



## The Pain and Pleasure of existence: Paradigms as a filtering mechanism and the paradigm shift.

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### 1. Introduction

This world embroils all who come to her shores with a great deal of pain and agony. A person will of necessity experience loss of many kinds; pains of many descriptions from the physical to psychological unto the very core his or her being and of course there is the reality of death which casts a shadow on whatever he or she may dream. On the other hand, there may also be a great deal of pleasure and joy ranging from the physical to the psychological and perhaps for some, beyond even that. In this essay, I will argue that the way pain is experienced (and dealt with) as with pleasure is filtered through the paradigm a person may have, albeit in the majority of all cases people are not aware of the paradigm that filters their experience (that is to say, pains and pleasures) of life. I will then suggest a paradigm which contains all such paradigms, although this may fail in the case of the notion of a “set of sets”. Unless one renames this “total paradigm” (“set of all sets”). But then one has simply altered the answer to fit a new definition which is flawed. It is better to say there cannot be “a set of all sets”, because grasping it so is impossible. In other words, human knowledge is at best partial. It is for this reason, that the answer to the question: “Why is there existence at all - with all these pains and pleasures?” cannot be answered. Notwithstanding, I will suggest the conceivability of a paradigm shift in a very broad sense.

By the word “paradigm” I wish to mean a certain worldview or way of seeing things or even a set of beliefs. It is so fundamental that a person would not only live by it but die for it. Or at least espouse its truth. I will point out a few paradigms I consider fundamental, namely the mystical; the philosophical; the scientific; the artistic, and what I call “the paradigm of ignorance”, shared by the vast majority of mankind. These paradigms will be defined and then analyzed in terms of how they filter, structure, and “color” notions of pain and pleasure. I will then postulate “the paradigm of paradigms” arguing that such is impossible just as one will remain forever (or so it would seem) ignorant over why there

is existence at all and thus why one has to (or must) endure this tumult of pleasures and pains. I will close with a suggestion for coping with simply not knowing that may free one from excessive pain; albeit without having arrived at the ultimate paradigm. Nevertheless, I will posit the possibility of a paradigm shift.

While a paradigm shift as developed by Kuhn to refer to changes in the scientific disciplines and the adoption of new concepts and experimental practices, it has also been used in a broader context and refers to a profound change in a fundamental model or perception of events. It is not self-willed as much as it occurs beyond the influence of a single individual. I will characterize this shift and its promise of greater pleasure and less pain, albeit one may still not be able to answer the “why anything” question. Perhaps the question itself will simply fade away.

### 2. The Mystical

The mystic seeks joy in attachment to the divine. In order to get there, so to speak he may denounce the world, seeking a meta-universe, one infused with the energy of the Creator who at every given moment gives life and energy to all things. The mystic still falls prey to pain yet sees it as a fall which will only lead to greater pleasure. Moreover, even that which appears bad is perceived as truly good, since all is the workings of the Creator. In this sense, even in pain, there can be joy.

I am not equating the mystical experience with adherence to one of the great religions. Religion may propel a person there, but that is a rare phenomenon in the great social mass of religious conviction. The mystic’s experience is never simply social. Though it may be difficult to categorize and write about such experiences, there is a wealth of mystical literature within mainstream religious practice, but again only few enter that domain.

The mystic lives in a world of rapture, certainly not one of rupture. The universe is infused with divine energy and all things of an expression, a creation thereof. Piercing the

external layers, the mystic can see the vibration of this energy. There is nothing to fear. All is as it is meant to be. He lives in wonder and awe and a deep love and compassion to all such entities. Though he may not know the essence of all; he may not have complete knowledge, his is one of experience, of being present to that which is. And though he laments the current state of the world, his discipline is to not confront that, but simply create light from the temple of his consciousness.

Yet some mystics live a normal life and in fact, may be unknown to others. Such a mystic is inspired by all aspects of living, he draws pleasure from the sip of coffee, from work and creative outlets, yet he keeps his God to himself while benefiting others as is his heart's desire. The road, however, is not at all easy: there is the pull of the physical and lustful pleasures of the world; of honor seeking and wealth; of negative emotions and scorn for a world bent on violence; there is the story of one's childhood which can never be perfect and the unanswered call to God for peace. Then there is the scourge of the bafflement of the mind, an impasse that only meditation can fix.

Meditation takes many forms. The essential core is awareness of the present moment and then an entering into an altered state that is neither intellectual nor exclusively visual. Vested from one's body, what is it that remains. It is that core that may be awakened. The mystic does not fear death; for that core is the light of God, the oneness of all and it is immortal.

