"IMITATION OF NATURE": TOWARD A PREHISTORY OF THE IDEA OF THE CREATIVE BEING

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I

For almost two thousand years, it seemed as if the conclusive and final answer to the question, "What can the human being, using his power and skill, do in the world and with the world?" had been given by Aristotle when he proposed that "art" was the imitation of nature, thereby defining the concept with which the Greeks encompassed all the actual operative abilities of man within reality — the concept of *techne*. With this expression the Greeks indicated more than what we today call technology [*Technik*]: It gave them an inclusive concept for man's capacity to produce works and form shapes, a concept comprising the "artistic" and the "artificial" (which we so sharply distinguish between today). Only in this broader sense ought we use this term we translate as "art." "In general," then, according to Aristotle, "human skill either completes what nature is incapable of completing or imitates nature."[1] This dual definition is closely tied to the double meaning of the concept of nature as a productive principle (*natura naturans*) and produced form (*natura naturata*). It is easy to see, however, that the overlapping component lies in the element of "imita-

tion." The task of picking up where nature leaves off is carried out, after all, by closely following nature's prescription, by taking what is inherently given and carrying it out.[2] This interchangeability of art for nature extends so far that Aristotle can say that the builder of a house only does exactly what nature *would do*, if it were able, so to speak, to "grow" houses.[3] Nature and "art" are structurally identical: The immanent characteristics of one sphere can be transposed into the other. This idea was then established as fact when tradition shortened the Aristotelian formulation to *ars imitatur naturam,* as Aristotle himself had already expressed it.[4]

What contemporary significance can this formulation have that would make its preconditions and historical transformations worth investigating? Has not modern man long been insisting that he is a "creative" being, starkly opposing nature to the manmade [*Konstruktion*]? In 1523, the Parmigianino painted his self-portrait from a distorted convex mirror — thus not allowing the natural to preserve and increase itself in the artistic, but rather to refract and transform itself.[5] Since then, the mark of the creative human being aware of his power has become ever more clearly evident in works of art. As a personal challenge and a testament to the genuine power of his being, art first became for modern man "the truly metaphysical task of this life."[6] A recognition of the absoluteness of this task crystallized around this question, "What is nature's authority over art?" Greater latitude for artistic freedom; the discovery of the infinity of the possible beyond the finitude of the factual; the easing of the relationship to nature through the historical self-objectification of the artistic process as art reproduces itself ever increasingly within and through art[7] — these are fundamental processes that appear to have nothing more to do with the Aristotelian formula. It has often been said and demonstrated that the world in which we live — a world of deliberate, even vehement, outperformance, disempowerment, and distortion of nature — is one in which what is given is insufficent. Perhaps it was André Breton who first gave Surrealism the ontological formulation that what is not is equally as real (*intense)* as what is — and this is the precise expression for possibility of the modern will to create overall, for the *terra incognita,* whose untrammeled state entices imaginations. A work does not refer through sugges-

tion or representation to some other, antecedent entity; rather, it has an authentic share of Being in the human world: "A new picture is a unique event, a birth, which enriches the universe as it is grasped by the human mind, by bringing a new form into it."[8] To see the new and to produce it is no longer merely a question of an instinctive "curiosity," in the sense of the medieval *curiositas*; rather, it has become a metaphysical need: Man tries to realize the image he has of himself. It is not because necessity is the mother of invention that invention is a significant act in the modern world; nor is it because our reality is so riddled with technological innovations that they crop up as subject matter in the artworks of the period. Here, we perceive instead the formative power of a homogeneous impulse that prompts the articulation of a radical self-understanding. Whence, however, the violence and force with which this self-understanding makes itself known?

Precisely this question we will not be able to answer adequately if we do not keep in mind what the modern concept of humanity had *set itself against*. The vehement passion with which the attribute of creativity was gained for the subject was marshaled in the face of the overwhelming importance of the axiom of the "imitation of nature." This struggle has not yet come to an end, even as other, new formulations seem to be triumphing. But it is not merely a political proverb that the enemy becomes a liability for the victor at the moment of defeat. The opposition, against which all powers were necessarily marshaled, disperses, and the forces once mobilized against it easily overshoot the position they once besieged.

II

I attempt next to describe more precisely the historical setting in which this contest took place. Although the "beginnings" of anything historical are always elusive, the *terminus a quo* I have selected already represents the striking early development of our problem. I am thinking of the Idiot in the *Three Dialogues* of Nicholas of Cusa of 1450. In order to characterize this figure in the dialogue, it is not enough to derive a sociological explanation based on the new consciousness of the layman in his conflict with the clergy in the fifteenth century, as it

is here reflected. The Cusan confronts his Idiot equally with the Philosopher as a proponent of scholasticism and the Rhetorician as a representative figure of humanism.[9] The Cusan "layman" is, to be sure, partially modeled on the opposition of the mystics and the *devotio moderna* to the Scholastic and educational arrogance of the time. But the irony with which this *illiteratus* counters these intellectual luminaries, the egalitarian, democratic style he employs in conversation, paying no mind to the dissimilarity of the premises, has a rather different basis — it suggests a new kind of person, who understands himself from the outside and justifies his worth by what he does and what he knows how to do — by his "achievement, " we would say. The in-no-way historically self-evident connection between achievement and self-consciousness is palpable in the Cusan Idiot, and precisely in the manner that concerns us.

In the second chapter of the dialogue *On Mind*, the layman demonstrates to his interlocutors, the Philosopher and the Rhetorician, what his own trade, spoon-carving — which provides him with only a modest living and which society regards as lowly — means for his own self-conception and self-worth. This "art" is indeed imitation — but not the imitation of nature. Rather, it is the *ars infinita* of God himself, specifically in the sense that this production is original, generated spontaneously, and creative, but not in the sense that this imitation created the world. "A spoon has no other exemplar except our mind's idea of [the spoon]." The spoon, not exactly a work of high art, is nevertheless something absolutely new, an *eidos* not represented in nature, and the simple layman is the one who fashions it: "I do not imitate the visible form of any natural object." The forms of the spoons, jugs, and plates that the layman manufactures are purely man-made forms. And there is no leap more noteworthy than the one from the pleasure derived from this fact to the accentuation of the object itself — the essential feature of modern industrial design. Humanity no longer looks to nature, to the cosmos, to discern its place in the realm of Being; rather, it looks to the world of things, created *sola humana arte*.[10] Also important for our point is that the Idiot explicitly contrasts his own "achievement" to the accomplishments of the painter and the sculptor: After all, they get their *exemplaria a rebus — non tamen ego* — "but not I!" It

is of immeasurable significance that here the entire pathos of creative, originary human beings breaking with the principle of imitation is expressed by an *artisan* — not by an *artist*. This distinction is probably *positively* accentuated here for the first time, and therein lies the value of the testimony, when one looks ahead and sees how almost immediately creative testimonials center on pictorial art and poetry. Part of the development of art from the end of the Middle Ages on is precisely that it becomes the place where the artist begins to discuss himself and his creative spontaneity.

The history of technology is generally poor on such self-revelations by its practitioners. This cannot simply be a typological phenomenon, a case of the sober inventor. Neither is it due merely to the sociological fact that public awareness and esteem for the intellectual origins of technical innovations only began with the recognition of the *artes mechanicae* in the French Encyclopedia. It is above all a phenomenon of "being at a loss for words" [*Sprachlosigkeit*] in the practical arts. For the poet and the artist, there was already an arsenal of ready categories and metaphors in antiquity, from the anecdotal to the more basic, that, at least in their negation, sufficed to express how the creative process would like to reconceptualize itself. No language was at the disposal of the approaching technological world, and the people involved with it could hardly have created such a language. It is not until today — when the technological arena is held in high regard as something "useful to society" — that the very striking situation has arisen in which the people who determine the face of our world most powerfully know the least about, and know the least how to express, what it is they do. Autobiographies of great inventors — in contrast to the refined self-interpretations of modern artists — are often at a touching loss for words for the phenomenon that they would like to explain. Just one example: Orville Wright gave the invention of the airplane a typical stylization, explaining that six years before their first flight at Kitty Hawk, the Wright brothers had gotten hold of a book on ornithology. With the book, they made the breakthrough to understanding why the bird possessed an ability that man could not appropriate for himself by using a scale model of the physical mechanism.[11] But that is exactly the topos that Leonardo da Vinci used four hundred

years before.[12] This of course made sense for Da Vinci, and even for Lilienthal,[13] since they actually attempted a homomorphic design. The hiatus lies between Lillienthal and Wright: The airplane was an actual *invention* in that it freed itself from the old dream of imitating the flight of birds and solved the problem using a new principle. The invention of the combustion engine (which itself represents an actual invention) is therefore not nearly as original or unique as the use of the propeller. Rotating elements are of a purely technical nature — that is, derivable neither from *imitatio* nor *perfectio* — since rotating organs must be foreign to nature. Is it somewhat too audacious to contend that the airplane is so contained in the immanence of the technical process that it would have come to that day at Kitty Hawk, even if never a bird had flown?

