

# The Myth of Aristophanes

## Plato and Freud on Love and Friendship

A hermeneutic reflection on science and myth  
Bernd Jager, Université du Québec à Montréal

### Couple and Cosmos

At the onset of any investigation into the realm of psychological phenomena we are confronted by a crucial choice between two vastly different ways of understanding the human world. We must decide whether our inquiry aims to clarify some aspect of a natural universe or whether we seek to better understand and better inhabit some aspect of the lived, historical world we share with our mortal and immortal neighbors.

If we follow the first path we find ourselves in the company of natural scientists and mathematicians and if we decide on the second we must walk with poets, artists, priests and storytellers.

On the first path we find ourselves in mixed company, amidst practitioners of disciplinary aims and methods so divergent that they appear at first glance to share little in common. Astronomy, geology, chemistry and biology all study very different subject matters. They each have developed a distinctive conceptual framework and specific ways of mastering their particular subject-matter.

Yet, if we look closer, we discover that all these diverse natural scientific enterprises converge in their one, unique aim, which is that of disclosing and mastering a material and natural universe.

Conceptions of that material and natural universe have changed over time but what has remained unchanged is that it concerns a wholly unitary and autonomous domain that is not influenced or bounded by a neighboring domain. Any natural scientific investigation forms part of a common quest to acquire intellectual and effective mastery over this particular physical, autonomous and unbounded natural domain. It follows that in order for something to become the object of a natural scientific inquiry it first must be construed as forming part of that material and natural world. It must be construed as having its natural place within that particular domain, as forming an essential part of it and as being able to fully and completely manifest itself there.

If we follow the second path we find ourselves in equally varied company. Here too we may find ourselves at first overwhelmed by the sheer variety of intellectual and spiritual activities and unable to discover a common thread. The cultural labors of painters, priests, actors, poets and musicians all appear at first glance so different that we fail to see their kinship and overlook the fact that they too address a very specific world, be it one different from the natural universe explored by the natural sciences. Their cultural labors all concern a cosmos understood as a neighborly world that makes place for both human and divine habitation.

A universe may give rise to intricate material formations that thereupon may disintegrate and disappear. But only a human cosmos offers us a place in which to be born and in which to die. All art and poetry and religious or philosophical thought seeks in last instance to reveal some aspect of this latter world.

It is, of course, always possible to look upon the world addressed by the painter, the priest or the poet from the perspective of the natural sciences. We thereby transform the cosmos they describe into a natural universe and miss thereby the aim and essence of their activity. Conversely, it is also possible to look at the earthly landscape of the geologist or the starry heavens of the astronomer with the eyes of a poet or a priest. What we discover in that case is not a natural universe but an inhabited cosmos and in this manner we overlook what is essential about the work of a scientist.

Evidently, both these divergent ways of seeing and understanding form part of a human way of being in the world and both make their distinctive and valuable contributions to our cultural life. The objectifying and naturalizing stance does this by contributing to the mastery of a material universe. The cultural labors of painters, priests, actors, poets and musicians do this by heightening and differentiating our awareness of the cosmos we inhabit. They both contribute to a cultural labor that transforms a rude and hostile domain into a viable human world.

The objectifying stance of the natural sciences assumes that human life will improve as a result of a better and more widespread understanding of the laws and the forces that govern a natural universe. The more fundamental stance of artistic and religious creation insists that human life comes to its full fruition only when it actively participates in the creation and inhabitation of a human and divine cosmos.

It is possible for a human scientist to pursue the first path and to construct a psychology or sociology with the ultimate aim of contributing to the natural scientific understanding of a natural universe. It is possible to conduct a psychological study about human

love and affection in a manner that sheds some additional light on the biology of sexual reproduction. It is not impossible to study human love and friendship in ways that contribute to a biological understanding of group cohesiveness, natural selection and evolution and thereby further our knowledge of living organisms. Such a study may contribute to our understanding of the natural and physical universe but add little to a thoughtful appreciation of a humanly inhabited cosmos.

But it is also possible to pose these questions within a very different, larger context that is ordered not by the desire to master a natural universe but by that of creating and sustaining an inhabitable and neighborly world. That neighborly world permits the cohabitation of the living, the unborn and the dead. It assigns a place not only to an earthly realm but also to a realm celestial; it is ordered around a dialogue between heaven and earth and between mortal and immortal beings.

The word "cosmos" refers originally to an *ordered* realm, that is, a realm that has been specifically rearranged (κοσμέω) to make it suitable for human habitation. This rearrangement refers specifically to the establishment of a threshold that assigns a place to the self and the other, to the dweller and the dweller's neighbor. The cosmos is thus essentially marked and set apart from a savage or uninhabited realm by the introduction of a threshold and by the neighborly interactions it makes possible. A natural universe, no matter how well understood and no matter how exquisitely ordered by natural laws remains allied to a savage or uninhabited realms since it lacks the presence of a threshold and remains innocent of the dynamics of neighborly relations.

It is the same sense that a human being studied from a universal point of view remains essentially a savage creature who has no home and who remains ignorant of neighborly relations. That universal perspective reveals him as a biological organism linked to others in the first place by natural law and only secondarily or derivatively bound to others by laws of hospitality. By contrast, a cosmic perspective reveals a humanity that is at home in the world and in dynamic interaction with neighbors.

An ancient Greek proverb would have it that "one man is no man" (*aner oudeis aner*) It proclaims that a human being cannot maintain his humanity in the absence of a neighbor. By the same logic we should insist that "one house is no house" or that "one world is no world" and that a cosmos minimally contains two worlds. The fundamental dynamics of a cosmos refer to interactions between neighbors. It refers to what transpires across thresholds between neighboring houses, realms, worlds or nations. Unlike a universe, a

cosmos cannot be properly represented as "a single domain or as an indefinite extension of time and space governed by immutable laws that govern all its parts". (Koyré, A. (1973) *Du monde clos à l'univers infini*, Gallimard, p. 11)

Reduced to its barest essentials a cosmos would have to be represented by at least two corresponding domains or by two neighboring houses, linked together and kept apart by a hospitable threshold. If we speak of the *order* (κόσμος) of this cosmic whole it is to refer to this dynamic threshold and to the distinct manner it organizes the exchanges between the different inhabited domains. Reduced to its elements a cosmos refers to a pair or a couple whose interactions are monitored by a threshold.

The thresholds that govern the exchanges between two neighboring domains can take an architectural form, but also can take a poetic, musical or liturgical form. It is in this way that the living and the dead form together a cosmic unity in which a funerary monument may serve as a threshold linking their domains together. We may think in the same way of gods and mortals as cosmic neighbors whose exchanges are formalized and monitored by a threshold in the form of an altar. This altar constitutes a limit of an earthly domain that links it to the realm beyond that limit. We may think of this altar as becoming architecturally elaborated in the form of temples, synagogues, churches and mosques. It acquires poetic form in prayers and holy texts and becomes song and dance when it takes the form of liturgy. This same boundary between heaven and earth became elaborated in the cult of Dionysus and assumed the form of theater.

Finally, this threshold or covenant that binds together the distinct regions of a cosmos can be understood as further elaborated by means of literary, philosophical and theological narratives.

In brief, we come to think of a cosmos as an inhabited domain whose distinguishing mark is that of a threshold governing the relationships between its various parts. We may think of these thresholds or portals that selectively open up and close off as governing all human and divine relations.

To reach the domain of his host a guest must cross both his own and the other's threshold. He must journey beyond the limits of his own domain to arrive at an outer limit that announces the domain of his neighbor. There he must perform the threshold ritual and ask permission to enter his host's domain. The host, in turn, must go out to meet his guest. He posts himself at the outer limit of his domain to welcome his guest and invite him to cross over the threshold. It is in this way that a ritual exchange is performed and that a human exchange is set in motion. Ideally this exchange is one of mutual

support and understanding, leading to revealing conversations and perhaps to friendship.

This brief description shows how our understanding of human relationships takes on a very different character depending on whether we pursue it within the context of a natural scientific investigation or within that of a cosmic exploration

When we pose the question about love and friendship within a cosmic context we quickly discover that it touches the very foundation of civilization and that its manner of elaboration casts its light and its shadow on all manner of aspects of public and private life.

We maintained that a cosmos is created when a symbolic threshold is placed within an uninhabitable terrain, thus dividing and transforming it into two distinct but interrelated and inhabitable domains. This transformation from chaos to cosmos, from a space and time that refuses to harbor us to one that welcomes human habitation, cannot be grasped by the logic of cause and effect. It cannot be represented or conceptualized within the space and time of a natural scientific universe. Yet this miraculous transformation and this wonder of welcome constitute the essential and perennial subject pursued by religious thought and practice as well as by the arts and the humanities. It is sung by poets, narrated in myth, depicted by painters and reenacted in rituals of welcome and in rites of passage. It is relived every time a hospitable door opens to welcome a weary traveler.

The cosmos is born with the placement of a first threshold in what was previously an uninhabitable domain. This creative act lays the foundation for all subsequent human acts and relations. It constitutes the beginnings of a human world.

We may think of human creativity as forever renewing the inaugural gesture that acknowledges another person and another world and that thereby opens a terrain for human habitation.

Once we fully understand the laying down of a threshold as a creative act that gives birth to a cosmos we are thereafter less apt to approach gates, portals, altars or funerary monuments as mere physical barriers protecting a natural domain. On the contrary, we learn to see these as symbols that point beyond our own world and that invite us to enter into a relationship to other, neighboring worlds.

It is the primary and civilizing task of such symbols to draw a self-enclosed and narcissistic world out of the chaos of its isolation and its self-preoccupation and invite it to become an integral part of an inhabited cosmos. These portals and these symbols form together an order (κόσμος) that transforms a brute and inhuman landscape into a coherent world fit for human habitation. The fundamental and

irreducible character of all such ordered and inhabitable worlds is that they point beyond themselves to *another* world.

The very absence of such thresholds in the infinite expanse of the natural universe shows us the limits, but also the rightful place of the natural sciences. Unlike a cosmos, the natural universe possesses no thresholds capable of pointing beyond itself in the direction of other, neighboring worlds. It represents a self-sufficient time and space that cannot point beyond itself and that lacks the means to enter into a relationship with worlds or persons that are truly *other*. To adopt the space and time of the natural universe as our ultimate cultural horizon, to take it as our model for building a human world, condemns us to a destructive narcissism and to ultimate alienation from ourselves and from our neighbors.

We only can inhabit a world that is divided and joined together by symbolic markers. We can only live a human life in a world marked by rituals, monuments and markers that announce the end of one domain and proclaim the beginning of another. Such markers compel us to interrupt our train of thought and turn away from the monotonous and mechanical succession of our daily tasks. They draw us out of the narrow causal world where we are alone with our tasks and bring us face to face with domains and worlds outside our present purview. They bring us to a halt before thresholds and portals; they make us want to bring gifts, and exchange greetings; they remind us to perform rituals, recite myths and prayers, to enter into new covenants or to renew old ones.

The essential role of such boundary markers and monuments is to grant us spiritual, intellectual and imaginative freedom by creating the possibility to move from one inhabited realm to another and to interconnect our particular time and place and our way of life with that of others.

A natural scientific universe offers us a very different prospect. It presents a monolithic whole that cannot make place for a different order of being. It cannot house the living nor can it offer sepulcher to the dead or find an abode for the gods. It can be closely observed; it can be intruded upon, manipulated and even mastered to a limited extent. Yet it cannot recognize thresholds or permit itself to be *inhabited*.

From the viewpoint of a scientific observer situated in a cosmos the natural universe makes its appearance as a phenomenon that can be observed and studied, but that can never be fully embodied or appropriated. Were the observer to lose his footing in the inhabited cosmos and become enclosed within that universe, he would at that instance cease to dwell. He would be deprived of thresholds and

therefore lack access to metaphor and symbol. He would become dispossessed of outlook and insight and be effectively bereaved of his humanity.

We easily overlook the vital relationship between an inhabited cosmos and a natural universe because the distinct appearance of the latter depends on our ability to temporarily distance and detach ourselves from the former. The natural universe comes into sharp focus only after we have obscured our inextricable attachment to a cosmos that forms the sole possible basis for scientific explorations.

The practice in objectivity that opens the world of the natural sciences is in fact a practice in forgetting our vital attachment to an inhabited, cosmic world. Such programmatic detachment and forgetting grants us an unusual and highly revealing perspective on both animate and inanimate life. It reveals certain aspects of the human world that would otherwise remain hidden. Yet, such a systematic practice of self- and world-estrangement, such systematic and disciplined forgetting of who we are and where we live, must be followed by an equally disciplined return to the inhabited, cosmic world that forms both the point of departure and the ultimate point of return for any scientific inquiry.

If we fail to return home from the journey that revealed a natural universe, if we refuse to come down to earth after having explored chemical, biological or astrophysical realms, we will have turned a potentially fruitful journey into a pointless and destructive voyage. It is not humanly possible to inhabit a natural universe because it lacks thresholds and it offers no standpoint from which to find access to *another* standpoint. We cannot humanly inhabit a world that does not open itself to *other* worlds.

We conclude therefore that it is possible to study the stars of astrophysics and the mountains of geology from the standpoint of the cosmos we inhabit. That standpoint gives access, not only to the mountains of geology, but also to the mountains that are cultivated by farmers, explored by hikers and skiers, visited by the muses, sung by poets and painters and beloved by our ancestors and our gods.

We can study the material universe only while situated within the inhabited cosmos. As soon as we attempt to reverse the process and pretend to study the inhabited cosmos from a position within the material universe we lose our bearing and our ability to discern what is distinctive and essential about human life. We come to regard the human world as if it were a mere extension of the natural universe and thereby lose sight of the object of our initial inquiry. What began as a journey of intellectual and spiritual inquiry thereby becomes transformed into aimless and dispirited wandering.

The concerted effort to study the universe from the inhabited standpoint of the cosmos has brought us the blessings of natural science and of modern technology. The modernist attempt to dislodge human inquiry from its ultimate foundation within the cosmos and to anchor it within a natural universe has brought us the blight of scientism and the curse of the modern totalitarian state. Scientism and the threat of a dehumanized cosmos should not discourage us from making use of natural scientific strategies. Neither should we be discouraged from practicing natural scientific objectivity or from distancing ourselves intellectually and emotionally from the cosmos in which we live. We should feel free to strategically and temporarily regard the human world or the human body as mere natural matter governed solely natural law. The last few centuries in particular have taught us the immense value of this intellectual strategy. But only a false science, a destructive philosophy or a pseudo religion would propose that this strategy by itself could guide our lives or truly reveal a human world.

Scientistic ideologies remain a constant danger for the modern human sciences as well as for our contemporary political and philosophical culture. These ideologies foster a climate of thought in which genuine human phenomena such as love and friendship can no longer be recognized as creative and constructive forces that hold a human world together. A scientistic reinterpretation presents these as natural traits of biological creatures that can be fully understood only within the context of a material universe. The very theater in which human phenomena reveal themselves most completely has been shifted from the inhabited cosmos to a natural and physical universe. Love and friendship, civic, marital and religious devotion, love of truth, loyalty to neighbors, attachment to familiar sights and sounds all come to be seen as masked manifestations of natural forces. The fundamental characteristics of a human and inhabited cosmos thereby come to be construed as mere features of a natural and material universe.

It was in a very similar way that the great political revolutions of the twentieth century sought to dislodge mankind from the cosmic world in which it remained embedded and force it to 'inhabit' a natural universe. Scientism and revolutionary zeal thus joined forces to create a "progressive" movement that was intent on discrediting and overhauling an ancient cosmic world order and sought to replace it with a new world order modeled on the materialist universe described by the natural sciences.



We find an apt illustration of this scientific displacement from an inhabited world to a physical universe in the recent novel of Andrei Makine, *“La femme qui attendait”*. It recounts an interesting anecdote about the Russian Revolution of 1917. It appears that Lenin’s close friend and ally, Alexandra Kollontaï developed an avant-gardist, read: “scientific”, notion about human sexuality that became known as “the glass of water theory of sexual intercourse”. She maintained that sexual desire should be regarded entirely as a matter of biological necessity, on the same order as drinking a glass of water when one is thirsty. Inspired by this premise, a revolutionary counsel of Moscow proposed thereupon that the state should provide the city not merely with drinking fountains and toilets, but also with little cabins where pedestrians, overcome by their sexual tensions would be able to find relief with other pedestrians in equal distress. Makine reports that Lenin eventually vetoed Alexandra’s proposal on the grounds that it posed a grave medical risk. His laconic verdict held that “even very thirsty citizens should not resort to drinking from dubious or dangerous sources”. (Makine, Andreï : « La Femme qui attendait » ; Editions du Seuil, Paris 2003 p.155)

This progressive, modernist and biologising view of human sexuality was still a shocking novelty at the beginning of the Russian revolution but it has become almost a commonplace in contemporary Western culture. This shows the pervasive influence of both revolutionary political theories and of the human sciences based on the same scientific model. From both these sources modern educated elites have learned to distance themselves from cosmic or “inhabited” perspectives and from the traditions in which these are embedded. Many have thereby lost access to all but naturalistic, materialistic and biological ways of thinking and can represent the most basic of human activities such as eating, drinking, dwelling and making love only in terms that have a resonance, however faint, in the natural worlds of biology, geology or chemistry.

As we have reiterated above, these observations are not meant to cast a shadow on the true accomplishments of the natural sciences. These sciences have vastly increased human control over a material environment and have greatly improved physical conditions of human life on earth. It is precisely their great material successes that encouraged the formation and subsequent development of the human sciences in the twentieth century. These new sciences adopted a universalistic rather than a cosmic perspective and became therefore associated with “progressive” attitudes towards all human appetites and desires, in particular with those associated with love, friendship and sexuality.

To defend these new sciences it can be said that it is intellectually stimulating and materially useful to investigate what remains visible and understandable of human existence once we project it on the neutral screen of a natural universe. But it is certainly harmful to a human order to regard what thus becomes visible as in some way an ultimate or fundamental revelation of the human condition or to treat what thus becomes visible and understandable as a guideline by which to orient our lives.

In what follows we take our distance from the modernist, progressive and universalizing traditions of the natural sciences and return to poetry, art and religious rites and practices as sources more appropriate and ultimately more revealing from which to draw and develop an orienting understanding of our world.

We do this in the conviction that what is truly essential and distinctive about human life becomes viable and visible only when it is brought within the protected enclave of a cosmos and placed against the background of a primordial host and guest relationship. We reiterate here that human habitation begins with the inscription of a threshold and with the establishment of a viable relationship between neighbors.

### **Saint-Exupéry's fable of the Little Prince and the Fox.**

If, in our attempt to understand love and friendship, we permit ourselves to be guided by poetry rather than by social science we find ample reward in studying the famous fable in *The Little Prince* about the fox who wanted to befriend a young prince.

Their meeting began inauspiciously enough. The little prince was looking for a real playmate but the fox knew only how to hunt for chickens.

"Come play with me" the Prince said to the fox. "I can't", said the fox "I have not been tamed".

This tableau presents the fox in a humorous and somewhat improbable vein as a wild creature who lives beyond the ken of human law and custom but who appears nevertheless to be fully acquainted with human mores and sensibilities.

The fox understands that he cannot be someone's friend or playmate without first being tamed. We may take 'taming' to refer here to the social process that gradually pulls a savage animal outside the closed and solitary circle of the natural world and introduces it to a very differently constituted cosmic world. It thus becomes possible for the animal to inhabit a house and to make friends.

The first step the fox must undertake in becoming friends with the prince is that of leaving his natural enclave of the forest and of

entering a world that is ordered by a threshold, and hence by customs and habits of hospitality and companionship.

It is curious to observe how the process of taming that changes a natural creature into a human companion follows the outlines of cosmogonic myths that tell of the miraculous transformation of an uninhabitable domain into a human world. In the light of this resemblance we come to understand the formation of a couple and the blossoming of a friendship as creative acts that lay the foundation of a human world. Taming, understood as a necessary prelude to friendship, implies a transition from a natural and universal to a cosmic world. The fox begins the process as an indifferent part of a natural world and ends it as a distinct inhabitant of a cosmos. He begins it as part of a world that knows of no other world and he ends it as an inhabitant of a realm marked by thresholds that, like so many portals and windows, grant him access to other worlds.

Our verb 'to tame', like its synonym 'to domesticate', derives from the Latin '*domare*', which means 'to tame', 'to subdue', and 'to train'. It can be understood in a violent and negative sense as 'conquering' and 'coercing', and in a positive sense as 'making fruitful' or 'rendering useful'. The literal meaning of '*domare*' is 'to domesticate' and it refers to the gradual process by which a wild plant, animal or a human being becomes accustomed to the needs, the mores and routines of a *domus* or house. We may describe that process also as one of learning to recognize and to live within the bounds of a threshold. In general we might speak of taming as becoming adapted or accustomed to a way of life that is founded in dwelling and guarded by thresholds. The fox understands that in order to enter into a friendship he must first find a way to enter a cosmos and learn to inhabit a human dwelling. This involves the recognition of a threshold and the ability to enter into a covenant of host and guest. It is this covenant that forms the basis of specifically human relationships, most prominent among which is that of love and friendship.

