

sun and lightning *the visibility of radiance*

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What is visibility? The question seems simple enough. Yet a brief investigation quickly leads to complicated answers. If visibility merely matched with the realm of the eyes, of what *we see*, of perspective and viewpoint, then it would soon become impossible to say anything about the next thing we see, be it of the same form or of other forms. Perhaps, then, we could improve the answer by saying that visibility matches with what *we can see*, which at least connects what we see at this moment with that of the next, what we don't see yet. Then again, how would we establish that what we see, what we take to be real, coincides with what the thing allows to be viewed, with what is given? In the end, what is shown is not the same as what is viewed. Though both are made of the same stuff, so to speak, the shown is the far larger category: there is always more to see. We feel the importance of the given as something cumulative, as generosity or wealth. Visibility is what is given, and that includes the things we see as well as those we can see and those we might never get to see. That is the brute fact of givenness, as Whitehead called it¹ – though we can question the notion of bruteness. It is more a matter of kindness: when things exist to be visible, the structure of the visible must coincide with that of existence. If they weren't of one kind, it would be impossible to link the substance of the one to the pure accident of the other. If visibility differs so fundamentally from perspective or viewpoint, it must amount to a form of radiance or luminosity, a light emanating from things, not a light cast on them by an external source but one independent of the time of day, of the state of our minds, even of our presence.² Radiance, then, is *visibility as generosity*, a gift that keeps on giving, and, as the rules of gift exchange prescribe, a gift that needs to be returned.

Undoubtedly, enormous consequences follow when things-in-themselves are identical to the way they show themselves, especially for their internal structure. They exist in the visible before we get to see them. Philosophically, this statement signifies the conflation of the for-itself and the for-others. Things are born in the arena of presence, without any backstage, basement or any other space behind the curtain – they acquire the status of image long before reaching our consciousness. However we define thought, intelligence or consciousness, it exists before we respond to it with our own. The crucial question then logically arises: How do ex-

ternal visibility and internal structure coincide? First and foremost, it means that what we call “parts” or “properties” are not – contrary to what the terms imply – owned by an invisible source, by some hidden essence or order. A thing does not “have” properties; a whole does not “have” parts. Ownership would not allow properties to be given, to be distributed and circulated freely under the public eye. No, the whole must be as present as its properties, as its parts. The parts need to be understood as loose and available while simultaneously being parts of a whole. Radiance implies that the parts have been sent out, that they are being distributed, or more precisely, being given. From a spatial point of view, they cannot be seen as being tied to or seated in a place but rather as being from a place, a place they belong to. Being a property, then, is a matter of *membership*, not ownership. Belonging is etymologically equal to “going along with,” making the expression that parts belong to a whole identical to saying that parts go along with one another, or better, belong to one another. Things are brotherhoods, their parts like members of a circle, or even a round table, where many parts make up one circular object, as in a necklace or a circle dance.

Let us explore the schematics of the circle for a moment. Circles are frequently used as schematic depictions of things, either in their singular state or as wholes containing parts, as when we draw a circle surrounding multiple smaller ones. Years ago, Gilles Deleuze proposed in a lecture making the distinction between a circle and a round,³ the former being defined by a midpoint, the latter being without one and merely defined by the activity on the line itself. A round may be wobbly when we draw it by hand, or angular when we drive around the block, or completely irregular, as in a tour, such as that of a house or the traditional Grand Tour of Europe. And a necklace or circle dance is likewise a round in the Deleuzian sense; the dance has no exact middle and its participants move sideways, often switching directions while holding hands, sometimes around a pole, but not necessarily. For our purposes, though, we should stick to the word “circle,” since the continuing use of “round” would quickly become confusing. What matters at this point is that in the act of belonging, the parts of a whole do not converge in some absent middle or core but at the periphery, and that the periphery consists of a single line. This model contrasts considerably with the classic parts-whole model of things, in which the parts are the contents of the whole. In that model, which is one of ownership, the whole is always depicted as if it is a container or a bag, while in the model of membership, the parts align on the circle itself. In this sense, things – the gatherings of parts – are to be understood as completely superficial, because the line has no thickness. Objects might take up volume; things do not. A

thing can only be made as an image: all the parts strive for visibility. Parts do not merely strive to collaborate but do so at the verge of the visible: a horizon drawn at the source of visibility, not at its limits. Things don’t show themselves against a background; they project themselves forward. And every sense of solidity, extensity or depth we generally associate with the real is a product of this projection.

The circle dance seems a viable model to explain the concept of belonging, because it touches upon many of belonging’s aspects. It clarifies the confusion between the whole and the parts, the one and the many, yet more importantly, between movement and standstill. The fact is, while the participants in the dance move around energetically, the circle itself stands still. That is the whole point of being a circle. The circle does not rotate; it *stands*. Deploying that word is critical, as becomes clear from the root of the word *existence*, which lies in the Latin *sistere* (as in *consist*, *assist*, *insist*, *resist*, *persist*, etc.), which means “stop” or “stand still.”⁴ In light of this, we could improve the last proposition as follows: the circle doesn’t rotate horizontally; it stands vertically. Yet the “stance” is one that persists without being prefixed with the usual “sub,” since it lacks the order – mathematical or otherwise – to support its roundness. Members actively finding one another, going along with one another, causes the building – elevating, erecting – of an image, a surface directed toward visibility. Therefore, the model of the circle dance also helps to clarify the confusion between stillness and radiance. Stillness could easily be mistaken for an immobile center, and it has been, too often to mention. We should consider the still circle as pointing outward, not inward. While the circle doesn’t rotate, it does radiate; more precisely, it radiates *horizontally*. It is pure visibility. If there is a thickness to things that defines their reality, it must be the thickness of radiance.

At this point, the whole argument about existence turns into one of beauty, which amounts precisely to the congruence of visibility and radiance. Seeing partakes in the more-to-see, certainly, but this is only possible when the more-to-see is structured in a way that allows for seeing. We can say a lot about Plato, and we will, but he not only made stoppage and visibility coincide, he also conceived both as fundamental to radiance and beauty. As will become quite evident, this reasoning relies on an alternative view of Plato; however, it incorporates a number of his central concepts in a structure that is surprisingly consistent. In this view, the parts do not simply implode into a dark whole we can only retrieve with supreme knowledge; what occurs is in fact a reversal of order: the parts now radiate off the whole, and do so purely in the realm of the visible, yet, as in Plato’s

doctrine, outside the realm of time. What was blind process – parts gathering into a whole – is now sheer beauty – parts radiating from a whole. Radiance cannot occur without stoppage. But stoppage is not to be confused with rest. Beauty makes things step out of time and switch to another type of movement – one that exceeds actuality – and to a visibility that exceeds perspective. In this sense, the standing image is not superficial at all; it merely exchanges the better-known depth between outer appearance and inner structure for an outwardly oriented depth, a depth that is intensely engaged with its environment, with the political space of views, feelings and moods – and this might involve lies as well as truths, trickery as well as authenticity, cunning as well as intelligence, because, in the end, beauty could not care less about any of these options: they are merely ways plants, humans and animals make use of its powers.

Now that we have entered the perilous world of Greek metaphysics, it cannot hurt to recall the illustrious words of Heraclitus: “We never cross the same river twice,” and “Everything flows.”⁵ How should we respond to these with the above paragraphs in our minds? As in the case of the circle dance, we could safely respond with a resounding “No, it is the water that flows, not the river” – in fact, the river stands still. While the water moves, the river comes to a stop, or, to phrase it somewhat less abstractly, the river is *established*, a word that directly relates to stability and standing. The horizontal movement of the water turns into the vertical posture of the river. Evidently, this stoppage is of a wholly Platonic nature. However, instead of directly concluding, as Plato did, that the river retreats from the visible into the realm of the mental, the ideal or even the eternal, we should acknowledge the notion of stoppage without sacrificing any of the given wealth of visibility. To achieve this, we merely need to reverse the relationship: stoppage is necessary to the river’s existence, yes, but the excess of visibility sprouts from it rather than sinking into its shadows. And indeed, Plato, when wisely misquoting Heraclitus by saying “Everything changes,”⁶ leaves open the possibility of thinking the river may regain its movement at the point of standstill, allowing the circle to wiggle, to pulsate or radiate. From this perspective, we cannot regard Plato as the philosopher entirely opposed to motion, as Walter Pater did,⁷ since Plato allows the river to move in a very different dimension and direction than the stream of water does; it might not exactly flow, but the river does shine and flicker in its continuous change. In this sense, Pater’s celebrated “gem-like flame”⁸ could not shine any more brightly; however, we should view the light as emitted by Plato’s gem-like stoppage, not by the Heraclitean flame-like flux. In all its changes, it is the river that shines, not the water.

sun and ekphanestaton

For centuries, the quintessential model of radiance and the radiant circle has been, of course, the sun. In modern eyes, the sun is either viewed as the machine of visibility, the external source that illuminates all things on earth, or, at best, as a metaphor for radiance. But the sun is neither machine nor metaphor, since radiance is visibility as generosity, not visibility in general. In a similar vein, we recognize the sun as a model of generosity in our own age, for instance in Bataille’s concept of “pure expenditure” as theorized in his *Accursed Share*. Yet his notion of generosity was disconnected from visibility, if not violently joined to its opposite, blindness, as in *Story of the Eye*. Bataille’s concepts of pure expenditure and excess were mainly based on the twentieth-century myth of what in anthropology was called the “pure gift,”⁹ the gift that cannot possibly be returned, an idea that we should understand as far more closely related to the aesthetic of the sublime than to that of beauty, since it invariably evokes awe and fascination: feelings of fixation, not of circulation.

