Introduction

Nothing that I can think of at the moment could seem more trivial than the association of imagination with education. As we speak, the largest nation on earth is studying the educational system that—so this nation thinks—produced geniuses the likes of Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, and its provisional conclusion is that that system's focus on imaginative playfulness—rather than learning by rote—is the principle of its educational success. Closer to home, to the end of "reimagining" higher education, 21st century college and university administrators together with their accreditation agencies have embraced the "best practices" approach to education. From out of this embrace and consequent attempt to graft the norms of social science driven theories of elementary school education on the practices of the professoriate, we are witnessing an unprecedented disciplinary leveling of knowledge to its least common denominator—that is, to "interdisciplinary" knowledge without a disciplinary basis. In concert with this, the imaginative embrace of educational technology together with the technology of education by both administrative and professorial visionaries alike has us on the cusp of substituting professorial images for their professorial originals at the most basic level in which education has been traditionally delivered in higher education—in a 'classroom' now become virtual. The arithmetic of this last move, of course, promises the substitution of image for original on an unprecedented magnitude, since the technology involved is capable of generating from one professorial original a transfinite number of images; images that, in turn, are capable of being seen by a transfinite number of original students. In contrast to the contemporary triviality of the association of imagination with education, however, is its association with learning, which is anything but trivial—or so I want to argue here today. Despite their close relationship, the relation between education and learning is one of a peculiar priority: insofar as education is driven by the goal of promoting or otherwise bringing about learning, learning has priority, as it is not only the goal of education but also its source, since only one who has learned something is in a position to educate someone else about it. Of course, the one who has already learned something and is therefore in the position of educating others about it—to the end of their learning the knowledge in question—presumably has learned what they know as a result of their education. That education, however, would again have to have its basis in the prior learning of the educator.

The priority of learning in education brings with it the related questions: what is learning and how does it take place? To the extent that these questions are investigated by "educational theory"—and that extent is considerable—the answers will hardly be satisfactory to someone intent on learning what their answers really are. I say this for the obvious—but for just that reason easily overlooked

fact—that the subject of "education theory" is not education per se but mass education. By 'education per se' I mean two things: 1) the conditions that bring about the initiation in a single soul of its movement from not knowing something to knowing it and 2) the means for confirming that this movement is underway. By mass education I also mean two things: 1) the conditions necessary for the institutional delivery of knowledge to many students and 2) the institutional certification that that knowledge has been delivered within a certain range of achievement to each one from among those many students who satisfy an institutionally specified minimal degree of achievement. As a result of this fundamental distinction, as soon as I hear some educational theory, invariably based in what "studies have shown" about how learning takes place in institutions of higher learning, appealed to as the evidence for some knowledge claim about learning, I know that I'm about to be deceived. Today, of course, we hear it a lot that "studies have shown" that unless outcomes for learning are identified and metrics for their assessment stipulated and then assessed, educators cannot be certain that learning is really taking place. While I agree with this conclusion, I can hardly agree with its putative premises, for the simple but profound reason that it is an abuse of language to presume to talk, as these premises do, about something without really talking about it at all. That is, insofar as language in its most original sense involves bringing to our understanding what the talk associated with it is about, by its very nature language has to be about something being what it is. To use talk in a manner that doesn't disclose or strive to disclose anything about that which it is about, is to misuse it and therefore is abusive. Rather than have—properly speaking—linguistic status, such talk is nothing more than chatter, no more meaningful than the twitting of birds in the trees to humans, albeit less pleasant on the ears. Thus I will argue that talk that identifies education with mass education, learning with outcome assessment, and imagination with thinking outside putatively learning stifling disciplinary boxes, neither brings nor strives to bring anything to our understanding of what education, learning, and imagination are. That is, inasmuch as education and mass education are fundamentally and irreducibly different from one another, learning and outcome assessment are things that are intelligible on the basis of mutually exclusive categories, and the proper relation of imagination to disciplinary knowledge is one of its acquisition, not dissolution, and therefore talk that presumes the contrary is a misuse of language and therefore abusive. The recognition of abuse brings with it the moral compunction to try to stop it by whatever means possible. In the case of the contemporary chatter about imagination, learning, and education, one means for trying to stop the abuse is to investigate the original meaning of that to which these words originally referred. Such an investigation, I want to stress, is not directed to the meaning of words but to the meaning of that which words are putatively about. Because the abuse in question is occurring in the Western tradition, it is there that the original meaning of what these words are about needs to be sought. In what

follows, I will investigate first the origin of imagination, then learning, and finally education, in order to hint at what I believe such an investigation reveals as their primordial association.

