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Topoanalysis and Cultural Images: The Case of the cul-de-sac

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The study deals with the possibilities of using the topoanalytical method applied to cultural images of urban spaces. As a guiding example, the phenomenon of a specific space, such as the cul-de-sac, is highlighted here. The author shows how the metaphor of the cul-de-sac as a description of a dead-end situation developed. It was historically imagined in three modes: as a dark and narrow alley (with an emphasis on the play of light, darkness, groping around and uncertain steps), as a space of wandering and being-lost, and finally as an image of impassability, of stopping and thus of a situation without a way out. Beyond the metaphorical and symbolic use of this image, attitudes to the place of the cul-de-sac in urban infrastructure have also changed: from its elimination in urban planning to its invocation as a positive value.

Keywords: topoanalysis – cultural images – imaginative sets – metaphors – cul-de-sac

Introduction

The topic I am going to deal with in this article philosophically connects various disciplines of the humanities, but perhaps most compactly it could be classified under the rubric "philosophy of the image," or more precisely, "philosophy of cultural images," that – as I have shown in other work – dominate our culturally constituted experience of the world (Vydra 2023, 13). In this text, I will discuss philosophical motifs in researching cultural images of space, especially of the cul-de-sac as a phenomenon that offers several possibilities of interpretation.

In his writings Gaston Bachelard called such a study "topoanalysis." Bachelard was particularly interested in the spaces associated with being happy. However, his thinking about space is not a mere reflection of the

internal states of the subject, as several other factors come into play: cultural imagination, perception, haptic experiences, bodily movement in space, collective memories, literary daydreams, texts or poetic images of poets, and so on. Jean-Jacques Wunenburger describes this Bachelardian topoanalytic approach with an emphasis on bodily experience accurately:

> The space thus acquires its dreamlike properties from the materials, shapes and movements of the outside world, but also from the archaic images and childhood memories that populate our memory. Perception and imagination are never dissociated from memory, especially from the memory of the body. Because our daydreams are also activated and prompted by the body's movements, gestures and rhythms. You can contemplate a landscape, but you can do so even better by walking through it, following the slow rhythm of your body (Wunenburger 2009, 56).

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard called "topoanalysis" an investigation of *the language areas* (Bachelard 1994, xxviii), by which he meant a peculiar phenomenological-psychological approach to the investigation of spatial images. "Topoanalysis, then," Bachelard says a little later, "would be the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives" (Bachelard 1994, 8).

Bachelard's topoanalysis focuses exclusively on archetypal images of intimate spaces: the house, the cellar, the corner, the garrets, etc. However, besides these, there are also external spaces, of which Bachelard is aware, but which he does not elaborate on.[1] A separate group of such images, a particular imaginative set, are precisely the images of the path, of travelling, or of the situation of being-on-road. Bachelard knows about them since he himself writes that "we should have to undertake a topoanalysis of all the space that has invited us to come out of ourselves….And what a dynamic, handsome object is a path!" (Bachelard 1994, 11). According to him there is also a dreaming of the walking man, a dreaming of the journey.

Another example of a topoanalytical researcher is Daniela Hodrová and her literary-scientific "walks" through the places of novels. Hodrová is reluctant to use the term "space," preferring instead to speak of "places": "A place without a subject and an event seems not to exist; it is formed and endures only through the one who is in it, through the event (the event of being) that takes place in it" (Hodrová 1994, 10). In her texts, various places with mystery, places with memory, places-labyrinths, places-figures, places

[1] The possibilities of applying topoanalysis to a new phenomenological study of home also in relation to the external environment have been suggested by David Seamon (2010, 236 – 237).

with or without entrances, and so on, come to the fore. Hodrová writes about them in the spirit of the Bachelardian topoanalytic method, which focuses precisely on this subjective or intersubjective lived experience of place. Topoanalysis is an analytical tool in the sense that it breaks down literary or apparently fixed wholes into their constituent elements. Space is thus an assemblage composed of elementary places. Topoanalysis recognizes, describes and divides them according to some criteria (Hodrová called them places-centres, places-peripheries, sacred places, profane places, intimate places, or public places) and shows what values have been attributed to these places in their history or in our contemporary use of them.

