it as its leader of all holy knowledge and activity [αὐτὸν ἔχουσα πάνσης ἱερᾶς ἐπιστήμης τε καὶ ἐνεργείας καθηγμένα], by looking to its most divine beauty, as far as possible making members of its dancing company [τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ θιασώτας] divine images, clear and spotless mirrors, receptive of the primal-light and primordial-God ray...” (*CH* 165A), which Perl terms a “bacchalian dance.”³⁶⁹ Indeed, when discussing the movement of the angels, Pseudo-Dionysius writes, “the divine intelligences are said to be moved cyclically, united to the illuminations, without beginning and without end, of the beautiful and good, but in a straight line, whenever they proceed for the providence of their inferiors...but spirally because even in providing for the inferior they remain not gone out in identity around the beautiful and good cause of identity, ceaselessly dancing around [περιχορεύοντες]” (*DN* 704D-705A). The hierarchy is a bacchic revel in which the members dance, ecstatically and share in the divine. But only by entering the dance, surrendering to it and our place in it can we participate in the ecstatic movement that is God. There is no discursive ground around which we are organized but instead we are caught up in the whirling circle of creation itself. “Here the divine erotic longing shows its own endlessness and anarchicness [ἄναρχον], as an eternal circle, whirling around through the good, from the good, in the good, and to the good in unerring coiling-up, always proceeding and remaining and returning in the same and by the same” (*DN* 712D-713A).

³⁶⁹ *Theophany*, p.79.

Pseudo-Dionysius presents us with a highly complex form of community. One in which we must enter into so that the mysteries of θεαρχία become manifest. But within this hierarchy we are led to realize that the hierarchy can no longer hold sway. When *apophasis* is applied to the hierarchy, it reveals its own limitations, opening up to an unceasing movement of being and thought. We are taken wholly outside of the rank and ordering of the hierarchy itself and we surrender to the anarchic source from out of which the hierarchy originates. Its very beginning is the overcoming of itself, in which the world itself opens out into a sacramental moment. Each moment is imbued and saturated with the divine manifestation to us, if only we enter the divine hierarchy.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has been broken into two parts, the first concerned with Plato and the second with Pseudo-Dionysius. Each part having a tripartite structure: discourse; communication; and community. The previous chapters have sought to illuminate the way in which philosophy in the Platonic tradition represented by these two thinkers presupposes its own ground of rationality, this “ground” then giving way and receding into an abyssal depth. That is to say, each of the chapters reveals the way philosophy opens itself up to its own limitations. Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius, each in his own way, have been shown to expose these limitations and draw us beyond them into the non-discursive background out of which the rationality and philosophy.

According to the presentation in the *Phaedrus*, philosophical $\mu\alpha\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha$ would seem to be a privileged form of discourse, since it is given to us from the gods and allows us to experience them. For Plato, discourse concerning the non-discursive background takes the form of $\mu\tilde{\upsilon}\theta\omicron\varsigma$, a myth or a tale. We also explored the relationship that $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ has to $\mu\tilde{\upsilon}\theta\omicron\varsigma$, which allows that which cannot be expressed to be articulated in a manner that recognizes its own limitation while still gesturing beyond it. Pseudo-Dionysius uses two forms of discourse: the *kataphatic*; and the *apophatic*. Instead of being two separate forms of discourse, we saw that they are, in fact, “intertwined.” *Kataphasis* presents us with positive statements. But contradictory statements are made of God, e.g., “all things in all things and nothing in any” (*DN 872A*). Presented with this *aporia*, we deny all statements of God, using *apophasis*. Everything that we have previously affirmed we now take away, until nothing is left to affirm or deny and the intellect is left in the silence of the *via negativa*.

Having in each case seen that the discourse concerning that toward which we are aimed escapes language, we then turned to the topic of how, for Plato and then for Pseudo-Dionysius, to communicate that which eludes discursivity. In the *Republic*, Plato makes the claim that “the good,” our ultimate concern is “ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας,” “beyond being.” Taking this claim seriously while using the vocabulary of “toiling, and distress” in the *Symposium*, “the good” is excessively present, forcing itself upon us even as it resists rational thought. Any attempt to bring it within the realm of the discursive is met with frustration. Taking up the claim that the good lies beyond being, Pseudo-Dionysius communicates God by means of silence. Various ways of such communication were used in Pseudo-Dionysius but especially that of prayer. We saw that prayer does not affect the object of prayer but rather transforms the one who prays. Prayer dissolves the subject in its division from the object, i.e., God. The individual becomes a site of the excessiveness of God’s presence.

After having examined these privileged forms of communication, for Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius, they the excess that they express, we, then, turned to the topic of community. We saw that Plato’s form of community, as expressed in the *Lysis*, is not based upon a political model but is rather a type of community that, as the *Phaedrus* shows, is essentially lacking a hearth, or stable center, always rather revolving around the contestation of the isolated sense of self. It is a form of community that attempts to incorporate, in the relations between its members, what we lack on an ontological level. Pseudo-Dionysius coins the term “hierarchy” to describe how both the celestial and ecclesiastical realms forms a cohesive whole. Although it is Jesus who heads both hierarchies, this proves not to be a fixed and stable ground, for it is the unsolvable *mystery* of Christ that Pseudo-Dionysius places atop them. This reveals that what Pseudo-Dionysius

means to suggest by “hierarchy” is not a closed rank and ordering of being but rather a rank and ordering that always threatens to overcome itself, ruptured from the very beginning.

Here, at the close of this dissertation, I would like to insist that far from being authors of the distant past concerned with ideas of only historical interest, Plato’s and Pseudo-Dionysius’ works resonate with contemporary thought quite profoundly. I will, here, explicitly take up the writings of Derrida, Heidegger, and Bataille in order to reveal present-day concerns as they are related to my dissertation. By giving a brief overview of these contemporary three thinkers, I have drawn our attention to how Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius share many of our modern-day interests.

I. Deconstructing Discourse:

The specter of a fully discursive, rational system of discourse, or what has been commonly understood by us as metaphysics has appeared on the horizon as problematic figures since the conception of 20th century philosophy. As Rodolphe Gasché points out, “Western philosophy is in essence the attempt to domesticate Otherness, since what we understand by thought is nothing but such a project, *heterology*...”³⁷⁰ The very activity of philosophical thinking has been characterized as the reduction of that which is other than itself, which is to say the reduction of difference so that alterity is mastered and comprehended under the totality of metaphysical signification. Portrayed in this manner, philosophy itself desires nothing other than totality and complete comprehension of knowledge. Jacques Derrida through his reading of historical discourse, in the course of his project of deconstruction, attempts to delimit the comprehensive scope of philosophy, revealing the limits of Western metaphysics.

Deconstruction is a critical strategy for reading the history of metaphysics and unveiling its inner structures. That is to say, deconstruction literally takes apart or dismantles the

³⁷⁰ Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror* (Cambridge:Harvard University Press, 1986), p.101.

arguments and conceptual relations on which the aims and values of Western metaphysics are grounded, revealing those foundations and thus these aims and values as highly question-worthy. Derrida characterizes the limits within which metaphysical discourse takes place in terms of an economy. Speaking of the metaphysical structural tradition Derrida writes,

These disguises are not historical contingencies that one might admire or regret. Their movement was absolutely necessary, with a necessity which cannot be judged *by any other tribunal* [emphasis added]. The privilege of the *phonè* does not depend upon a choice that could have been avoided. It responds to a moment of *economy* (let us say of the “life” of “history” or of “being as self-relationship”).³⁷¹

An economy, in other words, is a structural obligation in which the values and ideals that define the rationality of the discourse are limited. It names the discursive context of the whole and that which directs the particular substantiations of the whole and thus cannot be investigated by some system of signification outside of the pre-established economy. Economy, in this sense, names the totality that metaphysical, discursive thought presupposes, i.e., a form of thought that fully discloses the subject of its investigation.

Through deconstruction, Derrida endeavors to unveil the ways in which metaphysical, discursivity cannot fulfill the requirements of its own economy. Metaphysical discursive thought cannot accomplish its promise of complete self-relationship. Moreover, heterogeneous elements are always present within the economy, of which the closed economic system cannot take account. These elements form a “blind spot [*tâche aveugle*].”³⁷² This blind spot is the disavowed background within which the closed economy of signification claims to function. Derrida terms this forgotten dimension of discursive metaphysics the supplement—a supplemental or vestigial page in the text of historical discourse. The supplement, although, treated by the writer of the text as extra, unnecessary, superfluous is, in fact, proven, by the text’s own internal logic, to be

³⁷¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p.7.

