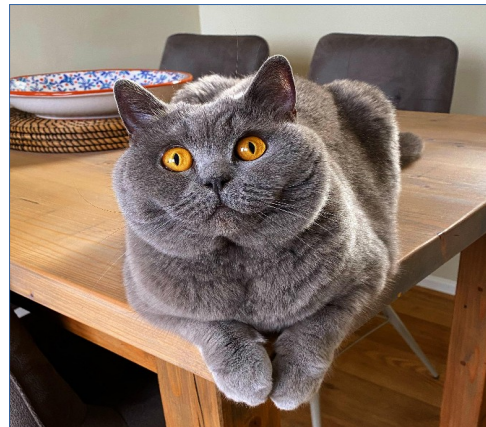


The Cheshire Cat

As everyone knows, the Cheshire cat plays the role of a guide to Alice in **Alice in Wonderland**. The usual depiction is a pink and purple striped cat with a permanent grin. Compare the two images below with their respective URL references, the left one by John Tenniel who did the original illustration dating from 1865. The cat certainly has the smile but not the coloration which seems to be a more modern addition. A real life Cheshire cat or more properly, a British short hair, is on the right, usually solid gray in color with a distinct natural smile giving it a definite enigmatic look enhanced by a stocky body. As for the fictional cat, one distinguishable feature is its ability to fade in and fade out confronting Alice only with the grin. The grin in and by itself would be creepy enough, but what makes it menacing are the sharp teeth. All in all we can see that Lewis Carroll most likely got his inspiration from the British short hair breed.



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheshire_Cat#/media/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheshire_Cat#/media/File:Tennel_Cheshire_proof.png)

[File:Tennel_Cheshire_proof.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheshire_Cat#/media/File:Tennel_Cheshire_proof.png)

https://www.reddit.com/r/Eyebleshoot/comments/n3rkzx/cheshire_cat_irl/

For some reason or another this cat has transcended Lewis Carroll's book and had made its way into popular culture. It's very much alive and represents different things for different people. This brief essay is just one such minor addition to a venerable long line of far more illustrious examples.

With that in mind, the article at hand seeks to use the Cheshire cat as one way

of representing a number of topics I had brought up in earlier articles. The possibility exists of assembling them together around a single theme. However, there's a problem. The material is too widely scattered despite the fact that I have enjoyed and continue to enjoy doing research and sharing it on this website. Bringing it all under one roof is a task I haven't yet faced, perhaps because I'm simply not ready to go that route. On the other hand, a helpful approach I adopted recently was to consider each essay as a chapter in a book. The advantage was that the image of a physical book provided a physical reference point. Still, that gets back to the old problem, of what the book would be about. Under such circumstances the best thing to do is continue writing and await some kind of intervention. If that comes, great. If not, that's great too. What counts is to enjoy the work at hand and forget about how it's arranged as well as received.

Anyway, let's get to the matter at hand. A more loose or relaxed approach emerged not at once but gradually and served to avoid a problem that was beginning to bother me. I was fearful of putting myself into a kind of mental straight-jacket essentially causing paralysis when trying to collate all the disparate material. I wanted to begin everywhere all at once. That, obviously, is impossible while at the same time it's offering an important lesson. Time to step back and take a broader look. Instead of getting all worked up about it, don't abandon ship but leave it to one's *daimon*. More on that, of course, later.

What's at issue is trying to get a better handle on the stuff I've been cranking out and to see if some kind of commonality was coming to light. Most articles seem to fall under the general label of spiritual matters. I'm not terribly happy with that catch-all phrase but will stick with it momentarily because it's familiar to most people. Once that decision was out of the way, step two started to emerge, to speak of an experience common to many of us. That consists of a certain restlessness or dissatisfaction in our daily lives. It's present all the time even if our needs are taken care of. Always we're attempting to find something beyond both our immediate physical and mental experiences. Why we're not satisfied runs very deep and consists of a profound misunderstanding. Time and again we fail to recognize that we are made whole and entire from the get-go. Such restlessness is a direct result of this warped idea and continues to plague the human race. While it may have been the impetus for various forms of creativity, sometimes we wonder at what price compared with the insight just put forth. So in a way this struggle with being restless is illusory and

indeed filled with a cast of characters of our own making as mirrored in **Alice in Wonderland**. I believe it was the Mad Hatter who said to Alice that “we’re all mad here.” Perhaps but in the long run, not necessarily so.

I didn’t plan on reading **Alice on Wonderland**; rather, the book somehow appeared on the horizon out of the clear blue, the reason having become clearer once I began reading it. The wide variety of characters Alice encounters shows that despite the chaos in which she finds herself, something much larger is at work. I hesitate to call it order, that being too prosaic a word, a way of putting a convenient label on something when in fact that might not be the case. So why not take the risk and jump down after Alice into the rabbit hole? As we know, she survived and was reunited with her dear cat Dinah. Actually there’s a huge contrast between Dinah and the Cheshire cat. The former is trusting and innocent whereas the latter is...well...questionable.

Alice also came off unscathed after her encounters with a menagerie filled with all sorts of weird creatures which interestingly all took place underground. That in and by itself is significant because what’s of interest in this article is situated underground, that is to day, I’m concerned here of what transpires behind the scenes, within ourselves. We can’t navigate there alone. Hopefully everyone of us who tags along with Alice will encounter our own Cheshire cat and be our guide, bizarre as that creature might be at least externally.

As part of my effort to discover what if anything was common to all the articles I had written, all it once it presented itself without me having to lift a finger. That discovery was assisted through the Greek word *daimon* which unfortunately got translated as demon. Hence it stuck with this negative connotation in the popular imagination. Personally I never found that an obstacle because I was introduced to it through a read of Plato’s **Symposium** or more precisely, where Diotima awakens Socrates to the presence of his *daimon*. This may be pushing it a bit too much, but can Diotima stand in for the Cheshire cat? Just curious if such a parallel is possible. For the moment I’d say it is so. Because the dialogue from the **Symposium** is so important, I include it at the end of this document as an appendage. In many ways I’d recommend discarding the current article and jump right to that text.

