THE SUN AND THE CAVE: GULLIVER'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE DIVINE

by

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I

"All I ventured was to raise my eyes towards the sun, and place my hands together in a supplicating posture, and to speak some words in an humble melancholy tone, suitable to the condition I was then in."[1]

Gulliver's sunlit prayer occurs during the second of his four reported travels, where he soon finds himself marooned on Brobdingnag, an uncharted land-mass, whose inhabitants' bodies are twelve times larger than Gulliver's. From the immediate context, however, it is not quite clear to whom or what Gulliver is praying: (1) to the God of the Church of England, from which country he had earlier set sail? (2) to the sixty-foot farm-laborer between whose thumb and forefinger he now finds himself firmly gripped? (3) to the sun itself, which according to Plato's *Republic*[2] is the visible god that is said to be, in turn, the offspring and likeness of the god-of-gods to which Socrates' "city. . .in speech"[3] is ultimately devoted--namely, the "idea of the good."[4] My paper examines all three possibilities in the light of Swift's (or his Gulliver's) overall intention in writing his highly imaginative, yet also philosophically and theologically instructive, travel book.

Looking in particular at Gulliver's explicit references to the "sun,"[5] together with his repeated references to a "cave,"[6] I suggest not only that Swift (or his Gulliver) is alive to the implications of the well-known Platonic image of the philosopher[7] as one who ascends from inside a cave towards the sunlight,[8] but also that *Gulliver's Travels* as a whole--in its mutual comparison and relative ranking of modern life (Voyage I), ancient life (Voyage II), modern thought (Voyage III), and ancient thought (Voyage IV)--is organized according to the well-known Platonic image of the divided line.[9]

In what follows, I will first describe the immediate situation in which Gulliver finds himself as he utters his prayer. Afterwards, I will examine the possible meaning of his prayer under three separate headings, corresponding to the three aforementioned hypotheses--theological, moral, philosophical. What is at stake here is whether Swift, or his Gulliver, is best understood in terms of Christian piety, moral satire, or Platonic philosophy. While there is something to be said for all three possibilities, the evidence favors the last.

[1] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. M. Cunliffe (New York: New American Library, 1960) [Afterwards, GT], 99.

[2] *Republic* 508a ff.

[3] *Republic* 369a.

[4] *Republic* 505a, 508e, 517c, 526e, 534b.

[5] GT 27, 45, 52, 90, 99, 172, 178, 180--1, 187, 197 ("sun-beams"), 200 ("sun-dial").

[6] GT 171--2, 187.

[7] Cf. GT 99, 107, 118 (Aristotle), 172, 202, 205, 213 (Socrates *et al.*), 214--5 (Aristotle *et al.*), 244, 288--9 (Socrates/Plato).

[8] *Republic* 514a ff.

[9] *Republic* 510c--11e.

II

The immediate setting of Gulliver's prayer is not quite self-contained. It points beyond to what has already happened and what is to come. Ultimately it points to all four of Gulliver's voyages. At the very least, it is explicitly connected with Gulliver's previous voyage.

A year after setting sail from England, where he had just returned two months earlier from his inadvertent sojourn in Lilliput, Gulliver's ship is disoriented by a storm, and wanders in the Indian Ocean (or is it the Pacific? no one on board can tell exactly). When land is unexpectedly sighted, Gulliver offers to accompany a dozen crew mates to procure fresh water. Alone for a moment on shore, he watches as their longboat is suddenly forced to flee the approach of a curious giant. Gulliver soon finds himself in the giant's cornfield, but cannot hide for long, since seven giant laborers are harvesting the giant-sized corn, and rain-damaged cornstalks and wind-strewn tassels impede his flight. He can only prostrate himself between two uncut rows of corn, grieve for his wife and children, lament his folly and willfulness in having taken this second voyage against all advice, and prepare to die.

> In this terrible agitation of mind [he writes in retrospect] I could not forbear thinking of Lilliput, whose inhabitants looked upon me as the greatest prodigy that ever appeared in the world . . . I reflected what a mortification it must prove to me appear as inconsiderable in this nation as one single Lilliputian would be among us. [GT 98]

Gulliver's recognition that he may have been the cause of his own predicament compounds his suffering as it provokes his reflection. He sees himself as back in Lilliput, with the measurements switched: having been large, he now finds himself small. If Gulliver's language is well-chosen, then speaking of his predicament as a "mortification" (literally, a killing, though he is not yet dead) suggests that he means to leave us unsure which he considers worse: dying, or just wishing he were dead. Even so, his perplexity generates further worry:

> But this I conceived was to be the least of my misfortunes [he adds]: for as human creatures are observed to be more savage and cruel in proportion to their bulk, what could I expect but to be a morsel in the mouth of the first among these enormous barbarians that should happen to sieze me? [GT 98f.]

