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Joseph M. FORTE[1], David PENN[2]

THE SELF-AWARENESS OF "SPIRITUAL" IMAGISTIC PHILOSOPHY

Abstract. Drawing on a variety of philosophers from Plato to Ricoeur, the authors suggest that philosophy based on poetry or image can be intellectually valuable in the following ways: They show how an intentional approach to imagistic, spiritual philosophy can promote consideration of beauty, engage the productive imagination, and ultimately alter one's engagement with the human predicament. This spiritual mode of philosophy does not stop in an aesthetic (the appetites) frame, but works through it productively.

Keywords: Plato, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, Ricoeur, myth, imagery, imaginary, imagination

Introduction

To be human is to be in a predicament. Born into a world not of our own making and with knowledge that we will all someday die, we nevertheless strive to live lives of meaning. Furthermore, we each develop conceptions/ images of this predicament that then indelibly shape our experiences. Political theorist William Connolly puts it this way: "An image of the human predicament informs affect-imbued judgment before it becomes an object of reflection" (Connolly 2011, 97). The term affect-imbued judgment effectively means something similar to the phrase "hermeneutics goes all the way down:" we do not experience the world neutrally and then

[1] Joseph M. Forte, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Rivier University, USA. Email: <jforte@rivier.edu>.

[2] David Penn, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Rivier University, USA. Email: <dpenn@rivier.edu>.

imbue meaning on it through reflection. Rather, our very experiences are always inundated with meaning garnered from our images of the human predicament. Our image-making faculties cannot be turned-off or bracketed away any more than, once I have learned to read, I can choose not to interpret these symbols as meaningful words. Spiritual practices offer training at the level of these directive images.

Spirituality is notoriously difficult to define, because any definition seems at once too broad and too specific.[3] By spiritual we need not make recourse to the supernatural. For this paper, we will simply suggest that spiritual practice is any intentional, repeated practice of reflection and mental construction that involves yet exceeds the bounds of rational argument. Words will only take us so far. Myths, parables, sacred poems, and proverbs all generate images which become contemporaneous with experience. Plato's Cave, the burning bush, Picasso's *Guernica*, and many other enduring images of all sorts are rightly said to "capture" our imaginations. To be captured is to, in some way, be subject to the power of the image. What if philosophy as a spiritual practice can, at the very least, make us more cognizant of our captors?

Plato's Self-aware Soul-Leading

For specific examples of philosophy as a spiritual practice that benefits from its self-awareness with regard to imagery, we turn to the exemplary Plato. Plato's attempts to lead souls to the highest forms of knowledge makes heavy use of imagery in the form of similes, allegories, and especially myths. Even writing itself is a kind of image-making. But unlike many of his contemporaries and predecessors, Plato was such a thoughtful practitioner of soul-leading that his work laid out the criteria for its own critique – sets of standards for others who followed in his footsteps.[4] By examining an example of self-aware and self-critical Platonic imagery, we can get a sense of both the limits and potential for

[3] We have in mind the work of sociologist Nancy Ammerman, whose methods of observing 'everyday' religion allow her to consider spiritual practices as anything which connects one to a deeper, unseen level of reality (see Ammerman 2014).

[4] Much of this section of the paper is based on sections of Forte 2016, 5-12, 79-81, 212-221.

image-laden philosophical writing that attempts to lead readers to higher forms of knowledge, including truths that we can confidently describe as spiritual in the sense explained above.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates implies that psychagogy (soul-leading rhetoric) only leads souls to what is good if its practitioner employs philosophy, and specifically dialectic. Socrates states that the rhetor or psychagogue leads his subjects "incrementally through similarities away from that which is on each occasion contrariwise" (262b6-7),[5] and without truly knowing what *is* the case, this endeavor would fail[6] (262b). Socrates explicitly identifies this knowledge needed for psychagogy as dialectic (*dialektikous*, 266c1) or philosophy (*philosophaysay*, 261a4)[7]. Above, it is clear that this dialectical process leads the subject away from what *is*, but why not lead the subject *toward* what *is*? Here, psychagogy seems to be a *reversal* of the dialectical truth-seeking process by a practitioner who has knowledge of what really *is*. Socrates even adds that *he* may have been inspired by the Muses to "toy with his audience and mislead them" (262d1-2).

