

BY WAY OF PROLOGUE: *THE SHADOW OF THE WEST**

University was just beginning and I was really excited. I couldn't wait to get stuck into a degree in science and technology. On the first day, we had an orientation and were given the syllabus and I suddenly found myself confronted with a few humanities subjects, one of them being Philosophy! I was so surprised and then instantly became disheartened. What good would that do me? What a waste of time!

On my way home, seeing me so worked up, my grandfather pulled me aside and said: "I'm going to tell you a story..."

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A long, long time ago, in the West, an evil man called *Soberbius*¹ led a group of youths into a dark cave. He wiped their memory and left them under the watch of Cerberus² *Ignorans*³. He tied the youths up inside the cave where all they could see was an enormous blank

* Note: As some students come from an Eastern culture, I have put footnotes to clarify some terms that may seem strange since they come from the Western tradition.

1 Relating to Pride.

2 In Greek mythology, Cerberus was a monstrous, three-headed dog that guarded the gates of the Underworld.

3 Relating to Ignorance.

wall, lit up by the sunlight that crept in from the outside world. Every now and again, these poor prisoners saw shadows shaped like strange beings projected upon the wall. They didn't know that they were projections of humans from the real world that passed by the entrance of the cave. For them, the shadows cast in this cave were "their reality". They saw dark beings with four legs, and others with two, flash across the wall, and some that flew and others that dragged themselves along the ground. This world of shadows was the only thing they knew. They had no way of knowing, or even imagining, that those authentic beings lived outside the cave and that the reality was a lot different to the one that presented itself upon that wall.

One day, one of the prisoners managed to free themselves from their chains and escape. As he left the cave, he was instantly blinded by the sunlight. When his eyes finally accustomed to the searing brightness, he marvelled at a completely different, wondrous world. Curious, he began to walk, stumbling across forests, rivers, animals, flowers... and when he saw his own shadow cast upon the floor, he asked himself what was real and what just appeared to be so. He became very weak and as night fell, he collapsed near a pathway, exhausted. A passer-by picked him up and took him to his house where he gave him warmth and shelter. When he awoke, the stranger asked him his name but the young boy didn't have an answer, so, feeling inspired, he decided to call him *Sophos*⁴.

Sophos marvelled at all he saw and questioned how things grew and blossomed. He devoted himself to learning all he could about the world and this eagerness to know led him to discover a great treasure that

4 Relating to wisdom, wise.

would help him distinguish what was true from what was not: the “*Logos*”⁵.

Over time, word of *Sophos*’ wisdom reached the *King*, who instantly pronounced him his Personal Advisor. *Sophos* got married and had twins, and called the boy *Philos*⁶ and the girl *Schia*⁷. Just like their father, they were both very intelligent and curious, but very different from each other. *Philos* was interested in everything and loved to know stories of all sorts; about different types of beings, wanting to know where they came from, where they went... He craved to know the fundamental reasons of life or “*arkais*”⁸. In contrast, his sister *Schia* had more of an adventurous spirit and a more specific knowledge about the world. She was interested in the more immediate questions, such as how storms occur, how animals survive in the jungle, how to cure illness.

Sophos taught his children all that he knew: how to achieve order, fight for justice and live a good life. Together, father and children complemented and balanced each other out as they went on searching and discovering the meaning of life. Their habits and abilities complemented each other in total harmony.

Sophos and his children continued to discover the secrets of the world and, thanks to the power of *logos*, developed *mindcraft*⁹ to improve the lives of others. Their people lived freely and without fear because they knew the decisions to make to become better people. Many child prisoners were released from *Soberbius*’ caves and the Cerberus *Ignorans* fled. This happiness

5 Reasoning.

6 Relating to friend, love.

7 Relating to “Science”.

8 Referring to “first principles”.

9 Referring to the production or “craft” of knowledge.

spread to other regions and the fame of *Sophos* and his children was known across the whole Western world as people shared their knowledge. Everyone was happy because the King had a fair Council of the Realm that was dedicated to common good.

