

## One Person or Is It Two?

In a way this article could be described as one more chapter in a book. Perhaps with some tweaking many such articles on this homepage, if not all, could be worked into a book though currently I'm not interested in doing so. Even though some good friends encourage me to that end, right from the get-go I knew that would detract from my main focus. That focus is quite simple, to enjoy the process of formulating ideas followed by giving voice to them as in the case at hand. The result is admittedly imperfect, but that's to be expected. Life is short, time is limited, yet it shouldn't be a hindrance to present as much material as possible.

This focus upon enjoyment certainly transcends any obstacle. In fact, it's a reward in and by itself and has a way of loosening you up from a desire to get something done. Unfortunately that can become an end in and by itself. Always you can tell when compulsion starts to rear its head. As soon as it does, stop, look and listen. Sounds a bit corny, but it works. The urge to accomplish something turns out to be a real bane whether we know it or not. Strange to say, should we withdraw from that temptation, stuff does get done only now it comes about in a more natural spontaneous fashion. Experience reveals that it happens when your ego takes up as little room as possible. As this short essay develops, I'll attribute that to our faculty of *anamnesis*.

Most of what interests me has come into clearer focus as a result of a string of conversations with people in responsible positions both at home and abroad. This doesn't happen often but at discreet intervals which somehow fall into place on their own. One thing I'm sure of. I had nothing to do with arranging them. Generally speaking these unique individuals are working on their own yet unbeknownst to them, are united by a common focus to keep alive interest in key documents of our Western heritage. In my case they happened to be interested in the Greco-Roman tradition together with the Bible. In both cases the original languages are paramount. While that's important, even more so these good folks share a desire for something better. They wish to have these ideas incarnated first in themselves and hopefully in others, small as that might be.

When speaking with them, I can't stop marveling at the fact that they manage to set aside the time to pursue their interests despite the responsible positions they hold, let alone the demands of family life. A few years ago one of them summed it up well by saying if you're passionate about something, neither time nor responsibilities are an issue. He admitted...*mirabile dictu*...that without imposing a plan upon own life things simply arranged themselves for his particular interest which happened to be the dialogues of Plato. However, he lamented that even if you have ample time which nowadays is truly a rare commodity, the material is endless...not just that but the process of absorbing it.

A young nephrologist whose wife recently had a second child, told me that he was doing a translation of some of Ovid's works. How and when where the first words out of my mouth. Not unlike the lawyer whom I had just quoted, he responded that regularly he gets up about 5 am and puts aside about ninety minutes. Stories like this are enough to blow you away with the dedication involved. I also noticed that his assistance seemed to hover around him in a manner you normally don't find. Their respect permeated the air not just because of his personality or the like. Clearly you could pick up his interest done in secret somehow oozed out for the benefit of all.

Given the man's profession as a medical doctor plus love of Latin (and I might add from an earlier visit, he like Euripides in the original Geek!), I felt the need to ask his opinion as to what's ailing us today or more specifically, what we need the most and how to go about it. Such a question borders upon the obvious. I was reluctant to ask as well as having a need to do so. And so the question simply came out of my mouth, somewhat fearful of a gentile yet firm put-down. It turned out otherwise. The good doctor wasn't a bit phased and responded with one word or rather one phrase, "no *otium*." Right away I could tell he nailed it.

*Otium* is a Latin word for leisure or time set aside for more thoughtful pursuits. Actually it's one of those words difficult to translate and presupposes a lifestyle other than what's commonly expected to back it up. The opposite is *negotium* which, not unlike the English rendering, pertains to business or some kind of enterprise. The *neg-* prefaced to *otium* is the negative of that word, no room for leisure, if you will. And so *otium* is one of those activities that takes place behind the scenes and without fanfare. It requires discipline and sensitivity to things usually not on our radar screen.

Much of this isn't heroic work as commonly perceived and remains invisible to the eye. To be sure, those doing it are somewhat reticent to discuss their interests because the broader audience is...well...so diminished or has become that way. And to think this happened in one generation, two at the max. And so the work of these people devoted to *otium* is not simply carried out in a hidden fashion but in a fairly complete ignorance among their fellows. That, however, can be used to one's advantage. People will ask what you're up to and once they find out, will just walk away. At least it's harmless, so they will say.

