

514 Next, I said, compare the effect of education and the lack of it upon
 our human nature to a situation like this: imagine men to be living in
 an underground cave-like dwelling place, which has a way up to the light
 along its whole width, but the entrance is a long way up. The men have
 been there from childhood, with their neck and legs in fetters, so that
 they remain in the same place and can only see ahead of them, as their
 bonds prevent them turning their heads. Light is provided by a fire
 burning some way behind and above them. Between the fire and the
 prisoners, some way behind them and on a higher ground, there is a path
 across the cave and along this a low wall has been built, like the screen at
 a puppet show in front of the performers who show their puppets above
 it. — I see it.

See then also men carrying along that wall, so that they overtop it, all
 kinds of artifacts, statues of men, reproductions of other animals in stone
 or wood fashioned in all sorts of ways, and, as is likely, some of the
 carriers are talking while others are silent. — This is a strange picture, and
 strange prisoners.

They are like us, I said. Do you think, in the first place, that such men
 could see anything of themselves and each other¹ except the shadows
 which the fire casts upon the wall of the cave in front of them? — How
 could they, if they have to keep their heads still throughout life?

And is not the same true of the objects carried along the wall? — Quite.
 If they could converse with one another, do you not think that they
 would consider these shadows to be the real things? — Necessarily.

What if their prison had an echo which reached them from in front of
 them? Whenever one of the carriers passing behind the wall spoke, would
 they not think that it was the shadow passing in front of them which was
 talking? Do you agree? — By Zeus I do.

Altogether then, I said, such men would believe the truth to be nothing
 else than the shadows of the artifacts? — They must believe that.

Consider then what deliverance from their bonds and the curing of
 their ignorance would be if something like this naturally happened to
 them. Whenever one of them was freed, had to stand up suddenly, turn
 his head, walk, and look up toward the light, doing all that would give
 him pain, the flash of the fire would make it impossible for him to see
 the objects of which he had earlier seen the shadows. What do you think
 he would say if he was told that what he saw then was foolishness, that
 he was now somewhat closer to reality and turned to things that existed
 more fully, that he saw more correctly? If one then pointed to each of
 the objects passing by, asked him what each was, and forced him to

1. These shadows of themselves and each other are never mentioned again. A Platonic
 myth or parable, like a Homeric simile, is often elaborated in considerable detail. These
 contribute to the vividness of the picture but often have no other function, and it is a
 mistake to look for any symbolic meaning in them. It is the general picture that matters.

answer, do you not think he would be at a loss and believe that the
 things which he saw earlier were truer than the things now pointed out to
 him? — Much truer.

If one then compelled him to look at the fire itself, his eyes would
 hurt, he would turn round and flee toward those things which he could
 see, and think that they were in fact clearer than those now shown to
 him. — Quite so.

And if one were to drag him thence by force up the rough and steep
 path, and did not let him go before he was dragged into the sunlight,
 would he not be in physical pain and angry as he was dragged along?
 When he came into the light, with the sunlight filling his eyes, he would
 not be able to see a single one of the things which are now said to be
 true. — Not at once, certainly.

I think he would need time to get adjusted before he could see things
 in the world above; at first he would see shadows most easily, then
 reflections of men and other things in water, then the things themselves.
 After this he would see objects in the sky and the sky itself more easily
 at night, the light of the stars and the moon more easily than the sun and
 the light of the sun during the day. — Of course.

Then, at last, he would be able to see the sun, not images of it in water
 or in some alien place, but the sun itself in its own place, and be able to
 contemplate it. — That must be so.

After this he would reflect that it is the sun which provides the seasons
 and the years, which governs everything in the visible world, and is also
 in some way the cause of those other things which he used to see. —
 Clearly that would be the next stage.

What then? As he reminds himself of his first dwelling place, of the
 wisdom there and of his fellow prisoners, would he not reckon himself
 happy for the change, and pity them? — Surely.

And if the men below had praise and honours from each other, and
 prizes for the man who saw most clearly the shadows that passed before
 them, and who could best remember which usually came earlier and
 which later, and which came together and thus could most ably prophesy
 the future, do you think our man would desire those rewards and envy
 those who were honoured and held power among the prisoners, or would
 he feel, as Homer put it, that he certainly wished to be "serf to another
 man without possessions upon the earth"² and go through any suffering,
 rather than share their opinions and live as they do? — Quite so, he said, I
 think he would rather suffer anything.

