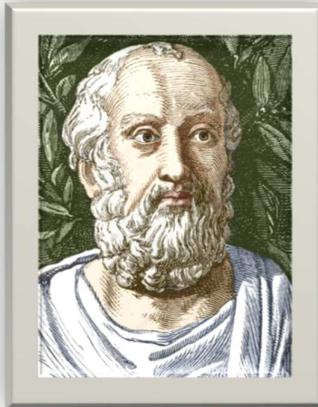


***ABSOLUTE BEING THE DIVINE ACCORDING TO HESIOD
AND PLATO***



Hesiod, detail of a mosaic by Monnus, 3rd century; in the Rhenish State Museum, Trier, Ger.
Courtesy of the Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Trier, Ger.



Plato, Ancient Greek philosopher, Science Photo Library H416/0435, Rights Managed

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A real experience of God would necessarily demand that the being who has that experience – a human being, precisely as far as we can transcendently perspective the whole of human experience – could be able to access God exactly as God, that is, God in all of his infinite reality.

Before saying, and having thus said, that such a demand is impossible to be met, we must say that this same impossibility is, as an experience, transcendental: all our experiences, concrete or possible, suffer from this problem of necessary incompleteness. But for the inner experience where that which we experience or experiment may coincide with the whole that can be experienced, and thus immediately, all other forms of experience deliver us just a part, generally a very small part, of what can be experienced, of what the object under experience or experimentation may yield us. In each considered or considerable abstract instant we can only experience one aspect of that object. No one has a plentiful experience of anything that transcends him or her.

Or God is the ultimate transcendent. Therefore, God is the ultimate out of reach in terms of experience as a whole. So, no one has properly "an experience of God"; the mystics themselves have infinitely minute experiences of God, when compared to the actual infinity of their object.

What we mean is that there is no shame as well as no originality in not having an experience of God as defined previously. Impossibilities imply no shame. As to originality, we can find thousands of original forms not of "experience of God", but of intuitions that point to a necessary absolute ontological principle, truly metaphysical, truly transcendent and transcendental.

Within the traditions, where such intuitions have occurred, and merely as a brief exemplification (one that most pleases us) we choose the mythic intuition of Hesiod and the metaphysical, though mythically approached, of Plato. The total scope of such a research is immense. This text is just a very down-to-earth essay.

The ancient Greeks were horrified at the perspective of nothingness. Their intuition did not deal with the absence of being as a matter for light hearted consideration: what they most feared was the absolute negation of actuality, mainly its impossibility. The immense force revealed by the existence of being, the same being experienced in the absolute act of existing, had to have an explanation residing in something capable of supporting such act. And due to the ontological dynamics and ontological kinetics of the experienced being, such supporting reality must necessarily be something of the dynamic and kinetic type.

In this tradition, there was no "in the beginning", for there was no intuition of an absolute difference between stages of being, just an evolution in that which concerns the multi-stage process of the development of the differences that constitute what became the cosmos, the transcendental world of possible human experience. The most radical form of being, its metaphysical root, escaped both submission to time and to the unthinkable metamorphosis from nothingness to "somethingness", the new born being.

This unborn deepest substratum and foundation for the whole of being is called "Khaos". Chaos is the immense (not to call it infinite, which, in fact it is) metaphysical reservoir of all the possibility of being, though in itself it cannot be called being. All the possibility of ontological differentiation resides within it, but absolutely mixed and confused. From the depth of eternity, all that is possible, eternally, constitutes the core of Chaos. This eternal possibility represents the metaphysical root of all things that can ever be. The coming of these possible things to being is the absolute springing that fascinated ancient Greeks and that received the designation of "nature", that which "phyein", that which is fountained from the depths of the chaotic melting pot to the place of "phainomenon" that is the world where, each morning, the pink fingered Aurora permits the revelation of that absolute impossible within Chaos, the form of evolving beings. This is the world of being as nature.

Although, different, as the inform Chaos and the formal nature, there is no continuity solution between them: the "Hesiodic" myth is quite clear about this. The

sprouts of Chaos, though different from the stem from which they sprout, are made of the same fundamental stuff and carry the absolute mark of their matrix forever.

