International Yearbook for Hermeneutics

Internationales Jahrbuch für Hermeneutik

Focus: The Space of Imagination
Schwerpunkt: Der Raum der Einbildungskraft

14 · 2015

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edited by

Günter Figal

in cooperation with

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e-ISBN PDF 978-3-16-154004-2
ISBN 978-3-16-154003-5
ISSN 2196-534X

The IYH is also available as an ebook. More information at http://www.mohr.de/ebooks.

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at *http://dnb.dnb.de.*

The book was typeset by Martin Fischer in Tübingen using Bembo Antiqua and OdysseaU, printed by Laupp & Göbel in Nehren on non-aging paper and bound by Buchbinderei Nädele in Nehren.

Printed in Germany.

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Articles / Beiträge

László Tengelyi (11. Juli 1954 – 19. Juli 2014)

Nachruf

von

Inga Römer (Bergische Universität Wuppertal)

Am 19. Juli 2014 ist László Tengelyi völlig unerwartet durch einen Herzinfarkt gestorben. Er war einer der herausragenden Phänomenologen unserer Zeit, dessen persönliche Großherzigkeit und Liebenswürdigkeit vielen in Erinnerung bleiben wird. In Ungarn geboren studierte und unterrichtete László Tengelyi zunächst an der Eötvös-Loránd-Universität in Budapest, bevor er im Jahre 2001 einen Ruf nach Deutschland an die Bergische Universität Wuppertal annahm. Dort war er seitdem Professor für Phänomenologie und theoretische Philosophie. Gastprofessuren führten ihn nach Frankreich (unter anderem an die Sorbonne), Belgien, die USA, Kanada, Mexiko, China und Hongkong. Von 2003 bis 2005 war er Präsident der Deutschen Gesellschaft für phänomenologische Forschung. 2005 gründete er das von ihm geleitete Institut für phänomenologische Forschung in Wuppertal, das seit seiner Gründung Gastgeber für eine große Zahl von internationalen Doktoranden und Gastwissenschaftlern war. Auf seine Initiative hin ist die Bergische Universität seit 2006 an dem internationalen deutsch-französischen ERASMUS-Mundus-Masterstudiengang „Deutsche und französische Philosophie in Europa" beteiligt. Wissenschaftlich begleitete er die Zeitschriften *Husserl Studies*, *Phänomenologische Forschungen* und *Annales de phénoménologie*; außerdem war er Mitherausgeber der Buchreihen *Phänomenologie und praktische Philosophie* sowie *Contemporary Studies in Phenomenology*.

Der Denkweg von László Tengelyi nahm seinen Ausgang bei Immanuel Kant. Seine ersten beiden, in ungarischer Sprache verfassten Monographien erschienen unter den (hier übersetzten) Titeln *Autonomie und Weltordnung. Kant über das Fundament der Ethik* (1984) sowie *Kant. Weltordnung und Freiheit in der Entwicklung des kritischen Systems* (1988, 2. Auflage 1995). Während in diesen ersten Arbeiten das Verhältnis von Freiheit und Weltordnung bei

Kant im Mittelpunkt stand, ging László Tengelyi schon bald über Kant hinaus. Das Problem des Bösen schien ihm eine Grenze der kantischen Freiheitstheorie darzustellen und begründete eine Hinwendung zu Schelling. In seiner nächsten, ebenfalls noch in ungarischer Sprache verfassten Monographie *Schuld als Schicksalsereignis* behandelte er das Problem der Schuld und des Bösen bei Kant und Schelling und kam zu dem Ergebnis, dass Schuld als ein „Schicksalsereignis" zu fassen sei.

Die zweite Periode seines Denkens war um die Probleme der Lebensgeschichte und der narrativen Identität zentriert. Sie mündete in der umfangreichen, ursprünglich in deutscher Sprache verfassten Studie *Der Zwitterbegriff Lebensgeschichte* (1998; übersetzt ins Französische, Englische, Ungarische). In diesem Werk steht die Spannung zwischen gelebter und erzählter Lebensgeschichte im Mittelpunkt. Wenngleich die Identität des Selbst durchaus narrativ über eine Lebensgeschichte verstanden werden könne, bliebe ein erfahrungsmäßig gegebener wilder Sinn, auf dem die Lebensgeschichte basiere, der sich jedoch einer vollen Integration in eine Lebensgeschichte entziehe. Dieser Entzugscharakter einer wilden Region des Sinnes wird weiter untersucht im Rahmen von Analysen der Zeitlichkeit und der Alterität. Das Buch schließt mit einer phänomenologischen Elementarethik, in deren Zentrum der Begriff einer wilden Verantwortlichkeit steht. Im Titel der ungarischen Übersetzung, der ins Deutsche rückübersetzt mit *Lebensgeschichte und Schicksalsereignis* wiedergegeben werden kann, kommt der Bezug zwischen dieser Monographie und den früheren Arbeiten besonders deutlich zum Ausdruck: Jene Ereignishaftigkeit der Schuld, deren Konzeption aus der Auseinandersetzung mit Kant und Schelling hervorging, deutete bereits auf jene wilde Region des Sinnes und der Verantwortung voraus, die innerhalb der phänomenologischen Erörterung des Problems der Lebensgeschichte eine umfassendere Bedeutung gewinnt.

In einer dritten Periode von László Tengelyis Denkweg setzte er sich mit dem Begriff der Erfahrung auseinander. Daraus entstanden zunächst die zwei Bücher *L'expérience retrouvée. Essais philosophiques I* (2006) sowie *Erfahrung und Ausdruck. Phänomenologie im Umbruch bei Husserl und seinen Nachfolgern* (2007). In diesen eindringlichen phänomenologischen Analysen der Erfahrung und ihrem Bezug zum Ausdruck wird die zuvor erörterte Spannung zwischen wildem Sinn und Lebensgeschichte aufgegriffen und in ihrer Tragweite ausgedehnt: Das Thema der erzählten Lebensgeschichte findet nun eine Ausweitung hin zu einer Phänomenologie der Sprache im Allgemeinen, und die Analysen des wilden Sinnes führen über den Begriff der Erfahrung zu der Konzeption eines eigentümlichen phänomenologischen Realismus. Gerade in diesem Jahr ist der zweite Band der philosophischen Aufsätze unter dem Titel *L'expérience de la singularité. Essais philosophiques II*

(2014) erschienen. Diese neueren Aufsätze, die an die zweite Periode anknüpfen, haben die Idee der Singularität des Selbst zum Gegenstand, die nur im Antworten auf die Ansprüche des Anderen erfahrbar werde und nur in einer Erzählung über diese Erfahrung angemessen ausgedrückt werden könne.

