

# **Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision**

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# Light as a Metaphor for Truth

## At the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation

Hans Blumenberg

If indications are not misleading, a revival of philosophical research into the history of concepts is imminent. Several factors are behind this trend, including a recognition of the futility of the conceptual neoproduction that has erupted during the last decades, increasing embarrassment about the difficulties of mutual understanding in philosophy, and paradigmatic accomplishments in theology with regard to research on concepts.

If this long-neglected work is profitably to be taken up again, one will, above all, have to revise the scope of the term *philosophical concept*, as compared with earlier approaches. Because of the peculiarity and history of philosophical statements, *terminology* has a much broader meaning here than in other disciplines, which have either drawn their concepts from philosophy itself or been able to construct their own conceptual apparatus by establishing unambiguous definitions. In constantly having to confront the unconceptualized and the preconceptualized, philosophy encounters the means of articulation found in this nonconceptualizing and preconceptualizing, adopts them, and develops them further in separation from their origin. The notion that the philosophical logos has "overcome" prephilosophical mythos has narrowed our view of the scope of philosophical terminology; besides concepts in the strict sense, which are offset by definition and fulfilled intuition [*Anschauung*],<sup>1</sup> there is a broad range of mythical transformations, bordering on metaphysical conjectures, which find expression in a metaphysics with diverse forms.

This preliminary stage of a concept is, in its "aggregate state," more

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vivid, more sensitive to the ineffable, and less dominated by fixed traditional forms. Often, what could not find a medium within the rigid architectonics of systems found expression here. Careful research in this area should be able to unearth a wealth of resources. The hope is that the present study of metaphors of light and their accompanying milieu will contribute, in both content and method, to a philosophical "metaphorology."<sup>2</sup>

In their expressive power and subtle capacity to change, metaphors of light are incomparable. From its beginnings, the history of metaphysics has made use of these characteristics in order to give an appropriate reference to its ultimate subject matter, which can no longer be grasped in material terms. Again and again, this cipher has been used in attempting to show that there is more to the concept of Being [*des Seins*] than an empty abstraction which one could extract from beings [*dem Seienden*] as their most general real predicate.<sup>3</sup> The relation of unity to plurality, of the absolute to the conditional, of origin to descent—all found a "model" of sorts here.

Light can be a directed beam, a guiding beacon in the dark, an advancing dethronement of darkness [*Finsternis*],<sup>4</sup> but also a dazzling superabundance, as well as an indefinite, omnipresent brightness containing all: the 'letting-appear' that does not itself appear, the inaccessible accessibility of things. Light and darkness can represent the absolute metaphysical counterforces that exclude each other and yet bring the world-constellation into existence. Or, light is the absolute power of Being, which reveals the paltriness [*Nichtigkeit*] of the dark, which can no longer exist once light has come into existence. Light is intrusive; in its abundance, it creates the overwhelming, conspicuous clarity with which the true "comes forth"; it forcibly acquires the irrevocability of Spirit's consent. Light remains what it is while letting the infinite participate in it; it is consumption without loss. Light produces space, distance, orientation, calm contemplation; it is the gift that makes no demands, the illumination capable of conquering without force.

The intent here is not to fill in the details of this short and doubtless fully incomplete outline of the expressive potential of metaphors of light, but rather to show the way in which transformations of the basic metaphor indicate changes in world-understanding and self-understanding. What we call "history" in a fundamental sense is of course always in conflict with the essential inertia of the materials providing the evidence in which a basic change in the conception of reality not only can become manifest but can actually, for the first time, achieve articulation. Here, however, it is precisely traditional philosophical terminology, as it populates indices and specialist dictionaries, that is capable of only the slowest shifts of meaning. In the history of ideas, settled definitions that emerge

from the reshuffling of concepts tend to be genuinely "slow on the uptake," just as, in philosophy, by the time a "system" comes together, the underlying substructure is usually already in motion again. These conditions explain the significance of immature, groping, tentative modes of expression, among which metaphors of light have a privileged position. Outstanding achievements have already been made in research on individual periods,<sup>5</sup> but only a more comprehensive periodization can make apparent the real "achievement" of these metaphors.

In all likelihood, the concept of light originally belonged to a dualistic conception of the world, as the second part of Parmenides poem [*The Way of Opinion*]<sup>6</sup> documents for us (and for the Pythagorians, according to Aristotle's report).<sup>7</sup> Light and darkness are, like fire and earth, fundamental primordial principles. Their enmity leads to the awareness that Being is nothing assured, that truth is nothing self-evident. But the fact that Parmenides situates this dualism in the *second* part of the poem already points toward its being overcome; it belongs to the sphere of *doxa*. At the beginning of the poem, the path to the truth leads *eis phaos*.<sup>8</sup> In the center of his work, Parmenides uproots the dualism of Being and not-Being, truth and appearance, light and darkness: Being does not exist because it is not not-Being (since not-Being would then be *necessary* for its Being),<sup>9</sup> and light is not *essentially* the opposite of darkness; rather, in the essence of light, darkness is destroyed and overcome. Thus, Plato was not the first to release the concepts of Being, truth, and light from a dualistic reliance on their opposite. Plato was, however, the first to demonstrate, by means of metaphors of light, that this splitting-in-two implies what can be termed the *naturalness* of the connection between Being and truth.

What this means is that Being *is*, as "nature," *of its own accord* (not in virtue of its opposite), and that, in exactly the same way, it is true, i.e., it is true of its own accord and not in virtue of a subsequent process of thought discovered in a situation of un-truth. Truth is light upon Being itself, Being as light, i.e., Being as the *self-presentation* of beings. That is why cognition in its highest form bursts out of the inactive, calm contemplation of *theōria*. That is why, in Platonic *anamnēsis*, the truth that has already been seen penetrates, again and again, into that which is forgetful of its origin. That is why, in the *Republic*'s allegory of the cave, an original situation is constructed with a perfectly artificial and forcible screening-off of "natural" light, a situation that no longer has anything dualistic about it and which only later must be bent back into a dualistic schema. The drama of truth is not a cosmic *agon* between light and darkness but rather only a process of man's withdrawing himself or handing himself over—a matter, thus, of *paideia*.<sup>10</sup> Truth is not only present, it is insistent.

In the Platonic allegory of the cave, it is said of the Idea of the Good—which figures there as the sun that puts everything in the light of Being—that (as the origin of knowability, Being, and essence) it is not itself a being, but rather something that stands out, in virtue of its dignity and strength, above beings.<sup>11</sup> This statement is not at all metaphysically laden: that which gives everything else visibility and 'objecthood' cannot, in the same way, itself have the character of an object. Light is only seen in what it lets become visible. The "naturalness" of light consists precisely in this, that it only "dawns," in its own sense, with the visibility of things, and thus is itself not of the same nature as that which it evokes. But already in Plato, this *difference* is tinged with *transcendence*; the *metaphorics* of light already has a *metaphysics* of light implicit in it. A way of expressing the naturalness of truth turns into its opposite: truth becomes "localized" in transcendency.

Despite an abundance of gods of nature, Greek religion did not have a deity of light,<sup>12</sup> precisely because light was too comprehensive to be grasped: it is the *wherein* of nature, not its component part, "daylight as the brightness in which one moves, in which the world articulates itself, in which it becomes surveyable and understandable, in which the distinction between here and there, between this and that, is possible . . . and which, at the same time, thereby makes existence [*Dasein*] understandable to itself."<sup>13</sup> Spirit and material things are equally in this brightness. "Illumination" is not an inner as opposed to an outer occurrence; rather, ontic and ontological elucidation [*Erhellung*] are identical. There is no *mysticism* of light in Plato; light is not a peculiar, special dimension of experience.<sup>14</sup> Aristotle formulated the same point in more sober terms when he said that that which sees becomes colored itself, so to speak, and that the reality of the perceived and the reality of the perceiving are identical.<sup>15</sup>

Therein lies the radical difference between light and darkness: darkness is unable to bring about this identity; it is ontically and ontologically impotent. From this perspective, it is easy to grasp the full difference that exists with regard to the meaning of "light" and "darkness" in the Neoplatonism of late antiquity. There, they become antagonistic forces that dispute with each other over the soul; they exercise, seize, and "incorporate" force.

Thus, in order to see what precisely "light" meant at the time, one must pay attention to how "the dark" is to be understood as well. There is an autonomous, "romantic" darkness [*Dunkelheit*] of the dark, and there is a darkness [*Dunkel*] that lies under the light and in the light. Corresponding to the perspective of classical Greek philosophy developed here, the following can be said of Greek tragedy: "Classical tragedy indeed shows the dark underground of human existence, but not as

something that is to be sensed dimly. On the contrary, it elucidates this dark underground with a ruthlessly bright light.”<sup>16</sup>

The transcendency of light implied in the Platonic allegory of the sun becomes dominant in Hellenistic thought. The brightness that fills the cosmos like a medium is withdrawn, concentrated, objectified as a metaphysical pole. Radiance comes to mean a decline, a loss of darkness [*Dunkels*]; and consumption comes to signify loss. The “unnatural” protection of the cave is extended to the cavernous nature of the entire cosmos, which seizes light, swallows it, and exhausts it. The previously translucent surfaces of the spheres thicken into cave walls. Light, now otherworldly and pure, does not allow for theoretical lingering in joyful contemplation; it demands extraordinary, ecstatic attention, in which fulfilling contact and repellent dazzling<sup>17</sup> become one. Few are equal to this task. The deadly light must be made available to mortals in the more cautious dosages of the *phōtismos* of mysteries. Thus, light becomes a metaphor for “salvation,” for immortality.

The cosmic *flight of light* is the precondition for the concept of “revelation,” which announces a return of light as an eschatological event and bids man prepare himself for it. By holding the transcendent in reserve, light demands a purer condition of humanity than now happens to be the case.<sup>18</sup> It is no longer being *in* the light and seeing that offers man fulfillment; instead, what drives him on is the idea of looking *into* the light itself and letting everything else that is visible be extinguished. Light’s flight from the world results in man’s urge to enter the light. This leads directly to the Neoplatonism of late antiquity and to gnosis. Here, the classical conception of *theōria* has lost its footing: Being is no longer the self-presentation of beings; it has become something “formless that cannot be glimpsed”;<sup>19</sup> it does not open eyes but shuts them. Absolute light and absolute darkness collapse into each other. Consistent with this, the areopagite of all mysticism will give the phrase *theion skotos* its initial coining.