Saint-Exupéry uses the verb *apprivoiser* for 'taming' and he thereby guides our thoughts in a somewhat different but complimentary direction. '*Apprivoiser*' means literally "to render private", in the sense of setting something apart from the public realm and thereby exempting it from a public duty or privileging it by granting it a place in one's home and heart. The Latin verb '*privare*' refers also, in a negative sense, to the act of depriving someone, of taking something valuable away from its owner. In a positive sense it means to free or relieve someone from what is burdensome, for example to permit an exile to come home or to relieve a sufferer's pain. '*Privus*' refers to

something that has been set apart and made to stand alone and hence it names what is unique and selfsame and for that reason not accessible to everyone. Within this semantic context '*apprivoiser*' refers to a setting apart, to a choosing, electing and singling out that transforms a mere anonymous thing or a generic creature into a valuable, recognized and named part of a household or *domus*. What is chosen, named and valued in this manner becomes transported from an anonymous natural universe to an inhabited cosmos.

The related concept of 'privilege' refers originally to a law or a public measure favoring a single person or a group of persons. Privilege sets apart and exempts from certain civic duties in the same manner that a private dwelling or *domus* is set apart from the public sphere and is granted a measure of autonomy. Since the civic realm is governed by laws that issue from the threshold giving access to the city, and since the private realm is governed by rules and laws issuing from the threshold to the *domus*, 'privilege' refers ultimately to a transfer of authority from the city to the household.

We may think of 'domesticating' and of '*apprivoiser*' as referring to the founding principle of any cosmos, including the particular cosmos that is a home. To have a home, to inhabit a *domus*, makes it possible to withdraw to a realm of privilege where we are exempt from anonymity, where we become recognized, named and loved inhabitants of a cosmos. We are by that fact *privileged* individuals who are unlike any others. It is therefore a *privilege* to inhabit a home and a cosmos. Our Latin ancestors used the expression '*Privatum se tenere*' for 'being at home', where home refers to a uniquely privileged and liberating environment.

The fox's plea to be tamed (*apprivoisé*) is in effect a plea to be liberated from the anonymity and indifference of a wilderness that is 'wild' precisely because it is ruled entirely by a natural law. This natural law makes no exceptions and cannot recognize customs and laws created by hospitable thresholds. The fox realizes that it is a favor and a privilege to gain admission to the private world of the *domus*. In effect he asks to be released from the indifference of a universe and brought home to the humanizing world of the inhabited cosmos.

Yet this release from indifference and this entry into the ordered world of the cosmos comes at a price. It brings with it a loss of innocence and revokes the protection of anonymity. It brings the fox under the law of the threshold, it binds him to a covenant, and it burdens him with the responsibility of answering to a host. Only in this manner can he become guest to a host and friend to a friend.

No doubt the fox is happy that as a tamed fox he will no longer be pursued by hunters. Yet he also will have to deprive himself of the pleasure of hunting chickens.

We might speculate that as a tamed animal the fox would still feel the promptings of his savage nature and that he would continue to dream of chasing chickens. Yet his new privileged status would demand of him to struggle against these promptings and thereby reassert his original desire to inhabit a cosmos rather than be simply part of a natural universe.

"The fox asked the little prince: "Are you looking for chickens?"

"No" said the little prince", I am looking for friends. What does 'tamed' mean? "It is something that has been too often neglected. It means 'to create ties'..."

"To create ties?"

"That's right," the fox said. "For me you are only a little boy just like another hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you have no need of me, either. For you I am only a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me we will need each other. You will be the only boy in the world for me. I'll be the only fox in the world for you..."

The fox understands that love and friendship do not make us alike but, on the contrary, create the means by which we become emancipated and differentiate ourselves. These relationships offer the sole means by which we become fully human and at the same time unique. Love and friendship bind the self to others in ways that liberate our humanity and that permit us to distinguish one person, one place or one thing from all others. It would appear that far from being blind, love and friendship grants us sight and opens for us a world worthy of being closely observed and of being better understood and inhabited.

To become a friend the fox must leave behind a savage natural and universal realm and cross over into a very differently organized cosmic world. This latter world is the only one offering the prospect of true individuation and emancipation.

Yet it is clear that the fox cannot accomplish this transition by himself alone. The task of taming and domestication, that is, of learning to cross a threshold and to inhabit a cosmos, can be accomplished only by individuals bound together in mutual respect and love. As we have seen before, the task of taming necessarily repeats the primordial gesture by which a host offers his house to a guest or by which a god animates and gives human form to mere matter. Creation is never a question of mere making but rather one of a host inviting a guest.

A guest cannot enter the house or the cosmos to which he has been invited without securing the help from his host. At the same time, a host cannot be a host without the help of a guest who is willing to respond to his invitation, to knock on his door and to ask to be admitted.

The fox cannot enter the human realm without the help of the little prince. His foxy cleverness and animal prowess are great assets in the hunt for chickens, but they cannot transform him into a friend, a host or a guest. To enter the realm of the *domus*, the fox needs more than cleverness and brute force. He needs the consent and the help of a loving other.

The fox complains about his life at the fringes in a no-man's land between the untamed forest and the inhabited world of humans. Saint Exupéry portrays him as belonging entirely neither to the realm of the universe nor to that of the cosmos and the *domus*:

"My life is monotonous. I hunt chickens; people hunt me. All chickens are just alike, and all men are just alike. So I'm rather bored. But if you tame me, my life will be filled with sunshine. I'll know the sound of footsteps that will be different from the rest. Other footsteps send me back underground. Yours will call me out of my burrow like music... The fox fell silent and stared at the little prince for a long while. "Please ...tame me!" he said."

The little prince wants to know what he has to do to tame the fox:

"“You will have to be very patient,” the fox answered. “First you will sit down a little ways away from me, over there on the grass. I'll watch you out of the corner of my eye, and won't say anything. ...But day by day you'll be able to sit a little closer.”"

One does not become friends solely on the strength of sentiment nor entirely by an act of will. One binds oneself to another in love and friendship in a gradual process of mutual rapprochements. It is in this way that an initial desire that recognizes only practical and physical limits becomes domesticated and learns to obey thresholds. The first step in taming desire and recognizing symbolic limits is one of imposing upon it a diurnal rhythm of coming and going, of appearing and disappearing, of visiting and saying goodbye. Learning to live within these rhythmic limits opens the way to a human life circumscribed by beginnings and endings, by living and dying, by birth and death. Only a person accepting fully his passing human life can be struck by the revealing beauty of a fleeting moment, by a momentary gesture or attitude that sets it apart from all others. Only a mortal

being accepting to live within borders and to honor thresholds can care enough about a mere mortal world and a mere mortal human existence to study it, paint it, sing or dance it. And only such a person is capable of binding himself to others in love and friendship. Untamed desire remains forever attached to a paradisiacal world that knows no limits, or to a universal and material world that has no neighbors. It overlooks or depreciates what shows itself within limits and therefore has no appreciation for what manifests itself within the bonds of love and it creates thereby a world populated by nameless creatures, faceless organisms and anonymous forces. Only a tamed desire and a neighborly world insist that we stop before a threshold and treasure a brief moment with those we love.

When the little prince returns the following day to see the fox he learns more about how to proceed to tame his wild friend:

"It would have been better to return at the same time," the fox said. "For instance, if you come at four in the afternoon, I'll begin to be happy at three. The closer it gets to four, the happier I'll feel. By four I'll be all excited and worried; I'll discover what it costs to be happy! But if you come at any old time, I should never know when to prepare my heart...*There must be rites.*" (Italics added)

The fox wants to know at what time to expect his friend so that he can bring his heart and his domain in proper readiness to receive his friend. The French text uses the expression *'s'habiller le coeur'* where *'s'habiller'* carries the meaning of 'dressing and preparing oneself to receive or to visit someone'. It is commonly said: *'Je ne puis vous recevoir, je ne suis pas habillé'* to indicate that one cannot receive because one is not properly dressed or prepared for the occasion. Saint Exupéry's phrase implies that a human encounter is not merely a natural happening, is not a kind of collision between material bodies, but rather a *cosmic* event that as such must be properly anticipated and carefully prepared. The prince must appear at a moment when the fox has had time to bring his house in order to receive him as his guest.

Moreover, to become friends one must cross hospitable thresholds that lead to the discovery of new worlds. Such crossings cannot be accomplished without performing an appropriate ritual.

"What's a rite?" asked the little prince. "That's another thing that's been too often neglected," said the fox. "It's the fact that one day is different from the other days, one hour from the other hours."

A rite honors the coming into being of a primordial division that created a cosmos and brought into being an inhabitable, human world. It recognizes and pays homage to a primordial difference incarnate in the threshold that set into motion an interchange between neighbors and thereby creates the roles of host and guest.

A rite can be thought as a circumscribed way of approaching a threshold and as a stylized way in which a guest approaches the host. In practicing the rite the guest acknowledges the existence of two different worlds, that of the host and that of the guest, while signaling his intention to symbolically link the two in a mutual recognition.

To participate in the rite and to honor the host's threshold means at the same time to participate in the creation and recreation of a human world. It means to participate in the moment when a monolithic chaos became ordered by a threshold and by a host and guest relationship.

To participate in a rite means to honor a fundamental division that created the human world by linking divinity to humanity, man to woman, neighbor to neighbor and friend to friend. Ritual celebrates the primordial creative division between host and guest that made it possible for "one day to be different from the other days, one hour different from the other hours".

Ritual began when the first mortal guest offered a sacrifice to an immortal host, when the first human being paid homage to the dead, or when a first man declared his love to a woman or his fealty to a friend.

Within the light of the ritual all things and beings become more fully individualized, all distinction become more clearly marked and imbued with meaning. The ordered pace and sequence of ritual is a school of loyalty and love.

Friendship comes to fruition when it adapts itself to the round, recurrent time of ritual and submits its fears and ardors to a culturally determined rhythm. The fable suggests that to become friends one must meet at regular intervals, must *frequent* one another at an agreed upon time and place. It is in this way that we speak of friendly encounters as 'visits' and describe friends as people who 'see each other'. If we follow the logic of this expression it would appear that "becoming friends" engages us in a particular way of "seeing each other" that takes the form of "visiting". The Latin *visitare* refers to a frequent or repeated seeing one another. Its verb represents a frequentative form of *visere*, which equally implies an attentive and repeated looking at something and which is itself a frequentative form of the more general *videre*, "to see".

In *visiting* a person or a site we see ourselves and our world in a distinct manner and it is the task of a hermeneutic psychology to



describe and thoughtfully differentiate that manner of seeing from other ways of approaching and understanding our world. Such a description shows that 'visiting' binds us to what we see in the manner in which a host and a guest are bound together. In visiting our seeing, hearing and understanding become cosmogonic activities that help create a human habitation. Visiting involves us in the building and maintaining of a human cosmos.

It appears noteworthy that the ritual of visiting that plays such an important role in the building and maintaining of a human world poses itself no clearly circumscribed task. Unlike the seeing and observing cultivated by the natural sciences and by technology, "visiting" promotes a manner of seeing and contemplating, of speaking and listening that pursues no definite aims. It does not collect data or follow a prearranged strategy for achieving particular or concrete results.

We visit for the pure pleasure of being in the presence of a good friend, of strolling in a favorite landscape or of standing before a beloved painting. Seeing in a manner that comports with *visiting* implies that what we see forms part of a continuing conversation that guides and orients our life. Such a way of seeing 'creates ties' and binds us to what we see.

At the end of a visit to a friend we express the hope of seeing each other again in the near future. Stung by the beauty of a landscape or the magnificence of a shrine we end the visit by vowing to return. Such promises and vows recognize that what we have seen, heard and understood will become part of our life and continue to have claims on us. 'Visiting' therefore implies a relationship of cohabitation that is structured by a hospitable threshold.

We might contrast this particular way of seeing or visiting with that of the hunter pursuing his game or that of the scientist studying the stars of astronomy or the mountains of geology.

As we turn away from a world of hospitable reciprocity and of mutual revelation to enter the world of daily work we also must take our distance from a way of seeing that reveals hearts, souls and faces and adopt a way of seeing that reveals the details and contours of a resisting natural world. We must shift from an inter-subjective, mutually revealing and circular way of seeing and understanding to a straight-forward and unambiguous observing and inspecting that fit the requirements of a particular task. As hunters we are required to chase our quarry from its lair. As natural scientists we must track an observed factual presence back to the antecedent natural causes. We do not rest till we have bagged the rabbit or till we have tracked a natural appearance back to its natural causes.

It is clear that the look of glad recognition with which the host greets his guest is not apt to discern hidden motives or produce reliable medical diagnoses. Conversely, the look that uncovers medical abnormalities or mathematical complexities is not likely to discover the beauty of a landscape or the face of a friend. We may therefore infer that a hunter or a scientist who returns to his daily tasks after having visited a friend must thereafter readjust his outlook and his way of understanding the world if he is to be effective in his work. Making the transition from visiting to working implies distancing oneself from the cyclical time of hearth and threshold, of friendship and love and entering a linear and progressive time appropriate to hunting or to doing science. This new stance may obscure, although it can never fully erase the cosmic neighborly sphere of the home and the city. That sphere remains the starting point as well as endpoint of any adventurous journey of material or intellectual conquest.

The fox understands that his world is merely one in which hunters pursue their quarry. The natural world of which he forms a part knows of no hospitable threshold and cannot recognize the bond that binds host to guest. The natural universe of the scientist similarly offers neither repose nor shelter, and the conquest of that world comes to an end only when the conqueror is conquered and the hunter turns into prey. Neither the forest of the fox nor the natural universe of the scientist offers a place for repose or friendship.

The fox asks to be delivered from this solitary and savage world where there is nothing else to do but chase chickens and to steer clear of hunters. He wants to enter an inhabited cosmos and be able to visit a friend.

We referred to the act of receiving or visiting a friend as a *cosmogonic* act because it honors a threshold and brings two different worlds together within one symbolic and cosmic whole. We may imagine that the fox lived at one time entirely within the confines of a natural world where he had as yet no awareness of a world beyond his own. In that state of unconsciousness he could not even imagine himself as forming part of a larger natural world.

But at the moment when he began to long for friendship and dreamed of being tamed, both the natural realm from which he sought deliverance and the inhabited realm he sought to enter began to appear to him as two different worlds that he could bring together and form into a cosmos. To inhabit a cosmos means to be aware of at least two distinct worlds that together form a dynamic interactive whole.

The desire to be tamed and the longing for friendship are coextensive with the awareness of a distinct self and with that of a beloved other. The fox comes to understand himself as a fox at the same moment that he begins to love the Little Prince. He becomes then also aware of two different worlds, one that offers friendship and requires ritual passages across a thresholds and another that recognizes no neighbors and is ordered solely by interacting natural forces. The very moment when the fox binds himself in friendship to the Little Prince he becomes able to distinguish one world from another. It then becomes possible for him to discern and bridge the difference between a world inhabited by mortals and an *otherworldly* domain inhabited by divine beings and beloved ancestors. In fact, from that moment onwards the fox will experience time and space in such a way that his every 'here' will have as its neighbor a distant 'yonder', and his every 'now' will evoke a corresponding 'then'. To *inhabit* a cosmos means to adopt a domicile, understood as a fundamental 'here' and 'now' that by means of a constant cultural and symbolic labor becomes linked to *other* times and places. To visit a friend means to cultivate a relationship to another world. That cultivation is accomplished in a ritual journey that links one threshold to another. This ritual demands that the visitor announce his presence before a threshold and before a portal that can be opened only by the host. The visit calls for an exchange of gifts and greetings, it calls for conversation and it is concluded with a ritual of departure that includes the promise of a return.

### **Plato's Banquet and Aristophanes' myth of the birth of love.**

It will be useful for us to place Saint Exupéry's fable about friendship side by side the classic Platonic myth about the birth of love as it was told by Aristophanes in the Symposium.

We think of Saint Exupéry's story as a fable because it resembles in certain respects the type of stories that we associate with Aesop and de la Fontaine. We approached this fable as a cosmogonic myth relating how friendship brought together two initially separate and unrelated worlds and formed them into a dynamic and cosmic whole. Aristophanes' narrative follows a similar cosmogonic pattern. It tells how the gods grew weary of a belligerent and insolent race of pre-human monsters that at one time populated the earth. These monsters were twice as big as present-day humans and they each possessed two heads, two sets of arms, legs and sexual organs. Some of these giants bore the characteristics of the two sexes while others were simple twice male or twice female. To curb their insolence and power

the gods decided to cut the monsters literally down to size. They proposed to slice them lengthwise into two parts so as to create two separate individuals each possessing only one head, one set of arms, legs and sexual organs. The myth relates how these separated halves of giants gradually adjusted to their plight as they learned to form friendships, found families and build cities and thereby assumed their role as human beings inhabiting a viable cosmos.

Both myths, the one cited by Plato and the one told by Saint Exupéry, tell of the creation of a specifically human world or cosmos that is held together, not merely by natural forces and material bonds, but by faithful alliances born of love and friendship. Both myths relate the mysterious transformation of a mere natural universe into a human and divine cosmos. Both represent this transformation and the dawn of humanity as an 'erotic' miracle that transforms a natural world into an intimate sphere of dwelling where mortals and immortals, friends and lovers, natives and strangers all can meet and form loyal bonds. The particular delight of these two narratives is that they teach us to think of love, friendship and neighborliness not merely as biological, sociological or even as psychological phenomena but as truly cosmogonic activities that are capable of transforming the natural universe of the untamed fox and of the self-sufficient giants into a human and divine cosmos.

The myth of Aristophanes has a very long history and it antedated by far the turn of the fifth and fourth century B.C. when Aristophanes recited it at Agathon's symposium and when Plato made it part of his famous dialogue on love. Numerous early versions and various traces of the narrative can to be found in the creation myths of Hinduism, Iranian Gnosticism, Sufism and Judaism. Aristophanes' jocular and high-spirited version of the myth clearly removes it from the sphere of religious traditions and brings it closer to that of popular entertainment. And yet, we should not conclude from this that the great comic poet had no serious intentions when he made it the substance of his contribution to the platonic discussion on love .

It should be recalled that Aristophanes and many of his cultivated contemporaries maintained an ambivalent attitude towards myth. In one of his own plays, "The Wasps", Aristophanes presents an ambitious youth who attempts to teach his lowborn father how to behave at fashionable dinner parties. "Never talk about anything having to do with nymphs, giants or other fantastical creatures" he instructs him, "and especially never make mention of myths because that is very likely to offend well-brought up people."

We may remind ourselves how Sigmund Freud found himself in a very similar circumstance among the well-brought up people of Vienna

around the turn of the century. We know from his later work how deeply he had been influenced by the Aristophanic myth, but we note also his intense embarrassment when he is forced to acknowledge his great debt to it in his meta-theoretical treatise on Eros and Thanatos. We might speculate that history presents recurring periods of rapid cultural upheaval and change in which the educated classes choose a kind of revolutionary amnesia and deliberately lose sight of their cultural heritage. At such times educated people no longer are able to understand and breathe new life into the older cultural forms. Rather than admitting defeat or seeking new inspiration, these cultural elites then tend to turn the tables and declare that beliefs and practices of preceding generations are either unintelligible or superstitious and that they therefore deserve to be forgotten.

Such recurrent periods of secularizing enlightenment typically represent the human world not as a cosmic unity but as a natural, material and self-sufficient whole. The human world is then no longer seen as a dynamic partnership between heaven and earth, or between present and preceding generations, but as a natural whole held together solely by conflicting material forces. Such a natural, self-sufficient whole has no need to form affective and cooperative partnerships with other times, places or points of view. During such periods of waning faith in a cosmos and of a growing preoccupation with a secular universe, intellectual life tends to limit itself to practical and technical inquiry and cultural life centers on the performance of useful, secular and utilitarian tasks. At such times the mysterious worlds of ancestors, of gods and heroes recede into the background to yield their place to a single, all-encompassing natural and secular world. With the decline and neglect of these mysterious *other* worlds, myth also loses its role as a narrative link between the present and the past, and between self and other. Myth loses its vital function of binding together different worlds into a cosmic whole. Deprived of that function it is remembered only as a bizarre relic inherited from a primitive past, or as a misguided and inadequate first attempt at scientific explanation.