But the reference to what is already available, to the bird with its God-given ability to fly, does not have anything like the function of explaining the genesis of the idea. Its purpose is rather to express the more-or-less defined feeling of *illegitimacy* about what man demands for himself. The topos of imitation of nature is a cover for the incomprehensibility of human creativity, which is thought to be metaphysical violence. Such topoi serve a purpose in our world, as when naturalistic titles are placed beneath abstract paintings at modern art exhibitions. What cannot be formulated cannot be asserted. Paradise was: knowing the name of everything and familiarizing oneself with it through that name. Where the *logon didonai* (in its double meaning, "to name" and "to give a reason for") fails, we have a tendency to speak of the demonism of the thing — as in the common expression of the "demonism of technology" [*"Dämonie der Technik"*]. A problematic like modern technology is characterized by the fact that we feel it to be a "problem," but are completely at a loss to formulate it as such. This embarrassment should be referred back to the validity of the definition of art as the imitation of nature. I am attempting to show that this idea affected and controlled our metaphysical tradition and how it did so in such a way as to leave no room for the conception of *authentic* human creations. The creative self-consciousness that emerged at the border between the Middle Ages and the modern period found itself ontologically inarticulable. As painters began to search for a "theory,"

they assimilated Aristotelian poetics: The creative "notion" [*Einfall*] was referred to with the metaphor of *enthusiasmo* and using expressions of a secularized *illuminatio*. The difficulty of articulation in the face of the overemphasis of the *imitatio* tradition *and* the Renaissance *gestus* of rebellion are all of a piece. The appearance of something that unquestionably had ontological status constituted a zone of legitimacy in which new ways of understanding could only succeed with force. One thinks as well of the "bursting onto the scene" of the "original genius" in the eighteenth century, who is systematically absorbed, so to speak, by Idealism.

Only in historical retrospect do we understand what Cusa's experiment could have signified — his formulation of the idea of man as a creator of Being with the irony of his spoon-making Idiot in such a way that it comes out as the unavoidable consequence and legitimate explication of the theological conception of man's being made in the image of God by God's will — as (in the earlier Hermetic formulation) *alter deus*. Measured by its historical effectiveness, this attempt to see the modern period as an immanent product of the Middle Ages — an attempt in which the metaphysical legitimization of ascribing the attributes of the creator to man is only *one* component — did not succeed. We have to consider Nicholas of Cusa's Idiot a historical indicator, not a historical force. For the sum of modern intellectual history constitutes the antagonism between the mechanical and the organic, art and nature, the will to form and the givenness of forms, between labor and rest. Human creation sees its room for maneuver hemmed in by reality. Nietzsche formulates this fact most sharply, when he says in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "Whoever should like to be a creator for good or ill, he must first be a destroyer and transgress values. Thus the greatest evil belongs to the greatest good: this is the way of creation."[14] Here nihilism is functionally assigned to the human claim to originary creation [*Seinsoriginären Anspruch*], but it is nonetheless unclear whether what is here expressed as an eternal law instead indicates a historical situation in which man finds his creative freedom situated in a specific metaphysical tradition (precisely the metaphysical tradition whose specifics we are laying out). The antinaturalism of the nineteenth century is pregnant with this feeling of the narrowing of

the possibility of authentic human production by an oppressive horizon of fixed conditions. The new pathos of labor directed itself against nature: Comte coined the term "antinature"; Marx and Engels spoke of "antiphysis." Nature had not only lost its role as authoritative example, had not only been reduced to an object whose meaning was exhausted by its theoretical and practical mastery; it became, moreover, something like the opposing term to technical and artistic will. Its effect on the emotional susceptibility of humanity awakened mistrust: The self-sufficiency, the attraction, the ultimate insularity of nature [*Das in-sich Beruhende, Ausreifende, zu-sich Zurückkehrende der Natur*] assumed the character of a temptation for the human will to create works to be unequivocal.[15] It has also been the case in our century that natural resources, on the one hand, and the physical capacities of humanity, on the other, have been disturbingly unequal to the demands technology has placed on them. The organic has revealed its thing-like inertia. The conception of overcoming it was first developed in ruthless fashion with Ernst Jünger's idea of the "organic construction" in *The Worker*.

This, by way of examples, is an indication the *terminus ad quem* of the historical process, whose metaphysical *terminus a quo* we would like to consider here. The metaphysical exclusivity of the concept of nature, as will be shown in more detail, eliminated the space for authentic human works, or, more precisely, rendered it invisible. By the end of a violent countermovement, nature itself had its value disputed in the face of the absolute claim of technical and artistic works. And not coincidentally, from Idealism on, on any occasion when one believed one could ask about what Being was, art took on exactly the same exemplary role in philosophy that nature had held in classical thought and the metaphysics it spawned.

Perhaps it has been made clear to the reader of our essay that one can say — without the presumption of a mental leap — that the modern pathos of the authentic human creation [*autentisch menschlichen Hervorbringung*] in art and technology springs from the protest against the metaphysical tradition of *the identity of Being and nature*, and that the definition of human works as imitation of nature was the direct consequence of this identity. A fundamental investigation of the historical background will be necessary here.

III

It is worth beginning with a look at the tenth book of Plato's *Republic*. As is well known, here Plato issues a polemic against poetry, and representative art in general, and he does so with an argument that does not so much protest against its negative consequences as against its *origins*, by focusing on its ontological underpinnings. That art imitates nature is therefore not just an assertion, but in fact the decisive objection. In order to put this objection into sharp relief, Plato takes as paradigmatic two basic everyday objects, couch and table. The craftsman *produces* them [*herstellt*], the painter only *reproduces* them [*darstellt*]. The craftsman, however, is not in addition the "inventor" of the couch or table, since no craftsman begets [*hervorbringt*] their *Form* as such.[16] The negative formulation of Plato's sentence presupposes a particular definition of *invention* [*Erfindung*]: it is the begetting of the Form itself. But where does the craftsman get the Forms for couch and table, if he did not beget them himself and did not find basic shapes of this kind in the given reality? The answer runs like this: Just as it contains the Forms for the things already present at hand in the world, so the world of Forms also contains the Forms for couch and table.[17] When the craftsman makes use-objects such as these, their Forms are somehow permitted to his mental gaze. The artist, however, gazes not upon the Form itself, but upon its already rendered copy. To reproach him for this, and to derive from the reproach a critique of the imitative arts, necessarily implies the premise that *imitation is in some way negative*. Plato, it is true, uses the expressions "to imitate" and "to participate in" indiscriminately and interchangeably — often for one and the same state of affairs. It is nonetheless important to recognize that *methexis* has a *positive* connotation that emphasizes the relation of material things to the reality of the Form, whereas *mimesis* emphasizes the negative aspect of the difference between Form and thing, the defect of phenomenal Being as over against Formal Being.[18] Imitation means precisely: *not to be* the imitated itself.[19] Art is therefore only a derivative of Being; in the example of a painting of a fabricated object, it is already "third from what *is*."[20] The craftsman can at least be excused by the need that his work will fill, but how can the painter justify himself?

This negative aspect of the imitation of the Forms will become so pronounced in the later history of Platonism that eventually even the *first* imitation, the foundation of the visible cosmos by the world Demiurge, cannot help but acquire a negative connotation. One should keep in mind this Neoplatonic one-sidedness if one is to understand why it was precisely the Platonism of the late Middle Ages that participated so vigorously in the overcoming of the mimetic formula for the work of art. The *Aristotelian* tradition — which made the "imitation of nature" formula its own, more than any other — never understood, could never even conceive of the idea, that imitation could be a stricture that would put the *worth* of human works into question.

For Plato himself, of course, priority should probably still be given to the positive aspect connected with the concept of *methexis*. It is easy to understand this when one keeps in mind the original hostility of the Socratic-Platonic school to the Sophists. It is the Sophists who first conceive of sheer making [*absolute Setzung*], a *thesis* of what does not have its basis in the pregiven.[21] But this concept still lacks almost everything that the concept of the "creative" [*schöpferische*] ought to entail. The state, language, norms are, to be sure, seen here as derived from man, guided by human *techne*. Likewise, "history" is first understood as a product of human making in Sophistic rhetoric — but this achievement does not attach to humanity as an honor; rather, its "inventive spirit" is an indication of human neediness, of a lack of natural endowments and discernible organizing structure. The Sophists also do not have a concept of the thinking subject to whom some sort of metaphysical "distinction" could be ascribed. "Making" is indeed a contrasting concept to "nature," but precisely because of this, making turns out to be close to mere *tuche*, which is how this contrast is usually expressed. What must have happened for the conception of the complete spontaneity of human activities first developed here to have procured its metaphysical dignity? The answer is easy to give in retrospect: Making first acquires metaphysical value because it is discussed as a theological concept, as an attribute of the divine. Only the transplantation of a concept onto theological soil makes it flourish so as to be sufficiently attractive in the history of human self-understanding

— from the *homoiosis theoi* (mystical longing for likeness to God) to the defiant usurpation of divine attributes in what has been called the hubris of the Renaissance — to move the will. Thus the fundamental question here is not at all about where the authenticity of human accomplishments was first conceived, but rather about where it achieved the unique metaphysical status that would allow it to be at the center of the thought of an entire epoch. Necessity is indeed the mother of invention — as the saying goes — but she is not able to give invention the luster that drives one to confirm incessantly that one is capable of it.

The Sophists' concept of *thesis* justifies appearance, *not Being*: It has no reference to *truth*. *Techne* and *aletheia* are foreign to each other. To bring a *foundation* to this foundationless human activity, to provide a relation to Being, a binding authority — that was the motive for the theory of Forms and its correlative concept of mimesis. The craftsman who produces the couch and table makes something *new* only from the perspective of the phenomenal world, but not from the perspective of the world of Forms, in which the Forms of these objects are *always already given*. When Plato now says that these Forms signify the couch and the table *en tei physei* (in essence)[22] then the implicit, specifically Platonic meaning of the imitation of nature formula becomes clear: To imitate nature means to copy the Form. But what then? Can one ask about yet another source behind the Form, or is it the absolute itself, without origin? Is the concept of a *creative* act foreign to Platonic metaphysics?