Radiance, in contrast, relates the gift directly to visibility. The sun is the ultimate model for relating the handing over of an object to the object showing itself. It is not just a model of visibility *and* generosity; it is a model of visibility *as* generosity. As said, this is an idea that goes back thousands of years. For instance, in ancient Egyptians’ depictions of the sun god Aten, we see the sun’s rays ending in stylized open hands – not very surprising when we realize their word for “ray” also meant “hand.” Such connections between light and the gift are widespread. At various times and places, we find the sun depicted as a disk with hands attached to it, or described as being “five-fingered” or “golden-handed.”¹⁰ Likewise, in Homer and Hesiod, sunrises are given the adjective “rosy-fingered”; the fingers are sometimes accompanied by golden arms.¹¹ These are just a few examples from what the nineteenth-century philologist Max Müller called comparative mythology, though expanding on his arguments on solar deities is not my aim here. My point is that from very early on the sun was not merely equated with light; its light was also equated with the gift. We see with our eyes, but *the sun shines with its hands*. This notion of radiance follows the same model I have discussed elsewhere¹² in explaining the transformation of the gift into the Greek notion of *charis*, mostly translated as “grace,” and again from *charis* into beauty: multiple hands radiating from the object, linking gentility, warmth and kindness with the shininess of gold and adornment. The ancient Greeks were obsessed with beauty and grace, of course, and invariably associated them with shining, gleaming or glowing. We

should note, however, that the hands of the gift are also those of making, as well as those of touching and seizing, sometimes even striking. Things handle their visibility; *they make us see*.

With the sun regularly related to the gift, both gold and fortune were readily implicated. Gold follows the radiant model of the sun, shedding warmth and gentility, as Nietzsche's Zarathustra said, adding that gold "always gives itself."¹³ In this sense, gold is not merely something that wants to be handed over; it shows itself as a handing over. Gold *streams*, as we know very well from fairy tales, such as the story of the goose that laid the golden eggs; myths, such as that in which Danaë is showered in Zeus's golden rain; and religious imagery, such as St. Theresa's penetration by a golden spear and the Virgin Mary's conception of Jesus, which traversed "like a sunbeam through glass," as medieval theologians used to describe it.¹⁴ Interpreting these stories as metaphors for latent truths (such as divinity, psychic energy, libido, or the like) would not do justice to their structure. Not only does the object of the sun mirror the radiance of the gift; its trajectory likewise mirrors the cyclical nature of fortune and fate. This implicitly makes the sun's passage across the sky a model of the gift cycle where its radiance is received by the earth and returned as growth. It is not mere pleasure, wisdom or wealth we get from radiance but our own growth. Nothing is more essential in gift exchange: not simply based on the going back and forth of goods but on improvement and increase. This is why the gift cycle is embodied by three stages, not two agents, such as object and subject or sender and receiver. These three stages are, as Marcel Mauss described them, "the three obligations: giving, receiving and returning."¹⁵ We recognize the triadic structure of reciprocation in the Three Graces, the ancient Greek, and later Roman, personification of gift exchange. The goddess Aglaea stands for the stage of giving, Euphrosyne for receiving and Thalia for returning. They are the "givers of all increase,"¹⁶ as the British classicist Jane Harrison called them. Though there are many overlaps with the model of the sun, the clearest is the fact that "Aglaea" means "radiance," and "Thalia" "bloom"; the name is similar to that of the goddess Thallo, the Hour of Spring. Sunbeams are not simply shed across the face of the earth; they are gifts that enhance life on earth, either through good fortune or through fertility and growth.

To classify the gift cycle as an early form of an economy would be to disregard its reversal of supply and demand: the fortune that proverbially falls into your lap wasn't really asked for, and the gold that fell upon you wasn't exactly earned. Fortune is a form of luck, that is, a form of favoring or grace. Though gold is a typically Greek passion and fortune a Roman one, they are strongly related. It is

no accident that the image of fortune as a wheel preserves the more ancient structure of the sun wheel and the sun chariot, which carries the sun either in the form of a golden disk or in the Greeks' personified form of Helios, often confused with Apollo, who also goes by the name of Phoebos, "brightness." While both are closely connected to the sun, it is generally assumed that Helios related more to its orbit and Apollo to its radiance. The sun's chariot is pulled by four horses, which, Max Müller argued, are the same horses that in Vedic poetry were given the name the Haritas, the etymological origin of the Charites, the Greek name for the Three Graces.¹⁷ The connection between the sun and the Graces as the personification of the gift cycle can perhaps most clearly be seen in the frequent depiction of Apollo holding a small statue of the Three Graces in one hand and a large bow in the other, hence offering both the hand of gentility as well as that of striking. In many ancient languages, the word for sunbeam not only means "hand" but also "arrow,"¹⁸ strongly indicating the ambiguous nature of the gift, which fluctuates between empowering and overpowering. And, as is well known, we encounter both models of the sun extensively in Plato.

To say the sun occupies an important position in Plato's philosophy would be an understatement, to put it mildly. It is not merely the protagonist of his most famous analogies, serving as a model to explain the notion of Forms; it also keeps haunting that notion, constantly overturning it with new questions that might as well be answered by opposing arguments. In fact, his writings are so riddled with ambiguities that it seems best to consider Plato's metaphysics as only a small portion of his conceptual machinery. Perhaps it would be a worthwhile experiment to look at the whole of the Platonic framework as if it were one of those 1970s Rubik's Cubes, whose mobile parts we can rearrange to constantly produce new configurations. In this way, we can view Plato's own metaphysics as a version of Platonism, just as we do Nietzsche's overturned variant, or Pseudo-Dionysius' Christianized Platonism, or Kant's idealist and Whitehead's organicist Platonisms – to name a not-altogether-accidental list of philosophers who dedicated themselves as much to the cause of beauty as Plato himself. Let us, just for argument's sake, postulate two Platos and study their respective "modeling" of the sun. The first is a joyous version (I), what I would call an "is-Plato," who believes in one world, where the sun touches and nourishes the earth, and the second version (II) is the metaphysicist and moralist, the "ought-Plato," who believes there are two worlds, one high up in the light and one caught in the shadows down below.¹⁹ Our lives would be a lot easier if, instead of agreeing or disagreeing with Plato (which in the end can only be a futile undertaking), we could distinguish the two clearly

and treat them as relatively independent from one another. One version is utterly positive and believes the wheels of participation and imitation are generative and productive, while the other operates through negation, viewing earthly matter and its forms as blocking the sunlight and obstructing our contact with reality.

The sun, according to Plato I in the sixth book of the *Republic*, is generous like an “overflowing treasury,” a source of “generation and growth and nurture” that constantly “gives birth.”²⁰ Indeed, the sun produces “offspring” in the form of likenesses, *eidē*.²¹ One paragraph further, he uses even stronger language: the sun literally “hands over” (*parechein*) the “power of visibility” to things.²² These are compelling formulations, and we should be wary of taking them metaphorically, since they evolved directly from the entwined history of gift-giving and solar mythology, in which the sun has hands and things are gifts in the form of radiant images. And the first image of the sun is the eye, the “most sunlike (*helioeides*) of the sense instruments,” a phrase later echoed by Goethe and Uexküll.²³ Things are not merely copies of the sun but miniature versions of it, models or modes, which makes them radiant as well as variable: variations of the golden light of the sun. It is no secret that the confusion of likeness and form lies at the heart of Plato’s philosophy, largely because of the fact that they are based on two closely related concepts: a “horizontal” likeness between things or forms, which Plato II disparages as mere imitation or *mimesis*, and a “vertical” likeness in which forms on earth “participate in” the heavenly Forms, in a procedure he termed *methexis*. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle recalls how Plato substituted the Pythagorean concept of *mimesis* with *methexis*,²⁴ in a change we could interpret in different ways. The usual interpretation is that Plato updated and improved on the old Pythagorean concept of things imitating each other flatly, which would come down to a complete separation of imitation and participation. The alternative is to view both concepts as inherently linked and overlapping, even as related.