Both Aristophanes and Freud could not entirely escape the prejudices of their times and circumstances. Yet they also sensed that it was not possible to articulate the mysterious ways of the human heart and mind without making use of the illuminating power of myth.

Aristophanes resolved this dilemma by, on the one hand, taking myth seriously and using it as a basis for his reflection on human love, while on the other, deriding it as an improbable old wife's tale that merits only a good laugh. He encourages us to approach the myth as a bizarre and amusing tale about bisected monsters looking in vain for their missing halves. Yet he also invites us to reflect seriously on what

the myth still might have to teach us about love and friendship and about the role these play in creating and sustaining a human world.

The famous after dinner conversation recorded in Plato's dialogue concerned the nature of love and friendship. It was agreed upon that the six guests and their host Agathon would each present a panegyric or a speech in praise of love. A panegyric was generally understood to be a public oration intended to commemorate some particular personality or event at a festival or public meeting organized to that purpose. The discussion at Agathon's house took the form of an exchange of panegyrics on the god called Love or Eros. Its aim was to evoke his divine presence in the same sense that a prayer is meant to evoke a divine presence or that a commemorative speech is meant to evoke the vivid memory of the deceased. This form of speech makes no attempt to 'analyze' a particular person or a particular event. Its intent is not to produce a psychological, sociological or biological treatise on love but rather to give form to a desire to draw nearer to its mysterious presence in our lives and to experience that presence within a wider register and in a more thoughtful and conscious way.

Aristophanes' speech was the fourth in the series. He had been preceded by Phaedrus, Phaedrus lover Pausanias and by the somewhat pedantic physician Eryximachus. His speech was followed by that of the host of the banquet, the tragedian Agathon and thereafter by that of Socrates, the guest of honor.

After some frivolous banter and risqué exchanges with Eryximachus Aristophanes presented his version of the myth about the birth of love.

"Our original nature was by no means the same as it is now. In the first place, there were three kinds of human beings, not merely the two kinds, male and female, as at present: there was a third kind as well, which had equal shares of the two.....The form of each person was round all over, with back and sides encompassing it every way; each had four arms, and legs to match these, and two faces perfectly alike on a cylindrical neck. There was one head to the two faces, which looked in opposite ways; there were four ears, two privy members, and all other parts."

Aristophanes spiced up his tale with comical details about how the giants moved around and procreated. We are told that when they ran they looked like acrobats doing cartwheels. They also were able to walk like present-day human beings, in the upright position, but unlike humans they could reverse or change directions at any moment without having to turn around. And, again unlike present day human beings, they had two heads that looked in opposite directions so that

front and back did not truly exist for them. This in turn meant that they were literally 'two-faced' in the sense that they could not ever commit to an unambiguous, single point of view. They therefore could not confront a person or a situation in the manner that we do.

To *confront* a situation and to meet it head-on means to give it our complete and undivided attention. This one cannot do with a body that has no back or front and that is able to instantaneously look and move in all directions. Such a polymorphous, bi-cephalic and quadri-dextrous body cannot truly meet another person, or even focus its complete attention on one particular thing. Such a body can experience the world only as a fleeting, sensuous blur in which nothing in particular stands out and in which nothing in particular can evoke curiosity, demand attention or inspire love.

It is hard to see how living in such a blur could give rise to a coherent conception of oneself, of another person or of a surrounding world. Such a polymorphously versatile and uncommitted body could never be that of a lover, a saint, a good friend, a poet or a thinker. Such a body would be forever unsuited to found a home or a city or transform a wilderness into a human world.

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Aristophanes continued his story:

"The reason for the existence of the three sexes .....is that originally the male sprang from the sun and the female from the earth, while the sex which was both male and female came from the moon, which partakes of the nature of both sun and earth. Their circular shape and their hoop-like method of progression were both due to the fact that they were like their parents. Their pride and strength was overweening; they attacked the gods....Homer's story of Ephialtes and Otus, who attempted to climb up to heaven and attack the gods (relates to) ...to these beings."

The proto-human giants of Aristophanes' myth inhabited a realm intermediate between heaven and earth. They were descendants from the sun and the moon and stood themselves half-way between the changeless and eternal bodies that move majestically across the sky and the unpredictable, ever changing, mortal bodies that walk the earth.

According to the myth the earth was born when heavenly bodies came down from the sky and settled upon the earth. These proto-human bodies began their descent as perfectly round and superbly self-sufficient heavenly bodies that moved about in circular patterns. In the course of that descent they were transformed into a new kind of

mortal creature that moved about the surface of the earth in irregular patterns and in response to the various opportunities and dangers that presented themselves.

These new creatures had to learn a whole range of novel skills in order to survive on earth. They had to learn to defend themselves by adroit maneuvers and skilful labor against hunger and thirst, heat and cold, as well as against predators and natural catastrophes. To do so they had to surmount their ancient habit of pursuing an unswerving and majestic path across the sky. To become true earthlings they had to set aside their self-sufficient ways and learn to interact with their new environment. In the end they would need to learn to love and to depend both upon the gods and upon one another.

According to the myth the evolution of mankind began therefore when the children of the sun and the moon fell down from heaven and landed on earth. It commenced when they plunged from the safe and circular realm of the heavens and landed upon the unpredictable earth. This evolution was completed when the descendants of these giant children of the sun and moon were transformed by Zeus and Apollo into true human beings who would be capable of love and friendship and could form families and build cities.

Aristophanes compared the proto-human giants to the colossal creatures Ephialtes and Otus of Homer's *Odyssey*. These were the sons of the sea god Poseidon, who could walk on water and who thought themselves powerful enough to chase the gods and to take their place in the heavens. These infamous brothers ended up killing each other with the very spears they had used to attack the gods. Aristophanes no doubt wanted to borrow the prestige of the *Odyssey* to bolster his claims for his creation myth. But he also understood, as had Homer before him and Virgil afterwards, that the attempt to get rid of the gods is but a prelude to fratricide and suicide.

Aristophanes told of the displeasure felt by the gods over the insolent behavior of the combative and narcissistic giants. They convened to discuss what was to be done about this flawed human race. After some thought Zeus came up with the following idea:

"I think," he said, "that I have found a way by which we can allow the human race to continue to exist and also put an end to their wickedness by making them weaker. I will cut each of them in two....they shall walk upright upon two legs (instead of rolling around on four legs and four arms). If there is any further sign of wantonness in them I shall bisect them again, and they shall hop along on one single leg."



What disturbed the gods was not only humanity's overweening pride and cold aloofness from each other but especially their failure to maintain a proper relationship to the gods. They seemed as incapable of loving each other as they were of loving the gods.

Aristophanes also uses the word 'licentiousness' (*akolasia*; ακλασίας) to describe the giants. We might translate this to mean: 'intemperance' or 'extravagance'. The verb *kolasis* (κόλασις) refers to 'pruning', 'correcting', 'chastening', or more generally to 'taming'. The gods objected to the earliest human race because they were as yet literally 'un-pruned', 'un-chastened', or 'un-tamed'. We might think of them as uncivilized in the sense of lacking sociability and being unable to maintain a relationship with others marked by mutual regard, friendship or love. We think here of the fox in the famous tale of Saint-Exupéry who asked to be tamed so as to become capable of friendship. The gods despaired of the early race of man because they seemed incapable of honoring a friend or of sacrificing to a god. They were as yet unable to pass across thresholds and enter into faithful and fruitful alliances.

The problem faced by the counsel of the gods was therefore not merely one of punishing wicked beings, but rather one of taming uncivil and brute creatures so they would be able to enter into loving, and mutually sustaining relationships.

The myth goes into some detail about how the gods proceeded in their work. Their first attempt at imparting civility and domesticity to humanity appears not to have produced the hoped for results.

"Man's original body having been thus cut in two, each half yearned for the half from which it had been severed. When they met they threw their arms round one another and embraced, in their longing to grow together again, and they perished of hunger and general neglect of their concerns, because they would not do anything apart."

The English text relates how the severed halves desired "to grow together again". The Greek text uses the verb *sympheo* (συμφύω) to convey the sense of their wanting to be reunited and made into one. Evidently they could not accept living apart from each other and they preferred dying to living separate and independent lives.

As the newly separated creatures continued to suffer and die, Zeus took pity on them and thought of ways to keep them alive. He then conceived of the idea of modifying the human body so that it could engage in sexual intercourse. He hoped that this would permit the severed halves to re-experience brief, satisfying moments of corporeal reunification. Human sexuality was thus meant to transform the

moribund and clinging embraces of the severed giants into time-bound, joyful and life bringing sexual embraces.

“He moved their reproductive organs to the front....By moving their genitals to the front, as they are now, Zeus made it possible for reproduction to take place by the intercourse of the male with the female. His object in making this change was twofold; if male coupled with female, children might be begotten and the race thus continued, but if male coupled with male, at any rate the desire for intercourse would be satisfied, and men set free to turn to other activities and to attend to the rest of the business of life.”

It was in this way that the proto-human giants of yore became transformed into the complete human beings of today. This transformation made it possible for humans to feel love and affection for one another and to delight in each other's company. Sexual embraces were meant to evoke consoling memories of a paradisiacal unity that had been lost when the ancestral giants became human.

It is curious to observe how specifically modern words such as 'sexuality' and 'sexual intercourse' still show traces of decidedly pre-modern sensibilities. It seems that these words continue to evoke a persistent association between human coupling and wounding, between human procreation and loss. This association persisted therefore in contravention to the modernizing tendencies of the psychologists and psychiatrists who adopted these terms in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The word 'sexuality' derives from the Latin verb *secare*, meaning: 'to cut', 'to amputate', 'to wound', 'to castrate', 'to partition' and 'to separate'. It seems clear that even today we cannot speak of human sexuality without evoking ancient myths about loss and separation.

It would appear that human sexuality cannot be fully understood or experienced without recourse to a mythic context evoking images of blissful unity and of a restored integrity against a contrasting background of separation, mutilation and loss. Human sexuality belongs intrinsically to a mortal and wounded creature able to confront the future and interpret the past. It opens a world that can be fully entered into only by those who are able to handle symbol and metaphor and understand and interpret mythic narratives.

The sexuality of the pre-human giants and that of their human descendents appears to be separated by a chasm so profound that only a divine miracle could have bridged the divide and effect a transformation from one into the other.

We should take particular note of the fact that Zeus did not invent human sexuality to improve the biological process of human reproduction but rather to make human beings properly responsive to each other and to induce them to be more mindful of their gods. Zeus' new 'invention' (mechanē, μηχανή) of human sexuality served the biological function of biological procreation no better than the earlier method of reptilian, oviparous reproduction.

Aristophanes reports that the proto-human giants had been in the habit of leaving their eggs on the ground "in the manner of grasshoppers". The divine purpose of the new invention had not been to improve human biology, but to attenuate the suffering caused by the fall from paradise and the loss of a perfect lover and companion. The gods desired human beings to accept their new ontological condition as earthbound, mortal and dependent creatures. They wanted the human race to move beyond mourning the past and begin to fully inhabit the earth. Humanity was meant to form couples, to raise families, to cultivate fields and build magnificent cities. The gods wanted their mortal subjects to construct cult sites and offer sacrifices and prayers. It was to this end that Zeus and Apollo replaced a merely natural and impersonal process of procreation with an emotionally charged, specifically human, loyal and loving coupling. The new 'invention' of human sexuality was specifically intended to take the place of an interminable and death-oriented embrace that refused to accept the limits inherent in human life on earth. The gods introduced human sexuality to replace an endless, helpless and hopeless desire of the wounded giants and transform it into a *punctuated* desire that could accept separation and that was capable of waiting before thresholds.

The gods sought to liberate humanity from the closed circle formed by incestuous couples so it would begin to build and inhabit a human world. Or, to open another register of the myth, Zeus sought to transform a celestial desire that made the stars described their endless circles in the vault of heaven. He sought to transform it so it would become adapted to mortal terrestrial life and become capable of coming and going, of working and celebrating, of visiting and coupling.

The myth teaches that human sexuality should not be understood as merely a functional, biological device. Zeus transformed the human body and the human psyche so that it could find release from a fatal preoccupation with absolute unity and perfect love. He wanted to create a human race that would be at home in a wider world, that could accept constraints and imperfections and that would fully embrace the opportunities inherent in life on earth.

In accepting the divine gift of sexuality human beings accepted a radical, ontological transformation that destined them to live at a never to be entirely bridged distance from those they loved. To live at a *di-stance*, understood here in its etymological and ontological sense, means to *stand apart* from the persons and the things we love. It means to stand apart, not only from the gods and the ancestors, but also from one's family, friends and neighbors and even from the surrounding natural and material world. It means to be unable to become entirely one with all that gives our world meaning. To become a sexual being in the sense expound proposed by the myth means to accept being separated from all that we love, yet without ever ceasing to attempt to bridge that distance with hospitable solicitude. This solicitude can take the form of amorous courting, of neighborly hospitality, of entering into philosophical discourse and exchanging ideas. It can also take the form of religious ritual, of prayer and contemplation. Or again, it may find expression in poetry, art or science.

To become a sexual being in the sense proposed by the myth means to overcome and domesticate a savage, primordial desire that demands absolute unity and perfect wholeness. It means to accept living and loving within the strictures of earthly time and space and within the limits imposed by divine and domestic thresholds. Our love for fellow human beings, for our better halves, resist here the temptation of endless, timeless clinging and takes the form of punctuated encounters, of *frequenting* and *visiting* at regular intervals. To be a sexual being also means to be able to interrupt one's intimate or familial life in order to attend to daily tasks and perform public duties. It means to overcome a primitive desire for utopic wholeness and totalitarian unity and to accept in its place a shared life that is maintained by a labor of love.

We noted earlier that the original dual giants had been able to procreate in a purely mechanical manner, 'by depositing their seed in the sand in the manner of crickets'. This manner of procreation required neither courtship nor personal commitment. With the birth of human sexuality it became possible, and indeed necessary, for friends and lovers to *turn towards* one another, to invoke thresholds and to enter into a relationship of host and guest. From that moment onward it became possible for a human being to embrace a lover and to visit a friend. At the same time it became possible to *turn toward* the past and *to address* a future. Only a body that can turn toward and away from others can remember the past and anticipate the future. Only a body that can turn to address and be addressed can become aware of thresholds and orient itself within an inhabited world. And only such an

oriented body can understand and communicate what it sees, hears and feels.

If we follow the bare outline of the Aristophanic myth we first encounter the narcissistic giants who live in a barren world untouched by neighborliness or human love. Next we come upon the death-obsessed lovers who are overcome by nostalgia and are imprisoned within a utopic perspective that does not permit them to either turn towards or away from those they love.

Only thereafter do we encounter the first fully formed human beings. They make their appearance as wounded lovers whose lesions have healed and who are now able to live at a creative distance from those they love.

The myth can thus be seen as describing the creation of mankind in three stages that each depicts a different attitude towards distance, difference and loss. The first stage presents a paradisiacal world where these have as yet not made their entrance. The second stage portrays the devastation of that paradisiacal world when difference and loss make their entrance. Only the third stage presents a world where human beings can be at home. The separation and distance brought about by the sword of Zeus has here been transformed from a source of despair and pain into a source of cultural inspiration. Difference and loss invite here the construction of bridges that are able to span the divide and create a new cultural unity.

According to the myth, creation starts with the appearance of a single and solitary world in which there is as yet no awareness of other worlds. It begins with autocratic and narcissistic individuals who lack regard for others, but it ends with mutually responsive couples who together build a human world.

Aristophanes sums up his myth in a remarkable sentence that invites our close scrutiny. The very terse and condensed nature of the phrase makes it very difficult to translate. Lamb, in the Loeb's Classical Library renders it somewhat circumspectly as follows:

"Each one of us is but a *tally of a man*, since everyone shows like a flatfish the traces of having been sliced in two; and each is ever searching for the tally that will fit him. (191D)

(According to Webster's Twentieth Century Dictionary a "tally" refers to an old system of accounting that used "a stick with cross notches representing the amount of debt owing or paid. Usually the stick was split lengthwise, half for the debtor and half for the creditor")

Walter Hamilton in the Penguin edition of texts translates it slightly more intelligibly as follows:

"Each of us is the mere *broken tally of a man*, the result of a bisection which has reduced us to the condition like that of a flat fish and each of us is perpetually in search of his corresponding tally."

The French version of Robin and Moreau in the Gallimard edition renders the essential part of the phrase as:

"Every one of us is therefore *the complementary half (la moitié complémentaire)* of another human being." (Plato (1950) *Le Banquet* tr. par Robin Léon et Moreau M.J. Paris: Gallimard p. 75)

The Greek text reads: "*hekastos oun hemon estin anthropou symbolon*" which can also be rendered: "Everyone of us is but a *symbol* of another human being".

This enigmatic and profound phrase is immediately followed by a humorous aside about the way a cook slices flatfish in the kitchen. Aristophanes had used the same jocular image in one of his own comedies, the *Lysistrata* (at 115, 131). We are faced here with a typical comedic device that hides a profound truth beneath a distracting surface of levity. We should not permit ourselves to be sidetracked by the joke and thereby miss a thought that goes truly to the heart of the Aristophanic creation myth.

The key word of the phrase is obviously the Greek word "*symbolon*" that is rendered variously in cited translations as "tally", "broken tally" or "complimentary half". The Greek verb *symbolloo* means, "to bring together". It also means "to join", "to engage" and "to encounter". The phrase tells us that to be truly human means to be paired off with, to be joined to, engaged with or irrevocably tied to another human being. To place the word *symbolon* in its proper historical and cultural context demands that we see it as forming part of an ancient Greek friendship ritual. This ritual was meant to formalize a friendship and establish a relationship of reciprocal hospitality. It was typically performed at the time when friends had to part and go their separate ways. It stipulated that the friends would break a coin, a die, or a potsherd in half so that each could carry half of it with him as a token of the absent other. This half of a broken whole would be called a '*symbolon*' and the act of breaking the whole was intended to represent the heartbreak that comes with parting. The '*symbolon*' was meant to remind the bearer of the absent friend and of the incomplete nature of anyone who has experienced love or friendship. At the same time the symbol would

point to the healing, whole-making power of human love as the best cure for human incompleteness. It would remind the friends that they would remain bound together through the pledge they had made to each other.

The *symbolon* would thus all at once represent the absent friend, recall the pain of parting, be a reminder of humanity's flawed and broken condition and point to faithful friendship as its principal cure. It was in this way that a broken piece of pottery came to symbolize the power of love. Nothing on earth could prevent jars from breaking, or coins from becoming defaced or friends from having to part. But the power of loyal love would be able to heal the breach and bring new presence to what time had defaced and forced to disappear.

Both the myth and the friendship ritual can thus be understood as naming and praising love and friendship as a new '*symbolic*' power capable of overcoming distance and difference and of "bringing together' (*sym-ballein*) what had been torn apart by fate.

The myth, the ritual and the symbol all speak of the power of love to triumph over mere material circumstances. They all proclaim that the vital sense of belonging together and of sharing a common fate cannot be erased by the mere caprice of time and place.

It is because of the symbolizing power of friendship that the fox in the myth of Saint Exupéry could look at a wheat field and feel himself in the presence of the Little Prince. It is this same unifying, symbolizing power of love that permits a broken die to evoke in us the memory of a friend or that makes it possible for a simple potsherd to draw us into a vivid relationship with a time and a place long past and gone. Friendship makes its appearance here as a great spiritual power that overcomes our loneliness by bridges the gap between self and other, now and then, here and yonder, heaven and earth.

We note that the myth and the ritual place love and friendship against the background of a disturbed material unity. The myth tells that love was born in the wake of a forced separation and the ritual reminds of a pledge of friendship given at the moment of a painful farewell. The symbol itself takes the form of a pottery shard, a broken die or coin. We learn that broken things have the power to evoke the plenitude of love and that it is only after having been injured and diminished that the giants become endowed with humanity and capable of loving. This entire strand of thought finds expression in the compact phrase of Diotima that proclaims that "Every one of us is but *a symbol* of another human being"

Friends and lovers are like broken shards and symbols. They cannot turn back the clock or restore a past condition. They cannot return to

the time and place of a mythical past and to an innocent and absolute possession of each other. They are forever barred from a condition of primordial plenitude. They cannot completely join each other nor become one with a surrounding natural and material world. They are maimed and separated creatures, yet endowed with a new and miraculous power of love that overcomes difference and distance and that binds together what fate has pulled apart. This new power of love is born and prospers in a world of mortal and broken things. It permits human beings to cultivate a world that is neither a paradise nor a merely natural or material world. It makes possible a life that is neither one of angels nor that of natural creatures, but one of mortal creatures gifted with a love that "brings together" what has fallen apart, that remembers, reconciles, hopes and heals. It is this power that transforms what would be a valley of tears into an inhabitable, hopeful and often joyous human world.