One of the characteristics of that mark is the necessity of a relentless movement, without which being as nature would fall into nothingness – it is the same intuition that supports the metaphysical thesis of Heraclitus. Chaos is an immense a-formal and disordered never dying movement. This movement left to its absolute simplicity would never produce anything different. Therefore, the myth manifests a necessary first fundamental subtle different movement, the desire to be, called Eros. It is this inner transcendent movement that is the origin of the metamorphic differentiation that will ultimately produce the world. This movement is never explained and its reason is never known. It is an absolute fact.

Firstly, Eros becomes Gaia, Mother Earth, womb and bosom of all forms to come. Earth is not a form among others, not even "the first form". She is that in which the formal possibility of all forms resides. She is the paragon of all possible paragons. More than an absolute limit or boundary between the absolute non-formality of Chaos and the formality of the world, Earth is the crucible for the metamorphosis of the pure dynamic energy that replenishes the act of what otherwise would be the absolute nothingness, which constantly and without any defection becomes the cosmic presence of a transformed energy, of a novel dynamism that is no longer a boiling turmoil, but a dialectic relation between acts that comprehend an endless potentiality for differentiation, and this same potentiality as their ultimate finality, thus imposing the notions of actuality, potentiality and finality as own possibility and general transcendental possibility of all beings considerable.

Mother Earth is all this, meaning that "she" coincides with the absolute formal possibility of all things. Whatever the possibility, its formal ontological roots inhabit Mother Earth as a proper possibility.

Treasuring all the actual "Energeia" that makes all possible, Gaia is the transcendental divine expression of the absolute might that maintains all being separate from the ever pending menace of annihilation.

Bearing in mind such ontological greatness, it would be blasphemy to call her a goddess. Goddesses are comparatively very inferior beings, all rooted in Mother Earth. The maker of the first sickle, the mother and chastiser of the Sky is the evidence of the absolute of power. Power impossible to correctly comprehend, but power perceived as the immediate maintainer of not just cosmic order, but of cosmic "Energeia", cosmic active act.

This fundamental trilogy is the ancient Greek conception of the divine as that which not only represents, but precisely is "the being". Ultimately, when a Greek human individual liturgically worshiped a god, he or she were serving and adoring the divine primary seed present within that god. Thus, not only they liturgically related themselves to the absolute apparent ontological positivity of Mother Earth, but they also, through the immanent relation between Gaia and Chaos, served by Eros, related to the almighty disordered reality of Chaos.

And they knew it.

The writings of Homer, Hesiod and the main tragic poets manifest this evidence and the deep concern associated to it. The omnipresence of the chaotic erotic and its effect, the almost impossible to remedy "hybris", human and divine, in works such as *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Theogony*, *Works and days*, and the theatrical plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, is a proof of the importance the intellectual thought embodied in mythic form attributed to the "alogia" constantly irrupting within that what should be the realm of form, of "logos", sole space, "khora" of the possibility of human existence.

In a very brief length of time, Greek poetic and mythic thought was able to perceive the greatness of the dynamic and kinetic first principle of being, its good and bad qualities, its metamorphosis, ending with the unsurmountable texts of Sophocles, where, through the merit of Oedipus and Antigone, the chaotic infection inserted by Zeus in the cosmos is transcended, though not annulled. The previous transformation of the diamantine Erinnyes from almost blind executioners of cosmic justice to benevolent correctors of that same order, by Aeschylus, the purge of the "hybris" of Zeus and of the successive generations which followed his rape of Europa undergone by Oedipus, his final reception within the Sanctuary of the Guardians of

cosmic order and the sacrifice of Antigone, all converged to a new conception of the divine as an absolute ontological force and might, pregnant both with possible goodness and possible evilness, but where the human being was not determined either way. This had been the philosophical work of Sophocles, given to us under the poetic form of his theatrical myths.

Adding to all this, the censure of Xenophanes to the human projective mania of producing deities from human positive and negative virtues, and the radically different conception of the divine as "spirit", "without any limits and autonomous", brought by Anaxagoras, when the Greek world reaches the era of old Athenian Socrates, mean that a new conception of divinity is on the verge of appearing.

