Iconologies: Reading Simulations with Plato and Nietzsche

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Introduction to the Problem

Perhaps what is most disturbing to many of Baudrillard's critics is his reasoned itinerary from a position of responsible and informed critique to one he himself comes to term "nihilism" (1981: 227-34, 1993: 132). After all, for our age, especially, isn't this precisely what must be avoided at all costs? Namely, to concede to the crisis of values, of the sciences, of humanity itself? Isn't this crisis of foundations precisely what prompted Husserl and so many others to reformulate the very thought of the twentieth century, so as, e.g., to establish philosophy as a "rigorous science" - one fully cognizant of the meaning and rationality of a free human existence? Isn't this the motive behind critical and rational discourse theory, to establish a common ground of intelligibility, truth, and value, one which could withstand the vicissitudes of accident and historical relativism? If real value is simply a mutation of exchange value, indeed, if all exchanges are merely in-house (one interpretive claim against another, one text against another, one theory against yet another), such that all transcendence, origin, or finality is but a regulative illusion, then it is understandable that the claim of determining the real, the true, seems to be little more than what Jean-Luc Nancy terms the "thought of an ahistorical return" -- a nostalgic wish to return to the absolute ground of a Kantian ethic and rationality, or of the Platonic Good and the True.

In discussing the opposition between Husserlian phenomenology, with its claim to return to "the things themselves," and the subsequent poststructural, deconstructionist, and postmodernist challenges to this claim, Vincent Descombes articulates what now seems to be the general problematic subtending these diverse standpoints, an opposition which effectively drives much of contemporary thought: "the problem... is to affirm the transition from the objective genitive to the subjective genitive , in the 'discourse of the thing itself' that philosophy attempts to be" (1980: 81). Clearly, this is but the most recent formulation concerning the traditional problems of realism and representation -- the subjective genitive being the interiorized social symbolic and linguistic orders. More traditionally, perhaps, one could likewise pose the opposition as one between the priority of a metaphysical or an epistemological account: the being of the former determining the truth-functionality of the latter. Or, alternatively, the capacity of the latter to represent the reality, meaning, and value of the former. The entire history of philosophy is enacted in the determination to resolve these oppositions.

Nonetheless, and this is what concerns us, a certain skeptical attitude persists concerning the validity of these philosophical operations and the capacity to resolve them. Such an attitude, we would point out, is as old as the tradition itself -- inhabiting it as a ghost or a shadow, perhaps as the tradition's own cynical observer, ever ready to lend witness to a history of pretense and dissimulation. If Baudrillard's own work engages these oppositions and shows their deeply paradoxical (if not paralogistic) nature, we would point out that such a project is emminently positive: it disabuses us of a general sense of closure, brought about precisely by the seeming
axiomatics of the tradition. In this sense, Baudrillard will at once enable us to understand the tradition more profoundly -- especially its founding claims to authority -- and to acknowledge the finitude of its agency, the infirmity of its presumptions. One hundred years after Nietzsche's madman proclaimed the death of God, Baudrillard, perhaps more cogently than any of our contemporaries, explains what the effects of this "greatest event" mean for us, since even great deeds and events take time to be known. Effectively, Baudrillard asks us to reconsider, with a newly found modesty and candor, what our very sanity consists in, when disburdened of the pretense of closure.

At the very core of Baudrillard's extensive writings stands the armature, the machinery in the very wheel of things, with which he is concerned, namely, the sublation of reference and meaning. That the real may be only its own simulation, that the highest values are incapable of resisting their own reversal and devaluation -- this is the nihilistic position which has earned Baudrillard his general reprobation. Baudrillard states his case most succinctly in his essay of 1978, "La Précession des Simulacres," subsequently taken up in his work of 1981, *Simulacres et simulation*. He recalls that the traditional notion of truth as correspondence underlies our knowledge claim of reference, representation. To the extent, then, that our idea of something corresponds to that thing as it is, our idea is said to be correct and the thing is held to be real. The idea refers to the object, it represents the object. Our understanding is thus mediated by our ideas of the object, our representations of it. According to this traditional view, Baudrillard argues, the relation of representation is "reversible." We can always verify our understanding, by referring the idea or representation back to the original object, i.e., to its referent. While this is most often thought of as a model of visual representation -- where the image "stands for" or "represents" its object -- by derivation, a tradition also assigns the same model to language, e.g., to what Wittgenstein termed "the picture theory of language." In this case, we understand that a word "names" a thing, or is a "word-picture" of things.

With Saussure's introduction of the linguistic sign, however, where the word or (material) "signifier" is said to express (an intelligible or conceptual) meaning or "signified," the situation changes dramatically. Since conceptual meaning or signification is itself fully discursive, it can be explained or defined, precisely in terms of other linguistic signs, other words. Thus, the "system of language" is relatively complete unto itself: meaning is intralinguistic, and not empirically referential, since the object discussed only means anything to the extent that it can be understood by someone -- by the speaker or by the listener -- according to the language in which it is articulated. Hence, to ask what something means is simply to ask that it be explained according to a set of words or concepts ingredient to the shared linguistic vocabulary. Unlike the traditional model of reference, then, the model of linguistic signification is not reversible, since, according to the latter, the object of reference itself is intelligible, makes sense, only according to the order of meaning, of language. And language alone "makes sense." In short, there remains nothing of significance outside the system of significance to serve as its (transcendent or foundational) guarantee of significance -- or, of its truth. As Baudrillard would say in "The Precession of Simulacra": "Death of the referential. Resurrection in signs." Hence Baudrillard's use of the term "hyperreal": the real itself is defined exclusively -- i.e., hyperbolically, exaggeratedly -- in terms of the sense it makes to us: principally linguistic, but basically in terms of our broader symbolic systems and social codes (among which language figures most prominently).
Baudrillard dramatizes his problematic (the sublation of meaning and reference) most effectively when he chooses the "image" or "icon" as his foremost example of simulation. An image is given as sole testimony to something else, as its ostensible referent. In the absence of the referent, however, the image becomes literally unbound, and can be understood or interpreted according to a broad range of possible significance -- i.e., according to the logical limits of the code which encloses it. His principal example is sublime: the crucial role of the "image" (Eikon: Eikon, icon) in the celebrated Iconoclastic controversy (or heresy) of early Fourth century Christianity.