At this point the question arises as to how the myth, the ritual and the personal and historical experience of love and friendship are related to one another. If we follow the Greek example we come to the conclusion that none of these three dimensions of human life should be thought in isolation of the others. Without the ritual the actual experience of saying farewell to a friend would remain indefinite and formless. To detach the experience from the myth would leave it without meaning. Similarly, it would be pointless to attempt to understand the myth or the ritual without making reference to our own lived experience of love and of saying farewell. It would transform the myth into an exotic but senseless tale and represent the friendship ritual as a neurotic symptom.

We cannot properly understand our own lived experience or that of others without placing it within its own proper mythic and ritual context. It is only within that context that human phenomena can be made to fully reveal themselves, that they can be persuaded to address us and give meaning and direction to our lives.

This is not to say that human experience remains rigorously isolated in its own cultural and historical context. We cannot fail to notice, however, that there occurs a significant overlap between different religious and mythic horizons. We note, for example, that the Aristophanic myth, the friendship ritual and the etymology of our own modern metaphor of "sexuality" all represent humanity as being in its very nature alienated, vulnerable, cut and wounded.

It is also important to observe that the Greek myth does not ascribe this flawed human condition to an historical event such as political oppression, religious bigotry, or to any other faulty social or economic arrangement or condition. The myth does not represent the



fundamental human condition as something that could be altered or repaired within historical time by means of political action or scientific discovery. On the contrary, myth speaks of human incompleteness, sinfulness or alienation in terms that place these beyond the power of human beings to erase or undo them. A mythic event forms part of a narrative horizon that transcends the realm of natural causality and historical events. We may think of our constantly changing historical world as surrounded by a mythic horizon. This horizon illuminates the historical world and gives a particular meaning to events that take place. It is this horizon that permits events to properly unfold, to address us and to speak to us in ways that give direction to our lives. This mythic horizon typically recedes from our field of vision when we become absorbed by our practical daily tasks and seek to effect real and concrete changes in our natural surroundings. It equally and necessarily recedes from consciousness when we enter a natural scientific perspective and venture to understand and manipulate a natural universe. Yet this horizon reappears as soon as work is done and we become thoughtful about our life and reflect on our relationships to others. We then reconnect with what truly surrounds, undergirds and overarches our mortal existence.

We see here a parting of the ways between Aristophanes' attempt to illuminate the human condition from within a religious and mythical horizon and a modern determinedly secular attempt to understand humanity solely from within the context of the natural and the social sciences.

As we have seen, these latter sciences all explore a natural and material universe whose central determining characteristic is that it has no neighbors. This universe confines us to a space and time that has been rigorously purified of all traces of myth and ritual and that thereby has lost the capacity to refer beyond itself to radically different, discontinuous and neighboring worlds.

These divergent paths of myth and science reopen for us the question about the viability of a human science that does not adopt the natural universe as its ultimate object or foundation. It raises the question of a psychology or anthropology that would no longer seek to trace human phenomena back to a single, material and universal world but that would instead trace them back to a miraculous creative event in which two fundamentally different worlds begin to cohabit and to form a cosmos together.

Such a differently conceived human science would adopt the general premise that humanity comes into being at the very moment when two divergent worlds come together to form a new symbolic, neighborly and cosmic whole. Humanity cannot be thought in isolation from world creation and habitation.

The human phenomena that attract our particular attention within the purview of such a human science are those that establish, uphold and elaborate threshold boundaries. These boundaries invite hospitable exchanges of symbols, of ideas, goods and services and thereby lay the foundations of an inhabitable world.

We may think of the birth of the primordial couple of heaven and earth, of host and guest and of self and other, as coextensive with the laying down of a first threshold and with the building of a first human abode. We then come to think of human behavior and of the dynamics of culture as essentially directed towards the creation of links between distant worlds. The urge to form couples, bound together by love and friendship makes its appearance here as a desire to transform chaos into cosmos. Love no longer appears here as a sweet mask hiding pleasure seeking, brute conquest or biological procreation. It unmask itself here as a desire to create an hospitable domain and an inhabitable world. We come to think here of love and friendship as a never entirely successful attempt to link heaven and earth and to bridge the void between self and other, man and woman and between the living and the dead.

We may think of the humanizing desire to bridge the distance between neighbors in terms of a Greek Eros or a Christian Holy Spirit, or in terms of a Judaic covenant binding mortal to immortal being. In all these instances human desire confronts a rupture that it seeks to repair or contemplates a wound that it seeks to heal and to transform into a symbol. To be human means to be called upon to construct a bridge across a painful, ontological divide. It is this bridge linking two distinct worlds that forms the basis of a cosmos and the foundation of an inhabitable and human world.

If we now reexamine the Arisrophanic myth to determine in what fundamental ways the ancient giants differed from their human descendants we note first of all that they possessed neither myth nor ritual. Their lives revolved entirely within a self-enclosed material world that contained no references to other worlds. They possessed no ritual with which to create a meaningful parting, they had no symbols with which to bridge the distance between lovers, they had no myths to remind and to connect them to other worlds. Their response to others and to other worlds was either one of denial and disregard or one of hostility and violence. They therefore lived submerged and wholly unconscious within in a solitary world in which it was impossible to encounter a neighbor.

Since they lacked rites, ceremonies and sacraments the pre-human giants were unable to honor thresholds. They could not give proper burial to their dead, greet the birth of a child with festivity, or

celebrate a wedding. They could not sacrifice or prey to their gods, or exchange gifts with neighbors. They could not be “tamed” as the fox of the fable of The Little Prince wished to be tamed. They were not able to visit friends or play the roles of host and guest. Deprived of thresholds and symbols, and therefore of love and friendship, the primordial giants would not have been able to differentiate themselves from others or even from the surrounding material world in which they were submerged. As such they formed one continuous and unconscious whole with the earth and as such were unable to truly *inhabit* it. Only the wounded human descendents of the giants would learn to acknowledge a threshold and to honor differences. Only they would become able to meet and part with friends, to exchange symbols and to enter into binding covenants. Only the imperfect, maimed and wounded descendants of the much more forceful giants would discover how to become a friend, a neighbor, a lover and a parent. Only they would learn to honor the gods, to respect the dead and to offer hospitality to strangers. Only they were able to found and build a human world.

### **Diotima’s Vision of Eros**

When it became Socrates turn to speak of love he began by asking to be released from his pledge to speak of Eros in the manner of a eulogist at a formal panegyric. He proposed instead to speak in a less formal and conversational way about what he had learned about the deity from the Mantinean priestess Diotima.

We suggested earlier that the philosophical conversations at Agathon’s house should be understood within the context of the traditional Lenaian festival in honor of Dionysus. As such these conversations can be seen both as a continuation of, and as an innovative departure from the traditions of the Dionysian theatre. Socrates’ request therefore represented a second, innovative departure from established traditions. He asked permission to depart from the formal style of the traditional eulogy and to speak of love within the context of a newly established tradition of wisdom-loving conversations among friends. Moreover, by bringing the priestess Diotima into the conversation Socrates made allusion to the Greek mystery cults and to ancient rites of initiation. He thereby restored a vital religious dimension to what had been up to that point mostly a secular conversation.

Before he met Diotima Socrates had assumed Eros to be a god and as such a ruler over a particular celestial and earthly domain. To his surprise he found that she thought of Love as neither a god, nor a mortal being, but rather as a spirit (*daimoon*). By way of explanation she told him:

"A God does not deal directly with man; it is by means of spirits that all the intercourse and communication of gods with men, both in waking life and in sleep, is carried on. A man who possesses skill in such matter is a spiritual man... .Spirits are many in number and of many kinds, and one of them is Love." (203 A)

Socrates learned to think of Eros as ceaselessly journeying between heaven and earth and thereby binding the two realms together in the manner that lovers are bound together.

"He (Eros) is a Great Spirit (*daimoon megas*) Socrates; everything that belongs to the nature of spirit is half god and half man." (203b)

Eros makes his appearance here as a spirit or divine messenger who overcomes indifference and absolute separation and creates a dynamic interaction between disjointed parts. He is the master of exchange and interplay, of conversation and interpretation. Love appears here in the form of a wondrous mutual fascination that sets in motion an artful conversation and a dynamic of reciprocal revelations and exchanges of gifts.

According to Diotima it is Eros' specific task:

"to interpret( *hermêneûon*) and to convey (*diaporthmeûon*) what belongs to the realm of the gods to mankind and what belongs to mankind to the gods; prayers and sacrifices coming from below and commands and rewards from above. Being midway (between the two distinct realms) he makes a whole out of all that is (*to pan*)." (203b) Diotima used the verb *syndeoo* (*συνδέω*) to describe Love's way of "making a whole" of all that is. This verb can be understood both as a "binding or tying together", but it also refers to the "binding up of wounds". The priestess thus expressed the thought that the creative act of binding heaven and earth together into a mutually responsive whole should also be understood as a therapeutic act that closed old wounds and that transformed pain and discord into harmonious discourse.

Diotima repeated here an element of the Aristophanic creation myth in which a monolithic whole is first painfully wounded and divided and thereafter healed and bound together by love's hermeneutic labor. This same interlocking sequence of ideas can be seen to be at work in Diotima's reference to Eros as a *daimoon megas*, or "great spirit". The substantive "daimoon" is related to the verb "daioo", which means "to divide", "to parcel out" or "to distribute". The Indo- European root "da", "dai", "de", means: "to cut off" "to separate" "to divide" and "to distribute". (Klein, E. (1971) *Klein's Comprehensive Etymological*

*Dictionary of the English Language*. Amsterdam: Elsevier; see under "demon"). A *dai-moon* inextricably belongs to a divided world that has been deprived of its material wholeness or physical integrity. It therefore belongs intrinsically to a mortal and wounded world that has been touched by loss, disease, aging, absence and death. The departed souls of men of the golden age were referred to as *Daimones* and they were thought of as forming a connecting and interpretive link between the world of the gods and that of mortal men. The name became later attached to departed souls in general and it is in this sense that they would reappear in Roman society under the name of *manes* and *Iemures*. (Liddell and Scott (1966) *Greek English Lexicon* Oxford: Clarendon Press; see under: "*daimoon*").

Socrates referred to what he believed to be his guardian angel or genius as his "*daimonion*". As we learn from several cited examples, this Socratic guardian spirit typically warned the sage to refrain from action in deference to a particular threshold. Right at the beginning of the *Symposium* Socrates is described as standing motionless in a kind of trance in the porch of a neighbor's house. This iconic stance of Socrates embodies the philosopher's desire not just to figure something out or to overcome through labor a mental obstacle, but rather to *receive* an insight in the same sense that a host receives a guest. It embodies the thought that although the philosopher must diligently strive after the truth his insight can never be seen as simply the fruit of his mental effort. Whatever he discovers comes to him rather as a gift or a grace, in the manner of a door being opened in response to his knocking.

We recognize a similar iconic stance in the Buddha seated motionless beneath the bodhi tree while awaiting enlightenment. We recognize it equally in the image of Christ on the Cross waiting with outstretched arms before the Portals of Heaven to be received by the Father.

This iconic image, repeated in numerous sacred idioms, gives expressive form to the aspiration of the pilgrim who, at the end of his journey seeks a sign from heaven. We find it equally in the secular literature in the image of the ardent lover before the door or the window of the beloved in the hope of a sign of acknowledgement or encouragement.

If we follow in the footsteps of the Eros of Diotima we will seek after love and enlightenment in the manner of a pilgrim who is willing to face countless physical and spiritual obstacles in the hope of a revealing encounter. Socrates' wisdom about love derives itself from such an encounter with the Mantinean priestess. His search for wisdom takes the general form of a theoretical journey that ends in a silent vigil before a threshold that can be crossed only with the help of

another. To get to that threshold and to be able to knock on that door Socratic seeker after wisdom, the pilgrim, the lover or the poet all make use of all the available resources of hearts, minds and body. But once they have arrived at their destination their *daimonion* brings them to a halt before a threshold. Here they can do no more than pay their respects and await the appearance of the beloved. This erotic journey modeled by Socrates and guided by the spirit of Diotima begins with an acknowledgement that whatever we seek cannot be made to appear by mere ardor or cleverness. Nor can it be produced by following a foolproof procedure or an infallible method or conjured by summoning an act of will. The truth, the revelation or the presence we seek comes here towards us like a grace from a source that remains forever beyond our reach and control.

Diotima began to reveal the nature of Eros by reciting a myth about the amorous first encounter of Love's parents in the garden of Aphrodite. It was in this same garden that the parents laid together and conceived Eros.

We learn that the father of Eros was named *Poros*, no doubt to emphasize his extreme resourcefulness and unrelenting enterprise. To be *poristikos* means to be handy and clever and therefore to be able to succeed where others might retreat and fail. It was for this reason that the name was applied to Athens' the official fundraisers, who were called *poristai* or "able procurers". It is also telling that the same term was applied to pirates who plied their trade around the Mediterranean. Eros' mother was called *Penia*, a name suggesting the personification of poverty, want and need.

The parents of Eros met at a celestial celebration of Aphrodite's birthday, where the father was an invited and pampered guest while the mother stood outside the gate amidst a group of beggars waiting for leftovers from the feast.

As *Poros*, filled with food and wine, lay slumbering on the grass, *Penia* stealthily entered the garden of the goddess, laid down beside him and became pregnant with Eros.

As a child of both dire poverty and endless resourcefulness Eros would come to embody the indefatigable drive and cunning of lovers everywhere. Yet, we should not think of this Eros in the manner of Freud as a natural force running its course till at last it is impeded or overrun by another natural force. The world illuminated by the myth and addressed by the priestess and her student is not the universe of the modern sciences but an inhabited world traversed by thresholds and unified by a friendship ritual.

Unlike a natural force that can be contained only from without, the erotic journey comes to an obedient stop before the door of the

beloved. It halts before an altar, an artwork, a revealing text, a holy site.

We may thus contrast the enthusiasm occasioned by Eros with the biological drive of an instinct seeking release. A sexual drive pursues an uninterrupted trajectory that leads from arousal to release in coitus. Eros inspires an equally passionate pursuits but it seeks no material conquest or release from an onerous burden. Its ultimate goal, if rightly understood is always that of a personal, fruitful encounter. The revelation it seeks comes in the form of a revealing response from the other.

As a child conceived in the garden of Aphrodite Eros would become also a passionate lover of beauty.

Diotima noted that Love cannot thrive in an atmosphere of rancor and ugliness. It requires for its flourishing an appealing, hospitable domain. There where ugliness and disharmony represent a primordial refusal of dialogue and a darkening of our world, beauty welcomes exchange and sheds light on our world.

Beauty represents a primordial welcome. It greets the stranger and makes the wanderer stop and linger on his path. It inclines us to wonder and admire, to converse and play.

The priestess proclaimed, somewhat mysteriously, that "beauty is a goddess who presides over birth" and then added: "*love aims at procreation in what is beautiful*". (206 C)

We should emphasize here that Diotima presents love neither as a natural or biological force nor as a complex of merely private, personal feelings. Its proper arena is neither that of a natural universe nor that of a private psyche but a human world that its knits together into a coherent and inhabitable whole. Love gives birth to a world where indifferent parts become responsive to each other, where strangers meet and become friends, where lovers become fascinated by each other and found families. It is a world in which it becomes possible to cooperate, to exchange with each other, to build cities and civic associations and to create a coherent private and public life.

Eros "brings together" and thereby builds a human world. Yet, none of that would be possible without the inspiration provided by beauty.

Diotima's starting point is the observation that no child can be conceived in love and raised in concord without the sexual attraction that unites the parents.

"All men, Socrates, have a procreative impulse (that is) both spiritual and physical and when they come to maturity they feel a natural desire to beget children. But *they can do so only in beauty and never in ugliness*.(italics by the author) There is something divine about the whole matter; in procreation and bringing forth the mortal creature is

endowed with a touch of immortality. But the process cannot take place in disharmony, and ugliness is out of touch with everything divine, whereas beauty is in harmony with it." (206 C)

In reading this passage we must remind ourselves that from the priestess' point of view heaven and earth form a primordial loving couple who's every interaction is administered by Eros. Were this primordial couple to fall apart, all other couples would equally fail and love's creative mission of drawing heaven and earth together would have equally failed. Human love and friendship have something divine about them. The attraction that human beings feel for each other forms part of a larger cosmic and erotic design that brings unity and coherence to all that is.

It is for this reason that human relations can come to fruition only within a larger cosmos where heaven and earth, divinity and humanity are brought into a properly harmonious relationship to each other. The human creative and procreative impulse therefore stands in a permanent relationship of opposition to ugliness and decay.

Mortal being is caught in a downward spiral of constant loss. Mortality points not only to the limited span of human life but to its precarious and ephemeral nature at every turn. It makes itself felt at every turn of life in the form of disease, pain, discomfort and feebleness. It is present in error, in forgetting, even in injustice and malice. It announces itself in the very absence of what we need and desire.

Love restores to us what we are always in the process of losing. Mortal beings, drawn together by love, give new form to their lives by raising families and by ordering their experience so it will not be lost and can be transmitted to their children. The arts, crafts and sciences all arise against this background of human mortality and they cannot be properly understood apart from the loving impulse of one generation to prepare a heritage and to transmit it to succeeding generations.

No art, craft or science is able to withstand the onslaught of time without taking the form of a legacy and a gift that is passed from one generation to another. Everything of value in the human world, including human life itself takes the form of a gift and is transmitted and preserved within the bonds of love.

Diotima maintains that human beings, though mortal, are at the same time "pregnant" with immortality. They enter into loving relationships to bring this pregnancy to term. Enamored couples realize that only under the tutelage of Eros and in the presence of Beauty can they unburden themselves of the trace of immortality they bear within.

They seek love and friendship because these offer them the hope of renewing and restoring what forgetfulness, discouragement, weariness and death were always in the process of breaking down.



Diotima's understanding of the human condition stays close to the sphere of family life. It uses a vocabulary appropriate to sexual intimacy, childbearing and parenthood, yet it envisions a vast terrain of human creativity that touches all aspects of the human life. It speaks specifically and characteristically of wisdom and virtue, moderation and justice as the 'progeny' of a loving erotic relationship.

We moderns tend to think of works of art and science as individual accomplishments that spring from individual minds and personal circumstances. In another mode we present these creations as the products of historical forces or as the results of particular sociological or psychological circumstances. By contrast, Diotima thinks of these creations as the progeny of loving couples. In her vision the arts and sciences and all the cultural other achievements of an age make their appearance as the bright children begotten by amorous parents with the guidance of Eros and in the presence of welcoming Beauty.

Socrates had at first supposed that the lover pursued the beloved in search of beauty. The priestess did not altogether disagree with that judgment but she insisted on placing it within a larger context. She understood the quest of the lover and the pursuit of beauty not as an end in itself, but as forming part of a larger human and cosmic pursuit of a purposeful and fruitful life. Only a life lived consciously within this broader pursuit would be able to counter the ravages of time and keep alive the spark of divinity and eternity that she saw as forming an essential part of the human condition.

Diotima taught that the aim of love is not beauty itself but that of "engendering (γενήσεως) and begetting (ὁ τόκος) in what is beautiful" (206 B).

The Walter Hamilton translation collapses these two terms into one single word: "procreation". This translation can be defended, yet it misses what to Greek ears represented a dynamic interaction between a specifically masculine action (engendering) and a corresponding, feminine activity of pregnancy and giving birth to a child. When Diotima spoke of human creativity she thought specifically of couples and of the creative and erotic tensions that brought them together. These tensions found release in the beautiful garden of Aphrodite, gave birth to Eros and thereby renewed a moribund world.

It is noteworthy that the myth of the birth of Eros draws our attention not in the first place to the beauty of the lovers but focuses it instead on the festive and beautiful setting of their first meeting. Certainly, this meeting involved a beautiful woman and a handsome man. But their attraction to each other would have remained without issue, were it not for Aphrodite's beautiful and welcoming garden. It was the feast

and the garden that brought them together and it was there that they consummated their relationship and conceived the child.

To better understand the nature of Eros and to draw closer to the miracle of his birth we must therefore not linger too long over the handsome features of the lovers or over their sex-appeal. We should focus instead on the beautiful and welcoming setting that brought them together and thereby brought their personal endearing traits and features into play.

We touch here on the typical sensibility of a people who spared no effort to beautify their cities and temples in the firm belief that the miracle of creation, of 'engendering' and of 'giving birth', required an inspiring and beautiful setting.

Diotima insisted throughout on this intimate connection between beauty, creativity and fruitfulness;

"The process (of engendering and giving birth) cannot take place in disharmony; ugliness is out of harmony with everything divine, whereas beauty is in harmony with it."

