

# Plato's Philosopher Kings



The Sun, Line, and Cave

# An Analysis of Justice

- ❖ Justice in the city =<sub>df</sub> each of the three parts of the city (rulers, soldiers, productive classes) does its own work, deferring where appropriate and never meddling in the affairs of any other part (*Rep.* iv 433a-c).
  - ❖ Informally: Justice is civic harmony.
- ❖ Justice in a soul (or, if you like, in a person) =<sub>df</sub> each of a soul's (person's) three parts (Reason, Spirit, and Appetite) does its own work, deferring when appropriate and never meddling in the affairs of any other part (*Rep.* iv 443c-3)
  - ❖ Informally: Justice is psychic health.
- ❖ Informally: Justice is psychic harmony.
- ❖ Justice =<sub>df</sub> the virtue whereby each essential component of a complex entity executes its appropriate function, while never interfering in the functions of any other component of that unity.
- ❖ Informally: Justice is harmony, whether social or psychic. N.b. this analysis treats Justice as univocal.

# Query

- ❖ Psychic harmony seems a good state—and so something desirable. . .
  - ❖ . . .but is it Justice?
- ❖ Justice seems essentially other-regarding; it concerns the conduct of one person towards another.
  - ❖ Plato's idiosyncratic account of justice seems entirely *inner-directed*.
  - ❖ Indeed, he affirms just this feature of justice towards the end of *Rep.* iv: 443c-d

# Platonic and Common Justice

- ❖ What relation does this analysis of justice—let us call it Platonic Justice—bear to our ordinary conception of justice, to justice as it is commonly conceived—let us call it Common Justice?
- ❖ Evidently, CJ is essentially other-regarding.
- ❖ By contrast, PJ is avowedly, in the first instance, inner-directed:
- ❖ ‘And in truth justice is, it seems, something of this sort. However, it isn’t concerned with someone’s doing his own externally, but with what is inside him, with what is truly himself and his own. One who is just does not allow any part of himself to do the work of another part or allow the various classes within him to meddle with the other. He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself. He puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale—high, low, and middle. He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious. Only then does he act. . .’ (*Rep.* iv 443c-d)

# The Benefits of Justice

- ❖ No-one will know the benefits of justice—whether for the individual or for the state—without first knowing *what makes justice good*.
- ❖ What does make justice good? Is it good? Is it something I should want, because it's good for me or because it's good for everybody? Both? Neither? What is the value of justice?
- ❖ To know the value of justice, we must know its relation to the Good.
- ❖ This is why we need the knowledgeable to rule. This is why we need. . .

# The Rule of Philosophy

- ❖ An Extraordinary Claim:
  - ❖ ‘Until philosophers rule as kings in cities or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide, while the many natures who at present pursue either one exclusively are forcibly prevented from doing so, the city will have no rest from evils, Glaucon, nor, I think, will the human race.’ (*Rep.* v 473c-e)
- ❖ Who are these philosophers?
- ❖ Evidently those with knowledge of the Forms (*Rep.* v 475e-480a)
- ❖ But why suppose there are Forms?

# Philosophers Know

- ❖ . . .what Justice is.
- ❖ . . .what makes Justice good.
- ❖ . . .and so they know what Goodness is.
- ❖ . . .and precisely how justice bestows its benefits.
- ❖ All this suggests, then, that *there is something such as Goodness.*

# Really?

- ❖ Justice exists? Goodness exists?
  - ❖ Independently of what we happen to regard as good or just?
    - ❖ Independently of what we agree to call good or just?
      - ❖ Independently of human constructions altogether?
- ❖ Goodness and justice are there to be discovered?
  - ❖ These are mind- and language-independent entities—existing abstractly?
    - ❖ Something there to be discovered and known, then, like the truths of mathematics or physics?

# Plato owes us:

- ❖ . . . a reason for taking this all seriously.
- ❖ . . . a reason for thinking that philosophers—trained and educated philosophers—alone have access to such entities.
- ❖ . . . a reason for believing in the existence of such entities.
  - ❖ He owes us, in short, an argument for the existence of Forms.

