



... some sudden cleavage took place in my soul, and its brighter element floated away from me, far off

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Shankha, Chakra, Gada, Padmadhari, Sri Krishna was manifested in his four-armed Form as Lord Mahavishnu. He has his sword, Nandaki pointed toward the ground. His golden crown contains an array of diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and pearls. His yellow, silken garments are ornamented and intricate in design.

His Lotus eyes are rolled back as if saturated with immense bliss. His eyelids have a brocade-like lattice of opal, pearl, and golden particles on them. The aura on His Lotus face is enhanced by the divine serenity of His beauty. His Lotus hands are soft as silk with translucent rays of light emanating from them.

His chest is emblazoned with radiations of celestial light, wealth, and power. In the midst of this divine grace, I respectfully inquired of the Lord, saying:

“Bhagawan, today You appear to be submerged in the deepest bliss similar to when You are reclining on the shesha nag. Sages have said that you are in a deep, blissful cosmic sleep.

“Is that true?”

“Turja, no it is not.”

“Nath, You appear to be greatly absorbed in an extremely high consciousness-state of bliss. What truly is it?”

“A meditation. It is a meditation upon My own Self. I see Myself everywhere at all times. The universe and all of the outer universes are surveyed altogether at once by Me. Nothing is, nor can ever be hidden from My sight.

“In Mathura and Brindavan during My lila with Mothers Devaki and Yashoda, I meditated upon My Self when at such time, they considered that I was asleep. Very affectionately, these divine mothers attended to me and cared for me; and they experienced great moments of joy and ananda to the utmost.”

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What can I say to someone so curled up with wanting, so constricted in his love? Break your pitcher

against a rock. We don't need any longer to haul pieces of the ocean around.

We must drown, away from heroism, and descriptions of heroism.

Like a pure spirit lying down, pulling its body over it, like a bride her husband for a cover to keep her warm.

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The allegory unfolds in three stages, each of them designated a turning point, a turning-about, and all three together form that turning-about of the whole human being which for Plato is the very formation of the philosopher. The first turning takes place in the cave itself; the future philosopher frees himself from the fetters which chain the cave dwellers' "legs and necks" so that "they can only see before them," their eyes glued to a screen on which shadows and images of things appear. When the philosopher first turns around, they see in the rear of the cave an artificial fire that illuminates the things in the cave as they really are. If we want to elaborate on the story, we could say that this first turning-about is that of the scientist who, not content with what people say about things, "turns around" to find out how things are in themselves, regardless of the opinions held by the multitude. For the images on the screen, to Plato, were the distortions of *doxa*, and he could use metaphors taken exclusively from sight and visual perception because the word *doxa*, unlike our word "opinion," has the strong connotation of the visible. The images on the screen at which the cave dwellers stare are their *doxai*, what and how things appear to them. If they want to look at things as they really are, they must turn around, that is, change their position because every *doxa* depends on and corresponds to one's position in the world.

A much more decisive turning point in the philosopher's biography comes when this solitary adventurer is not satisfied with the fire in the cave and with the things now appearing as they really are, but wants to find out where this fire comes from and what the causes of things are. Again they turn around and find an exit from the cave, a stairway which leads them to the clear sky, a landscape without things or people. Here appear the ideas, the eternal essences of perishable things illuminated by the sun, the idea of ideas, which enables the beholder to see and the ideas to shine forth. This certainly is the climax in the life of the philosopher, and it is here that the tragedy begins. Being still a mortal, they do not belong and cannot remain here but must return to the cave as their earthly home, and yet in the cave they can no longer feel at home.

Each of these turnings-about had been accompanied by a loss of sense and orientation. The eyes accustomed to the shadowy appearances on the screen are blinded by the fire in the rear of the cave. The eyes then adjusted to the dim light of the artificial fire are blinded by the light of the sun. But worst of all is the loss of orientation which befalls those whose eyes once were adjusted to the bright light under the sky of ideas, and who must now find their way in the darkness of the cave. Why philosophers do not know what is good for them--and how they are alienated from the affairs of society--is grasped in this metaphor: they can no longer see in the darkness of the cave, they have lost their sense of orientation, they have lost what we would call their common sense. When they come back and try to tell the cave dwellers what they have seen outside the cave, they do not make sense; to the cave dwellers, whatever they say is as though the world were "turned upside down" (Hegel). The returning philosopher is in danger because they have lost the common sense needed to orient themselves in a world common to all, and, moreover, because what they harbor in their thoughts contradicts the common sense of the world.

It belongs to the puzzling aspects of the allegory of the cave that Plato depicts its inhabitants as frozen, chained before a screen, without any possibility of doing anything or communicating with one another. Indeed, the two politically most significant words designating human activity, talk and action, are conspicuously absent from the whole story. The only occupation of the cave dwellers is looking at the screen; they obviously love seeing for its own sake, independent from all practical needs. The cave dwellers, in other words, are depicted as ordinary people, but also in that one quality which they share with philosophers: they are represented by Plato as potential philosophers, occupied in darkness and ignorance with the one thing the philosopher is concerned with in brightness and full knowledge. The allegory of the cave is thus designed to depict not so much how philosophy looks from the viewpoint of politics, but how politics, the realm of human affairs, looks from the viewpoint of philosophy. And the purpose is to discover in the realm of philosophy those standards which are appropriate for a city of cave dwellers, to be sure, but at the same time for inhabitants who, albeit darkly and ignorantly, have formed their opinions concerning the same matters as the philosopher.

