Simple examples of some of the background and first launching points for the project. Substantial discussion of these points would be much longer and much more delicate. We make only the broadest (and clumsiest) strokes here:

**TIMAEUS**

 God as a single rational being operating according to a single plan. The One is privileged over many. Reason is privileged over the primordial chaos. Augustine (and Christianity thereafter) reads *Genesis* side by side with the *Timaeus*.

Although to give a detailed account of it would be too much for us here, there is a way to read the *Timaeus* side by side with Plato’s *Symposium* (particularly the speech of Diotima) and *Phaedrus*.

In this reading, it is possible to interpret the primordial chaos or “matter” as erotic potency. The Demiurge of the story can be seen as relating erotically to the One above him and to the Soul and cosmos which he creates below him.

With this reading, there shows itself a confusion between “reason” and “mania.”

Eroticism is a mania for Plato. It is not “reasonable.” But it also supplies the vivacity of the philosophical life. In the *Timaeus*, reason must “persuade” the chaos to be arranged and to move under a rational and consistent order. But in order to be persuaded by reason, this mania or chaos must have some commonality with it already. (Otherwise, reason would have to “force” chaos, and thus would be acting as reason.) Also, reason must already have secret sympathy with mania in order to understand it enough to “persuade” it. “Like affects/responds to like” or “like unto like” is a platonic standard, after all.

So, we have a knot. Reason and mania, form and matter, the agency of reason and the passivity of matter or chaos: these pairs relate in more nuanced ways than would at first appear and how Plato presents them.

Reason’s “rule” over chaos or matter, it would seem, is backgrounded by a mania toward doing so. (In Medieval times, Christ standing over the chaotic void with a compass in hand to impose reason and order onto her was a not uncommon image. The sexual suggestions in this, with the leg of the compass penetrating the open void, were never commented on, however.) Reason or divinity works toward creating a cosmos out of the chaos—but via the impetus of that chaos, which we read as also being an erotic mania in the divine toward the project of creation. In this way, the primordial chaos is read as the motivational thrust for the divine to go about the work at all. She is the erotic churning that stirs it into action.

She is also called potentiality. She is potential of the cosmos to be created. She is the potency, too, of the divine to beget the cosmos. It may be said, then, that it is through her that the creative potency works. She is not just the medium out of which the creation appears. She is also the method or motivation by which it appears.

Reason is championed over myth in the *Timaeus*. Myth is an “inferior” vision suited to the “inferior” realms of the changeable and the relative. Reason is “superior” and deals in abstract concepts above and beyond these contingencies.

But we might suggest that while reason is excellent for buildings roads or performing open heart surgery, it is not excellent for saying what the heart is or for what it is to walk down a road at dusk and feel connected with the magic of that hour and the earth. (Others will say this same thing (Bergson, e.g.), but will offer more conceptual or abstract accounts for “why” this is so. I, however, am more interested in detailed descriptions of these experiences, not in throwing them under the headings of some big abstract noun.)

**MAYA**

*Maya* is in the Indian traditions the illusion of the manifold, the illusion that there is anything but the One or divine *Atman/Brahman.* She is typically maligned by lovers of conceptual reason and its radiant, placid, eternal, still light.

 But she is not maligned in popular image and myth.

She, too, like the chaos in the *Timaeus*, is linked to potentiality. Originally, *Maya* meant “magic” or “power/ability” rather than “illusion” or “nothingness.” This magic would originally have been the magical efficacy of the rituals to sustain and command the gods by the Brahmins.

 She is potency of active forces without herself being active.

She is also considered the realm of dreams, play, myth. Her is the realm of image and suggestive features in images, not conceptual reason or stable, enduring concepts outside of time. She is the relative domain. She is all veils, shifty metaphors, likenesses that link different sorts of things without uniting them.

As with the *Timaeus*, there is a knot here as well.

She is said to be access to and blockage from the Atman/One. This Atman/One is itself an image—an image of full unity and cohesion, of eternity, of self-consistency. It could not be articulated in this way without her. But she, too, is an image. She herself cannot be articulated except by way of images, metaphors, likenesses, etc. She is not graspable “in herself.” She is not a category of things; she is that in which images appear and the appearance of the images.

She is also called the shadow to eternity’s light. However, as “illusion,” she is the illusion of difference between shadow and light. The image of “light and shadow” is a metaphor that she enables. She is the illusion of a distinction between herself and eternity.