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5 Socrates also uses the word "psychagogy" (*psuchagogia*) to indicate the leading or directing of souls by means of speech at 271c10. Marina McCoy understands psychagogy as "the leading of souls toward the forms." My explanation of psychagogy is in line with her view (see McCoy 2011, 167). Michel Foucault's understanding of psychagogy involves modifying the mode of Being of a subject. Though our interpretation of the Divided Line and the Allegory of the Cave elsewhere supports this view, we will not devote much attention to this aspect of psychagogy here (see Foucault 2005, 407). Other ancient Greeks also referred to this word as amusement or gratification, and some used it in the same sense Plato does, as the winning or leading of souls. *Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., s.v. "ψυχαγωγία," by H.G. Liddell and R. Scott. Elizabeth Asmis provides some helpful additional context, explaining that Aristophanes (*Birds* 1555) speaks of *psuchagogia* as Socrates conjuring souls – meaning both alluring and beguiling them. Isocrates (*Evagoras* 10) talks about it as a charm effect (in line with one sense of the dictionary definition above). In the *Laws* (909b), Plato uses the word in a sense very similar to that of Aristophanes above, as beguiling the living. In the *Timaeus* (71a), Plato uses the word as "beguilement of the desiring part of the soul by means of images" (see Asmis 1986, 156). This last sense, from the *Timaeus*, could complement the meaning of psychagogy for which we are arguing (leading to the true by way of the false) quite well, if Asmis' assessment is correct.

6 All translations of Plato's *Phaedrus* are by Alexander Nehemas and Paul Woodruff, taken from Cooper, unless otherwise noted (see Plato 1997).

7 All Greek references to the *Phaedrus* are to Burnet's edition (see Burnet 1901/1967).

Is psychagogy, in Plato's account, simply a tool for deception, given this reverse practice of dialectic, or is Plato perhaps here describing a negative side of psychagogy that ultimately has a positive outcome? The context of the above remarks lends credibility to the latter suggestion because the *Phaedrus* contains several examples of ways in which we might be more successful at reaching the truth as a result of first pursuing that which is false in comparison:

(1) Socrates recants his first speech (237a-241d) in elaborate fashion (242b-244a, 257a-b), resulting in the second speech (244a-257b), which Phaedrus considers to be superior to the first (257c).

(2) The description of the charioteer's erotic experience of the boy proceeds quickly from its detailed depiction of the temptations of sex to recollection of the real. (253e-254b)

(3) The lover's erotic temptation, when overcome successfully, leads to a life of philosophy. (255e-256a)

Perhaps being toyed with and misled in this way can lead one to the truth, whereas other forms of misleading psychagogy, possibly those that are less artful or philosophical, do not yield this positive outcome. Perhaps Plato is suggesting that the one who is skillfully directed away from what *is* ultimately finds what *is* for himself.

Some clarification may lie in Socrates' description of a sort of shortcut to artful soul leading. He explains that anyone who wants to direct souls need to know how many kinds of souls exist as well as all of the kinds of speeches that best convince each type of soul (271d-272a). He and Phaedrus agree on the obvious, that it is quite arduous to practice psychagogy correctly (272b), after which Socrates says:

> "And that's why we must turn all our arguments every which way and try to find some easier and shorter route to the art: we don't want to follow a long, rough path for no good reason when we can choose a short smooth one instead" (272b7-c2).

This short smooth path, which he introduces as "the wolf's side of the story" (272c10-11), involves pursuing what is "likely" (*eikos*, 272e1). "The whole art consists in cleaving to that throughout your speech," says Socrates (272e5-273a1). He and Phaedrus agree that the likely is "what is accepted by the crowd" (273a7-b1). Socrates then gives an example of the way in

which this technique may result in a ridiculous outcome in a court of law, where a weak, tenacious man beats up and robs a strong man. The strong one will not admit to cowardice, and so, he invents a lie, in response to which the weak man can simply ask how a small man like him could beat up someone so big (273b-c). Clearly, the weak, guilty man would go free because of the way in which both men were unwilling to challenge the expectations of the many. This outcome undermines the very purpose of a court of law and makes a mockery of it. Socrates follows this by pointing out that a sensible man will make the laborious effort needed in order to speak and act in a way that pleases the gods, "his masters" (*despotais*, 274a1), rather than in a way that pleases his "fellow slaves" (*homodoulois*, 273e9). In summary, Socrates points out a shortcut, which involves essentially leading one's audience by using the false as a guide, in the form of the likely or crowd-pleasing, and then Socrates immediately recants that shortcut because he reduces it to absurdity with his court of law example. This shortcut to effective psychagogy results in an absurd outcome because its touchstone or standard is lies and deception, not because it initially leads its audience to the false. This shortcut is a world away from leading one's audience away from what *is*, or toying with them, while having knowledge of the truth and using the truth as a guide.[8]