It appears self-evident that people who are loathsome to each other are not likely to create offspring. Equally, those who are self-centered and quarrelsome are not likely to engage with others in fruitful conversations or collaborate in other ways that add to the collective cultural heritage. Yet the miracle of engendering and giving birth cannot be reduced to an interplay of the psychological traits or dispositions of individual actors.

Eros brings together. Eros unites mutually uncomprehending worlds. His interpretive skills prevail over the mutual indifference of individual things and beings. He creates a mutual responsiveness and forms cosmic wholes that, like the garden of Aphrodite, welcome 'engendering' and 'giving birth'. What at first was ugly and unresponsive and in disharmony with fruitful encounters he renders harmonious and receptive to creative encounters.

In following this train of thought we come to regard human creative activity as transforming indifferent beings, things or materials into cosmic wholes that, like the garden of Aphrodite or the hospitable home of Agathon, gives birth to the spirit of Eros. It is in this way that an unharmonious and sterile sphere is changed over into a harmonious domain that invites human and divine encounters.

We therefore need to distinguish a purely secular making or manufacturing from an inspired or 'erotic' creating. Ordinary making or fabricating requires no divine assistance and makes no demands on the workers beyond technical skill and a measure of goodwill towards

those who cooperate in the process. But an erotic creation always has, in the words of Diotima, "something divine about it". It demands that friends or lovers interact together in inspired ways and create together an intimate domain that mediates between different worlds and that attract the graces of Eros as its intermediary. Ordinary secular work demands competence and the ability to cooperate with others. It demands an equitable distribution of the burdens and the rewards of a communal enterprise. But an erotic creation demands a profound and inspired encounter with a beloved other. It is necessarily a labor of love. The setting of the Symposium illustrates this principle. The discussions took place among friends and lovers who were all received by an attentive host and guided in their efforts by a revered teacher. Together they created an intimate sphere that invited experimentation and encouraged frank and artful speech. Most importantly, this intimate sphere was created, ultimately, to attract the spirit of Eros. We should therefore not mistake this artful domain of wisdom loving conversations for a place of work. Unlike the rationalized and functional places where we perform our daily tasks, this new domain was meant to orient us to another world. It rather resembled the garden of Aphrodite at the time that Penia and Poros laid together and conceived Eros.

The friends have come together to build in the shadow of the Dionysian theater a new and intimate domain dedicated specifically to wisdom loving conversations. They came together with the specific purpose of calling upon Eros in a new way, of attracting his presence through the medium of thoughtful presentations and inspired commentary. They no doubt hoped that the spirit of love would render their conversations fruitful and lead them to new insights.

If we consider the fact that we still learn from their famous dialogue more than two and a half millennia after it first took place we cannot doubt that their hope was amply fulfilled.

### **Diotima's revision of the myth of Aristophanes**

Diotima understood Eros' principle task to be that of overcoming distance and difference between dissimilar worlds. It is to that end that Love journeyed without pause between heaven and earth and thereby wove the two realms together into a coherent and mutually responsive whole. As she understood it, Eros fulfilled the same role in regard to human couples. He mediated between strangers so they would come to understand and care for one another. Most importantly, he inspired these couples not just to cling together but to jointly create

an intimate domain that they would cultivate and make productive. In the case of married couples this intimate terrain would shelter new life and renew the race. In the case of philosophers this intimate realm would foster conversation, give birth to new insights or bring new life to an ancient myth. In all cases this intimate domain would shelter new life and bring hope to a mortal world.

As we saw before, Diotima presented Eros' activity as circumscribed by two verbs, *hermêneûō* and *diaporthmeûō*. The first of these means: 'to interpret', 'to explain', 'to make clear', 'to express' or 'to give utterance'. The second has the strong connotation of ferrying something across a river or carrying it over a threshold from one distinct realm to another.

We saw that Eros' special aptitude involved overcoming the distance and indifference that separates natural creatures and natural things. He brought together worlds that could not be physically or literally joined together. The unity he achieved was therefore necessarily of a spiritual or symbolic nature. It was his mission to come to the aid of lovers who did not find the proper words or gestures to make themselves understood. He came to the aid of worshippers who did not find the right manner to address the gods, and to the gods who did not know how to receive his sacrifice or prayers. He coursed between strangers while translating the questions, needs and desires of the one so these could be appreciated by the other. In this way he helped human beings to understand divine commandments while encouraging the gods to show love and understanding for mankind.

It becomes clear at this point that Diotima retold in a new form, the old myth cited by Aristophanes. That myth had told of a primitive world of powerful giants who lived alienated from the gods and from each other and who lacked the spiritual means to form bonds with others. These giants lived in a world that we may imagine as similar to a modern natural universe in that it lacked neighbors and gave no access to *another* world.

The gods grew impatient with the self-absorbed and unresponsive giant creatures. They thought of ways to make them more responsive to the gods and to each other since they desired to enter into a fruitful, reciprocal relationship with them. As we told above, the gods decided to cut them in half so as to reduce the giants' strength and lessen their foolish pride so that they might enter into loving and creative relationships with others. As we noted, this strategy failed because the wounded and diminished giants lost the will to live. Diotima's insight at this point is crucial. She understood that what had ailed the giants was not so much their physical strength or their

material self-sufficiency, but their lack of a spiritual dimension. To lack a spiritual dimension means here to lack access to a truly *other* world. The giants remained imprisoned within their own world and could not enter into an evolving relationship with a world beyond their own. They did not *inhabit* their world and lacked the attitudes, words and gestures needed to cross a threshold and engage others.

They had no means to explain themselves to each other, no manner of asking questions or interpreting answers. They had no prayers or sacrifices or ceremonies with which to address the world of the immortals. They had no ways to elicit a past or a future world. They could not formulate remembrances or plan for a future.

Diotima understood Eros specifically as a forceful interpretive presence that bridged the gap between two isolated worlds and transform these into one cosmic, conversational or spiritual whole.

The first measure undertaken by the gods, that of physically cutting the giants into halves did not as yet include the interpretive and spiritual dimension of Eros. That first measure still approached the relationship between heaven and earth in material terms of the polar opposites of strength and weakness, dominance and subordination. It sought to reform the materialist world of the giants by materialist means. It sought to humanize the giants solely by means of ingenious procedures and clever strategies and through the use of superior force.

According to Aristophanes' account, the gods invented human sexuality to prevent the total collapse and ultimate disappearance of their earthly subjects. But the sexuality they instituted lacked as yet a truly *erotic* dimension. It could grant only a brief and material respite from the pain of physical separation.

In the light of Diotima's vision of Eros we come to see the divine 'invention' of sexuality as described by Aristophanes as deficient and as lacking a properly spiritual and essentially *human* dimension. It remained no more than a brief material interlude within a wholly natural, quotidian world untouched by festivity and barren of anything divine. Such a sexual union, even it was biologically successful, was nevertheless doomed to remain a meaningless gesture since it took place in a world without thresholds and therefore without the means to interpret an event, or to anticipate or even to remember it.

Diotima did not deny the importance of physical sexual intercourse but she understood it as forming part of a larger erotic desire that sought to bridge the distance and the difference between isolated worlds. She saw erotic desire as seeking to transform unresponsive, uninhabitable and inhuman worlds into communicating, cosmic wholes. It was this larger cosmic and erotic desire that made human life bearable since it

alone could defend against the constant threat of loss and decline that is inherent in mortal, human life.

Diotima saw Eros as uniting heaven and earth, as holding together different worlds within bonds of love. By contrast, the 'new invention' of sexuality, as it was described by Aristophanes, was unable to create vital bonds and life-affirming couples. All it could do was to briefly intertwine two material bodies and create the short-lived and false impression of a return to a natural world untouched by difference and by death.

Diotima's Eros offers a sharp contrast to this earlier way of desperate and loveless copulation. Her Eros does not offer the prospect of fusion or maintain the illusion of a faultless natural world without neighbors. Instead it offers access to a mortal, finite world healed by hospitality and friendship, by conversations and a shared love of wisdom.

Diotima thus linked the human quest for knowledge to a more encompassing, primordial desire for a fruitful relationship with one's neighbors. She linked the desire for knowledge and for an understanding of our world to conversation and thus to hospitality and friendship.

As we noted above, the Symposium itself reflects this insight of Diotima. The friends gathered together in the home of Agathon came there so as to draw nearer to the mystery of human and divine love. Their gathering took the form of a wisdom loving conversation and it took place within hospitable surroundings and under rules specifically devised to invite the presence of Eros.

The symposiasts invited Eros not by making amorous overtures to one another but by making love the topic of their disciplined and artful conversation. They spoke and listened to each other in a manner designed to evoke the presence of the *daimoon megas*, the great interpreter who brought together different and distant worlds.

To that end they had to set aside the ancient materialist notion of knowledge as but a quest for power, survival, wealth and personal validation. That notion had been dominant among the pre-human giants who had wanted to storm the heavens and dethrone the gods/ It would remain dominant among all those who would later fall back into the habits of these primitive ancestors and think of knowledge's quest as a quest for power and as a way to rid themselves of their neighbors.

The participants to the Symposium chose instead to rely on the spirit of Eros whose ambassadorial and hermeneutic skills could transform perfect strangers into friends and neighbors.

We are reminded here again of Aristophanes' poignant phrase that described human beings as complimentary halves and "symbols" of each other. That phrase already told us that a viable philosophy and a well-lived human life both rest on a foundation no more solid than a symbolic exchange and no more concrete than a simple exchange of broken pieces of pottery or coins among parting friends.

Diotima's Eros teaches that this simple covenant between friends and neighbors offers us the surest and the most solid defense against the pain over loss and decline that is inherent in a mortal, human world. One enters the world of the Diotimean Eros by accepting separation and by honoring thresholds. This world remains closed to homeless wanderers and to those who perpetually mourn a lost paradise. It is a world that acknowledges limits, accepts separation, and that does not deny the reality of death. Loving and dwelling both begin with our exodus from a natural and limitless whole and by our acceptance of a threshold. Only such an acceptance of loss and limits can set in motion a loving interaction between neighboring worlds.

I am reminded here of a story told by the renowned French humanist Paul Veyne in which he tells how, as a child, he discovered and fell in love with the ancient world. He was about eight years old when he found on a hillside in the Vaucluse a tiny pottery shard of a Roman amphora. This piece of pottery fascinated him and appeared to him "as something coming from another world". It kindled his imagination and it started him on the path of a life-long exploration of the civilization of Rome. On that fateful day the boy held in his hand a tiny fragment of a distant and different world. It took the form of a *tessera* or *symbolon*, which from that moment onward would bind him in loyal friendship to the ancient world.

The boy had caught a first glimpse of a hitherto unknown, neighboring world that beckoned and that kindled in him the desire to bond with it. The situation of the young boy in the Vaucluse was not much different from that of any other boy or young man catching a first glimpse of his beloved. In both instances the young lover finds himself confronted by a mysterious world that fascinates precisely because it can never be completely appropriated or understood. That strangely near and distant world presents itself precisely as *another* world because it is protected by a threshold and therefore cannot be approached unaided. In both cases the lover catches sight of a neighboring world that cannot be annexed or appropriated but that offers the prospect of a passionate relationship under the aegis of Eros. In both instances the ensuing relationship serves the lovers as an infinite source of inspiration and renewal. And again, in both instances, the lover must call upon the mediation of the Diotimean Eros to interpret

(*hermêneûon*) and to align his world to that of the beloved so that an exchange (*diaporthmeûon*) can take place between them. In this manner the two worlds begin to form a cosmic whole.

When we place Aristophanes account of the birth of love side by side with the one given by Diotima we become aware of their essential difference. The substance of Aristophanes account concerns the divine intervention that was intended to transform the arrogant and self-obsessed giants into true human beings.

The surgery performed by Zeus and Apollo certainly made the primitive creatures more closely resemble human beings but it was not able to transform them into true human beings capable of love and friendship. After the operation they longed so fiercely for their missing halves that they lost altogether the will to live. The gods decided on more surgery and made it possible for the new creatures to engage in sexual intercourse.

What is striking about this account is that it assigned no active role for the pre-human creatures in their own development and transformation. Creation remained entirely a one sided affair that made no demands on the mortals. By contrast, the appearance of the Diotimean Eros opened a new era of dynamic exchanges between heaven and earth that laid the basis for love and friendship. It opened a world of symbolic exchanges that could 'bring together' (*symballoo*) different worlds. It also opened the possibility of human denial and refusal. One can turn a deaf ear to the pleas of a neighbor, one can misinterpret what the other says, and one can fail to reciprocate a gift or refuse to accept what the other offers. Eros is a spirit (*daimoon*) that mediates between host and guest, mortals and immortals and between friends and lovers. But it can perform this mediating function only for those who, like the fox of Saint Exupéry, want to be domesticated and enter into a fruitful relationship with a neighboring world.

It would appear therefore that the divine "device" of sexuality of the Aristophanic tale remains as yet outside the sphere proper of the Diotimean Eros. That 'device' was meant to serve a purely nostalgic and retrospective function. It was meant to ease the pain of separation by providing the illusion of a return to an undivided world. Such a sexual union may briefly console a lost creature but it cannot truly liberate the human spirit. That liberation comes in the form of an active dialogue leading to the progressive discovery of one's own and of a neighboring world.

The Love described by Diotima belongs neither entirely to a divine nor to a human world. It is a love that cannot be enclosed in any one particular world but that is at home only in the realm between



adjacent worlds. It does not belong exclusively to either a divine or a human world but serves as a kind of threshold guardian that mediates between mortals and immortals and that makes it possible for a human world to exist alongside a world divine. This love shows itself only where a host receives a guest, where friends engage in revealing conversations or where lovers lay together. It appears where the devout address their gods with gifts and prayers, and where the living pay homage to their dead.

This new Eros transforms the human realm so that thereafter it no longer can be fully understood from within the logic a physical, biological or natural world, or in that pertaining to a self-sufficient heaven or paradise. The arrival of this new Eros changes humanity so that it no longer can be adequately described solely in terms of neural or biochemical mechanisms or anatomical particularities.

What sets human beings apart from their giant ancestors is not so much their physical appearance or their mode of procreation but their erotic capacity for love and friendship, for faithful associations, for neighborliness, and citizenship. This new humanity, awakened by Eros from its slumber in a natural and material world, cannot find fulfillment in violent conquest and material fusion. It seeks instead a symbolic and spiritual union and thereby lays the foundation of a truly human world.

The proto-human giants were obsessed with material unity and homogeneity, with equality and sameness. Their proto-human love sought to erase differences and eradicate all distance and distinction. They sought to live in a fused material world.

By contrast, the world transformed by the Eros of Diotima sought a new unity that could accept differences and that would be respectful of distinctions. Its unity was guaranteed by thresholds that protected distinct domains and that encouraged the symbolic exchanges between them.

It was this world newly constituted by Eros that would later give birth to the natural sciences and the study of a natural scientific universe. But a world inspired by this Eros could never spurn the arts or disdain religion or dismiss the grace and wisdom inherent in poetry and myth. Such a world would betray itself were it to disregard the wisdom of traditions and break the bonds that bind it to other worlds.

## Freud's version of the Aristophanic myth.

### Myth and natural scientific narrative

When Freud made reference to the Aristophanic myth in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he did so in the midst of his growing uncertainty about the intellectual foundations of psychoanalysis. Before we explore the manner in which he incorporated the Platonic creation myth into his newly created discipline we need to understand how it came to assume such an important role within it. Freud sought to establish a practical and academic science (*Wissenschaft*) of the human psyche whose aims and methods would at some future time coincide with those of the natural sciences. Freud was, despite his often striking originality, a child of his time and his conception of human reality sought its ultimate support in a natural scientific description of a natural and material universe. He never wavered in his belief that all useful and legitimate knowledge is knowledge of a natural universe and that natural science constitutes our only hope of securing and verifying such knowledge.

Throughout his career Freud sought to establish psychoanalysis as a modern scientific discipline that at some future time would form part of a larger field of natural scientific explorations. It is in this spirit that we read his remarks at the end of his essay "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*" where he wrote that the present deficiencies in his psychological descriptions would vanish the day it would be possible "to replace (present-day) psychological terms with (future) physiological and chemical ones." (Freud, S. (1940) *Gesammelte Werke, Volume XIII* p. 65)

Freud's idea of creating a natural scientific discipline of the human mind grew out of the intellectual milieu in which he grew up. There is no evidence that Freud ever seriously thought about an alternative approach, or ever entertained the possibility of a human science whose aims and methods would not coincide with those of either a present or future natural science.

Freud received an excellent and extensive natural scientific education. He had been trained as a physician, and he worked for many years as a medical researcher in close collaboration with some of the most outstanding medical pioneers of his time. The spirit of the Enlightenment profoundly influenced him, and at times he resembles Voltaire in his eagerness to liberate the world from what he perceived to be the shackles of religious superstitions and illusions. "Research", he wrote, referring to natural scientific research, "regards all domains of human activity as its own and it must be mercilessly critical when some other power wants to encroach upon its territory." (2) (*Neue Folge der Vorlesungen* G.W. XV, 172-173).

He further amplified this view in an unambiguous way:

"It won't do to look upon the natural sciences as a domain of spiritual activity alongside religion and philosophy and to view all three as having equal validity. To do so would imply that they all have an equal claim on truth and that we should leave everyone free to form his own convictions and beliefs. Such an approach certainly sounds high-minded and tolerant and free of narrow minded prejudice. But such a view is not tenable because *it perpetuates all the evils of an unscientific worldview.*" (*op. cit.* p.173; translation and emphasis by the author)

Freud considered philosophy's claim to truth rather harmless because it did affect only a small group of select readers and exerted little influence on the masses. Art he saw as equally harmless as a competitor to scientific research since "it seeks not to be anything but an illusion." By contrast, he saw religion as "a serious enemy of science", (*eine ernsthafte Feind*) (*op. cit.* p.173)

In an earlier passage from *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* Freud ranked psychoanalysis proudly among the great natural scientific achievement of the modern age, alongside Copernican astronomy and Darwin's theory of evolution. He boasted at times, with something akin to gleefulness, of the social and cultural upheaval he expected to result from a wider acceptance of his psychoanalytic theories. He clearly welcomed such an upheaval, not only as a mark of the cultural importance of his theories, but also as a sign of their revolutionary and scientific nature. He wrote:

"In the course of the centuries the naive self-love of men has had to submit to two major blows at the hands of science. The first was when they learnt that our earth was not the center of the universe but only a

tiny fragment of a cosmic system of scarcely imaginable vastness. This is associated with the name of Copernicus, though something similar had already been asserted by Alexandrian science. The second blow fell when biological research destroyed man's supposedly privileged place in creation and proved his descent from the animal kingdom and his ineradicable animal nature. This reevaluation has been accomplished in our days by Darwin, Wallace and their predecessors, though not without the most violent contemporary opposition. But human megalomania will have suffered its third and most wounding blow from the psychological research of the present time which seeks to prove to the ego that it is not even master in its own house, but must content itself with scanty information of what is going on unconsciously in his mind." (Freud, S., 1920, p.285, 286)

Freud liked to think of psychoanalysis as just another science like chemistry and astronomy, albeit it in an earlier stage of development. He thought he bolstered this claim by pointing to psychoanalysis' skepticism in regard to established religion and conventional wisdom. Moreover, so he pleaded, did not psychoanalysis rely on observational methods like the natural sciences and seek consensus among trained observers. Was it not open to revision when a preponderance of the evidence pointed in that direction? And was not the cultural resistance it aroused in the bourgeoisie and among the conventionally religious proof positive that it formed part of a modern revolution that was about to replace old illusions with new scientific insights?

Yet this earlier triumphant note and this conviction of psychoanalysis' unquestioned scientific nature, so characteristic of Freud's earlier writings, are strangely absent from the pages of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In that essay Freud sought to come to grips with the fact that the questions that preoccupied him deeply and that touched most intimately on the theory and practice of psychoanalysis found no resonance in the domain of the natural sciences. On the one hand he wanted psychoanalysis to make common cause with natural science and in his more expansive moments he saw himself as part of an august lineage that led directly from Galileo to Darwin to himself. But, on the other hand, he could not ignore the fact that the concerns and interests that were fundamental to psychoanalysis found no response and appeared strangely out of place within the context of scientific biology and medicine.

It can of course be argued that Freud had realized this divergence of interests and methods from the very moment he founded his discipline. We find support for this thought when we consider his early

decision to distance himself from medical practice and to draw a clear distinction between his role as a psychoanalyst and that of a medical practitioner. We may think of that particular decision as founding the new discipline since it established that it was to be governed by a therapeutic rationale that differed significantly from that of medicine. The ensuing battles fought in psychoanalytic circles over the issue of lay-analysis can all be understood as arising from different estimations about the relative similarity or difference of the two disciplines. These different estimations, in turn, point to the deeper and never satisfactorily resolved ambiguities concerning psychoanalysis relationship to the natural sciences.

