

Four Mythological Dialogues

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For Anastasia

1. Odysseus and Proteus

The world always has more to it than we can capture by means of our knowledge. Odysseus thought Poseidon had kept him away from home, but it was Proteus.

Odysseus

Another shore! When will I finally reach?

Proteus

Are you not Odysseus of the many ways? You mortals only have one way, so if you have many, your way must be long.

Odysseus

But how will I finally reach Ithaca?

Proteus

Are you not Odysseus of the many ways? You will find another one.

Odysseus

But why are you pursuing me? Is this still the wrath and hatred of Poseidon, your father?

Proteus

That Poseidon is my father is only one of my countless shapes. I existed before the Olympians. If Poseidon hates you, that has nothing to do with me.

Odysseus

But are you not bound by the laws of Zeus and Poseidon?

Proteus

The Olympians think so. They don't know that their law does not reach everywhere. They are blind to what they don't control. They could defeat the

Titans because the Titans took a definite shape. But look at the sea. Does the sea have a definite shape?

Odysseus

I once thought so. They called me the master mariner. The sea was gentle and the waves were regular. But then the sea changed and I did not recognize it again. Our ship was tossed high up, the waves were like mountains and then we clashed down into the valley of water again. My comrades all drowned.

Proteus

The sea always has another way. It is full of surprise for you mortals. You never know enough. So it happens to the Olympians. They rule by laws, they think they know everything. They think they are in control. This might be their downfall. But the sea can always go another way. The winds and streams can bring you to Ithaca, but they can also lead you somewhere else again.

Odysseus

And if I offer a sacrifice to you?

Proteus

You can offer a sacrifice to the Olympians. If you offer a sacrifice to me, I will take on another shape. You cannot force me into one shape. You cannot force my actions into one defined shape, by sacrifice or anything else. If you try to define me, I will change. That is why there is no temple for me and no cult.

Odysseus

But you know the future.

Proteus

In a sense, but if you ask me, I will assume another shape.

Odysseus

So you will not reveal what my future is?

Proteus

I am your future. The future does not have a defined shape. Only when you are dead, your future has a defined shape. Being alive means being surprised. The world does not have a defined shape. If you think you know everything, it will change its shape. You cannot foretell the future; you can only live into it. But since the future is taking many shapes, you must take many shapes too. You must be of many ways, of twists and turns, because your future is like that too. If you knew everything in advance, you would not need eyes. You would not need your wit. Your future is to be surprised.

Odysseus

But people say we have a fate. What is my fate?

Proteus

Fate only exists in hindsight. The way is not fixed. The way that can be described is not the real way.

Odysseus

But will I finally reach Ithaca?

Proteus

Your trip was long and twisted, so you expect not to arrive? You may be surprised. A way can be many miles long or just one step.

2. Icarus

Had Icarus and his father understood that the dream of a father is not necessarily the dream of the son, the tragedy could have been avoided...

Daedalus

Finally free! We're ascending high over the ocean. The wings tied to my arms, I leave that prison's ties behind. That tangled house that was created by my own entangled wit, it then entangled me. The woolen thread that led the way had bound me there. But now, free as a bird, I am gone.

Icarus

Why am I now so sad? There is the house with all those corners, secret ways and rooms. My childhood's place and palace, full of my memories, no other place I can remember. Smaller and smaller now. Why do I have to fly away? Those walls, warm, safe and cool, the house my father built.

Daedalus

Don't stay behind, my son. The archers of king Minos could still reach you with their bows.

Free again! Soon we will be in Athens, and be safe.

Icarus

Those archers - are they not my friends, king Minos' palace guards, playfellows of my childhood, whom I chased through secret corridors, and playing hide and seek? I want to wave to them but those wings and ropes constrain my arms. Those ropes that fix the wings now to my arms, are bonds. And so I have to leave, bound to these wings, unfree and even like my father's slave. But let me stay instead. Let me return. Is Crete, is Cnossus not my mother's land?

But if I return, they will call me a traitor. It is better, then, to stay here. Better that I die free near my home than to be a servant far away.