**Baudrillard: The Values and Genealogy of the Icon**

The controversy centered around the practice of using an image or icon to depict or to represent, the Divine. Supporters of the use of such images were termed "iconolators" and opponents of this practice were called the "iconoclasts".

Since the image or icon in question was that used to represent the Divine presence, or likeness, it proved to be an extremely focal point of theological controversy, and for Baudrillard, it serves as one of the most pointed problems for any theory of knowledge. Since the making or recognizing of images, i.e., icons, seemed to entail a representation of the original, of the Divine in this case, and this mediated the original precisely by communicating the representation to the public at large, through images, those people in a position to control the use and disposition of the images obviously enjoyed an immense degree of authority. And, with that authority, there arose the question of its legitimate exercise. In any case, at least implicitly, the icon is said to be, is alleged to be, referential, representative. Hence the problem:

What becomes of the divinity when it reveals itself in icons, when it is multiplied by simulacra? Does it remain the supreme authority, simply incarnated in images as a visible theology? Or is it volatilized into simulacra which alone deploy their pomp and power of fascination -- the visible machinery of icons being substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea of God? (1983: 9)

Once the problem is announced in these terms, i.e., that the relations of reference and signification are sublated, the supposedly antithetical positions (the iconoclasts and iconolaters) themselves become subverted, and the values assignable to the image itself effloresce according to the logical square of possibilities.

A) The iconoclast is against the image, the icon, because the image assumes a concretely powerful and unwarranted degree of authority, of power. The image thus overpowers, by means of its very imagery -- e.g., by the languid eyes of the Virgin, the brilliant gold halos shimmering above the ecstases of God, the beatific human smile on Jesus, the adorable children and angels surrounding the ascension, etc. -- it overpowers that which it ostensibly represents. Thus the image devalues the original by concealing it, by hiding it. The image distorts the referent. Thus, for the iconoclast, we must destroy the image.

B) The iconocolast also stands opposed to the image, alternatively, since by overpowering the supposed original, the image denies rather than distorts the original. The image thus becomes cut off from the original, and is thus, properly speaking, not an image at all -- neither is it accurate
nor does it distort. The icon thus breaks with God, and this is the crime. If the image denies the original, so then, for the iconoclast, the image must be destroyed, since the image itself has usurped the position of the original.

Thus, the iconoclasts -- the haters of images -- are the ones who see the real power and autonomy of the image, the simulacrum. Their anger is thus a mark of their extraordinary sincerity, and of their fear -- a fear that resonates right through contemporary protestantism.

As for the Iconolaters, those who celebrate the image, the simulacrum, they do so for two reasons as well:

A) On the one hand, they celebrate the images because the images reflect, even if somewhat imperfectly, the Divine. Thus, God can be venerated. Save the image, save the Divine, even if the image in fact distorts the original.

B) On the other hand, God may become only his ostensible representations, his own simulacra. As such, he is destroyed. But, with the icon, he is resurrected as a sign, that is, by the signifying image, by the icon. Thus, the representational character of the image is broken, but the image itself must be retained; the image must be saved. Why? Precisely because the image is so powerful as to hide the fact that there is nothing at all behind it, nothing to which it refers. God is dead, but save the image itself -- which is enough, in the end, says the iconolater, to mystify and control those who lend it their worship and devotion.

Seemingly, then, any value position is possible with regard to the insertion of the image within the specifics of the social symbolic: in this case, according to the theological code which governs or permits the Iconoclastic controversy in the first place. This same dynamics of transformation and reversal can be dramatically illustrated in a somewhat different fashion, according to what Baudrillard terms "the successive phases of the image":

1. -- It is the reflection of a basic reality.

2. -- It masks and perverts a basic reality.

3. -- It masks the absence of a basic reality.

4. -- It bears no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum.

In the first case the image is a good appearance -- the representation is of the order of sacrament. In the second, it is an evil appearance -- of the order of malefice. In the third, it plays at being an appearance -- it is of the order of sorcery. In the fourth, it is no longer in the order of appearance at all, but of simulation (1983: 11-12).

Not only does Baudrillard mark his indebtedness to Nietzsche in this "genealogy of moral values," but in paraphrasing Nietzsche's "History of an Error," Baudrillard shows how the sublation of reference and signification into simulation effectively permits what Nietzsche would
term "the overcoming of all values into their opposites." Again, the formal demise of truth-functionality for the paradigm case of the icon or image:

1) The image reflects or represents reality.

A (the real) ----> is represented by the image of the real (A').

A=A'

2) The image masks or distorts the real.

The real ----> is represented by an image which is a disfigurement of the real, in that the image over-determines or under-determines the real. Let X = additional signification and -X = reduced signification.

Thus: A = A' (X V -X)

3) The image masks or hides the absence of the real.

The real ----> is replaced by an image, and the image conceals that there is no real. Dissimulation or play occurs: one feigns not to have nothing.

Or: A' = -(-A)

4) The image has no relation to the real.

The image ----> refers to no real thing. It thus kills the referential relation altogether and is pure simulation.

Or: A' = -A (Especially, perhaps, when, of all things, A = A'? And when might that be? Unclear.)

As Baudrillard would remark:

The transition from signs which dissimulate something to signs which dissimulate that there is nothing, marks the decisive turning point. The first implies a teleology of truth and secrecy (to which the notion of ideology still belongs). The second inaugurates an age of simulacra and simulation, in which there is no longer any God to recognize his own, nor any last judgment to separate true from false, the real from its artificial resurrection, since everything is already dead and risen in advance [i.e., what Baudrillard termed "the resurrection by signs"] (1983: 12).

