

CHAPTER 1

*Diaphoros*¹

Plato suggests that poetry, at least the art of the rhapsode, is a gift of the gods. “This gift you have of speaking well on Homer is not an art; it is a power divine, impelling you like the power in the stone Euripides called the magnet, which most call ‘stone of Heraclea’ ” (Plato, *Ion*, 533d). Art is divine. Socrates says this directly: why should we not believe him, believe he speaks for Plato and that we should believe it too? Perhaps because we are disturbed, unsettled, by the protean images Socrates calls to our attention:

No, you are just like Proteus; you twist and turn, this way and that, assuming every shape. . . . So if you are an artist [*technikos*], and, as I said just now, if you only promised me a display on Homer in order to deceive me, then you are at fault. But if you are not an artist, if by lot divine you are possessed by Homer, and so, knowing nothing, speak many things and fine, about the poet, just as I said you did, then you do no wrong. Choose, therefore, how you will be called by us, whether we shall take you for a man unjust, or for a man divine. (Plato, *Ion*, 542a)

If these are our choices, to be unjust or divine, let us choose the gods. If we must choose between knowledge and ignorance, reason and madness, which of us would choose the latter? Yet in *Phaedrus* Socrates chooses madness, at least madness given by the gods. Perhaps he does so elsewhere, in *Ion* and *Republic*. Perhaps everywhere.

But must we choose? And can we choose the gods, or do we exceed choice in choosing the divine? Do the gods choose as gods? Socrates asks Ion to choose, and Western philosophers typically read Plato, who shows the madness of choosing between justice and the divine, as making choices, as paying allegiance to the Ideas, and with the Ideas, to rationality, *technē*. We read him as choosing *technē* twice, first insisting on a choice, demanded by *technē* more than by the gods, then choosing *technē*'s rationality over the

gods, over divine, erotic madness. Over *poiēsis*. Yet how can we think that Plato chooses to join the divine and erotic madness of the Ideas with reason's sanity, as if they were alike, or that he chooses one over the other? To the contrary, in *Phaedrus*, *psuchē* travels incessantly between heaven and earth, a protean, "intermediary figure."² Perhaps the gods do not choose, but in their divinity know that what is sacred cannot cut off the good from the bad, that what is sacred is not cut away from the mundane, as if it were profane, but haunts intermediary figures. Eros and angels, sacred intermediary figures, move without choosing between like and unlike, where we mortals find ourselves called upon to choose, as if we knew better than the gods. Intermediary figures, Eros, divine madness, all speak of a good that does not cut, that includes, in whose memory we are called upon to choose, to cut, to exclude.

But this choosing, this cutting off and excluding the one from the other, the bad from the good, the sacred from the mortal, madness from rationality, all this belongs to what descends from the good, where the good in its glory resists every choice, resists the exclusions of work. We cannot choose the good that includes over goods that exclude, cannot choose the sacred over the mundane. The good, the gods, the sacred are not beings, things, to choose, but intermediary figures disturbing the hold of judgments, choices, exclusions, retaining a sense of strangeness in the other. I speak of the good as resistance to, interrupting authority, including divine authority. All this is expressed in the idea of intermediary figures, where the good is the circulation of intermediary figures, where intermediaries do not go to stay in one place or another, heaven and earth, as if these were different places, but circulate excessively, disturbing every place, foreign in every state. But I choose to defer this resistance to choosing for the moment, as if we might insist that Plato choose. I will recall the injustice and impossibility of such choices later.

So for the moment, let us accept Socrates' demand that Ion, that we, choose between injustice and the divine. I do not think injustice and divinity are our only choices, though in this context that truth is immaterial. I find it more important that where we Westerners, we philosophical readers of Plato, think that we must choose reason and truth over irrationality and falsity, thinking that we thereby choose good over evil, Socrates understands the choice in reverse, if we demand a choice. Ion must choose between injustice or divine madness; and of course, he cannot, must not, choose injustice; and besides, "it is far lovelier to be deemed divine" (Plato, *Ion*, 542b). And just.

For the gift of the gods is both lovely and just, beautiful and good. Socrates says this explicitly here, and says it elsewhere, in every dialogue that takes up the gift of beauty, contrasting art as *technē*, frequently called knowledge, *epistēmē* or *sophia*, with something divine, something mad. Repeatedly, madness is a gift from the gods, a certain kind of madness, linked with

erōs and *poiēsis*, always more divine than “mere” knowledge, “mere” *technē*, where this *technē*, this kind of art, bears nothing of a gift from the gods.

Another example, a brief interruption, before returning to *Ion*. In *Phaedrus*, near the beginning, Phaedrus asks whether he and Socrates are close to where Boreas seized Orithyia from the river Ilissus, and whether Socrates believes the story. Socrates replies:

I might proceed to give a scientific account of how the maiden, while at play with Pharmacia [*Pharmakeia*], was blown by a gust of Boreas down from the rocks hard by, and having thus met her death was said to have been seized by Boreas, though it may have happened on the Areopagus, according to another version of the occurrence. For my part, Phaedrus, I regard such theories as no doubt attractive, but as the invention of clever, industrious people who are not exactly to be envied. . . . If our skeptic, with his somewhat crude science [*sophia*], means to reduce every one of them to the standard of probability, he'll need a deal of time for it. I myself have certainly no time for the business. (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 229de)

Socrates associates *sophia* (frequently translated as *wisdom*) here with cleverness and industry, measure and probability, with *technē*. He has no time for the business: “and I'll tell you why, my friend. I can't as yet 'know myself'; as the inscription at Delphi enjoins, and so long as that ignorance remains it seems to me ridiculous to inquire into extraneous matters” (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 230). This represents a famous Socratic rule, that one's first business is to know oneself (*gnōnai hēmautōn*). But to know oneself is an endless pursuit, more like madness than *epistēmē*, more prophetic, divine:

in reality, the greatest blessings come by way of madness [*manian*] indeed of madness that is heaven sent. . . . No, it was because they held madness [*manias*] to be a valuable gift, when due to divine dispensation, that they named that art as they did, though the men of today, having no sense of values, have put in an extra letter, making it not *manic* but *mantic* [*mantikēn*]. (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244ac)³

More sacred than mundane.