³⁷² *Ibid*, p.164.

necessary. While Derridean deconstruction cannot make one gaze upon the blind spot anymore than we can look at the blind spot found in the periphery of our own sight, it does, nevertheless, break apart the disguise of a closed economy, forcing us to become aware that there is such a lack in our intellectual sight.

It is true that deconstruction finds itself always already within a closed economy of signification; however, it allow us, the reader of a text, to situate ourselves within a liminal space. Situated as such, we cannot be held completely under the sway of the pre-established values and aims of the economic system, since we are aware of the blind spot. Even though we are aware of the blind spot, we cannot place ourselves outside of the text. It is within this threshold space that Derrida allows the reader to become aware of the author's intention and the text itself, that is to say, what the "writer commands and fails to command in a language."³⁷³ Derrida wishes to show that the author cannot simply write a text without influence from the prevalent worldview and thus think in such a manner that does not serve a force that imposes itself upon the author. While Derridean deconstruction does not (and cannot of its own accord) propose to propose anything,³⁷⁴ it does work to show that the ideal of propositional discourse that would be completely reducible to a stable meaning is itself a metaphysical construct which philosophers fail to carry out every time they have to resort to discursive thought and to write a text. To put it as concisely as possible, Derrida is pointing out the necessity of a form of thinking

³⁷³ Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.23.

³⁷⁴ All metaphysical statements which take the form of "Deconstruction is X" miss the point from the very beginning. According to Simon Critchley, Derrida carefully avoids the verb "to be" and instead claims that deconstruction "takes place" [*a lieu*] and does so wherever something is said "to be," i.e., in all propositional logic. See *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, p.20ff. Also see Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy "Différance"* trans. Alan Bates (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.15, "...if we accepted the form of the question, in its meaning and its syntax ('what is?' 'who is?' 'who is it that?'), we would have to conclude the *différance* has been derived, has happened, is to be mastered and governed on the basis of the point of a present being...a *what*, or a present being as a *subject*, a *who*."

that exceeds the limits of rational discourse and that deconstruction is a method for articulating that which exceeds discursive thought.

Derrida believes that we must comport ourselves to discursive metaphysical thought in this manner, since its conception of philosophy has not come to terms with the basic ground out of which metaphysics grows, i.e., *logocentrism*. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida tells us that he has characterized philosophy as *logocentric* because it approaches the world through *logos*, which is concerned with discursivity (the history of metaphysics), rationality (the science of science), and the articulation of meaning (the history of writing).³⁷⁵ *Logocentrism*, then, is the *a priori* tendency of metaphysics to subordinate writing to speech. Speech, *logos*, should not be understood as any particular substantiation of language, but rather as the formal rules that govern over the possibility for language to occur at all. In the terms of Saussurean structural linguistics, as we are told, this is equivalent to the subordination of the “signifier” to the “signified,” of the material, contingent sign to the ideal of its permanent and stable meaning, thought to be present in all of Western thought.

When deconstruction occurs we are able to peer behind all assumed immediate presence of meaning, and start thinking from *différance*; “It is the domination of being that *différance* everywhere comes to solicit, in the sense that *sollicitare*, in the old Latin, means to shake as a whole, to make tremble in entirety. Therefore, it is the determination of Being as presence or as beingness that is interrogated by the thought of *différance*.”³⁷⁶ Derrida developed this “neographism,” which unveils the disavowed dimension of metaphysics, through an intentional misspelling of the French *différance* and whose dissimilarity can only be recognized in the written word and not acknowledged when spoken. Changing the spelling by a simple replacement of an

³⁷⁵ *Of Grammatology*, p.3.

³⁷⁶ *Margins of Philosophy* “*Différance*,” p.21.

‘a’, a difference which obscures itself in the spoken word, impels us to think difference not as a stable relation between the sign or the word spoken in discourse. The ‘a’ that remains silent cannot be known via discourse, it remains a secret that is forever yet to come. It cannot, then, belong to intelligibility; that which is thought through *différance* cannot be grasped fully and thus never comprehended.

Différance allows us to think the Saussurean sign without relying on presence or a ground—it opens a spacing such that the sign cannot be finally or authoritatively joined with a referent. A sign is that which is put in the place of the once present thing or meaning. When we do not have direct access to that which presented itself, we signify it through use of the sign, “we go through the detour of the sign.”³⁷⁷ The sign is used when the present is no longer present, “the sign represents the present in its absence. It takes place of the present.”³⁷⁸ Consequently, *différance* must be in play in a way such that the difference between sign and signifier may be revealed so that signification is possible at all. “It is because of *différance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called ‘present’ element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself...”³⁷⁹ But the difference is not a stable state of opposition between that which is sensible and that which is purely and objectively intelligible, i.e., that which is thought through *theōrein*,³⁸⁰ but rather as a process or an event of relation. *Différance* resists this opposition and does so precisely because it opens a space between the repetitious movement of pure presence found in *logocentric* thought and the “meta-textual interpretation,”³⁸¹ which allows us to traverse this repetitious space. The locality that *différance* opens is a non-site, a pre-discursive space, “which belongs neither to the voice nor to

³⁷⁷ Ibid, p.9.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid, p.13.

³⁸⁰ Ibid, p.5.

³⁸¹ *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p.26.

writing in the usual sense, and which is located, as the strange space”³⁸² in our thinking. In this way we are able to recognize the moment of blindness in the *logocentric* text and grants us insight into the alterity that exceeds it, “in this way, deconstruction opens a discourse on the other to philosophy, an otherness that has been dissimulated or appropriated by the logocentric tradition.”³⁸³

Moreover, *différance* leads us to realize that no transcendental signified can be found. Through *différance*, deconstruction incorporates that which is “alien, heterogeneous, in any case irreducible to the intuitive *telos*,”³⁸⁴ through the trace. The trace is that which is heterogeneous, it is the irreducible excess that is prior to the determination of presence. The trace cannot be a pure presence of a single sign, or referent, of the signified, but instead, the signified, as thought through the trace, points beyond itself and to a supplement, an excess, always referring elsewhere and never to a *single* referent. The trace is a hole in the semantic field. It unveils that the closure of *logocentric* metaphysics is fundamentally flawed. The trace should be understood as a scar or fissure on the surface of the text.³⁸⁵ The text is opened slightly and now unable to demarcate its inside from its outside, belonging and not belonging, which logocentric thought creates. The trace is the vestigial, the blind spot, the supplement of non-presence, constituting the possibility of an egress beyond the closure of metaphysics.

Thus, deconstruction incorporates, in the guise of *différance*, its limit (the trace), “which hence *does not mean anything*—is ‘before’ the concept, the name, the word, ‘something’ that would be nothing, that no longer arises from Being, from presence or from the presence of the

³⁸² *Margins of Philosophy* “*Différance*” p.5.

³⁸³ *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p.28.

³⁸⁴ Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” *Languages of the Unsayable*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p.11.

³⁸⁵ *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p.74.

present...”³⁸⁶ In other words, the ‘limit’ that deconstruction finds in *différance* is the trace that is neither part of the system nor even ‘prior’ (in a temporal sense) nor is it externally situated to the system. Allowing for the “movement of signification” *différance* is able to keep

within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this *trace* being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present [emphasis added].³⁸⁷

Derrida wishes to show that there is nothing outside of the text, “therefore, the text, language, or sign is not the expression of *anything* prior to itself. It is, indeed, expression, but not the expression of *anything* (else); it is sign, but does not refer to a separate signified.”³⁸⁸ The trace, although pointing beyond itself, does not point to a transcendental signified. The trace is the supplement or excess of language, but an excess of language, of the system; “the trace is also that which forever prevents a self from being self, since the relation to Other is ‘older’ than selfhood.”³⁸⁹ “The thinking of *différance* would thus have little affinity...”³⁹⁰ with presence-centric philosophy.

THE NON-ENTITY OF GOD

It is perhaps, finally, time to show that Pseudo-Dionysius does not rarify God into an entity that exists over and against entities themselves. Derrida tries to distinguish his own project from the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius. This he does accomplish. But I believe, as I will now show, that he misinterprets the project of Pseudo-Dionysius in so doing. We cannot understand this excessive-affirmation of God simply in a linguistical or even ontological manner. To do so, would risk thinking that God lies over and beyond being, essentially stating that God

³⁸⁶ “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” p.9.

³⁸⁷ *Margins of Philosophy “Différance”* p.13.

³⁸⁸ Eric D. Perl “Signifying Nothing: Being as Sign in Neoplatonism and Derrida,” *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought*, p.129.

³⁸⁹ *The Tain of the Mirror*, p.192.

³⁹⁰ *Denials*, p.11.

has some type of being. One may be lead to believe that ὑπερούσια is a “hyperessentiality.” On this account we have Derrida, who critiques the Areopagite for making God some being, and wishing to differentiate negative theology from deconstruction.