Until now, this particular dimension (the ‘de-lumination’ of the world) has been given more attention than the unanimity of other dimensions of Hellenistic and late Classical thought. What has been overlooked above all is that skepticism, too, represents a reply to the cosmic flight of light. Indeed, it is not at all an elementary “accident” (of the school) that skepticism breaks out in the middle of the Platonic Academy. Here too, a position is being taken with regard to the fundamental ontological event of light’s transcendency, and it is an attitude of flight, of shutting out the world, of rejecting *theōria* for *epochē*. One needs only to remind oneself that Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, has to experience the way in which turning toward reality itself dazzles the eye, and that the conclusion he

draws from this is to escape to *logoi* and to observe in them the truth of beings.<sup>20</sup> Vision wants to defend itself from this dazzling immediacy; it does not want to look into the sun and is content with the stand-in immediacy of *logos*.

Skepticism can situate itself in this tradition; it simply takes the next step, following the proven failure of *logos* in the dispute among the schools. It does not concern itself with the experience of light and dark at all. But before this step can be taken, the classical connection between *eudaimonia* and *theōria* had to be broken. A completely happy existence is presupposed for man as an *inner* possibility. But in skepticism, this interior is peculiarly *empty*; it is the sheer difference that remains after the subtraction of any connection to the world. *That* something remains in *epochē*, and *what* it could be never came into question for skepticism; like Epicureanism, it took for granted the assumption that happiness was guaranteed simply by protection against unhappiness, confusion, and pain. The skeptic is the negative version of the mystic: he too closes his eyes, not against the dazzling abundance of absolute light, but against the questioning and confusing urgency of *obscuritas rerum*. In shutting off the *outer* dark, however, the *inner* light has still not yet been won. This is the point on which the Stoics brought their moral absolutism to bear. Consistent with this, they sought a *positive* definition of the concept of happiness and connected it with the inner self-evidence of ethical life.

This engagement of the various Hellenistic schools of thought with one another on the basis of their mutual ontological implication becomes clear in Cicero. He coined the concept of “natural light” for the tradition.<sup>21</sup> And he linked the metaphor of light with inner moral self-evidence. For Cicero, light is no longer the universal brilliance in which all beings are found equally; rather, a sort of anthropocentric *economy* is attached to light. Human life finds itself in a clearing [*Lichtung*] appropriate to its necessities. In the theoretical sphere, the gleam of probability, to which the “naturalness” of truth is reduced, “suffices.” In the practice of methodically playing theses off each other, as the Academic skeptics engaged in it, *probabile* “shines” forth.<sup>22</sup> Wanting to go further is *arrogantia*, upon which the teleological economy of truth does not look highly. Outside the clearing that is economically appropriate to man, the dark is given its due. Among the *vitia* that violate the norm of *sapientia*, he mentions not only carelessness in giving approval, but also an orientation toward *res obscurae* and *non necessariae*.<sup>23</sup>

This sort of exclusion would have been unthinkable earlier, given the ontological assumptions of classical ancient philosophy. The natural striving for knowledge, as Aristotle formulates it at the beginning of the *Metaphysics*, moves in a sphere of *universal* theoretical brightness and visi-

bility, and *theōria* represents the comprehension (via imaginative reenactment) of an absolutely divine act. Cicero sees knowledge in the context of human specificity and neediness; theoretical activity comes to have moral premises. Under the title of *curiositas*, the Middle Ages will continue this trial in terms of theoretical hubris.<sup>24</sup>

For Cicero, it is in accordance with practical principles that light and dark are divided in the theoretical domain. The claim upon beings that is open to man is not primarily *scire* but *utii*.<sup>25</sup> Thus, light's center of intensity must lie in the principles of human action; only in these *res necessariae* are full light and compelling self-evidence assured. Plato's self-luminous *agathon*, which gives light to everything else, is not extended into transcendency but rather internalized in the most intimate immanence of moral consciousness—which *also* means, however, that it is theoretically hidden. Cicero accepts the Stoic principle that if one has any doubt whatsoever as to the rightness or wrongness of an act, one should refrain from performing it at all.<sup>26</sup> But the acceptance of this presupposition lands him in an unnoticed contradiction with his own Platonic “residuum of light.” For can there be any doubt about right or wrong at all if what is stated in the next sentence is true? *Aequitas lucet ipsa per se, dubitatio cogitationem significat iniuriae.* If the good presents itself as self-luminous, then doubt alone is enough to indicate that a wrong is being considered. The good is so authentically in-the-light that it rules out doubt.<sup>27</sup> Corresponding to the internalization of pure light are the inward forms of its obscuration by the passions.<sup>28</sup> But, at the same time, internalized light also pushes its way out again: Cicero treats *gloria* as the “emanation” of *virtus* that has been taken up and confirmed by the *communitas*; virtue shines forth and commands the respect of the human community.<sup>29</sup> Moral quality is still related to aesthetic quality and, at its highest level, can turn into it—a Platonic inheritance!

#### EXCURSUS: THE CAVE

Darkness, as the power dualistically opposed to light, as a vanquished emptiness, as the natural background zone of the economic clearing of the humanly knowable, as a dazzling envelope of pure and absolute light—these are the correlates of the metaphysics of light considered thus far. In this field of signification, metaphors of the cave gain a special position. The cave is not simply the world opposed to light in the way that darkness is the “natural” opposite of brightness. The world of the cave is an “artificial,” indeed perfectly violent underworld, relative to the sphere of natural light and natural dark: a region of screening-off and forgetting, a surrogate and derivative of Being. It is appropriate to address met-

aphors of the cave at this point, since it is Cicero who, in his discussion of a cave allegory found in an early Aristotelian dialogue, exemplifies most pronouncedly the just-mentioned features of cave metaphors.<sup>30</sup>

In this connection, the Stoic Balbus attempts to show that the *admirabilitas* of the world have paled for us as a result of our becoming accustomed to them, and that people who had always lived under the earth would, upon surfacing and beholding the cosmos, instantly believe in the existence and effectiveness of gods. The most important difference from the allegory of the cave in Book 7 of Plato's *Republic* is that, in Cicero, the situation in the cave is merely a thought experiment for hypothetically reducing the factor of being accustomed. The normal situation (*haec loca, quae nos incolimus*) is outside the cave, within sight of the cosmos in a constant and thus experientially flattened way. In Plato, the space outside the cave is the extraordinary residing place of the wise, whereas the situation in the cave represents our “normal” condition; the people in the cave are precisely not *atopoi*, as Glaucon asserts, but rather *homoioi hēmin*, as Socrates declares in rebuke. Already, in Plato, the artificiality of the cave world of objects is implied: the shadows that appear on the cave wall are generated by artificial equipment, artistic forms, and all sorts of productions by human hands.

Nonetheless, the Platonic cave is impoverished compared to that of Cicero. There, the emphasis is on brilliance and splendor, in order to prevent the slightest feeling of dissatisfaction or malcontent. Everything is there, *quibus abundant ii, qui beati putantur*. Cicero's cave world is one of “urban” luxury, a dazzlingly appointed sphere of culture, which captivates in virtue of its sheer attractiveness. In the Platonic cave, by contrast, man is chained and is in a situation of constraint which, although it is presupposed, virtually forces the question—which is not stressed until Neoplatonism—of what caused this. For Cicero, it is crucial that the cave world seem able to “compete” with the upper world, since the ascent out of this sphere is conceived as a matter of pure coincidence and is only considered in terms of the surprise that it effects.

In Plato, by contrast, the release from the chains, the painful reorientation, and the climb up the steps of disillusionment make up the crucial notion of *paideia*, which is meant to create an awareness, in retrospect, of the cave world as a sphere in which Being and truth were lacking. In Cicero, in spite of all the brilliance with which the actual cosmos is portrayed, the realm of artificial light has nothing horrifying about it. Cicero has become familiar with the economy of the dark. One might almost say that he might have had a certain affinity for his conception of the cave, in which nature has been turned completely into *res obscura* and all certainty continues to be allocated to the *inner* light.

The expressive power of Cicero's cave metaphor lies precisely in the fact that the cave has lost its (*sit venia verbo*) "existential seriousness"; it has become a hypothesis, a mental exercise. The contrasting background of *obscuritas rerum*, along with the internalization of *lumen naturae* corresponding to it, have undermined the assumptions behind the image of the cave.<sup>31</sup> From here on, radical reinterpretations of "cave" become possible. The entire cosmos had been equated with a cave once before by the pre-Socratics;<sup>32</sup> but it is Neoplatonism that, for the first time, really makes something of this identity.

Partly as a result of vivid allegorical readings of Homer, the grotto of the nymphs in the *Odyssey* gets cosmologically extended in meaning, as in the *De antro nympharum* of Plotinus's student Porphyry, where cosmos and cave exist for each other. The one is the *symbolon* of the other, and man is the *tertium*, who is prevented by temptation and gentle force from reaching his cave-transcending destiny. Here, the cave, identified with the cosmos, issues in a scenario of the incarnation characteristic of Eastern Christian symbolism: Christ is born in a cave instead of a stable, and Justinian insists that the cave cult of Mithras is a diabolical usurpation of this symbolic locus.<sup>33</sup> The topos of "the light in the cave" has become possible only as a result of this constellation.<sup>34</sup> The paideutic path no longer leads out of the cave; the gaze is directed into the dark, because in it the unbelievable—that light could appear *here*—has become believable. The Platonic opposition of the cave fire to the sun of the Good has been eliminated: the light in the cave is of one essence with its origin; it is its steward and guarantor, and not a deceitful source of shadows. The inside of the cave has been reassessed positively.

As individualized caves, the small room and the monastic cell become, in the Middle Ages, places where the truth is openly present, an indication that now everything can be expected *from within*. *Intra in cubiculum mentis tuae, exclude omnia praeter Deum*<sup>35</sup> is a new motto that generates caves and chambers in which one can *wait* for the light, as the belief in *grace* implies. But this conception immediately turns into a metaphor for the "inner space of self-possession," as Montaigne understands "cave" (*ta-nière*).<sup>36</sup> The cave remains in use as a contrasting metaphor vis-à-vis the new and emergent. Francis Bacon formulates the awkwardness of the individual within its subjective world under the title *idola specus*;<sup>37</sup> disposition, education, and experience represent each person's own particular cave, which breaks and weakens the "natural light" for each. The "cave" denotes the facticity of the subject, the world of its own in which the subject always already finds itself. Significantly, Bacon renders *idia phronēsis*, the phrase used by Heraclitus, to whom he refers by name, as "own little world." And leaving the cave is now no longer the paideutic path of the

wise individual into full light, but rather a *method*, a "technique" for the production of a "greater common world" for all.

