

Physis And Being

An Introduction To The Philosophy Of Pathei-Mathos

The philosophy of pathei-mathos is based on four axioms: (i) that it is empathy and pathei-mathos which can wordlessly reveal the ontological reality both of our own physis [1] and of how we, as sentient beings, relate to other living beings and to Being itself; (ii) that it is denotatum [2] - and thus the abstractions deriving therefrom [3] - which, in respect of human beings, can and often do obscure our physis and our relation to other living beings and to Being; (iii) that denotatum and abstractions imply a dialectic of contradictory opposites and thus for we human beings a separation-of-otherness; and (iv) that this dialectic of opposites is, has been, and can be a cause of suffering for both ourselves, as sentient beings, and - as a causal human presenced effect - for the other life with which we share the planet named in English as Earth.

For, as mentioned in a previous essay,

"empathy and pathei-mathos incline us to suggest that ipseity is an illusion of perspective: that there is, fundamentally, no division between 'us' - as some individual sentient, mortal being - and what has hitherto been understood and named as the Unity, The One, God, The Eternal. That 'we' are not 'observers' but rather Being existing as Being exists and is presenced in the Cosmos. That thus all our striving, individually and collectively when based on some ideal or on some form - some abstraction and what is derived therefrom, such as ideology and dogma - always is or becomes sad/tragic, and which recurrence of sadness/tragedy, generation following generation, is perhaps even inevitable unless and until we live according to the wordless knowing that empathy and pathei-mathos reveal." [4]

In essence, empathy and pathei-mathos lead us away from the abstractions we have constructed and manufactured and which abstractions we often tend to impose, or project, upon other human beings, upon ourselves, often in the belief that such abstractions can aid our understanding of others and of ourselves, with a feature of all abstractions being inclusion and exclusion; that is, certain individuals are

considered as belonging to or as defined by a particular category while others are not.

Over millennia we have manufactured certain abstractions and their assumed opposites and classified many of them according to particular moral standards so that a particular abstraction is considered good and/or beneficial and/or as necessary and/or as healthy, while its assumed dialectical opposite is considered bad (or evil), or unnecessary, or unhealthy, and/or as unwarranted.

Thus in ancient Greece and Rome slavery was accepted by the majority, and considered by the ruling elite as natural and necessary, with human beings assigned to or included in the category 'slave' a commodity who could be traded with slaves regarded as necessary to the functioning of society. Over centuries, with the evolution of religions such as Christianity and with the development in Western societies of humanist weltanschauungen, the moral values of this particular abstraction, this particular category to which certain human beings assigned, changed such that for perhaps a majority slavery came to be regarded as morally repugnant. Similarly in respect of the abstraction designated in modern times by such terms as "the rôle of women in society" which rôle for millennia in the West was defined according to various masculous criteria - deriving from a ruling and an accepted patriarchy - but which rôle in the past century in Western societies has gradually been redefined.

Yet irrespective of such developments, such changes associated with certain abstractions, the abstractions themselves and the dialectic of moral opposites associated with them remain because, for perhaps a majority, abstractions and ipseity, as a criteria of judgment and/or as a human instinct, remain; as evident in the continuing violence against, the killing of, and the manipulation, of women by men, and in what has become described by terms such as "modern slavery" and "human trafficking".

In addition, we human beings have continued to manufacture abstractions and continue to assign individuals to them, a useful example being the abstraction denoted by the terms The State and The Nation-State [5] and which abstraction, with its government, its supra-personal authority, its laws, its economy, and its inclusion/exclusion (citizenship or lack of it) has come to dominate and influence the life of the majority of people in the West.

Ontologically, abstractions - ancient and modern - usurp our connexion to Being and to other living beings so that instead of using wordless empathy and *pathei-mathos* as a guide to Reality [6] we tend to define ourselves or are defined by others according to an abstraction or according to various abstractions. In the matter of the abstraction that is The State there is a tendency to define or to try to understand our relation to Reality by for example whether we belong, are a citizen of a particular State; by whether or not we have an acceptable standard of living because of the opportunities and employment and/or the assistance afforded by the economy and the policies of the State; by whether or not we agree or disagree with the policies of the government in power, and often by whether or not we have transgressed some State-made law or laws. Similarly, in the matter of belief in a revealed religion such as Christianity or Islam we tend to define or understand our relation to Reality by means of such an abstraction: that is, according to the revelation (or a particular interpretation of it) and its eschatology, and thus by how the promise of Heaven/Jannah may be personally obtained.