Realizing that there are similarities between his own philosophy and that of negative theology, Derrida seems to be particularly interested in how deconstruction differs from those who write negative theology.³⁹¹ There are plenty of individuals who have critiqued Derrida on this point; for example, Jeffery Fisher in his article, “The Theology of Dis/similarity: Negation in Pseudo-Dionysius,” argues that “Derrida rejects negative theology virtually out of hand as still bound up in the ontotheology of the sign.”³⁹² While there is some credence in Fisher’s statement to the extent that Derrida is a little hasty to separate deconstruction from negative theology, there is no evidence that I can see, that Derrida outright rejects negative theology. Rather it seems that Derrida is attempting to draw attention to that which he sees as the greatest different between deconstruction and negative theology, the conception of *khōra*.

As we will see, *khōra* is the place which is the receptacle for excess, allowing it to show itself as excessive. After having given an account of Derrida’s critique of negative theology, I will recount Derrida’s notion of *khōra* and attempt, through secondary literature, to connect *khōra* with Pseudo-Dionysius’ conception of the divine, as thought by the Areopagite’s excessive-affirmation.

Deconstruction, like negative theology, is concerned with that which exceeds discursive reason and prediction. So that the two philosophies may be distinguished, Derrida drives a conceptual wedge between deconstruction and negative theology by emphasizing the latter’s

³⁹¹ Indeed, he wrote at least three essays devoted to negative theology, *How to Avoid Speakings: Denials, Post-Scriptum: Aporias, Ways and Voices*, and *Khōra*; the first is an explicit attempt to differentiate *déconstruction* from the negative theology, despite similarities.

³⁹² Jeffrey Fisher, “The Theology of Dis/similarity: Negation in Pseudo-Dionysius,” *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (Oct., 2001), pp.529-548, p.535.

purely “mechanical repetition,”³⁹³ in the form of prayer—a topic to which I will return in a later chapter. Having already decided upon the character of the addressee, the prayer is a mere repetition of what one has already decided upon. Negative theology, unconsciously, through its mode of greeting is caught within an infinite cycle of reiteration, “indefinitely defer[ing] the encounter with its own limit.”³⁹⁴ This cycle leads to a “merely sterile, repetitive, obscurantist, mechanical”³⁹⁵ mode of speaking; like a machine, one can repeat a prayer without thought.

For Derrida insofar as it is a form of greeting, “‘negative theology’ has come to designate a certain typical attitude toward language, and with it in the act of definition or attribution....”³⁹⁶ Like deconstruction, then, according to Derrida, negative theology is a theory of language, however a theory that is inherently contradictory. Because the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, in particular, must “indefinitely defer the encounter with its own limit,” negative theology unwittingly places the divine, its limit, outside of Being, forsaking the divine to a realm of “excessive-essentiality.” Derrida calls into question negative theology because “excessive-essentiality” is bound to the sign of ontotheology, i.e., a transcendent signified. Consequently, negative theology “continues to posit a transcendent signified in that, in its very insistence that God is not (a) being ‘but beyond’ being, it is attempting, in his [Derrida’s] words, to ‘disengage a superessentiality’, to locate a presence above and other than all beings, or signs.”³⁹⁷ And yet despite its place “beyond being,” Derrida writes that one is able to reach this “excessive-essentiality” through “a rarefaction of signs, figures, symbols.”³⁹⁸ The rarefaction of signs, which lead to the union with God, reveals that all negative signs of the divine are nonetheless

³⁹³ Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” *Languages of the Unsayable*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p.5.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid* p.11.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid* p.6.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid* p.4.

³⁹⁷ Eric D. Perl “Signifying Nothing: Being as Sign in Neoplatonism and Derrida,” *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought*, p.126.

³⁹⁸ *Denials*, p.10.

determined, by the transcendent signified “excessive-essentiality”, to have meaning. As a result of relying upon a transcendent signified, the negative theology of the Areopagite cannot help but expresses itself as affirmative. The negativity found in negative theology, according to Derrida, is still bound up in affirmative meaning in the form of prayer and hymns. Derrida believes negative theology cannot escape the economy of affirmative theology through approaching the divine and accepting an answer the addressor can understand. By positing a transcendental signified, negative theology unwittingly becomes seized by pure presence, a pure signified with pure meaning: the negative and darkened view of the divine “excessiveessentiality” is nonetheless “...the immediacy of a presence. Leading to a union with God,”³⁹⁹ resulting in contact and vision of the divine.

In distinction to negative theology, deconstruction is able to peer behind all assumed immediate presence of meaning, and start to think from *différance*, leading one to realize that no transcendental signified can be found. Without a transcendental signified, there can be no progression from effects to causes (the reification of signs), and thus proving the existence of the divine, a conclusion that Derrida directs his argument against negative theology. On the other hand, through *différance*, deconstruction incorporates that which is “alien, heterogeneous, in any case irreducible to the intuitive *telos*,”⁴⁰⁰ through the trace. The trace is that which is heterogeneous. It cannot be purely present to the signified it represents. Instead, the signified points beyond itself and to a supplement, an excess, always referring elsewhere and never to a *single* referent. The trace, then, is a hole in the semantic field. Thus, deconstruction incorporates, in the guise of *différance*, its limit (the trace), “which hence *does not mean anything*—is ‘before’ the concept, the name, the word, ‘something’ that would be nothing, that no longer arises from

³⁹⁹ Ibid p.9.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid p.11.

Being, from presence or from the presence of the present....”⁴⁰¹ In other words, the “limit” that deconstruction finds in *différance* is the trace that is neither part of the system nor even “prior” nor is it externally situated to the system.

Derrida wishes to show that there is no inside or outside of the text, “therefore, the text, language, or sign is not the expression of *anything* prior to itself. It is, indeed, expression, but not the expression of *anything* (else); it is sign, but does not refer to a separate signified.”⁴⁰² The trace, although pointing beyond itself, does not point to a transcendental signified. The trace is the supplement or excess of language, but an excess of language, of the system. *Différance*, then, seemingly as “the thinking of *différance* would thus have little affinity...”⁴⁰³ with negative philosophy.

To give space for the trace to manifest, Derrida relies upon the Platonic idea of *khōra*. Derrida mentions *khōra* in his two essays that explicitly address negative theology and within *Faith and Knowledge* in a discussion that echoes his discussions on negative theology,⁴⁰⁴ and finally in the essay entitled *Khōra*.⁴⁰⁵ Through the notion of *khōra*, Derrida is able to conceive of a place that belongs neither to being nor to non-being; it is a third genus (*Tim.* 48e), a place in which the trace is able to manifest but itself can be addressed neither affirmatively (as being) nor negatively (as non-being). Constituting this odd space, *khōra* “neither promises nor threatens anyone,”⁴⁰⁶ it is a place that is more originary than the split that *salut* produces—perhaps it is the

⁴⁰¹ Ibid p.9.

⁴⁰² “Signifying Nothing: Being as Sign in Neoplatonism and Derrida,” p.129.

⁴⁰³ *Denials*, p.11.

⁴⁰⁴ See §§23-25.

⁴⁰⁵ In his writings, Derrida places political weight on *khōra*. We will compare how the community formed around *khōra* (if there is such a community) with the community that Pseudo-Dionysius describes in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. It will be equally fruitful to examine this relationship within the interpretation that I presented in chapter 6. According to this interpretation, the seemingly bureaucratic negative theological community might be dismantled and an open society may be erected in its place.

⁴⁰⁶ Jacques Derrida, ‘*Khōra*’ trans. Ian Mcloed, *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p.89.

source of the *salut*.⁴⁰⁷ As the primordial *archē* of the *salut*, *khōra* cannot be properly equated with that which it springs from it, the promise or the threat.

Khōra gives room, allowing society to judge whether the trace is a promise or a threat from which society is built to express itself accordingly; *khōra* gives place to oppositions, and so “one cannot even say of it that it is *neither* this *nor* that or that it is *both* this *and* that.”⁴⁰⁸ *Khōra* defies the logic of non-contradiction. Hence, one cannot name *khōra*.

