

The Republic. Written 360 B.C.E Translated by Benjamin Jowett is one of the greatest works ever invented by a human being. At some colleges students spend an entire term studying it and all of its intricacies and all of its import. In this work Plato touches upon all the most important questions in Philosophy. He presents a single unified system of ideas in a work that is self referential in as much as it illustrates some of the very things concerning which he is attempting to educate his readers.

We don't have the time to do justice to this work and so all that you are asked to read and think about are the passages dealing with the divided line and the allegory of the cave, the Theory of Justice and the very idea of Philosophy as a method for thinking. These are covered below.

For our purposes here please consider just the following elements in Plato's work

1. **The Allegory of the Cave**
2. **The Divided Line**
3. **The Theory of Justice**
4. **Plato's Theory of Philosophy as Dialectical Inquiry and Argumentation**

1. The Allegory of the Cave, The Republic Book Seven

Plato believed that there were four levels or approaches to knowledge and genuine understanding. They are illustrated in the REPUBLIC in the allegory of the cave and in the divided line.

Level one: guided by images, stories guesses, opinions

Level two: guided by practical common sense, trial and error approach, practical

Level three: a theoretical, scientific approach seeking to understand why things are as they are

Level four: philosophical approach, by which theories are themselves evaluated. True understanding

People in the cave spend their time playing games and identifying the shadows on the wall. They think that the shadows on the wall are the real things. They are happy to win prizes in the cave for being so quick and accurate at identifying the shadows. They do not know that those are just shadows (I) caused by the light crossing over the statues (II) which are themselves representations of the things outside the cave (III) and all of those would not exist if not for the source of all things and all life, the sun (IV).



Saenredam after Cornelis Cornelisz, *The Cave of Plato*, Engraving, 1604, (London, B.M.)

Are there many people that you know who are at the first two levels , living in a cave and thinking it is the only reality? Thinking that the shadows on the world are the reality and

refusing even to turn around and look at what else may be the actual truth? Do you know of people who are happy to have a nice position in the cave and are looking for little beyond that? People who don't want their thinking to be disturbed even if it is wrong?

2. The Divided Line in The REPUBLIC

Plato believed that there were four levels or approaches to knowledge and genuine understanding. They are illustrated in the REPUBLIC in the allegory of the cave and in the divided line.

Level one: guided by images, stories guesses, opinions

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Level four: philosophical approach, by which theories are themselves evaluated. True understanding

From Richard Hooker

*The Allegory of the Cave and the Divided Line: Far and away the most influential passage in Western philosophy ever written is Plato's discussion of the prisoners of the cave and his abstract presentation of the divided line. For Plato, human beings live in a world of visible and intelligible things. The visible world is what surrounds us: what we see, what we hear, what we experience; this visible world is a world of change and uncertainty. The intelligible world is made up of the unchanging products of human reason: anything arising from reason alone, such as abstract definitions or mathematics, makes up this intelligible world, which is the world of reality. The intelligible world contains the eternal "**Forms**" (in Greek, *idea*) of things; the visible world is the imperfect and changing manifestation in this world of these unchanging forms. For example, the "Form" or "Idea" of a horse is intelligible, abstract, and applies to all horses; this Form never changes, even though horses vary wildly among themselves—the Form of a horse would never change even if every horse in the world were to vanish. An individual horse is a physical, changing object that can easily cease to be a horse (if, for instance, it's dropped out of a fifty story building); the Form of a horse, or*

"horseness," never changes. As a physical object, a horse only makes sense in that it can be referred to the "Form" or "Idea" of horseness.

Plato imagines these two worlds, the sensible world and the intelligible world, as existing on a line that can be divided in the middle: the lower part of the line consists of the visible world and the upper part of the line makes up the intelligible world. Each half of the line relates to a certain type of knowledge: of the visible world, we can only have opinion (in Greek: doxa); of the intelligible world we achieve "knowledge" (in Greek, episteme). Each of these divisions can also be divided in two. The visible or changing world can be divided into a lower region, "illusion," which is made up of shadows, reflections, paintings, poetry, etc., and an upper region, "belief," which refers to any kind of knowledge of things that change, such as individual horses. "Belief" may be true some or most of the time but occasionally is wrong (since things in the visible world change); belief is practical and may serve as a relatively reliable guide to life but doesn't really involve thinking things out to the point of certainty. The upper region can be divided into, on the lower end, "reason," which is knowledge of things like mathematics but which require that some postulates be accepted without question, and "intelligence," which is the knowledge of the highest and most abstract categories of things, an understanding of the ultimate good.

