

Dialogue between author and reviewers about ‘dark and light’ in Plato’s Cave Allegory
Paper: Towards Esoteric Futures beyond the Apocalypse: Mystery and the Sacred in Climate Collapse and Technological Accelerationism

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R#1: Dr. Sarah O’Brien, University of Manchester | **R#2:** Prof. Timothy Stacey, University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht

First review round

R#1: “The discussion of the dichotomy in Plato’s allegory is interesting, particularly the emphasis on the “whole soul [turning] from the world of becoming into that of being”. This idea of the “whole soul” seems to be what you focus on, in its inclusion of the valuable non-representational aspect in the production of knowledge. Could there be space to make this clearer, that “real” knowledge is associated with the intellect, whereas anything non-representational, processual and affective is relegated to the realm of the uncertain and perhaps not known? There is a moral valence attached to knowing or not knowing; the “evil of the dark” is about uncertainty and illegibility, and the realm of “light and goodness” is about certainty and knowing. Underlying your analysis based on Plato is the sense that uncertainty is attached to bodily processes and sense, and certainty to the intellect. I wonder whether this is what you were trying to get at, in your framework and analysis of knowledge production?”

R#2: “I find the use of Plato’s cave allegory as a means of identifying particular types of futurer promising. But this would need fleshing out to be convincing. For example, the author suggests that the “keen-eyed rogue” can be compared with today’s techno-optimists. But does this mean that a better, full-soul approach would mean more fully embracing the light? But isn’t our whole approach to light and darkness the problem?”

Author made a major change in rewriting and restructuring the essay, explaining: “a more expanded analysis of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave. This analysis now builds on existing philosophical interpretations, and hence provides a more solid foundation for the rest of the essay. After the initial analysis of Plato’s Cave, the next section continues the line of reasoning but in a more speculative direction. This is explicitly mentioned in the beginning of this section”.

Second review round

R#1: “Overall, I’d say much clearer writing tone and signposting across the essay, less confusing in the structure of the piece, and clear introduction and conclusion – lots of work has been done! I appreciate you moving away from dark/light and experimenting instead with the notion of “esoteric futures”, as well as the prominence you give to the political (the puppeteers, the shadow-casters, points about exclusivity and access and so on). This brings nuance to the points you’d made in your first draft. The concept of power is a welcome addition to your mystery/sacred dichotomy and your discussion on reality and knowledge production”. .. “Slight confusion for me on you stating the importance of the “**whole body**” and affect in the interpretation of the Cave allegory, but then moving away from it very quickly and into mentioning the “limits of justice” (and once again in a Plato quote on p.5 “shadow images of justice”,) – without then really elaborating of this concept of justice at that point (nor later in the essay)”.

R#2: “These are infinitely better and offer profound insights that I really enjoy. They still need work though in terms of clarifying the argument and improving the engagement with other scholars” [response letter]. “I feel this is getting closer to a clearly articulated approach but it remains difficult to follow very clearly. I am getting: apocalypticism; three dichotomies; esoteric futures, with its focus on mystery, the sacred, and power, as allowing us to break through these dichotomies. So then I assume esoteric futures is a framework of analysis, rather than a vision, or an approach? But that’s not what I get further down. I think a lot of work needs to be done here to very carefully tweak your sentences and offer a clear articulation of what you are trying to achieve and how” [comment in text margin].

Author: “The final draft of the essay has focused on conceptual simplification, on clarifying the overall line of argumentation of the essay, and on adding various further references where these were relevant and requested. All the various sections have been comprehensively rewritten for sake of clarity”. .. “In the essay, I reframe Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, and argue to prioritize mystery and the sacred, rather than an overly logical or rational conception of values such as ‘the good’. I believe that our conventional way of academic writing is deeply imbued with Platonic – in the traditional understanding – thinking. It aims at constructing concepts as monoliths, which have an unambiguous meaning which can be logically argued and delineated, and which remains stable independent of context. It aims at purging any ambiguities and inconsistencies from a text: clarity, order and explicitness are paramount. What would it look like if, instead, we prioritized mystery in our writing? As I have described, this is how Leo Strauss interprets Plato. It would be a performative contradiction, if I were to argue the importance of this perspective, without attempting to practice it myself. Of course, since this deviates from the common way of doing things, the result is rather idiosyncratic by necessity. Yet, I am grateful that you have questioned my approach, as it allows me to attempt and articulate some guiding principles”.

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In this brief document, I outline my experiences of going through the review process of *Futures Reframed* while writing an essay for their first issue which is themed *Darkness Reframed*. This experience has been very different, compared to publishing on other journals. To start, this journal is brand new, and compared to established publication outlets, there were relatively few restrictions and guidelines for authors to adhere to. This affords a great freedom to the author, and along with the journal's experimental outlook, I felt encouraged to explore this freedom.

As such, my initial submission was quite raw and unpolished: it was the result of me, thinking out loud, exploring ideas. As often happens, the initial draft was a bit all-over-the place, attempting to do too much yet being spread too thinly as a result. It is always a strange experience, to submit a draft to a journal, not knowing who will review it – what is their background, their worldview, or even their disciplinary orientation? Especially for this entirely new journal, there was not much to go off, besides the broad theme of *Reframing Darkness*.

In this case, I was not expecting reviewers with a background in philosophy and anthropology, who were requesting that I improve the rigor and analytical precision of the paper, in line with what they are used to in those fields. I am very glad that it turned out this way, as it has doubtlessly improved the quality of the essay very much. I am grateful to the reviewers for being patient with me, and not rejecting the initial draft, but instead, thinking along constructively and critically. I feel that in each round of review, the draft changed and improved a lot, much more than usually happens. Due to the lack of anonymity, the contact with the reviewers and the editor felt personal, which made me take their feedback more seriously. Rather than attempting to simply 'get through' the review phase, it motivated me to diligently work to improve the paper. I felt that they cared about me improving my work, rather than gate-keeping for the benefit of a for-profit publishing corporation.

I wrote this essay by myself, and as such, I had no sparring-partner or colleague to bounce ideas off. Hence the thoughtful and detailed feedback from the reviewers was even more instrumental towards improving the paper, than it normally is. There were different ways in which I experienced the reviewer feedback as helpful. For some parts, it was enough to hear someone reflect back to me what I wrote, to know how something should be changed. For other parts, it was helpful enough to hear that it was simply not good enough, and had to be improved. For yet other parts, specific suggestions to pursue particular concepts or authors proved informative and useful, and were integrated into the final draft. Finally, at some moments the reviewers' criticism made me more confident in my own ideas, and helped me to articulate them with more clarity and conviction.

To synthesize: I would like to greatly thank the reviewers for bearing with me, for putting up with something rather unpolished and experimental in the first draft, for putting time into writing detailed feedbacks, and for helping me to improve the work!

Gijs van Leeuwen