Pharmakeia appears in *Phaedrus* to warn us that we must be suspicious of a *sophia* and an *epistēmē* that lack gifts of love and madness, gifts called by many different names, but in *Phaedrus* represented by *pharmakeia* as medicine, drug, madness, remedy, poison, potion, agent, dye, pigment, color; *pharmakos* as sacrifice, scapegoat; *pharmakeus* as wizard. These gifts, in their madness, bring confusion as well as passion, bring a knowledge that never solidifies into security, never brings us to safety, that recalls the injustices of choice. For in *Phaedrus*, the knowledge that calls us, bearing relation

to the good, remains forever contested. “But what about the words ‘just’ and ‘good’? Don’t we diverge, and dispute not only with one another but with our own selves?” (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 263). Love, justice, goodness—*erōs*, *dikē*, *agathon*—all appear as terms that we dispute about not only with one another but endlessly within ourselves.

Ion speaks of these concerns in a different way. For Socrates asks Ion if he *knows* of what he speaks when he interprets, when he performs, scenes from Homer. Does he know the art of war when he proclaims Homer’s words on war? This art, this knowledge, is *technē*, where *epistēmē* and *sophia* are *technēs*. Does the rhapsodist, does the artist, possess *technē* or something else, some other gift, closer to divine madness? The answer approaches the gift of art. Or rather, the question of art approaches the gift of the good. The choice demanded of us is between *technē* and *poiēsis*, between art and divine madness. “[I]t is plain to everyone that not from art and knowledge comes your power to speak concerning Homer. If it were art [*technē*] that gave you power, then you could speak about all the other poets as well” (Plato, *Ion*, 532c). Ion agrees, and describes Socrates as a wise man (*sophōn*). The Ion who cannot choose by rule is prepared to choose by rule, desiring the art of rule. Yet Socrates responds to being called “wise” by saying: “I only wish you were right in saying that, Ion. But ‘wise men’! That means you, the rhapsodists and actors, and the men whose poems you chant, while I have nothing else to tell besides the truth, after the fashion of the ordinary man” (Plato, *Ion*, 532d). Rhapsodes and poets are wise without *technē*.

Socrates plainly says that he is not wise, that others like Ion are wise lacking *technē*, suggests that perhaps wisdom and self-knowledge are not *technēs*, arts by rule, but divine and poetic madneses, filled with disputed terms like justice, beauty, and the good. The divine and sacred, perhaps, remain disputed, without rules for exclusion. Art remains sacred and divine:

this gift you have of speaking well on Homer is not an art; it is a power divine, impelling you like the power in the stone Euripides called the magnet, which most call “stone of Heraclea.” This stone does not simply attract the iron rings, just by themselves; it also imparts to the rings a force enabling them to do the same thing as the stone itself, that is, to attract another ring, so that sometimes a chain is formed, quite a long one, of iron rings, suspended from one another. For all of them, however, their power depends upon that loadstone. Just so the Muse. She first makes men inspired, and then through these inspired ones others share in the enthusiasm, and a chain is formed, for the epic poets, all the good ones, have their excellence, not from art, but are inspired, possessed, and thus they utter all these admirable poems. So is it also with the good lyric poets. (Plato, *Ion*, 533d–534)

The Muses retain their divinity, their divine and sacred fount of inspiration, and by an infinite and indeterminate movement, the poets are possessed by divine madness, by a gift from the gods, as Muses. Or perhaps as Hercules, facing endless trials.

Or perhaps as cicadas, or bees, throughout nature:

The story is that once upon a time these creatures were men—men of an age before there were any Muses—and that when the latter came into the world, and music made its appearance, some of the people of those days were so thrilled with pleasure that they went on singing, and quite forgot to eat and drink until they actually died without noticing. From them in due course sprang the race of cicadas, to which the Muses have granted the boon of needing no sustenance right from their birth, but of singing from the very first, without food or drink, until the day of their death, after which they go and report to the Muses how they severally are paid honor among mankind, and by whom. (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 259c)

For the poets tell us, don't they, that the melodies they bring us are gathered from rills that run with honey, out of glens and gardens of the Muses, and they bring them as the bees do honey, flying like the bees? And what they say is true, for a poet is a light and winged thing, and holy, and never able to compose until he has become inspired, and is beside himself, and reason (*nous*) is no longer in him. So long as he has this in his possession, no man is able to make poetry or to chant in prophecy. (Plato, *Ion*, 534b)

Where Heidegger takes the gift of language to exclude mammals and birds, everything inhuman, Plato includes cicadas and bees in the sacred gift of art, includes all inanimate things under *psuchē's* care,⁴ gifts from the Muses. Where the gift of *nous*, including the art of reason, excludes, divides, and cuts, demanding that we choose, the gift of *poiēsis*, in its madness, knows nothing of exclusion, cuts nothing off from the gift of the good. Yet even so, rhapsodes and poets "speak many things and fine," participate in the good.

Certainly we wish to escape injustice, to avoid evil, to tell good from bad, to choose beauty rather than ugliness. Yet in art's *poiēsis*, beauty resists exclusion, resists being cut off from ugliness, evil, repulsiveness, or what disgusts us. Aristotle's famous words on how repulsiveness becomes transformed by art into beauty remain a challenge to our acceptance of the gift of art: "though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art, the forms for example of the lowest animals and of dead bodies" (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b). Freud and Nietzsche understand this delight as a dark truth about dark experience: we take joy in pain and suffering. And that may be. I would add that Aristotle's insight goes deeper, that art does not exclude the ugly, painful, or bad. Art

includes everything in nature, under the good. In art we take joy in everything around us, given as the gift of beauty from the good, in art.