Initially I had thought that such people were missing out on not being able to share their insights and therefore somehow were cheated in life. True to a certain extent. As time went on I saw that it was I who was mistaken. Lesson learned, however, so I came off as winner. Again, my nephrologist came to the rescue because after he expounded on *otium*, on his own he said that people engaged in such activity are by nature hermits. And so during that recent doctor visit I came away with far more than I had bargained for, being profoundly grateful for the privilege of having gotten some valuable insights.

As for the assembly of articles I had noted above, a certain coherency seems to exist between them all, all this done unintentionally and without foresight. This makes them all the more appealing because any ideas of planning to somehow have them coalesce doesn't fit. Somehow this ties in with an insight I've brought up on several other articles, namely, that already we are made whole and entire, a realization virtually absent today but has a rich heritage. More on that later as a way of summing up the ideas presented here. Actually this is a topic that turns out to be endless. Even a slight realization of being as such sends a thrill through our whole being that is undeniable. I guess that is proof enough that this insight has some validity.

Perhaps this is the end result, if you will, of what I'm trying to get at in the first paragraph. As for the subject matter at hand, I'm interested in the mechanisms involved when we respond to a person we meet whether casually, on business, family-related or someone with whom we're at odds. In other words, I include the whole range of relationships positive, negative or simply neutral. Putting it as such comes across as nothing special because we do this all the time. Not only that, almost always we're too preoccupied with our own affairs to appreciate the mystery such encounters contain. It'd be a wholly different situation should we stop and pay attention to what's right before our eyes.

As for this paying attention, I'm curious to know whether or not when we're interacting with another person he or she right before us is one or two persons, hence the reason for this article's title. I put the obvious in uncertain terms because when you get right down to it, a lot of uncertainty is involved. Unquestionably it is one person in the concrete, physical sense. To say otherwise suggests we're delusional or playing some kind of game the nature of which momentarily escapes us. Despite the objections presented by common sense, something doesn't quite fit with that approach.

The best way to determine whether we're dealing with one person or two is to start from a concrete situation and work through it. This is where the element of fantasy can be of assistance. Pretty out of luck I picked up the following definition of fantasy from Wikipedia which to my delight, turned out to be what I was after. "Fantasy is speculative fiction involving magical elements, typically set in a fictional universe and usually inspired by mythology or folklore." On the surface this puts anything related to fantasy in the realm of make-believe and not to be taken seriously.

On the other hand, fantasy properly employed can open up hitherto unopened doors, making our experience of life less drab and more exciting without getting into anything crazy or the like. One of the best ways of making sure we're grounded is by considering the Greek verb *phantazo* perhaps from which this noun is derived and means to become visible, to appear and the noun meaning sight, spectacle. This in many ways fits the bill of where I'd like to go because it involves revisiting topics covered in earlier articles.

More than that, *phantazo* keeps the notion of fantasy grounded, not allowing it to go off the rails...and us along with it. *Phantazo* does this by having access to myth which is contained in the Wikipedia definition above.

*Phantazo* evokes another key word, one I've examined elsewhere because it never ceases to wonder, *anamnesis*. I was almost going to preface this word with "the concept of" or "the idea of." That'd be okay at face value. However, both phrases are less than accurate because they evoke a mental image. As nice a concept as it is, *anamnesis* is more than a mental construct. Instead, it's a faculty within us which had been acknowledged at least 2,500 years ago as with Socrates but to my limited knowledge, it's rarely accessed today. Yes, *anamnesis* is taught in philosophy 101 classes and the like, but that's it. Nice to know about the history of the word, but we have to pass on to something more relevant.

*Anamnesis* is far more than our customary definition of memory. Instead, it is a kind of recollection in the literal sense of the word, a calling-back (re-) of the ground from which we've sprung. We know for certain that this ground is huge, something way beyond our comprehension yet friendly towards us. Obviously the original insight into this word can be found in some of the dialogues by Plato which boil down to an awareness of transcendent forms which give shape to the visible world. The word at hand is the famous *eidōs* which fundamentally means that which is seen, this from the verbal root for shape or figure. Not only that, *eidōs* evokes a certain comeliness which is important insofar as it is endowed with beauty and thus appeal. A lot of time can be spent mulling over this word and profitably so. However, we can stop there and take it no further, coming to a screeching halt when it's a question of personal application. That's where the problem lies. We don't take *anamnesis* and allow it to give us shape or form. In a nutshell, we don't allow any *eidōs* or shape of it in our lives.