Gulliver's new worry, which is connected with the observation that human savagery and cruelty are directly proportional to human "bulk," will soon be partly alleviated, as he is discovered by an unsuspecting giant who turns out to be benign. Meanwhile, Gulliver's train of thought leads to a further observation that will sustain him through Brobdingnag and beyond:

> Undoubtedly [he says] philosophers are in the right when they tell us that nothing is great or little otherwise than by comparison. [GT 99]

Let us retrace the steps bringing Gulliver to this last observation, in order to see what it might possibly mean for him.

Recalling Lilliput, as we have said, Gulliver characterizes his entrapment in the giant cornfield as a "mortification." Assuming his term is well-chosen, it serves to call attention to the problem we are pursuing. Does Gulliver use it to mean simply that he is utterly humiliated or ashamed? If so, then his perspective here, and perhaps throughout his travels, is moral; and if we keep in mind in addition that his account of some or all of his travels may well be tongue-in-cheek for the purpose of bringing out his own and others' moral excesses and deficiencies, then the book as a whole must be a moral satire, as indeed most critics assume. Yet if it is also true that a "mortification," theologically speaking, is the prelude or pointer to repentance, then instead of being shown simply that Gulliver's moral habits are ridiculously inappropriate, we may be meant to ask here, and throughout the book, whether Gulliver is being tested religiously, by being given opportunity after opportunity to respond to the situations in which he finds himself by following the teachings of the Church, opportunities which he all too frequently neglects. Such is the argument of the critic L. J. Morrissey,[10] which we shall look at further in a moment. Still, whether the book is meant to be a moral satire or a theological exhortation, it is hard to see how the purely intellectual component of Gulliver's observation--that nothing is great or little except by comparison--could be taken at face value, as something that Gulliver might have learned from his first travel, to say nothing of his travels as a whole. Consider, however, that the observation in question could easily mean not just two but three things. (1) Does it mean simply that all measuring-standards are rather arbitrary, as when Gulliver soon shows himself to be ridiculous in judging his hosts by what turn out to be the parochial standards of English mores? If so, then Gulliver's observation turns out to support the usual moralistic or satirical reading of the book. (2) Or does it instead mean that one is in need of true moral standards for judging things great (morally admirable) or little (morally contemptible), and that these standards are ultimately supplied by the Bible as understood by the Church of England? If so, then Gulliver's observation confirms the view that his travels must be interpreted theologically (as Morrissey will argue). (3) Or, finally, does it mean rather that those philosophers are correct who say that all standards for judging human greatness and littleness involve making comparisons, though it does not thereby privilege this or that set of standards but makes the true standards the object of a philosophical inquiry? If so, and only if so, does the possibility arise that *Gulliver's Travels* is meant to be understood as containing in itself just such an inquiry--an inquiry into the standards for judging human greatness and littleness--as the book's occasional, but well-placed appeals to philosophy further suggest.

[10] *Gulliver's Progress* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1978).

Again, each of the three aforementioned possibilities seems to have some merit. To decide which is best, let us look and see how each one connects--or perhaps fails to connect--with the circumstances of Gulliver's prayer.

III

We begin with the theological possibility advanced by Morrissey. His general argument is as follows. Swift appends two (fictitious) letters to the narrative of *Gulliver's Travels*: one is by Gulliver to his cousin Richard Sympson, the book's purported publisher; the other is by Sympson to the reader (GT v--viii, ix--x). In the first letter, Gulliver complains, among other things, that Sympson has confused or mistaken many of the dates and times reported in his original manuscript, which has since been destroyed. Gulliver adds that he is now enclosing a corrected list of dates (though he cannot be sure of them), in case there is a subsequent edition of his book. In the second letter, Sympson freely admits his "own ignorance in sea-affairs." He mentions that he has had to strike the strictly nautical minutiae from Gulliver's original manuscript, so as "to fit the work as much as possible to the general capacity of readers." Sympson thus confirms, albeit indirectly, the charges Gulliver makes in the first letter. At any rate, Morrissey infers from Gulliver's charges that the accuracy of the disputed dates must have an importance for the reader's arriving at the overall teaching of the book, and goes on to correlate each date with the lectionary of the Church of England for that particular year. He then argues that Gulliver's experiences during his travels are best understood in terms of the Old and New Testament lessons for those dates as they come up in the course of the narrative.

