

ON THE VARIOUS BRANCHES OF (AN OTHER) PHILOSOPHY:  
PART ONE

The ocean of mind...  
The light of consciousness...  
The cave of the heart...  
The sleep of death...

Are these mere metaphors? What if the mind were the ocean, light consciousness, heart a cave, death indeed a deep sleep? The ontogenetic constitution of the world hidden deep within the folds of language is veiled over by difference produced by the same language that bespeaks its non-duality. The nature of the concept of *difference* must be ascertained, a concept that subtly regulates all philosophy. This is what is attempted in these pages, but this attempt can only be made from a standpoint not itself complicit with the concept of difference it seeks to critique. Thus we shall speak in the voice of an alien philosophy, an other thinking that is quite possibly an other *of* thinking. The various branches of this philosophy shall also be outlined, although it must be remembered that these branches are really *aspects* or *modes* of the same thought, infinitely reflecting and resonating each other in their own mirrors not unlike the net of Indra. Thus we shall speak of vision and consciousness, light (and darkness), of magic, of caves and caverns, of sleep and death, of the heart and finally of the luminal, all the time speaking of one and the same thing.<sup>1</sup> For it is a unique feature of this philosophy that it doesn't deal in difference. And no elaboration adds an iota of novelty or introduces entities or categories that may add weight or substance to the teaching. It seeks to illumine without generating content or any meaning in the mind of the reader, at least not a meaning that is not subsequently undone.

### SPELEOLOGY

1. *Guh, gupt* (Sanskrit), *kruptos* (Greek)— hidden, secret
2. At one time robbers hid their treasures in caves deep in the mountains. And monks hid texts, spiritual treasures, there in the cavernous darkness where they would lie imperturbed until unearthed aeons later to see the light of day. Ascetics too would wander through the hills looking for the most appropriate cave to find a suitable sanctuary for prolonged meditation; the cavernous architecture ideal for the practice of withdrawal and self-isolation. Cave as the home of secrets, harboring treasures in its bosom. Cave, furthermore, as the first dwelling, home of the homo sapiens.
3. The logic of cavernous architecture must be worked out. Not through a materialist, empirical speleology but a luminological one, which assumes neither the premises of the natural sciences nor their classification and nomenclature. A speleology not burdened by artificial distinctions of

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<sup>1</sup> The final three topics are not dealt with here, which only constitutes the first half of the paper.

nature and spirit, consciousness and matter, geography and theology, revealed in the integrity and unity of its presencing in the world and the human being. What will this speleology look like? Let us explore the spiritual— which is to say, natural— topography of a cave.

4. Cave— (According to the American Heritage Dictionary) ‘A hollow or natural passage under or into the earth with an opening to the surface.’ Such a definition may be subjected to a non-dualist, non-naturalistic analysis of its meaning. First of all let us note that the cave is the original home, the paradigm of all sheltering, not only for the primitive man but for numerous sentient beings, burrowing into all kinds of natural hollows to weather the elements and take shelter. *The ‘hollow’ as a paradigm of sheltering.* By virtue of the very fact that it is an escape ‘under or into the earth’, space secluded and enclaved. Not the vast, empty space in the higher regions above the earth, no empty space does not shelter anything, but this secluded, walled space in the womb of the earth. Not a symbol of transcendence and absolute freedom that empty space often is in the non-dual traditions, but an immanent, earthly cavity, not space, but a *spacing* within earthly density. Life seeks out its hollows, spaces where it is most at home, where it may self-nourish and stay warm. Secondly, continuing the logic of its meaning, the cave as hollow is that which is capable of receiving— it is capacious. Not only the original paradigm of shelter but of receptivity. It receives silently whoever and whatever enters in order or take shelter, be it a life form or some treasure, material or spiritual. Or in the ultimate analysis, light itself— *the cave as light’s shelter and receptacle.* This will be further explored.

Further, the cave’s *hollow as a cavity, an emptiness.* The emptiness making possible both its sheltering as well as receptive capacities. But in itself it is nothing. It is the coming together of emptiness with earth, with the walls of a receptacle, that makes possible and releases the immanent potentiality of space, the vacuum so created letting beings and life itself emerge. But the heart of a hollow, not unlike the physical heart surrounded by tissue walls, must remain empty; remain so in order to act as an authentic receptacle. No receptivity without emptiness (at the heart). Emptiness as the condition of possibility of receptivity, of life, of creation itself. Emptiness as the ultimate truth or nature of things, as Madhyamaka would say, but a truth that makes possible conventional existence, life and creation.

Or a ‘passage into the earth’. A passage. No passage is ‘merely’ physical. It is the *non-dual archetype of transition/transformation.* One passes into the earth, into a mountain cave from open air. But what does it mean to enter or pass into a cave or mountainous hollow? Or even to exit or vacate the hollow? As Plato’s cavemen do in leaving their domicile behind them, unshackled and free. And what are these shackles? This movement is not merely one of traversing space. It essentially negotiates a transition, physically from the external into the internal, and psychologically from the outer to the inner. In all meditative traditions the idea of a ‘retreat’ involves a withdrawal, a return to an inner sanctuary and meditation or intense absorption is symbolized precisely by this *passage* into the inner sanctum. *The cave as the inner sanctum.* A retreat, literally, a place to which one *retreads* one’s steps after treading outwards. No wonder the cave as

an outer, physical space mirrors and is considered ideal for abidance in the inner, spiritual space of the soul.

Looking outwards always symbolized the perception of the world, often a distraction, and this retreading into the cave, this passage back into the inner sanctuary— inner sheltering— understood as finding one’s own true self. At a later stage we must probe further the real meaning of this inner-outer structure of spirituality inherited into modern philosophy and the consciousness-matter distinction. For now it is sufficient to see that it is profoundly tied with the cavernal architectonics being investigated here. But the term ‘cave’ contains in itself, over and above its physical and psychological meanings, another luminal meaning. The cave is a transition, not only from the outer to the inner, but essentially from transcendence into immanence. The cavernal structure negotiates in the immanentization of the transcendent, the elusiveness of space captured within the physical walls of the cave (or the human heart, as we will see), space which is one of the most universal symbols of the divine transcendent. Along with light. Two models of the soul’s genesis in Advaita— 1. Avacedavāda: the self as infinite space (Brahman as Being) circumscribed by the walls of the body and ‘becoming’ circumscribed space, 2. Pratibimbavāda: the self as a reflection of the original light (Brahman as Consciousness) in the mirror of subjectivity/mind. As we explore this further let us keep in mind that the logic of cavernal architecture is also a narrative of the origin of the soul.