Yet if we hope to escape from evil, and art will not help us do so, then we may conclude that art is either evil or without ethical value. We reinstate the quarrel between philosophy and poetry, ethics and art: art will not choose the good over the bad even where ethics demands it. Yet we have neglected another possibility, that the quarrel is not between poetry and philosophy, art and ethics, as if we must choose the one over the other, or in refusing the choice, refuse the good. The alternative is that the choice belongs to ethics and to philosophy, to arts under *technē*, but that in order for us to make such a choice, we must be in touch with something divine, something mad, something beyond all choice, all exclusion, something that retains, includes, all parties in its care, animate and inanimate, good and bad, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly. Here the gift of art refuses choice, not against ethics but in the name of the good. Repeatedly, we find ourselves understanding the quarrel as given by a demand to choose where we cannot, must not, choose, even where we cannot avoid choice. A refusal we find in art, under *poiēsis*.

Even here, Plato's account of the choice is expressed in enigmatic form. For he speaks of the quarrel between poets and philosophers in an extraordinary setting and in extraordinary words. First, this quarrel arises under reason's constraints:

Let us, then, conclude our return to the topic of poetry and our apology, and affirm that we really had good grounds then for dismissing her from our city, since such was her character. For reason [*logos*] constrained us. And let us further say to her, lest she condemn us for harshness and rusticity, that there is from old a quarrel [*diaphora*] between philosophy and poetry. (Plato, *Republic*, 607b).

We may ask, is this *diaphora* a war, a strife, or something else, something stranger? For although Socrates speaks of *henantiōseōs* a few lines later, and *henantios* is opposition, conflict, *diaphora* is unlikeness, difference, closer to heterogeneity than to *polemos*. Poetry and philosophy are unlike, but do they quarrel, and must we choose between them? Moreover, if and when we choose, our choice may not be between them, as if they existed independent of our choice, but our choosing may define each. If so, then in the *diaphora* of which Socrates speaks, art and philosophy are born together as separate disciplines in a *polemos* emerging from something that is not either of them, from which we may derive their difference.

We may also ask, who engages in this war, the philosopher or the poet? Who imposes its authority? One answer is, Socrates himself, from the begin-

ning, in Book II of *Republic*. Poetry knows nothing of this *diaphora*, knows nothing of quarrels with philosophy, does not bother with such distinctions. The quarrel between philosophy and poetry does not belong to each, though it may define them, but belongs to one, to philosophy's reason. Why should the poet accept the quarrel? And what may philosophy learn from poetry?

Socrates speaks of this quarrel as from old, *palaia*; and we may recall that what comes from old, ancient wisdoms in Plato recalled by Socrates is always strange, touched by the gods. In *Philebus* he speaks of another tale of "men of old," "a gift of the gods," that "[a]ll things, so it ran, that are ever said to be consist of a one and a many, and have in their nature a conjunction of limit and unlimitedness" (Plato, *Philebus*, 16d). We are to discern the number of forms intermediate between the one and unlimited many. "It is only then, when we have done that, that we may let each one of all these intermediate forms pass away into the unlimited and cease bothering about them" (Plato, *Philebus*, 16e). We must know the intermediate numbers and must then let them pass away to unlimit without bothering about them. How, in any sense of *logos* and *epistēmē*, are we to let our knowledge pass away unless it responds to another call? How let anything pass away to unlimit? All said of old to be given from the gods.

Socrates suggests that poetry may return from reason's exile on its own terms, yet still under the rule of reason, within an acknowledgment of poetic madness (Plato, *Republic*, 607d). The quarrel is repeatedly carried out on reason's terms, demanding that poetry demonstrate her benefit to human beings, her goodness over her evil. And repeatedly, the quarrel is undermined by poetry's gifts, for it is not poetry's responsibility or its gift to defend the good over the bad, but to portray the magical touch of the good against exclusion.

This magical force of *poiēsis* falls between two famous moments in Book X, one the contamination of work, falling away from the Idea, especially in painting, the other the myth of Er. Leaving aside the considerable distance between painting and poetry expressed by Plato and many others, which may bear upon the quarrel, we may read Socrates' argument opening Book X as an event in that quarrel, as we may read the entire *Republic* as framed by that quarrel as well as the quarrel over which is more profitable, justice or injustice.⁵ What does painting profit us if we seek useful things? If we think of painting as a craft, if we think of producing by craft, by *technē*, according to an Idea, then the painted bed, produced by the painter, is twice removed from that Idea, and useless, where the artisan, who builds a bed, and builds according to the Idea, makes something useful. Painting is likened to a mirror, which can easily produce and imitate all things, with no knowledge whatever of their truth and of no use whatever to our possession of objects. "You could do it most quickly if you should choose to take a mirror and carry

it about everywhere. You will speedily produce the sun and all the things in the sky, and speedily the earth and yourself and the other animals and implements and plants and all the objects of which we just now spoke" (Plato, *Republic*, 596e).

Socrates does not hesitate to extend this critique to poetry, including tragedy, among the least plausible examples of productive imitation according to *technē*, exceeded, perhaps, only by music:

The producer of the product three removes from nature you call the imitator?

By all means, he said.

This, then, will apply to the maker of tragedies also, if he is an imitator and is in his nature three removes from the king and the truth, as are all other imitators. (Plato, *Republic*, 597e)

Countless commentators have acknowledged that where the representational painter represents a bed, a couch, an object that otherwise would be presented by craft, the poet does not do so, because no object in a text is present to hand. The poet does not make a bed, does not make an object; the poem, a work, is not an object, not a material thing. Here the difference between plastic and literary art is one of sensibility, and we might refuse to take sides with poetry over plastic art in virtue of its immateriality. To the contrary.

Countless other commentators have also acknowledged that Socrates sets aside with the briefest comment another possibility attractive to the Romantics. Art does not remove us further from the Idea, but brings us closer, works in proximity to the Idea, and can do so in virtue of their shared spirituality. Socrates' dismissal of this possibility is brief: "For surely no craftsman makes the idea itself. How could he?" (Plato, *Republic*, 596c). No craftsman indeed, for *technē* presupposes the Idea, and perhaps not even the gods can make Ideas. But if art cannot make Ideas, perhaps art by *technē* is subservient to the Idea, according to its use—that is what Socrates says—while art by *poiēsis* brings nonbeing into being touching the Idea in its glory. We remember the sun, which gives no light directly to any of the shadows on the wall of the cave, but in some inexplicable way gives light itself, disrupting the fetters upon the bodies and souls of those in the cave. The good charges all things with responsibility for their being.