However, there are many other topological or topoanalytic studies that focus – more subjectively or objectively – on different types of space: landscape, urban or more generally outdoor space; scenic; religious; figurative or architectural space; minimalist, and liminal space.[2] In the context of this range of diverse ways of studying spaces, I will focus on a specific area related to cultural images of the being-on-path. Although the following text uses the notion of topoanalysis as developed by Gaston Bachelard, it does not pursue further his phenomenological intentions, but shows how culturally constituted images are inscribed in the formation of ideas.

Images of the path form a separate *imaginative set*, an autonomous collection of ideas, symbols and metaphors, which include not only paths and pavements and also, for example, intersections, forest roads, transportation, walking, hiking, wandering, and urban infrastructure. The imaginative set of the path is itself a broad thematic area of many cultural images. By *cultural image* I mean the imaginative field of discourses that are typical of a geographically or historically determined civilizational experience. These images, representations and imaginative links, in conjunction with some well-defined meaning, are transformed into metaphors that may at first have only a decorative function, but over time may develop into what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have called "conceptual metaphors." These are not decorative

[2] Let me mention at least some of the most contemporary ones. Paolo Furia, for example, explores the topological relations between landscape, place, space, geography and map using phenomenological approaches (Furia 2021; 2022a; 2022b). The collective of authors around Radan Haluzík has opened an interesting reflection on urban and suburban *terrain vague*, functionless places, liminal urban peripheries (Haluzík et al. 2021). *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Space*, a larger collection of texts, offers interesting contributions on sacred space and its functions (Kilde 2022). Also noteworthy is an older text by T. Hauer (2001) on the postmodern understanding of public space.

metaphors, but ones in which we think and act; they are part not only of our routine everyday communication and use of language.

It is from a similar collection of all possible images of the path, which includes all sorts of roads, wanderings, crossroads, highways, rails, rambles, expeditions, and the like, that I will choose here a particular image to serve as an exemplar for further interpretation: the cul-de-sac. It can be used to demonstrate the historical-cultural and linguistic shifts that have led to different metaphorical-symbolic uses, but also to different and often even contradictory approaches to the phenomenon of the cul-de-sac.

The methodological approach that I will apply in this study will follow the archaeological differentiation of different types of perception of the phenomenon of the cul-de-sac, as it was formed especially in Western thought, in urban planning in the construction of cities and public spaces, but also in the use of this type of space as a metaphor or symbol. As I will show later, there are at least three culturally constituted types or modes of the phenomenon of the cul-de-sac, which can be tentatively described as *darkness*, *wandering*, and *impassability*. Each of these types is associated with different imaginative and symbolic structures that have differently translated into the metaphorical meaning of a deadlock as "being stuck in a cul-de-sac."

I. Cul-de-sac as Cultural Image

In the topoanalysis of the cul-de-sac, there are two contradictory moments in determining the value of this image: on the one hand, the cul-de-sac is a metaphor for a dead-end, aporetic situation and the inability to overcome any obstacles (scientific, existential, etc.), and, on the other hand, it denotes a familiar space that moves away from the hustle and bustle of the main street and brings one into a private, safe zone. This imaginative antagonism makes the image of the cul-de-sac an unusual phenomenological object of interest.

We usually use the metaphor of the cul-de-sac as a negative signifier when we speak, for example, of a person who has fallen into an aporia, an impasse, when investigating a problem. This is exactly how Bertrand Russell uses the word when in his text "Mathematics and the Metaphysicians" he discusses the subject of infinitely large numbers, poorly understood by philosophy, which "seemed to have wandered into a cul-de-sac" (Russell 1981, 66). According to Russell, philosophers had to change their metaphysics in not very successful ways: for example, Immanuel Kant through the notion of the antinomies of pure reason.

It is interesting, however, that Kant, in the case of the antinomies of pure reason, did not so much use the image of being stuck in a cul-de-sac when

making self-contradictory statements, but rather the image of the laying of artificial snares "into which reason falls of itself and even unavoidably" (Kant 2000, 460; A407/B434), or of searching for "the right track for exposing the semblance that has so long misled us" (Kant 2000, 510; A490/B518). For Kant, the notion of the infinite is more of a trap or a misleading path for the scientist-tracker, and so a different cultural image. In Kant we find images of groping around, staggering or walking blindly (*ein bloßes Herumtappen*). Against these images he states his *es ging ein Licht auf* – the glimmering, sudden enlightenment of the mind typical of the representatives of the scientific revolutions postulated by him. In Kant's case, this is a portrayal of two images of scientists: one is of those who follow a safe path with a clear knowledge of the method and the goal, the other is of those who, although they also want to reach the goal, sometimes get stuck or end up literally in a jam, a dead-lock (*in Stecken gerät*) or have to go back often and look for another way (*öfters wieder zurückgehen und einen andern Weg einschlagen muß*).

