

Can We Trust Our Educators?

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It may seem there's a perfectly good and obvious answer to our question: "It depends! Sometimes we can trust our educators, sometimes we can't, it all depends on who they are (and when, and where)." If I did not think that our question—Can we trust our educators?—pointed to a deep and radical problem, I would be happy with this answer. But, I do think our question points to a deep and radical problem, and so I am not happy to proceed like that. What is the problem I have in mind? I shall take most of this talk arriving at it, and will only be able to articulate it at the end; but I hope the path will not be a waste of time and will be worth our while.

I do not claim to have discovered this problem for myself, for I have found it in Plato, in Plato's famous Cave story, when he likens us humans to prisoners deep down in a dark cave, chained and in fetters from birth so as to be able to face in one direction only, namely, towards the wall at the bottom end of the cave, our whole life consisting in just this, our watching the spectacle on the wall as on a giant monitor-screen and, moreover, taking a lively and vital interest in this spectacle as if it meant the world to us—to each of us individually and to all of us together communally—indeed as if that were a world of real things and live happenings and not lifeless shadows projected on a wall.

Let me read out the Cave story:

Plato's Cave story (in Republic, book VII, 514a-517a)

Next, I said, compare the effect of education and of the lack of it on our nature to an experience like this: Imagine human beings living in an underground, cavelike dwelling, with an entrance a long way up, which is both open to the light and as wide as the cave itself. They've been there since childhood, fixed in the same place, with their necks and legs fettered, able to see only in front of them, because their bonds prevent them from turning their heads around. Light is provided by a fire burning far above and behind them. Also behind them, but on higher ground, there is a path stretching between them and the fire. Imagine that along this path a low wall has

been built, like the screen in front of puppeteers above which they show their puppets. I'm imagining it. Then also imagine that there are people along the wall, carrying all kinds of artifacts that project above it—statues of people and other animals, made out of stone, wood, and every material. And, as you'd expect, some of the carriers are talking, and some are silent. It's a strange image you're describing, and strange prisoners.

They're like us. Do you suppose, first of all, that these prisoners see anything of themselves and one another besides the shadows that the fire casts on the wall in front of them? How could they, if they have to keep their heads motionless throughout life? What about the things being carried along the wall? Isn't the same true of them? Of course. And if they could converse with one another, don't you think they'd suppose that the names they used applied to the things they see passing before them? They'd have to. And what if their prison also had an echo from the wall facing them? Don't you think they'd believe that the shadows passing in front of them were talking whenever one of the carriers passing along the wall was doing so? I certainly do. Then the prisoners would in every way believe that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of those artifacts. They must surely believe that. Consider, then, what being released from their bonds and cured of their ignorance would naturally be like, if something like this came to pass. When one of them was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his head, walk, and look up toward the light, he'd be pained and dazzled and unable to see the things whose shadows he'd seen before. What do you think he'd say, if someone were to tell him that what he'd seen before was inconsequential, but that now—because he is a bit closer to the things that are and is turned towards things that are more—he sees more correctly? Or, to put it another way, if someone pointed to each of the things passing by, asked him what each of them is, and compelled him to answer, don't you think he'd be at a loss and that he'd believe that the things he saw earlier were truer than the ones he was now being shown? Much truer. And if someone compelled him to look at the light itself, wouldn't his eyes hurt, and wouldn't he turn around and flee towards the things he's able to see, believing that they're really clearer than the ones he's being shown? He would. And if someone dragged him away from there by force, up the rough, steep path, and didn't let him go until he had dragged him into the sunlight, wouldn't he be pained and irritated at being treated that way? And when he came into the light, with the sun filling his eyes, wouldn't he be unable to see a single one of the things now said to be true?

He would be unable to see them, at least at first. I suppose, then, that he'd need time to get adjusted before he could see things in the world above. At first, he'd see shadows most easily, then images of men and other things in water, then the things themselves. Of these, he'd be able to study the things in the sky and the sky itself more easily at night, looking at the light of the stars and the moon, than during the day, looking at the sun and the light of the sun. Of course. Finally, I suppose, he'd be able to see the sun, not images of it in water or some alien place, but the sun itself, in its own place, and be able to study it. Necessarily so. And at this point he would infer and conclude that the sun provides the seasons and the years, governs everything in the visible world, and is in some way the cause of all the things that he used to see. It's clear that would be his next step. What about when he reminds himself of his first dwelling place, his fellow prisoners, and what passed for wisdom

