

PLATO

Republic

Translated from the New Standard Greek Text, with Introduction, by

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SOCRATES: The sun, I think you would say, not only gives visible things the power to be seen but also provides for their coming-to-be, growth, and nourishment—although it is not itself coming to be.

GLAUCON: I would.

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SOCRATES: Therefore, you should also say that not only do the objects of knowledge owe their being known to the good, but their existence and being are also due to it; although the good is not being, but something yet beyond being, superior to it in rank and power.

And Glaucon quite ridiculously replied:

By Apollo, what daimonic hyperbole!³⁷

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SOCRATES: It is your own fault, you forced me to tell my beliefs about it.

GLAUCON: And don't you stop, either—at least, not until you have finished discussing the good's similarity to the sun, if you are omitting anything.

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SOCRATES: I am certainly omitting a lot.

GLAUCON: Well don't, not even the smallest detail.

SOCRATES: I think I will have to omit a fair amount. All the same, as far as is now possible, I won't purposely omit anything.

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GLAUCON: Please don't.

SOCRATES: Then you should think, as we said, that there are these two things, one sovereign of the intelligible kind and place, the other of the visible—I do not say “of heaven,” so as not to seem to you to be playing the sophist with the name.³⁸ In any case, do you understand these two kinds, visible and intelligible?

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GLAUCON: I do.

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SOCRATES: Represent them, then, by a line divided into two unequal sections. Then divide each section—that of the visible kind and that of the intelligible—in the same proportion as the line.³⁹ In terms now of relative clarity and opacity, you will have as one subsection of the visible, images. By images I mean, first, shadows, then reflections in bodies of water and in

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510a

³⁷ Socrates' claim ends with the words *dunamei huperechontas* (“superior in . . . power”), Glaucon responds with the punning *daimonias huperbolês*. Hence the joke.

³⁸ The play seems to be on the similarity of sound between *orano* (“heaven”) and *orato* (“visible”).

³⁹

all close-packed, smooth, and shiny materials, and everything of that sort. Do you understand?

GLAUCON: I do understand.

5 SOCRATES: Then, in the other subsection of the visible, put the originals of these images—that is, the animals around us, every plant, and the whole class of manufactured things.

GLAUCON: I will.

10 SOCRATES: Would you also be willing to say, then, that, as regards truth and untruth, the division is in this ratio: as what is believed is to what is known, so the likeness is to the thing it is like?

b GLAUCON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Next, consider how the section of the intelligible is to be divided.

GLAUCON: How?

5 SOCRATES: As follows: in one subsection, the soul, using as images the things that were imitated before, is forced to base its inquiry on hypotheses, proceeding not to a first principle, but to a conclusion. In the other subsection, by contrast, it makes its way to an unhypothetical first principle, proceeding from a hypothesis, but without the images used in the previous subsection, using forms themselves and making its investigation through them.

10 GLAUCON: I do not fully understand what you are saying.

c SOCRATES: Let's try again. You see, you will understand it more easily after this explanation. I think you know that students of geometry, calculation, and the like hypothesize the odd and the even, the various figures, the three kinds of angles, and other things akin to these in each of their investigations, regarding them as known. These they treat as hypotheses and do not think it necessary to give any argument for them, either to themselves or to others, as if they were evident to everyone. And going from these first principles through the remaining steps, they arrive in full agreement at the point they set out to reach in their investigation.

GLAUCON: I certainly know that much.

5 SOCRATES: Then don't you also know that they use visible forms and make their arguments about them, although they are not thinking about them, but about those other things that they are like? They make their arguments with a view to the square itself and the diagonal itself, not the diagonal they draw, and similarly with the others. The very things they make and draw, of which shadows and reflections in water are images, they now in turn use as images in seeking to see those other things themselves that one cannot see except by means of thought.

GLAUCON: That's true.