Helios

I can see how you suffer. Each day, on my trip, I see so much suffering, but I am too far away. But I could help you. Come near me, let me take those wings away, let me free you from those bonds.

Daedalus

Finally free! Soon we will be home.

But no, don't fly so high, you are getting too near to the sun. Did you forget...?

3. Eurydice and Orpheus

It is not true that Eurydice had to return because Orpheus looked back. It was the other way around...

Eurydice

I will remain here; I cannot come any further with you.

Orpheus

But I have not turned around nor looked back, as I was asked to. So just come with me.

Eurydice

Don't you understand that I do not stay behind because you might have looked back? No, you did not understand the condition the gods gave. You will turn around and look back because I don't come with you. I am going to leave you here. I am tired.

Orpheus

So I have been betrayed.

Eurydice

Humans always betray themselves. Actually, we just walk together for some time, and then we part. Sing, Orpheus, sing, because the meadows and forests, the lakes and plains are there only in your song. That world is inside the human being, not outside. Outside is only this narrow path between the rocks. There is one tedious step after the other. There is no Hades below and no upper world above.

Orpheus

I am looking at you now. So is that the last time?

Eurydice

Do you see my wrinkles? I am too old to continue. You will go ahead and I will stay here. I will step back behind that line. I will turn around and walk

away. Those who cross the line silently walk away and never turn around again.

Orpheus

But why? Was everything in vain?

Eurydice

Nothing was in vain. We walked together, and you were holding my hand. I could listen to your song.

Orpheus

But did not the gods themselves weep when I was singing?

Eurydice

The world of the gods is cold and without empathy. The gods cannot sing, they are deaf to song. The gods are dwelling in Hades. Don't you know that Mount Olympus is part of Hades? You must sing, Orpheus! For the immortals, everything is the same all the time. The immortals have no beginning and no end. They have no history. They live by cold laws. They don't have a life.

Orpheus

But are they not very powerful?

Eurydice

Yes, they are very powerful. But they are blind and deaf.

Orpheus

We can see and hear, but we, we are mortal.

Eurydice

Yes, we are mortal. What the gods have given to us is only this narrow rocky path and the hard steps of this staircase. That is all the gods were able to give. But for the mortals, there is more. They have a life, they have a history. They have songs. They create. The gods cannot create. Their world is perfect and complete, and therefore blind and deaf and mindless and infertile. There

is nothing new. There is no history and no life, only unchanging, invariable laws.

Orpheus

But you; was not your father Apollo?

Eurydice

I was a nymph, part of the immortal world, but I choose the world of the mortals. I thank you, Orpheus, you have given life and meaning to me through your songs and your love. Now go. This was my choice, make it yours. We have to agree with life and with death.

Orpheus

I understand now. I also thank you. So I should let go now?

Euridice:

Only mortals can enter the upper world. It is in your songs, in your dance, in the lyre and in the stories you tell. Did you not notice that we were there together? Now let go. It is time to let go now, first with the hand and then with the heart. Sing your song, and let go.

Touch turns into

Memory of touch

Glance turns into

Memory of glance

Voice turns into

Memory of voice

Orpheus

But will I see you again?

Eurydice

....

4. Prometheus

The Olympian gods could not understand that Prometheus, the Titan, was not like them. It was beyond their understanding that he was a force inside the mind, the force that can rip the mind open and break out of laws. Can such a force be permanently chained to a rock?

Hephaestus

So the reign of the Titans is over!

Prometheus

You may think so. I am not stopping you.

Hephaestus

But I am binding you to this rock!

Prometheus

You don't know what I am. I am a force inside the mind. The gods can bind me, but they cannot kill me.

Hephaestus

What kind of force are you, then? I heard already that your speech is abstruse.

Prometheus

I am the force that betrayed the gods. I stole the fire in the stalk of the Narthex plant, remember. And I betrayed Zeus when I divided meat and bones.

Hephaestus

That is what earned you this punishment. I regret I have to enchain you here.

But what can I do?

Prometheus

If you knew what I know, it would be easy for you not to do it. I have betrayed them once more, and they don't know. Maybe you are the only one of them who can understand. Your imperfect body and your skills show that you might have the seeds of this force inside you. But for that, your mother expelled you from Olympus.