Baudrillard's account of the Iconoclastic controversy not only points out the malleability of signs, their capacity to mutate and traverse the space of the symbolic code, but it dramatically exhibits the symbolic power exercised by the image, the sign -- what Baudrillard will come to term its power of "seduction." Since the sign (now, as simulation) no longer serves the traditional referential function of mediation, it effectively becomes "weightless." By this very token,
however, its power becomes immense, because it can be employed to serve the discursive agenda of those in a position to direct, to control, indeed, to manipulate it: hence to define and structure the very intelligibility of a collective social world -- of its "orbital," as he says. That the image is conventionally "held" or "felt" to be referential, only serves to enhance its operational efficacity. What could be more "natural" than to think that a sign or an image would be "of" something, or that they would "point to" something? Ultimately, based on a sensory-empirical prejudice, it would appear commonplace that "consciousness" itself is always "intentional" -- i.e., that consciousness has an object. Such a prejudice, of course, subtends the most traditional concept of truth itself: truth as correspondence. It is for these reasons that Baudrillard's example of the Iconoclastic controversy is so telling: the icon itself serves as a basis for establishing theological orthodoxy, depending on the position advanced, and it thereby determines the entire belief and value structure for the (in this case, religious) community. Such a generalized belief structure in turn legitimates the authority which so positioned the value of the icon in the first place. In the case of the Iconoclastic controversy, the authority, of course, is ecclesiastical, and the Icon serves as the \([-(-/+)(+(-/+))\)] likeness of the Christian God of Being and Truth.

**Plato: Birthing the Icon**

Employing Baudrillard's analysis, it is instructive to see virtually the same set of issues and resolutions operative at the very founding of the Western philosophical enterprise itself: the sublation of meaning and reference, through the agency of the icon or image, to establish a discourse of being and truth -- to which the "philosopher king" alone can claim access, and by which he secures his just authority. And, it should be added, knowledge would henceforth be equated with virtue and power. This broader case finds it focus in the celebrated "divided line" image (eikon) of Plato's *Republic*. Perhaps the most interesting -- and least recognized -- aspect of the divided line image is the central role played by the image (eikon: 'eikon,' icon) and the imagination (eikasia: 'eikasia') in the very construction of Platonic metaphysics.

The fact that 'eikasia' is traditionally taken to mean "the construction of images," "the artistic project of creating similitudes," as well as "the recognition of such images," implies a deeper significance to the term than has usually been given by Plato's critics -- who typically limit its significance to the "faculty" of "imagination." Specifically, this broader usage involves what could be termed the intentional or adumbrational character of 'eikasia,' whereby a referential function is strongly involved, whenever the "image" or 'eikon' is discussed in its epistemological function. Effectively, this is a "naturalistic" prejudice, as we have said before, one typically identified with a visual or sensible model.

The divided line image is given in Book VI of the *Republic*, in the context of Socrates' account of the apprehension of The Good (to agathon: to agathon). The earlier "pilot in the ship" eikon (488) leads to the demand for an explanation of the "true philosopher," and in what his wisdom and knowledge consists. An account must be given that supersedes the nature of justice and the philosophic virtues, in order to establish what "properly befits" the philosopher (504a ff), since it is "the greatest thing to learn the idea of the good by reference to which just things and all the rest become useful and beneficial." In 506b-c, Socrates explains the need for discussing the Good in terms of an eikon, for unlike the virtues, the Good -- at least at this point in the argument -- is not susceptible to definition. Indeed, Socrates provisionally dismisses the nature of the
"good in itself" (504e), deferring, rather, to speak of the "offspring and likenesses" of the good. He had earlier anticipated this discussion in Book V (476), by distinguishing two realms -- that of being and becoming -- and their corresponding mental states, knowledge and opinion. Stating the terms, he indicates the means of resolution, i.e., how the idea of the good may ultimately be apprehended in the world of becoming. Although the "...just, good, and all the ideas or forms" are each one, they are also many, i.e., they are in communion, i.e., participation, with that realm of becoming, in actions and bodies: "they present themselves everywhere." Objects in the realm of becoming, however, are objects of the faculty of opinion. Collectively, what will be the lower half of the (visual) line eikon of Book VI, opinion is here suggested as the faculty which is able to resolve the two realms. Since the philosopher (475d) is enamoured with the spectacle, the sight, of truth, it is understandable why Socrates starts his discussion of the Good, with the "offspring" or "likenesses" of the Good, since they are held to be readily apparent in the visual world, presenting themselves as a spectacle.

Socrates' first extensive discussion of the good occurs in Book VI (507a-509b), when he presents his celebrated "sun" eikon. The sun is compared to the good, as vision is compared to knowledge. Each is respectively the cause of its own "offspring." The sun eikon fails, however to explain the transition between the visible and intelligible orders, for human knowledge, and stands merely as an analogy of proper proportionality. Not only does the analogy lack a causal principle which could account for the transition between the two orders, but the meaning of the primary analogate, "the good," would itself have to be presupposed to construct the analogy in the first place. The divided line eikon (509d-511e) is meant to correct this, and to claim continuity between the visible and intelligible orders of being. And whereas the sun eikon was expressed in speech, the divided line eikon is itself specified as a visual eikon: the two spheres meant to be represented are rendered continuous as two unequal segments of a line. Each segment or section is divided in turn according to the ratio of the original division. Socrates starts with a classification of the objects belonging to the two orders, in continuity with the preceding argument, and they are classified in terms of their respective degrees of clarity. The first section is taken to represent images (eikones: eikones); the second, objects (onta: onta); the third, mathematical and scientific objects, and "those things akin," and the fourth section is taken to represent ideas (eide: eide). The first two sections represent the visible order, the second two, the intelligible. Corresponding to these four sections of objective being are four mental states (pathe: pathe), as related in 511e: imagination (eikasia: eikasia), trust (pistis: pistis), thought or understanding (dianoia: dianoia), and intellection (noesis: noesis). The first two are collectively designated as opinion (doxa: doxa), the latter two as knowledge or intellection (episteme: episteme). As Socractes specifies this later (533e-534b), opinion has to do with becoming (or, the visible) and knowledge or intellection has to do with being (the intelligible).