Leaving the cave becomes a metaphor within the philosophy of history; it denotes a *new epoch* of humanity. This is how Descartes used the metaphor. He compares the Scholastics' fight against the new science to the ways of "a blind man, who, to fight without a handicap against someone who is sighted, makes his opponent go into the depths of a very dark cave"; in publishing his method, by contrast, he "would be doing almost the same as if [he] were to open some windows and make some light of day enter into that cave where they have descended to fight."<sup>38</sup> This is a significant new image in place of the paideutic path out of the cave, for here the space itself is transformed. It does something not only to man but to *the world*, something that no longer depends on the individual's education and will. This is not, however, a momentary act, but rather a historically continuous path of dis-covering the truth, *qui ne se découvre que peu à peu*. The window metaphor takes this into account with its implication of light gradually gaining access. Recall the significance of the closed, medieval chamber in Descartes's portrayal of the turning point in his thinking: "I remained for a whole day by myself in a small stove-heated room."<sup>39</sup> Here the relation of the room to the world is still completely medieval: the "direction" is from the outside to the inside.

Nicholas of Cusa illustrated this with the image of a cosmographer (*Compendium 8*). In order to produce a map of the world, the cosmographer first collected all the empirical data, *clauditque portas et ad conditorem mundi internum transfert intuitum . . .* This internal 'ground' of the world is the immediate relationship between man's mind and God's, the *signum conditoris, in quo vis creativa . . . relucet*. In the medieval chamber's screening-off of the world, the creative potency of man lights up for the first time. Only through asceticism does man take hold of the world.

From this point on, the cave becomes the accepted metaphor in the philosophy of history for the point from which "progress" must begin. The problems of human socialization are exemplified by the hypothetical situation of leaving the primordial cave (where, quite fittingly, the relics of primordial man are also sought and found). The topos of the history-initiating departure from the cave was already given an initial form in antiquity. In Vitruvius, for example, it is the flames of a forest fire that lure people out of the cave and socialize them for the first time;<sup>40</sup> in Cicero, it is rhetoric that manages to "convince" them to come out of an isolated cave existence and enter into community.<sup>41</sup>

This ambiguity between an automatic instinctual process and a primordial intellectual accomplishment runs through the entire history of the motif of leaving the cave. The return to the cave, by contrast, is a

matter of deviant curiosity, as in Don Quixote's descent into a cave (*Don Quixote de la Mancha*, vol. 2, chaps. 22 and 23) or in the remarkable imitation of Cicero's allegory of the cave in Jean Paul,<sup>42</sup> where the hero, Gustav, in accordance with a condition of his parents' marriage contract, spends the first eight years of his life underground "for heaven" (in the Stoic sense!), with the paideutic idea of keeping the child from "being hardened to both the beauty of nature and the distortions of humans"; and it is expressly confirmed later that the plan worked, for "the beauty of nature was the only thing he could talk about enthusiastically with other (viz. female) beauties;—and he could condense, in the most lively way, all the world's charms into one morning, when he described his entrance up out of earth into the great hall of the world."<sup>43</sup> But the return to the cave, whence humanity stepped forth into its "progress," can also signify a distancing from this progress: the cave thus becomes a locus of aristocratic seclusion, of withdrawal from the lowly spheres of the commonly human, of the desire for a reorientation of movement in history. Zarathustra's cave is of this type. [End of excursus.]

Returning to the point where this digression began, we can say that the transcendency of light, on the one hand, and its internalization on the other, characterize the transition from the metaphorical to the metaphysical usage of the notion. Both correlates of this development are linked by a crucially new idea: light acquires a *history*.

The inner light of the mind [*Geist*] is descended from transcendent light: not, however, by means of "illumination" but by means of "dispersal"; not because of a message but due to an "accident" of theft, of illegitimate cosmic implication. The drama of the diaspora and reunification of absolute light is the fundamental conception of gnosis. Light no longer shines into the world in order to wake it into Being; instead, it gets lost in an alien and enemy sphere; it must be liberated and led back to its origin. The paideutic history of *man*, who comes out of the dark into the light, has been transformed into a history of *light*, which loses itself to the dark and returns to itself. Man is only a "vehicle" for this history, which is not a human but a cosmic drama. With this, the concept of "world" lands in an irresolvable ambiguity: without the descent [*Herabkunft*] of divine light, there would be no visibly formed cosmos, no origin of the material world; at the same time, however, this creation of the world represents the metaphysical ruin of pure light, the contamination and distortion of the absolute.

Plotinus, too, in his discussion of the origin of *kakon*, describes the emergence of the cosmos and the origin of evil *at the same time*.<sup>44</sup> For Plotinus, the pure light of the Good and the pure dark of matter are

each *mē on*. The drama of intermingling, from which *to on* emerges, is played out between these two poles; from the perspective of this origin, what is [*das Seiende*] has a negative value. This negativity of what is corresponds to that of *logos*. Whereas Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, sought refuge in *logoi*, now the mind must be awakened from its state of laboring under *logoi* and redirected to the ineffable and nonconceptual contemplation of pure light.<sup>45</sup> Likenesses no longer refer back to the original, as in Plato, but rather deceitfully seduce one away from it; only those who look, know.<sup>46</sup> There is only one "object" of true knowledge: light itself and itself *an sich*. *Descent is, by itself, decline*. Therein lies an irrevocable immanent conclusion of the metaphysics of light: light, as the Good, represents self-squandering and self-emanation; precisely thereby, however, light also represents distancing from itself, loss of self, and self-humiliation. This will be the main difficulty in the Christian reception of the metaphysics of light: *kakon* cannot emerge as a result of God's self-emanating, luminous essence. This is the central problem in Augustine's metaphysics, which he sets out to solve in his argument with Manichean gnosis. The cosmos, as the God's "creation," can no longer represent light's mésalliance.

The starting point for the *Christian reception* of the metaphysics and metaphysics of light is the peculiar separation that the biblical report of Creation makes between the origin of "light" (on the first day) and that of "lights" (on the fourth day). This provided an easy entrance, which could hardly be missed, for the idea of a light that cannot be localized in the cosmos and that precedes all beings. The Christian tradition's extremely rich "language of light" took its point of departure from this approach.

We are not concerned here with an inventory; instead, our attention is directed, once more, to transformations of meaning occurring in the transition to and reception of this language of light. Central themes of this transformation can already be found in Genesis: the light of the first day represents *created* light. It has its source in a divine command; its opposition to darkness is not a primordial dualism but is based on God's positing and dividing. God Himself is beyond this opposition and has it at His disposal. This requires a reversal of the initial, dualistic cast that late antiquity gave to metaphors of light.

Far more important, however, is the unavoidable collision that occurs between the implications of that conception of light, on the one hand, and the fundamental assertion of the *willful* positing of beings on the other. If the connection between phenomenal beings and the 'ground' of Being is understood in terms of the "model" of light, then the implication of a "natural" overflowing of light onto the lit, of the emanative

transformation of “ground” into “grounded” cannot be ruled out. This is indeed what metaphors of light have a tendency, immanently, to assert: that the entirety of a “ground” squanders and expresses itself, yet without diminishing. Implicit in metaphors of light is, further, the idea that they presuppose, if not a dualistic counterprinciple, then certainly a reflecting and passive underlying “ground”: the substratum entailed by the classical concept of *hulē*, which appears in the light. This is where differences emerge between the language that has been handed down and what it now has to say.

With his attempt to transform biblical statements into Greek metaphysics, the Alexandrian Jew Philo had already decided how the image of light would be received. In his allegorical reading of Genesis, *De opificio mundi*, Philo succumbs almost completely to his “guiding image” of light. Just as he puts the light of the first day and the lights of the fourth day in the *genetic* context of aesthetic light emerging out of noetic light, he understands *noēton phōs* as “emission” rather than “creation.”<sup>47</sup> The introduction of the concept of will was not able to stave off the “naturalism” of this image, because the concept of will is synonymous, for Philo, with that of the Platonic Ideas, which the Academic Antiochus had already dynamized.<sup>48</sup> Attempts have repeatedly been made since then to apply metaphors of light to an effective form of divine will, viewed as “emanation.”<sup>49</sup> There is, however, an insurmountable heterogeneity here between metaphysical fact and metaphorical category. In Philo, the accent is suddenly shifted, in the Platonic sense: light is not the worldly first-created, but is rather the otherworldly creator; as Creator, God is *phōs*,<sup>50</sup> is Himself *noētos hēlios*,<sup>51</sup> the original source of the light of Being.<sup>52</sup> This “naturalization” of the biblical idea of creation remains the essential indication of how metaphors of light are used until the High Scholastic Middle Ages.

The association of metaphors of light with Gnostic dualism slowed their Christian reception but did not prevent it. By developing a concept of freedom, and by strictly formulating the *ex nihilo* of creation thinking, Augustine undermined dualism and prepared the way for the final Christian legitimization of *illuminatio*. Never before and never since has the language of light been handled in such a subtle and richly nuanced way. The predominantly epistemological interest in *illuminatio* has not yet been able to generate a suitably encompassing study; for that reason, we will neglect this (epistemological) dimension here, in order to draw attention to what has usually been neglected. Most important is the way in which Augustine distances himself from the Gnostic usage of metaphors of light. He accuses the Manicheans of not distinguishing *inter lucem quod est ipse Deus* from *lucem quam fecit Deus*. God is not simply light; He is *lucifa lux*.<sup>53</sup>

Augustine renounces the idea of the emanative homogeneity of the light of Being (from absolute light to noetic light to aesthetic light), and thereby renounces the idea of a magnificently unified conception as well. He calls for metaphysical divisions: as between uncreated and created, so too between light *qua cernimus* and light *qua intelligimus*.<sup>54</sup> In our terminology, he traces the metaphysics of light back to the metaphorics of light! He argues with rhetorical vehemence against the Manichean *fabella* of light’s primordial struggle with darkness, against the entire dramatic mythology of defeat, consumption, and degradation by darkness and light’s liberation, purification, and elevation—all with the help of man.<sup>55</sup> Not only is Augustine’s God beyond the reach of such an attempt to grasp Him, but light, which God gives to humans, is not *tale lumen, quod ab aliquo possit obtenebrari*.<sup>56</sup> This is not only a matter of the incontestability of His saving Will but also of the illuminative underpinnings of the truth that is accessible to man. Man himself cannot be light: *Lumen tibi esse non potes; non potes, non potes*.<sup>57</sup> Man is not light [*Licht*] but only a light [*Leuchte*] that has been lit by light: *Lucerna et accendi potest, et extingui potest; lumen verum accendere potest, extingui non potest*. This talk of *lumen illuminatum* and of *participando illuminari* is meant not only to set out a strict distinction of *Being* but also to signify the absolute character of the *truth* available to man.<sup>58</sup>

Augustine made this discovery against the background of Academic skepticism. In contrast to the Neoplatonists’ ecstatic concept of truth, in which the highest level of the disclosure of truth is seeing-into-the-light, Augustine returns to the classical form of the metaphor of seeing-in-the-light: we can recognize the light only by the certainty that it grants us in elucidated beings.<sup>59</sup> Light is always, so to speak, “behind us,” and that is true precisely for *lux interior*, which is responsible for things being laid plain to us—*qua res quaeque manifesta est*.<sup>60</sup> In itself, this hiddenness of revealing light is indicated, in the same place, by the paradoxical and (in spite of being analogous to Neoplatonic formulations) completely autochthonous talk of *insensibilieas tenebrae huius lucis*. Notwithstanding the oft-desired terminological harmonization with Plotinus—e.g., in the case of *attigere* and *amplecti*—the sheer inwardness of *illuminatio* rules out an interpretation in terms of ecstasy.<sup>61</sup> In Augustine, the “locus” of *illuminatio* is the “depths” of the soul, especially *memoria*’s “ground” of inwardness.<sup>62</sup> What the ecstatic act would have to have missed is precisely the “direction” from which *illuminatio* comes.