As his account accelerates, Socrates says that "It quite necessarily follows, then, that the user of anything is the one who knows most of it by experience, and that he reports to the maker of the good or bad effects in use of the thing he uses" (Plato, *Republic*, 601de). Everything in the argument, the quarrel, depends on this premise, that the user, the *technēn*, of the bed, the implement, knows its good and bad. And perhaps that may be true of beds,

but it seems untrue about goodness, beauty, and truth, all disputed terms. What remains at stake repeatedly is the subservience of the craft to the Idea, as if the Ideas exist to distinguish the good from the bad, right from wrong, to set the norm, to normalize the craft, though repeatedly as well, we are told that no one, including Socrates, possesses that knowledge.

Famously, Socrates' argument is read as a denigration of the art of painting. Yet it pertains much less to any art of painting than to an analogous craft of mechanical drawing, picturing objects for use. And indeed, drawing and words, if not the arts of painting and tragedy, are used (the repeated word becomes essential) as aids to use, aids to practice (but perhaps not *praxis*, neither ethics nor politics). Some say a picture is worth a thousand words. Perhaps Socrates disagrees. But I am not speaking of the painting we call art. I am speaking of what Collingwood calls craft (Collingwood, *PA*, chap. 2; Ross, *AIS*, 191–201), of what in a more extended sense I have called *technē*, the production of objects and works to an end, under an idea, shaping materials to a goal, however laudatory.

In this light, the art of painting is not useful, does not give us objects for or in use, but—especially in modernism and postmodernism—displays objects away from their use, distorted, twisted, so that their usefulness is either held in abeyance or displayed as usefulness, which is quite different from objects in use.

Socrates speaks of those who “tell us that these poets know all the arts and all things human pertaining to virtue and vice, and all things divine” (Plato, *Republic*, 598e). He suggests at times that others than the poets know these things, though virtue and vice and all things divine are very different from couches and beds. And he suggests at other times that no one can know these things, including the poets, so that the crucial movement of critique must be to show how things divine may be known through *technē*, *sophia*, or *epistēmē*.

And here we find another role for art, closely related to the Greeks. For they repeatedly deny that virtue and vice and things divine are known by human beings, by mortals, or by anyone, including the gods. Our lives are buffeted by the winds of a fate, a divine, beyond understanding. Greek tragedy touches the limits of our world, natural and otherwise, in their vulnerability and fragility, in their horror, and makes us aware of our own vulnerability and the terrible side of the gods' demands upon us from beyond *technē*.

If we take art as *technē*, then we may expect that knowledge of good and bad, right and wrong, virtue and vice, and of the gods, all given by poetry, music, painting, and dance, will make them ready to hand, objects like good hammers and plump sheep. I must say immediately, against such a technical idea of use, that hammers and sheep are no more ready to hand than virtue and vice. That is because all things are touched by *psuchē*, by things erotic

and divine, interrupted in their usefulness, even as we must use them and must order them according to our uses, with memories of familiar things become unfamiliar, of the sacred and the good, given to us deeply and profoundly in art.

The Romantics, who read and deeply cared for Plato, took music and poetry to touch the divine. Plato grants that possibility. But within the *diaphora* between philosophy and poetry, between reason and madness, poetry and art fail to give us reason, *technē's* reason. Perhaps. But then reason does not give us *technē's* reason either, but must, as in *Phaedrus* and *Philebus*, grant the impossibility of reaching the divine, of bringing it ready to hand, of cutting it down to size. Rather, reason and divine madness exist in a quarrel that belongs entirely to reason, where we live in their juncture, surrounded by intermediary figures constantly moving between heaven and earth, between *poiēsis* and *technē*, without strife. The quarrel represents the demand, within *technē*, that we choose one over the other—for it is not supported by *poiēsis* that we must choose between them, nor by the gods. The divinity of the Idea, the madness of the gods, interrupts every choice. Art seems to give us this choice, but it all the more tells us—as Socrates says repeatedly about himself—that we do not know the good as if it were an object ready to hand, but know it as the divine madness that displaces every object, every thing, that we may hope to make ready to hand under *technē*.

Socrates names the quarrel of old, between *poiēsis* and *technē*, after he has chosen sides, after he has defended *technē's* relation to the Ideas, to the divine, at a point at which, on my reading, he reinstates lyric poetry, the most useless form of *poiēsis*, to give a defense in its own terms. Yet also, on my reading, the entire account of the quarrel, of defense and attack, of choosing at all, of choosing between *poiēsis* and *technē*, belongs to *technē*, not *poiēsis*. And more extremely, the entire *Republic* is framed within a view of justice that belongs to *technē*, not *poiēsis*. *Poiēsis* does not defend, does not argue, does not distinguish, does not quarrel, does not choose, does not exclude, but includes too much. How are we to think of this excessive inclusion? If we think of it as *technē*, it is useless and dangerous. Inclusion is dangerous in two different ways: it fails to cut off evil; it passes itself off as judgmental, as the result of choice.

We may describe the quarrel in a different way. Let us suppose that *poiēsis* and *technē* represent two modes of judgment. One contains at its heart a sense that the divine includes all things, a sense of cherishment, identified with the good, the sacred, and the gods, where *psuchē* stands on the back of the world and cares for everything, in beauty. The other, *technē*, judges the good from the bad, passes judgment dividing the world on the right and left. On the Day of Judgment God will judge everything, divide the world of human beings, and more, on right and left; but God is undivided. I

am naming the Manichean offense; these matters are not new. To divide God into good and bad is to deny divinity; to divide God among the good and bad, as if divine goodness were matched by Satanic evil, as if God belonged to the world, is to deny divinity. The sacredness of God is before, alongside, away from, interrupts the domination of identities and the hierarchy of judgments. If there be God. This is what Nietzsche in part asks us to recognize in the relation between Apollo and Dionysus: Apollo orders the world from high to low, but does not belong to that hierarchy; rather, he coexists with Dionysus as his twin, not his opposite. No quarrel is possible between Apollo and Dionysus, but neither are they One.