What Plato does not tell us in the story, because it is designed for these political purposes, is what distinguishes the philosopher from those who also love seeing for its own sake, or what makes them start out on their solitary adventure and causes them to break the fetters with which they are chained to the screen of illusion. Again, at the end of the story, Plato mentions in passing the dangers which await the returning philosopher, and concludes from these dangers that the philosopher--although they are not interested in human affairs--must assume rulership, if only out of fear of being ruled by the ignorant. But he does not tell us why they cannot persuade their fellow citizens, who anyhow are already glued to the screen and thereby in a certain way ready to receive "higher things," as Hegel called them, to follow the philosopher's example and choose the way out of the cave.

In order to answer these questions, we must recall two statements of Plato's which do not occur in the cave allegory, but without which this allegory remains obscure and which it, so to speak, takes for granted. The one occurs in the *Theaetetus* [...] where Plato defines the origin of philosophy: *for wonder is what the philosopher endures most; for there is no other beginning of philosophy than wonder...* And the second occurs in the *Seventh Letter* when Plato talks about those things which to him are the most serious ones, that is, not so much about philosophy as we understand it as its eternal topic and end. Of this he says, *it is altogether impossible to talk about this as about other things we learn; rather, from much being together with it... a light is lit as from a flying fire.* In these two statements we have the beginning and the end of the philosopher's life, which the cave story omits.

Thaumadzein, the wonder at that which is as it is, is according to Plato a *pathos*, something which is endured, and as such quite distinct from *doxadzein*, from forming an opinion about something. The wonder which a person endures or which befalls them cannot be related in words because it is too general for wonder. [...] This wonder at everything that is as it is never relates to any particular thing, and Kierkegaard therefore interpreted it as the experience of no-thing, of nothingness. The specific generality of philosophical statements, which distinguish them from the statements of the sciences, springs from this experience. Philosophy as a special discipline--and to the extent that it remains one--is grounded in it. And as soon as the speechless state of wonder translates itself into words, it will not be grounded in statements but will formulate in unending variations what we call the ultimate questions--What is being? Who are humans? What meaning has life? What is death? etc.--all of which have in common that they cannot be answered scientifically. Socrates' statement "I know that I do not know" expresses in terms of knowledge this lack of scientific answers. But in a state of wonder, this statement loses its dry negativity, for the result left behind in the mind of the person who has endured the *pathos* of wonder can only be expressed as: Now I know what it means not to know; *now* I know that I do not know. It is from the latter experience of not-knowing, in which one of the basic aspects of the human condition on earth reveals itself, that the ultimate questions arise--not from the rationalized, demonstrable facts that there are things man does not know, which believers in progress hope to see fully amended one day, or which positivists may discard as irrelevant. [...] As far as philosophy is concerned, if it is true that it begins with *thaumadzein* and ends with speechlessness, then it ends exactly where that one may find in so many strictly philosophical arguments.

It is this philosophical shock of which Plato speaks that permeates all great philosophies and that separates the philosopher who endures it from those with whom the philosopher lives. And the difference between the philosophers, who are few, and the multitude is by no means--as Plato already indicated--that the majority know nothing of the *pathos* of wonder, but rather that they refuse to endure it. This refusal is expressed in *doxadzein*, in forming opinions on matters about which people cannot hold opinions because the commonly accepted standards of common sense do not here apply. [...] Having opinions goes wrong when it concerns those matters which we know only in speechless wonder at what is.

The philosopher, who, so to speak, is an expert in wondering and in asking those questions which arise out of wondering [...] finds himself in a twofold conflict with the polis. Since their ultimate experience is, precisely, speechless, they have put themselves in the political realm in which the highest faculty is, precisely, speech. The philosophical shock, moreover, strikes one in their singularity, that is, neither in their equality with all others nor in their absolute distinctness from them. In this shock, a person, as it were, is for one fleeting moment confronted with the whole of the universe, as they will be confronted again only at the moment of their death. They are to an extent alienated from the city of others, which can only look with suspicion on everything that concerns a person in the singular.

Yet even worse in its consequences is the other conflict that threatens the life of the philosopher. Since the *pathos* of wonder is not alien to people but, on the contrary, one of the most general characteristics of the human condition, and since the way out of it for the many is to form opinions where they are not appropriate, the philosopher will inevitably fall into conflict with these opinions, which they find intolerable. And since their own experience of speechlessness expresses itself in the raising of unanswerable questions, they have indeed one decisive disadvantage the moment they return to the political realm. They are the only one who does not know, the only one who has no distinct and clearly defined *doxa* to compete with other opinions, the truth or untruth of which common sense wants to decide--that is, that sixth sense which we not only all have in common but which fits us into, and thereby makes possible, a common world. If the philosopher starts to speak into this world of common sense, to which belong also our commonly accepted prejudices and judgments, they will always be tempted to speak in terms of wonder [...]

The philosopher, overly conscious, because of the trial of Socrates, of the inherent incompatibility between the fundamental philosophical and the fundamental political experiences, generalized the initial and the initiating shock of *thaumadzein*. [...] For what is true for this wonder, with which all philosophy begins, is not true for the ensuing solitary dialogue itself. Solitude, or the thinking dialogue of the two-in-one, is an integral part of being and living together with others, and in this solitude the philosopher too cannot help but form opinions--they too arrive at their own *doxa*. Their distinction from their fellow citizens is not that they possess any special truth from which the multitude is excluded, but that they remain always ready to endure the *pathos* of wonder

... AND IT HAD THEREBY BECOME AN EXTRAORDINARY HALLUCINATION IN A WORLD SO FRAIL THAT A MERE BREATH MIGHT HAVE CHANGED US INTO LIGHT.



2020

Ain't doing nothing? said my father. Why, you know God damn well I'm getting a new poem arranged in my mind.