In examining the latter thesis, as advocated by Plato I, we see that the notion of things mimicking the sun coincides with the notion that things partake in the sun, and partaking is a form of sharing, akin to taking part in gift exchange. Again, this idea relates visibility to the gift, not to an accident caused by the chance intervention of an external light source. We do not see things because the sun illuminates them at some specific hour at some specific place; we see them because they are “of” the sun, or better – to put it in terms of gift theory – because they are an “inalienable” part of the sun.²⁵ Though the Greek term *methexis* does not as clearly refer to the dynamics of whole and parts as the English “participate,” it was a term used mostly in the context of gift exchange.²⁶ For something to be

shared, it has to go around. If it is true that earthly forms participate in heavenly Forms through a vertical likeness, then *methexis* can never be wholly separated from *mimesis*, the horizontal likeness between forms, since both share the same fundamental concept of likeness.²⁷ Yet this conclusion does not lead to an all-out flattening of encounters, to a carnival of masks and mirrors, since the conflation of likeness and gift means that the reverse must be true as well: no *mimesis* can be successfully accomplished without some *methexis*. No mask or mirror is without depth. The horizontal, mimetic relationship between forms necessarily requires a vertical leap: for one thing to successfully copy another, it needs to exceed itself and overreach. How else could that self become the other? How else would it excel and outdo itself? How else would it grow or multiply? How else would it learn anything? In our earthly, everyday relations, we constantly need to exceed ourselves in ways that mere horizontality could never explain.

Probably those statements contain nothing new, except perhaps in rejecting the general assumption that any ambiguity of *mimesis* and *methexis* should be explained by saying that mere mirroring of visibilities is impossible because all things need to pass through the realm of the invisible, the realm of ideas – in short, by surrendering the argument to Plato II. However, this ambiguity could also indicate that the step from the visible to the visible does not proceed via the invisible but via an *excess of visibility*, via a fundamental generosity of things, the more-to-see that Plato I called an “overflowing treasury.” His argument is more radical than that of his alter ego: the overreaching of transcendence means precisely to assume the power of a gift. The seemingly difficult and counterintuitive concept of a sun with hands means that visibility constitutes a domain where the distance between the human eye and a thing can be overcome and even reversed. Things shower us like gold, and there is such an excess of visibility we can hardly draw or paint them. Things have depth, certainly, though not the usual depth between the visible and the invisible, or between presence and absence, but between what they show and what we see, *between presence and the present* – a depth that lies not behind an appearance but in front of it. In short, Plato’s introduction of *methexis* was an essential addition to mere *mimesis*, but not a substitution for it; the two should be understood as necessarily operating in combination.

Taken together, the verticality of *methexis* and the horizontality of *mimesis* could explain the cyclical nature of exchanges. Without the transcendence of the gift, its return would be impossible. It means that mirroring and mimicking play a role similar to gift exchange, with the modeled feeding back into the origin, and the form into the Form – not just the reverse. The Form that hands over is also the

Form that is held high by forms. We not only meet things at the intersection of visibility and generosity, we see them returned as well, fulfilling the obligations that come with every gift – and with beauty. Beauty turns things into miniature versions of the sun:

But beauty, as I said before, shone in brilliance among those visions; and since we came to earth we have found it shining most clearly through the clearest of our senses; for sight is the sharpest of the physical senses, though wisdom is not seen by it, for wisdom would arouse terrible love, if such a clear image of it were granted as would come through sight, and the same is true of the other lovely realities; but beauty alone has this privilege, and therefore it is most clearly seen (*ekphanestaton*).²⁸

Here, in that last sentence, we finally encounter the word *ekphanestaton*, a word highlighted by Heidegger in his detailed discussion of Nietzsche's attempt to overturn Platonism.²⁹ The term is usually translated as signifying a clarity of vision, but understood more literally it means "shining out" or "shining forth"; in German, *Hervor-* or *Herausscheinen*, variations on *Erscheinung*, the word for "appearance" or "phenomenon."³⁰ *Ekphanestaton* means beauty is more than appearance, though, or rather, it means *beauty is the appearance of the more*. This definition of beauty not only denies the classic metaphysical postulate that things exist behind their appearance – the usual location of the more – it also denies the opposite, Nietzschean postulate that things fully coincide with their appearance. Surely there is depth; there is definitely more to things than the way they look. However, following the Plato of the first order, I would like to argue that this more does not exceed the realm of appearances, yet it does exceed what we see at a specific moment. Although this may seem a mysterious formulation, it merely means that presence transcends the present. Presence is superactual. The magic of beauty is that it finds a solution to seeing the superactual: taking in *enough* of the *more* without necessarily consuming it *all*. It is moderation and excess simultaneously: a gift in the sense that there is more to an appearance than actuality can process, but not so much that we cannot handle it. In this sense, *ekphanestaton* should not be designated as a clear seeing but as a thick seeing, much more dependent on slowness than on the suddenness of clarity.

At this point, we shouldn't concern ourselves with asking what exactly shines out, what it shines into or how it shines. What matters is primarily the convergence

of the gift and vision: things, as likenesses of the sun, hand over their visibility, and we "like" them in return, in a returning that strives to close the circle. Naturally, seeing the gift cycle completed is essential for the validity of the argument, since we might initially think the equation of visibility and generosity constitutes nothing but metaphor. As stated earlier, the return is not simply a question of the pleasure of Euphrosyne, who embodies the joyous middle stage of the gift cycle, but also of the growth and bloom embodied by Thalia. Even the Epicurean, subdued pleasure that Walter Pater commended as a way of mediating between Platonic stoppage and Heraclitean movement would never be able to guide radiance back to its origin. This form of pleasure tries to find a middle in a purely linear system stretching between objective beauty and subjective pleasure; it does not make the exchange cyclical. Thalia's growth is what links Aglaea's generosity to the generative. A bit further on in the *Phaedrus*, Plato writes:

... as he gazes, he reveres the beautiful one as a god, and if he did not fear to be thought stark mad, he would offer sacrifice to his beloved as to an idol or a god. And as he looks upon him, a reaction from his shuddering comes over him, with sweat and unwonted heat; for as the effluence of beauty enters him through the eyes, he is warmed; the effluence moistens the germ of the feathers, and as he grows warm, the parts from which the feathers grow, which were before hard and choked, and prevented the feathers from sprouting, become soft, and as the nourishment streams upon him, the quills of the feathers swell and begin to grow from the roots over all the form of the soul; for it was once all feathered.³¹

Growth it is. Before understanding the feathers as instruments of flight and movement, we should view them formally at first, as outspread arms and as sets of multi-fingered hands – not unlike the Homeric sunrise. The gift given is returned: seeing radiance makes one radiant. Undoubtedly, the induction of radiance evolved directly from the cyclical reciprocation of *charis*, though Plato never directly discussed the connection, and maybe deliberately suppressed it.³² We should realize, however, that Plato's notion of radiance is preceded by hundreds and hundreds of years of the ancient Greek obsession with shininess, gold and grace, cultivated in the context of *charis*. Radiance as an expansion of gift exchange into beauty and visibility is an old, collective achievement that goes far beyond Plato. As is well known, Plato calls this sprouting of wings love. A word of caution to fellow

Freudians and Darwinians: his feeling of love is completely distinct from pleasure and much closer to fright and anxiety. Love, in Plato's technical terminology, is a station before reproduction and birth, including actual childbirth. Of course, we can only love what is beautiful, but while we love we grow. To simply say love and *charis* are "relational" would fail to acknowledge the productive nature of the generous. Being nourished by the generative makes us generate in turn. The cycle is perpetually powered by increase. Ultimately, this is the meaning of the oft-cited *tokos en kaloi*, the "begetting in beauty,"³³ which Diotima explains to Socrates in the *Symposium*, and which is the same *tokos* that in the *Republic* denotes both offspring and interest. Though he doesn't make use of the notion of *charis*, Plato I upholds a perfectly circular understanding of radiance, one fully embedded in a long Greek tradition, while technically connecting the notion of visibility to that of generosity, and that of generosity to generativity.