Why ‘a passage into *the earth*’? Of all the elements, earth is the densest, most impervious. If space and light are immaterial in nature, the earth is a symbol of absolute materiality. It is also most amenable to human existence. But an earthly hollow, for that very reason, is also uninhabitable. The density of earth is what permits the cave its cavernous darkness, its capacity to absorb all light as if into a black hole. Within this opacity of a cave, one is always blind, blind to all differentiation— as if in a wakeful sleep, conscious but nothing to be conscious of, *consciousness without intentionality*. This very opacity makes the cave an ideal storehouse of treasures, or anything secret. A secret is that which lies in darkness, hidden, invisible. The cave is the original home of secrets, not excluding the archetypal secret, the secret which makes creation possible, as we will see. The light of day always escapes these sleepy hollows. So uninhabitable is this place that without an artificial fire one could not possibly make it one’s home, apart from, of course, the nocturnal mystics. The same fire that only produces false shadows, simulacrum of the ultimately true light, the Sun, in Plato’s allegory.

Let’s analyze the last structural component of cavernal logic, ‘an opening to the surface’. A cave is not a cave without an *opening out*— an opening the structural necessity of which defines the very essence of its existence. Unlike other dwellings, possessing doors that may be clamped shut at will, the cavernal hollow is a doorless, windowless opening out, reflecting its essential receptivity and sheltering nature. But it reflects more than that. For anything to be truly a receptacle, a cup, jar, pot etc must simultaneously possess this open-endedness along with the quality of being *caved* in or *hollowed* out. Being circumscribed on all sides except one, the side

where it opens out into emptiness. And at the same time into brightness into the day, becoming a translucent white, letting light inside. Yet light itself only hovers at the cavernous surface or, if it is able to enter, be transformed, becoming the most unnatural, blinding light— and the two, blindness of absolute darkness and the blindness of infinite luminosity, are really one and the same— not essentially distinct from the dark light of the nocturnal mystics. We saw that it is the obstructive power of the earth that lets be this ordinary blindness. But just as, in many Western and Indian mythologies, the blind man is often a *seer* of a higher kind, so this cavernous darkness makes possible a profounder seeing, a darkness more blazing than the luminosity of the sun. This is Consciousness as *pure, unintentional*, without an object. The darkness of the cave, within the cave, only implies this state of *absolute indifferenciation* wherein objects lose their differences, their luminous outlines and boundaries so as to merge into a unity of indistinction. Here only the light of consciousness is one's guide. Indiscreetly present as a presence not actuated into full illuminating power, into its function of revealing objects. Self-illuminating abidance indistinguishable from pitch darkness, from deep sleep (*susupti*); this indistinction the reason why Western Philosophy has necessarily been a photology, and why it exhibits an extreme poverty with reference to a sophisticated discourse about consciousness and the nature of sleep.

In the cavernous architectonics are operational both the elements of preservation, sheltering and concealment, as well as an opening out towards, a gaping, a patient receptivity to the incoming. Ultimately it is the light of day— luminosity, sun, the waking state— that marks the negative definition of the cave, as the absence of light and luminosity. It is light that the cave forever gapes towards and which it does not let pass safeguarding first of all its dark interior. Although open at its mouth, the cave is at the same time forever closed unto itself, as if impervious to the external light. In a way nothing ever enters a cave, at least nothing enters untransformed. What finds its way inside is itself stripped of its external guise and reduced to a black, empty, indistinct mass. The cave's impermeability does not contradict its receptivity. It merely changes the nature of what it receives concealing it within its dark bosom and letting the darkness even out its distinct characteristics.

Nonetheless the mouth of the cave is perpetually turned towards light, structurally resonating the human receptivity to the divine. The mouth is the point of access and contact with the luminous brilliance that lurks at the edges of the cave. Human consciousness is never divorced from its ground, it is merely turned away gazing out into the world oblivious of its immanent source, of the light of consciousness shining forth from within the folds of the mind and ultimately the human heart. Really the heart is another name for this cave in which divinity resides in all sentient creatures. This identity will be made lucid later on when we arrive explicitly at the subject of a non-dual and transcendental cardiology. It is in this cave of the heart that divinity goes and *hides*, the first and fundamental prototype of all hiding-places. 'Hides' of course only because it is simply inaccessible to the searching gaze of the mind and senses; the impossibility of turning the gaze to oneself and seeing the one who does all the seeing. Thus the

fundamental structural paradox of any spiritual search— the simultaneous availability and inaccessibility of the self’s ontological and experiential ground. A keen sense of homelessness in a world that is my original home. A yearning to arrive when one never really departed. All this only because Brahman although present *hides* underneath the mind within the heart; the heart which is not only the physical center of man but the non-dual locus where consciousness, and therefore all vitality and sentience, is present to beings. Within each of us is this dark cave, inaccessible to light and knowledge, its mouth reaching out to its luminal source inconspicuous by its sheer ubiquitous, eternal presence— pure consciousness as pure existence; ‘purity’ only indicating the absence of creation i.e., *ajāti* (as discussed in later sections).

One cannot avoid an overtly physical vocabulary here (in referring to the cave of the heart as the non-dual center or locus of man) but its evident that what is implied by ‘center’ is only a spatialization of a temporal moment, the moment in which the language of creation and created is rendered meaningful by the superimposition of causal potency in the causeless nature of all things, and of the division of subject and object mediated through the gaze. Only in the context of this dual superimposition is any discourse of hiddenness and secrecy meaningful. That divinity hides in man ultimately only means that causeless presence is always *experienced* as such through a causal, spatiotemporal and linguistic framework— the framework whose architecture has already been outlined in unfolding the architectonics of the cave. *Archei tekton*, the first building, the first human structure, can be none other than this original founding, this setting up of the open region in language, the ‘cave’, in which humans originally dwelt.