Although Morrissey does not comment on Gulliver's prayer directly, he does adduce the lessons for 17 June 1703, the reported date of Gulliver's being marooned on Brobdingnag. The lessons are Job 29--30 and Galatians 1. The Job chapters are, in Morrissey's words, "the record of the suffering of a solidly good man"; hence, Morrissey adds, "we are likely to find the source of his sufferings in a moral force outside him." During Gulliver's stay in Brobdingnag, in contrast, he continually betrays what Morrissey interprets as moral weakness. That weakness is displayed above all in what Morrissey correctly sees as the most important incident there. In order to curry favor with the Brobdingnagian King and compensate for his own littleness in virtually all other respects, Gulliver boasts of the superiority of his English education, and offers to supply the King with the formula for gunpowder. It is an offer that shocks and repels the King's moral sensibilities. Galatians 1 is thus said to address Gulliver's boastfulness, and the weakness that has prompted it, in the following way. Paul is addressing a dissension among the Galatians which has been caused by a rival missionary who has insisted that the new Christians must keep the old Jewish law; Paul argues from his own personal example, as one who formerly was the most vigorous persecutor of Christians in the name of the old law, but who now has been reborn after the spirit and become instead the widest-ranging preacher of the Gospel--which Morrissey

understands to be the teaching of universal love, tolerance and patience. According to Morrissey, then, Galatians 1--together with Galatians 2 and 4, which Gulliver's fellow Anglicans read, respectively, at Evensong of 16 June 1703, when his ship first sighted land, and 20 June 1702, when his ship first left England--is a "perfect complement" to Gulliver's moral weakness. Like Job and Paul, Gulliver in Brobdingnag is also seen to suffer persecution (owing to his littleness, etc.). Like them, then, he faces two moral options. Either he could, as Morrissey says, "arm himself with the religious patience of Job or Paul . . . or he could brave [i.e., 'tough'] it out" (76). The former response, according to what Morrissey has already said about Job and Paul, "demands that we see events in the world as part of a morally ordered universe." Unlike Job or Paul, however, Gulliver chooses the course of bravado. His ongoing refusal to recognize that what is demanded of him is to repent of his bravado, according to Morrissey, is what perpetuates his sufferings and his alienation from the rest of humankind.

The main evidence supporting Morrissey's argument here is the constant humiliation (or "persecution") Gulliver undergoes in Brobdingnag as a result of his being one-twelfth the size of everyone and everything else--especially in contrast to Lilliput, where his being twelve times the size of everyone and everything else made him, for good or ill, the constant center of attention. In Brobdingnag, says Morrissey, Gulliver is no longer "the very focus of the aggressive, male-dominated world" of armies, ministers of state, cabinet meetings, and the whirl of debate, controversy, and intrigue (70). Instead he is "given over to the world of women" (70f.). The Brobdingnagian farmer (the cornfield's owner) who takes him in, for instance, uses him as a toad or spider to frighten his wife; the wife and daughter in turn treat him as a doll to play with; the farmer, taking him on the road as a freak show, exploits Gulliver to the point of endangering his health; and although Gulliver is eventually able to persuade the Queen of Brobdingnag to rescue him, he soon undergoes similar indignities and dangers at the royal court: a giant pet monkey kidnaps and force-feeds him; giant rats, frogs, wasps, and flies attack him; he tries, unsuccessfully, to jump over a giant cow-patty; etc. As for Gulliver's boastful conversation with the King about the putative superiority of life in England, then, Morrissey sees it simply in terms of Gulliver's need to assuage his "frustrated anger" (75) at being abused. And as for Gulliver's philosophical observation back in the Brobdingnagian cornfield, Morrissey construes it in the light of a final inference Gulliver draws from it:

> . . .who knows but that even this prodigious race of mortals might be equally overmatched in some distant part of the world, whereof we have yet no discovery? [GT 99]

Despite the "who knows. . . ?" with which Gulliver prefaces this last inference--that there may well be mortals as gigantic vis-à-vis the Brobdignagians as the Brobdingnagians are vis-à-vis Gulliver, or as Gulliver is vis-à-vis the Lilliputians--Morrissey does not see Gulliver's observation here as philosophical at all. According to him, Gulliver is "just whistling in the dark," i.e.,

expressing further bravado in a vain attempt to "calm his fears" (*ibid.*).