In this cyclical concept of radiance, the sun completely coincides with the good, a statement that, as a matter of fact, Plato II would never agree with. He would say the sun is "like" the Good, but not identical with it, thereby separating appearance from reality. Plato II, the philosopher notorious for his hatred of *mimesis* and his mistrust of the arts, makes abundant use of analogies, similes and likenesses, while remaining remarkably untroubled by the contradiction. But what, then, is "likening" exactly? What makes him say the sun is like the good? Does it like the good? Does the good like the sun? In the cyclical concept of radiance, likening is nothing but the maintenance – etymologically, the "holding in hands" – of the cycle. Likeness signifies the receiving, and liking the returning. Along with connecting beauty to love, Plato also links beauty to the intelligible: intelligibility does not stem from the true but from the good. This is an absolutely staggering statement, as any further reflection immediately makes clear, since the true is something we uncover and the good something we receive. The primacy of the good, and of beauty, means consciousness lies with things, with visibilities, and not with us. *Understanding is nothing but things making themselves seen*; that is why we say "I see" when we want to express insight. Understanding is a form of seeing, i.e., of the *standing image*, as is evident from the etymological relationship between *eidos* and *idea*, terms Plato used interchangeably.³⁴ All too often, Plato's analogies are seen as mere pedagogical tools, in which a comparison is made between different sets of relations rather than between actual terms. But, honestly, when in Book VI of the *Republic* the group Sun-Eye-Visibilities is compared to the group Good-Mind-Forms, could that analogy be replaced by any other? Do we really think it is a mere accident of metaphor that Plato chose the sun to ex-

plain the nature of the good? No, of course we don't. The sun *is* good; or perhaps it is better expressed mathematically: the sun=good. The mathematical "is" of likeness equals the ontological "is" of existence. Therefore, when the sun equals the Good, visibility equals the Forms. Visibility has wrongly been allied (by phenomenology) with what *we* see, but it is what offers itself to be seen. Things do not ontologically converge on themselves; they turn toward us. There is no alternative way of explaining generosity if we do not accept its convergence with visibility. The sun gives, and the good is giving. It is the likeness and the liking that make it them ontological.

Let us go back for a moment to the river we discussed at the beginning. (Plato's mind remained occupied with Heraclitus' remarks, as Aristotle reports in the *Metaphysics*, probably because as a young man he started out as a Heraclitean.)³⁵ When we look at the river, what do we see? Perhaps we can now refine our earlier answer, in which we stated that the river stood still: while the water flows past, the river comes toward us. It radiates, certainly – but what does it show? We have already noted that stoppage should be viewed more as a switching of directions, or even of dimensions, than as an actual halting of motion. Stoppage does not entail that we see a river standing still or that we see the Form of riverness suspended amid all the motion of the water, like an x-ray through layers of flesh. It is not *any* river that we see; on the contrary, we see *this* river, and we find it absolutely distinct from every other river. That is why rivers have names, and why there are so many stories about them. Stoppage is not an essence but a narrow passage, or, less paradoxically, a pivot or hinge, in which movement takes place in one direction and stillness in the other, in the manner of an acrobatic flip in which part of the body moves and part stays still.³⁶ If the flowing water did not move via the hinge of *a river*, it would never be able to distinguish itself and become uniquely *this river*; it would just be liquid stuff passing by. As Zarathustra might have said, the river gives itself: the silveriness, the flickering, the noise, the grandeur, the waves, the windings, the fish leaving ripples on the surface, even the boats, swans and swallows – it all comes toward us. It does not pass by. And, like Venus in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, it comes toward us standing. The magic of that emblematic painting consists in her paradoxically standing in *contrapposto* on a shell while moving forward at high speed.³⁷ Beauty radiates; it comes toward us as a standing image – that is, as a visibility, not as a picture, photo or single perspective. Likewise, the river *nears*, and it nears as *this* river. As a thing comes closer, it also comes to a close and takes on its own distinct profile. All that is specific and particular accumulates and adds up. It is made up of images that take on density, that gain weight,

that thicken – that are, in short, real. Instead of seeing radiance as an opening up, as Heidegger would, we should see it more as a coming to a close, the expansion of an opacity that extends far more deeply into the environment than the actual spatial position of the object. Logically, because there is too much to see, we cannot exactly register the extended limit with our eyes; it is not like a second surface, more like the entering of a zone with blurred edges, like a scent or halo: we can only “come to see” it or “realize” it. It is exactly here that we require Plato I’s notion of understanding, not as Plato II’s more-than-seeing but rather as a seeing-of-more.

Understanding is not really insight, then; not the seeing of a still, ghostly object through all the movement and change. The seeing-clearly of *ekphanestaton* is not a transparent seeing-through (of an idea, order or essence) but a seeing-more, a cascade and culmination of seeing, wholly unlike the perception of material opacity. When perceiving, we are not thinning the river out into a generic river but accepting the thickening of this river, moving with it from generic to specific, in a passing on of the original movement of the gift. If things are surrounded by halos or nimbuses, by *vaghezza* or nebulae, seeing itself requires thickening. The *je ne sais quoi* of radiance is far more powerful than any possible form of knowledge. What do you actually know when you know what a river is? Understanding is not retrieving what stands beneath, i.e., its substance; it is the cumulative fulfillment of radiance: it lets the visible itself come to a stop at the point when a thing has completed its course to uniqueness. Though we describe it as a movement, radiance is resolutely atemporal – and the atemporal, by the way, should be clearly distinguished from the eternal. Radiance is extension itself, a movement of space, not in space; it is the creation of an aesthetic zone where things can take place. Things are enveloped in suspense; they are hanging in the air as much as standing on the ground. Space cannot be generalized or neutralized; if it were neutral, nothing would ever happen. All things that occur in the sphere of the river are driven by its specific mood – a mood that can be terrifying, calming, exciting or otherwise, but a mood that is itself not part of the temporal flux. There is something undeniably Platonic about beauty. One would wish every theory of beauty struggled to come as close to being Platonist as its time allowed it to be. Evidently, *ekphanestaton* aligns with the Plato of the first order, because it is far more a matter of us being transparent – in Walter Pater’s word, “diaphanous” – to things than the reverse.³⁸ Things, in a way, see through us. We are but a station via which things return to themselves, mere mirrors in the pervasive vanity of the world: a world of likenesses and likings. We love others who are like us, and we

love those who like us. Plato I fully recognized that this all-out vanity was necessary for the world to function; it is no news Plato II was horrified by it.

Obviously, Plato II would have us believe the mind sees ghostly, invisible things. It is not that this is particularly erroneous or untrue, but it does not necessarily follow from the relationship between stoppage, radiance and intelligence. Indeed, the idea creates more problems than it solves. For instance, to claim that every stoppage is archived for eternity simply makes events impossible, since it avoids addressing the production of visibilities. It denies the generosity of the sun; that is, it literally goes against the direction of gift-giving, which is fundamentally positive, *adding* to the world. When the sun, as Plato I argues, showers the earth with likenesses of itself, who is Plato II to say these likenesses are deficient rip-offs? Why would things happen at all if likeness was a degradation of visibility? No, likeness is what is generated by the sun; it hands over radiant images. Radiance gives and brings; it does not subtract, remove or obscure. In the allegory of the cave, Plato wants to make us believe that the sun, of all things, is the model of invisibility! The reverse is far more convincing: the flat shadows cast against the wall of the cave are nothing but children of the sun. And they are as brilliant as the sun. None other than the Plato who falls in love in *Phaedrus* tells us so: is he himself not in the grip of the boy with the “fiery eyes,” and not of any shadow? Beauty always starts out as a trap: it *captures*. The hands of the gift are those that take hold of us first; this is the reason we call the need to reciprocate an obligation. Plato falls under a spell, exactly as do those taken prisoner in the cave, being chained by the legs and neck – only to immediately start growing wings. He is only initially overpowered by beauty, *then empowered*. This turn is nothing but the final bend in the gift cycle, a re-turn. The good is what empowers, what *does* good. Plato is freed because he has fallen for the boy’s beauty. First he becomes “weak-kneed” (*deilos*) – as the Greeks relished saying – then he stands up again and flies away. From movement to stoppage, and from stoppage to movement.

Plato I viewed the two types of humans described by Plato II (the chained in the cave and the liberated in the sun) as consecutive phases in a continuous cycle of capture and liberation, not stages in a moral climbing contest. Being stopped and being moved belong together as receiving and returning; the cycle turns in jerks and jolts, fits and starts. Plato I is the inventor of this glorious system, expanding *charis* into philosophy while establishing beauty as the primary ontological category; all is assimilated in a fully cyclical systemacy of thought. He is the builder of wheels. Plato II, on the other hand, is the builder of ladders, the philosopher who devised the ladder of love in the *Symposium* and the divided line in the

Republic that places the intelligible *above* the visible, and, in the cave allegory, placed the real world, with its sun, trees and watery reflections, *above* a cave filled with illusions. All Plato's ladders and divided lines replace what he himself called the power of visibility with the authority of the invisible, mainly by extending the arena of presence into that of the beyond (*epekeina*). Plato I is the philosopher of generosity and gifts, Plato II of generality and universals. Plato I is the philosopher of circularity, Plato II of linearity.

lightning and epiphany

In the end, this must be why Plato's texts are populated as much with imagery of beauty as of the sublime, and why they often confuse the circular turns of beauty with the pure verticality of the "high" as we know it from Longinus' treatise on the sublime, *Peri Hypsous*, or "On the High."³⁹ The confusion of beauty and the sublime is not specifically Plato's; this, too, is much older, much more widespread, and part of a long tradition in the iconography of radiance, relating it to the sun on the one hand and to lightning on the other. There is no special reason to identify the sun with its highest position in the sky, fixing it to the blazing light of midday, when in fact it moves along a circular course that changes it to blood-red and even pink. Lightning, however, is consistently white, invariably strikes from above and always breaks through the darkness (even in daytime when storm clouds have gathered), by turning the invisible visible in a flash. Lightning is the icon of the linear model, the sun that of the cyclical model.