there? Don't you think that he'd count himself happy for the change and pity the others? Certainly. And if there had been any honors, praises, or prizes among them for the one who was sharpest at identifying the shadows as they passed by and who best remembered which usually came earlier, which later, and which simultaneously, and who could thus best divine the future, do you think that our man would desire these rewards or envy those among the prisoners who were honored and held power? Instead, wouldn't he feel, with Homer, that he'd much prefer to "work the earth as a serf to another, one without possessions," and go through any sufferings, rather than share their opinions and live as they do? I suppose he would rather suffer anything than live like that. Consider this too. If this man went down into the cave again and sat down in his same seat, wouldn't his eyes—coming suddenly out of the sun like that—be filled with darkness? They certainly would. And before his eyes had recovered—and the adjustment would not be quick—while his vision was still dim, if he had to compete again with the perpetual prisoners in recognizing the shadows, wouldn't he invite ridicule? Wouldn't it be said of him that he'd returned from his upward journey with his eyesight ruined and that it isn't worthwhile even to try to travel upward? And, as for anyone who tried to free them and lead them upward, if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn't they kill him? They certainly would.

(in the translation by Grube as revised by Reeve; with some adaptation by myself)

However, I recommend the translation by Christopher Rowe, which you will find in Penguin Classics and which is very affordable. I recommend Plato's Cave story when you find a moment to read it (you will find it at the opening of book 7 of the *Republic*).

The most important thing in the Cave story for our purposes today, is WHO those people are who cast the shadows on the wall, and HOW they go about casting those shadows on the wall. Plato calls these people, those who cast the shadows on the wall and so provide us with life's spectacle and with what we take to be our vital interest and attention both privately and publicly: 'puppeteers', or, on a translation that I prefer of the unusual Greek term that he chooses for labelling them: 'marvel-makers' (*thaumatopoiói*). Plato tell us, in (almost) so many words, who they are supposed to be: they are supposed to be our educators.

He also tells us how they project the shadows on the wall: they do this by using man-made, artificial things, things; apparently, either things they have made themselves or things they have inherited from their educators in turn. For example, when we see a rabbit hop across a field, what we are seeing is really a shadow of a rabbit, which we confuse with a real rabbit. And while we think we are seeing not only a real rabbit (as opposed to a shadow of a rabbit) but also a natural rabbit (as opposed to an artificial rabbit), what we are really seeing is not only a shadow of a rabbit, but a shadow of a rabbit projected not by a natural rabbit but by an artificial rabbit, a rabbit that has been fashioned by our educators.

This, then, is the first function of educators as Plato presents them here: they are responsible for, or at any rate contribute to, our impression that what we are experiencing (seeing, hearing, etc.) are real and natural things, whereas what we are experiencing is actually shot through with artifice and convention. (By 'real things', I mean as opposed to shadows and images of real things; by 'natural things', I mean as opposed to things that are (at least partly) artificial and conventional.) Plato's point, I take it, is that this artificial and conventional part of our experience is the product of our education and our educators. As I understand Plato here, his point is not that our educators are doing any of this because they are malevolent or manipulative. His point is, rather, that they do this because they don't know otherwise: they, too, are Cave dwellers like us; they, too, are familiar, from their experience, only with things that are inextricably (or, near-inextricably) mixed up with artifice and convention. They, too, owe their thinking and experience to *their* educators.

But Plato presents our educators as having a second, and closely related, function: this is to teach us language; teach us words, what words mean and what they designate in our experience. That Plato presents them as having this function is clear, when he says that they (or some of them) utter articulate sounds to the accompaniment of the images as they are projecting those images onto the wall. We recognize here a model of how we humans learn language; not a second language, but our first language: we learn language by being taught to associate words, understood as complex phonetic units, with items in our experience. For example, we learn to understand the meaning of the word "rabbit" by being taught to associate this complex phonetic unit with a rabbit that we see in front of us.

We come up now against a puzzle in understanding what Plato is saying here: for if we learn the meaning of the word "rabbit" by associating it with a rabbit that we see, there cannot, it seems, by anything artificial or conventional in the meaning of this word (even though the word itself, as a complex phonetic unit, is artificial and conventional), since it derives its meaning from its reference, which is a real and natural rabbit! This, however, is the opposite from what Plato intends. For he expressly says that the words we use derive their meaning not by designating real and natural things, but by designating things that involve artifice and convention.