Traditional Platonism, in any case, will leave that impression, and it will become evident how this impression arises. In our passage, however, in the tenth book of the *Republic*, it is explicitly stated that it is the god who wanted to be the true begettor of the couch that actually is — not just any couch that any craftsmen can make — and he accomplished this by establishing the couch, in the singularity of its nature, as a Form.[23] Three times in short succession, Plato insists on this formulation, and he calls the god who creates being *Futurgos*. It is here that *creation* is first conceived as the act of the originary formation of Being and made a divine attribute. One would think that this conception of the creation idea in its radical form would have been recognized and acknowledged at the very

latest when the biblical creation idea was being described in terms of ancient metaphysics and adapted to the tradition. But, as has been shown often enough, another element in the Platonic canon succeeded for this purpose: the myth of the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*. The Demiurge was seen to prefigure the biblical creator God. But the Demiurge is *not a creator*. He is — according to his function and not his metaphysical status — just as much a craftsman as the carpenter in book ten of the *Republic*. The Demiurge of the *Timaeus* functions as the founder of the visible cosmos, not of Being. He is supposed to clarify how, along with the cosmos of Forms, there is its pendant, the phenomenal world. He is thus intended to bridge over a difficulty in Platonic philosophy, at which Aristotle then so persistently took offense.

The Demiurge serves as an assistant, subordinate to the absolute Being of the Forms; the metaphysical accent lies not on this "creator" but on his blueprints. He only makes "that which actually is" (which one must imagine, as the Neoplatonists did, as being induced to announce itself) appear in a recognizable form; he translates it into the language of the senses. Whether or not the original model requires such an "expression" of its Being is an unimportant question, at least as long as the Demiurge is not the god who must be justified as the source of good. This identification of the Demiurge with God had already been introduced in the first century B.C., and it dominated Christian Platonism. Since the *Futurgos* of the *Republic* met with no interest and the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* was instead the influential model in the historical reception, the concept of "creation" had to be interpreted using the categories of the structural scheme of imitation. Although a conception of *human* spontaneous creation was still of little concern here, it was nonetheless *predetermined* to a considerable degree, when one considers how the concepts that make up the self-consciousness of the subject often incubate in theology. The adaptation of the Demiurge concept to the concept of God implied the decisive sanctioning of the principle of the "imitation of nature."

But the *Timaeus* introduces an important modification to yet another aspect of the position introduced in the tenth book of the *Republic*. Aristotle informs us of the fact — astounding in light of previous explications — that according to the Academy, there were

no Forms for artificial objects, as for a house or a ring.[24] How could Plato or his school have later abandoned the notion of Forms for artificial objects? The reason is readily apparent in the *Timaeus*. The Demiurge copies pregiven, original designs into pregiven matter, but he does not do this as he pleases; he does not do this at will. He is subject to the principle of optimal effect: The cosmos he produces is *kallistos ton gegonoton* ("the best of things that have become") and his work is qualified by *aristos ton aition* ("the best of causes").[25] The realm of Forms itself, in its double, ontological and ethical, function makes this means of formation mandatory: The Forms are not simply guidelines for how this work *can be* fashioned, but rather like obligatory norms for how it *ought to be* fashioned. In this way, Plato secures not only the unity of the real cosmos, but also its *complete compatibility* with the Formal model.[26] But this means, consequently, that the Demiurge exhausts [*schöpft aus*] the potential of the Forms; the real represents the Formal in its fully fashioned [*erschöpfend*] form. Everything that is possible is *already there*, and there are no unrealized Forms left over for the works of man. This considerable deviation from the tenth book of the *Republic* allows the question of the origin of human works to persist as a problem within Platonism. Aristotle reached the only possible conclusion: Everything "new" that is fashioned recalls what already is. The idea of the complete expression of possibility and reality does not allow for man's originary, imaginative creation. That means that man's efforts cannot ontologically "account for" what is; or put another way, essentially *nothing* is created in the works of man. Human creation has no real intrinsic truth of its own. No wonder, then, that it had no significance for traditional metaphysics.[27]

IV

The entire system, as Plato has already laid it out, is given in its traditionally accepted version by Aristotle. The eternity of the Forms becomes the eternity of the real world itself, and the complete correspondence of Forms to appearances becomes the unity and completeness of the cosmos in relation to the concept of possibility. The exemplary aspect is weakened in this Aristotelian reformulation:

Why nature *ought to be* imitated is easier to understand in Plato, since the real world appears as simply the best endowed creation; it would not make sense to conceive of a different one. Here again the Stoics will come into play. But what is more explicitly expressed by Aristotle than by Plato is why a work *can only be* a copy of nature. Nature is the embodiment of all that is possible. Thought can be defined only as a faculty concerned with a totality that already is. The possible is only what is already a reality in terms of its Form: The cosmos is the All of the actual as well as of the possible. Accordingly, the immanent law of motion (in the broadest sense that this term had for Aristotle, as change) is the eternal *self-perpetuation of Being*. This basic structure encompasses entity and idea, nature and "art"; it is, finally, the inner structure of the absolute Being of Aristotle's metaphysics: The "Unmoved Mover" is the purely intellectual form of self-perpetuation through *noesis noeseos*, thought that thinks itself. This self-enclosed self-sufficiency of the absolute is as little creative externally as it is internally innovative. (How astonishing that Christian theology nonetheless took it as a model!) The self-perpetuation of the absolute in the cosmos works according to imitation: This principle explains the first, undistorted circular orbit of the spheres simply as the highest returning to itself; it is mirrored in the circulation of the meteorological waters;[28] it is the fundamental law of all generative processes in which each entity always reproduces its own kind. Expressed as a general rule: What is derives solely from what was.[29] *Techne* is ranked very low in the organization of this cosmic process: The produced does not perpetuate itself. Only indirectly — precisely through the unavoidable dependence on "imitation" — does the act of *techne* rejoin the basic cosmic structure and avoid being mere *bia* [force] or *tyche* [chance]. Likewise, "art" is "saved" for the cosmos, functionally incorporated into it, a testament to its uniqueness and completeness. The theologizing of the cosmos, which first the Stoics would develop fully, is basically determined here. Where the completeness of Being is absolute, it cannot give "sanction" to Being, not even through God. The will has no power to bring into being; it can only will what already is, can only — like the god himself — "stay in motion." Seen in the context of this completeness of his metaphysics, the

homogeneity of the Aristotelian doctrine of knowledge becomes self-evident.[30]

In the interpretation of Aristotelian mimesis, the significance of the dynamic conception of nature is referred to repeatedly — not as the total, given eidetic constant, but rather as the embodiment of the generative processes producing this constant at any given time: "the creative force, the productive principle of this universe."[31] Here we have the classical distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. But I am not able to discern here a significant addition to Plato: Even if one emphasizes the *static* character of the world of Forms — ignoring the final formulation of the Platonic school — there is still an initializing *dynamic* concentrated in the Demiurge. Aristotle must bring all of this — Form, matter, Demiurge — under the rubric of nature. This leads to the ambiguity that pervades the mimesis idea. "Imitation of nature" thus means not only the reproduction of an eidetic constant, but the mimicking of the productive process of nature: "Art in general imitates the method of nature."[32] I cannot see that any decisive meaning comes out of this distinction for our question, however; since for Aristotle all generative processes of nature are in fact regulated by an unchangeable eidetic constant. Nature duplicates itself eternally by reproducing itself — what then makes it possible to ascribe a "creative force" to it? Here of course the implications of the modern concept of nature, defined by evolution, are frequently brought to bear. This consistently leads to the overemphasis of *epitelein* (leading to the goal) in the Aristotelian definition of art. How can nature require any kind of completion? Here lack, in any case, does not mean "empty space," but rather the developmental goal that is *never quite reached*. When Aristotle says it is the task of artists to imitate natural objects as they *ought to be*,[33] that does not mean by referring to the transcendental Form of one of these objects, but rather by "extrapolating" from the developmental process to its completion, from *genesis* to *telos*. The generative quality of the concept of nature is important for the artistic process because it does not allow art to remain satisfied with a mere factual instance of Being and focuses it on the developmental goal, which determines the final shape (*entelechia*) of the artwork. But the concept takes on importance only because once the Forms are set aside, and

despite their being set aside, some ideal is still necessary for man to understand what it is in the work — and especially the work of art — that defines him. Should nature ever forfeit its eidetic constancy, the Aristotelian school of "art" would likewise lose its foundation. Where is nature to acquire another exemplar of what ought to be, if the concept of *natura naturans* means not the eternal perpetuation of finite ontogenesis but an infinite phylogenesis induced by selection and mutation? This allusion to what comes later is only intended to indicate that fundamental philosophical concepts cannot just experience a renaissance for no reason.

At the core of the Aristotelian concept of *techne* is the idea that man the maker cannot be assigned an *essential* [*wesentliche*] function. What one would call "the human world" basically does not exist. The human has his place at the conclusion of the physical teleology as maker and actor: He brings to completion what nature *would have* brought to completion; the "ought to be" is immanent in nature, not in him. *Techne* and *physis* are congruous constituent principles: One affects *from the outside* what the other affects *from within*.[34] Production is tied to its counterpart, growth. The artistic or mechanical work therefore only has a derivative significance and contains no inherent truth. The possibility of experiencing something unique in a work of art is still unthinkable: The work is still not a medium for human self-recognition and self-confirmation.