SOCRATES: This, then, is the kind of thing that I said was intelligible. The soul is forced to use hypotheses in the investigation of it, not traveling up to a first principle, since it cannot escape or get above its hypotheses, but using as images those very things of which images were made by the things below them, and which, by comparison to their images, were thought to be clear and to be honored as such.

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GLAUCON: I understand that you mean what is dealt with in geometry and related crafts.

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SOCRATES: Also understand, then, that by the other subsection of the intelligible I mean what reason itself⁴⁰ grasps by the power of dialectical discussion, treating its hypotheses, not as first principles, but as genuine hypotheses (that is, stepping stones and links in a chain), in order to arrive at what is unhypothetical and the first principle of everything. Having grasped this principle, it reverses itself and, keeping hold of what follows from it, comes down to a conclusion, making no use of anything visible at all, but only of forms themselves, moving on through forms to forms, and ending in forms.

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GLAUCON: I understand, though not adequately—you see, in my opinion you are speaking of an enormous task. You want to distinguish the part of what is and is intelligible, the part looked at by the science of dialectical discussion, as clearer than the part looked at by the so-called sciences—those for which hypotheses are first principles. And although those who look at the latter part are forced to do so by means of thought rather than sense perception, still, because they do not go back to a genuine first principle in considering it, but proceed from hypotheses, you do not think that they have true understanding of them, even though—given such a first principle—they are intelligible. And you seem to me to call the state of mind of the geometers—and the others of that sort—thought but not understanding; thought being intermediate between belief and understanding.

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SOCRATES: You have grasped my meaning most adequately. Join me, then, in taking these four conditions in the soul as corresponding to the four subsections of the line: understanding dealing with the highest, thought dealing with the second; assign belief to the third, and imagination to the last. Arrange them in a proportion and consider that each shares in clarity to the degree that the subsection it deals with shares in truth.

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GLAUCON: I understand, agree, and arrange them as you say.

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⁴⁰ *Autos ho logos*.

Book 7

SOCRATES' NARRATION CONTINUES:

514a SOCRATES: Next, then, compare the effect of education and that of the lack of it on our nature to an experience like this. Imagine human beings living in an underground, cavelike dwelling, with an entrance a long way up that is open to the light and as wide as the cave itself. They have been
5 there since childhood, with their necks and legs fettered, so that they are fixed in the same place, able to see only in front of them, because their fet-
b ter prevents them from turning their heads around. Light is provided by a fire burning far above and behind them. Between the prisoners and the fire, there is an elevated road stretching. Imagine that along this road a low wall
5 has been built—like the screen in front of people that is provided by puppeteers, and above which they show their puppets.

GLAUCON: I am imagining it.

c SOCRATES: Also imagine, then, that there are people alongside the wall
515a carrying multifarious artifacts that project above it—statues of people and other animals, made of stone, wood, and every material. And as you would expect, some of the carriers are talking and some are silent.

GLAUCON: It is a strange image you are describing, and strange prisoners.

5 SOCRATES: They are like us. I mean, in the first place, do you think these prisoners have ever seen anything of themselves and one another besides the shadows that the fire casts on the wall of the cave in front of them?

b GLAUCON: How could they, if they have to keep their heads motionless throughout life?

SOCRATES: What about the things carried along the wall? Isn't the same true where they are concerned?

GLAUCON: Of course.

5 SOCRATES: And if they could engage in discussion with one another, don't you think they would assume that the words they used applied to the things they see passing in front of them?

GLAUCON: They would have to.

SOCRATES: What if their prison also had an echo from the wall facing them? When one of the carriers passing along the wall spoke, do you think

they would believe that anything other than the shadow passing in front of them was speaking?

GLAUCON: I do not, by Zeus.

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SOCRATES: All in all, then, what the prisoners would take for true reality is nothing other than the shadows of those artifacts.

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GLAUCON: That's entirely inevitable.