1. If you understand this first distinction, the much more difficult division of the intelligible world will make more sense. Think over this carefully: the visible world, that is, the world you see, has two kinds of visible objects in it. The first kind are shadows and reflections, that is, objects you see but aren't really there but derive from the second type of visible objects, that is, those that you see and are really there. The relation of the visible world to the intelligible world is identical to the relation of the world of reflections to the world of visible things that are real.

2. The lower region of the intelligible world corresponds to the upper region in the same way the lower region of the visible world corresponds to the upper region. Think of it this way: the lower region deals only with objects of thought (that are, in part, derived from visible objects), which is why it is part of the intelligible world. There have to be certain first principles (such as the existence of numbers or other mathematical postulates) that are just simply taken without question: these are hypotheses. These first principles, however, derive

from other first principles; the higher region of the intelligible world encompasses these first principles. So you can see that the lower region derives from the higher region in that the thinking in the lower region derives from the first principles that make up the higher region, just as the mirror reflects a solid object. When one begins to think about first principles (such as, how can you prove that numbers exist at all?) and derives more first principles from them until you reach the one master, first principle upon which all thought is based, you are operating in this higher sphere of intellection. Plato's line is also a hierarchy: the things at the top (first principles) have more truth and more existence; the things at the bottom (the reflections) have almost no truth and barely exist at all.

1. The Divided Line, The REPUBLIC book six

Plato's Theory of Knowledge and the Structure of the Republic

Intelligible World	Knowledge (Episteme)
Sensible World (Visible World)	
<p>Intelligence (level 4)</p> <p>Soul-Reasoning understanding the essence of a thing.... (How does something exist at all) the IDEAL FORMS</p> <p>Absolute Good –True understanding</p> <p>Philosophical approach, by which theories are themselves evaluated.</p> <p>And so with dialectic; when a person starts on the discovery of the absolute by the light of reason only, and without any assistance of sense, and preserves until by pure</p>	<p><u>Dialectics</u></p> <p><u>Reason- nous</u></p> <p>True Science- Episteme</p> <p>Judgment</p> <p>Realm of Being</p> <p>*****</p> <p>Character in Dialogue: Socrates (Philosopher)</p> <p>*****</p>

<p>intelligence he arrives at the perception of the absolute good</p> <p>- Plato's Republic (532-534D)</p> <p>Truth and existence itself</p>	<p>method of understanding-presenting the four levels: The simile of the Sun.</p>
<p><u>Abstraction</u></p> <p><u>Understanding</u> <i>dianoia</i></p> <p>Theorization</p> <p>Realm of Being</p> <p>Knowledge of why</p> <p>Use of prediction to verify</p> <p>*****</p> <p>Character in Dialogue:</p> <p>Glaucon and Adaimantos (Social / political Theorists)</p> <p>*****</p> <p>method of understanding-presenting the four levels: The Divided Line</p>	<p>Level three: a theoretical, scientific approach seeking to understand why things are as they are</p> <p>(The point of origin and steps to the first principals)</p> <p>Hypotheses</p> <p>- Numbers mathematical postulates</p> <p>(Knowledge of things like mathematics)</p> <p>Deals with process of thought that is derived from visible objects</p> <p>Custom terms them sciences, but they ought to have some other name, implying greater clearness than opinion and less clearness than science...-Plato's Republic (532-534D)</p> <p>.... The intermediate between opinion and reason....</p> <p>- Plato's Republic (532-534D)</p>

Opinion (Doxa)

<p>Level two: guided by practical common sense, trial and error approach, practical</p> <p>Faith or Conviction</p> <p>Maybe true some of the time occasionally wrong since based on the visual world of change.</p> <p>Have almost no truth and barely exist at all</p>	<p><u>Common Sense ?</u></p> <p><u>Belief-pistis</u></p> <p>Realm of Becoming</p> <p>Opinions</p> <p>Know how</p> <p>*****</p> <p>Character in Dialogue: Thrasymachus (Sophist and lawyer/politician)</p> <p>*****</p> <p>method of understanding-presenting the four levels: The Curriculum for Dialectical Thinking</p>
<p><u>Imagination</u></p> <p><u>Conjecture- Eikasia</u></p> <p>Guesses</p> <p>Realm of Becoming</p> <p>Opinions</p> <p>*****</p> <p>Character in Dialogue:</p> <p>Cephalos and Polemarchus (a wealthy old man and his son)</p> <p>*****</p>	<p>Level one: guided by images, stories guesses, opinions</p> <p>Illusions:Arts (shadows, reflections, paintings, poetry)</p> <p>For the arts in general are concerned with the desires or opinions of men.</p> <p>-Plato's Republic (532-534D)</p> <p>*Reflections to the world –not real and is proportional to visible things that are real</p>

