

## Cultivating a Sense of In Between-ness

Recently I attended a lecture where the speaker was attempting to come to grips with a subtle, difficult topic encountered by any earnest spiritual seeker. He spelled the situation out in terms of a tension inherent within the Judeo-Christian heritage, that is to say, how we handle the down-to-earth, nitty-gritty routine of daily life vis-à-vis spiritual reality. He didn't employ the word tension in a negative fashion but as indicative of a state of affairs proper to incarnate existence which we cannot escape nor should we try to. Instead of simply coping with problems or trying to solve them, the challenge is to endow them with an order which finds representation. One way of going about this is by having access to an ancient concept built around the intermediary role of the kosmos. The singular advantage of this term is that it doesn't deal with God directly which at first may sound odd. Most of us can't handle the divine one-on-one...simply because it's either too vague or too potent...but require something in-between to reduce the distance, if you will, and thereby acting as a mediator. By no means is this a defect but a basic human need. One of the most enduring tragedies of the Protestant Reformation was to cut out mediating elements in a desire to reach God directly. It commenced with noble intentions in light of the ecclesiastical corruption of the fifteenth century but turned out to be unsatisfactory as time went on. The poetic sense of religion was watered down, if not eliminated, leaving people with nothing much that inspires. "Faith alone" was the battle cry, not especially appealing over the long haul. Instead, the reformers gave rise to the awareness of an immense looming abyss depopulated by angels and saints which was next to impossible to close. So we could say that Protestantism set in motion the abolishment of the kosmos with a yawning gulf it posited between God and man. Ever since the fifteenth century the abyss has become wider, something that can be corrected by recourse to an updated image of the kosmos.

Shortly before writing this article I came across a verse from a poem by Ephrem the Syrian which nicely put into view this tension between the divine and human: "God descended as word and ascended as man." The Word's descent was easier since it lacks physical mass (besides, in this descent all it had to do was float downwards), whereas the ascent of man goes against the law of gravity: a heavy, earthly form leaving its natural habitat for the airy, heavenly dwelling place of the Word. Yet at the same time, this image, both by reason of being natural and unnatural, has a lot of appeal. A close reading of the Gospels, that is, Jesus' own words, minimizes the tension of these two down-up motions which has sunken into modern religious consciousness; later centuries, both on the Catholic and Protestant sides, overlaid the original insights with lesser ones of their own which, unfortunately, tended to stick more than the Gospel ones. Undoing these overlays is a genuine challenge. Even if we can undo them intellectually, the psychological scares remain a long time as coming from other people and institutions.

So let's get back to the tension between the spiritual and material worlds as posited in traditional up-down imagery, for this has sunken so deep within our religious heritage. Living in an all-pervading kosmo-logical based society, the Gospel writers were able to see the incarnation of God as coming within a closed, bounded environment which no one ever perceived as

confining; rather its limits were comforting. The political philosopher Eric Voegelin would call such a mentality "compact" in that all elements—religion, politics and culture as a whole—were closely tucked together, forming a single integral unit. With the advent of Jesus Christ there occurred a differentiation (another Voegelin term): that is to say, something blossoms from the compact (let's say, kosmo-logical order) order with the potential of taking humanity to another level of order while at the same time enfolding the previous level. As a brief side note, the process of compactness-to-differentiation can't help but make one speculate if another such process is in store for us or if we're going through one right now. Apart from this concern, it seems that the evangelists were able to realize that something new had come into being with the advent of Jesus Christ. Although later generations made their own contributions layer upon layer, century upon century, this process can't be called one of differentiation. They were adding reflections upon a fundamental shift that had occurred already, nothing more. The datum was given already to unpack. At the heart of these contributions the early Church was building up a more comprehensive sense of that in-between, mediating element where the divine was much more accessible than it is today. Within the movement from compactness to differentiation our heritage plays itself out, for it contains wonderful, dramatic images of God's intervention in human affairs. This commenced with the Old Testament and subsequently, the extended Christian tradition replete with marvelous treatises on prayer and theological writings which flourishes to the present. Many early Church Fathers became sensitive to a growing sense of two orders and make a sharp distinction between them (one thinks of Augustine's city of God and city of man). However, this was operative more upon the social plane, not the kosmo-logical one, which stood its ground well past the Middle Ages. Then it began to come apart, as noted earlier, with the real culprit, the Reformation. From here it was easy for scientific advances to get a jump-start to do their share in a climate that already had changed.

Ever since the composition of the New Testament and running right down to the present day, Christianity has been shadowed (and continues to be so) with gnosticism. This phenomenon operates parallel to an established religious tradition which rests upon historical events yet interprets them within the non-historical register of faith. One characteristic of this shadow-type religion is an attempt to force the kingdom of God into the present while privately acknowledging the inherent impossibility of such a project. And so it connotes an element of willful effort despite the obstacles. If and when a challenge comes to the fore, adherents to gnosticism are flexible enough to bend their interpretation in order to come up with an appropriate response. Part of this boils down to reducing revealed, divine truths to a technique, a technique aimed at obtaining a skewered form of incarnation. In other words, gnosticism prefers the trappings of transcendence over the Real Thing which by any standards is quite slippery. That means gnosticism's chief task (regardless of what form it takes) is to choose elements that strike one's fancy through participating in some degree of transcendence. This can involve anything from psychic phenomenon to a deliberate pick-and-choosing of sacred texts usually to back up a phenomenon in the created realm that is difficult to explain. Then these elements are bestowed with an importance that doesn't do justice to either them or the context into which they are inserted. Nobody knows for sure when this all started, but one possibility is when Jesus Christ failed to return as had been expected. Despite the let-down, the gap

perceived by the faithful gave rise to an opportunity to furnish substitutes.