Die vierte und letzte Periode seines Denkens wird von dem Problem einer phänomenologischen Metaphysik bestimmt. In der umfangreichen, gemeinsam mit Hans-Dieter Gondek verfassten Überblicksdarstellung *Neue Phänomenologie in Frankreich* (2011) formulierte László Tengelyi die These, dass eines der Hauptthemen bei den Autoren dieser Neuen Phänomenologie in Frankreich das Verhältnis zwischen Phänomenologie und Metaphysik sei. Während es dort Ansätze gibt, die Phänomenologie als eine andere Erste Philosophie zu etablieren, die sich von onto-theologischer Metaphysik unterscheidet, sucht László Tengelyi diese jüngeren Entwicklungen innerhalb der französischen Phänomenologie noch einen Schritt weiter zu führen. Ihm geht es um eine andere *Metaphysik*, die sich als andere Metaphysik von einer onto-theologischen Metaphysik grundlegend unterscheidet. Das kurz nach seinem Tod im vergangenen Sommer erschienene Hauptwerk *Welt und Unendlichkeit. Zum Problem phänomenologischer Metaphysik* (2014) unterscheidet in Anknüpfung an die französische Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung der letzten Jahrzehnte verschiedene Grundtypen der Metaphysik, die keinesfalls sämtlich und erst recht nicht im selben Sinne mit Heidegger als Onto-theologie bezeichnet werden könnten. Dies eröffnet im Ausgang von einer nuancierten Betrachtung der Metaphysikgeschichte die Perspektive, heute über die Möglichkeit einer Metaphysik jenseits der Onto-theologie nachzudenken. László Tengelyi vertritt die These, dass nach den Grundtypen der Metaphysik bei Aristoteles, Duns Scotus und Descartes ein vierter Typ der Metaphysik möglich ist, der Kants Kritik an der onto-theologischen Metaphysik standzuhalten vermag und auch Heideggers Kritik an derselben nicht zum Opfer fällt: eine phänomenologische Metaphysik. In den Fußstapfen von Husserl, aber auch Heidegger, entwickelt er die Idee einer Metaphysik der Urtatsachen, die ihren Ausgang nicht bei ersten Gründen und Prinzipien, sondern bei den faktischen Notwendigkeiten von Welt, Ego, Intersubjektivität und Geschichtlichkeit nimmt. Auf der Basis dieser metaphysischen Urtatsachen sei eine spezifische Form phänomenologischer Transzendentalphilosophie möglich, der László Tengelyi den Status eines methodologischen Transzendentalismus zuspricht und die er außerdem nicht als eine Philosophie des Subjekts, sondern als eine Weltentwurfsphilosophie versteht. Weil aus seiner Sicht allerdings jede Philosophie nicht mehr sein kann als ein Weltentwurf unter anderen, könne auch die Phänomenologie nur beanspruchen, ein Weltentwurf zu sein, für den

sich gute Argumente finden, der sich jedoch in einem agonalen Respekt gegenüber divergierenden Weltentwürfen wie etwa dem zeitgenössischen Naturalismus zu halten habe.

Es kann wohl durchaus davon gesprochen werden, dass dieses letzte große Werk eine eigenständige und phänomenologische Entwicklung derjenigen Themen enthält, die die ersten Arbeiten in ungarischer Sprache bewegten: Das Problem von Freiheit und Weltordnung wurde zum Problem einer phänomenologischen Metaphysik der Faktizität, im Rahmen derer ein Weltentwurf in unaufhebbarer Spannung zu einem offen Unendlichen steht, welches jeden endlichen Weltentwurf immer wieder stört und verschiebt. Die Spannung von wildem Sinn und Ausdruck findet ihre umfassendste Gestalt in einer phänomenologischen Metaphysik von Weltentwurf und Unendlichkeit.

László Tengelyi war ein Philosoph, dessen Denken sich dadurch auszeichnete, dass es die deutsche und französische Phänomenologie mit der Philosophiegeschichte und dabei insbesondere mit Kant und dem deutschen Idealismus sowie mit der Antiken Philosophie systematisch zu verbinden suchte. Aristoteles, Kant und Husserl waren vielleicht die wichtigsten Quellen, aber auch Schelling und Heidegger sowie viele andere aus der Philosophie, aber auch aus der Mathematik und nicht zuletzt der Literatur. Gerade an dieser Stelle sollte es nicht unerwähnt bleiben, dass er bei seinem Bestreben, die Phänomenologie aus der Philosophiegeschichte heraus weiterzuentwickeln, auch die hermeneutische Ausrichtung der phänomenologischen Philosophie wesentlich mit einbezog. Wie für Paul Ricœur war für ihn das Problem des Bösen eine frühe Weichenstellung auf seinem Denkweg und das Buch über die Lebensgeschichte ist deutlich durch Ricœurs Konzeption einer narrativen Identität geprägt. Heideggers „metaphysische Periode" zwischen 1927 und 1930 ist eine Hauptgrundlage für die Metaphysik der Faktizität, die im letzten Werk entwickelt wurde. Die Geschichtlichkeit, vielleicht *das* Problem einer hermeneutischen Philosophie überhaupt, war zudem dasjenige Thema, mit dem László Tengelyi sich als nächstes hätte befassen wollen. – Der Verlust, den sein viel zu früher Tod für uns bedeutet, ist kaum zu ermessen.