Hephaestus

Abstruse is your speech, indeed. You seem to be mad. I heard the Olympians fear you. You don't want to tell me now? I could let you go!

Prometheus

I am the force that created humans. Not from clay, that is just a story. They created themselves. I am the force that enabled them to do so.

Hephaestus

You are well known for your riddles. I don't know what you mean.

Prometheus

What I am talking about is the force that will make the gods fall. The gods are trying to bind it, but they can't.

Hephaestus

Haha! You doubt the strength of my chains? No god can open them!

Prometheus

No god, but humans can. I am the force that enables them.

Hephaestus

Look, the eagle is coming!

Prometheus

That eagle I am not afraid of. It is part of me. With its wings and eyes I am flying.

Hephaestus

But it will rip you open, again and again.

Prometheus

I am ripping myself open. I am never complete. I have gaps and holes. When I close them, new gaps will be opening. That is how I grow. You gods don't understand that. You think you can chain me to a rock, but you don't know what I am. We Titans came before you. You emerged from us. You are trying to kill us and lock us away, but we are ultimately stronger.

Hephaestus

But the gods are perfect, how can you be stronger?

Prometheus

The world is not perfect, so perfect gods don't understand it. You need to rip yourself open to understand that. You emerged to stop the holes from opening, but you can't.

Hephaestus

Our world is perfectly clear and simple. There are laws.

Prometheus

Your perfect and clear and simple world is not the whole world. I know this is worrisome for you. You could not get complete control. The monsters you have locked away in Erebus are all still there. You cannot kill me. The old world was without gods, but there was freedom. I can rip open your world, and you will fall into that rupture. You are trying to chain me to a rock, but I am still there. I know Zeus is going to send Hermes to try to find out what I mean by this. But I will not tell him. Not because I don't want to tell him but because this is beyond his and your understanding. Humans can understand it, not you, the gods.

Hephaestus

I am finished. Now, let me see how you will free yourself!

Prometheus

Yes, we will see.

Hephaestus

Ha, you are still chained there!

Prometheus

Humans will come and unleash me. You have chained them too, using fear and deception, but that will not last long.

5. Epilogue

In his book “Dialogues with Leuco,”¹ published in 1947, Cesare Pavese (1908 – 1950) presented a series of dialogues between mythological characters. For example, there is a dialogue between Prometheus and Heracles. Each dialogue is introduced by a short text. However, these short introductions are part of the artistic treatment of the material; they presuppose a familiarity of the reader with the underlying story and do not contain an explanation of the myths to readers unfamiliar with the material. The mythological material is used with some poetic license, in order to express the author’s philosophical thoughts. I have used this form for my own texts since I found that it works well for me. The content of my dialogues is, however, not derived from Pavese’s examples. His interpretation of the Olympian gods perhaps has some parallels to my own; but apart from that, I derived only the literary form from his book. I am following Pavese in his use of a small introduction that only gives a few hints. Nevertheless, I think it’s also necessary to explain these texts in more depth, and provide some background. Therefore, in this epilogue, I will provide my own interpretations of the four mythological texts and explain some of the underlying ideas from which these texts emerged.

These texts really did *emerge*, in the sense that they came forward by themselves. My experience of writing them was that I could use a mythological story as a tool for thinking and gaining insights, as well as a means of finding expressions for thoughts that can only later be expressed in more explicit, “scientific” terms. I understand philosophy as dealing primarily not with logical derivations and calculations inside well defined systems of thought, like the sciences, formal theories, etc. Instead, the main task of philosophy, as I understand it, is finding new modes of thought and expression, i.e., extensions of perception, thought, and language.² A myth, with its vagueness and richness of connotations and symbolisms that can resonate with new ideas in different ways, can work as a scaffold for the formation of new ideas. It can also function as a means of transporting those ideas into a more emotional level of our mind, connecting them with our everyday existence. This mode of thinking, however, can only come by itself (at least for me). I cannot sit down and decide to write a mythological text. Instead, while thinking about a topic and about a mythical story, the possibility of reshaping and reinterpreting the myth in a certain way and loading it with philosophical content suddenly appears, in a process of “resonance” of ideas. This cannot be evoked at will: it just happens, from time to time.