What orchestrates the dynamics of the divided line is the agency of the image, the eikon, and its corresponding mental state, the imagination, or eikasia (oftentimes translated as "picture-thought" as well), and its agency derives from its implicitly referential character, which supposes, if not induces, belief in the object purportedly depicted, imaged, represented. Prior to the whole discussion of the divided line, it is assumed that truth somehow resides in judgment, in our subjective capacity to cognitively judge that our understanding corresponds to the nature of the given object. Hence the objects in the divided line are arranged in ascending order according to their own "relative clarity and obscurity." By the close of the discussion, "clarity and
distinctness" are imputed to the intending subjective, mental acts, and truth and reality attributed to the objects. Hence, something is true to the extent to which it "participates" in "truth and reality". Truth and reality are in the things themselves, and our understanding and judgments are but subjective apprehensions. The order of signification is subordinated to that of reference in order to give the defining account of Platonic metaphysics: classical realism. And it will be the philosopher king alone who will be trained to have unique access to the truth "itself".

This referential character of the image or eikon is asserted in the brief description of the first level, where merely four lines of the text are devoted to it. Its importance becomes clear at the second level, however, in that the objects of "pistis" or trust ("...animals, plants, and all those objects made by man," or more simply stated, natural objects as such) are precisely the objective referents of the former level -- the level of pistis is composed of those objects of which the eikones themselves were likenesses or images. Thus, it may be said that the first two levels of the divided line are insensibly codependent. The eikon, that presentation of ordinary experience, is in fact an adumbration, a partial appearance of the object itself. Indeed, the visual or the visible image stands already as an index for the entire sensible order itself -- hence the inclusion of a descriptive vocabulary that draws on specifically tactile qualities (i.e., for the initial level of the eikon): "...you'll have one segment in the visible part [of the divided line] for images. I mean by images first shadows, then appearances produced in water, and in all close-grained, smooth, bright things..." And, as if to emphasize the generality of such appearances, Socrates concludes,"...and everything of the sort, if you understand" (509e-510a2). It would seem, then, that eikasia would have a broad perceptual function, similar in kind to sensory awareness, generally. To further qualify "pistis," emphasizing its character of "trust" (within the very order of "belief" or "opinion," i.e., "doxa"), we would specify, in more contemporary terms of reference, perhaps, that such objects would be termed "thetic" or "positional," i.e., that we explicitly assert the "thesis" or "position" of empirical reality to them.

With the transition to the "intelligible" sphere, Socrates introduces the objects of dianoetic understanding. The rather limited examples of the objects of the geometer (as well as the objects of those individuals who calculate, reckon and make arguments), stress the abstract character of the correlates of what might be called discursive reasoning, syllogistic reasoning, calculative thought, second order experience, etc. These "intelligibles" with which the "geometer" deals, are ideas, forms, essences, etc., but of a particular kind. They require a sensible intuition as their "hypothesis" or "supposition," in that they are dependent in various ways on a precedent visual model -- as the conceived square may be dependent upon or derived by abstraction from the perceived square. Thus, what is striking about this "third level" of dianoia, is that the dianoetic process is essentially a modification of "eikasia". Indeed, Socrates clearly specifies that one treats "...as images, the things imitated in the former division" (510b 4). If the contents of this mode of thought find their origin in the sensible order (i.e., to which they refer, correspond), it should be remembered that the dianoetic understanding deals with them in a deductive fashion, drawing conclusions and generalizations from these intentional objects, as the mathematical or geometrical proof. Thus, the starting point for the deductive or inferential process is at first assumed as a postulate, an assumption, from which the deduction and conclusion proceed.

While some critics have held that the dianoetic and noetic realms are distinguished according to the specific type of idea, i.e., in the former, "mathematical ideas," and in the latter, "moral ideas,"
it seems apparent that Plato found the "objects of the sciences" more nearly suited to his projects of unifying the various modes of cognition. If this is the case, the continuity is kept between the different "levels" and he would not be faced with the disjunction between fact and value, which would be incurred by the more popular view. Assuming such a strong disjunction, one could rectify it by arguing that the ground of eidetic resolution -- and the education of the philosopher as well -- would be through the recognition of "harmony," from whence the Platonic epistemology, axiology, and ethics might be derived.

Rather, we would argue that the continuity of levels in the divided line is retained, not by reference to an external principle, such as "harmony" (harmonia: 'harmonia'), but precisely by the inclusion of eikasia on the different levels. Here we are particularly concerned with its function on the level of "dianoia", and its correlative objects, as distinguished from the pure "eidos" as the correlate to noetic intuition. Granted that the dianoetic intuition finds as its object an intelligible (the abstract "image" of the sensible), it was only natural that Plato would choose as the paradigm case, that geometrical or mathematical mode -- as would later Descartes, in the Regulae and in his Discourse on Method. This in no way excludes the discursive understanding of ethical subjects, or any other, for that matter, precisely because the nature of dianoetic intuition is formal: the paradigm case is the deductive process itself, which Plato makes quite explicit (510b, and the explicit geometrical reformulation of 510c-d). The geometrical "reckoning" is precisely what Socrates himself does, in his function as an "eikon-maker," i.e., to render an account of the good. Having deferred an explicit account of the good (506e), or the unhypothetical first principle, Socrates urges that we start with the "offspring of the good." themselves postulates, assumptions (which he in fact simply postulates: 507b 4), and reckon or render the consequences (507a 4-7). The consequence is, of course, the series of eikons themselves, which are nonetheless said to adumbrate the nature of the good.

