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Fiction is All That is Seen: Plato's *Cave Allegory* and the Necessitation of Narrative

The human psyche is limited. What man sees is just a shadow. 1[Plato's *Cave Allegory*, an excerpt from his political-minded opus *The Republic*, paints a picture of how enlightenment deeply changes the way one sees the world, leading one to operate with respect to a different plane of motivations and understandings than the others.] 2[While Francis Bacon uses the understanding of man's crippled vision to put away intuition and rely upon repeatable causes and observable effects for the constitution of discernment, Sir William Rowes Hamilton takes the idea of unseen reality as cementing the significance of the more and more enlightened man's more and more perfect intuition.] 3[Physics, music, and narrative share common understandings. If one's interpretation of the world is a comparison of raw perception with preconception, and if the fabric of reality is composed of harmonious structures, then analogy may have some discrete basis.] 4[These structures come alive within the human psyche. Human satisfaction maintains a dualistic tie with perception of reality through the lens of narrative.] A second dynamic the *Cave Allegory* casts is the profound change of concerns that takes place when a man sees the light. Renewal of mind makes the man as incompetent and blind to the old world's sensibilities. 5[There are two directions a man may take with the receipt of truer vision: his calling may look higher, with his concerns touching the shadowlands' perspective less and less, or he may wall himself off to the heights, and return to the base earth with new advantages. Whether by malice

or misunderstanding, irreconcilable conflict grows the greater the disparity between one man and another's self-perceived worlds.] **The renewing of minds enters people into not just new realities, but a realer picture of the present one. Increased insight may lead to uplifted effect when the reined in impulses of the fleshly man is harmonized with their divined world view.** Transcendence of sight is where stoic sustenance meets romantic exuberance, but strength is what keeps it sane.

Plato was a recognized member of Athenian society, living between 428 and 347 B.C. (Jacobus 865). The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy summarizes his philosophical efforts as such:

[Plato] was not the first thinker or writer to whom the word “philosopher” should be applied. But he was so self-conscious about how philosophy should be conceived, and what its scope and ambitions properly are, and he so transformed the intellectual currents with which he grappled, that the subject of philosophy, as it is often conceived—a rigorous and systematic examination of ethical, political, metaphysical, and epistemological issues, armed with a distinctive method—can be called his invention.

(Richard 1)

Plato's spirit was borne out of a desire to minimize hypocrisy and assumption of cheap consciousness. Rather than build some self-conceived understanding, he sought to see the understanding that is already there. Because of this approach of seeking out “*Forms*, and *Ideas*” (Richard 2), his work inspires countless thoughts and movements, but itself always stays. In his work *The Republic*, a series of books on justice and the various contours of society, Plato's analysis of root realities brings him to show how people may see or may not see the same or as well as another. In what would eventually become known as the Socratic method, rhetoric is

delivered through dialogue, with a student posing questions and Socrates responding from first person. A real-life individual, Socrates' persona was often used as a character in Plato's and his contemporaries' dialogic writings.

To give a metaphor on man's state and process of enlightenment, Plato presents *The Allegory of the Cave*. It starts off as such: "And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: – Behold! human beings living in an underground den" (Jowett 197). He describes a row of people, constrained since birth, staring at shadowy projections on the cave wall. These shadowy images, Plato describes, are put forth by marionette players working on a parapet by the source of a distant fire (Silverman 13). The student responds, "you have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners" (Jowett 197). Upon further description and explanation of these prisoners' reality, Socrates makes his first point: "To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images" (Jowett 197). Socrates describes the release:

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows. (Jowett 197)

The releasee is told that his former sights were an illusion, and that now, as he approaches "nearer to being", with his eye turned towards "more real existence", he has a clearer vision. But, he is not acclimated, not dexterous to discern the distressing environment. "[Socrates:] Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now

shown to him? [Student:] Far truer.” (Jowett 198). Even more, by nature of the pain in his eyes, the old things remain his clearer reality:

And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take refuge in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him? (Jowett 198)

Taken to the limit, Plato surmises that if the man were to be abruptly forced straight up to the presence of “the sun himself”, it would be at a loss: the man’s sight dazzled into blindness of the white. Rather, “He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world” (Jowett 198). Thus begins the necessary process of transformation to attain relation with revelation; self, brought into compatibility with presented light: *enlightenment*.