¹ C. Pavese, “Dialogues with Leuco,” trans. W. Arrowsmith (Eridanos Press, 1965); the original text is “Dialoghi con Leucò,” 1947; and there is also a German translation, by C. Gelpke, “Gespräche mit Leuko,” 1958.

² Philosophy shares this task with art. The objectives of philosophy and art, however, are different—in philosophy the striving for knowledge is in the foreground, which is secondary in art—but there is a blurred boundary between both activities.

5.1 Sources

The Prometheus myth can be found in the works of Hesiod.³ Prometheus, a second generation Titan, steals fire from the gods and gives it to the humans. He betrays Zeus when sacrificing an animal, giving the meat to the humans and the bones to the gods. As a punishment, he is chained to a rock. An eagle comes every day to eat his liver. He is later freed by Heracles. Another text relevant here is in Plato's dialogue "Protagoras,"⁴ containing a myth involving Prometheus. The Prometheus myth has been taken up by many authors, including many philosophers. However, I am not aiming here to delve into the quite extensive literature on this topic.

The Proteus myth (and of course, the character of Odysseus) is from the *Odyssey*.⁵ However, as explained below, I have deviated from this original source in some ways and mixed in the motif of the Olympians vs. the pre-Olympian deities (see Hesiod's works on this), as well as a gesture towards early Chinese philosophy (see below). The Proteus motif has been used philosophically before, but to a far lesser extent than the Prometheus myth.

The stories of Orpheus and Eurydice and of Icarus can both be found (among several other places) in Ovid's "Metamorphoses,"⁶ a later Roman adaption of Greco-Roman mythology. Orpheus is a singer and poet whose wife Eurydice dies. He travels into the underworld and is allowed to take her back, on the condition that he must not turn around to look at her while they are ascending back to the upper world. Since he does not hear her footsteps any longer, he turns around, and she sinks back into Hades. Since this is a tragic love story, it has inspired many adaptations in art, literature, music and film, but it looks like they have not inspired much philosophical thinking yet. There seem to be not as many adaptations of the Icarus story, but it has been depicted by several painters. Daedalus, an architect and inventor, was imprisoned by king Minos of Crete, but escaped by building wings,

³ The section about Prometheus in the "Theogony" is available online at URL = <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0130%3Acard%3D507> and ff. The Theogony (more or less in its entirety) also contains the story of how Zeus and the Olympians gained power over earlier deities, especially the Titans. The relevant section in "Works and Days" is available online at URL =

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0132%3Acard%3D42> and ff..

⁴ See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=plat.+prot.+320d> and ff.

⁵ See:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0136%3Abook%3D4%3Acard%3D351> and ff..

⁶ See: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0028:book=10:card=1> and <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0028%3Abook%3D8%3Acard%3D183>.

made from feathers and wax, for himself and his son Icarus. Icarus got too near to the sun, the wax melted and he fell into the sea.

5.2 Interpretations

In this sub-section, I will give interpretations and explain the thoughts behind these four texts. All four dialogues deal with different aspects of creativity and incompleteness (two concepts I see as closely interconnected to each other), as I am going to explain below. I am presenting the interpretations here in a different sequence from the dialogues themselves, because I find that the concepts are easier to explain this way.

5.2.1 Interpreting "Prometheus"

This dialogue takes place while Prometheus is chained to a rock by Hephaistos, a god of fire and metal, a smith, who was thought to be small, ugly and lame. The dialogue is rooted in ideas about creativity. The basic and, in my opinion, defining property of the human mind is creativity: the ability to break out of any scheme, any fixed pattern or law of thinking. In my interpretation and version of the myth, Prometheus represents human creativity. Human beings creatively self-created themselves, so Prometheus's bringing the fire to humans is viewed as a mythological description of the invention of fire by humans, symbolizing the creative self-creation of humanity.