Allow me to spell this out. About us, whom he likens to those chained prisoners, Plato says that we are subject to a twofold illusion: we think that our words designate the things we see (which we take to be the real things, whereas in fact they are only shadows), whereas in fact our words designate the things that cast the shadows, which are artificial. The illusion that we are said to be labouring under, is twofold. For one thing, we take what we see to be what is real, whereas in fact it is not, since it is shadows, hence images of things, not those things:

‘All in all, then, I said, such people would take the real (*to alēthes*) to be nothing but the shadows of the fabricated things’ (515c1–2).

For another, we think our words designate the things we see, which appear to us perfectly real and natural, whereas in fact they designate the things that cast the shadows:

‘If then you thought that they [the chained prisoners] were able to converse with each other, don’t you suppose that they would take themselves to be naming those very things that they are seeing?’ (515b4-5)¹

What is Plato’s point here—which, admittedly, it is a little difficult to understand and get our head around? I take it he wants us to understand his point as follows. We humans are naturally inclined to think that what we experience (e.g. what we see) already comes divided up in real and natural units: if we see a rabbit, it is because there is a rabbit out there that causes us to see it; and rabbits are (as scientists and philosophers say) ‘a natural kind’. But Plato’s point is that this way of thinking of our experience—as being the direct experience of real, natural things—is an illusion. It is an illusion, he wants to argue, because it overlooks that how we divide up what we see is the result not only of what we see, but also of how we are habituated to divide it up when we first learn to speak and think. This habituation, he wants to argue, is the result of our education and of the models that our educators use as models for how to divide up and conceptualize our experience. Plato’s point is that these models are (in significant part) artificial, man-made, conventional; and since we divide up our experience according to such models, our experience itself is shot through with artifice and convention.

This is all very strange. But there is more to come in Plato’s story. As the Cave story unfolds, Plato has us imagine a scenario in which a single prisoner is released of her/his chains so as to be free to move freely; and he has us imagine this liberated prisoner (she/he is still a prisoner as she/he is still in the dark cave) turning around and then, a little later, being dragged forcibly up the steep ascent of the cave and towards the cave’s opening, before finally being thrown out of the cave and into the dazzling light of the sun where, slowly and gradually, she/he will recognize beautiful and wonderful things, which are not shadows or artificial stuff, but real and natural things.

While we may wonder what Plato means by all this, one thing does seem clear: Plato holds out some hope that we may free ourselves from our educators and our education. He casts this in a grand, pathos-filled, heroic moment, in which we become freed from our

¹ Following the text of manuscripts A and D, and reading *nomizein onomazein* at 515b5. This goes against Burnet, who follows manuscript F and Proclus and has only *nomizein*, and against Slings, who follows Iamblichus and has only *onomazein*.

attachment to the world as represented to us by our educators, with all the artificiality of that world, and we positively turn away from it.

Plato is telling us a story of liberation, reorientation, ascent and enlightenment. How can it get any better! But then again, we may wonder whether the story is just as troubling as it is uplifting. For one thing, the lucky escapee is not allowed to stay in the sun, she/he is forced to go back into the cave again and descend down to join again the human world; in fact she/he also wants to go back out of pity and compassion for her/his fellow humans and to bring them the good news of another, higher, truer world. But Plato has us imagine how the chained prisoners would welcome her/him on her/his return: they would not understand her/him at all at all at all, would mock her/him for not being at home in the ways of the world, would find him not only a nuisance but a threat, and might even end up killing her/him. This, of course, is what Athenian public did to Socrates, which is undoubtedly what Plato wants his readers and his audience to think of here.

The first thing that happens to the released prisoner once she's/he's been released of the chains and has turned around, is that she/he encounters 'someone' who presents her/him with all manner of things and asks her/him what these things are. And, at this moment, the released prisoner practically loses her/his bearings and her/his confidence and is ready to turn back to the shadows as a world in which she/he is more confident. Who is this 'someone' whom our hero first encounters and who makes our hero practically give up before she's/he's started? It is clear who it is: it is one of those who cast shadows onto the wall—one of our educators—and who used artificial things to cast the shadows. And it is those things that this marvel-maker (as Plato has called him) presents to our hero and insists that he recognize and acknowledge as more real than the shadows our hero was formerly facing, only for our hero to practically lose faith, give up and turn back to those shadows.