If the general metaphysical and epistemological project of Plato can be anticipated in the way we have set forth, then, by parity of reasoning, dianoetic intuition is hardly limited to those "objects" with which the "geometers" deal. Rather, dianoetic understanding is that reckoning or abstract reproduction of the contents of "lower" consciousness -- of "opinion" -- in respect to their essential or eidetic structure, thus adumbrating the intuition of the eidos itself. One is constrained from doing the latter on the plane of dianoesis, for its objects were said to be unexamined postulates; the full intuition of the noetic realm can only be attained by taking these starting points themselves and reasoning to their unconditional ground. This is a process, Socrates says, "...which makes no use of the images employed by the other section, relying on ideas only and progressing systematically through ideas" (510b 9-c4). Argument or reason (logos: logos) will then use what is formally abstracted -- by comparison, differentiation, ratio, etc. -- from specific individual cases to ascertain general formal natures or essences. In this sense, the references to particular images will be dropped, the instances considered not as factual particulars (i.e., not as real beginnings), but merely as formal or intelligible cases to be used (as "steps" or "springboards") in a process of essential determination (511b 5). This essence or form (idea) arrived at, basically by abstraction and generalization, is finally asserted to be that which itself depends on the unconditioned, the first principle, i.e., the cause of all being (pantos arch: 'pantos arche'). Logos is thereby alleged to find its ground in the first principle, which is, after all, held to be none other than the father of the offspring, i.e., of the ideas. If dialectical or noetic reasoning, then, proceeds to "...that which requires no assumption, and is the starting point of
all," the question must be asked as to exactly what that "unhypothetical" ground or first principle is. As the sun eikon attempted to grasp the Good, here again, the divided line eikon was constructed to illustrate exactly this. As the eikastic function refers from image to referent, so it is supposed that, at the level of the idea, the referent will likewise be intuited, albeit, in an abstract cognitive mode. Indeed Socrates asserts that as the levels of cognition are ascended, with the character of "clearness" and "precision," so do their objects "...partake of truth and reality." Unfortunately, just as the "Good" itself was left unexplained as a causal principle in the sun eikon, so is that unhypothetical first principle also left unexplained here, in the divided line.

Most importantly, however, for the divided line eikon, eikasia has operated to seal the breach between the realm of the visible and the intelligible, in function of its referential character. If we have been led to the realm of the eidos, it is at least asserted that the ideas themselves adumbrate a unifying cause and grounding principle. We are left with a considerable paradox, nonetheless. It is only this unifying principle which can ensure, which can be the guarantor of eikasia, which brought us to this point in the first place. If eikasia is the function which assures the identity of transition through the various levels, and leads us to that grounding principle, how may that grounding principle be invoked, in turn, to justify eikasia (assuming that the unhypothetical principle is ultimately truth and reality) -- such that the ideas themselves are "offspring" of the good, are metaphysically grounded at all? Seemingly, either the first principle -- the Good -- is not represented by the line, and the difference between thought and understanding or intellect would thus be of degree, of progressive abstraction (as the difference between eikasia and pistis - and their objects -- seems to be), or we are confronted with an insurmountable circularity. In which case, and ironically, Glaucon's response to Socrates' summary account of the divided line eikon is remarkably consistent: "I understand"(511e 7).

What, finally, can be said about L'Éminence grise behind the baroque of the Platonic eikones? The intelligible is claimed to be united with the sensible. This is effectively asserted in the divided line by the formal identity between sections two and three, i.e., between "pistis" and "dianoia" -- by the simple expedient that Socrates had constructed the two sections proportionally, in the first place. Since the latter is dependent on the image of the former for its content, there is no epistemological need for a doctrine of "participation" at all -- i.e., of the Platonic metaphysics. In this case, level four, "noesis" could be accounted for by a progressive abstraction of the contents of dianoetic thought, so as to construct abstract "ideas" or "essences" of virtually anything (and with somewhat different imperatives in mind, this is precisely what the Aristotelian and Cartesian traditions did). Their "reality," however, consists in their significance, their purely symbolic status. Because the intelligible order is itself discursive, symbolic, one can claim to talk about the sensible order easily enough: and the eikastic function of reference is effectively invoked to permit just this. One can speak about the world, i.e., it makes sense, because language is asserted to refer to it. In the same way that Descartes "supposed some order [i.e., a mathematical order], even among objects that have no natural order of precedence" (1985: 120) for his project of unifying the sciences, so the Platonic account assumes that the symbolic order of language (argument, speech: logos) renders the world "intelligible." Effectively, reference and signification are sublated -- through the agency of eikasia.

To the extent that the "ideas" are held to be the "offspring" or "children" of the good," i.e., that they are metaphysically grounded forms, which exist in themselves, and which "participate" in
things, all the while pointing to the good -- to the real and true -- to this extent Platonic realism demands that the "ideas" testify to their provenance, that they refer to their transcendent ground of Being. That the discursive sun eikon gets replaced by the visual divided line eikon, and that the eikastic function is incorporated as the very dynamic of the line, however, argues against the plausibility of such a provenance -- relying as it does, on the naturalistic prejudice of reference (what Husserl would later mean by "the natural attitude" of consciousness). Quite simply, the ideas are asserted to be such "offspring" of being, even before the sun eikon is framed:

"Anyhow, receive this interest and child [both: 'tokos'] of the good itself...."

"We both assert that there are," I said, "and distinguish in speech, many fair things, many good things, and so on for each kind of thing."

"Yes, so we do."

"And we also assert that there is a fair itself, a good itself, and so on for all the things that we then set down as many. Now, again, we refer to them to one idea of each as though the idea were one; and we address it as that which really is " (507 a3 ff.).

Distinguish the ideas in speech and assert their being. An entire edifice of metaphysics is thus constituted in speech, and it will indeed serve as the "father's narrative" (506e 10) for two millenia. Death of the referential: resurrection in signs. As for the final truth of the metaphysical edifice itself, Socrates acknowledges to Glaucon, "A god doubtless knows if it happens to be true." Nonetheless, one can always "suppose" it to be true, and to invest this token in the social:

"At all events, this is the way the phenomena look to me: in the knowable the last thing to be seen, and that with considerable effort, is the idea of the good; but once seen, it must be concluded that this is in fact the cause of all that is right and fair in everything -- in the visible it gave birth to light and its sovereign; in the intelligible, itself sovereign, it provided truth and intelligence -- and the man who is going to act prudently in private or public must see it."

"I, too, join you in supposing that, he said, "at least in the way I can" (517b 6ff.)

Since the eikons of the sun, divided line, and cave are ultimately intended to aid in the education of the political sovereign, Socrates doesn't hesitate to lend direction to the new philosophers:

"Then our job as founders [of the just state]," I said, "is to compel the best natures to go to the study which we were saying before is the greatest, to see the good and to go up that ascent; and, when they have gone up and seen sufficiently, not to permit them what is now permitted."