# Plato Delivers

- ❖ He proceeds in three phases:
  - ❖ First: shall we say that Justice and Goodness are something or nothing?
    - ❖ If they are something, then but one question remains: what sorts of things are they?
  - ❖ Second: must we not distinguish between knowledge and belief?
    - ❖ If so, must we not also appreciate that the objects of knowledge are distinct from the objects of belief?
  - ❖ Third: given this, can we not show—given that we *do* have some knowledge—that Forms in fact exist?
    - ❖ Of course, if Forms exist, and can only be known by the trained, and if Goodness and Justice are Forms, and those trained to know them are philosophers, does it not follow that philosophers alone are best suited to rule?

# 1. Something or Nothing?

- ❖ Do you say that  $\Phi$  is something or nothing (*Rep.* v 476e)?
  - ❖ Do you say, e.g., that courage is something or nothing?
  - ❖ Do you say that friendship is something or nothing? Virtue?
  - ❖ Justice? Goodness?
- ❖ Cf. *Parm.* 132b3-c7, *Rep.* 476e10, 478b6-c1, *Symp.* 199d1-2,e6-7, *Prot.* 330c1, *Lys.* 218d7-8, *Euth.* 291d7-e1, *Chrm.* 161d1-4.

## 2. Knowledge and Belief

- ❖ Knowledge is never the same as belief: beliefs, as a class, may be false as well as true, whereas knowledge is always true (*Rep.* v, 477a).
- ❖ How to distinguish knowledge, belief, and ignorance:
  - ❖ Knowledge ranges over what is.
  - ❖ Belief ranges over what is and is not.
  - ❖ Ignorance ranges over what is not.

# 3. Plato's Argument for Forms

1. Knowledge is set over what is identical with  $\phi$ -ness, where  $\phi$ -ness is never not- $\phi$ .
2. Belief ranges over what is  $\phi$  and not- $\phi$ .
3. Capacities with different objects are distinct (477d).
4. Hence, belief is not the same as knowledge (478d, 479d)
5. Each of the many  $\phi$ s is both  $\phi$  and not- $\phi$  (479a-b).
6. The sight-lovers have intentional attitudes only toward the many  $\phi$ s (479a, 479e).
7. Hence, the sight-lovers have only belief, and never knowledge (479d, 479e).
8. Knowledge is possible (480a).
9. Therefore, there must be potential objects of knowledge.
10. Therefore, there must be objects which are identical with  $\phi$ -ness, where  $\phi$ -ness is never not- $\phi$ .
11. Therefore, there are Forms (480a)
12. (13) Therefore, knowledge ranges over the Forms (480a, generalising).

# The Power of the Good

- ❖ In the realm of what is known, the Form of the Good is last and is hardly seen; but once it has been seen, it is necessary to conclude that it is in every way the cause of all that is right and fine (*Republic* vi 517b7-c1).

# Analogical Reasoning

- ❖ When asked to characterise the good, Socrates initially demurs, lest he be made to look ludicrous and make himself into a subject of ridicule (506b).
- ❖ Still, he agrees to speak of ‘an offspring of the Good’ (507e3), which is ‘most like it’ (506e3-4).
  - ❖ This is the sun.
    - ❖ Broadly: as the sun is in the visible realm, so the Form of the Good is in the intelligible realm.

# An Astonishing Contention

- ❖ In the case of things known, one is to say, then, that not only is their being known present to them because of the good, but that both their existence and their being is present to them because of that, though goodness is not being, but is still further beyond, surpassing being in dignity and power (509b6-10).

# Pre-Sun Characterizations I

- ❖ It is the greatest object to be learnt (the *megiston mathêma*; 504e4-5, 505a2).
- ❖ It is by their drawing upon the Form of the Good that just and other virtuous things become useful and beneficial (*chrêsima kai ôphelima*; 505a4-5).
- ❖ Without knowledge of the Form of the Good, even if we were to know things maximally, there would be no benefit for us—just as when we possess something without realizing its good (505a6-b1).
- ❖ Still, if the Guardians in charge of our constitution knows these things, then our constitution will be perfectly ordered (506a6-b2).

## Pre-Sun Characterizations II

- ❖ Those defining the Good as pleasure are shown to be mistaken by the bare fact of there being bad pleasures (505c6-9).
- ❖ Those who define the Good as knowledge cannot specify what the knowledge in question is knowledge of; when pressed, they fall back into circularity by suggesting that it is knowledge of the Good (505b8-10).
- ❖ Every soul pursues the Good and does all that it does for its sake (505d11-e1).