5. What we find in the founding metaphor of Western philosophy, however, is another story. Cave as a place of confinement and shackles, a locus of the darkness of ignorance. Is it entirely coincidental that Plato chose a cave after all, and not another confinement, a prison-house or something similar? Everything in Plato’s allegory bespeaks the destiny of Western thought. The impulse to flee from the very ground that was one’s home, the familiar environs of the cave, towards an external domain of illumination and knowledge, where the soul gazes directly at the heavenly Forms in the intellectual activity of *theoria*. But in doing so having already become detached and homeless. In general, this impulse generates the fundamental epistemological model of Western thought, emphasizing the active role of the intellect in grasping knowledge that is external to oneself. For there is no room for interiority in the founding allegory of the cave, in fact it is a blatant negation of all interiority and inwardness. The interior is always dark, hidden and full of secrets and in Plato there is no room for secrets, for any cryptology.

The everyday familiarity of the cave-dweller with his environs ultimately represents the first-person givenness of consciousness. The flames of the cavernous fire are nothing but the self-intimacy of the inner flame of consciousness. The darkness that surrounds this flame is not the darkness of ignorance but of the absolute indistinction of everything at its source. This consciousness never has to be reached or attained; it is an eternally attained truth of oneself. The teaching of the two truths, *satya-dvayam*, in the non-dual traditions is indicative of this very non-

duality of the seeker and the sought. As such it represents an alternative to epistemology as such (as a branch of philosophy), assuming no distance between the knower and the known and where salvation is the recognition of the absolute futility of all effort, action or means of knowledge, in particular of *theoria*, a notion critical to the subsequent development of epistemology in the West that is never able to shake off the initial and founding conception of difference presumed as fundamental to all discourse.

## GNOSOLOGY

1. *jñā* (Sanskrit), *gnos* (Greek), to know, to be aware

2. The history of Western Philosophy a history of sight and vision. Of the hegemony of sight and vision. And its effects. Isn't this hegemony already latent in the space vision appropriates for itself from the attention due to other senses? Merleau-Ponty thus speaks of a return to the tactility of the body, and Arendt to logos (as opposed to nous). Derrida, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Dewey and a host of other thinkers have offered their own critiques of ocularcentrism pervading Western philosophy ever since the Greeks. The history of modern philosophy post the age of rationalism as a history of the attempt to overcome this scopic regime.

3. The typical move of Western Philosophy: Substitution. Substitute one truth, one ideal, one center for another. For the love of wisdom, after all. Isn't anything else a sign of stasis, and authority and, of course, the theological? The free, unburdened movement of thought questioning, sifting, adjudicating, discarding, progressing...

Isn't there another way? Not theological, but least of all philosophical. Consider this. One must look. And continue looking deeper, longer, harder. Persist in the looking. Without being distracted by thought, without letting thought take off. Render the object naked, transparent in the absolute persistence of my gaze. Be so completely present to the object, so aware, as to lose any sense of distinction from the object. Union, yoga, advaita, as a paradigm of knowledge...

Hold on, I lost you there! In this talk of union/non-duality. So one must look keenly, attentively, being extraordinarily present, here and now, undistracted by the turnings of thought, *citta-vrittih*. That is clear, and already reminiscent of something. *Zu dem Sachen selbst!* To the things themselves! The motto of the phenomenologists.

Indeed. Phenomenology, itself tired of the rule of substitution regulating (Western) thought. Of theories detached from lived, felt experience. Taking recourse to this elusive thing called consciousness and the first-person standpoint...

But, if I may intervene here, isn't this talk of looking, seeing attentively etc itself an effect of the ocular-centrism of Western philosophy that privileges sight to other senses, which you question?

This is the question. How to speak of seeing and sight without resorting to another center, the destiny of (Western) thought, the capacity to make an ism of just about anything. If I may be permitted let us *look* at this thing called consciousness.

How paradoxical, for isn't consciousness what does the looking?

The paradox of the gaze, yes. But already have we arrived at something? A question: Is seeing a property of the eyes and vision, or of consciousness? Everything hangs on this. For only the former implies an ocular-centric discourse. The identification of knowledge with the faculty of sight. The sovereign knower— as a detached observer— standing apart and observing, surveying the field of his vision, the object-domain. But the latter, consciousness, malleable, ductile, submissive, not standing apart but merged with and into everything it reveals or illumines...

Surely you are not speaking of Descartes, or Husserl? Consciousness there is an independent presence, irreducible to its correlate, world, matter or whatever.

No one must look elsewhere. Consciousness here is only perverted, fetishized. Psychologized. Heidegger too was keenly aware of that. But all he does is take flight from that word. Finding refuge in Being. As if they were distinct, separable.

Are you suggesting...

I speak of the myth of the subjectivism of consciousness. Of the myth of intentionality. And the first-person standpoint. The first-person is none other than the third-person. This must be grasped. Consciousness has no relation, or rather no privileged relation, with subjectivity and personhood. Conversely subjectivity has no special access to consciousness. Once consciousness is liberated from its confines within the walls of individuality, personhood and subjectivity and released into the world as its objective basis one may begin to talk seriously about it.

Isn't this another form of idealism?

Only in the psychologist rendering of consciousness. Not a part, product or property of selfhood in any sense, detached from its identification with mind, thinking and ideation, consciousness loses all association with any strand of idealism.

But what remains of consciousness post this detachment from all sentience and selfhood? Surely it is a nothing.

Sartre would agree. Except that now it is everything. The loom of the fabric of the universe. What could be more concrete, tangible than consciousness! This stone here, visible through the window, in all its inert concreteness screams consciousness. This is not to imply that the stone is conscious *of* me or that it is sentient. Intentionality is merely a limiting case in which consciousness manifests in the wakefulness of animal being, an adventitious quality that phenomenology falsely raises to an essential one. Consciousness is, rather, the very condition of unhiddenness, the clearing in which beings reveal their Being.

That is beginning to sound Heideggerean.