Begin with an excerpt from another piece of writing. The style here is mythic, imagistic, dream-like, not discursive. The method is to trace out where certain images overlap, not to follow a straight line of logic.

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One element not heard in this excerpt but featured in the overall work is the visual overlap of the apple and the heart.

In shape, size, and color they are similar. The apple is typically considered a solar fruit, and the solar power is universally considered to be the governing power of the heart chakra.

There is an Edenic dimension that comes with this association, yes—though the fig or the pomegranate was the original fruit of the Eden tale (each having an aphrodisiac association). Sex and seduction as the trigger of the Fall—and the subsequent shame of nakedness and all that—are powerful elements of the tradition. Sex, feeding, and death together.

But more interestingly, Sappho in her poetry uses the image of reaching out to pluck an apple from a tree as an image for the erotic tension. There is also the Judgment of Paris, where the apple is awarded to Aphrodite. Also, there is the practice in the classical world to announce one’s crush on someone by taking a goodly sized apple and hurling it at the person’s head.

More generally, we did see in this excerpt an overlap of eroticism and eating.

We are *homo sapiens*. We are sapient creatures. “Sapient” comes from *sapere*: to taste. Our human in-sight into things is actually an in-taste into them. What do we in-taste in them? Their “essence,” which is traditionally imaged (in, e.g., mystery cults, later classical philosophical writings, etc.) by internal sap, which also comes from the word *sapere*.

But we should remark that saying that sap “means” essence or that the image of the sap refers or points over to essence or to any other such concept would not be quite right. “Essence” is a concept, and concepts do not really explain anything any more than such symbolic images do...though concepts are more easily consumed and volleyed about in common understanding. We tend, in our abstract philosophical reasoning (which has suffused the cultural tradition even if no interest or study in “philosophy” takes place), to prefer concepts—sometimes very complex ones—to images, but that’s just our modern prejudice. I would remind us of what Nietzsche said: all concepts are really dead metaphors.

We do not have the space or time to include a discussion of it directly, but in the common course of our language we often use metaphors that mutually relate food to sex and sex to food. These take the forms of puns, jokes, song lyrics, poem titles, slang, etc. A pizza might be “like an orgasm in my mouth.” A lover might be called one’s “sweetie pie.” There is a very, very broad and fascinating range that this covers.

In both eroticism and in eating, my “usual” sense of “inside of me” and “outside of me” is thrown into ambiguity. As I’ve suggested, we find something of ourselves in what we then reach out toward in order to eat. In eroticism, there is a very similar finding of me in another—and vice versa! (I might add, then, that food might not be, or does not need to be understood best as, an inert characterless “thing” that I simply pick up and eat just because of my own internal desires.) These experiences bring “me” into a dynamic. The dynamic is a dynamic of duality—but not dualism. The normally rigid demarcations of where I am and where I am not are now brought into confusion. But this ambiguous duality is the intimacy of eroticism and of eating. Just think: if in erotic communion the two bodies blended into one body, that would be the end of the intimacy, not its consummation! For when the two merged there would be only one body—and so the intimacy would not be there in the same way. We need a dualism for intimacy. We need borders to effect the erotic encounter with one another. (But these borders are there to be crossed.)

Now, eating and eroticism are very intimate and also very primal experiences. In this way, they are metaphorical or symbolic experiences. But we must distinguish this from the normal ways of thinking about metaphor or symbol.

We do not mean allegory, where one thing refers to another in a 1-1 correspondence and where both items are thought of as fully known.

We do not mean metaphor in the more common sense, either, where an image is taken to refer to a concept or relation of concepts. The image is taken as a stand-in, a colorful expression only. “Just a metaphor.”

We do not mean symbol in the more common sense, where an image is thought to contain maybe a few or several or even countless meanings at once.

Metaphor comes from *meta-pherein*: to carry over. That is what is happening in this duality: each element gets carried over to the other. But observe that there is thus a mutuality in this duality. The one does not just refer to the other as in common allegory or metaphor. Nor does one contain another as in the usual understanding of symbol.

