Studies in Historical Philosophy, vol. 7

Donald Phillip Verene

The Philosophic Spirit

Its Meaning and Presence

ibidem

Series Editors: Alexander L. Gungov, Donald P. Verene

Donald Phillip Verene

The Philosophic Spirit
Its Meaning and Presence

STUDIES IN HISTORICAL PHILOSOPHY

Editor: Alexander Gungov

Consulting Editor: Donald Phillip Verene

ISSN 2629-0316

1 *Dustin Peone*
Memory as Philosophy
The Theory and Practice of Philosophical Recollection
ISBN 978-3-8382-1336-1

2 *Raymond Barfield*
The Poetic Apriori: Philosophical Imagination in a Meaningful Universe
ISBN 978-3-8382-1350-7

3 *Jennifer Lobo Meeks*
Allegory in Early Greek Philosophy
ISBN 978-3-8382-1425-2

4 *Vanessa Freerks*
Baudrillard with Nietzsche and Heidegger: Towards a Genealogical Analysis
ISBN 978-3-8382-1474-0

5 *Thora Ilin Bayer and Donald Phillip Verene*
Philosophical Ideas
A Historical Study
ISBN 978-3-8382-1585-3

6 *Jeffrey Andrew Barash*
Shadows of Being
Encounters with Heidegger in Political Theory and Historical Reflection
ISBN 978-3-8382-1485-6

7 *Donald Phillip Verene*
The Philosophic Spirit
Its Meaning and Presence
ISBN 978-3-8382-1781-9

Donald Phillip Verene

THE PHILOSOPHIC SPIRIT

Its Meaning and Presence

ibidem
Verlag

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.d-nb.de abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

ISBN-13: 978-3-8382-7781-3
© ***ibidem***-Verlag, Stuttgart 2023
Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar. Dies gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und elektronische Speicherformen sowie die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronical, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

In memory of my friendship with the philosopher Ernesto Grassi (1902–1991) and our times in conversation at the Grassi's villa in several late summers on the island of Ischia, near Naples.

And thus it was from the Greeks
that philosophy took its rise.
Diogenes Laertius

Contents

Preface

The philosophic spirit is part of the human spirit. Philosophy exists because we are mortal and because it is possible to pursue the rational imagination as a means to comprehend the meaning of our mortality. This pursuit has its beginnings in the ancient quest for self–knowledge, which includes the quest to know how to act as human. We are today in the fortunate position to look back over more than twenty–five centuries of this quest for self–knowledge. It is a way for us to face our own need to acquire self–knowledge and to fill our own need to grasp how to be human. There is nothing in the present as present that will provide self–knowledge. Self–knowledge presupposes memory that places the present in connection to the past. The future is always what emerges from the past.

The history of philosophy is part of the great theater of human memory. The figures of the philosophic spirit appear on its stage and put their ideas into words. And then, like the sequence of speeches in a theater, the moving finger of philosophy writes and, having writ, moves on. Memory holds all that there is. The reader of this small book is invited to enter into the ideas it records. My selection of the figures that hold these ideas is subjective. I do not intend them to be a master list. I intend them to be a philosophical miscellany, an album, taken from the history of philosophy, as the repository of the philosophic spirit.

My approach is that of *ars topica*, not *ars critica*—to appreciate what various philosophers have said as starting–points for thought, allowing the ideas they express to speak for themselves. In so doing, my aim is to follow Horace's advice, in his letter to the Pisos, known as *Ars poetica*, "either to instruct, or to delight, or to utter words both pleasing and helpful to life" (333–34). Philosophy shares with poetry these three possibilities.

I agree with Cicero, who said, in the *Tusculan Disputations*: "O philosophy, thou guide of life, o thou explorer of virtue and expeller of vice! Without thee what could have become not only of me but of the life of man altogether? Thou hast given birth to

cities, thou hast called scattered human beings into the bond of social life, thou hast united them first of all in joint habitations, next in wedlock, then in the ties of common literature and speech, thou has discovered law, thou hast been the teacher of morality and order: to thee I fly for refuge, from thee I look for aid, to thee I entrust myself, as once in ample measure, so now wholly and entirely. Moreover one day well spent and in accordance with thy lessons is to be preferred to an eternity of error. Whose help then are we to use rather than thine? thou that hast freely granted us peacefulness of life and destroyed the dread of death" (5.2.5).

Philosophia is the transliteration of the Greek φιλοσοφια, which is formed by joining φιλια (*philia*, friendly love, affection, friendship, Lat. *amicitia*) with σοφια (*sophia*, wisdom, Lat. *sapientia*). Cicero says: "Wisdom [*sapientia*] is the knowledge [*scientia*] of things divine and human and acquaintance [*cognitio*] with the cause of each of them, with the result that wisdom copies what is divine" (*Tusc.* 4.26.57). Regarding friendship, Cicero says: "For friendship is nothing else than an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection, and I am inclined to think that, with the exception of wisdom, no better thing has been given to man by the immortal gods" (*Laelius on Friendship* 6.20).