First he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day?

Certainly.

Last of all he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water, but he will see him in his own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate him as he is. (Jowett 198)

The man has enveloped himself in this truer reality of greater magnitude and bounty of tastes, losing concern for the old reality, looking with pity upon his old cellmates of the cave. Their views are incompatible now: while the enlightened man elucidates how the sun controls the fire and makes seasons and all these other things, the men in the cave confer honors among

themselves regarding their own competencies and conclusions of the shadows, useless by the fact that such shadows are built upon deceptive architecture contrived by puppeteers. It is a shallow, small reality out of which these men, comfortably of-the-cave, operate. The student connotes, “Yes, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner” (Jowett 199). Furthermore, as the enlightened man lives to his truth, he becomes incompetent to the ways of the captive masses’ world. If he were to be tripped back into the old perspective, his sight would be full darkness. If he were to compete with the prisoners in recognizing shadows, his desires would be elsewhere, and his sight in need of acclamation to the darkness:

Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.  
(Jowett 199)

So ends the allegory. The overarching dialogue of this section of *Republic V* continues. Plato considers the two “bewilderments of the eye” – that of coming out or going into the light – to be true of the mind’s eye quite as much as it is true of the bodily eye (Jowett 200). He says:

Is there anything surprising in one who passes from divine contemplations to the evil state of man, misbehaving himself in a ridiculous manner; if, while his eyes are blinking and before he has become accustomed to the surrounding darkness, he is compelled to fight in courts of law, or in other places, about the images or the shadows of images of justice, and is endeavoring to meet the conceptions of those who have never yet seen absolute justice? (200)

This is the description of the tension, of a disparity between good man and bad. What can be said of the state of that relevant justice without decent perspective of reality? More than that, what can be said of man's perspective as it is? No one may judge when no one can ascertain. But man's fallow wisdom still fights:

Did you never observe the narrow intelligence flashing from the keen eye of a clever rogue – how eager he is, how clearly his paltry soul sees the way to his end; he is the reverse of blind, but his keen eyesight is forced into the service of evil, and he is mischievous in proportion to his cleverness? (Jowett 201)

This is where man's wisdom bounces down from its self-resigned roof and uses the rest of its spirit not for wonder or heightening mission, but for heightened conquest of the pitiful shadowlands. Meanwhile, the real hero is seen as incompetent with human vanities. Plato's analogy tells a story of how first-person reality shifts when enlightenment changes perception – an insight Sigmund Freud acted upon in his ability to pry between discerned action and self-discerned consciousness (Frie 119-120). Whatever its power and use, the main point of Cave Allegory is well agreed upon: “if we rely on our perceptions to know the truth about the world, then we will know very little about it” (Jacobus 866). Rather, it is the act of enlightening one's mind and senses that produces a stronger connection to meaning and true reality.

Francis Bacon uses the understanding of man's crippled vision to invalidate human intuition and to rely upon repeatable causes and observable effects for any constitution of discernment. An original exponent of experimental philosophy, Francis Bacon constructed his view of human compromise in his essay, *The Four Idols*. Bacon posits: “The human understanding is unquiet; [...] [It] is no dry light, but receives an infusion from the will and affections” (Jacobus 885). Taking a pessimistic stance on the validity of human intuition, he

proposes “true and perfect induction” as a remedy (Simpson 13). Francis Bacon’s lectures on scientific sobriety are valid. His warnings against the “half poetical” (Jacobus 892) ring true. His awareness of the child-like purity and open-mindedness required to find truth (Jacobus 893) is poignant wisdom. But, his ultimate pessimism cuts off the head of creative sight – and enlightenment with it.