Empathy and *pathei-mathos*, however, wordlessly - sans denotatum, sans abstractions, sans a dialectic of contradictory opposites - uncover *physis*: our *physis*, that of other mortals, that of other living beings, and that of Being/Reality itself. Which *physis*, howsoever presented - in ourselves, in other living beings, in Being - is fluxive, a balance between the being that it now is, that it was, and that it has the inherent (the acausal) quality to be. [7]

This uncovering, such a revealing, is of a knowing beyond ipseity and thus beyond the separation-of-otherness which denotatum, abstractions, and a dialectic of opposites manufacture and presence. A knowing of ourselves as an affective connexion [8] to other living beings and to Being itself, with Being revealed as fluxive (as a *meson* - μέσον [9] - with the potentiality to change, to develop) and thus which (i) is not - as in the theology of revealed religions such as Christianity and Islam - a God who is Eternal, Unchanging, Omnipotent [10], and (ii) is affected or can be affected (in terms of *physis*) by what we do or do not do.

This awareness, this knowing, of such an affective connexion - our past, our current, our potentiality, to adversely affect, to have adversely affected, to cause, to having caused, suffering or harm to other living beings - also inclines us or can incline us toward benignity and humility,

and thus incline us to live in a non-suffering causing way, appreciate of our thousands of years old culture of pathei-mathos. [11]

In terms of understanding Being and the divine, it inclines us or can incline us, as sentient beings, to apprehend Being as not only presented in us but as capable of changing - unfolding, evolving - in a manner dependant on our physis and on how our physis is presented by us, and by others, in the future. Which seems to imply a new ontology and one distinct from past and current theologies with their anthropomorphic θεὸς (god) and θεοὶ (gods).

An ontology of physis: of mortals, of living beings, and of Being, as fluxive mesons. Of we mortals as a mortal microcosm of Being - the cosmic order, the κόσμος - itself [12] with the balance, the meson, that empathy and pathei-mathos incline us toward living presented in the ancient Greek phrase καλὸς κάγαθός,

"which means those who conduct themselves in a gentlemanly or lady-like manner and who thus manifest - because of their innate physis or through pathei-mathos or through a certain type of education or learning - nobility of character." [13]

Which personal conduct, in the modern world, might suggest a Ciceronian-inspired but new type of *civitas*, and one

"not based on some abstractive law but on a spiritual and interior (and thus not political) understanding and appreciation of our own Ancestral Culture and that of others; on our 'civic' duty to personally presence καλὸς κάγαθός and thus to act and to live in a noble way. For the virtues of personal honour and manners, with their responsibilities, presence the fairness, the avoidance of hubris, the natural harmonious balance, the gender equality, the awareness and appreciation of the divine, that is the numinous." [14]

With καλὸς κάγαθός, such personal conduct, and such a new *civitas*, summarising how the philosophy of pathei-mathos might, in one way, be presented in a practical manner in the world.

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This essay is a revised and edited version of a reply sent to an academic who enquired about the philosophy of pathei-mathos

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Further Reading:
The Numinous Way Of Pathei-Mathos. ISBN 978-1484096642

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Notes

[1] I use the term physis - φύσις - ontologically, in the Aristotelian sense, to refer to the 'natural' and the fluxive being (nature) of a being, which nature is often manifest, in we mortals, in our character (persona) and in our deeds. Qv. my essay *Towards Understanding Physis* (2015) and my translation of and commentary on the Poemandres tractate in *Corpus Hermeticum: Eight Tractates* (2017).

[2] As noted elsewhere, I use the term denotatum - from the Latin denotare - not only as meaning "to denote or to describe by an expression or a word; to name some-thing; to refer that which is so named or so denoted," but also as an Anglicized term implying, depending on context, singular or plural instances. As an Anglicized term there is generally no need to use the inflected plural *denotata*.

[3] In the context of the philosophy of pathei-mathos the term abstraction signifies a particular named and defined category or form (ἰδέα, εἶδος) and which category or form is a manufactured generalization, a hypothesis, a posited thing, an assumption or assumptions about, an extrapolation of or from some-thing, or some assumed or extrapolated ideal 'form' of some-thing.

In respect of denotatum, in Kratylus 389d Plato has Socrates talk about 'true, ideal' naming (denotatum) - βλέποντα πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα, qv. my essay *Personal Reflexions On Some Metaphysical Questions*, 2015.

[4] *Personal Reflexions On Some Metaphysical Questions*.

[5] Contrary to modern convention I tend to write The State instead of

"the state" because I consider The State/The Nation-State a particular abstraction; as an existent, an entity, which has been manufactured, by human beings, and which entity, like many such manufactured 'things', has been, in its design and function, changed and which can still be changed, and which has associated with it a presumption of a supra-personal (and often moral) authority.

In addition, written The State (or the State) it suggests some-thing which endures or which may endure beyond the limited lifespan of a mortal human being.