It should also be pointed out that Freud became fascinated with the phenomenon of hysterical anesthesia precisely because it presented symptoms for which there could be found no adequate explanation in terms of the medicine and biology of his time. This led Freud to what was perhaps his most important theoretical decision, which was to study somatic symptoms from within a cultural and historical rather than a strictly medico-anatomical framework. This insight opened the way to a new understanding of the human body as not merely the product of anonymous and accidental natural forces but as formed and deformed by narratives and as marked or disfigured by human relationships.

It is often difficult to ascertain Freud's precise thought on the subject of the psychoanalytic body and on where to place it in respect to the medical body of the medical practitioner. Nor is it always possible to gain a clear understanding of where he placed psychoanalysis in respect to the natural sciences. At times he conceived of the sciences as a loose federation of particular disciplines, each one addressing a particular domain with its historically developed procedures and modes of thought. Understood this way it is not difficult to find a place for psychoanalysis among the natural sciences. Yet at other times Freud uncritically glorified the natural science as a monolithic body or as an absolute and ultimate horizon of human understanding. This more dogmatic and ideological conception of science and scientific reasoning placed psychoanalysis at a distinct disadvantage.

At times Freud thought of the sciences of his day as being still in an early state of development and therefore not yet able to fully appreciate and understand psychological phenomena. At the same time he envisioned a perfected science of the future that would be able to include the psychological world within its universal vision and at the same time accept psychoanalysis within its fold.

Freud's utopic scientism was closely allied to his doctrinaire atheism. His opposition to the Judaic and Christian faith was at the same time a radical denial of any human or divine reality that could not be

observed from a natural scientific point of view. His utopic scientism took the form of a search for an absolute or universal world that we have defined as *a world for which there could not be another world*. This scientism understood all human phenomena as emerging from within a natural, self-sufficient universe that would remain forever beyond the influence of outside events of neighbors.

To explore and comprehend such an absolute and self-sufficient world would seem to require an equally absolute and self-sufficient natural science. That exploration would demand points of view and manners of approach that would prove compatible with natural science and it would reject as invalid or irrelevant all other ways of organizing and understanding human experience.

This utopic scientism, although never denied in principle, was nevertheless tempered by Freud's great interest in a variety of artistic and disciplinary practices.

His realism and his practical interests permitted him to establish a new discipline and to discover and to treat afflictions that fell outside the domain of medicine proper. Yet his utopic faith made him dream of a future universal science in which all disciplinary differences would be erased. He saw that grand and unified natural science as eventually drawing psychoanalysis within its fold while permitting it to dissolve within its borders.

*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* makes for such fascinating reading because it charts the turbulent conflict at the very heart of psychoanalysis over its relationship to the natural and physical sciences.

One passage in particular chronicles Freud's vain and frustrating attempt to frame his questions about the meaning and function of sexuality and mortality in terms that would permit a scientific response. He assiduously read the medical and biological literature of his time without finding even the beginning of a response to his questions. He was thus forced to face the fact that matters of central importance to psychoanalysis were entirely ignored by the scientific literature.

In raising these questions about love, life and death Freud felt sure that he was addressing: "the great problems of knowledge and of life" (*die grosse Probleme der Wissenschaft und des Lebens*) (Freud, S. 1963, V. XIII, p.64). These problems touched on what he described as "ultimate" or "last" question (*die letzten Dinge*), words that in German evoke a Biblical and eschatological context.

In retrospect, it appears rather odd that Freud looked in medical and biological texts for answers to questions that to us seem to be of a philosophical and religious nature. Equally surprising and naïve

appears his reaction when at the end of his search through the medical literature he found himself none the wiser on these matters. He claimed to be astonished (*erstaunt*) at how little agreement there existed among biologists about the role of death in the world of living organisms. He noted that in the hands of biologists and medical experts

"the whole concept of death melts away under their hands " (Freud, 1963 V. XIII, p.47)

He was clearly no more successful when he approaches other "ultimate" questions, such as the "coming into being", (*die Entstehung*) of sexual reproduction, or the "the origins" (*die Herkunft*) of sexuality. He concluded:

"In this regard science has so little to tell us. From the perspective of science the problem about the origins of sexuality remains completely in the dark. We don't find here even a hypothesis capable of shedding a ray of light on this darkness. If we look elsewhere we do find a hypothesis, but one so fantastic (*phantastischer Art*) that it should be called a myth rather than a scientific explanation. I would not refer to it, except that it fulfills the one condition that we seek, namely it traces the origins of an instinct to a need to restore an earlier state of affairs. What I have in mind is the theory, which Plato put into the mouth of Aristophanes in the *Symposium* and which deals with the origins of sexual drives. (Freud, 1963, V. XIII, p.62)

Freud had made a genuine effort to elicit from biology and medicine answers to what he saw as "the great problems of knowledge and of life". He had wanted to place psychoanalysis on the sure foundation of natural science so as to provide it with a noble lineage and a sound method. When that goal escaped him he was forced to turn to Plato's dialogues and to the Aristophanic myth as a new starting point for his reflections.

This was not the first time that Freud referred to the Platonic myth. He had already made mention of it at the beginning of his career when he wrote his *Three Essays on a theory of sexuality*. At that time he described the myth as:

"a beautiful poetic fable (*poetische Fabel*) about the division (*die Teilung*) of mankind into two halves, those of man and woman, who seek to become united again in love. (Freud, S. Band V, p.34)

The same myth was again mentioned in the introduction to the Revised Version of these essays of the year 1920. Here he drew the reader's attention to the parallels he saw between his own psychoanalytic conception of sexuality, and that proposed by "the divine Plato". (*des göttlichen Plato*) (8) (Freud, S. Band V, p. 32)

We can gauge the profound influence this myth exerted on Freud's life and thought by citing the love letters he wrote his bride-to-be at the time when he was still a medical intern. In one letter, addressed to Martha Bernays on August 28, 1883, he complained of feeling lonely and somewhat dispirited in her absence:

"I am really only half a person in the sense of the old Platonic fable which you are sure to know, and the moment when I am not active my cut hurts me". (Freud, E., 1960, The Letters of Sigmund Freud, New York, Basic Books, p. 48)

From further reading it becomes clear that Freud was not simply making a casual reference to a well-known classical myth. Subsequent letters to his fiancé show the extent to which he had internalized the myth and drawn from it important insights. He wrote that whenever he felt the pain of being separated from his beloved he eased it by paying closer attention to his patients and by making an extra effort at performing his duties. This clearly shows that Freud had understood not only the psychological, but also the profound ethical dimension of the myth. He had accepted Diotima's interpretation of the myth and understood that the aim of love was not merely to enjoy beauty or to procure pleasure, but "to bring forth and to engender (*gennaoo*)". Plato 206 B.

In the light of the profound and guiding influence this myth had on Freud's own life it is not a little surprising to note his obvious discomfort and even reluctance when he referred to it in his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. It raises the question as to why it proved so difficult for him to publicly acknowledge the role this myth had played in his personal life and in that of psychoanalysis. This difficulty, no doubt, laid bare an inner conflict between Freud's lived experience and the constraints imposed upon it by his militant atheism and his ideological scientism.

Freud opened the discussion of the myth by assuring his readers that it played only a minor role in the edifice of psychoanalysis and that even this minor role would be eliminated as soon as sound natural scientific explanations would become available. He attempted to further minimize the scandal of incorporating a myth in a scientific enterprise by claiming to have made use of only a small part of the myth, and moreover a part that was sure to be verified by future scientific explorations.

He claimed to have borrowed only the part dealing with Love's attempt to recapture a lost unity and to restore a previous condition. He transformed this idea into a proposition about biological instincts which he subsequently defined as "an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things." (Norton p.51; G.W. XIII p. p. 38).



In adopting this two-pronged strategy Freud hoped to safeguard a prestigious alliance with the natural sciences, while still being able to profit from the wisdom of ancient myths.

Freud's own retelling of the Aristophanic myth takes the form of a drastically truncated version of U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's German translation of the Platonic original.

From this version he quoted several lines:

"Our human body was at first not formed in the manner it is now; it was entirely different. At first there were three sexes, not merely masculine and feminine as is the case now, but with a third hermaphroditic sex added in which the two sexes were united. These humans possessed everything in twofold, they had four hands and four feet, two faces, double sex organs, etc. Then Zeus let himself be persuaded (*liesz sich bewegen*) to cut these humans in two parts "in the manner in which we cut quinces to preserve them for the winter..... Now that the whole being was cut into two, their longing for each other drove the two separated halves back together. ("*trieb die Sehnsucht die beiden Haelfte zusammen*"; they clasped their arms around each other, they intertwined, driven by a longing to grow back together again. (*im Verlangen zusammenzuwachsen*)" (Freud, 1963, XIII p. 62, translation by the author)

What is truly noteworthy about this curtailed rendition of the myth is that it breaks off precisely at the point where it begins to tell about the birth of Eros and the genesis of human sexual relations. We recall from Plato's text that Eros should be understood as a sacred messenger who bridged the gap between heaven and earth and who brought mortals and immortals together into a new cosmic and symbolic union. He was, in Diotima's unforgettable phrase, the Great Spirit (*daimoon megas*) who healed the wounds caused by the sword of Zeus. He was the messenger and translator who reunited heaven and earth and who brought separated lovers back together again.

Yet Freud's retelling of the myth stops short of any mention of the Great Spirit of Diotima's interpretation. It breaks off at precisely the moment where the myth begins to make reference to a new spiritual order that opens the path to love and friendship.

Freud's retelling of the myth therefore limits itself to what happened prior to the time of Eros' appearance and prior to the miraculous transformation of a pre-human into a fully human world. It is curious to observe that Freud's vocabulary remains closely attuned to the pre-human world of the giants and restricts itself to terms appropriate to the biological or physical sphere. He limits himself to the use of verbs of physical interaction, such as "clasping", "intertwining", "driving" and

“grafting”, to describe the interactions between the separated giants, all verbs that make no reference to the miracle wrought by Eros. Freud’s interpretation of the myth at this point can be summarized in one single phrase: “Longing drove the two halves together again” (*die Sehnsucht trieb die beiden Haelfte zusammen*) This one phrase sums up Freud’s new understanding of Eros as a driving force or instinct (*der Trieb*) that temporarily pulls the organism back to a lost past of undivided bliss. But placed within the light of the Platonic myth itself this driving, regressive, and ultimately destructive natural force held sway only prior to the birth of Eros. It still belonged to a proto human world that was ruled solely by natural forces. This natural and material Eros of mechanical attraction and repulsion ruled over a world that had been cut apart by Zeus, but that had as yet not been graced by the presence of either a divine or a human love. According to the logic of the myth, Plato’s Eros is born only after the Freudian Eros has been subordinated and reintegrated into a new human and divine order.

When we compare Freud’s foreshortened version to that of the Platonic original we cannot help but be struck by the systematic omission of any reference to the religious nature of the narrative. Freud clearly could not read the myth as a sacred narrative that told of a lost and a miraculously restored relationship between heaven and earth. Nor could he accept it as a creation story that told of the miraculous birth of love and the coming into being of a separate and distinct human world.

He therefore was unable to explore what the myth could reveal about a cosmos and about a specifically human world set apart from the rest of creation. He read it instead as a pre-scientific narrative that contained some tentative, later to be verified notions about how an instinctual, biological life might have emerged out of a life-less natural scientific universe.

The quixotic nature of Freud’s enterprise becomes evident when we realize that he sought to describe the birth of human life and love from point of view and within terms that explicitly excluded any reference to either a distinctively divine or a distinctively human love.

Freud’s psychoanalytic Eros still bears the name of the ancient Greek *daimoon megas*, the Great Spirit of Diotima’s interpretation of the myth. His Eros still bears the faint mask of a uniquely human and divine power. But even the most cursory of examinations reveals this new Eros to be but a natural, biological force hastily and awkwardly disguised as a Greek divinity. This new Eros can no longer serve the role of a messenger between heaven and earth because it has become an integral part of natural scientific universe, that is, of a *universal*

*world for which there can be, on principle, no other world.* It has become a natural force among other natural forces in a natural universe that can represent humanity only as a natural object and that can depict divinity only as an illusion.

Placed within this totalitarian world without neighbors the new Eros is deprived of its essential function as a go-between and interpreter, ready to go the distance and bridge the gap between ontologically distinct worlds.

A natural universe cannot fully represent psychological or spiritual phenomena because their appearance implies a coming together of ontologically distinct worlds that are marked off by thresholds. As we pointed out earlier, a natural universe cannot acknowledge thresholds and it remains therefore in principle uninhabitable. It cannot offer a home to either mortals or immortals and it remains untouched by the mysteries of human love as well as by those of human life and death. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* offers one of the most striking examples of a modernist attempt to transpose the varied dimensions of a lived and inhabited cosmos onto a natural scientific universe. In that process it translates the phenomena of human life, love, and death into a language of natural and material relations.

We find the outlines of this program announced in a terse sentence at the beginning of the essay where Freud describes the Aristophanic myth as "a theory that deals with the origins of sexual drives (*die Herkunft des Geschlechtstriebes*)." (Freud, 1963, V. XIII, p.62)

Even a most cursory reading of the myth suffices to convince us that the Platonic dialogue did not at any time present Eros as a natural or material force or as an inborn drive or instinct. The guests at Agathon's banquet had come together to celebrate their host's recent literary success and they gave that celebration the distinct form of a loving and disciplined evocation of the spirit of Eros. They did not come to study a natural universe or to participate in a scientific discourse on biological instincts or drives.

There remains therefore something unsettling about Freud's willful misrepresentation of the great Platonic myth as merely a quaint and fantastic tale whose chief claim to fame would be that it contained hints about as yet undiscovered natural forces or instincts.

Freud was of course not the only one among his contemporaries to resort to such scientific misinterpretations of ancient myths. He lived at a time when the idea of a natural and material universe was gradually usurping the cultural space formerly occupied by a divine and human cosmos. This shift in orientation was not restricted to the natural sciences but came to include all cultural domains and all forms of academic discourse. Within this climate of thought it became more and more difficult to discern the essential difference between an

inhabited human world and a natural universe, or between the world of the pre-human giants and that of their human descendants. It was in this way that the significance of the birth of Eros and of its central role in the creation of a human world gradually disappeared from the reigning cultural horizon.

Within this cultural climate it became more and more difficult to accept the guidance of myth and sacred narrative as a guide to our thought on human nature and on the coming into being of a human world.

In the light of this cultural climate it is perhaps not so surprising that Freud would not allow his thought to be guided by the myth and that he sought instead to make use of only that small part of it that would fit his own preconceived schema. He therefore makes no mention of the beginning of the myth which tells of the loveless nature of the giants and their inability to properly bond and interact with the gods. Freud's foreshortened version of the myth simply notes that Zeus had been "persuaded" (*liesz sich bewegen*) to cut the giants into two parts and thereby begin the creative labor that would transform them into human beings. It makes no mention of the giant's narcissism, of their aggressiveness towards the gods or of their indifference to each other.

In contrast to Freud's interpretation, the myth itself teaches that the creation of a human world began with the attempt to diminish the power and the narcissism of the giants and that it ended with the introduction of human and divine love.

This love transformed a barren unresponsive world and opened it to a whole gamut of fruitful and constructive relationships. It made it possible for human beings to found families, to build cities and nations, to visit friends, to remember the dead and to honor the gods. When we place Freud's reductive and naturalistic interpretation of the myth against that of Diotima we become aware of the poverty, not only of metapsychology, but of the entire modernist attempt to recast ancient gods in the role of pseudo-biological forces. At the same time we become more fully aware of the essential differences between a mythic narrative and a natural scientific description. Recognizing these differences is essential in safeguarding the integrity, and thereby the fruitfulness of both of these forms of narrative. It will then no longer be possible to mistake a myth for a proto-scientific tale that finds its ultimate justification in a modern scientific treatise. Nor will we then make the mistake of reading a scientific account in the manner of a mythic tale and expect it shed light on the ultimate questions of human life and love.

We take note here of the fact that when a myth refers to the "origin" of some part or aspect of our world, it does so without implying an

historical sequence or a causal chain of events. Myth opens a path for our thought. It establishes a narrative horizon within which it becomes possible to orient ourselves, to find our place in an inhabited world and to interact in a meaningful way with our surroundings.

We may think of a mythic narrative as creating an ordered space that invites our thoughtful habitation. It invites us inside a theater where random and confused things and nebulous events acquire definition, become eloquent and impress their reality upon us.

Approached another way we may think of myth as leading us back, not to material causes or to a natural universe, but to the beginning of a cosmos and to the birth of an ontological distinction that announces a human world. That same ontological distinction differentiates a natural or biological sexuality from an erotic desire.

A mythic account of human sexuality does not provide us with technical mastery over biological functions. It does not modify a material world to suit preconceived needs or wishes. Rather, we may think of myth as guiding our thought away from the wilderness and from *'the world for which there is no other world'* by bringing into view the miraculous divide that is the source from which springs all human and divine love.

We return here briefly to the puzzling question as to why Freud felt compelled to make use of the Aristophanic myth in the construction of his metapsychology. He claimed that the mythic element proper that he borrowed was that of Eros as a universal regressive force. He wrote that the Eros myth had made him realize that "the origin of an instinct could be traced to a need to restore (*wiederherstellen*) an earlier state of affairs." (21)(Norton p. 51; G.W.XIII p. 62) As we have seen, Freud's metapsychology grafted the Aristophanic myth onto a myth of his own in which human sexuality stood pitted against a universal instinctual or regressive force. He saw this natural and regressive force as steadily undermining all forms of natural development as it steadily pulled the entire universe back towards a state of an undifferentiated chaos. Seen from the perspective of a universe under the threat of inexorable destruction biological sexuality seemed to offer a little respite from a universal downward trend. Within this new myth Eros comes to represent a pathetic last gesture in favor of life in the face of inescapable and universal destruction. Eros finds here its ultimate expression in the song of a dying swan or in the pathetic hymn sung on the deck of the Titanic.

We are here at a great distance removed from the Aristophanic myth and from Diotima's inspired interpretations. There where Diotima's Eros opened a first dialogue between heaven and earth and laid the foundation for a human world, Freud's Eros could do no more than

make futile gestures to ward off an inevitable onslaught of death and destruction.

Freud reinterpreted the Platonic myth, not as describing the birth of a cosmos but as representing events in a natural and universal world. Within that natural world Love would reappear as biological and sexual activity that served as a futile countervailing force to an all-encompassing universal destruction.

Freud's retelling of the myth overlooked the crucial distinction between a universe and a cosmos and between a mythic and a natural scientific reference to things past. Within the realm of myth, what is "earlier" belongs always to a distinctly different world from what occurs "later". Within a natural scientific context, "earlier" and "later" refer to changes or rearrangements that operate within a fundamentally unchanged and unchanging universe. We use here the words "earlier" and "later" to mark the difference between two chronologically distinct moments of a self-same world. "Earlier" and the "later" event belong here to the same order of being.

Yet, when a myth makes reference to what occurred "in the beginning", we make reference to *another* world that cannot be thought of as continuous with our own. We refer here not to what occurred earlier in our own world or to what transpired in a natural universe but refer instead to another time and place and to a story that recalls the dawning of a human and a divine world.

These two very different ways of addressing the past are not simply interchangeable, even though they cannot be thought separate from each other. Freud discovered very reluctantly what the philosophers at the Symposium accepted with more grace, namely that it is not possible to speak coherently of a historical, quotidian or natural world without evoking the world of myth. It is only against the background of a creation myth, of a narrative that tells of what occurred "in the beginning", that it becomes possible to explore, or even to conceive of historical or natural scientific events.

The Aristophanic myth presents us with two separate and distinct worlds. It describes a pre-human, natural world that existed prior to the arrival of Eros and a later, human world that was made coherent by bonds of love. The "earlier" events belong to a pre-human world are therefore qualitatively different from, and incommensurate with, the "later" events. This implies that there is no *natural* continuity between the pre-erotic and the post-erotic worlds. Eros birth breaks their natural continuity and then brings them together again within an erotic embrace. The two worlds and the two orders of being no longer are joined together by a chain of natural or historical events, but are

reunited by human and divine love. Together they formed a cosmic and *erotic* whole that invite human inhabitation.

The birth of the Platonic Eros announces the birth of a new world. A cosmos emerged out of a monolithic universe and for the first time two distinct orders of being and two worlds joined by love could live in proximity to one another without fusing into one monolithic whole. The creation of this new world did not mean the obliteration of the old. The narcissistic and materialist world of the giants remained accessible and continued to form the background against which the true Eros could appear. The world of the giants, like that of the natural universe formed as it were a horizon surrounding the erotic domain where human beings could make themselves at home. It was in this way that a new dual cosmos came into being. Part of that cosmos formed the natural terrain of the loveless giants while another part became inhabited by their erotically inspired human descendants.