In the Hellenistic period, the pseudo-Aristotelian work, *On the Cosmos* provides a not insignificant variation on the mimesis concept with the addition of a Heraclitan theme.[35] Mimesis does not depend primarily on the eternal eidetic constancy of nature, but rather on its *formal* structure (if one does not understand "formal" in the sense of Aristotelian-Scholastic *forma*). The cosmos is, according to Heraclitus, a network of contradictions that do not cancel each other out, just as a *polis* composed of rich and poor, weak and strong, bad and good, makes up a unified whole. Nature realizes itself in contradictions, such as male and female, dry and wet, warm and cold. And it is in this way that art imitates nature, as for instance when painting depicts contrasting colors, music harmonizes low and high notes, or the art of writing combines vowels and consonants. To be sure, this formalization of mimesis wins some latitude

for artistic authenticity, but it is not yet apparent how heterogeneous music or language (writing) is different from any natural process. The Stoics broadened the metaphysical foundation of mimesis considerably by elevating the completeness and unity of the cosmos to predicates of theological dignity. Man's position, on the other hand, was strengthened through the universalization of the theological principle that nature is organized to be at man's disposal and that the works of men are an imitation and completion of this relation. *Techne* is close to receiving religious sanction when, for instance, Posidonius traces the dyer's craft back to the sun, which gives plummage, flowers, and minerals their splendor, while also employing human "art" in its task.[36] There is no longer a definitive boundary between the natural and the man-made, a single *energia* is at work: "Art" is nature by other means. The example of dyeing shows nicely how the boundary between nature as a work of God and "art" as a work of man will be restored by the Christian creation idea: In certain patristic authors a polemic can be found against the processing of textiles with the reasoning that God would have created colored sheep if he had wanted man to have colored clothing. Tertullian generalized this into a very typical polemic against *ars*: "There is nothing that God found pleasing, that he did not himself bring forth. Was he incapable of creating purple or steel blue sheep as well? Even though he was capable of doing so, he did not want to do so; what God does not want to make, man must also refrain from making [...].What does not come from God, must come from his adversary." [37] Here, then, we have an anticipation of the "demonism of Technology," which places nature and "art" in a dichotomous schema. Of course this first required a new general conception of nature as an *expression of the will* of God and the still implicit presupposition of *other entities* as factual possibilities of Being, willed as such. But — in order to demonstrate a fairly typical distinction — I have jumped ahead. For Posidonius, imitation of nature represented only an external aspect of the homogeneity of the singular, total process working through both man and nature. "The theory of imitation becomes a theory of the relationship that allows for creation: The invention is an interpretation, a judgement, a deciphering of what is written in nature. Nature is not a model applied at man's

discretion, but rather directly, of its own accord, and man is to complete nature according to its essential, not its accidental, possibilities."[38] "Invention," as the uncovering of nature's blueprint, serves as instruction, so that for the first time the classical theory applies directly to the composition of the work, and philosophy appears as the root of material culture as well. Seneca's polemic against Posidonius is aimed less at this fundamental conception as at the "elevation" to which technical skills, as the highest achievements of nature itself, are transported: The theoretical Form forfeits its rank as the absolute — as is the case in Cicero. With precisely the same teleological principle, Seneca argues the exact opposite: Nature, centered completely on man, provides sufficiently, making technical advancements and work superfluous, having the character of luxury.[39] "Imitation of nature" is unnecessary, since nature provides for every need. There is no legitimate *transition* from nature to "art." Here "art" and hubris are already fundamentally one, a consequence of insufficient natural-divine *providentia*. The human being himself — his *artificial* needs, his excessive *facilis actus vitae* — drives the development of the *artes*. "The things that are essential are acquired with little bother; it is the luxuries that call for toil and effort. Follow nature and you will feel no need of craftsmen.... She equipped us for everything she required us to contend with."[40]

What is instructive about this reversal is that completely opposite conclusions are derived from one and the same metaphysical principle. While Posidonius so exaggerates the mimesis idea beyond its internal premises that it nearly transcends the cyclical pattern of a self-reproducing nature, Seneca sees the authentically human in the feeling that the provisions of nature are insufficent; the endless, self-perpetuating need, especially the desire for luxuries — with negative connotations, of course — is the source of the technical drive. Here imitation has basically lost its meaning as the impetus for "art" — art is precisely the rejection of the strictures and the contesting of the completeness of nature. Here, as is so often the case, a negative formulation has brought what is essential into focus.

V

The history of the destruction and deracination of the mimesis idea, however, is not — as the example of Seneca's polemic against Posidonius could lead one to presume — a process of the disintegration of its inner contradictions. It is much more a process of the inauguration of new, external, specifically theological ideas. Of course this is not to say that the biblical story of creation takes on novel premises here. Rather, it will become apparent how this process easily gets caught up in the existing interpretation of Being. The two elements that were constitutive of the mimesis idea — the restrictive mandate of nature and its essential completeness — seem at first to fit well with the concept of creation. One must admit that the *restrictive mandate* of a given nature was strengthened by the idea that it manifested the *will* of the creator, as the citation from Tertullian shows. It was not at all apparent at first that the justification of nature's strictures by an act of will would cast doubt on the idea that the actual world was *necessarily* the full realization of the possible. Accordingly, in the quotation we cited, Tertullian must formulate the expression of God's will in the facticity of nature this way: Not only did God *not create what He did not want,* but also *He did not want what He did not create.* But what does this "unwanted and not created" consist of? A possible kind of Being not yet represented in nature? This compelling deduction is no longer unthinkable. It implies the *facticity* and *incompleteness* of nature — an opening for the possibility of the "artificial." This example makes it possible to demonstrate the ontological consequences of adding will to the process of creation. The shoring up of the strictures of nature by claiming that God decreed His will through it leads to the inevitable corollary of unwilled possibilities — exactly the sort of thing to immediately arouse interest in an impious, curious mind, fond of splitting hairs.

This interpretation rules out the usual explanation of the new Christian understanding of Being in the context of the creation idea as a conception first explicated fully by Augustine. Rather, it was precisely this thinker who grasped the immanent consequences of the idea of creation in classical ontology. It is certainly correct that

with his reduction of *materia prima* to the absolute *nihil* of the *creatio ex nihilo* he had insured against dualism from all sides. But it is wrong to see the central problem at issue here. What is decisive here is that the divine spirit of creation is now identified with the Platonic *mundus intelligibilis*. The Forms and the power of the Demiurge are indeed now unified in *one* authority, but this does not change the fact that the *mundus intelligibilis* still represents a single unity — Plato's *zoion noeton* — which can only be transposed into the *mundus sensibilis* as a whole. Here Augustine is under the spell of the pedantry with which Neoplatonism rehearsed the correspondence of the physical and *noetic* world.[41] The divine act of will that determines the creation can only refer to the fixed totality of the singular cosmos of Forms. Therefore only the "that" of creation and not its "what" becomes a fact. In Augustine, the concept of *omnipotence* is not yet joined to the concept of *infinity*. Thus he remains within the structure of the classical correspondence of Being and nature. There is no alternative to the given actuality of the creation — not even for the creator. *After* the act of creation, nothing of essential originality can be brought into being. How a finite world and the infinite potential of God's power, the real and the possible, could be related to one another was one of the hardest problems left to the Middle Ages to think through to its conclusions.

My thesis about the *antiquity* of Augustine's ontology (as I presented it in Munich) is contradicted by Henry Deku in his shrewd history of the *possibile logicum*[42] — the history of the development of a realm of possibility, which encompasses the Formal as well as the real cosmos — what we have here considered as the space for originary creation. Deku, who begins his history with Augustine, refers mainly to *De spiritu et littera,* where the concept of *possibilitas* appears most frequently. But here — as is typical of Augustine — this concept appears only in conjunction with the Pelagian controversy, in other words, within the framework of salvation theology. It is a matter of the possibility of man without sin, of a *possibilitas non peccandi* — that is, of the possibility of a quality inherent in human behavior, a *possibilitas naturalis*, as opposed to salvation through grace alone.[43] God is therefore not the reason for *Being*, but the reason for *salvation* in this interpretation, just as the "ability" of

humanity arises only in regard to its being worthy of salvation. The treatise is directed against the tribunes of Marcellinus, who was the target of an earlier work, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione.* One can suppose that Marcellinus had answered the objection made in this earlier writing by claiming that humanity can rid itself of sin through good will and with the aid of grace, although one must nonetheless admit "that there is nobody who has been, is, or will be of such perfect justice in this life." In other words, man is assuming as possible what has not really come to pass.[44] Marcellinus, in any case, reasons very much within the horizon of ancient ontology: What is possible will only be proven by what is real — through the "actual coming into being" of the Forms. The argumentation is as close as possible to Lucretius, who objected to creation, "how can the gods be creators of nature when they lack the *exemplum* which only an already actualized nature can provide — unless nature itself provided a model of the creation."[45] Marcellinus' argument, which is unavailable to us, must be close to this position, if Augustine can say of it: "It appeared absurd to you to say that anything was possible of which no example ever occurred."[46] It will be shown that the biblical revelation offered a new guide to what is "possible with God," since God himself provides a testament of what is possible for him and the "word" takes the place of the "thing" as a reference of sorts — the story of the camel that can go through the eye of a needle, the faith that can move mountains.[47] However, these theological renditions of possibilities do not touch on the ontological basis of Augustinian metaphysics, since here the issue is God's ability to *reform* His own work of creation, man, to the originary constitution of his Being — in Platonic terms, the realization of the Form. The horizon of the pregiven cosmos of forms is *not broadened* by the question of human salvation, but rather reconstituted. When it is said that *"omnia possibilia sunt Deo"* (all things are possible with God),[48] this *omnia* still does not in any way indicate the possibility of more than what is actually created; rather, the correspondence between *mundus intelligibilis* and *mundus sensibilis* became defective because of the original sin of man, and it is a question of correcting this defect. To claim the *posse non peccare* of man is therefore a logical necessity — without this possibility noth-

ing can reasonably be said about the *posse peccare*. Man is defined precisely as a being who determines his own conformity to the Form. But this freedom arose very much *within* the Formal scheme.