Morrissey's dismissing any strictly philosophical element in Gulliver's observation is a bit hasty, however, especially if the "overmatch" in question turns out to be moral rather than simply bodily. Consider that a book Gulliver himself happens to peruse later on in Brobdingnag makes a strikingly similar observation to Gulliver's own in the cornfield. Given that Gulliver's immediate reaction to the Brobdnignagian book anticipates, as it were, Morrissey's critical reaction to Gulliver's own book, the passage is worth looking at:

> The book [says Gulliver] treats of the weakness of human kind, and is in little esteem, except among the women and the vulgar. However, I was curious to see what an author of that country could say upon such a subject. This writer went though all the usual topics of European moralists, showing how diminutive, contemptible, and helpless an animal man was in his own nature . . . He added, that nature was degenerated in these declining ages of the world, and could now produce only small abortive births in comparison of those in ancient times. He said it was very reasonable to think, not only that the species of men were originally much larger, but also, that there must have been giants in former ages, which, as it is asserted by history and tradition, so it hath been confirmed by huge bones and skulls casually dug up in several parts of the kingdom, far exceeding the common dwindled race of man in our days. . . . From this way of reasoning the author drew several moral applications useful in the conduct of life, but needless here to repeat. For my own part, I could not avoid recollecting how universally this talent was spread, of drawing lectures in morality, or indeed rather matter of discontent and repining, from the quarrels we raise with nature. And I believe, upon a strict enquiry, those quarrels might be shown as ill grounded among us as they are among that people. [GT 152f.]

Surely Gulliver, by dwelling on a book that in many ways resembles his own, gives us another option besides Morrissey's for how we are to understand the very habit in which Gulliver himself indulges throughout his travels: namely, what he calls the "universally . . . spread" habit of drawing moral inferences, however "ill grounded," from accounts of human beings never seen but only inferred. If we take Gulliver at his word here, he evidently does not need to "repeat" such inferences at the present moment, inasmuch as he has already been drawing them, or allowing them to be drawn, repeatedly all along. Yet it remains for us to see why Gulliver himself imitates his Brobdignagian model in the first place, conscious as he now shows himself to be of the shortcomings of that way of moralizing.

Let us begin by recalling that Gulliver's stated aim in speaking with the King, over and above the boastfulness or bravado Morrissey attributes to him, is a public-spirited one, especially as Gulliver himself seems independently aware of the criticisms that the King makes of English public life, and adjusts his presentation accordingly:

> I have always borne that laudible partiality to my own country, which Dionysus Halicarnassus with so much justice recommends to an historian. I would hide the

> frailties and deformities of my political mother, and place her virtues and beauties in the most advantageous light. (GT 148)

Gulliver freely admits to shading the truth about life in England--a country the King has never seen but can only infer from Gulliver's account. But Gulliver justifies his truth-shading as morally proper and praiseworthy when considered as an act of political (though not necesarily biblical)[11] piety: "to hide the frailties and deformities of my political mother," as he says. This same justification serves as a possible admission that Gulliver has shaded the truth to his own readers as well, including the truth about the very existence of such people as the Brobdingnagians. After all, Gulliver's readers are in something like the position of the King of Brobdingnag vis-à-vis Gulliver: they have never seen the people Gulliver is talking about either.

It follows that, if we judge Gulliver's truth-shading by the classical moral standards to which he appeals in connection with the King of Brobdingnag, then his arguably indulging in it, here and elsewhere in his travels, would indeed seem morally proper, if not as a strict exercise in historical reportage, at least for the rhetorical purpose of alerting Gulliver's fellow Englishmen to their moral and other vices as gently as possible under the circumstances, without shocking or alienating them as a bluntly truthful report might. Consider that, in an an earlier passage, Gulliver has already alerted us to the need for, let us say, diplomatic rhetoric. Admittedly, the immediate context is, again, his need to appear favorable to the King rather than to his own countrymen; yet his same words also apply *mutatis mutandis* to Gulliver's English reader:

> Imagine with thyself, courteous reader, how often I then wished for the tongue of Demosthenes or Cicero, that might have enabled me to celebrate the praise of my own dear native country in a style equal to its merits and felicity.