Kant does not use the metaphor of the cul-de-sac; he does not even know the term *Sackgasse*. In fact, the cul-de-sac first came into use as a metaphor apparently in eighteenth-century France only a few years before Kant wrote the *Critique*. The term cul-de-sac has indeed been documented since the thirteenth century (as I will demonstrate below), but then only as a metaphorical name for a certain type of street, not as a metaphor for a cognitive dead-end situation. Kant's terms for this circumstance are *Irrfahrt der Vernunft*, *Irrweg*, *Umweg* or *Verirrung*.

The metaphor of finding oneself in a cul-de-sac is a mainly negative use of a more original cultural image. Another is its use as an image of a private zone in residential planning of cities, an image of a street as "urban interior" (H. P. L'Orange's expression in Norberg-Schulz 1984, 142). We could say that the cul-de-sac is to urban space what the corner is to the space of the house: one can be driven into a corner as into a cul-de-sac; the corner is imaginatively the darkest place; but the corner is also a place of refuge, hiddenness, peace; the corner is "the chamber of being" (Bachelard 1994, 138). In her essay "Temný kout" (Dark Corner), a part of the book *Chvála schoulení* (Praise of Curling Up), Daniela Hodrová explains the darkness of corners mythically: "in dark nooks and recesses dwell with the underworld associated Hecate, both benevolent and terrible" (Hodrová 2011, 321).

Western urban development currently envisages just such zones, which are sought after for their familiarity, their absence of the public and tourists, their quieter and safer environment, and their distance from the hustle and

bustle of the city and from traffic. Eric Charmes even argues that the increase in the creation of cul-de-sacs during the twentieth century has been linked to the rise in the use of the car, which has encouraged people to seek suburban, quieter, and less noisy residential spaces (Charmes 2010, 358). Developers also gradually realized that creating similar remote residential zones offered people desirable luxury, privacy and a sense of wealth. This led to a mass mortgage hysteria in some American cities as people borrowed more than they could afford, thus giving rise to the term the "cul-de-sac syndrome" (Wasik 2011, 21).

As can be seen, a cultural image is more original than a metaphor, which grows out of it by fixing the image by associating it with a certain meaning. In this sense, the cul-de-sac is a multi-phenomenon.

II. Three Imaginative Schemas

In various Slavic languages, the term cul-de-sac is introduced using the expressions of blindness or blindsiding, literally as a "blind alley." This can help us to open three semantic levels on which the image of the cul-de-sac can be analyzed more closely.

A. A Dark and Narrow Street

Let me start with the cul-de-sac as a dark place where little light falls, where streetlamps are usually absent, a place that offers itself as a suitable space for smugglers, lovers, prostitution or various illicit activities. The cul-de-sac as a dark part of the urban space is associated with this negative definition of a relatively dangerous place.

When John Amos Comenius in *Orbis sensualium pictus* uses the Latin term *angiportus* (traditionally understood as equivalent to a cul-de-sac) in chapter CXXIV (the entry *Interiora Urbis*), he translates it as a "narrow Lane" (Comenius 1970, 250). The ancient Roman *angiportus* indeed denoted such tight streets, roads or gorges; they were also called *angustæ viæ* (narrow or narrowing roads).[3] However, when Comenius shows his pupil a picture of the city, he represents an *angiportus* as a narrow street between houses, which, though hatched, is not necessarily depicted as impassable. The hatching in his

[3] *Angustæ viæ* we could find in Virgil, in the *Aeneid* (II, 332), where he speaks of the narrow alleys occupied by the soldiers after the conquest of Troy. By this expression the Latin theologians often interpreted the New Testament passage about the straight and narrow (but not labyrinthic!) path through which the Christian is to go. See, for example, Ambrosius: *Expositio in psalmum CXVIII*; PL 15, 1278: "*Qui secundum mandata angustam et arctam graditur viam, ambulat in latitudine*."

engraving thus suggests a lack of light rather than impassability. *Angiportus* here is indeed a place with an absence of light. The images of darkness, anxiety, and not seeing the way out are also used by Comenius also in his book *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*, where he writes: "Not knowing where to return, nor how to find my way out of the darkness…" (Comenius 1942, 124; chap. XXXVII). Or later: "For in the latter [*in the world*] I saw blindness and darkness everywhere…" (Comenius 1942, 135; chap. XLI). And lastly, in the conclusion, "Thy good Spirit guide me and lead me among the snares of the world as in a plain, and may Thy loving-kindness accompany me in my journeys; lead me through this sorrowful darkness of the world to the light eternal" (Comenius 1942, 160; chap. LIV).

