

## How to Dissolve the Cave in One Easy Step

Ever undertake a writing project, really delve into it and after a short while discover without realizing it that you've been making a shift to something other than the one with which you've started? Such is the case at hand. For a while I've wanted to write about a subject other than the one with this deliberately slick title and went ahead for several pages with the project. After a while it drifted to somewhere else literally without me knowing it. Then I decided to pause and look back. Behold, I ended up with two different topics living under one roof or under one title. Sooner than later one had to give way to the other.

Indeed, I got off to what I consider a great start and was pleased with my progress for a while but not long afterwards got sidetracked. As for how and when that happened, I haven't the slightest idea. The best part about it was that I didn't feel that I had lost something or have gone down a blind alley. Something bigger seemed to be at work, so I decided to move on trusting that all would be well. Quickly I realized that several unresolved issues with regard to a perennial favorite subject matter required attention. Without realizing it, I was drifting in that direction. That, of course, was the image of a cave in Book Seven of Plato's **Republic**. Actually I find that image more fascinating than anything, in truth an endless source of inspiration. Mistakenly I thought that I had come to a pretty good understanding of the imagery present there. Then to my surprise, a whole bunch of other insights started to emerge. Instead of this being a kind of humiliation, it turned out to be a genuine delight.

As for the initial topic that got me going, I was both fascinated by it yet hesitant to continue for some reason that wasn't clear at the time. If you've ever find yourself in a situation parallel to this, go right ahead with your new insight. Save what you've written for another day and don't look back. Also I add another factor that's at work, an obstacle of sorts more pervasive than first imagined. That consists of a desire not to remove material already created fearful of reducing the size of the article. That's sounds like a petty-minded concern indeed. However, it does make its presence felt, so the best thing to do is recognize it and go ahead with the better attitude of filing it away temporarily.

What seems to be operating behind the scenes is a fear of dropping material where considerable time and effort had been devoted, all apparently for nothing. Intellectually we know that we can start up again at any time, but getting over our initial reluctance to either postpone or drop the matter isn't easy. Being aware of this fact is an important step forward although it can be argued that far more is involved. I'd say it's a preparation for a deeper mental and spiritual paralysis intended to dispose us for receiving something we hadn't anticipated and is far better for us than first imagined. Yes, paralysis. It sounds frightening at first but is absolutely essential.

Instead of trying to wiggle out of this impending paralysis, pause for a moment once you've come into its unrelenting grip. There you'll discover an unexpected boon. We find ourselves at a loss as to what to do by reason of an unaccustomed mental stiffness at odds with the desire to be creative. If we were to dwell too long on how stiffened-up we are at the moment, we'd run the risk of dying the death on the spot. Perhaps this won't happen physically but there are other deaths...worse ones...that can befall us if we're not careful. Sooner or later, however, we discover that this paralysis is temporary.

Should we stand our ground literally and not run from this paralysis...always a possibility...a new freedom suddenly bursts upon us. This is quite accurate and must be experienced to know that it's true, for throughout our apparent death...paralysis...we discover that we retain one thing and one thing only. That consists in our awareness which sits there and watches the whole show independently of ourselves. We look at ourselves and realize that without this paralysis we'd get nowhere. At first it appears painful, but such is the view from the outside. Because we equate such paralysis with (let's face it) death, the trick is to remain in this frozen state. When it will "thaw" isn't up to us but thaw it will at the proper time. During our frozen state we entertain no thoughts nor emotions. Yes, images do pass by...never do they cease...but they blow by us with far less impact despite their furious assaults.

Fortunately this state is not permanent. Once we emerge from it—how long is hard to say, that not being up to us—insights we've never entertained come to us that otherwise would be beyond our ken. Not only that, they come in an unimaginable abundance. One thing we do know. The paralysis at hand is

vastly different from that of the prisoners in Plato's cave (Book Seven, **Republic**). They are chained and thereby forced to look only straight ahead at projections on the wall. To draw any parallels between the paralysis under discussion and the condition of these people in the cave simply doesn't work. However, this image is a gold mine for other insights to which I've referred in several articles and will discuss here later on.