This idea of “true and perfect induction” made its way through Bacon’s legacy into the Scottish tradition of Common Sense Philosophy (Goldman 42-44; Hendry 15). Around the time of James Clerk Maxwell’s education, the Scottish way had reacted to Hume’s skepticism to throw away the whimsy of any ‘art of discovery’ and create a superfluously cramped misinterpretation of Newton: abstaining from hypothesis and imagined cause or analogy to rely wholly on Induction and observance of effects. Such a perceived reality may never have been “wrong”, but it was always dead in its incompleteness. Maxwell’s imaginative and philosophical tendencies, when applied to his problem solving, enabled him to see beyond such pitfalls.

Maxwell’s efforts define modern physics, playing a role in each major development – from relativity to thermodynamics and electromagnetism. He had a uniquely-undeceived open mindedness, with clear-eyed separation between the naturally compromisable and the critically uncompromisable. His philosophical approach both to the natural and the spiritual meant he architected his mind and understanding in a way that continues to hold water long past bouts of contemporary positioning. Maxwell’s defining characteristic lay in his adeptness at creating an architecture on an uncertain foundation into the invisible. This intuitive view of the world was heavily influenced by Maxwell’s mentor, Sir William Rowes Hamilton.

Contrary to Francis Bacon, Sir William Rowes Hamilton takes the idea of unseen reality as cementing the significance of the more and more enlightened man’s more and more perfect

intuition. He taught that causal and analogical thinking have to be a necessity by consequence of the limitations of the brain: all one learns of the world is gained through the senses, liable to distortion; producing knowledge that is relative rather than absolute (Hendry 27-30). The dynamical tradition in physics is propelled from this understanding. Hamilton championed technical mathematical models as a fit media between nature and the human mind. Going further, he sees the constant analogy between mind and nature as a manifestation of God. In a letter to a friend about this idea, Sir Hamilton expounds:

There are, or may be imagined, two dynamical sources: one subjective, *a priori*, metaphysical, deducible from meditation on our ideas of Power, Space, Time; the other Objective, *a posteori*; physical, discoverable by observation and generalization of facts or phenomena: that these two sciences are distinct in kind, but intimately and wonderfully connected, in consequence of the ultimate union of the subjective and objective in God, or to speak less technically and more religiously, by virtue of the manifestation which he has been pleased to make of himself in the universe to the intellect of man; so that the two sciences are never wholly separate, but may and ought to advance together, and use many common expressions, and each possess an analogy to many if not all the results and theorems of the other. (Hankins 175)

Just as the structure of natural philosophy allowed for progress into a new spectra of enlightenment, so the settling into purity of a human psyche must be needed to advance towards the ‘perfect’, with the aim of that trajectory itself ever perfecting.

To raise awareness of a fragmented, larger-than-life reality is to present a universe where its influence reaches beyond external realities but also internal makeups. Implicit models build up nature, and humans in turn base their conclusions and motivate conclusive actions towards

preconceived implicit models. If human interpretation of what's going on in the world is “a comparison of our raw perception with our preconceptions” (Wilczek 335), and if the fabric of reality is composed of harmonious structures, then analogy may have some discrete basis, and the pursuit of understanding across disciplines may lend insight to one's hypothetical intuition. Harmony, the multiplying, hardy relation of one thing to the other, is implicit in every system. Structures are how we see and aspire to see the world. This idea of analogy and symmetry is seen to be true everywhere from the artisan's aesthetic to fundamental physical laws, motivating physicists' method of hypothesis (Wilczek 229).

Einstein once compared the pursuit of music and scientific research as seeming to offer “a point of union between the lonely world of subjectivity and the shared universe of external reality” (Wilczek xi). The composition of music presents the most abstracted example of methodized harmonic form. The bases of music are rhythm and harmony. Rhythm is ordered recurrence in time. Pure tones are those whose vibrations are particularly simple and periodically orderly. Tones harmonize if their intervals of tonal vibration are in rhythm – that is, when their periods are proportional. Given the usual set of twelve pure tones, harmonies between them can be seen in relation geometrically – for instance, through John Coltrane's tone circle (Alexander 4-5). In *Fundamentals of Music Composition*, Arnold Schoenberg takes the concept of *form* to mean that “[a piece] consists of elements functioning like those of a living organism” (1). The presentation, development, and interconnection of ideas is based on *relationship*, differentiated according to importance and function (Schoenberg 1). *Motive* can be perceived as the germ of the idea: “the features of a motive are intervals and rhythms, combined to produce a memorable shape or contour – which usually implies an inherent harmony” (Schoenberg 8). The narrative of the composition is then controlled by the treatment and development of this initially defined