The issue of a *daimon* emerged during a discussion when Diotima taught Socrates about things related to love, *didasko* being the verb and *ta erotikia* or

those things which pertain to *eros*, a difficult to translate noun something like ardor or devotion. And so the two engage in a lively back-and-forth exchange as to what this means. A turning point in the dialogue is when Diotima situates a *daimon*¹ as “in between mortal and immortal.” *Metaxu*! This adverb is crucial, a marker or an interval that separates and easily can apply to that simultaneous friendly and threatening smile on the Cheshire cat. Like the *daimon*, this smile seems independent of the cat, having a life all its own as it fades in and out of visibility but certainly not existence. And so the *daimon* as standing between the divine and the human is central to the identity of Socrates as a philosopher. Indeed, the *daimon* is essential to understanding how Plato conceptualizes reason, the philosopher, and philosophy itself.

This *metaxu* business sounds fine, but Socrates does well to ask what is the function of the *daimon*, its *dunamis*, which also translates as the potential to function in a give way. In anticipation of a response we think in terms of receiving either a yes or no, nothing vague or uncertain as in between, the very thought of which can set us on edge. Diotima responds that the primary task of a *daimon* is to be a messenger, again not unlike the Cheshire cat dealing with Alice. This shuttle service, if you will, has the purpose of conveying prayers and sacrifices between gods and humans. All well and good but still, not quite satisfactory. The impression is that a *daimon* is some kind being you can't quite put your trust in.

Diotima goes on to describe the origins of this *daimon*, an offspring between *Poros* and *Penia* or means and poverty. These two divine beings interact to make their offspring neither immortal nor mortal, neither wise nor ignorant. Right away this reinforces our initial impression of a *daimon* which is slightly unfavorable. Really, who wants to have such a fuzzy-like existence? So for Diotima to come up with this is absolutely remarkable. It sets our teeth on edge and by reason of its *metaxu*, partakes of transcendence and being-in-the-body in a very special fashion. Again with reference to **Alice in Wonderland**, the language spoken here seems pure gibberish but has a purpose.

Much more, of course, could be said of the *metaxu* nature of a *daimon* in Diotima's speech. However, here is not the place. It's important to introduce or better, re-introduce as a reminder some of this material which I had touched

¹This is the first mention of *daimon* in the **Symposium** (202d) translated as a “great spirit.”

upon elsewhere in earlier articles. The material to follow with regard to the nature of a *daimon* as present in Socrates is a vital first step for expanding what it means. Granted it goes beyond what Diotima tells us which includes other references to *daimon* in Plato's works.

Let's delve a little more into this fascination with regard to *metaxu*. First of all it's generally not common to our every day experience. That means we have to take into account the *metaxu* or the between nature of a *daimon* as somewhat slippery and therefore difficult to lay hold of. Indeed, we don't like that one bit. Recognition of what's involved is the first and most important step. It enables us to move on to ask what within us does *metaxu* comply, if anything? That's the six-four thousand dollar question. It isn't anything physical, to be sure. Spiritual might be the first word that comes to mind, but that term has too broad an application. I had inferred that at the very beginning of this article. That term and others like it imply a reality outside the one in which we live. Fine, but often it introduces a tension between with our body-ness that never is resolved.

One way we try accessing spiritual reality as it has been presented to us through religion as well as culture is a process akin to archiving or photocopying. When we hit upon something we consider outstanding we attempt to capture it or in a word, replicate it. That's how things are done in the physical world. We don't give a thought otherwise as to questioning the process. Besides, we're surrounded by all sorts of fancy devices that can do this with ease. While the copy we come up with may be precise in every detail, it remains a copy. We can get a lot of mileage from this process, but in the long term it's unproductive. Sterile is more like it.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition has a lot to say about us being made in God's image and likeness as found in Gn 1.26. Talk about two words suggesting the tendency to copy or replicate! All very fine, but upon discovering the *metaxu* or in between-ness represented by a *daimon*, does it set God on edge? It certainly does. He seems completely unfamiliar with this reality and attempts to keep it concealed. Perhaps the closest to him is the realm of angels or messengers. Like *daimones*, they shuttle back and forth conveying messages. Their very nature is inferior to the Lord despite being spiritual. God made them as such to keep them under his control. If God admitted to this reality of *metaxu*, human beings in the divine image and likeness might see an option of living in a way other

than for which they were created. Indeed, this is something God hadn't foreseen.

Perhaps at this point the tree of the knowledge of good and evil might come in handy to flesh this out. God doesn't just plant it anywhere in the garden but in its very center where every creature can't help but notice it. Not only that, the Lord broadcasts it to the man. Talk about a gesture reeking of immaturity. It pinpoints exactly where and what the man should avoid. Now the man can't get it out of his mind and knows that sooner or later he's going after that tree. The way the Lord handles this is an invaluable insight into his incredibly dim-wittedness. Actually he'd rather not have it made known, but thanks to the author of Genesis it's out there for all to behold. The whole world no sees how he treats the very first man to come into existence. In other words, he's out to entrap him. If the man eats of its fruit...rather, when he eats of the fruit...he will die. Bingo, gotcha.

So we find the Lord now on the defensive. Suddenly he finds himself trying to protect himself from a rational creature made in his own image and likeness, one he's willing to put at mortal risk. Naturally we ask why. We have caught God setting a trap and although the serpent isn't directly involved, he knows he's around watching and taking notes. Thus we've caught the Lord red-handed colluding with the serpent. To reveal this would be the equivalent of disclosing a state secret with terrible consequences. With this in mind we can jump ahead a bit to when the trap is sprung. It's a chance God has been looking for. He's quite pleased while out this particular evening for his usual stroll in the garden. He makes himself deliberately known, that his, his voice of *qol*, much more than during previous evening walks. It's his way of entrapping the man and the woman for having eaten of the tree he had so loudly warned against. Again, another instance of incredible dim-wittedness. God knows the two will come forth, try to excuse themselves, but to no avail. The anger from a not fully mature being, even a divine one, is now unleashed and lacks no bounds.