So, eroticism and feeding are experiences where the direction is multiple and mutual, not one-way. The true metaphoricality of metaphor comes out in this mutuality, and so does the true symbolism of symbol, since symbol comes from *symbolon*, which was in the ancient world a coin, a bone from a ritual meal taken together[[1]](#footnote-1), or other trinket that was broken in half ; the two halves were used as silent token of recognition between people who kept a secret together. Interestingly, the first use of the word *symbolon* in writing is in the Homeric hymn where Hermes spies the tortoise and exclaims, calling it a *symbolon*, that he will sacrifice it and make a lyre of its shell. More on this later.

An important point here is that metaphor or symbol is a way of going about the world—a way of relating. It is a relation and it is not a one-way relation. A professor of mine last year quipped that metaphors seem only one-directional. The ocean as metaphor of my state, he said, may tell me about myself, but realizing something about myself does not tell me anything about the ocean. I very much disagree. Even in the metaphors of usual parlance there is a mutuality to be seen. “A fish out of water” applies to a person, for instance, but the person’s floundering and misplacement which brings out the metaphor in turn invites us to consider the confusion and flopping anguish of a fish out of her habitat. An ocean metaphor of any sort invites us, in turn, to look at the ocean as more than just an item “over there” for illustrating a state in us “over here”; we are invited to relate to—or relate *with*—the ocean. “Unpacking” or “unrolling” something—so simple a metaphor—doesn’t just say something about my unpacking for you a bundle of notions; it also invites us to pay closer attention to what it is to unpack or unroll something, the small ritual of it, if only for an instant. “Pulling the carpet out from under one’s feet” illustrates a situation while also re-relating us to just how the floor supports us, to pay attention to what it is to stand on a ground with firmness or without security. The correspondences do not need to be 1-1 (that is, 1 metaphor to 1 re-relation to 1 something), but I keep them 1-1 here just to briefly give the basic thrust. So, the metaphor elucidates the situation and the situation, in being described in a certain way via the metaphor, elucidates that image that was used to describe it.

I haven’t explained or sought to explain anything here about eros and feeding—I have only suggested, only pointed out overlapping themes. We pick up and played with things. “Explanations” count for little, anyway. “Why is sex pleasurable?” “Why do you love your mother?” “Why is your favorite color?”These questions are good launching points for exploring more details and associations...but there do not have to be any final explanations that sum up or “explain” why red is your favorite color or why sex as pleasant serves some or other evolutionary purposes or is meant to be an expression of God’s grace, etc. We offer no explanations for these or for the sex-death rites soon discussed. Only thematic details. Details in place of explanations means: entering into the images we live out and not covering them over with conceptual rhetoric that masks their autonomous characters.

These experiences (in our examples: feeding, eroticism) draw us into a mythic domain (note here the overlap of what is frequently conceptualized as instinct and what is called myth). But their sway over us clues us in to the power of this mythic domain. (Myth is not metaphor in the standard sense of metaphor. It is not fanciful imagery confabulated in lieu of rigorous science or philosophy, nor is it a collection of lies made solely for the manipulation of others, a bit of campfire entertainment gone too far, or any other such thing that it can be “explained” as being.) Myth is never “just a myth,” and metaphor is never “just a metaphor” in the common dismissal. Later, when we break down concepts into basic metaphors, we are not attempting reductionism, but only pointing out that images are the lifeblood or core sap of concepts.

Myth is self-suggesting. Like the imagery of metaphor. Blown forth from itself. Not “made up” by us as expressive of “a” meaning, but rather revealed to us. We search for the right word, a fitting image. It then, if it’s ready, plays itself to us in a bit of inspiration. We play back. We live and move and have our being in mythic domains. Dreams, so often likened to myth, are a good comparison. Dreams come to us, are not “ours.” But so many are so eager to define dreams, tell them what they are (flotsam from day, unconscious repressions, etc.). Same with myth.

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We can now move into the ritual Love-Death. This a common ritual sacrifice the world over, existing in numerous variations depending on where and when we’re talking about. Ritual (formal or personal, recognized as such or not) is, so to speak, enacted metaphor—is a dwelling in metaphor. The king and the high priestess couple on the altar. Two of the most popular variations are: either the king and priestess are ritually slain together in congress or the priestess slays the king at the moment of his orgasm. He is then dismembered and scattered throughout the farmlands and to household altars. This is one of the ritual sacrifices that promotes land-fertility for food and house-fertility for babies. Though this is seemingly the simplest level at which to consider such things, I’ll also say that, even on the level of bringing about fertility of the lands, etc., such rituals can and do work. (!)