The philosophic spirit arises from wonder (*thauma*). Wonder is produced when in our thought we arrive at an apparent equivalence between contrary meanings (*aporia*) such that we can see no way out. In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Theaetetus tells Socrates that he faces such *aporiai* when he attempts to think about fundamental questions of existence: "By the gods, Socrates, I am lost in wonder [*thauma*] when I think of all these things, and sometimes when I regard them it really makes my head swim." Socrates replies: "For this feeling of wonder shows that you are a philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning of philosophy, and he who said that Iris was the child of Thaumas made a good genealogy" (155c–d). Iris acts as the messenger of heaven and her father's name is a play on wonder.

Aristotle endorses this view of wonder when he says: "For it is owing to their wonder [*thauma*] that human beings both now

begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters" (*Metaphysics* 982b). *Thauma* is the middle term that joins *philia* with *sophia* and thus makes doing philosophy (*philosophein*) possible. The *aporiai* that are encountered by attempting to think about the nature of things induce wonder and cause those who encounter them to persist in the love of wisdom.

In Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates relates a speech made to him by Diotima, a woman from Mantinea, a village in the Peloponnesus, regarding the connection between Eros (Love) and wisdom. Diotima informs Socrates that Eros is by nature neither immortal or mortal, but is a figure midway between wisdom and ignorance. Diotima says: "In fact, you see, none of the gods loves wisdom or wants to become wise—for they are wise—and no one else who is wise already loves wisdom; on the other hand, no one who is ignorant will love wisdom either or want to become wise. For what's especially defective about being ignorant is that you are content with yourself, even though you're neither beautiful and good nor intelligent. If you don't think you need anything, of course you won't want what you don't think you need."

Socrates realizes that Diotima is describing the nature of the philosopher, who loves wisdom but does not claim to possess wisdom. Socrates asks: "In that case, Diotima, who *are* the people who love wisdom, if they are neither wise nor ignorant?" Diotima replies: "That's obvious. A child could tell you. Those who love wisdom fall in between those two extremes" (204a–b). Eros, as Diotima is speaking of him, is an ancient cosmogonic power. Hesiod, in the *Theogony*, says: "Eros, who is the most beautiful among the immortal gods, the limb–melter—he overpowers the mind and the thoughtful counsel of all the gods and of all the human beings in their breasts" (120–22). Diotima's characterization of Eros differs from Hesiod's. Diotima regards Eros as "neither immortal or mortal," but as occupying a position between gods and humans.

We can connect the sense of philosophy as *philia* (friendly love or affection), in relation to *sophia* (wisdom), with Diotima's

comparison of the philosopher with Eros. That philosophy is a kind of *philia* is an epistemic claim. The philosopher does not claim to possess a particular kind of wisdom but to seek wisdom in the sense of an all–inclusive knowledge of things human and divine. In so doing, the philosopher stands between the human and the divine, as does Eros in Diotima's account. Diotima's claim is metaphysical. It speaks to the status of the philosopher's being. The philosopher's love of wisdom falls short of possessing wisdom, which is the province of the immortal gods. Yet the philosopher, in pursuing wisdom, is not following the life pursued by those human beings who have no need to seek wisdom itself and are content with knowing whatever they know. They do not realize that this is, in fact, a kind of ignorance. Once the philosopher realizes this sense of ignorance, the philosopher is in the position of Diotima's Eros—midway between the divine and the purely human.

Two tropes are necessary for the expression of philosophical thought— metaphor and irony. The trope that the philosopher shares with the poets is metaphor. Aristotle says: "The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius" (*Poetics* 1459a). *Metapherein* is the ability to find similarity in dissimilars through the ingenious power of the imagination (*phantasia*). This ability is required to put forth *archai*, beginning points, for thought. The philosopher goes beyond the poet by adding irony to the narrative that the metaphor generates. Irony rests on the distinction between what *seems* and what *is*. To be a master of irony is to employ the question to induce dialectical thought—to consider what seemed to be settled on a subject in terms of the possibility of its opposite. Dialectic provides the means to confront *aporiai* and to continue philosophical thought.

The chapters that follow offer twenty concisely stated examples of the philosophic spirit from the ancient Greeks to Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms and A. N. Whitehead's speculative cosmology. Philosophy as the love of wisdom can be sought only through contemplation and a sense of what is held in cultural memory. It is one of the pleasures of the