There is no doubt that the idea of *willing*, introduced into the cosmology by the Hellenic period and made thoroughly virulent by Augustine, is a disruptive concept[49] of the highest order for the continued validity of ancient ontology and that it exercised a "denecessitating influence on what had become reality." Nevertheless, it was not Augustine whose understanding of Being was so fundamentally distorted that he somehow actually broke through the visual horizon. I believe I can even give the reason for this: Manicheanism initiated and brought to the forefront the problem of the elimination of the *materia prima* and the tendency toward dualism inextricably bound up with it. One believes oneself to be in the thick of our theme when one finds Augustine distinguishing between *creatum* and *creabile*, the created and the to-be-created, only to discover with disappointment that the expression *creabile* refers to the material substrate which he wants to be sure is included in his *tu fecisti* (of your [i.e., God's] making).[50] Where the discussion concerns what is *not yet*, but *could be*, it is always about matter, the possibility of Being as formal indeterminacy, which is associated with Aristotle.[51] The emphasis on willing in the concept of creation has its limit at the anti-Gnostic position, which attempts to understand creation as a rational act: "...who would dare to say that God created everything in an irrational manner?"[52] But here "rational" can only be interpreted in accordance with Plato's notion of the Demiurge, as the guiding, corresponding thread between the noetic and the real world. In this way, the concepts of omnipotence and infinity are necessarily separated; since *infinitum*, in the ancient understanding, is incompatible with rationality, it is the hyletic *apeiron* (unexperienced). Infinity does not yet figure as an attribute of God. Only when God's *potentia* is first understood as *potentia infinita*, does it become logically necessary to stop defining *potentia* (and the realm of Forms it implies) on the basis of the possible and to do the inverse — to define the possible on the basis of *potentia*.[53] It is only then that the limits of possibility are defined as its *logical* limits, and the realm of Forms is rendered irrelevant for the

question of what *omnia* means as the boundary of *omnipotentia*. As a consequence, the concept of rationality will be reduced to the concept of *noncontradiction*, while even in Augustine the concept of *ratio* is still not separable from the exemplary Form and therefore implies a final, objective order. Only *now* for the first time can the decisive step for our inquiry into the ontological space of the creative be taken: The supposedly finite cosmos does not exhaust the existing possibilities of the infinite universe — in other words, the possibilities of divine omnipotence — and *cannot* exhaust them. The cosmos is necessarily only an actualized portion of this universe, and there remains a space of unrealized Being — which of course will long be the unquestioned preserve of God and will not come up in connection with humanity's inquiry into its own potential. But the discussion of the concept of omnipotence made this space ontologically implicit and comprehensible as part of the background of the real world. This is primarily an eminently *religious* idea, not only in that the world has lost its self-evidence, but also in that *what* it is can now be understood as an act of a specific, divine decree. At the same time, however, it broadens the basis for a *philosophical* critique out of which an abundance of consciousness-raising questions arise. The world as *factum*: This ontological presupposition makes it possible — practically serves as the inducement and temptation — to fashion something of *human origin*, to render the authentically new in the realm of the unrealized by using what has not yet actually been realized, advancing beyond the dependence on imitation of nature to a place untouched by nature.

VI

Of course there is no temptation here for the Middle Ages: All speculative boldness will focus on investigating to its farthest reaches the possibilities of God, not those of man. It will require yet a further, decisive motivation for humanity to be able to know and grasp the theologically posited incongruity between Being and nature as a possibility for *its own* originary creativity.

The contact between *omnipotence* and *infinity*, which produces the initial spark, apparently occurs in around the eleventh

century, when it becomes necessary to systematize the doctrine of divine omnipotence in response to the "dialecticians," above all in response to the damage done by Berengar of Tours to the doctrine of transsubstantiation. It is above all Petrus Damiani who takes the lead here with his *De divina omnipotentia*.[54] I cite here only the typical rhetorical question, found in chapter twelve: *"Quid est, quod Deus non valeat nova conditione creare?"* ("What is there that God would not be able to create under different circumstances?") The Being of the world acquires a certain peculiar arbitrariness here, a revocability and hypothetical interchangeablity that it first receives in the waning Middle Ages, when the period's anxiety about facticity goes from *logical* to *emotional* — that is, is related by humanity to itself. I am not able to give a description of this transformation here. My intent is to present the *growing* incongruity between Being and nature and through it the growing relevance of the space of originary creativity. One ought not imagine this process as organic, nor attribute to it the honorable movement of historical necessity, which it appears to have *a posteriori* — especially coupled with the selective reading on which every study of this kind must rely. It is easy to see that the role the Scholastics played in this process of the reconceptualization of ontological premises hardly fits the description of "historical necessity." But one should likewise not consider the classical revival brought on by the Aristotle reception as a violent reversion, as is already demonstrated by Augustine's conclusion that the implications of ancient thought continued to have potency. It is precisely their persistence that made it all the more tempting for the high Scholastic revival of ancient metaphysics to accept as valid often unarticulated but nonetheless significant presuppositions, to substantiate *what could no longer be ruled out.*

Ontological precepts that seemed valid to Augustine without needing to be explicitly formulated were now "ripe for questioning" in the Scholastic manner. A revealing quotation with reference to our citation from Augustine is the polemic of Albertus Magnus against the *fons vitae* of Avicebron (Ibn Gabirol) with its identification of the metaphysical principle of light and will: "it is not possible for will to be first principle."[55] The function of divine will is concerned with the *existence* [*Existenz*] of the world, on the order *ut fiat,* not, however,

on the *forma operis*, the essential stock of Being, which here also has the givenness of the formal, predetermined totality.

Even Thomas Aquinas does not go beyond this conception. There is, however, a broader understanding of the principle of imitation of nature for which the related idea of imitation of God serves as underlying principle.[56] This relation existed formally in Aristotle, according to whom the precise circular motion of the first sphere was the imitation of the Unmoved Mover. But this exhausts the potential of the relation. Aristotle must therefore explain the genesis of a house, for example, as the architect's rendering of what nature *would have* allowed to result. In other words, the architect must *imagine* the artificial structure as a product of nature in order to then imitate this hypothetical representation. In this way, the universal validity of mimesis is guaranteed. Aquinas restricted the imitation of *nature* to only what nature could just as well have made on its own[57] — a house is precisely a purely artificial object, it always results from artifice, just as every house results from artifice. Here of course we do not have a discrepancy but a very great difference in emphasis. This is even more apparent in the commentary on the *Physics*, where he discusses the seminal passage (II, 8; 199a 15-17, cited at the beginning of this essay).[58] The Latin version available to Aquinas reads: "*ars alia quidem perficit quae natura non potest facere,*" to which the commentary reads: "He says that art makes certain things which nature cannot make...." This is formulated more radically than it could have been intended by Aristotle, who after all always takes for granted what is already on the way to becoming in nature when he discusses the human task of completion. *How* the imitation of nature so recognizably loses its invulnerability, why "art" *can* be taken out of the context of nature, Aquinas does not make explicit.

Not so his contemporary, Bonaventura, who does not participate in the attempt to interpret the creation idea with the metaphysics of the Prime Mover, since for him the mechanical character of this conception loses the sense of a divine will *desiring to express itself through its works*. "Expression" means, namely, that the limitless power of God does not, as it were, execute itself "automatically," but rather inheres in the finite, which a finite being can conceive of and comprehend.[59] A will to announce itself in the world emerges, which

wants to make comprehensible not *everything possible*, but rather *something specific*: "*multa non omnia*." God brings out many but not all of the treasures in His chest of possibilities in order to prove Himself in His greatness to creation.[60] The feeling expressed here, one could say, is that the difference between *omnia* and *multa* is a mere remainder, perhaps prudently and lovingly withheld from humanity — in any case, not a reason to feel short-changed in access to or possession of the store of Being. But William of Ockham, who forced the Franciscan tradition through to its conclusions, will reverse Bonaventura's formulation by putting the *multa* on the opposite side, on the side of the unwilled-unrealized: "There is much that God can create which he does not want to create."[61] One senses right away how an agonizing, gnawing awareness of the arbitrariness of the factual must arise, the growing uncertainty about why *this* and no *other* world was called into being — a question which could only have the stark *Quia voluit* of Augustine hurled against it as a non-answer. Its offensiveness to rationality made palpable the unbearableness of this reality: All of a sudden the accent shifted from the divine expression of will contained in the *creation* to the implicit and withheld in the *uncreated*. We can discern this process of accentuating the uncreated in its earliest forms in the careful attempts to deal with it, to absorb it, even to give it a positive valence.

The work of Nicholas of Cusa provides the most multifaceted response to the difficulty of this problem. In his early phase, Cusa anticipated Leibnitz' attempt to justify the noncreation of the uncreated by finding the actual world to be the highest form of reality, the self-exhaustion of the creative principle as *deus creatus*.[62] But in this christianized Neoplatonism inheres a contradiction between two elements of speculative theology: On the one hand, the maximal version of the concept of completeness of creator and work makes it necessary to say that nothing more complete *could have been* made. On the other hand, the maximal version of divine omnipotence makes it necessary to say, no actual creation of the creator comprises the full extent of what He in His greatness and perfection could have achieved. This dilemma is not overcome. In *De beryllo*, almost two decades later, Cusa understands the creation with the model of legal statutes: He refers twice to the quota-

tion in the Justinian *Digesta* in which the will of the Lord has the force of law.[63] At the end of his intellectual career, in the text *De ludo globi*, Cusa attempts to harmonize his two previous positions, explaining the difference in terms of perspective: Seen from *God's* point of view, there is room for the play of possibility; from the point of view of the *world*, there is none.[64] This is based on a metaphysics of the concept of possibility; in creating, God not only realized the possible or from among the possible, but also created possibility itself: *"et fieri posse ipsum factum est."* Certainly, this is precisely to wave off and ignore pressing, meddlesome questions. Nicholas of Cusa will also try to use a metaphysics of logic, just as Martin Luther attempts the radicalization of the exclusive claim of theology. With a decisive turn against Ockham's formula, he insists that "omnipotence" has no logically comprehensible meaning outside of its Scriptural meaning, and moreover does not indicate the power of God to realize much more than he had realized.[65] God's *potentia absoluta*, the inconceivability of which worries Luther, as it does the late Middle Ages as a whole, is to be understood as limited by God himself to the *potentia ordinata* through the instrument of the Revelation. Asking about anything beyond God's gracious self-restraint assumes the odium of disparaging this act of grace. Only by not asking about the infinite latitude of possibility does one escape the threatening uncertainty that it leaves open.