Years passed and *Schia* got married to a young *Tech-nos*¹⁰, a very skilled inventor who was an expert in the art of handicraft¹¹. They had a child called *Tecnoglo*¹² who inherited the best of his parents.

While *Sophos* and his family lived peacefully in harmony, the evil *Soberbius* continued to look tirelessly for the fugitive of the cave. One day, he overheard two of the King's soldiers discussing their surprise that an unknown man who had escaped from a cave was to be the King's Advisor. *Soberbius* knew at once that his search had ended and began to prepare his revenge. He decided that to inflict the most damage possible on *Sophos*, he would bewitch his children.

Almost overnight, *Philos* noticed that although he could see long distances perfectly and with great perspective – which is what allowed him to understand the meaning of reality and what makes up the whole – he now couldn't see things up close: he had suddenly become short-sighted. In contrast, the very opposite happened to *Schia*. She could see perfectly up close– she knew intimately the nature of specifics, the miniscule and even the microscopic. She distinguished and analysed the constitution of people with great clarity but couldn't capture distant things and as a result found it very difficult to understand many general aspects of reality because they lay outside her limited field of sight.

10 From *tekné* technique, skill.

11 Referring to the production of useful objects.

12 Referring to technology (union of Science and Technique).

As for *Sophos*, he noticed that when his children separated from each other, he became ill and began to waste away. Everything seemed to point to a curse and he immediately thought of *Soberbius*. Alarmed, he called for his children and told them about *Soberbius* and how he preyed upon human beings with a great, evil power. The only way they could weaken this power was by overcoming selfishness and discord, which they were to do together without ever parting sides. Above all, they needed to take care of the benevolent love that generated harmony. However, he refrained from telling them that if they did the opposite, he would slowly waste away and die, bit by bit. He didn't want to scare them or condition their freedom to choose how to live their lives.

One morning, the *King* awoke with an idea that came to him in a dream. He rang his advisors and ordered for a special school to be built where children could be educated on the most profound wisdom so they could develop the mindcraft. It was to be called a "Knowledge Community"¹³ and *Sophos* and his children would be in charge. *Philos* and *Sophos* taught the art of *Logos*, looking into the most profound causes of life and moral order so that everyone could better understand their inner-self and help others to lead a fulfilled life. *Schia* and *Tecnoglo* explained how to understand nature and to invent instruments to improve the health of society. Everyone complemented each other perfectly.

Upon seeing so much prosperity, *Soberbius* became blind with anger and, with his pride hurt, masterminded another plan. He rang his henchmen *Avarice*, *Discord*, *Lucre*, *Envy* and *Fallacy* and sent them to the city to wreak chaos, mistrust and selfishness amongst the inhabitants.

13 Knowledge.

First of all, *Avarice* tricked the King into naming her his Personal Advisor and also First Member of the Council of the Realm. She also gave a false testimony against *Sophos* who was consequently fired from the Council, although he continued to be in charge of the *Knowledge Community*.

Avarice forced *Lucre* to pay *Tecnoglo* huge sums of money for his inventions and to leave *Philos* in misery, enabling *Discord* to break the family up more easily. At the same time, *Fallacy* convinced *Schia* –who had no vision of perspective– that her brother *Philos* was useless and that she must promote her son *Tecnoglo*, as he was the person that would truly improve the lives of the people.

Envy did the rest, poisoning *Philos* who began to distrust *Schia* and *Tecnoglo*. Bit by bit, *Philos* distanced himself from *Schia* and *Technos'* family and lost contact with the immediate reality. With time and distance, *Sorberbius'* henchmen broke down the benevolent love of all of the members of the family who slowly began to separate from one another. This division made *Sophos* so gravely ill that he could no longer direct the *Knowledge Community*.

The people of the Realm ceased to understand the meaning of things and began to clutch on to the genius inventions of *Tecnoglo* that offered them a comfortable and enjoyable life but also increasingly distracted them from understanding themselves and the world. Tricked by *Avarice*, *Discord*, *Lucre*, *Envy* and *Fallacy*, people stopped caring about their neighbours and stopped thinking in community, focused on accumulating products solely for their own enjoyment.