As far as I can see, what Plato is telling us, in and through this part of the story, is this: even supposing that we have been liberated and have turned around, we still have to face our educators and to go through, beyond and above them, if we ever want to get out of the cave; and when we face them, we cannot expect that they will help us go through, beyond and above them, on the contrary, we can expect them to want us to recognize *their* offerings as being practically The Full Monty even though it is only artificial stuff. In doing this they will make us doubly confused as to what is more worth our while: taking the spectacle on the walls as real and vital OR taking the artificial things proffered by our educators and behind this spectacle as real and vital.

The problem I have in mind does not at all rely on the idea that our educators are bad people, people who are out to manipulate us. Some of our educators may be bad and manipulative, but many are not, and some are good and have the best intentions. I do not even want to rely on the fact that some of our educators are bad, others good; these

undeniable facts do not matter for the problem I want to set out. I would like to think that, in not at all relying on the idea that our educators (or some of them) are bad and manipulative, I am following Plato. There is no suggestion, from what I can find in the Cave story, that the marvel-makers manipulate the cave-dwellers. What is distinctive of the marvel-makers as Plato characterizes them is not that they are manipulative, but that they are conveyers of artificiality and convention. This is Plato's point, when he describes them as using not natural things, but artificial, man-made things to project the shadows on the wall: his point is that, what we humans experience is shot through with artifice and convention.

Notice that Plato's point is about what we experience, what we see (and hear, etc.): this is what (as he describes it) is shot through with artifice and convention. Of course, his point is also about what we think and how we speak, not only about what we experience. For he describes the cave-dwellers facing the spectacle on the wall as taking a live and vital interest in this spectacle, and an interest that occupies their thinking and speaking. For example, he describes them as vying with one another at remembering the sequence of things seen in the past and at anticipating the sequence of things to be seen in the future, and rewarding and honouring one another for excelling in such exercises and skills (see 516c8–d7). In doing so, they (or we, since it is all about us) are not just seeing things, they are just as much talking about and thinking about what they experience and see.

We see that when Plato has it that the world we are at home in is shot through with artifice and convention, he does not limit this point to being about our thinking and speaking, rather, he has it extend right through to what we see and experience: that, too, is shot through with artifice and convention.

Why is this so important? Imagine if the idea had been, rather, that while our thinking and speaking have a lot of artifice and convention in it, at least our experience is not like that; *it* at any rate is pure, genuine, authentic. Whether or not we see things the way they are objectively and independently of us, is not at all relevant for the present point. What is relevant is that, if we were to follow this idea instead, at least the way things appear to our senses is natural, genuine, authentic: how an apple appears to my sight, my eyes, is the product of the interaction between a thing out there (the apple or whatever) and my eyes. And, according to this idea, this appearance (the impression, the sensory image) is entirely free from artifice and convention. For, as this idea would have it, even if our thinking and speaking involves artifice and convention, our sensory experience does not.

This idea, which is not at all Plato's and appears to be quite opposite to Plato's, would take the sting out of the problem. For we would, each of us, straight away have something to which we could turn, whenever we so wished, for the sake of at least a momentary respite from the influence that artifice and convention have on us. Not only that, we would be able to invoke our sensory experience to provide us with a means of extricating *that* material in

our thinking and speaking that is artificial and conventional from *that* material in our thinking and speaking that is natural. For example, we could object to the name 'Pink Lady' for certain apples, and object to all the associations, prejudices etc. enshrined in this name, but at the same time rest content that, when it comes to the way those apples look and taste, we do not have to exercise any such caution, lest these impressions, too, be full of prejudices, for we know already that all the potential prejudice that convention brings with it stops short of that which we directly and immediately experience.

I hope you can see how this does really take the sting out of the problem. And let us note that it would make a mockery of Plato's Cave story. On that story, turning way from artifice, convention, prejudice requires something like a super-human effort, the kind of thing Plato refers to as the release of the chains that attach us to the conventional world, turning around and away from it and more. But, on this alternative idea, turning away from convention is as easy as anything. All that is required is that we attend, faithfully and without letting language and concepts get in the way, to what we see, hear, smell, touch and taste and that we make a good note of how it looks, sounds, smells, feels, tastes.