Gulliver's wish for "the tongue of a Demosthenes or a Cicero" is surely compatible with his actual possession and exercise of such a tongue. His conversation with the King of Brobdignag thus seems a perfectly plausible way to praise England "in a style equal to its merits and felicity"--that is, to its lack of merits and felicity--assuming that Gulliver's style of praise is meant to imitate the rhetoric of the classical authors he mentions: Dionysus Halicarnassus, Demosthenes, Cicero, and of course Plato, as we shall suggest later on.

In any case, by ignoring Gulliver's references to these authors, Morrissey fails to raise the pertinent question of whether, and in what way, Gulliver's deference to them fits--or jars--with the scriptural lessons Morrissey derives from the Anglican lectionary. Given this last difficulty, it looks as if those lessons may not bear the hermeneutical weight Morrissey claims for them: at best, they address only Gulliver's personal shortcomings, not the possible political and other deficiencies of his "mother" England. Besides, *contra* Morrissey, it may be that Gulliver's and Sympson's letters, by calling attention as they do to the possible inaccuracy of the dates, etc., of

[11] See, however, Lev. 18:7f.

his travels, alert us to the relative dispensability of such details for understanding them. We must therefore look beyond Morrissey's suggestion, and consider our second interpretive possibility. Is *Gulliver's Travels* rather, as most critics say, a moral satire?

IV

Let us return for a moment to the cornfield. If Gulliver's prayer is addressed directly to the farm-laborer who discovers him, then it seems to have had its intended effect. Although we are made aware early on that the Brobdingnagians have the capacity to treat him roughly or indifferently--the laborer's thumb and forefinger inadvertently pinch Gulliver painfully, for instance, and the farmer's eyes are not sharp enough to discern Gulliver's wallet or its contents when Gulliver offers them--nevertheless the Brobdnignagians turn out to be as responsive as they can be to Gulliver's wish for gentle and decent treatment. To be sure, the farmer exploits Gulliver as we have already mentioned; yet the farmer's inhumanity is mitigated by the further facts that his well-bred daughter acts as Gulliver's constant nurse and protector, and that no one in Brobdingnag ever quite believes that Gulliver is human--not even the King's scientists, and certainly not the King, especially after hearing Gulliver's offer of gunpowder. Presumably for all these reasons, Gulliver himself never criticizes Brobdingnag's moral standards, but only the defectiveness of its learning (GT 151; cf. 149). It follows that, insofar as *Gulliver's Travels* may be called a moral satire, the standards his travels invoke for judging morality would seem to be Brobdingnag's rather than the Bible's. But if so, we would still need to ask whether these standards adequately account for Gulliver's two later voyages, to Laputa and Houyhnhnmland respectively.

Let us pursue this question by reconsidering the King's reaction to Gulliver's gunpowder offer. Suppose Gulliver had made that same offer to the Emperor of Lilliput. Can there be any doubt that the Lilliputians would have accepted right away--and probably would have ended up using their newfound technological superiority, first, to flatten their Blefuscan enemies (consider that Gulliver was impeached, despite his heroism in capturing Blefuscu's navy, for treating the Blefuscans humanely in all other respects), and second, to solve their otherwise insoluble problem of how to get rid of Gulliver, by blowing him up? Bodily size-differences aside, Lilliput and Brobdingnag seem technologically at parity: both lack modern explosives, or in general modern science and technology. Other than size, then, the differences between Lilliput and Brobdingnag are strictly moral: Brobdingnag alone, in its public life, puts moral virtue first, whereas Lilliput, like Gulliver's England, does not. This contrast, with its morally instructive implications for Gulliver's reader, would not have become apparent to the reader without Gulliver's making Lilliput, which is like England in so many other respects, a gunpowder-free zone.

Even so, the technological underdevelopment Lilliput and Brobdingnag share, when compared to Gulliver's England, serves to raise a further question: What if Lilliput, or any country like it which ignores the importance of moral virtue in public life, were to become the

beneficiaries of the sort of scientific-technological progress with which Gulliver tries to tempt the King of Brobdingnag? That is, what if public policy judged what Gulliver calls the "advancement of human knowledge" (GT 118) as more important than, or as an adequate substitute for, old-fashioned Brobdingnagian moral virtue? This question evidently points beyond the moral horizon of the King of Brobdnignag, whose impeccable moral decency will not even let him consider it, at least in connection with Gulliver's gunpowder offer. The King's morally praiseworthy intransigence is a sign that the gunpowder offer, with its full implications, is hardly amenable to a simply moral treatment. It turns out to involve a serious philosophical question, which oversteps the limits of moral satire: viz., what is the relation between scientific enlightenment and moral decency? Gulliver's thematic consideration of this question is to be found only in the second half of his travels, in Laputa and Houyhnhnmland.