This runs contrary to the desire we all want for the faculty of *anamnesis* to be operative in our lives, for it to impart at the proper time and place a particular *eidōs*. It sounds strange, wanting something we talk about and long for but when the decision to incorporate it into our lives arises, we chicken out. It's as though we have some kind of innate fear to reach out and simply pluck that desired fruit waiting for us on the vine. Lurking just beneath our awareness is a fear of what will happen next. Our lives will change or more accurately, we will lose our former comfortable state where we talk about *anamnesis* rather than implement it. Actually this is quite inaccurate. We don't implement something that always has been a part of us. It'd be better to say we refrain from gazing upon it for fear of losing our identity.

This is of particular interest when it comes to seeing if there's a connection in the way we interact with people through our faculty of *anamnesis*, little appreciated as it is. For it to function properly some preparation is needed, at least when we're getting

acquainted. This consists in a certain withdrawal before we commence any such interaction. We take one step back from our regular way of doing things in order to see if we're ready to acknowledge that indeed we're endowed with this faculty. Such conviction isn't of our own doing but comes from without, if you will. In other words, this withdrawal is so necessary because of the vast difference between how we comport ourselves either with our without *anamnesis*.

When you think of it practically speaking, why the rush? The pause under discussion prepares us better to meet a paradox that awaits us. However, it isn't a common topic of discussion because on the face of it, the whole thought of it sounds downright preposterous. Nevertheless, something tells us not so because we sense, albeit imperfectly, that our faculty of *anamnesis* is quietly at work behind this. How else could we handle dealing with one person when in actuality we're confronted with two entities?

There's one example which on the surface doesn't line up with this but in reality certainly does. Say we've had an experience as I had a week ago, one that's more memorable than others. In the case at hand it was returning a package from Amazon in a UPS store. It so happened that I had gone ahead and informed Amazon UPS would collect it at my home, not at the store. That means I made a trip out and back, about twenty-five useless minutes each way. Though a minor inconvenience in comparison with what's going on in Ukraine and Gaza, it threw a small but very real wrench into my morning routine. Fast forward now to seven days later. From this perspective a week on, that experience had all the character of a dream. It was possible to hold two experiences simultaneously, something we can all do, the past event in all its details and the present from which we look at it as though it were a dream. Holding the two together like this is an endless source of wonder and mystery which can give rise to all sorts of ideas which are based on the sound basis of *anamnesis* yet stray from it.

When we do interact with a real physical person in the present or recall past experiences pleasant or otherwise, all partake pretty much of the same pattern. That consists in the rise of an impression upon us, it being sustained for a certain period of time followed by its dissolution. This way in which our conventional memory works provides a personal time line and therefore personal identity, at least on the surface. At the same time it gives rise to a certain tedium because more experiences of the same pattern lay ahead for us provided we don't die in the near future. And so our memories pass by, incessantly one after the other.

Within this strange almost dream-like state is where we live out our days, almost Ecclesiastes-like. By that I mean the biblical author took a rather dismal though realistic view of human activity and labeled it vanity. While that's the commonly accepted word, I prefer keeping in mind the Hebrew *hevel* which is more to the point because it means

breath in the sense of a vapor, that which is evanescent. There's nothing bad about *hevel*. Actually to realize that experiences and memories of them are blowing by is liberating. Ecclesiastes hints of this as well though overall he comes across as pessimistic.

This *hevel*-ness, if you will, might tie in with another apparently ethereal-like reality which I had noted in several other articles, that is, *daimon*.<sup>1</sup> It's best described in Plato's **Symposium**, a passage to which I've referred a number of times: "He's like what we mentioned before," she said. "He is in between mortal and immortal."<sup>2</sup> The person speaking is Diotima, pseudonym of a character who goes unidentified and who may be real or not. Regardless, she too is a kind of *daimon* instructing Socrates. As for the sentence, the key word is "between" or *metaxu*...neither human nor divine but somewhere in between the two which makes the *daimon* wonderfully elusive.