VII

But the force of the questions once they have emerged, cannot be contained. Where they lead, we can see already expressed almost to the fullest extent by Descartes. With Descartes, philosophy is a systematization of the possible; now what actually is is understandable from the point of view of what is possible. Hence the new meaning of *hypothesis*, which satisfies the intellectual desire to construct a *possible* situation, and to do so, moreover, with indifference to the question of the *actual* nexus. For the will that *creates a construct* [*Dem Willen zur Konstruktion*], it is irrelevant if by chance nature is imitated or if a solution not yet realized in nature results; the normative principle of *economy* is a principle of the human

intellect designed for its benefit, not for the workings of nature. The principle of *possible worlds* is so endlessly fruitful that an agreement between their deduced, hypothetical construction and the *actual world* can only be a coincidence.[66] It is already apparent with Descartes how the idea of freedom depends on the independence of rational formulae from the factually given: with the example of an ingenious machine, he demonstrates the force of the mind as so capable of originality that the inventor is able to conceive of the machine "without having seen anything like it anywhere."[67] Man "chooses" his world, just as God chose a world to create from the possible worlds. Leibniz will once again attempt to limit these worlds with his notion of preestablished harmony and to balance the weight of endless possibilities with a metaphysical optimism. But when this boundless optimism collapses in the middle of the eighteenth century, the whole trouble of the matter comes to light: What actually is can only be of arbitrary value in the realm of the possibility of Being. What justification then remains for the possible to continue as possible? Nature is the factual result of mechanistic combinations: How can it restrict or serve as a model for the manmade through mimesis? The arbitrariness of natural formations stands in opposition to human creations — aesthetic and technical — with their necessity. What Leibniz' "best of all possible worlds" allows to persist ontologically is not the "best world" but rather the infinity of possible worlds, a notion that becomes intellectually attractive precisely as the real world no longer plausibly represents the world chosen as best. Without being aware of the metaphysical background, Oskar Walzel traces the mid-eighteenth-century idea of the creative genius back to Leibniz.[68] Walzel makes it especially clear how the comparison of God to the creative artist already contained within it the artist's comparison of himself to God. In terms of *logic*, there will be nothing added here between the Renaissance and the *Sturm und Drang*. It is nonetheless decisively important that *poetry* comes to achieve a particular significance in the comparison. While the comparison of God to the master craftsman and the painter go back to antiquity, now the poet becomes the preeminent "creator," and not coincidentally, but rather — as is now simply obvious — because of the destruction of the mimesis idea. In his

Treatise on Painting, Leonardo da Vinci established the similarity of the painter to God: By imitating nature, the painter imitates its creator. And the rebellion of Mannerism against mimesis had *de facto* only managed an ostentatious deformation of nature. In the poetic tradition, the rebellion against *imitatio* was primarily against the stylistic restrictions of the classical canon; it was an insistence on the individuality of the expressive form against Aristotelian poetics and Ciceronianism.[69] Julius C. Scaliger in his *Poetics* of 1561 had already defined the difference between poetry and all other art forms: Only the poet's occupation was a *condere,* while that of all other artists was a *narrare,* a retelling as opposed to the creation of the poet, who like *alter Deus* could found a *natura altera.*[70] But this idea is still without ontological foundation: it receives a grounding first through Leibniz, who did not himself, however, draw any conclusions from the infinity of possible worlds,[71] and could not because of his metaphysical optimism. It is the "Swiss" who first establish the connection between the imagination of the creative poet and the idea of "possible worlds," which kindled a spark and determined the meaning of art as "metaphysical activity" for the next era. Johann Jakob Breitlinger's two-volume *Critische Dichtkunst* (*A Critique of the Art of Writing*) of 1740 is an "aesthetic" application of Leibniz' doctrine of "possible worlds."[72] The poet finds himself in the position of God *before* the creation of the world, facing the entire infinitude of possible worlds, out of which he must choose; therefore, poetry is — and here comes the most astonishing formulation on our theme that one could wish for! — "an imitation of creation and nature not only in their reality but also in their possibility." So powerful is the foundational formula of imitation of nature, so deeply rooted in the metaphysical tradition, that its sanction for the significance of human creations cannot be dispensed with, even when it is used to express — even to proclaim! — the exact opposite of its intended meaning! The endlessly possible now takes on the same role of regulative ideal as the Platonic Forms, if it is possible for the discourse of imitation to take on yet another meaning. Johann Jakob Bodmer in his ca. 1740 *Abhandlung von dem Wunderbaren in der Poesie* (*Treatise on the Wonderful in Poetry*) speaks of poetry in almost the same language: "It is always preferable that the material to

be imitated come from the possible rather than from the present world."[73] The example of Milton shows how the poet exceeds the boundaries of the given and is even able, via a "metaphysical exercise," to demonstrate nothingness precisely because he throws out everything that makes the world the world by invoking "the creation before the creation." Here comes the further, astonishing formulation that "through their art and by means of imitation" poets "produce things that are not."

The nineteenth century decisively sharpens the factual character of nature. What lies before us as nature is the result of unregulated mechanical processes, of the condensation of swirling primordial matter, of the interplay between randomly scattered mutations and the brutal fact of the struggle for survival. The result can be anything — only it cannot be an aesthetic object. How can random chance produce such surprising evidence of the beautiful? The previously unthinkable becomes comprehensible: Nature becomes *ugly*. As Franz Marc writes, "The trees, the flowers, and the earth showed every year more and more of their ugly and repulsive sides, until suddenly I became fully conscious of the ugliness and uncleanness of nature."[74] The ontological background is more precisely expressed by the French painter Raoul Duffy, when he replies to the criticism that he makes too short work of nature, "Nature, my good Sir, is a hypothesis...."[75] In the aesthetic experience of nature, the proviso of an endless number of possible worlds has had sufficient impact so that, since Descartes, we cannot say with scientific certainty which of these possibilities are realized in nature, but rather only with which of these possibilities we can *cope*. This nature has nothing more in common with the ancient concept of nature to which the mimesis idea referred: the unmakable model of all that is made. That all phenomena can be manufactured is instead the universal presupposition of experimental investigations of nature, and hypotheses are outlines of instructions for the manufacture of phenomena. Nature then becomes the embodiment of the possible results of technology. What remains of nature's restrictive mandate is revoked. For the inventor, nature can be more and more of a substrate whose given constitution stands in the way of the realization of its constructive use, rather than promoting it. Only through the

reduction of nature to its raw potential as matter and energy is a sphere of pure construction and synthesis possible. This results in a state of affairs that seems paradoxical at first glance: An era of the highest regard for science is at the same time an age of the decreasing significance of the object of scientific study.

VIII

Only now can the *positive* significance of the dissolution of the identity of being and nature be discerned. The devaluing of nature is thus not simply a nihilistic process, because it becomes possible to believe that "what is visible is but a fragment of the whole, there being many more latent realities,"[76] and that this world "is not the only possible world."[77] Thus art no longer points to another, exemplary being, but rather it itself is this exemplary being for the possibilities of humanity: The work of art no longer wants to *mean* something; rather, it wants to *be* something.

But is not this Being, which selects one out of the numberless many possibilities that are left lying *alongside* nature, nonetheless equally limited in its facticity and arbitarary in its selection? All questions arising out of the overcoming of the constraints of mimesis revolve around this. We are too much in the wake of the agonal process of overcoming mimesis to permit confidence in specific answers. We are dependent on hypotheses where we would like to flee from what is "merely a hypothesis." There are many indications, however, that the phase of violent assertion of the constructed and the authentic, of "works" and "labor," was only a transition. The overcoming of the imitation of nature could bring with it a return to an "anticipation of nature." Although humanity seems very much devoted to making certain of its originary power through the "metaphysical task" of art, a sense of the always-already-there comes through in creation, "*as if* it were a product of mere nature."[78] I am thinking of a life's work as paradigmatic in its deliberate intentions as that of Paul Klee, which demonstrates how unanticipated structures crystallize in the free play of creation, allowing what is ancient and eternal within the original foundation of nature to reemerge with renewed powers of persuasion. Thus the works that made Klee

famous are not to be interpreted with the usual difficulty one has with abstract works that contain personal associations; rather, they are the acts of a dismayed consciousness, which would almost like to announce that only *one* world validly realizes the possibilities of Being and that the road to the infinity of the possible was only an escape route from the unfreedom of mimesis. Are the infinite worlds, which Leibniz bequeathed to aesthetics, only endless reflections of *one* foundational character of the world? We do not know this yet, and we also do not know if we will ever know it; but further investigations into this question will be made innumerable times. Could it just be a circle which takes us back exactly where we started? The prospect of such a circle frightens many today, who fear that all these bold acts might have been in vain. But that is equally mistaken. It makes a crucial difference whether we *put up with* reality as unchangeable or if we rediscover it as the core of what is evident in the free play of the infinite possibilities and are able to consent freely to *recognize* it — if we are capable, finally, of "making the accidental essential."[79]

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1 Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 8; 199a 15-17. [The English translation used here is *Physics*, trans. Robin Waterfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996)].

2 Cf. the formulation in the *Politics* IV, 17; 1337a 1-2: "The purpose of education, like that of art generally, is simply to copy nature by making her deficiencies good."[The English translation used here is *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 331].

3 *Physics* II, 8 199a 12-15. Nature is, so to speak, "auto-technical," comparable to the physician who heals himself (199b 30-32). The inference that such auto-technicality is identical with deliberate intention would be rejected (199b 26-28). Aristotle does not demonstrate for us any (at least hypothetically) requisite original situation in which nothing exists yet, or nothing very specific. Since all of his specificity is always already there, for Aristotle, there is no moment when something must have been "thought up" and transferred from the imagination into reality. As a rule, thought thinks the existent only *afterwards*.