How does it matter? Unhiddenness as such, itself neither subjective nor objective, is the essential meaning of consciousness. To say of something, 'It exists' is to also mean 'It is conscious(ness)'— this must be grasped. As it partakes of being, it simultaneously partakes of being unhidden. The latter is not a property imparted to the object by the revealing glance of the

knower. No, self-revelation belongs to and is of the essence of objectivity itself, the third-person, the thing.

5. Gnosology: The study of the ontology of consciousness (and by implication, of its relationship with mind, knowledge and perception), bearing absolutely no relationship with psychology, phenomenology or the philosophy of mind. All these latter bear the stamp of a history of thought, from the earliest Greek conceptions of the *psyche* and *nous* to Augustinian and medieval Christian theology and subsequently the peculiar subjectivist stance of the Enlightenment thinkers and modern science on the nature of mind/consciousness down to the phenomenological emphasis on appearances, the first-person stand-point and lived experience, that has failed to do justice to recognizing and providing a clear explication of the nature of consciousness unburdened of all metaphysics and theoretical impositions. The *destruktion* of metaphysics carried out in twentieth-century Continental philosophy, already initiated by Nietzsche, leaves the metaphysics of consciousness untouched, indicating the partial, one-sided manner in which the self-critique of Western thought has historically occurred.

Yet one must point out the inevitability of this fate, that the theorization of consciousness has undergone, for Western thought has no resources by which to understand its own peculiarity and counter-intuitivity with respect to such theorization. The intervention of an *other* philosophy being absolutely necessary. As a first principle this philosophy declares the absolute autonomy of the discipline of gnosology, and further, the autonomy of the philosophy of consciousness as in fact First Philosophy. On the hand hand this implies the sundering of this discipline from the domain of mind, self and subjectivity, and on the other hand from any recourse to the theological and spiritual, including conceptions of interiority and inwardness with which consciousness is often associated. And least of all is consciousness to be posited in physicalist terms, in some sort of supervenient relationship with the body, brain or matter. The first presumption thus cast aside is the identity of consciousness and mind, and the *gnosological difference* between the former and everything belonging to the psyche must be indicated. What this difference means will emerge as we proceed.

## PHOTOLOGY

1. *Bhā* (Sanskrit), *phā* (Greek), light, shining, illumining
2. ‘The Greek expression *phainomenon*...comes from the verb *phainesthai*, meaning “to show itself.” Thus *phainomenon* means what shows itself, the self-showing, the manifest...*Phaino* belongs to the root *pha-*, like *phos-*, light or brightness, i.e., that within which something can become manifest, visible in itself. Thus the meaning of the expression “phenomenon” is established as *what shows*



*itself in itself*, what is manifest. The *phainomena*, “phenomena”, are thus the totality of what lies in the light of day or can be brought to light.<sup>2</sup>

3. ‘[W]e would have to attempt a return to the metaphor of darkness and light (of self-revelation and self-concealment), the founding metaphor of Western philosophy as metaphysics. The founding metaphor not only because it is a photological one— and in this respect the entire history of our philosophy is a photology, the name given to a history of, or treatise on, light— but because it is a metaphor. Metaphor in general, the passage from one existent to another, or from one signified meaning to another, authorized by the initial *submission* of Being to the existent, the *analogical* displacement of Being...’<sup>3</sup>

4. A metaphor? Are light and darkness *mere* metaphors? And what relates the essence of metaphor, the movement, the submission of one thing to another, with the essence of light itself? Has this question ever been asked?

5. Surely consciousness, in the least, bears a *resemblance* with light. As a presence that mediates the manifestation of beings. And further, as a presence that illumines itself in illumining beings. *Ātmajyoti*, the light of consciousness, has often been compared with that of a lamp in Indian non-dual traditions<sup>4</sup>. Moreover visions of God, radiant divine epiphanies, even in Abrahamic religions, bear an intimate relationship with inwardness and subjective experience. But in the history of philosophy one only finds a description of the ontogenetic constitution of beings, of the story of the genesis of the ‘visible’ world, the totality of all that is, as “what lies in the light of day or can be brought to light.” One must, however, also reveal their phylogenetic constitution. That consciousness is light, *ātmajyotiḥ*, is no mere metaphor. Rather consciousness is the phylogenetic manifestation of the same disclosing presence of which light is the ontogenetic— what we designate, rather imprecisely, as the inner and the outer. What *is* is merely this non-dual possibility of disclosedness, this illumining that glows sometimes as light and sometimes as awareness.

Radiance, light, appearance, phenomena, the language of philosophy, and even more of theology, is already replete with and deeply entangled in an ancient photology. It appears as if in seeking to liberate from the ocularcentrism of philosophy, you are leading it towards an all too familiar heliocentrism. Of Plato, of the solar mystics, of...

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger and David Farrell Krell, *Being and Time* in Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964). [San Francisco, Calif.]: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993, 73

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, 27

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘non-dual traditions’, or sometimes the non-dual śāstra, will be used in this paper to refer to the thought of Advaita Vedanta and Madhyamaka Buddhism, though not exclusively so in the latter case where the position may sometimes be representative of Mahayana Buddhism more generally. This is not to overlook the differences amongst these traditions but to engage certain key insights that are common to them.

There you go with the isms again. Let us *look* again. One is only indicating an other thinking. I daresay, an other of thinking. One must first be a light unto oneself, as the Buddha said to the Kalamas, else no epistemology or philosophy may ever lead us out into the light. This is why the caveman's ascent into the light, the *eidōs*, must end in failure. He escapes from the light that is most familiar, intimate to him, the light of his cavern fire. Consciousness. Plato would have none of it. But of caves and of fire we shall speak later. For Plato, and in this one cannot disagree with Heidegger, the essence of light is *eidōs*<sup>5</sup>. But it is already too late. Before this radiance assumes the characteristic of thought, ideation, contemplation of the Forms, it is pure consciousness self-present and self-illuminating. And, once detached from all selfhood and subjectivity, what is the self-illuminating of consciousness other than its ubiquity, the self-illuminating of the world? Sight and light, seeing and illuminating, are grounded, not in the sovereign subject's knowledge of truth or his privileged access to beings, but in the impersonal fact of unhiddenness that grounds not merely sight but all the five senses.