The attempt of gnosticism to engage in a subtle form of spiritual thievery shouldn't be taken as wholly negative, for it underscores a fundamental human need for security. At its heart, the intent is rooted in our inbuilt desire for God. At the same time it gives voice to a certain unease at how tradition articulates the relationship between the divine and human. All spiritual seekers have experienced this tension between institutionalized religion and its practice, so nothing new is going on here. On one hand we wish God yet on the other realize our desire is fulfilled partially, that we cannot and never will be able to be present to him in this life as much as we'd like. So if we can't realize God now, despite glimpses here and there, why not turn attention to a project which boldly assaults heaven in order to realize God's kingdom on earth? One way of accomplishing this is by avoiding a direct assault and looking around at the edges, as it were, of an established religion and finding what can be manipulated and what cannot. We effect this not so much physical means but by knowledge, the root meaning of word gnosticism. Such knowledge derives from true religion yet is taken out of context with the intent of bestowing a person with a transcendent dimension that could not be communicated otherwise. Gnosticism plays upon both our inherent limitations and openness to transcendence, a delicate balance that requires constant adjustment. Gnosticism acknowledges this balance yet wants to tip the scale in order to endow its own insights with legitimate transcendence. Considerable mileage may be gotten from the endeavor, but ultimately it runs up against the wall of human limitations. Already such limitations were put in place with great wisdom as we find through the legitimate expressions of myths. They remain generally accepted without manipulation because everyone knew instinctively that they speak to a wider audience about origins, of how the cosmos and our society came into being.

Recognition of that inherent unease at our unfulfilled state requires something better than what gnostic enterprises have to offer, for ultimately they are snipping away at the edges of established religion their solutions remain partial. In other words, gnosticism attempts to exert control due to discontent with our limited present condition. Putting it traditionally, we humans are trapped in a fallen, sinful world which requires medicine stronger than the faith offered by traditional religion to extricate ourselves: gnosis or knowledge of principles hidden from the masses is indispensable in order for this liberation. At the same time, always it's been a question of where this gnosis comes from; no one seems to have a clue except that it's "secret," a convenient way of explaining its existence. We could write this off, but gnosis has the benefit of revealing an uncomfortable aspect of our behavior which can be difficult to accept, namely, the desire of belonging to an elite which sets us apart and makes us special, not unlike a club mentality.

It's fairly accepted that religion deals with life after death. Such was not the case with the ancient Hebrew religion which did not believe in the soul's immortality because it impinged upon God's unity and divinity. Not only were the Israelites surrounded but were infiltrated by societies which believed in multiple gods and needed to defend their identity against them. So instead of ascribing belief in the soul's immortality, they emphasized the role of tradition,

patriarchs and Torah. Mysticism as we've come to understand it was absent. Surely it must have existed as communion with the living God yet the Israelites built up a cultural identity which became a way of satisfying our innate desire for eternity. By contrast, the ancient Greeks recognized the existence of the soul as delineated by Plato, Aristotle and many of their predecessors. For them it was easier to account for mystery rites which introduced the inductee into hidden knowledge which for the most part was not at odds with the general religion. But it was the discovery, if you will, of the soul...the psuche...that distinguished the Greeks. When Christianity came along, it attempted to incorporate the two strands of Judaic tradition and the Greek discovery of psuche, thereby giving occasion for another form of gnostic speculation. Never have we been able to resolve successfully the heritage of Hellas and Judaism. To the present there exists a tension which, without being over-simplified, is one between spirituality (which also includes philosophy in the original sense of the word, love of wisdom) and religious observance.

Thus throughout the long interaction between Judaism and Christianity (which incorporated elements from ancient Hellas), including to and beyond the Reformation, people sensed the tension between the divine and human in varying, intense degrees. Always present was a desire to cure this problem by recourse to some type of intermediate element. Here's where the value of a traditional kosmos as noted above comes in. For countless generations perception of this kosmos had remained constant until it was shed in favor of a modern unbounded universe. A concept helpful to comprehend the positive side of kosmos comes from Eric Voegelin who uses the preposition metaxy (taken from the Greek metaxu) which means in-between. It is a small but loaded term which says a lot about the human condition and our unease of being where we are. This unease is a peculiarly modern malaise, never satisfied with anything no matter what it is. Metaxu (I'll stick with that term, more proper to the original Greek) does not denote a place which, by reason of being localized, is subject to manipulation. Rather, metaxu might be viewed as an index...a sign or token...which points away from itself to a higher reality. This sounds a bit abstract, hard to get a handle on, and indeed it is. Like water in which fish live, it can't be demonstrated directly (as by the fish); one needs to step outside to appreciate the situation. That's where the appeal of gnosticism enters the picture. In its search for controllable knowledge, gnosticism claims to have stepped outside the normal bounds of human experience. It has touched sensitive nerves by pointing out the inherent limits of metaxu, the in-between locale of our residence. Yes, this residence is within space and time and for the most part is the only sphere with which we are acquainted. After all, even though the modern universe is imaginably huge, our human potential operates at its best within a bounded environment. This is not unlike being on a ship at sea. Despite the sea's vastness, there's something reassuring about being on a small, fragile vessel. The vessel's smallness endows it with a mysterious awareness that something larger and threatening is out there yet ultimately...and we don't know why...is taking care of us.