Instead, the paideutic moment associated with the metaphorics of light becomes prominent again: the crucial drama is not the history of light but human *conversio*. To put it in the language of Plato’s allegory of the cave, the accent is on turning away from the shadows, or more narrowly and precisely, on breaking the chains that forced the gaze toward

the shadows. Everything depends on something that, in Plato, the prisoners in the cave were not able to accomplish by themselves, although this is treated as incidental there and is given no importance in comparison with the path of *paideia*. At the start of the path of *paideia*, there is now an all-important condition, namely, the act of *gratia*, which can be grasped in the experience of *conversio*. Augustine's doctrine is a "metaphysics of conversion."<sup>63</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that Augustine's aversion to the implication of "flow" in the language of light represents an essential difference from the Neoplatonist metaphysics of light. He sets the emanantistic *fluere* in strict opposition to one of his favorite terms, the substantialist *manere: nihil est omne quod fluit... est autem aliquid, si manet, si constat, si semper tale est.*<sup>64</sup> The development of the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* implies a sharper outline of what is [*des Seienden*] than the Neoplatonic overflow of light onto the dark 'ground' of primordial matter; against the background of nothingness, the moment of keeping oneself in Being, of *custodire se velle* (as an intensification of the Stoics' *suum esse conservere*), establishes itself as a basic characterization of all that is [*alles Seienden*] (after *existentia* and *essentia*), for which Augustine reinvents the term *manentia*.<sup>65</sup>

The light of the Neoplatonists, which flows out in stages and which hypostatically multiplies and forms itself, is also the target of the Augustinian creation terminology, with its emphasis on the momentary totality of the creative act. This is evinced most succinctly in the *ictus condendi*, in the "push" that "grounds" Being, which expressly exceeds the "flow" of *gradibus attingere* and *gressibus pervenire*.<sup>66</sup> Augustine cannot accept the "naturalness" (in the sense of *natura non facit saltus*) implied by the metaphorics of light, as long as he holds onto the idea of the radical originating "leap" [Ur-*"sprung"*] of Being via the *mandavit* (viz. *Deus*) *et creata sunt*. In the medieval tradition, these boundaries of the metaphorics of light have all too often become blurred. The figurative as well as phonetic affinity between *lumen* and *flumen* comes to assert itself once again, in spite of Augustinian reservations.

#### EXCURSUS: THE EYE AND THE EAR

In the language of the metaphorics of light, the eye (as the *organ* associated with light) does not become explicitly significant until the correspondence between elucidation and vision has partly or even completely ceased to be obvious. Such a process (of ceasing to be a matter of course)

can mean a return either to a dazzling, extreme brightness which hurts the eye, blinds it, and forces it to shut itself, or to a dulling of the eye itself, due to everything from the impurity of those who see, to the willful and culpable shutting of the eye against what is, by nature, its to see.

In Plato's allegory of the cave, the relativity of the disruption of sight is seen in terms of the starting situations relative to different paths: both the one who comes out of the light into the darkness and the one who steps out of the dark into the light cannot see at first, because the organ cannot immediately make the transition.<sup>67</sup> Becoming accustomed to the light diminishes its dazzling effects. At the same time, however, it is also an essential source of deception about one's own standpoint *vis-à-vis* Being, since it functions ambivalently: after a while, one sees as well in the half-light of the cave as in daylight.

The absolutely dazzling, to which no one can ever become accustomed, first emerges in Neoplatonism. But here it comes to mean something positive: the coincidence of seeing and not-seeing found in the dazzling effect of pure light is the fundamental confirming experience of all mysticism, in which the presence of the absolute attests itself, in which all thinking and speaking is surpassed, and which represents the uniquely adequate way of encountering transcendency.<sup>68</sup>

At the same time, by way of painful presence, of the eye-penetrating violence of that which is seen, the sense of sight passes into a perception by the sense of touch, a "contact." The distance involved in vision is lost; in its place, the highest grade of evidence for the reality of the "object" comes to be that of the tactile faculty. With the loss of the distance and standpoint involved in sight, the one who previously had been "only" someone who saw has simultaneously become another; he is no longer this self and no longer himself; he *belongs* to the Other, which cannot be regarded purely theoretically. To want (and to be able) to do that, would be an illusion.<sup>69</sup> With this moment of nonvisual "belonging" [*Gehören*],<sup>70</sup> however, the language moves into another sensory realm: from seeing to hearing, from metaphors of light to those of the word, from the eye to the ear as the relevant organ. This is a transition that always bears on the possibility of *freedom* as well.

In addition to the meaning it has in the context of imperative dazzling, the shutting of the eyes can also represent the introduction of introversion, of inner contemplation, the free act of turning one's gaze inward. This is the characteristic attitude in Augustinian soliloquies, sustained by the emphasis on the inner *illuminatio* in contrast to the ecstatic encounter with the absolute. But Plotinus, too, was familiar with this screening-off of the gaze directed outward at the tempting and self-alienated world, which must be traversed, either into transcendency or into

inwardness, if one is not to succumb to it.<sup>71</sup> From this point on, the entire mystical tradition is situated in this ambiguity of shutting one's eyes.

Augustine gives the metaphor of shutting one's eyes yet another meaning: it is useless to open one's eyes in the darkness, but it is also useless to "be in the light" and to keep one's eyes shut.<sup>72</sup> The first image illustrates the situation of the "good heathen," the impotence of a subjective desire to see, in the absence of grace, the objective condition for vision. The second image illustrates the situation of the "bad Christian," who subjectively spoils the objectively given possibility of vision. This opposition could not have been articulated within the classical approach to metaphors of light, for it presupposes the involvement of the eye.

There is yet another, extreme form that this metaphor can take, one that can be asserted only after "darkness" [*Dunkelheit*] has gained a positive value, as in the Romantic concept of night and darkness [*Dunkelheit*]. Novalis will speak, in his first "Hymn," of the "infinite eye, which opens the night to us." Here, the light of the diurnal world signifies limitation and unfreedom through its association with the finitude of a gaze that is bound to and determined by material things, whereas the dark of the night signifies the diminishment of material determination, which makes it possible for the horizonless entirety of Being to be affectively present as a unity.

For Greek thought, all certainty was based on visibility. What *logoi* referred back to was a sight with form [*gestalthafter Anblick*], i.e., *eidos*. Even etymologically, "knowledge" [*Wissen*] and "essence" [*Wesen*] (as *eidos*) are extremely closely related to "seeing" [*Sehen*]. *Logos* is a collection of what has been seen. For Heraclitus, eyes are "more exact witnesses than ears."<sup>73</sup> This is a formulation that deeply shaped the Occidental tradition precisely when it found itself faced with a conception of a completely different type, namely, the conception found in the biblical intellectual world's concept of certainty. For the Greeks, "hearing" is of no significance for truth and is initially nonbinding. As an imparting of *doxa*, it represents an assertion that must always be confirmed visually.

For the Old Testament literature, however, and for the consciousness of truth it documents, seeing is always predetermined, put into question, or surpassed by hearing. The created is based on the Word, and in terms of its binding claim, the Word always precedes the created. The real reveals itself within a horizon of its signification, a horizon allocated by hearing. Just how inaccessible the biblical meaning of "hearing" must have been for those thinking within the Greek tradition is brought out in the first fundamental confrontation of these two intellectual worlds, which we find documented in Philo Judaeus, who tried to make the meaning of the Old Testament intelligible within the Greek cultural hori-

zon. What is remarkable there is that he must *translate* at precisely the point where the moment of "hearing" is involved. In this way, as has already been shown, the Creation image of the Word calling out of the void is transposed into an image of light emanating into the darkness [*Dunkel*] of matter, and his explicit view is that the only seeing which does not deceive is that through which beings are presented in their Being.<sup>74</sup> Consistent with this, Philo's personified "logos" must first of all prepare the organs that will receive its revelation, which it does by *transforming* human ears into eyes. It is then to these that logos manifests, as light, its nonverbal essence.<sup>75</sup> And Philo reinterprets the fundamental event of the Old Testament—the giving of the law on Sinai—as an experience of "illumination."<sup>76</sup>

In the New Testament, hearing the Word is the source of faithfulness. Not wanting to hear, means rejecting an offer of salvation.<sup>77</sup> But this already anticipates the form of the harmonization with Greek *theōria*, which then takes place in the work of the Church Fathers and the Scholastics, where vision comes to represent a mode of eschatological finality. The history-ending Second Coming (which has been held in reserve) consists in God, who until this point has been hidden, becoming visible. From this, the allocation of the classically ideal *theōria* to *status gloriae* develops. Thereafter, questions of human knowledge are interpreted in terms of a deficiency vis-à-vis *status viae*, which needs hearing as a guiding anticipation of conclusive *visio*.

This is a complete transformation of the Old Testament account, where the impossibility of beholding God is absolute and not merely temporary. The provisionality of hearing in the New Testament is further confirmed by the primacy of seeing in John, who represents most powerfully the arrived presence of the *eschaton*. In exactly the same way, the eschatologically pregnant Easter event shows the moment of the has-been-seen to its best advantage in comparison with mere hearing. There are plenty of approaches here for *theōria* (which has been eschatologically held in reserve) to stream back into worldly existence. "Hearing" restricts itself again: hearing [*Vernehmen*] the Word gets reduced to "heeding" [*Gehorchen*].

In Augustine, this meaning component forges links with the Roman idea of obligation found in *auctoritas*: following the Skeptics' undermining of "seeing," an equivalence of the instances of *ratio* and *auctoritas* becomes possible.<sup>78</sup> "Truth" becomes the integration of "hearing" and "seeing." But even within Augustine's thought, this equilibrium between the two "witnesses" to truth is fleeting: in the late writings, "hearing" the Word about divine predestination displaces vision's aspiration to seek *insight* into the reasons of the divine will. Once again, we see that the meta-

phorics of the *eye* is crucially connected to the concept of *freedom*, whereas the metaphorics of the *ear* indicates the limits or even suspension of freedom.