A sacrificial ritual that illustrates what we want to say in perhaps a still more interesting way is found among the Aztecs—but we wanted to note the erotic tones first because they are still here in the Aztec rite but are more easily overlooked. The Aztecs had many, many kinds of sacrificial rituals—even many kinds of cannibalistic rituals. But the one we’ll use here is the pyramid sacrifice.—The man has his heart cut out by the priest with three swift expert motions of the blade. The heart is then fed to the sun god. The gods must be fed in order that they, who sustain the lands and the winds, do not starve and perish. The blood is allowed to run down the four sides of the pyramid to bless the four quarters of the earth and the four winds. The rest of the body is cooked into a chili stew eaten by the congregation. Other parts are again distributed through the farmlands and to the household altars to, among other things, help fertilize mothers’ wombs.

An important detail here—important to all ritual—is the identification of the victim and the god to whom he is offered. This is THE formula for ritual sacrifice almost anywhere. The blood sacrifice IS the god. (A whole book could be written just on this.) The sacrificed one is, in being sacrificed, also the one to whom he is given.

We have the consecrated body of the slain for the people to eat and the heart for the god to eat. The heart is eaten by the sun god. He recognizes the part of himself that is in the organ of the heart chakra and takes it to himself. This on the principle of like goes with like. If you are what you eat, you eat what you are. It calls to him and he calls to it. The people, meanwhile, eat the flesh which is their own. Again, like and like together.

The god feeds on what seems to be human but is shown to be god-like as well, and the people feed on what is now the body of the god, but is also human. And you are what you eat. There is an ambiguity here—an identity in confusion in this mythic event.

Further, the body is cut apart and distributed, fed to the land. This ritual, then, is the god’s feeding the land and the god’s being fed. But if this is so, then the gods live in being slain. At the same time, it is death that reveals the human as the god and the godly as the human even as the two are not collapsed entirely but mutually sustained in a relation of duality. Death is the place of the meeting.

Both men and gods are fed by one another. But not just in this sacramental instant. The ritual sacrifice is what sustains the WORLD. If it did not happen regularly, the gods would starve and die, and then the seas would dry out, the sky shrivel away into dust. The world is the dynamic of mutual feeding and nourishing of the gods and the people. Men feed the gods and the gods feed men. Men sustain the gods so that the gods will sustain men and all the earth, and the gods sustain men and all the earth so that they will be sustained. You cannot pin down the creative power or source of the world-dynamic to just one location or place. The world is the duality—the mutuality.

One figure who has something to tell us about all this is Islamic mystic Ibn Arabi, who gives us this same dynamic in a more elaborate fashion.

 A quick and unfairly simplified version would run like this:

All things, the entirety of the manifest world, exist in a pre-manifest hive of potentialities. These are the potentialities for these things to be manifest. Corresponding to this hive there are the divine names or powers, one for each presence that it is possible to manifest. We, and all else, as these potentialities, are what seduces or entices the names or powers to active us into manifestation. It is our being potentially manifested or created that draws them toward the creating. Thus: we motivate the divine as much as the other way around. We create the divine as it creates us, since without us presenting ourselves to it as possibilities able to be taken up and fulfilled the divine powers would have nothing to BE the powers OF. And thus they would not be creative powers or divine in relation to us.

Therefore, the creation is what pulls the creating into action as much as the reverse.

Meister Eckhart (the Medieval Neoplatonist and mystic) says the same thing. God needs us to be God as much as we need God to be what we are.

Ibn Arabi uses stories about feeding from the Quran, hadith, and other sources to discuss this point. Angels are fed by Abraham, Miryam is fed by angels, etc. He also, unsurprisingly, got himself in trouble by writing erotically suggestive poems. Eating and sex seem to be his favorite metaphors when discussing any relation to divinity.

This is the model behind Ibn Arabi’s notion of prayer. He says that all things pray, howsoever “inanimate,” and that they are their forms of prayer. But each man or thing, in thus praying, sustains the unique divine Name/power that sustains him or it. Specifically for people, and even speaking just in terms of formal prayer, our prayer feeds the divine Names/powers. Without us, they would not be the divine Names and powers. “We are needed in order that the worlds or hypostases may be,” he writes.

More interestingly, Ibn Arabi calls this prayer an event of the IMAGINATION. I must play, as it were, both parts, just as that to which I pray must play the role of me as well as him/her/it-self.