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[8] Hadot's work comparing and contrasting the psychagogy or "*Seelenleitung*" of the sophists with that of Plato and Socrates bears out the aforementioned understanding of Platonic psychagogy (see Hadot 1969). Hadot explains that the sophists (especially Gorgias, followed by Isocrates) relied on public opinion as their touchstone for truth, while Plato and Socrates, highly critical of this, demanded an alternate test for truth (22). Plato's particular brand of soul-leading has an elaborate metaphysical foundation. Platonic psychagogy is well-grounded for leading its subjects to the truth of self-knowledge and knowledge about reality. Hadot also accounts for the force and effectiveness of Platonic psychagogy by examining its roots. Referring to fables of the sort we first find in Hesiod, Hadot explains that fantasy disguises moral principles in such a way that they penetrate verses and sentences in layers of consciousness much deeper than those that typify daily life. In this way, adds Hadot, these fables operate not only on reason, but also evoke emotion. (16) Hadot points out that the simultaneous engagement of emotions and reason lies at the foundation of *Seelenleitung*. Regarding the tools used for these purposes, Hadot mentions three in particular: "imitation, suggestion, (and) sympathy," which modern as well as ancient psychagogues have employed (20). All translations from German are our own, unless otherwise noted. Commenting specifically on Platonic psychagogy, Hadot explains that in wandering about the many inner

Imagery, or the contemplation of imagery, provides a fruitful third option that is neither deceitful nor impotent. Socrates frames his second speech in the *Phaedrus* (244a-257d) as a recantation or palinode in honor of love. He first announces that he wants to explain the truth about the soul, after which he outlines a proof for its immortality and an explanation of its structure (245c-246a). It is here where he introduces the image of a chariot pulled by a pair of winged horses and driven by a charioteer as an analogy for the soul. He then explains the way in which souls either fly high into the heavens to glimpse intelligible reality or, if the soul's wings are not nourished by things like Beauty, Wisdom, and Goodness, the soul sheds its wings, plunging down into physical reality. This is what souls do either before or after their life on earth, according to this speech, and the success of souls in this regard is linked to the souls' ability to become human in their next life and also gain wisdom in that life (246b-249c).

Socrates later explains the nature of the two horses and the charioteer in further detail, to shed further light on the nature of the soul. In the context of this description, he says that what keeps the whole chariot under control is the charioteer's recollection of intelligible realities from before birth. The charioteer represents the soul's rationality, and, if it is able to control the soul's erotic appetitive urges (represented by the horse that is untame), it will live virtuously and happily both during life and after it, while those who give in to the demands of the appetites adopt a lower way of living and are punished beneath the earth during the afterlife (253c-257a).

The images Socrates describes include the horses and charioteer (246a-b) (which bears a striking resemblance to the tripartite soul of the *Republic*), the heavens (246e-247c), and the realm that is beyond the

windings of a Platonic dialogue, one may investigate and find true knowledge. She adds that one may speak of certain knowledge only if one has suffered through the task of first considering many other possibilities (36). Hadot's words here may remind us of Socrates' description of psychagogy in the *Phaedrus*, where soul-leading, when done artfully by one who knows the truth in its fullness, mainly involves directing others toward what *is* by first leading them toward partial truths. One must suffer and strain through the repeated realizations that what one thought was the real truth actually is not, in such a way that one is ultimately led to what is real and true. Concluding her remarks on Platonic psychagogy, Hadot says that the Platonic dialogue both is itself a way and also shows a way for the soul to progress toward the good (37).

heavens (247c-e), with the latter two both helping to explain the intellectual heights to which the soul may ascend. Socrates also conveys the story of the souls' journeys before and after life, including their judgment (248a-250c), as well as their rewards and punishments (256b-e). These details arguably convey the benefits of intellectual love and the negative aspects of physical love by portraying the rewards of the former and the punishments associated with the latter. It seems that this speech is leading the soul to pursue intellectual love rather than physical love, where the former really is good and the latter only appears so. Socrates conveys the beauty of intellectual love by using erotic imagery.

It is not difficult to defend the viability of a figurative reading here, in large part due to the built-in allegorical elements, especially the charioteer image[9]. A purely literal reading is not viable, due to the myth's inherent reliance on a figurative image of the soul. It is viable, however, to understand the story of the soul's journey, including its rewards and punishments, as an account with many elements likely to resemble a probable literal truth in a very general sense[10]. The second speech treats love, in large part, by means of explanatory passages that do not tell a story with invented details, but that rely on the aid of a central analogy, as well as a story and its invented details. The speech also relies on a proof of the immortality of the soul. The entire speech can thus be called a likely account. Furthermore, the element of reincarnation, a widely accepted belief found in Orphism and Pythagoreanism, adds to the likelihood of the account. There seems to be grounds for a metaphorical reading portraying the immediate rewards or punishments for injustice in *this* life, like the description of immoderate souls not being able to see true reality as well as moderate souls can (247b). Since there is a clear

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9 R. Hackforth echoes this. Pieper also presents a figurative reading of the myth, although he, like Hackforth, does not identify the "myth of the soul" with the entirety of the second speech (see Hackforth 1952, 72; and Pieper 1964, 77-83).