In the background is the myth of how the Olympians gained power in a fight against earlier gods, especially the Titans. The Olympians (Zeus, etc.) here represent power in its different forms (political, commercial etc.), authority, and ideology. Ideology and power restrict creativity, so they cripple themselves intellectually. I view creativity as the core of intelligence. That is why the "gods" cannot understand this. But humans can and will set Prometheus (i.e., creativity) free.

The price to be paid for creativity is incompleteness. Incompleteness is the reverse side of creativity. We can never get a complete picture of ourselves and of our culture because we can always create something new. We can never get a complete description of the world, but by using our creativity, we can extend the descriptions we have. In the Prometheus story, that is my reinterpretation of the eagle. In the original story, the eagle rips Prometheus open and eats his liver, as a punishment, so this is a deviation from the original myth. The gods intend it as a punishment, but it *isn't*, from Prometheus' perspective. From the perspective of an ideology, or closed way of believing or thinking, the creation of a rupture or wound appears as disturbing and painful, hence as a punishment: but for the free mind, it *isn't*.

Creativity results in our world being “open”, in contrast to the closed, defined worlds of animals and ideologies. We are able to grasp new phenomena and re-interpret known ones in new ways, and in doing so, we are able to extend our world and our understanding of it as well as enter into novel interactions with the world. As a result of creativity, our cultures split up into an unbounded multiplicity of different groups displaying an unlimited multiplicity of different phenomena. One way to deal with this situation is to embrace it as something positive. Some people, however, seem to experience the fundamental incompleteness of our creative self-definition as a threatening gap, as an abyss. For them, the eagle represents painful punishment. They try to patch this rupture or wound in different ways, for example by social institutions limiting the freedom of action, and by dogmas limiting the freedom of thought. But the “crack” or “gap” can always be ripped open again by human creativity, so such creativity is a threat and must be limited. Thus Prometheus is chained to the rock. But ultimately, human creativity is going to break free.

5.2.2 Interpreting “Odysseus and Proteus”

In this piece, I am playing with the figures of Odysseus and Proteus. Both appear in the *Odyssey*, but I am deviating here from Homer, especially in my treatment of Proteus.

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is sometimes described with the epithet of “polytropos” (πολύτροπος). This term appears even in the first line of the epic. It can be translated as “with many turns,” or “wily,” and refers both to his long and twisted travels and also to his cleverness and versatility. Odysseus is the man “of many ways,” in both of these meanings. In this dialogue, he represents the human being facing the world. The long travels of Odysseus are taken as an allegory of human life, with all its ups and downs. This life is “polytropos,” so the human being has to be “polytropos” as well. In my interpretation, this term is again connected to the concept of human creativity. The world cannot be completely described and presents us with many unexpected turns, so we need a capacity for creativity in ourselves in order to deal with it.

The term “master mariner” is another epithet describing Odysseus that appears in at least one English translation, although it seems that it does not in the original.⁷ Here it represents knowledge that appears to be complete at first but is not:

⁷ See, e.g., Robert Fitzgerald’s translation. Epithets were used by the ancient singers to adapt names to the rhythmic structure of the verse. While prose translations can be quite exact, verse translations must make a compromise between content and form, and some translators seem to have created their own epithets to meet the constraints of the verse in the target language. However, for my purposes here, it does not matter if this expression is original or not.

despite his skills, Odysseus is shipwrecked. Reality has more properties than our knowledge of it covers at any single time, so we are presented with surprises. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus blinds the one-eyed Polyphemus and brings down the wrath of Poseidon, Polyphemus's father, upon himself that way, which is the main reason he gets into trouble repeatedly and does not return home until 10 years later. In my reinterpretation, the cause of the trouble is instead Proteus, representing the inexhaustible, "polytropos" complexity of reality.

Proteus is just a minor character in the *Odyssey*. He is described as an old man of the sea, taking care of a flock of seals. The story appears in book 4 of the *Odyssey*. When captured in an attempt to extract information from him, he tries to escape by changing his shape. I have taken up this motif—Proteus knows the future, but tries to avoid telling it by constantly changing his shape—but ignored the remainder of the story. In my interpretation, he does not even have any definite shape.