Reflect on this too, I said. If this man went down into the cave again

2. *Odyssey* 11, 489-90, where Achilles says to Odysseus, on the latter's visit to the
 underworld, that he would rather be a servant to a poor man on earth than king among
 the dead.

and sat down in the same seat, would his eyes not be filled with darkness, coming suddenly out of the sunlight? — They certainly would.

And if he had to contend again with those who had remained prisoners in recognizing those shadows while his sight was affected and
517 his eyes had not settled down — and the time for this adjustment would not be short — would he not be ridiculed? Would it not be said that he had returned from his upward journey with his eyesight spoiled, and that it was not worthwhile even to attempt to travel upward? As for the man who tried to free them and lead them upward, if they could somehow lay their hands on him and kill him, they would do so. — They certainly would.

This whole image, my dear Glaucon, I said, must be related to what we
b said before. The realm of the visible should be compared to the prison dwelling, and the fire inside it to the power of the sun. If you interpret the upward journey and the contemplation of things above as the upward
c journey of the soul to the intelligible realm, you will grasp what I surmise since you were keen to hear it. Whether it is true or not only the god knows, but this is how I see it, namely that in the intelligible world the
d Form of the Good is the last to be seen, and with difficulty; when seen it must be reckoned to be for all the cause of all that is right and beautiful, to have produced in the visible world both light and the fount of light, while in the intelligible world it is itself that which produces and controls
e truth and intelligence, and he who is to act intelligently in public or in private must see it. — I share your thought as far as I am able.

Come then, share with me this thought also: do not be surprised that those who have reached this point are unwilling to occupy themselves with human affairs, and that their souls are always pressing upward to
d spend their time there, for this is natural if things are as our parable indicates. — That is very likely.

Further, I said, do you think it at all surprising that anyone coming to the evils of human life from the contemplation of the divine behaves awkwardly and appears very ridiculous while his eyes are still dazzled and before he is sufficiently adjusted to the darkness around him, if he is
e compelled to contend in court or some other place about the shadows of justice or the objects of which they are shadows, and to carry through the contest about these in the way these things are understood by those who have never seen Justice itself? — That is not surprising at all.

518 Anyone with intelligence, I said, would remember that the eyes may be confused in two ways and from two causes, coming from light into darkness as well as from darkness into light. Realizing that the same applies to the soul, whenever he sees a soul disturbed and unable to see something, he will not laugh mindlessly but will consider whether it has come from a brighter life and is dimmed because unadjusted, or has come from greater ignorance into greater light and is filled with a brighter

dazzlement. The former he would declare happy in its life and experience, the latter he would pity, and if he should wish to laugh at it, his laughter would be less ridiculous than if he laughed at a soul that has come from the light above. — What you say is very reasonable.

We must then, I said, if these things are true, think something like this about them, namely that education is not what some declare it to be; they say that knowledge is not present in the soul and that they put it in, like putting sight into blind eyes. — They surely say that.

Our present argument shows, I said, that the capacity to learn and the organ with which to do so are present in every person's soul. It is as if it were not possible to turn the eye from darkness to light without turning the whole body; so one must turn one's whole soul from the world of becoming until it can endure to contemplate reality, and the brightest of realities, which we say is the Good. — Yes.

Education then is the art of doing this very thing, this turning around, the knowledge of how the soul can most easily and most effectively be turned around; it is not the art of putting the capacity of sight into the soul; the soul possesses that already but it is not turned the right way or looking where it should. This is what education has to deal with. — That seems likely.

Now the other so-called virtues of the soul seem to be very close to those of the body — they really do not exist before and are added later by habit and practice — but the virtue of intelligence belongs above all to something more divine, it seems, which never loses its capacity but, according to which way it is turned, becomes useful and beneficial or
e useless and harmful. Have you never noticed in men who are said to be wicked but clever, how sharply their little soul looks into things to which
519 it turns its attention? Its capacity for sight is not inferior, but it is compelled to serve evil ends, so that the more sharply it looks the more evils it works. — Quite so.

Yet if a soul of this kind had been hammered at from childhood and those excrescences had been knocked off it which belong to the world of becoming and have been fastened upon it by feasting, gluttony, and similar pleasures, and which like leaden weights draw the soul to look
b downward — if, being rid of these, it turned to look at things that are true, then the same soul of the same man would see these just as sharply as it now sees the things towards which it is directed. — That seems likely.