The hermeneutic *types* cannot inform, they cannot give form to *khōra* except to the extent that, inaccessible, impassive, “amorphous” (*amorphon*, 51a) and still virgin, with a virginity that is radically rebellious against anthropomorphism, it *seems to receive* these types and *give place* to them. But if Timaeus names it as receptacle (*dekhomenon*) or place (*khōra*), these names do not designate an essence, the stable being of an *eidōs*, since *khōra* is neither of the order of the *eidōs* nor of the order of mimemes, that is, of images of the *eidōs* which come to imprint themselves in it—which thus *is not* and does not belong to the two known or recognized genera of being. . . *Khōra* is not, and above all not, is anything but a support or a subject which would *give place* by receiving or be conceiving, or indeed by letting itself be conceived.⁴⁰⁹

Khōra does not couple with the father (the “Good”), marking “a place apart, the spacing which keeps a dissymmetrical relation to all this which, ‘in herself’, beside or in addition to herself, seems to make a couple with her.”⁴¹⁰ *Khōra* does not belong within an oppositional relationship, it is beyond opposition, in excess of it. *Khōra*, itself, is supplemental, existing outside of all paradigms, eluding “all anthro-po-theological schemes, all history, all revelation, and all truth.”⁴¹¹ *Khōra* is the place which receives the excess allowing the trace to appear *qua* trace. *Khōra* is not the productive force of the “Good” and does not couple with the “Good” but rather is the receptacle for the excess that the “Good” produces. That which appears in *khōra*, the trace of the trace, refers to further excess *ad infinitum*. Thus, *khōra* as *khōra* cannot be addressed “there is

⁴⁰⁷ By allowing the trace to manifest, *khōra* does not place judgments upon that which it receives.

⁴⁰⁸ *Khōra*, p.89.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid p.95.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, p.124.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

khōra but *the khōra* does not exist,”⁴¹² nothing can be said of *khōra* except that it gives space for the trace to appear. One attempts to grasp *khōra*, yet all one can grasp is another trace.

Khōra is the space, *par excellence*, which Pseudo-Dionysius and the other negative theologians, attempted to think but were, according to Derrida, unable.⁴¹³ According to Derrida, the Areopagite conceives not of the ungraspable divine but the Platonic “Good”, which “gives birth to Being or to the essence of what is, *to einai* and *ten ousian*.”⁴¹⁴ The “Good” produces that which is capable of being anthropomorphized; it is that which must be anthropomorphized if it is to be known at all.⁴¹⁵ Consequently, what Pseudo-Dionysius describes is that which can be expressed either negatively or positively and thus cannot describe the “excess,”⁴¹⁶ which as excess of the divine defies definition and as such takes the structure of the trace. As stated before, it seems that it is the *khōra* that separates Derridean deconstruction from the negative theology of the Areopagite. If we are going to attempt to incorporate Derridean terminology within negative theology we must find a place in Pseudo-Dionysius that resembles *khōra*.

Jeffery Fisher does trouble Derrida’s interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius’ notion of the divine and his relation to it. He contends that “Dionysius engages in an apophaticism of the most radical kind, that it is radical in a quite particular semiotic fashion, and finally that Dionysian negative theology is significantly compatible with certain aspects of Derridean

⁴¹² *Khōra*, p.97.

⁴¹³ It might be said that Derrida believes that the negative theologians were unable to think *khōra* because it is a fraternal order, whereas *khōra* is feminine: Jacques Derrida “Post-Scriptum: Aporias, Ways and Voices” trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. *Derrida and Negative Theology* ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), p.286.

⁴¹⁴ *How to Avoid Speakings: Denials*, p.32.

⁴¹⁵ The “Good” has political connotations in the sense of being the sovereign over all that is known (*Rep.* 509c-e). If one approaches the world with regard to sovereignty, one already falls into the trap of being subjected to dichotomous reasoning, choosing one choice over another. One is being forced by external coercion. A true community of individuals who are open to experience an event cannot arise in such a situation. It is only within the space of *khōra* that a true community can be founded. I discussed community in chapter 6.

⁴¹⁶ *How to Avoid Speakings: Denials*, p.33.

deconstruction.”⁴¹⁷ One aspect that Fisher draws upon throughout his article⁴¹⁸ to support this claim is that Pseudo-Dionysius writes that God is not only excessiveessential but is also ὑπερθεότητος—“excessive-God.”⁴¹⁹ This firstly, forecloses the opportunity to discuss a first principle, since even the divine is a radically non-entitative God. This distinctively marks Pseudo-Dionysius from Plotinus and the latter’s divine emanation. The Areopagite’s divine, unlike the god of the Neoplatonist emanation, cannot be a semantic ἀρχή. To make this point, Fisher turns to a very similar passage that Derrida uses in his “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials” to show that Pseudo-Dionysius engages in an esoteric ritualistic political project.⁴²⁰ Both authors focus on Pseudo-Dionysius’ use of the Greek προβεβλήσθαι.⁴²¹ Derrida emphasizes the literally translation as “shield” to show that Pseudo-Dionysius is speaking about “political stratagems”⁴²² to indemnify the community against the uninitiated many. “The ‘sacred symbols’, the compositions [*synthemata*], the signs and figures of the sacred discourse, the ‘enigmas’, and the ‘typical symbols’” used by the Areopagite, “are invented as ‘shields’ against the many.”⁴²³ In other words, προβεβλήσθαι are able to be placed because Pseudo-Dionysius does, according to Derrida, have an affirmative conception of the divine, which he is attempting to keep holy and safe from those who would bring disruption into the community. Fisher, on the other hand,

⁴¹⁷ The Theology of Dis/similarity: Negation in Pseudo-Dionysius,”p.530.

⁴¹⁸ There are other aspects that are important for Fisher’s argument, perhaps the most important being Pseudo-Dionysius’ semiotic approach, that is to say, Pseudo-Dionysius’ ability to run affirmative and negative discourse along side each other. For an example, see *DN* 869D-872A. Another important theme running throughout Fisher’s article is how the Areopagite’s god is explained both in terms of an immanent and transcendent being, i.e., god slips between both conceptions.

⁴¹⁹ See the beginning of chapter four of the *Divine Names*, which concerns “Good”, ‘light’, ‘beautiful’, ‘love’, ‘ecstasy’, and ‘zeal’. I am particularly interested in how love and beauty produce ecstasy such that ὑπερθεότητος can be experienced to which I will turn in the next chapter.

⁴²⁰ It does seem as if there is an air of bureaucratic negative theology within Pseudo-Dionysius’ work, especially in the ‘Ecclesiastical Hierarchy’. However, if my interpretation is correct with regard to the political dimension of Pseudo-Dionysius’ work, the community does not come together as a conscious choice but rather through a compulsion of a shared experience of that which exceeds rational discourse.

⁴²¹ Another author who focuses on this word is Eric D. Perl in “Signifying Nothing: Being as Sign in Neoplatonism and Derrida,”*Neoplatonism and Contemporary*, p.141-42.

⁴²² *Denials*, p.23.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*

translates προβεβλήσθαι as “projection” and claims that the term “serves an epistemological-semiotic rather than ontological function.”⁴²⁴ He acknowledges the double meaning of προβεβλήσθαι; it indicates an outcropping, an extension, as well as a shield for defense.⁴²⁵

With this root in mind, προβεβλήσθαι could mean not only shield but also “to present,” like a problem calling for its own solution. The Dionysian sign could, then, under this interpretation, shields what it presents, while at the same time, present what it shields.⁴²⁶ The divine language is, then, the presentation that shields while at the same time being the shield that presents. The signifier and signified do not lie in dualistic opposition. In Fisher’s words,

In semiotic terms, we may understand projection (extension) as signifying the possible ontological and epistemological connection of the created world to its *archē* (thus the ‘causal approach’) and projection (shield) as the semiotic interruption of semantic stability (thus denial, the negative approach. The projection as the possibility of signification coincides with projection as the necessity (or inescapability) of signification, that is, of the sign never reaching its ground. Because what seems to reveal in fact obscures, even deceives, Pseudo-Dionysius’ God can never be the semantic *archē*.⁴²⁷

The divine is revealed not in immediate presence, a noetic vision, but rather is opened to us in its veiling, its withdrawal, within the signs, which conceal the divine from us. The signs, consequently, do not lie before that which we are to be silent, but rather expresses this silence; the sign is silence and silence is the sign.⁴²⁸ To cite Pseudo-Dionysius’ words from the *Epistles I* 1065a, “Someone beholding God and understanding what he saw has not actually seen God itself but rather something *of his* which has being and is knowable.”⁴²⁹ Here, Pseudo-Dionysius explicitly argues against anthropomorphism, and even its possibility. We see the necessity to

⁴²⁴ “The Theology of Dis/similarity: Negation in Pseudo-Dionysius,” p.532.

⁴²⁵ We have already seen in what way God project itself outward in terms of both πρόοδος and as veils.

⁴²⁶ This is how the symbol functions.

⁴²⁷ “The Theology of Dis/similarity: Negation in Pseudo-Dionysius,” p.532.