In one particular case the paralysis I have in mind came in handy when composing this article, that is, when making the shift from writing about one topic to the one at hand. By no means was it earth-shattering matter, but as with any undertaking, the paralysis did away with all the how-what-when-and-where with regard to the shift. So instead of the transition being uncomfortable, far from it. It turned out that I didn't lay down the terms but they were laid down for me, tailor-made, if you will. Putting this paralysis in terms of an article seems puny compared with what's going on in the world. On one level, so true. On another level, not so. If the little things can't be mastered, the big stuff won't either. Then again, most of what we face comprise the little things or better, a whole series of them day after day after day. With reference to Plato's cave once again, I appeal to the man who simply got up and freely exited the cave. He wasn't hindered as I had been by any of those literal "makes of wonders" or *thaumatapoieo* whose job it is to project images upon the wall. In fact, no one in the cave, including the just mentioned fabricators, seemed to be aware of this man's departure.

At this juncture memory of those engaged in *thaumatapoieo* may be helpful. We don't seek to recreate their work...that's for the cave only...but use them as a pattern as how not to operate in our new environment. Now with the distinct advantage of seeing things in full sunlight, we can engage in a creative process, not engage in making wonders. This is a way of saying that we don't see now as we do with our physical eyes but are aware of things just as they are. Here is where a diffuse sort of awareness comes to the fore, this to be discussed shortly. The last time this clarity was explicit was, paradoxically, in our state of paralysis. There as noted the only thing left to us after all has been stripped away is this awareness, pure and simple. Now in the light outside the cave this type of awareness comes into its own, beyond paralysis if you will. This time we, unlike the makes of wonders, don't employ a dizzying array of images but

our attention now is focused in an untrammelled manner which will govern our activity in a new but familiar way. Such is the parallel as well as difference between the two.

Not unlike the man who simply walked out of the cave, we're unaccustomed to the light and have to wait for our eyes to adjust to the new environment. This period of time is marked by anticipation as to what we are about to see. Then all at once the soreness in our eyes fades away, and we have a straight-on view of what we're supposed to do. Two elements are key here. The first is our passiveness to the process. This may not be the choicest word but will do for now. We don't interfere in any way with the adjustment nor do we have the desire to do so. The second element is the immediacy or cause-lessness of what's transpiring. This is key, a clear indication that neither we nor anyone nor anything else is responsible for what we've hit upon. Actually we don't have the slightest idea of where it came from. We know it's genuine by the spontaneous feeling of gratitude that comes upon us. Indeed, there's nothing fabricated about this in the least.

What's transpiring here is next-to-impossible to articulate, so it's helpful to slow down the whole process. The operation of cause-lessness (pardon the awkwardness of the word) does take place within time...sort of. By that I mean yes, time is a necessary component to our life and is not operative when we're moving from the cave to what lays outside. Obviously spacial imagery is required but is to be taken with a grain of salt. So by necessity we need recourse to a kind of mythic presentation of how cause-lessness works. Please note that in two or three articles before the current one I had gone into some details about all this. Key to its operation is the presence of our inner *daimon* which is in accord with how it governed Socrates.

We can expand on this by positing the fact that a *daimon* represents a transcendent feature in our lives. Without it we flounder around here and there. Looking for a way to detect its presence or more precisely, its presence by a trace, its absence? No doubt about it, living without a *daimon*'s influence consists of restlessness. We may use this in a creative or even a brilliant way, but it's far removed from how we respond to the *daimon* within us. In fact, the *daimon* is helpless to affect us as long as we're restless. In contrast to such an

uneasy state is that instantaneous recognition of the *daimon*. It doesn't operate in us as producing a cause. Being free of causality, the *daimon* wishes the same for us. It may sound a bit abstract but turns out to be the greatest gift we could ever receive.