Within this bounded environment everything is characterized by a rise and fall, of coming into being and falling out of being. Actually, the same happens in the modern universe but that model has a lot more of the same stuff going on. Ultimately it's a matter of degree. If

understood properly, realizing the essential sameness of that “stuff” both within the universe and the kosmos models reduces anxiety, making us more secure in the role first of spectators and then of participants. The notion of an on-looker doesn’t detract from the necessity of engagement; rather, it frees us up from the need of compulsive involvement. Despite the complexities we face, we know that the field before us ultimately is bounded. Our awareness always will remain bounded as mirrored by the kosmos which should come as good news, not the imposition of a straight-jacket. By its very nature the twofold mode of watching and being involved comprises all we experience. This observation sounds prosaic yet needs to be put out there in order to bring home the bounded nature of our environment-as-kosmos despite its multiform character. “Bounded” is a more appropriate term than “limited” since it means that despite an infinite number of things and events, we can grasp what’s transpiring, that the process ultimately is symbolic of a greater, transcendent reality. At first we may feel hemmed in, but questions about the meaning of life that previously had gripped our attention loosen up their hold. Actually this is quite miraculous, not unlike a kairos event. Such coming into being and dissolution gives the appearance of an infinite sequence. True on one level but not on another; while an indefinite multitude of things may transpire, they do so within a limited context. Suddenly this context becomes more manageable...not that we gain control of it but we become at home with our inherent messiness and unresolved issues.

The ancient Greeks saw this kosmos-environment as an ornament worn by women. Originally it applied to the firmament where the stars form a decoration adorning the night sky, the dense compactness of the Milky Way. This kosmos is located in a fixed position “above” our native residence “below” which is in conformity with biblical teaching. Such a view was sensible in pre-scientific days and even now has a certain attractiveness despite all our scientific advancements. Not only that, the dome-like nature of the heavens resembles a tent with each of its four ends touching the earth and enhances the attractiveness of this picture: living in such a kosmos conveys a genuine appeal by reason of being metaxu...in-between a more comprehensive reality which brought it into existence together with us who live within its bounds. We can experience this on a clear, cool night. If you go out and tsoak in this view, an invariable awe overtakes us which automatically conveys the sense that something (or someone) brought it into being. Insistence upon attributing the kosmos to a divine source flies in the face of scientific evidence and refuses to go away. The power of such an experience is testified by cultivating memory of the night time kosmos throughout the daylight hours which can inform our daily activities. Even when overwhelmed with work and concerns, we know that the same kosm-etic adornment is up there despite being blocked by the overpowering sun. Of course, we cannot return to a literal, pre-scientific view although a kosm-ic view is appealing by reason of its elegance. As an aide in ordering our lives, it is more valuable than the hard-core facts of an open-ended system (i.e., the modern universe), for instinctively we feel at home here. Within this environment emphasis is more upon beauty than upon its acknowledged finiteness which outweighs other values. At the same time it holds its own in the face of modern concepts about the universe; on the practical level, it counters the negative perceptions of ourselves we get when confronted with the universe’s vastness. Despite its awesomeness, something unbounded and infinite lacks identity. If the universe lacked a first cause which brought it into existence, that means that all

the causes we see transpiring right now had been operative before and will be operative later. The "stuff" of this universe remains out there independent of us, even alien to our humanity, and breaks down how we perceive ourselves. Without sounding overly succinct, it doesn't make us happy which is our natural state.

The idea of a kosmos as just delineated is not an attempt at resurrecting a quaint, naive concept from the ancient past but symbolic of something deep within the human spirit. Its appeal to our innate sense of beauty and proportion transcends the hard, cold facts of modern scientific world view; these two reasons are sufficient for its validity. But there arises a hard to deny fact that such a view is artificial. True if we stay within the compact ancient vision which is outdated. However, this vision may be unpacked, so to speak, when we appreciate it as symbolic as opposed to literal reality. It counters the infinity proper to the modern universe by adapting to that propensity for infinity within the human spirit which is far richer than all the "stuff" of the physical universe. The kosmos recognizes this inbuilt desire which is not to be found on the outside but within us. After all, even in those days when the kosmos was taken literally there were plenty spiritual forms or movements which worked within the inherent limits of representation. Although history has plenty of accounts about the conflicts between religion and new scientific advancements, records are mute on how it affected practiced spirituality. Chances are that a shift away from a kosm-ic world view would have left untouched genuine practitioners. The same applies today even in the face of far greater knowledge about the universe...right down to the possibility of multiple universes. Hence the kosmos, while being a closed system, points to an open one or one symbolic of "human" infinity as opposed to the scientific kind. It takes some courage to stand up to this without literal appeal to religious literature. Thus we have a little bubble, very vulnerable in its structure, but awareness of this vulnerability is its appeal as well as endurance.

For a scriptural example of how the kosmos mirrors the human capacity for infinity, consider Psalm 8.3-5: "When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have arranged, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him little less than God and crowned him with glory and honor." Here is a direct correspondence between the kosmos, the human person and God. The psalmist isn't bothered by the incredible discrepancy of all three: God's unboundedness, the night sky's immensity and man; rather, he marvels at the creation of the human person who, despite being situated within the confines of the kosmos, is "little less" than God who is outside it. That leaves the dome of night as intermediary. The first impression is that this "little less" consists in the capacity to express awe at the kosmos, true for anyone who gazes up at the night sky. Going deeper, this verse contains awareness that a person, by reason of being rooted within the kosmos, participates in that which made it. By reason of this mediating position of standing in-between (metaxu) it and full transcendence, the person can reach to God the kosmos. Thus human nature is metaxu, a symbol of what touches the frontier of God through the kosmos.

As noted above, the ancients perceived the kosmos as representing something in-between...metaxu...themselves and the gods, an image which has appeal on a more personal level.