⁴²⁸ Eric D. Perl also makes a very similar argument, “Signifying Nothing: Being as Sign in Neoplatonism and Derrida,” *Neoplatonism and Contemporary*, p.141-42.

⁴²⁹ Καί εἴ τις ἰδὼν θεὸν συνῆκεν, ὃν εἶδεν, οὐκ αὐτὸν ἐώρακεν, ἀλλὰ τι τῶν αὐτοῦ τῶν ὄντων καὶ γινωσκομένων.

cease human conceptual thought. The προβεβλήσθαι draws one in with an outreaching motion, but at the same time interrupts one understanding of the sign, or protects the sign. With this double meaning truly the divine προβεβλήσθαι only reveals insofar as it deceives and obscures one's discourse on the divine.

Through emphasizing ὑπερθεότητος, one is able to avoid any “god-language,”⁴³⁰ and consequently, excessive-affirmations concerning the divine cannot be transformed into finite or mundane affirmations, since what one is discussing is not the divine itself but only signs, or to use Derridean terminology, traces of the divine—“An unbridgeable gap persists between even the ‘most God-like’ symbol and God.”⁴³¹

While this is a fine counter-interpretation to Derrida's interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius' negative theology, one must still respond to Derrida's critique that there is no *khōra* to be found in Pseudo-Dionysius' works, since this is the weight of Derrida's argument throughout all of his writings on negative theology. Derrida is worried about the place (political and otherwise) that has to give rise to manifestations of that which is in excess of the human. In fact, Fisher writes concerning Pseudo-Dionysius' notion of the divine, “God is merely a trace,”⁴³² God cannot be found in discourse because even God is ὑπερθεότητος, every sign is a consequent of another sign, so that signs can only signify other signs. “If the good is excessive to all existing things, as it is, and makes form the formless, and in it alone non-existence [ἀνούσιον] is an excess of existence, and not-life is held above life, and the mindless held about wisdom, and whatever is in the good is of what preeminently makes form of the formless, and if

⁴³⁰ “The Theology of Dis/similarity: Negation in Pseudo-Dionysius,” p.534.

⁴³¹ Ibid p.536.

⁴³² Ibid p.538. We have seen that this is the case above.

one is allowed to say by the laws of God and the human, even not-being [μὴ ὄν] itself in incited upon the good excessive to all things” (DN 697A).

If we turn to the example of the circle’s center pre-containing its radii, we will understand how God is nothing but an empty space. At the very center, at God *per se*, there is a complete harmony of opposites. This movement of differentiation and gathering applies equally to conceptual opposites (DN 821B), which are “in a simple unity within the universal cause. For that source is the beginning of existing things and from it comes the to be itself” (DN 821B). The ‘to be’ itself is prior to opposites. God is that source in which concepts, as individuated, breakdown. The movement of the excessively-overflowing nature of God ruptures being, at its core this movement is the creation of all being. There is no unity, in the sense of an ordinary Oneness, but rather complete indifferentiation without unity. Unity can be derived only over and beyond another positive concept, but the center of being, there is no concept. In other words, at its core there is no non-contradiction to being, although it gives the principle of non-contradiction at the level of being, being the “delimitation which excessively-rises above contradictions” (DN 825B).

In the discussion of God through *kataphasis*, we understand that God is the ebb and flow of the movement of being, the unfolding and enfolding of being. There is nothing but pure excessive-bubbling over. At the center, there is only an incessant source of nourishment, nothing precedes it. A constant excessive-flowing source of productiveness, it is a source but not in an ontological manner, complete separate from what bubbles over from it. As a center, or perhaps more fittingly a zero point, it is the space from which πρόοδος and ἐπιστοφή have room; God is the non-present point at the heart of presence or being, “it is fullness in relation to lacking and

excessive-fullness in relation to fullness...not suffering a loss with regard to its excessive-fullness from its unspeakable emptying out of itself” (DN 648D-649A).

God, then, is literally nothing, but an open space into and out of which all things moves. In the previous chapter God was revealed to be the aporetic space where non-contradiction does not exist. We have already seen that Pseudo-Dionysius characterizes God as “word unsayable, *non-sense* [ἄλογία], unconceptual, and without name, existing according to no thing’s existing” (DN 588B). God is not simply something that cannot be conceived by the human mind due to some lack or deficiency of discursive thought but rather passes over into literal non-sense. In fact, God “is the form-making form in things formless, as source of form, formless in the forms as excessive to the form” (DN 648C). Even as the source of the forms, God itself is without form. Moreover, “If the good is excessive to all being and makes form the formless [τὸ ἀνείδεον εἰδοποιεῖ] and both remaining in itself it is non-existent [ἀνούσιον], in excess of existence” (DN 697A). Pseudo-Dionysius continues with the same theme “Reason [ὁ λόγος] dares to say, that even non-being [τὸ μὴ ὄν] participates in the beautiful and the good” (DN 704D). In the latter two passages, non-being and non-existence is ascribed to God and in fact the word, reason, λόγος, demands this—reason itself moves beyond itself. Discursivity demands nonsense and non-being. God is literally nothing but an open space.

II. Heidegger’s Communication:

During his time writing *Sein und Zeit*, published in 1927, Heidegger critiques the particular way of understanding that has dominated Western philosophical thinking. Western thought has, according to Heidegger, emphasized the enduring presence of substance which underlies all properties. This ontology is a metaphysics of presence. Emphasizing the absolute presence of ‘what is’, these thinkers place themselves in detached relation to ‘what is’. They

adopt a standpoint of theoretical reflection. Consequently, such thinkers attempt to achieve an impartial, objective view of 'what is'. Beings in the world lose their meaning and significance of their being in the everyday experience of them. The goal of Heidegger's philosophy is to challenge the assumption that reality must be thought exclusively in terms of substance and the presence of substances. His project during this time is to recover a more original sense of beings by setting aside a view of beings that we have inherited from a theory of thought that has stressed theorizing. There is no pure external vantage point from which we can gain access to beings. Instead, Heidegger focuses on how beings show themselves, become manifest to us, or in what way they show forth themselves for us in our everyday pre-reflective experience of beings.

In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger poses the question asked by traditional ontology, what is the being of beings? However, he notes that this question is naïve if it does not from the beginning inquire first into the meaning of being itself. Beings are only accessible insofar as they first reveal themselves to us as relevant in some determinate manner, and then we must clarify the conditions for beings revealing themselves to us. Distancing himself from a theoretical mode of relation to beings, Heidegger proposes that we are always already in the world, engaged in everyday dealings with beings in the world. For Heidegger, this gestures that we have a pre-understanding of the being of beings. If this were not the case, we could not experience beings at all.

We are presented, however, with a different Heidegger beginning in the 1930 essay *On the Essence of Truth*, in which he writes of a turn [*Kehre*] in his thought. During this time Heidegger focuses on the project of thinking the history of being. Here, being is understood to be a happening or occurrence. Being is the history of unfolding epochs of self-manifestation. We are seen to be respondents who are called to the task of safekeeping being. Being, *Sein*, or *Seyn*

as Heidegger begins to write it, has been forgotten; the Greeks focused not on *Sein* but rather on *Seiendheit*, beingness. The history of metaphysics is thus a history of forgetfulness, specifically vis-à-vis the withdrawal of the dynamic nature of being. The movement of emergence that allows anything like *existentia* or *essentia* to appear remains hidden and concealed. We must, then, retrieve the genuine beginning of disclosing being. A new poet, who is charged with the safekeeping of being, is necessary to poetize the background upon which being shows itself.

Heidegger finds such poetizing in Hölderlin. The poetry of Hölderlin provides a language that finds new names to invoke the gods of antiquity. Heidegger's conception of language as a saying whose "soundless voice" is able to call forth that which has been forgotten or concealed. There cannot, however, be a final conclusive word concerning being, since the essence of being is never conclusively sayable. Rather, we must think along with the poet who speaks in the silent saying of language, reawakening us to a new experience of being.