What does it take, then, to take seriously the idea that not only our thinking, but our experience is shot through with artifice and convention? In the way in which Plato, apparently, does? Of course, we need to be clear, straight away, that Plato thinks that there is a way of extricating ourselves, our thinking, and even our experience, from what is conventional. Or at any rate he thinks that we can attempt this, and can, all going well, succeed to some degree and up to a point. It is just this attempt that he articulates in the Cave story, when he holds out the prospect, or hope, of a chained cave-dweller becoming free of her chains and turning around and away from the world of shadows cast onto the wall by a man-made mechanism employing man-made models for the things projected onto the wall. Plato thinks that our thinking and experience is dominated by convention, but he does not think that convention is an inextricable part of our thinking and experience; for he holds out the prospect or hope that we can extricate ourselves, or at any rate try to.

It is easy to think that whereas the label 'Pink Lady' is artificial and convention, the label 'apple' is natural and designates a natural kind. How can one think otherwise? Let me try to explain. Imagine a time in which those who used the label 'Pink Lady', and even those who first decided to use it for those apples, thought that this label is as natural as we think the label 'apple' is (if we think this). We can imagine them thinking that all things are either male or female, and that all things are either aristocratic or plebeian. So they asked themselves of these apples: Are they male or female? And they decided that, evidently, they are female (since they are pink and pink is a female colour). Then they asked themselves whether these apples are aristocratic or plebeian, and decided that they are aristocratic, perhaps on account of their delicacy and exquisite beauty. We, of course, think these name-givers are deluded; we know that the distinction between male and female is greatly

artificial and conventional, and we know this just as much, if not more, about the distinction between aristocratic and plebeian.

Now all we have to imagine, to take seriously the idea that not only our thinking but our experience is shot through with artifice and convention, is that some future people recognize that we are no less deluded about the label 'apple', when we think it designates a natural kind, as we recognize that those people are (or were) deluded about the label 'Pink Lady' who think that *it* designates a natural kind. I admit, that is not so easy to imagine, for we think the way we think. But I hope it is not impossible to imagine, with the help of the analogy I have just offered.

Where does all this leave us? I think, with two or three or four questions. These questions, I want to suggest, help articulate to problem I have been at pains to articulate from the beginning.

First, is it really the case (as Plato thinks) that our thinking and our experience are thoroughly, and perhaps even inextricably, bound up with convention, convention rooted in our education and how we are educated, and especially in our learning of language?

Second, if our thinking and our experience are thoroughly, and perhaps even inextricably, bound up with convention, why should this at all be a concern to us? Why should we not simply accept, without any worry, that this is how things are with us humans?

Third, is this something we can do something about? Can we begin to extricate ourselves, or at least put some distance between ourselves and the conventional element in human existence? Can we aspire to a perspective that is, at least to some degree, free from this conventionality?

Finally, what form does this convention take, especially when it becomes so pronounced as to be something we, or some of us, might find oppressive and might resent?

These are difficult questions, and I won't be able to answer them, or even begin trying to answer them, today. They are the questions that articulate the problem that I've been trying to articulate in this talk.

In regard to the first question (whether our thinking and experience really is so thoroughly conventional) I observe that this is something that has been occupying philosophers more recently, too, not just Plato a long time ago. One of them is (Willard Van Orman) Quine, who is an important twentieth century American philosopher. He argued that our thinking and indeed our experience is inextricably bound up with convention in this way, that is, a way rooted in language, how it is taught, and the only way it can be taught. Here is how another

important twentieth English century philosopher, and contemporary of Quine's, Michael Dummett, formulates Quine's position:

'Now these are two highly controversial theses of a general kind concerning the theory of meaning which are maintained in *Word and Object* (by Quine, in 1960) ... the other I will call the 'inextricability thesis', the thesis, namely, *that convention and experience cannot be disentangled as determinants of our linguistic dispositions.*'

(M. Dummett, 'The Significance of Quine's Indeterminacy Thesis' (1973), reprinted in his *Truth and Other Enigmas* (London: Duckworth, 1978); the above quotation is from p. 387 in *Truth and Other Enigmas.*)

Setting Quine and Dummett next to each other, I think, is instructive also in regard to our third question (whether we should at all be bothered, if our thinking and experience is, either inextricably or at least thoroughly, tied up with conventionality). For, if I am not mistaken, Quine was not at all concerned about this, he simply accepted that this is how things are, we just have to operate within convention and do our best; and he was quite optimistic that we can, gradually and incrementally, improve things (especially through natural science), even in spite of his conventionalism.

Michael Dummett, on the other hand, was not at all happy to accept Quine's conventionalism, or, as he summed it up, the inextricability thesis. Dummett was concerned that we should be able to put some distance, in our thinking and experience, between ourselves and convention. It may be worth noting here that Dummett, unlike Quine, was a religious believer, in fact a devout Catholic, and not only devout, but politically active. Dummett was also, in addition to being an academic philosopher and long-time professor in Oxford, a social reformer and thoroughly dissatisfied with the state of the land in which he lived. Quine seems to have been more conservative, politically and in every other way.