10 Richard Bett argues for the viability of a literal reading (see Bett 1986, 24). Hitchcock argues for a literal interpretation of the divine procession, but he also considers a metaphorical reading of the speech's account of reincarnation and recollection (Hitchcock 1974, 230). Morgan argues that only a sophist, according to the opening of the *Phaedrus* (229c-230a), would seriously investigate the literal truth of a myth (see also Morgan 2000, 160). There's clearly some truth to this, in our estimation, given that the "likely" in the *Phaedrus* is associated with what is generally accepted by the many.

discussion of Forms in this account, it may also be possible to argue that this myth provokes contemplation of those Ideas and the others to which they are related. The function of Socrates's second speech involves teaching the reader about the nature of intellectual love, including its rewards, in contrast to the deprecating results of purely physical love.[11]

While the erotic language and imagery engages our base appetites, the myth entices us to view the erotic imagery in a way that recollects divine Beauty, with the former motivating the latter. In 251a-252d, for instance, Socrates describes the way in which one experiences the longing of love. At the same time that the erotic language he uses engages the appetites, Socrates' description of the pain of yearning for one's beloved strikes the reader. The reader simultaneously recalls the feelings of erotic longing and awe for his beloved, as well as the desire to compete for this person's love. Then, describing the experience of love, Socrates highlights the important role of shame in helping to keep the soul from acting on appetitive impulses (254a-e and 256a-b). For fully experiencing the various desires and pains of love and refusing to give in to the temptations of the appetites, the reward is the greatest good possible for a human being: one ascends to the intellectual realm of the divine (256b).

The myth invites further inquiry. The audience is invited to understand madness by beginning a philosophically fruitful conversation about it and not arriving at a final definition. The audience is also invited to engage in dialectical metaphysics. When the soul travels its circular path, it sees Justice, Self-Control, and Knowledge (247d). This discussion of the Forms invites dialectical engagement with the following questions: Why are only Justice, Self-Control, and Knowledge mentioned? Why is Plato highlighting them? Human self-control is a bad thing according to the speech, so then, what is divine Self-Control by comparison?

Describing souls in the heavens before birth, Plato designates three levels of vision and then nine types of lives (248a-b and d-e). Which lives correspond with the soul who is god-like, which with the one who

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[11] Pieper thinks the second speech is the "real" content of the *Phaedrus*, making the whole dialogue worthwhile (Pieper 2011, 42). Though we see the palinode as a high point of the dialogue, Pieper risks overstating its role with such a remark.

misses some real things, and which with the one who sees no reality? Apart from the gods' souls, there is a three-fold distinction: souls that see Forms fairly continuously, those that see them intermittently, and those that do not see Forms at all (248a). In the discussion of incarnations, there is a corresponding distinction: (1) Souls that follow gods and see the Forms are not incarnated (248c3-5); (2) souls that are not able to follow gods continuously, but have glimpsed some of the Forms are incarnated into the nine types of human lives in the order of the extent of their vision (248c5-249b5); and (3) the souls that have not even glimpsed Forms are incarnated into animals (249b5-6). This pair of three-fold distinctions invites important questions about the cognitive potential of human beings: What knowledge of Forms are we capable of and what does that look like when manifest in our lives? What are the implications of achieving it or not?[12]

The second speech of the *Phaedrus* is interconnected with the dialogue around it in numerous ways, one of which is the criteria for its own value. This palinode recognizes its limitations by indicating some of the directions in which further study can proceed in order to continue the lines of discussion begun in the less mythological, more strictly rational, aspects of the dialogue. One result of repeated consideration of the mythical imagery[13] is that it might evoke a communion with the Forms like a kind of prayer or meditation.

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[12] R.S. Bluck says that this myth exemplifies the principles of collection and division (see Bluck 1961, 52). Cristina Ionescu engages in a thorough exploration of the relationship between recollection and dialectic in the second speech (see Ionescu 2012, 1-24). Morgan argues that the method of collection and division could not be developed in the second speech, because it is only there by chance and needs to be developed by rational inquiry (see Morgan 2020, 239).