Historical Origin of the Conceptual Recognition of Imagination

Strange as it may seem, the conceptual recognition of imagination first occurs in philosophy, Plato's philosophy to be exact. What is recognized, however, is not some single and unitary faculty or power of the mind connected with the generation of mental contents self-evidently identifiable as images. Rather, the power of the soul to make visible appearances together with these appearances themselves is decidedly something that for Plato is neither singular nor unitary. Moreover, imagination is manifestly not a power of the mind (*nous*), while these appearances themselves are decidedly not ever self-evidently identifiable as images, let alone as contents of the mind. This is to say, that the early modern understanding of imagination, canonically articulated by Descartes, is an obstacle to getting at the original meaning of that to which the word 'imagination' originally refers. To have a chance of uncovering that means, then, that the Cartesian suppositions that soul and mind are the same thing, that the contents of the mind can be methodically isolated from their referents, and that among those contents, 'images' can be self-evidently singled out as those contents that refer to extra-mental things that are their causes, must be pushed aside. Also, the exclusive identification of 'image' with something that is visible must be dropped if imagination's original conceptual recognition is to be gotten at. This last supposition, however, takes us beyond Descartes back to Plato's best student, Aristotle. Aristotle's account of *phantasia* fatefully connects it with light and the power of making visible. This despite the fact that on his account only one of the *phantasmata* that correspond to the specific senses properly speaking concerns the visible. But the *image* he uses in his analogy to explain the relationship between perception and *phantasm* is telling in this regard, as the *phantasm* is to the sensible being that is its source as the impression in wax is to the seal on the signet ring that makes the impression. As it is for his teacher, *phantasia* for Aristotle is not a single power or faculty of the soul. Likewise as it is for Plato, *phantasia* is the same as perception without being identical to it. But here the similarities end, as Aristotle's account of *phantasia* is presented not only against the backdrop of Plato's account of it but also in critical contraposition to it. Specifically, Aristotle's account of *phantasia* takes aim at the ontological pervasiveness of *eidolon* (image) in Plato's ontology. The Stranger tells Theaetetus in the *Sophist* subsequent to their discovery that Not-Being mixes with the *logos* that one consequence of this is that everything is full of *eidôla* (images).

Aristotle's account of the specific senses' relation to their specific sensible objects forms the basis of

his rebuke of Plato's image saturated ontology. According to Aristotle, the perceptions of the specific sensible objects proper to each specific sense, viz., colors, sounds, tastes, smells, and tangibles, are without *pseudos* (falsehood) and therefore always *true*, in the precise sense of revealing the specific sensible object as it is. A fundamental consequence of this is the incorrigibility of the *phantasm* that remains in the soul when the object proper to the specific sensible no longer acts on the sense specific to it: as the product of the same *kinêsis* (motion) as perception, the *phantasm* cannot be present in the soul as anything other than an impression manifesting *formal* equivalence with its sensible source. Contra Plato, two ontological consequences follow from this for Aristotle: one, sense perception at its most elementary does not have the status of a semblance but is revealing of the intelligible *form* (*morphê* and *eidos*) of the sensible being; two, the *phantasm* that receives that *form* is—in principle—untainted by semblance as well. The reason behind Aristotle's stress on the incorrigibility of the image as *phantasm* becomes apparent when Plato's account of the image as *phantasm* is considered. I say "image as *phantasm*" here because for Plato not all images are *phantasmata*. Plato distinguishes between two fundamentally different kinds of *eidola*: 1) *eikones*, which are images whose relation of 'likeness' to its original is one of truth preserving symmetry, and 2) *phantasmata*, which are images whose relation of 'likeness' to its original is one of truth distorting semblance. For Plato, the power of the soul that is responsible for forming the instances of the latter, that is, the *phantasm*, is *phantasia*. As we will see, however, the latter's proper translation in its Platonic context is *not* 'imagination' but 'perception'. This is the case because for Plato *phantasia*, in community with *doxa*, *logos* and the five specific senses, is what is responsible for the following: 1) the soul's apprehension of the specific perception proper to each of these senses, because the perception of these senses themselves is directed to their specific sensible objects and not to their *own* perceiving of these objects; and 2) its apprehension of the things that are common (what 'is' and what 'is not', likeness and unlikeness, what is the 'same' and 'other', and 'one' and 'number') to the specific sensible objects proper to the specific senses. *Phantasia* is the word that refers to the *appearance* (*phainesthai*) of the sensible object as a *koinon* (common thing) that is manifest through that to which it is irreducible, namely the specific senses' perception of their specific sensible objects. Because for Plato the true sources of the common sensibles that appear as the *koinon* (common thing)—owing to their *formal* (*eidetic*) being—cannot be manifest in perception, the ontological status of the *phantasm*, as that which appears in *phantasia*, is that of a *semblance* that distorts rather than reveals the true source of its appearance. In a word, *phantasia* (perception in the Platonic sense) is manifestly not a truth preserving likeness to what is but an *apparition* that distorts it.

