

second edition

SPECULATIONS

AN ANTHOLOGY FOR READING, WRITING AND RESEARCH

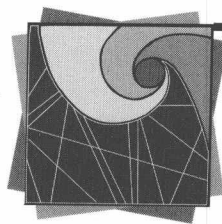
EDITED BY

PAULA ANCA FARCA • MATTHEW WYNN SIVILS • CONSTANCE SQUIRES

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An Anthology for Reading, Writing, and Research

SECOND EDITION



Edited by

Paula Farca

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KENDALL/HUNT PUBLISHING COMPANY
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How Does the Mind Work?

Introduction

The idea of Artificial Intelligence presupposes that we can understand enough of how the human mind works to duplicate it, and cloning aspires to the perfect duplication of a functioning human. So how does the mind work? At its most basic level, human consciousness must constantly mediate between itself and the world outside, between “me” and everything that is “not me.” The subject of the fundamental barrier between these two worlds stands at the core of every selection in this section. As citizens, students, writers, readers, and consumers, all of us have probably at one time or another become aware of the impossibility of seeing the world outside ourselves without the mind imposing its own order on what it perceives.

We encounter this difficulty at every level, from the personal to the professional. It affects our thinking on many questions, from what kind of learning environment is best for different kinds of intelligence to whether or not the Internet changes how effectively we connect with other people. How does our ability to imagine walking a mile in someone else’s shoes determine how we understand societal issues, and subsequently, how we vote? How do the stories we tell about ourselves form and sustain our sense of self? Do objective standards of art, culture, politics, or religion help us to understand our world, or do they artificially impose objective standards where there are none?

None of the pieces appearing in this section claims to settle the question of how the mind works. The writing in this section ranges from ancient philosophy to contemporary poetry and fiction, from modern philosophy to psychology and medicine. Each piece suggests the fascinating complexity of the human mind and offers ways of approaching the subject that will facilitate further exploration.

Thomas R. Smith, “Learning to Read”

Thomas R. Smith is the author of three collections of poetry, *Keeping the Star*, *Horse of Earth*, and *The Dark Indigo Current*. He has conducted poetry workshops in schools and often visited schools during his tenure as director of Artspeople, a community arts organization in western Wisconsin.



Before You Read:

What is your earliest memory of learning to read? What emotions are attached to it?

Learning to Read

Thomas R. Smith

How tired the elbows grew,
bones thrusting against skin.
Flesh took the brunt,
pressed into the carved desk.

In front of the room, a woman—
old, pretty, ugly, young,
she was ours and we were
hers. We hoped for kindness.

Around us, other faces in that
same balance of anticipation
and dread. Large black letters
floated unanchored on the page.

The boy and girl in the pictures looked
friendly, but only those who could
fit the sounds into words
were allowed to join their play.

The ones who couldn't learn
smoldered with a fatal resentment
I rarely noticed before it gushed
a bloody nose on the playground.

Meanwhile my mind turned a word,
grasped it, used it as a key
to open the door to a refuge
beyond hard desks and fists.



For Discussion:

1. How does Smith's image of language as a "key" compare with the images given by Plato, Brennan, Hofstadter, or Schank?
2. Compare the form of this poem to the form of "Advice to Young Writers." Why do you think Smith breaks the poem into six stanzas? What do you notice about the stanzas?
3. Notice how learning to read immediately creates division between children on the playground. Compare this to the educational hierarchies offered by Hofstadter and Plato.
4. Why do you think Smith uses the word "fatal" in the 5th stanza?



For Fact-Finding, Research, and Writing:

1. Using a reliable online encyclopedia, like Wikipedia, look up "blank verse" and "free verse." Which is Smith using in this poem?
2. Using an online database like google.com/unclesam or Statistical Lexis-Nexis (through the library A-Z index), find current statistics about literacy in Oklahoma.