Further, is it not likely, I said, indeed it follows inevitably from what was said before, that the uneducated who have no experience of truth would never govern a city satisfactorily, nor would those who are
c allowed to spend their whole life in the process of educating themselves; the former would fail because they do not have a single goal at which all their actions, public and private, must aim; the latter because they would

refuse to act, thinking that they have settled, while still alive, in the faraway islands of the blessed. — True.

d It is then our task as founders, I said, to compel the best natures to reach the study which we have previously said to be the most important, to see the Good and to follow that upward journey. When they have accomplished their journey and seen it sufficiently, we must not allow them to do what they are allowed to do today. — What is that?

To stay there, I said, and to refuse to go down again to the prisoners in the cave, there to share both their labours and their honours, whether these be of little or of greater worth.³

Are we then, he said, to do them an injustice by making them live a worse life when they could live a better one?

e You are again forgetting, my friend, I said, that it is not the law's concern to make some one group in the city outstandingly happy but to contrive to spread happiness throughout the city, by bringing the citizens into harmony with each other by persuasion or compulsion, and to make 520 them share with each other the benefits which each group can confer upon the community. The law has not made men of this kind in the city in order to allow each to turn in any direction they wish but to make use of them to bind the city together. — You are right, I had forgotten.

Consider then, Glaucon, I said, that we shall not be doing an injustice to those who have become philosophers in our city, and that what we shall say to them, when we compel them to care for and to guard the others, is just. For we shall say: "Those who become philosophers in other cities are justified in not sharing the city's labours, for they have grown into philosophy of their own accord, against the will of the government in each of those cities, and it is right that what grows of its own accord, as it owes no debt to anyone for its upbringing, should not be keen to pay it to anyone. But we have made you in our city kings and leaders of the swarm, as it were, both to your own advantage and to that of the rest of the city; you are better and more completely educated than those others, and you are better able to share in both kinds of life. c Therefore you must each in turn go down to live with other men and grow accustomed to seeing in the dark. When you are used to it you will see infinitely better than the dwellers below; you will know what each image is and of what it is an image, because you have seen the truth of things beautiful and just and good, and so, for you as for us, the city will be governed as a waking reality and not as in a dream, as the majority of cities are now governed by men who are fighting shadows and striving against each other in order to rule as if this were a great good." d For this is the truth: a city in which the prospective rulers are least keen

3. Plato does indeed require his philosopher to go back into the cave to help those less fortunate than himself, but only as a duty, not because he loves his neighbour or gets any emotional satisfaction from helping him.

to rule must of necessity be governed best and be most free from civil strife, whereas a city with the opposite kind of rulers is governed in the opposite way. — Quite so.

Do you think that those we have nurtured will disobey us and refuse to share the labours of the city, each group in turn, though they may spend the greater part of their time dwelling with each other in a pure atmosphere?

They cannot, he said, for we shall be giving just orders to just men, but e each of them will certainly go to rule as to something that must be done, the opposite attitude from that of the present rulers in every city.

That is how it is, my friend, I said. If you can find a way of life which is better than governing for the prospective governors, then a 521 well-governed city can exist for you. Only in that city will the truly rich rule, not rich in gold but in the wealth which the happy man must have, a life with goodness and intelligence. If beggars hungry for private goods go into public life, thinking that they must snatch their good from it, the well-governed city cannot exist, for then office is fought for, and such a war at home inside the city destroys them and the city as well. — Very true.

Can you name, I said, any other life than that of true philosophy which b disdains political office? — No, by Zeus.

And surely it is those who are no lovers of governing who must govern. Otherwise, rival lovers of it will fight them. — Of course.

What other men will you compel to become guardians of the city rather than those who have the best knowledge of the principles that make for the best government of a city and who also know honours of a different kind, and a better life than the political? — No one else.

Do you want us to examine how such men will come to be in our city, c and how one will lead them to the light, as some are said to have gone up from the underworld to join the gods? — Of course I want it.

This is not a matter of spinning a coin⁴ but of turning a soul from a kind of day that is night to the true day, being the upward way to reality which we say is true philosophy. — Quite so.

We must therefore examine what study has the power to do so. — Of d course.

What study would it be, Glaucon, which draws the soul from the world of that which becomes to the world of that which is? This occurs to me as

4. A proverbial saying, referring to a children's game in which the players were divided into two groups. A shell or potsherd, white on one side and black on the other, was then thrown in the space between them to the cry of "night or day" (note the reference to night and day which immediately follows) and, according as the white or black fell uppermost, one group ran away pursued by the other. The meaning here is much the same as in our expression "spinning a coin," namely that this was not a matter to be settled in a moment or by chance.