Socrates describes the quarrel of old between *poiēsis* and *technē* at a point at which he begins to pass from *technē*'s view of this quarrel, on my reading a quarrel that belongs exclusively to *technē*, never to *poiēsis*, begins to pass from *technē* to the divine, or if we resist the divine, to heterogeneity, passing through *poiēsis*. So we may read Book X as presenting *technē*'s view of painting and tragedy, where it is mistaken to think of them as *technēs*—that is, providing useful knowledge of the essences and identities of things—and also mistaken to think of them as opposing useful knowledge of essences and identities. Painting and tragedy, as *poiēsis*, are *otherwise* to the domain of use. Imitation, as Socrates describes it at the beginning of Book X, belongs to the sphere of use, either as a repetition or an opposition, by contradiction. But *poiēsis* neither belongs to use nor opposes it; nor does it bear no relation to it. This enigmatic relation is the thought of the good. It is a thought Plato repeatedly traverses whenever he deeply and profoundly seeks the thought of Ideas, which are neither the essences of things, as if given over to technical use, nor entirely Other, oppositional. On my reading here, only for *technē* does the Idea define the norm. Only under *technē* are there norms. Ideas as such are not norms, though under *technē* they are useful as norms. But the Plato of the allegories of the sun and cave, for whom the good is cause of and care for the authority of knowledge and truth, for whom all soul has care of all inanimate things, this Plato cannot understand the Idea of the Good as a norm, a model, a rule. Instead, the idea of the good charges norms, models, and rules with their authority.

In this light, we may consider two famous passages in *Philebus*, more than any other dialogue, perhaps, on the rule of the good. One passage I have already touched on briefly presents a different tale of “men of old,” “a gift of the gods,” who “passed on this gift in the form of a saying,” “through Prometheus, or one like him”:

All things, so it ran, that are ever said to be consist of a one and a many, and have in their nature a conjunction of limit and unlimitedness. This then being the ordering of things we ought, they said, whatever it be that we are

dealing with, to assume a single form and search for it, for we shall find it there contained; then, if we have laid hold of that, we must go on from one form to look for two, if the case admits of there being two, otherwise for three or some other number of forms. And we must do the same again with each of the "ones" thus reached, until we come to see not merely that the one that we started with is a one and an unlimited many, but also just how many it is. But we are not to apply the character of unlimitedness to our plurality until we have discerned the total number of forms the thing in question has intermediate between its one and its unlimited number. It is only then, when we have done that, that we may let each one of all these intermediate forms pass away into the unlimited and cease bothering about them. (Plato, *Philebus*, 16de)

This account, up to a certain point, belongs to *technē*, with two extraordinary qualifications. One is that the tale, a gift of the gods, is brought to us by Prometheus, who brought the gift of fire, where Prometheus, and fire, and perhaps this gift as well, all circulate as intermediary figures—that is, figures of divine unrest interrupting mundane things. Prometheus is so explicit an intermediary figure, preserving divinity in human terms, that I would add only that he is forced to remember his act through unending torment. And so, perhaps, the divine endlessly and painfully disturbs the flow of human life and practice by endless disasters. Or perhaps the intermediation of the strange and other is met in life by the coercive powers of the State. The other qualification is that the intermediate numbers, representing *technē*, pass away to unlimit, opening themselves from fixed and normative intermediate limits to intermediary figures of the divine.

The most striking feature of this enigmatic passage, alluding to the indefinite dyad, is that we are not to remain in the intermediate numbers, are not to remain content with knowing the total number of intermediate forms, but when we know that are to let all of these intermediates *pass away into the unlimited and cease bothering about them*. But we are not to let these intermediates pass away to unlimit too quickly, but must pass through and attend to the intermediates before we cease bothering about them. In other words, to limit and unlimit Plato adds intermediate numbers, but these do not replace or exclude unlimit, nor does unlimit exclude definite numbers. Both belong in a relation that belongs neither to the one or the other, neither to limit or to unlimit or to number, but . . . I would say, to the good.

Socrates gives several examples. One is language, letters and sounds. Alluding to Theuth as he does in *Phaedrus*, Socrates suggests that Theuth (or someone else) put order into language by combining many different vowels and intermediate sounds into letters, where each letter represents a kind of bond among disparate sounds. This is an immensely contemporary view of linguistics, but it leads Philebus to remark that "I still feel the same dissatis-

faction about what has been said as I did a while ago" (Plato, *Philebus*, 18d). And indeed, the bond of unity established among disparate sounds, essential on Saussure's view for *langue*, is an untamed intermediary figure in which identity and difference continue to divide each other endlessly.

Socrates repeats that our responsibility—some would say, in the name of truth, I say in the name of the good: "is just this, to show how each of them is both one and many, and how—mind you, we are not to take the unlimited variety straightaway—each possesses a certain number before the unlimited variety is reached" (Plato, *Philebus*, 18e). Mind you, we are to take the unlimited number, if not straightaway. The unlimited nature of language, thought, and truth calls to us in our examination of the elements of language. If we do not listen to the unlimit, we will turn language and thought into mechanical, technical instruments. If we ignore the elements, we wallow in the miasma of meaningless thought.

Another example, following shortly, is hot and cold, the example read by many commentators as alluding explicitly to the indefinite dyad. "Take 'hotter' and 'colder' to begin with, and ask yourself whether you can ever observe any sort of limit attaching to them, or whether these kinds of thing have 'more' and 'less' actually resident in them, so that for the period of that residence there can be no question of suffering any bounds to be set" (Plato, *Philebus*, 24b). This example suggests that *unlimit* means *more or less*. "When we find things becoming 'more' or 'less' so-and-so, or admitting of terms like 'strongly,' 'slightly,' 'very,' and so forth, we ought to reckon them all as belonging to a single kind, namely that of the unlimited" (Plato, *Philebus*, 25). I consider the possibility that the One and the unlimited are not kinds, that to think of them as kinds is to think of them as belonging to *technē*, that we must distinguish hot and cold from good and bad, beauty and truth, where the latter are disputed terms, intermediary figures.

