

From Plato to Cormac McCarthy: Mathematics as Metaphor

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- What if there is no outside?
- What if there are no objects behind us? That is, what if the shadows are all there is?

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- How would we model the world if our senses were different?

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Save the surface and you save all.

Numbers and reality

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Indeed, numbers are referred to things in three ways: magnitude, similarity, order.

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Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them a priori through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an a priori cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us.

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- Is this even conceivable to us?

Conscious vs. subconscious mind

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Les péripéties du voyage me firent oublier mes travaux mathématiques; arrivés à Coutances, nous montâmes dans un omnibus pour je ne sais quelle promenade; au moment où je mettais le pied sur le marche-pied, l'idée me vint, sans que rien dans mes pensées antérieures parût m'y avoir préparé, que les transformations dont, j'avais fait usage pour définir les fonctions fuchsiennes étaient identiques à celles de la géométrie non-euclidienne.

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- Cormac McCarthy recalls a similar story about August Kekulé and his discovery of the structure of benzene in a dream.

Paintings on the walls

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*Caminante, son tus huellas
el camino y nada mas;
caminante, no hay camino,
se hace camino al andar.
[Walker, your footsteps
are the path, the path is nothing more;
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You make the path by walking.]*

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*She knew that in the end you really cant know. You cant get hold of the world.
You can only draw a picture. Whether it's a bull on the wall of a cave or a partial
differential equation it's all the same thing.*

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- As G. H. Hardy notes in his *A Mathematician's Apology*:
A man who could give a convincing account of mathematical reality would have solved very many of the most difficult problems of metaphysics. If he could include physical reality in his account, he would have solved them all.

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