Ron Padgett, "Advice to Young Writers"

Ron Padgett is the author of more than twenty-five books of poems and books on education. He also translated the poetry and fiction of Guillaume Apollinaire and the *Complete Poems of Blaise Cendrars*. Padgett's *New and Selected Poems* was published in 1995. A founding member of the Teachers and Writers Collaborative in New York City, Padgett has taught for thirty years in poetry-in-the-schools programs in many states. He is currently the director of publications for the Teachers and Writers Collaborative.



Before You Read:

Do you have certain activities that seem to stimulate your imagination? Is writing one of them?

Advice to Young Writers

Ron Padgett

One of the things I've repeated to writing students is that they should write when they don't feel like writing, just sit down and start, and when it doesn't go very well, to press on then, to get to that one thing you'd otherwise never find. What I forgot to mention was that this is just a writing technique, that you could also be out mowing the lawn, where if you bring your mind to it, you'll also eventually come to something unexpected ("The robin he hunts and pecks"), or watching the FARM NEWS on which a large man is referring to the "Greater Massachusetts area." It's alright, students, not to write. Do whatever you want. As long as you find that unexpected something, or even if you don't.



For Discussion:

1. Does Padgett deliver the advice he promises in his title? What is it?
2. How many writing techniques have you been taught that you can think of? How are they similar to or different from what is offered here?
3. The speaker here suggests that his "writing technique" can be applied to just about anything. How, in your experience, has that been true?
4. Do you think it's all right, as the speaker claims, if you don't find "that unexpected something"?



For Fact-Finding, Research, and Writing:

1. What traits identify this piece of writing as a poem?
2. Padgett's biographical note indicates that he is also a translator. Can you find his translations under his name in the OSU library? How else would you search for these books?

3. Find the correct format in MLA and/or APA for citing a translated book.
4. Using a reliable online search engine, what can you find out about the Teachers and Writers Collaborative that Padgett founded?

Plato, “The Allegory of the Cave”

Plato (428–347 B.C.) lived in Athens and studied closely with Socrates. Much of Plato’s writing is in the form of imagined dialogues between Socrates and Plato, with occasional questions from various students. After Socrates was sentenced to death in 399 B.C., Plato founded the Academy, an institution of learning that endured for almost a thousand years. Many of the practices and beliefs begun by Plato in the Academy are still visible in the basic organization and educational premises of most modern universities. “The Allegory of the Cave” models the belief that we cannot rely on our senses to tell us the truth about the world; it also suggests a relationship between our ability to understand what is outside ourselves and our ability to lead.



Before You Read:

How do you know that what you perceive with your senses is real? Why might this be an important question? Or isn’t it?

The Allegory of the Cave

And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened:—Behold! human beings living in an underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

From *Plato, Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, pp. 167–173. Copyright © 1974 by Hackett Publishing Company. Reprinted by permission of Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. All rights reserved.

I see.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?

Yes, he said.

And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?

No question, he replied.

To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

That is certain.

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive someone saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision—what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them,—will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?

Far truer.

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

True, he said.

And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he is forced into the presence of the sun himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.

Not all in a moment, he said.

He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day?

Certainly.

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

Certainly.

He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and in a certain way the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Clearly, he said, he would first see the sun and then reason about him.

And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

Certainly, he would.

And if they were in the habit of conferring honors among themselves on those who were quickest to observe the passing shadows and to remark which of them went before, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honors and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer,

Better to be the poor servant of a poor master,

and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner?

Yes, he said, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner.

Imagine once more, I said, such a one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?

To be sure, he said.

And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable), would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.

No question, he said.

This entire allegory, I said, you may now append, dear Glaucon, to the previous argument; the prison house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will

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not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed—whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.

I agree, he said, as far as I am able to understand you.

Moreover, I said, you must not wonder that those who attain to this beatific vision are unwilling to descend to human affairs; for their souls are ever hastening into the upper world where they desire to dwell; which desire of theirs is very natural, if our allegory may be trusted.

Yes, very natural.

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

Anything but surprising, he replied.

Anyone who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees anyone whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter life, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other; or, if he have a mind to laugh at the soul which comes from below into the light, there will be more reason in this than in the laugh which greets him who returns from above out of the light into the den.