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Coming As If From Nowhere

by

John Sallis (Boston College)

If there is any imperative that has imposed itself on philosophy in recent times, it is that a new beginning be ventured. We hear this imperative especially as it was sounded more than a century ago when Nietzsche, in the voice of Zarathustra, called for a newly born thinking in the figure of the child: "The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, play, a self-turning wheel, a first movement, a sacred yes-saying."[1] This call resounded in Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology, in which for the first time, the question of the meaning of Being would begin to be genuinely addressed. The call resounded even more distinctly when in the 1930s Heidegger ventured a thinking that would begin on the yonder side of an overcoming of metaphysics. The deconstructive strategies of Derrida, Nancy, and others take up this call and respond to the imperative.

Yet to begin with the imperative that a new beginning be ventured is, in a sense, to violate that imperative, for one will have begun, not with the beginning demanded, but with the demand itself, with the imperative. In beginning anew, one will, then, already have responded to the imperative, and therefore any new beginning will be burdened with – not to say compromised by – a certain antecedence. Or to construe it otherwise: the imperative belongs to the very beginning that it demands.

Furthermore, the venturing of a new beginning is not itself anything new; it is not something only now undertaken, only now ventured. On the contrary, a new beginning has been repeatedly ventured in the history of metaphysics. Plato portrays Socrates as venturing a new beginning in what is called his second sailing, which is carried out through a decisive turn from φύσις to λόγος. Descartes ventures a new beginning by breaking with Scholasticism and extending universal doubt to its limit. Kant ventures a new beginning by submitting metaphysics to a critique that, in advance of

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra, in: Giorgio Colli / Mazzino Montinari (eds.), Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe Volume VI/1, Berlin 1968, p. 27.

metaphysics, would determine the possibilities and limits of reason. Hegel's venture of a new beginning takes the form of an absolute beginning, which in posing the question "With what must the science begin?" and indeed in the very undertaking of a phenomenology of spirit recognizes the complexity and reflexivity involved in beginning.

Thus, venturing a new beginning is not itself anything new; it is not itself a beginning but rather a repetition of a decisive move that has repeatedly renewed and revitalized the most profound radicality of philosophy. On the other hand, to venture simply another beginning in distinction solely from a first beginning requires abstracting from the manifold resurgence of the radical motif and positing a substantial unity underlying the entire history of metaphysics, from which, then, the other beginning can be set apart. Whether the history of metaphysics displays any such uniformity is – to say the least – highly questionable. In order to mark this questionableness and so to keep the assumption of such uniformity at a distance, it needs to be stressed that the word *metaphysics* is suspended between singular and plural.

Because of its antecedent imperative and especially because it is a repetition of a move manifestly undertaken in the history of philosophy, the venture of a new beginning is necessarily referred back to that history. There is no beginning simply anew, as with a tabula rasa, but rather a beginning is always already situated in a history. In order to be true to the radical motif of philosophy, it is necessary that the venture – or adventure – of a new beginning take cognizance of this situatedness. The imperative is, then, not only to venture a new beginning but to do so in a way that goes back into the history of metaphysics. It may well be in this retreat that certain resources, certain possibilities, for a new beginning can be uncovered.

The complexity involved in venturing a new beginning recurs in more specific form in the effort to rethink the sense of imagination within the new beginning portended for our time in Nietzsche's image of the child. How, in this new beginning, is imagination to be thought? This question cannot simply be addressed directly and straightforwardly, for in the very formulation there is a tension that forces the question to recoil on itself and thus to pose a question of the question, to the question. The tension is between, on the one side, the prospect of a new beginning that, like the child, would be innocence and forgetting and, on the other side, the compound of presupposed language and conceptuality that is put in force as soon as one takes up any theme that, as with imagination, has from the outset been developed in relation to the parameters of metaphysical thinking. In posing the question of imagination, all the connections that this conception sustains are also drawn into the sphere of the new beginning, contaminating its state of innocence and limiting its forgetting. In the form of imagination

the child will not, it seems, be newly born at all but only reborn in a guise that cannot but retain certain features from its previous incarnations.

And yet, there is something that prevents this tension from abruptly immobilizing the question, a certain factor that eases it and opens a space for the question. It is the fact that in the history of metaphysics imagination is not simply appropriated. Again and again, from Plato on, metaphysics is compelled to set imagination at a distance, to establish a refuge (such as pure practical reason or the final haven of dialectic), a refuge that would be free from the play of imagination, a play often innocent of – even oblivious to – the difference between truth and semblance, a play that, from beyond good and evil, never ceases to celebrate – to say yes to – the sensuous. Nothing is more telling in this regard than the judgment pronounced by Pico della Mirandola in his treatise *On the Imagination*. Having granted that the soul, in its embodiment, must rely on imagination to supply it with images, Pico then charges imagination with producing "all monstrous opinions and the defects of all judgments." He concludes: "But imagination is for the most part vain and wandering; for the sake of proving this to be so I have assumed the present task of demonstration."[2] Thus, if metaphysics would aim at the true and the good, it must protect itself from imagination, must keep this not so innocent play at a safe distance. At best, imagination will only have been the errant stepchild of metaphysics.

To take up again the question of imagination, but now within a new beginning attuned to the Nietzschean imperative, has therefore a certain appropriateness, for this conception, even though taken over, has a certain intrinsic resistance to metaphysics – or at least to certain dominant strains within the history of metaphysics. Having been kept at a distance from the heartland of metaphysics, it has a capacity now to aid in setting metaphysics – or at least certain principal motifs of metaphysics – at a distance. In this respect rethinking imagination can contribute – perhaps uniquely – to the venture of a new beginning, in which, though indeed drawn back into the history of metaphysics, thinking would put metaphysics, in its multiple occurrences, more radically in question, thereby exposing hitherto unheeded openings.