6. Light, luminosity and radiance in the religious literature of East and West signal a divine presence who reaches out, radiates, descends and illuminates the realm of mortal beings. The *unio mystica* is often of the nature of an illumination. The lightning flash, the thunderbolt, the flame, the sun, the lamp, often signify a divine intervention or communion of some kind. Why are Biblical passages, Neo-Platonic or Medieval Christian texts and even Buddhist and Upanishadic thought rife with allusions to light and luminosity? Even after God has been ousted out of philosophical discourse, light as the mediator between Being and beings finds its rightful place in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Unhiddenness, disclosure, clearing, radiance, *aletheia*— Heideggerian ontology abounds in luminal vocabulary. What is it about light that lets it slip unnoticed into this ontology, that is otherwise extremely wary of any theological-sounding discourse? In the same breath we may further ask, "What is light itself?", and "Does light have Being?", "Does it exist?" Its a curious fact that philosophy has rarely found this question significant enough to be asked<sup>6</sup>, its all-pervasiveness and familiarity being no justification for its neglect. Such considerations are brushed aside by Heidegger in the context of Being insofar as an existential familiarity must proceed alongside genuine wonder and questioning. It still disturbs in its all too familiar uncanniness. The presence and nature of light doesn't disturb, doesn't solicit philosophy for an answer. Why?

In modernity we might find one reason to account for this neglect. Science has completely usurped the entire discourse on light. It has been naturalized and turned into an empirical problem. It moves, traverses distance, bounces off objects and finally 'falls' on the retina. This

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger and Ted Sadler, *The Essence of Truth: On Plato's Cave Allegory and Theaetetus*. London ; New York: Continuum, 2002, 43

<sup>6</sup> Very few philosophers, such as Martin Heidegger, have actually undertaken a philosophical investigation of the nature and essence of light.

activity of light as a thing amongst other things moving, bouncing, splitting, falling, reaching, acting would seem quite strange to someone unfamiliar with the vocabulary of our age. Yet this usurping and naturalization of light in scientific discourse cannot by itself explain the absence of serious philosophical reflection on the nature and essence of light. The analogy made with Being is fertile. We may speak of the question of Being qua Being itself suffering an ancient neglect owing to the obsession with beings, their order and classification, i.e. optical investigation. Being itself has nothing to offer to the naked eye except its deployment of itself as this or that being. We might bring into the conversation a third interlocutor with a similar fate—consciousness. Just as one is not likely to stumble upon Being when one is walking down the street, one is unlikely to stumble upon consciousness either. Nor did Descartes succeed in accomplishing the task. The *cogito* is a recognition of existence only insofar as there is thinking, doubting, cogitating. It is this Western philosophers have dealt with, and not what is clearly distinguished here as consciousness, whose difference from the former is designated here as the *gnosological difference*.<sup>7</sup>

Being, consciousness, light. Is there anything more significant to their interrelationship than this gratuity and the accompanying sense of discomfort in identifying them with their visible, manifest correlates? For isn't light too condemned to wander in a kind of darkness? Who ever saw light? What we see are objects. Passing by a building I perceive gleaming white marble. When the sun sets in the evening it is a pale shadow of itself. And yet all I 'see' is the same old marble in a different shade, a different tinge or color. We infer from these changing colors and profiles of things the existence of light; or that there *is* less or more light now than before. But light *is* never less or more; only the marble is less or more colorful, darker or brighter. The world in its ever-changing forms and appearances presents to the mind a potential hypothesis of light, which is taken up by scientific discourse and reified into an independently existing reality. Phenomenological enquiry however reveals another story: *Light is never given as such to experience. It is merely a condition for experience.* We may add: *Light presences itself by concealing itself. It is known only by its sign— the world.* Upanishadic literature abounds in the use of light as a metaphor for consciousness. Light here does not so much flow vertically from 'higher' to 'lower' as from 'inner' to the 'outer' since divinity is immanent. In illumining the world *ātma-jyoti* or the light of consciousness illumines itself, on the analogy of the flame of a lamp that does not need another lamp to illumine itself. In other aspects too light is often used as a paradigm to describe or reveal features of consciousness, and in the case of Mahāyāna Buddhism, of the mind. It may appear as if in drawing all these comparisons one is merely using light as a useful metaphor for consciousness. This is misleading. Rather one must venture towards a bolder thesis, since even if this were the case, it is so owing to a more primal unity. We may say: *Light is the objective deployment of the same being of which consciousness is the subjective.*

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<sup>7</sup> Not structurally unlike the ontological difference of Heidegger.

That is, consciousness and light are one appearing as the illumining principles in the inner and the outer worlds. This illumining principle is nothing but *unhiddenness*. This *unhiddenness* deploys itself phylogenetically as consciousness and ontogenetically as light. It is what accounts for the self-evidence of any knowledge. In fact, knowledge is nothing but the co-presence or co-manifestation of the two principles towards one and the same locus, the dual condition for knowledge. *Lumen naturale* is the same as *lumen vitale*. And insofar as light is unhiddenness we may further add: *Light 'is' not, but deploys isness to all essents by taking them into its clearing*.

## MAGISTICS

1. *Mahat* (Sanskrit), *mazda* (Avestan), *magos* (Greek )

2. How long did the creation of the world take?

—Seven days and seven nights

—Aeons

—Blink of an eye...or less

—What creation?

—No response

Five theories of creation: Biblical, historical, Luminal, Śāstric, Bauddha. Narrative, explanatory, philosophical, actual, soteriological.

3. Jāti, Genesis, birth, creation, creativity. The first question of First Philosophy: Why is there something and not nothing? This question must be asked all over again. At the very outset we shall leave behind the scientific standpoint, which assumes too much, and speak of a mystery, the original mystery, of the inscrutable origin of all things.

4. Why 'inscrutable'? Because of a system's being inexplicable from within itself. That is, the originary incapacity and incompleteness of a system as capable of furnishing its own justification and theoretical explanation. That is, an original assumption, a founding maxim, a lie needed to set creation off. A line is the closest distance between two points. Xp is a field composed of all and only prime numbers. The prime mover.

5. Why 'inexplicability'? Because no straight line or causal chain may be drawn from the originary source to the system. Because causality is itself a function and characteristic of the system. And so a founding leap, a *leap of faith*, necessary to establish a link between the source and the created.