# Analogical Characterizations I

- ❖ In the realm of reason, the good stands to the objects of reason as the sun stands, in the visible realm, to the objects of sight (508b13-c2).
- ❖ As the sun provides the light enabling objects of vision to be seen and the power to see to the faculty of vision, so the Form of the Good gives truth and intelligibility enabling the objects of reason to be known and to the faculty of reason the power to know (507d11-e3, 508b6-7, 508e1-3).
- ❖ As the sun can be seen, so the Form of the Good is itself an object of knowledge (508e4).

# Analogical Characterizations II

- ❖ The Form of the Good is responsible for knowledge and truth (508e3).
- ❖ Still, knowledge and truth are not identical with the Form of the Good, it being still more beautiful than they are (508e2-3).
- ❖ Still, the Good is not being, but surpasses it in dignity and power (509b5-6).
- ❖ As the sun provides not only the ability to be seen but also the generation, growth and nourishment to what is visible, so the Form of the Good provides not only being known to the objects of knowledge, but also their existence and being; 509b6-8).

# The Visible and the Intelligible

- ❖ Following on from the Analogy of the Sun:
  - ❖ ‘Understand, then, that, as we said, there are these two things, one sovereign of the intelligible kind and place, the other of the visible. . . You have two kinds of things, then, visible and intelligible’ (*Rep.* vi 509d).
  - ❖ ‘It is like a line divided into two unequal sections. . . Then divide each section, namely, that of the visible and that of the intelligible, in the same ratio as the line’ (*Rep.* vi 509d).

# Dividing the Line I

- ❖ The Visible

- ❖ ‘In terms of comparative clarity and opacity, one subsection of the visible consists of images. And by images I mean, first, shadows and then reflections in water and in all close-packed, smooth and shiny materials, and everything of that sort, if you understand.’ (*Rep.* vi 509d-e)
- ❖ ‘In the other subsection of the visible, put the originals of these images, namely the animals around us, all the plants, and the whole class of manufactured things’ (*Rep.* vi 510a)

# Dividing the Line II

- ❖ The Intelligible
  - ❖ ‘In one subsection, the soul, using images as the things that were imitated before, is forced to investigate from hypotheses, proceeding not to a first principle, but to a conclusion’ (*Rep.* vi. 510b)
  - ❖ ‘In the other subsection, however, it makes its way to a first principle that is not a hypothesis, proceeding from a hypothesis but without images used in the previous subsection, using Forms themselves and making its investigation through them’ (*Rep.* vi 510b).