### 3. The Philosophical

The philosophical is characterized by freedom of thought, reflective and analytical methods that ask certain fundamental questions about the nature of existence. The tradition relies on text, is inherently skeptical, and employs reason (usually) as its guiding light. As opposed to the mystic, the philosopher does not seek merely an experience but wishes to discursively understand things and coherently put forth ideas that so describe the universe.

While it has been divided into four main sections – the metaphysical, the epistemological; the moral, and the aesthetic – all such domains do not exist in isolation. Many “big picture” accounts have been proposed in its long history, and while it does not count as revelatory kinds of knowledge, the work of the philosopher is to rationally assess and understand the nature of reality. Today, metaphysics no longer has such an ambitious goal and rather seeks after smaller goals.

There is a further distinction in (professional) philosophy between that of the analytical and continental which one can describe as the difference between the Classical and Romantic in the arts. The East and the West may also be separated in that the former is more holistic and intuitive, while the latter is more individual and analytical. Philosophy may also be noted as the prelude to scientific investigation or as a postscript of such knowledge systems.

As for pleasure, one recalls the Ancient Greeks whose maxim “to know thyself” and “philosophy” itself having the meaning “love of wisdom”, imply that philosophy itself is a pleasure

whose goal is clarity and truth. Again, such notions today may seem antiquated in a prevailing paradigm that is unintellectual wishing not for the pleasures of intellectual understanding, but rather immediate sensations. Nevertheless, the philosopher like the next person feels pain and is frustrated in the task of finding such wisdom. Socrates was condemned; Spinoza excommunicated; Nietzsche went insane. Philosophers such as Russell may argue that logic and rational thinking is our best bet against the drive for power and destruction, but it seems quo the Enlightenment that it may not be as simple as that. Without a transcendent wisdom, can one escape the categories of mind, to borrow from Kant? The philosopher cannot go beyond and wishes to have nothing to do with a transcendent source that amounts to belief and blind acceptance and adherence.

This state of not knowing the essence as it was described in Existential terms as a deep anguish, alienation, terror, and aloneness in a an unknown universe and as an unknown self. The philosopher then may succumb to a very deep pain and cannot filter it out, since existence precedes essence, so the task of philosophy is challenged by the very hard realities of brute existence.

### 4. The Scientific

Whereas the artist begins with subjectivity, the scientist begins with objectivity. Whereas the artist allows indeterminism, the scientist seeks determinism even if probabilistic. The scientific method is generally one where the assumption is that nature can be quantified, measured, and predicted, and then manipulated in various technologies for human use. Its history is perhaps only three hundred years old as it originated as a robust method in Europe and its language is mathematics, empirical observation, and experimentation in very defined ways.

Science so conceived is reductive. A thing, say an organism seeks to maximize pleasure and avoid pain. Stars, galaxies, people, animals, plants, and rock are all objects of study; they are neither sacred nor unique. That which survives and propagates is determined by a sort of “will” of the “survival of the fittest”; nature is neither deified nor vilified. Relationships are quantified giving immeasurable control, just as counting enabled human evolution.

Yet science opens up worlds as discoveries occur and the universe is rendered more mystical, while the game of science a great pleasure and joy in the act of invention and progress. It need not render a picture of the universe that is inert and impersonal. Indeed, it may straddle the realms of fantasy and awe. Yet science, as with art and philosophy may simply serve other institutions, such as the political in which case it is often put to bad use, and the dream of “a brave new world” is thwarted. Does technology really improve the lot of the human race? It will at first glance seem certainly so, considering medical; communications; transportation; the digital revolution all advancing exponentially. But there is another side: Has this been at the expense of the more mystical, philosophical, and artistic? Has this led to a

materialistic philosophy and sterile art, to a scientific age that is a religion of sorts.

The question “why existence with its pleasures and pains?” can simply be reduced to the human condition, with no a priori content as the individual is submerged in the darkness of the subconscious, of being an organism with inputs and outputs that are beyond one’s control. The flaw is if such is the case, then the project of the scientific method is brought in question, for one’s very methods and assumptions are not themselves sacrosanct – at best, science offers but one picture of the world, one narrative. It is here that the post-modernist might celebrate differences between cultures and their narrative and not privilege the world parceled up into Descartes coordinates or described by numerical values or categorized and systematized according to subatomic elements, chemical quantities, biological processes and encompassing the discipline of Cosmology – all this is not simply limited knowledge at any given time, but one kind of knowledge amongst many other forms or methods. And the rate of technological progress is itself not a necessary good as the clamor for power and control creates war and greed, or just mindless consumption and competition.