The “qualities” of the “eye” and the “ear” that let them say something metaphorically imply an entire phenomenology of the senses.<sup>79</sup> For example, the attitude of not wanting to hear is marked, even if only metaphorically, as more serious than the attitude of not wanting to see, since the ear is, by nature, always open and cannot be shut. Thus, not hearing presupposes a greater degree of contrariness and of intervention in nature than does not seeing. Compared to the language of “illumination,” the Gnostic metaphor of the “call” found in the Mandean and Manichean doctrines points toward a more compelling, more powerfully “gripping” phenomenon, that of the absolute claim to *metansia*. Luther’s language in *De servo arbitrio* plays metaphors of the ear against those of the eye: the merciful Lord’s offer allows none of the distance for free consideration that two parties have when they catch sight of each other.<sup>80</sup> That which is not expected and has not been prepared for, the character of “grace” as a pure event, comes through in the language of “hearing.”

The eye wanders, selects, approaches things, presses after them, while the ear, for its part, is affected and accosted. The eye can seek, the ear can only *wait*. Seeing “places” things; hearing is placed. The term “listener” [Zuhörer] lacks the sense of disengagement implied by “onlooker” [Zuschauer]. Correspondingly, the “Word” does not have the cosmic universality of “light.” The Word is essentially “directed at” something; one can obey it and submit oneself to it, but one cannot stand “in” the Word, in the sense of *in luce esse*. That which demands unconditionally is encountered in “hearing.” Conscience has a “voice,” not light. For Kant, the moral ought is *given* as an unavoidable “fact of reason” before it can be deduced—that is, before insight into it can be achieved—from its premise of freedom. Accordingly, Kant speaks of the “voice of reason,” which is “with respect to the will . . . so distinct, so irrepressible, and so clearly audible to even the commonest man.”<sup>81</sup> Here, the structures of “hearing” can still be found beyond all transcendental metaphysics.

Finally, metaphors of “hearing” are also significant for grasping the phenomenon of *tradition*. “Seeing” is oriented toward the *repetition* of eyewitness experience, most clearly in the restoration of the phenomenon itself in all experimental methodology. The demand for the *presence* of the object under study is the point of departure for the modern idea of science, and in Bacon and Descartes, this demand is formulated in opposition to the validity of *auctoritas*. Here, needing to rely on tradition appears as a lack of knowledge which can, in principle, be remedied. Implicit in this reproach is the assumption that reason does not need to

“hear,” because it can, at any time, make the objects under study accessible to sight (experimentation) and insight (deduction). Ontologically, this means that every condition is *iterable*; there is no unique and actual experience. Or rather, such experience has no significance for the human fund of knowledge. Only if the actual-and-unique is essential for man, does “hearing” a tradition have binding force. Only then must man allow something to be “handed down” to him without being able to expect to see it himself.

In judging the value of tradition, a teleological moment is always implied, namely, that “truth” is *intended for man* and that it is for that reason that it *reaches* him via the precarious stream of cultural transference. The denial of vision that is entailed in listening to tradition always includes an element of teleological trust that “theoretically” cannot be justified. For this reason, in the attitude of “hearing” (i.e., in being dependent on tradition), there is often a hidden insufficiency, which presses for a shift from *veritas asserentis* to *evidentia obiecti*, to put it Scholastically. The metaphorical language indicates this insufficiency primarily where the facts of tradition—of *auctoritas*, and thus of “hearing”—appear in metaphors of light.

Cicero seems, once again, to have been at the start of this. Thus, in connection with his “translation” of Greek philosophy into the Latin medium, he speaks of *lumen litterarum Latinarum* (*Tusc.* 1. 5), of *lux auctoris* (1. 5. 11). Rhetoric becomes the primordial form of this light. In *Scienza Nuova*, Vico portrays the history of jurisprudence as light spreading over the obscurity [*Dunkelheit*] of facts (4. 14. 2). And at the end of *Démocratie en Amérique*, Tocqueville says, negatively, that ever since the past stopped shedding its light on the future, the human spirit has been lying in darkness. [End of excursus.]

The path of metaphors of light in the Middle Ages needs to be sketched only briefly here, not only because comprehensive studies of it are already available but also because its course has already been decided in the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages. Arabic and Jewish Prescholasticism amalgamated Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism, in that “light” was equated with “form”: *forma est lumen purum*.<sup>82</sup> Albertus Magnus passed this amalgam on to Latin Scholasticism in *De causis et processu universitatis*, in which there is a striking ease in the way he adopts the metaphor of “flux” (*influentia constitutionis ad esse*) or adopts *diffusio intellectus* as *lumen luminis rei*.<sup>83</sup>

Thomas Aquinas is completely hostile to the “language of light,” because, in his view, it blurs the distinction between metaphysics and metaphorics. For him, light is a *qualitas per se sensibilis et species quaedam*

*determinata in sensibilibus*, and, in this respect, “light” may be spoken of, in intellectual contexts, only *aequivoce vel metaphorice*, where the *ratio manifestatiois* of what is [des Seiende] (i.e., its ontological truth) is concerned.<sup>84</sup>

His contemporary Bonaventure, by contrast, handles the metaphysics of light with a mastery comparable only to that of Augustine. Light is the *natura communis* of what is [des Seienden].<sup>85</sup> a fundamental state and underlying determination of all things, even before their differentiation. In Bonaventure, however, dawn breaks primarily in the inwardness of man, whose light is a *possession*—not a gradually elucidating *acquisition*—which precedes and makes possible all cognition, just as all truths are based on “truth.” Light changes and becomes one with the ‘ground’ of identity of the subject itself. Thus, God is *secundum veritatem in anima*—not, however, as its object or idea, but rather as its capacity for truth and, in this respect, *intimior animae quam ipsa sibi*.<sup>86</sup> What this very bold wording of the internalization of *illuminatio* means is this: the subject can always become objective to itself in reflection, and to the extent to which it can do so, a light is required that must thus be “more internal” to the subject than the subject is to itself. This provides a formulation for the discovery of the idea, already suggested in Augustine, that inner light has to be “behind” the self, so that looking into the light becomes impossible here. The *lux veritatis, in qua cuncta relucent*,<sup>87</sup> is “given” only in the self-certainty of the subject’s capacity for truth: not in *cognitio* (for that, Bonaventure allows for the possibility of an Aristotelian *tabula rasa*) but in *notitia*, as Being’s radical prefamiliarity with the subject.<sup>88</sup>

Thus we find, formulated in the metaphysics of light, something that in terms of cognition is *more* than mere receptivity. The mystical emotion of *amor* (which is the vehicle of all relations of Being) and the sustaining pretheoretical *notitia* are but two aspects of *one* fundamental relation: *Amor et notitia animae connaturales sunt*.<sup>89</sup> Here, it becomes possible to grasp the philosophical “achievement” of illuminative representations: they point to a radical *unity* of the mind, beyond the psychological plurality of its “faculties.” And they point, in the same way, to the ultimate unity of the horizon, in which all that is becomes phenomenal [*in dem alles Seiende zur Gegebenheit kommt*].

Consistent with this, Duns Scotus, in whose works the Augustinian tradition has to assert itself within the constraints of Aristotelian axioms, carries out an extreme (though stabilizing) *reduction* of *illuminatio*. He lets *illuminatio* be rooted in the *one* original phenomenon, the *primum obiectum* associated with the univocal concept of Being.<sup>90</sup> Here, *esse* is not *esse commune*, at the last derivative of abstraction, but rather the first and total anticipation of the meaning of all merely possible phenomena. In

this way, with the help of the illuminative representation, the “naturalness” of truth, its antecedence relative to all that is predicatively true, receives a subtle articulation yet again.

This “yet again” is explained by the fact that it is precisely in Duns Scotus that the Augustinian tradition takes a direction in which “natural light” increasingly obscures itself, in order to focus the situation of man (vis-à-vis the absolute) entirely on “hearing the Word.” Nominalistic fideism needs the backdrop of a darkening of the world in order, once again, to drive out the *credo quia absurdum*; the doctrine of *Deus absconditus* no longer allows for the “naturalness” of truth. Nor is this tendency halted, in the fifteenth century, by Nicholas of Cusa’s development of the “language of light,” which he treats in all its richness, yet also in a way that unmistakably and excessively grants metaphor independent status as metaphysics (for example, in the dualism of *De conjecturis*). His *Magnaie potentiae veritas est*<sup>91</sup> remains a historically isolated experience at the close of the Middle Ages.

What is more essential is that the medieval “internalization” of light prevents the worldly dark from fully penetrating and disempowering the subject. To keep with the metaphor, so much transcendent light has “passed over” to the subject that the subject has become “self-luminous.” Augustine’s principle within the illumination doctrine—*Lumen tibi esse non potes*—emerges weakened by the change in the language of light that begins at this point. In the late-medieval experiment, where it is left to itself vis-à-vis *Deus absconditus*, the human mind proves itself to be authentic light. This is shown, purely grammatically, by the fact that in the expressions *lumen rationis*, *lumen intellectus*, and so on, the *genitivus objectus* becomes the *genitivus subjectus*.

There are transitional forms that remain indeterminate, such as Francis Bacon’s *lumen experientiae*, in which the object of experience as well as the act of experience can be “light.”<sup>92</sup> The luminarity of the human mind can be seen precisely in the fact that the analysis and subsequent elimination of the obscurations and misdirections of this light come to be understood as the new task of philosophical “method.”<sup>93</sup>

What characterizes the dawn of a new epoch here, indicated in the metaphors of light, is that it can be said of man—at least in his highest realization, *studiosus homo*—that he is *naturalis lux*.<sup>94</sup> Man does not find already in place an objectively fixed world structure that obligingly presents itself and to which he has to adapt himself; rather, he becomes, himself, the principle of a structural formation that emanates from him. And by realizing himself as *sapiens*, he gains that emanative force: self-realization becomes a condition for world-realization. *Sapientes* “realize” the world in that they *quodlibet ad proprium finem ducunt*.<sup>95</sup> Cognizing the

world and the *rite uti* of its things is not a relation of *receiving* but of *giving*. In cognizing and in using, man remedies the one great deficiency of Being, namely, that Being *is* everything, but is everything *unknowingly*.<sup>96</sup> The physical only becomes "fulfilled" in the mental. Theory and practice are no longer derivatives of an all-binding nature, but are rather its integration and its fulfillment of Being. *Homo denique fulgor est, scientia, lux et anima mundi...*

Once this turn has been taken, we are not far from the comprehensive historical significance of the concept of "enlightenment," whose descent from the language of light is so tangible in French<sup>97</sup> and English: *siecle des lumières, progrès des lumières*, the *Aufklärer* (enlightenment figure) as an agent of light, *qui propage les lumières*, as well as the English word "enlightenment."