[13] This objection assumes that myth is a type of poetry, which is how I understand the relationship between the former and latter. I do not see them as simply equivalent. Janet Smith explains that we can identify myth as poetry since most ancient Greek poetry had myth as its content. Also, Platonic myth has a number of features typically considered poetic, like beautiful language, similes, metaphors, and emotional intensity. Additionally, she says, Plato's myths are sometimes rhythmical. However, completely equating the Platonic myth with poetry is problematic, according to Smith, because Plato's myths are not metrical. She cites 393d8 where Socrates says he will speak without meter since he is not a poet (see Smith 1985, 10-12). Catherine Collobert argues convincingly that Plato sees myth as poetic philosophy (see Collobert 2012, 87).

In the *Republic*, Plato lays out a well-known, controversial, and elaborate set of criteria for good image-making that the palinode of the *Phaedrus* seems to satisfy – in addition to the guidelines laid out in its own dialogue. This is not to say that Plato wrote one dialogue before the other, or that he composed the *Phaedrus* with the *Republic* in mind. Rather, the fact that the second speech of the *Phaedrus* might satisfy even the criteria of the *Republic* is further evidence of its value as self-aware imagery.

In book 2 of the *Republic*, Socrates begins censoring art for the sake of children's rearing, arguing that this is warranted because of their impressionability and inability to understand certain adult themes (377b). The censorship eventually grows quite expansive, extending to many well-known passages from Homer, Hesiod, and others. Rather than just banning these passages from use for children, as was initially suggested, much of this literature is either severely restricted or eliminated entirely from the city[14]. The justification here is that these texts present themes that are dangerous for the average citizen to hear, like portrayals of the gods as deceptive[15] and, in general, depictions that might encourage vice,[16] including those of unjust people being rewarded (392a-b).

The justification for this censorship is maintained throughout the *Republic*, and even into the final book, where Socrates confirms that they were right not to admit any imitative art (595a) because of its distance from the truth and the way it perverts the thoughts of those who hear it[17]. Socrates explains why the mimetic arts are distanced from truth, saying that, whereas a craftsman produces a copy of a Form, an artist produces a copy of the craftsman's copy, thus being twice removed from truth (597b-598c, 602a-c). Explaining why imitation has a perverting effect on thinking, Socrates claims that it relaxes the rational part of the soul and allows shameful emotions to surface (605d-606d).

We suggest that Plato's palinode in the *Phaedrus* is conscious of both of these criticisms, as well as the criticisms of art from the earlier books of the *Republic*. He does this by carefully regulating the emotion

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14 377e-378b, 378d-e, 379d-e, 383a; This list is far from exhaustive.

15 379b-c, 381b, 381d-e, 382e.

16 388e-389a, 389e-392a.

17 595b, 596b-598b, 598d-600e, 602c-d, 605a-b.

his work evokes,[18] and by producing copies that function like objects in the cave that inspire freed prisoners (his readers) to turn around toward the light[19]. Also, he portrays the divine – the Forms – as good, as opposed to deceptive, and presents the unjust as being punished while the just are rewarded. Plato consequently encourages virtue rather than vice with his depictions. However, even well into book 10 of the *Republic*, the reader has not heard anything even remotely positive about the imagery of poetry and art, so why would Plato even consider writing it? Furthermore, why would he possibly want us to take it seriously?

To answer this question, we will turn now to Plato's final word on poetry in book 10. Socrates says:

> "Nonetheless, if the poetry that aims at pleasure and imitation has any argument to bring forward that proves it ought to have a place in a well-governed city, we at least would be glad to admit it, for we are well aware of the charm it exercises. But, be that as it may, to betray what one believes to be the truth is impious… Therefore, isn't it just that such poetry should return from exile when it has successfully defended itself, whether in lyric or any other meter? …Then we'll allow its defenders, who aren't poets themselves but lovers of poetry, to speak in prose on its behalf and to show that it not only gives pleasure but is beneficial both to constitutions and to human life. Indeed, we'll listen to them graciously, for we'd certainly profit if poetry were shown to be not only pleasant but also beneficial." (607c2-e1)

Four times, Socrates says that the city will benefit from poetry if it is *proven* to be beneficial. Plato's myths possess a built-in philosophical defense, which results in large part from their interconnectedness with

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[18] Destrée, for instance, says that by multiplying the indirectness of the account, Plato allows us to feel emotion in a distant, even ironic way (see Destrée 2012, 124). Plato clearly does this in the *Phaedrus* with the second speech, which Socrates says is by Steischorus (244a).