V

Meanwhile, back in the Brobdingnagian cornfield, Gulliver expresses his relief over having his original, sunlit prayer answered, as follows:

> But my good star would have it, that he [the Brobdignagian laborer who first picks him up] appeared pleased with my voice and gestures, and began to look upon me as a curiosity, much wondering to hear me pronounce articulate words, although he could not understand them. [GT 99f.]

If the "good star" here is the sun (as the immediate context allows us to speculate), and if the heaven-sent response occurs in the form of the Brobdingnagian laborer's "curiosity" and "wondering" in the expectation of "articulate words," then we seem at the moment to have left behind not only Christian prayer in favor of pagan star-worship, but also Christian (or, for that matter, pagan) morality in favor of understanding pure and simple, or, alternatively, in favor of the wish for such understanding--a wish that Brobdingnag by and large denies Gulliver, however. With this last result in mind, let us now look at the beginning of Gulliver's third voyage, to the mad scientists of Laputa, where his transition to that society is again made by way of the sun and, this time, a cave.

Gulliver's ship has been hi-jacked by Japanese pirates in the Gulf of Tonquin, and he is set adrift by his captors at the insistence of the lone Christian among them, a Dutchman, who is angered rather than sympathetic at Gulliver's direct plea to show Christian pity to fellow Europeans. When Gulliver's skiff reaches a rocky island five hours later, he stores his meager provisions in a "cave," in which he then spends a fitful night, despondent as he is over how to preserve his life and avoid a miserable death "in so desolate a place." It is perhaps midday before he summons his spirits "enough to creep out of [his] cave," only to encounter a "sun so hot that [he] was forced to turn his face from it" (GT 172). Suddenly, however, the sun is "obscured" by

what looks like a cloud, but turns out to be what he describes as "a vast opaque body between [him] and the sun." It is an immense floating island, which, traveling two miles above him, succeeds in blocking out the sun for six or seven minutes. In his momentary astonishment, Gulliver notices that the island is inhabited by men who could steer, raise and lower it at will. "But," he adds in retrospect,

> not being at that time in a disposition to philosophise upon this phenomenon, I rather chose to observe what course the island would take, because it seemed for the moment to stand still. [GT 172f]

Gulliver's observation here is emblematic not only of his own "disposition" at the outset of his stay on and under the floating island, but also of the "disposition" of the "phenomenon" itself, namely, modern science. The latter, we might say, blocks out pre-modern science's philosophizing about nature, undertaken with a view to simply understanding nature, in favor of "observ[ing] what course [nature] would take," i.e., in favor of prediction with a view to the practical mastery of nature. The theme of mastery of nature hovers over voyage three, and eclipses the moralizing themes of voyages one and two.

Gulliver's Laputan rescuers haul him up onto the city-sized, circle-shaped hovercraft, a flattened replica of the earth itself (cf. GT 183). Those in charge are scientists, who have absolutely no interest in Gulliver except as a possible object of scientific curiosity (GT 174--82). Their attention span is limited, since they preoccupy themselves with their own mathematico-cosmological theorizings, and acknowledge Gulliver only as an instance of what they already think they have thought through. While in public, the scientist-rulers must be diverted from their abstract preoccupations by attendants, who use a "flapper," or bean-bag on a stick, to tap the scientist's appropriate sense-organ whenever there is need for him to look or listen to anyone besides himself, and tap his mouth whenever it is his turn to speak (the bean-bag device parodies the stimulus-response epistemology of Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and other philosophical spokesmen for the new science). Otherwise, the scientists remain oblivious to others: their wives, whom they grossly neglect, have affairs with strangers literally under their husbands' noses. Gulliver does not tell us much about the scientists' theorizing as such--his mathematical competence is too far beneath theirs--but we do see its technological byproducts in Laputa's geometrically-shaped food, trigonometrically-measured custom clothing (ill-fitting, as it turns out), and badly built houses (since the scientists do not condescend to translate their mathematically formulated architectural designs into the practical math required for blueprints). Although the scientists' heads are in the clouds, they are by no means innocent of the wish to dominate those below over whom they exercise their rule: a rebellious city is subject to the floating island's blocking out the "sun" indefinitely, and perhaps to a rock bombardment or even to being bounced on and crushed by the floating island itself--against which the only defense is for the populace to flee into "caves" and meanwhile to count on the city's church steeples to puncture the floating

island during its descent. (The churches, needless to say, are entirely independent of the technology dispensed by the ruling scientists; their deterrent-value seems to be the nicest thing Gulliver has to say about Christianity during his whole travels.)