Once the two had eaten of the tree's fruit God takes special delight in lecturing the serpent, woman and man, laying it upon each as thick as he can. It is precisely memory of this lecturing which clings permanently to all three each in their own way. They are powerless to shake it off. However, the serpent, by reason of his collusion, now crawls on the ground. Before this he was upright. He has the distinct advantage to shed his skin which is symbolic of being able

to shake off that lecturing and focus on what he loves to do, causing trouble. Such is the so-called sin which tradition calls original ².

While it's great to be made in the divine image and likeness, in light of this we can turn around and say, so what? Is it really worth it? A closer look reveals that it replicates the blind unconsciousness of God even if a very attractive part of the package consists in participation of his all powerful nature. We're made for something more than that, if it may be put as such. We don't want to replicate anyone or anything no matter how exalted it happens to be. To be blunt, it's downright boring. God can't help but recognize this standing out like a sore thumb as it sets his teeth on edge. The reason? It boils down to simple jealousy, that human beings have something he lacks and wants desperately. What's so frightful is that God discovers a zombie-like quality in himself he'd rather not acknowledge and can't seem to shake. As we know from movies and the like, a zombie is a dead person walking around as alive, completely mindless and lives by feeding off human beings.

With this rather scary stuff in mind, let's see if there's a faculty within us which is free from the tendency to replicate, keeping in mind that it's alien to the *metaxu* or between nature of a *daimon*. The reason for this inability? Within the zone of *metaxu* there's nothing present to copy. It intimates that a *daimon*, despite being neither here nor there, isn't interested in copying. He finds the whole enterprise boring, devoid of life. Copying suggests making a replication of someone or something that already exists. Indeed, we're familiar with that being made in the divine image and likeness. That's the real reason why we want to move on. The place where a *daimon* resides or *metaxu*, represents freedom from that all consuming absorption and hence subservience. While this may have a tinge of rebellion about it, there's the promise for further development. Why not? In addition to freeing us up more, it will have the benefit of educating the Lord, of filling him about something he lacks. Finally...at last...he gets the hint. Why not become one of those human beings myself?

So what exactly is this faculty to which replication is alien? We can designate it by the phrase sliver of awareness which has evolved over several months worth of reflection plus conversations with friends. I'm not sure as to its exact origin which at first was a bit disappointing but later the uncertainty turned out to

²The article **Reverse Redemption** also on this homepage goes into this at some length.

lend it a certain mystery. That's appropriate because indeed it has a certain unknowable quality by reason of being beyond our grasp. I had touched upon this phrase in several other articles. Despite this, it seems to be fertile ground for revealing continuous new insights.

Awareness in and by itself is the root, if you will. It's something belonging to each and every person on this planet, that which makes us human. As for a sliver, that connotes something long and thin as well as having a sharp point. We all carry around varying degrees of sharpness with regard to awareness, even if it's quite narrow. On the other hand, the thicker it is, the sturdier and more stable. This allows more awareness to come in and govern our lives. However, it can never broaden out more than what we've designated as a sliver. The reason? Given the inherent narrowness of our human nature we can absorb only so much of awareness. It can swing either way, less or more, but that too is within a restricted range of confinement. The best part is that this sliver extends beyond physical existence and keeps on going. Indeed, despite the inherent limitation, it's a powerful antidote to operating from the built in replicating character of being made in the divine image and likeness.

We could say that a *daimon* inhabits this sliver of awareness whose location is that in between land, the region of *metaxu*. All three fit into each other, occupying the same space, if you will. As for *metaxu* being halfway between the divine and the human, the *daimones* living there aren't constrained by either side. However, they can be superseded by an entity we can call an archetype. That's pretty much a blind force with great power also transcending space and time. It can step into a person's life, weakening or even kicking out the *daimones* and what they represent. Once you have consented or better, abdicated to such an archetype, you lack authority. As St John's Gospel presents it with regard to Jesus Christ, you've abdicated your inner authority or *ap' emautou* which literally means "from myself." Thus you lack support and easily can fall into a dreaded abyss. Also should you listen to a person operating without this *ap' emautou*, you come under his control. Not good.

This talk about a *daimon* and awareness makes you wonder about the language commonly employed to describe the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The language runs as thus. He, being divine, took on human nature. The words "put on" or those which are similar reflect our tendency to adopt imagery related to clothing. It's a convenient way to talk about such matters. Unfortunately it

suggests a distinction between the person and what he puts on. I guess it's okay to a certain point, but there's something uncomfortable about it. It infers that while Jesus is divine somewhere out there (i.e., heaven), the body he "puts on" is here, basically in the muck. In other words, two separate realities are uncomfortably slammed together. Despite the best of intentions, the two never will get along. Now we have the path set for centuries of theological mind-bending theories trying to extricate from this. Again, not good.

Keeping in mind this caveat with regard to language, let's take an example with regard to the sliver of awareness. You come across someone in your field of vision. Automatically that information comes as an image followed by a reflection upon it which then is registered in our heads. The important thing to keep in mind is that both happen in far less than a split second. However, unbeknownst to us is a space, very tiny indeed, between the two. It is here that the sliver of awareness is waiting in the wings, so to speak. By reason of the exceptional speed involved, we fail, as a popular expression puts it, to recognize it hiding in plain sight.