By

In order to transform the Aristophanic myth into a materialist and proto-scientific narrative Freud was obliged to omit that part of the myth that specifically dealt with the birth of Eros and the creation of a human world. The narrative thereby lost its essential mythic character. It could no longer evoke for him the mysterious dawning of a human world above the chaos of a merely literal and material one. It could no longer remind him of the *ontological* difference that separates a merely natural from a truly human world. The myth lost its power to speak of beginnings and endings, of birth and death, and hence of love. In the process of transforming a great myth into a slightly comical but ultimately senseless tale, Freud was also bound to lose sight of the "great problems of humanity" that had originally inspired his quest and led him to evoke the myth.

Let us briefly retrace our path and summarize what the Aristophanic and myth has been able to teach us about the dynamic of natural instincts or about what Freud chose to call the "*Wiederherstellung*" or the restoration of an earlier state of affairs. As we have seen, the "earlier" state described in the myth referred to the untroubled and natural world of the all-powerful giants. That state of affairs ended when Zeus' knife cut that world apart so that it could give birth to a new world. The "later" event referred to the birth of Eros, which awakened the desire of the separated parts to form together a never before realized, wholly new world. But this new whole, achieved with the help of Eros, was *ontologically* distinct from the whole that had been lost. The "restoration" of the old condition was actually the creation of an entirely new and never before achieved condition. This "restoration" (*Wiederherstellung*) had very little, if anything, to do with

Freud's instinctual "establishment of a prior condition". On the contrary, it gave birth to *the new world* as we know it today.

We have maintained throughout that the birth of Eros can best be understood as the miraculous appearance of a bridge across the divide that separated the giants and that continued to divide lovers, friends and neighbors. This bridge forged a symbolic union that came to replace a material and literal continuity. That bridge and that symbolic union became incarnate in the hospitable threshold that connects and sets apart one dwelling from another and that thereby creates an inhabitable world.

The Diotimean version of the Aristophanic myth represented the human world in the form of a pair of lovers facing each other across a cruel divide. The birth of Eros did not erase the distance between the lovers, nor did it restore an earlier state of affairs. The lovers remained separated in a manner that even the most intimate and passionate of embraces could not undo. And yet, they remained bound by love and thereby could triumph over absence and difference.

We learn from the myth that a sexual embrace becomes truly a human embrace the moment when lovers accept their divinely ordained division and no longer seek to erase their differences. The embrace becomes fully human the moment the lovers are able to interrupt their passionate quest for unification and come to a halt before a threshold that announces the difference and the irreducible mystery of the other. It is before this threshold that lovers cease regretting their differences and begin to build a world together. They now welcome the divide as an integral part of human life while bridging it with gifts of heart and mind. They now accept their bondage to Eros as that which frees them to live a human life.

Freud sought an understanding of human love and sexuality that would fit the narrow contour of a natural universe. He wanted to conceive of human sexuality as merely a variant of animal sexuality and as He wanted to remove from human sexuality any trace that might something that was ultimately inscribed in the very matter of a natural universe. connect it to the miraculous birth of a cosmos. He wanted to de-mythologize sexuality by placing it outside the context of an ontologically distinct human and divine world and by anchoring it entirely within a natural universe. This project no doubt was inspired by Freud's dogmatic atheism and its related utopic scientism.

In placing himself in opposition to the inner dynamic of the myth and in imposing upon it his own preconceived orientation he was obliged to disregard the central part of the myth that told of the miraculous birth



of Eros. He also was thereby forced to turn a blind eye to the brilliant link proposed by the myth between the birth of Eros, the meeting of two different worlds, the creation of an inhabitable cosmos and the establishment of a distinctly new temporal order.

To understand that new temporal order that was specific to the cosmos created by Eros we must recall certain essential aspects of the myth.

We recall that the gods did not introduce human sexuality in order to improve human reproduction. The giants had been able to reproduce themselves quite adequately prior to being transformed into human beings and the new invention of sexual intercourse brought no change in this respect.

The myth tells us that the gods introduced amorous and sexual relations with the intend of ending a clinging, moribund attachment and of transforming it into a life and joy-bringing encounter. They introduced sexual relations so as to provide love and longing with a temporal frame of waxing and waning, of coming and going and of beginning and ending. They brought a new rhythm to human life that transformed all human relations. It ordered the world so that there would be a time of giving and receiving, of being hospitably received and of regretfully leaving, of being born and of having to die.

It was in this way that the gods broke the monolithic and unidirectional time that had governed the world of the pre-human giants. They created a new temporal order of reciprocity and hospitality that became the foundation of human and divine love and that formed the basis of a human community.

This new rhythmic order that set limits to life and love made possible the formation of symbols. We learn from the myth that human love making is itself a symbolic act that commemorates a lost paradise and remembers a vanished world that knew no division. Seen from the mythic perspective it shows itself capable of reconciling our infinite longing for paradisiacal unity and absolute harmony with the need to live a concrete, mortal and fruitful existence.

It is in this way that the birth of Eros brings new life to a moribund universe. This birth is relived every time lovers embrace. This embrace commemorates the act of creation that "in the beginning" brought new 'symbolic' unity to the severed bodies of the giants and to their shattered universe.

The new temporal order of beginning and ending, of coming and going that was celebrated in the first lover's embrace forms the background against which it became possible to form friendships and alliances of all sorts. That embrace forms the prototype of the friendship ritual of ancient times and of all other forms of contracts, promises and

expressions of loyal adherence that together form the basis of an inhabitable world.

This new temporal order, inaugurated by a loving embrace finds its most perfect embodiment in the hospitable threshold. It is this threshold that permits friends and neighbors to set fruitful limits to their visits and to inaugurate a rhythmic relationship of coming and going. This hospitable threshold creates an inhabitable and hospitable world in which it becomes possible *to receive* impressions, *to give* an account and *to exchange* interpretations. It forges a bridge and introduced a wholly new relationship between an inside and an outside, a "here" and a "there", as well as between a "now" and a "then". As such it forms the basis of our intellectual and spiritual life. It gave rise to conversations in which the participants took their turns as hosts and guests, as listeners and speakers. It opened an intellectual world of questions and answers, of reading and writing, of essay and experimentation, of proposition and interpretation. It opened an artistic world of telling and showing, a critical world of approaching and of taking a distance, and a religious life of ritual and prayer.

It also created a world in which it became possible to make moral and ethical choices. The establishment of a first threshold gave access to a world in which it became possible to transgress. It opened a world in which it was possible to violate a threshold, to be out of step with the course of a relationship or to disturb the rhythm of a conversation. As long as we are in the grip of a storm, as long as some force or instinct or some implacable inclination or intention carries us blindly along we do not, indeed cannot, cultivate and maintain human relationships. As long as we live completely submerged in a natural order we form but part of a universe that can be neither enhanced nor disturbed by our human actions. As long as we form wholly part of a boundless natural universe we are condemned to live a life beyond transgression and beyond good and evil.

But as soon as we enter the domain of Eros and bind ourselves in solidarity to others, we no longer can exclusively rely on the natural order of the universe to govern our relations. To guide us we now are obliged to invoke the fragile symbolic and rhythmic order of love and friendship.

The natural order of a universe can be partly understood and exploited to our advantage, or misused to our detriment. But that order itself remains unchanged by human actions. Yet the fragile symbolic order of love and friendship depends for its flourishing entirely on human acts of kindness and faithfulness.

The pre-human giants lived in a universal realm beyond good and evil while their human descendants, inspired by the spirit of love, came to inhabit a human and divine moral order.

We learn from the myth that the pre-human giants did not embrace each other in the manner of later mortals. Their intellectual life and their quest for knowledge remained as yet untouched by a threshold and by the dialogical rhythm that would later rule the life of mortals. We may infer from this that prior to the arrival of Eros the giants could not have had a distinct awareness of succeeding generations, of passing seasons or successive years. Nor could they have engaged in conversations, or loved wisdom, or buried and remembered their dead or honored their gods. They would not have been able to recognize thresholds, to build houses, to establish neighborly relations, or create villages or cities. Nor could they have been aware of history, transmit myths and traditions, or practice the arts and the sciences. Their ignorance of Eros and their inability to embrace each other and their world deprived them of the most basic means to lead a human life. In the absence of Eros, the giants' could not develop a coherent science. Their pursuit of knowledge could only take the form of a ceaseless, boundless quest for absolute answers and final solutions. In the absence of love the quest for knowledge can only assume the form of a soulless and ultimately pointless quest for the absolute mastery of a material universe.

With the birth of Eros that solitary and bleak quest assumed a distinctly dialogical and conversational form and transformed itself into a desire for the mutual revelation of self and other. The urge to conquer and subdue a material universe transformed itself into an erotic desire to approach and to come into the presence of another world. It became desire to reveal one's own world by bringing it into an erotic and symbolic relationship to another. It became desire to reveal our world and that of others by building a common cosmos in which we could be neighbors.

The giant's desire for conquest was limitless and they would have stormed the gates of heaven in the pursuit of what they wanted. By contrast, the desire inspired by Eros recognized thresholds. It halted before gates, it knocked on closed doors, it addressed itself to a host and waited to be admitted.

The giant's desire knew only progress, triumph or defeat. The desire inspired by Eros pulsated with the rhythm of conversation and the cadences specific to human life. This desire bound the lover to the beloved and the host to his guest while leaving in place a threshold and upholding a covenant to time and to structure their interactions.

The rhythm of friendship and love became one of give and take, of question and answer, of visiting each other and of coming and going.

We learn from the *Symposium* that the celebration at Agathon's house was meant to honor Eros. The guests came together to evoke the Great Spirit and to draw from his presence the inspiration and guidance needed to conduct their wisdom-loving conversations. It comes therefore as no surprise that these conversations did not lead to ultimate conclusions or absolute answers. Like most of Plato's dialogues the *Symposium* began and ended in an inconclusive manner. It did not seek to conquer Eros but only aimed to evoke his presence and to inspire their conversations.

These conversations have endured not because they add to a store of positive facts with which to impose our will on the world. They have survived because the inspired exchanges of the symposiasts monetarily place our life and our loves in a revealing new light. These inspired exchanges are rather of the nature of smiles that light up our world and warm the heart. It is in their nature to come towards us, to greet us and then to leave and to pass on. We receive them gratefully, but without being able to hold and to possess them and to make them appear at will.

At the end of the *Symposium* the participants leave Agathon's house with their faith restored in love and friendship. One imagines them not as soldiers returning at the end of a victorious battle or as adventurers going home with their plunder, but rather as grateful visitors bearing memories of a brilliant conversation while looking forward to future encounters.

The setting in which the *Symposium* took place underscores the amicable and even familial nature of the conversation. Unlike modern scientific research that requires the specialized environment of a laboratory or an office space, the search for the truth and real presence of Eros took place in an ordinary private home. More specifically, it took place in that part of the home set aside for receiving guests. The dialogue makes clear that all the participants are the guests of Agathon and together they are the host of Eros. Their conversation can be understood as a collective invitation to the Great Spirit to enter into their midst.

The story begins with Socrates washing and dressing in preparation for the party at his friend's house. It ends equally homely fashion with Socrates taking leave of his sleepy friends and heading for the Lyceum to wash up and dress for the coming day.

Plato's portrayal of Socrates in conversation with his friends at Agathon's house reminds us in its modesty and evocative power of Vermeer's well-known painting of a small street in Delft. Both Plato and Vermeer draw us closer to the revealing power of common, familial settings and ordinary things.

Neither dazzles us with extraordinary scenery or promises us radically new and better worlds. Both draw us inward to discover beneath the worn surfaces of things the radiant presence of a spirit that the Greeks called Eros.

Had Freud explored the Aristophanic creation myth further, in particular the part that dealt with the origins (*die Entstehung*) of human sexuality, he would have discovered a very different path for his thought. This path would have led him beyond the domain of natural and biological procreation. It would have permitted him to leave the moribund worlds of the giants and of the defeated lovers and discover a world radically transformed by the divine Eros. He would have come face to face with a human and divine love that transcended the world of natural forces and of mechanical causes and effects. Instead of reproductive sexuality he would have encountered love and friendship as the ultimate foundation of a human world. This, in turn, would have drawn his attention to the chasm that separates human love-making from biological sexuality. It would have clarified the essential difference that separates being inspired by the divine Eros from being pushed and pulled by a natural force or a universal instinct. The myth highlights the ontological distinction between "forming part of a natural universe", as exemplified by the pre-human giants, and "inhabiting a human world" as typified by the giant's human descendents and by the symposiasts gathered in Agathon's dining room.

The myth helps us understand the quixotic nature of modern psychology's attempt to derive human love from instinctual, biological sources. At the same time it shows the contradictions inherent in all attempts to construct a smooth and uninterrupted path of natural cause and effect that would interconnect an inhabitable human world with the loveless and uninhabitable universe of the self absorbed giants.

We learn from the myth that the narcissistic, non-erotic vitality that animated the giants remained enclosed within their natural bodies. It animated and unified the various parts of the giant's material body and preserved it as a functional organic whole. But this vitality was never able to reach beyond the closed circuit of the bodies in which it was contained. It could not order a cosmos and build a coherent world.

Closed off from the surrounding world it could not create symbolic wholes or generate spiritual bonds. It could not unite in love a husband and a wife, or join friends or create neighbors. It is in this way that the myth points to the limits of what natural and material forces can bring together. It then points to Eros as the creator of symbolic wholes and credits divine inspiration with laying the foundation of a human world.

We learn that prior to the birth of Eros there existed a natural universe that was governed solely by instinctual and natural forces. This rude and natural world had all the characteristics of a modern natural scientific universe. When Zeus set about to introduce Eros into that world he was faced with the problem as to how to open up a closed universe. He had to transform an uninhabitable world into one that could be inhabited and that would be able to receive a stranger. To accomplish this Zeus was obliged not only to split apart the narcissistic giants but also to shatter their natural universe. He then charged Eros with the task of healing the broken bodies of the giants and of bringing a new symbolic unity to a shattered natural world.

We have repeatedly raised the question as to why Freud made such limited and even perverse use of the great creation myth in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. What was it that prevented him from accepting the guidance of the myth in his exploration of what he called "the great problems of knowledge and of life". Why did he fail in this instance to discern the inherent limits of biological and medical narratives and why did he in this instance turn a deaf ear to myth? As we pointed out before, part of the answer lies in Freud's persistent ambivalence about the uses of myth. On the one hand he accepted uncritically the positivist's view of myth as a primitive and inferior form of thought that was destined to be replaced by modern scientific rationality. No doubt his dogmatic and militant atheism also played an important role, as did the eighteenth century Enlightenment rationalism he inherited from Voltaire and Diderot and from nineteenth century writers such as Macaulay and Gomperz.

Yet, at the same time, it cannot be denied that Freud was also one of the great mythologists of the twentieth century whose extraordinary hermeneutic skills left an indelible imprint on the whole of twentieth century's culture and thought.

It appears that Freud remained all his life torn between, on the one hand, a modern materialist and scientific ideology that left no place for myth or poetry and, on the other, by an ancient Judaic, Greek and Christian art of interpreting sacred texts.

Freud seems, on the one hand, to have realized that it was not possible to make sense of the human world without invoking and

interpreting mythic narratives of one kind or another. He understood that myth forms an ultimate narrative horizon against which the realities of human life stand out and within which they can be ordered. It is for this reason that he placed his patients' life-stories within a larger narrative setting of Greek mythic tales. Freud had, on the other hand, convinced himself that intellectual and moral reliance on myth stood in the way of human progress. On the other, he understood that such reliance was indispensable if his patients were to make sense of their lives. His scientific ideology made him believe that natural science was destined to rid mankind of its harmful illusions, chief among which he ranked Judaic and Christian myths. His profound and inescapable attachment to Jewish and Christian culture would not permit him to detach himself from the world of myth.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he set out to solve this conflict by constructing a grand new orienting narrative that he hoped would take the place of the older, religious and non-progressive myths. He embarked on a project to write a still partly mythic tale that was to eventually lose its mythic character as it became accepted and sanctioned by mainstream science. Freud thus hoped to construct a creation narrative that would eventually become part of the natural sciences yet remain sufficiently close in style to a religious myth so that it could frame human understanding and guide human conduct. The hybrid narrative he constructed turned out to be a stillborn tale that stood halfway between natural science and religion without being able to contribute to either realm. It could not furnish a sound basis for scientific research and it failed utterly to reinvigorate the quest for what Freud himself had termed "mankind's ultimate questions".

In retrospect, the chief virtue of Freud's pseudo-myth of Eros and Thanatos may be that it drew attention to a vivid and unresolved intellectual and emotional conflict lying at the root of psychoanalysis and, by extension, at the whole of a modern, academic human science culture. That artificial and academic culture, so well reflected in Freud's hybrid tale, sought to reveal the human world in a manner that would mirror the way biology, astronomy and physics revealed a natural universe. Yet, in the process of founding a new science and forging a new perspective on human life human scientists sought at the same time to usurp for themselves the ancient role of religious myth and poetry. Not content to be a natural science of the psyche or of human behavior psychology, sociology and anthropology wished to be regarded as a final arbitrator and ultimate rational guides in the conduct of human affairs.

The confusion at the heart of Freud's meta-psychological narrative, and of that of the modern human science culture of which it forms a part, can be understood as a confusion concerning its ultimate object

of study. Freud's narrative in this instance distanced itself from the inhabited cosmos and sought to take the material universe of the natural sciences as its ultimate object. Yet in doing so Freud did not relinquish the claim that his narrative revealed a specifically human world and that it was meant to shed light on the great mysteries of life and death, of love and friendship.

In the ensuing confusion over the aims and methods of the human sciences and stung by the grand ambition to make over and replace an existing cultural order, some psychologists and sociologists began to construct elaborate secular myths of their own devising. Others simply turned away from what Freud had called "the great problems of life and culture" and began to construct labyrinthine mathematical or biological schemas and puzzles in the hope that these abstract problems and their solutions might eventually contribute to a future science of human nature. For these psychologists it became an affront to raise questions about love and friendship, or about any other human dimension that could not fit the parameters of a mathematical and natural-scientific frame of mind. Psychology became unable to evoke the mysteries of life and love and failed to address the very questions that have inspired and guided human conduct since the beginning of time.

The confusion at the heart of Freud's tale and at that of the contemporary human sciences can also be understood as resulting from the failure to distinguish between two fundamentally different narratives styles. A natural scientific report makes use of a descriptive and calculating language that describes and interrelates the various events that take place in a natural, physical universe. Language manifests itself here as a passive instrument that as such plays no determinative role in the course of the events it records and explains. The style and language of a scientific report repeats certain prominent features of journalistic reporting in that it presents us with a kind of parallel universe to which we are causally connected and whose unnoticed presence exerts a decided influence on our lives. By contrast, the events related in a mythic or poetic narrative do not take place in a parallel universe but in a lived, cosmic world to which the reader remains allied in his very being. Mythic events tell of the coming into being of the very world in which we live and they mark out the place that we occupy within it. The events unfolding in a myth toll the bell which tolls for me. They do not provide us with information about what is happening in an abstract physical universe or in a distant, mundane and prosaic world. They tell us instead who we are and where we live.



It is for this reason that the events recounted by the myth cannot be detached from the telling. Both the myth and the world of which it speaks can reach us only by being offered to us. A myth is an offered domain that invites thoughtful habitation. We enter it as we enter a house to which we have been invited. Thoughtful dwelling, telling and reading are all the fruits of a viable relationship between a host and a guest, a creator and his people, a story teller and an eager audience. All are made possible by a covenant that transforms strangers into neighbors

A myth is born the moment when a host opens a door to a guest who in turn acknowledges the host before entering. Myth belongs entirely to the realm of hospitable intersubjectivity; it has no life except that which passes between succeeding generations, neighboring worlds, divinity and humanity. In coming alive, in being told, interpreted and understood, the myth gives new life to the cosmos. Telling a myth repeats the essential creative action through which a human world came into being. The narrative is here always contemporaneous with the events it describes and evokes.

Mythic narrative has no knowledge of the abstract, natural and physical world that forms the subject of natural science writing. There is here no question of a universal world that exists independently from the language that describes it or from the people and the gods that dwell within it. There is here no question of a tone deaf universe that is thereafter set to music, or of a mute and blind universe that is thereafter made intelligible and visible with the help of language and natural science. Myth speaks of a world that came into being in its encounter with another world. It has as its ultimate foundation nothing more substantial than a covenant. It has as its basis nothing more solid than conversation and an exchange of gifts. It is for this reason that telling and interpreting a myth means to build and maintain a cosmos. To give new life to a myth means therefore to participate in a cosmogony.