4 *Physics* II, 2; 194a 21 f. *Meteorology* IV, 3; 381b 3-7.

5 Cf. Exhibition Catalog No. 88, "The Triumph of European Mannerism" (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1955).

6 "Forward to Richard Wagner," in *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 31-32.

7 Cf. Werner Hoffman, " 'Manier' und 'Stil' in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts," *Studium Generale* 8 (1955): 9. Kant had already transferred the momentum of imitation to the reproduction of one artwork by another. Nature, on the other hand, is the ultimately productive *Ur*-instance of art, through the medium of "genius," in a

sense, however, that implies not imitation but "production through freedom." (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, §§ 43, 46.) Genius "is to be fully contrasted to the spirit of imitation." Although genius must be understood as "subject to nature," an ultimately formal authority of nature is presupposed that no longer has any explanatory value. Only the historical process is still obviously imitative; for example, "the product of a genius" is "to be an example to another genius, who will thereby gain a sense of his own originality," so that art produces "schools" — "for whom fine art is imitation insofar as nature provides the guidelines through a genius." (Ibid., § 49). [Translation mine].

8 Henri Matisse, as cited in Werner Haftmann, *Painting in the Twentieth Century*, 2 vols., trans. Janet Seligman (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 1:78.

9 Cf. the editor's introduction to the *Dialogues* in *Nikolaus von Cues, Die Kunst der Vermutung: Auswahl aus den Schriften*, ed. H. B. (Bremen, 1957): 231ff. [The English translation used here is *The Layman on Mind* in *Nicholas of Cusa on Knowledge and Wisdom*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis, MN: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1996)].

10 It is exceedingly characteristic of the "medieval" aspect of Cusa, that yet another hidden reference to Aristotle's dual definition of "art" is contained in the statement of the Idiot cited here: "*ars mea est magis perfectoria quam imitatoria figurarum creatarum et in hoc infinitae arti similior.*" ("So my artistry involves the perfecting, rather than the imitating of created visible forms, and in this respect it is more similar to the Infinite Art.") It is implied that the two parts of the Aristotelian definition refer to a *general* difference (instead of a *specific* one) and that they are to be applied differently. Since the Idiot cannot take his art to be *ars imitatoria*, he is left only with the option of referring to the *ars perfectoria*, since there is no possible third term left over for him — although the description of what he does, given just before, offers no specific evidence that he takes up something left uncompleted by nature and "completes" it, unless it be the material that he uses. Here it is evident how the history of the human spirit can be canalized through definition (read: through the claim to definitiveness).

11 "How We Invented the Airplane," *Harper's Magazine* 6 (June 1953).

12 Leonardo da Vinci, *Tagebücher und Aufzeichnungen* [*Diaries and Sketchbook*], ed. and trans. Theodor Lücke (Zürich, 1952), 307. "You must do an anatomical study of the wing of a bird, along with the breast muscles that move the wing. And you must do the same with a human being, in order to determine what possibilities there are for man if he wants to keep himself up in the air by flapping wings." Here, along with the *ars imitatoria*, the *ars perfectoria* comes directly into play — that is, the whole of Aristotle.

13 Otto Lilienthal, *Birdflight as the Basis of Aviation*, trans. A. W. Isenthal (London, 1911).

14 *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I quote from the somewhat altered self-reference in *Ecce Homo: Gesammelte Werke* 21 (1928), 277 [*Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1967), 327].

15 No one could have depicted this more grippingly than Bertolt Brecht, who in one of his *Anecdotes of Mr. Keuner* entitled "Mr. K. and Nature" has one of his characters say: "Now and then I would like to see a few trees coming out of the house..." The subjunctive [*Ich würde gern*] is like a hidden man-trap in the quasi-idyllic, which then reveals itself where the "special degree of reality" of natural objects as opposed to the pure relativity of use-objects is celebrated, "something soothingly indepen-

dent" about the trees, "outside myself...." The hope is almost uttered that perhaps there is something unuseable, immaterial about these trees. But this sharp-eyed phenomenology of an underground need for nature ends with a call to order. Its casual style — the following sentence is in parentheses and begins "Mr. K *also* said" — is merely a paideutic tactic. "We must also make use of Nature sparingly. Spending your time amidst Nature without any work, you may easily fall into a diseased condition; you are seized by something like a fever." Brecht, *Tales from the Calendar,* trans. Yvonne Kapp (London, 1961), 110 [Translation slightly altered].

16 Plato, *The Republic,* Book X: 596b: "For presumably none of the craftsmen fabricates the Form itself." [The English translation used here is *The Republic of Plato,* trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968). I have used the term "Form" instead of Bloom's "Idea" throughout.

17 Ibid.: "... there are presumably two, one of couch, one of table."

18 Aristotle admits only a nominal difference: *Metaphysics* I 6:987b 10-13. For him, however, the ambiguous nature of the situation, which Plato was to have corrected, is no longer the case.

19 Explicitly in Democritus: "One must either be good, or imitate a good man." (The English translation used here is Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragment in Diels,* Fragmente der Vorsokratiker [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971], 99). Even his derivation of human achievements from those of animals (weaving, darning, building houses, singing; ibid, fragment 154) clearly implies the superiority of a *natural* attribute over the poverty of an acquired one.

20 Plato, *The Republic,* Book X: 599a.

21 The inclusion of the Sophists refers back to a discussion of my thesis with Dieter Henrich.

22 Plato, *The Republic,* Book X: 597b-c.

23 Ibid., 597d.

24 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, 9; 991b 6ff. Formulated positively: *Metaphysics* XII, 3; 1070a 18-20.

25 Plato, *Timaeus* 29a [The English translation used here is Francis M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology* (see next note), 22-3].

26 Ibid., 30c-d, 31. See also Francis M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology* (London, 1947), 40f.: "The intelligible Living Creature corresponds to it, whole to whole, part to part."

27 Ancient Platonism soured on this hypothesis, as Willy Theiler [*Die Vorbereitung der Neuplatonismus* (Berlin, 1930)] has shown. On the exclusivity of the Forms for *physei onta,* it was maintained [eg. in *Chalcidii Plato Timaeus,* ed. Johann Wrobel (Leipzig, 1876)]: "*ideae sunt exempla naturalium rerum.*" ("Ideas are examples of the natural world.") One can be resourceful, with any kind of "Scholasticism," and use nominal distinctions which lack conceptual cohesiveness, such as the distinction between *idea* and *eidos,* already touched on by Plato. *Eidos* is supposed to be the Form inherent in the work.

28 Aristotle, *Meteorology* I, 9; 346b 16-347 a 5.

29 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, 2; 1069 b 19. XII, 3; 1070a 8. Cf. Hans Blumenberg, "Das Verhältnis von Natur und Technik als philosophisches Problem," *Studium Generale* 4 (1951): 463ff.

30 Samuel H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (London, 1927), 126, points out correctly that one cannot render Aristotle's *fantasia* precisely as "imagination," which would imply "an image-making power." The more direct transla-

tion of "fantasy" also allows for a similar inference of an additional meaning, whose ontological possibility is precisely what concerns us here. One should not retroactively attribute this meaning to Aristotle. This makes all the less comprehensible to me Butcher's mysterious remark that (Ibid., 127, n. 1): "The idea of a creative power in man which transforms the materials supplied by the empirical world is not unknown either to Plato or Aristotle, but it is not a separate faculty or denoted by a distinct name." It is characteristic of the history of the meaning of the term "fantasy" how late the first, original connotations flood in and no less that it was a representative of the so-called "Second Sophistic Movement" in 3 A.D., who gave a new definition to *phantasia* as "creative imagination." *A Greek-English Lexicon*, comp. Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott (Oxford, 1925) lists Philostratus, in his *Apollonius Vita*, where fantasy and imitation are expressly contrasted, and this in reference to what inheres additionally in a statue of a god, a Phidias or a Praxiteles, the addition of what is invisible, not pregiven: "Mimesis enacts what has appeared, while *phantasia* enacts what has not appeared."

31 Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art,* 116.

32 Ibid., 117.

33 Aristotle, *Poetics* XXV; 1460b 11 35.

34 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, 3;1070a 7ff. "Now art is a principle of movement in something other than the thing moved, nature is a principle in the thing itself..." [The English translation used here in *A New Aristotle Reader,* ed. J.L. Ackrill (Princeton, 1987), 342.]

35 Pseudo-Aristotle, *De mundo* 5; 396a 33-b 22. It is surely wrong to claim that the mimesis element in this connection is present in Heraclitus, as Carl Michaelis does, s. v. *mimeomai, Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament,* ed. Gerhard Kittel et al, (Stuttgart, 1943) [available in English as *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964)], prompted by the complete rendition by Hermann Diels, *Zwei Fragmente Heraklits* (Berlin, 1910), 22 B 10.

36 *hou (sc. Tou helion) ten physiken energeian tas thnetas technas minesamenas [...] mathetrias genomenas tes physeos.* Posidonius in *Diodori Biblia historica,* 57, 7.

37 Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* I, 8.

38 Karl Reinhardt, *Poseidonios* (Munich, 1921), 400. In this connection, cf. Cicero's expanded formulation of this relation with reference to the art of rhetoric in *De ratione ad C. Herenium*: "Art imitates nature because what the latter desires the former finds, and what the latter shows the former follows."

39 Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium,* XC, 16; "*Simplici cura constant necessaria: in delicas laboratur. Non desiderabis artifices, si sequere naturam.*"

40 Ibid., XC, 18. [The English translation used here is *Letters from a Stoic,* trans. Robin Campbell (New York: Penguin, 1969), 166.]