For Comenius, the world is "a dark and disordered place, a valley of bondage, iniquity, endless woes and groping without a way out" (Marcelli 2014, 35). The three passages cited here point to Comenius' typical imaginative set of light and darkness, which he uses as an epistemological, valorizing, and spatial metaphor. We could see a similar connection between light, darkness, snares and space in Immanuel Kant. In short – as Peter Machamer argues – especially from the seventeenth century onwards

> the representations of knowledge are always spatial displays.…The seventeenth century thought in spatial terms; this mode of understanding and representation they took to be the prototype of the intelligible (Machamer 2000, 93).

However, the original meaning of *angiportus* in Roman era was a bit different. Angiportus were opposed to the open and lighted main avenues or boulevards (*plateæ*), as we can read about it in Vitruvius. In his *De architectura* he writes of *angiportus* that "they are rightly laid out if the winds are carefully shut out from the alleys" (thus, ventilate the space), because Vitruvius believed that the winds complicated the life of the people and brought disease (Vitruvius 1955, 52 – 55; *De arch*. I, 6, 1). Streets, he says, should be built in such a way that the winds are broken, reflected and finally dissipated.

The Roman *angiportus* was thus a narrow street or alley between two rows of houses, which often indeed ended up as a cul-de-sac, and was usually imagined as a dark place for illegal activities or prostitution. Horace, in one of his odes, writes of the aging Lydia, who has lost her charm and been abandoned as "a thing of no account in a deserted alley" (*flegis in solo levis angiportu*). Lydia can now only weep over her arrogant lechers (Horace 2004, 70 – 71; *Od*. I, 25, 9 – 10). In other words, there is nothing left for her to

do but the oldest profession in these tight and dark *angiportus* of the Roman city quarters.

B. Wandering and Labyrinths

The situation of finding oneself in a cul-de-sac is also associated with the expression "wandering," which was functional even before the metaphor of the cul-de-sac was coined to describe similar situations. However, it had a slightly different imaginative basis. Here, dead ends are a term for tortuous alleys. Just as Vitruvius in the first century BC described *angiportus* as places whose function was to ventilate public space, the Renaissance architect Leon Battista Alberti, in his *De re ædificatoria* of 1452, describes the medieval *angiportus* in a similar context of windy weather, but no longer for health reasons (Wallace-Hadrill 2022, 51). They were, according to him, created not only because of the weather (the zigzag and narrow streets protected against strong winds and gusts of mud, while the wide streets created an open and "cruel tunnel for the wind" for the medieval townsman – Mumford 1961, 308), but, incidentally, also to defend against the enemy, that is, to confuse the entering enemy troops and to get lost in such alleys. "But I notice," Alberti writes,

> that the ancients preferred to give some of their roads within the city awkward exits, and others blind alleys (*aliquas inextricabilis atque aliquas nullius exitus*), so that any aggressor or criminal who entered would either hesitate, being in two minds and unsure of himself, or, summoning up the courage to continue, would soon find himself in danger (Alberti 1988, 107; *De re æd*. IV, 5).

Let us add that Alberti himself – as well as many others in the Renaissance – did not consider *angiportus* an ideal part of urban architecture.

Alberti's *inextricabilis viæ* were literally inseparable paths, entangled, knotted, so-called labyrinthic (*labyrinthicus*), which did not yet metaphorically represent unsolvable questions, but were already counted as a manifestation of the metaphor of the labyrinth, wandering and getting lost. And it was precisely wandering – whether outside in the city or inside in the labyrinth – that reminded many in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of the epistemological impossibility of arriving at a set destination. When Francesco Petrarca ascends (real or imaginary) the Mont Ventoux, he refuses to walk up a direct path and finds himself on a more arduous traverse that seems to lead nowhere:

> Having offered this excuse for my laziness, I was still wandering through the valleys [*per valles errabam*] without finding a more gentle access anywhere by

> the time the others had reached the summit. The road got longer, and my burden grew heavy" (Petrarca 1975, 174).