Aristotle's account of *phantasia* is fateful for a second reason. His account of the incorrigibility of

elementary *phantasmata* elides completely not only Plato's account of the two kinds of images (*eikones* and *phantasmata*) but also Plato's account of the relation of their common quality as images (*eidôla*) to a power of the soul that is other than *phantasia*. Thus this power, *eikasia*, and the ontological function it assumes in Plato's ontology, not only does not figure in Aristotle's account of 'imagination', but because of this it ceases to be a factor in the Western conception of both 'image' and 'imagination' that is Aristotle's legacy. The ontological function at issue in *eikasia* is not insignificant, as it involves the soul's power to recognize an image *as* an image, which is to say, the soul's power—initially—to make the fundamental distinction between *image* and *original*. Because Aristotle's account of image and imagination passes over in silence Plato's account of 'imagination' as *eikasia*, the problem behind this account, that of the very *intelligibility* of the distinction between image and original, is passed over as well. At issue in this distinction is the very capacity of the soul to recognize that that which appears is something that is only like but *not* what it appears to be. The distinction, then, between 'image' and 'original', and, further, the distinction between an 'image' whose likeness to its original is one of truth preserving symmetry and an 'image' whose likeness distorts the truth of the original, are for Plato not distinctions that are readily apparent at the start of any investigation into what something is. Rather, they can only be made, if at all, in the course of such an investigation. Three things follow from this. One, 'imagination' in the sense of 'image recognition' (*eikasia*), can only function in community with thought (*dianoia*). This state of affairs is presented in Plato's famous image in the *Republic* of the *eidê* of the relationship between the visible and invisible realms of the cosmos and the affections (*pathe*) of the soul corresponding to these two realms. This image is likened to a line that is divided into four segments according to the same ratio. In the resulting proportion, *eikasia* and *dianoia* share the same ratio, which provides a mathematical image for their philosophical inseparability. Two, imagination in the sense of *phantasia* presupposes *eikasia*, which is to say, it presupposes its accomplishment with respect to sense perception. That is, the recognition that the *phantasm* is an apparition, an appearance that distorts the truth of the original that it's like but not, is a philosophical accomplishment, and not a self-evident natural distinction or relation. And, three, the mode of being of image per se, that is, 'image' whether a truth preserving or truth distorting appearance, is, as the appearance of an original that it is like but not, *to be precisely what it is not*.

The last point is crucial for understanding the imagination's original relation to and thus involvement with learning in Plato's philosophy. This is the case because among all the things that are, the image alone is the only thing that compels the soul that encounters it to recognize its mode of being in order to encounter it at all as what it is. That is to say, the soul's encounter with an image of *necessity*

involves its recognition of the image as *not being* what it appears to be. This means, among other things, that the being of an image is not limited to the medium of the visible. Anything that "appears" to be like something that it's not, including both spoken and written speech (*logos*), has the status of being an image, as it makes manifest that which it is not but nevertheless in some sense bares a likeness to. Crucial for my purposes is the recognition that the status of this necessity is not logical but *ontological*: to *be* an image most fundamentally and irrevocably means *not to be* what something appears to be; absent this recognition, what appears will not be grasped as an image but as a being, as something that is what it is, which is to say with Plato as an "original." Moreover, owing to the ontological nature of the necessity involved here, once the non-being of an appearance is recognized as such, that is, recognized as an image, the soul is powerless to turn away from that recognition; for turning away from it would entail the capacity of the soul to encounter an image subsequent to its recognition as such as no longer being an image but as being that very original that it was previously recognized as being like but not. The ontologically compelling nature of the image's necessity is related for Plato to learning in the following way. As the soul's movement from not knowing to knowing something, learning *necessarily* involves the soul's own recognition that it does not know what it is that it desires to know. The not knowing involved here for Plato is not a total nullity or complete absence of all relation to the knowledge sought. But, rather, it is the appearance of the sought after knowledge together with the recognition that what appears is somehow only that knowledge's likeness. As knowledge's likeness, the movement of learning is therefore manifest as an image that falls short of that knowledge which is the object of its desire. However, unlike the necessity determinative of the image's per se mode of being, and, in the case at hand, of the image of the knowledge sought that characterizes the soul's movement in learning—which once encountered cannot be denied by the soul that encounters it—the encounter with the necessity determinative of learning can be denied. This is the case for Plato because despite the necessity of the soul's recognition of the not knowing of what it desires to know that is determinative of its learning, *the soul has the power to stop its movement toward knowledge*. That is, the soul of the learner has the power at any time *not* to respond to the necessity manifest by its ignorance, the necessity that it pursue learning the knowledge whose appearance is manifest through this ignorance. This last point is what is behind the necessary connection for Plato between learning and education. Or, more precisely, between the need of educators in order for learning to take place. Of course, taken out of its original, which is to say, Platonic context, this last sentence sounds utterly trivial. But when inserted back into its Platonic context, nothing could be less trivial. Owing to the necessary ontological relationship between image and original, learning is of necessity an image of the knowledge sought by learning. That image, in turn, is of necessity borne in the soul's recognition that