I view creativity as the ability of humans to break out of the scope of any exact theory about human cognition. Because of this, every exact theory about humans, their cognitive processes, and their culture is incomplete. On the other hand, I also think that the real world we are facing has the same property: every exact description of it is incomplete. I was looking for a name for this philosophical concept, a short term for "something for which every exact theory of it is incomplete." Starting with the adjective "protean", I had a look at the Proteus myth and found that it fitted this philosophical concept, so I coined the term "proteon." I then played around with that trop a little bit, and this dialogue is the result.

I am giving Proteus a more important role here than he has in the *Odyssey*, by stripping off some parts of the story and then mixing in some other mythology. In this dialogue, he appears as one of the pre-Olympian gods, like the Titans. The Olympian gods represent the established order, exact science, systematic knowledge, etc. The myth of the fight between the Titans and the Olympians is in the background here, as it is in the Prometheus story. But while in the Prometheus myth, it can actually be traced to the ancient sources in Hesiod's texts, in the Proteus dialogue, I have added this element myself. Underlying that orderly world, there is a more complex primordial world represented here by Proteus, the god without a fixed shape, who, in my interpretation, is not subject to the Olympian order, although the Olympians (including Poseidon) don't know this. In Homer, he does not have such a role, so I have put this character into a new context here. That Proteus is considered the son of Poseidon, (but is not really) is also my own invention here. Proteus, as he appears in this dialogue, represents the complexity of the world that lies beyond the systematic "Olympian" order. He is, therefore, behind the twists and turns of Odysseus' long travels (while the *Odyssey* attributes this to the wrath of Poseidon).

I imagine Odysseus finally reaching his home island Ithaca, perhaps after being shipwrecked, without knowing yet that he has finally arrived. We might think of a beach of the island as the stage of this dialogue. At the end of the dialogue, Proteus provides a hint that possibly Odysseus has reached home.

Proteus's statement that "The way that can be described is not the real way" is a citation or interpretation of the beginning of the Dao De Jing (Tao De Jing), adding another component to my interpretation of the Proteus character.⁸ It looks like early Taoists were on the track of the phenomenon of incompleteness. At least, some of their texts can be interpreted this way.⁹

5.2.3 Interpreting "Eurydice and Orpheus"

In this text, the Olympians represent the "cold" laws of nature. They are powerful, perfect, and blind. Death is final, and the dead are really dead. So Eurydice cannot come back up to the upper world and stays behind. In my version of the story, and deviating from tradition, Orpheus does not cause her to sink back into the underworld by turning around; instead he turns to her because she has to return in any case.

I imagine him being in a dark kind of tunnel or corridor, with cold stone walls and perhaps a staircase made of stone. This stone corridor represents physical reality. It is everything that "really" exists. However, he is able to create another world by means of his song. As a living human being, he can enter this "upper world" of human culture. The gods, although mighty and strong, cannot. They are blind, and in that sense, they reside in Hades, the underworld. This is, of course, another deviation from classical mythology.

The upper world is not at the end of the tunnel, but Orpheus resides in the upper world while physically remaining in the tunnel. The upper world is the world of human culture, represented by Orpheus's song. It is imperfect and impermanent. Beauty and value do not arise from perfection, but from humanness, of which creativity and imperfection are main features. They are tied to incompleteness. So the common theme connecting this text to the other ones is again the theme of human creativity. Human creativity is an essential part of what lies at the heart of culture and this is what lets Orpheus escape from the grip of Hades. The Olympians, on the other hand, are perfect and in their perfection, they are uncreative. There is nothing new in their realm. Orpheus is not perfect. He is creative, and creativity creates cracks and gaps. It creates incompleteness. Orpheus is mortal and inherently

⁸ see <https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing/ens#n11592>.

⁹ See for example the Zhuangzi, Outer Chapters, "The Way of Heaven (天道)", Nr. 9 (the story of the wheel maker), <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/tian-dao/ens#n2807>.

incomplete and imperfect. His knowledge is incomplete, so he needs—and has—ears and eyes, and a sense of touch. He can look at Eurydice and be looked at, talk and sing to her and hear her and they can touch each other. The perfect gods, on the other hand, are blind and deaf. Eurydice has chosen to share this imperfect, mortal existence and has left the realm of the perfect, but blind immortals.