In this connection we may also mention the first verses of Dante's *Inferno* (in Canto 1), where he says that he found himself "in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost," (Dante 1996, 27), which is a description of a similar wandering against the image of a mountain and its peaks.

Only a century later after Petrarca, however, labyrinthic wandering is already understood as a term for insoluble propositions (*insolubilia*), although we would not have found this connection directly in Ockham's work, as we would expect. However, in 1495 Peter of Ailly wrote his *Conceptus et insolubilia*, and it is the section on insoluble propositions that opens with the sentence: "Now there is such a great difficulty with so-called 'insoluble' that human understanding, wandering around in it as if in the labyrinth of Daedalus, is scarcely strong enough to find a way out" (Peter of Ailly 1980, 35).

Wandering, *erratio*, traverse, detour, labyrinth[4] – today we would describe it with the metaphor of a cul-de-sac. And here is also one more circumstance that needs to be mentioned: for such aporetic wandering is often referred to as being in a vicious circle (*circulus vitiosus*). This expression was popular in seventeenth century England, although it appeared in two different usages – on the one hand, as a wrong argumentative practice (*petitio principii*), and on the other hand and more originally as a wrong calendar cycle (φαύλος κύκλος). Isaac Newton, immersed in the study of the early Christian Church Fathers, mentions Epiphanius of Salamis, who in his *Panarion* reproaches the *quartodecimans* for using the wrong cycle (84-years) in calculating the day of Easter. Newton wrote here also about *a vicious cycle* (Newton 1922, 246). It is not a circularity in the argument that is at issue here, but rather an incorrect annual cycle.

The identification of the vicious circle with the *petitio principii* also has a history. Medieval authors, such as Thomas Aquinas, do use terms such as *demonstratio circularis* or *circulation*, but they are not referring to the circular argument as a vicious circle. Similarly, Ockham in the *Summa logicæ* (III, 15) does speak directly of the *petitio principii*, but nowhere does he call it a vicious circle either. Ockham and similarly Robert Kilwardby in his *De ortu scientiarum* from the middle of thirteenth century use the term *vitiosus* mainly in a moral sense in describing free will, which is neither virtuous nor vice (*virtuosa vel*

[4] A great introduction to multicursal and unicursal labyrinths is offered by Penelope Reed Doob (2019, 39 – 50 *et seq.*).

vitiosa) (Kilwardby 1976, 141; *De ortu* XLIII, 404, 16, and 405, 26 – 27). It is in fact only in Francisco Suárez's (1548 – 1617) *Disputationes Metaphysicæ* from 1597 where we find the description of the *petitio principii* as *vitiosus circulus* several times.

C. Impassibility

The third interpretive framework could be described as impassability and is related to the Old French expression *cul-de-sac* (the bottom of the bag, through which one can no longer get). The image of impassability here has its origins in the Greek term *aporia*. The word ἄπορος ("without passage") means something impassable, impracticable, very difficult, hard to solve or uncertain. This is close to the Latin *angiportus*, and even *angustus* and *portus* were explained as "the narrow entrance to a port" (Smith 1973, 95), the words πορος and *portus* (harbor, gate, door) seem to have the same etymological stem with the meaning of "passage."

In the labyrinthic model, cul-de-sac would correspond to multicursal (branching) labyrinths with so-called headless streets. After all, originally these small streets (*ruelles*) were also called *rues sans chief* (streets without head). It is true, however, that in the thirteenth century there were types of path called *via sine capite* as it is noticed in a document of 1260 (Berty, Legrand 1885, 19). By the term *caput viæ* the Romans signified the "head of the road," a milestone or point of importance. Roads with a head led to the next significant point (a crossroads, a church, a pillar); a road without a head was as if "cut off" and leading nowhere.

The word *cul-de-sac* for streets, even in the form "cul de çac" according to one document of 1307 (Censier de Saint-Merry 1891, 177), was therefore already in use at that time and its first metaphorical use links the sack or bag with the street. So, the original French term *cul-de-sac* referred from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries onward, to a narrow or dead-end street, and later to a profession or business that leads nowhere. The first mention of the use of the term as a new metaphor dates back to eighteenth century when physician James Douglas wrote in 1730 his *Description of the Peritonaeum and Of That Part Of the Membrana Cellularis Which Lies On Its Outside*. After that, the pouch of Douglas (*excavatio rectouterina*) was called commonly cul-de-sac by anatomists.