By contrast, a natural scientific narrative evokes for us a world in the creation of which our being and our language have played no essential role. It introduces a time and a space that has never and that will never be *offered* to anyone. It opens to our inspection an uninhabitable world that demands to be understood as "*a world for which there is, on principle, no other world*".

A natural scientific narrative whose task it is to describe this solitary, universal world cannot therefore describe or explore, a dual cosmos born of encounter and maintained by a covenant. This type of narrative can represent humanity and divinity only in terms of the natural things and forces that make up an uninhabitable natural universe. Whenever this type of writing and this manner of thinking is

employed to recount the story of mankind, it can do so only by reciting biological and geological information pertaining to a natural universe. Humanity shows itself here as a beleaguered biological species that is perpetually threatened by other species and natural dangers present in its environment.

A natural scientific narrative of human evolution inevitably becomes a tale of woe of a precarious life lived on a hostile planet. It takes the form of a Darwinian struggle for survival or a Hobbesian tale of "human slaughter, solitude and the want of all things".

Freud's pseudo-myth about the adventures of his naturalized Eros and Thanatos conforms entirely to the conventions of this narrative genre. It tells how a particular biological form of life emerged on the wings of a Freudian Eros and was briefly lifted above the universal maelstrom of lifeless matter. It then recounts how this rising new form of life became caught up in a competing downward spin, symbolized by Thanatos, that would eventually drag it back down to the low point from which it arose.

This depressing narrative has found its way into all spheres of modern cultural life, from music to drama and literature, from painting and sculpture to social science writing. It characteristically portrays humanity as precariously poised on the brink of an abyss from which it can neither retreat nor escape. It typically depicts cultural life as motivated either by an irrational desire to obscure and ignore the inevitable fall, or by a rational desire to devise the most effective means to postpone it for as long as possible.

In the first instance, cultural life is thought to center its efforts on obfuscating the harsh but ultimately inescapable truth. It devises myths and religious rituals to encourage the feeble and offers poetry to soften the blows of a cruel and inescapable fate. In the second instance culture makes an effort to face up to the harsh realities of human life and expends its capital on natural science and technology in the hope of forestalling the inevitable demise.

But no matter how escapist or how heroic the stance adopted by a particular form of human culture, the outcome is inevitably the same. Humanity is bound to eventually disappear without leaving a trace within the maelstrom of a collapsing universe.

Freud's pseudo-myth about Eros and Thanatos faithfully follows the plot of this particular narrative tradition. He sums up his materialistic and scientific vision of human life in two succinct phrases. The first of these proposes that "*the aim of all life is death*" (*Das Ziel alles Lebens ist der Tod*). The second affirms the priority of all that is without life over all that has life. It has as it were the rights of the firstborn that is destined to triumph over the rights of the lastborn. The Freudian

universe begins as a lifeless whole; it gives birth to living things and thereafter sinks back within its prior lifeless state. He writes that "*the lifeless was there before there was life*". (*Das Leblose war frueher da als das Lebende*) (G.W. XIII, p. 40)

The first phrase has a Lamarckian twist in so far as it mixes the incompatible elements of two different storylines and two different discourses that address different objects. It attributes a goal or purpose to what is also described as a purely natural and mechanical process of rise and fall.

One thinks here, for instance, of a warrior who aims to kill his opponent, using a spear or an arrow to accomplish his goal. The warrior's purpose forms part of an inhabited human and divine world in which it is possible to make decisions and pursue goals. It would be clearly wrong to attribute a specific purpose to either the arrow or the spear used in the killing, or to the wind and the gravitational force that also played a part in the course of the battle. "Purpose" belongs to a world we share with others, but it is absent from the universal world of material things and forces that is ruled entirely by natural law.

Etymologically the German "Ziel" for "goal" is related to the English "to till"; it evokes the sphere of purposeful work, of tilling the fields and of inhabiting the earth. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition it evokes the mythical image of Adam, God's gardener in paradise, whose humanity was from the start linked to purpose. Goal and purpose belong inherently to an inhabited, human world. It has no place in an abstract material universe.

The second phrase evokes a temporal threshold and a momentous passage from a universe of lifeless matter to a world of living things. It introduces the concept of a "before" and an "after" without preparation and it makes reference to a purposeful transition from a pre-human universe to an inhabited world. It evokes a new temporal order and the passage across a threshold linking a world of "before" to a world "thereafter". Moreover, it assigns the task of creating a miraculous passage from one kind of world to another to natural forces. The Freudian myth evokes a voiceless and faceless universe that is nevertheless endowed with purpose. It conjures up a passage across a threshold within a space and time that cannot accommodate thresholds and that leaves no room for ontological distinctions and formal transitions. At the very moment when his story touches upon the birth of a human world and narrates the crucial transition from a dead universe to a world that can nurture life and support humanity, Freud abandons the terrain of myth. At that very moment he adopts the guise of a scientist or a journalistic reporter who wants to report universal and material facts.

In sharp contrast to this we saw how the myth of Aristophanes and Diotima centered its narration entirely on the mysterious passage across a threshold that led from a world of functional, biological sexuality to a world of interpersonal relations. In offering its account of this passage the myth laid the basis for human self-understanding and offered the prospect of a coherent, human way of life. It did so, not by using abstract and naturalistic terms and casting the story in terms of biological life and death, or of organic and inorganic nature. It told instead of how a closed universe of narcissistic giants opened itself to other worlds and thereby became transformed into a human cosmos. Indirectly it told of the creation of a first portal that gave access to an outside world. It told of a first step in the direction of a human world that led across a threshold dividing and uniting an outside and an inside, a before and after, a self and another.

In a different key it told of the birth of human sexuality that also required passage across a threshold within the context of an inhabited world. This narrative told at the same time of the birth of a world in which it became possible to court and to make love, to form friendships and to found families. It told of the coming into being of affectionate and neighborly bonds that permitted human beings to build cities, to create nations and civilizations and perfect a human way of life.

We note that all these strands of the mythic narrative tell in their own way of the coming into being of a human time and place. They all suggest that time, rhythm and narrative do not exist separate from one another. They all order an interval that leads from a beginning to an end and from one threshold to another. They all point to the primordial passage from one particular domain to a distinctly different, neighboring one.

Narrative forms here an intrinsic part of an inhabited world. This world is itself constructed like a narrative that leads from one domain and one person to another within the framework of a beginning and an end. We note that what is "earlier" and "later" can be determined only within the course of a passage leading from one domain to another and from one threshold to another. When we speak of an "earlier" and a "later" event within the context of a natural universe we are able to do so only because we observe it from an inhabited world that offers us thresholds and that encloses our lives within birth and death. For those who are not embraced by the limits of birth and death and unable to cross the threshold of a friend or neighbor there can be no before and after and no passage of time.

The myth of Aristophanes and Diotima tells the story of how an enclosed universe, devoid of spirit, was touched by gods, was opened

to an outside and an inside and transformed into a human world. Mythic narrative always refers back to this miraculous event and to the divine touch that brought into being a human world.

Natural scientific narratives pose themselves a very different task and operate on very different principles and therefore narrate the story of the birth of the human world in very different ways. These narratives all use the image of a natural scientific universe as a giant screen on which to project all things human and divine. Some aspects of human life are thereby marvelously clarified while others are obscured beyond recognition. Myth and scientific narrative perform their very different intellectual tasks best when these tasks are clearly distinguished from one another and when we do not permit one type of narrative to usurp or obscure the place and the function of the other.

Our myths of creation forever revive in us the pain of a primordial separation from a prior world in which we formed an unquestioned part of all that was. It also renews in us the joy of being freed from an earlier bondage and of being born in a world made new. It tells how the wound inflicted by our being separated from a prior world became mysteriously transformed into a threshold. It tells how, starting from this threshold, we came to build places of sacrifice and burial and then learned to build houses and cities. It tells how we learned to assume the roles of host and guest and how we found our way to the hearts and minds of those we love. It forever tells the story of how we came to *inhabit* a human world by entering into a covenant with the worlds beyond.

It is in this way that myth and poetry cannot ever be detached from cosmogony and from the creation of a human world. It is this specifically human world that is reborn each time we tell or interpret a myth or cite a poem or create a painting. This same world is reborn every time we visit and open our heart to a friend.

### **Freud watches his grandchild play**

A close examination of Freud's texts shows his varying allegiance to a scientific view of the world. At times this allegiance appears undeniable when Freud clearly expresses his desire for a future psychology that would be purged of all mythology and forthrightly adopt the language of chemistry and physiology. Yet it cannot be denied that Freud's thinking moved generally in quite the opposite direction.

We already noted that Freud's psychotherapeutic practice placed itself within the horizons of Greek mythology. He encouraged his patients to interpret their personal histories within the larger horizon of Greek mythic tales, mostly derived from the tragedies of Sophocles. In this

way Freud introduced into his therapy the remnants of a religious perspective and practice, although he was always careful to limit it to Greek and Roman sources and showed a pronounced aversion for Judaic and Christian myths.

We should therefore not pay disproportionate attention to Freud's own frequently voiced claim that psychoanalysis formed part of the great onward march of modern science. We rather should understand his theoretical writings as well as his therapeutic innovations as primarily inspired by classical sources, chief among which were Greek mythology and Stoic philosophy. Seen in this light, Freud's chief contribution to the life and thought of the twentieth century was that he brought back into currency some long forgotten insights of an older and much neglected religious and philosophical culture. No matter how much he esteemed scientific rationality, Freud was also keenly aware of its limits when it came to understanding and treating the psychological and spiritual afflictions of his age. He has never been known to suggest to his patients, or even to his fellow therapists, that they might somehow become better equipped to deal with psychological problems by studying anatomy, physiology, chemistry or physics. In his treatise on the question of lay analysis he concluded that knowledge of medicine was at best tangential, but never essential to the practice of psychoanalysis. Moreover, as we have seen, Freud's own work took on its true psychoanalytic character only after he had first distanced himself from the practice of medicine and had created an effective practical and intellectual separation between the two disciplines.

It is also not difficult to demonstrate that the most original and lasting of Freud's insights came about, not as the result of his interest in natural science, but through his fascination with the art, religions and philosophies of the ancient world. We can illustrate that principle by comparing two different sections of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. There where Freud assumed a self-conscious pose as a modern naturalist and adopted natural science as his ultimate horizon his genius left him and his ideas took the form of sterile abstractions. But where he let his thoughts to be touched and guided by the genius of Greek myth his psychological insights were often brilliant and remain of lasting value.

In discussing *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* we have dealt extensively with that part of the text that saw psychoanalysis as forming part of the grand onward march of the modern natural sciences. The main body of the text is indeed devoted to that purpose. But at the beginning of the essay Freud relates a personal story that sheds an entirely different light on his theoretical constructions. It deserves for

that reason our close attention. It tells how, in the early autumn of 1915, Freud had the occasion to visit his daughter Sophie in Hamburg. He used that opportunity to become closer acquainted with his young grandson and he amused himself watching him play. (Jones, 1957 Volume 3 p. 267) He wrote a brief account of what he learned from that encounter at the very beginning of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. This brief narrative is not only remarkable for its inventiveness and the depth of its psychological analysis. It presents also a telling instance of the evocative power of myth and of the far-reaching influence that the Aristophanic creation story had on Freud's thinking.

Freud tells us that at the time he visited his daughter in Hamburg his grandson was about one and a half years old. He describes the child as sweet and well behaved and as not notably precocious. He had just begun to say a few words and had begun to actively explore his environment. He also got on well with his parents and with a maid who attended to his needs whenever his mother had to absent herself for brief periods. Whenever that occurred the child gave no signs of distress and he seemed ready to accept this temporary deprivation. Freud noted, however, that whenever the mother left the house the child would engage in a particular game. This game Freud interpreted as the child's creative response to the stress he felt over being separated from his mother.

Freud writes that the child would take hold of any toy or small object nearby and throw it out of the crib. As he did so he would utter a long and rounded "Oh" sound that stood for the word "*Fort*" for "gone". The child seemed thus to have developed a game in which he made use of his toys and used language to represent an important event in his life. A few days later on Freud noted a further elaboration of the game. After the mother had again left the house, the child took hold of a wooden spool with a piece of string tied around it. He would throw it away so that it disappeared out of his sight and shout 'gone', and then reel it back towards him. At the moment when the toy reappeared in sight the child would utter a joyful "*da*", for "there it is (again)". The child had thus developed a rudimentary, but complete game of "going away" and of "coming back". At most times the child would be content to repeat the first part of the play and throw his toys away. But occasionally he would add with great pleasure the second part in which he would recover the spool. (Freud, S. 1961, P.12ff.)

In a footnote Freud added that his grandson would at times play a similar game before a mirror and make his image alternately appear and disappear by shifting his position and changing his angle of vision. Freud spoke emphatically of these games as representing a "great cultural achievement" (*eine grosse, kulturelle Leistung*) (Freud, S.

1961 p. 13). Central to that achievement stood the child's ability to modify his original desire for the physical and material presence of his mother. He threw no temper tantrums and did not in other overt ways protest her leaving. In its stead he created a game of disappearance and reappearance that symbolically represented his painful conflict over being separation from his mother. It is interesting to note that the child also played the same game of hide and seek, of disappearance and reappearance with his own mirror image. The meaning of these childish games can be extended to the life of art and culture in general in so far as they are symbolic and healing representations of separation and loss. That separation and loss is here no longer lived as it was in the world of the wounded giants as an inalterable natural fate but as a *represented* and *symbolic* reality that as such could form part of a conversation and of a constantly developing relationship between self and other.

Freud's description and analysis of his grandson's play raises important questions about his method of observation and analysis of human behavior. How could he draw such important and far reaching conclusions about a child's state of mind and even about the nature of cultural life by simply watching a toddler throw toys from his crib? How was he even able to perceive a significant narrative whole where others might have seen no more than the random actions of a frustrated child? How was he able to link together the disparate actions of the child so that together they formed a coherent narrative whole, and moreover one that involved the departure of his mother and his desire for her return?

To ask these questions means to begin to inquire into the narrative models Freud used to decipher the play and to interpret the state of mind of the child. We would want to know what narrative prototypes enabled him to connect the dots and link the departure and return of the mother to the child's throwing away and retrieving his toys. On a different level we would want to know what narrative logic informed his conclusion that the child's invention of a game helped him to cope with the absence of his mother? And what was it that convinced Freud that his grandson's play should be understood as "an important cultural achievement"?

All these questions lead us back to the important role the Aristophanic myth played in Freud's understanding of his world.

We noted that already as a medical student he had made mention of the myth in a letter to his future wife in which he referred to the pain and distress he felt over her absence. He wrote in that letter that he felt most bereft when he was idle and that he felt better whenever he made a redoubled effort to assist his patients. (Freud, E., 1960, The



Letters of Sigmund Freud, New York, Basic Books, p. 48) The myth had taught him from early on that the pain over being physically separated from the beloved can be eased by following the good example of the mythical giants who accepted their primordial separation and found meaning in building a human world together.

We note here once more the striking similarities between the Aristophanic myth and the story Freud told about his grandson. Both narratives can be read as creation myths that tell the story of mankind's birth. Both refer to a mythic moment of creation when a first symbol was exchanged and when a human world began to emerge out of a sea of pain and confusion. Both tell of the mysterious moment when a narrative logic began to order the world and a first history began to unfold. Both tell the story of intertwined lovers who were fated to live apart. Both tell how they escaped moral destruction by entering into conversation and finding words and gestures to overcome their isolation.

At the moment when his mother leaves the house Freud's grandchild finds himself in the same position as did the giants after Zeus cut them apart with his sword. They all find themselves bereaved of their better halves and are at first tempted to yield to their loss and succumb to their wounds. Yet they chose a different path and learned to live at some distance from the beloved and to replace natural and unconscious unity with a symbolic accord. It was in this way that they broke out of the cocoon of a natural universe and were able to enter into conversation and establish meaningful relationships.

Both narratives refer to a fundamental choice and a decisive step that led the wounded creatures across a symbolic threshold into the human world. The heroes of either narrative could have chosen to not take that step and the tension we feel while reading the story speaks of the uncertain nature of their choice. The toddler and the wounded giants could at any moment have refused to move forward into a world of symbolic unity and permitted themselves to fall back into the wordless, timeless and homeless world from which they emerged. They could have refused to make the required sacrifice. They could have refused to renounce the seductive forgetfulness of an absolute and indistinct belonging. They could have rejected the difficult and uncertain task of creating meaningful alliances under the aegis of the Diotimean Eros. Yet they chose to enter the new world and to cultivate it with the help of ritual and myth, of the arts and sciences, of commerce and technology. Entering the inhabited human world meant accepting the laborious cultivation of the very terrain opened by the sword of Zeus and by the mother leaving behind her child. This terrain was at first a

wound. It was then miraculously transformed by Eros into the receptive and supportive foundation of a human community. Depending on the choices of the heroes this terrain would become either a burial ground for dispirited lovers or a cradle of civilization. Both the Platonic and the Freudian myth tell of an *ontological* change that transformed the narcissistic giants and the undifferentiated child into *spiritual* beings who would find fulfillment and completion in human invention and in cultural and symbolic exchanges. The transformed lives of the mutilated giants and the distressed child would henceforth unfold under the aegis of Eros, the *daimoon megas*, the great spirit of the Diotimean myth who linked heaven and earth and bound lover to lover and neighbor to neighbor. It is under the sign of this Great Spirit that natural and self-centered creatures would learn to live at an intimate, but never entirely erased, distance from those they loved.

In neither myth is there question of human development understood as a complex succession of natural causes and effects. Both myths teach that we enter the human world not as the direct result of natural causes but as the consequence of having made certain difficult choices. In the light of the myth we come to understand childrearing psychotherapy and education as practical arts that are designed to assist those who are in the process of responding to demanding questions and making difficult decisions. The burden of finding creative responses to difficult questions can be born only within a general atmosphere of goodwill and mutual support. The Aristophanic myth presents the drama of the suffering giants as unfolding under the watchful eyes of concerned divinities. The Freudian story tells of a child struggling with the absence of his mother in the presence of a doting grandfather and an attentive maid.

We may think of this particular Freudian myth as presenting us with the fundamental paradigm or the primordial image of psychoanalytic therapy. That image shows us a struggling human being who in the presence of a helpful witness makes a fateful choice between, on the one hand, withdrawal and aggression and on the other, the laborious and redemptive cultivation of a human world. That scene represents the birthplace of our humanity and depicts the miraculous transition from a barren universe to an inhabitable cosmos. It tells of the creation of a human world under the aegis of the Diotimean Eros. In last instance it is this Eros who opens a path between neighbors, friends and lovers and transforms a broken world into a wholesome place.

As we have seen, this transformation cannot proceed without a real sacrifice on the part of the separated lovers. Freud formulated that sacrifice in terms of an incest taboo that forbids the return to an

earlier stage of physical and bodily continuity between parent and child. He read the Oedipus myth as the story of mankind's unconscious and wayward desire to abandon the human world and to return to an earlier scene untouched by birth and death and free of the pain over parting.

The Aristophanic myth points to a primordial human reluctance to make ourselves at home in a world that assigns to us the role of host and guest and that we can never make absolutely and wholly our own. It equally speaks of our reluctance to live within the order of time and to accept the limits of coming and going that order all our human relationships. This reluctance and hesitation is relived every time we face an hospitable threshold and are bid to enter. It is in final instance this hospitable threshold that in being crossed transforms an inhospitable universe into an inhabitable cosmos and changes an absolute and timeless longing for the beloved into a culturally mediated and temporally circumscribed human and divine relationship. Both Aristophanes' and Freud's story end with the lovers discovering the wider world they have in common. They resolve to live their own distinct life by cultivating this world in common while yet never ceasing to belong to one another. It thus became possible to feel close to someone not physically present, and to be made whole by a simple word or a gesture.

If we now return to the question we raised earlier about what it was that enabled Freud to make such wide-ranging interpretations of his grandson's behavior, we note once more the great debt he owed the Aristophanic myth. In this instance too we see the sweep of Freud's thought as inspired and guided by the very same mythic and poetic thought that inspired and guided the brilliant conversation at the house of Agathon. In Freud's case this mythic thought illuminated the scene of a toddler coping with the physical absence of his mother. In the case of Socrates and Diotima it clarified the nature of friendship and situated philosophical discussions and inquiries within the realm of divine and human love.

It is important to note at this point that no amount of carefully calibrated observations or meticulously planned naturalistic experiments could ever have given rise to the kind of insights inspired by the Platonic and Freudian myths. No amount of statistical analysis, no string of the most cleverly conceived and methodically sophisticated scientific manipulations could have inspired us to connect the inchoate gestures and the poorly enunciated words of a toddler to the birth of theater and the founding of a human world.