motive (Schoenberg 3). *Flow* is the establishment of a continuous flux, in perfect proportions. Through this, music produces a “stream of intention” (Jourdain 302). The ability for an idea to make maximum impact with minimal hindrance has to do with its having good *flow*.

A story, to taste, requires a bit of impedance of flow to make the “good stuff” have relative flavor. Story is from what humans ascribedly center *life*. It has such pull. In 1995, Kurt Vonnegut theorized the existence of a few common functional story arcs from which literature is pieced. Twenty years later, Vonnegut’s theory was validated. By determining the emotional valence of a segment of story text, then analyzing how this sentiment changes from moment to moment, a piece of literature may be plotted as a function of sentiment vs. time. The result is the mapping of a story arc. Andrew Reagan, with the University of Vermont’s Computational Story Lab, comprehensively used this method of sentimental analysis for over 1,700 stories with data mining techniques. The study’s result is remarkable: “we find a set of six core trajectories which form the building blocks of complex narratives” (Reagan 1). In film, it may be seen that if a story doesn’t follow the conditioned types, the audience is less likely to accept it. They don’t automatically fit it into their minds as evident truth, where they feel and keep with them that “*this must be so*”.

Human satisfaction maintains a dualistic tie with perception of reality through the lens of narrative. Understanding is built up through analogy. Analogy is abstract, to which harmonious structures may be clearly perceived. “Everything we do, including grasping a moment of music, commences with a sort of fleeting hypothesis that is confirmed or disconfirmed; every subtle mismatch is countered by adjustments to the next anticipation” (Jourdain 302). This is induction, motivated by manipulable precepts. So sheer is one’s tendency to fit experiences to a model that they force continuity between some perceived cause and effect without conscious basis:

We perform many unintended behaviors that require some artificial interpretation to fit them into our views of ourselves as conscious agents. Even when we didn't know what we were doing in advance, we may trust our theory that we consciously will our actions and so find ourselves forced to imagine or confabulate memories of 'prior' existing thoughts. (Bayne 479)

Contour is hard-wired into the human brain (Bar 2192). This is the means for the creation and comparison of narrative – the basis for human agentic self-awareness (Bayne 485).

If a feeling of what is satisfying is inherently harmonic, then different relations between notes must express different feelings – the spectra of which being connected by a spirit of value and desire. This mechanic is observed in shifting macro-cultural differences regarding tuning and harmony (Jourdain 73-77). If success is derived from some feeling of satisfaction, with satisfaction itself being derived from some harmonic progression to euphoria, then different morality codes offer varying rates of success, with differing definitions on what that success is and is surrounded by. For there is both architectural soundness, and architectural compromise. That which is sound, is in the vein of truth. Otherwise it is structurally compromised, inasmuch as it is motivated by some spirit of effect towards a fallacious vision. Such structures may be held together by partial legitimacy, lengthening its moment of apparent sustainability, but ultimately exist as ephemeral. Without truly sound structure, there is no balance, no storehouse, no perception of beauty, and no sustained or honest pleasure.

Humanity searches for what is architecturally sound. It is in this search that logic and spirit coincide. Humans have a value-driven, identity-forming pallet. Logic and the idealization of value alone is benign, a construct without a soul. There is an inherent futility to it, a lack of life to all one's personal ideals when they are not connected to a larger construct. If there is life

then, there is a bright shining point to all one's efforts. It is *spirit* that gets them there, that possesses them to an aim. As structure is to logic, harmony is to spirit. Spirit is empowered by story. Story distilled could be surmised as: *the way things should be, and what goes horribly wrong*. Narrative; as motivated by conflict, aimed at a resolution (Rosen 4). Progression; from dissonance, into harmony. Such a story, in essence, reverberates with the story of humanity. They look for a perfect spirit, to guide them to some harmonic model of the way things should be, motivated by the dissonant problems of their shared existence. They desire a life-giving spirit, to heal and to satisfy. Because people are ultimately controlled, directed, and motivated by what they find purpose and identity from, they are ultimately spiritual beings. To motivate action is power. By this, humanity's inherent worshipfulness is its most powerful and evocative quality.