the knowledge it desires is not in its possession. The ignorance connected with this last recognition, however, is something that it is always in the soul's power not to respond to, which arrests learning. Hence, the need for an educator, who, in the face of the knowledge of not just the power of the soul in general power to arrest learning but more importantly, in the face of the knowledge of a particular soul's habits in that regard, is charged with the task of learning's facilitation.

The Necessity of Imagination for Learning in Plato's *Meno*

The *Meno* is the Platonic dialogue that presents most powerfully the necessity of both the imagination and an educator for learning. The plot is simple. Meno asks Socrates how human excellence (*aretê*) is acquired. Given this question, it is significant to know that Meno in real life was an infamous mercenary whose treachery on one account led to his death after being tortured for a year; and that Socrates in real life was an infamous philosopher who on one account was said to have claimed to possess a human kind of wisdom rooted in self-knowledge—where the "self" here refers not to something psychological but to knowledge itself and its other, ignorance. Socrates' claim not to know the answer to Meno's question because of his ignorance of what human excellence is, is an ignorance he also claims to share with *all* the other human beings he's ever met. Meno avers not only that he has met someone who knows what human excellence is (the Sophist Gorgias) but also that he learned from that person what it is. The rest of the dialogue consists in Socrates' interrogation of Meno, to the end of getting him to realize that what he thinks is his knowledge is really the unsubstantiated opinion of another that has entered his soul through memory. In the course of the interrogation it is made apparent that Meno's realization of this is a pre-condition for him to learn what human excellence is, namely the realization that what he thinks he knows about human excellence has its source not in that excellence but in a distorting image of it. The failure of Meno, despite Socrates' interrogation, to respond to the image that presents his ignorance by assenting to the necessity inseparable from that image of pursuing its original, results in the dialogue ending without an apparent positive answer either to Meno's initial question or to Socrates question in response to that question. Hence it's classification as an "aporetic" dialogue. Beneath this simple plot, however, the word images of the dialogue, when traced to their originals, can be seen to present not the image but the original of Meno's soul's ignorance, unmediated by Plato's or anyone else's images. That original, in turn, is manifest as not just Meno's but every human soul's power of not assenting to the necessity of learning when confronted by its ignorance. The manifestation of this original provides the base line for de-mythologizing the dialogue's presentation of the myth of learning by tracing its mythic images to their non-mythic originals. The myth is introduced by Socrates following Meno's recitation of the

sophistical paradox that learning is impossible, as ignorance is a condition of not knowing the putative object of knowledge, a not knowing that precludes as well the having of any idea where to look for it or the capacity of being able to recognize it if it is somehow encountered. Socrates' response is to tell the myth that learning is nothing but recollection, understood as the recovery of prenatal knowledge forgotten at birth. This recovery, in turn, is characterized in terms of the recollection of a single knowledge leading to knowledge of the whole of what is, given the interrelation of all things and their knowledge. Demythologizing the myth of learning entails tracing the images in which it is portrayed back to their non-mythic originals. Socrates' putative "demonstration" of the truth of the myth with Meno's boy (*pais*) provides the clues needed for pursuing these originals. The high point of the demonstration, the boy's encounter with an *aporia* (impasse) consequent to his realization that what he thought he knew about the side of an eight (square) foot square, i.e., that it is three feet, he didn't really know, is instructive for our purposes. Because the boy was ignorant of geometry, all his opinions about the various squares and their sides clearly have their origin in his perception of Socrates' diagrams of them and in Socrates telling him what the geometers call the mathematical objects appearing to the boy's perception. The standard reading of the significance of this is that Socrates' claim not to be teaching the boy anything is dissembling, because it's obvious that Socrates is the source of the boy's geometrical opinions, notwithstanding Socrates' claim that his questions are only awakening opinions slumbering in the boy's soul. This reading is clearly guided by the supposition that "teaching" means putting knowledge into the soul that wasn't previously there and that therefore memory is both the medium and repository of what is learned.