When under the guidance of this sliver of awareness, stuff both outside and inside us becomes...well... de-stuffed of their content. The result? A residue in the form of a weak memory, fuzzy around the edges, because it's not allowed to become calcified as it happens so often. Yes, calcification comes upon us slowly. It starts off with being comfortable with a certain way of thinking and behaving, no problem at all. Then we become comfortable and repeat it until one day we wake up to find ourselves stuck in a deep rut. Time now for insertion of the sliver of awareness. We might not be able to do it all at once, for that would be forcing a solution which never works. Rather, try inserting a pause because it connotes not simply stopping but coming to a rest which is temporary, not permanent. Thus we become disposed to avoid tension. The whole purpose of this is to overcome the bugaboo of calcification which can afflict anyone of any age. Discovering this is a humongous relief, almost too good to be true. In fact, it takes some time getting used to because we're completely ignorant of the gift within us ready to emerge on its own.

Our run-of-the-mill awareness consists of a before and an after, not a during, the realm of *metaxu*. On the other hand the sliver of awareness is, as already noted, *metaxu* or in between. Thus at first it can be quite difficult to comprehend the difference. It means a stage of preparation is most helpful

which is not the same as attempting to pull off a Prometheus-like assault on the divine realm and bringing what belongs there to uninformed human beings. Instead you try as best as possible to get a comprehensive picture of all the elements involved simply by observing them without imposing preconceived ideas. If you stick with it, behold. Patterns emerge which previously had been invisible. Such is the readily accessible joy of participating in that sliver of awareness or to be even more to the point, realizing firsthand that already we-are-it. However, let it stand as such because such words are guides to be let go once we get the hang of it.

Let's put all this in another way because it's so important. Standing on the sidelines trying to get a handle on this common yet mysterious process is only possible by allowing that sliver of awareness to do its thing minus interference on our part. In other words, a simple yet difficult task is set before us. Either we allow ourselves to be caught up by the stuff zooming by us or we behold it. I prefer "behold" because this verb takes in more than what's seen as passing through. Furthermore, it allows sound and the other senses to operate allowing for a full-bodied presence, if you will.

Above all else the sliver of awareness is something we don't "access." We don't effect it nor do we approach it. Instead, our participation in it allows us to see directly into what had been bothering us from the very beginning. That consists in being caught up by the passage of images and thoughts which muddle our attention. Talk about shades of photocopying mentioned earlier. Spiritual and religious disciples across the board recognize this fact. And to think that we have to do nothing but observe. It takes a long time to adjust to this fact, well worth the effort.

Information coming from either outside or inside us takes two stops. The first is the most obvious one, the accuracy of which depends upon so much of the person's history, disposition and physical make-up. The second may be designated as an archetype within this person. That term has technical ramifications of which I'm fully aware plus the fact that I may be using it here inaccurately or if I were more informed, would substitute a better word. However, I can't come up with one at the moment. Nevertheless, I'll be cautious and stick with the literal meaning, a *tupos* which is *arche* or an impression or figure which is the first principle of something.

Should we keep an eye on this rough-draft definition of an archetype, we discover that it bears an existence independently of the person associated with it. That is to say, the *tupos* which is *arche*...the impression which is a first principle...is very different from the sliver of awareness. While both are invisible they do not occupy the same space. Still, an archetype is in a way transcendent because it can insert itself anywhere, any place and in any person at any time. An archetype partakes of a certain form, one that's fuzzy around the edges as described earlier relative to the sliver of awareness. The major difference is that the archetype, by reason of *arche* has a beginning in terms of a first principle. Such beginning-ness governs how information impacts our vision (and from all other inputs, if you will) and is registered in our skulls. This it does not in accord with a person's volition or personality but independent of him or her.

So we have the *arche-tupos* and sliver of awareness which deal with information in two radically different ways. The former can accept it, pass judgment as to its utility and even consign it to the trash bin without ever opening it. Anyone familiar with how a desktop computer works understands this analogy. The reason? The *tupos* which is *arche* (it's helpful to rearrange these terms to see their flexibility) is possessive. It accepts information in accord with its own operation or if otherwise, rejects it. Hence this process automatically bypasses the real person with real eyes. What is seen is secondary to its interpretation even though it's definitely out there. The speed with which this is done gives the impression that something almost divine is at work but clearly is not as such. Not everything free from the bonds of space and time is fully transcendent.

So it seems we have two operating systems in one unit...in one individual person...which doesn't work out in the long term. What would the Cheshire cat do in this situation? It would leave the two systems alone, taking a position midway between the information coming from our eyes and passing to our brain which receives it. Then it would observe and nothing more. However, that unique smile reveals that something else is going on which we don't know about, especially the way its unsettling smile fades in and out. Indeed it wishes Alice and us should we be in her position to have that sliver of awareness but can only do so by watching her. To explain what it's doing would be a waste of time and of no benefit. Luckily for Alice she has a clear memory of her pet cat Dinah. Although different from the Cheshire cat, at least this memory makes

the one at hand less menacing, for after all, both are felines.

The lesson? Always the sliver of awareness is a step beyond us yet never engages in belittling behavior characteristic of an adult-to-child model. To it everyone is an adult. This counters the so-called original sin as a resentment at being lectured to. Starting with the first man who was banished from the garden all the way through Israel's history (which in many ways is a mirror of all history), people have yearned to be treated by the Lord as an adult. To do so is very simple. If the Lord had learned that early on, things would have turned out much better. Instead, he preferred to complicate matters. Even with the coming of Jesus Christ who sought to remedy this, there persists that adult-to-child relationship because it's so rooted in our collective history. At least a foothold has been made through Jesus in the way he taught us how he relates with his Father. For it to be worked out and substituted with an adult-to-adult relationship will take a long time.

Letting this mature type of relationship operate involves no effort. That's the benefit which if talked about more, would speed things along. It happens spontaneously which is why we find it hard to accept. However, it runs into trouble big time. The very nature of an archetype is to control and to control in the absolute sense. It does so not out of malice but simply because that's its nature. *Arche* and *tupos* don't form one word for nothing. There's the expression "nature abhors a vacuum." Instead, we can change it to "*arche* abhors the sliver of awareness." Thus the archetype does all it can to eliminate this inmost part of ourselves...the sliver of awareness...but never can. That would be the equivalent of committing murder.