It seemed to have been developed with the rise of philosophical inquiry and reached a high point with Plato. For example, refer to his Symposium which contains a speech of Diotima, a prophetess from Mantinea (cited below in full with insertions of transliterated key Greek words) who may or may not have existed, something beside the point. Diotima teaches Socrates about love (eros), "a great spirit" or daimon whose function is to interpret (hermeneuo) in-between (metaxu) gods and humankind. Not only this but eros is the source of inspiration such as for prophets and priests. Compared with eros all other forms of wisdom is "mean and vulgar" which in Greek is banausos (mechanical), a striking term with modern resonance. What's especially unique about eros is that he is the offspring of Poros (a means or contrivance) and Penia (poverty) and by reason of this parentage is "neither mortal nor immortal but a means between (metaxu) the two." So eros recognizes his poverty as being "rough and squalid" yet does not wallow in it. Instead, he has the means...the poros...to get out of it, but his hold is always tenuous. In other words, the proper name of eros' father, Poros, reveals a constant state of tension which Diotima recounts as a fondness for trickery and deception to get his way.

Now a philosopher is a lover of wisdom who is "in a mean between (metaxu) the two," that is, wisdom and love, and like eros, may be considered a child of Poros and Penia. His object of search is to channel an eros for the good (agathos) which makes him happy or eudaimon. And being such, the philosopher becomes a daimon (like eros) by reason of his role of metaxu or being in-between. Now the philosopher in his desire has "one form" or eidos which is to be a lover and possessor of the good. Diotima directs the philosopher's attention to that eros with physical begetting in mind, a phenomenon common to everyone, which is a kind of "immortal principle" bestowed upon the mortal creature. Such begetting seeks within its own limited sphere that which lies beyond it and effects this by propagating children who, in turn, do the same into the indefinite future. Diotima doesn't denigrate physical procreation but urges Socrates to see it as an image of "beginning from the beauties of earth and to mount upwards for the sake of that other (beauty, to kalon)...using them as steps." Once realizing that this ability motivated by eros is achievable, it is relatively easy to perceive it imaged in the kosmos model, that is, kosmos as a physical representation of divine beauty. There is now a one-on-one correspondence between that which is within with that which is without.

The content of this article is essentially simple though I am aware of the complexities involved, usually true when examining things we normally don't pursue. After all, we're dealing with the unfolding of a mystery together with the search for order which differs considerably from the favorite modern desire to seek progress. Indeed we as humans have the capacity for that which is infinite and can glory in it yet fail to recognize its positive role concerning our bounded nature. Models of human boundedness don't exist anymore or if they do, require some kind of rehabilitation as we've seen regarding the notion of a kosmos. This requires more than rehabilitation of old terms and appreciation of an earlier model that had worked for generations but eventually went out of style. Here is where the speech of Diotima to Socrates comes into play: she teaches him to see the correspondence between inner and external beauty, the latter being reflected through the kosmos. After all, appeal to beauty is universal, a fairly sure-fire way to get one's attention which if done properly, can lead to the contemplation of things unseen.

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Speech of Diotima as found in Plato's Symposium (201d-212c)

Translation by Benjamin Jowett

(A more up-to-date translation exists: Plato, Complete Works, edited by John M. Cooper, 1997)

201 "And now, taking my leave of you, I would rehearse a tale of love [logos & eros] which I heard from Diotima of Mantinea, a woman wise [sophos] in this and in many other kinds of knowledge, who in the days of old, when the Athenians offered sacrifice before the coming of the plague, delayed the disease ten years. She was my instructress [didasko: to teach] in the art of love [ta erotika], and I shall repeat to you what she said to me, beginning with the admissions made by Agathon, which are nearly if not quite the same which I made to the wise woman when she questioned me-I think that this will be the easiest way, and I shall take both parts myself as well as I can. As you, Agathon, suggested, I must speak first of the being and nature of Love [ho Eros kai poios tis], and then of his works [ergos]. First I said to her in nearly the same words which he used to me, that Love was a mighty god [megas theos], and likewise fair [kalos: beautiful] and she proved to me as I proved to him that, by my own showing, Love was neither fair nor good [agathos]."

What do you mean, Diotima," I said, "is love then evil and foul [aischros: causing shame & kakos: evil]?"

"Hush," she cried; "must that be foul which is not fair?"

202 "Certainly," I said.

"And is that which is not wise, ignorant [sophos & amathes: unlearned]? Do you not see that there is a mean between [ti metaxu] wisdom and ignorance?"

"And what may that be?" I said.

"Right opinion [to ortha doxazein]," she replied; "which, as you know, being incapable of giving a reason [logos], is not knowledge [epistamai: to be able to, acquainted with] (for how can knowledge [episteme: acquaintance with] be devoid of reason [alogos]? Nor again, ignorance [amathia], for neither can ignorance attain the truth), but is clearly something which is a mean [metaxu] between ignorance and wisdom [phronesis: purpose, intention & amathia]."

"Quite true," I replied.

"Do not then insist," she said, "that what is not fair is of necessity foul, or what is not good evil; or infer [homologeio: to agree, confess] that because love is not fair and good he is therefore foul and evil; for he is in a mean between [ti metaxu] them."

"Well," I said, "Love is surely admitted [homologeio] by all to be a great god."

"By those who know [eido: to see] or by those who do not know?"

"By all."

"And how, Socrates," she said with a smile, "can Love be acknowledged [homologeio] to be a great god by those who say that he is not a god at all?"

"And who are they?" I said.

"You and I are two of them," she replied.

"How can that be?" I said.

"It is quite intelligible [rhadios, adverb: easily]," she replied; "for you yourself would acknowledge that the gods are happy and fair [eudaimos & kalos] of course you would-would to say that any god was not?"

"Certainly not," I replied.

"And you mean by the happy, those who are the possessors [ktaomai: to procure, get] of things good or fair?"

"Yes."

"And you admitted [homologeō] that Love, because he was in want [endeia, with dia], desires [epithumeō: to long for, covert] those good and fair things of which he is in want [endeēs]?"