Because what was just said is essential to grasp, I pass it by again but here in outline form:

Restlessness = no *daimon*  
cause-lessness = presence of *daimon*

Here's where fostering a diffuse type awareness helps lift us from restlessness. You don't hear much about that being an affliction because it's not unlike the positive diffuseness under discussion. In many ways it's the worst affliction because of the difficulty we find in trying to lay hold of it. Restlessness just doesn't sit still enough to get a handle on it, always on the move. For most of the day our awareness is diffuse, so what's so special about it? That question contributes a lot as to disguise it and keep us, well, restless, unable to move ahead as we're called to do.

Here we're taking diffuse awareness to a wholly different level, retaining the same word because it's what we have right in front of us. It parallels our regular awareness which moves from one thought to another and so forth without ceasing. Actually it gives the appearance of being inferior but is not. Diffuse awareness as intended consists in not setting down on anything particular but being free to drift from place to place, if you will. Instead of tiring us out, we feel refreshed. It may seem like another form of restlessness but is not. Indeed, failing to appreciate the best tool as right in front of us is embarrassing, but what a boon we have without having to go anywhere or do anything.

To foster the type of diffuseness at hand requires considerable discipline. Again, this doesn't involve step A leading (causing) step B and so forth in a rigorous sequence, something so serious and tiring (Shall we add restless?). Instead, it just blurts itself out there. Once expressed, it doesn't turn back in on itself. To any external observer ignorant of this frame of mind acting

diffusely seems like a thorough waste of time. That's good...actually very good...because such perceptions pigeon-hole us and pigeon-holing has the untapped benefit of freeing us up. We don't have to waste time explaining ourselves away. It's a strange place indeed where true freedom lies, in the opposite place we usually expect.

Once we've been set free in the manner just described we can settle upon whatever we so desire without fear of become dissipated or diffuse in the natural sense. Looking at this phenomenon more closely, we can say that we've become loosened up from the tyranny of causality which loves to produces this and that, going on almost indefinitely. So another way to describe this diffuse awareness characteristic of a *daimon* is to call it not-caused, a radically different mode of comporting ourselves. All the while we've been living...suffering...effects in real time and in real conditions brought on by an infinite variety of causes. Even worse, without knowing it we've been perpetuating this sequence like everyone around us. What an incredible waste of time. It takes awhile to acclimatize ourselves to this causeless existence which initially seems so bizarre. After a while, the opposite turns out to be true. We've been living in a truly unnatural fashion and now are in accord with the truth or perhaps better put, in accord with reality.

As for this diffuseness, the first correlative that comes to mind is dispersion or scattered-ness which is suggestive of having no orientation or if we had it, we had lost it. While indeed cause and effect are operative at all times minus the occasion we're suggesting here, disorientation is a spin-off of being restless. While physically we're okay, mentally and spiritually we're in danger of simply falling apart. That's all there is to it. The distinction between the two modes—cause and cause-lessness—never can be appreciated until one has passed from one to the other. So if we're looking for a way to discern between the two, it boils down to restlessness being the culprit. The formula, if we may put it as such?

Cause and effect = restlessness  
cause-lessness = diffuse awareness

Should we examine ourselves more closely, we start off by freely acknowledging

how much we're conditioned by causality. Such-and-such a thing happens to us which makes us respond in such-and-such a manner. It's so obvious and natural, easy as pie to overlook because it's so incredibly common. This setup, if you will, makes it quite easy for us to fall into a funk or worse. A negative thought or experience comes our way and we fall right in accord with it. The same happens with anything positive, but cause and effect is more obvious with the former. Now take a whole slew of these experiences and we have a pattern where something negative grabs hold of us and we react in an equally negative fashion. It's so incredibly ingrained that to consider the existence of an alternative is next to impossible. When you come right down to it, we have here a pretty good working definition of fate where we're stuck in an unalterable situation. Now we see the absolute need for the intervention of a *daimon*.

Just the fact that we're able to recognize this simple universal process is a vital first step. We see how it works both in us and in other people and start wondering, wondering if there's an alternative. The motive to take the first step isn't found among most people mostly because they're not sufficiently inquisitive and take for granted that this situation is part of the human condition. Yes, it is true but happily turns out to be a small part. That's the tragedy, it seems, when reaching the end of one's life, of having lived like this. Perhaps then the so-called veil is lifted and we're full of remorse at the realization of having missed everything. Still, there's hope. In an earlier article I dealt with the issue of Purgatory. That's usually taken as a typically Catholic thing. Maybe so, but it does have some application. In sum, the hope to be purified after death remains an option, albeit a greatly misunderstood one.