Because this quality of human idealization of value is fundamentally psychological in nature, and conceived from a structure of imparted or direct experiences, one's reaction and narrative model can be skewed from some original self-supporting understanding and mechanic of justice. The results of this skewing can be seen as triggered responses and implicit self-manipulation of rationale in response to stimuli (Bar 9, 11-12). This resulting reaction is emotional, its logic feigned by association. This emotion begets dogma, a necessary pillar to uphold an illusory structure of identity. Emotions and motivators cumulate in emotive force. Not only by an external force – often, it is by a crowd of peers that an impetus of narrative leanings gains strength. When people relate to things by the crowd, it could be seen as a structure of props, only facetiously held together as its own support. Like the pursuit of a solid “twang” of a string, the satisfaction comes as relative to the other notes, but is not certified in their tuning. A sustainable harmonic model is first based on the pure tuning of the base note, and then derivably

on the tuning of the other notes relative to it. Without both rules in check, the system will swing into discordance.

While there may be a structure of absolute integrity to which everything may rest, human tendency to lean on a form by desire allows such forms to be compromised. This potential for such compromise lies in the filling of the vacuum in the human heart. The method by which this potential may be claimed is by trust-basis mechanics (Denning 89), which at worse may end with the usurpation of one's values. Values prescribe meaning, which prescribes impact, which may be moved to some forceful result. Values may be eroded by compromise, by counter, or by the impression of betrayal from the object of those values itself. Values are drawn out in desires, in which we can either have meditative contentment (sustainable pleasure) or eternal violence (tortured pleasure). Tortured pleasure puts stress on one's system, and can break down that structure. It is by dependency that this dynamic takes place. Dependency is a necessitation, a biological truth and a haphazard reality, as from the start a person cannot sustain the life they need on their own. From dependency comes trust, the shared ownership of ourselves and our offerings to the object of our loyalty. This loyalty leads to or comes as a result of submissive deference, by which self-ownership is taken, to the worship of the taker: that new person, force or idea.

There are two directions a man may go upon receipt of truer vision. His calling may look higher, with his concerns touching the shadowland's perspective less and less. Or, he may wall himself off to the heights, and return to the base earth with new advantages. Whether by malice or misunderstanding, irreconcilable conflict grows the greater the disparity between one man and another's self-perceived worlds. Even Plato's allegory ends with warning. Enlightenment is dangerous, whether as sorcerer or prophet.

Plato said: “our senses give us only a very partial and often misleading picture of the world” (Wilczek 57). The rest of human awareness is inferred. Furthermore, differing landscapes of presented and inherent reality – seen clearly in language barriers – deeply effect our conceptual bearings (Boroditsky 65). Emotion is critical to reasoning (Jourdain 309); and narrative is capable of manipulating some deeply-engrained psychological tendencies. In this pursuit of understanding, the wise man’s goal is to develop a heightened perception: where “the rough-and-ready perception with which evolution has supplied us is leavened by an admixture of our own creation” (Wilczek 340). Because perception is in a state of constant compromise, narrative is the truest translator between the incomprehensible world and the needy human mind. Furthermore, nature or what moves it has made this insane paradigm of transcendental truth a real agent of transitive understanding and validation thereof. Humans, unlike the animals, have the “happy burden” of choosing what they are prepared to see (Wilczek 339). Self-perception is a signature of one’s humanity (Sengers 428). If one does not choose their own mindset, it will probably be chosen for them (Harris 5). The battle for the mind is one that isolates and obfuscates and demonizes the wrong thing. It’s a war on noticing; and ownership is the victory.

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