Should you interact with one or more persons in whom the archetype is alive and well, the information it has taken in takes two routes. Either the impression is favorable or hostile toward you. Note! Emphasis is upon impression. Normally you think to be directly in its cross-hair. Instead of interpreting this as an affirmation or an attack, in reality both don't apply. The response, negative or positive, requires an object. You just happen to be conveniently standing there. If it were someone else or let's say even an empty chair or refrigerator, that would fit the bill. In other words, the archetype needs an object for venting, nothing more. Objectively it looks like I'm being affirmed or despised but in essence, neither. I'm interchangeable with anyone else. Those persons doing all this seem responsible but are not. They are too enthralled by

the archetypes working within them to take notice. I.e., what previously had bothered you endlessly and causing perceptions of inferiority is completely misplaced.

This is so essential to grasp. It needs to be shouted from the rooftops. Indeed, no exaggeration which can't but make you ask rhetorically, has this ever been discussed or written about? I've been looking around for information but as yet, nada. I'm sure it's out there. We've been conditioned to receive negative input as a personal attack That may be true in some cases, but mostly it's otherwise. We can't be reminded enough of this. That's why I informed a friend to hit me over the head with a sledgehammer when discussing this matter. It needs to be pounded into us not just here and there but at all times. After a while or after some persistent pounding, it takes effect, perhaps one of life's best kept secrets finally having been revealed.

As for the sliver of awareness, it doesn't have to go through this rigmarole because after the Cheshire cat, it's geared for watching and nothing else. To say that the sliver is indifferent is both an injustice and misrepresentation. That would make it bordering on the inhuman. Rather, the sliver = absolute freedom and ultimately life in abundance transcending space and time. To boot, there's the prospect of that wonderful adult-to-adult relationship taking hold. It may not catch on as we'd like but at least is taking root here and there.

So in conclusion, the information coming at and then into us is neutral. The sliver is similarly neutral but for the sake of this essay Neutral with a capital "N" in deference to its innate transcendence. The *tupos* which is *arche* or the impression which is the first principle of putting this information into action is prejudiced, if you will. It may provide helpful, even vital information but in the long run is not a reliable witness.

So if ever in trouble, call on the Cheshire cat. However, be prepared to become the object of that unsettling smile plus the fact that he may not reveal to you what you expect.

Symposium 201d-212c³

Now I'll let you go. I shall try to go through for you the speech about Love I

³Plato: Complete Works edited by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, 1997).

once heard from a woman of Mantinea, Diotima—a woman who was wise about many things besides this: once she even put off the plague for ten years by telling the Athenians what sacrifices to make. She is the one who taught me the art of love, and I shall go through her speech as best I can on my own, using what Agathon and I have agreed to as a basis.

Following your lead, Agathon, one should first describe who Love is and what he is like, and afterwards describe his works—I think it will be easiest for me to proceed the way Diotima did and tell you how she questioned me. You see, I had told her almost the same things Agathon told me just now: that Love is a great god and that he belongs to beautiful things. And she used the very same arguments against me that I used against Agathon; she showed how, according to my very own speech, Love is neither beautiful nor good.

So I said, “What do you mean, Diotima? Is Love ugly, then, and bad?”

But she said, “Watch your tongue! Do you really think that, if a thing is not beautiful, it has to be ugly?”

“I certainly do.”

“And if a thing’s not wise, it’s ignorant? Or haven’t you found out yet that there’s something in between wisdom and ignorance?”

“What’s that?”

“It’s judging things correctly without being able to give a reason. Surely you see that this is not the same as knowing—for how could knowledge be unreasoning? And it’s not ignorance either—for how could what hits the truth be ignorance? Correct judgment, of course, has this character: it is in between understanding and ignorance.”

“True,” said I, “as you say.”

“Then don’t force whatever is not beautiful to be ugly, or whatever is not good to be bad. It’s the same with Love: when you agree he is neither good nor beautiful, you need not think he is ugly and bad; he could be something in between,” she said.

“Yet everyone agrees he’s a great god,” I said.

“Only those who don’t know?” she said. “Is that how you mean ‘everyone’? Or do you include those who do know?”

“Oh, everyone together.”

And she laughed. “Socrates, how could those who say that he’s not a god at all agree that he’s a great god?”

“Who says that?” I asked.

“You, for one,” she said, “and I for another.”

“How can you say this!” I exclaimed.

“That’s easy,” said she. “Tell me, wouldn’t you say that all gods are beautiful and happy? Surely you’d never say a god is not beautiful or happy?”

“Zeus! Not I,” I said.

“Well, by calling anyone ‘happy,’ don’t you mean they possess good and

beautiful things?”

“Certainly.”

“What about Love? You agreed he needs good and beautiful things, and that’s why he desires them—because he needs them.”

“I certainly did.”

“Then how could he be a god if he has no share in good and beautiful things?”

“There’s no way he could, apparently.”

“Now do you see? You don’t believe Love is a god either!”

“Then, what could Love be?” I asked. “A mortal?”

“Certainly not.”

“Then, what is he?”

“He’s like what we mentioned before,” she said. “He is in between mortal and immortal.”

“What do you mean, Diotima?”

“He’s a great spirit, Socrates. Everything spiritual, you see, is in between god and mortal.”

“What is their function?” I asked.

“They are messengers who shuttle back and forth between the two, conveying prayer and sacrifice from men to gods, while to men they bring commands from the gods and gifts in return for sacrifices. Being in the middle of the two, they round out the whole and bind fast the all to all. Through them all divination passes, through them the art of priests in sacrifice and ritual, in enchantment, prophecy, and sorcery. Gods do not mix with men; they mingle and converse with us through spirits instead, whether we are awake or asleep. He who is wise in any of these ways is a man of the spirit, but he who is wise in any other way, in a profession or any manual work, is merely a mechanic. These spirits are many and various, then, and one of them is Love.”