There are, no doubt, several avenues by which, in thinking imagination anew and in order to think it anew, one can turn back into the history of metaphysics in a way that furthers such thinking by exposing certain junctures from which such thinking might set out. The avenue to be followed

[2] Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, On the Imagination, Latin text with English translation by Harry Caplan, in: *Cornell Studies in English* Volume 16, New Haven 1930, p. 29. See my discussion in: John Sallis, Delimitations: Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics, second edition, Bloomington 1995, chap. 1.

here is one that runs through two distinct, yet parallel mutations. Both mutations are broached – or at least their points of departure are established – in the history of metaphysics. These starting points are, in fact, fissures or breaches in what might seem the uniform landscape of metaphysics, tears, as it were, in its fabric. As such, they open the way toward thinking imagination anew. One such point occurs at the outset of metaphysics, at certain junctures in the Platonic dialogues where the metaphysical parameters have not yet been so thoroughly stabilized. The other is generated by certain consequences of the Kantian critical project and comes to the surface in Fichte's reconfiguration of that project.

We have observed that Pico, in characterizing imagination, identifies two opposed tendencies, one that is veracious and salutary, another that is errant and mendacious. The ascription of such a twofold character to imagination does not, however, originate with Pico; neither is he the last to posit such a differentiation. On the contrary, the distinction runs throughout much of the history of metaphysics, forming a complex strand of that history as various representations and designations of the respective sides gain prominence. The differentiation between the two sides or forms is borne by the distinction between the two Latin designations *imaginatio* and *phantasia*, though the precise sense of the distinction and the specific character of each form vary enormously in the course of this history.[3]

The distinction derives from the difference between the two forms designated in Plato's *Republic* by the terms εἰκασία and φαντασία. In this context these are not yet conjoined as two forms of the same power, nor even as powers that are somehow akin; their association and hence the distinction as such are established only later in Proclus' commentary on the *Republic*. It is especially in the Platonic treatment of the first of these forms, εἰκασία, that one can discern the starting point that, largely suppressed in the history of metaphysics, sets in motion one of the mutations that imagination undergoes in the present venture of a new beginning.

The term εἰκασία occurs in the Socratic account of the divided line, which represents the course by which philosophy would make its ascent toward true being and the final good; it is the way on which the soul is turned around and engaged in παιδεία. Derived from the word εἰκών, translatable as *image* or *semblance*, εἰκασία is characterized as the capacity to apprehend images. More precisely, as elaborated through the corresponding image of the cave, εἰκασία is the capacity to apprehend, in and through an image, the original of which it is an image or semblance – the capacity, for

[3] See the account of this history in John Sallis, Force of Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental, Bloomington 2000, chap. 2.

instance, to recognize in a picture of Polemarchus the man Polemarchus himself. Though εἰκασία is explicitly assigned only to the lowest of the segments of the divided line – assuming the usual vertical representation – the further elaboration indicates that much the same capacity is also operative at other levels, so that the term may, with some justification, be extended to nearly the entire course that philosophy would traverse. In the movement up the line, there would occur reiterated passage of vision through an image to the original of which it is an image; such passage from image to original is precisely what would drive the philosophical ascent. The capacity required for this passage would consist in the ability to catch a glimpse of the original in the image so as then to extend one's vision onward to apprehend the original itself. Thus, εἰκασία would enable vision to move repeatedly through image to original, each original then serving, in turn, as an image from which vision would again move on to its original. Yet, in this movement there is not only the passage onward to the original but also another constituent move, namely, the recognition that the image is an image and not simply an original. Thus, from the moment one's vision advances from image to original, it also circles back to the image, recognizing its character as an image. Thus, εἰκασία involves a double operation, that is, two operations with opposite directionalities that are, on the other hand, bound together. It belongs to εἰκασία not only to release these operations but also to hold them together so that precisely in recognizing the image as an image one advances toward the original, and conversely.

Two distinctive features of εἰκασία thus come to light. The first lies in the fact that its relation to images is not a simple, direct relation; rather, it is a double relation, a holding together of two operations with opposite directionalities, setting the original forth from the image while also marking the image as an image. The second feature lies in the fact that εἰκασία is not a relatedness to mere images in contrast to the things that truly are. Rather, the images that εἰκασία engages are precisely images that have the character of imaging – even if from a distance – the things that truly are; and εἰκασία is thus a power, not merely for entertaining mere images, but for advancing toward being.

These two features thoroughly distinguish εἰκασία from imagination as it is conceived in recent reductive accounts, which regard it merely as a power of entertaining freely formed images. These reductive accounts – Sartre's and Casey's, for example – exemplify the way in which concepts rigorously forged in the history of philosophy can come to be exhausted and can collapse into near-trivialities. But in the case of imagination there was always resistance that kept it somewhat apart from metaphysics and from certain corrosive forces attached to metaphysics, even though – as these examples

show – it was never entirely immune. Features such as these two, held in reserve, can provide an opening for thinking imagination anew.

The second of the two forms described in the *Republic* is φαντασία, which is subsequently compounded with εἰκασία into what will come to be translated as *imagination*. As described by Socrates, φαντασία is mimetic in character: it is the capacity to produce an image or semblance of things, an image that resembles what it images but that, because it is only a resemblance and not the thing itself, can deceive, keeping its beholders at a distance from the thing itself. Because of this power of deception, φαντασία is submitted to criticism and in the best city would be subject to censor. Both as the evocation of the image through words – that is, as poetry – and as actual representation in painting, φαντασία is capable of deceiving and corrupting those who are exposed to its productions, keeping them at a remove from the truth. It is this Socratic description that is resounded in Pico's condemnation of imagination nearly two millennia later.

But suppose now, in order to clear the space of a new beginning, one moves outside this critical perspective and considers phantasy as it operates either purely or in relation to words, setting aside the more complex case of the phantastics of painting. This operation readily proves to be more complex than might have been supposed.

Suppose one imagines a dragon of the awesome Chinese sort, doing so with or without the word *lóng*, which designates such a creature, with or without observing how in the Chinese characters (龙, 龍) one can discern a shape suggestive of such a creature,[4] with or without explicitly recalling pictures one has seen of Chinese dragons. Since such creatures, which the ancient Chinese regarded as the force of life itself, tend – so it is said – to appear suddenly only to disappear again, they display a special affinity to phantasy, beyond their being, as we say, mere figments of imagination.