But Imagination is not our faculty. It is NOT “an ability to make stuff up.” It is more like what language is for the later Heidegger…not something we do or a power that we have, but something we attend to and that attends to us. Imagination is of the world; it is what binds the world as world and reveals world as world. A cosmic power. Also, it is a co-creative duality-dynamic. The divine Names/powers are not our projections, but we make them what they are as they make us what we are. We do not make them up from ourselves, and they do not just make us up from themselves. The world is image in Imagination. Imagination is the mutual sustenance.

We mentioned Hermes calling the tortoise a *symbolon* and sacrificing it to make the first lyre.

This maintains the duality. Hermes sees in the tortoise a potentiality. But this potentiality announces itself to Hermes in the tortoise. Likewise, the potential in Hermes to be maker of the lyre is brought out in the tortoise’s possibility of becoming the lyre. The tortoise is transformed through Hermes, and Hermes is transformed through the tortoise. Even though the exclamation of “symbolon” is likely meant only as an exclamation that he sees it as a sign or portent—a fateful image—of what it can become, still, it works on a greater level, too. The lyre’s music, traditionally, is a symbol(on) of the cosmos or world harmony.

Now, Ibn Arabi is a monotheist, ultimately. But in talking about this dynamic he refers to the divine Names/powers—plural.

We will consider polytheism and monotheism.

A monotheistic “God” tends to eclipse everything else. The sea, the earth, the sky are not granted any innate divinity (though divinity, too, etymologically is a metaphor only later made over into a THING just in-itself); All is said to “reflect” the divinity of “God.” But in this way ocean, dirt, and sky are eclipsed in their own being by “God’s” glory. They are divine only in that they are created by Him. And the creation works one way, not matter how intense the affection shared. Thanksgiving goes to the single creator for the meal instead of to the one slain to be fed upon, like in the rites of ancient hunters all over. In myth, the animal or plant slain becomes, itself, the honored and the frightful—that is, the sacred.

Thus, the duality is eclipsed.

By the drawing we’ve been using here, which is simplistic but will have to do for the sake of time, we see a god/human parallel. Multiple gods, multiple strands of the human being. Polytheistic gods, polyvalent self. Monotheistic God, monlithic self. A monotheistic God will reflect a monolithic self; a monolithic self will reflect a monotheistic God. It is not about one of these begetting the other or fashioning or projecting the other in its image, but, like to like, they will go together, belonging to one another in mutual support. And so, too, with polytheism and polyvalent self. Polyvalent self is not just an “I-am” this: a human, an Albanian, a tailor, a husband, all together in a neat, tidy whole. There are many I’s. Just as in pretend games of children: I am I and am the monster, the god,…I am the little boy and the policeman. I am a man, but I can also in imagination be a woman, an ogre, a king, a river, a car, and these fantasies can tell me a lot about my “self” and can bring out ways of relating to people, animals, “things”, forces, etc. (All of which, by the way, take on multiple and animate identities by being related to this way.) I am and am not I—I am I and the fish out of water. My lust is “mine,” but is also a stampede of jungle beasts, as a poet’s metaphor once put it. My smile is on my lips but is also a form of the solar radiance, as a mother might say! “Where” am I? I become not just the subject of these contexts, but as much a play made in them. By whom or what? Hush! Do not take things so literally!

And so we are discussing likeness, a describing of one thing vis-à-vis another without “explanation.” What is said is said or revealed in the overlap, in the duality of identity, in being and not being this some one thing. Remember what we said about slipping into metaphors: our identity is not just on one side of the picture.

The monotheistic/monolithic version has brought us to prefer concepts and single references to image. We, in monolithic self, have devoured, have appropriated to ourselves the gods and the world. Concepts are neutered and give us a sense of control. We claim that the world is mostly “inanimate objects” and language has changed accordingly. “Genius,” for instance, went from a spirit or numen (something one relates to) to being a subjective visitation of inspiration to eventually the individual person (“genius” collapsed into “me”). Our pronouns are neutered save with people or sometimes animals.We claim that the world is mostly “inanimate objects” and we have turned the gods into psychological traits or projections or figures of the unconscious. Myth becomes “a product of the unconscious.” Or for theologians it becomes “just a way of expressing things of the Divine Reality relatably to men.” Or for Niezsche it becomes expressions of the Will. Something tends to “explain” or stand over myth qua myth.