SOCRATES: Consider, then, what being released from their bonds and cured of their foolishness would naturally be like, if something like this should happen to them. When one was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his neck around, walk, and look up toward the light, he would be pained by doing all these things and be unable to see the things whose shadows he had seen before, because of the flashing lights. What do you think he would say if we told him that what he had seen before was silly nonsense, but that now—because he is a bit closer to what is, and is turned toward things that *are* more—he sees more correctly? And in particular, if we pointed to each of the things passing by and compelled him to answer what each of them is, don't you think he would be puzzled and believe that the things he saw earlier were more truly real than the ones he was being shown?

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GLAUCON: Much more so.

SOCRATES: And if he were compelled to look at the light itself, wouldn't his eyes be pained and wouldn't he turn around and flee toward the things he is able to see, and believe that they are really clearer than the ones he is being shown?

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GLAUCON: He would.

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SOCRATES: And if someone dragged him by force away from there, along the rough, steep, upward path, and did not let him go until he had dragged him into the light of the sun, wouldn't he be pained and angry at being treated that way? And when he came into the light, wouldn't he have his eyes filled with sunlight and be unable to see a single one of the things now said to be truly real?

516a

GLAUCON: No, he would not be able to—at least not right away.

SOCRATES: He would need time to get adjusted, I suppose, if he is going to see the things in the world above. At first, he would see shadows most easily, then images of men and other things in water, then the things themselves. From these, it would be easier for him to go on to look at the things in the sky and the sky itself at night, gazing at the light of the stars and the moon, than during the day, gazing at the sun and the light of the sun.

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GLAUCON: Of course.

5 SOCRATES: Finally, I suppose, he would be able to see the sun—not reflections of it in water or some alien place, but the sun just by itself in its own place—and be able to look at it and see what it is like.

 GLAUCON: He would have to.

10 SOCRATES: After that, he would already be able to conclude about it that
c it provides the seasons and the years, governs everything in the visible world, and is in some way the cause of all the things that he and his fellows used to see.

 GLAUCON: That would clearly be his next step.

5 SOCRATES: What about when he reminds himself of his first dwelling place, what passed for wisdom there, and his fellow prisoners? Don't you think he would count himself happy for the change and pity the others?

 GLAUCON: Certainly.

10 SOCRATES: And if there had been honors, praises, or prizes among them for the one who was sharpest at identifying the shadows as they passed by;
d and was best able to remember which usually came earlier, which later, and which simultaneously; and who was thus best able to prophesize the future, do you think that our man would desire these rewards or envy those among the prisoners who were honored and held power? Or do you think he would feel with Homer that he would much prefer to “work the earth as a
5 serf for another man, a man without possessions of his own,”¹ and go through any sufferings, rather than share their beliefs and live as they do?

e GLAUCON: Yes, I think he would rather suffer anything than live like that.

 SOCRATES: Consider this too, then. If this man went back down into the cave and sat down in his same seat, wouldn't his eyes be filled with darkness, coming suddenly out of the sun like that?
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 GLAUCON: Certainly.

517a SOCRATES: Now, if he had to compete once again with the perpetual prisoners in recognizing the shadows, while his sight was still dim and before his eyes had recovered, and if the time required for readjustment was not short, wouldn't he provoke ridicule? Wouldn't it be said of him that he had returned from his upward journey with his eyes ruined, and that it is not worthwhile even to try to travel upward? And as for anyone who tried to
5 free the prisoners and lead them upward, if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn't they kill him?

 GLAUCON: They certainly would.

¹ *Odyssey* 11.489–90. The shade of Achilles speaks these words to Odysseus, who is visiting Hades. Plato is likening the cave dwellers to the dead.

SOCRATES: This image, my dear Glaucon, must be fitted together as a whole with what we said before. The realm revealed through sight should be likened to the prison dwelling, and the light of the fire inside it to the sun's power. And if you think of the upward journey and the seeing of things above as the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm, you won't mistake my intention—since it is what you wanted to hear about. Only the god knows whether it is true. But this is how these phenomena seem to me: in the knowable realm, the last thing to be seen is the form of the good, and it is seen only with toil and trouble. Once one has seen it, however, one must infer that it is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything, that in the visible realm it produces both light and its source, and that in the intelligible realm it controls and provides truth and understanding; and that anyone who is to act sensibly in private or public must see it.