For Socrates alludes to a third example repeatedly, that of music, which on the one hand possesses intermediate numbers, intervals between high and low pitch, but is also filled with more and less, this *technical* unlimited kind (Plato, *Philebus*, 17d). We must grasp the intervals, the scales, systems of notes, and so on. And even within these intervals, notes, and scales are unlimits and infinites. But we may also ask our technician, our musical gymnast, do you know music when you know the intervals, notes, and scales? And do you know music when you don't? By analogy, do we know language without knowing letters and rules of grammar? And do we know language when we do know letters and rules of grammar? Contemporary linguistics, especially transformational generative grammar, struggles with this *diaphora*, that those who speak may not know the parts and rules of language, while those who do know, may not speak and write well or truthfully or beautifully. When Socrates returns to music, it is to contrast its imprecision with the building

of ships and houses (Plato, *Philebus*, 56a). Whatever the good of music may be, it does not reside in measures and instruments (Plato, *Philebus*, 56bc). The unlimit of more and less pertains to such measure and instruments, to carpentry and woodworking. Music touches another unlimit. Music dwells in beauty (Plato, *Republic*, 402).

This is our quarrel repeated, if it is a quarrel. About it Socrates says two things in *Philebus*, one that he wanted to discover “not which art or which form of knowledge is superior to all others in respect of being the greatest or the best or the most serviceable, but which devotes its attention to precision, exactness, and the fullest truth, though it may be small and of small profit” (Plato, *Philebus*, 58b). The good, the greatest, is not the most precise or exact, possibly not even the fullest truth. Socrates is exploring the precise or exact, the technical: carpentry and woodworking; grammar; what we call musical theory. Philosophy, music, poetry, art are something else, even something incomparable with this exact precision, which in its realm includes the comparable, but not separable from it.

The other thing Socrates says, shortly afterward, the second passage I alluded to some time ago, arises in speaking of justice, divine and human. “Will such a man be adequately possessed of knowledge, if he can give his account of the divine circle and the divine sphere themselves, but knows nothing of these human spheres and circles of ours, so that, when he is building a house, the rules that he uses, no less than the circles, are of the other sort?” (Plato, *Philebus*, 62ab). After a brief reference to music once more, situated we may suppose in the same difficult place as justice, we find the following exchange:

SOCRATES: Do you want me, may I ask, to give way like a porter jostled and knocked about by the crowd, to fling open the doors and allow every sort of knowledge to stream in, the inferior mingling with the pure?

PROTARCHUS: I don't really see, Socrates, what harm one would suffer by taking all those other sorts of knowledge, providing one had the first sort.

SOCRATES: Then I am to allow the whole company to stream in and be gathered together in a splendid Homeric mingling of the waters? (Plato, *Philebus*, 62de)

Another, different, far-reaching image of unlimit. I call attention to the mingling of the waters, postponing its discussion for a moment.

The passage at 62ab seems as clear as anything Socrates says that the philosopher or poet who would claim knowledge of divine justice and divine being, of the sacred good, who stands on the back of the world and knows nothing of mundane justice and goodness, knows nothing worth claiming as

knowledge. Knowledge of the good demands knowledge of *technē*. That is the truth that Socrates claims to be the gift of the gods. But Socrates says equally explicitly that *technē*'s knowledge alone, human knowledge, untouched by the divine, by madness and love, is dead. That is what Socrates says in *Phaedrus*, and he says it in *Philebus*. The knowledge gained by *technē* cuts off the very knowledge that we must let burst in, inspired, mad, disorderly, cuts it off as if the mundane could be divine—for knowledge, truth, and the good are divine. That is the enigmatic, oracular truth of the self-knowledge that Socrates endlessly seeks: it is mad, disorderly, divine.

Philosophy is love of wisdom, touched by the light of the sun, called from the good. Such a wisdom and such an *erōs* comes by way of the gods, retains its memory of the divine, which touches it with madness. Knowledge of being, the good, justice, and beauty all resonate endlessly with what *technē* can never know, pass away in their movements to unlimit, but without *technē* are nothing at all.

Why does Plato not say as directly as possible what Nietzsche says of tragedy: that tragedy falls between Apollo and Dionysus, that all things that come from the good are brought by *poiēsis* and *technē* together? Well, Nietzsche didn't say it that explicitly either, and we may easily read him to repeat the quarrel between Apollo and Dionysus. Or put another way, if tragedy bears the mark of the two different gods, memories of the divine in its different places, it is not without conflict between them, even as we know without a doubt that only together do the gods give us tragedy. Something impossible is touched by tragedy, between Apollo and Dionysus. Something impossible is touched by justice, beauty, by judgments of good and bad. The impossibility is that finite and infinite, limit and unlimit, meet at every such point, demand mobility, intermediary movements, but every such point is experienced by the finite as a quarrel over strangeness. It is the impossibility of *diaphora*.

Recall that the *diaphora* of old, between poetry and philosophy, madness and reason, is unknown as *polemos* to poetry and madness, to the divine. The gods give their gifts without understanding them to conflict with humans, but human works bear the mark of conflict, of sacrifice. Reason's nature is to quarrel, to divide the good from the bad, the one from the other, even if this means destroying the gods. Reason, *technē*, would obey the gods, would understand itself to be a gift of the gods, containing madness and inspiration. But in itself, it takes on all authority, cuts poetry off not because poetry is bad poetry, bad art, bad for the gods, but because it is bad *technē*, not useful enough, not useful in the most apparent ways. Moreover, poetry is frequently taken by its readers to be useful, truthful, where it is anything but, where it is divine. Music even more is holy, expressed in the mad singing of the cicadas, who do nothing but make music no matter what the cost. This is crazy under *technē*; crazy under any impulse than that of art, which reaches to the

stars, driven by the same unlimited desire for truth and the good that inspires philosophy.