That, he said, is a very just distinction.

But then, if I am right, certain professors of education must be wrong when they say that they can put a knowledge into the soul which was not there before, like sight into blind eyes.

They undoubtedly say this, he replied.

Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good.

superior

enlightened

Very true.

And must there not be some art which will effect conversation in the easiest and quickest manner; not implanting the faculty of sight, for that exists already, but has been turned in the wrong direction, and is looking away from the truth?

Yes, he said, such an art may be presumed.

And whereas the other so-called virtues of the soul seem to be akin to bodily qualities, for even when they are not originally innate they can be implanted later by habit and exercise, the virtue of wisdom more than anything else contains a divine element which always remains, and by this conversion is rendered useful and profitable; or, on the other hand, hurtful and useless. Did you never observe the narrow intelligence flashing from the keen eye of a clever rogue—how eager he is, how clearly his paltry soul sees the way to his end; he is the reverse of blind, but his keen eyesight is forced into the service of evil, and he is mischievous in proportion to his cleverness?

Very true, he said.

But what if there had been a circumcision of such natures in the days of their youth; and they had been severed from those sensual pleasures, such as eating and drinking, which, like leaden weights, were attached to them at their birth, and which drag them down and turn the vision of their souls upon the things that are below—if, I say, they had been released from these impediments and turned in the opposite direction, the very same faculty in them would have seen the truth as keenly as they see what their eyes are turned to now.

Very likely.

Yes, I said; and there is another thing which is likely, or rather a necessary inference from what has preceded, that neither the uneducated and uninformed of the truth, nor yet those who never make an end of their education, will be able ministers of State; not the former, because they have no single aim of duty which is the rule of all their actions, private as well as public; nor the latter, because they will not act at all except upon compulsion, fancying that they are already dwelling apart in the islands of the blessed.

Very true, he replied.

Then, I said, the business of us who are the founders of the State will be to compel the best minds to attain that knowledge which we have already shown to be the greatest of all—they must continue to ascend until they arrive at the good; but when they have ascended and seen enough we must not allow them to do as they do now.

What do you mean?

I mean that they remain in the upper world: but this must not be allowed; they must be made to descend again among the prisoners in the den, and partake of their labors and honors, whether they are worth having or not.

But is not this unjust? he said; ought we to give them a worse life, when they might have a better?

You have again forgotten, my friend, I said, the intention of the legislator, who did not aim at making any one class in the State happy above the rest; the happiness was to be in the whole State, and he held the citizens together by persuasion and necessity, making them benefactors of the State, and therefore benefactors of one another; to this end

he created them, not to please themselves, but to be his instruments in binding up the State.

True, he said, I had forgotten.

Observe, Glaucon, that there will be no injustice in compelling our philosophers to have a care and providence of others; we shall explain to them that in other States, men of their class are not obliged to share in the toils of politics: and this is reasonable, for they grow up at their own sweet will, and the government would rather not have them. Being self-taught, they cannot be expected to show any gratitude for a culture which they have never received. But we have brought you into the world to be rulers of the hive, kings of yourselves and of the other citizens, and have educated you far better and more perfectly than they have been educated, and you are better able to share in the double duty. Wherefore each of you, when his turn comes, must go down to the general underground abode, and get the habit of seeing in the dark. When you have acquired the habit, you will see ten thousand times better than the inhabitants of the den, and you will know what the several images are, and what they represent, because you have seen the beautiful and just and good in their truth. And thus our State, which is also yours, will be a reality, and not a dream only, and will be administered in a spirit unlike that of other States, in which men fight with one another about shadows only and are distracted in the struggle for power, which in their eyes is a great good. Whereas the truth is that the State in which the rulers are most reluctant to govern is always the best and most quietly governed, and the State in which they are most eager, the worst.

Quite true, he replied.

And will our pupils, when they hear this, refuse to take their turn at the toils of State, when they are allowed to spend the greater part of their time with one another in the heavenly light?