Socrates lived his last years and died defending a cosmos where there was no real place for old deities, but where the understanding of the fundament of all things would have to inherit the tradition we dwelt upon these last pages. Whatever the ultimate reason of all cosmic things is, that must be of a different sort of that of worldly immanence. The divine, whatever it may be in itself, is a transcendent reality, irreducible to all immanence. The unique centre for human concern is no mundane act, no profane place or action, but something absolutely sacred, positively sacred, as the order guarded by the Goddesses of Colonus. That is the only thing worthy dying for, but also the only thing worthy living for. That is philosophy as an act of treading the path from bestial ignorance to celestial wisdom. That is a liturgy that raises the human being from the condition of slavery under a tyranny of heteronomous passivity to the condition of master of oneself, making each human being a free entity, free as Oedipus and Antigone at the end of their lives.

Both of them were philosophers, in a Socratic way, each ending their lives within the framework of the divine level of cosmic rules. They both died within these rules and for these rules. From now on, no human life is worth living unless lived at this level. All the rest is beneath human dignity. Humanity finds itself belonging to the heights of divinity. Human life is an experience of the spirit or is nothing at all. Call it "religion" or not.

Plato had a deep knowledge both of the mythical/poetic and of the previous philosophical traditions that constituted the cultural mainframe of his time. He had seen the consequences of the illogical action, ethical and political, that reached its apex with the destruction of Socrates.

The question of the ontological nature of the cosmic principle was thus paramount since all the rest depended on the reality and quality of that principle.

What is the ultimate matrix of all being, past, present and possible?

As Socrates logically perceived, his condemnation theoretically doomed forever the type of principles that guided the action of those who took part in the tragic issue of his process. Plato's reaction to poetry, rejecting it (though remaining fascinated with great part of it), is quite understandable: not using as principle an indefectible, absolute axis, it is impossible for it to have a path of undeletable goodness.

The steps that constitute this path, steps that no god or any other alien force will stride in the stead of every human being, have no guaranty of treading in a way that produces goodness, that is, ontological positivity.

It is this ontological positivity, absolutely considered, that is the axis of Plato's intuition and philosophical thesis. Either cosmos is innermost informed by a principle of absolute ontological positivity or there can be nothing that deserves the designation of "cosmos". The minor version of this intuition, given to us in the *Timaeus*, shows a workshop version of the relation between the cosmos and its principle. Strangely, it continues the tradition Plato so detested. But the version of this relation presented in three successive great metaphors in *Politeia*, Books VI and VII, manifest, though poetically – but here the initial strangeness belongs just to the exterior form of the essay trying to communicate the insight –, a fundamentally different intuition.

The point of departure is the simple evidence that there is something. This is an absolute. Secondly, that which is not chaotic. Thirdly, the existing order is not perfect. But imperfect order is no chaos. This absolute of the existence of a reality

informed by order logically implies the incompatibility with nothingness and with chaos. Therefore, there necessarily is an absolute kind of reality that transcends all possibility of ontological movement, which innermost reality consists in absolutely being. Its movement would mean the cessation of its being and, thus, the cessation of all being.

This absolute, eternally indefectible ultra-being, the eternal obstacle to nothingness, receives the name of "agathon". It is not another projection of a human characteristic upon an invented entity, thus nourishing old illusions, but the intuition of the necessary ontological counterpart of the existence of anything, however infinitesimal it may be. The smallest of beings need an infinite ontological and eternal presence – metaphysical – to explain not only its existence, but also its mere possibility. The reality of the infinitesimal implies necessarily the reality of the infinite positively understood. This is what is manifested by the grand image of the analogy between the sun and its infinite radiation of light and "Goodness " and its infinite radiation of being. This is Plato's God and the product of his deepest and most precious insight and experience.

This is the philosophical and theological notion of God with which our tradition has been nourished and with which it has to work in order to perceive not only the ontological axis of worldly being but also the metaphysical greatness of Revelation.

BIONOTE

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ABSTRACT

The matrix of all Hellenic culture is the intuition of the absolute difference between the existence of something and its contradiction, for which there are no proper words. Hesiodic myth, as well as the narratives of Homer and the great dramatic authors, portray the first conception of this relation, depicted in many detailed forms. Plato, following Socrates' teachings, proposes Goodness as that absolute difference, as the absolute ontological positivity that produces/creates being.

KEY-WORDS:

Hesiod, Plato, Absolute being, Ontological positivity