method of understanding-presenting the four levels: The Allegory of the Cave	
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Table by Brandy Bryson (QCC, Sp 03)

In this next table the characters in the dialogue are located on the level of the divided line on which they operate in their thinking.

Plato's Theory of the Forms of Thinking and Approaches to Knowledge and the Structure of the Dialogue, The REPUBLIC Itself									
	Approaches to Knowledge of the GOOD needed for a GOOD LIFE <u>the GOOD (to Agathon)</u> the ONE								
					Systems (groups) of FORMS	few			
					FORMS	many			
					Things	very many		characters representin g the level thinking\	
					Appearanc es of things	most			
realm of being	intelligible realm	I V	reason (nous) true science (noesis)	dialectic	Forms Norms Ideals Tested theories (noesis)	True Judgment	Simile of the SUN- analogy (Rep, BK VI)	Socrates Philosopher	Reason

	(noeta)		(episte me)						
	REA SON	I I I	unders tandin g (dianoia)	abstra ction theori zation	Hypothes es Theories Structure s Deductive Systems	Unders tanding Knowle dge of teh "why" with Predict ive power	Divided Line Theoret icla Strutur e (Rep, BK VI)	Glaucon Adeimantos Theorists (social contract) Scientists	spir it app etit e
*****from level II to III is intellectual development most difficult to make*****									
realm of bec oming chang e	visibl e realm of OPIN IONs (Doxa)	I I	belief (pistis)	comm on sense	concrete world as experien ced experienti al technique	Practic al "know how"	Curricu lum experie ntial progres s (Rep, BK VII)	Thrasymac hus Sophist Lawyer	
		I	Conjec ture Eikasia	Imagi nation	Images Appearan ces stories fictions hearsay anecdotes second hand info myt hs (ikons)	guesses	Allegor y of the CAVE (Rep, BK VII)	Cephalos (wealthy old man) Polemarchu s (his son and heir)	---

3. Plato's Theory of Justice in The REPUBLIC

4. Plato's theory of PHILOSOPHY and DIALECTICAL REASONING which is at the heart of PHILOSOPHY.

Broadly speaking, a dialectic is an exchange of propositions (thesis) and counter-propositions (anti-thesis) resulting in a synthesis of the opposing assertions or at least an important change in the direction or level of the dialogue. The exchange of propositions occurs in a question and answer format in the SOCRATIC METHOD. This is exemplified in Plato's dialogues. In the passages below Plato describes dialectics and its identity with PHILOSOPHY. Doing dialectical thinking concerning the most basic and important issues facing humans is what Plato takes to be Philosophy. The passages are identified by their standard location numbers and in the pages of the popular Mentor paperback book, **Great Dialogues of Plato.**

The following passage contains Plato's goal concerning the use of dialectics," we have at last arrived at the hymn of dialectic. This is that strain which is of the intellect only, but which the faculty of sight will nevertheless be found to imitate; for sight, as you may remember, was imagined by us after a while to behold the real animals and stars, and last of all the sun himself. And so with dialectic; when a person starts on the discovery of the absolute by the light of reason only, and without any assistance of sense, and perseveres until by pure intelligence he arrives at the perception of the absolute good, he at last finds himself at the end of the intellectual world, as in the case of sight at the end of the visible.(Republic (532A-534D) Mentor 331-334)"Another passage states, " But I must also remind you, that the power of dialectic alone can reveal this, and only to one who is a disciple of the previous sciences.(Republic (532A-534D) Mentor 331-334)" This next passage gives some insight into the idea of first principles and forms. Plato states, "I understand you to say that knowledge and being, which the science of dialectic contemplates, are clearer than the notions of the arts, as they are termed, which proceed from hypotheses only: these are also contemplated by the understanding, and not by the senses: yet, because they start from hypotheses and do not ascend to a principle, those who contemplate them appear to you not