To appreciate the distinction more deeply, we should again consult Greek mythology. Zeus strikes with lightning (*keraunos*) and terror, while his son Apollo, radiating sunrays from the spiked crown on his head, shoots arrows. Certainly, they both strike, but one does so with a jagged sword from *above*, the other with a gracious curve from *afar*. These are two radically different models, and we should distinguish carefully between them. The first thing that springs to mind is, of course, that the vertical strike characterizes the angry father and the horizontal shot the son, the negotiator and persuader. (I would not be the first to state that Christianity copied this model from the ancient Greeks. In fact, very early depictions of Jesus show him as beardless as Apollo, and with his head surrounded by the same radiant halo.) The differentiation between the father and son is always of a structural nature. Zeus personifies the purely vertical: pure authority reflected by pure awe, and when we meet him – if that's entirely possible – we can only be

awestruck, overwhelmed and blown away: words that belong fully to the domain of the sublime, not of beauty.

We should note that Apollo does not simply oppose this model by representing the solely horizontal; rather, he embodies both directions. The archaic, long since destroyed colossal statue of Apollo on Delos, his island of birth, carried an enormous bow in its left hand and a full-sized statue of the Three Graces, set on a disk, in its right.⁴⁰ The design was often used to signify Apollo's dual nature, though it is less known because no statues have survived intact, and only a handful of engravings on ancient coins and descriptions in ancient manuscripts are still in existence. In a parallel development, Apollo's more well-known attributes, the bow and the lyre, became as strongly connected as the bow and the Graces. For example, Heraclitus used the bow and the lyre to illustrate his celebrated doctrine on the harmony of opposites,⁴¹ later developed into *concordia discors*, the maxim of the Renaissance. Aside from the formal resemblance between bow and lyre, there is a conceptual one: the bowstring can "sing well and clearly," as Homer wrote,⁴² and the music of the lyre can strike at our hearts with a piercing force. The classical philologist Karl Kerényi describes how "Apollo turns sunlight into music."⁴³ Not only is his music radiant, but the rays of the sun are as sharp and lethal as arrows.⁴⁴ Kerényi also argued that Apollo could not be adequately characterized in terms of the customary lofty transcendence but combined chthonic darkness and ouranian clarity in one divinity.⁴⁵ In a similar vein, the classicist Marcel Detienne speaks of Apollo's "profound ambivalence."⁴⁶ Apollo could "strike from afar" (hence the epithet *hekebolos*) as well as enchant and persuade with his music or his speech. In other words, Apollo's dual nature is not so much a question of choice, of either/or, but of a combination, a doubling of dimensions in which each of his actions takes place. This combining should be viewed more as a crossbreeding resulting in singular offspring than as a merging or welding in which the two originals remain present. Any language-based analysis would at this point be forced to use terms such as "ambiguity" or "paradox" while failing to acknowledge the nature of this singularity. From an ontological viewpoint, a thing is never contradictory and cannot be broken down. The whole argument of radiance and beauty starts here.

The doubling of dimensions, as we encountered it in the case of *mimesis* and *methexis*, is precisely why we have been discussing the notion that things "take a turn"; why the gift cycle returns to its origin; and, even more fundamentally, why circles are round and straight lines are not. Simply put, a straight line does one thing at a time, while a curve does two. A straight line can decrease or increase a value, but only by going in opposite directions on the same line; a curve (in our

specific case of the cycle, a circle) can decrease and increase values simultaneously. When you increase one value while decreasing another, the line bends downwards, and conversely, when you increase both values, it bends upward. And we can repeat the whole operation by decreasing the initial value and again either decreasing or increasing the other, respectively causing a down- or upward curvature. Before this becomes too analytical, let me rephrase it by stating that curves are not antilinear or nonlinear but bilinear (this is why they are quadratic functions.) By bending, they equate the influence of two separate values along two sliding scales, which we call axes. Straightforward linearity is based on ladders that vary between *high and low* only. Circularity, in contrast, combines such a vertical axis with a second axis perpendicular to it, which has values that vary between *close and far*. And though one axis does not exactly follow the behavior of the other, they cannot be fully separated either. While the far-close axis indexes the *reach* of things into the environment, i.e., their connectivity or horizontality, the high-low axis indexes their *aloofness*, their transcendence or verticality. When discussing Apollo's characteristics, the German mythologist Walter Otto called the young god's remoteness the most significant, though we would be mistaken to understand it as a spatial separation exclusively registrable on the axis between close and far.⁴⁷ In fact, Apollo's aloofness helped the deity to thrust his arrows again and again into the bodies of unfortunate mortals. In the realm of the gods, there was no killer more ferocious than Apollo, and killing requires absolute nearness. In other words, Apollo teaches us that we can have enormous reach into the world, but not without making use of depth; however, the more we aim for profundity, the less we will be able to connect. Circularity, then, describes the exact limits of these extremes in a biaxial system linking horizontal outreach to vertical aloofness.⁴⁸

Obviously, the two axes form a cross – specifically, a Greek cross with equal arms, what Heidegger coined a *Geviert* or fourfold, and at first, the structure does seem to divide itself similarly into four distinct quadrants. To merely acknowledge this cruciform structure will not suffice, however; the interdependence of the two axes transforms it into a wheel, which Heidegger himself once called a “round dance” (*Reigen*), in a remark he never expanded on to its full consequence.⁴⁹ The fact is, the German philosopher was rather vague about the workings of the fourfold, and that should not surprise us, because in contrast to the double axis, his isolated quadrants (sky, mortals, gods, and earth) probably hinder operability more than enable it. One simply cannot develop the concept of a circle from four quadrants; only biaxiality can do that. Heidegger never went further than describ-

ing the partitions as mirroring, though this could have helped to identify them as axes and subsequently to develop them conceptually, for example by accepting *mimesis* as part of the systemacy. In the cruciform system, both axes will exert their influence at any position, while with quadrants, three of the four would remain disabled. To be sure, any position will always be covered by one of the quadrants, but that quadrant will not play any active role in its positioning. The cross should not be viewed as a static piece of architecture, like the crossing between nave and transept, but as an ontological machine that at every instantiation solves what we could now call the *Apollonian equation*: to exist, i.e., to be radiant, every single act or object needs to conciliate the two dimensions of reach and aloofness. The cross does not divide up; it turns like a wheel by constantly interrelating the two. The operability of biaxiality therefore carries far more importance than the mere fact that the machine resembles a fourfold when it is turned off. Emphasizing its structure would be like looking at Apollo's bow without shooting it – certainly, the string and arrow are initially perpendicular, but the resultant trajectory is curved. Things combine both horizontality and verticality; along with reach or outreach, they also need intensity or profundity. And the reverse is as true: things cannot retreat into their own depths at the cost of not being present – a conclusion that would surely have been rejected by Heidegger, for whom depth equaled absence, *Abgrund* and withdrawal. Shocking though it may be, the circle as a whole is a continuum, and as such, it relates being fundamentally to presence, which is why I call it an arena of presence.

Our exemplary river, with all its changes over the course of the year, reaches deeply into the environment. The river has such an enormous variety of appearances at its disposal, it would be difficult to name something with more depth. A blooming flower dangling in the wind along the same river does not reach nearly as deep, but this is not because of its smaller size, since its scent can carry further than the apparitions of the river. (A butterfly can smell it from miles away.) No, the flower reaches less deeply because it is less variable and less complex in its approach to whatever might enter its sphere. Next to a large *number*, the river collects a large *range* of responses, while the flower does not, and indeed need not. In general, we consider outreach a strategy lacking in depth, an averaging-out of appearances, similar to, for example, the generic shape of a T-shirt, or the agreeableness of the taste of milk to every baby, or of Coca-Cola to every adolescent. Depth, meanwhile, we usually consider to be a retreat from the public eye, a tendency toward inwardness, or centripetality, as Walter Pater called it,⁵⁰ were it not for the fact that no matter what the river does – dry up, freeze over – *it is always*

visible and public, like all things under the sun. Even in its most minimalist and quietist state of being dried up, the river is centrifugal (or radiant), simply because calling it centripetal (or withdrawn) would constitute an “as-if” statement, not an ontological one. As if the river could hide from us. Or, even more curiously, as if it could hide from itself. Ontologically speaking, all things come toward us, whatever state they are in – that is, all the possible states things can be in are ways of coming toward us. However, this does not mean things are in the process of being received; we should radically distinguish between gift and reception. A gift is outreach, not intake. The given reaches out to relate but is not related just yet.⁵¹ A more radical conflation of the for-itself and the for-others is hardly conceivable, and the depth of radiance is the only concept that allows us to appreciate the existence of things as being neither isolated or related. Every change in the river’s appearance, even those related to drying up, immediately adds to the depth of its mosaic presence, not to its absence.