## 5. The Artistic

The artist also feels the pains of existence. Attuned to the beat of the “sound and fury” of life, he recoils into a reflective and imaginative world and creates an object in shape or sound or movement or dramatically. Lost in this creative world, he cannot transcend the questions that he would like to be answered. He recoils again into the sensual, pleasurable act of creating, though sometimes he is a conduit for depression and fear and a nightmare. Art then is more than simply being about the beautiful. Beauty is deceptive. Whole swathes of Western Art lured by the visage of gods and deities - false they may be. The artist then is often simply used by other, more powerful, and influential institutions – the church; the state, and today one may even speak of the art market.

Art mimics the variation found in nature. its history reflects formal changes that correspond to new conceptual schemas or paradigms. Hence the power of art to not merely reflect but shift consciousness at a particular time and place. Yet it may always simply be decorative or simply entertainment. Even in its rebellion, there is possibility that it will merely be observed as an aesthetic phenomenon, without the discursive impact and coherence of philosophy.

Hegel’s observation that art is the idea given sensual embodiment is a good definition, though it fails to appreciate that, as the mystic will remind us, form is by definition limited and therefore cannot embody notions of infinity. Hence art has for so long been associated with pagan worship and later various deities in the great religions. Arts’ shift to the secular appeared to carve out a niche for itself, though it is difficult to assess the influence of the cultural, political, and religious on the arts of today.

I hold great hope still for art especially as took the form of abstract art. Here it appeared was a more metaphysical and

deeper structural concern, beyond the representational, the mimetic, and the traditions and orthodoxies of the past. Although Pop Art seems to have won the day against Abstract Expressionism, the postmodern by definition includes all such expressions. The downside is that in such a current epoch there is no definition of what art is and certainly of what constitutes good art.

In any event, at its best, art is the joy of creativity and creation, transmuting in her method’s everyday life into one of heightened awareness, emotional depth, and intellectual concepts. It is inherently rebellious and, in my opinion, attempts to perceive a pattern and order or at least question prevailing one’s; it invites chaos and inspiration; it is non-linear and provides a vision of who we are and where we may go.

Notwithstanding, art is little understood and appreciated and those who claim as such may value it merely for commercial reasons. The fate of the object is ultimately one of dust and ashes. Conceptual art tried to override such a fate but failed. Being at whatever level sensual, the law of entropy holds. Even text suffers the same fate. Might there be an art of living? At this point, the fine arts become an illusion, the Enlightenment paradigm false, and the postmodern rebellion, vacuous.

## 6. Paradigm of Ignorance

The great majority of humankind both historically and in the current epoch live in a world of ignorance, meaning there is no “second-order” reflection on, about, and in life itself. They *are* the pain. They *are* the pleasure. Even aspirants of knowledge do so on the grounds of learning a skill so as to have a job. Thus, such ignorance is not only a matter of the fault of a poor intellect and lack of imagination, but simply a certain unawareness or unconsciousness, driven by internal and societal forces without examination, reflection, and creatively seeking alternatives.

It is here that the human world of relationships assumes the form of a soup opera with dramatic emotional bursts and a refusal to sit with self, to be in contemplation. Here the ignorant seek salvation from an external source - either the god of traditional religion he uncritically accepts, even in nationalistic sentiment and war, or simply the mind-numbing entertainments of the day. He may be an employee or an employer, master, or slave; he may be rich or poor; saturated with education or without it – in all such cases, his life is a dream of disordered sequences that he himself simply experiences without asking seriously neither as simply an academic or one pursuing wealth and honor – what does this all mean and then stretching his faculties in anticipation of a rich reward. No such questions spring forth and only at times of extreme pain and calamity, he may cry out. Yet again, as one drenched in the vile stench of course existence and physical crassness.

He sees not beauty; he feels not wonder; he does not wish to exercise his mind. Simply to sustain himself – to eat; emit waste; gain victory; to toil; to procreate; to learn only for

instrumental gain if at all; he is drowned in entertainment and the unexamined life and neatly answers the “big questions” with either his traditional religious upbringing or with the certainty in his existence that there is nothing else besides. In more sophisticated forms, the universe is random. In less sophisticated forms, he deifies, worships, and prostrates to a false god for whom many will commit murder.

The saying often goes that ignorance is bliss. It is true that knowledge could be a weight, a burden wherein one might see that one is not truly free. It is true that knowledge humbles one or the precise opposite, renders one arrogant. All the same, to know means one cannot simply trust in one’s senses or even calculations. One enters an unstable universe, or one highly ordered in which one’s own condition is unknown, that is, wither this life leads. The ignorant do not have such a burden being not vexed by such questions; being as it were one with life without knowing so. In this sense, ignorance is not bliss – it is simply the kaleidoscope of changing sensations and feelings, being prodded here and there in an unconscious stupor.