Returning to the simple example of bringing a package from Amazon to a UPS store as just described, while it was in progress I was frustrated at the waste of time involved. As noted it was insignificant compared to other issues but nevertheless cut from the same cloth. While I was in the thick of it, I kept reminding myself that soon the experience will be over. With this in mind I could project myself...right now in the present...into the future when I'd be recalling it as a past event. A friend noted not long ago that such instances aren't to be brushed aside as though they don't fit the bill compared with much bigger ones that either comes our way or those which make the headlines. In other words, the small issue provides excellent training for the Big Stuff which we invariably encounter.

This minor but frustrating experience of having to do something that needs immediate attention and looking back at it a week later is a typical incident where memory is instrumental. However, it's a common type of remembering and not the same as our recollective faculty, *anamnesis*. In the case where Diotima speaks of *daimon*, the active side of *anamnesis* is operative and applies to us all constantly reminding us of our transcendent source. It's the only part of us...in truth our very core...which when coming upon a person, any person, we can say yes. Here is a flesh-and-blood human being right before me. However, we can be pretty sure that he or she is completely unaware of being influenced by an inner *daimon* latent in that person. Nevertheless, that *daimon* is ever ready to spring into action.

So could we posit a space or better, a distinction, between a flesh-and-blood person and his or her *daimon*? It seems possible, so the best way to find out is to go ahead and see

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<sup>1</sup> There's a temptation to think of the word demon which etymologically is of the same root as *daimon*. However, this association has nothing to do with the way Socrates uses it as well as in this document.

<sup>2</sup> **Symposium** 202d. **Plato: Complete Works** edited by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, 1997).

what happens. And what about proof of this distinction? That's what really counts. Let's say we're dealing with a person...just about any person...and suddenly we see a dramatic change. Either a memory, event or something uttered dislocated him or her so much that the person right before your eyes something else you have never seen before. Such a phenomenon is the essence of being hijacked. This happens when someone goes about a daily routine and out of the clear blue is intercepted by another person who takes over. Not just that, but often the take over is whole and entire.<sup>3</sup> There seem to be an infinite number of triggers responsible for this, some more dramatic than others.

Such an agent can be best described as a *daimon* of which there are many. What's common to all is as noted with regard to the brief sentence from the **Symposium**, a *daimon* operates in between two different realities...*metaxu*...without partaking of either one. At the same time to us who are observers sure as heck there is no between-ness that we see, just a person who can be described as borderline possessed. However, that's with the physical eye. The eye informed by *anamnesis* or recollection of our transcendent ground-ness knows right away that something else is going on which is invisible but nonetheless real.

At issue here is that our faculty of *anamnesis* is grounded in a place, if you will, where there is no between-ness or no *metaxu*. In other words, it has no need for a *daimon* to shuttle back and forth between the divine and the human. Already it is with the divine. But what about going about our daily life, the activity of living? That isn't so divine. Does it mean somehow we've jumped out of the world like Enoch who "walked with God, and he was not" [Gn 5.24]?

In an instance as this we could say that *anamnesis* casts the minimum of a shadow when light falls upon it. I guess a parallel to this is standing on the equator at high noon. The sun is shining down directly and gives close to no wiggle room. This perhaps is what happened to the man in Plato's allegory of a cave once he freely exited that confined space where it seems the human race dwells. On the other hand, should a person criticize someone, he is seeing his own personal shadow instead. The task here is to become thin enough so that when the sun shines down it casts little a shadow as possible. In this instance it's best to forget about eliminating the shadow completely. Rather, engaging in the process of thinning down is what counts. In this way one person alone is doing us all a massive favor. He or she is taking as little public space as possible.

Sometimes we might be hurt by the activity of a *daimon* working through a person. At the same time this person doesn't seem aware of behaving as such nor retain little or no memory of "his" or "her" harmful action. I put both in parentheses to show that unaware-ness (for lack of a better word) is what's operative. We've seen this time and time again not in major ways but on a small scale. Again, size does not matter. Both large

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<sup>3</sup> I'm not sure, but is this what the Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde story is about?

and small are cut from the same cloth as noted earlier.