What we call the river is itself an ontological device that moves from one state to the next over time, each state defined by a specific segment of the aesthetic spectrum. And that spectrum must take a circular form, since the river’s metamorphoses are cyclical: every change is bound to be repeated at some point. Its wondrous state of serenity in the morning; its sublime state of violence after a long period of rain; its common state, with a breeze leaving its imprint on the water; its magnificence when swollen; and its boring, dried-up state in summer – they all accumulate via a system of sharp contrasts and subtle nuances into a mosaic appearance that is itself biaxial. Even a thing in its most sublime or most common state is obliged to call in the help of Apollo to reconcile outreach and depth. The profound or sublime is required to be presentable in order to become part of the gift cycle, and a shallow, common appearance must exceed its material contours or else it cannot act as a gift. Again, the cross limits itself in a wheel. When things have so many ways of combining the vertical and the horizontal – that is, so many modes of radiance, or styles of being, if not proper *fashions of being* – it logically follows that when fitted together they will form a radial, circular object. The question then arises of how much beauty overlaps with those modes that are deemed not-beautiful but sublime, common, boring, magnificent or otherwise, since each of those instances is part of the same biaxial systemacy.⁵²

Beauty is not a simple striving for the deepest (on one axis) or furthest (on the other), nor is it enough to call it a mere linking of the two, since all modes of radiance are equations between the two axes. No, beauty is what Plato famously called *metaxu*: it needs to find the middle between them. Of course, the notion of

equation already inherently contains that of some form of weighing or middling, with each axis setting a limit to what the other can contribute. The equation of the circle, by transforming the two axes into interconnected sliding scales, disables any combination of two maximum or minimum values in one act or object.⁵³ One cannot achieve both the highest and the furthest, or the lowest and the furthest, or the highest and the closest, or the lowest and the closest. The model that would enable these options would be a square, not a circle. But, the circle is not just about limiting the extremes, which it does at its periphery. All these extremes, even when limited, are severely asymmetrical, while beauty somehow finds symmetry between aloofness and outreach. It is the symmetry that occurs when the hands of Apollo, one holding the bow and the other the Graces, are on the same level. Beauty, then, is the middle of all middling – *the hub of the wheel* – which is the most difficult position to occupy in the circular spectrum. It does two things simultaneously, finds an uncharted middle between two sets of variables, to achieve closure while opening, stoppage while moving, and, of course, moderation while exceeding.

Apollo’s paradigm – *mēdèn ágan* (“nothing in excess”) – is anything but a tedious call for moderation; he is calling for moderation *of excess*. And the difficulty lies precisely in the fact that the two are not of the same order: you cannot simply stop halfway to excess. The problem cannot be solved with mere linearity. Considering the question of moderation is equal to asking how things come to a close or how things find their end. Apollo has been wrongfully accused of being the single-minded, proto-Christian anti-Dionysus, a teetotaler god. But he does something far more difficult than abstaining: he drinks and finds a way to stop. The German Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schelling clearly distinguished the “Apollonian inspiration from the merely Dionysian” as being “simultaneously intoxicated and sober.”⁵⁴ Dionysus merely follows monoaxial linearity in his quest for rapture – nothing could be easier. On the other hand, the Apollonian dual state cannot be resolved by dividing oneself in two, into a rational, moderating mind and a body thirsty for excess, since the mind would quickly concede after intoxication. Contradiction and ambiguity never solved anything. No, the two forces need to be mediated: the question can only be solved as one act, that is, as an equation. Here, a single act is not a continuation of doing one thing until the point of exhaustion. A single act relies on a curved trajectory: it starts in one direction and comes to a close in another. Apollo shoots upward while aiming forward. The Apollonian paradigm means that everything, whatever it does, needs to take a turn.

And again, our wanderings have led us back to the principle of radiance modeled on the sun, which combines the verticality of transcendence and the horizontality of connectivity, in a way similar to how both *methexis* and *mimesis* should be understood as operating in Plato's (I) cyclical model, as we concluded earlier. The fact is, the circle of the cycle incorporates the purely vertical ladder of Plato II. Something similar occurs with the notion of insight, which – when considered as a seeing-through – seems to refer to pure verticalism only, to a flash of lightning, while the seeing-more refers to the cyclic nature of the sun. Both forms of insight we should classify as an *epiphany*, a word that is almost the identical twin of *ekphanestaton*. The latter appears only twice in Plato's works and was never absorbed into other languages; it is only thanks to Martin Heidegger, and followers such as Hannah Arendt and Hans-Georg Gadamer who regularly made use of it, that we are aware of its existence. In sharp contrast, the term “epiphany” has an enormously rich and long history that stretches from ancient mystery cults to the Christian liturgy of the Epiphany, and to Wordsworth's “radiant geometry,”⁵⁵ James Joyce's writing technique and Levinas' philosophy of facing the Other – and it offers an equally wide variety of meanings. Originally, epiphanies would appear “either in a dream or in a waking vision”; during special rituals, they took the form of oracles, such as those spoken in the Temple of Apollo in Delphi.⁵⁶ Oracles would be uttered on the seventh of the month by the Pythia, a female priestess who prepared for days on end to enter a trance and make contact with Apollo, who “entered into her and used her vocal organs as if they were his own.”⁵⁷ Again, it is important to stress that Dionysus did not have an exclusive right to rapture, *Rausch* and ecstasy; those were just as much a part of Apollonian epiphanies. To describe the two gods as operating interdependently – if not fraternally⁵⁸ – at Delphi would be more correct than describing them as being in deep opposition, as the young Nietzsche did in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

Though “epiphany,” similarly to *ekphanestaton*, has its etymological roots in the concept of “shining forth,” it adds a different connotation of suddenness and even violence. We are definitely struck during an epiphany; the circumstances under which the god appears are almost always extraordinary, and the apparition shows up either through a painstaking, lengthy ritual or completely unexpectedly. “Epiphany” originally meant a *manifestation* of the divinity, and the word “manifest” literally signifies the act of striking by hand, which, in the context of gift-giving, adds to the concept's importance. Granted, a manifestation is the most extreme form of gift-giving, since it can hit us like a slap in the face, but as a gift it also hands out or hands over and hence essentially shares the same space as us.

Yes, the gods are elusive and remote – and Apollo more than most – but they are not detached. In his *Homeric Gods* of 1929, Walter Otto is adamant about the ancient Greeks sharing a realm of pure presence and outwardness with their gods. The Greeks idolized presence. Certainly, when gods manifest themselves to mortals, they necessarily appear in disguise, but they do so to prevent humans from developing unhealthy inwardness or subjectivity.⁵⁹ In Otto's own words, “the soul only faces outward, as it were, towards the world of forms, not inward, towards an invisible realm accessible only to itself.”⁶⁰ Every time Odysseus is on the brink of taking a decision, he encounters a divinity who inspires or seduces him to take a certain action. In the Homeric world, thoughts and feelings roam outside of us in the form of manifestations. We feel things, yes, but *we do not own our feelings*; they are part of incessant – and public – cycles of exchange. Greek psychology consisted of relationships between visibilities, not between repressed secrets and visible actions, as modern psychology does. The gods of the Greeks spared them an unconscious. However, the manifest cannot be reduced to what we customarily describe as the visible world; it is an infinitely thicker and denser realm – a plenum – of swirling metamorphoses, where models are scaled up and down and likenesses thrown on and off like fashionable cloaks. The abundance of stopping and moving can only exist because thought coincides with seeing, that is, because of epiphanies.