In any case, suppose one imagines – that is, evokes in phantasy – such a creature soaring through the clouds, its claws extended, its scales glistening. In order to imagine seeing the dragon, the look of the creature must come before one's inner vision, must be present to one's phantasy, present to – as we say – the mind's eye. Yet, as merely imagined, the dragon is not perceptually given; there are, one assumes, no dragons actually existing such that one could see them as one sees birds, trees, and mountains. In the case of the dragon, its look must be brought forth by the activity of imagining, that is, specifically, by phantasizing. In order that the look of the dragon be intuitively given, in order that it be present to the inner vision, this givenness must be produced precisely in and through the imagining.

[4] See the account in David Hinton, Hunger Mountain, Boston 2012, pp. 74–79.

In such a case imagination – in the mode of phantasy – *gives to itself* that which is imagined, brings it forth in such a way that it, in turn, is given to the inner vision that belongs to imagining. Furthermore, once the look of the dragon has been brought forth, it must be sustained if it is to remain present to one's inner vision and not, as dragons are wont to do, abruptly disappear. Yet there is nothing to sustain it other than the self-giving, and so it must be continually brought forth through such autodonation. The dragon must be held there in phantasy, must be continually brought forth precisely as it is intuited. The production of the image belongs no less to the structure of phantasy than does the vision of it in the mind's eye. Thus, phantasy, too, proves to involve a double operation: in and through the imagining, the phantasy image is both brought forth and intuited. Hence, the operation of phantastic imagination must be such as to carry out, but also to hold together, the productive and the intuitive moments in their opposite directionalities. Phantastic imagination must circulate between these two opposed operations so as, through this circulation, through this hovering between them, to hold them together.

Both the recovery of εἰκασία and the analysis of phantasy serve to bring to light the character of imagination as holding together in their opposition two moments that are opposed in their governing directionality. It is through the emergence of this character that the first of the two mutations of imagination is broached, the mutations through which imagination assumes the form in which it is to be redetermined within the venture of a new beginning. It is only in the final phase of the history of metaphysics that this character begins to be explicitly grasped, namely, in German Idealism. In this context there is no more succinct formulation than that given in Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*: "That alone through which we are capable of thinking, and of holding together, what is contradictory [is] imagination."[5] The distinctive operation in which it displays this character is designated by the word *Schweben* – let us say: hovering. The sense of the word is that imagination suspends itself between the opposed moments, wavering between them rather than settling on one or the other, while circulating or oscillating between them so as to bond them together as a dyad of moments that retain nonetheless their mutual opposition.

Yet it belongs equally to this mutation that through such an operation, imagination launches an advance to being. Such is most explicit in the case of εἰκασία, for the progression from image to original is precisely an advance to being. In the case of phantasy, this connection becomes evident

[5] F. W. J. Schelling, System des transzendentalen Idealismus, Hamburg 1957, pp. 295–96.

only if the disclosive capacity of phantastic images is taken into account. Whether evoked through words, as in poetry and literature generally, or actually produced, as in painting, images display a capacity to reveal the things they image, to open onto their truth, even if, as the Socratic account emphasizes in its specifically political context, they also have the power to conceal. To the Chinese sensibility the image of the dragon is not something totally disconnected from life but reveals something of its profound animation. In the celebrated dictum by Paul Klee: "Art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible."[6]

Within the context of German Idealism, the advance to being that is enabled by imagination is understood, not just as gaining insight into a predetermined, preconstituted realm of being, but rather as the advance in and through which being is first brought forth as such, as the operation by which things first become manifest to the advance of insight. In the words of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*: "It is therefore here taught that all reality – *for us* being understood, as it cannot be otherwise understood in a system of transcendental philosophy – is brought forth solely by the imagination."[7]

As it emerges through its mutation, imagination assumes the form of a power that, through its hovering between opposed moments so as to hold them together in their opposition, is effective in letting things come forth into their manifestness. It is preeminently through imagination that things as such and even the unseen truths about them come to light for us.

The second of the mutations through which the form of imagination passes as it emerges in the venture of the present new beginning is distinct from the first, though the two are linked and at a certain point intersect in such a way that this other mutation interrupts the first. The point of departure of the second mutation is also to be found at certain junctures – or breaches – in the history of metaphysics. It is foreshadowed in the indecision (demonstrated in recent studies)[8] that Aristotle displays as to whether φαντασία is a power of the soul and in the corresponding indecision in Kant as to whether imagination is to be classified as a power (*Vermögen*) of the subject. In such indecision there is perhaps a trace of the broad tendency of metaphysics to keep imagination safely at bay. The relevant point of departure is foreshadowed also in Neoplatonism, specifically in Iamblichus, who subordinates human φαντασία to the gift of divine epiphanies. According to Iamblichus, what draws the human soul into the advance to being is

[6] Paul Klee, Schöpferische Konfession, in: Kunst-Lehre, Leipzig 1987, p. 60.

[7] Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre, in: Werke, ed. by Immanuel Hermann Fichte, Volume 1, Berlin 1971, p. 227.

[8] The reference is to the studies by Eva Brann (on Aristotle) and Rodolphe Gashé (on Kant) discussed in Sallis, Force of Imagination, pp. 44–45, 70.

nothing in the soul itself but rather the gift of light, the more-than-human φαντασία that comes upon us, to which, in turn, mere human φαντασία is bound to submit and respond.[9]

Yet the starting point of the second mutation comes fully to light in the radical consequence that Fichte draws from the Kantian critical project. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, imagination is already engaged as the power that yokes together sense and intelligence, intuition and thought, in such a way that experience of objects and indeed objects themselves become possible. The consequence that Fichte draws is that it is only in relation to an object that there can be a subject, that is, that the very constitution of a subject requires the bringing-forth of objects that is accomplished solely – or at least preeminently – by imagination. Thus, Fichte concludes that imagination is the ground of the possibility of the subject. But in this case imagination can no longer be conceived as a power *of* the subject, since it is presupposed by the very constitution of the subject. A reversal is thus broached: rather than imagination belonging as a power to subjectivity, subjectivity will stem from the operation of imagination.