Shortly afterwards, Voltaire was already fuming over this crude designation of streets, writing in his 1764 *Discourse aux Welches* (as a part of *Contes de Guillaume Vadé* and in the interests of anonymity ascribed to Antoine Vadé) that words like *cul-de-sac* to designate streets without exit (*les rues sans*

issue) and other "dry and barbaric words," as he calls them, disfigure the French language. In *Discourse aux Welches* he recalls that the Romans called a cul-de-sac a more gracefully *angiportus* and that they could never imagine that the word *cul* (from Latin *culus*, buttocks) should remind someone of a street (Voltaire 1764, 134).[5] Voltaire suggested calling these streets *l'impasse* (impassable), which is now used as a synonym or substitute for the somewhat pejorative cul-de-sac.

However, the French etymologist and Voltaire critic Charles Rozan in his *Petites ignorances de la conversation* of 1856, says that the word cul-de-sac would not have been so shocking if Voltaire had not made so much noise about it, and he concludes his entry on the term with a quotation from François Guénin:

> This metaphor may lack sublimity (though, after all, habit obliterates the relief of these expressions), but it does not lack precision, for the sack does indeed sit on its ass (bottom), and a man who stubbornly tried to pass through the cul-de-sac would no more succeed than one who stubbornly tried to get out of the sack through its bottom (Rozan 1860, 289 – 291).

Whatever the controversy over the naming of cul-de-sac in France, the imaginative scheme associated with it was based on an understanding of this old image as an impassability or a cessation of movement.

III. Conclusion

In my analysis, I have shown three modes of interpreting the image of the cul-de-sac: the uncertain and intuitive *groping* in the dark, the aimless *wandering*, and finally *impassability* and the inability to find a way out. The human imagination has applied these three situations to aporetic moments when thought has proceeded with a faltering step, when it has wandered in chimeras far from the goal, or when it has, by its own doing, fallen into straits.

Topoanalysis finds its material not only in the lived experience of the walking being, but also in the dreams of poets, in the old and new texts of philosophers and scholars, and in the everyday language of the past and the present. The archaeological unearthing of linguistic, dream, cognitive or imaginative sediments opens a broad field of possibilities of investigation for topoanalysis thus understood.

However, what has philosophy gained by applying the topoanalytic method to such a cultural image as the cul-de-sac? Apart from its hermeneutical

[5] Let me add as a counterpoint that, according to George Orwell, the expression *cul-de-sac* was an example of *pretentious dictions* that are uncritically adopted from foreign languages and people use them to attain "an air of culture and elegance" (Orwell 1946, 256).

significance and the fact that it makes us better understand the images used by past authors, philosophy can also develop new ways of thinking about topics related to noetics, to axiology, and to the phenomenology of space, art or literary text. Daniela Hodrová has noted that "certain places correspond to certain stages of cognition and states of consciousness, ways of perception" (Hodrová 1994, 9). And it is in this sense that the use of images of dark space and uncertain walking differs from images of wandering (so different from images of peregrination or vagrancy) or from images of impassability (again different from images of roadblocks, closed gates or locked doors).

"To find oneself in an *angiportus*" thus means to find oneself in some imaginative context. The philosophers mentioned by Bertrand Russell did not grope in the dark like Kant's intuitive, pre-scientific scholars, nor did they wander down winding paths like Petrarca on Mont Ventoux, nor did they stumble through the corridors of scientific labyrinths; they merely took without any existential doubt and unconsciously a path that led nowhere. There are various situations that describe what it means to find oneself in a cul-de-sac. And aren't these accents, these nuances, these differences in details the very material of philosophical reflection?

When Socrates drove his fellow disputants into straits with his questions, they found themselves in situations with no way out, in aporias. However, it was not a dark *angiportus* in which they felt existentially distressed, in dangerous, or insecure. Their argumentations were only hasty and wrong turns, misguided attempts to find the right path, as when one turns into a street that leads nowhere. And so, they have must take *a step back*. But when many scientists in the early twentieth century realized that they had believed some erroneous theories all their lives, it was an existentially different experience. Especially to the older ones, their world completely collapsed. Finally, it was Bachelard, the father of topoanalysis, who tried to show them the way out of this troubling *angiportus* through the concept of the "new scientific spirit." This time they had to take *a step forward*.

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