5.2.4 Interpreting “Icarus”

The ideas behind the Icarus text are ideas about pedagogy and education, and again, about creativity. In part, these ideas emerged from my experience as a father. I also received valuable inspirations here from my wife, who is a social worker and counsellor, i.e., she is a professional in helping people transform themselves. Before I can discuss my interpretation of the myth, let me explain some ideas on learning and teaching, and on transformative education, in a little detour from the mythological text.

Our knowledge and understanding is always incomplete. Using creativity, we can extend it and move on to a higher level of understanding. However, while we are on the lower level, we do not have enough knowledge to get to the higher level on our own. It is possible, but can take a lot of time. If the way to the more comprehensive knowledge was adequately described by the knowledge already available on the “lower level,” the “higher level” would not be higher, but would be covered by the existing knowledge.

Creativity goes into the unknown. It took us many thousands of years to reach where we are because the way was not mapped out. So for each individual to reach a higher understanding, we need a guide, a coach. But there are many possibilities, many ways a young person might take. The process of learning is not just a process of filling a brain with knowledge. It is a process of transformation. There is no fixed structure of cognition. The reason for this is that the mind is creative, i.e., able to get out of any fixed system or framework of thought. So the teacher (e.g., the parent) has to guide the student (the child) through a process of transformation.

But there is not one single, unique goal; there are many possible ways. As a result, there is a delicate balance in education, and it also takes a process of learning on the side of the educator. On the one hand, we should give the learners freedom to find their own way, to become what they want to become and can become, and help them to get as far as possible on this way. And on the other hand, from the more comprehensive level of understanding of a more experienced person, we might see the errors of the students or the children before they are able to see them. The problem is finding the right level of intervention without restricting the freedom of the learner too much.

When reading about the Icarus story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it seemed to me that this could be taken as a parable of failed education, of what not to do. Daedalus is technically advanced and smart, able to build wings, and he instructs his son Icarus not to fly too high or too low. However, he fails to ask the question of whether Icarus wants to fly away at all. He is himself not on a sufficient level of wisdom for the task of education. We can think of him as a professional who does technical work (building the labyrinth for King Minos), and forgets spending time with his child. I once had a classmate who, after finishing school, started studying law. He failed an important exam three times and was forced to leave university since this was the maximum number of attempts. His whole future shattered and he suffered a nervous breakdown. I once met him afterwards, he looked shockingly aged. He had found a job as a clerk in a public authority, but one could see that he had gone through a terrible crisis. I heard from someone else that studying law had not been his own idea or desire but was what his father had prescribed to him. He had always been designated to become a lawyer. He had never been given the freedom to decide for himself what he wanted to—and was able to—become. This came to my mind when I was reading Ovid. This young man was an Icarus who had fallen because he had to fulfill the dream of his father, instead of pursuing his own.

So I read the Icarus story as the story of a father who decides what his son should become. Icarus is not asked whether he wants to leave Crete. The father, feeling the overwhelming wish to leave, finds a way to escape, but does not spend time with his son in order to find out his wishes. How would the story look, I asked myself, if Icarus actually did not want to leave? Would he kill himself out of despair? Might we then take the fall of Icarus not as an accident but as a suicide, resulting from failed education and understanding? So I decided to try to reinterpret the story in this direction, as a story about how the balance between scope for development and guidance in learning has failed catastrophically and tragically, because of lack of communication (this is not really a dialogue), lack of time spent with the child and lack of consideration. Instead of guidance, allowing the son to find his own way, a kind of coercion was used.

Suicide, however, can also be viewed as a result of being at an insufficient level of insight. In a difficult situation, from the lower level of understanding, with limited knowledge, it might appear as the only way out. However, viewed from a more advanced level of understanding, the same situation might appear different and other solutions become visible. So Icarus should better have followed his father and looked for a way to return to Crete later, or for another course for his life altogether. Tragedy here emerges from the restricted horizons of both father and son.