41 Eg., The *Enneads* of Plotinus, where the duplication of the world is executed in such detail that the underlying logical structure of the Formal is given up in favor of the exactitude of a model of the physical world. The world then seems conceivable only in this one particular, binding form. Even the reversal of rank, described by Willy Theiler, between the Demiurge and the Forms — which, with the aid of logical speculation, Philo subordinated to the *organon* of the creator god — did not alter the absolute exemplarity of the Forms as one of the more integral concepts.

42 Henry Deku, "Possibile Logicum," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 64 (1956): 10.

43 Augustine, *De natura et gratia*, XLIV, 52.

44 The pervasiveness of the problem is most clearly formulated in Retractationes II, 7: "*quomodo [...] posse fieri cuius rei desit exemplum.*" ("How is it possible that that thing exists for which there is no exemplum?")

45 Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, V, 181-86. [The English translation used here is *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. R.E. Latham and John Godwin (New York: Penguin, 1994)].

46 Augustine, *De spiritu et littera* I, 1. [The English translation used here is *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, 2 vols., ed. Whitney J. Oates (New York: Random House, 1948), 461.]

47 Ibid., XXV, 62.

48 Ibid., V, 7.

49 As formulated by Henry Deku in correspondence.

50 Augustine, *Confessions*, XII, 19, 28: "*Verum est quod non solum creatum atque formatum, sed etiam quidquid creabile atque formabile est, tu fecisti ex quo sunt omnia.*" (Günter Gawlick alerted me to this quotation.)

51 Augustine, *De vera religione*, XVIII, 36: "*ita omne quod est inquantum est, et omne quod nondum est inquantum esse potest, ex Deo habet (sc. esse et esse posse).*" ("Thus everything that is, insofar as it is, and everything that is not yet, insofar as it can be, has its being [or potential being] from God.") The context of this citation is also illuminating in connection with previously discussed *De spiritu et litera*. The theological concept of *salus* is here identified with that of *bonum* and laid at the foundation of classical assumptions as *integritas naturae* — in Platonic terms, as an expression of the Forms.

52 Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus*, LXXXIII, q. 46.

53 For the derivation of *possible* from *posse*, I quote the *versio latina* of *De natura hominis* of Nemesius of Emesa: "*tria igitur haec sunt ad invicem se habentia: potens, potestas, possibile, posse quidem essentia, potestas vero a qua habemus posse, possibile autem, quod secundum potestatem natum est fieri.*"

54 The significance of this author for the history of the concept of possibility is demonstrated by August Faust, *Der Möglichkeits Gedanke* (Heidelberg, 1931), I: 72-75.

55 Albertus Magnus, *De causis et processu universitatis* I tr. 3 c. 4: "*primum enim et operi proximum, in quo primi est potentia agendi, est illud, quod dat formam operi, et non illud, quod iubet et praecipit opus fieri; lumen autem intellectus universaliter agentis est forma operis opus determinans ad rationem et formam, voluntas autem non est nisi praecipiens ut fiat.*"

56 Albertus Magnus, *Summa Theologica* I, q. 9a. 1-2: "*...suam similitudinem diffundit [sc. divina sapientia] usque ad ultima rerum: nihil einem esse potest quod non procedat a divina sapientia per quamdam imitationem [...].*"

57 Albertus Magnus, *Summa contra Gentiles* II, 75 ad 3: "*In his autem quae possunt fieri et arte et natura, ars imitatur naturam [...].*"

58 In *octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis exposito* II, lect. 13 n. 4. [The English translation used here is *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, trans. Richard J. Blackwell, Richard J. Spath and W. Edmund Thirlkel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 119.] In order to show how a more authentic rendering of Aristotelian meaning can be achieved, I cite the translation of Johannes Argyropylos (ed. Immanuel Becker, Berlin 1831, III 109b): "*atque ars omnio alia perficit, quae natura nequit perficere, alia imitando naturam facit.*"

59 Bonaventura, *Breviloquim* II, 1, 1: "*universitas machinae mundialis producta est*

in esse extempore et de nihilo, ab uno principio primo, solo et summo; cuius potentia, licet sit immensa, disposuit tamen omnia in certo pondere, numero et mensura." Deeply rooted ontologically in this factual specificity is the "incentive" to measure, count, to venture, which opens the empirical route to knowledge.

60 Bonaventura, II. *Sententiarum* I, 2, 1, 1 concl.: "*Propter ergo immensitatis manifestationem multa de suis theauris profert, non omnia, quia effectus non potest aequari virtuti ipsius primae causae.*" The Aristotelian foundation for the vast heterogeneity of reality is typical. However, Bonaventura was more conscious of the difference between him and Aristotle than Aquinas was; in fact, he believed that he could praise Aristotle as a historical figure who understood the eternity of the world rightly, and in accordance with Bonaventura's own principles.

61 William of Ockham, *Quodlibeta Septem* VI, q.1: "*Deus multa potest facere quae non vult facere.*" Here the relationship of our problem to Ockham's "nihilism" is apparent: The realism of the *universalia* proves itself to be incompatible with *creatio ex nihilo* in the strict sense of the term. The *universale* as somehow concretely reproduced and reproducible has only one meaning as long as the universe of possible existence is a finite whole (as the *mundus intelligibilis*), for which only existence is, as it were "supplied" (*distinctio realis*). The concept of the *potentia absoluta*, however, implies an *infinite* possible universe; it makes no sense to interpret individual entities as "duplications" of a universal. Creation signifies the *ex nihilo* of the *essentia* of every creature. In this way, Ockham argues, the notion that God contained his *potentia* through the creation of what is, is ruled out. The establishment of a *universale* only within the bounds of its reproduction of itself would make only imitation possible, and not creation: "*creatio est simpliciter de nihilo, ita quod nihil essentiale vel intrinsecum rei simpliciter praecedat in esse reali.*" ("Creation happens simply out of nothingness, and so this essential or intrinsic nothing of a thing simply proceeds into real existence.") The realism of the universe would mean that "*per consequens omnia producta post primum productum non crearentur, quia non essent de nihilo*" ("consequently all things produced after the first production are not created because they do not come into being out of nothingness") (Bonaventura, I. Sententiarum, dist 2 q4 D). How much room the realm of possibility already allowed for is apparent in Ockham's refutation of the claim of his predecessor, Duns Scotus, that God alone possesses creative powers. (Ockham, *Quodlibeta Septem* VII, 23.) This is not yet the investiture of human beings with the attribute of creating, but it releases the potential of this idea from its exclusively theological conception and makes its transfer predictable.

62 Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* II, 2: "*Quoniam ipsa forma infinita non est nisifinite recepta, ut omnis creatura sit quasi infinitas finita aut Deus creatus, ut sit eo modo, quo hoc melius esse possit; ac si dixisset creator: Fiat, et quia Deus fieri non potuit, qui est ipsa aeternitas, hoc factum est, quod fieri potuit Deo similus.*"

63 "*Quod principi placuit legis vigorem habet*" (*Corpus Iuris Civilis: Iustiniani Digesta* I, 4.1, ed. Theodore Mommsen [Berlin, Weidemann, 1877]), as cited in Nicholas of Cusa, *De beryllo* XXIX. This is explicitly aimed at the inability of classical metaphysics to explicate the act of creation: "*Cur autem sic sit et non aliter constitutum, propterea non sciret nisi quod demum resolutus [!] diceret: Quod principi...*" ("But why it was established to be such and not otherwise, [Aristotle] would not thereby know — except in the end he would say without hesitation[!]: For what has pleased the Prince...") (Ibid., cf. XVI). Ecclesiastes 7: 17 is cited for

biblical authority: "*Omnium operum Dei nulla est ratio*" ("There is no reason for all the works of God"). [The English translation used here is from *On [Intellectual] Eyeglasses* (*De Beryllo*) in Nicholas of Cusa, *Metaphysical Speculations*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis, MN: Authur J. Banning Press, 1998), sec. 51.]

64 Nicholas of Cusa, *De ludo globi*, I: "*...perfectiiorem et rotundiorem mundum atque etiam imperfectiorem et minus rotundum poutit facere Deus, licet factus sit ita perfectus, sicut esse potuit.*"

65 D. Martin Luthers Werke, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, 1908), 18:718: "*Omnipotentiamvero Dei voco non illam potentiam, qua multa non facit quae potest, sed actualem illam, qua potenter omnia facit in omnibus, quo modo scriptura vocat eum omnipotentem.*"

66 "The Principles...are so vast and so fertile, that their consequences are far more numerous than the entire observed contents of the visible world...." Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, "Part Three: The Visible Universe," sec. 4, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. I, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

67 Ibid., "Part I: The Principles of Human Knowledge," sec. 17.

68 Oskar Walzel, *Das Prometheussymbol von Shaftsbury zu Goethe* (Munich, 1932).

69 Cf. August Buck, *Italienische Dichtungslehren* (Tübingen, 1952).

70 The passage is cited at length in Walzel, *Das Prometheussymbol*, 45ff.

71 Ibid., 51.

72 Ibid., 39; and the passage following.

73 Ibid., 43, for this and the following quotations.

74 This and other references from Hans Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis: The Lost Center*, trans. Brian Battershaw (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 159.

75 Cited in *Geschichte der modernen Malerei. Fauvismus und Expressionismus* (Genf, 1950), 69ff.

76 Paul Klee, cited in Werner Haftmann, *The Mind and Work of Paul Klee*, trans. anon. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1954), 90.

77 Klee, *Über die moderne Kunst* (Bern, 1945), 43. [The English translation used here is *On Modern Art*, trans. Paul Findlay (London, 1966), 45.]

78 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, § 45.

79 Klee, cited by Haftmann, *Paul Klee*, 71 [translation altered].

Anna Wertz should appear as the translator for the article by Hans Blumenberg, "'Imitation of Nature': Toward a Prehistory of the Idea of the Creative Being," printed on pages 17 - 54. We apologize for the error.
— The Editorial Board