Gulliver's visit to the continent below shows the disastrous effects of the modernization being superimposed onto it.

> I never knew a soil so unhappily cultivated, [he reports,] houses so ill contrived and so ruinous, or a people whose countenances and habit expressed so much misery and want. [GT 192]

He has been invited to visit one Lord Munodi, a former Governor who is out of favor for not keeping up with the times, and cannot speak freely in public. Munodi continues to manage his estates in the old-fashioned way. Gulliver describes Munodi's house, for example, as "a noble structure, built according to the best rules of ancient architecture" (GT 195). Munodi waits till they are alone, however, before telling Gulliver

> with a very melancholy air that he doubted he must throw down his houses in town and country, to rebuild them after the present mode, destroy all his plantations, and cast others into such a form as modern usage required, and give the same directions to all his tenants, unless he would submit to incur the censure of pride, singularity, affectation, ignorance, caprice, and perhaps increase his majesty's displeasure. [*ibid.*]

Munodi is being forced to replicate in practical life the new method spelled out by Descartes and others for the sciences: doubt everything; deconstruct everything into its simplest elements; reconstruct according to mathematical models; then double-check against miscalculations. The country-wide modernization policy, which has been in place for a generation, followed a five-month visit to the floating island by "certain persons" who, on their return,

> began to dislike the management of everything below, and fell into schemes of putting all arts, sciences, languages, and mechanics upon a new foot. [*ibid.*]

To implement their quasi-utopian schemes, colleges have been established in every town; Munodi encourages Gulliver to visit the local one:

> In these colleges the professors contrive new rules and methods of agriculture and building, and new instruments and tools for all trades and manufactures, whereby, as they undertake, one man shall do the work of ten; a palace may be built in a week, of materials so durable as to last for ever without repairing. All fruits of the earth shall come to maturuty at whatever season we think fit to choose, and increase an hundredfold more than they do at present, with innumerable other happy proposals. The only inconvenience is, that none of these projects are yet brought to perfection, and in the mean time, the whole country lies

> miseably waste, the houses in ruins, and the people without food or clothes. By all which, instead of being discouraged, they are fifty times more violently bent upon prosecuting their schemes . . . [GT 195f]

We need not go into the detailed research of the local professors, or "projectors," as they are called, except to note that they follow Descartes' rules impeccably, if absurdly: the project to reconstitute food from its original elements as retrieved from human excrement is typical of the rest. Gulliver's own motive for visiting the projectors, however, casts light on why he has needed to travel to Laputa in the first place. Lord Munodi recommends Gulliver to the projectors by representing him "as a great admirer of projects [i.e., of modern scientific technology] and a person of much curiosity and easy belief"--a description that Gulliver says "was not without truth" (i.e., was not *entirely* false), "for I had myself been a sort of projector in my younger days." (GT 197) Gulliver himself, we now learn, is a reformed "projector," one who has come to doubt the salutariness of the technological progress he once recommended naively to the King of Brobdignag. Having since abandoned what we might call the moral obtuseness of Lilliput (or modern England), in light of what he must have discovered to be the moral decency of (pre-modern) Brobdignag, he now comes to doubt the moral goodness of modern science in turn--without yet, however, arriving at any intellectually sound alternative. The missing alternative comes to sight only in, though it is not entirely constituted by, Gulliver's fourth voyage, to the land of the Houyhnhnms.

VI

In Houyhnhnmland, horses and humans are switched. The horses are given the strictly human perfections (reason and moral decency), and the humans (or Yahoos) retain only what remains. As a result, the humans there are simply beastly (filthy, naked, ill-mannered, unteachable), and the horses alone are worth speaking to and learning from. The name they give themselves in their horse-talk, "Houyhnhnm," is said to mean "perfection of nature" (GT 255); and long after his return home from his final voyage, Gulliver continues to call the horse who took him in "my Master" (cf. GT v). So why doesn't Gulliver just stay with the Houyhnhnms? Why must he return to his natural, human home?