**But the unconscious, for example, and all such psychological or theological concepts do not explain anything; they simply describe or name in a more conceptual language that suits a certain prejudice as to what is “reasonable**.” These concepts that stand over and “explain” the gods, the events of myth, the rituals with their own sorts of time, space, and tone are, themselves, myths. (And we are not using the word “myths” in a derogatory or dismissive way, as in “just a myth.”) To say (as Jung does) that a dream-image of bottomless ocean waters is an image “representing the unconscious” does not say anything, though we assume it does due to a general favor of concepts. The “unconscious” as a concept is derivative of experience and image. It is a type of qualitative description or detail found as a common motif in certain sorts of images—and this common quality has been extracted and crusted over into a hard noun. “The unconscious mind” seems less farfetched to us than “the gods” or other figures of myth due to the more “reasonable” character of the former—at least to the standards of what we have erected as the standards, methods, and orders of rationality.

To say that something is of the unconscious only brings something mysterious over into a language that covers over the profound and silence-inducing mystery with a show of conceptual definition. It does not explain, it is merely a new mythic image…and one that is conceptually framed. The images upon which it is based or from which it has been extracted have certain qualitative motifs and patterns. Certain figures and events in dreams, visions, altered states, and sudden insights come from beyond ourselves…and certain figures (as Jung’s studies helped show) tend to show similar themes or styles or characteristics all over the world and all across history*.* One motif seems to be a sub-surface realm of dynamism hidden from the daylight or the domains of direct standard awareness and attention. The qualitative suggestiveness of this run of images, however, is BEFORE any conceptual summary of these such as “the unconscious.” Paintings have their themes. Poems have their themes. But a poem or a painting will never be “explained.”They will “only” beconsidered and attended to time and time over, a new association suggested here, a startling overlap of themes there. And so on endlessly.

Also, any mention of an “unconscious” is made in context-specific images.Several kinds of images can show themselves, and so several “unconsciousness-es” can be debated over.As much as they may share overlaps, such images are not to be simply equated to one another interchangeably. Each image has its own specific characteristics, its own particular shapes and colors and hairs and whiskers.

The most conceptually abstract ideas and terms are still built from the bodies of calcified metaphors. Even the simplest and most everday notions. Why, even the word “have” is metaphorical, etymologically! Not to mention the very concept of “concept!”

We have, then, many big nouns that seem so simple. “Existence.” “Reality.” “Mind.” “Body.” “Philosophy.” “Nature.”Reason’s language begins to sound like a control method, a forceful control. “Nature,” for example, is a large concept, very abstract. It speaks of a world governed by certain laws and standards according to basic principles articulable by reasoned and distanced observation. Not what “native” peoples live in at all, with their spirits, suns who eat hearts, etc.

And so, say, with our eros/feeding overlap. We haven’t explained or sought to explain anything.

“Explanations” purport to say “what” and “why”. But are these worthwhile or interesting questions in the first place? Are these the best approaches for living with a sense of engagement and meaning in the world? “Why are plants green?,” one might ask. To answer by talking about the chemical make-up plants does not even explain what it purports to, for what, in the end, are these chemicals and why are they as they are? In turn, what makes that which makes each chemical how it is? And so on. Satisfaction with such a response is contingent on an era’s prejudices and what it simply accepts as a “good enough” account. For our era, it would be something genetic, most likely. With that in mind, consider evolution. It is an account, myth, or story of things that has its own themes, details, interesting points, internal dramas, etc., but it falls flat compared to more traditional creation stories. It is a literalism—and a boring one at that. Besides, telling me the genetic lineage that gives rise to a rhinoceros charging the plain does not at all tell me “what” a rhino is. It tells me, as it were, the doorway through which the rhino entered manifest being. But to say that Bob came through the left door does not say who or what Bob is. For such a thing, a much more interesting and imaginative story will have to suggest itself.[[2]](#footnote-2) Other questions, and much more fascinating ones, like “what is love?” become meaningless when matched to any answer or explanation.

We might add that literalism is not confined just to fundamentalism or evolutionism. Augustine is an example of strong literalism without having a necessarily literalistic interpretation. He rejects literalistic readings *Genesis*, etc. But he accepts God as the literal reality to which all else is “merely symbol or myth or way of expressing.” That his God is also an image and a mythos is covered over with rationalistic splendor and light. Literalism is not just fundamentalism. It can be highly sophisticated—indeed, is often sophisticated and erudite, abstruse.