6. Why 'a lie'? Because of the unfoundedness of the originary premise.

7. Māyā: A name for this lie, this inscrutable origin of all things.

8. 'It's like a painter

Spreading the various colors:

Deludedly grasping different forms

But the elements have no distinctions

...

In the mind is no painting,  
 In painting there is no mind;  
 Yet not apart from mind  
 Is any painting to be found.

...

Just as a painter  
 Can't know his own mind  
 Yet paints due to the mind,  
 So is the nature of all things.<sup>8</sup>

9. 'Here is a *first hypothesis*: the drawing is blind, if not the draftsman or draftsman...here is the *second hypothesis* then— an eye graft, the grafting of one point of view onto the other: a drawing of the *blind* is a drawing of the blind.'

'What happens when one writes without seeing? A hand of the blind ventures forth alone or disconnected, in a poorly delimited space; it feels its way, it gropes, it caresses as much as it inscribes, trusting in the memory of signs and supplementing sight. It is as if a lidless eye had opened at the tip of the fingers...This eye guides the tracing of the outline [*tracé*]; it is a miner's limpet the point of writing, a curious and vigilant substitute, the prosthesis of a seer who is himself invisible.'

'[A]t least *three* types of powerlessness for the eye, or let us say, three aspects, to underscore once again with a *trait* that which gives the experience of the gaze over to blindness...I would see the *first* aspect in the *perspective of the graphic act*. In its originary, pathbreaking moment, in the *tracing* potency of the *trait*, at the instant when the point at the point of the hand moves forward upon making contact with the surface, the inscription of the inscribable is not seen.'

'[T]he *second aspect*...I will name it the *withdrawal* [*retrait*] or the *eclipse*, the *differential inappearance of the trait*. We have been interested thus far in the act of tracing, in the *tracing* of the *trait*. What is to be thought now of the *trait once traced*?...A tracing, an outline cannot be seen. One should in fact not see it insofar as all the colored thickness that it retains tends to wear itself out so as to mark the single edge of a contour: between the inside and outside of a figure. Once this limit is reached, there is nothing more to see, not even black and white, not even figure/form, and this is the *trait*, this is the line itself: which is thus no longer what it is, because from then on it never relates to itself without dividing itself just as soon, the divisibility of the *trait* here interrupting all pure identification and forming...[D]rawing always signals toward this inaccessibility, toward the threshold where only the surroundings of the *trait* appear— that which

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<sup>8</sup>Thomas F. Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra*. Boulder : [New York]: Shambhala Publications ; Distributed in the U.S. by Random House, 1984, 451-2

the trait spaces by delimiting and which thus does not belong to the *trait*. *Nothing belongs to the trait...* Nothing ever participates in it. The *trait* join and adjoins only in separating.<sup>9</sup>

10. ‘What is at work in the work? Van Gogh’s painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth. This being emerges into the unconcealment of its Being. The Greeks called the unconcealment of beings *alétheia*...In the work of art the truth of beings has set itself to work...Some particular being, a pair of peasant shoes, comes in the work to stand in the light of its Being. The Being of beings comes into the steadiness of its shining.’

‘The world is not a mere collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar and unfamiliar things that are at hand. But neither is it a merely imagined framework added by our representation to the sum of such given things. *The world worlds...*’

‘All creation, because it is such a drawing-up, is a drawing, as of water from a spring. Modern subjectivism, to be sure, immediately misinterprets creation, taking it as the sovereign subject’s performance genius.’<sup>10</sup>

11. ‘As there are four stages in the painting of a picture, so there is fourfoldness in the Self. In a picture we have the canvas, stiffening with starch, drawing of outlines and application of color. Correspondingly there is pure consciousness, indwelling consciousness, one identified with the totality of all subtle bodies, and with the totality of all physical ones.’

‘People understand that to be *Māyā* which though clearly seen is at the same time beyond all determination, as in the case of magic.’

‘Things that are inconceivable should not be subjected to canons of logic; and this world is one such, for the mind cannot conceive of the very mode of its creation.’<sup>11</sup>

12. Four texts. Four ideologies. Joined together by a thin yet ineluctable thread. Each in its own way— and the qualification ‘in its own way’ is absolutely essential— questioning, undermining all sovereignty, agency, foreknowledge and rationality in the domain of creation and creativity. A certain blindness at the origin of all origins, a hand that moves invisibly in darkness, a world worlding, a mind that knows not what it is painting. Each centered around a definite logic.

13. The logic of unconcealment. Presupposes that which *unconceals* itself. ‘The Being of beings comes into the steadiness of its shining.’ And the ontological difference between Being and beings. This notion of a *being that unconceals* regulates the system from within. The unconcealment mediated specifically through art, but fundamentally through language, the language of poetry. Other forms of creation “always happen already, and happen only, in the open region of saying

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Derrida and Musée du Louvre, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-portrait and Other Ruins*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 44-5, 54

<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger and David Farrell Krell, *The Origin of a Work of Art* in *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*. [San Francisco, Calif.]: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993, 161, 170, 200

<sup>11</sup> Mādhava and Swami Swahananda, *Pañcadaśī of Śrī Vidyāraṇya Swāmi* =: Śrīmadvidyāraṇyasvāmiviracitā Pañcadaśī. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1980, 114

and naming...They are an ever special poetizing within the clearing of beings which has already happened unnoticed in language.”<sup>12</sup> Language as the mediator of this unconcealment. Let us leave this here.

The logic of the trace. Art, drawing, creation resting, not upon a secure self-present foundation, but a disappearing trait, a movement that founds all meaning without itself founded upon anything; the *trait* as the differential trace. Not intelligible nor present to itself because from it originate the very senses of intelligibility and presence. As all meaning. Almost Godlike— ‘Is it by chance that in order to speak of the *trait* we are falling back upon the language of negative theology or of those discourses concerned with naming the withdrawal [*retrait*] of the invisible or hidden God’<sup>13</sup> Everything turns on *naming this withdrawal*. Heidegger names it ‘concealment’. For Advaita too Brahman is hidden, concealed, covered (*āvrita*) under the veil of *māyā*. This withdrawal, therefore, may be articulated in two ways, cryptologically and deconstructively. The former (Heidegger and Advaita) leads all meaning back to a primal source, that which is concealed underneath the world engaged by meaning and difference. For the latter (Derrida and Mahāyāna) there is no *underneath* and therefore nothing concealed under, no cryptology. Yet as opposed to Derrida, and this represents Mahāyāna Buddhism’s point of departure (as well as its affinity to Advaita), the latter remains absolutistic in some fundamental ways, positing an ultimate truth to be realized and a state of final realization free of all doubts and ignorance. Nonetheless, as Derrida confesses, deconstructive discourse indicates its own absolute, the place of the ‘invisible or hidden God’ usurped by the *trait* or trace.