"What's that?"

"To remain there," I said, "and not be willing to go down again among those prisoners...[for, the law's concern lies in] ...harmonizing the citizens by persuasion and compulsion...in order that it may use them in binding the city together" (519c 8ff).
Nietzsche: Twilight of the Icons

Like Baudrillard, Nietzsche is first struck with the question of error, distortion, falsification, and how the conceptual system results in a world which is hardly represented, so much as fundamentally constructed, by virtue of our discourse about it.

Specifically, Nietzsche attributes the hyperreality of our traditional world to the simulation ingredient to rationality itself -- specifically, to the vehicle of rationality, its signifying medium of language. Nietzsche's account is perhaps more historically comprehensive than Baudrillard's four-staged evolution of the hyperreal, since Nietzsche discusses at length how the relation of reference, or conceptual representation, gets elaborated in the first place -- such that the concept or the idea can be asserted to stand for the real. Nietzsche analyzes this derivation in the section entitled "Reason in Philosophy," in his work of 1888, The Twilight of the Idols. Then, in the following section of the same work, he sketches out what he calls "The History of an Error," namely, a genealogy of reversion -- a devolution, as it were -- of the very pretense of such a simulation as the real, the true. He subtitles the account, "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable." This devolution closely anticipates Baudrillard's own account, and for all purposes, it is from Nietzsche's analysis that Baudrillard devised his own. Nietzsche goes on, however, to show the specific content of what such a hyperreal world entails, and in doing so, directs his critique against Christianity -- a frequent target for Nietzsche. More importantly, the critique is directed against the foundational terms of Western thought itself, which terms or "idols" traditionally served to explain and lend meaning to the human condition, thence to address that condition, and ostensibly, would help enable us to improve it. Finally, in The Antichrist, Nietzsche proposes to explain what he sees as an entire set of motivations which subtend the terms and the initial construction of this hyperreal world.

For Nietzsche, the tradition of Western thought, beginning with the presocratics, made its first mistake when it distrusted the testimony of the senses, distrust having been predicated on the supposed autonomy of reason, that is to say, on the capacity of reason to ascertain the truth about the real. Parmenides thereby argued against the senses, since the senses seemed to give us no access to the real, the true, to the permanence of Being. Heraclitus also cast distrust upon the senses since he claimed -- precisely to the contrary -- that while they do show us the unity or permanence of things, this must necessarily be wrong, since it is only impermanence which is real, not stability, not immutable Being. Nietzsche's observation?

They [the senses] do not lie at all. What we make of their testimony, that alone introduces lies; for example, the lie of unity, the lie of thinghood, of substance, of permanence. 'Reason' is the cause of our falsification of the testimony of the senses. Insofar as the senses show becoming, passing away, and change, they do not lie. But Heraclitus will remain eternally right with his assertion that Being is an empty fiction. The 'apparent' world [Die "scheinbare" Welt] is the only one; the 'true' world is merely added by a lie (1968: 480-1).

Reason thus distorts and falsifies the testimony of the senses. It imposes a demand that the real be other than what the senses yield, and furthermore, reason demands that this other, Being
itself, substance and permanence, be understood conceptually. Thus, the real world, or Being, stands opposed to the merely apparent world of sense experience, which discloses only change and passing, i.e., becoming. In this respect, Nietzsche likens traditional philosophers to iconolators, or as he says, idolators: whatever is real can only be admitted or grasped to the extent that it is first transformed into a concept, the concept of Being. The actual world thus is judged lacking in Being, and is dismissed as impermanent, transitory, aleatory, as false -- it consists in mere appearance, becoming. Or, as Nietzsche quite simply says, they mummify it:

All that philosophers have handled for thousands of years have been concept-mummies; nothing real escaped their grasp alive. When these honorable idolators of concepts [Begriffs-Götzendiener] worship something, they kill it and stuff it; they threaten the life of everything they worship. Death, change, old age, as well as procreation and growth, are to their minds objections -- even refutations. Whatever has Being does not become; whatever becomes does not have being. Now they all believe, desperately even, in what has being. But since they never grasp it, they seek for reasons why it is kept from them (1968: 479-80).

The actual world thus becomes represented to the philosopher by its purported sign, namely, by the concept of being. Thus, the concept of being on the one hand is claimed to refer to the domain of the real, the metaphysically real itself. But, precisely due to its conceptual nature -- either as a discursive construction of language, or as a set of mathematical axioms and postulates: the Platonic-Aristotelian and Cartesian traditions, respectively -- it imposes significant requirements as to what this reality is.

In such a fashion, actuality becomes displaced by the simulacrum, which is none other than the "concept of being" -- and it thereby loses its claim of adequation to the concept, to the concept of being. Since the reference is thus broken between the experienced world and the concept of Being -- which is supposed to yield the "true world" -- the "true world" is itself only a concept, indeed, an abstraction predicated upon the very rejection, the very antithesis of actuality. And this antithesis further devalues the actual to another hyperreal domain, to that of "mere appearance," "becoming," and "non-being."

For the tradition, then, actuality is never grasped as such. In this case, it is doubly dissimulated -- as Being and as mere appearance, both of which are conceptual predications which testify to no actuality at all. To follow Baudrillard's usage, both Being and mere appearance are "resurrections of the real by signs," i.e., they are two forms of simulated hyperreality.

What, for Nietzsche, is at the source of this dispossession of actuality by signs? At first, he claims it is "the prejudice of reason," which "forces us to posit unity, identity, permanence, substance, cause, thinghood, being," so that we are "ourselves somehow caught in error, compelled into error. So certain are we, on the basis of rigorous examination, that this is where the error lies" (1968: 482).