But the Question of Questions is how do we step out of causality and into...and into what? At first glance the alternative seems absurd, that we're stepping into nothing. Instead of lurching forward, of reacting to a cause as everyone around us does, this time we hold back. To say we refuse is inaccurate because it's too forceful...a common or expected gesture...for the application of force in any form doesn't have a lasting effect. Better to say we withdraw from causality like stepping out of a given environment, for example, stepping out water onto dry land. Both environments remain the same as well as we although something new has been introduced or better put, we come to realize this something new had been present all along. That of course is the introduction of an awareness

which is diffuse.

Choosing this option indeed consists of making the tiniest of all steps, really, but the most important one. What, then, is the origin of the inspiration? We know for sure it doesn't come from us. That comes across loud and clear. The whole thing is way too different, outside the normal course of human or natural ability. Let's return to the best resource of them all on this matter, Plato's cave. A parallel to when and how we make this option is found in one of the captives facing the wall and watching the projected images. On his own volition he picks himself up and simply walk out. Note how it's put: "When one of them was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his head, walk and look up toward the light" [514c].

Although this person is described as being among those who are bound or fettered (cf. 514a), they're not called prisoners though for all practical purposes they are such. Lack of this word implies that they have the capacity to release themselves, so in essence they are prisoners but in another way are not. All but one...just one...realizes this, sees that never he had been fettered and simply opts to leave. What could be more simple than that? The real fetters...those which are voluntary...are the images projected on the wall before those who are bound. They are so fascinated that how could anyone think of living otherwise? Note that in addition to their legs being fettered, 514a says their necks are such, like being locked in a stockade. That's as close to paralysis as you can get.

As for this paralysis, I take it as representing causality even though causality implies movement, sometimes in a rigorous fashion. Everyone in the cave is "caused" not so much involuntarily as one might think but willingly. What choice is there? Then we have that mysterious person who without further ado gets up and leaves the cave. Unfortunately there are no details which at first frustrates us. "Why" and "How?" we ask and get no response. The silence confronting us is deliberate and put there to spur us on to ask questions which only we can answer. We're powerless to describe how that man decided to do what he did. After all, he was fettered both by his legs and neck like everyone else.

After standing up and exiting the cave this man decides to return and free his fellows. While that's getting beyond the scope of the intent of this article, let's say we meet him outside the cave just before he returns. Our interest isn't why he goes back (a savior or a glutton for punishment?). That's secondary. We're more interested in how he and he alone manages to pull off his release. If we understood that, we'd understand the second half, if we may put it that way. Chances are he wouldn't know which may sound evasive, avoiding the question, but this turns out to be 100% true. We do know that his former shackle-mates would attempt to kill him (516e). Jealousy is bound to be a large part of this resistance. Nevertheless, that doesn't deter him, for he has a unique trick up his sleeve to be described shortly.

We've come to realize that any attempt to force a release from causality is to no avail. It'd be the equivalent of using causality to get free of causality. Recognition of this simple fact alone is the key. Our former prisoner knows full well that he's risking his life by walking out of the cave, but if we could ask him if this bothered him, he'd admit it freely. While there certainly is fear and threat of retaliation from his fellow shackle-mates, sneaking by the makers of wonders is far riskier. They don't want anyone challenging their nice little set-up for which they've worked so hard to establish. The best strategy is to take advantage of their attention in projecting images against the cave wall, avoiding any momentary pause in their activity and then slip out. His knows that his real life and that of the others is situated somewhere else...outside the cave...even if his fellows never emerge from the cave. Actually he's not intent on freeing anybody. That sounds selfish but is tantamount and requires a closer look.