In the end, “what” and “how come” are invitations to good stories. They are openings, perhaps, into a mythic domain. “Why are plants green?” There was once a sorceress known as Green Face who, to follow a larger story along its course, ended up buried in a patch of soil that was covered over with some shrubs. Such a story ties in themes of life and death and decay and renewal. The greenness of plants becomes situated in a deeper context than itself and something participating in characters and relations. Such tales and the rituals and prayers that accompany them are not “made up” but suggest themselves via a lived familiarity and experience.

Also, we want to avoid Imagination or image or myth as some sort of final “explanation” or answer to anything. Imagination is itself an image known only in, through, and by imagery, the images that it discloses. It grounds nothing. It is not a substance or a “what” to be examined from without. As singing is best entered by singing rather than through books about singing, so is imagination and myth known in the imaginative and mythic. We are not introducing any replacement big nouns or final truths. Even “metaphor” is a metaphor, both etymologically and for our purposes here.

We spoke above of metaphors as able to re-relate us back to common things or situations—metaphor as not just one-directional pointing. With the mono-theistic/lithic, though, this relationality turns into a one-way pointing—and it does so while turning the pointed-at into an object rather than a presence.

Intellect and Imagination become “ours”—things we “use” or “do.” Internal to us—not a dynamic of our relation in duality. Dualism arises as the inevitable counterpart to the monolithic. God manipulates matter, and so do we in His image. And matter is rendered silent in all this, though she is the potentiality of any power to be…even of God’s power. Without her, God’s power cannot act and so cannot be a power.

But many gods instead of one “God” gives polyvalence a breathing space and does not suffer from having to unify everything under a single umbrella, single destiny, a single vision. The polyvalence of the polyvalent self is in part its being open to relating with all sorts of things, including so-called non-living ones of countless different kinds. This requires a many-ness that become many things at once. Nuanced monotheisms like Ibn Arabi’s go toward polyvalence in a big way, but this is mysticism, not monotheism per se, and even Ibn Arabi only stretches it to a certain point. He still has an omniscience that gathers only at a single point and from a single power, still has divinity unsullied with the affairs of sex, war, good humor, drunkenness, injured feelings, etc., whereas non-Abrahamic gods mostly are.[[3]](#footnote-3) The gods of myth are we yet not we; they are of the life we give them, and we are of the life they give us. Why can there not be several fateful powers at work, several godly patterns who can be at times in contention with one another. A universe of paradox. I am this and that. That the gods duel amongst themselves at times, trick one another, live in dependence on one another, or fuck one another in love or in lust or in sneakiness or even in comedic confusion of identities, even as they all make claims upon us and help shape our fates, complicates and opens out our vision of ourselves and the world. Creation with many gods is not always deliberate, which is very suggestive already—and it is not always a work of all of the gods or the unfolding of a single plan. This is a very different sort of world to live in than the Abrahamic. The gods do not require “faith” in the way this word has come to be spoken; they ask for play, for trust in the play, like slipping into a good, suggestive metaphor. And they have a stake in the play just as much as we do. They are not beyond it; they are in it. They take their sustenance from it like we do.

Also, the mono-model conflates sacred with good, light, or purity. But *sacer* means, not good, but awesome, awful, that which brings awe. Beautiful or horrifying, and with no definite moral category. Terrific and terrible. Contrary to belief, “God” is not related to the word “good.” *Gott* is, to go by two of the more prominent etymological notions: 1.) what is invoked or called; and 2.) what is poured to (as in, a libation or offering). The gods have their being in being invoked and in being offered to. But it is never asked, “do you see or invoke or pour to the gods;” it is asked, unimaginatively, boringly, “do you believe in God?”

\*I wish to ask: has any sort of pace been made here toward a renewed animism? To regard all things as ensouled is to relate to them in a different way—a way marked by mutual affectivity as the sustaining of the world. But of course, “soul” has become so literalized that it has become “ours:” our soul, my soul, your soul—or it is abandoned (by existentialists, etc., who take it just as literally as any preacher, except from the opposite direction). But never the dirt’s soul or the lake’s soul. Never the door’s soul or the chocolate cake’s soul. But soul, if anything, must stem from a very non-literal (but very vividly and directly real) sense of things, for it cannot be shown or pinpointed. But still, we have made it ours by making it concept instead of living metaphor. The soul is a metaphor. To say that does not at all mitigate or compromise its full being. That would be to suppose that metaphor, itself, is “only metaphor,” which it is certainly not.