[19] Collobert is especially illuminating on this point. She argues that Platonic imagery has a philosophical model as its original, and therefore, delusion is removed from the illusions he creates. While poets and sophists merely copy from the realm of opinion, which leads to the confusion of images with their originals, Plato's copies are well-grounded, because they are devices to portray philosophical content, and have a grasp of what *is* as their foundation. Also, unlike the sophist, the philosopher does not conceal the distance between image and model, making the deluded viewer aware of the delusion (see Collobert 2012, 87, 95, 102). Collobert (2012, 99), specifically argues that the imagery of Platonic myth is only once removed from the truth.

the broader dialogical context[20]. Plato here makes the point emphatically that poetry can really be a good thing, *if* framed correctly, that is, philosophically or non-poetically. One reason for this benefit, as stated above, is the charm (*kayloumenois*, c7) of poetry. Socrates implies here that this charm could be a tool for good if implemented by one who could defend its use[21]. Specifically, great poetry can be a source of pleasure that is beneficial for the soul. This is contrary to the many appetitive pleasures discussed throughout the dialogue that threaten the harmony of the soul and that lead down a slippery slope resulting in dooming one to the miserable life of a soul driven entirely by the most depraved pleasures. The good pleasures of poetic imagery on the other hand include contemplation of the Forms, which myths like the second speech of the *Phaedrus* stimulate largely because of their treatment of the Forms, which comes forth in close figurative reading, and the re-reading and re-thinking they provoke through their charm effect. One need not even have the actual text before them to engage in such pleasant contemplation. Ultimately, such repeated pleasant contemplation leads to glimpses of beautiful, virtue-inspiring Ideas, along the lines experienced by the charioteers who manage to rise temporarily above the constant procession.

Contemporary Perspectives on Spiritual Philosophy and Its Relationship with Imagery

Contemporary approaches to this problematic utilize several overlapping but related terms including: imagination, cultural imagination, imaginary, and many variations therein. Theorists from fields as divergent as psychoanalysis, theology, anthropology, and sociology continue to work and rework theories that converge around the concept of the imaginary.

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[20] It is precisely because Platonic myth provokes critical reflection that Marina McCoy argues it satisfies the criteria for good poetry (607e-608a). Also, she says, Plato's poetry might awaken the lower parts of the soul, but it does so in a way that promotes rational goals. In these ways, Platonic poetry incorporates its self-prescribed limits (see McCoy 2012, 130-131).

[21] Stanley Rosen refers to those who have this ability as those who possess the remedy for poetry (see Rosen 1993, 10).

The imaginary encompasses both what can be expressed in language and the unconscious attitudes and directive images beneath language. The imaginary can be understood to have a core of directive images and a horizon delineating the limits of what can be thought. It is deeply individual, but the development of an individual's imaginary is heavily dependent on their context. Just as for Plato myths and images invite reflection into their deeper dimensions, the purpose of the spiritual practice of contemplation can be to widen that horizon and subsequently re-view one's directive images. In her thoughtful book on imagination and spiritual development, Sarah Arthur argues that there is a general feeling that:

> "… the imagination is somehow evil or at least something we're supposed to grow out of… No doubt we have Freud and the moderns to thank for equating imagination with fantasy and illusion and making it all negative… Even now there's a tenacious tendency among both liberals and conservatives to equate imagination with making stuff up." (Arthur 2007, 41)

Arthur instead describes the imagination thus: "the imagination is the image-making faculty of the intellect that helps us discover, process, and creatively express coherent meaning. Or, to state it quite simply, imagination is how we put things together" (Arthur 2007, 53)[22]. The imagination is, for Arthur, the tool that constructs one's imaginary. She shows how the imagination, thus described, can also be a useful tool for spiritual formation. She casts the youth mentor as "bard," inviting young people to journey to Middle-Earth, Hogwarts, or Redwall on their way to Calvary. In distancing herself from an imagination which actually *does* "make stuff up," Arthur limits the imagination's role to expressing or deriving meaning from some pre-existing reality. This is the imagination's ability to construct imaginaries: the imagination draws connections between disparate bits of information in order to construct imaginaries, discrete but overlapping clusters of concepts and understandings which enable an individual to both negotiate the troubled waters of the world and derive meaning from it.

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[22] This is similar to Richard Osmer's definition of the primary imagination as "*the activity of pattern formation and recognition*" (Osmer 2014, 55).

Anthropologist Claudia Strauss argues that the term *Imaginary* – as in, a national-cultural imaginary, or a social imaginary – has gained traction as the term 'culture' has been sliding into obscurity (see Strauss 2006, 322). Strauss argues that the term has become so commonplace that its meaning is generally assumed. However, current uses of 'imaginary' in anthropological studies typically come from one of three sources: "for Castoriadis, the imaginary is a culture's ethos; for Lacan, it is a fantasy; for Anderson and Taylor, it is a cultural model (*i.e.* a learned, widely shared implicit cognitive schema" (Strauss 2006, 323). Strauss meticulously outlines these positions, all the while arguing against any conception of the imaginary which creates a false homogeneity:

> "This means talking, not about 'the imaginary of a society', but of people's imaginaries." (Strauss 2006, 323)

The imaginary is not the way a culture presents itself to an individual. It is the way individuals imagine their culture, relationships, purpose, and so on (see Strauss 2006, 326). This is another way of saying what we've argued at the outset: that our directive images exert a relentless influence on the experience of being human.