"Yes, I did."

"But how can he be a god who has no portion [amoiros] in what is either good or fair?"

"Impossible."

"Then you see [nomizo: to hold as a custom] that you also deny the divinity [theos] of Love."

"What then is Love?" I asked; "Is he mortal [thnetos]?"

"No."

"What then?"

"As in the former instance, he is neither mortal nor immortal [thnetos & athanatos], but in a mean between [metaxu] the two."

"What is he, Diotima?"

"He is a great spirit (daimon), and like all spirits he is intermediate [metaxu] between the divine [daimonios] and the mortal."

"And what," I said, "is his power [dunamis]?"

"He interprets [hermeneuo]," she replied, "between gods and [para] men, conveying and taking across [diaporthmeuo: to carry over, interpret] to the gods the prayers [deesis: entreating] and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands and replies [epitaxis: injunction & amoibe: requital, answer] of the gods; he is the mediator [en meso] who spans [sumpleroo: to fill up] the chasm which divides them, and therefore in him all is bound together [sundeo], and through him the arts of the prophet [mantike] and the priest [techne: works (of the priest)], their sacrifices and mysteries [telete: initiation into mysteries] and charms [epodos: a singing to or over], and all, prophecy and incantation [manteia &

203 goeteia], find their way. For God mingles [mignumi] not with man; but through Love all the intercourse [homilia: a being together], and converse [dialektos: discussion] of god with man, whether awake or asleep, is carried on. The wisdom [sophos with daimonios aner: spiritual man or one possessed by a daimon] which understands this is spiritual; all other wisdom, such as that of arts [techne] and handicrafts, is mean and vulgar [banausos: mechanical]. Now these spirits [daimon] or intermediate powers are many and diverse [pantodapos: manifold], and one of them is Love.

"And who," I said, "was his father, and who his mother?"

"The tale," she said, "will take time; nevertheless I will tell you. On the birthday of Aphrodite there was a feast of the gods, at which the god Poros or Plenty, who is the son of Metis or Discretion, was one of the guests. When the feast was over, Penia or Poverty, as the manner is on such occasions, came about the doors to beg [prosaiteo: to ask besides]. Now Plenty who was the worse for nectar (there was no wine in those days), went into the garden of Zeus and

fell into a heavy sleep, and Poverty considering [epibouleuo: to plan, contrive against] her own straitened circumstances [aporia: difficulty, loss], plotted to have a child by him, and accordingly she lay down at his side and conceived love [eros], who partly because he is naturally [phusis] a lover of the beautiful [erastes & kalos], and because Aphrodite is herself beautiful, and also because he was born on her birthday, is her follower and attendant [therapon]. And as his parentage is, so also are his fortunes. In the first place he is always poor, and anything but tender and fair, as the many imagine [oiomai: to suppose] him; and he is rough and squalid, and has no shoes, nor a house to dwell in; on the bare earth exposed he lies under the open heaven, in-the streets, or at the doors of houses, taking his rest; and like [phusis: having the same nature of] his mother he is always in distress. Like [kata] his father too, whom he also partly resembles, he is always plotting [epiboulos: treacherous] against the fair and good; he is bold, enterprising, strong, a mighty hunter, always weaving some intrigue or other, keen in the pursuit of wisdom [phroneis: purpose, intention & epithumetes], fertile in resources; a philosopher at all times, terrible as an enchanter, sorcerer, sophist. He is by nature neither mortal nor immortal, but alive and flourishing [thallo: to bloom] at one moment when he is in plenty, and dead at another moment, and again alive by reason of his father's nature. But that which is always flowing in is always flowing out, and so he is never in want [aporia] and never in wealth; and, further, he is in a mean between [en meso] ignorance and knowledge

204 [sophia: wisdom & amathia: ignorance]. The truth of the matter is this: No god is a philosopher or seeker [epithumeo] after wisdom, for he is wise already; nor does any man who is wise seek after wisdom. Neither do the ignorant [amathes] seek after Wisdom. For herein is the evil [chalepos: painful, grievous] of ignorance, that he who is neither good nor wise [phronimos] is nevertheless satisfied with himself [dokein einai hikanon: to think to be worthy]: he has no desire [epithumeo] for that of which he feels [oiomai] no want [endees]."

"But-who then, Diotima," I said, "are the lovers of wisdom [philosopheo], if they are neither the wise nor the foolish? [sophos & amathes]"

"A child may answer that question," she replied; "they are those who are in a mean between [metaxu] the two; Love is one of them. For wisdom is a most beautiful [kalos] thing, and Love is of [peri] the beautiful; and therefore Love is also a philosopher: or lover of wisdom, and being a lover of wisdom [philosophos] is in a mean [metaxu] between the wise and the ignorant. And of this too his birth is the cause [aitia]; for his father is wealthy and wise, and his mother poor and foolish. Such, my dear Socrates, is the nature of the spirit [phusis & daimonos] Love. The error in your conception [oiomai] of him was very natural, and as I imagine from what you say, has arisen out of a confusion of love and the beloved [to eromenon & to eron], which made you think that love was all beautiful. For the beloved is the truly beautiful, and delicate, and perfect, and blessed [kaos & habros: pretty & teleos & makaristos]; but the principle [idea: outward appearance, kind, sort] of love is of another nature, and is such as I have described."

I said, "O strange woman, thou speak well; but, assuming Love to be such as you say, what is the use [chreia] of him to men?"

"That, Socrates," she replied, "I will attempt to unfold [didasko: to teach]: of his nature and birth I have already spoken; and you acknowledge that love is of the beautiful. But some one will say: Of the beautiful in what, Socrates and Diotima?-or rather let me put the question more dearly, and ask: When a man loves [ero] the beautiful, what does he desire [ero]?"