The answer has something to do with Gulliver's dietary difficulties in Houyhnhnmland. The unprocessed grains the Houyhnhnms eat are too indigestible, and the road-kill the Yahoos feed on is too disgusting. But Gulliver's homecoming has more to do with the fact that the Houyhnhnms ultimately cannot understand him. This fact leads directly to the Platonic hypothesis that underlies my own--and, I believe, Swift's--argument.

Consider Gulliver's high praise of his Houyhnhnm master, the highest praise he ever gives anyone or anything in his travels:

> . . .when I used to explain our several systems of natural philosophy [Gulliver recalls], he would laugh that a creature pretending to reason should value itself upon the knowledge of other people's conjectures, and in things where that knowledge, if it were certain, could be of no use. Wherein he agreed entirely with the sentiments of Socrates, as Plato delivers them, which I mention as the highest honour I can do to that prince of philosophers. [GT 288f]

Gulliver's equine master is a philosopher, who criticizes the modern "natural philosophy" of Gulliver's Europe for reasons Plato's Socrates would agree with. The reasons are twofold: (1) modern philosophy depends on "other people's conjectures," i.e., on appeals to the authority of others, who may or may not know what they are talking about (presumably the reference is to the sort of scientists found in Laputa); and (2) even in the best case, modern philosophy is useless. What, then, is the Socratic counterpart, the non-conjecture-based, non-useless alternative with which Gulliver's master would agree if he were acquainted with it? The difficulty of answering this question, i.e., of accounting for Socratic philosophy in Houyhnhnms' terms, is the reason for Gulliver's return home.

Consider the Houyhnhnms' single defect as a species when it come to knowledge. They do not understand lying. When Gulliver tries to explain it, his master can only call it "the thing which is not" (GT 254f, 259f, 266, 279; cf. v). Like the Presocratic philosopher Parmenides, the Houyhnhnms know only what *is* and what *is not*, but not what is in between or transitional. Yet lying--Gulliver's occasional milieu, as we have seen--is not simply non-being. It is thinking of what *is* as if it *were not*, or else thinking of what *is not* as if it *were*. It thus involves the equivalent of "conjectures," of which the Houyhnhnms are so contemptuous, but which humans like Gulliver find indispensable for clarifying what is and what is not Recall how Gulliver, like the Brobdingnagian author he once read, is forced to conjecture places and people that *are not*, in order to draw inferences about places and people that *are*. In spite of what Gulliver says in Brobdignag, or perhaps in agreement with it, as we have already suggested, lying, or something like it (conjecture and the like) is humanly necessary, not only for reasons of tact, but also since humans do not start out with a horse's point of view. Where knowledge is at stake, though, the best conjectures are not those that substitute for knowledge, or masquerade as it, but help bring about the transition to it, in ways only human beings, and not horses, can be brought to understand. If Gulliver is correct about his choice of philosophical authority, moreover, those best conjectures--the ones that facilitate rather than stifle the transition to knowledge--are exemplified above all in Plato's Socrates.

VII

Plato's image of the divided line, I began by suggesting, is, as it were, Gulliver's travel-planner. In the *Republic*, Socrates divides a line in a certain proportion, then divides each

subsection in that same proportion. He calls the four divisions (1) images, (2) things, (3) mathematics, and (4) "ideas." As images depend for their intelligibility on the things of which they are images, so mathematics is said to depend on the intelligible principles (or "ideas") of what is being measured. Similarly, voyage one, to Lilliput, a place where the modern moral virtues rule, is shown to depend for its intelligibility on voyage two, to Brobdignag, where the pre-modern, pagan moral virtues rule. Also, voyage three, to Laputa, where modern science rules, is shown to depend for its intelligibility on voyage four, to Houyhnhnmland, where ancient philosophy rules. Finally, the moral virtues, adumbrated in Gulliver's first two voyages, are shown to depend for their intelligibility on science or philosophy, as adumbrated in his last two voyages. Naturally, the divided line is a mathematical image, which by its own standards (to say nothing of others) makes it doubly inadequate: *qua* image, it forces us to conjecture the things that make it intelligible, and *qua* mathematical, it forces us to conjecture the principles that solicit our mathematical attention in the first place. It reminds us that something like divination underlies our most sustained efforts at observation and calculation.