In *Sein und Zeit* and in other writings and lectures from this period, Heidegger poses his fundamental question as concerning the "sense of Being" (*Sinn des Seins*). He, here, uses infinitive *Sein*, "to be." Yet, after what he been termed the 'turn', Heidegger makes a point of distinguishing his proper question from the fundamental ontological question asked by the entire metaphysical tradition, which, in Aristotle's formulation, is the question concerning "being *qua* being" [τὸ ὄν ᾗ ὄν] (*Met.*1003a21) or, the "being-ness" [οὐσία] of beings (*Met.*1028b2–4). The Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, according to Heidegger, studies "beingness" simply as the universal feature of all things that are, consequently excluding the Heideggerian question of the event of Being as a dynamic background dimension that is radically different from beings. In his *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Heidegger adopts the obsolete German spelling *Seyn* so as to emphasize that what he is questioning is something other than what traditional metaphysical ontology has

been looking for. His question concerns a more archaic notion of Being that is not completely detached from the metaphysical conception of beingness, but rather is viewed as its “condition of possibility.”⁴³³

In *Sein und Zeit* and in Heidegger’s lecture courses from the 1920s, we find the attempt to refer Aristotle’s apophantic and predicative “as”-structure (*als*) – S as P – back to a pre-theoretical, existential and hermeneutic “in-order-to”-structure (*um zu*), based on the constitutive temporal transcendence of the human *Dasein* towards the future, on the basis of which the human being primarily encounters his surroundings as meaningful in a temporal context of practical possibilities, i.e., in the mode of “handiness” (*Zuhandenheit*), not as simply present, “accessible” (*vorhanden*) objects. It is true that in *Sein und Zeit*, *logos* is translated into German through *Rede*, which does mean “speech,” but should, in this context, be understood in a wider sense as “discourse” or “articulation,” “to make something clear and articulate,” and, more significantly, to the English verb *to read*. With this in mind, it is essential that in Heidegger’s later readings of *logos*, particularly in the Heraclitus fragments, he often translates *logos* as *Lese*, which firstly refers to the verb *lesen*, “to read,” but as a noun means “harvesting, gathering in the harvest.”⁴³⁴ These clues bring us to the core of how Heidegger fundamentally reads *logos*. The most concrete and fundamental connotation of the Greek verb *legein*, from which the German *lesen* derives – “to speak out,” “to discourse,” “to articulate” – is “(selective) gathering,” “picking out,” “collecting”; in Latin, *lego, legere* comes to mean “to read.”

When we read, we look at a multiplicity of written symbols and we collect them together into meaningful units: words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs. In this sense, reading is gathering:

⁴³³ Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, *Gesamtausgabe* 65 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1989) p. 73–77.

⁴³⁴ See e.g. Heidegger, *Aristoteles, Metaphysik Θ 1–3: Von Wesen und Wirklichkeit der Kraft* [1931], *Gesamtausgabe*, 33 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1981), 117–148.

it is the formation of meaning and sense through the discovery of unity in plurality. This, for Heidegger, is precisely the original Greek sense of *logos* as λέγειν “to collect” or “to gather”⁴³⁵ the original essence of reason, of rationality, of discursively articulate meaningfulness, originally understood not as some subjective faculty but as the very way in which meaningful reality in itself is articulated. This also allows him to call *logos* an original Greek name for Being, i.e., for the articulation of meaningfulness as such:

The *Logos* of which Heraclitus speaks is, as reading [*Lese*] and collection [*Sammlung*], as the One that unifies all, not a feature among beings. This *Logos* is the original gathering that preserves [*verwahrt*] beings as the beings that they are. This *Logos* is Being [*Sein*] itself, where all beings [*das Seiende*] hold sway [*west*].⁴³⁶

In Heidegger’s reading, this original sense of *logos* is best captured by Heraclitus’ fragment 2: “Having heard not me but to the word [τοῦ λόγου], it is wise [σοφόν ἐστὶ] to go along with it and to speak along with it [ὁμολογέειν]: All is One [ἓν πάντα εἶναι].” Being as *logos* is something that is *heard*, something whose address needs *listening* to.

Heidegger highlights the above fragment because he puts into question the primacy of *seeing* and of *visual* metaphors in the metaphysical tradition. Aristotle, opening his *Metaphysics*, emphasizes seeing as the sense which gives us the most precise and accurate acquaintance with things, and which humans therefore value above all other senses.⁴³⁷ “Every human naturally desires to know; a sign of this is our esteem for the senses. For apart from their use we esteem them from their own sake and most of all sight” (*Met.* 980a22-24). The metaphysical key words ἰδέα and εἶδος, “essence” or “form,” both mean literally the “look” of a thing, that is, according

⁴³⁵ Martin Heidegger, *WegMarken*, “Vom Wesen und Begriff der Φύσις” (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967), pp.348-49

⁴³⁶ Heidegger, *GA* 55, 278.

⁴³⁷ Aristotle, *Met.* A.1.980a21–27. The opening words of the *Metaphysics*, πάντες ἀνθρώποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρεγόνται φύσει, are usually rendered as “All humans, by their very nature, strive for knowing”; however, the verb *eidenai*, “knowing,” is originally the perfect tense of the verb *horaō*, “to see,” meaning literally, “having seen.” The kind of knowledge that all humans naturally strive for is thus to be understood as a “having-in-sight,” a comprehensive view of what and how things are.

to Heidegger, the permanent and identical structure which allows the thing to show and present itself, to be seen, as the very thing that it is. The highest form of “seeing” is, for Plato and Aristotle, νοῦς, i.e., the immediate and indivisible grasp of the most permanent, necessary, basic and simple principles and structures of meaningfulness [ἀρχαί] that cannot be further analyzed or justified (*Post An.* 72b4). This is the foundation for all scientific and systematic comprehension of the basic character of reality.

It is to be noted that the important feature of νοῦς is that it is beyond *logos*, it is non-discursive, non-referential, non-contextual. Νοῦς, as well as pure sensual perception of a simple perceptible, such as a pure color, for that matter, is beyond propositional discursivity, in that it simply discovers something without discovering it *as* something, simply apprehends something without thinking something about it. Νοῦς is concerned with the ἀρχαί that are completely beyond discursivity. Regarding these truths there is no possibility of error or misunderstanding, of apprehending something in the wrong sense, *as* something that it is not – they are either grasped as such or not at all. Νοῦς is above and beyond the realm of discursive meaningfulness or *logos*, since it is concerned with the necessary foundations and principles that make discursive articulation possible in the first place.

As opposed to the immediacy of νοῦς, where the perfect being is seen to become completely identical with itself and to refer purely to itself, discursivity, *logos*, is seen to presuppose difference and reference to otherness. Things that are discursively constituted as meaningful always refer back to something other, something different, in order to be meaningful. This is the final outcome of Heidegger’s *Destruktion* of the Aristotelian *logos*; this is what Heidegger takes Aristotle himself to perceive in analyzing the basic structure of *logos* as “τι κατὰ τινος.” *Logos* as such *is* the endless movement of signifiers signifying other

signifiers, i.e., referentiality, relativity and differentiability. Hearing, which is always bound to *logos*, cannot therefore be the metaphysically foundational form of sensation. Precisely because the Aristotelian metaphysics of presence cannot allow an absolute, foundational difference, in order to be consistent, it has to found *logos* on something absolutely indifferent that relates and refers purely to itself. It has to privilege direct seeing and touching over indirect hearing.

Moreover, Heidegger develops theological thinking and is related to his philosophical thinking and is influenced by his conception of being. To understand the Medieval tradition, Heidegger thought it was necessary to move beyond its logical and logocentric surface and instead reach for the medieval “experience of life [*Lebenserfahrung*].” That is to say, the abstract thinking that is thought to define medieval thought originates from a concrete experience of life. The soul has an intense relationship to God and the medieval thinkers’, especially the mystic Meister Eckhart, writings are the expression of this relationship. The soul belongs wholly to God, according to mysticism. However, by God the mystics transforms the idea of God, and thus of the idea of essence in general, “the *essentia entis*, into a being and makes the ontological ground of a being, its possibility, its essence, into what is properly actual. This remarkable alteration of essence into a being is the presupposition for the possibility of what is called mystical speculation.”⁴³⁸ Thinking belongs to such a notion of God and Heidegger attempts to break through the conceptual surface of the traditional metaphysical thinking to recover its living core and life giving experiences.

God or being becomes something that cannot be grasped conceptually by human understanding but rather only granted—coming to the human being in revelation. Thinking is a gift, it is given, like an address, it becomes an event to which the human can only submit wholly.

⁴³⁸ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*” trans. Albert Hofstadter (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988), p.90.

The human must cooperate with the divine or being to remain open to its advent. However, it is perhaps necessary to point out that God and being are not the same for Heidegger. Being is not a God who is here-present before us, but rather is manifestness, the happening of the unfolding of being. Heidegger begins to poetize the concept of God, looking particularly to Hölderlin. It is a god that must be experienced in a sacred and awe-inspiring moment.

III. Bataille and the Insufficient Community:

In the foregoing, we have appealed at crucial moments to Bataille's thought, using it as a wedge by which to open both Plato's and Pseudo-Dionysius' conception of community. There we saw that the individuals lose themselves to the totality in which they find themselves. Now, let us take up Bataille's thought directly, as expressed in his *Inner Experience* and listen to what he himself has to say concerning community.