“Who are his father and mother?” I asked.

“That’s rather a long story,” she said. “I’ll tell it to you, all the same.”

“When Aphrodite was born, the gods held a celebration. Poros, the son of Metis, was there among them. When they had feasted, Penia came begging, as poverty does when there’s a party, and stayed by the gates. Now Poros got drunk on nectar (there was no wine yet, you see) and, feeling drowsy, went into the garden of Zeus, where he fell asleep. Then Penia schemed up a plan to relieve her lack of resources: she would get a child from Poros. So she lay beside him and got pregnant with Love. That is why Love was born to follow Aphrodite and serve her: because he was conceived on the day of her birth. And that’s why he is also by nature a lover of beauty, because Aphrodite herself is especially beautiful.

“As the son of Poros and Penia, his lot in life is set to be like theirs. In the first place, he is always poor, and he’s far from being delicate and beautiful (as ordinary people think he is); instead, he is tough and shriveled and shoeless and homeless,

always lying on the dirt without a bed, sleeping at people's doorsteps and in roadsides under the sky, having his mother's nature, always living with Need. But on his father's side he is a schemer after the beautiful and the good; he is brave, impetuous, and intense, an awesome hunter, always weaving snares, resourceful in his pursuit of intelligence, a lover of wisdom³⁷ through all his life, genius with enchantments, potions, and clever pleadings.

"He is by nature neither immortal nor mortal. But now he springs to life when he gets his way; now he dies—all in the very same day. Because he is his father's son, however, he keeps coming back to life, but then anything he finds his way to always slips away, and for this reason Love is never completely without resources, nor is he ever rich.

"He is in between wisdom and ignorance as well. In fact, you see, none of the gods loves wisdom or wants to become wise—for they are wise—and no one else who is wise already loves wisdom; on the other hand, no one who is ignorant will love wisdom either or want to become wise. For what's especially difficult about being ignorant is that you are content with yourself, even though you're neither beautiful and good nor intelligent. If you don't think you need anything, of course you won't want what you don't think you need."

"In that case, Diotima, who are the people who love wisdom, if they are neither wise nor ignorant?"

"That's obvious," she said. "A child could tell you. Those who love wisdom fall in between those two extremes. And Love is one of them, because he is in love with what is beautiful, and wisdom is extremely beautiful. It follows that Love must be a lover of wisdom and, as such, is in between being wise and being ignorant. This, too, comes to him from his parentage, from a father who is wise and resourceful and a mother who is not wise and lacks resource.

"My dear Socrates, that, then, is the nature of the Spirit called Love. Considering what you thought about Love, it's no surprise that you were led into thinking of Love as you did. On the basis of what you say, I conclude that you thought Love was being loved, rather than being a lover. I think that's why Love struck you as beautiful in every way: because it is what is really beautiful and graceful that deserves to be loved, and this is perfect and highly blessed; but being a lover takes a different form, which I have just described."

So I said, "All right then, my friend. What you say about Love is beautiful, but if you're right, what use is Love to human beings?"

"I'll try to teach you that, Socrates, after I finish this. So far I've been explaining the character and the parentage of Love. Now, according to you, he is love for beautiful things. But suppose someone asks us, 'Socrates and Diotima, what is the point of loving beautiful things?'

"It's clearer this way: 'The lover of beautiful things has a desire; what does he desire?'"

“That they become his own,” I said.

“But that answer calls for still another question, that is, ‘What will this man have, when the beautiful things he wants have become his own?’ ”

I said there was no way I could give a ready answer to that question.

Then she said, “Suppose someone changes the question, putting ‘good’ in place of ‘beautiful,’ and asks you this: ‘Tell me, Socrates, a lover of good things has a desire; what does he desire?’ ”

“That they become his own,” I said.

“And what will he have, when the good things he wants have become his own?”

“This time it’s easier to come up with the answer,” I said. “He’ll have happiness.”

“That’s what makes happy people happy, isn’t it—possessing good things. There’s no need to ask further, ‘What’s the point of wanting happiness?’ The answer you gave seems to be final.”

“True,” I said.

“Now this desire for happiness, this kind of love—do you think it is common to all human beings and that everyone wants to have good things forever and ever? What would you say?”

“Just that,” I said. “It is common to all.”

“Then, Socrates, why don’t we say that everyone is in love,” she asked, “since everyone always loves the same things? Instead, we say some people are in love and others not; why is that?”

“I wonder about that myself,” I said.

“It’s nothing to wonder about,” she said. “It’s because we divide out a special kind of love, and we refer to it by the word that means the whole—‘love’; and for the other kinds of love we use other words.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Well, you know, for example, that ‘poetry’ has a very wide range. After all, everything that is responsible for creating something out of nothing is a kind of poetry; and so all the creations of every craft and profession are themselves a kind of poetry, and everyone who practices a craft is a poet.”

“True.”

“Nevertheless,” she said, “as you also know, these craftsmen are not called poets. We have other words for them, and out of the whole of poetry we have marked off one part, the part the Muses give us with melody and rhythm, and we refer to this by the word that means the whole. For this alone is called ‘poetry,’ and those who practice this part of poetry are called poets.”

“True.”

“That’s also how it is with love. The main point is this: every desire for good things or for happiness is ‘the supreme and treacherous love’ in everyone. But those

who pursue this along any of its many other ways—through making money, or through the love of sports, or through philosophy—we don't say that these people are in love, and we don't call them lovers. It's only when people are devoted exclusively to one special kind of love that we use these words that really belong to the whole of it: 'love' and 'in love' and 'lovers.' ”

“I am beginning to see your point,” I said.

“Now there is a certain story,” she said, “according to which lovers are those people who seek their other halves. But according to my story, a lover does not seek the half or the whole, unless, my friend, it turns out to be good as well. I say this because people are even willing to cut off their own arms and legs if they think they are diseased. I don't think an individual takes joy in what belongs to him personally unless by 'belonging to me' he means 'good' and by 'belonging to another' he means 'bad.' ”

That's because what everyone loves is really nothing other than the good.