Such is not the case with the slowly acquired alternative meaning of “epiphany,” *revelation*, which likewise comes as a shock but arrives from another world altogether, bursting through the barrier between the invisible and the visible. Manifestation follows the radiant model of the sun, of illumination as a gift, while revelation follows that of lightning, in which all things hidden are suddenly unveiled and uncovered. The difference between manifestation and revelation might seem a subtle one, especially since their connotations have become so intertwined, as, for instance, in the case of the Freudian distinction between the manifest and the latent, which misplaces the manifest in the category of the revealed. Both terms embody the meaning of a manufacture of visibilities, of the sometimes forceful way things make us see. The manifest makes itself visible to us, while the revealed is the invisible becoming visible, that is, something that lies beneath – truth, forces, secrets – rising to the surface. The manifest never emerges from the invisible; it might not be in view, it might be disguised or too much to apprehend at one moment, but it is fundamentally of the order of presence. Manifestation is the moment of shock when all perspectives cumulate into one thick image, as in the moment when the novelist Charles Dickens, sitting in a coffee room in London, suddenly

realized the window, viewed from inside, said MOOR EEEFOC – an epiphany that Chesterton called “the motto of all effective realism,” in which the fantastic merges with fact, and thought with seeing.⁶¹

The revealed, on the other hand, is of a wholly different order, that of the principally invisible – the order of absence, which needs to be distorted and violently forced into the visible if it is to show itself. For example:

Bababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronnontonnerronttuon-
nthunntrovarrhounawnskawntooohooordenenthurnuk!⁶²

This is the first of the ten thunderclaps that structure James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, each indicated by an onomatopoeic, oracular “hundredlettered word.”⁶³ Joyce firmly believed in epiphanies as moments of revelation and as slips of the tongue, even as foul language. Unlike MOOR EEEFOC, his thunderclap is a word that comes from yonder (“thunder, yunder”), the place where no appearances or manifestations are allowed. It is a cry. Manifestation is still part of Plato’s identification of beauty with the good: it may be an extreme gift, coming as a shock, but it is beneficial nonetheless. A revelation, on the other hand, replaces the good with the true, and to do so successfully, it likewise has to replace beauty with the sublime.⁶⁴ Revelation is the bolt of lightning that crackles down the vertical axis without the least inclination of horizontality: it merely clatters down on earth. It is a sound more than an image, indeed a *clap*, a word on which *Finnegans Wake* offers many variations: “acclapadad,” “clapperclaws,” “clipperclappers,” “clapper-coupling,” “claptrap.” For Heraclitus, the “thunderbolt that steers all things”⁶⁵ is the word of *logos*, but since it needs to speak the unspeakable, or “represent the unrepresentable,” it takes on a distorted and violent form.⁶⁶ In wanting to show itself, the sublime needs to accept the conditions of the arena of presence, which it can do only by bursting in, by breaking through from one dimension to the other: the two axes have now become two distinct worlds. The sublime, then, resorts to a pure overpowering without empowering, a pure gift without return, a father without a son, Zeus without Apollo. The sublime and truth seek the un-negotiable, the naked, white and purified, but can only come to us in an impure form, since for them, form is by definition impure. Plato (II) resolutely associates the true with the “colorless (*achromatos*), formless (*aschematistos*), and truly intangible,”⁶⁷ in a statement that will later evolve into Kant’s association of the sublime with formlessness.⁶⁸ The sublime is the realm of forces without form, which

some philosophers, such as Schelling, have located in the deep, and others in the high.

Zeus, according to Walter Burkert, should be considered a god of the sky and the weather more than of the sun.⁶⁹ Weather, in its constant moving toward and away from form, is the specific domain of the dynamical sublime, as we know so well from Turner’s paintings. The sublime inhabits the vertical axis of the high and the elevated, the *Erhabene*, and can appear on earth only as shock and awe, because it necessarily opens up to the formless, or better, to the formlessness of truth. More than a god of the weather and the sky, Zeus should be considered a classic thunder god, i.e., a god of terror – a feeling Kant denoted with the German term *Schreckhaft-Erhabene*, “the terrifying sublime.” Longinus, the first official theoretician of the sublime, makes extensive use in *Peri Hypsous* of the terrifying to describe the epiphanic character of sublimity, which he aligns with the power of lightning striking from above, moving the subject “out of himself” (*ekstasis*) and overpowering him with “irresistible force”⁷⁰ – the irresistible force of the unspeakable word of *logos* appearing as a flash of light and coming down on us like the crack of Zeus’s whip.⁷¹ During Heidegger’s seminar on Heraclitus, the philosopher remembered a moment when he was traveling to the Greek island of Aegina: “Suddenly I saw a single bolt of lightning, after which no more followed. My thought was: Zeus.”⁷²

notes

1. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 42. The notion of “brute fact” comes from A. E. Taylor, whom Whitehead quotes.
2. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 60. In a discussion of Bergson, Deleuze writes: “Things are luminous by themselves, without anything illuminating them.” And, in a comment on Foucault’s discussion of the work of Raymond Roussel: “Visibilities are not forms of objects, nor even forms that would show up under light, but rather forms of luminosity which are created by the light itself and allow a thing or object to exist only as a flash, sparkle or shimmer,” in: *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 52.
3. Gilles Deleuze, “Cours Vincennes,” on April 4, 1978, retrieved from Webdeleuze (<http://www.webdeleuze.com>). See also: Jacques Derrida, *Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John Leavey (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press), 123–4: “anexact ... vague essences ... roundness, under which is constructed the geometric ideality of the ‘circle.’”
4. Similarly to the German word for existence, *Bestehen*, with similar variations, such as *Durchstehen*, *Widerstehen*, *Beistehen*, *Entstehen*, *Verstehen*, etc.
5. Heraclitus, Fragments 12 and 91. “Panta rhei” is not in the *Fragments* but can be found in Simplicius’ *Physics* (1313, 11).

6. Plato, *Cratylus* 402a. Plato uses “*panta chōrei*” (“everything changes”) instead of “*panta rhei*” (“everything flows”).
7. Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism* (London: MacMillan and Co, 1917 [1893]), 12.
8. Walter Pater’s famous remark, made in the conclusion of the first edition of *The Renaissance*, created such a stir in Victorian England that he removed the sentence in the second edition, only to reinsert it with small changes in the third. See: Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. by Donald Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 189. The young Pater here foreshadows something of the older Pater of *Plato and Platonism* in linking the time-consuming flame to a hard, time-resistant gem and paradoxically acknowledges both Platonic stoppage and Heraclitean flux. Since he writes “gem-like flame” and not “flame-like gem,” he is saying the Heraclitean supersedes the Platonic. When he writes “While all melts under our feet ...” a paragraph further on, indicating that nothing is left to us but passing Epicurean sensations, this becomes even clearer.
9. For instance, in: Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1972), 193–4. The notion of a “pure” or “free” gift does not exist in gift exchange, as Mary Douglas makes abundantly clear in her introduction to Mauss’s *The Gift*.
10. In *Symbols of Transformation* (C.W. 5, New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), C. G. Jung refers to the Spitalkirche in Tübingen, which has a relief depicting the sun with hands attached (101). And Georg Blattmann, in *The Sun: Ancient Mysteries and a New Physics* (Ch. 1.8, “Sun Hands”), quotes the singing Akhenaton: “You embrace lovingly with your shining hands” (46). We find similar ideas in Max Müller’s *Lectures on the Science of Language* (Vol. 2, 396): “we see that in the Veda, *Savitar*, one of the names of the sun, is called golden-handed.” And also in Jung’s *Symbols of Transformation*, 95: “‘five-fingered stars,’ similar to the ‘rosy-fingered Dawn.’”
11. *Odyssey*, XXIII.241 and II.1 (*rhododactylos*). Also Hesiod, *Work and Days*, 610.
12. See: Lars Spuybroek, “Charis and Radiance: The Ontological Dimensions of Beauty,” in: *Giving and Taking: Antidotes to a Culture of Greed*, eds. Joke Brouwer et al. (Rotterdam: V2_Publishing, 2014), 128–9.
13. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 74.
14. Cf. Andrew Breeze, “The Blessed Virgin and the Sunbeam Through Glass,” *Celtica* 23 (1999): 19–29.
15. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990), 39–43.
16. Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1903/1991), 438, 444.
17. Max Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1893), 76. In the Veda, the Haritas were originally the brilliant rays of the rising sun.
18. In Old High German, *strala* means “ray” as well as “arrow.” In Old English, the word for “arrow” was *strael* (similar to the Dutch *straal*), which also meant “ray,” “spurt” and “radius.” In *The Childhood of Man* (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), Leo Frobenius has an extensive chapter on how the model of the sun produces “arrow myths” (Ch. XXI, “On the Path of the Sun”).
19. Iris Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).
20. Plato, *Republic* VI, 508b.
21. *Eidē* is the plural of *eidōs* and means “forms,” as in Plato’s Theory of Forms. Concrete, particular forms “imitate” or “participate in” abstract, universal Forms, though the distinction between universal and particular is of another order. “Particular” signifies a similar role to “part,” though “universal” does not signify the same role as “form.” It is not by accident that Plato used *eidōs* as often as *idea*, and although the latter indicates that mental quality he so desired, it missed the mimetic connotation of *eidōs*.
22. Plato, *Republic* VI, 509b.
23. *Republic* VI, 509a. J. W. Goethe: “Wär nicht das Auge sonnenhaft, / Die Sonne könnt es nie erblicken,” from: *Zahme Xenien*, III (1824).
24. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 987b, 10–5: “With regard to the ‘participation,’ it was only the term that he changed; for whereas the Pythagoreans say that things exist by imitation of numbers, Plato