Of course, tragedy is Apollo joined with Dionysus. Except that under Dionysus, this crossing is masked, enigmatic. Under Apollo it is a quarrel. This is the impossible place where tragedy emerges. And of course justice falls between a good without measure, a gift of the gods, repeatedly surpassing every measure given by *technē*, and *technē*'s measures, where *technē* wars with everything that would undermine its measure.

The good demands that after we have reached and counted the intermediates, we must let them pass away to unlimit and cease bothering about them. But we must not go directly to unlimit, as if we did not inhabit intermediates. The good, the divine, the sacred, haunts the human, mundane world with memories of injustice, disaster, given by the intermediates. But there is no escape.

Yet we remember the divine and sacred. And we experience them in art, if not art alone. Still, if anything is certain in human experience, it is that counting the intervals and scales is not music, that counting the vowels and consonants is not poetry, that something in art surpasses any *technē*, reaches for the divine. The question for us at this moment is whether this divine beauty is the good. I take it to be the good that Plato says gives birth to knowledge and truth, all coming from the gods, all that we know in some way or another comes as a gift.

That is what he says in *Ion*:

Herein lies the reason why the deity has bereft them of their senses, and uses them as ministers, along with soothsayers and godly seers; it is in order that we listeners may know that it is not they who utter these precious revelations while their mind is not within them, but that it is the god himself who speaks, and through them becomes articulate to us. (Plato, *Ion*, 534d)

these lovely poems are not of man or human workmanship, but are divine and from the gods, and . . . the poets are nothing but interpreters of the gods, each one possessed by the divinity to whom he is in bondage. (Plato, *Ion*, 534e)

This gift is not just the gift of inspiration, from the Muses, not just the inexplicable soul of poetry, the light and holy madness of the poet. The god speaks in the poem; the sacred shows itself; the good calls from within the poem to us. Art is not *technē* but from the gods, possessed by the gift of the good.

Ion tells its tale within the *diaphora* between philosophy and poetry, *technē* and *poiēsis*. *Ion* is asked to choose whether he would be unjust or divine, and chooses the divine. Who would choose otherwise—except, perhaps, two millennia of Western rationality? Homer is not to be praised as *technōn*,

but as artist, divine. Plato writes within the *diaphora* of a choice that is no choice, a judgment that cannot judge, because we cannot give up *technē*, cannot choose the divine over *technē*. *Technē* owns the right of choice. This is the aporia at the heart of judgment in relation to the good, repeated endlessly through time, but returning with a certain force after the crimes of our century with the understanding that we do not know how to judge any better now than then. Human beings must choose but cannot choose with assurance between the good and bad. Both the demand to judge and its impossibility come as gifts from the good.

I left the *diaphora* suspended between the duplicity and poverty of the painting regarded as belonging to *technē*'s reason and the unintelligibility of the madness that made it art. The poets who must, on all ethical and political grounds, be banished from the state will return on lyric poetry's terms. The defense will be pleaded in lyric measure, which will touch the soul without an understanding of benefit or harm. And those who love poetry who are not poets may defend poetry in prose. Those who love. Yet the question remains of poetry's benefit; good and bad give us an account of art against which art measures up very badly. Yet as we come to understand this truth, we pass away from measure to the divine. We understand the intermediates as intermediary figures, retaining within themselves the sacredness of the good.

The "chief accusation" (Plato, *Republic*, 605c) to which the poets and their defenders must reply is not poetry's imitativeness and lies or its relation to truth, but poetry's "power to corrupt" (Plato, *Republic*, 605c), to stir the emotions, making us unhappy, ruling us rather than being ruled. "For it waters and fosters these feelings when what we ought to do is to dry them up, and it establishes them as our rulers when they ought to be ruled, to the end that we may be better and happier men instead of worse and more miserable" (Plato, *Republic*, 605d). I again postpone the waters for a moment.

But I think of Tolstoy's thought of beauty as disease, of art as infection of feelings: "*The stronger the infection the better is the art*, as art" (Tolstoy, *WA*; Ross, *AIS*, 178). This truth that art transmits feelings, that beauty moves us to tears, this goodness of beauty is for a moment said by Socrates to be art's disadvantage. This harm that *poiēsis* does is told entirely in the voice of advantage. What profit do we receive from art? Socrates replies in terms of the injuries we receive, claiming that art harms our souls, governs our emotions, in virtue of its extreme materiality. A natural reply is that art benefits us by releasing the darker side of our emotions, releases them to the gift of the good, that the delight that art brings improves us, benefits us, does us good.

Both voices exercise authority and rule, and indeed, *poiēsis* is not a good of rule and does not establish authority in or out of the soul, but works as love. That is how I have asked that we think of the good in Plato, origin of the

work we do that does not occupy the space of work. Socrates speaks of the work that art does, the work of *poiēsis*, which must be governed by *technē* because *technē* is the voice of authority. But something other, heterogeneous, must displace the authority of authority if it is to respond to the good, something closer to immortality, that knows nothing of profit and advantage, something erotic, filled with divine madness, with intermediary figures moving between the sacred and mundane, disturbing and arousing (but not ruling) our emotions, filling us with joy.

And indeed that is how Socrates continues, for he follows his accusation with the possibility that lyric poetry may return from exile, may be able to defend herself in lyric voice, now ignoring her illusion and deceit. And he goes on to speak of immortality, first in terms of advantage and profit, but concluding, on my reading, with the story of Er, where advantages and benefits disappear in memories of immortality. For the story of Er returns us to the question of choice in an entirely different way, where choice knows nothing of *technē*, nothing of profit. Adeimantus and Glaucon ask Socrates in Book II to show that justice is more profitable to the just person than injustice, given the possibility that a just person, like Job, might suffer endless opprobrium and misfortune, while the unjust person may profit in countless ways. Perhaps Socrates answers that request in arguing that the well-run soul is governed by reason, and the order of such a soul is named justice. But now, in Book X, an entirely different level of discussion opens up, in relation to the gods.