Is it possible to *evacuate* this place for good, to resist the temptation of (quasi-)transcendental discourse? Not only in the delineation of the trace but in much of Derrida’s later writing one hears echoes of *the unconditional*, a haunting non-present presence that evades all determination and knowledge yet constituting the ground of social and political hope. Not merely a quasi-transcendental *condition of possibility* that the trace is, but *the impossible*, that which forever eludes all engagements and transactions of everyday life, individual agency and knowledge. The impossible is also deeply tied, in the thought of Derrida, with the future, the *to come* that contains within it possibilities of another present, an indeterminate that upsets and disallows all sovereign foreknowledge and predetermination of truth. The logic of unconcealment, on the other hand, is led by precisely the opposite force— it resorts to a preexisting presence, the Being concealed within beings, that serves as the explanatory paradigm of all existence by means of its gradual unconcealment.

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger and David Farrell Krell. *The Origin of a Work of Art* in *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*. [San Francisco, Calif.]: HarperSanFrancisco, 199

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida and Musée du Louvre, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-portrait and Other Ruins*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 54

It is another question (which cannot be explored here in depth) whether these are indeed distinct and exclusive viewpoints or whether they may be seen as consequences of *philosophical* choices about certain explanatory paradigms (having distinct and definite political implications that are all too obvious), which may be expressed as *the deflation of value (or even essence)* on one hand and the *transference of value (or essence) to another sphere* on the other— the two fundamental philosophical leitmotifs. These choices do not by themselves preclude the possibility of a substantive, and in some ways, more fundamental agreement, for instance, in the affirmation of the constructed nature of meaning, experience or world, or a critique of reason and rationality, or the negation of individual agency, human sovereignty and Western anthropocentrism, and in this case, the almost non-human and mysterious nature of creation and artistic creativity.

More importantly the question arises whether there exists a third possibility— beyond the explanatory paradigm relying on an original, secure presence, a presence that is *present* before and in all things, on the one hand, and a paradigm which, in order to question what is in fact this self-sufficiency and self-closure of truth, of a reference to something already pre-existing and pre-determining all being and thought, takes recourse to a future, a *to-come*, neither presence nor present, remaining an eternal promise, a quasi-messianic negation of the present for a future capable of shattering the horizon of all knowledge, determination and human expectations. Let us only intimate here the third possibility, which has never really been acknowledged in Western thought— non-duality.

14. Non-duality/*Advaitam*: The non-difference or indistinction of the *here* and *beyond*, immanent and transcendent, *samsāra* and *nirvāna*, source and creation. Between the messianic hope of deconstruction and the sufficiency of Being, between the self-closure of truth grounded in the known and the appeal to an impossible, an *indeconstructible*, that threatens to invade all self-sufficiency and closure, there lies the possibility of embracing *advaitam*, this non-duality of past and future, security and threat, that eternally belongs to the present and to the heart of everything. The alternative to sovereign knowledge is not the faith of the blind man but complete surrender to the absolutely otherness and transcendence of every moment of experienced and immanent presence. Absolute otherness is the very essence of the self-same.

15. So far we have not even scratched the surface of the real reason behind the inscrutability at the origin of all things, the mystery of creation. Let us approach this: Creation is inscrutable simply because it never really *occurred* at the first place. Because creation itself is a lie, and the unfoundedness and falsehood of the original premise/first principle (that initiates creation) obtains directly from and because of this original lie.

16. Two ways to comprehend this ajāti/non-birth: Luminous and Śāstric

17. First way. *Yugapat srishti*— Immediate creation, creation without time-lag. Emanation as beads rolling fallen from an outstretched hand.

But how?



Why, isn't the potential to *be* a snake always already latent in the rope? How long does it take for a rope to transform itself into a snake in someone's perception?

No time at all...

All the more because the rope never *really* transformed into anything to begin with. Such is the nature of creation.

But surely creation is a *real* emanation of effects from cause. While you only speak of perceptual error that presupposes a conscious subject looking at and misapprehending the nature of an object.

Presupposes consciousness yes, but not an onlooking subject. We have, earlier on, already divorced consciousness from all individual agency and subjectivity. Nor does error require the dichotomy of a (mis-)perceiving subject and a perceived object. For why must it be posited that consciousness is other than Being, the same objectivity that grounds the world? The first-person, after all, is the third-person. To put it crudely, if reality itself is of the nature of consciousness (what collectively is called Brahman), and the latter is not seen in psychologistic terms, then there is no *prima facie* objection to identifying creation with perceptual error as opposed to causal emanation. The potential for something to appear otherwise than itself is contained in and effected by existence itself and not some human agency.

Nonetheless creation is a real change, a process of becoming in which an effect is really *produced* from a source.

Historically the notion of what is *real* has come to be identified with causal efficacy, activity or active productivity, as if the latter were a test, a proof of a thing's existence. No thing which is not caused by another and no thing that is not itself causally efficacious. This may be true of *things*, of elements within a causal framework, but not of the framework itself. Action and activity are meaningful only amongst ontologically congruent entities. The framework of the totality of all existence can rise from its prior non-existence, not as an act, but only through a non-arising, that is to say, the appearance of an arising. For nothing, no act, can initiate creation. For creation is latent in, or rather, is a mode of existence itself. Existence looking at itself. The only coherent model of creation, therefore, is vision. The mere presence, and not self-conscious deliberate activity, of a seer is sufficient to explain the emergence of the world of forms. Within this world the relation of one form to another assumes the necessity of action. Jñāna is ontologically prior to and incongruent with karma. Self-existent consciousness, or self-conscious existence, is ontologically prior to and incongruent with the realm of action. Manifestation and production are two diametrically opposed modes of explanation of the same existence seen transcendently and immanently (respectively). Creation as an act or event is a confusion of these modes. The latter already rests on and assumes a *substratum-manifestation* or *seer-seen* framework which sets up the possibility for any experience or occurrence of change and production.