With the emergence of the Enlightenment, "light" moves into the realm of that which is to be accomplished; truth loses the natural *facilitas* with which it asserted itself. Even (or rather, only) in caricature does the now-broken connection between metaphors of light, on the one hand, and trust in the "naturalness" of self-presenting truth, on the other, demonstrate itself. Thus, in the *Dialogo (Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems)*, Galileo endowed Simplicio—the figure of the Scholastic, often ironically characterized as "Middle-Aged"<sup>98</sup>—with this trust, now exposed as careless confidence. There is, for example, a discussion of the problem of the cause of the tides, in which Simplicio says that although there can be only *one* cause, there are many opinions about this and that one has to take into account that the true explanation will not be among them; otherwise, it would certainly be most astonishing for the true not to emit so much light as to shine out through the darkness of such mistakes.<sup>99</sup>

As a result of the inversion of metaphors of light during the Enlightenment, it is precisely this conception of truth (as that which is self-luminous and penetrating) which becomes a way of reproaching the Middle Ages for its credulity, for not noticing its own darkness. According to d'Alembert, the principles of science and the arts were lost during the twelve centuries of the Middle Ages because the beautiful and the true, which *seem* to reveal themselves to people from all sides, do not actually get through to people until they have them pointed out.<sup>100</sup> The ignorance of the Middle Ages must thus be attributed precisely to the illusion that the truth "reveals itself." The truth does not reveal itself; it must *be revealed*. "Natural" luminosity cannot be relied on; on the contrary, truth is of a constitutionally weak nature and man must help it back on its feet by means of light-supplying therapy, as it were, *parce que rien n'est si dangereux pour le vrai et ne l'expose tant à être méconnu que l'ali-*

*lage ou le voisinage de l'erreur.* That is the exact, literal opposite of the state that Galileo had Simplicio attribute to the true!

In this characterization of truth as weak and in need of assistance, the background of the late-medieval concept of God is still perceptible: d'Alembert compares the universe to a literary work *d'une obscurité sublime*, whose author tries, again and again, by means of "flashes of hope," to give the reader the illusion of having understood almost everything. As it is found, "natural" light thus acquires virtually the function of misleading: in the labyrinth of the world, once we have left the path, the few *éclairs* can just as well lead us further away from the path as back to it.<sup>101</sup> In such a world, which has become the playing field for a divine game (*où l'Intelligence suprême semble avoir voulu se jouer de la curiosité humaine*), the value of an individual truth is ambiguous—it can be either a beacon or a will-o'-the-wisp—as long as its sporadic character has not been put into a systematic context. "Truth," as such, is dubious [*zwielichtig*], as long as it lacks a well-ordered origin in *method* and a well-ordered position in a *system*. The dictionary and the encyclopedia become exemplary instruments of the Enlightenment: d'Alembert wrote not only the introduction but (along with it) the metaphysics of the great *Encyclopédie*.

In the idea of "method," which originates with Bacon and Descartes,<sup>102</sup> "light" is thought of as being at man's disposal. Phenomena no longer stand in the light; rather, they are *subjected to the lights of an examination*<sup>103</sup> from a particular perspective. The result then depends on the angle from which light falls on the object and the angle from which it is seen. It is the conditionality of *perspective* and the awareness of it, even the free selection of it, that now defines the concept of "seeing." The significance, for the modern age, of perspective and a consciousness of location would require a study of its own. All that can be done here is to indicate the way in which *technological* figures come to invade the metaphysics of light, the way in which light turns into an encompassing medium of the focused and measured ray of "direct lighting."

The status of this development as a historical signature is best illustrated in painting. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the idea of light as the homogeneous, unquestioningly presupposed medium of visibility that ensures the unaccented presence of that which is to be represented, turns into a localized factor which can be "adjusted." Caravaggio and Rembrandt already engage in something like "a staging of lighting," although the "quantity" of light—subject to the law of inverted quadratic proportion—is still limited. Not until the nineteenth century do Drummond's "lime" lights put the *theater* in a position to generate, in combination with concave mirrors, lighting "effects," a development which begins to open up new possibilities for an accentuating approach

to vision, an approach that always takes as its point of departure, the dark as the "natural" state.

But it is only because these possibilities for *directed* light were discovered at all, that the technology for this discovery could ultimately make possible the most violent of methods and devices; and it is significant that the term *lighting*<sup>104</sup> is used to refer to thoughtless accentuation by artificial light, as well as to the technological selection and overemphasis of the work of man, which—as the only things thought to be worth seeing—is to be made impossible to overlook. This manipulation of light is the result of a long process.

In nocturnal spaces, an "optics of prefabrication"<sup>105</sup> is being developed, which eliminates the freedom to look around within a general medium of visibility, and confronts modern man with ever more situations of coerced vision [*Zwangsoptik*].<sup>106</sup> The connection between vision and freedom is being dissociated. Due to the dominance of the prefabricated and of technologically pre-cast situations and aspects, the modern extension of sensory spheres has not become a source of freedom.<sup>107</sup> The structure of this world of optical prefabrications and fixations of the gaze is once again approaching that of the "cave." (W. H. Auden portrays the cave situation of modern man in *Age of Anxiety*.) As a paideutic metaphor, "leaving the cave" is regaining real relevance.

Man—on whom the technological light of "lighting" has imposed, in many forms, an 'optics' that goes against his will—is the historical antipode of the classical *contemplator caeli* and his freedom to gaze. Today, there are even people who have never seen a star. "Stars? Where?" This is the unbelieving (but now believable) cry of the modern metropolitan lyricist.<sup>108</sup>

#### NOTES

1. In philosophical texts, "intuition" is the standard rendering of *Anschauung* but it should be understood not in its contemporary sense of nonrational perception but rather in its older sense, stemming from the Latin *intueri* ("to gaze upon"), where the visual dimension found in the German (*Schauen*, to look) is implicit. See Robert M. Wallace, "Translator's Notes," in *The Genesis of the Copernican World* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), p. 692—Trans.

2. For more recent contributions to a philosophical "metaphorology," see Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985); see also

The translator would like to thank Paulien Kleingeld, Patrizia Nanz, and David Michael Levin for their assistance.

*The Genesis of the Copernican World*—especially part 4, "Vision in the Copernican World"—and *Höhlenausgänge* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1989).—Trans.

3. This distinction is notoriously difficult to translate. Here, *das Sein* has been translated as "Being," while *das Seiende* has been rendered either (in the plural) as "beings" or (less commonly) as "what is"; in the latter case, the German is always given in brackets.—Trans.

4. In German, there are several words for darkness: *Finsternis*, which has connotations of utter and foreboding darkness; *Dunkelheit*, which connotes an obscuration of vision; and *das Dunkel*, which generally corresponds to the English "the dark." In this essay, *Finsternis* is the most common term. Whenever "darkness" has been used to translate either of the other terms, the original German will be given in brackets.—Trans.

5. The work that must be mentioned first of all remains Cl. Baeumker's "Witelo, ein Philosoph und Naturforscher des XIII. Jahrhundert," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* III:2 (Münster, 1908), incomparable in its collection of material. Concerning antiquity, see R. Bultmann, "Zur Geschichte der Lichtsymbolik im Altertum," *Philologus* 97 (1948): 1; J. Stenzel, "Der Begriff der Erleuchtung bei Platon," *Die Antike* 2 (1926): 235–257. On the Middle Ages: "Die Abstraktionslehre in der Scholastik bis Thomas von Aquin mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Lichtbegriffs," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 44 (1931) and 45 (1932); M. Honecker, "Der Lichtbegriff in der Abstraktionslehre des Thomas von Aquin," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 48 (1935): 268; L. Baur, "Die Philosophie des Robert Grosseteste," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* 18 (Münster, 1917): 4–6; P. Garin, *Le théorie de l'idée suivant l'école thomiste* (Paris, 1930); and R. Carton, *L'expérience mystique de l'illumination intérieure chez Roger Bacon* (Paris, 1926). With regard to St. Augustine, Bonaventure, mysticism, and Nicholas of Cusa, the relevant literature contains a wealth of material, of which insufficient use has been made. With regard to the modern age, it evidently still needs to be proven that the history of metaphors of light *continues* at all.

6. H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1939), 28 B 9; in this connection, see also Simplicius's commentary on fragment 8, 53–59.

7. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1. 5. 986a 25.

8. Diels, 28 B 1, 10.

9. Diels, 28 B 2, 5.

10. Martin Heidegger, "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," trans. John Barlow, in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Anthology*, vol. 3, ed. William Barrett and Henry D. Aiken (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 257–258. [Original German edition of 1947, pp. 25–26.]

11. Plato, *The Statesman* 509 B.

12. U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Der Glaube der Hellenen*, 2d ed. (Darmstadt, 1955), vol. 1, p. 135.

13. R. Bultmann, p. 13.

14. J. Stenzel, p. 256.

15. Aristotle, *De Anima* 3. 2. 425b 20–27. Cf. W. Bröcker, *Aristoteles* (Frankfurt, 1935), p. 148: "Aristotle takes seeing to be not primarily some occurrence in the subject, but rather the visible's showing itself."

16. K. v. Fritz, "Tragische Schuld und poetische Gerechtigkeit in der griechischen Tragödie," *Studium Generale* 8 (1955), p. 228.

17. The German here (*Blendung*) has a range of meaning, extending from "confusion" and "deception" to "the act of blinding a person." It has been rendered throughout as "dazzling" in order to capture the broad sense of a (painful) bewilderment caused by light.—*Trans.*

18. Seneca, *Epist. Mor.* 102:

Cum venerit dies ille, qui mixtum hoc divini humanique secernat, corpus hic, ubi inveni, relinquam, ipse me diis reddam (22). Alia origo nos expectat, alius rerum status. Nondum caelum nisi ex intervallo pati possumus. (23 sq.) . . . aliquando naturae tibi arcana retegentur, discutietur ista caligo te lux undique clara percutiet. Imaginare tecum, quantus ille sit fulgor tot sideribus inter se lumen miscentibus. Nulla serenum umbra turbabit: aequaliter splendebit omne caeli latus: dies et nox aeris infimi vices sunt. Tunc in tenebris vixisse te dices, cum totam lucem et totus asperexeris, quam nunc per angustissimas oculorum vias obscure intueris, et tamen admiraris illam iam procul: quid tibi videbitur divina lux, cum illam suo loco videris? (28).