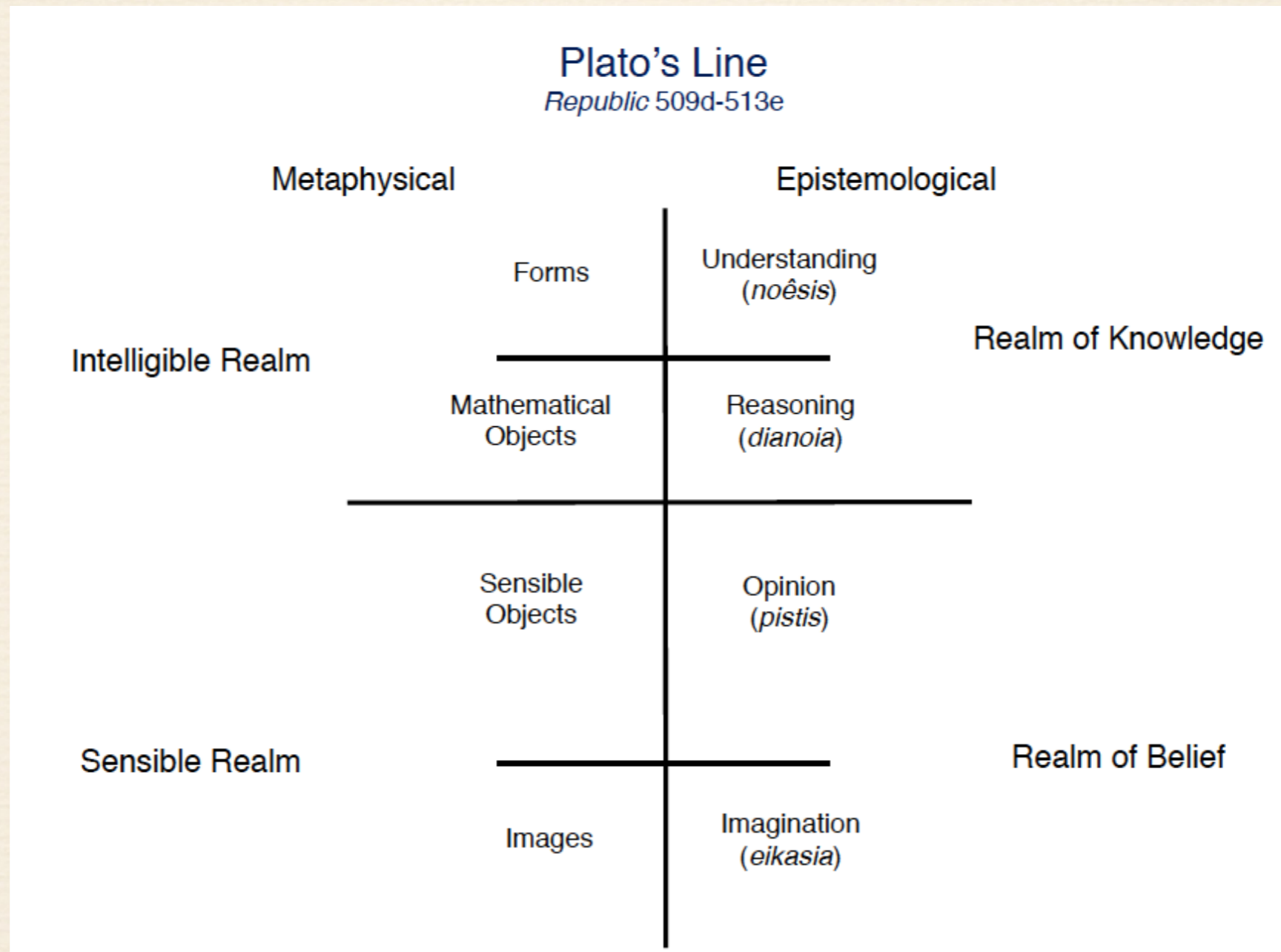
# The Intelligible Explicated I

- ❖ ‘Students of geometry, calculation, and the like. . .make use of their hypotheses and don’t think it necessary to give any account of them, either to themselves or others, as if they were clear to everyone. And going from these first principles, through the remaining steps, they arrive in full agreement’ (*Rep.* vi 510c).
- ❖ ‘This then is the kind of thing I said is intelligible, and is such that the soul is forced to use hypotheses in its investigation, not traveling up to a first principle, since it cannot reach beyond its hypotheses. . .’ (*Rep.* vi 511a)

# The Intelligible Explicated II

- ❖ ‘Then also understand that, by the other subsection of the intelligible, I mean that which reason itself grasps by the power of dialectic. It does not consider these hypotheses as first principles, but truly as hypotheses—stepping stones to take off from, enabling it to reach the unhypothetical first principle of everything’ (*Rep.* vi 511b)
- ❖ ‘Having grasped this principle, it reverses itself, and keeping hold of what follows from it, comes down to a conclusion without making use of anything visible at all, but only of Forms themselves, moving from Forms to Forms, and ending in Forms’ (*Rep.* vi 511b)

# The Line Visualized



# Six Features of the Line

- ❖ Reasoning (*dianoia*):
  - ❖ . . .uses as images the things earlier imitated.
  - ❖ . . .is forced to investigate from hypotheses.
  - ❖ . . .proceeds not to a first principle (*archê*), but to a conclusion (*teleuté*)
  
- ❖ Understanding (*noêsis*):
  - ❖ . . .makes its way to an unhypothetical first principle (*archê*) of all.
  - ❖ . . .also proceeds from hypotheses—but evidently understanding them as such.
  - ❖ . . .proceeds without the aid of images, but moves among the Forms themselves.