to exercise the higher reason upon them, although when a first principle is added to them they are cognizable by the higher reason. And the habit which is concerned with geometry and the cognate sciences I suppose that you would term understanding and not reason, as being intermediate between opinion and reason (Republic (511C) Mentor 311)” The next line gives information that concerns the process and states, “However, this was the method which I adopted: I first assumed some principle which I judged to be the strongest, and then I affirmed as true whatever seemed to agree with this, whether relating to the cause or to anything else; and that which disagreed I regarded as untrue.. (Phaedo (99C-100C) Mentor 503-504)” In the next passage there is a caution about the process when Plato states, “Yes, Simmias, replied Socrates, that is well said: and more than that, first principles, even if they appear certain, should be carefully considered; and when they are satisfactorily ascertained, then, with a sort of hesitating confidence in human reason, you may, I think, follow the course of the argument; and if this is clear, there will be no need for any further inquiry (PHAEDO (107B-108A) Mentor 511-512)”.

Plato states,” For I dare say that you, Socrates, feel, as I do, how very hard or almost impossible is the attainment of any certainty about questions such as these in the present life. And yet I should deem him a coward who did not prove what is said about them to the uttermost, or whose heart failed him before he had examined them on every side. (Plato PHAEDO (85C) Mentor, p 490)” In the preceding passage Plato acknowledges the difficulty of ascertaining the truth of the matters of life and goes on to state that one should be brave and tackle the issues regardless. Plato then states, “For he should persevere until he has attained one of two things: either he should discover or learn the truth about them; or, if this is impossible, I would have him take the best and most irrefragable of human notions, and let this be the raft upon which he sails through life-not without risk, as I admit, if he cannot find some word of God which will more surely and safely carry him. (Plato PHAEDO (85C) Mentor, p 490)” In that statement he implies that truth is important for living a worthwhile life and that if the truth is unattainable one should be guided by the best truth available although it will involve the risk that comes from uncertainty.

Concerning the pursuit of truth, Plato, cautioned about maintaining the right state of mind. He warned of the danger of becoming a misologist or hater of ideas as displayed in the

following passage, “For as there are misanthropists or haters of men, there are also misologists or haters of ideas, and both spring from the same cause, which is ignorance of the world. (2)” I interpret that passage to indicate what can stem from the frustration that can develop from the process of examination combined with the ignorance of the examiner. In the following he describes an example of how that happens, “Yes, Phaedo, he replied, and very melancholy too, if there be such a thing as truth or certainty or power of knowing at all, that a man should have lighted upon some argument or other which at first seemed true and then turned out to be false, and instead of blaming himself and his own want of wit, because he is annoyed, should at last be too glad to transfer the blame from himself to arguments in general; and forever afterwards should hate and revile them, and lose the truth and knowledge of existence. (PHAEDO (90A) Mentor 494-495)” In the following passage Plato describes a way in which to prepare ones mind for the dialectical process, “ For the partisan, when he is engaged in a dispute, cares nothing about the rights of the question, but is anxious only to convince his hearers of his own assertions. And the difference between him and me at the present moment is only this-that whereas he seeks to convince his hearers that what he says is true, I am rather seeking to convince myself; to convince my hearers is a secondary matter with me. And do but see how much I gain by this. For if what I say is true, then I do well to be persuaded of the truth, but if there be nothing after death, still, during the short time that remains, I shall save my friends from lamentations, and my ignorance will not last, and therefore no harm will be done. (PHAEDO (90A) Mentor 494-495)”

DIALECTICAL THINKING: A simple illustration using Plato's metaphor of the RAFT

In Philosophy thinkers take a position on a topic or question using dialectical thinking to defend or support that position. What is dialectical thinking? It is the form of critical thinking associated with Philosophy. But what is it?

Here is a representation on what dialectical thinking involves. It will use the metaphor that Plato provided concerning the selection of a raft.





“For he should persevere until he has attained one of two things: either he should discover or learn the truth about them; or, if this is impossible, I would have him take the best and most irrefragable of human notions, and let this be the raft upon which he sails through life-

not without risk, as I admit, if he cannot find some word of God which will more surely and safely carry him. "(Plato **PHAEDO** (85C))

In that statement he implies that truth is important for living a worthwhile life and that if the truth is unattainable one should be guided by the best truth available although it will involve the risk that comes from uncertainty.