Try dealing with the same hijacked person who hurt you a few hours later. He or she has pretty much forgotten the incident and is his or her merry self. It's quite a phenomenon to behold and holds an unexpected boon for us. Due to this suspension of memory (again, not *anamnesis* but an imitation of it), it precludes us from spending time licking our wounds. The best part is that despite having been hurt, we don't have to waste the usual time feeling sorry for ourselves along with entertaining all sorts of ways to get even. On the other hand, if that person saw us walking around with a sullen attitude, he or she wouldn't have a clue of having been responsible for it. Such is a symptom, if you will, of having been hijacked not by another person but by a *daimon* who now is in control.

The *daimon* doesn't live in time and space whereas the person it inhabits does. This is the most important lesson we can garner, and to grasp it means we've avoided a world of grief. Also we're hit upon a wonderful template for the future. If we examine the situation more closely, for sure the *daimon* has moved on elsewhere. It will make its appearance at another time and place but for the moment, we're off the hook. We now realize that we've had an encounter which outwardly involves a physical human being but in reality it's another entity. In other words, two-in-one or two very different realities, one visible and another invisible.

Try telling that to someone. You run the risk of being laughed at and understandably so because no longer do we subscribe to *daimones*. At most people would substitute demon for *daimon*, the stuff of movies. I attribute this in part to a relatively recent phenomenon in our culture, ignorance of our Western classical tradition. For example, I can recall quite well a number of teachers both in high school and in college who were imbued with the classical tradition and surprise of surprises, actually lived what they taught. Hidden masters is what I like to call them. Now unfortunately they are few and far between. Nevertheless, like the *Tzadikim Nistarim* or Hidden Righteous Ones who supposedly number just thirty-six, that's enough to keep the world from imploding.

Returning to our faculty of *anamnesis*, of recollection, by reason of existing in that place apart from the *metaxu* or between-ness where a *daimon* operates, it seems to bear some resemblance to what, I believe, Buddhism holds as we being made whole and entire. This, of course, applies to the here and now. It goes so contrary to what we've learned and even comes across as illusory by reason of the way we as well so many people around us behave. All you have to do is look at relatives, friends and of course the media. They scream at you saying this is an illusion.

Stretching this a bit further, being made whole and entire might put religion as we know it out of business. Where would sin be? The so-called fall? The redemption, to name just a few? This clearly is something the West can't accept for it would mean a radical change



or even elimination of some its most precious institutions. Nevertheless, *anamnesis* is part and parcel of our human constitution, of what it means to be made in the divine image. We can ignore it, deny its existence and all the rest. However, it will never go away. Should it be able to do so, we'd be the ones who go away. So despite coming close to the edge of the cliff, we don't fall over.

The stuff about being made whole is where the image part comes in which seems to parallel *anamnesis*, something hard-wired into our system. It has the ability to create a certain space or better, a buffer zone between the person attuned to it and the operation of a *daimon* within a person, especially should it be one that's quite vehement. Somehow the *daimon* recognizes that *anamnesis* is operating and as soon as it does, backs down, if we could put it as such. In other words, the *daimon* defangs itself without us having to lift a finger.

On the other hand, the likeness is where we run into trouble. It posits a distinction between being made whole and entire (true enough) yet is where we retain awareness that something somehow somewhere has gone wrong. We know this is true but can't quite put our finger on it. Even the very "like" suggests sometimes being with and sometimes not being with the object with which it's associated. Awareness of that fact is enough to show that while important, likeness lacks the depth and certainty of image, of *anamnesis*. Anyway, that's one way of looking at human nature as a whole: body, mind and spirit. Nevertheless, being aware of these two halves, if you will, working in us is in a nutshell simply marvelous. It allows us to move through both the good and bad of life with regard to ourselves and other people with the knowledge that we will come off okay in the end.

It'd come as no surprise that a reader would find this text convoluted and inaccurate in so many ways. However, I refer to the opening paragraph where I noted it's the pleasure of thinking about and writing about these matters that counts. Even better, this process of writing is just the first step of actually putting all this into practice. In a way, such conventional words are inaccurate. It goes against the premise that we are made whole and entire with nothing to add and nothing to subtract. That's where Good Stuff lays.

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