Avarice noticed just how many goods and riches he obtained thanks to *Tecnoglo* and forced the Realm's Advisors to make the King open more *Knowledge*

Communities in the West, but with purely profit-making interests. These were called “*miniversitas*¹⁴” and were to be controlled by one of the strictest members of the Council of the Realm, *Bureaucratos*¹⁵, who was named “Profit Expert”. The *King* gave his authorization because he didn’t want to come across badly with his advisors or his people – who were increasingly ignorant and malleable at the time. The *miniversitas* began to multiply in number and taught students how to make inventions and money, perverting the truth of the knowledge of *Tecnoglo* and *Schia* for corrupt and financial means.

This new plan spread all across the land and, according to the propaganda, would make more and more cities prosper so that everyone could live a comfortable and fulfilled life. *Bureaucratos* set rigid rules so that in each *miniversitas* there was a supervisor that controlled the quality of a utilitarian output, with strict parameters and purely technical content. This would ensure that all traces of the useless teachings of *Philos* and *Sophos* were done away with. If anyone did discover critical thought and understand the value and meaning of human life, they would unearth the authentic values of spirit and people would once again think of others and bring moral order to their lives and possessions. This would reduce ignorance and alert people to the lethargy produced by consumerism, dragging them from their narcotic lives and breaking the manipulation that they were under. *Soberbius* could not permit it.

This all led to the deterioration of the West, which in very little time began to lose all its values. People showed less and less respect towards others, less solidarity and

14 Derogatory diminutive of “University”.

15 Concerning bureaucracy.

individualism grew rife. This frenzy to achieve a purely material and immediate wellbeing at any price also destroyed *Nature* and the world began to fill with misery, pollution and destruction. The *miniversitas* perverted the original aim of the *Knowledge Communities* and focused only on teaching that which would bring money and power. The spirit of *Logos* was completely forgotten. Bit by bit, interest in discovering the causes of reality and true meaning disappeared. Without perspective or universal order, relativism reigned, knowledge was substituted for opinion and the great truths disappeared. *Soberbius* once went back to locking up youths in his caves and *Ignorans* was again named “Cerberus”. One way or another, a shadow fell across the opening of the cave and expanded across the West. The sky, once clear and blue, turned grey, dark and claustrophobic. All of nature was damaged and fallen.

They say today that *Sophos* is unhappy, ill and weak. Almost everybody forgot his teachings or mixed them up with ideologies spread by *Fallacy*. *Tecnoglo* and *Schia* remain under the strict control of *Bureaucratos* and *Avarice* leads the corrupt Council of the Realm. *Philos* looks after *Sophos*, who has a small office in the first and only *Knowledge Community* that is now called *Universitas*. There he writes and teaches in secret to a few free rebels that want to discover who they are, what they live for, what lies beyond the purely material and, above all, how to find the true meaning of life and communal happiness. These renegades call themselves the “Guardians of Western Tradition” and warn against *Soberbius* and his schemes, training themselves in critical thinking in the hopes to transform anonymous societies into human communities.

Avarice and *Fallacy* still have the *King* under their spell and are impatiently plotting the death of *Philos*

and *Sophos* so they can reach full domination of the West. They do everything they can to keep *Philos* and *Schia* apart and *Soberbius* has *Tecnoglo* firmly under their control.

Philos and *Sophos* can be found in their small office; ignored by a society that remains anonymous, they continue to work on recovering the truths of life, looking after the treasures of “*Logos*” and supporting those few valiant rebels that fight to break the darkness and recover the wisdom and morality that once flourished throughout the West. Hope is not lost.

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As he finished the story, my grandfather looked at me smiling and said: “Make your own conclusions about Philosophy and Humanities. Maybe some day all STEM¹⁶ studies will turn into STHEM, with Humanities in the centre... Do you know what I always have in my office? My microscope and telescope, it has never occurred to me to separate them because they remind me of the universal way of learning”.

16 STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.