For lyric poetry's defense will not be that poetry is profitable, but that it is inspired, ecstatic, contains a sacred joy. The account of profit and benefit presupposes a certain view of good and bad, governed by *technē*. Socrates follows the suggestion that poetry must demonstrate its profitability in this mundane world by speaking of eternity, of "all time" (Plato, *Republic*, 608d). In a single life, injustice might be more profitable, but an immortal soul must be concerned for all time. Read as an account of benefit, good and bad, Socrates' suggestion here runs directly counter to his suggestion in *Philebus*, discussed above, that the divine does not give us knowledge of the mundane.

I read *Phaedrus* and *Philebus* as instituting the quarrel between *poiēsis* and *technē* in order to disrupt the possibility of any quarrel in relation to *poiēsis*. Poetry knows nothing of justifying a choice between poetry over philosophy, one poem over another. Poetry has nothing to do with justification, with reason's exclusions, and everything to do with choice, but not in relation to limits. Art comes from the sacred and divine as inclusive, not exclusive, even where we understand that every work excludes. This care for what may be included where we cannot live except by exclusion marks a certain sense of art, a sense incompatible with the sense of art both as giving us a wisdom comparable to benefit and loss, and as irrelevant to the good.

I briefly interrupt this reading of the sacred gift of art in Plato to turn toward a more mundane figure of the good, water, waves of water, appearing recurrently throughout our discussions. For mirroring Socrates' account of *technē* and *mimēsis* is his account of water, in two figures. One is the figure of reflection, dominating Book X but recurrent throughout Socrates' discussions, beginning with music, an extraordinary place to find a figure of visible images and reflections, a hard, adamant figure, whose mobility would destroy any likeness. "And is it not also true that if there are any likenesses of letters reflected in water or mirrors, we shall never know them until we know the originals, but such knowledge belongs to the same art and discipline?" (Plato, *Republic*, 402b). Continuing in discussions of the divided line and beyond, contrasting the rigidity of reflections and the mobility of the changing world:

By images I mean, first, shadows, and then reflections in water and on surfaces of dense, smooth, and bright texture, and everything of that kind, if you apprehend. (Plato, *Republic*, 510a)

And at first he would most easily discern the shadows and, after that, the likenesses or reflections in water of men and other things, and later, the things themselves, and from these he would go on to contemplate the appearances in the heavens and heaven itself, . . . (Plato, *Republic*, 516ab)⁶

This repetition of the figure of mirror reflections in water reflects a contrast with unchanging being and truth. Mirror reflections do not give truth, do not give us the Idea itself, but an easy, mindless simulacrum, something we could not plausibly say of art or poetry, even less of music, but might say of draftsmanship to those who took the drawing for the thing. But we might say something similar to the *sophoi* who took their knowledge for the thing itself, for the truth, without divine inspiration.

The second figure of water is its fluidity and mobility, adding the impossibility of holding truth fast within its reflections. If reflections are illusory, watery reflections are inconstant as well. Socrates repeats this image of water's mobility to enforce, not the unreliability of truth but the power of growth and movement. Imitation "waters and fosters these feelings when what we ought to do is to dry them up" (606d). Perhaps, if any Greek would wish to dry up human passions under the eyes of the watchful gods. But this movement moves on to the story of Er, where waters recall the forgetfulness of being, drinking of oblivion before returning to life, the River of Lethe.⁷ This oblivion in waters seems to me quite different from the watery illusions and unreliabilities that surround human life, closer to the heart of truth and being, in oblivion, of which Heidegger speaks, much closer to *poiēsis* than *technē*. For we must cross the River of Lethe to live, to be, must enter upon

and drink the waters, cross the ocean, throw ourselves into the sea, embark on nature's journeys, always with mobility, fluidity, and forgetfulness, an oblivion we cannot overcome.

I have passed over other figures of water. They lead to another interruption in the name of the good. For when Socrates interrupts his own account of justice in the *polis*, abstracted from most everyday considerations except for relishes, meat, and war (Plato, *Republic*, 372–373),⁸ to consider mundane matters of utmost importance for the *polis*, women and children, interrupts the account of guardians as if they might all be male to consider women guardians and family affairs, he does so in repeated figures of water, if somewhat obliquely, waves of aporia.⁹ Socrates associates women with water in an aporia so distant from the rigid reflections of watery mirrors that we cannot reasonably follow the movement from the one to the other. Water gives us useful reflections, too mobile to be of much use or truth. But water flows on to the very heart of being, in forgetfulness, in waves of mobility and fluidity, where we find women and children. Without women, what possibility of *technē* can there be? Without water's mobility and fluidity. No state can be built without *technē*, but also without mobility and fluidity, without women, and children, without sexual difference, all exceeding any *technē*.

Leading me to another interruption, interrupting my interruption of an interruption, where Irigaray speaks of water, fluidity and mobility, against the cutting edges of volume. Yet before I turn to Irigaray, procrastinating for just a moment, I recall that what is interrupted by Socrates' account of women, in waves of aporia, is his most demanding account of justice in the *polis*, again given in the figure of water. Where he speaks of justice in the individual and in the city as the same, he speaks of waters: "Through these waters, then, said I, we have with difficulty made our way and we are fairly agreed that the same kinds equal in number are to be found in the state and in the soul of each one of us" (Plato, *Republic*, 441c). These are the waters through which we hope to make our way. But perhaps they are the way, these waters, in their fluidity and mobility. Perhaps the fluidity of waters opens the way.

Returning to women and our interruption. For I believe no thought is possible of law and world, of the mundane or divine, without sexual difference, women, something heterogeneous, something intermediary. Nor of art:

Woman is neither open nor closed. She is indefinite, infinite, *form is never complete in her*. (Irigaray, *VF*, 229)

Fluid has to remain that secret *remainder*, of the one. Blood, but also milk, sperm, lymph, saliva, spit, tears, humors, gas, waves, airs, fire . . . light. All threaten to deform, propagate, evaporate, consume him, to flow out of him and into another who cannot be easily held on to. (Irigaray, *VF*, 237)