If, finally, we tie in this question (whether we should at all be bothered, if our thinking and experience is substantially tied up with conventionality) with the last question (whether this is something we can do something about), I want to note that these two questions go naturally together. Because, if we think we have no way of overcoming this conventionality in our thinking and experience, even to a degree, then, you might say, we might as well accept it without demurring. If, however, we think we have some way of putting at least some distance between ourselves, our authentic thinking and authentic experience, and the thinking and experience that is shot through with artifice and convention, then we will, naturally, be preoccupied and concerned if we do not do this or at least try to.

Let me end, therefore, by returning to Plato and drawing our attention to one or two ways in which, for him, we are able to put some distance ourselves and convention, and that, naturally, this is something we will want to do or at any rate try to do.

First, he thought that we humans are able to ask hard questions, radical questions. And he thought that the very fact that we have the ability to ask such questions shows that we are not entirely tied to, or at home in, or satisfied with the conventional world. Such questions, he thought, are distinctive of philosophy, at any rate philosophy when it is genuine and authentic.

Secondly, Plato thought that there are certain more familiar and generally recognizable and available ways of recognizing that we are not entirely tied to or at home in the conventional world. These ways he identified as, especially, first, love (*eros*) and openness to beauty. He thought that these two things in us humans (love and the openness to beauty) have the potential of indicating to us that we are not entirely at home in or satisfied with the conventional world, and that we are able to put some distance between ourselves and it. In fact these two things in us are, for Plato, closely connected (I mean love and the openness to beauty). For he thought of love as a force or potential in us that is stimulated, or triggered, through our perception of beauty. It is here if anywhere, Plato thought, that we have some potential to liberate, or at least partially liberate ourselves; if you like, liberate ourselves from our educators. (Plato articulates these ideas in two dialogues, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*.)

It's a good question precisely what Plato had in mind when he thought of love and the perception of beauty in this way. Personally, I think I understand him best, or at least a little, about all this, when I think of myself opening myself up to certain aspects of beauty in nature, especially the beauty of things that are, to our perception and experience and even our thinking, boundless. I am thinking of the experience of the sky, the sun, the weather and the sea. When I expose myself to, and reflect on, these experiences of beauty in nature, I am struck (sometimes at any rate) that here if anywhere I sense that I am free, or at any rate, feel free, from the conventional world. I admit, this may be just wishful thinking, but this is how it strikes me.

One or two final remarks.

Let's suppose, for a moment, that we can, at least try, to put some distance between ourselves and the conventional world, either through our asking radical questions or through the perception of beauty (or certain forms of beauty) and the mindset that goes with this. How can we make good use of this? In particular, can we use it to reform the ways we are educated, with the aim of making them less conventional? (I mean, reform with a political edge.) To reform our educators, our future educators, and ourselves as educators? Or is this mindset, rather, a private one, which one may perhaps be able to share with oneself and a few people especially close to one (the people we love), but not something we can use by way of educational and in general political reform?

Let me end with a word about this whole idea of our thinking and our experience being shot through with artifice and convention. Is that not too much to swallow? It may make for an intriguing story (as in Plato's Cave story), but can we really take it seriously? I would have thought so, especially for us who are engaged in a lecture remotely and through all this technology. Imagine the amount of rules and regulations we have to master and accept, to use, and make good use, of this technology. If I want to walk to the beach and along the shore, there are few rules and regulations I have to conform to, master, accept, make into my second nature. But suppose I take the car (I don't actually have one). Straight away, I have to internalize all kind of rules and regulations, called the traffic code. But the difference between walking and taking the car is already old hat, practically antediluvian. Imagine, instead, the difference between a particular group of people meeting to listen to each other and talking to each other, and any number of people meeting as we are not, remotely. I can turn off my screen, alter my voice, record myself; so can you. All this can be regulated, and no doubt it will be. Perhaps we will agree, by convention, that on the whole it is better if screens are off and we cannot see each other, and if our voices become regularized so as not to reveal gender, sex, accent that could be revealing or race or social background and more.

I think you will agree that such changes would affect the way we think. Will they also affect the way we experience the world, literally the way we see things? Would it not be overly optimistic to assume that the answer is no?