One's imaginary thus has several delineable characteristics. First, one's imaginary develops in relation to material objects and practices (325). Thus, it is likely that people who participate in similar practices and with similar material surroundings will develop similar imaginaries surrounding those objects and practices. Second, the imaginary can be distinguished from both the symbolic and the real (327). Whatever the *real* is, it is not accessible to an individual. We always interact with the world through our imaginaries, preverbal constructs developed from birth. This leads to the third important characteristic: an imaginary can actually obscure the real, it can be 'misconstructed' (327). At any given moment an individual juggles numerous imaginary – these imaginaries may overlap to greater or lesser degrees. In her analysis of post-Columbine discourse, Strauss shows how different imaginaries are operationalized by the same person depending on the circumstances and that person's individual goals. One's individualistic moral imaginary may prevent one from giving

money to a beggar. But later, that same person may draw upon a communal moral imaginary to argue for the centralization of healthcare.

The imaginary is often implicitly assumed to inscribe the limits of what is real. However, this often does not leave any space for creativity. Rather, one's imaginary – or, the sum total of one's imaginaries – is implicitly assumed to readily correlate with what is 'out there,' and the imagination, contrary to Arthur, is seen as existing outside of that sphere. For example, in 1830, a member of the British Parliament named William Huskisson was attending the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway when he attempted to cross the tracks ahead of an oncoming train. The size and speed of trains had no place in his spatial imaginary, and he was summarily run over (Gonzales 2003, 76)[23]. Had Huskisson possessed the right knowledge – of train speeds, for example – and a reasoning faculty, he would have survived. The imaginary is therefore seen as the place where reason works with knowledge to enable an organism to function (*Fig. 1*). This positivistic conception renders intelligible a certain epistemology that renders objects passive and 'knowers' generic[24]. This model fails, however, in its inability to account for the creative moment which makes possible the invention of a train capable of existence. Where is the convergence of the imagined and the real? For this, we turn to the work of Paul Ricoeur.

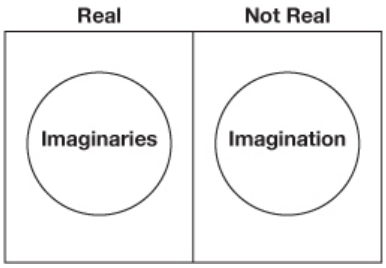

Figure 1

[23] It is possible that he understood how trains worked, and knew how to profit from their expansion. So, one could say there was a place for trains in his economic or mechanical, but not spatial imaginaries. This further illustrates the presence of multiple, overlapping imaginaries an individual juggle.

[24] This conception can also be linked to the subject-object binary common in Enlightenment thought. See the work of Grace Jantzen, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and others.

For Ricoeur, the imagination is not incidental to thought; it permeates all of thought and has both a reproductive *and* a productive function. The reproductive imagination is an essential ingredient of perception, a point ignored in *Fig. 1*. George Taylor, summarizing Ricoeur's imagination lectures, echoes Arthur's claim about the marginalization of the productive imagination: "to the degree the imagination tries to portray something different from the original, it is simply marginal, an escape or flight from reality; it produces nothingness" (Taylor 2006, 95)[25]. This is the sense behind the oft-heard critiques of imagination as irrational, or even in recent debates about arts education. On this view, which in some ways resembles Plato's critique of poetry above, knowledge is produced solely by the rational reflection of a rational agent on their experiences. The arts, which depend on the imagination, are mere fancy, incapable of moving from the imagined to the real. Feminist and Postcolonial thinkers, however, have exposed the ways in which Western thought's separation of reason and the imagination has served particular power structures and interests. In short, it is hegemonic.[26]

In contrast, Ricoeur develops a conception of the productive imagination that discloses new dimensions of reality (see Taylor 2006, 98). In Taylor's words:

> "The productive imagination is not something 'irrational,' [Ricoeur] says; 'it must be categorical in order to be transcategorical. To be effective, the productive imagination must transform existing categories; it cannot exist totally outside and separate from them. This suggests that any transformative fiction… must have elements of reproductive imagination, must draw from existing reality sufficiently so that its productive distance is not too great." (Taylor 2006, 97-98)

The productive imagination is thus dialectically related to the reproductive imagination and the boundary between the two is porous (*Fig. 2*). So while imaginaries exist primarily within the reproductive imagination, a disease – or a new healthy growth – can readily spread to the imagination as a whole. Conversely, a healthy productive imagination draws upon

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[25] This history, which will not be addressed here, goes back as far as Plato.