Instead of engaging in any dialogue, our former prisoner walks over to his former seat and sits down. Everyone has noticed his empty place which has stood out in his absence as a sore thumb. However, those in the cave were indirectly aware of it simply because their necks were fettered which prevented them from turning sideways. Never before has anyone gotten up and left, so it was bound to create quite a stir. To counter it, the makers of wonders increased the frequency of images on the cave wall but to no avail. The more stuff they cranked out, the less effective.

In the meantime, once the former prisoner took his seat without uttering a word, he faced the cave wall and watched the same old images projected on the wall. Instead of being captivated by them he allows his awareness simply to be diffused...to wander every which-way and that...without fixing it upon anything. Obviously this stands out like a sore thumb to the makers of wonders. It goes exactly against what they are doing to the prisoners. Shortly afterwards this inevitably extends to the prisoners themselves. Something new had been introduced which is destined to change their lives forever. When they realize that they don't have to have their attention fixed on the images projected onto the cave wall, automatically their chains fall off. The sound of liberation quickly fills the cave. The best hope now is to muster these newly released prisoners to go and in turn slap fetter on their captors, the makes of wonders, giving them a taste of their own medicine.

The Big Question is what happens next? Presumably there is life after being in the cave. At this point I interject something outside this line of thought...fully aware of the shift...but one that has personal significance. It's recounted in a verse from Psalm Twenty-Seven (vs.4). The verse has to be unfolded in five sections in order to grasp the richness it contains:

One thing I ask from the Lord  
This I will seek  
That I dwell in the house of the Lord all days of my life  
To perceive with inner vision in the pleasantness of the Lord  
And to inquire

Note the sequence of verbs: *sha'al* → *baqash* → *yashav* → *chazah* → *baqar* (ask → seek → dwell → perceive → inquire).

Because the element of transcendence is involved, we could put the words of this psalm verse or something like it in the heart of the man before his departure from the cave. He did *sha'al* or ask one thing...just one...from the Lord. That which comes from *sha'al* is *baqash* or to seek, also as to strive after which comes *yashav* or to dwell in the sense of taking up permanent residence. This has a particular place, the house of the Lord and a particular length of time, the psalmist's entire life. Once located there—and let's say this can be the

full light of day outside the cave—the second part, if you will, of the *sha'al/baqash* kicks in. That consists of the following two: 1) *chazah* or to see in the sense of behold, of taking it all in, the divine pleasantness or *noham* which connotes loveliness as well as delight. 2) *Baqar* or to inquire or search as in breaking up the ground to find something.

All in all life-outside-the-cave or life-within-the-temple can't be described as a process to which we work (and that involves labor) but as something that happens at once, no causality being involved. Note too that the cave represents that which is inside the earth or is hidden. The same applies to the temple but space and time here is more extensive than outside it. Perhaps that's why the temple as image of the cosmos is considered more spacious than the what lays outside it.

So how do we comport ourselves after reading this or better, after having seen a plan laid out for us to follow? It sounds great. However, there's the issue of incompleteness which remains with us to the very end. All what was said here and in documents far more eloquent than mine are simply pointers. The real issue is to practice, a summons which become starker the more we grow in awareness of what's involved.

We continue as usual or as Jesus said with regard to those in Noah's day before the flood, "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" [Mt 24.38]. This verse can represent life-within-the-cave, going along absorbed with phantoms projected on the way. Compare with the ark being fashioned, an anti-cave if you will destined to save life. The other option...the only one as it turns out...is what could be called point-to-point living. That means paying as full attention we can muster with regard to the nitty-gritty details of daily life. How boring at first glance. Despite any misgivings about this approach, it's guaranteed to work.

Focus upon the physicality of daily life has a way of keeping us in that diffused awareness which is so slippery yet at the heart of living the best possible way. No doubt Socrates would approve or better, his *daimon*. The best part of it is that we remain relaxed, freed up from that tension so well described by the fetters around the legs and necks of the prisoners in the cave. Because this

image is so vivid and accessible to all, in the end it's a mystery as to why just one prisoner among a myriad of them gets up and walks out of the cave. That's all he does. Walks. Such is how the cave is dissolved and the others are set free...hopefully including those "makers of wonders" responsible for keeping us bound.

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