- says that they exist by participation – merely a change of term. As to what this ‘participation’ or ‘imitation’ may be, they left this an open question.”
25. Inalienability is one of the arguments explaining the gift’s bouncing back to its origin; although it is given away, it remains tied to the donor. Cf. Annette Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping While Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
 26. Euripides, *Helen*, II.2: “The gifts of men.” Plato, *Protagoras* 321d–2a: “a gift to men.”
 27. Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Image: Mimesis and Methexis,” in: *Nancy and Visual Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016): “That no *mimesis* occurs without *methexis* (under threat of being nothing but a copy, a reproduction): here is the principle. Reciprocally, no doubt, there is no *methexis* that does not imply *mimesis*, that is, precisely production (not reproduction) in the form of a force communicated in participation.” See also: Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, Ch. 2. Usually, commentators view *methexis* as creative and *mimesis* as imitative; that is, the former as creating the new and the latter simply copying something pre-existent. Things are not so simple, however. For instance, when medical students train to become doctors, they do so partially by imitating actual doctors teaching their students the craft by demonstration. Meanwhile, dramatic actors, so thoroughly loathed by Plato, when playing doctors on stage imitate actual doctors as well, and often by creatively acquiring new mannerisms and inventing new gestures and words that improve characterization. Although both acting to “become doctors” for different reasons, the imitating medical student and the actor playing a role should both be viewed as creative. Admittedly, a member of the audience feeling sick would be ill-advised to climb onto the stage to ask the actor for help; we can concede this to Plato II when he complains about the imitation of doctors’ talk (*Rep.* X, 599c). Then again, the director of a theater company would be just as foolish to hire an actual doctor to play one on stage. Playing a doctor on stage is as real as being a doctor, and both professions rely equally on a combination of creation and imitation, or, in Nancy’s words, of production and reproduction, or, in my own words, of vertical and horizontal likeness.
 28. *Phaedrus*, 250d.
 29. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Vol. I: The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 195–6.
 30. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 310.
 31. *Phaedrus*, 251a–b.
 32. Lisa Atwood Wilkinson, *Socratic Charis: Philosophy Without the Agon* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013), 139.
 33. *Symposium*, 206e.
 34. See: Anthony Preus, *Historical Dictionary of Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 96–7, 145. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Husserl’s Origin of Geometry*, 106–7.
 35. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.987a. And: Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism*, 12.
 36. See my “Charis and Radiance,” where I coin the term “saltational principle” to denote the switch from the gathering of parts into a whole (convergence) to the radiating of parts from that whole (divergence).
 37. Cf. Lars Spuybroek, “The Ages of Beauty: Revisiting Hartshorne’s Diagram of Aesthetic Values,” in: *Vital Beauty: Reclaiming Aesthetics in the Tangle of Technology and Culture*, eds. Joke Brouwer et al. (Rotterdam: V2_Publishing, 2012), 35.
 38. Walter Pater, “Diaphaneitè,” in: *Imaginary Portraits* (New York: Allworth Press, 1997), 205–10.
 39. Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. D. A. Russell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).
 40. Yves Bonnefoy, *Greek and Egyptian Mythologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 137. And: R. Pfeiffer, “The Image of the Delian Apollo and Apolline Ethics,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* Vol. 15, No. 1/2 (1952), 20–32.
 41. Heraclitus, Fragment 51.
 42. *Odyssey*, XXI.411.
 43. Karl Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), 149.
 44. See note 18.
 45. Karl Kerényi, *Apollo: The Wind, the Spirit and the God* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1983), 58.

46. Marcel Detienne and Anne Doueïhi, "Apollo's Slaughterhouse," in: *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer, 1986), 51.
47. Walter F. Otto, *The Homeric Gods*, trans. Moses Hadas (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 79–80.
48. This overlaps considerably with Charles Hartshorne's "Diagram of Aesthetic Values" in *Wisdom as Moderation* (New York: SUNY Press, 1987), 3.
49. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 178. Cf. Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010), ch. 6. Harman describes the quadrants mainly as the poles of two axes. However, axes are *sliding scales*, and there is no sign in Heidegger of any gradual decreasing or increasing influence of the fourfold's members on an object. A sliding scale between absence (concealed: earth, gods) and presence (unconcealed: mortals, sky) would have been inconceivable for Heidegger; they are opposites and not poles of a continuum filled with gradual steps in between. The lines of Heidegger's *Geviert* are not axes in the true sense of the word, but *dividing lines*, maybe at best axes of symmetry or reflection, since Heidegger speaks of "mirror-play." See also: Graham Harman, *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenon to Thing* (Chicago: Open Court, 2007), 131-41; and "Dwelling With the Fourfold," in: *Space and Culture*, vol. 12 no. 3, august 2009, in which he rightly stresses the "lack of dynamism" of Heidegger's fourfold (298). My views on the cruciform wheel are largely based on Hartshorne's "Diagram of Aesthetic Values" (see note 37, 48, 52, and 53) which is (a) devised as a circle with two axes, four poles, and eight categories on the periphery; and (b) constructed from purely positive values of presence varying between a minimum and a maximum, while intersecting at the middle position of beauty.
50. Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism*, 103–4. Also see Harold Bloom's introduction to *Selected Writings of Walter Pater* (New York: Signet Classics, 1974), xxix–xxxi.
51. Lars Spuybroek, "Charis and Radiance," 137.
52. For further discussion, see: Lars Spuybroek, "The Compass of Beauty: A Search for the Middle," in: Voyatzaki, Maria (ed.), *Architectural Materialisms: Nonhuman Creativity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017). In this essay I make some small repairs to Hartshorne's "Diagram of Aesthetic Values" and reconfigure it as a "compass of beauty."
53. Charles Hartshorne, *Wisdom as Moderation*, 1–13. Hartshorne based his diagram mainly on Whitehead's remarks on beauty as existing between, on the one hand, an axis of intensity or profundity (varying from the maximum depth of the sublime to the minimum depth of the pretty or cute), and on the other hand an axis that varies from the maximum unity (what Whitehead called "massivity") of the boring (what Hartshorne called "neat") to its minimum, the plurality of the ugly. For more information, see note 52.
54. F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 24. Lecture: "... in demselben Augenblick zugleich trunken und nüchtern zu seyn ... Dadurch unterscheidet sich die apollinische Begeisterung von der bloss dionysischen."
55. Martin Bidney, *Patterns of Epiphany* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 25–42.
56. Albert Henrichs, "What is a Greek God?" in: *The Gods of Ancient Greece*, ed. Jan Bremmer (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 33. And: H. S. Versnel, "What Did Ancient Man See When He Saw a God? Some Reflections on Greco-Roman Epiphany," in: D. van der Plas, *Effigies Dei: Essays on the History of Religions*. Studies in the History of Religions (Supplements to *Numen* 51) (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 42–55.
57. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 70.
58. T. Dempsey, *The Delphic Oracle* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1918), 33.
59. Walter F. Otto, *The Homeric Gods*, 173–81.
60. *Ibid.*, 177.
61. G. K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), 25.
62. James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 3.15–7.
63. *Ibid.*, 424.23.
64. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe likewise associates the sublime with truth, as is shown in his long Heideggerian essay "Sublime Truth" (*Cultural Critique*, in two parts, I and II: Spring 1991 and

- Winter 1991–92). However, in sharp contrast to our thesis, he views that connection in the context of *ekphanestaton* and Heidegger's notions of *Lichtung*, the Open, and unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*), which Heidegger himself (mistakenly) relates to beauty. Lacoue-Labarthe describes *ekphanestaton* as the "beyond-light" (II, 226) and compares it at several points to lightning and Longinus: "But a sublime thought, if happily timed, illumines an entire subject with the vividness of a lightning-flash" (II, 224). In short, Lacoue-Labarthe had good reasons (too many to discuss here) to replace Heidegger's connection of truth and beauty with one of truth and sublimity, but not to align the two with *ekphanestaton*, which relates beauty to the good. The argument of Lacoue-Labarthe's should be understood in the broader context of the modernist project as a whole, which had violently turned against beauty and was based directly in the *aporia* of the sublime. This sometimes occurred tacitly, such as during the long development of abstract art from Malevich's "Black Square" to minimalism, and sometimes more explicitly, such as in the works and writings of Barnett Newman, who played a central role in Lyotard's appreciation of the sublime in *The Inhuman: Reflections of Time*. The first (and only) figure in French philosophy to turn against the (post-)modernist obsession with the sublime was Jean Baudrillard, both in his critique of media technology as a project of fascination and in his favoring of cyclical exchange over linearity (in: *L'échange symbolique et la mort*) as well as seduction over production (in: *De la séduction*).
65. Heraclitus, Fragment 64.
66. Originally phrased by the German Romantic poet Novalis as the *Darstellung des Undarstellbaren*. The formula influenced Kant in his definition of the sublime, and, later, Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Inhuman*.
67. *Phaedrus* 247c.
68. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §24: "considering the formlessness that may belong to what we call sublime, we begin with that of its quantity, as first moment of the aesthetic judgment on the sublime ..."
69. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 126.
70. Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. D. A. Russell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), I.3–4.
71. Heraclitus, Fragment 11.
72. Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, trans. Charles Seibert (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 5.