But Nietzsche quickly makes an analogy with the perceptual order, and specifies that it is the operation of language which itself governs rational thought processes, and it is this which underlies the fiction, the affabulation, the simulation, of Being:
It is no different in this case than with the movement of the sun: there, our eye is the constant advocate of error, here it is our language. In its origin, language belongs in the age of the most rudimentary form of psychology. We enter a realm of crude fetishism when we summon before consciousness the basic presuppositions of the metaphysics of Language -- in plain talk, the presuppositions of reason. Everywhere, it sees a doer and doing; it believes in the will as the cause, it believes in the ego, in the ego as being, in the ego as substance, and it projects this faith in the ego-substance upon all things -- only thereby does it first create the concept of "thing". Everywhere "being" is projected by thought, pushed underneath, as the cause; the concept of being follows, and is derivative of, the concept of ego.... Indeed, nothing has yet possessed a more naive power of persuasion than the error concerning being... After all, every word we say and every sentence speak in its favor... "Reason" in language -- oh, what an old deceptive female she is! I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar! (1968: 482-3)

Nietzsche then goes on to sum up his account of this genesis of the double simulacrum, i.e., of the merely "apparent world," and the so-called "real world," that of "true being," in two brief propositions:

1) The reasons for which "this" world has been characterized as "apparent" [scheinbar] are the very reasons which indicate its reality; any other kind of reality is absolutely indemonstrable.

2) The criteria which have been bestowed on the "true being" of things are the criteria of non-being, of naught -- of nothing; the "true world" has been constructed out of the contradiction to the actual world; indeed [this is] an apparent world [eine scheinbare Welt], insofar as it is merely a moral-optical illusion [eine moralisch-optische Täuschung]. (1968: 485)

Fine: genesis of both the "apparent" and the "true" worlds, each deriving from our inordinate faith in discursive rationality, or in short, our grammar. An inherited grammar subtends our capacity to reason, which, as a universal -- or, at least Western -- characterization of human understanding, serves as the foundation for our belief in a true world. Yet that belief, as expressed in the concept of being, is already in Nietzsche's words, an illusion, a fable. As such, Nietzsche's paradigm is even more complex, perhaps more sinister, than that of Baudrillard, since Nietzsche begins his account -- "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable," or "The History of an Error," which corresponds to Baudrillard's "successive phases of the image" -- with the prior suspension of the reference relation.

It's interesting then, to see the elaboration of Nietzsche's account as both the exhaustion of the very semantic content of the image, sign, or concept -- i.e., "the true world" -- as well as a reaffirmation of the broken reference. Thus, reference emerges as but a dream, an idyll: but even more so, the concept, image, idea, or sign, which is described as "the true world," is itself shown to be evacuated of sense. The history, then, is of an error, which is the evolving development, the genealogy of an Idea. And as Nietzsche frequently remarked, some ideas or concepts, simply become effaced: they lose their distinctive signifying marks, their power or place, in a signifying system. Ideas, in this sense, are precisely like icons, images, or as he says, idols, in that they are fetishes. As such, they are significantly overinvested. Or, as Baudrillard would have it: hyperreal.
Deflated, thence devalued -- no longer even a medium of exchange -- of exchange value or symbolic value, they are dis-invested, divested. Let us follow this very curious and picaresque itinerary of an error:

1) The true world -- attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man; he lives in it, he is it. (The oldest form of the idea, relatively sensible, simple, and persuasive. A circumlocution for the sentence, "I, Plato, am the truth.")

2) The true world -- unattainable for now, but promised for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man ("for the sinner who repents"). (Progress of the idea; it becomes more subtle, insidious, incomprehensible -- it becomes female, it becomes Christian.)

3) The true world -- unattainable, indemonstrable, unpromisable; but the very thought of it -- a consolation, an obligation, an imperative. (At bottom, the old sun, but seen through mist and skepticism. The idea has become elusive, pale, Nordic, Königsbergian [i.e., "Kantian"].)

4) The true world -- unattainable? At any rate, unattained. And being unattained, also unknown. Consequently, not consoling, redeeming, or obligating: how could something unknown obligate us? (Gray morning. The first yawn of reason. The cock-crow of positivism.)

5) The "true" world -- an idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating -- an idea which has become useless and superfluous -- consequently, a refuted idea: let us abolish it! (Bright day; breakfast, return of bon sens and cheerfulness; Plato's embarrassed blush; pandemonium of all free spirits.)

6) The true world -- we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.

(Noon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA.) (1968: 485-6)

What the so-called "true world" entailed or embraced, what it ostensibly signified, was, for Nietzsche, practically a catalogue of Western metaphysics: it included the domain of causality, religion, will, being, science, psychology, morality, and purposiveness. Such a "true world," which effectively defines the Judeo-Christian universe itself, the lives and habits of individuals and their culture, as well as the very discourse of the West, for some two millennia -- this entire apparatus of our intelligibility itself, Nietzsche attacks with his celebrated "critique of pure fiction." Such a fictional world, he would remark, in The Antichrist, one not even attaining to the status of a dream world, finds its initial motivations in precisely a hatred of the actual, the sensible, world of nature:

In Christianity, neither morality nor religion has even a single point of contact with reality. Nothing but imaginary causes ("God," "soul," "ego," "spirit," "free will" -- for that matter, "unfree will"), nothing but imaginary effects ("sin," "redemption," "grace," "punishment," "forgiveness of sins"). Intercourse between imaginary beings ("God," "spirits," "souls"); an imaginary natural science (anthropocentric; no trace of any concept of natural causes); an
imaginary *psychology* (nothing but self-misunderstandings, interpretations of agreeable or disagreeable general feelings -- for example, of the states of the sympathetic nervous system -- with the aid of the sign language of the religio-moral idiosyncrasy: "repentance," "pangs of conscience," "temptations by the devil," "the presence of God"); an imaginary *teleology* ("the kingdom of God," "the Last Judgment," "eternal life").

This *world of pure fiction* is vastly inferior to the world of dreams, insofar as the latter *mirrors* reality, whereas the former falsifies, devalues, and negates reality. Once the concept of "nature" had been invented as the opposite of "God," "natural" had to become a synonym of "reprehensible": this whole world of fiction is rooted in *hatred* of the natural (of reality!); it is the expression of a profound vexation at the sight of reality.