I answered her "That the beautiful [ta kala, plural] may be his."

"Still," she said, "the answer suggests a further question: What is given by the possession of beauty?"

"To what you have asked," I replied, "I have no answer ready."

"Then," she said, "Let me put the word 'good' in the place of the beautiful, and repeat the question once more: If he who loves good, what is it then that he loves? "The possession of the good," I said. "And what does he gain who possesses the good?"

205 "Happiness [eudaimoneo, verb: to be blessed with a good genius]," I replied; "there is less difficulty in answering that question." "Yes," she said, "the happy are made happy by the acquisition of good things. Nor is there any need to ask why a man desires happiness; the answer is already final."

"You are right." I said.

"And is this wish and this desire common to all? And do all men always desire their own good, or only some men?-what say you?"

"All men," I replied; "the desire is common [koinos] to all."

"Why, then," she rejoined, "are not all men, Socrates, said to love, but only some them? Whereas you say that all men are always loving the same things."

"I myself wonder," I said,-why this is."

"There is nothing to wonder at," she replied; "the reason is that one part [eidos] of love is separated off [aphiemi: to let go, slacken] and receives the name of the whole, but the other parts have other names."

"Give an illustration," I said.

She answered me as follows: "There is poetry [poiesis: literally, making], which, as you know, is complex [polus: much, many]; and manifold. All creation or passage of non-being into being [ek tou me ontos eis to on] is poetry or making, and the processes [ergasia] of all art [techne] are creative [poiesis]; and the masters of arts [demiourgos] are all poets or makers."

"Very true."

"Still," she said, "you know that they are not called poets, but have other names; only that portion of the art which is separated off [aphorizo: to mark off by boundaries] from the rest, and is concerned with music and meter, is termed poetry, and they who possess poetry in this sense of the word are called [prosagoreuo: to address] poets."

"Very true," I said.

"And the same holds of [peri] love. For you may say generally that all desire [epithumia] of good and happiness [eudaimoneo, verb] is only the great and subtle [doleros: treacherous] power of love; but they who are drawn [trepo: to turn, direct] towards [peri] him by any other path, whether the path of money-making or gymnastics or philosophy, are not called lovers -the name of the whole is appropriated to those whose affection takes [spudazo: to be busy, zealous] one form [eidos] only-they alone are said to love, or to be lovers."

"I dare say," I replied, "that you are right."

"Yes," she added, "and you hear people say that lovers are seeking [zeteo] for their other half; but I say that they are seeking neither for the half of themselves, nor for the whole, unless the half or the whole be [tugchano: to hit upon] also a good. And they will cut off their own hands and feet and cast them away, if they are evil [poneros]; for they love not what is their own,

unless perchance there be some one who calls what belongs to him the good, and what belongs to

206 another the evil [kakos]. For there is nothing which men [oikeios: related, of the same family] love but the good. Is there anything?"

"Certainly, I should say, that there is nothing."

"Then," she said, "the simple truth is, that men love the good."

"Yes," I said.

"To which must be added that they love the possession of the good?"

"Yes, that must be added."

"And not only the possession, but the everlasting [aei] possession of the good?" "That must be added too."

"Then love," she said, "may be described generally as the love of the everlasting possession of the good?"

"That is most true."

"Then if this be the nature of love, can you tell me further," she said, "what is the manner [tropos] of the pursuit [dioko, verb]? What are they doing who show all this eagerness and heat [spoude & suntasis: tension] which is called love? And what is the object which they have in view [tugchano]? Answer me."

"No, Diotima," I replied, "if I had known, I should not have wondered at your wisdom, neither should I have come to learn [manthano] from you about [para] this very matter."

"Well," she said, "I will teach you:-The object which they have in view is birth in beauty, whether of [kata] body or soul [soma & psuche]."

"I do not understand [manthano: to perceive by the senses] you," I said; "the oracle [manteia: prophetic power] requires an explanation."

"I will make my meaning clearer," she replied. "I mean to say, that all men are bringing to the birth in [kata] their bodies and in their souls. There is a certain age at which human nature [phusis] is desirous [epithumeo] of procreation-procreation which must be in beauty and not in deformity [aischros: causing shame]; and this procreation is the union of man and woman, and is a divine thing [theion pragma]; for conception and generation are an immortal principle [athanaton & enistemi] in the mortal creature, and in the inharmonious [anarmostos] they can never be. But the deformed [aischros] is always inharmonious with the divine [theios], and the beautiful harmonious [harmozo]. Beauty, then, is the destiny [moira: part, division, lot] or goddess of parturition [eileithuia] who presides at birth, and therefore, when approaching [prospelazo] beauty, the conceiving power is propitious, and diffusive and benign [hilaos & euphraino], and begets and bears fruit: at the sight of ugliness [aischros] she frowns and contracts and has a sense of pain, and turns away, and shrivels up, and not without a pang refrains from conception. And this is the reason why, when the hour of conception arrives, and the teeming nature is full, there is such a flutter and ecstasy about beauty whose approach is the alleviation of the pain of travail. For love, Socrates, is not, as you imagine, the love of the beautiful only." "What then?"

"The love of generation and of birth in beauty."

"Yes," I said.

"Yes, indeed," she replied. "But why of generation?" "Because to the mortal creature, generation

is a sort of eternity and immortality [aegenes & athanaton]," she replied; "and if, as has been already admitted [homologeo], love is of the

207 everlasting possession of the good, all men will necessarily desire [epithumeo] immortality [einai aei] together with good: wherefore love is of immortality [athanasia]."