So think of life as a journey and the path that you must travel has rivers to cross. These rivers are the challenges, the problems, the issues that you will face. You need to cross the rivers and continue on your journey. At the bank of the river you reach there are many rafts of different types that you can use to cross the river. These rafts are possible positions or answers or solutions that humans have devised. You want the best possible raft with which to cross safely. There are no perfect rafts. No ideal rafts. You need to select the best one for crossing the river.

Using this metaphor it could be said that Plato indicated that the purpose of Philosophy was knowing how to select the best raft or in life how to select the best option when deciding how to live a “good” life. The method is applied by Philosophers to questions or "rivers" such as:

-  What is knowledge?
-  What is truth?
-  What is the “good”?
-  What is beauty?

So, just what is the method? At the bank of the river you would look carefully to find as many rafts as you can and then examine each one to determine which is the best. You would select based upon the purpose it is to serve. You would not select based on which is the biggest or the most popular or the most expensive or even based on your favorite color. None of that is relevant to the purpose. Such criteria are not relevant. You need the best raft for crossing the river and that is not necessarily the biggest or most popular or the most expensive. You need the raft that will get you across safely. It needs to have been well assembled. It should have few or no leaks or tears in the ropes that bind the logs of the raft together.

You select one after having “good” reasons to reject the others. You find fault with them. They have leaks. You select the one least likely to leak or come apart and most likely to get you across the river.

You must also respond to those who are selecting other sorts of rafts and using other methods of selection. They will criticize your selection. They may say you should have picked the most expensive or the biggest or the red one or the one most others have. “Don’t you want to be one of us?” You respond to the criticisms indicating why the critics are wrong. e.g., they are using criteria not relevant to the buoyancy and dependability of the raft.

With the dialectical process you use reason and hold your passions and emotions in check and choose the best based on reason and evidence. You don’t select on appeals to loyalty or popularity or prestige.

Passages from the Dialogues of Plato with description of elements of the Dialectical Process of Thought

PHAEDO (85C) Mentor, p 490

For I dare say that you, Socrates, feel, as I do, how very hard or almost impossible is the attainment of any certainty about questions such as these in the present life. And yet I should deem him a coward who did not prove what is said about them to the uttermost, or whose heart failed him before he had examined them on every side. For he should persevere until he has attained one of two things: either he should discover or learn the truth about them; or, if this is impossible, I would have him take the best and most irrefragable of human notions, and let this be the raft upon which he sails through life-not without risk, as I admit, if he cannot find some word of God which will more surely and safely carry him. And now, as you bid me, I will venture to question you, as I should not like to reproach myself hereafter with not having said at the time what I think. For when I consider the matter either alone or with Cebes, the argument does certainly appear to me, Socrates, to be not sufficient.

PHAEDO (90A) Mentor 494-495

But first let us take care that we avoid a danger.

And what is that? I said.

The danger of becoming misologists, he replied, which is one of the very worst things that can happen to us. For as there are misanthropists or haters of men, there are also misologists or haters of ideas, and both spring from the same cause, which is ignorance of the world. Misanthropy arises from the too great confidence of inexperience; you trust a man and think him altogether true and good and faithful, and then in a little while he turns out to be false and knavish; and then another and another, and when this has happened several times to a man, especially within the circle of his most trusted friends, as he deems them, and he has often quarreled with them, he at last hates all men, and believes that no one has any good in him at all. I dare say that you must have observed this.

Yes, I said.

And is not this discreditable? The reason is that a man, having to deal with other men, has no knowledge of them; for if he had knowledge he would have known the true state of the case, that few are the good and few the evil, and that the great majority are in the interval between them.

How do you mean? I said.

I mean, he replied, as you might say of the very large and very small, that nothing is more uncommon than a very large or a very small man; and this applies generally to all extremes, whether of great and small, or swift and slow, or fair and foul, or black and white: and whether the instances you select be men or dogs or anything else, few are the extremes, but many are in the mean between them. Did you never observe this?

Yes, I said, I have.

And do you not imagine, he said, that if there were a competition of evil, the first in evil would be found to be very few?

Yes, that is very likely, I said.