[26] This visual representation fits well with Jantzen's critique of a Lockean epistemology which features a stark subject/object binary: "It is in fact a technology of power for excluding radical difference, and thereby effectively limiting who shall count as knowers" (Jantzen 2001, 7).

the reproductive imagination and is, for Ricoeur, at the heart of both redemption and conversion.

> "[The imagination] is, par excellence, the instituting and the constituting of what is humanly possible. In imagining his possibilities, man acts as a prophet of his own existence. We can then begin to understand in what sense we may speak of a *redemption through imagination*: by means of dreams of innocence and reconciliation, hope works to the fullest human capacity… The imagination, in so far as it has a mytho-poetic function, is also the seat of profound workings which govern the decisive changes in our visions of the world. Every real conversion is first a revolution at the level of our directive images." (Ricoeur 1965, 127)

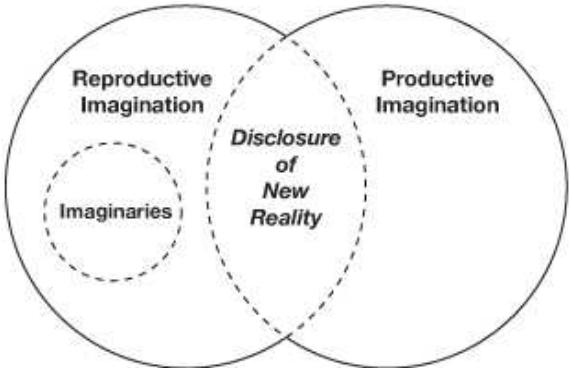

Figure 2

Ricoeur thus takes others to task for limiting the imagination to its synthesizing capabilities. There is, in the intersection between the reproductive and productive imaginations, the potential to disclose a new reality. Ricoeur links this to, for example, the ability to imagine a vision of utopia. I can imagine a world without racism even though I have no 'real' referent for such a world. Furthermore, my ability to imagine such a world is the first step in actualizing that world. Richard Osmer notes the importance of the productive imagination for both individual and societal transformation. On the individual level psychological developmental models point to the imagination's role in discovering limitations of the status quo and imagining one's life differently. On the societal level, the productive imagination creates myths, or "imaginative stories that depict the everyday world within an interpretation of the ultimate context of human existence" (Osmer

2014, 57) These myths, products of the imagination themselves, become the basis of new social arrangements and understandings and fodder for new creative moments. The space created in the intersection of one's reproductive and productive imaginations is the space in which the imagined becomes real.

Conclusion

We've sketched a philosophy with high aspirations for overcoming a malaise of thought prompted by, depending on whom one asks, technocracy, social media, AI, sports, advertising, neoliberalism, the culture industry, or simply the ascendancy of emojis. One need not accept Plato's metaphysics to observe that these images lack both depth and coherence. Therefore, the world of the 21st century tends to collapse into static. Plato suggested that poetry's usefulness is dependent upon one's framing of it, but the modern world admits little time to even construct a frame. Indeed, one could plausibly suggest that the default directive imagery of the 21st century individual is itself an over-saturated mental state devoid of content, what Karmen MacKendrick calls a "scattered time" (MacKendrick 2016, 40). It is not the content of the images that matters; it is the mode of engagement.

In contrast to the image-saturated nature of modern life in which one can scroll mindlessly through seemingly infinite, banal content on the internet, the kind of contemplation suggested by Plato and Ricoeur requires sustained effort. This is precisely the role of philosophical training in a spiritual mode. An image, it is said, is worth a thousand words. This is only true, however, if we spend time in thoughtful contemplation. Otherwise, we are cutting off our imagination before it can really get started by limiting it to, at most, its reproductive function. Isn't there more pleasure to be found, as Plato suggested, in contemplating images in one's own mind even when those images are not physically present? Is this not exactly the way in which such images, like memories, both provide pleasure and are transformed?

We hope to have troubled the space between "the real" and "the imagined." Since at least the time of Kant, skepticism about the human ability to access things in themselves has prevailed. Knowledge is a slippery

thing. This need not, however, prevent the curious and the thoughtful from practicing philosophy in a spiritual mode that goes beyond rational argument to the deepest recesses of our image-generating faculties. Following Plato and Ricoeur, a spiritual mode of philosophy refuses to end inquiry, observation, and reflection too soon. This in turn produces new, slower habits of thought. The process is not linear, like scrolling on a phone, but iterative, like walking the same trail again and again until the trail itself changes. In this way philosophy, by prompting thoughtful reflection on directive images, has the power to uniquely alter the human predicament.

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