19. Plotinus, *Enneads* 6. 7. 17: *amorphos kai aneideos*.

20. *Phaedo* 99E-100A.

21. W. Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2 (Leipzig, 1923), p. 177.

22. *De officiis* 2. 2. 8: "Contra autem omnia disputantur a nostris (sc. academicis), quod hoc ipsum probabile elucere non possit, nisi ex utraque parte causarum esset facta contentio." Typical of the unclarity of the meaning of metaphors of light is the transitive rendering that K. Atzert gives *elucere* in his translation (Limburg, 1951): "Das geschieht deshalb, weil sich das Wahrscheinliche erst *ins rechte Licht rücken* lässt, wenn man . . ." ["This happens because the apparently true lets itself *be put in the proper light* only when one . . ."] K. Büchner (*Vom rechten Handeln* [Zürich, 1953]), by contrast, renders it adequately: "weil eben dieses *Einleuchtende* nicht *aufstrahlen* könnte, wenn nicht . . ." ["because just *this plausibility* cannot *shine forth*, when not . . ."]. Atzert basically brings the modern transformation of metaphors of light into Cicero, while Büchner does well to leave the skeptic with the remainder of Platonic presuppositions at which he hints. The Academic skepticism is generally "more Platonic" than it wants to know. Not only does it "break out," institutionally, in Plato's school, but it is moreover a result of Platonism itself, of Platonism's transcendence of Ideas. The rumor about Arcesilas passing on Platonic orthodoxy to an esoteric circle of pupils (Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrh. Hyp.* 1. 33. 234) while pretending to be a skeptic, fits perfectly in this regard. Above all, however, the Platonic remainder is in the meaning of the apparently true. In this concept, the difference between Idea and appearance is transferred to "truth" itself. Cicero translates the Skeptics' *pithanon as verisimile* and initially retains the metaphorical character of this with a *quasi* (*Luc.* 32), only then to terminologize it. The apparently true not only "appears" (in the sense of deception) to be the true, but is the "showing-through" [*Durchscheinen*] of the true, the appearance of the true that is sufficient for man. In his dispute with Academic skepticism (*Contra Academ.* 2. 27), Augustine draws a connection to the presupposition of *verum in verisimile*.

23. *De officiis* 1. 6. 18.

24. In his paraphrase of *De officiis*, St. Ambrose already goes beyond Cicero in polemicizing against his making an exception for geometry and astronomy. For Ambrose, that which is set aside is a "matter of salvation" and not, as with Cicero, of *societas* (*De officiis ministrorum* 1. 26. 122). The idea of leaving *res obscurae* alone is already suggested to the Christian in the belief in a judge, "whose notice the hidden does not escape" (1. 26. 124). It is easy to see how the stage is already set here for the medieval identification of *curiositas* with natural science.

25. *De divinatione* 1. 35: "Latet fortasse (sc. causa) obscuritate involuta naturae. Non enim me deus ista scire, sed his tantummodo uti voluit." The importance for Cicero of this view has been pointed out by G. Gawlick in studying the phrase *Perdifficilis et perobscura questio* in his dissertation *Untersuchungen zu Ciceros philosophischer Methode* (Kiel, 1956). See, there, the extensive further evidence documenting the "natural" darkness [*Dunkelheit*] of things outside the "economic" clearing of Being [*Seinslichtung*] centered around human beings.

26. *De officiis* 1. 9. 30: "Quocirca bene praecipuumt, qui vetant quicquam agere, quod dubites acquum sit an iniquum."

27. Several editions have wanted to polish away the inconsistency here by placing an *enim* after *acquitias*. Atzert, for example, corrects (without any justification in the apparatus criticus) his own edition of 1939 in the revised edition of 1949, but does not properly consider the unmotivated *enim* in his 1951 translation. This can also be said of Büchner and Gignon.

28. *Tusc.* 3. 2: "Nunc parvulos nobis dedit (sc. natura) igniculos, quos celeriter malis moribus opinibus depravati sic restinguimus, ut nusquam naturae lumen appareat."

29. *De officiis* 2. 9. 32: "Etenim illud ipsum, quod honestum decorumque dicimus, quia per se nobis placet animosque omnium natura et specie sua commovet maximeque quasi perlucet ex iis, quas commemoravi, virtutibus, idcirco illos, in quibus illas virutes esse remur, a natura ipsa diligere cogimur." In Kant's concept of "respect," the accent is shifted almost entirely to *cogimur*: "Respect is a tribute we cannot refuse to pay to merit whether we will or not." *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 80. Here, metaphors of light are no longer of use.

30. *De natura deorum* 2. 37. 95. V. Rose (1886), R. Walzer (1934), and W. D. Ross (1955) have no doubts with regard to this quote. Without further consideration, W. Jaeger (*Aristoteles* [Berlin, 1923], p. 167) sees it as providing evidence for the proximity to Plato, as well as the young Aristotle's reconstruction of Plato. A comment of Erich Burck's led me to wonder about the authenticity of the text under discussion: there is, indeed, too much Stoicism in it. But that can still be laid at the doorstep of Cicero's understanding of "translation." G. Gawlick (op. cit.) has produced important new evidence in support of this. The whole question probably cannot yet be answered definitively. We are on firm ground, however, when we utilize the text only for the context in which, for us, the question occurs.

31. Cf. Heidegger, "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," p. 261 [German, p. 53]: "Where the truth is of another essence and is not unhiddenness or at least where

unhiddenness is not a component of this definition, an ‘allegory of the cave’ has no basis from which it can be clarified.” The depth and “exactness” with which Plato’s metaphor of the cave is supported can, in fact, be seen in its rehearsal at *Phaedo* 109E, where the mistaking of Being [Seinsverwechslung] and the ascent out of the deceiving depths are already implicit.

32. Pherecydes of Syros, Diels, 7 B 6.

33. *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudeo* 78. 5–6 (possibly in response to *Protev. Jacobii* 18. 1). On this, cf. C. Schneider, *Geistesgeschichte des antiken Christentums* I (München, 1954), p. 250, where (Ps.) Basilius, *Hom. in nativ. Christi* is again referred to. See also E. Benz, “Die heilige Höhle in der Alten Christenheit und in der östlichen orthodoxen Kirche,” in *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 22 (1953).

34. A most recent reflection of this is in Ezra Pound’s “Canto XLVII”: “The light has entered the cave. Io! Io! / The light has gone down into the cave, / Splendour on splendour!”

35. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, c. 1.

36. Cf. H. Friedrich, *Montaigne* (Bern: Franke, 1949), p. 307.

37. *Novum Organum* 1. 42:

*Idola specus sunt idola hominis individui: Habet enim unusquisque (paeter aberrationes naturae humanae in genere) specum sive cavernam quandam individuum, quae lumen naturae frangit et corrumpt . . . ut plane spiritus humanus (prout disponitur in hominibus singulis) sit res varia, et omnino perturbata, et quasi fortuita: unde bene Heraclitus, homines scientias, quaerere in minoribus mundis, et non in maiore sive communi.*

38. *Discourse on Method* 6, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), p. 38; first French edition, p. 71.

39. Ibid., p. 6; French edition, p. 11.

40. *De architectura* 2, prooemium.

41. *De inventione* 1, prooemium.

42. *Die unsichtbare Loge: eine Biographie* (1793), section 3.

43. Ibid., section 30.

44. *Enneads* 1. 8.

45. Ibid., 6. 9. 4.

46. Ibid., 6. 9. 9.

47. *De opificio mundi* c. 8 (ed. Cohn, 1889, p. 9).

48. W. Theiler, *Die Vorbereitung des Neuplatonismus* (Berlin, 1930), p. 50.

49. An illustrative example is found in Salomon ibn Gabirol (Avicenzron), *Fons vitae* 4, 31 (ed. Baeumker, p. 254): “Dubitas quod lumen infusum in materia [!] sit defluxum ab alio lumine, quod est super materiam, scilicet lumine, quod est in essentia virtutis agentis? Et hoc est voluntas, quae eduxit formam de potentia ad effectum.” In Moses Maimonides (*Dux neutrorum* 1. 72), a metaphor of light is applied to the motor force emanating from the first sphere of heaven.

50. *De somniis* 1. 13. 75 (ed. Cohn-Wendland).

51. *De virtutibus* 22. 164.

52. *De Cherubim* 28. 97.

53. *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* 22. 8.

54. Ibid., 20. 7.

55. Ibid., 13. 18.

56. *Enarratio in Psalmum* 26. 2. 3.

57. *Sermo* 182. 5.

58. *Epist.* 140. 7.

59. *Epist.* 120. 10: “sed invisibiliter et ineffabiliter, et tamen intelligibiliter lucet, tamque nobis certum est, quam nobis efficit certa quae secundum ipsum (sc. lumen) cuncta conspicimus.” Deviating from his stance on Manichaeism, Augustine attempted to harmonize his relation to the Neoplatonists and thus did not stress the distinctions in the metaphysics of light sharply enough. (*De civitate dei* 10. 2). Even in the phrases that sound Neoplatonic and esoteric—such as, *sed paucissimis (sc. conceditur) videre quod verum est* (*De div. quaest. q. 46*)—what is meant, in fact, is only reflection upon the origins [*Herkunft*] of certainty, not ecstatic, mystical contemplation of its source [*Quelle*].

60. *De genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* 5. 24: “Convenienter autem lucem hanc dici concedit, quisquis concedit recte dici lucem, qua res quaeque manifesta est . . . haec lux qua ista manifesta sunt, utique intus in anima est, quamvis per corpus inferantur quae ita sentiuntur.”

61. Pace J. Barion, *Plotin und Augustinus* (Berlin, 1935), p. 152.

62. *De Trinitate* 14. 6. 8–7. 10; see also *Confessiones* 10. 20.29–21. 30.

63. E. Gilson, *Introduction à l’étude de St. Augustine* (Paris, 1929). German edition (Hellerau, 1930), p. 399.

64. *De beata vita* 2. 8.

65. *Epist.* 11. 3.

66. *De genesi ad litteram* 4. 33. 51.

67. *The Statesman* 518 A.