GLAUCON: I agree, so far as I am able.

SOCRATES: Come on, then, and join me in this further thought: you should not be surprised that the ones who get to this point are not willing to occupy themselves with human affairs, but that, on the contrary, their souls are always eager to spend their time above. I mean, that is surely what we would expect, if indeed the image I described before is also accurate here.

GLAUCON: It is what we would expect.

SOCRATES: What about when someone, coming from looking at divine things, looks to the evils of human life? Do you think it is surprising that he behaves awkwardly and appears completely ridiculous, if—while his sight is still dim and he has not yet become accustomed to the darkness around him—he is compelled, either in the courts or elsewhere, to compete about the shadows of justice, or about the statues of which they are the shadows; and to dispute the way these things are understood by people who have never seen justice itself?

GLAUCON: It is not surprising at all.

SOCRATES: On the contrary, anyone with any sense, at any rate, would remember that eyes may be confused in two ways and from two causes: when they change from the light into the darkness, or from the darkness into the light. If he kept in mind that the same applies to the soul, then when he saw a soul disturbed and unable to see something, he would not laugh absurdly. Instead, he would see whether it had come from a brighter life and was dimmed through not having yet become accustomed to the dark, or from greater ignorance into greater light and was dazzled by the increased brilliance. Then he would consider the first soul happy in its experience and life, and pity the latter. But even if he wanted to ridicule it, at least his ridiculing it would make him less ridiculous than ridiculing a soul that had come from the light above.

5 GLAUCON: That's an entirely reasonable claim.

SOCRATES: Then here is how we must think about these matters, if that is true: education is not what some people boastfully declare it to be. They presumably say they can put knowledge into souls that lack it, as if they
c could put sight into blind eyes.

GLAUCON: Yes, they do say that.

SOCRATES: But here is what our present account shows about this power to
5 learn that is present in everyone's soul, and the instrument with which each of us learns: just as an eye cannot be turned around from darkness to light except by turning the whole body, so this instrument must be turned around from what-comes-to-be together with the whole soul, until it is able
10 to bear to look at what is and at the brightest thing that is—the one we call the good. Isn't that right?
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GLAUCON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Of this very thing, then, there would be a craft—namely, of this turning around—concerned with how this instrument can be most easily
5 and effectively turned around, not of putting sight into it. On the contrary, it takes for granted that sight is there, though not turned in the right way or looking where it should look, and contrives to redirect it appropriately.

GLAUCON: That's probably right.

SOCRATES: Then the other so-called virtues of the soul do seem to be
10 closely akin to those of the body: they really are not present in it initially, but are added later by habit and practice. The virtue of wisdom, on the other hand, belongs above all, so it seems, to something more divine, which never loses its power, but is either useful and beneficial or useless and
519a harmful, depending on the way it is turned. Or haven't you ever noticed in people who are said to be bad, but clever, how keen the vision of their little soul is and how sharply it distinguishes the things it is turned toward? This shows that its sight is not inferior, but is forced to serve vice, so that the
5 sharper it sees, the more evils it accomplishes.

GLAUCON: I certainly have.

SOCRATES: However, if this element of this sort of nature had been hammered at right from childhood, and struck free of the leaden weights, as it were, of kinship with becoming, which have been fastened to it by eating
b and other such pleasures and indulgences, which pull its soul's vision downward²—if, I say, it got rid of these and turned toward truly real things, then the same element of the same people would see them most sharply, just as it
5 now does the things it is now turned toward.

² See 611b9–612a6.

GLAUCON: That's probably right.

SOCRATES: Isn't it also probable, then—indeed, doesn't it follow necessarily from what was said before—that uneducated people who have no experience of true reality will never adequately govern a city, and neither will people who have been allowed to spend their whole lives in education. The former fail because they do not have a single goal in life at which all their actions, public and private, inevitably aim; the latter because they would refuse to act, thinking they had emigrated, while still alive, to the Isles of the Blessed.