Yes, that is very likely, he replied; not that in this respect arguments are like men-there I was led on by you to say more than I had intended; but the point of comparison was that when a simple man who has no skill in dialectics believes an argument to be true which he afterwards imagines to be false, whether really false or not, and then another and another, he has no longer any faith left, and great disputers, as you know, come to think, at last that they have grown to be the wisest of mankind; for they alone perceive the utter unsoundness and instability of all arguments, or, indeed, of all things, which, like the currents in the Euripus, are going up and down in never-ceasing ebb and flow.

That is quite true, I said.

Yes, Phaedo, he replied, and very melancholy too, if there be such a thing as truth or certainty or power of knowing at all, that a man should have lighted upon some argument or other which at first seemed true and then turned out to be false, and instead of blaming himself and his own want of wit, because he is annoyed, should at last be too glad to transfer the blame from himself to arguments in general; and forever afterwards should hate and revile them, and lose the truth and knowledge of existence.

Yes, indeed, I said; that is very melancholy.

Let us, then, in the first place, he said, be careful of admitting into our souls the notion that there is no truth or health or soundness in any arguments at all; but let us rather say that there is as yet no health in us, and that we must quit ourselves like men and do our best to gain health-you and all other men with a view to the whole of your future life, and I myself with a view to death. For at this moment I am sensible that I have not the temper of a philosopher; like the vulgar, I am only a partisan. For the partisan, when he is engaged in a dispute, cares nothing about the rights of the question, but is anxious only to convince his hearers of his own assertions. And the difference between him and me at the present moment is only this-that whereas he seeks to convince his hearers that what he says is true, I am rather seeking to convince myself; to convince my hearers is a secondary matter with me. And do but see how much I gain by this. For if what I say is true, then I do well to be persuaded of the truth, but if there be nothing after death, still, during the short time that remains, I shall save my friends from lamentations, and my ignorance will not last, and therefore no harm will be done. This is the state of mind, Simmias and Cebes, in which I

approach the argument. And I would ask you to be thinking of the truth and not of Socrates: agree with me, if I seem to you to be speaking the truth; or if not, withstand me might and main, that I may not deceive you as well as myself in my enthusiasm, and, like the bee, leave my sting in you before I die.

PHAEDO (107B-108A) Mentor 511-512

But I have nothing more to say, replied Simmias; nor do I see any room for uncertainty, except that which arises necessarily out of the greatness of the subject and the feebleness of man, and which I cannot help feeling.

Yes, Simmias, replied Socrates, that is well said: and more than that, first principles, even if they appear certain, should be carefully considered; and when they are satisfactorily ascertained, then, with a sort of hesitating confidence in human reason, you may, I think, follow the course of the argument; and if this is clear, there will be no need for any further inquiry. That, he said, is true.

Argumentation Republic (487C-D) Mentor 285

To these statements, Socrates, no one can offer a reply; but when you talk in this way, a strange feeling passes over the minds of your hearers: They fancy that they are led astray a little at each step in the argument, owing to their own want of skill in asking and answering questions; these little accumulate, and at the end of the discussion they are found to have sustained a mighty overthrow and all their former notions appear to be turned upside down. And as unskilful players of draughts are at last shut up by their more skilful adversaries and have no piece to move, so they too find themselves shut up at last; for they have nothing to say in this new game of which words are the counters; and yet all the time they are in the right. The observation is suggested to me by what is now occurring. For any one of us might say, that although in words he is not able to meet you at each step of the argument, he sees as a fact that the votaries of philosophy, when they carry on the study, not only in youth as a part of education, but as the pursuit of their maturer years, most of them become strange monsters, not to say utter rogues, and that those who may be considered the best of them are made useless to the world by the very study which you extol.

DIALECTICS Phaedo(99C-100C) Mentor 503-504

I thought that as I had failed in the contemplation of true existence, I ought to be careful that I did not lose the eye of my soul; as people may injure their bodily eye by observing and gazing on the sun during an eclipse, unless they take the precaution of only looking at the image reflected in the water, or in some similar medium. That occurred to me, and I was afraid that my soul might be blinded altogether if I looked at things with my eyes or tried by the help of the senses to apprehend them. And I thought that I had better have recourse to ideas, and seek in them the truth of existence. I dare say that the simile is not perfect-for I am very far from admitting that he who contemplates existence through the medium of ideas, sees them only "through a glass darkly," any more than he who sees them in their working and effects. However, this was the method which I adopted: I first assumed some principle which I judged to be the strongest, and then I affirmed as true whatever seemed to agree with this, whether relating to the cause or to anything else; and that which disagreed I regarded as untrue. But I should like to explain my meaning clearly, as I do not think that you understand me. No, indeed, replied Cebes, not very well.