*But this explains everything*. Who alone has good reason to lie his way out of reality? He who suffers from it. But to suffer from reality is to be a piece of reality that has come to grief. The preponderance of feelings of displeasure over feelings of pleasure is the cause of this fictitious morality and religion; but such a preponderance provides the very formula for decadence (1968: 581).

**Sense and Sensibility**

Baudrillard's self-professed nihilism, often qualified, is precisely his affirmation of Nietzsche's critique. This is not just to invoke the Death of God in a narrow sense, but rather, to point in agreement to the entire apparatus which generated, sustained, and oversaw the repeated atavistic reincarnations of the divine (e.g., the exhaustive theoretical enterprise of Western scientific thought, together with its political nationalisms, its utopian ideologies, and its seemingly interminable series of improbable moral causes), in short, everything that lent purpose and meaning to a world and to a humanity which found itself constructed through the disposition of that meaning. What for Baudrillard would result in the oversaturated world of hyperreality, was for Nietzsche, precisely the entire symbolic of the "religio-moral idiosyncracy," or what Heidegger would later term the Western tradition of "ontotheology" (perhaps revising Nietzsche's own ironic term, "monotonoteism"). If Baudrillard oversaw the social imploding into the masses, so Nietzsche likewise saw the progressive emergence of "the herd individual" as consequent to the intellectual and moral encoding of the tradition. For both thinkers, the individual would find his or her own value and significance in function of this encoding, just as Plato had defined the very essence of the human to be discursive rationality itself. While Nietzsche would regard the Platonic metaphysical edifice to be a "pious fraud," constructed either to advance the interests of the state, or to preserve the semblance of a universal ground (the good, true, beautiful taken up into a supraessential One -- which would foreshadow the Trinitarian god of being, truth, and goodness) against his adversaries, the sophists, or, even as a hyperbolic response to his other adversaries, the Protagoran academics, he nonetheless did so by cleverly manipulating the sensible image, or icon, in the account (which was itself specifically advanced as an icon) of the "divided line" in the *Republic*. That sensibility should so intrude upon, and indeed, surreptitiously condition, the genesis of "true world" only serves to reaffirm "Plato's embarrassed blush" -- at the return of "good sense" and at the very superfluity of such a "true" world (much less, in response to Alcibiades' erotic advances in the *Symposium*).
If such a world would be invoked to assuage our suffering by lending meaning (precisely, the metaphysical-moral investment of tradition) to it and to humanity, Nietzsche saw all too clearly that such meaning was precisely the cause of so much of our suffering in the first place: it placed suffering under the metaphysical-moral structure of sin and guilt, thereby only intensifying its domain and rendering impossible the elimination of our *ressentiment* against reality, i.e., the actual world of human existence. Hence, Nietzsche would invoke Zarathustra to repudiate the entire tradition, arguing instead, that the world is an immense play of eternally recurring forces, in constant metamorphosis and transfiguration -- a Will to Power whose only "truth" consisted in the dynamics of its appearing, i.e., our experiencing it as the infinitely mutable domain of sensible objectivity (of which we are ingredient). Of itself, Will to Power is meaningless: it has neither origin, moral purpose, finality, nor significance. But, for all that, it is nonetheless the repository of all possible forms, events, history, and future -- humanity included.

Like Nietzsche, Baudrillard would locate the nihilism of his own age in the hyperreal world of simulation, which would resurrect the real in the form of exclusively and universally determing codes of signification. With the sublation of reference and signification, however, the real is short-circuited, and the system becomes infinitely orbital and refractory, ever changing its values and significance by virtue of its governing operationalism. Hence, Baudrillard's charge that the system of meaning kills, that all value is sundered by it, rendered into its opposite, negated, and ultimately, left indifferent (1981: 234). All this facilitated by the unassimilable speed of the electronic media, which, as we saw earlier, effectively mediates nothing, but can explain everything according to an infinity of symbolic axes, such that everything becomes transparent, neutral, inconsequential, without effect or affect. This would be the terrorism of the system itself, its capacity to render everything indifferent, adiaphorous, a series of images which, in their effulgent succession, no longer refer to anything, of communication which endlessly circulates information, only to be transformed, reversed, countered, debated, rearticulated politically, economically, aesthetically, ideologically, according to yet another symbolic index. Handguns don't cause crime, public assistance causes welfare, ketchup is a vegetable, God must be brought back to the schools, sex education causes teenage pregnancies, condoms promote AIDS, dictatorships are emerging democracies, everyone profits from the globalization of trade, the free market will restore human rights, equal opportunity is racist and sexist, etc. Mindless saturation, meltdown, indifference.

Yet, just as Nietzsche had concluded his "History of an Error" by invoking Zarathustra -- indeed, *Twilight of the Idols* itself ends with a quotation from Zarathustra -- so does Baudrillard sound much the same call at the close of his discussion of nihilism ("Sur le nihilisme"), concluding *Simulacres et Simulation*. Instead of "Incipit Zarathustra," his final remark in the book is "C'est là où commence la séduction." Seduction would in large part constitute Baudrillard's return to the actual, to the primacy of the objective domain in its sensible integrity, its objective necessity. Expressed in terms quite reminiscent of Zarathustra's account of Will to Power, such an objective dimension is framed to challenge the original sin of a significant and purposive "world order," one so transparent in its hyperreality as to leave practically no clue that the entire order is itself what he would come to term "the perfect crime." Baudrillard's inquiry into the transfiguring and transforming play -- the seductive game -- of objective appearances would serve as a modest beginning to counter the totalizing systems of purposive interpretation, whose legitimate agency, we finally and fatally come to realize, may be largely nominal. The
interminable age of this "moral-optical illusion" may well be returned, as Nietzsche had hoped, to the domain of *bon sens* -- of good sense -- where chance and necessity would give rise to the fatality of a tragic wisdom, a joyous wisdom. And this was Zarathustra's "secret":

"...and I whispered something into her [Life's] ear, right through her tangled yellow foolish tresses.

"You know that, O Zarathustra? Nobody knows that."

And we looked at each other and gazed on the green meadow over which the cool evening was running just then, and we wept together. But then life was dearer to me than all my wisdom ever was (1968: 339).

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