68. It is perhaps Nicholas of Cusa who has best expressed this mystical, methodological function of darkness [*Dunkelheit*] as the criterion of the correct path, in order, significantly, to justify the obscurity [*Dunkelheit*] of his own metaphysics: “It is just as in the case of someone who seeks the sun and approaches it in the correct manner: as a result of the overpowering light of the sun, darkness emerges in his weak eye; and for him, who seeks the sun, this fog is a sign that he is on the right path, and were the dark not to appear, then he would not be on the path to that brilliant light.” (Letter to the Abbot of the Tegernsee Cloister, September 14, 1453 [Vansteenberghe, ed., *Autour de la docta ignorantia* (Münster, 1915), p. 113, n. 5].) This fits perfectly with Nicholas’s metaphysics of *coincidentia oppositorum*. In a single sentence, he effortlessly carries out the objectification of subjective mystical experience: *Deus est maxime lux, quod est minime lux* (*De docta ignorantia* 1. 4). The pseudo-hermetic *Liber XXIV philosophorum* (prop. 21) of medieval mysticism had already given this a proto-formulation: *Deus est tenebra in anima post omnem lucem relicta*. And Bonaventure says: *Exceaecatio est summa illuminatio* (*In Hexaem.* 22. 11). In Nicholas of Cusa’s *docta ignorantia*, this entire tradition is given its densest wording.

69. Plotinus, *Enneads* 6. 9. 10: *hoion allos genomenos kai ouk autos oud' antou*.

70. Blumenberg is making use here of an untranslatable German homophony between *Gehör* (“the sense of hearing”) and *gehören* (“to belong to”).—Trans.

71. *Enneads* 1. 6. 9; 5.5. 7.

72. *Enarratio in Psalmum* 25. 2. 14.

73. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 22 B 101a. Cf. the parallels quoted by Diels.

74. *De fuga et inventione* 208: *apseudes d'horasis, hēi ta onta ontōs katanoeitai.*

75. Cf. H. Leisegang, *Der heilige Geist* (Leipzig, 1919), p. 215.

76. Ibid., p. 219.

77. Gerhard Kittel, *akouō*, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933), vol. 1, pp. 216–225. See, there, all the evidence for the following.

78. *De ordine* 9. 29: *Ad discendum necessario dupliciterducimur auctoritate atque ratione.*

79. Cf. H. Jonas, "The Nobility of Sight: A Study in the Phenomenology of the Senses," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 14 (1954): 507–519. See further the analyses by H. Lipps, *Die menschliche Natur* (Frankfurt, 1941), p. 25, 76.

80. The way in which the humanist Melanchthon returns from the language of hearing back to that of seeing is characteristic: "Lux quid sit cerni rectius potest, quam dici, estque illa ipsa claritas quae cernitur, quae omnia ostendit, sic et in corde nostro, clara ostensio, lux est." (*Commentarius in Genesin* c. 1 [Corp. Reform. 13, p. 767].)

81. *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 36. Cf. *Studium Generale* 6 (1953): 179.

82. Ibn Gabirol *Fons vitae* 4. 14.

83. *De causis et processu universitatis* 1. 1, c. 1.

84. *Sententiarum* 2, dist. 13, q. 1, a. 2.

85. Ibid. 2, dist. 12, a. 2, q. 1, arg. 4.

86. Ibid. 1, dist. 1, a. 3, q. 2, concl. Characteristically, just this wording returns, extracted from the metaphysics of light, in Luther, in reference to the *verbum dei* (*Werke* 9 [Weimar]: 103), that is, as the absolute intimacy of "hearing."

87. *Interarium mentis* 2. 9.

88. *Sent.* 2, dist. 39, a. 1, q. 2, concl.

89. Bonaventure *Sent.* 1, dist. 3, p. 2, a. 2, q. 2, concl. What is of primary importance here is that emotion—which the classical tradition had judged to be *obscuring of Being* [*seinsverdunkelnd*]—experiences a positive reevaluation and gains an *elucidating* function. The connection of a positive doctrine of emotions with the usage of metaphors of light also becomes quite clear in (Ps.) Witelo's *Liber de intelligentiis* (ed. Baeumker): *amor* and *delectatio* are the soul's primary "answers" to the luminosity of Being; in them, the *appetitus substantiae cognoscentis ad ipsum cognoscibile* emerges, without which the gaze would not be open for phenomena; it would be an *ordinatio huius ad hoc* preceding all spiritual "acts" (prop. 18).

90. Cf. E. Gilson, "Avicenne et le point de départ de Duns Scot," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen-age* 2 (1927): 116.

91. *De apice theoriae.*

92. *Novum Organum* 1. 49. Cf. 1. 56, where the difference in kind among intellects is determined according to *admiratio antiquitatis* or *amor novitatis*, and

where it is then said, "veritas autem non a felicitate temporis alicuius, quae res varia est, sed a lumine naturae et experientiae, quod aeternum est, petenda est."

93. *Novum Organum* 1. 49: "intellexus humanus luminis siccii non est: sed recipit infusionem a voluntate et affectibus."

94. Carolus Bovillus (Charles de Bovelles), *Liber de sapiente* (*Studien der Bibliothek Warburg* 10 [1927], ed. Klibansky), c. 51. This statement cannot be put in the same context with the fact that Aristotle represented *nous* in its active-passive double function as *phōs* (*De anima* 3. 5. 430a 14–17). This *nous* is genuinely cosmic, and associated with the human soul only "from the outside" in cognitive accomplishment. The "direction" of this light is thus from the inside to the outside; what is crucially new is the inversion of this direction.

95. Bovillus *Liber de sapiente*, c. 19.

96. Ibid. "Omnia siquidem est mundus: scit tamen novitque nihil. Porro exiguum et fere nihil est home: scit attamen novitque universa."

97. The transition is, in the simultaneity of its nuances, particularly tangible in Pascal's language, for example, in Fragment 337 (ed. Brunschvicg): "par une nouvelle lumière, par une autre lumière supérieure, selon qu'on a de lumière." In the first fragment of Pascal's study *De l'esprit géométrique, lumière naturelle* is both the limit of the human mind with regard to its aspiration to prove all its premises and the foundation of those exacting proofs which are in fact possible for the mind, in spite of its limitations.

98. The German here (*mittelalterlich*) can mean both "middle-aged" and "medieval."—Trans.

99. "Dialogo IV," *Opere*, ed. Albèri, 1. 456: "anzi così credo esser veramente perchè gran cosa sarebbe che il vero potesse aver si poco di luce, che nulla apparisce tra le tenebre di tanti falsi." The connection of *simplicitas*—though in a positive sense!—with this basic view is found, with exceptional expressiveness, in a thirteenth-century tract, *De usuris*, written by Aegidius of Lessines as an exegesis of the first sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "Quam (sc. veritatem) si quis concupiscit vero corde, et eam quæsierit in simplicitate cordis sui, ipsa seipsam manifestabit . . ." Cited in M. Grabmann, *Mittelalterliches Geistesleben II* (Munich, 1936), p. 522.

100. *Discours Préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie*, ed. Picavet: "Les principes des sciences et des arts étaient perdus, parce que le beau et le vrai semblent se montrer de toutes parts aux hommes, ne les frappent guère à moins qu'ils n'en soient avertis."

101. It would require a separate study (which would be part of the history of the concept of "probability") to demonstrate this ambivalence in the change of meaning of *verisimile*. Originally, the "appearance" of the apparently true is entirely appearance as pale reflection of the *proximity* of truth (cf. footnote 22 above). [The author's use of metaphors of light here cannot be rendered fully in English: "Der 'Schein' des Wahrscheinlichen ist ursprünglich durchaus Schein als Abglanz der Nähe der Wahrheit."—Trans.] This understanding of the term has, however, metaphysical premises that no longer hold for Descartes. For him, "appearance" means possible deception; the apparently true (or probable) is only something that looks like the true and must therefore be methodologically "bracketed." Until an object can be confirmed by *clare et distincte percibere*, it is

without significance for truth [*wahrheitsindifferent*]. "Certum etiam est, cum assentimur alicui rationi quam non percipimus, vel nos falli, vel casu tantum incidere in veritatem . . ." (*Principia philosophiae* 1. 44). The idea that one could "hit upon" the truth "by chance" is a previously unthought and unthinkable thought, one in which the entire tradition of the metaphysics of light is negated and raised to a higher level [*aufgehoben*]. "Method" then takes this annoying element of chance by the hand and puts it at man's disposal.

102. Cf. *Studium Generale* 5 (1952): 133–142.

103. *Beleuchtet*: the translation here attempts to capture the double meaning that Blumenberg is playing on here: *beleuchten* can mean both "to shine light on something" and "to examine."—*Trans.*

104. The German here, *Illumination*, refers primarily to artificial outdoor lighting.—*Trans.*

105. *Optik des Präparats*. Consistent with his general emphasis on the intimate interrelations between science and *mentalité*, Blumenberg here uses *Optik* ("optics") to refer not to a specific science but to a view of light and vision that is embedded in a general consciousness. *Präparat* generally refers to a laboratory or pharmaceutical "preparation," but it is rendered as "prefabrication" to convey the central idea that, in the world of artificial lighting, visual possibilities are shaped in advance.—*Trans.*

106. Today, one speaks of the "technology of light" in a sense not at all limited to the generation of light or to the "lighting" [*Beleuchtung*], but rather one which understands light as a construction unit like steel, concrete, etc. See the book by W. Köhler and W. Luckhardt, *Lichtarchitektur* (Berlin, 1956).

107. Whether it has become a source of truth is a question that W. Wagner has raised: "Versuch zur Kritik der Sinne," *Studium Generale* 4 (1951): 256.

108. Gottfried Benn, *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Zürich, 1956), p. 98.

## TWO

### Vision, Representation, and Technology in Descartes

*Dalia Judovitz*

*The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.*

OSCAR WILDE

Commenting on René Descartes's *Optics*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty observes in *Eye and Mind* that the visible is exorcising the specters of illusion, as well as being redefined according to a model based on the clarity of thought:

How crystal clear everything would be in our philosophy if only we could exorcise these specters, make illusions or object-less perceptions out of them, keep them on the edge of a world that does not equivocate!

Descartes's *Dioptrics* is an attempt to do just that. It is the breviary of a thought that wants no longer to abide in the visible and so decides to construct the visible according to a model-in-thought. It is worthwhile to remember this attempt and its failure.<sup>1</sup>

Merleau-Ponty's pointed remarks isolate in Descartes's thought two fundamental and related tendencies. The first involves Descartes's struggle against, and critique of, illusion. Illusion in all its forms, be it reflection, *trompe-l'oeil* or artifice, threatens by its deceptive character to impede the search for truth. By relegating illusion to the status of an objectless perception, Descartes seeks to eradicate the question of doubt from the elaboration of certitude understood as objective truth. Merleau-Ponty's subsequent observation underlines Descartes's rejection of illusion by extending it to the visible world as a whole. No longer abiding in the visible, Descartes constructs it according to a figurative model based on mental schematism. This study will demonstrate that, while interested in optics as a physical science, and in vision as the dominant sense, Descartes is in fact systematically undermining in both his scientific and philosophical writings the role of vision and its perceptual domain. Instead, the properties of the visible will be transferred to the mental do-