There is nothing new, he said, in what I am about to tell you; but only what I have been always and everywhere repeating in the previous discussion and on other occasions: I want to show you the nature of that cause which has occupied my thoughts, and I shall have to go back to those familiar words which are in the mouth of everyone, and first of all assume that there is an absolute beauty and goodness and greatness, and the like; grant me this, and I hope to be able to show you the nature of the cause, and to prove the immortality of the soul.

Republic (511C) Mentor 311

And of this kind I spoke as the intelligible, although in the search after it the soul is compelled to use hypotheses; not ascending to a first principle, because she is unable to rise above the region of hypothesis, but employing the objects of which the shadows below

are resemblances in their turn as images, they having in relation to the shadows and reflections of them a greater distinctness, and therefore a higher value.

I understand, he said, that you are speaking of the province of geometry and the sister arts. And when I speak of the other division of the intelligible, you will understand me to speak of that other sort of knowledge which reason herself attains by the power of dialectic, using the hypotheses not as first principles, but only as hypotheses --that is to say, as steps and points of departure into a world which is above hypotheses, in order that she may soar beyond them to the first principle of the whole; and clinging to this and then to that which depends on this, by successive steps she descends again without the aid of any sensible object, from ideas, through ideas, and in ideas she ends.

I understand you, he replied; not perfectly, for you seem to me to be describing a task which is really tremendous; but, at any rate, I understand you to say that knowledge and being, which the science of dialectic contemplates, are clearer than the notions of the arts, as they are termed, which proceed from hypotheses only: these are also contemplated by the understanding, and not by the senses: yet, because they start from hypotheses and do not ascend to a principle, those who contemplate them appear to you not to exercise the higher reason upon them, although when a first principle is added to them they are cognizable by the higher reason. And the habit which is concerned with geometry and the cognate sciences I suppose that you would term understanding and not reason, as being intermediate between opinion and reason.

You have quite conceived my meaning, I said; and now, corresponding to these four divisions, let there be four faculties in the soul-reason answering to the highest, understanding to the second, faith (or conviction) to the third, and perception of shadows to the last-and let there be a scale of them, and let us suppose that the several faculties have clearness in the same degree that their objects have truth.

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we have at last arrived at the hymn of dialectic. This is that strain which is of the intellect only, but which the faculty of sight will nevertheless be found to imitate; for sight, as you

may remember, was imagined by us after a while to behold the real animals and stars, and last of all the sun himself. And so with dialectic; when a person starts on the discovery of the absolute by the light of reason only, and without any assistance of sense, and perseveres until by pure intelligence he arrives at the perception of the absolute good, he at last finds himself at the end of the intellectual world, as in the case of sight at the end of the visible.

Exactly, he said.

Then this is the progress which you call dialectic?

True.

But the release of the prisoners from chains, and their translation from the shadows to the images and to the light, and the ascent from the underground den to the sun, while in his presence they are vainly trying to look on animals and plants and the light of the sun, but are able to perceive even with their weak eyes the images in the water (which are divine), and are the shadows of true existence (not shadows of images cast by a light of fire, which compared with the sun is only an image) --this power of elevating the highest principle in the soul to the contemplation of that which is best in existence, with which we may compare the raising of that faculty which is the very light of the body to the sight of that which is brightest in the material and visible world --this power is given, as I was saying, by all that study and pursuit of the arts which has been described.

I agree in what you are saying, he replied, which may be hard to believe, yet, from another point of view, is harder still to deny. This, however, is not a theme to be treated of in passing only, but will have to be discussed again and again. And so, whether our conclusion be true or false, let us assume all this, and proceed at once from the prelude or preamble to the chief strain, and describe that in like manner. Say, then, what is the nature and what are the divisions of dialectic, and what are the paths which lead thither; for these paths will also lead to our final rest?

Dear Glaucon, I said, you will not be able to follow me here, though I would do my best, and you should behold not an image only but the absolute truth, according to my notion. Whether what I told you would or would not have been a reality I cannot venture to say; but you would have seen something like reality; of that I am confident.

Doubtless, he replied.