[6] 'Reality' in the philosophical sense of what (in terms of physis) is distinguished or distinguishable from what is apparent or external. In terms of ancient Hellenic and Western Renaissance mysticism the distinction is between the esoteric and the exoteric; between the physis of a being and some outer form (or appearance) including the outer form that is a useful tool or implement which can be used to craft or to manufacture some-thing such as other categories/abstractions. With the important ontological proviso that what is esoteric is not the 'essence' of something - as for example Plato's ἰδέα/εἶδος - but instead the physis of the being itself as explicated for instance by Aristotle in *Metaphysics*, Book 5, 1015α,

ἐκ δὴ τῶν εἰρημένων ἡ πρώτη φύσις καὶ κυρίως λεγομένη ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία ἢ τῶν ἐχόντων ἀρχὴν κινήσεως ἐν αὐτοῖς ἢ αὐτά: ἡ γὰρ ὕλη τῷ ταύτης δεκτικὴ εἶναι λέγεται φύσις, καὶ αἱ γενέσεις καὶ τὸ φύεσθαι τῷ ἀπὸ ταύτης εἶναι κινήσεις. καὶ ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κινήσεως τῶν φύσει ὄντων αὕτη ἐστίν, ἐνυπάρχουσα πῶς ἢ δυνάμει ἢ ἐντελεχείᾳ

Given the foregoing, then principally - and to be exact - physis denotes the quidditas of beings having changement inherent within them; for substantia has been denoted by physis because it embodies this, as have the becoming that is a coming-into-being, and a burgeoning, because they are changelements predicated on it. For physis is inherent changelement either manifesting the potentiality of a being or as what a being, complete of itself, is.

That is, as I noted in my essay *Towards Understanding Physis*, it is a meson (μέσον) balanced between the being that-it-was and the being it

has the potentiality to unfold to become.

In respect of "what is real" - τῶν ὄντων - cf. the Poemandres tractate of the Corpus Hermeticum and especially section 3,

φημι ἐγώ, Μαθεῖν θέλω τὰ ὄντα καὶ νοῆσαι τὴν τούτων φύσιν
καὶ γνῶναι τὸν θεόν

I answered that I seek to learn what is real, to apprehend the physis of beings, and to have knowledge of theos [qv. *Corpus Hermeticum: Eight Tractates*, 2017]

[7] Qv. *Towards Understanding Physis*, 2015.

[8] I use term *affective* here, and in other writings, to mean "having the quality of affecting; tending to affect or influence."

[9] Qv. footnote [6]. In terms of ontology a meson is the balance, the median, existing between the being which-was and the being which-can-be.

[10] This understanding of Being as fluxive - as a changement - was prefigured in the mythos of Ancient Greece with the supreme deity - the chief of the gods - capable of being overthrown and replaced, as Zeus overthrew Kronos and as Kronos himself overthrew his own father.

[11] As explained in my 2014 essay *Education And The Culture of Pathei-Mathos*, the term describes "the accumulated pathei-mathos of individuals, world-wide, over thousands of years, as (i) described in memoirs, aural stories, and historical accounts; as (ii) have inspired particular works of literature or poetry or drama; as (iii) expressed via non-verbal mediums such as music and Art, and as (iv) manifest in more recent times by 'art-forms' such as films and documentaries."

This culture remembers the suffering and the beauty and the killing and the hubris and the love and the compassion that we mortals have presenced and caused over millennia, and which culture

"thus includes not only traditional accounts of, or accounts inspired by, personal pathei-mathos, old and modern - such as the *With The Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa* by Eugene Sledge, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Aleksandr

Solzhenitsyn, and the poetry of people as diverse as Sappho and Sylvia Plath - but also works or art-forms inspired by such pathei-mathos, whether personal or otherwise, and whether factually presented or fictionalized. Hence films such as *Monsieur Lazhar* and *Etz Limon* may poignantly express something about our φύσις as human beings and thus form part of the culture of pathei-mathos."

[12] κόσμον δὲ θείου σώματος κατέπεμψε τὸν ἄνθρωπον, "a cosmos of the divine body sent down as human beings." Tractate IV:2, Corpus Hermeticum.

Cf. Marsilii Ficini, *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*, XXVI, published in 1489 CE,

Quomodo per inferiora superioribus exposita deducantur superiora, et per mundanas materias mundana potissimum dona.

How, when what is lower is touched by what is higher, the higher is cosmically presenced therein and thus gifted because cosmically aligned.

Which is a philosophical restatement of the phrase "quod est inferius est sicut quod est superius" (what is above is as what is below) from the Latin version, published in 1541 CE, of the medieval Hermetic text known as *Tabula Smaragdina*.

[13] The quotation is from my *Classical Paganism And The Christian Ethos*, 2017.

[14] The quotation is from my *Tu Es Diaboli Ianua: Christianity, The Johannine Weltanschauung, And Presencing The Numinous*, 2017.

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