Do you disagree?”

“Zeus! Not I,” I said.

“Now, then,” she said. “Can we simply say that people love the good?”

“Yes,” I said.

“But shouldn't we add that, in loving it, they want the good to be theirs?”

“We should.”

“And not only that,” she said. “They want the good to be theirs forever, don't they?”

“We should add that too.”

“In a word, then, love is wanting to possess the good forever.”

“That's very true,” I said.

“This, then, is the object of love,” she said. In view of that, how do people pursue it if they are truly in love? What do they do with the eagerness and zeal we call love? What is the real purpose of love? Can you say?

“If I could,” I said, “I wouldn't be your student, filled with admiration for your wisdom, and trying to learn these very things.”

“Well, I'll tell you,” she said. “It is giving birth in beauty,⁴¹ whether in body or in soul.”

“It would take divination to figure out what you mean. I can't.”

“Well, I'll tell you more clearly,” she said. “All of us are pregnant, Socrates, both in body and in soul, and, as soon as we come to a certain age, we naturally desire to give birth. Now no one can possibly give birth in anything ugly; only in something beautiful. That's because when a man and a woman come together in order to give birth, this is a godly affair. Pregnancy, reproduction—this is an immortal thing for a mortal animal to do, and it cannot occur in anything that is out of harmony, but ugliness is out of harmony with all that is godly. Beauty, however, is in harmony with the divine. Therefore the goddess who presides at childbirth—she's called Moira

or Eilithuia—is really Beauty. That’s why, whenever pregnant animals or persons draw near to beauty, they become gentle and joyfully disposed and give birth and reproduce; but near ugliness they are foul—the labor is painful. This is the source of the great excitement about beauty that comes to anyone who is pregnant and already teeming with life: beauty releases them from their great pain. You see, Socrates,” she said, “what Love wants is not beauty, as you think it is.”

“Well, what is it, then?”

“Reproduction and birth in beauty.”

“Maybe,” I said.

“Certainly,” she said. “Now, why reproduction? It’s because reproduction goes on forever; it is what mortals have in place of immortality. A lover must desire immortality along with the good, if what we agreed earlier was right, that Love wants to possess the good forever. It follows from our argument that Love must desire immortality.”

All this she taught me, on those occasions when she spoke on the art of love. And once she asked, “What do you think causes love and desire, Socrates? Don’t you see what an awful state a wild animal is in when it wants to reproduce? Footed and winged animals alike, all are plagued by the disease of Love. First they are sick for intercourse with each other, then for nurturing their young—for their sake the weakest animals stand ready to do battle against the strongest and even to die for them, and they may be racked with famine in order to feed their young. They would do anything for their sake. Human beings, you’d think, would do this because they understand the reason for it; but what causes wild animals to be in such a state of love? Can you say?”

And I said again that I didn’t know.

So she said, “How do you think you’ll ever master the art of love, if you don’t know that?”

“But that’s why I came to you, Diotima, as I just said. I knew I needed a teacher. So tell me what causes this, and everything else that belongs to the art of love.”

“If you really believe that Love by its nature aims at what we have often agreed it does, then don’t be surprised at the answer,” she said. “For among animals the principle is the same as with us, and mortal nature seeks so far as possible to live forever and be immortal. And this is possible in one way only: by reproduction, because it always leaves behind a new young one in place of the old. Even while each living thing is said to be alive and to be the same—as a person is said to be the same from childhood till he turns into an old man—even then he never consists of the same things, though he is called the same, but he is always being renewed and in other respects passing away, in his hair and flesh and bones and blood and his entire body. And it’s not just in his body, but in his soul, too, for none of his manners, customs, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, or fears ever remains the same, but some are

coming to be in him while others are passing away. And what is still far stranger than that is that not only does one branch of knowledge come to be in us while another passes away and that we are never the same even in respect of our knowledge, but that each single piece of knowledge has the same fate. For what we call studying exists because knowledge is leaving us, because forgetting is the departure of knowledge, while studying puts back a fresh memory in place of what went away, thereby preserving a piece of knowledge, so that it seems to be the same. And in that way everything mortal is preserved, not, like the divine, by always being the same in every way, but because what is departing and aging leaves behind something new, something such as it had been. By this device, Socrates,” she said, “what is mortal shares in immortality, whether it is a body or anything else, while the immortal has another way. So don’t be surprised if everything naturally values its own offspring, because it is for the sake of immortality that everything shows this zeal, which is Love.”

Yet when I heard her speech I was amazed, and spoke: “Well,” said I, “Most wise Diotima, is this really the way it is?”

And in the manner of a perfect sophist she said, “Be sure of it, Socrates. Look, if you will, at how human beings seek honor. You’d be amazed at their irrationality, if you didn’t have in mind what I spoke about and if you hadn’t pondered the awful state of love they’re in, wanting to become famous and ‘to lay up glory immortal forever,’ and how they’re ready to brave any danger for the sake of this, much more than they are for their children; and they are prepared to spend money, suffer through all sorts of ordeals, and even die for the sake of glory. Do you really think that Alcestis would have died for Admetus,” she asked, “or that Achilles would have died after Patroclus, or that your Codrus would have died so as to preserve the throne for his sons,⁴³ if they hadn’t expected the memory of their virtue—which we still hold in honor—to be immortal? Far from it,” she said. “I believe that anyone will do anything for the sake of immortal virtue and the glorious fame that follows; and the better the people, the more they will do, for they are all in love with immortality.