But I must also remind you, that the power of dialectic alone can reveal this, and only to one who is a disciple of the previous sciences. Of that assertion you may be as confident as of the last. And assuredly no one will argue that there is any other method of comprehending by any regular process all true existence or of ascertaining what each thing is in its own nature; for the arts in general are concerned with the desires or opinions of men, or are cultivated with a view to production and construction, or for the preservation of such productions and constructions; and as to the mathematical sciences which, as we were saying, have some apprehension of true being --geometry and the like --they only dream about being, but never can they behold the waking reality so long as they leave the hypotheses which they use unexamined, and are unable to give an account of them. For when a man knows not his own first principle, and when the conclusion and intermediate steps are also constructed out of he knows not what, how can he imagine that such a fabric of convention can ever become science?

Impossible, he said.

Then dialectic, and dialectic alone, goes directly to the first principle and is the only science which does away with hypotheses in order to make her ground secure; the eye of the soul, which is literally buried in an outlandish slough, is by her gentle aid lifted upwards; and she uses as handmaids and helpers in the work of conversion, the sciences which we have been discussing. Custom terms them sciences, but they ought to have some other name, implying greater clearness than opinion and less clearness than science: and this, in our previous sketch, was called understanding. But why should we dispute about names when we have realities of such importance to consider?

Why indeed, he said, when any name will do which expresses the thought of the mind with clearness?

At any rate, we are satisfied, as before, to have four divisions; two for intellect and two for opinion, and to call the first division science, the second understanding, the third belief, and the fourth perception of shadows, opinion being concerned with becoming, and intellect with being; and so to make a proportion: -- As being is to becoming, so is pure

intellect to opinion. And as intellect is to opinion, so is science to belief, and understanding to the perception of shadows. But let us defer the further correlation and subdivision of the subjects of opinion and of intellect, for it will be a long enquiry, many times longer than this has been.

As far as I understand, he said, I agree.

And do you also agree, I said, in describing the dialectician as one who attains a conception of the essence of each thing? And he who does not possess and is therefore unable to impart this conception, in whatever degree he fails, may in that degree also be said to fail in intelligence? Will you admit so much?

Yes, he said; how can I deny it?

And you would say the same of the conception of the good? Until the person is able to abstract and define rationally the idea of good, and unless he can run the gauntlet of all objections, and is ready to disprove them, not by appeals to opinion, but to absolute truth, never faltering at any step of the argument --unless he can do all this, you would say that he knows neither the idea of good nor any other good; he apprehends only a shadow, if anything at all, which is given by opinion and not by science; --dreaming and slumbering in this life, before he is well awake here, he arrives at the world below, and has his final quietus.

In all that I should most certainly agree with you.

And surely you would not have the children of your ideal State, whom you are nurturing and educating --if the ideal ever becomes a reality --you would not allow the future rulers to be like posts, having no reason in them, and yet to be set in authority over the highest matters?

Certainly not.

Then you will make a law that they shall have such an education as will enable them to attain the greatest skill in asking and answering questions?

Yes, he said, you and I together will make it.

Dialectic, then, as you will agree, is the coping-stone of the sciences, and is set over them; no other science can be placed higher --the nature of knowledge can no further go?

The Seventh Letter (344a-b)

Plato is describing the highest kind of thinking that is true philosophy, contrasting it to that type of dispute where, “anyone who pleases among those who have skill in confutation gains the victory.”

To sum it all up in one word, natural intelligence and a good memory are equally powerless to aid someone who has not an inborn affinity with the subject [of moral goodness]. Without such endowments there is not the slightest possibility [of really doing philosophy]. Hence, all those with no natural aptitude for and affinity with justice and all the other noble ideals, though in the study of other matters they may be both intelligent and retentive—all those too who have affinity [with justice and moral ideals] but are stupid and unretentive—such will never any of them grasp the most complete truths in regard to moral concepts. The study of virtue and vice must be accompanied by an inquiry into what is false and true of Being—what is—in general and must be carried on by practice throughout a long period, as I said in the beginning. After much effort practicing detailed comparisons of names and definitions and visual and other sense perceptions, after these are brought into contact and friction one with another in the course of scrutiny and friendly disputation by people who proceed by question and answer without jealousy, at last in a sudden flash, understanding of each blazes up, and the intelligence, as it exerts all its powers to the limit of human capacity, is flooded with light.”