### 7. “The paradigm of paradigms”

One might think that for all the different paradigm there are, of which perhaps some of the most pivotal are mentioned herein, there is a powerset such that all the paradigms are contained in one very general and finite but immensely large set, the set of all paradigms. It has been proven that ideas such as the “Set of all sets” lead to a contradiction and it is an axiom that a contradiction means it is false.

Semantically, rather than mathematically, one might call this the problem of self-reference. A set of all sets that itself is not a member (i.e., it is transcendent) leads to a contradiction in the same way that for example if a Cretan made the assertion: “all Cretan’s are liars”, it would be false if it were true and true if it were false. Thus, there is no ultimate set which includes and overrides all the various paradigms. Seeking an interdisciplinary framework may be noble, but only in local, very specific matters and not in an ultimate, global sense.

In this sense, one must deduce that a given paradigm may be dominant at any given time. In fact, the very notion of the ultimate paradigm is what gives impetus to a particular philosophical or religious or scientific, or cultural “way of seeing” to govern and supervene socially, sometimes for hundreds of years. And it is usually the very claim that this way of seeing is ultimate – the true “ism” – that ensures its longevity and the power it maintains over large stretches of time and over large populations. It is only when one realizes the impossibility of such ultimate ways of seeing (and controlling) that one can begin to maneuver, counter, question – and live.

Yet while I am not saying that “Sets” cannot be integrated or intersect – paradigms certainly have elements or properties in common – and a synthesis can be achieved. For example, it is obvious that both science and say art share certain common qualities, for example, at the very least in the idea of interpreting the world. What is been claimed here is not that

the interdisciplinary does not exist, only that there is no “ultimate set” that defines all sub-sets – no one paradigm that can contains or expresses everything, though there are “moments” and movements and shifts to higher, more rarefied linkages and connections which circumvents a narrow mindset.

As for pain, it appears since there is no “knock out”, no ultimate paradigm discernable, existence is less demanding, less dictatorial. It promises a reality that is filled with compassion and patience. Pain will still be as the there is thus neither an ultimate answer, but the pleasure of gradual, small increments in light and knowledge, in emotional depth and learning so as to extricate oneself from the mud of ignorance, softens the blow. One might even find moments of joy – not self *as* joy, but joy through the self. One is not just a body being tickled, but a soul that is touched.

### 8. Conclusion: Paradigm Shift

While there is no ultimate paradigm, a final form as it were, one can speak of radical shifts in perspective on a global scale. The basic component that is central to this shift in consciousness occurs in that mediating organ known as the human brain.

One can take an example from sport to see how this may be relevant to our task, namely in describing that on the precipice of a new world consciousness, it appears dark and gloomy, that the pain is too great, the answers are not forthcoming, that one will simply resign.

Noakes believes that the point in the race when you think you have given everything you’ve got is actually a signal or response from the brain to slow down to preserve health, rather than a physiological reality. In actuality, Noakes believes you have more to give physically when this happens. (adapted from: <https://runnersconnect.net/centralgovernortheory/#:~:text=Noakes's%20hypothesis%20suggests%20that%20the,fatigue%20to%20ensure%20self%2Dpreservation.>) If indeed, this is the case, then the time for such change is upon us and the dawn will break. Just a little more and the relief of making a breakthrough will have come.

New energy will come from this pain as the finish line is closer, just as the runner finds a surge of energy close to the finish. Let us visualize this shift in consciousness, this new paradigm: It will be one where morally humankind will be on a higher level for what is true and beautiful is what is good. An end to violence of all kinds. Could it be that if one should train one’s mind to visualize as such one changes one’s very cellular makeup and neuronal connections? Could we engineer ourselves from the inside out? Is it simply mind over matter? Will this not bring joy and pleasure in its wake and make the preceding pain endurable? Will humans finally speak the same language and slavery and exile and greed be a thing of the past?

I believe that the answer to these questions is an emphatic “yes”. It would mean that mysticism becomes something in this world, not a cry to separate from it; that philosophy will

be enriched with the wisdom of new insights; that science will be used responsibly and better theories will result in its various disciplines; that art will serve to go beyond the superficial and connect to the life-world and that the great wall of ignorance suffered by the vast majority will be pierced and the light of peace shine in the hearts and the minds of suffering humanity.

Even though this may be gradual, there is a definite point at which this era is ushered in. The response to such change is not fear or suffering the loss of what we know, but the joy and pleasure of waking up into a new world, perhaps at first a mere spark in the murky recesses of the mind and heart and then slowly, carefully, sensitively beyond and beyond.