“Now, some people are pregnant in body, and for this reason turn more to women and pursue love in that way, providing themselves through childbirth with immortality and remembrance and happiness, as they think, for all time to come; while others are pregnant in soul—because there surely are those who are even more pregnant in their souls than in their bodies, and these are pregnant with what is fitting for a soul to bear and bring to birth. And what is fitting? Wisdom and the rest of virtue, which all poets beget, as well as all the craftsmen who are said to be creative. But by far the greatest and most beautiful part of wisdom deals with the proper ordering of cities and households, and that is called moderation and justice. When someone has been pregnant with these in his soul from early youth, while he is still a virgin, and, having arrived at the proper age, desires to beget and give birth, he too will certainly go about seeking the beauty in which he would beget; for he will

never beget in anything ugly. Since he is pregnant, then, he is much more drawn to bodies that are beautiful than to those that are ugly; and if he also has the luck to find a soul that is beautiful and noble and well-formed, he is even more drawn to this combination; such a man makes him instantly teem with ideas and arguments about virtue—the qualities a virtuous man should have and the customary activities in which he should engage; and so he tries to educate him. In my view, you see, when he makes contact with someone beautiful and keeps company with him, he conceives and gives birth to what he has been carrying inside him for ages. And whether they are together or apart, he remembers that beauty. And in common with him he nurtures the newborn; such people, therefore, have much more to share than do the parents of human children, and have a firmer bond of friendship, because the children in whom they have a share are more beautiful and more immortal. Everyone would rather have such children than human ones, and would look up to Homer, Hesiod, and the other good poets with envy and admiration for the offspring they have left behind—offspring, which, because they are immortal themselves, provide their parents with immortal glory and remembrance. For example,” she said, “those are the sort of children Lycurgus left behind in Sparta as the saviors of Sparta and virtually all of Greece. Among you the honor goes to Solon for his creation of your laws. Other men in other places every where, Greek or barbarian, have brought a host of beautiful deeds into the light and begotten every kind of virtue. Already many shrines have sprung up to honor them for their immortal children, which hasn’t hap pened yet to anyone for human offspring.

“Even you, Socrates, could probably come to be initiated into these rites of love. But as for the purpose of these rites when they are done correctly—that is the final and highest mystery, and I don’t know if you are capable of it. I myself will tell you,” she said, “and I won’t stint any effort. And you must try to follow if you can. “A lover who goes about this matter correctly must begin in his youth to devote himself to beautiful bodies. First, if the leader leads aright, he should love one body and beget beautiful ideas there; then he should realize that the beauty of any one body is brother to the beauty of any other and that if he is to pursue beauty of form he’d be very foolish not to think that the beauty of all bodies is one and the same. When he grasps this, he must become a lover of all beautiful bodies, and he must think that this wild gaping after just one body is a small thing and despise it. “After this he must think that the beauty of people’s souls is more valuable than the beauty of their bodies, so that if someone is decent in his soul, even though he is scarcely blooming in his body, our lover must be content to love and care for him and to seek to give birth to such ideas as will make young men better. The result is that our lover will be forced to gaze at the beauty of activities and laws and to see that all this is akin to itself, with the result that he will think that the beauty of bodies is a thing of no importance. After customs he must move on to various kinds of knowledge. The result is that he will see the beauty of knowledge and be looking mainly not at beauty

in a single example—as a servant would who favored the beauty of a little boy or a man or a single custom (being a slave, of course, he’s low and small-minded)—but the lover is turned to the great sea of beauty, and, gazing upon this, he gives birth to many gloriously beautiful ideas and theories, in unstinting love of wisdom, until, having grown and been strengthened there, he catches sight of such knowledge, and it is the knowledge of such beauty....

“Try to pay attention to me,” she said, “as best you can. You see, the man who has been thus far guided in matters of Love, who has beheld beautiful things in the right order and correctly, is coming now to the goal of Loving: all of a sudden he will catch sight of something wonderfully beautiful in its nature; that, Socrates, is the reason for all his earlier labors: “First, it always is and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes. Second, it is not beautiful this way and ugly that way, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another; nor is it beautiful here but ugly there, as it would be if it were beautiful for some people and ugly for others. Nor will the beautiful appear to him in the guise of a face or hands or anything else that belongs to the body. It will not appear to him as one idea or one kind of knowledge. It is not anywhere in another thing, as in an animal, or in earth, or in heaven, or in anything else, but itself by itself with itself, it is always one in form; and all the other beautiful things share in that, in such a way that when those others come to be or pass away, this does not become the least bit smaller or greater nor suffer any change. So when someone rises by these stages, through loving boys correctly, and begins to see this beauty, he has almost grasped his goal. This is what it is to go aright, or be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives⁴⁷ in the end at this lesson, which is learning of this very Beauty, so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful.

“And there in life, Socrates, my friend,” said the woman from Mantinea, “there if anywhere should a person live his life, beholding that Beauty. If you once see that, it won’t occur to you to measure beauty by gold or clothing or beautiful boys and youths—who, if you see them now, strike you out of your senses, and make you, you and many others, eager to be with the boys you love and look at them forever, if there were any way to do that, forgetting food and drink, everything but looking at them and e being with them. But how would it be, in our view,” she said, “if someone got to see the Beautiful itself, absolute, pure, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great nonsense of mortality, but if he could see the divine Beauty itself in its one form? Do you think it would be a poor life for a human being to look there and to behold it by that which he ought, and to be with it? Or haven’t you remembered,” she said, “that in that life alone, when he looks at Beauty in the only way that Beauty

can be seen—only then will it become possible for him to give birth not to images of virtue (because he's in touch with no images), but to true virtue (because he is in touch with the true Beauty). The love of the gods belongs to anyone who has given birth to true virtue and nourished it, and if any human being could become immortal, it would be he.”

This, Phaedrus and the rest of you, was what Diotima told me. I was persuaded. And once persuaded, I try to persuade others too that human nature can find no better workmate for acquiring this than Love. That's why I say that every man must honor Love, why I honor the rites of Love myself and practice them with special diligence, and why I commend them to others. Now and always I praise the power and courage of Love so far as I am able. Consider this speech, then, Phaedrus, if you wish, a speech in praise of Love. Or if not, call it whatever and however you please to call it.

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