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GLAUCON: True.

SOCRATES: It is our task as founders, then, to compel the best natures to learn what was said before³ to be the most important thing; namely, to see the good; to ascend that ascent. And when they have ascended and looked sufficiently, we must not allow them to do what they are allowed to do now.

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GLAUCON: What's that, then?

SOCRATES: To stay there and refuse to go down again to the prisoners in the cave and share their labors and honors, whether the inferior ones or the more excellent ones.

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GLAUCON: You mean we are to treat them unjustly, making them live a worse life when they could live a better one?

SOCRATES: You have forgotten again, my friend, that the law is not concerned with making any one class in the city do outstandingly well, but is contriving to produce this condition in the city as a whole, harmonizing the citizens together through persuasion or compulsion, and making them share with each other the benefit they can confer on the community.⁴ It produces such men in the city, not in order to allow them to turn in whatever direction each one wants, but to make use of them to bind the city together.

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GLAUCON: That's true. Yes, I had forgotten.

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SOCRATES: Observe, then, Glaucon, that we won't be unjustly treating those who have become philosophers in our city, but that what we will say to them, when we compel them to take care of the others and guard them, will be just. We will say: "When people like you come to be in other cities, they are justified in not sharing in the others' labors. After all, they have grown there spontaneously, against the will of the constitution in each of them. And when something grows of its own accord and owes no debt for

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³ 505a–b.

⁴ 420b–421c, 462a–466c.

its upbringing, it has justice on its side when it is not keen to pay anyone for its upbringing. But both for your own sakes and for that of the rest of the city, we have bred you to be leaders and kings in the hive, so to speak. You are better and more completely educated than the others, and better able to share in both types of life.⁵ So each of you in turn must go down to live in the common dwelling place of the other citizens and grow accustomed to seeing in the dark. For when you are used to it, you will see infinitely better than the people there and know precisely what each image is, and also what it is an image of, because you have seen the truth about fine, just, and good things. So the city will be awake, governed by us and by you; not dreaming like the majority of cities nowadays, governed by men who fight against one another over shadows and form factions in order to rule—as if that were a great good.⁶ No, the truth of the matter is surely this: a city in which those who are going to rule are least eager to rule is necessarily best and freest from faction, whereas a city with the opposite kind of rulers is governed in the opposite way.”

GLAUCON: Yes, indeed.

SOCRATES: Then do you think the people we have nurtured will disobey us when they hear these things, and be unwilling to share the labors of the city, each in turn, and wish instead to live the greater part of their time with one another in the pure realm?

GLAUCON: No, they couldn’t possibly. After all, we will be giving just orders to just people. However, each of them will certainly go to rule as to something necessary, which is exactly the opposite of what is done by those who now rule in each city.

SOCRATES: That’s right, comrade. If you can find a way of life that is better than ruling for those who are going to rule, your well-governed city will become a possibility. You see, in it alone the truly rich will rule—those who are rich not in gold, but in the wealth the happy must have: namely, a good and rational life. But if beggars—people hungry for private goods of their own—go into public life, thinking that the good is there for the seizing, then such a city is impossible. For when ruling is something fought over, such civil and domestic war destroys these men and the rest of the city as well.

GLAUCON: That’s absolutely true.

SOCRATES: Do you know of any other sort of life that looks down on political offices besides that of true philosophy?

GLAUCON: No, by Zeus, I do not.

⁵ I.e., the practical life of ruling and the theoretical life of doing philosophy.

⁶ See 476c–d.

SOCRATES: But surely it is those who are not lovers of ruling who must go do it. Otherwise, the rivaling lovers will fight over it.

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GLAUCON: Of course.

SOCRATES: Who else, then, will you compel to go be guardians of the city if not those who know best what results in good government, and have different honors and a better life than the political?

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GLAUCON: No one else.