Bataille's writing constitutes a unique point of confluence among many of the 20th century's most significant artistic, philosophical, scientific, and political currents. At one stage or another of his career, Bataille assimilated influences from Catholic mystical theology, Hegelian Idealism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, surrealism, existentialist thought, structuralism, and Durkheimian sociology. He eventually rejected many of these currents or positions, sometimes in violent terms. Yet Bataille's mature texts bear traces of their lasting (and often conflicting) impacts.

There are two major dimensions which characterize Bataille's understanding of religion and spiritual experience. The first is what Bataille terms inner experience: the territory of an intensely private, inward-turning, and essentially ahistorical venture into the hidden regions of the psyche. The second is the domain of religion as a social phenomenon: the public, historically evolving dimension of religious life expressed in collective religious rites. These two key aspects

of Bataille's view of religion correspond to Bataille's most important text on religion, *Inner Experience*. In the following pages, Bataille's treatment of mysticism in *Inner Experience* will be surveyed. I will argue that "community" as Bataille understands this term furnishes a concept connecting the dimensions of mystical experience and collective religious practice within Bataille's total view. Organized around the idea of community as the transgressive shattering of bodily, psychological, and spiritual limits, Bataille's theory illuminates religion and related areas of thought and practice in challenging ways.

Bataille's first approach to writing on spiritual and religious phenomena presented itself as a passionate, personal exploration of mystical consciousness. *Inner Experience*, published in 1943, was no work of disinterested scholarship, but rather the gripping confessional account of a voyage into an inner world "in which anguish and ecstasy intermingle."⁴³⁹

Bataille acknowledges that his concept of inner experience is comparable to forms of mysticism known in the great religious traditions. Yet "the experience" as Bataille wishes to describe and to live it is stripped of the dogmatic labels and qualifications attached to mystical states in traditional religious frameworks. "I understand by inner experience what one usually designates as mystical experience," Bataille writes: that is, "states of ecstasy, rapture, at the very least of meditated emotion"⁴⁴⁰ Yet, in reflecting on ecstatic states and the means of their cultivation, his preoccupation is with the "naked experience" itself, "free from attachments, even as regards its origins, to any religious confession whatsoever."⁴⁴¹ What concerns him is not "chose du théologien" transcendent reality reduced to an object of quasi-scientific study, but rather the raw, immediate, and convulsive fact of mystical experience itself, the dimensions of passion and mystery into which the experience leads.

⁴³⁹ *Inner Experience*, p.10.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.15.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid*.

A first decisive characteristic of Bataille's understanding of inner experience is announced in the refusal of any form of confessional attachment. Bataille declines all traditional theological labels for the inner states he wishes to describe, dismissing the claims of organized theological systems to furnish authoritative interpretations of mystical explorations. The "dogmatic presuppositions" of organized religious traditions have "set unnecessary limits" on inner experience.⁴⁴² By integrating the data of mysticism into a familiar framework of metaphysical and moral teachings, dogmatic religion robs the realities encountered and apprehended through inner experience of their force. Preestablished religious systems and frameworks of interpretation tame the intensity of the experience, guiding the spiritual researches of religious mystics into the narrow channels defined by theological and ecclesiastical authorities, taking away the decisive capacity of unfettered inner experience to "call everything into question."⁴⁴³ Bataille acknowledges that Christians have "excelled" in mystical investigations, venturing "as far in this direction as dogma permitted." Yet his own claim is to have followed the method Christian mystics developed "with a more bitter rigor" than Christians themselves have been able to deploy. Rather than submitting his inner research to any type of "end given in advance" (beatific ecstasy, communion with God or Christ, etc.), Bataille determines that "the experience should lead where it will."⁴⁴⁴ This is true even (and especially) if the experience moves into dark and troubling regions of the psyche in which traditional religious categories lose their ability to make sense of events.

In many if not all previous cases, Bataille affirms, "inner experience has had ends beyond itself, in which value and authority were placed."⁴⁴⁵ God has played this role in Christianity and

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

Islam; in Buddhist traditions, the “suppression of suffering” has been the aim of meditational practice. In other settings, refined forms of pleasure or the acquisition of supernatural knowledge (enlightenment) have been regarded as ends of spiritual discipline.⁴⁴⁶ For Bataille, all such secondary goals fall away. Inner experience has its founding principle “neither in a dogma (moral attitude), nor in science (knowledge can be neither its origin nor its end), nor in a search for enriching states (experimental, aesthetic attitude).” The experience “can have no concern and no goal other than itself.” Inner experience is its own “sole authority, sole value.”⁴⁴⁷

Connected with the concept of inner experience as its own authority is Bataille’s rejection of the idea of the “project.” He understands under this term the mode of thought and action in which our ordinary lives are inscribed, insofar as we find ourselves experiencing each action in which we engage not as an end in itself, but instrumentally: as a step on the way toward something else, a deferment [*remise*] of the full existence which is continuously projected ahead of us, but which we can never grasp. The project is the mode of behavior demanded by all forms of concerted, goal-oriented action arid by the structure of discursive thought itself. Yet the project is also “a paradoxical way of being in time:” the perpetual “putting-off of existence.”⁴⁴⁸ For Bataille, inner experience, totally focused upon itself, abolishing deferred futures in the intensity of the instant, represents the negation of the project and the mode of being the project requires. The experience “is being without delay.”⁴⁴⁹ The end of inner experience in Bataille’s sense is also its means: the fact of the experience itself. When end and means coincide fully, projective-discursive thought is left behind, and the subject approaches, enters, becomes the state Bataille terms “the extreme limit of the possible.”

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, p.19.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, p.18.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, p.59.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid, p.80.

Like many other mystical writers, Bataille acknowledges the paradoxical structure of inner experience. The aim of the experience is precisely to reach a state in which all projective operations are suspended. Yet insofar as it rests on certain prescribed patterns of action, on what could be termed a meditational discipline, at the very least a systematic focusing of awareness, the experience retains aspects of the structures associated with the project. Thus, the “principle of inner experience” must finally be formulated in paradoxical terms: “to escape, by means of a project, from the domain of the project.”⁴⁵⁰

For Bataille, the mental and behavioral structures of the project reach far deeper than the simple routine of forming plans and acting to carry them out. The “contestation” implied in inner experience attacks conventional patterns of thought and action at a more fundamental level. Language itself is the root of entrapment in the perpetual deferment of existence. All discursive thought and the forms of knowledge generated by such thought are barriers to the shattering immediacy of mystical experience. Thus, the experience can only free the subject from projective thinking by opening the way toward unknowing [*non savoir*].

Words, Bataille writes, “drain away almost all life in us.” Yet beneath the regions dominated by discursive thought, a “mute, secret, unseizable part subsists,” a part of ourselves ordinarily hidden by the verbal activity in which we are almost constantly engaged. Only on rare occasions, upon the emergence of certain types of “vague inner movements,” are we able to “reach or gain control over” this secret region.⁴⁵¹ As long as we “live without contesting the law of language,” the ecstatic states to which this silent part of our selves yields access are “in us,” but unacknowledged, “as if they did not exist.” But we can revolt against the domination of language, and learn “to fix our consciousness on one of these states and, silencing the speech

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid, p.60.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid, p.27.

within us, to linger over the surprise” this state offers us, augmenting its intensity and unfolding.⁴⁵² The goal of such research is not more factual information about the complex structures of inner life but awareness of the darkness and convulsive intensity of unknowing.

Citing precedents among Christian mystics and in the yogic practices of Indian traditions, Bataille describes a dialectic of continual reversal. Discursive reason leads us to the horizon of an ecstatic unknowing. In such moments, “the experience attains the fusion of subject and object, being as subject unknowing, as object the unknown.”⁴⁵³ Yet immediately, as we attain communication with “the hidden world, transformed into an abyss by unknowing,” unknowing crystallizes and fixes itself into a form of (mystical) knowledge: an image of the divine which we label “God.” This knowledge then instantly demands its own transcendence, its own dissolution into a new form of unknowing. So the movement carries us restlessly “farther, even farther.”⁴⁵⁴

A perpetual spasm of annihilation, unknowing is “intolerable.” Yet it opens the way to the highest pitch of ecstasy. It is a “state of nudity” revealing the deepest foundation of the human condition. “Sinking down” into the paradoxical reality revealed and abolished by unknowing, we seize the fact that “the only truth of man ... is to be a supplication without response.”⁴⁵⁵ “UNKNOWING STRIPS BARE,” Bataille writes. “This proposition is the summit, but must be understood thus: strips bare, so I see what [discursive] knowledge hid until that moment, but if I see, then / know. In effect, I know, but what I have known thus, unknowing strips it bare again.”⁴⁵⁶ Unknowing is the ongoing abolition of all mental contents, and the dissolution/re-creation/redissolution of the containing mind itself.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Ibid, p.21.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid, p.65.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, p25.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, p.66.