Therefore, the mutation to which imagination comes to be submitted results from its liberation from the subject. No longer determined as a power (δύναμις, *Vermögen*) of the soul or of the subject, it can be twisted free of any such belonging. It is no longer to be conceived as something possessed by a psychic entity or substance, as a capacity at the disposal of such an agent, as a power to be actualized by the psyche. Even the hovering attributed to it through the first mutation is to be freed of the subject; it is no longer to be determined as an activity of a subject made possible through a power possessed by the subject. This liberation from the subject marks the point where this other mutation intersects with and interrupts the first mutation. There remains, then, only the hovering without anything that hovers, without anything underlying (ὑποκείμενον). It is not unlike the flashing of lightning. Though our grammar requires us to say that lightning flashes, there is, in fact, no thing, the lightning, behind the flashing, no agent that flashes; rather, the lightning is nothing other than the flashing. So it is also with the hovering of imagination. There is only the hovering in the wake of which things may then come to light, may become manifest to humans.

The consequences of this development are virtually unlimited in their deconstructive effect on the classical concepts that have shaped the basic conception of the human throughout much of the history of metaphysics. If the manifestation of things to humans is subordinate to the hovering imagination, that is, if imagination, releasing things into the light, is not

[9] Sallis, Force of Imagination, pp. 60–63, 74.

grounded in something within the human that is underlying, then the very determination of the human as essentially soul or subject is effaced. The space of another determination of the human is thus opened. Such a determination would no longer proceed from the classical concepts of οὐσία and ψυχή, nor from all that comes in the train of these ancient determinations, such concepts as *substantia*, *res cogitans*, etc.; rather, it would set out from the configuration of the moments that belong to the self-showing of things. Thus would a new conception of the human be broached within the project of such a new beginning as is presently being ventured.

If the hovering of imagination is not activated through the power of a subject, if it is not grounded in something underlying within the human, then its occurrence is most aptly described by saying that it simply arrives, that it comes without any ground or origin becoming manifest, that it comes as if from nowhere. This *nowhere* has often been given a name, especially in relation to poetic imagination; the Greeks often named it mythically, calling it Apollo. Such mythical naming is not to be simply dismissed, for it is a preeminent way in which imagination, drawing on such natural elements as light and fire, engages the human in reflective discourse and representation.

Yet, granted that imagination comes as if from nowhere, it cannot, nonetheless, eventuate as something utterly beyond the human. Coming as if from nowhere, the hovering of imagination lets things come to light for humans; it has the character of a pure luminous gift, of a gift without any manifest origin. As with every gift, there comes with it the entreaty that we receive it with gratitude, though in the instance of imagination the gratitude called for is directed at no one, at no source of the gift. Receiving the gift with gratitude, welcoming it, cannot, however, occur as a deliberate act, not at least at the level at which imagination first lets things come to light. For any deliberate act already presupposes a context in which things are manifest; prior to any such act, the configuration of manifestation must already have taken shape; yet this draft is possible only if imagination has already come upon the scene, indeed even before it actually becomes a scene. Humans will, then, always already be bound to the imperative to welcome the coming – as if from nowhere – of imagination. This imperative will also harbor the requirement that the gift always be relinquished rather than possessed, that is, rather than a claim being staked to possess it, as if it were – or could become – a power of a subject. The *always already* that characterizes the human reception of imagination as it comes as if from nowhere is thus unassimilable to the classical concept of the *a priori*. As with the imperative that a new beginning be ventured (the imperative with which we began), the antecedence that releases the imperative of imagination is decisive. And

the human bond to this imperative can, if thought through in its articulation, perhaps provide a locus from which the ἦθος of the human can, in the new beginning, be thought.

In any case, in venturing to think imagination anew, one will take it as coming as if from nowhere to hover over the luminous presence of things, as the Greeks dreamed of Apollo coming unaccountably to guide the hand of the poet.

Summary

A reflection is here undertaken regarding the imperative that a new beginning be ventured. In particular, the question as to how imagination is to be thought in a new beginning is taken up and developed. It is shown that such thinking can take as its point of departure certain mutations in the history of metaphysics, certain breaches that become explicit in German Idealism.

Zusammenfassung

Gegenstand der Überlegungen ist die Forderung, einen neuen Anfang zu wagen. Insbesondere wird die Frage aufgenommen und erörtert, auf welche Weise die Einbildungskraft im Zusammenhang eines neuen Anfangs zu denken ist. Gezeigt wird, dass ein solches Denken von gewissen Mutationen in der Geschichte der Metaphysik, von gewissen Bruchstellen, die im Deutschen Idealismus zum Vorschein kommen, ausgehen kann.

Creatures of φαντασία

On Dreams and the Radical Imagination

by

Dennis J. Schmidt (Pennsylvania State University)

1.

Let me begin with a conclusion that I have been led to by my efforts to speak about the imagination; namely, that the imagination is not definable, not delimitable; it morphs into so many different forms and takes up residence in the world and in us in so many different ways that it simply will not admit of a precise definition. But the problem one confronts when trying to speak of the imagination is worse still: the imagination is not only mutable and not able to be delimited, it seems to actively rebel against every effort to pin it down, and this energetic resistance to exposing itself, to being brought into words *as itself* and not only in terms of its own productions, seems to belong to its basic nature. One sees this in the way in which the word easily slips into different senses: we can translate "imagination" as φαντασία, εἰκασία, *Vorstellung*, *Einbildung* – to name only a few of the many options – and in the way in which none of these words line up unproblematically. And to make matters worse, no matter how we translate the word, when we come to speak of the imagination we find it invariably doubled: it can be reproductive or productive. Like the god Proteus the imagination eludes capture by being able to take an infinite number of forms.