All this she taught [didasko] me at various times when she spoke of [peri] love. And I remember her once saying to me, "What is the cause [aitia], Socrates, of love, and the attendant desire [epithumia]? See you not how all animals, birds, as well as beasts, in their desire [epithumeo] of procreation, are in agony when they take the infection of love, which begins with the desire of union [erotikos, adverb & diatithemi: to arrange, place separately]; whereto is added the care of offspring, on whose behalf the weakest are ready to battle against the strongest even to the uttermost, and to die for them, and will, let themselves be tormented with hunger or suffer anything in order to maintain their young. Man may be supposed to act thus from reason [logismos: counting, reckoning]; but why should animals have these passionate feelings [erotikos, adverb]? Can you tell me why?"

Again I replied that I did not know. She said to me: "And do you expect ever to become a master [didaskalos: teacher] in the art of love [peri ta erotika], if you do not know this?"

"But I have told you already, Diotima, that my ignorance is the reason why I come to [para] you; for I am conscious that I want a teacher [didaskalos]; tell me then the cause of this and of the other mysteries of love [ta erotika]."

"Marvel not," she said, "if you believe that love is of the immortal, as we have several times acknowledged [homologeo]; for here again, and on the same principle [logos] too, the mortal nature is seeking [zeteo] as far as is possible to be everlasting and immortal: and this is only to be attained by generation, because generation always leaves behind a new existence in the place of the old. Nay even in the life, of the same individual there is succession and not absolute unity: a man is called the same, and yet in the short interval which elapses between youth and age, and in which every animal is said to have life and identity, he is undergoing a perpetual process of loss and reparation [aei gignomenos, ta apollus or apollumi: to destroy]-hair, flesh, bones, blood, and the whole body are always changing. Which is true not only of the body, but also of the soul, whose habits [tropos], tempers [ethe], opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears, never remain

208 [paristemi] the same in any one of us, but are always coming and going [gignaomai & apollumi]; and equally true of knowledge [episteme], and what is still more surprising to us mortals, not only do the sciences [episteme] in general spring up and decay, so that in respect of them we are never the same; but each of them individually experiences [pascho: to suffer] a like change. For what is implied in the word 'recollection [melete: care, attention, practice], but the departure of knowledge [episteme], which is ever being forgotten [lethe], and is renewed and preserved by recollection [mneme], and appears [dokeo] to be the same although in reality new, according to that law of succession by which all mortal things are preserved, not absolutely the same, but by substitution, the old worn-out mortality leaving another new and similar existence behind unlike the divine, which is always the same and not another? And in this way, Socrates, the mortal body, or mortal anything, partakes of [metecho: to have with] immortality; but the immortal in another way. Marvel not then at the love which all men have of their offspring; for that universal love and interest [spoude] is for the sake of immortality [athanasia]."

I was astonished at her words, and said: "Is this really true, O wise Diotima?" And she answered with all the authority of an accomplished sophist [hoi teleoi sophistai]: "Of that, Socrates, you may be assured;-think only of the ambition of men, and you will wonder at the senselessness [alogia, lacking logos] of their ways, unless you consider [ennoeo: to have in one's thoughts] how they are stirred [enthumeomai] by the love of an immortality of fame. They are ready to run all risks greater far than they would have for their children, and to spend money and undergo any sort of toil, and even to die, for the sake of leaving behind them a name which shall be eternal. Do you imagine that Alcestis would have died to save Admetus, or Achilles to avenge Patroclus, or your own Codrus in order to preserve the kingdom for his sons, if they had not imagined [oiomai: to consider] that the memory [mneme] of their virtues [arete], which still survives among us, would be immortal? No," she said, "I am persuaded that all men do all things, and the better they are the more they do them, in hope of the glorious fame of immortal virtue [huper aretes athanatou]; for they desire the immortal [athanatou erosin]. "Those who are pregnant in the body only, betake themselves to women and beget children-this is the character of their love; their offspring, as they hope, will preserve their memory and giving them the blessedness [eudaimonia] and immortality which they desire in the future [eis ton epeita chronon]. But souls 209 which are pregnant-for there certainly are men who are more creative in [kata] their souls than in their bodies conceive that which is proper for the soul to conceive or contain. And what are these conceptions [proseko: to reach, belong to]?-wisdom and virtue [phronesis & arete] in general. And such creators are poets and all artists [demiourgos] who are deserving of the name inventor [euretikos]. But the greatest and fairest [kalos] sort of wisdom by far is that which is concerned with the ordering [diakosmesis] of states and families, and which is called temperance and justice [sophrosune: discretion, moderation & dikaiosune]. And he who in youth has the seed of these implanted in him and is himself inspired, when he comes to maturity desires [epithumeo] to beget and generate. He wanders about seeking beauty that he may beget offspring-for in deformity [aischros] he will beget nothing-and naturally embraces [aspazomai: to welcome kindly] the beautiful rather than the deformed body; above all when he finds fair and noble and well-nurtured [gennaios: suitable to one's birth] soul, he embraces the two in one person, and to such an one he is full of speech about virtue and the nature and pursuits [epitedeuo: to pursue] of a good man; and he tries to educate [paideuo] him; and at the touch [hapto: to fasten] of the beautiful which is ever present to his memory [homileo: to be in company with], even when absent, he brings forth that which he had conceived long before, and in company with him tends that which he brings forth; and they are married by a far nearer tie [koinonia] and have a closer friendship [philia] than those who beget mortal children, for the children who are their common offspring are fairer and more immortal. Who, when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets, would not rather have their children than ordinary human ones? Who would not emulate them in the creation of children such as theirs, which have preserved [parecho: to hold in readiness] their memory [mneme] and given them everlasting glory? Or who would not have such children as Lycurgus left behind him to be the saviors, not only of Lacedaemon, but of Hellas, as one may say? There is Solon, too, who is the revered father of Athenian laws; and many others there are in many other places, both among Hellenes and barbarians, who have given to the world many noble works, and have been the parents of virtue of every kind; and many temples have been raised in

their honor for the sake of children such as theirs; which were never raised in honor of any one, for the sake of his mortal children.