Two considerations, however, argue against this supposition and therefore against the standard reading. One, Socrates elsewhere (Bk. 7 of the *Republic*) is on record as making the claim that the view of teaching (which he attributes to the sophists) that it puts knowledge in the soul in a manner akin to putting sight into the eyes of the blind, is wrong. Two, Socrates' interpretation of the demonstration clearly identifies the inception of the boy's learning with his realization that the opinion in his soul that he took for knowledge is false, and that because of this he needs to continue his investigation of the unknown but sought after piece of knowledge, in the case at hand, knowledge of the side of an eight (square) foot square. Learning is therefore clearly identified by Socrates with the necessity of pursuing the unknown that appears through the image that presents the soul's ignorance, in this case, its mistaken opinion that the three foot line is the side of an eight (square) foot square. Socrates' leading questions in the exercise clearly play a crucial role in the boy's learning, and he is the first not to deny that, as he explicitly calls attention to that fact. But he nevertheless insists that his questions don't count as "teaching," as they instead do nothing more

than to facilitate the boy's learning by encouraging him—in the face of the recognition of his own ignorance—to continue the sedulous pursuit of the unknown but sought after knowledge that appears with the recognition of his ignorance. The mythological image of this pursuit of knowledge is what is called 'recollection', and the mythological image of its origin, as mentioned, is the particular soul's prenatal acquisition of the knowledge of all things. Recollection in this mythic context is inseparable from the particular soul's putative forgetting of this knowledge attendant its union with a body on the occasion of the birth of a particular human. Crucial, then, to the mythological meaning of these images is the awareness of having forgotten what it once knew that occasions the soul's attempt to recollect it. The mythic images therefore maintain a distinction between the closely related phenomena of 'remembering' and 'recollection', insofar as only the latter is mediated by an awareness of having forgotten that which—in recollection—is sought after.

This last distinction, between memory and recollection, is what points beyond the realm of mythic images to their non-mythic originals. That is, it points us to the psychological distinction between memory and recollection just made in the attempt to understand recollection's mythic image. Psychologically unpacked, the psychological recollection that is the original of the image of the mythic recollection is inseparable from two things. One, from the awareness of having forgotten something and two, from the experience of being able to reject possible memorial candidates of what was forgotten as *not* being that which is sought-after without being in the possession of that which was previously forgotten. This ability, most significantly, does not have as its condition the correct memory of the item sought-after in recollection to serve as the basis for the comparison with the rejected memorial candidate. Indeed, both the rejection of a memorial candidate as not the sought after forgotten item as well as the recognition of a memorial candidate as precisely what was sought are the defining characteristics of psychological recollection. (For instance, in the attempt to remember the name of my fourth grade teacher, because it was she who told my parents I would never amount to anything, various memorial candidates present themselves: 'Miss Floody', 'Miss Smith', 'Miss Evans', each of which I am able to reject as false memorials even though I'm not in the possession of the true memorial. However, when the memorial 'Miss Rogers' appears, I recognize this immediately as the sought after name of my "educator.")

When these defining psychological characteristics of recollection are transported into the larger than life domain of mythic images in Socrates' tale of learning, these images—I submit—assume the paradoxical capacity to illuminate the soul's non-mythic originals of imagination, learning, and education. Imagination, as the recognition of the distinction between image and original, can be seen

then as having its precondition in the recollective distinction between a memorial candidate whose appearance manifests itself in truthful symmetry with its source and one that doesn't. Learning, as the movement of the soul consequent its recognition of its ignorance of some piece of sought-after knowledge, then has as its precondition the imaginative distinction between image and original. And education, as the facilitation of learning, has then as its precondition the learning in the soul of the student—and the knowledge in the soul of the educator of that learning's precariousness—in the face of *both* the student and his or her educator's soul's power to, at any time, arrest learning by not assenting to the necessity of pursuing the cognitive original disclosed by the image of its ignorance. In the light of this primordial association between imagination, learning, and education, it's hard not to avoid the conclusion that was passes for them today lacks even the most basic quality of being an image, which as we have seen, means appearing as a likeness. Lacking all reference to its original, that which is taken to be imagination, learning, and education in the contemporary world therefore has the status of a hallucination, or, more precisely, of a shared hallucination—or so it appears to anyone who thinks themselves educated enough not to have a share in it.

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