Impossible, he answered; for they are just men, and the commands which we impose upon them are just; there can be no doubt that every one of them will take office as a stern necessity, and not after the fashion of our present rulers of State.

Yes, my friend, I said; and there lies the point. You must contrive for your future rulers another and a better life than that of a ruler, and then you may have a well-ordered State; for only in the State which offers this, will they rule who are truly rich, not in silver and gold, but in virtue and wisdom, which are the true blessings of life. Whereas if they go to the administration of public affairs, poor and hungering after their own private advantage, thinking that hence they are to snatch the chief good, order there can never be; for they will be fighting about office, and the civil and domestic broils which thus arise will be the ruin of the rulers themselves and of the whole State.

Most true, he replied.

And the only life which looks down upon the life of political ambition is that of true philosophy. Do you know of any other?

Indeed, I do not, he said.



For Discussion:

1. Plato describes the process of education as similar to emerging from a cave. He considers the essential quality of an educated person to be tolerance of others. Consider your own education, both formal and informal. Does your own education agree with Plato's version of education?
2. Explain Plato's statement, "And surely it is those who are no lovers of governing who must govern." What in his argument leads him to this conclusion? Do you agree?
3. Where do modern means of communication like television and the Internet fit into Plato's cave metaphor? Do they help us to apprehend the world outside of the cave, or do they act as the shadows on the wall inside the cave, or both?
4. If the material world is an illusion, as Plato asserts, how would over-reliance on materialism affect a person's decision-making ability?

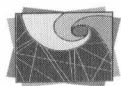


For Fact-Finding, Research, and Writing:

1. Plato believes that educated people owe a debt to their communities that should be paid by useful service to that community. Identify and provide basic background on two educational programs that strongly emphasize this service ethic today.
2. Using appropriate reference materials, identify the allusion to Plato's allegory in the writing of St. Paul.
3. Compare Plato's ideas on education to those of Russell or Gardner.

Roger Schank, "Where Stories Come from and Why We Tell Them"

Roger Schank is the Director of the Institute for Learning Sciences and John Evans Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, Psychology, and Education at Northwestern University. His publications include *The Creative Attitude: Learning to Ask and Answer the Right Questions*, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, and *Tell Me A Story: Narrative and Intelligence*, from which "Where Stories Come From and Why We Tell Them" is excerpted. An expert in both education and computers, Schank explains how narratology (the study of how the mind organizes reality into stories) can provide a model of human thought processes useful in the development of Artificial Intelligence. In "Where Stories Come From and Why We Tell Them" Schank categorizes stories according to their goals.



Before You Read:

What are urban legends? How many can you name? Where did you learn them?

Where Stories Come from and Why We Tell Them

I WAS SITTING in my office one day when three people came in, one at a time, to talk to me. The first was a foreign student who was about to become a graduate student. He told me the following story.

In order to go to graduate school, I had to postpone going into the army. Ordinarily, three years of service are required, but my country decided that if I wanted to study for a Ph.D. now, I would owe them five years after I finish my studies. I agreed to this, but after I agreed, my country called and said I would owe six years of service. Again I agreed, and again I received a call saying that now they had decided seven years would be required. What should I do?

The second person who entered my office was someone who worked for me. This was his story:

My ex-wife just called. She's moving back to town, and she's planning to put our child in public school here. She's had him in private school, but now she wants me to pay the tuition money to her instead. She isn't planning on working and is trying to get me to support her. I just called my lawyer to ask him what to do.

The third person was a friend. He had been looking to change jobs and had negotiated a fine deal for himself in another town. This was his story:

I've been busy selling my house and otherwise preparing for the move. All of a sudden, my appointment has been stopped at the highest levels of the company. No one will tell me why, but I think someone who was my enemy in the past has a friend at the company. And I think she wrote a letter that prejudiced them against me. I'm very upset.

Schank, Roger C. "Where Stories Come from and Why We Tell Them," from *Tell Me A Story: Narrative and Intelligence*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990, pp. 28–55. Reprinted by permission.