210 "These are the lesser mysteries of love, into which even you, Socrates, may enter [mueo: to initiate into the mysteries]; to the greater and more hidden ones which are the crown of these, and to which, if you pursue them in a right spirit [methiemi: to release & orthos, adverb], they will lead, I know not whether you will be able to attain. But I will do my utmost to inform you, and do you follow if you can.

"For he who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms [hiemi: to put in motion & epi ta kal somata (bodies)]; and first, if he be guided by his instructor [hegeomai & hegoumenos] aright, to love one such form only-out of that he should create fair thoughts [kalos & logos]; and soon he will of himself perceive [katanoeo: to understand] that the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another; and then if beauty of form [eidos, with epi] in general is his pursuit [dioko], how foolish [anoia: want of understanding or noos] would he be not to recognize [hegeomai] that the beauty in every form is and the same! And when he perceives [katanoeo] this he will abate [kathistemi: to set down, place, be calm] his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem [kataphroneo: to think lightly of] a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms [soma]; in the next stage he will consider that the beauty of the mind [psyche] is more honorable than the beauty of the outward form [soma]. So that if a virtuous soul has but a little comeliness [anthos: blossom], he will be content [exarkeo: to be quite enough] to love and tend him [kedeuo: to attend], and will search out and bring to the birth thoughts [logos] which may improve [beltion: comparative of agathos] the young, until he is compelled to contemplate [theaomai: to behold, be a spectator] and see the beauty of institutions and laws, and to understand that the beauty of them all is of one family [suggenes], and that personal beauty is a trifle; and after laws and institutions he will go on to the sciences [episteme], that he may see their beauty, being not like a servant in love with the beauty of one youth or man or institution, himself a slave mean and narrow-minded [phaulos: slight, trivial], but drawing towards [trepo: to turn, direct] and contemplating [theoreo: to view, behold] the vast sea of beauty, he will create many fair and noble thoughts and notions [logos & dianoema] in boundless love of wisdom [philosophia]; until on that shore he grows and waxes strong, and at last the vision is revealed [kateidon: to look down upon, perceive] to him of a single science, which is the science of beauty everywhere. To this I will proceed; please to give me your very best attention [prosecho & noos]: "He who has been instructed thus far in the things of love, and who has learned [paidagogeo: to teach, train] to see [theoreo] the beautiful in due order and succession [ephexes & orthos, adverbs], when he comes toward the end [telos] will suddenly [exaiphnes] perceive [kathorao: to look down upon] a nature [physis] of wondrous beauty (and this, Socrates, is the final cause of all our

211 former toils)-a nature which in the first place is everlasting [proton & aei], not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly, not fair [kalos] in one point of view and foul [aischros] in another, or at one time or in one relation or at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul, as if fair to some and-foul to others, or in the likeness of a face or hands or any other part of the bodily frame, or in any form of speech or knowledge, or existing in any other being, as for example, in an animal, or in heaven or in earth, or in any

other place; but beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting [kath' auto meth' auto], which without diminution and without [pascho: to suffer, undergo] increase, or any change, is imparted [metecho] to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things. He who from these ascending [epanerchomai] under the influence of true love [paiderasteo: to love boys], begins to perceive [kathorao] that beauty, is not far [hapto: to touch] from the end. And the true [orthos, adverb] order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love [epi ta erotika], is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards [epanerchomai] for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps [epanabasmos] only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms [kalos & soma], and from fair forms to fair practices [epitedeuma: pursuit, business], and from fair practices to fair notions [mathema: lesson], until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last [teleutao: to complete, finish] knows what the essence [ho esti] of beauty is.

This, my dear Socrates," said the stranger of Mantinea, "is that life above [pou allothi: if anywhere] all others which man should live, in the contemplation [theoreo] of beauty absolute [auto to kalon]; a beauty which if you once beheld [eido: to see, know], you would see not to be after [kata] the measure of gold, and garments, and fair boys and youths, whose presence now entrances [ekipto: to fall out, escape] you; and you and many a one would be content to live seeing them only and conversing with them without meat or drink, if that were possible-you only want to look at [theaomai] them and to be with them. But what if man had eyes to see [eido] the true beauty-the divine beauty, I mean, pure and dear and unalloyed [eilikrines: unmixed & katharos: pure & ameiktos: unmixed], not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colors and vanities of human life-thither looking [kathorao], and holding converse with the true beauty simple

212 [monoeides: one form] and divine? Remember how in that communion [suniemi] only, beholding [theoreo] beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images [eidolon: phantom] of beauty, but realities [monachou: alone, only] (for he has hold not of an image but of a reality [alethe: true]), and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God [theophileo] and be immortal, if mortal man may. Would that be an ignoble life?"

Such, Phaedrus-and I speak not only to you, but to all of you-were the words of Diotima; and I am persuaded [peitho] of their truth. And being persuaded of them, I try to persuade others, that in the attainment [ktema: possession] of this end human nature will not easily find a helper [sunergos] better than love: and therefore, also, I say that every man ought to honor [timaio] him as I myself honor him, and walk in his ways, and exhort [parakaleo: to call, invoke] others to do the same, and praise [egkomiazoo] the power and spirit [dunamis & andreia: manliness] of love according to the measure of my ability now and ever. [nomizo: to hold as custom, consider] The words which I have spoken, you, Phaedrus, may call an encomium of love [egkomion eis erota], or anything else which you please.