If the soul is metaphor, the self (which is NOT conflated with the soul, traditionally speaking) is metaphorical as well, since we have been unable to lock down a “self” as a specific location. It is a pattern. It is an image, a something that is “as if.” Taking the self too literally would be disastrous—and has been so culturally. Equally sad would be to literalistically deny it. We do not need to squash the self; we need only to let it be as it is without literally accepting it as a hard and fast “reality.” If rejection based on metaphoricality were the formula, then we’ve be left bereft of words and conversation and relation altogether (a sheer impossibility).

\*And: Is it not in Imagination that our relations occur? Even self-relation. To relate to myself in solitude, I still must, as it were, play two parts (and this is, in the most general sort of way, part of being polyvalent). To relate to another as I step out of that solitude, I must also play two roles—I must be me and be the one I meet if I am to relate to—relate with—her in any meaningful and compassionate way, sharing in her being and vice versa. In this way I will be able to empathize, to *be with*, her. But more, to relate to all presences in any real way I will do so imaginatively in this same fashion. This gives a soulful face to quantum physics’ telling us that the sun is there because we behold it, even as we are here to behold the sun because the sun provides us the nourishment we need.

\*And: we can with this re-assess our creation stories. We must take the evolutionary, bio-chemical, cosmo-geological stories just as non-literally as we nowadays do the traditional stories. But the traditional tales still are deeper. There can be many creation stories at once. The world does not need—is too grand to be fit to—just one tale or just one origin. The self does not need a single account or origin or identity. Each reveals or hints at another dimension of it and of the world. And not just that: there is not one sky, one sun, one earth, one sea. These, too, are seen to be polyvalent. To the Aztecs the sun shows one of his faces; to another people, another. (Amaterasu, etc.—also, burning gas ball sun, Juliet the sun, etc.). Just as we are different characters and names in one company versus another. These are disclosures of “real” *versions* of things, not just epiphenomenal fancy. *They may be related to, therefore they have “reality.”*

 But here, we can begin re-thinking what it is to create. I envision a creation story where the gods or primordials—some of them, at least—stand at a bottomless abyss of pure potentiality. In this abyss all potentiality of anything whatsoever floats. The gods fish out from this certain possibilities for a world. But they do not do this just according to some design they’ve “come up with,” and they don’t just pull out or explicate things. They listen into the abyss and hear the ocean suggest herself as a possible part of the creation. Hearing this self-suggestion, they pull her out and actualize her. So too with the earth, the sky, and so forth. All good metaphors are suggestive in some way. Perhaps each one of us suggests him/her self there, and now is the time of our playing out this taken-up suggestion. It is, then, a true co-creation. And the gods were only hovering about the abyss at all because they would not be without it. Without it, they would have no potency, no potential to create, and neither would the sea, the earth, or the sky be potentialities for explication. Did they, the gods, also come from the abyss? That is a meaningless question, since there is no abyss without another to witness it. Is the abyss their fund of power or does their power come from the abyss? Whoever would dare part his lips to offer answer, let him be silent!

For what can be told of the relation between the undying gods and the moral men, between eternity and time?—except that it is a relationship of likeness in intimate duality. Goethe wrote: *Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis*. Nietzsche retorted: *Alles Unvergängliche—das ist nur ein Glechnis*. Although each of us will gravitate toward one or the other of these, and although my attraction (in contrast to many PSA-ers’) is toward Goethe’s version, the real point is that both are true. Both are true because between them they trace the duality and mutuality of gods and men, the dynamic that is the world. Each—the passing and the eternal—is a *Gleichnis*, a metaphor, a likeness that points out but also is pointed toward. We are made in the image of gods and the gods are made in the image of us. Or, that is: the relation between the two is the *Glechnis*, the metaphor, the likeness that carries over and is carried over.

1. The verb “to mate,” which has come to include a sense of sexual relation, stems from an old verb meaning “to sit at a table together and share a meal.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. None of this is to take issue with evolutionary theory on its own level, as a creationist narrative would want to, say. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. But Ibn Arabi often repeats one of the most lovely things any figure in world-creation mythology has ever said. It is a traditional hadith of the Islamic world. In it God says: “I was a hidden treasure, and I wanted to be discovered. Therefore I created the world so that I might be found.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)