Inner experience reaches its high point in the phenomenon Bataille terms “communication:” the ecstatic state in which the boundaries of selfhood dissolve and the individual “communicates” in fusion unity with the world. The ecstasy to which the concept of communication points should however by no means be understood as beatific joy, or even as a serene absence of feeling. Rather, Bataille insists that the psychic forces set loose through communication are inextricably bound up with pain, terror, and *angoisse*. To characterize the experience in its entirety, insofar as it leads us to the “extreme limit” of that which is bearable for the human mind, he uses the word *supplice*, translatable as “torment” or “torture.”⁴⁵⁷ The inner world into which the experience conducts is not a luminous, peaceful realm, but is filled with currents of convulsive violence. Bataille presents the “schema” of the “pure experience” as the wrenching leap through which *angoisse*, when pushed to a sufficient level of intensity, launches the subject into a fevered state of despair and self-abandonment out of which ecstasy surges, only to collapse again as soon as the mind makes a movement to grasp and hold it. *Angoisse*, the initial state of isolation and anguish out of which the experience unfolds, “presupposes the desire to communicate, that is to lose myself, but it lacks the total resolution.” The anguished yearning for communion at the same time reveals the self’s inability to communicate; it “bears witness to my fear of communication.”⁴⁵⁸ The isolated self, *ipse*, is moved by the desire to “be everything,” to dissolve in communion with the whole universe. Yet at the same time, it wishes to “remain *ipse*,” to hold firm to its own individual selfhood. Out of the hopelessness of this position emerges the despair and “abandonment” through which “the rapture [*ravisement*] begins.” Yet as soon as the sudden ecstasy is seized as “my rapture, a rapture that I, *ipse*, possess,” it slips

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, p44.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, p.67.

away, leaving the self once again trapped between its “desire to be everything” and its fear of self-loss, until a new wave of ecstasy seizes and carries it again beyond its own boundaries.⁴⁵⁹

Both inner experience and public religious practice draw their power from their ability to transform the human person from a “subject isolating itself from the world,” into “a place of communication, of fusion between subject and object.”⁴⁶⁰ Yet, Bataille insists, such communication can never be realized apart from acts of transgression which establish the realm of the sacred as a space of violence, risk, and ambiguity.

IV. Summation:

Derrida, Heidegger, and Bataille, each in their diverse and unique ways, express the same concerns with which the two main figures of this dissertation have dealt. Philosophy and what it presupposes, a ground in which it can base itself, is essentially open. There is a concept that is left unsaid and which can never be recouped within the confines of philosophy itself. Philosophy undoes itself in the process of attempting to articulate what cannot be accounted for. Both Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius emphasized the self-limiting mode of philosophizing.

According to Derrida, *logocentrism* is a metaphysical comportment we have toward the world. It attempts to fully account for that which we experience through *logos*, reason itself. *Logocentrism* is the tendency to subordinate the world to speech as the formal rules that govern the possibility for language at all. To remedy this predisposition toward the world, Derrida developed deconstruction, allowing us to see behind what is presumed in language and allows us to start thinking from *différance*. This allows us to think without relying upon presence and opens a space for thought. Platonic thought, as I have expressed it here, is essentially concerned with rupturing discursive thought. In Plato writings, erotic *μανία* was utilized as a way to break

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, p.67-68.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid, p.21.

open the closed economy of Lysias' speech. This speech attempted to give a fully a complete account of a love relationship between two individuals. Reason is at the center of this speech. To correct Lysias, Socrates speaks to Phaedrus of the ecstatic nature of the soul, showing him that any account of the human being must presuppose an element that the speech itself cannot grasp. Likewise, Pseudo-Dionysius revealed that all positive statements concerning God are, in fact, intertwined and dependent upon negative statements. These negative statements are intensified concepts of the positive such that the entirety of the concept cannot be expressed by positive statements. What is positively said is reliant upon what is unsaid about God, opening the intellect to think what is unsayable. The intellect is forced to pay special attention to that which is negatively expressed.

For Heidegger language and communication was never planned, but arose from out of the necessity to account for to what we immediately exposed. We are living the wake of this inadequate mode of expressing what we experience. Heidegger's intention is to re-appropriate certain words and concepts and to give to new meaning without completely repudiating its everyday sense. Heidegger is concerned with the living experience of life itself. So too are Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius. Both describe the living movement of that which cannot be discursively articulated. Plato, using the language of eroticism, reveals how one is moved by that which escapes the grasp of reason's ability. Eroticism overwhelms the individual, despite him or herself, and is brought into an exposure with that which passes by unnoticed, essentially hidden from view. Pseudo-Dionysius employs the language of ecstasy to express this lived exposure to the divine. Such language reveals that the divine is a living experience, a living liturgy, to which we are exposed and not simply a concept with which one is theoretically concerned. For both Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius our ultimate concern is that to which we can only submit ourselves

wholly. As with Heidegger, there is an essential movement and manifesting, a happening of the unfolding of this concern. It is a concept that must be experienced in a sacred and awe-inspiring moment.

We have used Bataille's thought as a wedge by which to open both Plato's and Pseudo-Dionysius' thought of community. There we saw that the individuals lose themselves to the totality in which they find themselves. Now, we will see Bataille's thought as expressed in his *Inner Experience* and what he, himself, has to say concerning community.

To ask oneself before another: by what means does he calm within himself the desire to be everything? Sacrifice, conformity, trickery, poetry, morality, snobbery, heroism, religion, revolt, vanity, money? or by several means together? or all together? A wink of an eye in which glimmers a deceitfulness, a melancholy smile, a grimace of fatigue together betray the disguised suffering which the astonishment at not being everything, at even having concise limits, gives us.⁴⁶¹

With this passage, Bataille opens the wound of insufficiency felt by each individual who wishes to surpass his or her limited experience. In *Inner Experience*, he states that we cannot escape our desire to be everything, to identify with the entirety of the universe. The wish to surpass our limited existence may be satisfied in numerous ways. Just as inevitable as the desire to be everything is the knowledge that we will die, that our individual existence is not commensurate to the universe with which we seek identification. This uneasiness which we experience before the inevitability of our disappearance pervades our being, it inspires anguish. We avoid this suffering by suppressing the thought of death, or by postponing our existence in a frenzied yet essentially absent devotion to the world of work or project. Yet just as we can never be commensurate to the universe with which we seek identification, so that toward which we turn can never totally suppress our suffering.

⁴⁶¹ *Inner Experience*, p. xxxii

The individual's struggle between, on the one hand, the desire for continuity, which implies a loss of discontinuous being, and, on the other hand, the individual's desire to embrace the whole, all the while maintaining discontinuity. Here Bataille sets out the inevitable tension which arises between any particular, isolated element of being and the whole which transcends it. The isolated element seek autonomy, yet wishes to embrace the entirety of the whole: on its own, in isolation, it cannot fulfill this second wish. To identify with the entirety of the whole, it must forego its desire for autonomy. It enters the transcendent whole, losing a good measure of its sense of discontinuity only to find reawakened the frustrated desire for autonomy. The cycle is in this way renewed.

The uncertain opposition of autonomy to transcendence puts being into a position which slips: each being *ipse*—at the same time that it encloses itself in autonomy, and for this very reason—wants to become the whole of the transcendence...Its will for autonomy opposes it at first to the whole, but it withers—it is reduced to nothing—to the extent that it refuses to enter into it. It then renounces autonomy for the sake of the whole, but temporality: the will for autonomy is only abated for a time...⁴⁶²

Plato expresses the same sentiment in both the *Phaedrus* and *Lysis* when he discusses a form of relationship that is closer than one based upon law. This form of community is has its foundation in nature. In one passage on the *Lysis*, Socrates states “Then if you two are friends to each other by some natural bond you belong to one another [ὕμεις ἄρα εἰ φίλον ἔστων ἀλλήλοις φύσει πη οἰκεῖοί ἐσθ' ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς]” (*Lys.* 221e). The ambiguity in the Greek shows the individuality of each by not uncovering each other. I remain in the world and experience resistance and defend a place of dwelling [οἰκία] that is placed closer to me, i.e., the world. The friend opens itself to me in his or her own uniqueness. What *Lysis* does not understand in his experience of φιλία is the need of experience of someone who resists to be reduced to mere use-

⁴⁶² Ibid, p. 85.

value. The friend is not to be assimilated, not to be mastered but rather experienced. The experience is not so radically different that it is wholly unknown to me, but is different enough not to be mastered and placed in a sphere of economy.

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