But even if one does not try to define the full sweep of the imagination, even if one confines the imagination to the realm of the human (something that I believe is a fundamental mistake), even if one simply makes the rather arbitrary decision to restrict its meaning to something like a "creative power," what the imagination is capable of "doing" is still quite overwhelming: by means of the imagination we give birth to monsters, music, beauty, science, madness, delusion, evil, pleasure, desire, and more. The imagination can lead us down rabbit holes, through looking glasses,

and to the heights of harmony. It moves us and terrifies us, and in doing this it clearly shows that, rather than being in our control, the imagination easily carries us away and only seldom does our bidding. Even if we try to situate it in the orbit of the human we quickly find that it overwhelms us and is larger than us. In the end, the imagination opens a region so large that it seems fair to ask if there are any limits to the imagination. Is there anything that is inherently unimaginable, unable to be touched by the imagination? Such a question is, of course, an impossible one, but were one to risk an answer, I suspect that the answer would need to be "no". I say this in order to emphasize the immensity of what the topic of the imagination puts in play. Rousseau said that "the imagination [defines] the measure of the possible,"[1] but one could just as easily say that there is nothing impossible for the imagination. The imagination can transfigure the real, but it can equally assert its rights in the nowhere and the nothing. As Shakespeare said: "the imagination […] gives airy nothing […] a name."[2] For all of these reasons it should be clear how it is that the effort to delimit the scope of the imagination has led me to see why John Sallis – whose work, more than any other body of work I know, has been devoted to taking the power of imagination to heart – says "Is the meaning of Being not, then, a matter of imagination? […] Is imagination not the meaning of Being?"[3] Saying this is not a way of reducing Being to some production of a human faculty. Quite the contrary, it is a way of speaking about the way Being can begin to be thought as a matter both of incalculable possibility and "airy nothing". If the sameness of being and nothing has a name, then "imagination" must be a candidate for that name since it entails both with equal value and weight.

I have begun by referring to this apparent limitlessness and mutability of the imagination for two reasons. First, because it attests to what John Sallis has described as the force of the imagination in the expanse of the elemental. Second, as Sallis has argued, it is precisely this overwhelming force and expansiveness of the imagination that has been domesticated throughout the history of philosophy. This effort to shrink the imagination needs to be avoided if anything is to be said of the most radical, the fullest sense of the imagination. And yet, in the history of philosophy the most prevalent way of speaking of the imagination begins by severely reducing and limiting it. There are several ways in which the imagination has been chopped down and tamed in that history: it is treated as something simply reproductive and thus dependent upon the real; it is tucked into a category or deemed

[1] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Émile – Éducation – Morale – Botanique, Œuvres Complètes Volume 4, ed. by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, Paris 1969, p. 304.

[2] William Shakespeare, Midsummer Night's Dream, Act V, Scene 1.

[3] John Sallis, Echoes. After Heidegger, Bloomington, IN 1990, p. 97.

one faculty (usually a weaker one) among others that can be turned on and off at our whim; and it has been yoked to and measured by the standards of reason. All of the features of the imagination that depart from these delimitations are taken as evidence of the dangerous or irrational tendencies of the imagination.

Of course, there have been a few important exceptions to this tendency: here I am thinking of Kant in the A edition of the 1st Critique or his remarks about genius in the 3rd Critique, as well as Hegel's claim in *Faith and Knowledge* that the "imagination must be recognized as what is primary and original."[4] But eventually all of these important exceptions to the philosophical urge to reduce the force and role of the imagination get retracted so that the 1st Critique gets re-written in a way that explicitly tames the sense and role of the imagination,[5] Kant "clips" the wings of genius in the 3rd Critique, and Hegel eventually simply drops the imagination as something originary. Other exceptions, such as *De Anima* where Aristotle says that "the soul never thinks without phantasm,"[6] get interpreted and taken up into the history of philosophy in a way that tames any possible force. So, for instance, Aristotle's remark gets translated as "the soul never thinks without a mental image" and that "mental image" is taken simply to be a copy of the real. In this way, Aristotle's potentially radical claim about the constitutive power of φαντασία is tamed by being turned instead into something reproductive and dependent upon the real. In the end, I believe we need to acknowledge that, with precious few exceptions, philosophers are inordinately afraid of the imagination. It seems that this retreat from and reduction of the imagination is not accidental, nor simply a failure of courage on the part of individual philosophers. Rather, this retreat from the imagination seems to be part and parcel of the philosophical project that needs to tame the imagination and rope it into the orbit and rule of reason. But, if this is indeed true, then why is it that the philosophical project is so inherently resistant to the claims of the imagination? Why this hostility? What would it mean and what would it take to release the imagination to its own ends and to unshackle it from the authority and rule of reason? Or better: what would it mean to recognize that the imagination is larger and more original than reason, and that reason needs to form itself by following the lead of the imagination?

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[4] G. W. F. Hegel, Jenaer kritische Schriften, Gesammelte Werke Volume 4, ed. by Hartmut Buchner and Otto Pöggeler, Hamburg 1968, p. 329.

[5] On this, see Martin Heidegger, Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik, Frankfurt am Main 1973.

[6] Aristotle, *De anima*, 431a 15: διὸ οὐδέποτε νοεῖ ἄνευ φαντάσματος ἡ ψυχή. *De Anima* is quoted from: Aristotle's De anima, ed. by William David Ross, Oxford 1956.

2.

I do not intend to attempt a full answer to this question, but it was only when I came to ask myself this question – only once I began to recognize how vigorously suppressed the question of the imagination is in the history of philosophy – it was only then that I arrived at the special question that I want to address here. I will turn to that question in a moment, but first I want to make a few further observations about this claim that the very idea of philosophy has a constitutive impulse to suppress the most radical and far-reaching forms of the imagination.