Yet to call the world an error...

That, confessedly, is not the most felicitous term although the non-dual traditions often rely on it. Surely the traits and strokes on a canvas or a writer's scribbles are not nothing, even if to an unaccustomed perceiver they are just patches upon paper. Take away the clay and there *is* no pot, take away the paper and no writing, yet there is a novel element introduced into the preexistent plenitude of being— meaning— not *being* but *meaning*. The possibility of engagement, response, life itself. The meaning generated in my mind is nowhere to be found in the scribbles themselves but those meanings constitute the entire universe. Call it what you will— error, manifestation, production, life— one must recognize both the ontological emptiness and the phenomenal richness of meaning. And the absence of any time, effort, activity or agency in its emergence. Meaning only arises out of *differánc*e, which is to say, it doesn't really arise.

You seem to speak of artistic and actual creation interchangeably, as if they were the same thing?

Fundamentally yes. No thing where the word leaves off. *Differánc*e sets up the realm of possibility, within which both art and fact situate themselves. Or one might say, following Heidegger, that language— the house of Being— sets up the open region in which beings come into the fullness of their shining. Irrespective of the mode of articulation— deconstructive or metaphysical— all four of our interlocutors converge on the constitutive role of language and mind in the emergence of the world, and not merely a representative one. We only further indicate that this emergence is only coherent as a non-emergence.

18. Second way. Creation as absolutely non-existent. The Non-dual Śāstra presents us with another alternative theory of creation— absolute *ajāti*. Nothing ever arises, not even the appearance of a manifestation. From the point of view of the *effect*, creation must have had to 'occur'. Explanation of creation as manifestation fulfills this requirement, without assuming the causal framework of production as seen before. From the point of view of the *cause* however (which no more may be designated as such), there was never any appearance, leave aside experience, of the effect in the cause. No event of manifestation of the rope as a snake occurred in the biography of the rope. *Ajāti* implies, depending on the point of view adopted, both the negation of any causal theory in the explanation of creation, as well as the negation of creation itself.

19. Even if creation is understood as *manifestation* as opposed to *production* it is possible to reflectively distinguish the various 'stages' of this process, even though they are really non-stages, for nothing ever comes out of anything. First of all one must acknowledge the ontological basis of creation, that in which the manifestation/creation occurs. But here one has already assumed the fact or event of creation, owing to which one *refers back* to the original condition as its 'cause'. As seen before, no causal relation may be established between the rope and the snake. Such attributions of prime causality, the original founding and creation the world, religious or scientific, originate from the standpoint of the created. But from the standpoint of existence or Brahman nothing ever really *occurred*. For the linguistically mediated arising of a *world* and of

meaning does not add anything ontologically or gnosologically to Brahman. It does not weigh Being heavier. Its tangibility and reality reducible to Being and its perception and knowledge to Consciousness— take away the element of its existence and its perceptibility and what remains of an object is only *nāma-rūpa*, a linguistically mediated universe of meaning, the product of *differance*, nothing in itself but mysteriously arising in experience. But why, it may be asked, must an original presence— Brahman, Being or whatever— be assumed at the first place? Call it what you will there *is* something out there (and this last qualification is really unnecessary), and not everything is a product of the mind's (in the case of Mahāyāna) or language's (in the case of deconstruction) activity. And this unnameable emptiness-presence at the origin of all things cannot bear any relation to anything.

To return to the question, the ontological basis/origin of creation cannot constitute the first premise or principle of any theory of creation— it is already derivative, derivative of the standpoint that creation in fact occurred. Thus a theoretical *move* is necessary in order to explain the creative act. A move of the order of 'reconstituting' the thing— in itself indifferent to the standpoint of causality— as the locus of the possibility of creation, i.e. as containing the potential to transform into or manifest as effect. In effect, this reconstitution— which is really a reorientation— is the founding premise, the original lie, of creation. 'Reorientation' because it refers back to the same presence by the adoption of a new glance, that of presence as cause, without the former undergoing any change at all. There is a shred of white cloth lying here, indifferent and complete unto itself. But instantaneously it is *transformed* into a potential cause of a created entity, a picture, merely in the *seeing* of the cloth as a canvas, even prior to the first brushstrokes of the painter. Thus potentiality is effected by an act of superimposition of the notion of cause into a causeless original, presence (or a non-original non-presence). This move is represented in Advaita by the '*starching*' of the canvas, making existence answer to the demands of creative superimposition and imagination, to the differential spacing of language that generates meaning. This *seeing* of what is *as* a potential cause, moreover, is itself a possibility latent in the isness of what is, since existence itself is of the nature of consciousness. Being human (or more broadly sentient) merely actuates this potentiality.

'Starching', this original superimposition of creative power, is therefore the first 'stage' of creation. From then on tracing the evolution of the universe can proceed unhampered by a straight causal line from cause to effect, beginning with the 'original' cause. Creation is no more a mystery. As will be evident this original move is not an origin at all, but the preparatory hypothesis— the 'magic trick'— for any discourse about origins and causality to be rendered meaningful, science and theology included. One may proceed then to articulate further stages of evolution, as Advaita does by positing a subtler to grosser model of emanation. The details of differential evolutionary treatments are irrelevant. What is essential is that they all obfuscate the role of consciousness and seeing in the 'event' of creation, applying a cause-effect model instead

of acknowledging a deeper *substratum-manifestation* or *seer-seen* structure behind a causal explanation of creation.

20. Let us only indicate the etymological associations of creation (*mahat* is the first evolute of creation in the Upanishads) with magic or *magos*, as well as birth (the *Magi* after all were the wise men from the East present at the Nativity of Christ), mystery and finally wisdom or intelligence. Associations themselves shrouded in mystery which magistics can only slowly and patiently uncover.

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