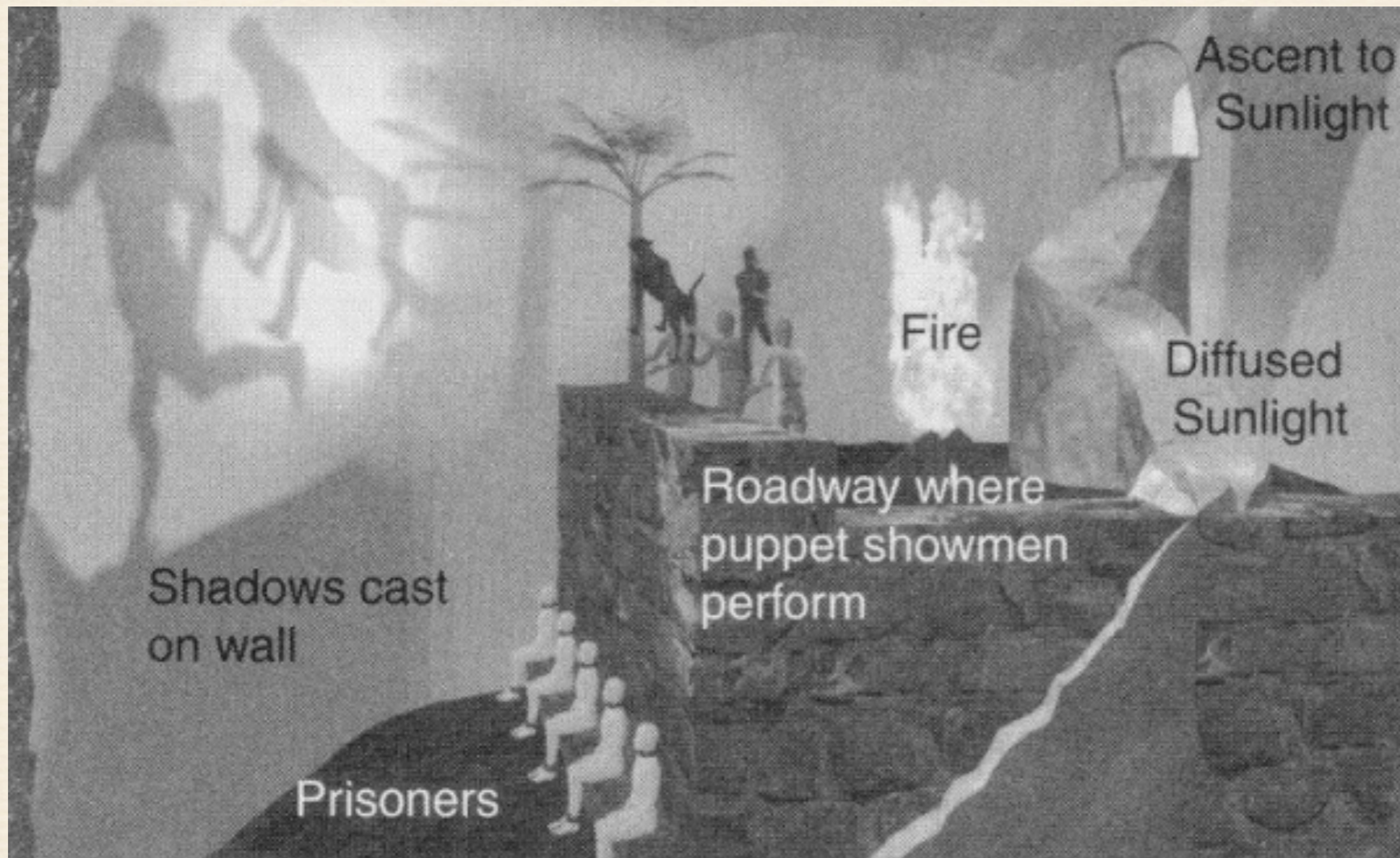
# Psychic Conditions

- ❖ ‘Thus there are four such conditions in the soul, corresponding to the four subsections of our line: understanding for the highest, thought for the second, belief for the third, and imaging for the last. Arrange them in a ratio, and consider that each shares in clarity to the degree that the subsection it is set over shares in truth’ (*Rep.* vi 511d-e)

# The Cave: Education and its Lack

- ❖ ‘Compare the effect of education and its lack on our nature to an experience like this: imagine human beings living in an underground cavelike dwelling, with an entrance a long way up, which is both open to the light and as wide as cave itself. They’ve been there since childhood, fixed in the same place, with their necks and legs fettered, able to see only in front of them, because their bonds prevent them from turning their heads around. Light is provided by a fire burning far above and behind them. Also behind them, but on higher ground, there is a path stretching between them and the fire. Imagine that along this path a low wall has been built, like the screen in front of puppeteers above which they show their puppets.
- ❖ Then also imagine that there are people along the wall, carrying all kinds of artefacts that project above it—statues of people and other animals, made of stone wood, and every material. And, as you’d expect, some of the carriers are talking, and some are silent.’ (*Rep.* vii 513e-514c)