In order to understand this claim one needs to recognize the immense power of the imagination as well as its astonishing innocence. It is precisely this coupling of power and what is best described as innocence that seems to be so threatening to the very idea and aims of philosophy. The power of the imagination is evident in the way in which it seems to breeze through anything and to be uninhibited by the real. Measured by its own standards and nothing else, the imagination seems infinitely capable. Measured by its own standards, nothing is unimaginable. What I have called the "innocence" of the imagination is evident in the way it is – again, when left only to its own concerns – just as capable of leading to madness as into music, delusion as into insight, non-sense as beauty. Left alone, left only to its own measures, answering to no ends other than those it has established for itself, the imagination is oblivious to its own consequences as well as to its own reality. In the end, this makes it clear that the imagination has no concern with or relation to any orthodox sense of "truth" or the "real".[7] One might even say that if one does want to grant some capacity for truth to the imagination, then our understanding of what truth means will need to be reevaluated. It seems that what threatens the aims of philosophy here is the way in which the imagination opens up a space of experience that is independent – and even most likely outside – the boundaries of the intelligible. Left to itself, unfettered by the demands of the intellect, the imagination can simply unfold into nothing. I would put the point even stronger and in a somewhat inverted way: in its most radical expression and most self-defined form, the imagination is our deepest living relation to "the nothing": just as it seems to emerge out of nothing, so too does the imagination open up into nothing.

One can easily understand how the imagination can lead to madness and delusion: opening up at each end into nothing, infinitely capable and

[7] In this regard, it is worth noting that the innocence of the imagination resembles the innocence of the child.

innocent, the imagination seems to have no native respect for the real and it is this, above all, that has driven the philosophical impulse to shackle the imagination to the rule of reason and to measure it by a conception of the real defined by what is present. Measured in this way, the imagination seems weak. That is why Descartes is able to confidently claim that the imagination is so weak that one cannot imagine a thousand-sided figure with the same clarity and distinctness as the mathematical conception of such a figure.[8] That, of course, is a preeminent example of submitting the work of the imagination to the standards of reason. One finds the counterexample in Kant who, despite every effort to keep the force of the imagination in check, truly does appreciate that it is an immense and original power. That is what he means when he says that the imagination "is a blind, but indispensable function of the soul without which we would have no cognition at all, but of which we are seldom even conscious."[9] Rather than commenting further upon the treatment of the imagination in the history of philosophy, I want to pursue a theme that is largely absent in that history. To do this I want to begin by thinking about the strangeness of Kant's remark that the imagination is "blind".

Describing the imagination as blind, as unseeing, is directly in conflict with our customary conception of the imagination, which takes the imagination first of all as seeing images. To call the imagination "blind" is to strip it of what seems most self-evident about the imagination, namely, that it shows itself first and foremost in images that we see. I doubt that Kant was deliberately challenging the commonplace assumption that the imagination is a form of seeing; nonetheless, his reference to the imagination as blind does give one pause and leads one to ask why we assume that the imagination is chiefly to be thought in terms of images? That this assumption that yokes the imagination to vision has been persistent is, I believe, quite clear. Plato, who is quite obsessed with the questions posed by φαντασία and εἰκασία, inaugurates the habit of thinking the imagination in terms of an icon-image, that is, as essentially a matter of imitation, a simulacrum of the real. Painting and writing are the most articulated forms of this iconography.[10] But, I believe that we need to ask a question that Plato seems to have passed over: if there is indeed a privileged relation between the imagination and the image, then what is the character of such images? Is the "seeing" proper to the imagination dependent upon something given? Are the im-

[8] René Descartes, Meditationes de prima philosophia, Œuvres, ed. by Charles Adam and Paul Tannéry, Volume 7, Paris 1904, especially Meditation Six.

[9] Immanuel Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, Hamburg 1976, B 103.

[10] On this, see chapter 1 in: Dennis J. Schmidt, Between Word and Image, Bloomington, IN 2012.

ages proper to the most radical forms of the imagination to be understood simply as copies of something else? Or are these images to be understood as expressions of something more original? In its most radical, its most self-determined form, what sort of image emerges from the imagination? But where and how does one come to find the radical imagination, the imagination that is driven by itself above all and set free to its own ends?

3.

Perhaps the most direct and unmediated presentation of the imagination is found in the dream, in what Goya called "the sleep of reason" (and let's forget, just for a moment, that the full title of Goya's painting is "the sleep of reason produces monsters"). My sense is that it would be worth the effort to trace the role of the dream in the history of philosophy since the dream has occasionally functioned as a sort of epistemological loophole through which something otherwise not knowable by means of reason is able to appear. By means of the dream something is presented that cannot appear within the schema of reason. This is especially true for Plato for whom dreams play a quite significant role. In fact, Socrates talks and thinks about his dreams a great deal. One finds dreams in *Crito*, *Phaedo*, *Theatetus*, *Philebus*, *Republic*, and of course it is a dream that presents the idea of the χώρα in *Timaeus* – to say nothing of the dream that Socrates had the night before he was introduced to Plato.[11] The dream is so vital, so definitive of life for Plato, that Socrates describes death as a "dreamless" state; nothing determines the character of the loss of life more than the loss of the ability to dream.

Now, as interesting as it might be, I do not intend to pursue the question of the dream in Goya, Plato, or the history of philosophy. I am not interested in the "content" or "meaning" of dreams. I want to bracket off any possible significance of the dream, its symbolism, its relation to divination, its revelation of desires, or its layers. Rather, my turn to the dream is driven by the conviction that in the dream we find the purest expression of the imagination itself. So, I simply want to call attention – as Nietzsche

[11] The references in the Timaeus (10c, 71b, 87d) are especially important. (Plato's works are quoted from: Platonis Opera, ed. by John Burnet, Oxford 1900–1907). On the dream-like appearance of the χώρα (it is "scarcely believable"), see John Sallis, Chorology, Bloomington, IN 1999, pp. 113–124 and 152–154. On the role of dreams more generally in Plato see Jean-Pierre Vernant, Image et apparence dans la théorie platonicienne de la mimesis, in: Journal de Psychologie (2/1975), pp. 133–160.