# The Cave Visualized



# Strange Prisoners

- ❖ ‘It’s a strange image you’re describing, and strange prisoners.’ (*Rep.* vii 515a)
- ❖ ‘They are like us.’ (*Rep.* vii 515b)
- ❖ ‘If they could talk to one another, don’t you think they’d suppose that the names they used applied to the things they see passing before them?’ (*Rep.* vii 515b)
- ❖ ‘Then the prisoners would in every way believe that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of those artefacts.’ (*Rep.* vii 515c)

# An Ascent

- ❖ If released and *compelled* to stand and look towards the light, a prisoner would be dazzled and unable to see the things which produce the shadows he had seen. (*Rep.* vii 515d)
- ❖ If asked what was real and *compelled* to answer whether the objects now seen or the shadows formerly seen are real, a prisoner would insist that the shadows familiar to him are more real and truer than the objects producing them. (*Rep.* vii 515d)
- ❖ If dragged up the path *by force* into the sunlight, he would be unable to see. (*Rep.* vii 515d)
- ❖ Bit by bit he would acclimate, and eventually be able to gaze upon the sun. (*Rep.* vii 516b)
- ❖ Now, though, he would understand himself to be happy, and to pity the prisoners whose number he had earlier.

# Returning to the Cave I

- ❖ Someone returning would have difficulty seeing as he once had done. (*Rep.* vii 516e-517a; cf. 517e)
- ❖ He would thus become an object of ridicule—and the worth of his journey out of the cave derogated. (*Rep.* vii 517a)
- ❖ As for anyone who tried to free them and lead them upward: ‘if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn’t they kill him?’ (*Rep.* vii 517a)
- ❖ ‘In the realm of what is known, the Form of the Good is last and is hardly seen; but once it has been seen, it is necessary to conclude that it is in every way the cause of all that is right and fine.’ (*Rep.* vi 517b7-c1).

# Returning to the Cave II

- ❖ ‘It is our task as founders, then, to compel the best natures to reach to reach the study we said before is the most important, namely to make the ascent and see the good. But when they’ve seen it sufficiently, we mustn’t allow them to do what they’re allowed to do today—to stay there and refuse to go down again to the prisoners in the cave and share their labours and honours, whether they are less worth or greater.’ (*Rep.* vii 519c-d)
- ❖ ‘Then are we to do them an injustice by making them live a worse life when they could live a better one?’ (*Rep.* vii. 519d)
- ❖ ‘You are forgetting again that it isn’t the law’s concern to make any one class in the city outstandingly happy but to contrive to spread happiness throughout the city by bringing the citizens into harmony with each other through persuasion or compulsion.’ (*Rep.* vii 519e)
- ❖ ‘Observe that we won’t be doing an injustice to those who’ve become philosophers in our city and that what we’ll say to them, when we *compel* them to guard and care for the others, will be just.’ (*Rep.* vii, 520a)

# A Conception of Education

- ❖ ‘If that’s true, then here’s what we must think about these matters: education isn’t what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes.’ (*Rep.* vii 518b)
- ❖ ‘Our present discussion shows that the power to learn is present in everyone’s soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body. This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming into being without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest things that is, namely the one we call the good.’ (*Rep.* vii 518c)
- ❖ Those who have been most successful in education ‘must be led to the goal and compelled to lift up the shimmering eye of their souls to what which itself provides light for everything. And one they’ve seen the good, they must each in turn put the city, its citizens, and themselves in order, using it as their model.’ (*Rep.* vii 540a-b)

# Two Queries

- ❖ Is the cave effectively a bleak, pessimistic condemnation of the benighted condition of humanity—or an optimistic portrait of the radical transformative powers of education?
- ❖ Why is the entire metaphor strewn with remarks about *compulsion*—even to the point where the most highly educated must, at the age of fifty, be compelled to cast open the eyes of their souls to the visage of the good—and thereafter to return to the cave?